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Abstract

Situated between early instances of economic migration from Punjab in the 1920s and the disintegration of the Labour Movement in the 1980s, this dissertation examines the political and social formation of Punjabis in twentieth century Britain. This project offers a discursive corrective to analyses of the British working-class that exclude or ignore the presence of thousands of nonwhite workers that came to the United Kingdom during that period and offers an assessment of the multiracial constitution of the British working-class and labour movement. As a contribution to South Asian history, this dissertation pursues a deterritorialized study of South Asian and Punjabi history -- as a history of people rather than a place. By bridging the historiographical divide of partition and independence, this project explores the significant interplay between the histories and struggles of host and home societies. These struggles were often mutually reinforcing for migrants, who, because they exist at the interstices of both societies, were mobilized by events near and far. Rather than insisting on the primary and definitive importance that one or the other place, native or host society, has on the development of ideologies, alliances, or cultures, this dissertation posits that they are historically produced, for mobile people, out of movement, interaction, and experience. Thus, this project centers on transnational connections and intergroup alliances, what I call migrant internationalism, as an essential medium through which to understand the history of South Asian migrant workers in Britain.

LALKAR: MIGRANT INTERNATIONALISM AMONG PUNJABIS IN TWENTIETH
CENTURY BRITAIN

by

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B.A., Lenoir-Rhyne University, 2006
M.A., University of Manchester, 2009
M.Phil., Syracuse University, 2014

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in *History*.

Syracuse University
May 2019

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List of Abbreviations

AAFDI: Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India

AIC: Association of Indian Communists

ALLVDC: Anti-Labour Laws Defense Committee

AYM: Asian Youth Movement

BIC: Berlin Indian Committee

BPA: Black Peoples' Alliance

BT: Board of Trade

CAACO: Conference of Afro-Asian-Caribbean Organizations

CARD: Campaign Against Racial Discrimination

CASO: Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order of 1925

CCARD: Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination

CCCS: Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham

CEC: Central Executive Committee

CIC: Committee of Indian Congressmen

CID: Criminal Investigation Department (Indian Government)

Comintern: Communist International, also known as the Third International

CPB (M-L): Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

CPGB: Communist Party of Great Britain

CPI (M-L): Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

CPI: Communist Party of India

CRO: Commonwealth Relations Office

DIB: Director of Intelligence Bureau (Indian Government)

DIR: Defense of India Rules

FIAGB: Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain

ILP: Independent Labour Party (UK)

IMG: International Marxist Group

IOR: India Office Records, British Library

IPI: Indian Political Intelligence

IRA: Irish Republican Army

IRR: Institute of Race Relations, London

ISU: Indian Seaman's Union

ITUCNW: International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers

IWA: Indian Workers Association

IWAGB: Indian Workers Association, Great Britain

KUTV: Kommunističeskij Universitet trudjaščichsja Vostoka (University of the Toilers of the East)

LAI: League Against Imperialism

LCP: League of Coloured Peoples

LHA: Labour History Archive, People's History Museum, Manchester, UK

MRC: Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick

NCCI: National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants

NSFU: National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (UK)

NUS: National Union of Seamen (UK)

RCP: Revolutionary Communist Party

RILU: Red International Labor Union. Also known as *Profintern*

RSL: Revolutionary Socialist League

SBS: Southall Black Sisters

SYM: Southall Youth Movement

UNO: United Nations Organization

WASU: West African Students Union

WIL: Workers International League

WWLI: Workers' Welfare League of India

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List of Foreign Terms

Ailan-e-jang: Declaration of war

Akali: lit. "Eternal one." 1920s: A quasi-military corps of volunteers raised to oppose British control of Sikh gurdwaras.

Babbar: lion; Babbar Akali: militant splinter group established in 1921

Desh Bhagat Sahayak Sabha: Patriot Welfare Committee

Farangi: Foreigner or European (derogatory)

Ghadar-di-gunj: Echoes of mutiny

Ghadar: Mutiny or revolt

Hartal: Strike or work stoppage

Inquilab: Revolution

Jatha: An armed or organized band of Sikhs

Ji: Suffix of honor or respect

Khilafat: lit. Caliphate; Khilafat Movement (1919-1924): Agitation among Indian Muslims in defense of the Ottoman Sultan after World War One.

Kirti-Kisan: Workers and Peasants

Lalkar: Challenge, also literally translated as Red Work

Lascar: East Indian sailor; probably derived from lashkar, Urdu for army or camp.

Mazdoor: Worker

Prabandak: Steward

Purna swaraj: Complete independence

Sabha: Committee

Serang: Boatswain of an Indian crew

Shaheed: Martyr

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandak Committee: Supreme Gurdwara Stewardship Committee

Swadeshi: Home-grown, indigenous; **Swadeshi Movement:** (1920-22): Economic boycott of

British-made goods

Swaraj: Self-government

Vaisakhi: Sikh new year

Zindabad: Long live

Introduction: Migrant Internationalism from World War One to Deindustrialization

The night of Friday, 4 June 1976, was chilly but dry in London.¹ Gurdeep Singh Chaggar and some friends were walking up The Green, the main road in Southall, West London. Between the Victory Pub and the Dominion Theatre they were met by a group sympathetic with the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the National Front. While details are scarce and often differ, a fight broke out between the two. In the melee Chaggar was stabbed and left to bleed to death on the sidewalk.² The next day, Suresh Grover came upon the site of the murder -- Chaggar's body had been removed but the blood had yet to be cleaned -- and he inquired of the police standing nearby what had happened. Learning that "just an Asian" had been murdered, Grover immediately found a cover for the blood in an effort to show some respect for the deceased.³ By Monday, five young men were charged with Chaggar's murder and two, Jody Hill and Robert Hackman, were convicted of manslaughter in May 1977, eleven months after the affray. Due to their youth and the judge's opinion that the murder was not racially motivated, Hill and Hackman were shown leniency and sentenced to a mere four years in prison.⁴

Even as the murder was under investigation, the perception of police indifference enraged the South Asian community in Southall. Two days after the murder approximately 200 people demonstrated at the local police station and several were arrested. Clearly, the murder and the

¹ "Weather Forecast and Recordings," *The Times* (London, England), 4 June 1976.

² Diana Geddes, "Asians clash with police in protest over killing," *The Times* (London, England), 7 June 1976. Also see A. Sivanandan, "From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain," *Race & Class* 23, 2-3 (1981): 141-42; Rajbir Purewal Hazelwood, "A Diasporic Politics of Belonging: Punjabis in Postwar Britain" (PhD diss, Washington University of St. Louis, 2013), 119-130; Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

³ Kavita Puri, "The Pool of Blood that Changed my Life," *BBC News Magazine*, accessed 12 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33725217>.

⁴ Robert Parker, "Five charged with murder of Southall Asian youth," *The Times* (London, England), 8 June 1976; "Two young men jailed over Asian's death." *The Times* (London, England), 3 May 1977.

police had alienated Indian youth in Southall. “I remember his death. I remember the shock to the community,” notes Kuldeep Mann. “That was a turning point I think in my memory and for a lot of people in Southall as well.”⁵ Evident in Mann’s statement, young Asians in Southall had been politicized in the aftermath of the murder. At the same time, they grew impatient with the gradualism of the Indian Workers Association (Southall), a long-established community organization, because of its reputation for passing resolutions but not engaging in direct action. By the end of the Sunday demonstration, under the leadership of Suresh Grover and others, the Southall Youth Movement had been formed and second-generation Asian youth in Southall entered the struggle against racism and fascism in Britain.⁶

Chaggar’s murder shook the South Asian community in Southall. According to a 2015 interview with the BBC, Suresh Grover believes that the late 1970s, especially after the murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar and, in 1979, the police killing of Blair Peach, both in Southall, transformed South Asian politics in Britain. “It was the first time young people - mainly Asians but with a sprinkling of African-Caribbean people from Southall,” he contends, “took to the streets and organised themselves as a youth movement against racial violence and police harassment in Southall.”⁷ While these events in the late-1970s were indeed pivotal for the second generation, native-born British Asians in Southall, it is easy to overestimate the significance of Grover’s claim.

As this dissertation details, the history of South Asian radicalism in Britain very often had young people at its center. Rather than suggesting that the rise of white nationalism and

⁵ Quoted in Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 26.

⁶ Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF), *Southall: The Birth of a Black Community* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1981), 52.

⁷ Puri, “The Pool of Blood.”

police brutality in the late-1970s radicalized South Asians for the first time after decades of migration, it is imperative to see these events as adumbrating the political education of second-generation British Asians without characterizing all that came before as the mendicancy of elders. I suggest that this moment has a genealogy rooted in South Asian radicalism in Britain. The Indian Workers Association, the Association of Indian Communists, and the Black People's Alliance of the 1960s and 1970s had been steeped in an ethos of self-defense and anti-fascism and were themselves the products of communist internationalism, Indian anticolonialism, and Pan-Africanism of the interwar period. The response to Chaggar's murder can, therefore, only be appreciated within the historical context of migrant politics that emerged over the course of the twentieth century. Thus, while the revolutionary zeal of youth in Southall might have been transformative for Asian politics in West London, it was not without precedent.

Situated between early instances of economic migration from Punjab in the 1920s and the disintegration of the Labour Movement in the 1980s, this dissertation examines the political and social formation of Punjabis in twentieth century Britain. This project offers a discursive corrective to analyses of the British working-class that exclude or ignore the presence of thousands of nonwhite workers that came to the United Kingdom during that period and offers an assessment of the multiracial constitution of the British working-class and labour movement. As a contribution to South Asian history, this dissertation pursues a deterritorialized study of South Asian and Punjabi history -- as a history of people rather than a place. By bridging the historiographical divide of partition and independence, this project explores the significant interplay between the histories and struggles of host and home societies. These struggles were often mutually reinforcing for migrants, who, because they exist at the interstices of both societies, were mobilized by events near and far. Rather than insisting on the primary and

definitive importance that one or the other place, native or host society, has on the development of ideologies, alliances, or cultures, this dissertation posits that they are historically produced, for mobile people, out of movement, interaction, and experience. Thus, this project centers on transnational connections and intergroup alliances, what I call migrant internationalism, as an essential medium through which to understand the history of South Asian migrant workers in Britain.

Methodology

This study of the South Asian labor diaspora is underpinned by a critical awareness of the layered identities that influence the creation of communities and political networks. Of importance in this context is a clear understanding of the kinds of collaboration and resistance that characterizes South Asian worker politics and experience in Britain. From the early 1920s onward, interwar internationalism, embodied by the League Against Imperialism and the Communist International, emphasized that the “communities of belonging” open to South Asian activists and travelers represented global networks of resistance and de-emphasized state power and the bounds of national identity.⁸ However, the breadth of communities that emerged in Britain after World War I subverted Soviet internationalist hegemony and opened bonds of affinity that exceeded the struggle for national liberation by uniting disparate projects for social, economic, and political change. For South Asians in Britain, the goals of nationalism and

⁸ Kris Manjappa, “Communist Internationalism and Transcolonial Recognition,” in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 159-177; Partha Chatterjee, “Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism: Some Observations from Modern Indian History,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 36, 2 (August 2016): 320-334; Ali Raza examines how international communism shaped Punjabi interwar politics and the deterritorialization of Punjabi identity: Ali Raza, “Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Meerut and the Creation of ‘Official’ Communism in India,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 33, 3 (2013): 316-330. See also Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, Benjamin Zachariah, eds., *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917-39* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2015).

internationalism were not perceived of as mutually exclusive, one parochial and the other universal. Rather, the two movements were linked through anti-imperialist aspirations in pursuit of a more just future.⁹

The emergence of migrant internationalism in metropolitan neighborhoods of “overlapping diasporas” among Punjabi peddlers and industrial laborers was a manifestation of colonial internationalism in Britain.¹⁰ It articulates the intersection of class mobilization and militant anticolonialism that emerged in the interwar period and found new life in postwar British society. A fuller engagement with migrant internationalism among Punjabis in Britain is an essential step in confronting the long-term radical politics that shaped their transnational activism as travelers, workers, and revolutionaries. The concept encourages a return to, and a reassessment of, the power of the Communist International (Comintern) on the lives of working-class migrants in western European cities as well as the emergence of communist movements in South Asia and throughout the colonial world.

Migrant internationalism is fundamentally about the nature and condition of South Asian worker politics that emerged in British cities throughout the twentieth century. Concerns about proletarianization, working-class consciousness, and the applicability of the concepts of British Marxist labor historians to the South Asian context has been a fiercely debated topic over the course of the last forty years. By putting the concepts of affective communities, wherein apparently disparate individuals are brought together through common experiences, and

⁹ G. Thomas Burgess, “Mao in Zanzibar: Nationalism, Discipline and the (De-) Construction of Afro-Asian Solidarities,” in *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, Christopher Lee, ed. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 196-234; Manu Goswami, “Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (December 2012): 1461-1485.

¹⁰ Earl Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas,” *The American Historical Review*, 100, no. 3 (1995): 765.

vernacular cosmopolitanism, which fits together the parochial with the universal, with internationalism, this project charts the ways in which Punjabi migrants in Britain deployed transnational and interracial political alliances to engage with the labor movement and radical politics in twentieth century Britain.¹¹ To that end, this dissertation will explore the networks that working-class Indians created in Britain and the politics these networks facilitated sought the concomitant destruction of colonialism and imperialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism.

In the tradition of labor and subaltern historians, this project is built on a close reading of the records in an attempt to access the mentalities of marginalized people and produce a narrative of the political and cultural coalitions in which Punjabis participated that broke down the barriers between host and home and transcended ethnic and national boundaries.¹² The Indian migrants, whose stories, affiliations, and politics, fill the following pages are not, for the most part, well-known to history. In the interest of reconstructing their networks and their activism, I have made considerable recourse to surveillance and police documents because these are not individuals who were widely covered by the press nor did they bequeath their libraries and personal papers to archives. Nevertheless, I have made every attempt to use the intelligence apparatus to demonstrate the agency and intentionality of Indian migrant peddlers and workers in Britain

¹¹ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Pnina Werbner, *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives* (New York: Berg, 2008); Kamala Visweswaran, *Un/Common Cultures: Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

rather than to rehearse the frantic search for a “Bolshevik Menace” or the “dark million” that agitated journalists and policy-makers alike throughout this period. Thus, I have deployed the meticulous information gathering that the Metropolitan Police and the Indian Political Intelligence service conducted to reconstruct the kinds of coalitions that Indians created abroad in pursuit of economic opportunity and anticolonial mobilization. Characterizations of their politics or movement as extremist or devious by the intelligence community is instructive not only in terms of how they were perceived by the state, but also, and more importantly, because these documents reveal much about the materiality of migration. It is in that latter sense that I hope my use of government archives will be understood.

The title of this dissertation pays homage to the long tradition of radical newsletters and pamphlets that South Asian migrants published in Britain. *Lalkar*, which means “challenge” in many South Asian languages and could also be translated as “red work” in reference to the aspirations of communist internationalism, was one of the official newsletters of the Indian Workers Association. First published in 1967 under the editorship of Avtar Singh Jouhl, it sought to challenge racism in Britain and imperialism abroad -- both of which the paper viewed as inevitable aspects of late-industrial global capitalism. The first issue resonated with activists for decoloniality throughout Britain. Self-described “revolutionary Afro-Asian Journalist” Molapo Q. Molapo, a representative of the Basutoland Congress Party in London, wrote to Avtar Singh to congratulate him on the inaugural issue and stated that “I have no doubt that your revolutionary journal will advance concrete contribution towards our noble struggle.”¹³ Since *Lalkar* articulated migrant internationalism in Britain as a mouthpiece of movements for national

¹³ Molapo to Jouhl, 27 September 1967, Papers of the Indian Workers Association, MS2141 A/4/1/84. The Wolfson Centre for Archival Research at the Library of Birmingham.

liberation and democracy, it serves as a fitting encapsulation of the politics of Punjabi migrant workers in Britain that this project examines.

The core topic of this project was shaped by the work of the *Subaltern Studies* collective.¹⁴ However, this project rejects the argument that working-class politics, as a manifestation of subalternity, were articulated in distinct and autonomous domains unconnected to wider social, political, and economic processes.¹⁵ Although the critique of Subaltern Studies is well-worn terrain,¹⁶ it is worth noting that this dissertation, though it is inspired and informed by the *Subaltern Studies* corpus, must diverge both from the analysis of South Asian peasant societies at the center of the first iteration of the Subaltern Studies in the 1980s and from the notion of the subalternity of Indian elites that informed the crux of the work produced in the era of postcolonial studies in the 1990s.

Partly the reason for my research's divergence from early Subaltern Studies work is that my analysis pertains near exclusively to the twentieth century, whereas the bulk of analysis published in the 1980s in the Subaltern Studies anthologies considered the eighteenth and

¹⁴ Selected *Subaltern Studies* monographs: Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Ranajit Guha, editor, *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press 1988), 40.

¹⁶ Javeed Alam, "Peasantry, Politics, and Historiography: Critique of New Trend in Relation to Marxism," *Social Scientist* 11, no. 2 (February 1983): 43-54; Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 189-222; Sumit Sarkar, "The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies," in *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 82-108; Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013).

nineteenth centuries. Certainly, this project with its emphasis on internationalism in the Punjabi diaspora could hardly have been set in an earlier time. Much social science analysis has suggested that Indian immigrants, especially in the postwar era, existed in ethnic enclaves within British cities. This dissertation argues that, far from being alienated from British society, Punjabi workers were deeply embedded in British social and political milieus. A necessary component to individual and collective survival was the ability to integrate with migrants and natives from the working-class as well as political and social elites. The interpenetration of workers' domains and myriad other spheres of religious, political, and social influence impacted the worldview and activism of those workers. In other words, this dissertation cannot but reject the central thesis of early Subaltern Studies scholarship that posited an autonomous domain for the subaltern.

Following Rajnarayan Chandavarkar's pioneering research into worker politics and non-institutional networks in the Bombay cotton mills and adjoining neighborhoods, this project contributes to the emerging scholarship on the agency of the Indian working class in the early- to mid-twentieth century and the changing perception among workers of the ways in which they could negotiate the conditions of their labor.¹⁷ Gopalan Balachandran has brought critical attention to, and attempted to dislodge, the "conventional assumptions about the centrality of freedom in capital's social relationships in the West" in the pre-war era by examining the myriad forms of unfree and coerced labor in the history of capitalism.¹⁸ Thus, a transnational appreciation of worker social and political formation of Indian migrants in Britain both

¹⁷ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Gopalan Balachandran, 'Making Coolies, (Un)making Workers', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24, no. 3 (2011): 288.

magnifies the importance of the interwar period as a global moment for workers to claim rights as workers as states and corporations sought to restrict those rights during global economic depression and the era of western deindustrialization.

Crucially, this work challenges conventional notions of colonial modernity by demonstrating through a transnational frame that the struggles for representation and political power overlapped among non-elite populations in South Asia and Northern Europe.¹⁹ “Historicism,” Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, “came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody’s way of saying ‘not yet’ to somebody else.”²⁰ This kind of historical incrementalism contends that non-European people were necessarily incomplete historical agents when confronted with presumed universal standards of modernity and, therefore, could not achieve historical developments in advance of Europe. In contradistinction to such a Eurocentrist interpretation of history, Chakrabarty provides the concept of “peasant-but-modern,” which allows him to argue that the different modernity that was attained in non-European contexts is modernity nonetheless.²¹ One of this dissertation’s contentions, however, is that this alternate modernity is not the only kind of modernity available to non-European societies. Not only do non-European societies have access to peasant modernity, but also participate in the global renegotiation of workers’ rights at the center of modern history.²²

¹⁹ For a fuller elaboration on this point see Silas Webb, “*Pet ke waaste*: Rights, Resistance, and the East India Railway Strike, 1922,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 51, no. 1 (January 2014): 71-94.

²⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.

²¹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 11-16.

²² Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, “‘The Making of the Working Class’: E.P. Thompson and Indian History,” *History Workshop Journal* 43, no. 1 (1997): 177-196, especially 190-92; Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed, *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Gurminder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15-33.

Through an exploration of transnational politics, this project works toward a deterritorialization of South Asian history by engaging with the idea of Global Asia.²³ In so far as the numbers of Punjabis migrating to Britain created the category of British Asian history, it no less contributed to the intertwined issues of colonial capitalism, military recruitment, and labor formation in South Asia. Therefore, this project is structured around a continuity that is often elided by histories of South Asia that end with independence and partition in 1947. Since emigration from India in the interwar period was foundational to settlement and political formation subsequent to the creation of India and Pakistan, a broader timeframe is essential to any understanding of the history of the Punjabi left in the twentieth century. Revolutionary anticolonialism in Punjab emerged through a dialogic relationship between migration and return and was steeped in the socialist internationalism of the interwar period. Yet, historians have been slow to incorporate South Asian narratives into understandings of British class formation the experiences of the diaspora have often been compartmentalized and separated from South Asian history both processes have the effect of reducing the histories of migrants to a liminality that is not fully recognized by historians of India or Britain. An important contention of this dissertation, in contrast, is that the history of Punjabis in Britain must be viewed simultaneously as integral to South Asian and British history.

²³ Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); John Hutnyk, *Global South Asia on Screen* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

Historiography

Literatures on South Asians in Britain and anti-colonial transnationalism in Britain, the intersection of which is where this dissertation exists, are often represented at the exclusion of one another. In the era of Race Relations Studies in Britain, during the 1960s and 1970s, the primary focus of scholarship was on the ability of nonwhite commonwealth immigrants to integrate or assimilate into postwar British society. This work was particularly concerned with the arrival of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian economic migrants who came to Britain in the era of full employment during postwar reconstruction and took up low skilled employment in factories, foundries, and municipal transportation authorities. By focusing on race and class consciousness among these migrants and native-born residents of the United Kingdom some of this work also queried nascent sociocultural organizations and sought to establish the nature of black political activism, which emphasized the shared histories of imperialism, exploitation, and dispossession of Afro-Caribbean, African, and South Asian migrants.²⁴

As the first wave of Race Relations scholarship subsided in the 1980s, historical attention turned to an earlier epoch to examine the emergence of race and racism in Britain that was tied to imperial racial ideologies of the late-nineteenth century. While rooted in an examination of the social and legal contours of Britishness that codified a white national identity, this generation of scholarship also began considering cross-cultural encounters that facilitated resistance to racially

²⁴ Rashmi H. Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (London: University of Oxford Press, 1963); Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965); Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Study of West Indians in London* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965); John Rex and Robert Samuel Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); Peter L. Wright, *The Coloured Worker in British Industry, with special reference to the Midlands and North of England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Sheila Patterson, *Immigrants in Industry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Daniel Lawrence, *Black Migrants, White Natives: A Study of Race Relations in Nottingham* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

exclusive definitions of belonging. Although such work resonates with this dissertation, it differs because of its limited temporal scope and dearth of archival engagement. This dissertation shares its point of origin in the interwar period with the first waves of nonwhite migrant workers with and expands it into an analysis of postwar trends of movement, settlement, and political formation, two periods which are conventionally kept separate.²⁵ Thus, the effect of this project is both to demonstrate that migration redefined conceptions of British identity and to expose the transnational linkages that animated working class radicalism throughout the period of anticolonial agitation and Western deindustrialization in the twentieth century.

Recent scholarship on South Asians in Britain has moved away from focusing on the ability of newcomers to assimilate into their host society and the violence inherent in that process. Much recent work explores community formation and the efforts of migrants to recreate cultural and religious institutions in Britain. Because of the large Punjabi Sikh population in Britain, the Sikh diaspora specifically has received significant attention recently in part to offer a fuller understanding of the Sikh separatist movement for Khalistan that emerged in the 1980s.²⁶ This literature begins with the immediate postwar period of mass migration from colonies and former colonies to Britain during reconstruction and full-employment. Such studies end with the

²⁵ Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism, and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

²⁶ Important contributions to this field, with a focus on Sikh studies, have been: Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Brian Keith Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh "Diaspora"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community* (London: Zed Books, 2006); Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Giorgio Shani, *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age* (London: Routledge, 2008); Falu Pravin Bakrania, *Bhangra and Asian Underground: South Asian Music and the Politics of Belonging in Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Hazelwood, "A Diasporic Politics of Belonging: Punjabis in Postwar Britain."

aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 to gesture toward the rejuvenation of anti-Muslim prejudice as well as attempts by Hindus and Sikhs to differentiate themselves from Muslims socially and politically. Without the context of earlier migration patterns, the events of the postwar period can often appear as *sui generis*, a tendency this project avoids by beginning with the arrival of Punjabi peddlers and seamen in the 1920s and 1930s.

The depth of belonging that South Asians, including students, dignitaries, and workers, had on British shores and their contributions to British society and culture was the organizing theme of the 2007 UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) research project titled “Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad.” Primarily, this project generated work that intended to exhibit the myriad contributions that South Asians had made to British culture, literature, and cinema. Due to that focus, the histories that emerged tended to chart the lives of social elites and their cross-cultural encounters while in Britain.²⁷ Others beyond the AHRC project have also contributed to emerging scholarship on British class and race prejudice in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The Anglo-Indian experience, with the manifold ways in which these travelers navigated a new and occasionally hostile environment, has been examined through the lives of students, athletes, and politicians. Certainly, the important work produced on this topic in the first decade of the twenty-first century has shared many of the conclusions about South Asian elites in British society and the contributions that they were able to make because of their class status.²⁸

²⁷ Susheila Nasta and Florian Stadler, eds, *Wasafiri*, Special Issue on Indians in Britain 27, no. 2 (2012); Ruvani Ranasingha, ed. *South Asians and the Shaping of Britain, 1870-1950: A Sourcebook* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2013); Susheila Nasta, ed, *India in Britain: South Asian Networks and Connections, 1858-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Elleke Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals, 1870-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁸ Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race*

The AHRC project, which is the most recent cohort of studies, produced only one volume, the anthology *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947*, that looked closely at either anti-colonial mobilization in general or at worker politics in particular prior to the creation of India and Pakistan.²⁹ There have been some attempts to examine the transnational linkages of South Asians in Britain in the last several years by scholars unaffiliated with the AHRC project; however, the scope of these projects has been truncated temporally or topically. The Indian Workers Association, which figures prominently in the present dissertation, has been a perennial focus for scholars of South Asian resistance in Britain. Dewitt John published the first book-length study of the organization in 1969 and over the decades it has been a flashpoint for discussions of South Asian political organizing in Britain.³⁰ Yet, most available work has relied too heavily on John's study or has focused on factionalism within the organization to a point that obfuscates the impact it had on British political culture in the postwar era.³¹ In the past few years, the IWA has received renewed interest from academics but the extant literature either sketches out avenues for possible future research or remains limited to microhistorical analysis without demonstrating the social and political lineage of South Asian migration to Britain from the 1920s and 1970s.³²

and Identity, 1880-1930 (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Satadru Sen, *Migrant Races: Empire, Identity, and K.S. Ranjitsinhji* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2004); Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travelers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1930* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); A. Martin Wainwright, *"The better class" of Indians: Social Rank, Imperial Identity, and South Asians in Britain, 1858-1914* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2012). For a more general argument about British race and class prejudice in this period see David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2002).

²⁹ Sumita Mukherjee and Rehana Ahmed, eds., *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947* (London: Continuum, 2012).

³⁰ Dewitt John, *Indian Workers Associations in Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

³¹ Sasha Josephides, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers Association* (Coventry: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, 1991).

³² John Hutnyk, "The Dialectic of 'Here and There': Anthropology 'at Home'," in *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*, ed. Nasreen Ali, Virinder Kalra, and S. Sayyid (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 74-90; Virinder S. Kalra, "Poetic Politics from Ghadar to the Indian Workers Association," in *Routledge Handbook of*

In the 1980s, attention to the long history of economic migration to Britain from the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia began to displace the race relations focus on assimilation, integration, and the impact that nonwhite migration had on British society. The historical sociology that attends to questions of black and brown proletarianization in Britain and the formation of African and Asian political and cultural organizations, especially in London and Birmingham, is foundational to this dissertation. The cross-fertilization between Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham and the Institute for Race Relations (IRR) under the leadership of A. Sivanandan recast the narrative of race relations as one of white British racism and contributed considerably to understandings of black political agency in this period.³³ John Solomos' extensive work on the sociology of race and ethnicity in Britain, Tariq Modood's writing on Islam and multiculturalism in Britain, and Satnam Virdee's research that combines the historical sociology of racism and ethnicity with that of class stratification in Britain extend the research agenda of the CCCS and the IRR into the twenty-first century.³⁴

the Indian Diaspora, ed. Radha Sarma Hegde and Ajaya Kumar Sahoo (London: Routledge, 2018), 203-215; Talvinder Gill, "The Indian Workers Association Coventry, 1938-1990: Political and Social Action and its Impact on the Politics, Culture, Community and Identity Formation of Indian Migrants" (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2011); Also see; Talvinder Gill, "The Indian Workers Association Coventry 1938-1990: Political and Social Action," *South Asian History and Culture* 4, 4 (2013): 554-573.

³³ From the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, see especially: Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Centre for Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s' Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982); Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1987). From the Institute of Race Relations, see especially: A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance: Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism* (London: Verso, 1990). For a deeply researched case study, see Mark R. Duffield, *Black Radicalism and the Politics of Deindustrialisation: The Hidden History of Indian Foundry Workers* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988).

³⁴ John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, LTD, 1989); John Solomos and Les Black, *Racism in Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Tariq Modood, *Not Easy Being British: Colour, Culture, and Citizenship* (Stoke-on-Trent: Runcymede Trust and Trentham, 1992); Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Satnam Virdee, "The Continuing Significance of 'Race': Racism, Contentious Antiracist Politics and Labour Markets in Contemporary Capitalism," in *Race and Ethnicity in the 21st Century*, Alice Bloch and John

This dissertation, therefore, seeks the company of scholarship that focuses on the political and social lives of migrants from the colonial and postcolonial world. Recent work has contributed considerably to understandings of black internationalism and the politics of race in Britain through examinations of the transnational networks of activist African and Caribbean intellectuals and workers in the twentieth century.³⁵ In the interwar period, London was both the center of the British Empire and became a locus of black anticolonial strategizing and decolonial imaginings. As Afro-Caribbean migrants navigated questions of belonging and citizenship in the decades after the *Empire Windrush* dropped anchor at Tilbury Dock, on 22 June 1948, Britain continued to represent a site of economic opportunity and contested national identity.³⁶ Prior work on colonial and postcolonial migration to Britain recognizes that Indian anticolonialism and black politics influenced one another but highlights the internationalist associations of African, Caribbean, and American intellectuals in the imperial metropolis. Thus, the inter-ethnic and trans-colonial solidarities between South Asian, African, and Caribbean migrants upon which much of the anticolonial activism of this period was built has not been adequately explored by historians. This dissertation offers new insights into that relationship.

Solomos, eds., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 62-93; Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class, and the Racialized Outsider* (Basingstoke; Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³⁵ Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

³⁶ Recent events serve as a reminder that these questions are far from settled. In 2018, more than a dozen Caribbean-descended residents in the United Kingdom were either deported or threatened with deportation because the Home Office had not maintained any records of those who were granted leave to remain. This scandal caused a ripple-effect of panic among the tens of thousands of Afro-Caribbean residents who were part of the Windrush Generation -- a generation of undocumented migrants whose access to basic services, employment, and housing was undermined in a period of renewed anxiety about immigration to Britain and heightened xenophobia in the populace.

The work of Vaughan Robinson and Rozina Visram moved the field of South Asians in Britain away from race relations and toward a social history of the centuries-old movement of servants, soldiers, and statesmen back and forth between colony and metropole.³⁷ Peter Fryer, Ron Ramdin, and Dilip Hiro also contributed to the study of nonwhite economic migration from the colonies and commonwealth to challenge further the idea that modern Britain was a homogenous, white society.³⁸ Yet, by situating these studies within national frames they are limited in their ability to move beyond the ramifications that nonwhite migration had on British society. A body of literature whose influence on the current project runs in parallel with studies of black internationalism and South Asian labor migration to Britain involves what G. Balachandran has deemed, in a different context, the “New Transnational History” of South Asia.³⁹ These studies build on histories of South Asian migrants in North America, which constituted a social history of South Asian migrant labor on farms and in the lumber yards of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁴⁰ Attention to the transnational linkages of South Asian political and social formation in the United States has gained prominence in the twenty-first century and has emerged as a critical site of exchange for scholars of migration, sexuality, and internationalism.⁴¹ Among the most important lessons of this literature for the current project

³⁷ Vaughan Robinson, *Transients, Settlers, and Refugees: Asians in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars, and Princes: Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London: Pluto, 1986).

³⁸ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot: Gower, 1986).

³⁹ Gopalan Balachandran, “Transnational Histories and Subcontinental Pasts: A Review Essay,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 52, no. 4 (2015): 533-545.

⁴⁰ Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983); Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

⁴¹ Though Balachandran only included Seema Sohi and Vivek Bald (2013) in his category of “New Transnational History,” I propose a longer list of closely related monographs concerning this theme: Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and*

are the sophisticated and deeply textured accounts of social complexity embodied in the communities that South Asian migrants joined and redefined upon arrival.

Though inspiring work has been produced on the social history of African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean migrants in Britain, the themes covered in recent studies on South Asian American history -- commercial networks, social activism, and interracial intimacy -- have not adequately been discussed in the literature on South Asians in Britain. Therefore, this dissertation is a contribution to the scant literature on the South Asian diaspora in Britain that engages with the agency and positionality of migrant workers through descriptions and analysis of their political and social organizations, their relationships, and their neighborhoods.⁴² Unique in its temporal breadth, this dissertation reframes the contributions of Indian activists and workers in concert with other colonial migrants and white allies as integral to the history of internationalism and anticolonialism in Britain in the twentieth century. By bringing together South Asian histories of movement and British histories of race and racism, this dissertation combines the priorities of the recent research on black internationalism, race in British political culture and the “lost histories” of South Asian transnationalism.

Chapters

the Law in the North American West (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance and Anticolonialism in North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴² Recent contributions to British race and racism that attend specifically to South Asians are helpful in theorizing long-term processes. Virdee’s recent work demonstrates the process of racialization in Britain, especially in the British working class, through the construction of the “racialized outsider” but does not elaborate on interracial coalitions or resistance: Virdee, *Racism, Class, and the Racialized Outsider*, 2014. Anandi Ramamurthy’s study of second-generation Britons of South Asian descent examines racism and resistance as it explores Asian youth politics in the late-1970s and 1980s, but, due to its temporal limitations, does not assess the connected histories of colonial migrants in the interwar and early postwar years: Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 2013. Raffaello Pantucci has produced a work of considerable depth and complexity in his examination of social alienation and religious radicalization among South Asian Muslim youth and the emergence of British jihadism in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries: Raffaello Pantucci, *“We love death as you love life”: Britain’s Suburban Terrorists* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015).

Chapter One charts the ways in which British policy in Punjab facilitated the emergence of a Punjabi diaspora and led to the emergence of Punjabi anticolonial politics that spanned the globe. In the 1930s, Punjabi left politics was characterized by a fluidity between constitutionalism and insurgency. By foregrounding the importance of mobility to Punjabi political mobilization, this chapter argues that appreciating the cyclical movement of labor and revolutionary praxis between India and Europe is integral for understanding the influence that global capitalism had on the struggle against imperialism in India. Additionally, this chapter describes how this mobility shaped successive generations of Punjabi radicals through a dialogic relationship between Indian migrant workers in Britain and the networks in Punjab that sustained them.

The inter-war history of Indian workers in Britain, primarily seamen who had deserted dehumanizing conditions on ship to find better wages on shore, forms the core of the second chapter. While Indian lascars, generally Punjabi and Bengali Muslims, escaped their contracts due to inhumane treatment, their presence in Britain was not systematically recorded until the enactment of the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order of 1925. This new legal apparatus caused confusion among Indian residents who in many cases had married local women and considered themselves British subjects with the right to remain. Lascar recruitment, working conditions, and settlement patterns, which chapter two outlines, are fundamental to the broader history of migrant internationalism among Punjabis in Britain. Moreover, this chapter examines the racial, gendered, and class-based anxieties that were articulated with the advent of nonwhite settlement in British port towns and industrial cities.

After World War I, Punjabis were caught in the double-bind of colonial capitalism at home, which made small scale agriculture untenable, and industrial capitalism, in which they

sought a non-agricultural livelihood. Yet, when Punjabi migrants attempted to participate in the British industrial economy, they endured racial discrimination in factory hiring and unequal contracts in the Merchant Navy. Thus, in contradistinction to the exclusionary practices of the racial capitalism in British ships and factories, chapter three analyzes how working-class neighborhoods throughout Britain facilitated a migrant economy that functioned as an alternative to the sea and the shop floor. Specifically, from the mid-1920s escaped Punjabi Muslim seamen and Sikh travelers formed an Indian peddler fraternity. Furthermore, by conceiving of the built environment of the neighborhood as a socio-spatial entity enabling “undesirable” migrants to navigate the fringes of British capitalism and mobilize non-institutional networks for housing, credit, and work, this chapter demonstrates that the migrant economy subverted prevailing assumptions of ethnic segregation and exposed the porousness of racial capitalism in interwar Britain.

In the early twentieth century, Indian students and organizers in Britain had sought to work within the confines of British social and political institutions in order to bring about incremental political change in India. However, Punjabis in interwar Britain increasingly sought a more direct confrontation with British imperial policy. Framed with the trial and execution of Udham Singh, who murdered former Lieutenant Governor of Punjab Michael O’Dwyer in 1940, chapter four charts the emergence of revolutionary anticolonialism among Indians in Britain. Admirers of the San Francisco-based militant anticolonial Ghadar Party, these Punjabis pursued radical solidarities with Pan-African, Indian nationalist, and British anticolonial movements in Birmingham, Coventry, and London. This chapter contextualizes Udham Singh’s martyrdom within the nascent black internationalism symbolized by Paul Robeson and the West African Students Union and transnational South Asian anticolonialism that memorialized Singh’s

execution. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that the Indian Workers Association, formed during the Second World War and Singh's trial, was integral to articulating a Ghadarite anticolonialism in Britain.

The story of Udham Singh exhibits the heterodoxy of Punjabi politics in the interwar period as the trial and appeal were characterized by a broad spectrum of supporters that were often at odds concerning strategies for Indian freedom, the legitimacy of revolutionary violence, and the desirability of international communism. Chapter five further outlines the idiosyncrasies of Punjabi radicalism by examining the salience of non-Stalinist communist internationalism, or Trotskyism, for anticolonial politics during World War Two. Specifically, this chapter shows the tactical and ideological uniformity between Punjabis in India and Britain by detailing the transnational mobilization against the British war effort among Sikhs, who were disproportionately recruited into military service in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, as this chapter points out, the anti-war movement, inflected by the sentiment that Stalin's Soviet Union had abandoned the colonial world by entering the "imperialist war," helped to consolidate South Asian anticolonialists and non-Stalinist British communists under a single banner in the 1940s.

Chapter six explores the resonance that the Asian-African Conference had in emerging postcolonial states and among marginalized communities of color Britain during the Cold War. Held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, the conference emphasized the creation of a third way between American and Soviet hegemony, which animated the political alliances of Commonwealth migrants in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s and structured anti-racism and anti-imperialism in Cold War Britain. Through the pamphlets of activist and organizer Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan, this chapter examines a "praxis of Bandung" that highlights episodes of migrant

resistance rooted in inter-cultural cooperation and non-violence to demand human and democratic rights. This study demonstrates the ways in which the spirit of Bandung was articulated in Britain by Commonwealth migrants in pursuit of international cooperation at the height of the Cold War.

Yet, the politics of friendship embodied in the Final Communique from Bandung proved ineffective in the face of racial violence against Indians in Britain and international tensions between India and China in the 1960s. The consolidation of Maoism in Britain, especially among Indian migrants, marked a new phase in the struggle against white supremacy in Britain and the erosion of civil liberties in postcolonial India. Beginning with the 1964 election in Smethwick and the overt racism of Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths' campaign, this chapter charts the trajectory of anti-fascist politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, among South Asian activists in this period, the Emergency governments in India and progressively anti-immigrant legislation in Britain came to be seen within the same lens of illegitimate state power. This chapter highlights the Maoist turn among Indian radicals in Britain to understand the simultaneous and overlapping trends in India and Britain. Motivated by the revolutionary ideology of Mao, Frantz Fanon's views on the inevitability of decolonial violence, and the necessity of protecting one's rights and community by any means necessary that emerged out of the American Civil Rights Movement, this chapter argues that the dual mobilizations against white supremacy in Britain and totalitarianism in India were mutually reinforcing. The rise in violence against black and brown people in Britain and against adivasis, communists, and trade unionists in India were met with a growing practice of armed self-defense.

This project does not intend to provide an exhaustive history of the Punjabi community in Britain. Rather, by investigating communities of working-class Punjabi migrants and British

radicals, it elaborates on the continuity of six decades of Punjabi diaspora radicalism, which was sustained in neighborhoods comprised diasporic communities from Europe, Africa, and South Asia. This confluence was sustained into the late-1970s when Trade Unionism and the Black Power movement began to disintegrate while the British New Right became ascendant and the Khalistani Movement in South Asia forced a reconfiguration of diaspora politics on ethno-religious grounds. The foundation for militancy among Indian workers in Britain was underpinned by interwar communist organizations, particularly the Communist Parties of India, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, and the Punjab-based Kirti Kisan Party, which had begun to mobilize Indian migrants in British ports by the early-1920s. Thus, the cooperation between lascars and international communism created footholds in Britain that facilitated the long-term political education of Punjabi migrants that circulated routinely between British and Indian ports.

Chapter 1

A History of Punjabi Anticolonial Radicalism

In his forward to Pearay Mohan's *An imaginary rebellion and how it was suppressed*, a study that attempts to explain the causes of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, Lajpat Rai cautioned the reader that

it should not be forgotten that the Punjab has been seething with discontent for more than twenty years. With its unique record of services in the cause of the Empire, having profusely shed its blood in the expansion and protection of British dominions all the world over, having given its best in developing British colonies and British possessions, the treatment it has received has been most cruel and bitter.¹

In this summary of Punjab's place in British imperial expansion, Rai notes the important contribution that the province made to the British Indian Army. Contingents of Punjabi soldiers were deployed throughout the Empire and were used extensively in World War I and World War II and as military police in East Asia. Yet participation in the colonial armed forces was not the only kind of mobility that contributed to the creation of a Punjabi diaspora. The forms of free and unfree labor that followed colonial expansion -- agricultural migrants in the American Northwest, seamen in the Merchant Marine, and the indentured servants who built the Uganda Railway in East Africa, to name a few -- were constitutive of the Punjabi migrant community that emerged in the early- to mid-twentieth century. The history of free and unfree movement of labor is fundamental to understanding the political orientations of Punjabi migrants that gave way to the global anticolonial insurgency that sought to repudiate the imperial world order

¹ Lajpat Rai, forward to *The Punjabi 'Rebellion' of 1919 and How it was Suppressed: An Account of the Punjabi disorders and the working of martial law (in two volumes)*, by Pearay Mohan, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1999 [1920]), 3; *Report on Publications Registered in the Punjab during the year 1920*, written by Bishan Das, Reporter on Books for the Punjab Education Department and published in the Punjab Proceedings for the Home Department, notes that the original title for this book was *An Imaginary Rebellion and How it was suppressed: An Account of the Punjab Disorders and the Working of Martial Law*. Punjab Proceedings Home Department. 12 May 1921. P/11132. India Office Records. British Library.

established by the British. It is in this context that I want to explore the impact of British colonial policy on the Punjabi polity in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, which forced the migration of Punjabis in search of a sustainable living and underpinned their politicization.

Recruitment of Sikhs into the Bengal Army was limited prior to the mid-nineteenth century because colonial officials presumed that Sikhs would harbor anti-British sentiment in the aftermath of the Anglo-Sikh wars that had concluded with the annexation of the province in 1849.² Thus, the province was mostly demilitarized from 1849-1857, with only a few thousand Punjabi soldiers recruited. The gradual shift toward Punjab as a site of recruitment was part of a process that demobilized Bengali soldiers in eastern India who had been central to the mutiny at Barrackpore and Meerut in April and May 1857. The command of the British Indian Army turned to Punjab, which was isolated from the events in Bengal and the United Provinces, to enlist soldiers to quell the rebellion. Punjabis became more heavily recruited in the 1880s during the “Great Game” with Russia, out of British fears that Russia may invade and due to border skirmishes with Afghans. In both cases, Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs were well positioned and had local knowledge that would allow them to effectively defend the borders of British India, which led to the full incorporation of Punjabis into the amalgamated Indian Army.³ Having established zones of military recruitment throughout the province in the decades immediately prior to World War I, the British were able to enlist sixty percent of its soldiers from Punjab, with most Sikhs coming from central Punjab and Muslims from the Salt Range Tract cities of

² Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State the Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849-1947* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), 36; By 1918, the breakdown was roughly this: Punjab had provided 360,000 recruits, of which 136,000 were Muslim, 88,925 were Sikh, and 23,000 were Dogra Hindus. Thus, Punjabi Muslims outnumbered Sikh and Hindu recruits combined, even though a disproportionate number of Sikhs served in the military and their visibility is reflected in military histories and commemorations. See David Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 39.

³ Yong, *Garrison State*, 52-57.

Rawalpindi and Jhelum in western Punjab.⁴

After 1857, to minimize the threat of mutiny, the British Indian Army adopted a strategy whereby the rank and file were recruited from heterogeneous ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds so that “natural ‘race’ antagonisms” could be maintained between South Asian communities. It is commonplace to observe that the composition of the British Indian Army in the years leading up to World War I was guided by “martial race” theory, which simultaneously sought to recruit genetically superior soldiers and those who had remained loyal during the mutiny.⁵ However, it is worth considering that, though loyalty and martial race theory were principal reasons for recruitment and contributed significantly to changing regional and religious identities in the late-nineteenth century, there were also material reasons for enlistment.⁶ Tan Tai Yong reminds us that military recruitment up to the beginning of World War I was tied to regions that respectively comprised majorities of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. While the reasons for enlistment were rooted in economic well-being, they were distinct in each region. As such, Muslims in the Salt Range sought economic opportunity beyond that arid region, Sikhs in central Punjab enlisted to extricate themselves from the densely populated heavily subdivided agricultural land, and Hindus in southeastern Punjab, those recruited in the smallest numbers,

⁴ Yong, *Garrison State*, 28-33.

⁵ Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

⁶ Recent anti-discrimination campaigns among Sikhs in the United States for the right to wear turbans as part of the official and permanent Sikh uniform demonstrates the continued determination of Sikhs to serve in the military and indicates the degree to which martial race theory has had a profound and lasting effect on notions of Sikh identity and martial prowess. Sikh Coalition, “Our Campaigns: Sikhs in the U.S. Armed Forces,” last accessed 9 October 2017. <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/our-work/ending-employment-discrimination/sikhs-in-the-u-s-armed-forces;> Kamal Singh Kalsi, “Op-ed: Sikhs also bleed red, white and blue,” *Newsday*, last accessed 9 October 2017, [http://www.newsday.com/opinion/oped/sikhs-also-bleed-red-white-and-blue-kamal-singh-kalsi-1.9641590;](http://www.newsday.com/opinion/oped/sikhs-also-bleed-red-white-and-blue-kamal-singh-kalsi-1.9641590) Sehej Kaur, “The Blog: Why Having Sikhs in the Military is a Plus,” *Huffington Post*, last accessed 9 October 2017, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-having-sikhs-in-the-m_b_10641962.html?section=india.](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-having-sikhs-in-the-m_b_10641962.html?section=india)

pursued military service as a guard against routine famine there. Moreover, the colonial government offered land in the canal colonies as a reward for military service, which would have helped to alleviate each of the foregoing economic conditions that Punjabis experienced, but they were inconsistently granted after demobilization.⁷

The relationship between the Punjab and the British Indian Army played a significant role in the mediation of nascent anticolonial politics in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Tan Tai Yong has argued that the role of local landed elites in Western Punjab helped to insulate their spheres of influence from emergent nationalism in the 1920s. Moreover, the proximity that the recruiting boards maintained with villages facilitated the distribution of anti-nationalist propaganda.⁸ Tahir Mahmood has recently examined the importance of landed elites in Shahpur district in Rawalpindi in not only providing military recruits, but also in competing to limit the spread of revolutionary and anticolonial disturbances.⁹ For instance, in the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Shahpur Tiwana Maliks deployed militia to protect the area from the groundswell of boycotts, civil disobedience, and violence that had been witnessed elsewhere in the province. Due in part to the determination of the Tiwana family to outdo one another in the execution of martial law and to the longstanding impact that counter-propaganda in military recruitment centers had played, there were virtually no disruptions there.¹⁰

⁷ Yong, *Garrison State*, 69-93.

⁸ Yong, *Garrison State*, 166.

⁹ Tahir Mahmood, "Collaboration and British Military Recruitment: Fresh Perspectives from Colonial Punjab, 1914–1918." *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 5 (2016): 1474–1500.

¹⁰ Mahmood, "Collaboration and British Military Recruitment," 1492.

Colonial Expansion, Commodity Agriculture, and Dispossession

In central Punjab, the most fertile region of the province, the population was heavily concentrated, and the farms were small. The creation of canal colonies in Western Punjab expanded farming into previously arid areas but the use of this land was heavily guarded and as much as eighty percent of the newly arable land remained under direct state control.¹¹

Agricultural dispossession, then, was tied to exclusion from the governing process. Indian participation in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in Lahore was restricted to the nominations of the Provincial Government, which only selected sympathetic Indians. Therefore, there was little opportunity to devise a political solution to the issues surrounding land distribution, debt, and military engagements, all of which affected Punjabis, especially Muslim and Sikh peasants.¹²

After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, the institution of revenue tax was modified and led to the concentration of landholding into the hands of a smaller number of prosperous proprietors while the existing cultivators stayed on as occupancy tenants.¹³

Though the canal colonies made the region more productive, the available land was finite and the reward system imperfect. Punjabi agriculturalists who were unable to cultivate in the canal colonies faced difficulties of producing food along with more lucrative cash crops in a period of price fluctuation, land shortages, and uncertain yields.¹⁴ For these precarious farmers, moneylenders became an essential source of capital that would both allow them to plant their fields and pay land revenue to the colonial state. Yet, as Sucheta Mazumdar has pointed out, not

¹¹ Michael Mann, *South Asia's Modern History: Thematic Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 157.

¹² Shalini Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab: Governance and Sedition* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 16.

¹³ Sucheta Mazumdar, "Colonial Impact and Punjabi Emigration to the United States," in *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before World War II*, ed. Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 322.

¹⁴ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (Madras: Macmillan India Limited, 1985), 30-32.

only would moneylenders often absorb mortgaged land through legal machinations, but they would also charge exorbitant rates of interest, as high as thirty-six percent per year, that virtually ensured the land would pass to the creditor upon default.¹⁵ While the cycle of credit and debt that this arrangement created in the short-term helped farmers sustain themselves during lean times, the pressure to repay loans and subdivide landholdings gradually pushed many farmers off the land altogether.¹⁶

It might be noted here that the waves of Punjabi migration that began at the turn of the century and continued into the 1950s and 1960s were highly influenced by structural factors that were heavily inflected by ethnicity. Sikhs and Muslims from Punjab were both heavily recruited into the British Indian Army after the 1857 revolt and deployed to protect British interests in East Asia and Africa as colonial police. Though the numbers of Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims in the British Indian Army and various colonial police were both significant, the proportion of Sikh enlistment was roughly ten percent whereas the proportion of Punjabi Muslim enlistment was closer to two percent in 1895.¹⁷ While such a high rate of Sikhs went into the military outright, many Muslims from Western Punjab were recruited into the Merchant Marine. The structural differences between the two is more apparent in Africa. While Punjabi Sikhs went to East Africa as cultivators in the 1890s, Punjabi Muslims were typically those indentured on the Uganda Railway. It was, of course, Punjabi Sikhs who came to the Yuba and Imperial Valleys of California as cultivators in the first decade of the twentieth century. The distinction in free and

¹⁵ Mazumdar, "Colonial Impact and Punjabi Emigration to the United States," 324.

¹⁶ BR Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 85; Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy, 3rd edition* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 84.

¹⁷ Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, 126

forced movement between Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims can also be gleaned in interwar Britain where Punjabi Muslims arrived as lascars, or Indian seamen, and Punjabi Sikhs arrived in Britain as fare-paying travelers, even though both contributed to the formation of an Indian itinerant merchant community in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁸ What were effectively class distinctions that were reproduced by colonial ideologies on ethnicity and religion inform the constitution of the Punjabi diaspora globally.

The uprising in 1907 was the result of a series of paternalist legislation that the colonial government enacted in Punjab. According to policy makers, laws such as the Land Alienation Act of 1900 and the Colonization of Land Bill of 1906 were intended to protect the peasantry. However, the effect of these bills led to the alienation of large swaths of the countryside by reducing individual agency over land use and inheritance while simultaneously imposing burdensome fines and increasing water rates for irrigation in the canal colonies of western Punjab. In 1907, members from all three major religious communities in the province, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh, joined coalesced in a significant, if short-lived, demonstration against colonial rule in India.¹⁹ Though consequences of colonial capitalism on Punjabi agriculture had been dire, the political effects had only just begun to materialize in Punjabi politics.

In addition to the reorganization of the landowning structure and revenue collection after annexation, the demands of British trade and global capitalism necessitated the transformation of Punjab into an area of commodity agriculture. The impact that classical colonialism had on Indian economic underdevelopment and impoverishment was a point of emphasis for the votaries

¹⁸ See chapters 2 and 3 below.

¹⁹ N. Gerald Barrier, "The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest," *Modern Asian Studies* 1, no. 4 (1967): 353-383; Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 14-24.

of the “drain of wealth” theory, particularly Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chunder Dutt, among others, at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁰ With the advent of capitalist agriculture in the late-nineteenth century, land use was dramatically changed in Punjab. The agrarian legislation imposed on Punjab, as elsewhere in India, was part of the British colonial administration’s attempt to ensure that India remained profitable through heavy taxation and guaranteed returns on capital investment.²¹ Even if contemporary Punjabi migrants did not perceive the systematic exploitation of Indian agriculture as it happened, its effect served to fuel nascent agrarian agitation in Punjab. By the end of World War I, these upheavals merged with other local and international concerns that resulted in broad-based anticolonial mobilization among Punjabis.

In the half century following annexation, and crucially in the years after the 1857 Revolt, India was brought under a system of trade that was organized around the importation of manufactured goods from Britain and exportation of agricultural raw materials to markets around the world, especially the United States and continental Europe.²² The commodity agriculture that India commenced during the “high noon of colonialism” often necessitated monoculture, which was highly susceptible to failure during droughts and price fluctuation on the world market. Indeed, the focus on exporting agricultural commodities exacerbated food production for local markets. For instance, as Mike Davis notes about the Madras Famine that ravaged south India in the late-1870s, “grain merchants, in fact, preferred to export a record 6.4 million cwt. of wheat to

²⁰ Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1901); Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1902).

²¹ Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, Third Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 124-131.

²² Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 80-83.

Europe in 1877-78 rather than relieve starvation in India.”²³ A similar process occurred in Punjab with the commercialization of agriculture in the latter half of the nineteenth century that emerged with the ability to export surplus foodstuffs via the newly constructed transportation links that had connected Punjab to major Indian cities and ports.²⁴ Between the urge to export surplus food and cultivate increasingly valuable cash crops, cultivators in Punjab became ever-more precariously tied to the global imperial system.

Punjabis were incorporated into the “webs of empire” -- the ligaments supporting the British imperial system -- for reasons that buttressed the expansion British political and military hegemony as well as global capitalist development.²⁵ Yet, the relationship between the Punjab and the British Raj was a turbulent one. While, on one hand, the Punjab comprised the major recruiting area for the British Indian Army in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, it also came to present serious challenges to British colonial power in the early twentieth century. The importance of these connections did not elude Lajpat Rai, a leader of the revolutionary Indian nationalism that emerged in the aftermath of the first partition of Bengal in 1905 and, later, of the Hindu reformist *Arya Samaj*. In his foreword to Mohan’s book, he suggests a periodization for the consolidation of anticolonial politics in Punjab by alluding to the longstanding disquiet in the province. For Rai, the disturbances of 1907 were an early attempt to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the colonial government in Punjab, which was confirmed by the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar and the subsequent imposition of martial law in the

²³ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 31-32. 6.4 million cwt of wheat is 640 million pounds, or 290 million kilograms, or 320 thousand tons, of wheat.

²⁴ Mazumdar, “Colonial Impact and Punjabi Emigration to the United States,” 323.

²⁵ Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*.

province.

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

Though he reflected on the two decades of oppression and dispossession in Punjab, Lajpat Rai's forward and Mohan's book were written in response to the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919. An understanding of the causes of the massacre and its ramifications for Punjabi politics and policy is fundamental to any appreciation of the organizations and campaigns of the Punjabi diaspora later in the century. In March 1919, the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, more commonly known as the Rowlatt Act and derided by Indians as the "Black Acts," was a measure that extended repressive wartime legislation into the immediate postwar peace. It was rooted in colonial fears of Bolshevik creep following the Russian Revolution and on suspicions that Indian dissidents would contribute to the destabilization of imperial order. The Act was an extension of the Defense of India Act (1915), which provided the government with broad powers of censorship and detention, including the suspension of the right to a trial by jury, during World War I. Increased food prices and poor agricultural yields in 1918-1919 combined with anger over the repressive measures and provoked Indian nationalist resistance in the form of civil disobedience and work stoppages. In 1919 a massive *hartal* was organized to protest the colonial government and the ways in which the Acts contravened the liberal-minded Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that recommended the slow devolution of political power and the introduction of the "responsible government" of Indians by Indians.²⁶

Per the authority given to colonial administrators, Punjabi officials renewed their focus on nationalist and anti-British upheaval. Agitation against the proposal and implementation of

²⁶ Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 34.

the Rowlatt Acts incited considerable resistance throughout the country and Punjab was no exception. The arrest and deportation of Kitchlew and Satyapal, two prominent nationalist leaders, for giving public speeches in Amritsar and Lahore after Gandhi initiated the anti-Rowlatt campaign, contributed to disquiet throughout the region and especially in Amritsar.²⁷ On 11 April 1919, Miles Irving, deputy commissioner of Amritsar and staunch critic of Indian self-government, issued a dictum against public assembly and implicitly instituted martial law:

The troops have orders to restore order in Amritsar and use all force necessary. Neither gatherings of persons nor processions of any sort will be allowed. All gatherings will be fired on. Respectable persons should keep indoors until order is restored.²⁸

The threat of lethal force apparently did little to deter demonstrators. On 13 April, between ten and twenty thousand people had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh, an enclosed garden in central Amritsar. Many had assembled to protest the Rowlatt Acts but there were an untold number of Sikh pilgrims who had traveled to the holy city of Amritsar in observation and celebration of *vaisakhi*. To disrupt the thousands-strong crowd, which subverted both civil and military orders, Brigadier General Reginald Dyer raided the space with his contingent of non-Punjabi soldiers, immediately ordering them to open fire.²⁹ This “holocaust of ‘native’ lives” resulted in the murder of 379 demonstrators with another 1,137 injured.³⁰

Although the Rowlatt Acts provided the legal pretext for martial law in India, it was officially declared two days after the attack. The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and subsequent

²⁷ Derek Sayer, “British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre, 1919-1920,” *Past and Present* 131 (1991): 136-137.

²⁸ Mohan, *The Punjabi ‘Rebellion’*, 127.

²⁹ Dyer’s soldiers, who were stationed in the central Punjabi city of Jalandhar, were Balochi, from a province situated between Punjab and Afghanistan, and Nepalese Gurkhas. This fact is significant because it highlights a form of divide and conquer that emerged in the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion, which instructs that soldiers from outside a given region should be deployed to quell disturbances there.

³⁰ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab, etc.*, 1920, Vol XIV, Cmd. 681, 29. The quotation comes from Mohan, *The Punjabi ‘Rebellion’*, 126. Also see: Kim Wagner, *Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

imposition of martial law are major touchstones in the history of Punjabi anticolonialism; however, the colonial response to perceived disturbances may not have been as severe had Punjab not previously been transformed into the “garrison state” for the British Indian Army. Purnima Bose instructs that law in a colonial context is complicated by the uneven acceptance of the state’s authority. Subjects in colonial India unevenly and incompletely received the rights and privileges that were promised to the British-born population even in times of civil administration. Martial law was declared in order to quash the struggle for just treatment -- the illiberal response of an illiberal regime.³¹ “Never in the history of our connection with England,” reflects Pearay Mohan, “has the fact of our being a subject race been so offensively brought home to us, as in the terrible months of martial law.”³² Indeed, with a nod to Mohandas Gandhi, Durba Ghosh has recently argued that in 1919, “terrorism” describes the function of the government better than that of violent political revolutionaries.³³

State terrorism in Punjab in 1919 comprehensively attacked the honor, belief systems, rights, homes, and bodies of Indians throughout the province -- but the force of the military was focused on the central range. A chief complaint against the Rowlatt Acts was that they undermined the right of a trial by jury. Yet, during the period of Martial Law, the colonial judicial system was dismantled, and military tribunals were constructed and tried all those accused of undermining the King’s government. In total, 852 people were accused of committing crimes against the government, 581 were convicted with 108 being sentenced to death. Eighteen

³¹ Purnima Bose, *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 55-60.

³² Mohan, *The Punjabi ‘Rebellion’*, 191.

³³ Durba Ghosh, “Gandhi and the Terrorists: Revolutionary Challenges from Bengal and Engagements with Non-Violent Political Protest,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016): 567.

people were ultimately executed while the rest of the sentences were commuted by Royal Amnesty proclaimed in December 1919. 264 people were convicted and transported for life.³⁴

The institution of military tribunals was matched by cases of vindictive deprivation, such as limiting access to electricity, water, and train travel, as well as corporal punishment. Among the latter, public flogging appears to have been the most common. Derek Sayer points out that “ritualistic humiliation” was exacted in myriad ways. High-caste men and professionals were forced to do menial work, people in Gujranwala were ordered to salute uniformed European officers, and those in Kasur had to skip rather than walk. Dyer established the “crawling lane” as a collective punishment for the injury of a European woman during a protest. Here, all those who passed down the road were forced to do so on their stomachs while being prodded and kicked by armed soldiers.³⁵

The indiscriminate violence and humiliation in Punjab deployed against the “open rebellion” that emerged out of the anti-Rowlatt agitation was seldom more dramatic and brazen than during the aerial bombardment of Gujranwala.³⁶ According to newspaper reports, a procession of demonstrators had set the Gujranwala train station on fire as part of a spate of attacks on symbols of colonial rule. To scatter the procession (and allegedly to limit property damage and loss of life), airplanes were dispatched from Lahore with instructions to “drop a few bombs on a mob.” During Indian Questions in the House of Commons, Colonel Wedgwood, Independent Labour Party MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, asked Edwin Montagu, Secretary of

³⁴ *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab, etc.* (London: HMSO, 1920), Cd. 681, 65.

³⁵ Sayer, “British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre,” 140.

³⁶ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 113; “' Open Rebellion ' in India.” *The Times* (London, England) 19 April 1919.

State for India, whether airplanes had been used and if any thought had been given to “more humane” options since “aeroplanes cannot drop bombs accurately and that bombs dropped on large towns are almost certain to hit the wrong people.” Dismissing Wedgwood’s concerns as well as the myth of humanitarian colonialism, Montagu flatly responded that “[c]ertainly in this case the aeroplane was successful in dispersing the mob.”³⁷

The Ghadar Movement and the Emergence of Sikh Radicalism

In early-twentieth century Punjab, demographics and political institutions varied geographically. Thus, to argue, as Yong and Mahmood have, that western Punjab was successfully inoculated against the spread of radical ideas because of the forces of a strong landed elite and the close attention of the military, is not to suggest that Punjab was sheltered from the disruptions of burgeoning nationalism and militant anticolonialism. Even the 1907 disturbances, which occurred throughout the canal colonies of western Punjab, undermine the narrative of universal passivity in these areas. They demonstrate that rural elites were not omnipotent in their spheres of influence and that rural peasants were able and willing to question the legitimacy of the colonial government when their customary rights to water and land were threatened. However, as has been the subject of considerable scholarship, central Punjab was pivotal in the concentration and articulation of national self-determination and revolutionary communism in this period.³⁸ Since the military recruitment apparatus was most effective in regions of entrenched landed elite, its power was circumscribed in this Sikh-dominant region.

³⁷ "House of Commons." *The Times* (London, England) 29 May 1919; Bose, *Organizing Empire*, 55.

³⁸ Kamlesh Mohan, *Militant Nationalism in Punjab, 1919-1935* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985); Richard Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), esp. Chapters 5-6; Mridula Mukherjee, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution: Practice and Theory* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004); Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab*; Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice, and Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

The more diffuse nature of political power and influence in the doabs of central Punjab made it more conducive to demonstrations for democratic governance and freedom from foreign hegemony. This phenomenon is foundational to the greater likelihood of nationalist and anticolonial politics entering Sikh political discourse in the early interwar period.³⁹

The Ghadar Party was founded in San Francisco in 1913 by expatriate intellectuals that sought to organize Punjabi farmers and lumber workers in the Pacific Northwest who had migrated to the United States to escape economic, political, and social oppression under the British administration in Punjab.⁴⁰ From its inception, the Party pursued “militant anti-imperialism, economic egalitarianism, and social emancipation,” and outpaced conventional Indian nationalist organizations in the demand for independence.⁴¹ The party was rooted as much in conditions in Punjab as in the experience of racial discrimination and segregation in the United States. The use of the term *ghadar*, meaning “mutiny” or “rebellion” in many South Asian languages, is a reminder of the role that Punjabi soldiers played in quelling the uprising in 1857.⁴² Although, the Ghadar Party emerged at the intersection of American racism and colonial oppression, it became a transnational network of nationalists, anarchists, socialists, and Pan-Islamists that demonstrated the fact that “much of the power of the independence struggle was incubated outside the territory of British India.”⁴³ Ghadar is most commonly remembered for conspiring with German sources, smuggling weapons into British India, and foment a mutiny

³⁹ Yong, *Garrison State*, 167

⁴⁰ Puri, *Ghadar Movement*. For updated, if contrasting, perspectives on the Ghadar Movement, see: Nishant Upadhyay, ed., *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, Special Issue: Ghadar Movement: A Living Legacy 10, no. 1 (2014) and Radha D’Souza and Kasim Tirmizey, eds., *Socialist Studies/Études Socialistes*: Special Issue: Ghadar Movement a Living Legacy 13, no. 2 (2018).

⁴¹ Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, 10.

⁴² Radha D’Souza, “Revolt and Reform in South Asia: Ghadar Movement to 9/11 and After,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 8 (2014): 59-73.

⁴³ Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, 1-5. For more on the Ghadar Party see Chapters 4 and 5 below.

among Punjabi troops that resulted in a failed attempt to overthrow the Indian colonial government in 1914. This plan resulted in the Hindu-German Conspiracy case of 1915, which was tried at US District Court in San Francisco and, in India, the First Lahore Conspiracy case of 1921. Both cases led to the imprisonment of some leaders and the deportation of many others. In the short-term, the Ghadar Party was significantly fragmented; yet, in the long-term, it was able to continue organizing and recruiting from its headquarters at 5 Wood Street in San Francisco, and from branches across the globe, until the late 1930s.⁴⁴

Although often considered a failure due to the collapse of the mutiny effort in 1915, the interwar iteration of the Ghadar Party integrated Punjabi radicalism in North America, Europe, and India in the interwar period. Ghadar's contribution to the Akali Movement and the ways in which its political orientation changed between 1920-1925 marks an important transition period for the Party as well as those revolutionaries who continued to return and those who had been detained after 1914. The contact that Ghadarites made with Sikh activists during the Akali movement further served to transform the landscape for Punjabi resistance in the early-1920s as the line between Sikh communitarian politics and communist anti-colonialism became more and more difficult to discern as "communism had become embedded in local spaces" and the Sikh demand for autonomy in religious practice and gurdwara management slipped between religious reform and political agitation.⁴⁵

Being upset both by Government appointed managers of the Darbar Sahib as well as the provincial Mahants who many viewed as "immoral," the Sikhs of central Punjab organized

⁴⁴ Letter from British Consulate-General, San Francisco, to Viscount Halifax, Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Office, London. December 12, 1939. L/PJ/12/300, File 852/26. IOR. British Library.

⁴⁵ Ali Raza, "Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Meerut and the Creation of 'Official' Communism in India," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 3 (2013): 321.

jathas that consolidated into the Akali movement. Initially, though the colonial administration perceived a more militant wing of the Akali movement, the Punjab administration suggested that the movement was non-violent. Nevertheless, the widespread disaffection required comment: “Even the more sensible Sikhs lost patience with the ordinary civil procedure and the more extreme men advocated occupation of shrines by force.”⁴⁶ Among the most prominent non-violent acts was the decision that Akali leaders made to organize the Prabandhak Committee as a way of restoring management of the Golden Temple to Sikhs. However, during the “breakdown”⁴⁷ of political and social order that the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movements suggested, the Akalis demonstrated more militancy and began to “declaim violently against Government, and to speak openly of the coming Raj of the Sikhs.”⁴⁸ Thus, the Akalis led both a political and religious reform movement that had anti-colonialism at its heart and had broad appeal among Sikhs in Punjab.

In 1923, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (DIB) reported that “the Sikh national movement has obtained a very firm hold everywhere and a strong conviction exists in the minds of all Sikhs that Government has deliberately aimed at damaging their religion.” The Akali movement had achieved a level of penetration in the central Punjab that forced the surveillance apparatus to acknowledge “Sikhs have adopted an attitude in opposition to Government.”⁴⁹ Although the Akali movement had broad rural support in Punjab it was in the Babbar Akali wing that saw the recrudescence of the armed struggle for independence. Highlighting them as a fringe

⁴⁶ Note on Sikh Question in Punjab, 1919-1922, June 1922, Punjab Proceedings Home Department, P/11277. IOR.

⁴⁷ Sumit Sarkar, “The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Co-operation, c. 1905-22,” *Subaltern Studies III* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 305-320.

⁴⁸ Note on Sikh Question in Punjab, 1919-1922. June 1922, P/11277, IOR.

⁴⁹ “Extracts from Weekly Intelligence Summary for Week Ending 15 May 1923,” Sikh Activities in India, 1922-23, L/PJ/12/170. IOR.

group, able to exercise considerable autonomy from the Akali Dal, the mainstream political representation of the Gurdwara reform movement, and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Richard King has argued that Babbar Akali reoriented the independence movement, at least in Punjab, toward revolutionary violence.⁵⁰

The Comintern and the Sikh Bachelors of Communism

Whereas the orthodox Akali movement had followed a non-violent path consonant with Gandhian ideals, the Babbar Akalis turned to violence in the face of religious and political persecution. One of the major reasons for the extremism of Babbar Akali tactics was the leadership that it received from Ghadar Party revolutionaries. Indeed, the continued prominence of Ghadarites among Punjabis contributed significantly to support for the movement in the central Doab as well as in pockets of Punjabis across the globe. In 1926, The DIB noticed that the Desh Bhagat Sahayak Sabha, a welfare organization that was established to support the families of Ghadarites who had been executed to transported, had been contributing funds to the families of Akalis as well.⁵¹ Indeed, “the interest in the Babbar Akali spirit displayed by Sikhs in Canada and America,” HG Haig, secretary of the Indian government’s Home Department, wrote to the Undersecretary of State for India in that same year, “points to a general revival of the seditious activity among the Sikhs in those countries which was originally associated with what is known as the Ghadr movement.”⁵² Thus, by the middle of the 1920s the colonial government was aware of the cross-fertilization and interpenetration of Akali and Ghadar resistance that would shape the remainder of interwar anticolonialism in Punjab.

⁵⁰ Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, 98.

⁵¹ Extract, DIB, 18 November 1926. L/PJ/12/118, File 6569(b)/22. IOR.

⁵² HG Haig to Under-Secretary of State for India, 11 November 1926, L/PJ/12/173. IOR.

The imbrication of Sikh religious mobilization and radical politics in the Punjab can be gleaned from the cooperation of Akalis and Ghadarites with nascent communist organizations in the province. The Babbar Akali experiment of melding religious reform with anticolonial violence was shot through with concomitant organizing between Ghadar leaders and international communist organizations. Beginning in the 1920s, the joint activities of the Ghadar leadership and its branch in Afghanistan represented an important locus of militancy just beyond the reach of the British Raj.⁵³ In 1922, Rattan Singh and Santokh Singh went to Moscow to forge a partnership between the Party and the Comintern's University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) so that Ghadar Party members could receive formal education in revolutionary history, trade unionism, and military and vocational training.⁵⁴ By 1926, the Party supplied the Comintern with the majority of its Indian students.⁵⁵ A decade later, of the seventy Indians who had enrolled at KUTV, twenty-two had come from South America and as many as seventy percent of all new recruits came from Rosario, Argentina.⁵⁶ Rattan Singh maintained his position as "Moscow's chief recruiting agent where Sikhs are concerned" throughout the 1930s, and his correspondence revealed much about the training program that had been instituted at KUTV.

In 1931, Rattan Singh and Gurmukh Singh were in Kabul working with the Soviet Embassy to facilitate the transportation of subversive literature. Importantly, Rattan Singh was able to enlist Ghadar Party members to work as lorry drivers along the Kabul-Peshawar road to transmit anticolonial, communist, and nationalist literature. Hoping to block this arrangement,

⁵³ Extract, DIB, 28 January 1932, L/PJ/12/300. IOR.

⁵⁴ Ani Mukherji, "Anticolonial Imagination: The Exilic Productions of American Radicalism in Interwar Moscow" (PhD diss, Brown University, 2011), 41-42. "KUTV" is the abbreviation for the Russian name of the school, *Kommunističeskij Universitet trudjaščichsja Vostoka*.

⁵⁵ Mukherji, "Anticolonial Imagination," 68.

⁵⁶ Bhagwan Josh, *The Communist Movement in Punjab, 1926-1947* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977), 28.

the Chief Constable of the Northwest Frontier Provinces suggested detaining lorry drivers on the suspicion of smuggling cocaine to enable the “detection and seizure of incriminating correspondence.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, fearing the coordination between the Embassy and the Party and knowing that the Kabul branch had recently adopted the hammer and sickle emblem confirming that “the movement is definitely Bolshevistic,” the Afghan Government, under King Nadir Shah and Prime Minister Hashim Khan, deported Rattan Singh to Russia and arrested Gurmukh Singh.⁵⁸ Although Rattan Singh’s deportation to Moscow presented a small obstacle to organizing in Afghanistan, his return to Russia allowed him to resume work within the Comintern and to help coordinate Indian revolutionaries in Europe.⁵⁹

The Akali movement had opened space in Punjabi politics for the merger of Ghadar activists and Sikh “extremists” into more conventionally communist organizations in Punjab rather than relying exclusively on Moscow for education and training. Mridula Mukherjee points out that after 1925 the Akalis fragmented into “three broad political trends”: moderates aligned with the Unionist Party; Sikh communalists took over Akali itself; and anti-imperialists worked within the Congress, Communist, and Kirti-Kisan Parties.⁶⁰ Rattan Singh had mobilized Ghadar resources in support of the establishment of the Kirti-Kisan Party in Punjab in 1926, which from the outset had clearer ideological connections to international communism and took direct inspiration from the Russian Revolution.⁶¹ The party’s paper, *Kirti*, was established by well-

⁵⁷ Chief Constable of Nathia Gali, North West Frontier Province, 2 July 1931, L/PS/12/588. IOR.

⁵⁸ Annual Report, 1931, L/PS/12/588. IOR.

⁵⁹ In 1931, “while in Moscow,” Rattan Singh, “was in close touch with the notorious communist Muhammad Ali alias Sepassi and Chattopadhyaya” (*Ghadr Directory* 1934, 250). Sepassi was a close associate of MN Roy at the time and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya was a leader of the anticolonial Berlin Indian Committee.

⁶⁰ Mukherjee, *Peasants in India’s Non-Violent Revolution*, 34.

⁶¹ JS Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 164-166, quotation is from 166.

known Ghadarites Santokh Singh, Bhag Singh Canadian, Hardit Singh, and Karam Singh Chima.⁶² The June 1926 issue of *Kirti* carried a tribute to the Babbar Akalis, praising them as “those brave warriors, and true jewels of the Nation.”⁶³ The cross-pollination of radical politics in Punjab in the 1920s resulted in an “idiosyncratic” communism and created a larger pool of recruits for anticolonial activity.

From the onset of the relationship between the Ghadar Party and the Comintern, Rattan Singh helped to locate Indians in the Western Hemisphere, especially in Argentina, to study in Moscow. He also dictated the “devious routes” whereby students, so-called “Bachelors of Communism,” would return to India after completion of the course to contribute to the struggle against British hegemony.⁶⁴ In January 1936, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, JF Cowgill, wrote that “for the past twelve months or so there has been a continuous stream of these Moscow-educated Ghadr Party Sikhs...returning to India.”⁶⁵ An example of complexity of these “devious routes,” as well as the cooperation of the various organizations participating in the communist anticolonialism in Punjab, was given in an August 1936 communique:

They are given doctored passports, make way to a French port and sail to Argentina or East Africa, and apply for new passports to make their way to India; then they work with the Ghadr network in India and link up with the Kirty Kisan Party [sic], and attempt to spread communism among the workers and peasants.⁶⁶

The surveillance of returning migrants in 1931 was a product of the longstanding determination of Ghadarites to return to India to undermine the colonial government and the military apparatus in Punjab.

⁶² Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, 153

⁶³ Extract, DIB, 30 September 1926, L/PJ/12/118, File 6569(b)/22. IOR.

⁶⁴ DIB, 2 April 1936 and 25 June 1936, L/PJ/12/284. IOR.

⁶⁵ Cowgill to IPI 11 January 1936, L/PJ/12/284. IOR.

⁶⁶ DIB, 13 August 1936, L/PJ/12/284. IOR.

Even though such effort was made to cover the tracks of Indians returning from Moscow, many of these would-be revolutionaries were detained upon attempting to enter India, which “caused as much consternation to the leaders of the Ghadr Party as it has satisfaction to the authorities responsible for maintaining law and order in India.”⁶⁷ The leadership of the Ghadar Party was not only upset that their recruits’ revolutionary careers were circumscribed, but Comintern officials also grew impatient with the inability of such recruits to contribute to the revolutionary movement in India. The Comintern determined that the problem was rooted in the quality of the recruits themselves. Therefore, in the fall of 1936, it requested that all recruits be sent directly from India, which highlights that the Kirti-Kisan Party had become an effective instrument for recruiting and training capable agents in the decade since its founding.⁶⁸

The multiple and overlapping threads of communist anticolonialism in India in the early interwar period also saw the potential that the Akali movement represented. “The real infidels are those few Englishmen who oppress India to serve their selfish ends, as also those so-called Hindus and Mussalmans who serve the English for the sake of lucre and throttle the Sikhs,” Mahendra Pratap, the self-described President of the Provisional Government of India, which he founded in Afghanistan in 1915, wrote in a 1924 issue of *The Akali*. It is the duty of every follower of Guru Gobind Singh to oppose the real infidels,” he continued. “Rise and obey the orders of the Guru!”⁶⁹ Pratap’s interest in the Akali movement was distant and opportunistic. The reductive nature of his support indicates his inability to move beyond the lure of harnessing Sikh communalist zeal. Moreover, the notion that all Sikhs were in open rebellion against the colonial

⁶⁷ DIB, 2 April 1936, L/PJ/12/284. IOR.

⁶⁸ DIB, 3 November 1936, L/PJ/12/284. IOR.

⁶⁹ Extract from Summary of Intelligence, 30 January 1924, L/PJ/12/171. IOR.

state is a selective view of Sikh politics in this moment. The Akali movement did not empty the British Indian Army of its Sikh troops and there was not a single Sikh politics that was either anti-British or purely sectarian. The cooperation Sikh Akalis showed with revolutionary organizations clearly indicates that the Akali movement had moved beyond purely communalist aims. Thus, the claim that all Sikhs were actively engaged with anticolonial politics and that all Hindus and Muslims were anathema to revolution demonstrates Pratap's limited concern for the movement as such and reveals his preoccupation with his own status.

In 1922, the Kabul Branch of the Indian Communist Party showed considerable interest in the peasant struggle in the Punjab and sought to make inroads with the Akalis. According to one first-hand account, Sikh agitators made frequent visits to the hub of Indian communist activities in Afghanistan to procure funds in support of the Akalis. Significantly, some of these Akalis were associated with the notorious *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914, wherein hundreds of Indians, primarily Sikhs, attempted to undermine the Canadian "continuous journey" regulation. This law effectively banned Indians from coming to Canada by requiring that all international visitors arrive by "continuous journey" from their place of birth or citizenship. The *Komagata Maru* was chartered by Gurdit Singh so that its passengers could abide by the letter of the law and disembark in Vancouver. However, the Canadian authorities did not permit these travelers to enter the country and, instead, forced the ship to drop anchor in Burrard Inlet for two months before being forced to return to India. Upon arrival in Bengal, the passengers were forcibly put on trains headed for Punjab, which sparked off a serious riot in Budge Budge, near Calcutta. These events had a radicalizing effect on many of the passengers who became actively

involved in the Ghadar Movement soon after.⁷⁰ The presence of Akali Sikhs in Kabul further highlights the overlapping nature of patronage for revolutionary movements in the Punjab in the early twentieth century.⁷¹

The material and intellectual support that MN Roy's Indian Communist Party gave to the fledgling Babbar Akalis made a more critical impact on the arc of the movement. Roy founded the Communist Party of India in Soviet Tashkent in 1920 and had subsequently found his way to the KUTV independent of the Ghadar Party.⁷² Although the CPI was not much more established than the Babbar Akalis, the connection with the Comintern provided considerable resources for the peasant movement in the Punjab.⁷³ The Indian Communist Party clearly had a more sophisticated view of Punjabi political alliances than did Mahendra Pratap. In an article for *International Press Correspondence*, Evelyn Roy, MN Roy's wife, wrote of Mota Singh, a leader of the militant wing of the Akali movement. According to Roy, the Indian Government viewed Mota Singh "with greater concern and apprehension than those of Mahatma Gandhi" because the support he garnered for the Akali movement was perceived to be a danger to the military recruitment operations among Sikhs in Punjab. From this point, as Roy's article makes clear, the Communist Party actively sought to engage revolutionaries from the Akali and Khilafat movements to direct pan-Islamist and anticolonial tendencies toward international communism.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, 134-151.

⁷¹ Ghulam Hussain, State Prisoner, to Governor-General in Council, Delhi, 14 January 1924, L/PJ/12/54 File 4968(C)/21. IOR.

⁷² Kris Manjappa, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Routledge, 2010). MN Roy was at the height of his international political career in the early-1920s. Having established the Indian Communist Party, he submitted Supplementary Thesis on the National and Colonial question and debated Vladimir Lenin on the same at the Second World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1920.

⁷³ Extract from Weekly Report of DIB, 12 July 1922, L/PJ/12/46. IOR.

⁷⁴ Extract from Weekly Report of DIB, 13 October 1922, L/PJ/12/46. IOR; Evelyn Roy, "Mota Singh, Leader of the Indian Peasants," *International Press Correspondence* 2, n. 75 (1922): 563-564.

Having infused the Akali movement with revolutionary violence and founding the Babbar wing, Mota Singh remained the principal contact between MN Roy's communist group and the Babbar Akalis after 1922. Khushi Mohammad, one of MN Roy's emissaries in Kabul, allegedly witnessed Mota Singh join the Indian Communist Party at Kabul and, having promised loyalty, the Party "[gave] him a mandate, empowering him to claim assistance from all Communist organisations in India."⁷⁵ At the same time, the Punjab Criminal Investigation Department (CID) intercepted a letter from Singh that helped to establish direct correspondence between him and the Soviet Union through Roy. In the letter, Singh referred to "three boxes of grapes" that he had received. Upon inspection, the CID determined that this was code for three £100 Bank of England notes that the Russian Trade Delegation in London had sent and that he had subsequently cashed in Jullundur. These notes were part of a larger payment of £6300 that had been cashed throughout Punjab as well as in Karachi, Bombay, and Colombo.⁷⁶ To its surprise, this revelation convinced the colonial administration that Mota Singh was a paid agent of the Comintern, which meant that communists had influence over political and social reform movements that were not explicitly communist.

Beginning in 1923, the British surveillance apparatus in India documented the consolidation of the communist movement in Punjab, which had previously been feared mainly in Bengal and Bombay. The government discerned the Punjabi contingent of the Indian Communist Party was organized and led by Ghulam Hussain and Shamsuddin Hassan under the direction of MN Roy.⁷⁷ A major initiative of the Lahore Communist Group was to establish

⁷⁵ Ghulam Hussain, State Prisoner, to Governor-General in Council, Delhi, 14 January 1924, L/PJ/12/54 File 4968(C)/21. IOR.

⁷⁶ Extract from Weekly Report of DIB, 12 July 1922 and 28 March 1923, L/PJ/12/46. IOR.

⁷⁷ Ghulam Hussain also operated under the alias Muhammad Saddiqi.

Inquilab, a communist propaganda organ, with funds received from the Soviet Legation in Kabul, Afghanistan, which was populated by translations of MN Roy's proscribed pamphlets.⁷⁸ For his work on *Inquilab*, Ghulam Hussain was arrested under Sections 121 and 124 of the Indian Penal Code for attempting to wage war against the colonial government and for the seditious crime of inciting disaffection.⁷⁹ The government did not, however, consider Ghulam Hussain a significant player in the Indian communist movement. He was perceived to be well connected and privy to tactical and strategic information to be a useful government informant. Thus, in exchange for a lighter sentence, Hussain agreed to testify against leaders of the Indian Communist Party, particularly Roy's associate Mohammad Shafiq.⁸⁰

Although the intent of his testimony was to provide evidence against Shafiq and other communist agents operating out of a "nest of revolutionary intrigue" in Kabul, Hussain's remarks focused primarily on exonerating himself while indicating the level of contact between the Indian Communist Party and the Akali movement. Foremost, Hussain claimed that by his involvement with MN Roy and contribution to *Inquilab* "I never intended anything more serious than grabbing Bolshevik money."⁸¹ Elsewhere, the CID reported that Hussain had returned to India "with a good sum of currency notes of £100 each" and that by December 1922, he had deposited nearly Rs. 20,000 into an Alliance Bank account.⁸² Hussain sought to represent himself as a "man of socialist tendencies" but not a doctrinaire communist. Moreover, it was his greed

⁷⁸ Extract from weekly report of the DIB, 7 February 1923 and 21 February 1923, L/PJ/12/54 File 4968(C)/21. IOR. *Inquilab* means "revolution" in many South Asian languages including Urdu and Punjabi. A popular chant among anticolonial activists in the interwar period was *inquilab zindabad*, "long live revolution."

⁷⁹ Indian Law Cases, Supreme Court of India, "Indian Penal Code, 1860, Section 97-140." last accessed 10 October 2017, <http://indianlawcases.com/Act-Indian.Penal.Code,1860-1557>.

⁸⁰ Extract from weekly report of the DIB, 20 February 1924, L/PJ/12/54 File 4968(C)/21. IOR.

⁸¹ Ghulam Hussain, State Prisoner, to Governor-General in Council, Delhi, 14 January 1924, L/PJ/12/54 File 4968(C)/21. IOR.

⁸² Extract from weekly report of the DIB, 21 February 1923, L/PJ/12/47. IOR.

and “supine insensibility” that led him to cooperate with the Kabul branch to “rob those who were themselves living on robbery.” Nevertheless, the time Hussain spent in Afghanistan provided him with access and insight into the relationship between the communist movement and events in Punjab.

Conclusion

The mobility of central Punjabi Sikhs has been a routine topic of study, particularly in the case of Punjabi migration to the United States and the Pacific coast of Canada. These studies have focused on the early twentieth-century, a period when, according to Maia Ramnath, “the general Punjabi population was not yet connecting their grievances to a larger, secular and/or national context.” This chapter, in contrast, offers a genealogy of Punjabi anticolonialism. The migrants who arrived in Britain in the early interwar period, as demobilized soldiers, seamen from the Merchant Marine, and itinerant merchants, had both experienced the economic struggles wrought by colonial commodity agriculture as well as the upsurge in militant nationalism and anticolonialism that emerged during World War I. Yet, this period of interwar migration, which was already suffused with politics, nationalism, and internationalism, is a pivotal and underappreciated period in Punjabi radicalism.

The unevenness of political power and economic stability in Punjab had profound effects on nascent anticolonialism in India, which served as a foundation on which later militancy emerged in the interactions between Punjabis who traveled abroad and those who did not. In her *Echoes of Mutiny*, Seema Sohi emphasizes the important ways in which Indians were incorporated into, and victimized by, global market capitalism in the early twentieth century, to explain the emergence and influence of the anticolonial Ghadar Party. However, to suggest, as Sohi does, that migrants are politicized in the act of travel and the violence of other places, while instructive, is insufficient to understand the effect that modes of colonial domination and

oppression had on interwar migrant, anticolonial, and nationalist politics.⁸³ The creation of Indian migrant workers in the early twentieth century was an effect of colonial agricultural policies that maintained persistent undercapitalization on Indian farms, particularly in Punjab, that fed into a cycle of debt and dispossession.⁸⁴ Not only had small farmers been undermined by revenue systems that led to the concentration of farmland into fewer hands, but also the land promised to demobilized soldiers as a reward for service was dwindling, which contributed significantly to discontent, which Punjabi migrants took with them when they went abroad.⁸⁵

While political and economic alienation facilitated the rise of the Punjabi Left, it also led to the creation of a Punjabi migrant population, who both participated in Left politics and experienced economic dispossession. These processes were the seeds of the revolutionary internationalism that began to germinate in places of heavy Punjabi settlement, especially the American Pacific Northwest, parts of South America, East Asia, and East Africa. It was out of this ferment that those who ventured to Britain came in the 1920s and 1930s. Importantly, this later wave of Punjabi migrants would have a different political education than those who traveled to North America a decade or two earlier. Indeed, the experiences of the earlier generation, and certainly the interaction between the returned Ghadarites and communists of different stripes, directly inform the political activities of Punjabis in the interwar period in India as well as in diaspora.⁸⁶

⁸³ Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, 14-16.

⁸⁴ Mazumdar, "Colonial Impact and Punjabi Emigration to the United States," 316-36; Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 312; Mann, *South Asia's Modern History*, 173.

⁸⁵ Yong, *Garrison State*, 142-143.

⁸⁶ Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, 8 and 18; Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, 14-15.

Chapter 2

Restriction, Resistance, and Intimacy: Indian *Lascars* in Britain

On 29 July 1930, Jan Mohamed, from Danewal, Punjab, was given a Special Certificate of Identity and Nationality. This document came after more than five years of having his British nationality questioned and undermined by immigration officials and the Home Office. He joined the crew of the Finnish ship *Navigator* in February 1925 and was discharged in Antwerp a month later. Subsequently, he proceeded to England at his own expense and attempted to land at Harwich, a port-town just across the North Sea from Antwerp. Yet, since he was only carrying a Certificate of Continuous Discharge, which provided his biographical details and employment history as a seaman, rather than a passport, he was deemed an “alien passenger.” Therefore, he was refused leave to land under Article 15 (1) of the Aliens Order of 1920 and was sent back to Antwerp. Undeterred, Mohamed reappeared in Britain just a couple of months later and resumed signing onto ships’ crews. Fed up, after again being refused leave to land at Harwich in 1929 because he lacked satisfactory proof of nationality, he began to apply for appropriate documentation. On 22 January 1930, after being granted a series of travel documents for non-British nationals and being refused a British Passport by the Consul-General in Antwerp, the Home Secretary for the Punjab Government confirmed his birth in Punjab. Yet, rather than receiving a passport, he was granted a second-class certificate of nationality reserved for “coloured” seamen.¹

Jan Mohamed’s tortuous journey to affirm his British nationality is representative of the struggles that colonial subjects endured in the 1920s and 1930s, even if most did not drag on for

¹ Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Jan Mohamed. HO 45/13750. TNA and L/E/7/1390, File 2503. IOR.

five years. An understanding of lascar recruitment, working conditions, and politics is essential to the broader history of migrant internationalism among Punjabis in Britain for a few reasons. First, Punjabi firemen were crucial to lascar recruitment regimes from the middle of the 19th century and this population was the largest Punjabi community in Britain in the interwar period. Second, the formulation of the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order of 1925 was premised on the perceived need to stem the tide of foreign sailors deserting ship in Britain and competing with white seamen for places on ships' crews or attempting to settle ashore. Third, the Home Office and police perception that "lascar" was self-same as "Indian" in interwar Britain led to a broad application of the CASO to non-seafaring Indians. It is important, for this period, to tease out the ethnic diversity within the Punjabi diaspora in Britain to present a more sophisticated view of the social and political formation of Indian workers in Britain prior to the period of mass migration in the 1950s. This chapter will detail the history of lascars in Britain, with a focus on the networks that were deployed in their recruitment, the conditions of their employment, and the legal and social impact of their arrival in British ports.

This chapter will, first, examine the emergence steam shipping and the creation of the colonial seaman, the *lascar*, as an effective corollary to the colonial laborer, the coolie, and the codification of a documentary apparatus that monitored lascar movement and protected the interests of white Britons. As South Asian migrants reaffirmed their right to travel to Britain, the state sought to restrict access to passports, the only document that would satisfy any suspicion of one's British nationality. Second, lascar attempts to organize within Britain and internationally will be explored, especially in the context of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU) and National Union of Seamen (NUS). Third, lascar politics beyond trade unionism forms an important aspect of the experience of Indians in Britain and India. Coordination between the

Communist Party of Great Britain and the Communist Party of India to mobilize lascars for revolutionary motives is central to an understanding of lascar political formation in the early interwar period. In sum, the experiences of the people at the center of this chapter demonstrate an effective ban on Indian migration to Britain in the 1920s and 1930s and gesture toward postwar anti-immigration policy in Britain.

“Coloured Seamen” and British Belonging

In the immediate aftermath of the World War I, British policies regarding migration and identity became semi-permanent mechanisms to police the movements of so-called “undesirables” within the empire. This shift had a double effect on the hundreds of South Asian travelers and economic migrants that came to Britain in the interwar period. Although the Merchant Marine had relied heavily on lascars, the continued distrust of foreigners, combined with competition for jobs between lascars and demobilized English, Scottish, and Welsh soldiers, resulted in the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order of 1925. This legislation required all nonwhite seamen provide proof of nationality or, lacking that, to register with the Board of Trade as non-British aliens so that their movements could be monitored while they were docked.

The Coloured Alien Seamen Order (CASO) was instituted to protect white British sailors’ access to jobs on ships in the aftermath of World War I. For Punjabi lascars and other visitors, the Order had the effect of negating their rights as British subjects to travel freely within the Empire. Enacted to minimize competition between white Britons and so-called “coloured alien seamen” from Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, the Order emerged in the aftermath of an eruption of racial violence in multiple port cities. Since competition for jobs was high in the immediate postwar period and native-born English and Welsh often felt entitled to preference for employment. Therefore, in a few instances the presence of people of color in port

town vying for jobs with white workers led to bloody riots.² Moreover, CASO, like Aliens Orders that had come before, placed the onus to prove one's British nationality on the individual. This requirement was complicated for seamen because it was common practice not to issue passports to seamen and rely on only Certificates of Continuous Discharge, which were not give the same legal status. Within the Empire, passport officers were specifically directed not to issue passports to sailors as such documentation was considered unnecessary for the purposes of following the sea. Finally, the police often required many British colonial subjects, particularly those with Muslim inflected names, to register under the Special Restriction Order if he could not adequately document his birthplace and nationality.³

The Special Restriction Order was transformed into a tool to police the intersection of color and nationality that was used to target individuals who did not appear to be British. This phenomenon had an immediate impact on Muslims from colonial Punjab. On 20 January 1926, Robert Gloag wrote to the Secretary of State for India on behalf of forty Punjabi residents of Glasgow to enquire about the status of British Indians per articles of the Special Restriction Order. In 1925, CASO was only enacted "where coloured seamen were mostly to be found," but on 1 January 1926 it was expanded to cities that had communities of colonial migrants. Thus, less than a month after CASO arrived, Gloag's clients had "been called upon by the Aliens Officer in Glasgow to register as aliens," demonstrating a zealous approval of the Order by the Glaswegian authorities.⁴ Inspector Ewen McCaskill confirmed to the Chief Constable of the Glasgow Police that "73 coloured persons in Glasgow who failed to produce definite

² Jenkinson, *Black 1919*.

³ Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*.

⁴ Gloag to India Office, 20 January 1926, L/E/7/1438. IOR.

documentary proof of British nationality...have been registered here.” In addition, he emphasized that “all the Lascars, with the exception of three, admitted when registering here that they were deserters from steamers in United Kingdom ports” who “have been employed since they came to this country in coal mines, iron works and at peddling.” It is worth noting that desertion was not a contravention of CASO and the laws against desertion in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, were seldom enforced.⁵

As this case suggests, colonial seamen needed documentary evidence of their British nationality or the Special Restriction Order would be applied on a nearly arbitrary basis by local authorities. Believing this to be the case, the Glasgow Indian Union wrote to the Secretary of State for India noting that most of these Indians had been born in the Punjab and had been working in Britain during the war. Furthermore, the letter stated, with a degree of suspicion, that “it appears to be the intention of the Home Secretary to register these labourers and pedlars as Alien Seamen which they certainly are not.” With exasperation the letter adds that “in the Identity Books issued by the local Authorities the nationality and birth places are left blank!”⁶ The Glasgow Indian Union insisted that it was hardly the fault of the Indians in question that they were unable to produce satisfactory proof of nationality when the only documents that they had been provided were woefully lacking in pertinent details.

Nevertheless, though CASO explicitly did not apply to Indian lascars in Britain, whether they had broken the terms of their contract or not, it was quickly appropriated by the government as a means of controlling that population. In the fall of 1930, the Chief Superintendent for Scotland, CT Lane, summarized the procedure for recovering deserters and noted that the police

⁵ McCaskill to Chief Constable, Glasgow, 11 February 1926. L/E/7/1438. IOR.

⁶ Glasgow Indian Union to Secretary of State for India. 17 February 1926, HO 45/12314. TNA.

respond immediately “when information is received that a strange ‘Native’ has been about.” As a core aspect of detection and recovery of deserters, Lane observed that “a watchful eye is kept on the Indian peddling fraternity here all strangers being closely examined.”⁷ During a meeting at the Board of Trade on 5 May 1930, which was convened to consider strategies for deporting lascars, FJ Adams, from the Office of the High Commissioner for India, recounted the procedure for obtaining certificates of British Nationality. Though the process could last up to four months, during which time the lascar would generally be treated as an alien and registered under the Special Restriction Order, Adams cautioned that “where verification is forthcoming it is not possible to withhold the certificate, by virtue of which the holder becomes immune from deportation from this country.”⁸ In other words, when colonial migrants demonstrated birth within the realm of the British Empire, their rights to remain were validated and their vulnerability to CASO avoided. From FJ Adams’ perspective it was undesirable that such rights be affirmed.

The *Lascar* and Colonial Mobility

The advent of steam-powered shipping in the mid-nineteenth century led to heavy recruitment of Punjabi Muslim seamen into the merchant-shipping industry to work as firemen in ships’ engine rooms.⁹ While in the earlier part of that century, companies were keen to recruit among Malabaritis and Gujaratis, and from other regions with a longstanding seafaring tradition, steam allowed for a deskilling of mariners and facilitated the devaluing of Indian ocean-going

⁷ CT Lane, Chief Superintendent for Scotland, Report, 25 October 1930, TNA HO 45/14299.

⁸ Note of a Meeting Held at The Board of Trade at 3.30 p.m. on the 5th May 1930. L/E/9/962/162-165. IOR.

⁹ FJA Broeze, “The Muscles of Empire: Indian Seamen and the Raj, 1919-1939,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 18, no. 1 (1981): 45-46.

labor.¹⁰ Ravi Ahuja has observed that South Asian seamen were recruited from a series of rural “labour catchment areas.” These areas had different effects on crews depending on the port from which they embarked. Crews out of Calcutta were mostly composed of sailors from eastern Bengali whereas crews at Bombay were segmented along functional and geographical lines: Punjabi Muslim firemen, Christian Goanese stewards, and Hindu Gujarati deck hands. Moreover, cities in western Punjab’s salt tract systematically used as areas for recruiting engine-room crews among discharged soldiers.¹¹ The geographical overlap in systems of recruitment for the Army and the Merchant Marine is rooted in the perceived loyalty of the residents of this region but a more convincing explanation is that the economic stability of this area was founded on military and merchant marine service and that the power in the area was concentrated among a few rural elites who actively cooperated with the District Soldier’s Boards.¹²

Punjabi seamen signed onto ships crews under Asiatic Articles, conventionally referred to as lascar articles, which were instruments of racial oppression used by shipping companies and protected by the state from the early-nineteenth century into the 1950s and 1960s.¹³ Unequal treatment of lascars was established in law under the Lascar Act of 1823, the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, and the Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1923.¹⁴ Asiatic Articles stipulated that one must embark on a roundtrip service, meaning that Indians did not have the prerogative to

¹⁰ Gopalan Balachandran, “Conflicts in the international maritime labour market: British and Indian seamen, employers, and the state, 1890-1939,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 39, no. 1 (2002): 73-75.

¹¹ Ravi Ahuja, “Subaltern Networks under British Imperialism: Exploring the Case of South Asian Maritime Labour (c. 1890-1947),” in *Space on the Move: Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, eds. Jan-Georg Deutsch and Brigitte Reinwald (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2002), 45-49. See page 49 for the quotation.

¹² Mahmood, “Collaboration and British Military Recruitment, 1474-1500; Yong, *Garrison State*, 166-167.

¹³ Tabili, “*We Ask for British Justice*”, 41-48.

¹⁴ Marika Sherwood “Lascar Struggles Against Discrimination in Britain 1923-45: The Work of N.J. Upadhyaya and Surat Alley,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 90, no. 4 (2004): 438, n. 3.

terminate their employment outside of British India. Furthermore, these laws allowed for the devaluing of Asian labor in virtually every way compared to those who joined crews in Europe. Lascars were afforded less food, worked more hours per week, and were paid between three-quarters to two-thirds that of a European seaman. Even bunk space given to lascars was typically less than half that given to a European, meaning that a shipping company could house twice as many lascars as Europeans in the same cubic footage of berths. Considered together, the lascar was roughly twenty to twenty-five percent cheaper to employ. Thus, it was not uncommon for shipping companies to discharge their more expensive European crews in Bombay or Calcutta, as they were not obligated to employ their European seamen for roundtrip journeys, and sign replacement lascar crews before departing.¹⁵

Fears of an influx of “coloured” seamen were paradoxical. As British subjects, Indian seamen were entitled to passports and freedom of movement within the empire. Yet, as seamen that right was superseded by the requirements of shipping companies and the Board of Trade for cheap and nearly captive labor. Due to the CASO, a preponderance of information about Indians in Britain emerged in the mid-1920s. In May 1930, the Board of Trade examined the question of lascar deserters working as peddlers in British towns. Specifically, the Board sought a deeper understanding of the material conditions of lascars and the process by which peddlers were licensed. A note on the meeting summarizes the reasons why lascars deserted:

Lascar seamen desert their ships in this country either for the purpose of obtaining pedlars’ licenses, by means of which they are able to earn considerable sums of money before returning to India, or as a result of inducements held out by keepers of Boarding Houses for Asiatic seamen, who derive profit from corrupt practices in connection with the supply of coloured stokehold crews to ships in UK ports.¹⁶

¹⁵ Balachandran, “Conflicts in the international maritime labour market,” 73-76.

¹⁶ Note of a Meeting Held at The Board of Trade at 3.30 p.m. on the 5th May 1930. L/E/9/962/162-165. IOR.

The perception that boarding house keepers with ulterior motives facilitated Indian desertion emerged in the mid-1920s as Indian Muslim peddlers became more visible. On 3 November 1925, the Secretary to the Commissioner of Police in London wrote to the Secretary of State for India about the recent increase in applications for peddlers' certificates submitted by "Lascar and Indian seamen" and described the process by which lascars would enter the peddling trade; a process that Ravi Ahuja has termed "networks of the subordinated."¹⁷ The letter draws attention to the relationship between one applicant, who had resided in London since 1922, and Syud Ally, the proprietor of a shop and lodging house for Indians. The Secretary observes that "the present applicant is penniless and Syud Ally is financing him by way of paying the fee for the certificate and providing him with goods [to sell], on terms favourable to himself." To protect deserters from unscrupulous hostel keepers and to protect the sensibilities of Britons in the East End of London, among whom, the Secretary believed, there was a "general feeling...against men of colour being empowered as certified peddlars to call at private houses to offer the good for sale." For these reasons the Police Commissioner of London undermined the Pedlars Acts and unilaterally decided to cease the certification of "these Indian natives" as peddlers.¹⁸

For its part, the India Office responded to protest the Commissioner's decision for a series of interlocking reasons. First, noting that desertion was not a criminal offence, to withhold such certificates could lead a lascar "to consider himself treated as an enemy of society and will tend to be more susceptible to undesirable influences." Second, the India Office abjured a

¹⁷ Ravi Ahuja, "Networks of Subordination -- Networks of the Subordinated: The Case of South Asian Maritime Labour under British Imperialism (c. 1890-1947)," in *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia and the Indian Ocean*, eds Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tiné (New York: Routledge, 2008), 11-48.

¹⁸ The Secretary to the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis, New Scotland Yard, To Secretary, India Office. 3 November 1925. L/E/7/1422, file 6704. IOR.

general ban on issuing peddler certificates to presumed deserters because the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 required that indigent Indians be repatriated at the expense of the India Office, unless the Shipping Company holding the contract for the lascar and be identified and induced to repatriate. Finally, in response to the Commissioner's perception of the "general feeling" that Londoners are not ready for nonwhite door-to-door salesmen, the India Office observed that "these men are British subjects, many of whom served with distinction in the War", and the Commissioner's proposal was a clear case of "racial, or colour, discrimination against them."¹⁹

The concern that the India Office displayed for the treatment of Indians in Britain, whether out of concern for the Indian revenues that might be used to repatriate those who became destitute or a stance against state-sanctioned racial discrimination, did not resonate with the Home Office. By the middle of 1930, the Home Office issued a circular directing the Police to take time to "ascertain how the applicant entered the United Kingdom" before granting a peddler's certificate -- a process intended to "discourage desertions from Lascar Articles."²⁰ To assist in these efforts, the Government of India issued a Notice to Seamen, which was displayed in all the major ports of British India, especially in Bombay and Calcutta. The Notice alerted seamen that "any idea that there is ample opportunity of obtaining employment in the United Kingdom is wholly erroneous." Not only did the Notice cite "prevailing unemployment" in Britain, but also that "special restrictions" had been instituted on the grant of peddler certificates to Indians suspected of desertion from the 1930s. The police increasingly took up Home Office instructions: "I seem to remember that Lascar deserters were granted pedlar certificates with

¹⁹ India Office to The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, New Scotland Yard, Draft letter. December 1925, L/E/7/1422 File 6704. IOR. See chapter 3 for a fuller account of the social and political formation of the Indian peddler fraternity in Britain.

²⁰ Home Office, Circular, 21 May 1930, MEPO 2/5064. TNA. Same record is also located at L/E/9/962. IOR.

some freedom on the urgent insistence of the late Lord Birkenhead when he was Secretary of State for India,” the Assistant Chief Constable for the Metropolitan Police observed in 1933. “As he is dead, perhaps his wishes can now be disregarded.”²¹ Although there were multiple routes for Indians to become peddlers in Britain, a focus of the next chapter, the Home Office and India Office both sought to restrict lascar mobility out of a belief that colonial seamen were the only source of Indian peddlers.

Considering the inability of municipalities to induce repatriation, government officials appealed to the terms of the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, which, among other things, outlined the responsibility that shipping companies had to their crews. According to that Act, shipping companies were responsible both to report all desertions from their crews as well as to offer all destitute seamen working passage back to their native countries. However, because there was not a consistent mechanism to oversee the correct reporting of desertions and because shipping companies were loath to repatriate any seamen at a potential cost to themselves, the Act was often unenforceable. In 1930, the Board of Trade contacted many of the shipping companies that operated in Liverpool as to their procedure for reporting, tracking, and repatriating Indian seamen. The response was overwhelmingly one of disinterest, stating either that desertions were not a major concern or that the companies were in a poor position to remedy the situation. For instance, the Bibby Brothers Company stated that “desertions of Lascars from our vessels are very rare. Whenever a desertion is discovered we immediately inform the police and they usually have no difficulty in tracing the culprit.”²² Nevertheless, the representatives of these companies

²¹ Assistant Chief Constable, Copy of Minute 25, 25 January 1933, MEPO 2/5064.TNA.

²² A Harding, Manager, Bibby Brothers and Company, to GE Baker, Assistant Secretary, Mercantile Marine Department, Board of Trade, 23 July 1930, L/E/9/963. IOR.

were eager to suggest remedies to the non-existent problem. The Thomas and James Harrison Company thought that harboring Indians without notifying the Merchant Marine should be illegal.²³ The Anchor Brocklebank Line insisted that suspected lascars should be barred from peddlers' licenses.²⁴ The P. Henderson and Company went as far as to propose that "a period of imprisonment might act as a deterrent," even though such an action would exceed the punishment outlined in the Act.²⁵ The Ellerman's City Line was more candid. First, it stated that, though desertions did occur, they amounted to a negligible proportion of their total crews and thus went unreported. Second, it reminded the Board of Trade that "it must be borne in mind that these natives are British Subjects."²⁶ Yet, though the shipping companies agreed that desertions were rare and easily traced, the government maintained that it was the cause of the high rate of increase among the Indian population in Britain.

Unsatisfied by the position that most shipping companies maintained in the face of the desertion crisis, the Board of Trade held up the Peninsular and Oriental Line as a model of desertion detection and repatriation, which had resulted in only twenty-eight lascars going unaccounted in the preceding six years. The scheme was certainly simple: All missing lascars were reported and their Certificates of Continuous Discharge, often called nullies, were given to the special agent in port. With this information, the special agent secured a warrant against Section 221 of the Merchant Shipping Act. Interestingly, this section only provides for the forfeiture of wages by deserters in Britain; however, if the desertion occurred outside of the

²³ Thomas and James Harrison to GE Baker, 30 July 1930, L/E/9/963. IOR.

²⁴ DW Williams to GE Baker, Assistant Secretary, Mercantile Marine Department, Board of Trade, 29 July 1930, L/E/9/963. IOR.

²⁵ P Henderson and Company to GE Baker, 25 July 1930, L/E/9/963. IOR.

²⁶ George Smith and Sons to GE Baker, 30 July 1930, L/E/9/963. IOR.

United Kingdom, the lascars would be subject to up to twelve weeks of imprisonment and withheld pay.²⁷ Warrant in hand, the special agent then set to work tracking down the deserter. If found, the seaman was taken to court, ordered to pay for all expenses incurred during tracking, and then ordered to return to his ship or any India-bound ship on that shipping line. Although the Mercantile Marine Department acknowledged that the system was imperfect, and relied heavily on a recent nully, it made full use of the Merchant Shipping Act to recover all “illegally landed” persons. The scheme also required that the shipmaster be willing to pay for the cost of recovery, which was only returned if the seaman was found and tried.²⁸

Social Welfare, Integration and Interracial Intimacy

Anxieties around lascars desertion and the fear of a growing population of colonial seamen settling, at least for a time, in British port cities led to the production of innumerable reports on their numbers and their welfare as a means of monitoring them. Having recently started studying the living conditions of lascars in Glasgow, the Scottish Board of Health devised a scheme in 1920 to provide temporary support to lascars in Glasgow with money from the National Relief Fund on the condition that all those who receive support agree to return to their home countries.²⁹ However, on this occasion, the “money inducements” offered to lascars proved ineffective in the repatriation effort. This failure demonstrates, at least in part, that colonial seamen were committed to remaining in Britain either to sign onto ships on European articles or because living conditions in Glasgow, as in Liverpool, Cardiff, and London, were

²⁷ Merchant Shipping Act 1894 (57 & 58 Vict c. 60). Part II, Section 221a. 105, last accessed 18 February 2019, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1894/60/pdfs/ukpga_18940060_en.pdf.

²⁸ “Note of Scheme Adopted by a Shipping Company. For the Tracing of Lascar Deserters,” no date, L/E/9/963. IOR.

²⁹ WRH Johnston to the Town Clerk, Glasgow, 21 January 1920, CO 323/843. TNA.

comparatively better than those in Bombay or Calcutta.³⁰ The goal throughout the interwar period, as the Scottish Board of Health proposal indicates, was to facilitate the repatriation of as many lascars who had landed in Britain as possible to mitigate the size of the community in Britain; a community believed to be undesirable people prone to destitution and other illicit habits that undermined core values of British civilization.

Barring legal recourse that would allow the state to actively reduce the size of the Indian population, the government attempted to confine lascars to ports and struggled to understand their “social conditions” as a method of control. According to a 1935 study by the Joint Council of the British Social Hygiene Council and the British Council for the Welfare of the Mercantile Marine the threat that lascars posed to British society was rooted in the built environment. The study examined the “poverty and grime” that characterized the areas most heavily occupied by lascars and noted that “one may search in vain for a tree or any sort of alleviation of this cheerless outlook.” Without acceptable recreational facilities, the report suggested that lascars huddled in pubs, which were “more decrepit, more flagrantly the rendezvous of vice, and more sordid than are the public houses of any other neighbourhood.”³¹ Attracted to the “possibility of an easy life of idleness and the comparative wealth that is presented to them by the money obtainable from unemployment benefit or public relief,” the report asserted that Indian lascars were increasing “by the hundreds” in Cardiff.³² This judgement was little more than a rehearsal of the ‘myth of the lazy native’ that Syed Hussein Alatas exploded in his study of colonial

³⁰ S Paterson to Under Secretary for Scotland, 10 February 1920, CO 323/843. TNA.

³¹ “Social Conditions in Ports and Dockland Areas,” p. 13, LAB 13/74. TNA.

³² “Social Conditions in Ports and Dockland Areas,” p. 18, LAB 13/74. TNA.

capitalism, in which he demonstrates that the colonized were necessarily figured as indolent as a means of justifying colonial expansion.³³

For the authors of the survey, the easy “rendezvous of vice” that allowed lascars to return to their supposed natural state of degradation, not having been “imbued with moral codes similar to our own,” was a central complaint.³⁴ On its face, this assessment suggests that Indians were not suited for life in the United Kingdom because of their lack of work-ethic; notwithstanding the conditions of their labor in the stokehold of steamships where they endured excessive heat and shift durations from which Europeans were exempt. But the image of the docile and lazy Indian was combined with British sexual anxieties around the purity of white women. Taken together, the lascar became both a symbol of decay and a vector of wickedness. Specifically, the report claims that prostitutes and “women of low type” were uniquely attracted to Indian and African seamen. The authors evoke their own sexual inadequacy by discussing the sexuality of colonial seamen much as a zoologist might discuss that of a lion, by reducing it to “mating with our women” and referring to their children as “male offspring”. The “social evil” that interracial sexuality presented to the authors of the report, however, was in “the half-caste girl” who was “characteristically disinclined to discipline and routine work.” Yet, the authors seem to acknowledge the spuriousness of this claim. Since the proposed social ills that the lascar population had created were little more than fifteen years old, the report admits that “proportionately there are more half-caste children below school age than of it.” Therefore, such assessments of the willingness of children to work or their disposition toward discipline is rife

³³ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 215.

³⁴ “Social Conditions in Ports and Dockland Areas,” p. 18, LAB 13/74. TNA.

with prejudice. Unsurprisingly, the report did not attempt to substantiate the claims of laziness and indiscipline, but rather deployed racial ideology in the place of evidence.³⁵

The urgency of repatriating any lascar who had landed irregularly or who had become destitute in Britain was compounded by the relationships that Indian and African seamen had with white women. Interracial intimacy formed the foundation of racial animosity in Britain in the 1920s and informed the hysterical rhetoric of government councils ostensibly committed to lascar welfare. At the close of World War I, the global economic slowdown combined with the increased population of nonwhite workers contributed to social instability in Britain. In 1919, race riots occurred throughout the country and occasions of white women socializing with black and brown men often acted as the spark igniting a tinderbox of racial, sexual, and economic uncertainties.

Late in the evening of 13 June 1919, a chartered bus was returning to the Cardiff docks. Its occupants were Arab seamen and white Welsh women who had spent the evening picnicking. As they disembarked, gangs of white men, many of whom were demobilized soldiers themselves, set upon the caravan. There were shots fired as some of the Arab seamen were armed with revolvers and razors. But, as paramilitary contingents of white men continued their pursuit, the seamen retreated into “the maze of narrow streets abutting the canal,” colloquially referred to in the press as “Nigger Town.”³⁶ Highlighting the fundamental cause of the violence, *The Daily Express* report on the incident commented plainly that “the riots have arisen out of the growing feeling of hostility towards the blacks mainly because of their association with white

³⁵ “Social Conditions in Ports and Dockland Areas,” p. 19, LAB 13/74. TNA.

³⁶ “Race Rioting at Cardiff,” *The Times* (London, England), 13 June 1919.

girls and women.”³⁷ The violence resulted in the deaths of a Welshman, John Donovan, and an “unidentified negro.”³⁸

The official opprobrium surrounding colonial migration to Britain, along with the “social evils” they caused, continued unabated throughout the 1920s. In 1929, the Foreign Office began negotiations with the French effectively to expand their sphere of migration control into French ports, especially Havre and Marseille. British ministers contended that France had no restrictions on colonial seamen disembarking there but they theorized that those who landed in France would then board Britain-bound ships. Through this technique colonial seamen were able to land in Britain, skirting many of the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Acts, including those holding shipping companies and the India Office liable for repatriation. In his analysis of the problem of colonial seamen entering Britain on French ships, John Anderson portrayed it as a twofold issue: “First, the coloured man is a serious competitor with the white seaman in the labour market” because white and nonwhite seamen could not serve on the same crew. “The second difficulty is a social one” Anderson continued, “racial feuds and the intercourse of coloured men with white women”³⁹

Over and above the economic competition that lascars presented, the principal concern surrounded the freedom of regularly landed lascars to establish businesses and employ white women. Fears that colonial seamen would lure white women into unlawful sexual relationships abound in the Home Office and various police archives. The Chief Constable of the Cardiff Police, noticeably exercised by Maltese and Indian owned cafes in the city, moaned that “the

³⁷ “Black men and white girls,” *Daily Express*, 13 June 1919.

³⁸ “Cardiff Race Riots.” *The Times* (London, England) 14 June 1919.

³⁹ John Anderson, Home Office, to Ronald Lindsay, Foreign Office, 15 January 1929, HO 45/13392. TNA.

waitresses or assistants kept in them dance with the patrons, who are mostly coloured seamen, and as there is usually an inner room at these establishments very little imagination is necessary to conjure the sequence.”⁴⁰ Clearly, the Chief Constable in Cardiff presumed that the cafes and clubs that Indian and Maltese migrants established there were nothing more than brothels.

An investigation into interracial intimacy makes it clear that the police in London were actively looking for a test case to punish black sexuality and vindicate their presumptions of degeneracy among lascars and their own sexual inadequacy. In 1937, an Indian boarding house at 22 Spital Square, London, came to the attention of the Metropolitan Police as a site of presumed procuration wherein Wassid Miah, a Sylheti seaman, was accused of having sex outside of wedlock with a 14-year-old girl named Sybil Kent. According to the Police, Miah met Kent and her friend, Rose Love, in the coastal town of Great Yarmouth, some 120 miles northeast of London. Though the Police alleged sexual impropriety on Miah’s part, neither Kent nor Love made any allegations against Miah, except that they had walked along the beach with him. Nevertheless, the police pursued the case and gave Kent a physical examination that revealed “no evidence of sexual intercourse.” Love, Kent’s friend, was implicated in a cover up, having previously stayed with Miah in London. Though there was no supporting evidence, during this visit, according to the Detective Inspector investigating the case, Miah and Love had slept together providing her with a reason to protect him. Lacking evidence, the police dropped the case against Miah. “This is to be regretted” lamented the Detective Inspector in his report,

⁴⁰ “A Social Evil in Cardiff.” *The Times* (London, England), 11 January 1929, HO 45/13392. TNA.

“as a prosecution of a man of colour in this district, for attempted procurement of a white girl, would deter men of colour from associating with young white girls.”⁴¹

To be sure, the kinds of relationships that Indian and other colonial seamen formed with white women had differing degrees of intensity reflected the dynamism of their surroundings. For instance, women often worked with Indian seamen and boarding house keepers to help them comply with the provisions of the Aliens Orders. In early 1933, the Limehouse station of the Metropolitan police wrote regarding the requirement that boarding house keepers keep a register of their guests stipulated under Section 7 of the Aliens Order of 1920. According to this section, British subjects were only asked to sign their names and nationality. Yet, as so many lascars and other Indian migrants were unable to write in English these registers were often unintelligible for any review by the Aliens Department. As a result, the proprietors were accused of breaking the rules of the Order. Thus, aware of the stipulations and possible consequences, some boarding houses relied on “low class English females” who stayed there to maintain adequate, English language registers. Thus, these relationships were vital to Indians in Britain during the interwar period because they were a mark of social integration that helped recent migrants to navigate economic and legal obstacles.

Not only did white women help to keep the books for Indian-run boarding houses, but they were a perennial presence in new migrants’ attempts to remain in Britain. These lodgings became a focus for government officials in their attempt to enforce the Aliens Order, which would ordinarily not apply to Indians in any case, but also in their effort to better understand how

⁴¹ Metropolitan Police, Commercial Street Station, 5 November 1937, MEPO 2/5064. TNA. Procurement, as defined by Section 2 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885), is the offense of having or attempting to have “carnal knowledge” with any women under the age of 21 without a valid marriage or recruiting or attempting to recruit a woman or girl into prostitution.

Indians and other colonial migrants navigated the labyrinthine regulations intended to limit their presence and mobility in Britain. Boarding houses not only provided short-term lodgings, often on credit, but gave new migrants access to economic and social networks once in Britain. Since the Aliens Orders put the onus of proving nationality on the migrant and considering that recent migrants were not typically proficient in English, appeals to authorities in their home district often required a go-between who understood the process and could fill-in the form. As was often the case, compatriots of new migrants helped in this process, both by filling-in forms, if they were able, or introducing them to white women who were intimately involved with the community. In 1930, the Liverpool Criminal Investigation Department focused on the proprietors of a tea shop at 65 Pitt Street, a few blocks the east bank of the River Mersey, for providing such assistance. In exchange for patronage at her shop, Ethel Mohamed, “the English wife of Noah Mohamed,” reportedly completed, or helped to complete, applications for Certificates of Identity and Nationality. If granted, these Certificates allowed migrants to avoid registering as aliens, even if they did not ensure that the migrant would then be afforded the rights of a British subject without question.⁴²

Throughout the interwar period, government commentators and various welfare organizations targeted the relationships between colonial migrants and white women. The relationships were decried as “social evils” and the women were demeaned as “low type” and dismissed because “many of these girls come from the provinces.”⁴³ The view that poor and rural women were dangerously naive extended to their marriages. Remarking on inter-racial relationships in Cardiff, the *Times* notes with palpable derision that “some of the women are so

⁴² Liverpool Police, Report, 26 November 1930, L/E/9/962. IOR.

⁴³ Commercial Street Station, Metropolitan Police, 15 November 1937, MEPO 2/5064. TNA.

credulous as to go through a form of marriage according to what they are told is Mohammedan law.”⁴⁴ Of course, the collusion between the paper of record, municipal police forces, and the Home Office to trivialize and pathologize these relationships provides little insight to their content.

Much as Ethel Mohamed worked with new migrants to navigate the documentary apparatus to establish their identity, wives of seamen reached out to various ministerial offices of government to resolve any outstanding doubts about their husbands’ nationality. In 1925, Mary Fazel wrote to the Secretary of the Colonial Office to enquire about her husband’s status as a British seaman. She wrote that Fazel Mohamed had presented a Certificate of Nationality upon landing at Cardiff in 1919. However, the document was disregarded, and he was registered as an Alien. Her concern for him, especially as an active seaman, and his ability to return to Britain was at the forefront of her appeal. “I have been married to him seven years, and we have three children,” she reported, “therefore the knowledge that my husband is not a recognized British Subject, causes me much consternation, as should anything happen to him in a foreign port his rights as Britisher would be jeopardised, and consequently my own and our children’s.”⁴⁵ Mary Fazel certainly does not resemble the dupe that the government presumed. A year later, her sophisticated and persistent advocacy for her husband resulted in the issuance of a Certificate of Identity and Nationality after the Home Department for the Government of India replied, plainly, that “Fazel Mohammad is a British Indian subject,” having been born in Peshawar.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “A Social Evil in Cardiff.” *The Times* (London, England), 11 January 1929. HO 45/13392. TNA.

⁴⁵ Mary Fazel to Secretary, Colonial Office, 7 September 1925, L/E/9/953. IOR.

⁴⁶ Viceroy, Home Department, Government of India, to Secretary of State for India, 24 August 1926, L/E/9/953. IOR.

These efforts take on heightened significance because the wives of aliens typically deprived of their own British citizenship. On 26 May 1930, around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Winifred and Abdul Ghani reported to the Fleetwood Section of the Lancashire Constabulary, just north of Blackpool, to register under the Coloured Alien Seamen Order because they were "unsure of their nationality." According to the police records, Winifred Ghani, born Winifred Jones, worked as a barmaid in a hotel in Blackpool and Abdul Ghani had been signing onto ships in Liverpool since 1919. They had been married only a few weeks and, even though Winifred had been born at Sheffield and Abdul at Jhelum in Punjab, his lack of any documentation convinced them to register and forfeit British nationality -- effectively leaving them stateless.⁴⁷ Having complied with the Aliens Order, Winifred pursued documentation of Abdul's birth so that their nationality could be reinstated allowing them to remain in England together. In response to Winifred's letter for guidance, the Home Office reminded her that it was the responsibility of any presumed alien to demonstrate British nationality. In this case, it took nearly three years for the Home Department in Punjab to confirm Abdul's birth. Even so, the confirmation of his nationality came with a seed of doubt because "his date of birth which would not be verified from the birth register" suggested still that any narrative of his life could be disputed.⁴⁸

The state remained unmoved by the hardship that surveillance and registration placed on such marriages.⁴⁹ Indeed, the authorities remained derisive of these relationships throughout the

⁴⁷ Lancashire Constabulary, Kirkham Division, Fleetwood Section, 28 May 1930, HO 45/15183. TNA.

⁴⁸ Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Abdul Ghani, HO 45/15183. TNA.

⁴⁹ The legislative history of interracial intimacy has received considerable attention by scholars of the South Asian diaspora. Karen Leonard, in her work on Punjabi-Mexicans of the Imperial Valley in California, has noted that "the strongest prejudice was against Punjabis associating with white women." To that end, the California state legislature passed anti-miscegenation laws that were in effect from the early-twentieth century until just after the Second World War. In a similar context, Nayan Shah has looked at the phenomenon of "stranger intimacy," those relationships that

interwar period. Regarding Indians “consorting with white women” in Stepney in 1934, an Inspector lamented that “police cannot intervene in these cases as often as they would desire as the white women, usually of a low and degraded type, resent Police interest in their affairs.”⁵⁰ Moreover, in 1939, while assessing the welfare of seamen in British ports, the International Labour Office observed that Lascars often “form undesirable associations with white women of the lowest type.”⁵¹ The Police and International Labor Office were joined in their anxious scorn by the Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) unit, which was devised in order to monitor communism and nationalism among Indians. The “social problem,” bemoaned the IPI, emerging in Birmingham was that “many of these Indians have already married or otherwise set up house with English women.” The state joined in with white supremacist outrage at the proliferation of inter-group intimacy, but it must be acknowledged as a crucial component not just of transforming a migrant into a settler but also that the indignance of the state and the violence of working-class racism was foundational to migrant politics in post-war era.

Lascar Politics: Discipline and Revolution

The conditions on ship and the persistent surveillance on land presented lascars with considerable reason for discontentment. Since the progressive and long-term erosion of worker rights at sea and the maintenance of a race-based hierarchy of seamen was not uniformly protested throughout the period under review it remained a viable system for shipping firms.

subvert normative expectations, especially regarding the nascent practice of marriage licenses. He points out that the marriage license was a “powerful and invisible tool for judging a couple’s fitness for marriage.” Marking the inter-racial relationship as illegitimate functions simultaneously to legitimize and protect heteronormative, endogamous relationships. See Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), Ch. 4; and Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), Ch. 5.

⁵⁰ L. Clark, Metropolitan Police, Leman Street Station, Report, 26 January 1934, L/P&J/7/1007, file 719. IOR.

⁵¹ “Enquiry into Seamen’s Welfare in Ports”. International Labour Recommendation, No. 48: Port of London. Appendix XXII, 8 July 1939, L/E/9/457. IOR.

However, the lack of systematic and widespread resistance means neither that the conditions of employment were adequate, nor that Indians served in obeisance. Indeed, the conditions of employment combined with the mobility of the lascar to present myriad modes of political action in the interwar period. In this section, I will detail lascar politics as they emerged in connection with organized political organizations, the Communist Parties of Great Britain and India, and the trade union movement. Furthermore, I will examine political activity in response to perceived breaches of lascar customary rights on ship.

In this context, the National Sailor's and Firemen's Union (NSFU) sought to restrict access to contracts originating in British ports. Lascars, by the contract they signed in India, were not permitted to land in Britain for discharge and, therefore, their possession of a passport was deemed unnecessary and not permitted. Instead, the only documentary proof of identity and nationality that they were granted was a record of their service on ships called a Continuous Discharge Book, or nully.⁵² The ways in which the state interacted with lascars in Britain clearly demonstrates a lack of trust and the reliance on heightened surveillance. According to a Metropolitan Police report from 1932, "Practically the only means of identifying a Lascar seaman is by his Nully...which bears a photograph and detailed description of him." The report observes that in most cases of desertion, these documents remain on the ship and return to India. Thus, as the report continues, "unless the seaman gives accurate information about himself he is in no danger of being identified." From this view, Indian seamen deliberately deserted without their nullies to sign onto a ship from a British port and thereby obtain higher wages.⁵³

⁵² Douglas H. Hacking, Home Office, to JS Wardlaw-Milne, M.P, 15 April 1926; "Indian Lascars. Registration as Aliens," *Pioneer Mail* (Delhi, India), 7 May 1926. L/E/9/953. IOR.

⁵³ Metropolitan Police, Report, Commercial Street Station, 11 July 1932, L/E/9/962. IOR.

The official view of desertion was either opportunistic on the part of the sailor or exploitative on the part of the boarding house keepers who persuaded Indians to jump ship. However, the act of desertion was a form of political agency. In 1925, for instance, the Indian crew of the *Tenbergen*, deserted upon calling at Leith, Edinburgh's North Sea port, because the terms of their engagement had been changed after embarkation. According to the shipping company, the Indians, who joined the crew at Karachi, protested the revised itinerary that would take them to Newport News, Virginia, instead of New York City. The stated reason for the change was the New York fell outside latitudinal parameters that were specified in the contract. However, the crew alleged to believe that the ship was bound only to Leith and was then to return to Karachi. According to representatives of the crew, there was no knowledge of the trans-Atlantic journey and the prospect of visiting New York in the cold of early-spring was unwelcome. Thus, when the ship arrived at Leith via London, the men escaped the ship after having a physical altercation with the Captain and First Mate.⁵⁴

Upon desertion, the Immigration Officer at Leith instructed that the lascars be remanded to the poorhouse and supported with public funds. Finding the situation untenable and wasteful, the Chief Inspector of the Aliens Branch at the Home Office contacted the representative of the Furness Shipping & Agency Company, headquartered in Denmark, which owned the *Tenbergen*, alerting them that the sixteen lascars had deserted without any documentary proof of their nationality and were therefore presumed to be aliens. Therefore, the purpose of the letter was to request proof of nationality of the men or for funds to be made available so that they could be repatriated. Curiously, the shipping company responded that,

⁵⁴ Aliens Branch, Home Office, to Furness, Withy & Company, Limited, 25 March 1925, L/E/9/953. IOR.

since the men had deserted, they were absolved of the requirement to repatriate. Moreover, the company added that any laws pertaining to the immigration of aliens were irrelevant because the lascars were British subjects.⁵⁵

The *Tenbergen* episode provides a glimpse into the thought-world of lascars and allows for a slightly more nuanced view of their political agency. As stated, the ship travelled from Karachi to Leith via London with the disputed onward journey to North America. The desertion was the result of perceived or real abrogation of the contract. In any case, the trans-Atlantic voyage seems only to have donned on the crew upon arrival at Leith. Had the sailors realized that the ship would be sailing to New York, or Virginia as the case may be, London would have been the optimal opportunity to escape, considering the extensive lascar network in existence there. Indeed, among Britain's major ports, Leith is seldom mentioned in connection with lascars, suggesting that ships with Indian itineraries rarely embarked from there. Even considering the official understanding of lascar desertions, that they are the result of inducements from Indian boarding house keepers, the fact that these sixteen men acted alone indicates that lascar politics, at times, was tied as much to customary rights, as it was to wages, treatment, and outside agitators.

The interwar period for lascars was often characterized by tensions among labor organizations. While the NSFU attempted to create an organizational vacuum among Indian sailors by barring them from membership and actively seeking to restrict their ability to work, the existence of a global network of lascars combined with communist anti-colonialism sought to ensure that such a vacuum was filled. In the first instance, the mobility of the lascar offered an

⁵⁵ Ross to Aliens Branch, 28 March 1925, L/E/9/953. IOR.

opportunity to mobilize the colonial working-class against the dual hegemony of Britain and capital. As early as 1922, Manabendranath (MN) Roy, the founder of the Indian Communist Party at Tashkent, wrote of the opportunity that sailors presented to the goals of the Party. “Look at the thousands and thousands of seamen in the harbour of Calcutta,” he wrote to Pulin Das on 6 June, “They can be more useful to the revolution than any other element in the population.”⁵⁶ Subsequently, as his associates were being arrested for criminal intent under the Bengal Regulation III of 1818, Roy and Muzaffar Ahmed worked together to develop a system of communicating with one another through lascars in order to avoid having their communique intercepted. This plan evolved into using lascars as couriers of propaganda and weapons while facilitating the coordination between Indian communists in Europe and the subcontinent.⁵⁷

Revolutionary activities were concentrated in Dutch and German port cities but the ease of movement between European ports put the British on high alert. Early reports on the Union of Eastern Sailors confirmed that none of the shipping lines that were affected by attempts by the Red International Labor Union (RILU) to mobilize lascars called at ports in India or the UK.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, reports that communists were gaining access to shipping vessels disconcerted British intelligence officers. Muhammed Ali Sepassi, a close associate of MN Roy, upon being expelled from Kabul in 1922, travelled to Europe, first to the Soviet Union and then to Germany. While in Germany, he was reported to have taken the alias Ibrahim and “endeavor[ed] to spread disaffection among Indian seamen at Hamburg.”⁵⁹ Around the same time, Mubarak Ali and Obed

⁵⁶ Roy to Das, 6 June 1922, L/PJ/12/46. IOR.

⁵⁷ Director of Intelligence Bureau, Report, July 1923, L/PJ/12/54, File 4968(C)/21. IOR.

⁵⁸ British Consulate-General, Batavia, to MacDonald, 6 November 1924, L/P&J-12/238. IOR.

⁵⁹ British Embassy, Berlin, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, enclosed in Director of Intelligence Bureau Weekly Report, 11 March 1925, L/PJ/12/149. IOR.

Hussain operated what the Public and Judicial Department referred to as the Hamburg Institution, where lascars could purchase cigarettes and liquor. Through the Hamburg Institution, Obed and Ali claimed to have sent more than 1500 pistols to India via lascars. Though the surveillance officer reporting on this smuggling operation believed that it was purely for the private profit of the lascars, it exposed the degree of revolutionary potential that existed on merchant ships.⁶⁰

Importantly, Indian communists in Europe were deeply entrenched in the revolutionary politics of the interwar. In Germany, associates of MN Roy coordinated with and sought support from the Berlin Indian Committee, which was headed by Virendranath Chattopadhyay, known as Chatto for short. The BIC created a hub of interaction between European and Indian radicals in Central Europe that was a common meeting site on the route to and from Moscow. In Britain, Roy maintained close connections both with the leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain as well as with Indian students and professionals. In both cases, the interconnections between Indian and European communism, often supported by the Communist International, facilitated the promulgation of radical politics and propaganda among Indian mariners on ship and in boarding houses in London, Liverpool, Rotterdam, and Hamburg. Engagement with the Union of Eastern Sailors in Dutch ports was soon replicated in British ports with the continued support of the RILU and Indian communist operatives.

Interwar lascar organization was structured by myriad nodes of international communism. The interactions between South Asian communists were largely funded and

⁶⁰ Note on the Indian Communist Party, 3 September 1924, L/PJ/12/49. IOR. For more on how the CPI used lascars as conduits in the interwar period see Raza and Zachariah, "To Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble: The 'Lascar System,' Politics, and Agency in the 1920s," *Itinerario* 36, no. 3 (2012): 19-38.

facilitated by European Communist Parties. The ways in which these South Asian organizations formulated their party apparatus was clearly directed by European forms. However, the relationship between the European and South Asian iterations of interwar communist anticolonialism and global socialism should be seen neither as a network in which European political forms single handedly gave rise to Indian radicalism nor to suggest a complete and thorough-going ideological identity among these various strands. Nevertheless, the reliance on European organizations, especially the RILU and the Federation of Transport Workers, for funds and regional networks is unavoidable in the case of lascar political organization and radicalization. As the revolutionary potential that communist operatives saw in lascars switched from a focus on their mobility, as carriers of proscribed items, to their dispossession in port and alienation from white society, efforts to unionize took precedence. In this iteration of lascar politics, Indian and British communists hoped not only to appeal to seamen in terms of improved working conditions, including increased pay, reduced working hours, and support for unemployment and injury but also to fashion a radical vanguard out of the lascars. In this iteration, the organization of colonial sailors would have the effect of undermining imperialism and fascism by refusing to transport arms or coordinate with racially segregated unions.⁶¹

Perceived and real coordination between lascar labor organizers and the Soviet Union, especially through the Profintern (or Red International Labor Union) animated the British surveillance apparatus. In 1923, Shapurji Saklatvala, the communist Member of Parliament for Battersea North and nephew of industrialist JN Tata, led the transformation of the Lascars Welfare League into the Indian Seamen's Association. This Association, which was known

⁶¹ J. Crosby, Consul-General, Batavia, to J. Ramsay MacDonald, MP, 6 November 1924, L/PJ/12/238. IOR.

variously as the International Oriental Seafarers' Union and the Eastern Seamen's Union, was active in the major British ports of London, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Cardiff. It sought to organize Indian seamen to secure better conditions on ship, which, theoretically, would have militated against the urge to desert, and in port. From its inception, the organizers of the association understood the global character of the lascar workforce endeavored to coordinate with the RILU, which had previously worked with lascars on the continent. In May 1923, the Indian Political Intelligence reported first that the Indian promoters of the Indian Seamen's Association hoped to secure the financial support of the RILU. Later in the same month, the intelligence service noted that four members of the Soviet organization and fifty lascars participated in a meeting of the organization in London, during which the constitution of the Association was drafted.⁶² Even though official affiliation was not agreed to, the close coordination between the Indian Seamen's Association and the Soviet body led some observers to comment that the organization appears to be "merely the Oriental Branch of the RILU."⁶³

In 1924, NJ Upadhyaya, a recent arrival from Gujarat, was selected to help organize the Indian Seamen's Association and discipline communism among Indian workers in Britain. Yet, from the outset, some believed he was a curious choice because of his limited English proficiency and discomfort engaging with other Indians in Britain. "Though he is known to quite a few of our Comrades," Adela Knight, who had taken him into her home upon his arrival in England, observed in a letter to Saklatvala, "he [has] never associated with any of his Compatriots and I cannot understand why but he seems nervous of his own here but fearless of

⁶² Indian Political Intelligence, Summary: Indian Communists, 10 May 1923, L/PJ/12/47. IOR.

⁶³ Indian Political Intelligence, Summary: Indian Communists, 10 May 1923, L/PJ/12/47. IOR.

the English.”⁶⁴ Because of his fearlessness, Knight recommended that Upadhyaya be given the chance to work among Indian sailors in London. Saklatvala, in turn, accommodated Knight’s wishes and offered Communist Party support to Upadhyaya in the mid-1920s.

Upadhyaya commenced a decade of campaigning for the Indian Seamen’s Union and the Communist Party of Great Britain simultaneously. He made public addresses under the auspices of the International Class-War Prisoner Aid in Glasgow arguing for the cooperation between trade unions, British communists, and lascars.⁶⁵ In addition, he sought to establish Marxist study circles for Indian students in London to encourage revolutionary consciousness among the Indian bourgeoisie at British universities who could then assist in the organization and mobilization of Indian sailors. In this latter initiative he received the diligent assistance of a woman that New Scotland Yard referred to only as Miss Hillman, who distributed communist propaganda and solicited donations at meetings of the Indian Communist Study Circle.⁶⁶ Although he worked tirelessly and received the assistance of Indian politicians and activists, as well as British sympathizers, the misfortunes of the Communist Party in the interwar period militated against his success. Upadhyaya’s frustrations were tied to the general downward trend in Party membership in the 1920s due mainly to the its inability to cooperate with other major parties in British politics at the time. Moreover, struggles to induce Indian migrants, especially lascars, to Party membership, much like union membership, were compounded by the costs of membership, which surely helped to dissuade lascars, who had been systematically underpaid, from joining.

⁶⁴ Adela Knight to Shapurji Saklatvala, 14 December 1924, L/PJ/12/233: File 1767/24. IOR.

⁶⁵ New Scotland Yard Extract, 25 February 1925, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

⁶⁶ New Scotland Yard Extract, 14 July 1926, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

Undeterred, Upadhyaya made every effort to court lascars as potential party members, catering events and supplying tea at Party expense.⁶⁷ Attempts to mobilize Indian mariners, if not through the Party or official union membership, continued in the form of mass meetings. In May 1926, he hoped to convene a lecture titled “India and Humanitarianism” at the Minerva Cafe in London. Unfortunately, the lecturer and chair, both of whom were Indian, neglected to attend due to fears of deportation under the prevailing Emergency Powers Act that had been declared in response to the Trade Union Congress’ General Strike in support of coal miners.⁶⁸ At the same time, he began circulating a flier, first in English but then in Urdu, that outlined the benefits of the Indian Seamen’s Union. This circular began by noting the unequal conditions of lascar labor, that their depressed wages contributed to the profits of shipping companies, and the lack of any provisions for injury compensation or retirement. To achieve parity, the flier continued, lascars need to unionize and “put forward one united demand on behalf of all of us.”⁶⁹ His efforts to recruit Indians for Party and union membership by distributing fliers and selling pamphlets had mixed results. It appears to have helped to expand the salience of these organizations among Indians while institutions serving Indian mariners in Britain, such as the Asiatic Seamen’s Home in the East End of London, banned him from entering.⁷⁰

A year later, having just returned from India, he set his sights on Liverpool where he combined public lectures and visits with lascars in their homes and on ships to distribute literature and discuss the merits of unionization. On 30 April 1927, the Liverpool and District Economic League noted with concern that Upadhyaya had mustered forty Indian seamen for a

⁶⁷ New Scotland Yard Extract, 19 May 1926, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

⁶⁸ New Scotland Yard Extract, 19 May 1926, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

⁶⁹ New Scotland Yard Extract, 19 May 1926, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

⁷⁰ New Scotland Yard Extract, 7 April 1926, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

labor demonstration, which was coupled with increased activism in the city in protest of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act and its numerous proscriptions on strike activity.⁷¹ On May Day he addressed a gathering of a couple dozen Indians in Cleveland Square and rehearsed the indignities that working-class Indians faced under the Colored Aliens Seaman Order claiming that Indians were “socially despised” in an era of state sanctioned racism and tacitly accepted segregation. *Workers’ Life*, a newspaper published by the CPGB, reported on the mass meeting and printed the resolution adopted at its conclusion demanding that the Home Office cease the application of CASO to Indian residents, that police cease harassment on the presumption that Indians are aliens, and the Indian National Congress acknowledge the persecution of Indians in Britain and advocate on their behalf. Finally, the meeting resolved to establish the Liverpool Indian Association to protect Indians in the city and organize strike actions.⁷² Ultimately, due to the difficulty of growing a dedicated trade union movement among lascars and a lack of official backing from seamen’s and communist organizations, the Liverpool Indian Association and the Indian Seamen’s Union foundered.⁷³

Even though individual campaigns demonstrated varying degrees of success and failure, Upadhyaya’s work for the Indian Seamen’s Union in Britain received considerable attention from the India Office. In December 1927, it emerged that Upadhyaya had successfully enlisted Abed Ali to work as a courier for him while he served on the crew of the s.s. *Manora* between London and Bombay. In this way, Upadhyaya was able to introduce union and so-called “seditious” publications into India to further the goals of the Indian Seamen’s Union and the

⁷¹ Lewis Edwards to J. Sandeman Allen, 2 May 1927, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

⁷² New Scotland Yard Extract, 18 May 1927, L/PJ/12/233 File 1767/24. IOR.

⁷³ Marika Sherwood, “Lascar Struggles Against Discrimination in Britain 1923-45: The Work of N.J. Upadhyaya and Surat Alley,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 90, no. 4 (2004): 441.

Communist International.⁷⁴ By 1928, the ISU boasted a membership of 1400. Considering the expansion of the Union and Upadhyaya's overall subversive influence, the India Office corresponded with IPI and the Home Office regarding the possibility of deporting him under the Aliens Restriction Order of 1920 because he was born in an Indian Princely State. Ultimately, the Home Office pointed out that to deport him as an alien because of his status as a protected person would have substantiated the claims of Indian Princes to be Independent Sovereigns. Moreover, the threat that Upadhyaya posed and the fact that another organizer would have been found easily for the ISU, the idea of deportation was dropped.⁷⁵ Though it was deemed unnecessary to deport him, Upadhyaya remained under surveillance for years afterward. In August 1933, IPI insisted that he "continues to promote Communist activities amongst Indian lascars. It is desired by means of this check to maintain a watch on his movements and it should therefore be continued."⁷⁶ To that end, MI5 authorized the Postmaster-General to "detain, open and produce for my inspection all postal packets and telegrams addressed to [Upadhyaya]."⁷⁷

Unionization and collective action among Indian seamen remained the goal of many communist and anti-colonial activists in Britain and India but there remained a constant tension between the improvements to working conditions promised by organization and the legal ramifications that individual sailors and crews faced. In August 1935, the fire men on the *City of Roubaix* refused to work claiming exhaustion. As penalty for "willful disobedience to the lawful commands of the master and officers of the vessel," contrary to the Merchant Shipping Act of

⁷⁴ Public and Judicial Department, "Nathalal Jagjivan Upadhyaya, Addition to History Sheet," 19 April 1928. L/PJ/12/234. IOR.

⁷⁵ Peel to IPI, 24 May 1928, L/PJ/12/234. IOR.

⁷⁶ IPI to Watson, 11 August 1933, KV 2/615. TNA.

⁷⁷ MI5 to Postmaster-General, 17 August 1933, KV 2/615. TNA.

1894, each of the thirty-one firemen on the crew was sentenced to fourteen days in prison. Had the action been an approved strike by a recognized union, the sailors would not have been incarcerated but the cooperation of the British seamen's unions was still not forthcoming. Therefore, as punishment for protesting the conditions of their work -- which was nothing more than base insubordination -- rather than face penalties within the framework of their employment, the state intervened and demonstrated the uneven acknowledgement of workers' rights to strike according to perceptions of nationality and, more importantly, the intersection of racial animus and class privilege.⁷⁸

From the mid-1930s, Surat Ali, a former lascar himself, and the Colonial Seamen's Association took up the mantle of lascar organizing in the 1930s, after Upadhyaya's descent into obscurity. The Colonial Seamen's Association insisted that "seamen from the colonies must organize in order to put a stop to colour discrimination in British ships," which was precisely Upadhyaya's message. Although the call for improved working conditions and pay parity were the common demands of organizations working on behalf of lascars, it was the coming of war in 1939 that prompted widespread resistance among lascars. In October 1939, forty-four lascars were sentenced to two months imprisonment for striking work on the crew of the *Clan Alpine*. These sailors demanded a fifty percent increase in pay, better food, and a bonus.⁷⁹ In other cases, lascars were under the impression that they were to be given a one hundred percent increase in pay, which they believed had been given to the crew of the *Oxfordshire* in 1939. News of the agreement with the *Oxfordshire* spurred Indian seamen to refuse work and leave ship unless

⁷⁸ "31 Indian Seamen Sent to Prison for Strike Action," *Indian Front: News Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (October 1935), Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/Dutt/23/09. Labour History Archive (LHA). Manchester.

⁷⁹ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, "Arrest and Imprisonment of Lascar Seamen," 15 November 1939, no. 154, L/PJ/12/630. IOR.

similar pay raises were secured. Considering that “a feature of the strike movement among the Indian seamen has been the absence of any practical encouragement or assistance from the British Labour Movement,” these actions often had the same result: the shipping company refused any increases and sought the support of the local magistrates and the Board of Trade to either induce the men to work or send them to prison.⁸⁰

The fact that war-time perils gave Indian sailors more of an impetus to mobilize in their economic self-interest was met with the British state’s need to ensure a functional Merchant Marine for the deployment of soldiers and the distribution of munitions. The enforcement of the Merchant Shipping Act became a mechanism to compel non-combatants to serve -- and die -- in the war. The choice that lascars had to make was between striking, ostensibly for increased pay, or go to sea at the risk of encountering German U-boats and the Luftwaffe. While they were simultaneously reduced to the enemies of global trade, the war against fascism, and Nazis all at once, the strategies of resistance that they employed had been learned from communists and trade unionists. Though the politics of self-preservation, anti-imperialism, and Communist Internationalism are difficult to disentangle here, it is important to recognize that ideology figured into lascar resistance alongside demands for remuneration and safety. The persistent work among lascars in port by communist operatives like Upadhyaya and Surat Ali, and their ability to connect the demand for better work conditions to the socialist revolution, hearkens to the early 1920s when lascars were suspected as potential conduits for radical propaganda and arms that had been proscribed in India but that would help to hasten the end of empire in the interwar period.

⁸⁰ Public and Judicial Department, “Unrest Among Indian Seamen,” 7 December 1939, L/PJ/12/630. IOR.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the work and social history of Punjabi Muslims who arrived in Britain as seamen, or lascars, and slowly began to construct networks that facilitated economic opportunities beyond ship's engine rooms and British workhouses. It located Indian male sailors at the intersection of race-, class- and gender-based marginality in the UK during the inter-war era. It traced why and how the British state enforced such marginalization based on race and class, which operated through a gender-coded sexual threat that Indian men posed to white women. At the same time, the relationships between Indian men and British women were essential to navigating the legal apparatus that was constructed to negate their Britishness. The experience of state-endorsed racial anxiety, infused with nascent anticolonialism in India, paved the way for radical internationalist political forces to intervene in the unionization process of Indian sailors. This intervention created the conditions for the rise of radical internationalist politics among British working classes of South Asian origin.

As lascars, South Asian travelers and workers had their rights as British subjects superseded by their contracts that devalued their labor, imperiled their safety, and contravened their right to free movement within the Empire. They were subjected to policies that undermined their control over their own employment and restricted their access to normal travel and identity documents, leaving them bound to their nullies while at sea and in port. While Asiatic Articles dictated the kinds of work that Indian seamen could do on ship and their recourse to leave in British ports, the enactment of the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order of 1925 instituted a legal precedent that undermined the British nationality of nonwhite, non-elite visitors and settlers from the colonies. Designed as a mechanism to reduce the numbers of non-British workers competing for jobs with native-born British, this law was egregiously applied to British

subjects of South Asian descent because of the increasing correlation, drawn by civilians and policy makers alike, between whiteness, English fluency, and Britishness.

CASO and its predecessor, the Aliens Order of 1920, may not have been originally intended for the "wholesale registration" of Indians in Britain but the effect that this Order had on policy and the British surveillance state was tantamount to wholesale exclusion of working-class Indians, regardless of their ability to provide documentation of their British nationality. The Board of Trade authorized CASO because of the "accumulation of coloured seamen at ports in the United Kingdom during and after the war."⁸¹ In 1942, the Order was rescinded because, as MJ Clauson of the India Office wrote, it was "apparently the only enactment in this country constituting a colour bar, and the Colonial Office have pressed for its revocation on sentimental grounds, since it applied to African seamen who are British Protected Persons."⁸² Nonetheless, for seventeen years the matrix of competition, violence, and belonging provided the logic for the Special Restriction Order – a logic which was underpinned by white supremacy in interwar Britain.

⁸¹ Home Office, "Minutes of a Home Office Conference on Coloured Seamen," 13 December 1926, L/E/9/953. IOR.

⁸² MJ Clauson, Memo, 1942, L/E/9/953 collection 141/1. IOR.

Chapter 3

The Punjabi Peddler Fraternity, 1925-1942

On the night of 16 May 1925, John Keen, John McCormack, Robert Fletcher, and a few of their friends, invaded a house on Water Street in Glasgow, where “a number of Indian pedlars” were known to live.¹ In the melee that ensued, Keen’s mob, armed with knives, sticks, and stones, attacked Noor Mohammed, Nathoo Mohamed, and four other Indians, while a crowd gathered outside.² In the chaos, Keen plunged a knife into Noor Mohammed’s chest. Before anyone could summon the police, the mob escaped with £18 worth of inventory, including “jumpers, ladies’ dresses, and scarves, while Noor bled-out on the floor. The gang was apprehended later that night and remanded in connection with Noor Mohammed’s murder.³ In September, Keen was convicted and sentenced to death. On the dock, he became disconsolate and, with tear-soaked cheeks, he declared that his conviction was a travesty of justice.⁴ Though a petition for his reprieve received more than 60,000 signatures in a matter of days, Keen was executed at eight o’clock, Thursday morning, 24 September 1925.⁵

The *Times* ran a series of articles tracking John Keen’s fate: noting his tirade in court and acknowledging the magnitude of the effort to stay his execution. At one point, the paper nearly

¹ “Glasgow Murder Trial,” *The Times* (London, England), Friday, 4 Sept 1925; “Indians Attacked in Glasgow,” *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 18 May 1925.

² Bashir Mann, *The New Scots: The Story of Asians in Britain* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1992), 111-12. Nathoo Mohamed’s biography is here reconstructed through passport information (Number 24975 Issued at Lahore on 27 April 1927) that is cited in the Magistrate of Pedlars Certificates for Glasgow, 1939-1949 (Mitchell Library, Glasgow City Archives, E7/11/1) and in Maan’s text. Although Nathoo Mohamed had not yet obtained this passport at the time of the home invasion, Maan cites oral testimony to place Nathoo Mohamed with Noor Mohamed in 1925.

³ “Indians Attacked in Glasgow,” *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 18 May 1925; “Ten Persons Charged with Murder,” *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, 20 May 1925.

⁴ “Glasgow Murder Trial,” *The Times* (London, England), Friday, 4 Sept. 1925.

⁵ “Women Magistrates and an Execution,” *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, 10 Sept. 1925; “Woman Magistrate at an Execution,” *The Times* (London, England) 25 Sept. 1925.

eulogized “the young married man condemned for the murder of an Indian pedlar.”⁶ Noor Mohammed, Keen’s victim, received considerably less attention -- not even named in many cases, just an Indian peddler. True, the paper noted that Mohammed was Punjabi, that at his death he was 27 years old, and that he walked the streets of Glasgow selling carpets and drapes, women’s clothing, and, perhaps, some silk. Peddling, the paper suspects, was the cause of Noor’s death, as Keen and company appear to have intended a robbery and not a murder. It is as if Mohammed, a Punjabi Muslim, after all, whose presence in Glasgow might have been a result of desertion in the first place, was complicit in his own murder. As if Keen, a young Scot, was a victim of circumstance.

From the onset of the 1930s, hostility toward Indians in Britain took on a more general character. Not only were lascars strictly monitored to minimize the likelihood of desertion, but also Indians hoping to travel to Britain legally were faced with institutionalized hurdles. Importantly, the question of obtaining a passport for non-seafaring Indians was suffused with prejudices against working-class migrants.⁷ While the government continued to focus on lascars as the major source of Indian peddlers, restrictions that were placed on South Asian mobility, especially as it concerns travel to Britain, exposes the nascent trend of fare-paying passengers arriving in Britain as itinerant traders. Such mobility had given rise to a new demographic texture among South Asians in Britain, one that moved beyond the narrative of desertion and, instead, showcases the importance of free movement to the constitution and maintenance of a community.

⁶ "Woman Magistrate at an Execution." *The Times*.

⁷ Secretary of State for India to Passport Issuing Authorities in India, Circular no. F.236-G/34, 21 February 1935. L/E/9/972. IOR.

What had been primarily an onshore occupation for lascars and deserters, an almost exclusively Muslim population, peddling became the chosen occupation of Punjabi Sikh migrants who had the connections or finances to make the voyage to Britain. This phenomenon contributed to the diversification of the South Asian peddler community in Britain from the 1930s. As the Indian community changed over the course of the late-1920s and through the 1930s, the response from British popular opinion and policy was one of hostility that was premised on racial and class prejudices that were built on the foundation of civilizational chauvinism and colonial ideology and made manifest through violence. This chapter demonstrates that Punjabi itinerant merchants, just like their lascar predecessors, faced racial discrimination and institutional exclusion. Yet, through the maintenance of non-institutional networks for employment, housing, and credit, they persisted in their trade.

Although local police displayed considerable consternation at the uptick in Indian applicants for peddlers' certificates, ignorance and lack of interest facilitated the slippage between lascar, peddler, and Indian. Thus, Indian peddlers operated under constant scrutiny because of suspicions that only escaped lascars became peddlers. However, in this period, Sikh travelers were turning up on British shores as fare-paying passengers who sought to enter the rag trade. These travelers came from different socioeconomic backgrounds and hailed from a different region of the Punjab. As the previous chapter noted, the preponderance of Punjabi lascars was recruited from the Rawalpindi district of western Punjab, which also supplied most Punjabi Muslim soldiers for the British Indian Army. In the case of Sikh peddlers, however, the clear majority came from the central range, and especially the Doab cities of Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, and Ludhiana.

The economic factors for emigration have been detailed elsewhere, but it is worth noting that, while Punjabis dominated the so-called Indian peddler fraternity in Britain, there were a variety of routes. First, this chapter will detail the history of peddling and explore some of the writing on itinerant merchants by Justus Möser and Fernand Braudel. Second, the chapter will delineate the diversity in the demographic makeup of the community of Punjabi itinerant merchants to dislodge prevailing assumptions about its history. Third, it will detail the operation and formalization of peddling among Indians, which began in the early 1920s and continued through World War II. Lastly, my focus on peddlers will return to questions of criminality among the peddler fraternity, with particular attention to the story of Nathoo Mohamed, who was with Noor Mohammad at his death. Narratives of migrant criminality help to reveal modes of politics that undermined British authority while not being targeted as overtly nationalist or seditionist.

History of a Migrant Trade

The available literature on the South Asian peddler community is not extensive. Many of the secondary sources attend to the question of Sikh peddlers, with reference mainly to the small Bhatra Sikh community in Nottingham.⁸ Other scholars have given general emphasis to Sikh peddlers at the expense of the Muslim community.⁹ The suggestion that non-Sikh peddlers were marginal to the overall South Asian peddler community is difficult to sustain considering the wealth of documentary evidence of Muslim peddlers, who, for many areas of Britain, constituted

⁸ Eleanor Nesbit, "Aspects of Sikh Tradition in Nottingham" (M.Phil. Thesis, University of Nottingham, 1980); Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community* (New York: Zed Books, 2006); Peter Bance, *The Sikhs in Britain: 150 Years of Photographs* (London: Coronet House, 2012), 49-68.

⁹ Roger Ballard, *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain* (London: Hurst, 1994), 93; Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), Ch. 9; Hazelwood, "A Diasporic Politics of Belonging: Punjabis in Postwar Britain," 15.

the larger contingent of South Asian peddlers throughout the interwar period. Moreover, it must be noted that there is not reliable evidence to suggest the centrality of the Bhatra community among Indian peddlers in this, or any, period. The focus of this section, then, is to build on the previous chapter's focus on lascar deserters and to explore the emerging diversity of South Asians peddlers that became more visible in the interwar period. One must approach the question of Indian peddlers with a degree of nuance that allows for simultaneous and interacting communities of South Asians who did not follow the same route to Britain. To that end, this section highlights the need to disaggregate the South Asian peddler community in Britain to appreciate the diversity of experience, prospects, and politics possible within what has hitherto been considered as an undifferentiated mass.

Peddlers have been marginal figures within capitalist society for centuries and their potential for destabilization has followed them throughout. In the late-eighteenth century, Justus Möser, a Westphalian social conservative who regarded nascent capitalism with steadfast suspicion, was an early critic of itinerant door-to-door traders. In his view, capitalist accumulation undermined hierarchy and threatened social order. The peddler, in the German hinterlands, was an agent of capitalist expansion and facilitated the emergence of consumerism at the expense of the "artisan-citizen and the independent peasant."¹⁰ The peddler carried foreign goods that substituted for locally made wares, which, Möser feared, caused the peasantry to question their inherent social station. Coupled with his concern about the creation of new desires in the eighteenth-century German village, was an anxiety about the cultural difference of the peddler. Ordinarily, in Möser's view, the peddler was a foreigner, most often a Jew, preying on

¹⁰ Jerry Z. Muller, "Justus Möser and the Conservative Critique of Early Modern Capitalism," *Central European History* 23, nos. 2-3 (1990): 168-172. The quotation here is from 168.

naive and parochial Germans, competing with local producers, and effectively impoverishing the region as he traveled along his route.¹¹ Finally, in this portrait of early capitalism, the peddler jeopardized patriarchal control by appealing directly to women at their door, in the absence of their husbands, which Möser believed was a transgression against the sanctity of the private sphere, distracted women from their customary duties, and lead to excessive spending on inessential luxuries. Cast as a predatory vector of market consumerism, the peddler of Möser's era was a figure of dubious character and a harbinger of social decay: a "destroyer of local culture."¹²

In the second volume of his *Civilization and Capitalism*, Fernand Braudel develops a critique of the peddler along similar lines; however, he focuses on the utility of the itinerant trader, not the threats to custom and tradition posed. Braudel praises the peddler's tenacity and considers his economic function essential: "They filled in the gaps in the regular channels of distribution, even in towns, though mostly in villages and hamlets."¹³ At his root, the peddler, for Braudel, was anyone who traveled to sell his skill or stock, whether an itinerant trader or a large merchant delivering to shops. As is true of Indians in Britain in the early twentieth century, the seventeenth century peddler that Braudel examines was a figure in flux. He often began as a traveling salesman, a vestige of centuries old trading practices, and would eventually become a shop owner or a wholesaler. Moreover, his trade was couched in his abilities to sell himself before his goods. Braudel asserts that the peddler's charisma was foundational to his ability to

¹¹ Muller, "Justus Möser," 171. Half a century later, Marx would rehearse much of Möser's critique of peddling in his "On the Jewish Question": "The self-emancipation of our age would be emancipation from bargaining and from money, that is from practical, real Jewdom." Quoted in Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 185.

¹² Muller, *The Mind and the Market*, 95.

¹³ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, vol. 2, *Wheels of Commerce* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 75-80. Here the quotation comes from page 75.

“buy his way into poorly served areas and persuade the hesitant.” Importantly, Braudel points out that peddling is an “eminently adaptable system” and reappears whenever the formal distribution mechanisms falter or customary authority breaks down, thus it is no wonder that Indian traders during the depression era of the interwar and into World War II became such a common sight and, for the government, an intractable problem.¹⁴ “For peddling is and always has been,” Braudel notes in closing, “a way of getting round the sacrosanct market, a way of cocking a snook at established authority.”¹⁵

In 1931, protests erupted in Bolton, a city northeast of Manchester, against an influx of Indian peddlers selling goods in direct competition with local shops. According to Councilor Herbert Eastwood, the activities of these Indians added “insult to injury” considering the “attitude of the Indian Government towards imported Lancashire products.”¹⁶ The relationship between Lancashire and India had been strained for much of the previous decade since import substituting industries began to flourish in Bombay and Ahmedabad. By 1918 Indian manufactured cloth largely replaced that of Lancashire for local consumers. A few years later, in 1922, London granted fiscal autonomy to the Indian government, permitting the latter to impose import duties on British goods.¹⁷ The struggles of the Lancashire economy, which had been propped up by preferential trade terms with India for centuries, created a hostile environment for Indian outsiders. Considering the low prices that the Indians merchants asked, Eastwood declared that their trade was “grossly unfair to...all the workers of Bolton.” His sentiment echoes

¹⁴ Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 79.

¹⁵ Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 81.

¹⁶ “Indian Goods at Cut-Throat Prices. Pedlars Arouse Bolton Indignation. ‘Grossly Unfair’,” *Manchester Evening News*, 20 March 1931, L/E/9/962. IOR.

¹⁷ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 105-108.

that of Laurence Frederic Rushbrook Williams, publicity officer of the Indian Government, who said, in 1920, “the average workingman is in some danger of...regarding all peoples of India as highly undesirable niggers whose mission in life is to undersell more civilised countries in the labour market.”¹⁸ Indeed, Rushbrook Williams’ forecast proved to be an appropriate distillation of British racism in the depression era as well as in the postwar period of immigration control legislation.¹⁹

The story on Bolton, which was reported in the *Daily Dispatch*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, depicts the surprise and offence that local officials and shop owners took at the competition, pursues explanations for the Indian presence and strategies to undermine their trade. The typical response, invoked by Councilor Eastman, was to prevent “aliens” from obtaining peddler certificates -- a problematic solution for reasons described below. Reminiscent of Möser’s lament, for many in Bolton these twenty peddlers presented a thorough-going challenge to their way of life. Of concern was the ease with which they approached and addressed local women. “Housewives in Bolton, which depends almost entirely on the cotton industry,” reports a local newspaper, “have been surprised in the last few weeks to have offered at their doors cotton, silk, voile, and woolen goods which the Indian salesmen claim to have been made entirely in India.”²⁰ In a manner that would have pleased Braudel, these peddlers used their natural talents in pursuit of their trade: “Their good nature and good temper is helping them to smile their way into the homes of English people, to whom they

¹⁸ LF Rushbrook Williams, “Memorandum on the education of public opinion in Britain in matter relating to India,” 29 July 1920, Home Pol., Nov 1920, A 12. National Archives of India: Quoted in Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 49.

¹⁹ More on this in chapter 4 below.

²⁰ “Indian Cloths Hawked in Cotton Town. Pedlars’ Licenses for 20 Coloured Men.” *Daily Dispatch*, 20 March 1931.

have little difficulty in selling their goods.”²¹ In Bolton, the Möserian specter of the peddler was resurrected. However, in this case, their potential to expand capitalism was not the chief complaint; rather, concerns over the welfare of British capitalism were at the forefront of the row.

Unwilling to admire the fortitude of these Indian entrepreneurs, the locals suggested that the Indian migrants were political operatives whose presence was an overt attempt to destabilize the region. Mr. W. Coucill, a veteran of the cotton industry in Lancashire and Cawnpore, seriously suggested that “there might be Indians in this country who, posing as pedlars, are emissaries of the Indian Swarajists.”²² The eminence of Gandhian nationalism in the 1930s was not lost on the editors of the *Guardian* either, even if the Manchester papers seem to be making light of the injury to small town sensibilities. In a satirical consideration of the political motives of the Indian merchants, prompted, no doubt, by Coucill’s remarks, the paper suggests “[b]efore we know where we are we may have Bolton launching out on an economic boycott” akin to Gandhi’s campaign of *swadeshi*. In an effective summary of classical colonialism in India, the piece continues, “Lancashire in her present plight has every reason to resent the intrusion of foreign merchants carrying goods which she herself produces.” With tongue in cheek, the article concludes “these inconsiderable pedlars, like the Elizabethan traders who after many perils and difficulties were able to buy and sell in India to their own great enrichment, may be called by future historians merchant adventurers, founders of an empire.”²³

²¹ “Secret of Indian Cotton Pedlars: Goods Imported from France: A Propaganda Theory,” *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 21 March 1931, L/E/9/962. IOR.

²² “Secret of Indian Cotton Pedlars: Goods Imported from France: A Propaganda Theory,” *Manchester Evening Chronicle*.

²³ “Indian Pedlars,” *Manchester Guardian*, 21 March 1931. L/E/9/962. IOR.

Legislation for the licensing of peddlers in Britain can be traced back to the seventeenth century but the specific law that regulated peddler certificates in the interwar period was initially passed in 1871 and subsequently amended in 1881.²⁴ The Pedlars Act of 1871 made two important contributions to standardizing peddling in Britain. First, it defined the profession as anyone who “without any horse or other beast bearing or drawing burden, travels and trades on foot and goes from town to town or to other men’s houses, carrying to sell or exposing for sale any goods, wares, or merchandise, or procuring orders for goods, wares, or merchandise immediately to be delivered, or selling or offering for sale his skill in handicraft.” Thus, a peddler was an itinerant salesperson, a person who took orders and then delivered the specified goods, or a door-to-door technician. Second, the Act stipulated the criteria a person must satisfy to obtain a certificate. Specifically, one must have lived in the relevant police district for at least a month prior to application and then satisfy the interviewing police officer that one is “above seventeen years of age, is a person of good character, and in good faith intends to carry on the trade of a pedlar.”²⁵ Initially a certificate obtained under the 1871 Act was only valid within the district that granted it, but in 1881 the act was amended so that a certificate was valid throughout the United Kingdom.²⁶

Though this legislation antedates the first alien restriction laws by more than three decades it came to be infused with the same suspiciousness of mobility and difference that marked South Asian migrants in the twentieth century. In 1905 the Chief Constable of Liverpool

²⁴ William III, 1697-8: An Act for licensing Hawkers and Pedlars for a further Provision of Interest for the Transport Debt for reduceing of Ireland. [Chapter XXVII. Rot. Parl. 9 Gul. III. p. 5. n. 3.], in Statutes of the Realm: Volume 7, 1695-1701, ed. John Raithby (s.l, 1820), 397-399. Last accessed 24 June 2015, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol7/pp397-399>.

²⁵ The Pedlars Act, 1871, Vict. c. 96.

²⁶ The Pedlars Act, 1881, Vict, c. 45.

expressed concern over the increase in “[t]he number of foreigners unable to speak English, or speaking it very imperfectly” who were applying for Certificates. Though for the time he acquiesced to these applications, he “[began] to doubt the advisability of doing so.”²⁷ Fifteen years later, London, in confronting the anxieties of a post-war society, also focused on the “grave” situation of “alien pedlars.” A peddler certificate, according to W. Horwood, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, “gives to its holder considerable freedom of movement which may easily be abused by ill-disposed persons and which, it is conceivable, may even afford cover for espionage.” Thus, in the advent of new hostilities, the Commissioner suggested that the authorities should “cease to issue new pedlar’s certificates except to British born and English-speaking subjects.” Although the Commissioner included the caveat that certificates should be issued to “British born” people, which would include colonial migrants, his insistence that they also be “English speaking”, reasserts the fundamental importance of the English language to British identity.²⁸

Concern over “aliens” becoming peddlers in the prewar era was directed primarily at travelers from Europe, especially Germany and Russia, but fluency in English as a criterion for legitimate claims to belonging in Britain undermined Punjabi Merchants in the interwar era too. JW Hose, the Secretary of the Public and Judicial Department in the India Office made the point about cultural difference clear: “The Indian of the class referred to [is]...not a desirable resident in any country of a European type.” Moreover, “[if] he ceased to be an Indian and lived as an Englishman in England, the case would be different. But the Indian out of his country does not

²⁷ Head Constable, Central Police Office, Liverpool, to Under Secretary of State, Home Office, 26 January 1905, HO 45/15000. TNA.

²⁸ W. Horwood, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, to Home Office, 17 November 1920, HO 45/15000. TNA.

assimilate himself with his new surroundings.” Thus, Hose rationalized, the “prejudice of colour is natural.”²⁹ In these terms, postwar anxieties about non-English speaking peddlers were reconfigured to place Indians “of the class referred to” beyond the dictates of the good character clause of the Pedlars Act. Hose’s contention, for which he was certainly not the sole proponent, permitted the Aliens and Nationality Committee to dismiss the possibility of banning “aliens” from peddler’s certificates while maintaining that “the Police should exercise special care in satisfying themselves with regard to the good character and bona fides of alien applicants for Pedlars Certificates [sic].”³⁰

Britain’s confrontation with foreign migrants and aliens was first codified in 1905 and the twentieth century was one that saw ever-increasing control over rights of entry and the freedom to settle of those the state considered not to be British subjects. The central authority over alien migration was the police, with whom it was decided in the 1914 Aliens Registration Act that all foreign visitors must register their presence. Initially for the purposes of the Aliens Acts of 1914 and 1920, and later the Coloured Alien Seamen Order, local police were heavily relied on in the surveillance and control of non-British nationals through the verification of their nationality and the issuance of certificates of registration. The primary criterion that would satisfy the authorities of British nationality was a valid British passport. Yet, many Indian travelers were restricted from obtaining a passport due to their status as sailors and others had passports that port authorities believed were stolen, borrowed, or otherwise illegitimate. Therefore, the process of traveling to, or through, Britain during the period between the enactment of the Aliens

²⁹ J.W. Hose, India Office Memorandum, 30 November 1925, L/E/7/1422 file 6704. IOR.

³⁰ Home Office Draft Circular to Police, n.d. [1921], HO 45/15000. TNA.

Restriction Act and the era of decolonization was fraught for Indian and other colonial subjects whose presence was deemed illegitimate.

The Sikh Rag Trade and the Formalization of the Peddler Fraternity

While John Keen's trial was ongoing, an Inspector at the Aliens Department at the City of Glasgow Police wrote to his Chief Constable about the illicit activities of Indians in the city. Along with commenting generally about the behavior of lascars in Glasgow, including fears that deserters sold revolvers to lascars on ship, he was particularly concerned with Shiv Kiddar, Said Mohammed Mullah, Mohamed Abbas, and Nathoo Mohamed. According to his department, these four Indians operated a prostitution ring in Glasgow and cohabited with white women, some of whom were married and living apart from their husbands. The social problems that Nathoo Mohamed and his associates presented to the Glasgow authorities led the Inspector to request that the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, which had gone into effect in a few specified localities in April 1925, be extended to Glasgow.³¹ Even though the Order was explicitly not designed to control British Indians, it was extended to Glasgow in January 1926 and the Glasgow police commenced registering as aliens any and all nonwhite seamen who were unable to immediately produce evidence of British nationality, regardless of present occupation.³²

While the Home Office attempted to devise schemes to restrict access to peddler's certificates, particularly to those suspected of deserting ships, local authorities continued to issue such certificates mostly in accordance with the 1871 Act. In Reading, the continued ability of Indians to secure certificates led to routine correspondence with the Home Office, which was

³¹ City of Glasgow Police, Aliens Registration Department, 10 September 1925, HO 45/12314. TNA.

³² Under Secretary of State, India Office, to Secretary of Glasgow Indian Union, 16 April 1926, HO 45/12314. TNA.

“anxious to discourage [l]ascar seamen from settling down ashore...and engaging in petty trade as pedlars.”³³ Yet, in response to a Home Office circular regarding “lascar deserters” police districts returned information showing few certificates were issued to ex-seamen. Instead, by the early 1940s, Jullundur and Hoshiarpur, the predominantly Sikh areas of central Punjab, “had almost a monopoly in the supply of pedlars to the United Kingdom,” a fact that undermines suspicions around Muslim peddlers and lascar deserters.³⁴

The gradual increase in the size of the South Asian population in Britain, which was facilitated through travel endorsements, bridgehead communities, and a network of settled Indian merchants across the country, was not a welcome phenomenon for Ramsay MacDonald’s Labour Government. Although the definite number of passport-holding Indian migrants in Britain in the late-1920s and early-1930s is not readily available, it was, from the Government’s perspective, excessive and required action. Around the very same time that Bolton was panicking, the Government officially instructed Consular Offices throughout India not to grant passports to non-elite travelers. On 4 September 1931, the Foreign Office, therefore, distributed a circular stating that, while “Indian British subjects of good character and established position...may be granted ordinary British passports,” those “of a low standard of education and limited means...should not be granted passports.”³⁵ Since lascars were already disqualified from passports, this new policy was clearly intended to further reduce the number of Indians in Britain and restrict their ability to move around the empire as British subjects.³⁶

³³ E.W. Holderness, Home Office, to T.A. Burrows, 15 July 1933, HO 45/15000. TNA.

³⁴ IPI note, “The Indian Workers Association,” 14 April 1942, L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

³⁵ Foreign Office Circular to Consular Offices, 4 September 1931, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

³⁶ In 1937, the Home Secretary for the Government of Punjab forwarded a list of 64 Punjabis whose passports had been rejected on the grounds of the 1931 Circular to the Foreign Secretary of the Government of India. Yet, in 1939, the Government of Bombay generated a list of Punjabis who had been granted passports, although they “did not know English well,” because they “had produced...written assurances of employment, other than that of pedlars.” Sir

Nonetheless, much in the logical vein of the Colored Seamen Order, the Home Office remained fixated on turning Indian origins into grounds for suspicion. For instance, the Metropolitan Police returned a register of three Sikhs, Kesman Singh, Ishar Singh, and Arjan Singh, who had been certified in Buckinghamshire and Reading after producing passports issued in India.³⁷ Further to this point, in early May 1933, a list of eleven Sikh peddlers, with certificates issued at Reading, was recorded by the Limehouse Station of the Metropolitan Police. Though they had not been stamped at the British port of entry, their possession of passports suggests that they were properly documented travelers. This fact undermined the Home Office assumption that any Indian peddler in Britain had deserted a ship and ought to be repatriated if discovered.³⁸

Scrutiny of individual applicants was based on concerns about the overall number of Indians in Britain. In 1933, Kartar Singh and Company, a Wholesale firm based in Dundee, applied for a passport to bring Fanasar Singh to Britain so that Kartar Singh could return to India. Nearly three years later, the Government of Punjab responded to this request and refused to grant the travel document; a decision presumably based on the 1931 passport restrictions. Kartar Singh wrote again to the India Office in January 1937 imploring them to approve the passport application so that he could arrange to return to India. On this occasion, though the Government of Punjab acknowledged that Fanasar was “an illiterate agriculturist whose services could clearly be of little or no value in a shop or warehouse in England or Scotland,” the passport was granted.

Gilbert Wiles, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Political and Services Department, to Secretary to the Government of India, External Affairs Dept, 15 March 1939, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

³⁷ C.R. Pulling, Metropolitan Police Office, to EN Cooper, Home Office, 17 February 1933, HO 45/15000. TNA.

³⁸ W. Coombe to S.D., Inspector, 4 May 1933, HO 45/15000. TNA.

This decision allowed Kartar Singh to return to England and have Fanasar Singh come to Scotland in his stead.³⁹

In other cases, travel facilities were granted or refused in a seemingly arbitrary manner. For instance, in November 1937, Banta Singh applied for a passport for his brother Partap to come to Britain as his assistant. The police found that “there is nothing known against the man’s character here. He appears to be of thrifty habits and is, at present, in a position to maintain his brother here...” Yet, the report speculates, “Banta Singh will finance him for a start and then leave him to earn his own living.” Although the lack of a permanent position gave the authorities pause, the stated reason for concern was that, “this country is becoming over-run with Indian pedlars to the detriment of local small traders.” To that end, Partap Singh’s passport application was rejected. Yet, Noor Mohamed’s request to bring his associate Gulam Rasul from Jullundur to assist him in his work was treated in precisely the opposite manner. Upon further investigation of Noor Mohamed’s business, the Police realized that the address Mohamed gave for his operation, 62 Millgate Road in Wigan, was a private home accommodating eight Indians. Even though the Police endeavored to discredit Mohamed’s business, Ghulam Rasul was granted a passport.

These cases resonate with postwar attempts by the Home Office to manage the flow of Indian migrants who came to Britain as industrial laborers. However, in the 1950s, there was a systematic attempt to direct migrants to areas to prevent the perception of an over-population of

³⁹ Similarly, in 1937, the Glasgow Police considered the requests of Javala Singh, Pakhar Singh, and Akbar Ali, who intended to return to India for one to two-year visits and hoped that a relative could come to Britain to take over their businesses. In this case, the 1931 provision was discarded because “the suggestion in all these cases is that a relative should take the place of an Indian in this country” and passports were granted. In each of these proposals, a pedlar exchange was suggested that would not increase the overall population of Indians in Britain and thus the Home Secretary did not object. See L/PJ/7/1007 File 719. IOR.

Indians and Pakistanis in any single area. The interwar manifestation of this logic reduced the management of migrants to a local decision and relied on the perception, as one officer put it, that “there are...far too many of the type of SINGH here now and I would suggest that every possible step be taken to prevent any more coming.”⁴⁰ With this statement, the officer summarized the perception of the surveillance and police apparatus in Britain -- that too many Indian migrants were being permitted to enter the country and engage in trade. This stance on working-class Indian migration persisted into the late-twentieth century.

Over the course of the 1930s the presence of Indian shopkeepers, warehousemen, and peddlers expanded through family and village networks. As seen above, a particularly important aspect of this economy was the myriad configurations that sponsorship could take. Among the most common avenues for expanding this community was for an individual to sponsor a close relative, often a son, brother, or nephew, to join an established business. Typically, such a request would originate from an individual, in some cases so that he could return to India. For instance, Jawala Singh of 25 Clyde Place, Glasgow, requested to bring his son to Britain, because, as he wrote in his letter to the Under Secretary of State for India, “my wife is dead, and I wish to have him here under my care, as he is without any guardians now.”⁴¹ Yet, the Board of Trade noted regional differences in the organization of labor in the rag trade. “In Londonderry and Glasgow,” the Board noted in 1930, “it is known that the employment of...pedlars is organized from central warehouses or by Head pedlars.”⁴² Thus, the operation and organization of the Indian peddler network in Britain was variable as a rule for survival. Having noted the

⁴⁰ Metropolitan Police, Report, Commercial Street Precinct, 28 January 1938, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ Jawala Singh to Under Secretary of State, 4 January 1939, HO 45/15000. TNA.

⁴² Note of a Meeting Held at the Board of Trade, 5 May 1930, L/E/9/962. IOR.

intense scrutiny that Indians experienced in Britain between the wars, this section will turn to questions of supply the peddler's route.

Foremost, due to the invasiveness of the surveillance apparatus, it must be observed that Indian trade occurred in an unsettled and necessarily transient manner. Mohammad Tanda's dealings in Britain in the 1930s is exemplary of the flexibility and resourcefulness of the Indian peddler in a hostile environment. Tanda first came to the notice of the police in London in 1931, while engaged in a small-scale distribution and supply firm with Niaz Ali in Aldgate. The Metropolitan Police investigated Tanda and Ali because they were suspected of inducing lascars to desert. However, once these investigations "proved abortive," Tanda slipped out of the historical record for nearly a decade.⁴³ Having had his firm disrupted by invasive police practices, it appears that Tanda was forced out of London in search of a less intrusive municipality. Accordingly, he reappeared in Glasgow as an associate of Sulman Mohammad Sharif and Ata Mohammad Ashrif, in a firm that they had formed in 1934. Although Tanda had evaded the Metropolitan Police, his new trading firm remained under the watchful eye of the British authorities.

Since there was no recourse to deportation or repatriation for documented and financially secure Indians, the police pursued any potential lead they could to undermine the function of Indian peddling enterprises. Therefore, the police focused primarily on circumscribing the labor supply from India. In 1939, Tanda's firm attempted to sponsor "no fewer than 8" passports for Indians from central Punjab. The Government of India and the Glasgow City Police found that many of those who Sharif, Tanda, and Ashrif attempted to sponsor were "men of the agriculturist

⁴³ F. Warren, Inspector, to Superintendent, Metropolitan Police, 6 June 1931, L/PJ/7/1007, file 719. IOR.

class, of little or no education, and of extremely limited means.”⁴⁴ The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in the Glasgow Police concluded that these migrants were not guaranteed employment upon arrival in Britain, but instead were being recruited as itinerant traders. “This type of application by coloured men is becoming very common,” the Superintendent of Police added, “in the circumstances, they should be discouraged.”⁴⁵ In accordance with the Glasgow Police’s recommendations, the Home Secretary notified the India Office that guarantees from Sharif, Tanda, and Ashrif should not be accepted and travel facilities for prospective associates of the firm should be refused.⁴⁶

Among the eight, only Nabi Baksh obtained travel documents because the Home Office determined that the remainder “are men of the agriculturist class, or little or no education, and of extremely limited means.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the firm was able to put Baksh to good use. Evidently, Sharif, Tanda, and Ashrif sent Baksh throughout the United Kingdom to peddle goods. In the Glasgow Pedlar Registry, Baksh appears in Glasgow in two separate years having come from a remote police district. He spent 1939, upon arrival in the United Kingdom, in Belfast and in 1943 he carried a peddler’s license from Coventry.⁴⁸ Baksh’s travels around Britain are indicative of the ways in which Indian peddlers made their living traversing great distances always to return to a central hub for restocking en route to a new destination. The Glasgow Pedlar Registry, to

⁴⁴ AV Askwith, Home Secretary, Government of Punjab, to Secretary, Government of India, External Affairs Dept, 4 March 1939, L/PJ/7/1007, File 719. IOR.

⁴⁵ Criminal Investigation Department, City of Glasgow Police, Report on Sharif, Tanda, and Ashrif, 23 June 1939, L/PJ/7/1007, File 719. IOR.

⁴⁶ Under Secretary of State, Aliens Department, Home Office, to Under Secretary of State for India, Public and Judicial Dept., India Office, 11 October 1939, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

⁴⁷ AV Askwith, Home Secretary, Government of Punjab, to Secretary, Government of India, External Affairs Dept., 4 March 1939, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

⁴⁸ AV Askwith to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs Department, 4 March 1939, L/P&J/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

which this chapter will return, is of unparalleled importance in tracing these movements and reconstructing the Indian peddler fraternity.

A singular focus on Indian firms, such as Tanda's, was not enough for the government's intention to monitor Indian migrants and the variability and flexibility of the Indian peddler community exposed the limits of any single mode of control. Although law enforcement believed that Indian traders were centrally organized and were initially recruited into peddling by lodging house keepers, the expansion of this community relied on family networks as well as the entrepreneurial spirit of recent arrivals. Nevertheless, government reports detail one common trajectory of the migrant economy that Ravi Ahuja has elsewhere described as "the networks of the subordinated."⁴⁹ According to this theory, the peddler was encouraged to buy supplies from a wholesaler associated the lodging house keeper, or in many cases supplies would be given on credit "until such time as they are in a position to purchase stock for themselves."⁵⁰ In 1936, the Glasgow police reported the Kaka group not only employed nine Indians, each of whom made a regular wage and commission, but also two white Glaswegians "who [were] employed as errand boys."⁵¹ For Malla Singh, in contrast, the most effective arrangement was to purchase stock jointly with his housemates but sell it independently; rather than to be associated directly with a warehouse.⁵² Thus, though warehousing firms helped formalize the Indian peddler economy in the 1930s and 1940s, the organization and supply of these merchants in Britain between the wars was neither consistent nor bound to just a few houses. Indian migrants may have been induced to

⁴⁹ Ahuja, "Networks of Subordination -- Networks of the Subordinated," 11-48.

⁵⁰ Coombe to S.D., Inspector, 28 July 1932, L/E/9/962. IOR.

⁵¹ The police report notes that each of the Indian peddlers was paid 30/- per week with an additional "1-5% on goods sold". It neglects to include information about the wages of the two errand boys. Alexander Dawson, Detective Inspector, Glasgow Police, to Chief Constable, 1 October 1936, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

⁵² Wolverhampton Borough Police, 28 October 1938, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

peddle as a means of paying down a debt, they might have operated in small groups, sharing the overhead costs, or they might have been directly employed by established firms.

Peddlers in Glasgow: Housing and the Migrant Economy

The Pedlars Registry that the Glasgow police maintained and preserved for the 1940s has provided a unique insight into the Indian “rag trade” in Britain.⁵³ Of the neighborhoods where Indians settled, the Gorbals, the so-called “slum district of Glasgow,” appears typical. This was a working-class area south of the River Clyde composed of Italians, Eastern European Jews, and Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims, all of whom engaged the mosaic of unskilled, itinerant, and casual labor open to them.⁵⁴ The concentration of migrants facilitated a parallel economy that operated at the fringes of the industrial capitalism under the auspices of people marginalized within the British working-class. The built environment of the neighborhood served as a sociospatial entity that enabled “undesirable” migrants to navigate the fringes of British capitalism by mobilizing non-institutional networks for housing, credit, and work. The nature of peddling facilitates a migrant economy that subverted prevailing assumptions of ethnic segregation as well as preoccupations with material gain and demarcated the limits of racial capitalism in the interwar period.

The Punjabi peddler fraternity operating in Glasgow has been uniquely well documented due, in part to the fastidiousness of the City police in its attempt to track down all who were deemed undesirable migrants. Such police correspondence fills Home Office files on peddlers

⁵³ Unless otherwise noted, the information for this section was taken from Magistrate of Pedlars Certificates, 1939-1949, E7/11/1. Glasgow City Archives, Mitchell Library.

⁵⁴ Peter Monro Jack, “Glasgow Slums: No Mean City. By Alexander McArthur and H. Kinsley,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1936.

and suspected lascar deserters. The Nationality and Naturalization papers at the National Archives have been used extensively by historians of the Indian community in Britain. An equally useful and interesting source is the Glasgow Registry of Pedlars Certificates. Although all municipal police were charged with the task of issuing peddler's licenses, the Glasgow Registry for the years 1939-49 appears to be among the very last of these lists in existence. The Registry facilitates additional insight into the peddler community. For the period that it documents, the Registry records the names of nearly 1200 Indians. Some of whom were settled in Glasgow, with many years of successive registration. Others appear to have peddled as a stop-gap between serving on ships' crews. Still others were long-time peddlers with no clear home-base who had received certificates from Glasgow while passing through along their route. The Registry adds layers of personal and community information about Indians in the city otherwise obscured by an over-reliance on periodic police reports.

The Registry allows for the reconstruction of professional biographies for many individuals who were based in Glasgow and facilitates a more complete understanding of the operation of the rag-trade in Glasgow. I have already indicated police and government beliefs about the organization of Indian peddlers, particularly their use of "networks of the subordinated" by way of Indian boarding house keepers and established peddlers and wholesalers. However, the information contained in the Registry allows for additional observations that are helpful to imagine the Punjabi community in Glasgow shorn of the racial anxieties contained in police and ministerial reports.

First, the Registry contains numerous instances of sequential passports that were issued from the same city, typically Lahore, on the same day. This suggests that many Indian peddlers applied for passports and came to the United Kingdom in groups, whether those group were

organized through a *serang* or similar recruitment apparatus or simply through a village network is not easily determined. Though the Registry reveals different patterns for individuals in these groups after arrival, some of whom would have been dispatched by hiring firms, and others moved about independently to sell their stock, the fact that they moved together demonstrates that the intention to peddle was not always, or even often, a spur of the moment decision made from desperation. Second, the Registry contains information on residential address, which complicates notions of self-imposed ethnic segregation and can be combined with Valuation Rolls to describe housing patterns, inter-ethnic cooperation, and the emergence of Indian landlords. Third, the fact that the Registry contains certificate numbers and place of issue provides a new view of the kinds of routes that peddlers followed across England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Finally, information on certificate numbers permits the researcher to reckon with patterns of certificate renewal that exceeded information on housing patterns and passport numbers thereby adding nuance to understandings of community formation after arrival in the city.

A thorough reading of the Registry provides the opportunity to recreate the Punjabi peddler fraternity in Glasgow in previously unknown ways. By tracing passport numbers in the Registry from year to year facilitates a better understanding of the consolidation of the community in Glasgow at handful of addresses. Of the most important, 410 Argyle Street, in City Centre, and 25 Clyde Place, in the Gorbals, were dominated by Sikh traders. 71 South Portland Street and 171 Hospital Street were occupied primarily by Muslim traders. However, over the course of the decade recorded, the Registry demonstrates that the Punjabi community was not strictly segregated by religion. The transition of 16 Queen Arcade, in the City Centre, is a good example of this observation. From 1939 to 1944, it was occupied nearly exclusively by

Sikhs. During that time, of the thirty-two entries at this address, “Ismail” was the only Muslim name listed. However, of the twenty-seven entries from 1945 to April 1949, thirteen of the residents were Sikh and fourteen were Muslim. Thus, 16 Queen Arcade was a point of contact for many new residents from India regardless of perceived markers of identity and affinity.

Nevertheless, perhaps because of the higher proportion of Muslim peddlers in the city, the housing story that the Registry tells is one that broke down along religious lines. The Muslim population outnumbered non-Muslims in the Gorbals by a 7 to 2 margin throughout the 1940s. Thus, at least for Glasgow, although the Sikh contingent has received the bulk of the scholarly attention, Muslims constituted the larger community of Indian peddlers. The addresses recorded in the Pedlars Registry further confirms that Indian peddlers were concentrated in the Gorbals, south of the River Clyde, which accounted for nearly 60% of the names at the twenty most popular addresses in Glasgow. Almost all popular addresses for Indian peddlers throughout the city appeared to house primarily Muslims or non-Muslims.

Seldom did an address accommodate large groups from both communities simultaneously. 16 Queens Arcade, which was in City Centre and was the most populous address throughout the period is a striking exception. Though it exclusively housed non-Muslim Indians in 1939, in 1941 and from 1944-1949 it was an inter-religious residence. 410 Argyle St., 50 Milton St., 71 South Portland St., and 136 Hospital St., the latter two situated in the Gorbals, show similar dramatic fluctuations in religious occupancy. Thus, though the community appears to have been largely segregated by religion, the more popular residences that housed peddlers based in Glasgow, rather than transients who moved through Glasgow en route to Dundee, Inverness, or Coventry, showed a remarkable fluidity in the demographic and religious composition of their tenants.

Reviewing the valuation rolls reveals more complexity about the housing distribution among Indian peddlers in Glasgow. As early as 1939, K. Taylor, Superintendent of the Glasgow Police, complained that Indians “obtain[ed] the tenancy of houses in the poorer quarters of Glasgow which they sub-let at exorbitant rentals to our own poor people to their disadvantage.”⁵⁵ Although there is no record of an Indian owned home in the Gorbals in 1938, per the Superintendent’s lament, by 1948 there were 21 addresses under Indian ownership.⁵⁶ Because the valuation rolls only provide appraisals and not actual rent rates, it is difficult to assess Taylor’s allegations of extortion. What is apparent is that the non-Indian tenants of Indian landlords in 1946 numbered 28 whereas Indian tenants of Indian landlords amounted to just 3.⁵⁷ However, observing that Punjabi Muslim and non-Muslim migrants in Glasgow tended not to live together does not also suggest that they lived in ethnic ghettos. Indeed, as the proportion of Indian landlords renting to non-Indians and numbers of Indians living in non-Indian owned properties indicates, the Gorbals was a site of multi-racial entanglements where popular addresses for Indians also housed Jewish, Italian, Irish and Scottish -- men and women -- laborers, travelers, and traders.

Punjabi Muslims and non-Muslims appear to have lived separately but there are instances of cooperation that extend beyond living arrangements. Other historians have noted the relationship between Ali Mohammed Painter and Kartar Singh Seran, who had ties to the same village in Ludhiana. It is useful to acknowledge the various forms that such relationships took.⁵⁸ The valuation roles evince a further level of inter-ethnic business partnerships and property

⁵⁵ Report Addendum by K. Taylor, Superintendent, Glasgow Police, 23 June 1939, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

⁵⁶ Glasgow Valuation Roll, 1938 and 1948, Ward 26, Glasgow City Archives, Mitchell Library

⁵⁷ Glasgow Valuation Roll, 1946, Ward 26, Glasgow City Archives, Mitchell Library

⁵⁸ Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 257; Hazelwood, “A Diasporic Politics of Belonging”, 15.

ownership. For instance, in 1946, Sultan Ahmad Ansari, one of only two Indian property owners with multiple holdings, owned rooms at 77 Nicholson Street jointly with Shanker Singh and Partap Singh. Two years later, Ansari's name had been removed from the deed and his Sikh associates became sole owners. Though the rooms had been occupied by a variety of non-Muslim tenants while Ansari was a part owner, after his departure the address began to function as the Sikh *Sabha*, or association.⁵⁹

The valuation rolls do not provide much additional context for the changed ownership. However, Ansari's departure could have facilitated the establishment of a religious institution in several conceivable ways. Harkening back to the Gurdwara reform movement in Punjab, from 1920 to 1925, perhaps there was anxiety surrounding non-Sikh ownership and Ansari obliged. Alternatively, Ansari might have sought other real estate opportunities out of a reluctance to be a partial landlord for a Sikh organization. Finally, the owners might have had a falling out and Ansari sold his share in the property to his Sikh associates. Interestingly, Chander Parkash, who had lived at 81 Nicholson under Sultan Ahmad Ansari, moved down the street to 77 Nicholson after the Sikh Sabha began operating at that address. There is a certain ambivalence to Parkash's residence, but it does suggest that housing decisions were neither exclusively, or even typically, made based on ethnic identity nor were they infused by ethnic antagonisms that later historians have sought. The course of ownership at 77 Nicholson, in the Gorbals where Muslims were the predominating property owners, lends credence to Roger Ballard's assessment that, by the 1950s, Sikh property ownership increased as a mode of supplementary income by renting out rooms in "decaying Victorian and Edwardian terrace houses which could be found in the inner areas of

⁵⁹ Glasgow Valuation Roll, 1946-1948, Ward 26, Glasgow City Archives, Mitchell Library

most British cities.”⁶⁰ Certainly, the business relationship between Ansari, Shanker Singh and Partap Singh undermines any facile perception of ethnic segregation among Punjabi migrants in Britain.

Another avenue for investigating levels of cooperation between Muslim and non-Muslim Punjabis in the Gorbals, and throughout Glasgow, in the 1940s is to review patterns of certificate renewal.⁶¹ It was common for Indians to use connections to enter peddling and often went with friends to secure or renew a certificate. The Pedlar Registry includes information on the date that an applicant received a certificate. For the period between 1939-1949, 458 entries, out of a total of 1179 (38.85%), were registered in small groups on just 194 distinct days, which amounts to just under 20% of the total days in the registry that recorded an Indian applicant. Moreover, those 458 entries represent 293 distinct peddlers. Of those, 155 were registered in inter-religious groups over the ten-year period. More than two dozen of those were registered as part of inter-religious groups in multiple years. Considering more than a third peddlers were registered on just 16% of the days in the Registry, these groups, particularly for those who adopted this practice for multiple years, appear to have been assembled intentionally based on personal affinity or professional connection. Thus, though most applicants appeared at the police office on individual bases, it was not necessarily uncommon to visit in groups of two or three on the day of renewal. Of these group registrations, 56.7% of the groups were comprised of co-religionists and 43.3% contained Muslim and non-Muslim applicants. The latter percentage indicates that there was

⁶⁰ Roger Ballard and C. Ballard. “The Sikhs: The Development of South Asian Settlements in Britain.” in *Between two cultures*, ed. J.L. Watson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 31-32.

⁶¹ This information is taken from Magistrate of Pedlars Certificates, 1939-1949. E7/11/1.

more inter-religious cooperation among South Asian migrants than the valuation rolls alone suggest.

The networks that were characteristic of the Punjabi peddler community were not limited to the inter-religious solidarities rooted in South Asian village and kinship ties. They also included, almost by necessity, a broader contingent of British society. For instance, police reports indicate that, although Tanda's business operations supplied silk to individual Indian peddlers, the distribution network exceeded bounds of the Indian community. Of unique importance for many Indian warehousemen and wholesalers was coordination with Jewish distributors. According to the Metropolitan Police, Tanda and Ali purchased their inventory from three London-based firms: Witkower and Katz, Bronowski and Flatto, and Rewschand.⁶² Moreover, although the highest concentration of Punjabis in Glasgow in the 1940s was in the Gorbals area, south of the River Clyde, the valuation rolls of some of the most common addresses demonstrate that this area housed migrants from Italy, Ireland and Eastern Europe. Not only did these people share the same neighborhoods, tenements, and landlords (some of whom were Indian), but they also shared makeshift professions, combining peddling with unskilled industrial work.

The contours of the peddler's neighborhood in Glasgow were typical across Britain. In London, the Police at the Leman Street Station took special interest in Nand Singh's property at 9 Adler Street. After noting that it was more of a lodging house for Indians than a shop, the Inspector observed that the address "is a portion of a line of small dwelling houses, shop and workshop premises, chiefly occupied by poor class Jews of foreign birth or extraction." But, as

⁶² F. Warren, Inspector, to Superintendent, Metropolitan Police, 6 June 1931, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

far as the Inspector could discern, this coexistence was not a coincidence. The “large colony of British Indians” living in Alder Street was there both because they could purchase their stock from wholesalers in the area and, crucially, because “the predominating Jewish population do not object to their presence.”⁶³ Noting, wryly, that the only disturbances in the neighborhood were the result of Indian men taking up with white women, which was a point of serious contention throughout the period.⁶⁴ Thus, the multicultural neighborhoods that peddlers inhabited is further evidence that early South Asian migrants in Britain were thickly embedded in local communities and made use of a variety of complicated social relationships to sustain the migrant economy.

Criminality, the Black Market, and Migrant Politics

Nathoo Mohamed, who witnessed Noor Mohammad’s murder in 1925, had purchased a flat at 6 Brown Street, Glasgow, in 1924 and later obtained a passport issued at Lahore in 1927. Yet, his efforts to participate in the peddler economy, marked as they were by the suspicion of deserting his seaman’s contract, provides only a superficial biography. His presence in Water street in 1925 was an early example of his gravitation toward trouble, both as a victim of racist assault as well as an alleged purveyor of illicit goods and services. A letter to the Deputy Commissioner at Jullundur in 1937 provoked renewed interest in Nathoo and exposed a unique depth of criminality. A request for a travel endorsement for his associate Channan Singh is revelatory. The police determined that Singh’s poverty and lack of business acumen were adequate reasons to reject the application. However, his finances and education were the least of

⁶³ L. Clark, Metropolitan Police, Leman Street Station, Report, 26 January 1934, L/P&J/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

⁶⁴ See chapter 2 above for a fuller discussion of inter-group intimacies and sexual networks between Indian sailors and white women.

the reasons why Singh was prevented from joining Nathoo.⁶⁵ Though sponsoring family members and neighbors was a common route for Indians to gain travel endorsements to Britain, Nathoo Mohamed's background militated against his appeal on Channan's behalf.

Investigations into Nathoo Mohamed's past revealed a pattern of illegal behavior that convinced the Under Secretary of the External Affairs Department, Government of India, that he was unfit to act as a sponsor.

In 1932, Nathoo had been convicted under the Firearms Act of 1920 of possessing illegal weapons in Glasgow. This Act was the first act to regulate the sale of arms in general by the institution of a certificate scheme. A firearm certificate was issued by municipal authorities and possession of a firearm without this document was proscribed. It would appear, therefore, that Nathoo Mohamed had not received the appropriate certificate, but the reason for its refusal or revocation is not stated. Reasons for leering are not far to seek. The Firearms Act stipulates that anyone of "intemperate habits or unsound mind" is disqualified from obtaining a certificate.⁶⁶ Yet, the Home Office's assumption that Indians, seamen, and undesirable aliens were one and the same, the presumption of guilt disallowed Indians from owning firearms by the same logic that they should be barred from peddler's certificates. Thus, Nathoo Mohamed, in addition to peddling, was a suspected deserter from the Merchant Marine, and an alleged pimp, he was suspected of attempting to smuggle arms into India. It is unclear if his motives were economic or

⁶⁵ AV Askwith, Home Secretary, Government of Punjab, to Secretary, Government of India, External Affairs Dept., 10 October 1938, L/PJ/7/1007 file 719. IOR.

⁶⁶ Firearms Act, 1920 [10 & 11 Geo. 5 Ch. 43]. Last accessed 30 October 2017, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1920/43/pdfs/ukpga_19200043_en.pdf.

political, but such suspicion suggests that he might have been contributing to the wave of revolutionary violence that had crested in northern India in the late 1920s.⁶⁷

Nathoo Mohamed's case is suggestive but atypical.⁶⁸ However, the image of the Indian pariah informed the surveillance apparatus for decades. Moreover, the scarcity caused by World War II caused many peddlers, Indian and white alike, to run afoul of the law. The various rationing orders resulted in stricter control of consumption and distribution and instituted a coupon system for all consumer goods, but especially food and clothes. This regime resulted in greater scrutiny of the business practices of all retailers, and particularly those of informal and small-scale peddlers.⁶⁹ This scrutiny was based generally in a mistrust of itinerant merchants, especially those of Jewish and Punjabi heritage. As Mark Roodhouse has pointed out "small independent retailers with precarious finances handled a higher proportion of the illegal than the legal trade."⁷⁰ Ballard has observed that Punjabis were particularly successful due to their business acumen and "their skillful manipulation of prices and credit."⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, the Home Office and the Glasgow City Police viewed these practices less as cunning and more as graft. At a meeting in 1942, the District Detectives Conference heard that the "Black Market activities" were "perpetrated by 'mushroom' firms...run by persons of alien origin."⁷² Since local and national authorities always suspected Punjabis of already having deserted, and because the peddler embodied a threat to social and economic norms, the Board of Trade had strong biases

⁶⁷ Chapter 2 above demonstrated that the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Communist Party of India attempted to use lascars as conduits for proscribed literature and arms in support of anticolonial mobilization in India. Chapter 4 below will examine at the story of Udham Singh who was implicated in some of the same behavior throughout the 1930s.

⁶⁸ A similar but far more prominent case was that of Udham Singh. See chapter 4 below.

⁶⁹ Mark Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain: 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 162.

⁷⁰ Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain*, 96.

⁷¹ Ballard and Ballard, "The Sikhs," 28.

⁷² No. 6 District Detectives' conference minutes, 8 October 1942, MEPO 3/1868. TNA.

against Indian peddlers. Suspecting Indians of wrongdoing was a prominent narrative throughout the 1930s and 1940s, even as participation in illicit trade, whether willful or otherwise, was commonplace during the war and not limited to any single group -- native or migrant, consumer or retailer.⁷³

But the odiousness of the Punjabi trader was especially pronounced in the war years. The Indian Political Intelligence unit often commented on Sikh unwillingness to contribute to the war effort, choosing instead to make their fortunes door to door. The fact that many of these Punjabi travelers likely did contribute during World War I as soldiers went unacknowledged by the police. The IPI asserted that “all [Indian workers] who can do so gravitating to peddling which offers enormous financial profits, particularly to those who are prepared to operate on the Black Market.”⁷⁴ Yet, while suspecting Indians to be participating in highly coordinated efforts to undermine the rationing scheme, and thereby the struggle against fascism in Europe, the IPI insisted that politics were not involved. Scoffing at their imputed laziness and indiscipline, an intelligence officer commented that Indian peddlers “may and do make fervently patriotic and anti-British speeches from time to time but the Black Market is their temple.”⁷⁵

Due to the proportion of Indians among all peddlers in Britain, routinely at twenty percent of the total number of certified peddlers in Glasgow, and the already high-level of suspicion that surrounded Indians in Britain, the Board of Trade and the surveillance apparatus was determined to root out illicit trade conducted by the migrant population. Much like the

⁷³ Kassondra Lea Hutchings, “Moratorium on Morality” (MA Thesis, University of Arkansas, 2010), 33-37.

⁷⁴ IPI Note on Indian Activities in the United Kingdom, 8 March 1944, L/PJ/12/646. IOR. It is worth noting that in 1942 the IPI was of the exact opposite opinion: “As the defence programme developed Indians throughout the UK found that they could secure more lucrative employment by working as casual labourers than by hawking haberdashery.” IPI note on The Indian Workers Association, 14 April 1942, L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁷⁵ IPI, Indian Political Organizations in Britain, 4 February 1945, L/P&J/12/646. IOR.

perceptions surrounding the Indian peddler fraternity, the illicit economies of migrants during the war were perceived as having a significant degree of centralization and organization. In Southampton, nine Indians were suspected of trading in goods controlled by the Consumer Rationing Order of 1941 or charging exorbitant prices.⁷⁶ That a network of nine apparently localized Indians was the focus of the Metropolitan Police's Detectives Conference indicates the level of deviousness that the government ascribed. However, the black market cannot operate in isolation. As small traders, these Indians needed customers; as wholesalers, they needed retailers. Though one could try to dismiss the latter relationship by assuming that Indians only supplied other Indians, albeit a dubious assumption indeed, the former relationship was foundational to the operation of the black market during the war. In July 1943, Sarwan Singh was fined £100, for obtaining his inventory of women's clothes by means outside the parameters of the coupon rationing scheme and then accepting coupons for men's clothes as payment. Thus, Singh was caught in a matrix of illicit trading, having received his stock from a supplier known to him only as Bill and selling to white women in pubs.⁷⁷

Where Sarwan Singh's story is one of entanglement within the larger clothing trade, Nasir Singh's fine appears to be one of racial profiling. On 11 January 1944, Nasir was apprehended at the Nottingham train station with 4,000 clothing coupons and £300 cash. Though he pleaded ignorance of the coupons, which were in a package that he claimed should have only contained trousers that he had purchased in London "from a Jew in Petticoat Lane." Police then found an additional £1400 in a safe at Nasir's home. In his defense, he claimed that he was

⁷⁶ No. 6 District Detectives' conference minutes, 8 October 194, MEPO 3/1868. TNA.

⁷⁷ "Seamen's Vouchers: Indian Pedlar Fined £100," *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 July 1943.

holding cash for other Indians in Nottingham who did not own their own safe.⁷⁸ In addition to his sterling resources, he had a bank book showing more than 13,000 rupees. Singh's fraudulent activity, contested though it was, was not cited as the reason for stopping him upon alighting a train or seizing his belongings. Even though surveillance officers acknowledged that peddling could be a lucrative occupation during the war, the police intimated that his success as a peddler, evinced by his wealth, was further corroboration of his illegal activity. His possession of ill-gotten coupons separates him from other Indians who may have been stopped at random by police without any incriminating parcels. Yet, in the context of British concerns about the presence of Indians and their presumed guilt, it is little wonder that he was stopped, with or without cause, as many may have been.

The perception of foreignness kept Indians under the eye of the police. The complexity of rationing and lack of English language fluency left them vulnerable to infractions. According to Sarwan Singh's defense attorney, HS Holmes, he relied on the honesty of English-speaking wholesalers and suppliers to help him operate according to rationing regulations. In Nottingham, the police ascertained that "a flood of forged coupons" had made its way into the hands of local traders. Again, since these were described as "very clever forgeries," it is little wonder that they would have fooled many small merchants, especially those who were illiterate in English. A newspaper article detailing the scam focuses on the fate of Fateh Mohammed, who was fined £150 for having forty-three forged coupons in his possession and observes that several other Indians had been charged for infringing on the Consumer Rationing Order. The fundamental goal of the peddler was to sell his stock and whether the bounds of legality were crossed wittingly or

⁷⁸ "Indian Pedlar's £300 Fine: 4,000 Clothing Coupons," *The Manchester Guardian*, 12 July 1944.

out of ignorance is often difficult to discern.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the profit motive intersected with the semi-autonomous space that Indian migrants sought beyond segregated and discriminatory British industry to allow peddlers to help maintain British quality of life during the war while they operated at the fringes of British society.

As the peddler fraternity was formalized and as Indian cultural institutions were established, the opportunity to make profit while mobilizing Indian migrants in Britain was seized. While the surveillance apparatus was ambivalent about the political nature of Indian peddler participation in the black market, and while others have concluded that the tendency to evade rationing orders during World War II was a common one, the connections between the black market and politics among Indians in Glasgow can be gleaned in the Hindustani Majlis. As the Glasgow Indian Union, which was founded in 1926 to represent the interests of Indian seamen, laborers, and peddlers in the face of the Colored Alien Seamen Order, lost ground, the Majlis gained prominence. Originally established as a student organization at Glasgow University, the Majlis increasingly functioned as a social and professional network for Indians in the city. An oft-cited source for the coordination between politics and the black market was the Hindustani Majlis in Glasgow. In May 1944, one of the founders of the Majlis, Surendranath Joshi, who ran a shop at 64 Warwick St, reportedly advised his audience to “make all the money they could via the Black Market or otherwise.”⁸⁰ At a different meeting, Pakar Singh warned against “careless talk” on political activities or business interests that could garner the unwanted attention of the authorities.⁸¹

⁷⁹ “A Flood of Forged Coupons: Indian Pedlars Fined,” *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 August 1946.

⁸⁰ IPI, Indian Activities in the United Kingdom, 8 May 1944, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁸¹ IPI, Indian Political Organizations in Britain, 4 February 1945, L/P&J/12/646. IOR.

Though Indians were the target of significant official opprobrium and news coverage, such attention seems to be out of proportion with the numbers of Indians charged with illicit trading. According to the Pedlar Registry, admittedly not a complete source on criminal behavior, Indians were implicated in black market activity only five times in ten years. In the first instance, Ali Muhammad, who had been peddling in Glasgow for at least one year, was charged for infringing on the Consumer Rationing Order at Falkirk in 1941, which suggests, potentially, a lack of familiarity with the rationing scheme as the first Order had been issued that year. He was fined less than £5 for two counts of using counterfeit coupons, clearly operating at a lower volume than Sarwan and Nasir Singh. In 1948, Khushi Mohamed, the last-named Indian charged with illicit activity, was brought up on two counts for which he was fined a total of £7 or, if unable to pay, fifty days in prison. The severity of the sentence, in the postwar period is difficult to reconcile with the far greater fines given to other Indians where no threat of imprisonment was made. Conceivably, compared to the others, he had fewer resources with which to pay the fine and therefore prison was considered a viable punishment. The only Indian in the Glasgow Register of Pedlars Certificates to be charged on multiple counts in successive years, was known as Sheru. In 1946, he was charged with three counts of breaking the Consumer Rationing Order and fined £30. The next year he was fined £50 for an additional three counts. The dearth of Indians who were charged with anything resembling black market activity suggests that the focus on them as a group prone to illegal behavior was the product of anxiety about their presence rather than a systematic attempt to undermine the British war effort.

Conclusion

“An Indian Pedlar’s Life,” an unsigned autobiographical account of migration published in English by *Indian Front* in 1934, recounts a narrative of the difficult passage that Punjabis

made to Britain.⁸² “The small and uneconomic holdings we had, had at last to be disposed of,” the anonymous author begins, remarking on the winnowing of property and wealth that many Sikhs and Muslims experienced because of colonial agricultural regimes. Forced off the land, the narrator moves step by step through his journey. Attempts to secure a passport and travel endorsements were thwarted until bribes were paid. Even after documents were secured, the accommodation on ship was squalid: “The coal dust that was being carried by the wind was never properly swept up. The seasickness of new men like myself began to be seen on board. Some of us vomited incessantly. That, too, was not properly cleaned.” Then, in a British port, the author had no recourse to industrial work because of pernicious and insidious racial discrimination in factories and foundries. Thus, having no other option, the migrant was forced to obtain a pedlar’s license and live a life of poverty and dispossession -- transformed into the emblematic “unclean” Indian.

He describes the racial contempt he experienced and his inability to remit money to his home in Punjab and concludes: “The only way to get out of this miserable state of affairs is to organize the workers and peasants in all their different spheres of activity and, with the might of organisation, to give a death blow to the entire system of society which creates differences between man and man.” The objective of the short story reveals the political orientation of *Indian Front*, which was financed by the Communist Party of Great Britain. However, insisting that Indian migrants in Britain are reduced to vagabondage and their only salvation is trade unionism is a reductive portrayal of the social, economic, and political lives of Indian peddlers. This chapter has examined lives, businesses, and politics in a different manner. Having outlined

⁸² “An Indian Pedlar’s Life.” *Indian Front* 2, no. 6 (1934).

the difficulties that lascars faced in the British labor movement and how the diffuseness of the peddler community rendered syndicalism an empty promise, this chapter analyzed the ways in which working-class neighborhoods throughout industrial Britain facilitated a migrant economy that functioned as an alternative to the sea and the shop floor. By detailing the networks, social entanglements, and professional fluidity of Punjabi peddlers in the 1920s to 1940s, this chapter explored modes of everyday resistance that are often underestimated or misunderstood by conventional methods of political organizing and historical analysis.

This story is indicative, if extreme, of the social and professional fluidity that characterized early South Asian migrants in Britain. At the core of this fluidity are the non-institutional networks of the small itinerant merchant. The urge to peddle among the South Asian migrant population in interwar Britain had manifold reasons. Economic opportunities for nonwhite migrants were generally limited and went through bull and bear periods based on the needs of British industry. Therefore, in the face of persistent color discrimination on ships, in factories, foundries and shops, Indians sought self-employment.⁸³ Other scholars have commented on the flexibility that peddling affords not only to obtain supplemental employment in a productive economy, but also to observe rituals and holidays that were not accommodated within the dominant culture.⁸⁴

However, there were social and professional reasons as well. The migration of Sikhs and the recruitment of peddlers by firms run by former seamen, suggest that peddling in Britain was a preference for many and was not exclusively the last resort of the victims of global capitalism.

⁸³ Monder Ram, Bob Jerrard and Joy Husband, "West Midlands: Still Managing to Survive," in *Unravelling the Rag Trade: Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Seven World Cities*, ed. Jan Rath (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 75.

⁸⁴ Arcadius Kahan, "Economic Opportunities and Some Pilgrims' Progress: Jewish Immigrants from Eastern Europe in the U.S., 1890-1914," *The Journal of Economic History* 38, no. 1 (1978): 240, n. 11.

In the interwar period the peddler trade was populated and supplied by working-class migrants from across Europe, who generally lived in proximity to one another. Indians were no exception and upon entering a working-class neighborhood in Glasgow, London, Coventry, or Newcastle, they were easily incorporated into the network of supply and debt that characterized the peddler's enterprise.

The Gorbals area of Glasgow functioned as a "social nexus," typical of many British cities, that helped Punjabi migrants to navigate credit, suppliers, housing, and welfare. The peddler fraternity in Britain was an expansive organization that facilitated the movement of Punjabis from Northern Ireland, the Midlands, London, and throughout Scotland, with the most popular route for Glaswegian traders being back and forth from Dundee, through Edinburgh. The Gorbals anchored this community for several reasons. First, as a port city, it was easily accessible for escaped lascars and fare paying passengers alike. Second, it was common practice in Glasgow to issue peddler's certificates to anyone with either a British Passport or a Seaman's Certificate, regardless of suspicions that an applicant might have deserted. Third, by the 1940s, Glasgow had been enmeshed in the broader peddler network for decades. Records of Indian peddlers date to 1925 -- the grisly murder of Noor Mohammad by John Keen -- and Indian warehousing and outfitting firms emerging throughout the 1930s. Finally, the Gorbals itself facilitated the expansion of the Indian merchant community through the acquisition of tenements that buttressed the incomes and thereby the capacities of warehouses in the area, allowing them to recruit and sponsor more migrants from Punjab.

Successive waves of South Asian migrants have made a lasting mark on Glasgow. As noted throughout this chapter, Muslim and non-Muslim peddlers interacted with one another and the wider British and migrant communities to sustain their trade. Moreover, it has been observed

that Muslims formed the largest contingent of South Asian peddlers in the city, even though Sikhs have received more notice. The Muslim community that first came to the Gorbals in the 1920s and 1930s formed a bridgehead for subsequent migration. Although the street plan of the Gorbals has been transformed in the aftermath of successive urban renewal campaigns in Glasgow, it is hardly surprising that the central Mosque sits in the area between what was once Hospital Street and Gorbals Street. Yet, as a permanent reminder of this history of suspicion and surveillance, the mosque sits in the shadow of the Glasgow Sheriff and Justice of the Peace Court, the busiest court in Scotland.

Chapter 4

Udham Singh, Diaspora Radicalism, and the Cult of Assassination

On the morning of 13 March 1940, a Wednesday, Udham Singh had planned to visit the India Office to see about getting a travel endorsement for his passport. But Sir Hussan Surawardy, advisor to the Secretary of State for India, was out, and Singh decided he had better things to do than queue for a colonial official. On his way out the door, he glanced at a notice about a joint meeting of the East India Association and the Central Asian Society being held later that day at the Caxton Hall in London. His interest was piqued enough to remember the details, or perhaps he wrote them down, but not quite enough to change his plan for the day. Later, he told police, “when I left home today I thought I would go see the Paul Robeson picture in the Leicester Square.”¹ But, unfortunately for this story, the cinema had not yet opened when he arrived. So, instead of viewing Paul Robeson’s *The Proud Valley*, he went home, retrieved his .44 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver, and walked to the Caxton Hall. On arrival, he stood in the side aisle of a capacity Tudor Room, waited until the end of the remarks, and approached the stage with gun drawn. He discharged six bullets. One into Lord Lamington, the Marquess of Zetland, and another into Sir Louis Dane. While a couple of bullets flew errantly into the stage, two went into the back of former Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab Sir Michael O’Dwyer, whose tenure oversaw the Amritsar Massacre in 1919, killing him in an instant.

The assassination of Michael O’Dwyer was an act of revolution borne out of the militant political philosophy of the Ghadar movement in North America. In the 1930s, Punjabi left politics was characterized by a fluidity between Ghadarites, Communists, and Congressmen,

¹ Deposition of Mohammad Singh Azad, 13 March 1940, MEPO 3/1743. TNA.

which radicalized peasant politics in Punjab.² As this chapter demonstrates, Punjabis in interwar Britain, many of whom had migrated for economic opportunity but had been politicized during successive upheavals at home, admired Ghadar's radical solidarities with nationalist and anticolonial movements. Much of the literature on Ghadar traces the short-term impact of its failure to foment rebellion among troops in Punjab 1915, the *Ailan-i-jang*, without investigating the ways in which Ghadrists continued to struggle against British rule until the end of World War II.³ By focusing on the immediate ramifications of the failed mutiny, such scholarship neglects the global resonance that Ghadar had within the Indian diaspora, of which Udham Singh is exemplary. The history of Ghadar's influence among Indians in Britain goes deeper. The peripatetic Punjabi radicals in Britain, often working as peddlers and sailors, illustrate that movement between India, North America, and Europe sustained the Ghadar Party for decades after its foundational failure and nurtured anticolonial internationalism in Britain.

Inspirations and Inheritances: Before Udham Singh

Among nationalist leaders in India, O'Dwyer's assassination was anathema to Gandhi's campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience. It was, therefore, decried by mainstream nationalist leaders to exculpate the Indian independence movement from any involvement. Instead of Gandhian nationalism, other inspirations were posited for Udham Singh. The *National Herald* lamented that the assassination would be "widely regretted" and the *Times of India* noted the "senseless character of the crime." Others indicated that there were politics behind the act. After

² Mukherjee, *Peasants in India's Non-violent Revolution*, 45; Raza, "Separating the Wheat from the Chaff," 322.

³ Representative titles that do not pursue the history of the Ghadar Party into the 1930s and 1940s includes: Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Ghadar Syndrome: Nationalism in an Immigrant Community," *Punjab Journal of Politics* 1, no. 1 (1977): 1-22; Puri, *Ghadar Movement*; Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*; Nishant Upadhyay, ed., *Sikh Formations*, Special Issue: Ghadar Movement: A Living Legacy.

voicing its shock, the Lahore-based *Tribune* suggested that “the assailant drew inspiration from and was misled by the example of the Irish Republican Army [IRA] and wanted to produce an Indian counterpart to the assassination produced by that party in England by its recent acts of terrorism.”⁴ The *Tribune* was referencing the IRA’s S-Plan.

Only a month prior to the assassination, two men, Peter Barnes and James McCormack (also known as James Richards), were hanged for their part in the detonation of a bomb in Coventry.⁵ The bombing was an intentional act of sabotage. The IRA’s Sabotage Plan, or S-Plan, was a reprisal of Irish republicanism that, according to Tony Craig, “specifically set out to avoid gratuitous collateral damage to civilian life and lives,” while wreaking targeted political violence.⁶ While Udham Singh may have been aware that the IRA’s S-Plan was responsible for five murders in Coventry in August 1939 and more than 150 bombings that year, his attack on a colonial administrator was clearly distinct from the S-Plan’s focus on British infrastructure.

Though the *Tribune*’s attribution of IRA inspiration to Udham Singh appears to be more convenient than evidentiary, not to say that anticolonial violence in Ireland had not been influential in India, the IRA bombings informed the way the British judicial and police apparatus reacted to Singh. New Scotland Yard issued a series of recommendations for maintaining order during the trial that also revealed the perceived parallels in Udham Singh and the IRA. “As the possibility of a further ‘spectacular outrage’ being committed in Court by some disaffected Sikh cannot be altogether overlooked,” Scotland Yard warned, “[we] will no doubt take such

⁴ *The National Herald* (Lucknow), 15 March 1940; *The Times of India* (Bombay), 15 March 1940; *The Tribune* (Lahore) 16 March 1940, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁵ "I.R.A. Men Hanged." *The Times* (London, England), 8 Feb. 1940; See also Paul McMahon, *British Spies & Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2008), 262-275.

⁶ Tony Craig, Sabotage! The Origins, Development and Impact of the IRA’s Infrastructural Bombing Campaigns 1939–1997,” *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 3 (2010): 311.

precautions as are possible to scrutinise those securing admission; the precedent afforded by recent IRA trials may prove useful.”⁷ In part, this appears to be a reference to the “extraordinary precautions” at the Court of Criminal Appeal in January 1940, when large numbers of uniformed officers and undercover detectives were placed throughout the courtroom during the appeal of Barnes and McCormack.⁸ During Singh’s trial, a discussion of which is below, these precautions seem to have been unnecessary as very few Indians attended the trial and none of them were close associates of Singh or other Indian anticolonial or independence organizations in Britain.

Of course, anticolonial violence had been a mainstay of Indian radicals throughout the early twentieth century. The similarities in the acts of Udham Singh, Madan Lal Dhingra, and Bhagat Singh have often been compared. Both Dhingra, who assassinated Sir Curzon Wylie, aide to the Secretary of State, in 1909, and Bhagat Singh, who was executed in 1931 for his role in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, acted within the larger organizations with which they were closely associated. Dhingra's radicalism was the product of his membership of India House while a student in London under the tutelage of Shyamji Krishna Varma. Indeed, India House and its journal, *Indian Sociologist*, were prominent forces for Indian revolution decades before the demand for complete independence was made by mainstream Indian politicians and activists.⁹ Moreover, India House served to link Indian revolutionaries throughout Western Europe and India as it had opened its doors to Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Har Dyal, and Lala Lajpat Rai.¹⁰

⁷ Scotland Yard Report, 18 March 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁸ "Various," *The Times* (London, England), 23 January 1940.

⁹ Alex Tickell, "Scholarship Terrorists: The India House Hostel and the 'Student Problem' in Edwardian London," in Ahmed and Mukherjee, *South Asian Resistances in Britain*, Ch. 1.

¹⁰ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, Ch. 6

Similarly, Bhagat Singh, who became synonymous with anticolonial violence in interwar India, acted as part of the Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha (NJBS)) and Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA), which sought to drive the British out through coordinated attacks on colonial administrators. Bhagat Singh was first arrested for throwing bombs into the Legislative Assembly in Delhi in 1930. In detention, he was later charged in connection with the murder of Assistant Superintendent of Police John Saunders, which he had helped to coordinate with the NJBS and HRSA. The assassination of Saunders was committed as revenge for the death of Lajpat Rai at the hands of the Lahore police during protests of the Simon Commission, an all-white governmental commission that was examining possible avenues for political reform in India.¹¹

Even if "in many respects" the acts were similar, Udham Singh was atypical of these purveyors of political violence for two reasons.¹² First, though Udham Singh was radicalized by the Ghadar Party and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, his attack was independent of any organized campaign. Characterizations of him as a solo actor stand in contradistinction to the proximity that Dhingra and Bhagat Singh maintained with their organizations. Secondly, it bears pointing out that Udham successfully targeted a prominent former colonial official that he begrudged for sanctioning the Amritsar massacre. In Dhingra's case, the assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie was effectively a case of mistaken identity and the intended target was George Curzon, former Viceroy of India. Similarly, JP Saunders was not the intended victim of the NJBS and HRSA. They sought, instead, to assassinate Superintendent of Police, JA Scott, who

¹¹ Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice, and Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chs. 1-2; Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), Ch. 3.

¹² "Udham Singh" memo, 19 July 1940, HO 144/21445. TNA.

was personally blamed for Rai's death but was misidentified in the moment. Thus, the case of Udham Singh is not easily grafted onto anticolonial violence emanating from India or Ireland; however, both strands facilitated the perception that British imperial authority was in crisis and Singh chose to act during that breakdown.¹³

This chapter focuses on the murder, trial, and execution of Udham Singh and the affect that this highly visible case had on Punjabi migrants in Britain. This examination will enhance current understandings of the influence that the Ghadar Party had on Punjabis in Britain even while the Ghadar Party never established a former branch in the colonial metropole. Rattan Singh, who liaised between the Ghadar Party and the Communist International and established Ghadar Parties on three continents, was integral to Ghadar mobilization in Britain. Udham Singh had a twenty-year career of traveling between India, Britain, and the United States, during which he committed himself to Ghadar militancy and was memorialized as a martyr for Indian independence. The Indian Workers Association, with which the article concludes, was the organizational embodiment of the Ghadar movement in Britain and was established by peddlers and semi-skilled workers who were enamored by the examples of Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh, Udham Singh, and countless of their relatives and neighbors who had been jailed, transported, or executed while resisting colonial rule in Punjab. By foregrounding the importance of mobility, and examining complementary events in South Asia and Britain, this chapter argues that labor migration between India and Europe and the global transmission of Ghadar Party publications were integral to anti-colonial mobilization in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s.

¹³ For more on "breakdown," see Sumit Sarkar, "The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy, 1905-1922", in *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Ranajit Guha, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 305-320.

“Fighting the ‘enemy’ in the proper way”

The preponderance of South Asian lascars, peddlers, and students in Britain, rather than the farmers and soldiers that Ghadar ordinarily recruited, was alone sufficient evidence to convince Ghadar Party leaders that expansion into Britain was untenable.¹⁴ The Ghadar Party of the late-1930s was a highly centralized, global organization that had been disciplined through cooperation and coordination with the Communist International (Comintern) and the University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow. As a result, the majority of Ghadrists recruited in the interwar period came from established networks in South Asia, East Africa, South America, and California. The distance that these networks created between Ghadar and Indians in Britain combined with the lack of effective mobilization of Indians by local political organizations helps to explain the reluctance to expand into Britain. Yet, this skepticism about the mettle of Indians in Britain, often dismissed as apolitical merchants, failed to deter Ghadar-inspired Punjabis from organizing. Furthermore, it revealed a thorough misunderstanding of the influence that homeland politics and anticolonial agitation had on enclaves of zealous Punjabis in Britain.

The two methods of escaping agricultural hardship in interwar Punjab that led to Britain were employment in the Merchant Marine and establishment of peddler networks. Systems of recruitment into the Merchant Marine had become highly sophisticated by the end of World War I. According to Ravi Ahuja, recruitment of Indian seamen, typically called lascars, was facilitated by “spatial centralization” in the ports of Bombay and Calcutta. Moreover, zones of military recruitment in Western Punjab, particularly Rawalpindi and Attock, were gradually transformed into recruitment grounds for Muslim engine-room crews for shipping companies.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Report on Ghadr Party,” 10 May 1939, L/PJ/12/285. IOR.

¹⁵ Ahuja, “Subaltern Networks under British Imperialism,” 47-49.

Central Punjab, an area populated heavily by Sikhs, did not become a locus of recruitment into the Merchant Marine; however, the economic stagnation of the 1930s compounded long-standing issues around access to land in the fertile Jullundur doab led many Punjabis from Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, and Ludhiana to use family and village networks to establish themselves as peddlers in British cities.¹⁶

Although many of the Punjabi migrant workers who came to Britain in the interwar period came from central Punjab, a region described in 1942 “the birthplace” of the Ghadar movement, their residence in Britain kept them out of Ghadar’s established recruiting networks.¹⁷ In 1922, the Ghadar Party forged a partnership with the Comintern’s University of the Toilers of the East so that Ghadar Party members could receive formal education in revolutionary history, trade unionism, and military and vocational training.¹⁸ Over the course of this relationship there were two primary modes of recruitment to the KUTV. First, the Ghadar Party supplied most of the Comintern’s Indian students.¹⁹ Second, beginning in 1936, the Comintern resolved that all Indians were to be enlisted in India and then sent to Moscow via “devious” routes: “These youths are to find their way from India in the first instance either to North or South America in the guise of labourer or to England as students. From these countries arrangements will then be made to send them to Moscow.”²⁰ Importantly, this approach made Britain a central thru-point for Indian recruits, but in neither approach was Britain deemed an appropriate site for recruitment.

¹⁶ Ballard and Ballard, “The Sikhs,” 21.

¹⁷ IPI, “Proposed inclusion of certain Indians on the Suspect List,” 15 May 1942, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

¹⁸ Mukherji, “Anticolonial Imagination,” 41-42.

¹⁹ Mukherji, “Anticolonial Imagination,” 68; Josh, *The Communist Movement in Punjab*, 28.

²⁰ IPI, Report on Ghadar Party, 3 November 1936, L/PJ/12/285 file 1392(A)/25. IOR.

Emboldened by Soviet propaganda and the emphasis on military training from University of the Toilers of the East, the Ghadar Party of the 1930s was newly determined to covertly arm Indians and start a revolution. Therefore, fear of arms smuggling was a high priority for the British authorities surveilling Ghadarites. In 1916, during the attempt to foment a mutiny among Sikh troops in India, the Ghadar Party enlisted two ships, the *Annie Larsen* and the *Maverick*, to illegally transport guns.²¹ Twenty years later, after enlisting the help of Soviet tacticians, the *City of Christchurch*, a steamship, had been seized by police in Calcutta with a cache of arms and noted that “the Indian police have an idea that Gadaries [sic] are secretly gathering arms.”²² In connection to this, the intelligence apparatus was keen to learn that Udham Singh was arrested on 30 August 1927, under Section 20 of the Arms Act. His possession of two revolvers, one pistol, ammunition, and “copies of the prohibited paper, *Ghadr-di-Gunj*” was taken as evidence of an attempt to smuggle weapons.²³ Udham Singh’s arrest in 1927 highlights the fact that his radicalization was the product of a long engagement with the revolutionary politics of the Soviet Union and Ghadar Party and embodies the direct links between India and North America in this period -- circumventing Britain.

Any consideration of interwar migrant politics must acknowledge the distance between British political parties and colonial migrants in British cities. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and its anticolonial work has been a topic of debate.²⁴ Though the CPGB and the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) supported the International and Oriental Seafarer’s

²¹ Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 105.

²² *Hindustan Ghadr*, September 1940, L/PJ/12/757. IOR.

²³ John Swain, Inspector, Metropolitan Police Report, 16 March 1940. MEPO 3/1743. TNA.

²⁴ Marika Sherwood, “The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920-1938,” *Science & Society* 60, no. 2 (1996): 137-163; John Callaghan, “Colonies, Racism, the Cpgb and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years,” *Science & Society* 61, no. 4 (1997): 513-525; Evan Smith, “Class Before Race: British Communism and the Place of Empire in Postwar Race Relations,” *Science & Society* 72, no. 4 (2008): 455-481.

Union and sought to use Indian seamen in European ports to smuggle arms and propaganda into India, both efforts were short-lived and non-systematic.²⁵ By attempting to segregate initiatives directed at British socialism and anti-colonialism, Indian workers in Britain were overlooked as potential Party members in the early 1920s and remained outside of the CPGB ambit until the period of mass migration in the 1950s. The inability or unwillingness of British political parties to recruit and incorporate Indian migrant workers into their ranks in the early interwar period contributed to the slow pace of political organization among migrants.

In interwar India, the organized left had contributed to making Punjab a site of revolutionary politics. Yet, Indians in Britain have remained marginal to the debate surrounding the interaction between the British left and the struggle against imperialism. As London, Coventry, and Birmingham became bridgeheads for Indian settlement in the late-1930s, they also provided the opportunity to mobilize around community-specific issues, especially military conscription. While mutiny is foundational to Ghadar Party lore, and remained an animating force throughout the period, by 1937 the march to war had led to a new mode of military disruption in the form of anti-recruitment meetings in Punjab.²⁶ At the same time, Punjabi migrants in Britain were beginning to organize around the same principle and soon joined up with the Independent Labour Party, a staunch critic of the War.²⁷ The confluence of settlement and increased participation in local political organizations provided a foundation that partially facilitated the emergence and articulation of a Ghadarite zeal in Britain previously untapped because of ineffective political leadership and mobilization.

²⁵ IPI, "Indians in London," 25 May 1923, L/PJ/12/143. IOR;DIB Report, July 1923, L/PJ/12/54 file 4968(C)/21. IOR.

²⁶ Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab*, 85.

²⁷ IPI, "Indian Notes: September-October 1942," L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

In May 1939, Charan Singh Chima, a Punjabi Sikh in Coventry who was “anxious to start a Ghadr [sic] Party group in the U.K.,” wrote on behalf of “four or five young men of his way of thinking” to Rattan Singh, one of the leading lights of the interwar Ghadar Party, for guidance on establishing a branch in Britain.²⁸ Rattan Singh, listed as R-36 in the *Ghadr Directory*, was “one of the most active and dangerous leaders of the Ghadr movement.”²⁹ Chima was aware of Rattan Singh both due to his leadership role within the Ghadar Party and because of close family connections. Charan Singh Chima’s uncle, Karam Singh Chima, had participated in the failed mutiny of 1915 and, though restricted to his village, was an integral link between the Akali and Kirti movements in 1920s Punjab. For instance, he was jailed in 1920 for “fomenting Akali agitation” in Jullundur. In 1924 he was arrested for serving on the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, an Akali organization which had been banned by the colonial government. Subsequently, in 1927, Karam Singh Chima became the Vice-President of the Desh Bhagat Sahayak Sabha, which supported the families of Ghadarites who had been imprisoned, deported, or executed.³⁰ Karam Singh Chima’s overlapping political and social affiliations was unsurprising in a period of considerable upheaval. The strength of the Ghadar party, as well as the salience of Punjabi communism in the 1930s, was due in large part to the ability of its members to negotiate multiple alliances and leverage them for political ends.³¹

In a period when attempted unionization of sailors and factory workers was the primary mode of associational politics for Indians in Britain, Chima and his colleagues sought to harness

²⁸ IPI, “Report on Ghadr Party,” 10 May 1939, L/PJ/12/285. IOR.

²⁹ Intelligence Bureau, *The Ghadr Directory, containing the names of persons who have taken part in the Ghadr movement in America, Europe, Africa and Afghanistan as well as India*. New Delhi, 1934, V/27/262/6. IOR.

³⁰ Intelligence Bureau, *The Ghadr Directory*, 154-56.

³¹ Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab*, 3; Mukherjee, *Peasants in India’s Non-violent Revolution*, 105.

the power of Ghadar to mobilize Indian migrant workers against imperialism, conscription, and unfair working conditions. These Indian migrants in the English Midlands had been raised in the ferment of Ghadar-Akali-Kirti agitation of the 1920s and early-1930s and upon arrival in Britain sought to contribute to these struggles. Yet, Rattan Singh did not enthusiastically endorse their goals because he believed that there were not enough Indians in Britain who were willing and able to participate in the struggle “in the proper way”. Nonetheless, he suggested that Charan Singh Chima organize an “Indian Political Prisoners’ Defense Committee,” which was clearly inspired by, and potentially modeled on, Karam Singh Chima’s welfare committee.³²

A few months later, Charan Singh Chima wrote to Rattan Singh and intimated that he had abandoned his plans to organize a discrete association, but he hoped to collect funds for remittance to Punjab from among the Punjabis in the Midlands and would endeavor to continue “studying the History of the Russian Communist Party.”³³ Not only had Rattan Singh evidently dissuaded Charan Singh Chima from establishing a Ghadar Party branch in the United Kingdom, but the onset of war also delayed any ideas of contributing to the militant struggle for Indian independence in Britain. However, by this point Punjabis in Britain had begun to mobilize politically. The prospect of directly engaging with the Ghadar movement was reanimated amid the trial, appeal, and execution of Udham Singh. As a preface to Udham Singh’s radicalization, a return to his failed trip to the Leicester Square Theatre will act as an essential *mise en scene* to his enthusiasm for Paul Robeson, an icon of communist anticolonialism and black internationalism in the 1930s.

“I thought I would go see the Paul Robeson Picture in the Leicester Square”

³² IPI, “Report on Ghadr Party,” 10 May 1939, L/PJ/12/285. IOR.

³³ IPI, “Report on Ghadr Party,” 3 November 1939, L/PJ/12/285. IOR.

The decade leading up to Singh's crime was a period of escalating fame for Paul Robeson, especially on the theatre circuit in London. In 1930, his portrayal of Shakespeare's Othello was greeted with praise and immense box office success. As a performer, his name would have been ubiquitous throughout the country and, indeed, the anglophone world. This alone, especially in the aftermath of the racial politics at work in the staging of *Othello*, makes Udham Singh's interest in Robeson's recent cinematic offering unremarkable.³⁴ But over and above his fame on stage and screen, the Robeson of the 1930s also entered the world of liberation struggles and revolutionary politics, which was buttressed by his "discovery of Africa" in the late 1920s.³⁵ His first foray was with the West African Students Union (WASU) in London, where he communed with luminaries of African independence movements, while simultaneously engaging with African seamen in the ports in London, Liverpool, and Cardiff. In this way, Robeson was entrenched not only in the politics of nationalism but was also exposed to the lives and limitations of the black working-class in Britain.³⁶

Recent historical research has highlighted the London-based black intelligentsia that converged in the 1930s and contributed to a new theorization of anticolonialism and African modernity.³⁷ Although scholars have gestured toward the shared lineages between Pan-Africanism and Indian anticolonialism, the overwhelming focus of this literature is occupied with the manifestation of black internationalism that emanated from African, Caribbean, and

³⁴ Gerald Horne, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 41-42.

³⁵ Marti Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 171.

³⁶ Horne, *Paul Robeson*, 51.

³⁷ Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015)

American intellectuals, students, and activists in the imperial metropolis. Thus, such work has a blind spot for inter-ethnic and trans-colonial solidarities. In this way, conventional approaches to black internationalism have prepared the way for more detailed analysis of the forms of anticolonial activism that engaged Africans, South Asians, and leftists in Britain that emerged in the interwar period and persevered through the era of decolonization. Robeson's London was a thriving site for new organizations that were immersed in the politics of interwar internationalism, Pan-Africanism, feminism, and communism. The activities of the intellectuals at the center of these associations produced a London that was both the center of the British Empire and a locus of anticolonial strategies for decolonial futures.

London in the 1930s is where Robeson received his political education and claimed to have realized his working-class roots. Susan Pennybacker has discussed the emergence of the international Scottsboro campaign which brought communists, socialists, and liberals together to forge an anti-racist movement in Britain under the leadership of, among others, Shapurji Saklatvala, MP, Willi Munzenberg of the League Against Imperialism, and George Padmore, a leader of the Comintern's Negro Committee in Hamburg.³⁸ Parallel with this trans-Atlantic anti-racist upsurge was the formation of political and cultural organizations that fashioned space for African sociability and advocated for the rights of the nascent black community. Marc Matera has provided a detailed analysis of black political culture and cultural politics and examines the myriad ways in which people of African heritage in this moment coordinated their struggles against white supremacy and imperialism and forged new conceptions of African identity.³⁹ Moreover, Willi Munzenberg's League Against Imperialism was a focal point of the global

³⁸ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 4-6.

³⁹ Matera, *Black London*, Ch. 1.

struggle against colonialism in the interwar period. This organization was instrumental in bringing nationalist leaders from across the colonized world into contact with one another to articulate the fundamentals of anticolonialism. Indeed, the League Against Imperialism was foundational to Jawaharlal Nehru's anticolonial internationalism that emerged in the late-1920s and informed his intellectual development.⁴⁰

The momentum of black politics and anticolonialism in Britain in the 1930s inevitably intersected with other movements for national liberation. The Indian national movement was certainly a touchstone of many of these movements and there was considerable cross-fertilization in Britain. Udham Singh's affinity for Robeson might partly be attributed to latter's friendship with Jawaharlal Nehru, which was forged out of the coordination of Black and Asian organizations in London. Among these was the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP), founded in 1931 by Jamaican-born Harold Moody, which included in its mission the aim to "improve relations between the Races." From this position, the LCP coordinated with the Coloured Men's Institute, which served non-European seamen in London, including Indian lascars. Additionally, with the India League, considered the London branch of the Indian National Congress, the LCP co-hosted Mohandas Gandhi and Nehru in London.⁴¹ Furthermore, at a 1938 India League meeting held to honor Nehru's visit to Britain, *Challenge*, the newspaper of the Young Communist League of Great Britain, reported that Robeson stood to address the meeting. "The struggles that are going on in China, India, Abyssinia, and Spain are one," Robeson said, "the

⁴⁰ Michele L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁴¹ Matera, *Black London*, 40.

struggle of the colonial peoples is a struggle for democracy and freedom for all.”⁴² Nehru and other Indian intellectuals subsequently supported Robeson’s political awakening, especially in the form of the revolutionary Unity Theatre.⁴³ Robeson thus served to connect black internationalism with the questions of Indian independence and proletarian revolution.

Through his interactions with colonial intellectuals and his studies of ostensibly disparate cultures, Robeson began to reckon with the linguistic, historical, and ideational linkages between Africa and Asia. Moreover, through his perception of these commonalities he became convinced of the shared struggles against imperialism, white supremacy, and fascism that were foisted on these continents and marked their natives. This realization took him to Moscow in the mid-1930s and gave shape to his burgeoning political awakening. Of his time there, Robeson remarked on the lack of “color-consciousness” among the younger generation in Moscow.⁴⁴ He declared “all the masses of every race are contented and support their government,” which he saw in opposition to the violent racial oppression in the United States at the same time.⁴⁵ The mid-1930s was also the period of greatest interaction between the University of the Toilers of the East and the Ghadar Party. While there is no evidence that Robeson actively interacted with Punjabi radicals during his time in the Soviet Union, it is a clear indication of the cross-currents that connected black internationalism, militant anticolonialism, and proletarian revolution to

⁴² *Challenge*, June 30, 1938, quoted in Sean Creighton, “Paul Robeson’s British Journey,” in *Cross the Water Blues: African American Music in Europe*, Neil A. Wynn, ed. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 136.

⁴³ Horne, *Paul Robeson*, 89.

⁴⁴ Horne, *Paul Robeson*, 60-61.

⁴⁵ ‘I Am at Home’, Says Robeson at Reception in Soviet Union: Interview by Vern Smith, *Daily Worker*, 15 January 1935. In *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interview, 1918-74*, Phillip S. Foner, ed. (London: Quartet, 1978). Daniel G. Williams has pointed out that Robeson had first-hand exposure to the anti-Semitism of the Soviet regime in the 1930s, even though he denied any deeper knowledge of systematic purges of Jews in that period. Nevertheless, the view that Russia was a color-blind society in the 1930s and free of racist oppression represents an offensive degree of intellectual dishonesty. See Daniel G. Williams, *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales, 1845-1945* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 148-149.

Robeson's emergence as a political icon by the end of the decade. His ideological awakening and his travels were foundational to his transformation into an avowed communist who believed in the emancipatory rhetoric of the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ In this period, he was among the most prominent African American communists and his status was magnified by the fight against fascism in Spain and the growing momentum of anti-colonial movements throughout Africa and Asia. Certainly, at this moment, he became a model for black internationalism and was a subject of reverence for Udham Singh and his Ghadarite forebears.

The Proud Valley, the Robeson film that Udham Singh had sought out on the day of the assassination, had opened just a few days earlier in Leicester Square, London. The film was a production of Ealing Studios, under the direction of Sergei Nolbandov, and it emerged out of the revolutionary ethos of the Unity Theatre in London that Robeson joined upon his return to Britain after a stint with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. Even before his sojourn in Spain, Robeson had begun "fostering socially useful art." In *Stevedore*, Robeson played the part of Lonnie Thompson who, accused of raping a white woman, enlists the support of white and black workers to protect him against a lynch mob.⁴⁷ But the Unity Theatre provided him with an intentional production company that allowed him to stage productions that highlighted class solidarity. "Joining Unity Theatre," said Robeson in 1937, "means identifying myself with the working-class. And it gives me the chance to act in plays that say something I want to say about things that must be emphasized."⁴⁸ The Unity Theatre was established in the tradition of the "workers' theatre" in 1936 when, as Colin Chambers suggests, "the left animated the cultural life

⁴⁶ Horne, *Paul Robeson*, 52-58.

⁴⁷ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 192.

⁴⁸ "Why I Joined Labor Theatre: Interview by Philip Bolsover," *Daily Worker* (London), 24 November 1937.

of Britain.”⁴⁹ The Workers’ Theatre Movement was inspired by the Russian Revolution and emerged in the 1920s through coordination between the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Independent Labour Party, and the Council for Proletarian Art.⁵⁰ The Unity Theatre was steeped in the Popular Front strategies of the Communist Party that sought to build a left-coalition against European fascism, rooted in the British labor movement, and made possible by the contributions of Jewish refugees in London’s East End.⁵¹

The path for *Proud Valley* was laid when Robeson met Herbert Marshall, who later wrote and directed the Unity production of *Plant in the Sun*, in Russia. Having committed to performing with the Unity Theatre as early as 1934, Robeson was cast as the central character in *Plant in the Sun* in 1938. The play centers around workers’ politics in a US-based candy factory and serves as an illustration of the Theatre’s popular front politics as it implores left solidarity over class and ethnic division.⁵² One strategy that the play deploys to achieve such solidarity was in the disregard for race when considering casting, allowing the director to cast Robeson the an Irish-American teenager Pewee. Similarly, considering that it was the final film that Robeson produced during his time in Europe before returning to the United States for the duration of World War II, *Proud Valley* stands as the culmination of the political education that Robeson received while living in abroad. It chronicles David Goliath (Paul Robeson), an African American seaman, as he takes a job in a Welsh coal mine, joins their choir, and forges friendships with the crew.⁵³ This film was both a testament to the plight of the Welsh coal miner

⁴⁹ Colin Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 18-19.

⁵⁰ Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre*, 24-34.

⁵¹ Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre*, 35-37.

⁵² Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre*, 153-155.

⁵³ Stephen Bourne, *Black in the British Frame: The Black Experiences in British Film and Television* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 26-28.

and to Robeson's belief in inter-racial working-class solidarity. The avant-garde casting of *Plant in the Sun* is echoed in the aspirational working-class solidarity of *The Proud Valley*. Both highlight the anti-racism of the Unity Theatre, which was shaped, in part, by the supposed lack of color-consciousness of Soviet Union.

The Proud Valley was a testament to Paul Robeson's radical sensibilities. It was in this period that he became a convinced socialist and gave his support to the Soviet Union, as the only place in the world he felt fully accepted in society as a black man.⁵⁴ Having acted in films that buttressed racist stereotypes and gave succor to imperialist rhetoric, Robeson reminisced in 1960 that *The Proud Valley* was indeed "the film I was most proud to make."⁵⁵ In a reference to these previous performances, Robeson said that *The Proud Valley* would "depict the Negro as he really is -- not the caricature he is always represented to be on the screen."⁵⁶ Robeson's ideological orientation did not receive unanimous critical praise. The novelist-cum-critic Graham Greene complained in *The Spectator* that "too many red herrings scent the story lines...colour prejudice is dragged in for the sake of Mr. Paul Robeson who plays the part of a big black Pollyanna."⁵⁷ The "colour prejudice" that Greene lamented was, of course, at the core of the film's message. It served as a response to the processes of marginalization that workers and people of color experienced. Awareness of this marginalization was clearly articulated when a white miner exclaimed "well, damn and blast it, man, aren't we all black down in that pit?"⁵⁸ The themes that

⁵⁴ Horne, *Paul Robeson*, Ch. 5; Mark Allen Rhodes III, "Place Paul Robeson in History: Understanding his Philosophical Framework," *Journal of Black Studies* 47, no. 3 (2016): 235-257.

⁵⁵ BBC Transcript, 8 June 1960. Box 3, Paul Robeson Papers, Howard University, Washington, DC. Qtd in Horne, *Paul Robeson*, 9. Of the films that Robeson made that contributed to racist stereotypes, *Sanders of the River* stands as his biggest regret because he hoped to make a film to celebrate Africa.

⁵⁶ *Glasgow Sentinel*, 1 November 1938. Cited in Foner, *Paul Robeson Speaks*, 264, n. 458.

⁵⁷ Graham Greene, "The Cinema: *Proud Valley*. At the Leicester Square. *Dead Man's Shoes*. At the Regal." *The Spectator* (London, England) 15 March 1940.

⁵⁸ *The Proud Valley*, Ealing Studios, 1940.

the film explores are the product of Robeson's experiences during nearly a decade of living, working, and performing in the United Kingdom and coordinating within the labor and communist movement in the 1930s. If not for the outbreak of war in 1939, which necessitated a changed ending, as Matthew Sweet has acknowledged, *The Proud Valley* "would have been the most uncompromisingly Marxist picture ever produced in Anglophone cinema."⁵⁹ Thus, though Udham Singh arrived too early, this film's representation of anti-racism and militant worker solidarity are indicative of the revolutionary anti-imperialism of the Ghadar movement and provide insight into Udham Singh's politics.

"I bought the revolver from a soldier in Bournemouth"

Udham Singh occupies a contested place in Sikh, Punjabi, and Ghadar history. For some, his singular act of political assassination has been dismissed as a "random incident" by a "vagrant Sikh." For others, his execution is considered in the context of Sikh martyrdom.⁶⁰ Though Udham Singh's treatment as *shaheed* by historians of the Sikh diaspora reflects the legitimate embrace of a noteworthy Punjabi by the Sikh community. His status is enhanced by his well-documented interaction with Sikhs at the Gurdwara in Shepherds Bush, London. Such a representation echoes colonial racial logic and ignores his own statements about his political allegiances and his religious beliefs. Rather than a spontaneous act of individual terrorism, documents from the Home Office, India Office, and Metropolitan Police demonstrate that Udham Singh systematically targeted Michael O'Dwyer and other colonial administrators,

⁵⁹ Matthew Sweet, *Shepperton Babylon: the lost worlds of British cinema* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 172.

⁶⁰ Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*, 91; Fenech, "Contested Nationalisms; Negotiated Terrains: The Way Sikhs Remember Udham Singh 'Shahid' (1899-1940)," *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2002): 827-870.

revealing a deep attachment to the methods of the Ghadar Party and revolutionary anticolonialism.⁶¹

Udham Singh was born in Patiala state in colonial Punjab between 1901 and 1905. Both of his parents died while he was a child and he grew up in an orphanage associated with Khalsa College in Amritsar. Very little is known about his early life. Upon his arrest he claimed that part of his grudge against Michael O'Dwyer was because family members died at Jallianwala Bagh but that was never confirmed. Beginning in 1917, he served as a carpenter with a Pioneer Unit in Basra and then went to East Africa to work in the Uganda Railway Workshops.⁶² Having served in the military and worked in East Africa he then sailed for the United States, like so many Sikh agriculturalists and Indian students had done in the first decade of the twentieth century. His extended sojourn in the United States was peripatetic. He lived in California where he connected with Ghadarites, then he worked for a time at a Ford Motor plant in Detroit, and finally landed in New York City, where he lived for five years. While in New York, he signed onto the crews of the US Shipping Line under the assumed name of Frank Brazil, allowing him to avoid a ban on hiring Indians.⁶³ His life prior to coming to England was in many ways typical of Punjabi Sikhs at the time. However, his proximity to the Ghadar Party in Northern California and his proclivity to assume new identities indicates that his journey was not altogether routine.

Upon his return to India in 1927, and for the remainder of his life, Udham Singh was an avowed radical who endorsed revolutionary violence. In 1927, soon after his return home, Singh

⁶¹ Navtej Singh, "Reinterpreting Shaheed Udham Singh," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 48 (2007): 21-23; Florian Stadler, "'For every O'Dwyer...there is a Shaheed Udham Singh': The Caxton Hall Assassination of Michael O'Dwyer," In Ahmed and Mukherjee, *South Asian Resistances in Britain*, 19-32.

⁶² IPI Note, "Mohamed Singh Azad," 15 March 1940, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁶³ John Swain, Inspector, Metropolitan Police Report, 16 March 1940. MEPO 3/1743. TNA.

was found with “obscene postcards” in his possession. Not long after that, he was arrested and imprisoned for five years for possession of arms and proscribed literature. Not only did he evidently have the means to inflict harm, he had the motivation. Around the same time as his arrest, he proclaimed that he “intended to murder Europeans who were ruling over India and that he fully sympathized with the Bolshevics [sic], as their object was to liberate India from foreign control.”⁶⁴ More than a decade later, he was working as a carpenter at the Blandford Militia Camp in Dorset, southeast England. Police noted that, though they were unable to interview his former landlord, “it is understood that during the time the Allman family lived in Bournemouth an Indian subject lodged with them and he had strong Communistic [sic] views.”⁶⁵ Singh worked at the Camp for nearly two months but was ultimately fired. According to a representative of Sir Lindsay Parkinson & Company, “it was rumoured that he carried a loaded revolver, that as a workman he was not satisfactory and that he was bad tempered and quarrelsome,” even though no one had seen him with a gun.⁶⁶ During a police interview at the Caxton Hall on the night of the shooting, Singh commented on the murder weapon and confirmed that he had bought the revolver from a soldier in Bournemouth: “I bought him some drinks, you know.” There is no indication beyond his violent rhetoric that his purchase months earlier was part of a plan that would allow him to satisfy his grudge against O’Dwyer.

In 1934, the Metropolitan Police confirmed that “Udam Singh Sidhu,” of 9 Adler Street, Stepney, London, had been granted a peddler’s certificate in December.⁶⁷ Investigations revealed that “Udham Singh peddles hosiery and lingerie and uses a small car for the purpose; he does not

⁶⁴ Intelligence Bureau, *Ghadr Directory*, 267.

⁶⁵ Hants Constabulary, Police Report, 23 March 1940. MEPO 3/1743. TNA.

⁶⁶ Dorset Constabulary, Police Report, 21 March 1940, MEPO 3/1743. TNA.

⁶⁷ Leman Street Station, Metropolitan Police Report, 5 December 1934, MEPO 2/5064. TNA.

appear to be short of money.”⁶⁸ Peddling, of course, was a common occupation for Indian migrants in the interwar period because they were largely kept out of industrial work until the labor shortage that accompanied the onset of war. This area of Stepney was home to “a large colony of British Indians.” A common lodging house, 9 Adler Street was among the many nodes within in the Punjabi peddler fraternity. According to Inspector L. Clark, nine British Indians had applied for peddler’s certificates from this address that year. Five certificates, including Udham Singh’s, had been granted. The building, according to Clark, was a ramshackle former shop, where “with the exception of a small portion left uncovered and painted, presumably to admit light, the shop window of No. 9 is permanently shuttered.” Its inhabitants, he continued, were “men of low intelligence and social order” appearing “unmistakably dejected and dismal.”

When questioned by police, Banta Singh stated that the men who lived at 9 Adler Street were self-employed traders who “as a rule purchase their goods from the local wholesalers and arrange their own sales.”⁶⁹ After stating his derision for the residents of 9 Adler Street, Inspector Clark noted that Indians were attracted to this part of Stepney largely because “the predominating Jewish population do not object to their presence.”⁷⁰ Thus, to use Earl Lewis’s felicitous phrase, Stepney was an area of “overlapping diasporas.”⁷¹ Here, Indians and Eastern European Jews created a community that was emblematic of Udham Singh’s overarching commitment to the international labor movement and the degree to which he transgressed the presumed boundaries of ethnicity.

⁶⁸ IPI to Mr. Silver, 22 November 1937, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁶⁹ Clark, 26 January 1934, L/PJ/7/1007. IOR.

⁷⁰ Clark, 26 January 1934, L/PJ/7/1007. IOR.

⁷¹ Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot,” 765.

To be sure, Udham Singh's perception of his religious and ethnic identity was fluid. While explaining his chosen name to Divisional Detective Inspector John Swain, after he had been detained in Caxton Hall, Singh recalled "when I was seven I call myself Mohamed Singh. I like Mohamedan religion and I try to mix with Mohamedans."⁷² Furthermore, testifying during his trial, he underscored his interest in moving beyond the Sikh and Punjabi communities in Britain. "I have nothing against the English people at all," he noted, "I have more English friends living in England than I have in India. I have great sympathy with the workers of England. I am against the Imperialist Government."⁷³ By "English" there is every reason to think that Singh meant "British." Foremost among these friends, it would seem, was a Welsh woman, Irene Rose Palmer, with whom Singh had lived, at least periodically, for nearly four years prior to his imprisonment. A police report from 1936, observes that "it is believed that [Singh] is cohabiting with a white woman somewhere in the West End of London and working at intervals on 'crowd scenes' at film studios."⁷⁴ Later investigations suggested that Singh and Palmer lived together at 25 Werter Road in late-1938. In addition, the police found that Palmer, who adopted the aliases Mrs. Devi Lakshmi, Mrs. Devi Lakshmi Singh, Mrs. Devi Shankar, and Mrs. Singh, had lived with two other Indian men at that address between 1937 and 1940.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Singh had, at one point, proposed marriage to her, but she declined citing his penchant for travel and his hot-headedness.⁷⁶

⁷² Swain, 16 March 1940, MEPO 3/1743. TNA.

⁷³ Udham Singh [Mohammad Singh Azad] Deposition, 5 June 1940, MEPO 3/1743. TNA.

⁷⁴ Extract from New Scotland Yard, Report No. 76, 4 November 1936, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁷⁵ Extract from New Scotland Yard, Report No. 171. 10 July 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁷⁶ Metropolitan Police Report, 9 April 1940. HO 144/21444.

As an indication of the intimacy of their relationship Palmer continued to care about Singh's fate and remained an advocate for him even after his imprisonment. In early April 1940, Palmer, under the alias Mrs. Shankar, and Framroze Jehangir Patel, a mutual friend, visited Singh in Brixton Prison. Subsequently, an officer visited the address they provided, 95a Tottenham Court Road, London. Palmer was the proprietor of an Indian restaurant at this address and Patel occupied a suite of rooms in the building. In fact, Singh and Palmer first met at this restaurant, where he was a frequent diner. The officer's call at the restaurant did not reveal much. He did record that a picture of Udham Singh was on display in Palmer's room. Palmer also seems to have intervened in discussions surrounding Singh's legal counsel. In late-March, Feroz Khan Noon, the High Commissioner for India, relayed a message to the India Office, about a conversation he had with Dr. Bhandari who sought guidance on how to support Udham Singh's case. At the behest of the Ghadar Party, Bhandari sought to convince Krishna Menon, the head of the India League, to contribute to the defense. "Evidently," Noon reported, "Dr. Bhandari thinks that his address was supplied to the prisoner by his mistress, a young woman with whom he had been living before he was arrested. This young woman got Dr. Bhandari's address probably from Krishna Menon." For his part, Noon cited the Indian National Congress' condemnation of Singh and suggested that he had little sympathy for the accused. The exchange with Bhandari is remarkable in that he indicated that Irene Palmer was either particularly well-connected or sufficiently well-informed and persistent to solicit the support of prominent and well-respected Indians in Britain on Singh's behalf.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Noon to Stewart, 1 April 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

Indian communities throughout Britain and North America were mobilized in support of Udham Singh after his arrest and arraignment. Usually focused on the welfare of Indian seamen in British ports, Surat Ali initially garnered support for Udham Singh by collecting funds for his defense in the East End.⁷⁸ As the campaign to raise funds for Singh's defense began in Britain, the Sikh Temple in Stockton, California, a well-established wing of the Ghadar Party, sent a telegram to Indian representatives in London to enquire about the arrangements for Singh's legal counsel. Even though there was "no evidence whatever of recent direct communication between him and the Party," Udham Singh instructed his solicitor, Robert Clayton, to respond to the Sikh Temple and assured him that it "would bring in anything up to £1,000."⁷⁹ Soliciting the Ghadar Party for funds seems to have irritated some Indians connected with Udham Singh's representation. It was not, as Robert Clayton had understood, the result of a feud between Sikhs in the UK and those in California. Rather, in the India Office's view, "there is no reason to suppose that anything in the nature of a feud exists" but "the United Kingdom Sikhs are doubtless not anxious to give the appearance of having relations with a body so notorious as is the Ghadr Party."⁸⁰ Ultimately, the Stockton Temple cabled £150 as an endorsement of Udham Singh's act and with a view to buttress the movement through coverage of the trial.⁸¹

As early as June, the India Office appeared convinced of both the political salience of Udham Singh's case among Sikhs and the utter lack of interest from the rest of the Indian community in Britain. To that end, the Office suspected that the Sikhs would seek a reprieve and, "if they failed, Udham Singh would die a martyr's death, and his photograph would be added to

⁷⁸ IPI to Mr. Silver 21 March 1940, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁷⁹ IPI to Mr. Silver 23 April 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁸⁰ IPI to Mr. Silver 23 April 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁸¹ "Udham Singh Case" 11 July 1940, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

the...*Hindustan Ghadr*.” However, the Home Office claimed, “other sections of the Indian community in this country, of which the Sikhs form only some 20%, have no sympathy for, or even interest in, the condemned man.”⁸² In late July 1940, Krishna Menon worked with Shiv Singh Jouhl, alternately a peddler and a priest in London, to circulate a Petition for Reprieve throughout the country. Perhaps anticipating his career as an ambassador for, and minister in, the post-Independence Indian Government, Menon addressed the Petition to Sir John Anderson and wrote:

We, the undersigned, loyal subjects of His Majesty George the Sixth, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India, humbly pray that you see fit to recommend to His Majesty that a reprieve be granted in favour of one Udham Singh, otherwise known as Azad Singh...We fervently believe that such act of mercy, in sparing the life of the aforesaid Udham Singh, will strengthen the bonds of union between the British and Indian peoples.⁸³

As Shiv Singh Jouhl began to distribute the Petition for Reprieve, the India Office remained convinced that “the general view is that outside the Sikh community, very little interest is being manifested in Udham Singh’s life.”⁸⁴ Yet, a simple tally reveals that of the Indians who signed the petition at least 150, more than half, were Muslim.

Interestingly, while Udham Singh may have been “well-known in certain Indian circles in London” and “equally well-known among Sikh peddlers who lived at Coventry, Southampton, and other places,” it is remarkable that Ujagar Singh and Kartar Singh Nagra were the only two signatories from London and Coventry, respectively. The misperception that the India Office had of Muslim interest in Udham Singh’s fate may have stemmed from the distinct lack of signatures

⁸² “Note re Udham Singh” 24 June 1940, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁸³ Petition for Reprieve, HO 144/21445

⁸⁴ “Udham Singh: Petition for Reprieve” 26 July 1940, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

from London's East End. Surveillance reports suggest that Surat Ali advised Indians in the East End, many of whom were escaped Bengali Muslim seamen, not to sign the Petition. He feared that supplying one's full name and address could have elicited unwarranted Police attention to an already precarious community. Instead, the highest number of signatures came from the Birmingham, Huddersfield, Southampton, and the Royal Air Force Camp in Melksham, underscoring that the primary activities of Punjabis in Britain as soldiers, peddlers, unskilled labor, and escaped seamen.

The moral and monetary support that Udham Singh received from the Indian community in Britain did not lead to his immortalization. Discharging two bullets from a .44 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver into Sir Michael O'Dwyer, former Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, at the Caxton Hall in London on 13 March 1940 and his subsequent hanging on 31 July 1940 at the Petonville Prison, gained him notoriety. But the uses to which his name and image were put in radical publications such as the *Hindustan Ghadr* and *Kirti* made him a martyr.

Udham Singh's Martyrdom and the Cult of Assassination

The *Hindustan Ghadr* took a keen interest in Udham Singh's case and both helped to galvanize transatlantic support for him in the days before his trial and, after his execution, attempted to cement Udham Singh's reputation as a revolutionary icon. In May, while Udham Singh sat in Brixton Prison, the *Hindustan Ghadr* published an editorial comparing him to Madan Lal Dhillon and noted that, "in the eyes of crores of inarticulate Indians, Udham Singh has attained the dignity of martyrdom."⁸⁵ The India Office was outraged that the paper would favorably compare these two incidents and present them as "worthy of emulation." Indeed, the

⁸⁵ "Report on Ghadr Party" 17 July 1940, L/PJ/12/286. IOR.

Office suggested that it was engaging in “indirect incitement to further acts of assassination.”⁸⁶

Later, in the September 1940 issue of *Hindustan Ghadr*, commenting on Udham Singh’s execution and its ramifications for British imperial rule in India, the Paper asserted that:

The 31st July 1940 will ever be remembered in Indian history. On this day Comrade Udham Singh Ji achieved martyrdom. By hanging Comrade Udham Singh Ji the Farangis...have further augmented their oppressions. The sigh of the oppressed Indians will ultimately destroy the oppressive Farangis.⁸⁷

Underscoring the excesses of colonial rule, and the extraordinary power of the insurgent sigh, this article suggests that Udham Singh’s execution was an example of British tyranny. The full appreciation and canonization of Udham Singh’s martyrdom, however, seemed to require a different genre altogether.

Poetry was an important mode of revolutionary expression and political education throughout Ghadar Party history. Both the *Hindustan Ghadr* and the *Ghadr-di-Gunj* routinely published verse written by its members. Also, while in prison, Udham Singh included some lines of “national poetry” in a prepared statement that he attempted to read before the judge sentenced him. An India Office functionary, who attended Singh’s trial and who would have been familiar with Ghadar publications, remarked derisively that writing and reciting poetry was “not an uncommon hobby among Punjabis...it is in fact one of the most effective ways of influencing the ignorant and semi-ignorant, for statement of fact is made subordinate to emotion, rhythm, rhyme and the interplay of words.”⁸⁸ Yet, for the Ghadar Party, the violence of colonial rule in India could only be met with violent resistance. For that reason, Udham Singh was exemplary. The December 1940 issue of *Hindustan Ghadr* published an unsigned poem that caused an Indian

⁸⁶ IPI to Mr. Silver 27 June 1940, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

⁸⁷ *Hindustan Ghadr* September 1940, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

⁸⁸ “Note re Udham Singh” 24 June 1940, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

Political Intelligence agent to declare that “it is a long time since the *Hindustan Ghadr* has appeared with anything so strongly supporting the cult of assassination.”⁸⁹ As an ode to revolution, any question of fact is secondary to the possibility of “making sinners pay the penalty.” For instance:

By striking with your hand you have made the tyrants pay the penalty
 a fine garland of martyrdom is placed round your neck.
 You are the perfect hero in the matter of freedom
 You have struck down the chains of slavery [...]
 Hands such as yours seizing the sword
 washing away the mark of slavery from the brow [...]
 Arise, heroes, be steady
 the time to introduce freedom has come.
 Expel the tyrants, pacify India
 there is no time left for delay.
 Come, let us annihilate cruel England
 you who want to introduce freedom.
 Expel the cruel Farangis from your house
 consider how to bring about rebellion.⁹⁰

Moreover, echoing the Ghadar critique of British tyranny, the poem places Udham Singh in a lineage of “the greatness of those who became martyrs for their country,” which included Kartar Singh Sarabha, a Ghadarite who was executed in 1915, and Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev, executed together in 1931, among others. In this way, the poet indicates that the spirit of militant anticolonialism had been embodied many times before and that Udham Singh should not be the last.

The international circulation of its publications was integral to the dissemination of Ghadar politics to Europe and India. As has been mentioned, Udham Singh was arrested in 1927 under the Arms Act. It was additionally incriminating that he was apprehended while in

⁸⁹ IPI to Mr. Silver 28 January 1941, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

⁹⁰ *Hindustan Ghadr* December 1940, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

possession of copies of *Ghadr-di-Gunj*. Also, in the months prior to the assassination, he was in “regular receipt” of the *Hindustan Ghadr*.⁹¹ These two instances both buttress claims about Udham Singh’s personal connection to the movement and his underlying revolutionary tendencies. They also indicate the ease with which these publications were distributed. Because of the Ghadar Party’s intention to disrupt British Indian soldiers and encourage them to desert, the India Office sought to monitor the movement of their publications. In February 1942, for instance, the Office realized that the *Hindustan Ghadr* had “played no small part in inducing a general atmosphere of disaffection” among Sikh soldiers in the Far East.”⁹² Thus, even as the British authorities noted the presence of Ghadarite publications in war-zones, the route that the papers took was difficult to discern and, therefore, difficult to stop.

The India Office acknowledged that the effort to reduce the circulation of the *Hindustan Ghadr* was exacerbated because receipt of the paper was not contingent on subscription. Although it was not home to a single active subscriber, the United Kingdom “receives two or three dozen copies every month.” The point, evidently, was not for the paper to garner subscription fees for the Party but simply to maximize circulation. Indeed, the production of the Paper not only served as one of the Ghadar Party’s primary contributions to the struggle against imperialism during World War II, but also, more fundamentally, it helped “to keep alight the flame of...extreme nationalistic ardour of Sikhs abroad.”⁹³ In Coventry, which received bundles of the paper up until at least 1947, access to the *Hindustan Ghadr* and the tenets of the Ghadar

⁹¹ “Report on Ghadr” 17 July 1940, L/PJ/12/286. IOR.

⁹² IPI to Mr. Silver 28 February 1942, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

⁹³ IPI to Mr. Silver 28 February 1942, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

Party played a significant role in the political consciousness and subsequent organization of Charan Singh Chima and his clique of “extremist Sikhs,” to whom this chapter will now return.⁹⁴

Conclusion

The Indian Workers Association (IWA), the expatriate organization that Charan Singh Chima ultimately helped to establish after consulting with Rattan Singh in 1939, was integral to articulating an anticolonial politics in Britain. Informed by the Ghadar movement, animated by the trial and execution of Udham Singh, and aligned with the internationalist and national liberation movements emerging in late interwar Britain, the IWA became synonymous with South Asian radicalism.⁹⁵ From its earliest history, the Association threatened to be a destabilizing force among Indians in the Midlands. Indian Political Intelligence feared that “under invasion conditions some of them, particularly the Sikhs, might present considerable danger” to British security.⁹⁶ Such alarm was founded on the observation that the majority of the IWA's members were from Hoshiarpur and Jullundur in the central Punjab. The IPI was quick to note that these areas “have for many years past been hotbeds of violent political agitation, and in fact represent the birth-place of the Ghadr Party.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, the Intelligence agency believed that “it is quite clear...that the leaders of the Indian Workers Association regard it as one of their functions to educate the Indian workers in this country politically, so that when the time comes for them to return to India they may be able to take their part in the revolutionary

⁹⁴ “Report on Ghadr” 1 December 1947, L/PJ/12/286. IOR; “Review: 1942-43” 19 November 1943, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁹⁵ Based on all available documentary evidence that I have seen, Udham Singh’s relationship to the IWA was exclusively as a mobilizing icon. Although there are records suggesting that he had close ties to Indian peddlers in Coventry in 1938 and 1939, there are no records to substantiate the claim that he was a founder-member of the Indian Workers Association (Hiro 1973; Clark 1975; Sivanandan 1981). For the note on Singh’s activities in Coventry see Udham Singh History Sheet, L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

⁹⁶ IPI to Mr. Silver 15 May 1942, L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁹⁷ “Indian Workers Association” 14 April 1942, L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

movement.” Thus, the India Office coordinated with the Home Office and Chief Constable of Birmingham to maintain a close watch on the work of the association, most of whom had congregated in the Midlands for economic opportunity.

In 1945, having taken some time to establish itself within the landscape of Indian organizations in Britain, the Coventry-based IWA brought out a newsletter, *Azad Hind*.⁹⁸ Under the direction of Kartar Singh Nagra and Vidya Parkash Hansrani, the paper adopted the militant anticolonialism detailed in Ghadar party publications, making it, in the eyes of the British intelligence apparatus, “as extreme as anything which has yet appeared in this country in any Indian language.”⁹⁹ Indeed, during a meeting of the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain (FIAGB) on 14 April 1946, Kartar Singh Nagra stated that *Azad Hind* was modeled on the *Hindustan Ghadr* and that he hoped to emulate the latter.¹⁰⁰ An evocative example of this confluence can be seen in the reprinting of Banka Singh’s hagiographic verse eulogizing Udham Singh as “Bawa,” which had been previously published in *Ghadar*.¹⁰¹

The violent anticolonial rhetoric of the paper, with a circulation in “the London area, the Midlands and the industrial North,” won it the attention of MI5 and the Home Office sought to bring charges against it. However, one government minister lamented, “it was doubted whether, in the event of a prosecution, an English jury could be convinced that the questionable matter amounted, in fact, to incitement to murder.”¹⁰² In any case, the fears that “a second Udham Singh should arise” due to the encouragement of the paper, led to its characterization as “insidious and

⁹⁸ More information on the history of the Indian Workers Association is in Chapter 5 below.

⁹⁹ “Indian Activities” 1 June 1945, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

¹⁰⁰ IPI to David Petrie 18 April 1946, HO 45/25460

¹⁰¹ *Azad Hind* December 1945, HO 45/25460; *Hindustan Ghadr* August 1940, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

¹⁰² Minute 23 January 1946, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

poisonous propaganda which aims at corrupting the political views of the working-class Indian in this country and at instilling revolutionary and terrorist ideas.”¹⁰³ The national distribution of *Azad Hind*, which was facilitated by the pockets of anticolonial radicalism that had emerged out of the formation of the Indian Workers Association, helped it to become one of the most prominent instruments for introducing Ghadarite militancy to hundreds of working-class Indians in Britain.

¹⁰³ David Petrie to Alexander Maxwell 15 January 1946, L/PJ/12/758. IOR.

Chapter 5

Indian Ideology in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain

In July 1936, an array of communist and anticolonial activists in London convened the Fifth Indian Political Conference. A circular for the event observed that it would be a demonstration of solidarity between Indian and British organizations that were contributing to the struggle against the British Empire. The animating cause for the Conference was the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935, which the circular repudiated as a “fascist constitution.” Held at the Unity Theatre, a celebrated part of the Workers’ Theatre Movement, the conference was to be presided over by Rajani Palme Dutt, the leading theorist of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Although he was absent due to illness, his presidential address was printed and available for purchase. The resolutions at the conference remind us that the Indian freedom struggle in Britain was tied in with global anticolonialism. The resolutions accepted at the conference included statements on Civil Liberties in India, Indian Students in England, and Indians Abroad. George Padmore, the prominent Trinidadian Pan-Africanist, proposed that “this Fifth Indian Political Conference deplores the plight of Indian Pedlars and Seamen living in the East End of London. Being the victims of insidious colour discrimination they are being driven to the borders of starvation and destitution.” Padmore’s resolution highlights both the overlapping experiences of nonwhite workers in interwar Britain and the cooperation demonstrated by Indian, African, and Caribbean anticolonial and nationalist activists and theorists in their shared struggles.¹

¹ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report. 15 July 1936. L/PJ/12/373. IOR.

The leadership that Rajani Palme Dutt and George Padmore provided before and during the conference was indicative of the state of Indian anticolonial mobilization in Britain in the late 1930s. Their presence was emblematic of the course of the movement over the ensuing decade. In addition to serving as president of the Conference, in 1936 Palme Dutt was the editor of *Daily Worker* and a member of the Secretariat of the Communist Party and remained a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union until his death. In contrast, Padmore had been a committed worker in the Red International Labour Union in Moscow. But he had recently been expelled from the Communist Party due to his views on the super-exploitation of black workers, which was a deviation from prevailing Leninist class analysis.² In these two leaders, Indian radicals in Britain were presented with a choice in the mid-1930s that would be wrangled over for the remainder of the decade. As Dutt was increasingly associated with pro-war Stalinism, Padmore's politics embodied a form of anticolonialism that moved beyond the Communist International and offered a critique of communist imperialism even while he remained sympathetic to the Soviet project.

The focus of Palme Dutt's Presidential Address in 1936 was on the future of a "united Anti-Imperialist People's front in India, capable of defeating Imperialism," which he believed was emerging throughout the colonized world. In his view, uniting workers, peasants, and students under the banner of Jawaharlal Nehru's Indian National Congress was the only "way forward ultimately to the victory of the Indian national struggle." Moreover, he insisted that "all elements...who are prepared to fight against imperialism without compromise, are welcome to this common front." At the same time, those who willingly took up office within the Government of India, as provided for in the 1935 Government of India Act, rejected the national movement.

² Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 38; Mukherji, "Anticolonial Imagination," 142.

“Whoever rejects mass struggle must cooperate with Imperialism,” Dutt averred, “there is no third course.” This speech anticipated the Congress decision to abandon the Government in 1939 after their electoral victories in 1937 because the United Kingdom declared war on the Axis power on behalf of the colonies without consulting Indian political leaders. The speech also predicted the reasons why anti-imperialist forces, including Indian workers, in Britain eventually moved away from the Communist Party even as its membership swelled after the Soviet Union entered the war. Though Dutt’s faith in the Soviet Union was unwavering, he understood in 1936 that the Soviet stance was widely perceived as cooperation with imperialism and therefore anathema to the idea of an Anti-Imperialist People’s Front.³

Padmore’s life in the Communist Party offers a critical response to Dutt’s belief in a popular front organized around the leadership of the Soviet Union. Early on, Padmore was ardent worker in the Communist Party of the United States and eventually head of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) and editor of *Negro Worker*. Yet, by the mid-1930s his changing views on the status of black workers and the conduct of communist anti-imperialism led to his split with the Comintern. Having presented a synthetic analysis of colonial exploitation and black resistance in the pages of *Negro Worker*, Padmore grew restless with the reluctance of the Communist International to adequately support his work. He was particularly devoted to the development of African communist cadres at the University of the Toilers of the East. According to Ani Mukherji, Padmore was forced to break with the Comintern in the face of Hitler’s rise and the Soviet Union’s efforts to develop mutual support systems in Europe against

³ John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993); Andrew Thorpe, “Stalinism and British Politics,” *The Historical Association* (1998): 608-627; Tom Buchanan, “‘The Dark Millions in the Colonies are Unavenged’: Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s”. *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 4 (2006): 645-665.

Germany. A by-product of the Soviet Union's focus on Europe was the abandonment of the ITUCNW and "near desertion of anticolonial work." From this experience, Padmore learned the importance of autonomy from Marxist-Leninist organizations in the pursuit of national liberation, worker solidarity, and racial emancipation. These were lessons that penetrated the non-Stalinist left in the following decade and especially informed mid-century political praxis among Indians in Britain.⁴

Indian Coordination with British Intelligentsia, 1917-1942

In the Britain of the 1920s and early-1930s, the fight for Indian Independence was largely carried out by social elites and Indian workers were seldom mobilized for anticolonial or nationalist causes. Yet, there was some attempt to organize Indian lascars. Among the most prominent examples of this initiative was the Indian Seamen's Union, under the leadership of NJ Upadhyaya, who enjoyed the financial backing of Shapurji Saklatvala and the Communist Party of Great Britain.⁵ Saklatvala, a relative of the industrialist Tata family and Communist Member of Parliament for the Battersea North constituency in London, was a mainstay of leftist anticolonialism in Britain. Through his Workers' Welfare League of India (WWLI), founded in 1917, he and his associates did much to inform British communists of the condition of Indian workers. However, the name of the organization notwithstanding, this body did not recruit

⁴ Mukherji, "Anticolonial Imagination," Ch. 3. Quotation from page 149; Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 245-305.

⁵ See chapter 2 above.

members from the docks or along the peddler's route. Instead, its ranks were filled by Indian professionals and sympathetic white Britons.⁶

In the early-interwar period, the League Against Imperialism (LAI), the Comintern, and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) provided much of the connective tissue that allowed for the emergence of the first generation of Indian nationalist and anticolonial organizations to achieve broad appeal. It is instructive that the LAI, established in Berlin in 1927, had immediate contacts with Indian nationalists, particularly Virendranath Chattopadhyaya in Berlin, Jawaharlal Nehru in India, and Saklatvala in London. In addition, the British section of the LAI was led by Reginald Bridgeman, who also sat on committees for the Indian Swaraj League, covered Indian events in London for the journal *Indian Front*, and formed part of the India League leadership under Krishna Menon in the 1940s.⁷ The British Section of the LAI also counted NJ Upadhyaya as a branch member in 1928.⁸ The Chairman of the British Section was James Maxton, ILP Member of Parliament in the 1930s and an ideological leader of the non-Stalinist left during World War II.⁹ Moreover, Indian participation in the Independent Labour Party dates to at least 1920, when Shapurji Saklatvala, CP Vakil, and KS Bhat, among others, sought to push the Party toward closer coordination with the Comintern when the latter was formed. While the ILP did not officially affiliate with the Comintern, it did have shared anti-imperialist goals. While the ILP's cooperation with Moscow ended at the beginning of World War II, its stance as a

⁶ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, Ch. 4.

⁷ Metropolitan Police Papers, The League Against Imperialism, MEPO 38/92, TNA; New Scotland Yard Reports, India Independence League, London (renamed Indian Swaraj League), L/PJ/12/373. IOR; IPI Report, "Indian Notes," 7 April 1942, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁸ IPI Extract from a letter Sent to Mrs. Baruch, 30 November 1928, MEPO 38/92.

⁹ In 1928, for example, Maxton was a Member of Parliament in the Independent Labour Party, the President of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism and the Chairman of the British Section of the League Against Imperialism. MEPO 38/92. In 1944, he worked with the Revolutionary Communist Party in the Anti-Labour Laws Victims Defense Committee, see *Fourth International*, June 1944, 170.

consistent critic of imperialist war appears to have given it and likeminded organizations greater influence among anti-war Indian migrants in Britain.

An early statement of the ethos of the Workers Welfare League of India is contained in the undated pamphlet titled “An Indictment of Slave Labour!” Written by KS Bhat, then president of the League, this pamphlet is a commentary on colonial capitalist production and the social and economic alienation that sustained it. “Millions of peasantry and workers in forest areas and mines are kept illiterate with the deliberate object of exploiting their ignorance; kept without essential and primary political rights; kept away by force from the influence of their better-knowledged [sic] countrymen.” The piece directs the British reader’s attention away from the plight workers in Russian timber yards and towards the “backward condition of life” prevalent throughout the colonized world. In a passage equating colonial labor practices to cannibalism, Bhat notes that “rice, wheat, tea, coffee, cocoanuts, various fruits, spices, &c., are also brought over to Britain from India. Every British home consuming these commodities is consuming human flesh and blood...” While the piece was an expansive argument against the extractive industries of classical colonialism, this imagery was certainly not intended for an Indian audience and plainly does not consider the myriad forms of everyday resistance that were practiced on colonial plantations.¹⁰

Following the Comintern and the Communist Party of Great Britain, The Workers Welfare League of India believed in a theory of labor politics that elevated collectivization and unionization as the only legitimate form of resistance. The relationship that this theory created between western communists and colonized workers was therefore necessarily pedagogical. The

¹⁰ KS Bhat, “An Indictment of Slave Labour,” Worker’s Welfare League of India. No date. LHA.

leaders of the WWLI believed that emancipation for India would only come once Indians learned how to properly oppose colonial exploitation. Near the end of the decade, in support of this worldview, another circular emerged as a testament to the work that the WWLI had done among Indians specifically. In “An Appeal to the Workers of Britain,” signed by Secretary JE Potter-Wilson, the WWLI solicited support for “in its work of building up ties of solidarity and mutual assistance between British and Indian workers.” In this appeal, the League touted its contributions to the growth of trade unionism in India, noting with satisfaction that “during 1928, three million working days were lost through industrial disputes, more than during the whole of the preceding five years put together.” However, jealous of its position within the Indian labor movement, the circular was quick to deride the notion that “it is controlled by any other organization,” which appears to be an acknowledgement of the closeness between Saklatvala, the WWLI, and the CPGB.¹¹

Though it tried to sustain an Indian membership through a special Indian Section, the WWLI only made inroads among Indian academics, politicians, and journalists -- most of whom were colleagues who operated within the same social world as Saklatvala.¹² Regardless of official affiliations, the WWLI was not unique in its limited appeal to Indians in Britain. While the WWLI appears to have liquidated in 1932, a similar organization emerged under the leadership of VK Krishna Menon. According to Paul M. McGarr, Menon became secretary of the Commonwealth Group of India in 1928 and transformed it into the India League four years later. Though he did not immediately seek the support of the Communist Party of Great Britain,

¹¹ “An Appeal to British Workers,” Workers’ Welfare League of India. N.d. [1929?]. Labour History Archive. Manchester.

¹² Workers Welfare League of India: Indian Section, “Minutes,” 19 May 1932. LHA.

he was emboldened to do so in 1935, after the Seventh Congress of the Communist International resolved to rejoin the fight against imperialism. A few years later, CPGB and India League cooperation reached its zenith allowing Menon to be the primary intermediary between the Indian and British Communist Parties. In this period, Menon's India League was the most prominent organization in Britain on the question of Indian independence.¹³

Menon's ability to coordinate with Communist and Labour leaders allowed him to represent India in Parliamentary fora and among the British political elite. Indeed, as late as 1942 the Communist Party reaffirmed the India League's position as the Indian National Congress representative in Britain. However, though he was ascendant during this period, the India League, as with the Worker's Welfare League before it, made little headway among Indians in Britain. Therefore, Indians abroad did not consider the India League a vehicle for mass mobilization. An Indian Political Intelligence report from November 1942 notes parenthetically that "it has always been held against the India League that it is not an Indian organization and is 'bourgeois' in its nature and appeal."¹⁴ Certainly, the League's preeminence in British politics caused much consternation among revolutionary Indians in Britain. Challenges to Menon's hegemony within British Indian political and social campaigns can be gleaned in the wrangling for influence during the trial of Udham Singh. In this episode, Menon and Surat Ali, a former lascar from Bengal, vied with one another to determine who would facilitate Singh's defense.¹⁵

According to police files, Udham Singh was a personal acquaintance of Surat Ali, even if the latter believed that Singh was unstable. Just days prior to the attack at Caxton Hall and the

¹³ Paul M. McGarr, "'A Serious Menace to Security': British Intelligence, V.K. Krishna Menon and the Indian High Commission in London, 1947-52," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 38, no. 3 (2010): 444-446.

¹⁴ IPI Report, "Indian Notes (September-October 1942)," 14 November 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

¹⁵ For a fuller treatment of Udham Singh, see Chapter 4 above.

murder of Michael O'Dwyer, Singh had visited Ali at his home to discuss Indian politics.¹⁶ Perhaps due to this connection, Ali later found himself in the position to provide Singh with legal counsel and sought Bernard Linder's services. Linder was a solicitor and a known entity among peddlers and lascars in the East End who "had acted in the past in cases affecting seamen's interests."¹⁷ In the days just after the attack, Menon evidently did not consider intervening in Singh's defense. However, Feroz Khan Noon, Indian High Commissioner in London, advised the police that Irene Palmer, with whom Udham Singh had lived off and on for three years, sought Menon's help in the defense.¹⁸ Moreover, Menon began to appreciate the political capital of the trial when, in mid-March, he received a telegram from Ajmer Singh, a representative of the Stockton Sikh Temple and Ghadar Party, asking about Singh's case.¹⁹ Then, on 5 April 1940, Palmer visited Singh at the Brixton Prison with Framroze Jehangir Patel, who identified himself as a "solicitor's clerk to Robert Clayton," Menon's choice of counsel.²⁰ Claiming to represent the Indian community, Patel entreated Singh to allow Clayton to serve as his solicitor because Linder was "making a mess of the defense."²¹ Subsequently, Singh decided to enlist Clayton and, by extension, Menon for his defense.

The dispute between Menon and Surat Ali demonstrates the vibrancy of Indian politics in Britain and underscores the myriad spheres of influence that emerged during the formative period of the interwar. The Udham Singh trial provided a space for these contrasting spheres to compete for leadership positions among Indians in Britain. However, what it ultimately suggests

¹⁶ Police Report. Metropolitan Police. Special Branch. Subject: Udham Singh. 15 March 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

¹⁷ IPI Note. "Reactions to the Caxton Hall Outrage." 29 March 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

¹⁸ Noon to Stewart, 1 April 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

¹⁹ Police Report. Metropolitan Police. Special Branch. Subject: Udham Singh. 15 March 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

²⁰ Police Report. Special Branch. Metropolitan Police. Subject: "Udham Singh." 9 April 1940. HO 144/21444. TNA.

²¹ IPI Note. "Udham Singh's Defence." 8 April 1940. L/PJ/12/500. IOR.

is that the Indian community in Britain was not uniform in its political aspirations or its social standing. While Surat Ali was consistently working on the part of Indian seamen and peddlers in London and his attempt to bring Bernard Linder into the case was both an act of familiarity on Ali's part and the will of a group of East End Sikhs. Menon, in contrast, was brought into the case by the force of his political reputation and a belief not in Singh's guilt or innocence but in his ability to turn the trial into a spectacle. In this tussle, moreover, VK Menon was ultimately able to exercise his influence due largely to the persistence of his "emissaries" Irene Palmer and Framroze Jehangir Patel, who believed, wrongly, in his capacity to win a reduced sentence for Singh. Menon's political ambitions and his inability to coordinate with Indian workers in Britain would, however, lead to his growing irrelevance among them. In turn, Surat Ali, his associates, and related organizations were able to build on their street-level organizing, attract a larger following, and achieve greater political salience as the decade, and the war, wore on.

Fourth Internationalism and the Anti-Conscription Movement

During the interwar period there had been considerable coordination among leftist organizations and political parties in Britain around the question of Indian Independence. Thanks to the prominence of Indian politicians in the British left, British imperialism and the question of Indian freedom was a common rallying point for the left, even if it seldom engaged working-class Indians. Shapurji Saklatvala and Rajani Palme Dutt both used their political capital to push their organizations toward a recognition of the struggle in India and to declaim the British Empire. Moreover, the British Section of the League Against Imperialism facilitated the cooperation of white and Indian leftists, under the auspices of the Communist International, on the question of Indian independence. Many of these individuals were simultaneously mainstays of pro-Indian, pro-Soviet, and leftist organizations in Britain. However, the onset of World War

It contributed to the dissolution of this leftist unity in Britain. The Communist Party of Great Britain following the line of the Communist International on both the validity of the war itself as well as on the position of India and the Indian National Congress within struggle for international communism. Other leftist organizations, that existed beyond the control of the Comintern and outside of conventional party politics, were free to follow their own line. In several instances, this led to the consolidation of power in Fourth International and Trotskyist organizations that, while focused on communist revolution, remained opposed to the war and imperialism.

In the 1940s, Indian expatriate organizations in Britain started gravitating toward the non-Stalinist left. Among the reasons for this move was the anti-war and anti-conscription stance that was held in common between the Fourth International organizations and Indian political organizations. The urge to resist the war for Indians in Britain came, in part, from the Indian National Congress' lead in 1939 when it condemned the unilateral declaration of war that the United Kingdom issued for itself and its colonies. Anger about entering a war without prior consultation led the Congress to resign seats its seats throughout the government.²² In addition to Congress' actions, the Indian left had begun organizing anti-conscription rallies throughout India and the force of those rallies was echoed among Indians in Britain in the form of non-conscription efforts. Anti-conscription was a force that united many Indian political organizations in the late-1930s and early 1940s. Though representing disparate political and social aspirations, the Indian Workers Association, Swaraj House, and the Committee of Indian Congressmen counseled Indians in Britain in ways to avoid conscription. The chief strategies

²² Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 138-139.

were either to register as Conscientious Objectors or to argue that the National Service Act should not apply to Indians. The urge to protest World War II was rooted in the perceived duplicity of the British Government after World War I. Many Indians were under the impression that serving in good faith would lead to Indian Independence after the Armistice. Because independence was not granted, many Indians rejected contributing to the war effort in the 1940s.

A point of contact between the anti-war left in Britain and the Punjabi politics that informed much Indian mobilization abroad was the question of conscription and recruitment into military service. Not only did Fourth International organizations align with the Indian National Congress in its unwillingness to be declared belligerents without consultation, but also the anti-recruitment agitation in Punjab resonated with Trotskyist policies.²³ As the “garrison state,” the Punjab was the likeliest place to experience a backlash against the military both due to political and economic pressures. While thousands served in both world wars and in various other conflicts where the British Indian Army was engaged, there was a ground swell against recruitment regimes throughout the interwar period that reached a fever-pitch in the late-1930s. The anti-recruitment movement emerged in the Jullundur Doab, which had served as a site of anti-colonial resistance for much of the twentieth century. According to the Director of Intelligence, the campaign to resist military service might have originated with the Communists and Congress Socialists.²⁴ Certainly, prior to the Soviet Union entering the war, Communists were prominent anti-war agitators.²⁵ The Punjabi left collectively produced extensive propaganda that contained anti-war messages. *Ailan-i-Jang*, a leaflet produced by the

²³ Ian Talbot, *A History of Modern South Asia: Politics, States, Diasporas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 137-139; Bose and Jalal, 138-139.

²⁴ Yong, *The Garrison State*, 284-85.

²⁵ Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab*, 85.

Communist Party of India in Punjab, had been distributed among soldiers in the 19th Lancers in Lahore imploring them to desert or mutiny.²⁶

As early as 1937, much of the central tract of Punjab, from Lahore to Hoshiarpur, was consumed by anti-recruitment meetings. Shalini Sharma instructs that in September of that year twenty-five meetings were convened--averaging nearly one per day.²⁷ The fervor eventually resulted in the formation of the League Against Fascism and War. This is an important reminder that communists and nationalists were able to be anti-war in protest of British imperialism. Regardless of how the British officials represented it, being against the War was not an act of complicity with Nazis. Nonetheless, the Punjab authorities made use of the war-time Defense of India Rules to try to quash the anti-war movement. According to Mridula Mukherjee, the justifications for imprisonment were manifold, including subversive activities, fomenting rebellion in military ranks, inciting terrorism, and “disseminating alarmist rumours.”²⁸ This response gave the Province the distinction, by 1940, of having imprisoned the largest number of communists and socialists in India.²⁹

In addition to the general increase in mistrust of the military in Punjab, Tan Tai Yong points out that the “reliability of one of the mainstays of the martial classes--the Sikhs--was brought into question during the war.”³⁰ According to Yong, Sikhs grew more distrustful of the colonial government because the war happened to coincide with the rise in pro-Pakistan mobilization by the Muslim League.³¹ A more direct influence, however, appears to be the

²⁶ Mukherjee, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution*, 200.

²⁷ Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab*, 85.

²⁸ Mukherjee, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution*, 202.

²⁹ Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab*, 89.

³⁰ Yong, *The Garrison State*, 281.

³¹ Yong, *The Garrison State*, 286

sustained campaign by the Kirti Kisan Party to spread discontent among Sikh soldiers. Evidence for this agitation is borne out by a general uptick in Sikh desertions and the occurrence of insubordination among Sikh soldiers, first in Egypt in 1939 and then among the Sikh squadron of the Central Indian Horse in June 1940.³² Because of this widespread disaffection, the military was forced to suspend Sikh recruitment the following year, which substantially limited the pool of Indians available for enlistment during the war.

The anti-war position of so-called Trotskyist organizations was a natural umbrella under which many Indians and Indian organizations began to operate. The anti-war position of the Trotskyists was consistent throughout the period. At the onset of hostilities in 1939, the communist world was against World War II as an imperialist war. However, once the Soviet Union was brought into the conflict in 1941, the Communist International re-branded the conflict a people's war and required the contribution and support of all the national parties. At this point, the ideological division between the Communist International and the Fourth International became clear. The latter remained a critic of the conflict and implored sympathetic organizations and activists to maintain strict opposition to entering what was still considered an imperialist war. The freedom of opinion that Trotskyist organizations exercised in this period was a manifestation of the anti-Stalin position of the Fourth International. Whereas the Communist Parties were beholden to the pro-war line of the Communist International, Trotskyist opposition to the war was rooted in a fundamental distrust of a capitalist war. Moreover, votaries of Trotsky were doubly suspicious of Stalin's leadership because the Soviet premier had effectively expelled Trotsky from the USSR and later had him killed in Mexico.

³² Johannes H Voigt, *India in the Second World War* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1987), 65; Yong, *The Garrison State*, 288.

Vellala Srikantappa Sastry: “The Most Dangerous Indian in the Midlands”

The marriage of Indian anticolonialism and revolutionary Trotskyism was built on a foundation of mutual resistance to the Second World War. There were myriad points of contact between these two political projects. Exponents of both communities believed in the brutal commonalities of British imperialism and Nazi fascism. Votaries of the Fourth International maintained that the war would perpetuate capitalist dispossession while Indian supporters of the Congress Party refused to participate in a war that would not result in their self-determination. However, the coordination between these movements was not in any sense inevitable. Representatives of Indian nationalism in Britain had for decades partnered with the Labour and Communist Parties, both of which, for different reasons, ultimately gave their support to the war. This support alienated a vocal and organized contingent of Indians in Britain from across the ideological spectrum. In this moment, the Independent Labour Party, under the leadership of James Maxton and Fenner Brockway, helped to bridge the gap between the labor movement, anti-war agitation, and the struggle for national liberation. In 1942, Vellala Srikantappa Sastry, more commonly known as VS Sastry, emerged as the essential connective tissue between the British Fourth International and Indian working-class activism.

Sastry’s leadership acumen were well documented during early investigations into the rise and potential threat posed by Indian organizations in Britain during the war. Originally from Madras, Sastry first came to Britain in 1936 with hopes of establishing himself as a journalist. For a short time, he worked with PB Seal in the latter’s Orient Press Service, but long-term work and ideological disagreements with Seal led Sastry into different sectors. He found steadier work in the British war-time economy. He Initially worked in the Indian Stores Department and later moved to the Coventry-based Albert Herberts Ltd. His foray into the industrial economy also gave him the opportunity to interact with his Indian co-workers. In 1941, he was a shop steward

at Daimler. According to an IPI history sheet, by the time he started at Daimler “he had already begun to take an interest in educating the Indian worker politically with a view to preparing him for the task of bringing about a social, economic, and political revolution in India.”³³ Indeed, the biographical note that IPI prepared goes on to comment on the danger the he posed in the Midlands because he had “considerable organizing ability” and was “able to infect others with his own enthusiasm.” To that end, Sastry, having gained some organizing experiencing while at Daimler, took on the post of General Secretary of the Indian Workers Association in 1942, which led to the organization’s revitalization.³⁴ During this uptick in organizational activity the IPI began to track Sastry and his associates with a view to interning them in the event of a German invasion. Such preparation was necessary neither for politically anemic organizations nor for those, like the India League, that attempted to make inroads with British political institutions. Thus, plans for internment are an early indication of the IWA’s revolutionary potential.³⁵

Even though Sastry had demonstrated considerable ability as an organizer, his devotion to journalism had not disappeared. Rather, his energies had been redirected. In February 1942, the surveillance apparatus noted that he was distributing copies of *Socialist Appeal*, the official journal of the Trotskyist Workers International League.³⁶ A few months later, IPI reported that Sastry had cemented his commitment to the Fourth International by joining the staff of the paper. In 1944, the Workers International League and the Revolutionary Socialist League had merged to produce the Revolutionary Communist Party, which took over production of *Socialist*

³³ IPI to Mr. Silver. 2 April 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

³⁴ In Indian Political Intelligence and other India Office records, the Indian Workers Association was also referred to as the Indian Workers Union until 1942-43.

³⁵ IPI Report. “Proposed inclusion of certain Indians on the Suspect List.” 15 May 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

³⁶ IPI to Mr. Silver. 10 February 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

Appeal.³⁷ As soon as he began coordinating with Trotskyist groups in the Midlands, Sastry was engaged as a factory organizer. By the end of 1942, Sastry had joined the staff of *Socialist Appeal* and commenced organizing a “factory group” in Birmingham under the aegis of the Fourth International.³⁸ A year later, Sastry had been elected General Secretary of the Indian Workers Association, made a contributor to the most prominent Trotskyist journal in Britain, enlisted as a paid organizer for the recently consolidated Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain. Furthermore, he attempted to open an accountancy business at 25A Paradise Street in Birmingham, an address he shared with the IWA, to help defray the rent for the Association.³⁹

Following in the tradition that Menon and Saklatvala established in previous decades, Sastry understood the importance of working with the British labor movement and revolutionary political parties. However, for Sastry, as well as for many working-class activists, it was incumbent on Indians to pursue their political goals through organizations reserved for Indians to ensure that their they were not diluted. Thus, Sastry sought to facilitate coordination from the helm of the IWA. In April 1942, Sastry evoked the Workers Welfare League of India’s “An Appeal to the Workers of Britain” by circulating his “Appeal to Indian Workers.” By asserting that “the Indian workers are playing an increasingly important role in the movement for national liberation,” this pamphlet embodied Sastry’s divergence from earlier generations by directly addressing Indian workers as agents of change. “It is the purpose of the Indian Workers Association,” he asserts, “to struggle against these hardships and play its part in the British Labour Movement. To achieve these aims we must bring every Indian worker into the

³⁷ Michael Crick, *Militant* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016), Ch. 2.

³⁸ IPI Report. Indian Notes. 15 December 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

³⁹ IPI Report. Indian Organizations in the United Kingdom: A Review 1942-43. 19 November 1943. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

organization.”⁴⁰ Of course, attempts to link the British and Indian labor movements were not new. The Communist Party of Great Britain had helped establish the Communist Party of India in the 1920s and maintained much the same approach as that outlined by Sastry. Yet, Sastry’s break with the Communist Party helps to explain the renewed focus on the Indian worker. At an Amritsar Day meeting in November 1943, commemorating the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Sastry instructed the audience that “Amritsar was a great tragedy. It was more than that, it was the end of a definite period in Indian Nationalism. It destroyed for the last time the illusions of many Indian Nationalists that cooperation with British Imperialism would result in Freedom for India.”⁴¹ With this, Sastry impugned the Communist Party’s cooperation with the Allied Forces after the Soviet Union formally declared war in 1941 as cooperation with British Imperialism. Thus, to historicize that break, as Sastry does, is to connect his own anti-war position and affinity for the Fourth International to the events in Amritsar in 1919.

While Sastry rose to prominence in Indian activist circles due in large part to his organizational ability and revolutionary rhetoric, his participation in the Revolutionary Communist Party appears to have broadened his tactical arsenal. In March 1944, IPI remarked that Sastry was “rapidly developing into a political menace” and was considering an effort to agitate among the Indian “Bevin Trainees” at Nottingham.⁴² However, this plan appears to have manifested as part of a broader RCP strategy to disrupt wartime extractive industries. The defining moment for Sastry’s role in the RCP came in summer 1944 with the imprisonment of

⁴⁰IPI Report. “The Indian Workers Association.” 14 April 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁴¹ William Lowe, Criminal Investigation Department. Birmingham City Police Report. 12 April 1943. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁴² IPI to Mr. Silver. 28 March 1944. L/PJ/12/645. IOR. Rosina Visram instructs that the Bevin Training Scheme began in May 1941 and sought to bring Indian workers to Britain “for a period of six months’ industrial training.” See Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 342.

his associates Jock Haston, Roy Tearse, Heaton Lee, and Ann Keen under the Trade Disputes Act of 1927 for their role in a strike among Bevin Boys in Newcastle. The Director of Public Prosecutions, J. Charlesworth, argued that the strike was illegal in the first instance because it did “not further a trade dispute” but was “for political reasons” designed to “put pressure on the Government.”⁴³ Although multiple apprentices from the Tyne Apprentices Guild testified that the strike would have happened without RCP assistance, the state’s case was rooted in the fact that none of the RCP operatives worked as Bevin Boys. Therefore, it argued, their contribution to the strike amounted to conspiracy, incitement, aiding and abetting, and furthering an illegal strike.

The RCP stance toward the conscription of labor was consistent with the Fourth International position on capitalism and the war. Specifically, the Bevin Boys were part of a system of unfree labor, known as the Bevin Ballot Scheme, named for Labour Minister Ernest Bevin, whereby young men were conscripted into work during the labor shortage caused by the war. As a representative of the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain, Sastry worked with the RCP, the Independent Labour Party, and members of the Labour Party to form the Anti-Labour Laws Victims Defense Committee, which was meant to be the “conscience of the Labour Movement since the official Trade Union and Labour leadership was willfully blind to the implications of this trial.” This Committee hosted events to discuss the excesses of Government policy toward workers during the war and fundraised to help offset court fees.⁴⁴ Sastry routinely reported on the progress of the case for *Socialist Appeal* and ultimately produced a pamphlet

⁴³ “Trade Disputes ACT Charges.” *The Times* (London, England), 19 May 1944.

⁴⁴ VS Sastry, “A Victory for labour! The Case of Jock Haston, Roy Tearse, Heaton Lee, and Ann Keen Under the Trades Disputes Act of 1927” (London: The Anti-Labour Laws Victims Defence Committee), 11; JB Stuart, “A Brief Report on England,” *Fourth International* (June 1944): 170.

published by the Defence Committee. “Today it is Bros. Haston, Tearse, Lee and Keen,” Sastry cautions, “tomorrow it can be any militant trade unionist or shop steward -- any trade union secretary or branch official who can be hauled up before the courts and jailed whenever the vindictiveness of the ruling class leads them to behead and crush the movement of the workers to resist attacks upon their rights.”⁴⁵ The four were initially charged with a litany of transgressions but were only found guilty of aiding and abetting the organizers of the strike, namely Bill Davy of the Tyne Apprentices Guild.⁴⁶ Upon appeal, Haston, Tearse, Heaton, and Lee were released because the Court ruled that their efforts were made prior to the beginning of the strike and therefore could not, by definition, be held on a charge of furthering an illegal action.

The arrest and trial of his colleagues gave Sastry an opportunity to put his organizing and journalistic abilities to full use. In this period, he increased his visibility within a militant organization that had gained prominence among workers and anti-war activists. Indeed, in the context of Ernest Bevin’s myriad recruitment initiatives, Sastry was able to draw the struggles of workers and Indians in Britain closer together. By doing so, he effectively lobbied for their mutual support. Not only did he operationalize rhetoric that Indian activists and their sympathizers had deployed for decades, but he was also able to demonstrate the usefulness of broad front coordinating committees that appealed to activists and politicians from across the political spectrum. This tactic resonated in *Socialist Appeal*. “Whatever criticisms we have of the political programme of the different groups who participated in this Defence Committee (the ALLVDC) ... these comrades showed that they were fighters. The limited unity won on this issue

⁴⁵ Sastry, “A Victory for labour,” 3.

⁴⁶ Sastry, “A Victory for labour,” 7.

won a labour victory.”⁴⁷ At the risk of ideological heterodoxy, Sastry’s imprint on Indian activism was the prioritization of selective broad-front cooperation as an organizing principle with Indian independence, resistance to war, and labor solidarity as core objectives.

The Rise of Indian Rank and File Organizations in Britain, 1935-1946

The Indian organizations that existed in Britain for much of the interwar period, backed as they were by the Communist Party of Great Britain and associated anti-imperialist organizations like the League Against Imperialism, did not show much ability at engaging and enlisting working-class Indians in their organizations. The Workers Welfare League and the India League were more concerned with soliciting British support for their campaigns. They sought to contribute to Indian nationalist and labor movements didactically and monetarily. They did not attempt to actively recruit the politically and economically marginalized Indian worker who had come to Britain as part of a process of capitalist expansion in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Indian political organizing was often supported by the British left if not effectively incorporated by them. The Indian Seamen’s Union, established in 1927, is an example of Saklatvala and the CPGB giving financial assistance to Indian organizers devoted to mobilizing Indian workers. However, the distance that Indians maintained from formal subscription to British political parties, as well as the obstacles that institutions serving Indian workers erected to circumscribe activism, had the effect of delaying political organization while creating the necessary space to allow for quasi-autonomous political organizations to emerge and participate within the network of anti-imperialist, nationalist, and parliamentary organizations

⁴⁷ “Labour Defence Organisation Needed Immediately,” *Socialist Appeal* (September 1944), 4.

that the India League, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the Labour Party had helped to create.

Beginning in the mid-1930s, a generation of activists, journalists, professionals, and workers, many of whom had, in a way, apprenticed with Saklatvala and Menon, began to grasp for new forms of association to follow a more radical path toward Indian independence, worker solidarity, and racial emancipation. Among the first of the organizations that articulated a new political framework was the Indian Swaraj League. According to New Scotland Yard, this organization was a joint effort between the Communist Party, the League Against Imperialism and many former allies of Menon's India League.⁴⁸ Although the Metropolitan police were convinced that the Indian Swaraj League "is being used as a facade" by the British left, it was led by mainstays of Indian nationalism in Britain such as KD Kumria, Suresh (DJ) Vaidya, and novelist Mulk Raj Anand. Despite the appearance of cooptation of the ISL by the Communist Party, due to the visible communist presence on the platform of an Indian Independence Day event in January 1937, the event was chaired by Dr. Saeed Mohamedi and the audience was overwhelmingly comprised of Indian workers. Suraj-ud Din Piracha, perhaps prompted by the presence of seamen and factory workers, spoke about the complicity of British workers in the economic underdevelopment of India and the plight of the colonial working-class. Yet, he struck a conciliatory note at the end of his address by "appealing for great unity and sympathy between the workers of Britain and the Indian workers, in order to smash British imperialism both here and in India."⁴⁹ Though Indian Independence Day celebrations were not new to Britain, this

⁴⁸ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, No. 82. 27 January 1937. L/PJ/12/373. IOR.

⁴⁹ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, No. 83. 10 February 1937. L/PJ/12/373. IOR.

event marks a transition away from individuals who had monopolized British Indian political expression and toward a democratization that allowed for the emergence of a plurality of voices.

While the Indian Swaraj League appears to have been relatively short-lived, in existence for roughly five years, it contributed to a reorientation of Indian political energies in Britain toward self-sufficiency. The last mention of this organization came in the spring of 1940, in preparation for May Day, when Suresh (DJ) Vaidya, then secretary of the League, penned a notice encouraging Indians to join. Here, Vaidya suggested that the organization was founded in 1935 and, as such, functioned as a primary catalyst for the Indian Political Conference held the following year. Moreover, he reminded the reader that “the membership of the League is confined to Indians only” in contrast to earlier and competing organizations dedicated to Indian independence. He also clarified that the decision to admit only Indians was not one based “on narrow sectarian, racial or other local considerations, but solely with the object of securing that the decisions and the activities of the League will be in the hands of Indians.” Vaidya insisted that “the second Imperialist war has brought the forces of British Imperialism into sharp conflict with the peoples of India,” which, prior to the breach of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, was the routine anti-war stance endorsed by the Communist International. Vaidya did not dwell on the circumstances of the war, Soviet Russia’s relationship with Nazi Germany, or the official line of the Communist International. For him, Indian independence, the excesses of colonial rule, and the end of imperialism were of paramount importance. By mentioning the Defense of India Act, which allowed martial rule in India and the suspension of habeas corpus during World War I, he drew an inherent comparison between British imperialism and German fascism. British rule in India constituted a “system of exploitation which has forged the chains of our slavery.” Vaidya

entreats his “compatriots” abroad to join the struggle for freedom; even if, in this brief notice, the contribution that “we Indians, at present far away from Home” could make is left undefined.⁵⁰

Understanding that the Communist Party had begun to place less significance on the struggle against imperialism, especially as the struggle against fascism ramped up in the mid- to late-1930s, Indian leaders in Britain, while continuing to prioritize an Indian rank and file membership so that their agenda would not be diluted by other ideological or political concerns, began to look for new sectors of British politics within which to coordinate. A clear indication of the rift that was emerging between Indian anti-colonial nationalism and British communism came in the form of Harry Pollitt’s pamphlet “How to Win the War,” which argued that all workers were socially, politically, economically, and ideologically bound to support the British war against fascism. As Andrew Thorpe has pointed out, Pollitt’s position was the product of a long-term shift within British communism, that mapped onto the priorities of the Communist International. In short, pro-war communists in Britain facilitated the rise in the “cult of Stalin” and the concomitant “virulent denunciation of Trotsky” and other anti-war forces.⁵¹ The void that the communists left in their abdication of anti-imperialism was filled by the Independent Labour Party (ILP). According to Tom Buchanan, the ILP was the “most outspoken voice on imperial questions in Britain in the later 1930s” both through the establishment of the British Centre Against Imperialism and by supporting Black and Indian organizations in Britain and struggles for national liberation abroad.⁵²

⁵⁰ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, no. 166. 1 May 1940. L/PJ/12/373. IOR.

⁵¹ Andrew Thorpe, “Stalinism and British Politics,” *The Historical Association* (1998): 611-614.

⁵² Tom Buchanan, “‘The Dark Millions in the Colonies are Unavenged’: Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s”. *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 4 (2006): 652-653.

Evidence of the Communist International's nascent anti-fascism and the frustration that colonial migrants expressed during the 1930s notwithstanding, the move away from the CPGB and toward the Fourth International was gradual, partial, and fleeting. Even as the India League lost its luster, especially among Indian workers outside of London, it continued to serve a purpose for newer organizations. For instance, the Indian Workers Association, which had been moribund due to poor leadership and the Coventry Blitz, hosted a joint Independence Day with the India League in January 1942. Menon attended and addressed the audience about the Congress' demand for *purna swaraj* in 1930 and its continued resonance during the war. Indeed, Menon's presence appears to confirm the IPI's suspicions that the IWA had quickly become one of the most significant Indian organizations in Britain, which compelled Menon to attend so that he could attempt extend his influence among Indians in the Midlands.⁵³ Yet, in Menon's absence, the Midlands remained a hotly contested area where the IWA, the Communist Party, and the India League contested one another for supremacy. For instance, as a British intelligence officer had it in April 1942, the Birmingham branch of the India League "is becoming a battle ground [sic] for the local Communists and Trotskyists" and its local leadership was doing what it could to minimize Menon's role in their affairs. Moreover, the Communist Party itself was concerned about the growing independent influence of VS Sastry and the Indian Workers Association and sought to take control of the same India League branch in order to stem the tide of Indian workers who were following Sastry's lead and giving support to the local Independent Labour Party and leaving the Communist sphere of influence.⁵⁴ For its part, the Independent Labour Party had been making inroads with factory workers in Birmingham and it appears that

⁵³ IPI to Mr. Silver. 10 February 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁵⁴ IPI Report. "Indian Notes." 7 April 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

cooperation between the ILP and the IWA was both a matter of shared goals and overlapping ideology.⁵⁵

Considering that the CPGB intended to undermine Menon's leadership in Birmingham while also attempting to counteract the allure of the Indian Workers Association and the Independent Labour Party, it sought to make its case to Indian workers in the Midlands through Surat Ali and his Hindustani Social Club. Intelligence records postulate that Ali's visit to Birmingham in April 1942 was "sanctioned, if not prompted, by the CPGB" so that he could instruct Indian workers there on the Communist position on Indian independence.⁵⁶ However, Ali was not an uncritical communist operative among Indians in the Midlands. Instead, in this moment, his politics and allegiances represented a heterodox orientation toward Party communism and the Indian anti-war stance. Indeed, his visit to Birmingham appears to have had the opposite effect to Communist Party hopes. Rather than bolstering support for the League and the CPGB, May Day events held in the city demonstrated that "The 'Trotskyist' Indian Workers Union seems on the whole to have been more prominent on these occasions than were Menon's disciples."⁵⁷ Soon after his trip to Birmingham, Ali was at the center of an ideological dispute with the CPBG during which he accused the Party itself of being non-interventionist, in direct opposition to the dictates of the Comintern.⁵⁸ Subsequently, Ali resigned from the Party entirely when it affirmed that the India League retained official Party support on questions of Indian independence.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ IPI Report. "Indian Notes." 14 July 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁵⁶ IPI Report. "Indian Notes." 7 April 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁵⁷ IPI Report. "Indian Notes." 10 June 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁵⁸ IPI Report. "Indian Notes (September-October 1942)." 14 November 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁵⁹ IPI Report. Indian Notes. 24 February 1943. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

Surat Ali, Swaraj House, and the Future of Subject Peoples

Even at the time of his visit to Birmingham, Ali was using the Hindustani Social Club to coordinate with the Indian political organizations, especially the Indian Workers Association in Birmingham and the Committee of Indian Congressmen (CIC) in London. While he was distancing himself from the Communist Party, he began to draw closer to the IWA and, specifically, to VS Sastry. Initially, Ali sought to work with the CIC, which was organized by PB Seal and Amiya Nath Bose, the nephew of Netaji Subhas Bose, largely due to geographical proximity in London. However, Ali was concerned that the CIC followed the pro-Japanese approach adopted by Subhas Bose and the Indian National Army.⁶⁰ Therefore, Ali took greater control of his political ambition by breaking with the CIC and establishing Swaraj House in 1942. Ali enjoined Suresh Vaidya to help manage the organization, which was founded on militant anti-imperialism and named as if to be the inheritor of the legacy of Shyamji Krishna Varma's India House. In its inaugural statement, Ali affirmed that Swaraj House was meant to be a home for "politically-minded Indians who cherish the freedom of our country and are supporters of the Indian National Congress."⁶¹ Thus, Swaraj House, like many other Indian organizations emerging during the war, was a staunch supporter of the Indian National Congress and it was because of their distrust of Menon's India League that they grew more and more frustrated as the League was privileged with the status of INC representative in Britain.

⁶⁰ IPI Report "Indian Workers Union." 17 December 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁶¹ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report. No. 233. 25 November 1942. L/PJ/12/658: File 2572/42. IOR. In this instance, it is worth highlighting the ambivalence of "freedom" in this statement as it is not clear if the reference is to the freedom of assembly afforded to Indian migrants in Britain or the freedom for India that this organization, like several others in Britain, joined with Congress to achieve.

Surat Ali's gravitation toward VS Sastry culminated in the establishment of the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain (FIAGB) in May 1943. The Federation was to act as a coordinating committee between Indian organizations that followed similar ideological lines. By and large, the Federation was an umbrella organization that allowed the Indian Workers Association and Swaraj House to retain their organizational identity and independence as they combined their resources and mobilized their membership for joint initiatives. On the founding of the Federation, the Indian Political Intelligence noted tellingly that "the mere inauguration of it must be regarded as an achievement for Surat Ali, whose association in office with VS Sastry, a leading Trotskyist and ILP henchman, is a highly significant indication of the trend of ideas and activities of Indians in this country."⁶² With the Federation, Ali effectively gave Sastry an expanded platform from which to disseminate his critique.

Under the banner of Swaraj House, Sastry wrote a response to the Government's White Paper on India in March 1943 in which he fulminates that "the British Government in India evidently hopes to whitewash its conduct of the Indian situation before the British public and the Allied Nations by clumsy reiteration of its own distorted version of the tragic developments in India." "It is significant", he continues, "that the White Paper says nothing about the shootings, bombings, machine-gunning, wholesale arrests and imprisonments without trial, floggings, and the imposition of unbearable collective fines on the destitute peasantry comparable only to Nazi atrocities in occupied Europe." These comments were reminiscent of the list of complaints issued by the organizers of the Fifth Indian Political Conference, which also excoriated the British Government for the "the terror it instituted in the face of the revolutionary struggle."⁶³ Moreover,

⁶² IPI Report. "Indian Organizations in the United Kingdom." 27 May 1943. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁶³ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report. 15 July 1936. L/PJ/12/373. IOR.

Sastry's thoughts on the "problem of the Indian revolution" focused on the flaws of Gandhian nonviolence and revealed his penchant for permanent revolution by issuing a call for the immediate arming of the Indian masses. During a Swaraj House meeting in August 1944, Sastry insisted that "Indians would achieve their independence only by using force."⁶⁴ Sastry's frustrations with Gandhi were exacerbated by his perception that Gandhi was cooperating with the British by proposing a path toward partition in his talks with Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Later, Sastry gave Jinnah's dissent during the Shimla Conference backhanded praise "for causing its failure and thus saving India from suicide."⁶⁵

In June 1945, Swaraj House, led by Surat Ali, had worked with PAF and WASU to convene the Subject People's Conference in London. This Conference, also known as the All Colonial Peoples Conference, is commonly represented as an example of anti-colonial and nationalist cooperation in London en route to the Manchester Pan-African Congress in October of that year. Tellingly, historian Leslie James suggests that George Padmore's "many years of labour" culminated in the "realization of a large, broad-based pan-African movement" which manifested as "the British Pan-African Federation and the October Manchester Pan-African Conference."⁶⁶ The convention was purported to be a response to the inaugural conference of the United Nations held in San Francisco. It afforded Indian, African, and Southeast Asian organizations in Britain to demand, in unison, an end to imperialism, racism, and discrimination and the global acknowledgement of national self-determination enshrined in the Atlantic Charter

⁶⁴ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report. No. 278. 13 August 1944. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

⁶⁵ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report. No. 303. 1 August 1945. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

⁶⁶ James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below*, 59.

of 1941 and the UN Charter of 1945.⁶⁷ However, the coordination between anticolonial and nationalist organizations in Britain in preparation for the Subject People's Conference, demonstrates that the event moved beyond a narrative of nascent Pan-Africanism in Britain. Rather it was a step toward the Bandung moment of Afro-Asian solidarity in the post-war world and anticipated the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁶⁸

Swaraj House was vital to the organization and staging of the Subject People's Conference. According to Indian Political Intelligence, "all the preliminary ad hoc committee meetings of the Colonial Conference held in London on 10.6.45 were held at Swaraj House."⁶⁹ Thus, the Conference was an expression of trans-colonial solidarities that had been forged in London and was not exclusively the provenance of African and Caribbean activists. Indeed, George Padmore had actively coordinated with Swaraj House during the War and members of Swaraj House, especially Suresh Vaidya, had been working with Padmore since the mid-1930s. For instance, records show that Padmore attended a celebration meeting at Swaraj House in celebration of Jawaharlal Nehru's 55th birthday in November 1944.⁷⁰ Just over a year later, Swaraj House hosted the first in a series of demonstrations protesting the use of Indian troops against the "National Liberation Movements in Indo-China and Indonesia," which again demonstrated its links to the Pan-African movement in London. On this occasion, not only did

⁶⁷ Eric Porter, *The Problem of the Future World: W.E.B. DuBois and the Race Concept at Midcentury* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 116-17; Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, 176; Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 195-96.

⁶⁸ Christian Høgsbjerg, "Remembering the Fifth Pan-African Congress," *Leeds African Studies Bulletin* 77 (Winter 2015/16), 119-139. Last accessed 15 February 2018, <http://lucas.leeds.ac.uk/article/remembering-the-fifth-pan-african-congress-christian-hogsbjerg>.

⁶⁹ IPI Report. "Indian Activities in the United Kingdom June to September 1945." 1 October 1945. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁷⁰ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, No. 285. 22 November 1944. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

Padmore attend, but also WEB DuBois spoke on the failures of British imperialism in Britain and suggested that “if Britain could do no better than this in two centuries, she should relinquish her hold on the country and let the Indians see what they could do for themselves.” Both Padmore and DuBois expressed solidarity between Africa, India, and the people of Southeast Asia.⁷¹

Importantly, the Subject People’s Conference of June 1945 did not mark the fulfillment of Afro-Asian cooperation in Britain in the 1940s, but rather was a high-water mark of sustained cooperation throughout the period. Indeed, in October, just after the Manchester Pan-African Congress, the Coordinating Committee of the Struggle of Subject Peoples hosted a second Subject People’s Conference at the Farrington Hall in London.⁷² Further evidence of the mutuality and reciprocity that these organizations exhibited is embodied in Surat Ali, who not only was a driving force behind the Subject Peoples’ series of events, but also was one of two Indian delegates to the Manchester Congress. Indeed, Ali appears to have taken responsibility for maintaining alliances with Pan-African and Black International organizations after Suresh Vaidya had returned to India upon his appeal and release. Swaraj House’s Policy Statement of 1945 affirmed its commitment to a “world federation of free nations,” echoing the UN Charter, by stating that “freedom for India must be a symbol of, and prelude to, the freedom of all other Asiatic nations under foreign domination.” Upon that foundation, Padmore attended Indian Independence Day meetings at Swaraj House in January of 1946 and 1947 to “condem[n] British intervention in Indonesia” and to “deman[d] the immediate cessation of hostilities in Indo-China

⁷¹ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, No. 311. 21 November 1945. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

⁷² IPI Report. “Indian Societies in the UK (January/May 1946).” 6 June 1946. L/PJ/12/646. IOR; Hakim Adi, “Pan-Africanism in Britain: Background to the 1945 Manchester Conference,” in *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*, Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, eds. (London: New Beacon Books, 1995), 25.

and to the granting of independence to Vietnam.”⁷³ Certainly, the coordination among the British left, Pan-Africanists, and Indian revolutionaries contributes to the rise of a “spirit of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist unity” and the mobilization against imperialist incursions in the late-1940s that moved beyond the territoriality of Africa and India.⁷⁴

The Indian Workers Association’s Dissidence

While there was a clear Trotskyist trajectory in Indian politics during the war, the “idiosyncrasies” Punjabi communism were manifest in Britain.⁷⁵ From its establishment, the Indian Workers Association was a congeries of disparate political ideologies that made the intelligence service uneasy. The police and IPI responded to the IWA by developing dossiers on the “leading personalities” of the association so that “disaffected Indians” might be easily interned in the event of an invasion. Of the few dozen Indians in Coventry and Birmingham who routinely attended the Association’s meetings, attention was paid to six: Thakur Singh Basra, Charan Singh Chima, Karm Singh Overseer, Kartar Singh Nagra, VS Sastry, and Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan. A demobilized soldier, Thakur Singh Basra was known to subscribe to the *Hindustan Ghadr* and was reputed to have been a “very prominent” fundraiser for Udham Singh’s defense. Charan Singh Chima, the nephew of Karam Singh Chima -- “one of the most prominent of the Ghadr Party leaders in the Punjab” -- used his uncle’s position to facilitate the

⁷³ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, No. 316. 30 January 1946. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.; Extract from New Scotland Yard Report, No. 10. 29 January 1947. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

⁷⁴ Adi, “Pan-Africanism in Britain,” 25.

⁷⁵ Shalini Sharma has described the heterodoxy of Punjabi communism during the interwar period: “The Naujawan Bharat Sabha conforms to no stereotypes of other leftist organizations in India. For it to have done so would have required it to adhere to Marxist doctrine, concentrate on organizing workers or peasants and possess a committed and unquestioning cadre of disciplined followers. It had none of these characteristics. In the view of the Punjab’s rulers, the Sabha seemed, instead, more akin to a terrorist than a run-of-the-mill communist organization. Yet it was its very idiosyncrasies and peculiarities that enabled the Sabha to capture the imagination of such a wide spectrum of radical opinion in the Punjab.” Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab*, 36.

establishment of the IWA. Karam Singh Overseer was a devotee of Udham Singh and had held a subscription to *Kirti* the journal of the Kirti-Kisan Party in Punjab. Kartar Singh Nagra subscribed to the *Kirti Lehar* and the *Hindustan Ghadr* and “had obviously been interested in revolutionary Sikh activities before he sailed from India.” VS Sastry and Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan, included in the dossier, were not considered to be orthodox Ghadarites; however, they coordinated and helped to lead the IWA because their politics overlapped with that movement in key areas, especially militant anticolonialism and the effort to undermine the British war-effort.⁷⁶

Public meetings served important functions for the pedagogic mission of the association because they provided a discrete space to promulgate nationalist and internationalist politics through rousing speeches, recitation of poetry, chants of *inquilab zindabad*, and eulogies of Udham Singh. For instance, at a February 1942 meeting in Bradford, Karam Singh Overseer proclaimed that Udham Singh “did not care for his own life” and Banta Singh echoed these remarks and entreated all in attendance that “Everybody should be like Udham Singh. If a man dies after shooting a man or two, his name will be inscribed in golden words in the pages of history.” Also, the meeting displayed a deep distrust of the British military apparatus. Banta Singh noted that Indians had registered for national service but subsequently attempted to attain the status of Conscientious Objector but were instead jailed for insubordination. Akbar Ali Khan added to this sentiment but observing that “whenever the British had wanted to make other countries slaves” they had used Indians to do so. “When Indians can fight for another nation to make others slaves,” he continued, “then they can fight for themselves.”⁷⁷ Thus, this event allowed IWA to echo Punjabi revolutionary sentiment by encouraging Indian soldiers to abandon

⁷⁶ IPI to Mr. Silver 2 April 1942, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁷⁷ IPI to Mr. Silver 20 March 1942, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

their posts and undermining British imperialism by refusing to maintain the oppression other colonialized people.

In addition to exalting Udham Singh and imploring Indians to disengage from imperialist military campaigns, the Indian Workers Association closed ranks with other leftwing Punjabi organizations by soliciting funds for the Desh Bhagat Sahayak Sabha, which distributed money to the families of those imprisoned or executed for participating in the Ghadar and Akali movements in Punjab. Karam Singh Chima, Charan Singh's uncle, worked closely with this fund in Punjab and the Indian Workers Association might have begun its existence as the "Indian Political Prisoners' Defense Committee" had the war not slowed its development. As early as 1934, the Ghadar Party made special requests for funds, having already distributed nearly Rs. 100,000 from 1922 to 1934, noting that "it is our foremost purpose to help the orphans and the aged parents of those national heroes who sacrificed themselves to have us freed and to make us happy."⁷⁸ By 1942, the IWA had remitted Rs. 2,000 to aid "the families of the Ghadr party leaders."⁷⁹ Support for the fund was not uncontroversial. Later that year, the Coventry IWA leadership unilaterally sent "considerable sums" to India without the input of the membership. Evidently, some argued that such money should be spent primarily on programs to improve conditions for Indians in Britain, which was a foundational, if competing, concern for the organization.⁸⁰ Yet, factional disputes notwithstanding, the IWA continued to send support to the Desh Bhagat Sahayak Sabha for the duration of the war.

⁷⁸ *Hindustan Ghadr* October 1934, L/PJ/12/757. IOR.

⁷⁹ IPI to Mr. Silver 20 March 1942, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁸⁰ "Indian Notes" 14 November 1942, L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

The heterodoxy of the IWA was also reflected in its leaders. Among them, Charan Singh Chima's political activity is exemplary. Chima had become an avowed communist and Party member prior to reaching out to the Ghadar Party in San Francisco for support in establishing a branch of that organization in Britain. The cooperation between the Ghadar Party and the Communist International was vital in the emergence of a militant freedom struggle in Punjab in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸¹ However, after the outbreak of war and the reorientations of the Indian Workers Association as anti-war and anti-Stalin and the Communist Party of Great Britain as pro-war and Stalinist, Chima continued to operate within both spheres. What is more remarkable, perhaps, is that, while serving as the President of the Coventry branch of the Indian Workers Association in 1943, he also presided over the newly organized Coventry branch of Menon's India League, which, by then, was anathema to both the IWA and the Communist Party.⁸²

Considering that the Birmingham branch of the India League had some years previously started acting independently of Krishna Menon in London, there is little reason to suspect that Chima had become in any sense a lackey of the League, a votary of its policies, or a defender of its prominence. Rather, since he continued to share the stage with Sastry and other leaders of the Indian Workers Association throughout this period, there is reason to believe that he intended to use the name and resources of the India League for other purposes. To be sure, Chima's affiliation with the Indian Workers Association was long-term and resilient. Indeed, Chima

⁸¹ See Chapter 4 above.

⁸² IPI Report. "Indian Activities: June-July 1943." No date. L/PJ/12/646. IOR. The IWA had long-standing concerns over the priorities of the India League and lack of attention to Indians in Britain. The falling out between the India League and the Communist Party came after the dissolution of the Communist International in 1942. At this point, Menon was sidelined as the intermediary between the CPGB and the Communist Party of India. Instead, Dutt and Ben Bradley coordinated directly with PC Joshi in India. Having had his role in the CPGB minimized, Menon drew ever closer to the Indian National Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru. His decision evidently paid off as he was appointed the first High Commissioner for Independent India in London and subsequently given a Cabinet position as Defence Minister for Nehru.

should be remembered as not only one of the founders of the Association but one of the very few who served in a leadership capacity in the interwar and postwar iterations of the organization, after many of his compatriots would have returned to India or retired from politics.⁸³ Therefore, his status in the League, though it caused some confusion in the intelligence community, did not suggest a break with the priorities of the IWA or the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain.

Another example of the uneven and incomplete Trotskyism among Indian activists in Britain was the willingness of Sastry's IWA to make alliances with the Communist Party out of political expediency while continuing to criticize its pro-war position as imperialist apology. Prompted by the circumstances of the Bengal Famine, the IWA began attending and interrupting public addresses by LS Amery, who at the time was both the Secretary of State of India as well as a Member of Parliament for the Sparkbrook constituency of Birmingham. During these demonstrations, Indians and other members of the RCP demanded that the Government confront its role in the systematic deprivation of Bengal and redirection of foodstuffs to the war effort.⁸⁴ At a meeting held in October 1943, Sastry led chants against Amery and the British Government and demanded the "re-opening of negotiations with the Indian leaders, also the release of political prisoners." Moreover, the IWA distributed its flier "British Imperialism Starves Indian Masses," wherein the Association argued that "the present famine is deliberately caused to

⁸³ In 1964, Charan Singh Chima was serving as the General Secretary of the newly organized Bradford branch of the Indian Workers Association. A few years later, in 1967, he had become the President of the Huddersfield branch. In 1988, only months before his death, he wrote to the General Secretary of the Indian Workers Association, Great Britain, Avtar Singh Jouhl, about the importance of consolidating the various Indian Workers Associations that had emerged over the decades. Although it is unclear if the IWA in the late-1980s fully appreciated Chima's role in formation of the group fifty years earlier, his branch held a memorial rally for him on 21 May 1989 at the Huddersfield Town Hall, during which many prominent British Indian organizers eulogized him. See: MS2141/A/8/8: Papers of the IWA, Huddersfield Branch, Wolfson Centre, Birmingham Library.

⁸⁴ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 141-142.

destroy the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants.”⁸⁵ Throughout the following year, Sastry organized a series of “Quit India” demonstrations that targeted Amery’s public events. In January 1944, a contingent from the Bradford branch of the IWA traveled to York again to disrupt public comments about British policy for India and the end of the famine.⁸⁶ Later, the IPI reported that “Sastry has about 50 Indian Volunteers who are ready to give Mr. Amery a hostile reception when he next addresses a meeting at Birmingham.”

The mobilization of Indians in the Midlands took on a new significance during the general election campaign of 1945. Sparkbrook was due to elect a parliamentary representative. LS Amery was the incumbent and he was challenged by Percy Shurmer from the Labour Party and the Communist Rajani Palme Dutt. As the initiatives of the Indian Workers Association over the preceding year suggest, Amery’s seat was particularly vulnerable due to his perceived culpability during the famine. Dutt was prepared to seize that mobilization as a candidate for parliament and he made a specific entreaty to the electorate in Birmingham, which was particularly effective among Indians there. In a campaign publication, Dutt disclaimed Amery’s tenure as Secretary of State for India as a “crime against democracy.”⁸⁷ His pamphlet “Mr. Amery’s Record,” reaffirmed the belief that the Secretary of State for India shared responsibility “for the grave administrative shortcomings” that caused the famine.⁸⁸ In a letter to the *Birmingham Post* from June 1945, Dutt insisted that responding to famine conditions was a secondary concern to the circumstances that led to it in the first place. He impugned Amery for the “failure to fulfil[l] the most elementary responsibilities of Governmental wartime economic

⁸⁵ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report. No. 257. 27 October 1943. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁸⁶ IPI Report. Indian Activities in the United Kingdom. 22 January 1944. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁸⁷ “A Message from the Communist Candidate R.P. Dutt to every voter.” No date [1945]. RP Dutt Papers. LHA.

⁸⁸ “Mr. L.S. Amery and Mr. R.P. Dutt on the Bengal Famine.” No date [1945]. RP Dutt Papers. LHA.

organization and control in relation to food supplies, distribution and prices;” a failure that caused more than one million deaths by starvation in 1943.⁸⁹ Even though there were ideological differences between Sastry’s Revolutionary Communist Party and Dutt’s allegiance to the Communist International that had previously caused tensions between these organizations, the Indian Workers Association instructed its membership to vote for Dutt in the Sparkbrook contest while elsewhere supporting Labour.⁹⁰

The Vaidya Affair: Conscription and the Morality of Opposition

Indians in Britain joined with their compatriots in India to deride the war effort along with any suggestion that Indians ought to contribute. As many anti-conscription meetings were held in Punjab after Britain declared war against the Axis on behalf of India, the sentiment was echoed in Britain among the many demobilized Indian soldiers who had made their way to Britain after serving in World War I. Among the *raisons d’etre* for the mushrooming of Indian organizations in Britain in the late interwar period was to protect colonial subjects, especially Indians, from conscription. Because these organizations specialized in the welfare of Indians abroad, they developed acumen in the various plausible methods of avoiding conscription. Through this shared value these Indian organizations drew closer to the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party. The most successful option to avoid conscription was to become a Conscientious Objector based on the acceptable, if misinformed, premise that South Asian religious traditions unanimously abjured violence.⁹¹ The services of the

⁸⁹ Dutt to Editor, *Birmingham Post*. 25 June 1945. RP Dutt Papers. LHA.

⁹⁰ IPI Report. Indian Activities in the United Kingdom June to September 1945. 1 October 1945. L/PJ/12/646. IOR. Amery was defeated in the 1945 General Election by the Labour candidate, PLE Shurmer. The vote breakdown was: PLE Shurmer (Labour) 14,065 (57.8%); LCMS Amery (Conservative) 8,431 (34.6%); RP Dutt (Communist) 1,853 (7.6%). See: Fred S.W. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949* (Glasgow: Political Reference Publications, 1969), 89.

⁹¹ IPI Report “Indian Workers Union”. 17 December 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

Indian Workers Association, Swaraj House, and the Committee of Indian Congressmen were sought out by Indians in Britain who hoped to avoid conscription under the terms of the National Service Act. It was Suresh (DJ) Vaidya's determination to avoid service that became a *cause celebre* for those intending to highlight the treatment, and resistance, of Indian subjects in the metropole.

Having first come to the attention of British surveillance operatives via the relatively dormant and short-lived Indian Swaraj League, Suresh Vaidya became a prominent figure in war-time Indian political agitation throughout Britain as one of the organizers of Swaraj House and the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain. In 1944, however, he gained notoriety after he was Court Martialed for "failing to comply with his Calling-up notice."⁹² Considering that, since he was a well-connected and well-informed activist, he would have been aware of the normal practice of registering as a Conscientious Objector, Vaidya's transgression seems to have been designed as a spectacle to test the idea that Indians should be subject to conscription. In the short-term, the decision had a visible impact. In late-January, the Independent Labour Party, the Indian Freedom Campaign Committee, and Swaraj House joined forces on Indian Independence Day and staged a protest to demand Vaidya's release. During the event, Dr. CB Vakil moved a resolution decrying the National Service Act and avowing that "this meeting of Indians and their friends...expressed deep resentment at the way in which Indians are being coerced into joining the British Army, as Indians are not morally bound to help Britain."⁹³ The legality of conscription was not questioned but Vaidya's act of defiance created space to make an ethical argument against serving in the British Army and fighting for the perpetuation of the empire.

⁹² IPI Report. Indian Activities in the United Kingdom. 22 January 1944. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

⁹³ Extract from Police Report No. 264. 2 February 1944. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

Subsequently the Advisory Council and Standing Committee of Swaraj House issued a statement on the “Conscription of Indians Resident in Great Britain,” to consider the position that Indians in Britain should take in response to the juridico-legal apparatus of conscription and objection. According to the authors, the fight against conscription is emblematic of the struggle for national sovereignty and therefore resistance should not be confined to parameters set by the British Government”

The Conscientious Objectors Tribunals are, by their statutory terms of reference, restricted to consideration of exemption from military service solely on objections based on moral and religious grounds. They are therefore not competent to deal with the special case of Indians.⁹⁴

In other words, while Swaraj House had assisted some in obtaining Conscientious Objector status, Indian activists should declaim conscription on political grounds, reject constitutionalism, and refuse to work within framework erected by their oppressors. “The Indian people as a whole do not accept the pacifist position,” the authors of the statement note, offering useful clarification on what circumstances should be met so that Indians might contribute to the Allied war effort. Instead, Indians “are anxious to throw their full moral and material resources in the battle against Fascism on the basis of a treaty of military alliance between a Free India on the one hand and the United Nations on the other.” This is to say that the war effort was not fundamentally flawed but that it was untenable for colonized peoples to contribute to the perpetuation of their oppression. Therefore, only as a free people should Indians enlist in an Indian Army to fight fascism. This position emphasized that the anti-war stance of many Indians in Britain was tied to anti-imperialism. This stance was aligned with the Fourth International perspective on World War II as an imperialist war. Moreover, Trotskyists also believed in just war and revolutionary violence

⁹⁴ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report No. 265, 16 February 1944, L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

rather than pacifism. Thus, British Trotskyists and Indian activists maintained their anti-war position barring immediate and radical changes in global power relations and capitalist expansion.

Though Vaidya's case was first taken up by his colleagues within Swaraj House, their connections to the Independent Labour Party facilitated greater awareness of his protest. In January 1944, George Orwell contributed a commentary on the case for *The Tribune*. Here, Orwell espoused the commonly held view that conscripting colonial subjects was a futile exercise as it could only result in a "few score extra soldiers" who would have no measurable impact on the war effort. Moreover, by compelling those who object "you", the British Government, "antagonize[s] the entire Indian community in Britain -- for no Indian, whatever his views, admits that Britain had the right to declare war on India's behalf or has the right to impose compulsory service on Indians."⁹⁵

Vaidya was imprisoned in the Canterbury Jail for the duration of his trial, during which he was represented by Fenner Brockway. In June, the Appellate Tribunal reviewing his Court Martial recommended Vaidya's discharge from the army. Brockway clarified in a letter to the *Tribune* that the Tribunal "has taken a broad view in recognising that Indian Nationalism can be a ground for conscientious objection to military service."⁹⁶ Swaraj House hosted an event to celebrate his release. "Miss Datta," who presided over the meeting, proclaimed that "India had need of more men like [Vaidya]. It was examples like his which would inspire Indians to

⁹⁵ George Orwell, "As I Please," *Tribune*. 28 January 1944. Last accessed 6 February 2018, <http://www.telelib.com/words/authors/O/OrwellGeorge/essay/tribune/AsIPlease19440128.html>.

⁹⁶Fenner Brockway, "Correspondence: The Case of Suresh Vaidya," *Tribune*, 26 May 1944; Fenner Brockway, "Suresh Vaidya," *Tribune*, 30 June 1944; "Suresh Vaidya: Registration as a CO Recommended," *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 May 1944.

continue the fight against British Imperialism.” Dr Kumria, a long-time co-agitator of Vaidya’s, then commended him for the successful opposition to conscription on “political grounds,” suggesting that his release and his registration as Conscientious Objector was based on his determination to fight in the war only as a citizen of an independent India, rather than on a plea of religious or moral objection to war. With this, Kumria acknowledged that Vaidya had set a precedent for other Indians to resist conscription on political grounds.⁹⁷

Conclusion

The mobilization of Indian anti-colonial activists and Fourth International organizations against the war was expressed in the belief that nations should have the power to exercise self-determination regarding declarations of war. Over the course of the conflict, it became clear to some that the war sought “the redevision of the colonial world” and that resistance to imperialist war in one instance should lead to struggles against the military imposition of colonial power anywhere. Such resistance, according to Ajit Roy, a colleague of VS Sastry’s at *Socialist Appeal* and the Revolutionary Communist Party, was “in defense of the colonial revolution.”⁹⁸ In 1948, Roy insisted that the defense of the colonial revolution required more than narrowly nationalist campaigns of liberation. Indeed, the struggle against imperialist dispossession anywhere was sustained by the recognition that the same force was at work in all colonial contexts. “By the slaughter of the Indonesians,” Roy observed, “they [British imperialists] hope to teach a lesson to the peoples of Burma, Malaya, and India whose demands for freedom are daily becoming more insistent.”⁹⁹ Thus, by the end of the 1940s, self-described subject peoples in London had

⁹⁷ Extract from New Scotland Yard. Report No. 273. 7 June 1944. L/PJ/12/658. IOR.

⁹⁸ Ajit Roy, *In Defence of the Colonial Revolution: End the Labour Government’s Imperialist Policy! Withdraw the troops from the East! Freedom for Indonesia and Indo-China!* (London: Revolutionary Communist Party, 1948), 1.

⁹⁹ Roy, *In Defence of the Colonial Revolution*, 10.

managed to orient themselves away from British party politics, while negotiating the contributions of white allies, and more fully toward the revolutions of the colonized world.

Although Fourth International groups strived to incorporate colonial labor into their political platforms, the War provided an opportunity for deeper cooperation between organizations representing national liberation movements in India, Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. In this way, the anti-war position of Trotskyists and sympathizers with the Indian National Congress Party, which was based on opposition to capitalist exploitation at the root of imperialism, was transformed into a struggle against colonialism and a defense of the rights of nations to self-determination. Nationalist movements had been working in tandem in London for decades, but the shift in organizational philosophies to prioritize membership of people from the colonies created momentum for groups like the Pan-African Federation (PAF), the West African Students Union (WASU), the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain, and others to interact directly. Though the Fifth Indian Political Conference was convened under the auspices of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the League Against Imperialism in 1936, the participation of Rajani Palme Dutt and George Padmore anticipated postwar shifts. By the mid-1940s black and Indian organizations managed to retain the support of British trade unionism and the labor movement while displacing the leadership role they had held.

From the confluence of leftist politics in interwar Britain to their disintegration during the war, the post-war period allowed for a further recombination of the forces that animated international anticolonialism. The anti-war stance of the Fourth International re-emerged as Third Worldism in the early years of the Cold War. Though anticipated by myriad activists and theorists, the Third World was erected in opposition to the capitalist world led by the United States and the Soviet communist sphere of influence. It was envisioned as a world of cooperation

among colonial and decolonial states in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. By the early 1960s, Indians in Britain demonstrated the disparate political paths of Third Worldism. On one hand, the politics of friendship that emerged out of the African-Asian Conference at Bandung in 1955 resonated in the policies and declarations of the Indian Workers Association. On the other hand, Indians on the far left rebuked the idea of non-alignment and agitated for a clearer revolutionary posture from postcolonial subjects and the British labor movement. Within this more radical strain, Maoist insurgency, characterized by the rural revolution and emblematic of a rising Asian world power that would contest the United States and the USSR, became a mobilizing force. The momentum that Bandung represented for a diffuse vision for global power was anticipated by Indians in Britain during World War II who sought a revolutionary path that circumvented Russia and allowed for a worldview that permitted colonial people to operate outside of the ideological constraints of Stalinism.

Chapter 6

Peaceful Cooperation and The Spirit of Bandung in the Era of Mass Migration

In the years immediately following World War II, and especially in the aftermath of the establishment of India and Pakistan in 1947, anticolonial theorists and organizers sought to mobilize people in support of national liberation movements and against racial discrimination in Europe and the United States. To that end, in April 1955, Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan hosted an additional twenty-four African, Asian, and Arab countries at the Asian-African Conference for International Order in Bandung, Indonesia. This gathering presented itself as a parallel entity to the United Nations Organization. The intergovernmental norms that the UNO represented were fully embraced by the Bandung conference to the point that the participating countries insisted on automatic membership in the Organization for all states that satisfied criteria for admission. By extension, considering the global power imbalance, the Conference contended that more African and Asian states should be given non-permanent seats on the Security Council. The Conference noted with grave concern the prospects of nuclear holocaust and insisted the denuclearization was imperative in pursuit of international peace and cooperation.¹ In addition to the attempt to incorporate postcolonial states into the international order and the pursuit to create new states by supporting nationalist struggles, the Bandung Conference focused on the urgency of international human rights that was enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In short, an internationally codified notion of human rights was an organizing concern for Bandung that was

¹ Ampiah Kweku, "Appendix 1: Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, 24 April 1955," In *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference of 1955: The Reactions of US, UK and Japan* (London: Global Oriental, 2007), Part F.

bequeathed to activists in Britain who operated within a politico-legal framework in their opposition to colonialism and racism.²

The hosts structured the Bandung meeting around the Five Principles for the Promotion of World Peace which had been approved by China and India at Beijing in 1954 to normalize “trade and intercourse” between the two states with respect to Tibet.³ These Principles, mutual respect for territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, were based on the idea of the *panchashila*, which was an intentional gesture toward Buddhist ecumenicism across South and East Asia.⁴ Guided by the Five Principles, the hosts hoped to expand regional cooperation across the Asian-African world as a way of securing peace and decolonization beyond the geopolitical priorities of the United States or Soviet spheres of influence during the Cold War.

Though anti-colonialism and anti-racism were the dual guiding political initiatives at Bandung,⁵ the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were deployed in the interest of regional cooperation. At a time when national boundaries had only recently been drawn or were still being sketched, the integrity of national territory was a paramount concern for national governments. Prior to the Conference, many in attendance viewed China as the chief threat to each of the Five Principles. But, as Arif Dirlik suggests, Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai was

² Roland Burke, “‘The Compelling Dialogue of Freedom’: Human Rights at the Bandung Conference,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2006): 950-51.

³ United Nations -- Treaty Series. No. 4307. “Agreement between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet Region of China and India. Signed at Peking, on 29 April 1954.” Last accessed on 6 April 2018, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20299/v299.pdf>.

⁴ Partha Chatterjee, “Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism: Some Observations from Modern Indian History,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, no. 2 (2016): 329.

⁵ Though at no point was uniformity achieved regarding the primary perpetrators of either, especially since China played a key role at the Conference and was uneasy with any direct repudiation of “communist colonialism”. See Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 27-33.

able to assuage those fears and transform regional opinion from hostility to “hopeful acceptance.”⁶ With China’s participation, the Final Communique highlighted economic cooperation in the region, which was intended as a counterweight to American and Soviet investments in the region, and cultural cooperation and exchange intended to strengthen the bonds within the region in the period of decolonization.

While much has been written on the priorities and disagreements of the Bandung Conference and the reactions of western governments,⁷ this chapter will contribute to emerging scholarship on the resonance of Bandung that followed the conference’s Final Communique as it circulated across the postcolonial world and mobilized racialized travelers throughout Europe.⁸ This chapter will highlight the declarations made in the Final Communique because, for economic migrants, that document was the most widely available resource on the conference even if, as some have argued, it is not a full or even accurate depiction of the proceedings themselves.⁹ Although cooperation between migrants and European anticolonial activists was not new in the postwar period, Bandung infused the movement with a new lexicon of peace and friendship. Thus, the political alliances of Commonwealth migrants in Britain in the 1950s and

⁶ Arif Dirlik, “The Bandung Legacy and the People’s Republic of China in the Perspective of Global Modernity,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16, no. 4 (2015): 619.

⁷ Ampiah Kweku, *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference of 1955: The Reactions of US, UK, and Japan* (London: Global Oriental, 2007); Amitav Acharya and See Seng Tan, eds., *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*; Dirlik, “The Bandung Legacy and the People’s Republic of China,” 615-630.

⁸ Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Cynthia Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a US Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Quinn Slobodian, “Bandung in Divided Germany: Managing Non-Aligned Politics in East and West, 1955-63,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 4 (2013): 644-662.

⁹ Robert Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-Doong),” *Humanity* 4 (2013): 261-88.

1960s must be viewed through the prism of Bandung as an event that helped to structure anti-racism and anti-imperialism in Britain.

Among the most important contributions of Bandung was the goal of creating a third way between USA and the USSR that had not previously animated action. Thus, this chapter begins in the period just prior to mass migration to Britain from the Commonwealth with the life and writings of Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan, who anticipated the need for an Asian core of nations to resist American and Russian hegemonies. Before exploring Bandung political action in Britain, this chapter examines the era of mass migration and immigration control legislation both to concretely establish migration patterns in the 1950s as well as to focus attention on anti-immigrant rhetoric and racial discrimination that necessitated migrant political organization. Ultimately, this chapter will highlight episodes of resistance that were rooted in inter-cultural cooperation and non-violence. Migrants politics in the postwar period sought to assert human rights norms and to demand state protections and legal reform against racial violence. By charting the theory and praxis of these principles within the politics and activism of Indian migrants in Britain between 1947 and 1965, this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which the spirit of Bandung was brought to British shores by Commonwealth migrants in pursuit of international cooperation within a constitutionalist political framework.

The Political Writings of Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan

Among the most prominent organizers of Indian workers and activists in 1940s Britain, Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan spent the decade after the creation of independent India and Pakistan developing a theory for Bandung politics that would inform South Asian activism in the 1950s and early 1960s. Throughout World War II, Khan held a high position within the Coventry section of the Indian Workers Association. During the reorganization of the Association in 1941-

42, Khan lived with VS Sastry and Thakur Singh Basra in Coventry.¹⁰ Along with his housemates and the co-organizers of the Association, Khan was considered potentially dangerous and placed on the list of Indians in Birmingham who should be incarcerated in case of a Nazi invasion.¹¹ When he first came to the notice of British intelligence agents, Khan appeared to be of “somewhat superior education” and motivated to help Indians avoid conscription. “Although he is comparatively young,” observed an Indian Political Intelligence note, “he seems to command considerable influence among Indian Muhammadans.”¹²

Near the end of the war, Khan became alienated from the leadership of the IWA and the Federation of Indian Associations in Great Britain. He moved to London and organized a new Association, which he called the Mazdoor Majlis, entrenching his political power and extending the network of organized South Asian workers into Southeast England. According to IPI, Khan’s London organization was hostile to the IWA in the Midlands and published a few issues of “Indian Worker,” a newsletter that criticized the IWA leadership in Coventry.¹³ Apart from screening Hindi films to crowds of hundreds of Indian seamen and workers,¹⁴ Khan’s organizing took shape in affiliation with the Committee of Indian Congressmen (CIC), which was led by Amiya Nath Bose, Subhas Chandra Bose’s nephew, and PB Seal. His newfound allies were ostensibly a strange choice. Bose and Seal had met with Khan and Thakur Singh Basra in December 1942 about consolidating the IWA and CIC but were rebuffed.¹⁵ Thus, in moving to

¹⁰ IPI to Silver, 17 December 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

¹¹ IPI to Silver, 2 April 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

¹² IPI to Silver, enclosed biographical dossier, 2 April 1942. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

¹³ IPI, “Indian Activities in the United Kingdom: March-May 1945,” 1 June 1945. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

¹⁴ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report No. 302, 18 July 1945. L/PJ/12/645. IOR. Film screenings remained an important part of IWA cultural programming in the postwar period. The Southall section of the Association eventually purchased the Dominion Theatre for film screenings and other functions.

¹⁵ IPI, “Indian Notes,” 15 December 1942. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

London Khan had not only distanced himself from the Birmingham core of Indian working-class politics in Britain, but he also considered new modes of political activity. His association with Bose and Seal was remarkable because of their tacit support for the Nazis and Japanese as a path for Indian independence. He also became more vocally sympathetic to the Soviet Union. In May 1945, Khan wrote a congratulatory note to Stalin: “We rejoice at the victory of the Red Army – the army of liberation of the oppressed nations. We rejoice at the triumph of socialism over fascism. We hope that this march of socialism will be triumphant all over the world, and crush imperialism too, which breeds war and thrives on exploitation of the subject nations.”¹⁶ His support for Stalin and the Red Army in defeat of fascism was anathema to VS Sastry, leader of the IWA in Birmingham and active contributor to the Trotskyist left in Britain, who believed that the Soviet Union had betrayed the anti-colonial movement by supporting the British Empire’s war effort.¹⁷

The future of a united independent India was a mobilizing force for many Indian nationalists, regardless of religious identity or regional heritage, because, in part, it was fundamentally anticolonial. In 1944, a year after dissociating with the Coventry group, Khan was again elected to the presidency in Coventry over Dhantu Ram. Curiously, the IPI suggests that the factions were split by religion, where the Sikhs voted for Khan, a Muslim, and the Muslims voted for Ram, a Hindu. In this case, it would appear, in contrast to IPI’s interpretation, that Muslims voted for Ram because he was more supportive of the British during a time when, in support of the Pakistan Plan, Muslims had pledged loyalty to the British Government and refused

¹⁶ Extract from New Scotland Yard Report No. 297, 9 May 1945. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

¹⁷ See Chapter 5 above.

to cooperate with “anti-British” Sikhs.¹⁸ Khan, described in September 1944 as “the bitter anti-Pakistan pamphleteer,” was welcomed back into the leadership of the IWA by Sikhs in Coventry who rejected the partition plan.¹⁹ The fact that Khan’s political fortunes were tied in large measure to a worldview that repudiated the arbitrary power of a tyrannical regime foreshadows the trajectory of his postwar career as a pamphleteer and critic of colonial oppression.

It should be noted that opposition to Pakistan in the mid-1940s was not only a question of communalism. Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan worked with the admittedly right-wing Committee of Indian Congressmen and Amir Shah in December 1944 to establish an Anti-Pakistan Committee.²⁰ Furthermore, at an IWA conference held in conjunction with the British Center Against Imperialism, Nizam-ud-din asserted that the Muslim League served to “create disunity amongst Muslims in Great Britain.” The League’s failure was evident in the broad support that South Asian Muslims in Britain gave to the Indian National Congress prior to partition.²¹

As a polemicist and organizer, Khan stitched together his disdain for the Mountbatten plan for partition with a sustained critique of imperialism throughout Africa and Asia. Demonstrating against partition did not necessarily indicate religious antagonism; rather, it signified a principled opposition to British imperialism and communalism. In early January 1946, his pamphlet “Might is Right” came to IPI’s attention, who, in turn, lamented that it

¹⁸ IPI, “Indian Activities in the United Kingdom,” 8 March 1944. L/PJ/12/646. IOR. Anant Ram was elected as Secretary of the Coventry section, with Khan as President, in 1946. Subsequently, in June 1947, during a meeting of Sikhs and Muslims at the Tom Mann Hall in Coventry, Ram and Khan jointly issued a resolution against partition that was unanimously accepted. Thus, any perception of Ram as an apologist for Pakistan in Britain appears to have been fleeting. See Extract from New Scotland Yard, Report No. 19 (New Series), 19 June 1947. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

¹⁹ IPI, “Indian Activities in the United Kingdom,” 25 September 1944. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

²⁰ IPI, “Indian Activities in the United Kingdom,” 28 December 1944. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

²¹ Extract from Metropolitan Police Office Report (Special Branch), New Scotland Yard, London, 26 July 1946. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

“missed no opportunity to sling mud at Britain and the British Empire.”²² At the annual general meeting of the London IWA, Khan insisted that “the Indian Workers Association had always advocated the establishment of an Indian socialist republic” that was free of communal prejudice.²³ In June 1947, Khan chaired a protest meeting in Coventry convening nearly 100 Sikhs and Muslims to voice opposition to partition. During this meeting, Khan, a native of Gujranwala in what would become Pakistani Punjab, clarified that his opposition to partition was personal and that he “regretted the division of his home province” and that he “would never pay allegiance to any government formed by narrow-minded communalists.”²⁴ Indeed, the method of partition itself was rejected as an imperialist technique. Jan Mohamed, who chaired the IWA conference in Birmingham in June 1947, addressed a crowd of nearly 300 and said that he “would not tolerate the ‘Ulsterisation’ of India.”²⁵ In his pamphlet *Auf Wiedersehen*, Khan observed not just that “the vivisection of the Indian mainland is in progress today,” but that “European imperialism is following the same course everywhere.”²⁶ He echoed the anticolonial movement in Britain by lambasting the commonalities of imperial powers: “Having been suckled with the same milk of exploitation of colonial peoples and heartless drive for huge profits all imperialists are blood brothers.”²⁷

For Khan, India was the model for national self-determination across the colonized world. “Sometime or other in history the role of taking up the cause of the oppressed people has been the care of one nation or other,” he posited in *August 14/15*. It was France during the

²² IPI, “Indian Societies in the UK: October-December 1945,” 15 January 1946. L/PJ/12/646. IOR.

²³ Extract from Metropolitan Police Office Report (Special Branch), New Scotland Yard, London, 31 July 1946. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

²⁴ Extract from New Scotland Yard, Report No. 19 (New Series), 19 June 1947. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

²⁵ Extract from New Scotland Yard, Report No. 20 (New Series), 2 July 1947. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

²⁶ Chowdry Akbar Khan, *Auf Wiedersehen* (London: Hindustan Press, 1947), 1-7.

²⁷ Khan, *Auf Wiedersehen*, 7.

American Revolution and the United States since then. “Today it has fallen to the lot of India to give fillip to the liberation movements.”²⁸ In another pamphlet from 1953, he argued that “the freedom of the subcontinent of India has broken the backbone of imperialism and set the forces of liberty and emancipation free in the occupied parts of Asia and in Africa.” he cited the Mau uprising in Kenya as evidence of the “forces of liberty and emancipation” in Africa. Believing that the Mau Mau uprising was a justified resistance to “the colour cult” imposed by the European ruling class, he asked “who would twist the events of history to differentiate between the guerrillas fighting against the Nazis in the occupied countries of Europe and the Kikuyu rising against British Imperialism?”²⁹ In a call to arms against the treatment of the Kikuyu in Kenya, Khan reiterated the view that imperialism and fascism were ideologies of violence and domination. Furthermore, in *Storm Bound* he observed that “imperialism is taking cover behind the word ‘Communism’ to hide its own hideous rapaciousness.”³⁰ Though Khan rejected Soviet imperialism, he details with acuity the way in which imperialist administrations use communism as an excuse for continued interference: “America and her associates claim to be champions of human rights in the eastern European countries [against Soviet involvement], but the same rights are being denied by them to the peoples of Asia and Africa.”³¹

In the era of decolonization, Khan anticipated that African and Asian states would need to reverse the trend of fragmentation and partition and unite to protect their interests. This belief in consolidation is resonant throughout the pamphlets that he published in the decade after Indian independence. While accusing Pakistan of “[h]aving brought an unforgivable calamity upon the

²⁸ Chowdry Akbar Khan, *August 14/15* (London: Indian Workers Association, 1953), 4.

²⁹ Chowdry Akbar Khan, *Races Apart* (London: Indian Workers Association, 1953), 3-4.

³⁰ Chowdry Akbar Khan *Storm Bound* (London: Indian Workers Association, 1953), 4.

³¹ Khan, *Storm Bound*, 5.

Muslim inhabitants of the East Punjab,” in his *Indian Twins* from December 1947, Khan holds out hope for reunification “so that a sound foundation of federating all Asian countries be laid.”³² In *The Subcontinent Today*, which he published in 1955 just months after the conclusion of the Bandung Conference, Khan compared the economic development of India and Pakistan and he suggested that partition was to blame for many of the problems in both countries. Thus, he implored them to “come nearer each other to form a sort of confederation, a nucleus for the rest of the Asian and African countries to coalesce.”³³ Yet, continued tensions between India and Pakistan undermined not only the Bandung injunction for peaceful coexistence, but also, Khan believed, India’s potential as the “centre of a third bloc” to balance the Soviet Union and the United States.³⁴ Khan’s writings present a theory of Bandung politics that were to be pursued by South Asian migrants in the era of mass migration. In the years that Khan was most prolific, there remained a small population of India-born workers in Britain. But, as the economy reached full employment and British industry and services sought labour around the world to come and contribute to its rebuilding, Khan’s theory was operationalized.

Immigration Control: Solving an Imaginary Crisis

The era of mass migration and migrant politics in 1960s Britain were both shaped by the move toward immigration control legislation by the British Government in the late 1950s. Threats of immigration control contribute in large measure to the numbers of South Asian immigrants coming to Britain in the first years of the decade who sought to “beat the ban.” The perception that immigration control unfairly targeted nonwhite Commonwealth migrants,

³² Chowdry Akbar Khan, *Indian Twins* (London: Indian Workers Association), 8.

³³ Chowdry Akbar Khan, *The Subcontinent Today* (London: CA Brock and Co, Ltd., 1955), 10-11.

³⁴ Chowdry Akbar Khan, *The Tale of the Two* (London, 1958), 6.

migrants from Canada, Australia, and other “old” Commonwealth countries were exempted, was foundational to migrant activism. Prior to exploring the particular dynamics of migrant political behavior as it was shaped by the priorities of Bandung, this section will examine the history of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 and provide a gloss of the alternative strategies that were considered, the rationales for the Act, and the domestic criticism and retrospective considerations of the Act’s achievements that began to emerge in 1965. By the mid-1960s it became clear that Harold Wilson’s Labour Government would retain, and augment, restrictions imposed by its Conservative predecessor.

The Government, unsatisfied that South Asian and Afro-Caribbean people had continued to arrive in Britain, noting that immigration from India and Pakistan had “doubled and trebled, respectively, during the previous two years,” despite non-legislative attempts to limit immigration, introduced the Commonwealth Immigrants Act for debate on 1 November 1961 and enacted it on 1 July 1962.³⁵ The Act established a voucher scheme for would-be immigrants, category A for those coming with genuine job offers, category B for those coming with special skills, category C for those coming without a guaranteed job and without special skills. By June 1964, according to a background note on the act distributed by the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), “there were some 300,000 applications outstanding for Cat. C vouchers, of which some 90% came from Indians and Pakistanis.” This statistic demonstrates both the inefficiency of the system at processing voucher applications and the determination of South Asians to come to Britain and work. Although there was initial criticism of the Act in government, the CRO satisfied itself that “immigration controls have been operated on a non-discriminatory basis as

³⁵ “Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1962,” Commonwealth Relations Office Memo, 30 September 1964, page 1. DO 175/177. TNA.

well as much more liberally and humanely than was originally feared, criticism of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in other parts of the Commonwealth has ceased.”³⁶ This statement ignores the sustained campaign against the ban on cross-border migration that was led by recent migrants from South Asia and the Caribbean.

Though the Commonwealth Relations Office defended the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, it did not believe that it was the ideal or inevitable solution for Britain’s stated population problems. For the duration of the 1950s, Government ministers sought a different course. In April 1958, AW Snelling, Commonwealth Relations Officer, wrote to RWD Fowler in Karachi insisting that “we are determined to put a stop to the wave of immigration from Pakistan into this country without, unless absolutely necessary, resorting to legislation.”³⁷ A year later, a Working Party on Commonwealth immigration reported to the Home Office that, believing the situation to be manageable, “there was no pressing demand for the imposition of controls over the number of immigrants arriving in this country.”³⁸ In the immediate post-war period, the British government continued to focus on the Punjabi peddler community as the most acute immigration concern that South Asia presented. But at this time, the government did not believe that the South Asian population was overwhelming; rather, it complained, as usual, that peddlers constituted undesirable migrants for a vague set of reasons.³⁹

³⁶ “Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1962,” Commonwealth Relations Office Memo, 30 September 1964. DO 175/177. TNA. It must be observed that the notion that a law designed to scapegoat nonwhite immigrants largely from the Caribbean and South Asia for long-standing social problems was not inherently discriminatory is risible and the race-based logic for immigration control showed contempt for human equality.

³⁷ Snelling to Fowler, 11 April 1958. DO 35/7985. TNA.

³⁸ Working Party to report on the social and economic problems arising from the growing influx into the United Kingdom of coloured workers from other Commonwealth countries. “Draft Progress Report to the Ministerial Committee.” 10 June 1959. DO 35/7983. TNA.

³⁹ Nationality Department Memo 28/4/3. 6 August 1952. HO 213/1625. TNA.

Because of British concerns, the Indian government had attempted to restrict the issue of passports to would-be migrant workers, reserving the privilege of travel for social and economic elites. In 1958, Ranbir Singh, Chief Passport Officer for the Government of India, distributed a “Note on the Government of India’s Policy in Relation to the Issue of Passports for the UK with particular reference to the migration of Indians,” which was reminiscent of the general prohibition on the issue of passports working-class Indians that was issued in 1931. In his Note, Singh noted that in “early in 1955 a firm directive was issued by the Ministry of External Affairs which had the immediate effect of inhibiting and, but for a few marginal cases pertaining to forgeries and other types of illicit traffic, preventing the migration to England of Indian nationals with low educational and financial qualification -- particularly those who were potential peddlers and hawkers.” Ranbir Singh continued that “as a matter of course, Regional Passport Officers do not issue passports to those persons who, having educational qualifications less than that of a graduate and being patently possessed of very limited financial means, seek to go to the U.K. for employment or allegedly for study or for any other purpose.” Even if, Singh admitted, “some miscreants have been caught,” he refused to agree with the UK Commissioner’s opinion that undesirable migration was a commonplace occurrence and, instead, insisted that “illicit traffic...remains very marginal.”⁴⁰ The Acting High Commissioner in Delhi sent a telegram to the Commonwealth Relations Office in November 1958 praising India’s efforts to undermine the mobility of “undesirable persons” with the establishment of a new protocol for the issue of

⁴⁰ Ranbir Singh. “Note on the Government of India’s Policy in Relation to the Issue of Passports for the UK with Particular Reference to the Migration of Indians.” 17 November 1958. DO 35/7986. TNA.

passports. This policy stated that the applicant must provide assurances against requiring state funds for repatriation in the event of destitution abroad.⁴¹

The pretext, then, for restrictive immigration legislation appears, *prima facie*, based on the economic strain that nonwhite Commonwealth citizens put on Britain. Concerns over unemployment, destitution, and repatriation, mixed with the notion that the country was being overwhelmed by migrants in the 1950s resound in the public narrative that the government constructed. The propaganda campaign that went into effect in 1958 aimed to discourage people from migrating from India and Pakistan because of the difficulty that they would experience in their search for work. In 1961, the Working Party on Commonwealth Immigration reported that 15,700 migrants from India, Pakistan, and the Caribbean arrived in Britain in August of that year. Yet, “despite this enormous influx it remains true that there is remarkably little unemployment amongst the immigrants.”⁴² An additional report by the Working Party observes that migrants were engaged in industries “where there is an acute labour shortage” and migrants, therefore, “make a contribution to the productive capacity of the economy.”⁴³ Correspondence between the Department of Employment and regional offices of the Ministry of Labour give additional details about the employment of Commonwealth migrants. In these letters, employment patterns emerge demonstrating the importance of Commonwealth migrants to local transport and other city services as well as manufacturing and hospital staff. According to the London and South Eastern Regional Office, “this region was significantly reliant on male

⁴¹ Acting High Commissioner, Delhi, to Commonwealth Relations Office, 14 November 1958. DO 35/7986. TNA.

⁴² Working Party to report on the social and economic problems arising from the growing influx into the United Kingdom of coloured workers from other Commonwealth countries, “Report to Ministerial Committee,” 26 September 1961, DO 175/55. TNA.

⁴³ Working Party to report on the Social and economic problems arising from the growing influx into the United Kingdom of coloured workers from other Commonwealth countries, “Economic Effects of Immigration into the United Kingdom. Memorandum by the Treasury,” No Date [1963], LAB 8/2867. TNA.

‘coloured labour’.”⁴⁴ In addition to the admission that many industries relied on Commonwealth labour, Exchange Managers later admitted to the Ministry of Labour that “when immigrants first arrived in a locality there was a general reluctance amongst employers to be the first to engage them.” Thus, Employment Exchange Managers confirmed that migrants were not unemployed due to any lack of opportunity or willingness to work but rather because employers colluded against them.⁴⁵

Even though the levels of migration from South Asia to Britain were both manageable and necessary for the British economy, the British Government was determined to reduce to the lowest possible amount the numbers of Indians and Pakistanis moving to Britain. In April 1958, IC Edwards, Commonwealth Relations Officer in the Information Department, wrote an Intra-departmental missive to Benjamin Cockram about a strategy to disseminate propaganda “to discourage the flow of Immigrants” from India and Pakistan.⁴⁶ Of particular concern, according to CW Dixon, was to dissuade “unskilled uneducated labourers...migrating to this country and swelling the ranks of the unemployed” Yet, Dixon admitted that he did not know how many South Asian migrants were unemployed and observed that “our real need therefore is to have statistics of the numbers of Indians and Pakistanis who are unemployed.”⁴⁷ In other words, the Government sought to solve a problem that it had no proof existed. Malcolm MacDonald, UK High Commissioner in India, emphasized that the task was all the more difficult because “we have painted for so many years, through our Information Services, a bright picture of life in the

⁴⁴ Healy to Morgan, 5 September 1963. LAB 8/2867. TNA.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Labour, Meeting Minutes: Integration into Employment of Commonwealth Migrants, 16 November 1965. LAB 8/3109. TNA.

⁴⁶ Edwards to Cockram, 24 April 1958. DO 35/9501. TNA.

⁴⁷ Dixon to Cullingford, 31 July 1958. DO 35/9501. TNA.

United Kingdom, it is obviously impossible and it would be wrong for us to put this process into sharp reverse.”⁴⁸ Yet, Gilbert Laithwaite, Permanent Under-secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, observed in a note to MacDonald, because “the information machinery should be used to bring home to a particular section of the Indian public the fact that life in the United Kingdom for the unskilled immigrant is, in the present economic situation, likely to prove hard and difficult” without undermining the message of “economic progress and advance.” Accordingly, in the summer of 1958, the Information Department drafted nine articles for the English, Punjabi and Urdu press in India, with titles such as “Too many chase too few jobs” (13 May 1958), “From Rawalpindi to Birmingham but no job” (16 May 1958), and “No work for the tailor from Ludhiana” (18 June 1958), that intended to discourage migration with a targeted depiction of economic hardship for unskilled workers.

The net effect of the propaganda campaign itself seems to have had, at best, marginal results. The CRO recognized that the style of feature that the Information Services had produced was not likely to get a warm reception by Indian newspaper editors who “reject anything they feel to be propaganda.” Therefore, entire draft articles had to be scrapped because the tone and message were “too vague and rhetorical, and we still feel that this approach is so contrived and artificial that Indian editors would not only reject it but might even find it offensive.” A representative article of this sort, initially approved by the Central Office of Information before protests came from officials in India, concludes that “these pseudo-adventurers,” as the article refers to migrant workers, “must be saved from their own enthusiasm for the sake of themselves and their families.”⁴⁹ Moreover, information gleaned from Indian officials indicated that the

⁴⁸ MacDonald to Lincott, 14 May 1958. DO 35/9501. TNA.

⁴⁹ Draft article “Pseudo-Adventurers,” No Date [1958]. DO 35/9501. TNA.

depiction of the British ability to absorb new labour made it appear stagnant. According to the Director of Publicity in the Ministry of External Affairs for the Government of India, the anti-migration propaganda was seized on by Communists in Punjab as “a true reflection of what life throughout the capitalist countries has become. Rising unemployment, rapacious landlords, colour-bar, poor and unsuitable food, bad health, and all are grist to the mill of the Communist propagandist.”⁵⁰

Not only did the propaganda create a negative view of the British economy and receive criticism from South Asian stakeholders, it also seems to have intentionally obfuscated popular sentiment about Commonwealth migration from India, Pakistan, and the Caribbean. During postwar reconstruction and full employment, sessile and vagile workers were readily soaked up by British industry and city services. Thus, regardless of the attempt to discourage South Asians from migrating purely on threat of poor employment prospects, a memo on the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 issued by the Labour Department in 1965 performed a feat of selective memory and remembered that

the restriction of immigration has never been argued on manpower grounds. There is still an unsatisfied demand for labour; certain occupations have come to rely on a flow of immigrant workers; and low unemployment figures show that immigrants are absorbed into employment. Restriction have been based on social (housing, health, education, public order, etc.) considerations rather than on the manpower position, and decisions on immigration must depend on weighing these factors against our manpower needs.”⁵¹

Perhaps it is because the Office of Information sought, in 1958, to deter migrants by using empirically problematic information rather than saying, as was routine in intra-departmental memos, that Commonwealth migrants faced significant and unyielding racial stigma in most

⁵⁰ Hughes to Cockram, 11 July 1958. DO 35/9501. TNA.

⁵¹ “Emigration and Immigration,” Labour Department Memo. No Date [1965]. LAB 8/2864. TNA.

parts of the country that the Government was perceived as blaming Commonwealth migrants for undermining British prosperity in a period of economic stagnation.

For the CRO in the mid-1960s, the reason for immigration control legislation was because the government believed that nonwhite migrants were not welcome in Great Britain and limiting their arrivals was the best way to maintain law and order. As A. Sivanandan has suggested, scapegoating Commonwealth migrants, as this rationale does, facilitated the emergence of white nationalist organizations and normalized violence against black and brown residents.⁵² The propaganda campaign began in the same year as the racial violence at Notting Hill and Nottingham, which made the uncertainties of a multi-racial society urgent questions for policymakers. The urge to restrict nonwhite migrants was rooted in hopes of allaying the “acute social tensions” that had emerged in the latter part of the decade.⁵³ The presence of a nonwhite workforce led to vociferous protests by white workers across the country. According to JC Healy of the London and South Eastern Regional Office of the Ministry of Labour, “Many well-disposed employers who have tried to avoid a quota have suffered economically because of the loss of trained white workers, or because output (quality and quantity) has suffered.”⁵⁴

The single greatest factor in South Asian migration to the UK in the years leading up to the Commonwealth Immigration Bill was the prospect of immigration control itself. Thus, more Indians and Pakistanis came to Britain because the Bill was discussed then might have come had no control been considered. Moreover, it is sufficiently clear that there was in no sense an

⁵² Sivanandan, “From resistance to rebellion,” 116.

⁵³ Working Party to report on the Social and economic problems arising from the growing influx into the United Kingdom of coloured workers from other Commonwealth countries, “Economic Effects of Immigration into the United Kingdom. Memorandum by the Treasury,” No Date [1963], LAB 8/2867. TNA.

⁵⁴ Healy to Morgan, 5 September 1963. LAB 8/2867. TNA.

overwhelming number of Commonwealth immigrants, no strain on services, and no excessive unemployment among this group that would necessitate restriction in the first place. Yet, because immigration control was introduced the numbers of immigrants came at a higher rate only exacerbating the rationale for control, which fundamentally was to mitigate social tensions that emerged because white Britons were uncomfortable with black and brown neighbors. From 1960 to 1962, South Asian migration exploded from fewer than 10,000 per year from India and Pakistan in 1957 (the previous high mark) to more than 40,000 in 1961 and 90 thousand in 1962 prior to the Act taking effect. Immediately after the Act went into force, the numbers of Indian migrants receded to 1950s numbers for the remainder of 1962 and, according to the Times, immigration from Pakistan virtually stopped. Yet, beginning in 1963 those numbers again resembled that of 1960 (roughly 40,000 South Asian migrants per year). Moreover, the ebbs and flows of commonwealth immigration correlated with the numbers of unemployed in Britain. Thus, when unemployment ticked up between 1957-1959, Commonwealth immigration declined and in times of full employment.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ "The Sikh -- 12 Jobs in 18 Months -- is a Manual Misfit," *The Times* (London, England), 19 January 1965.

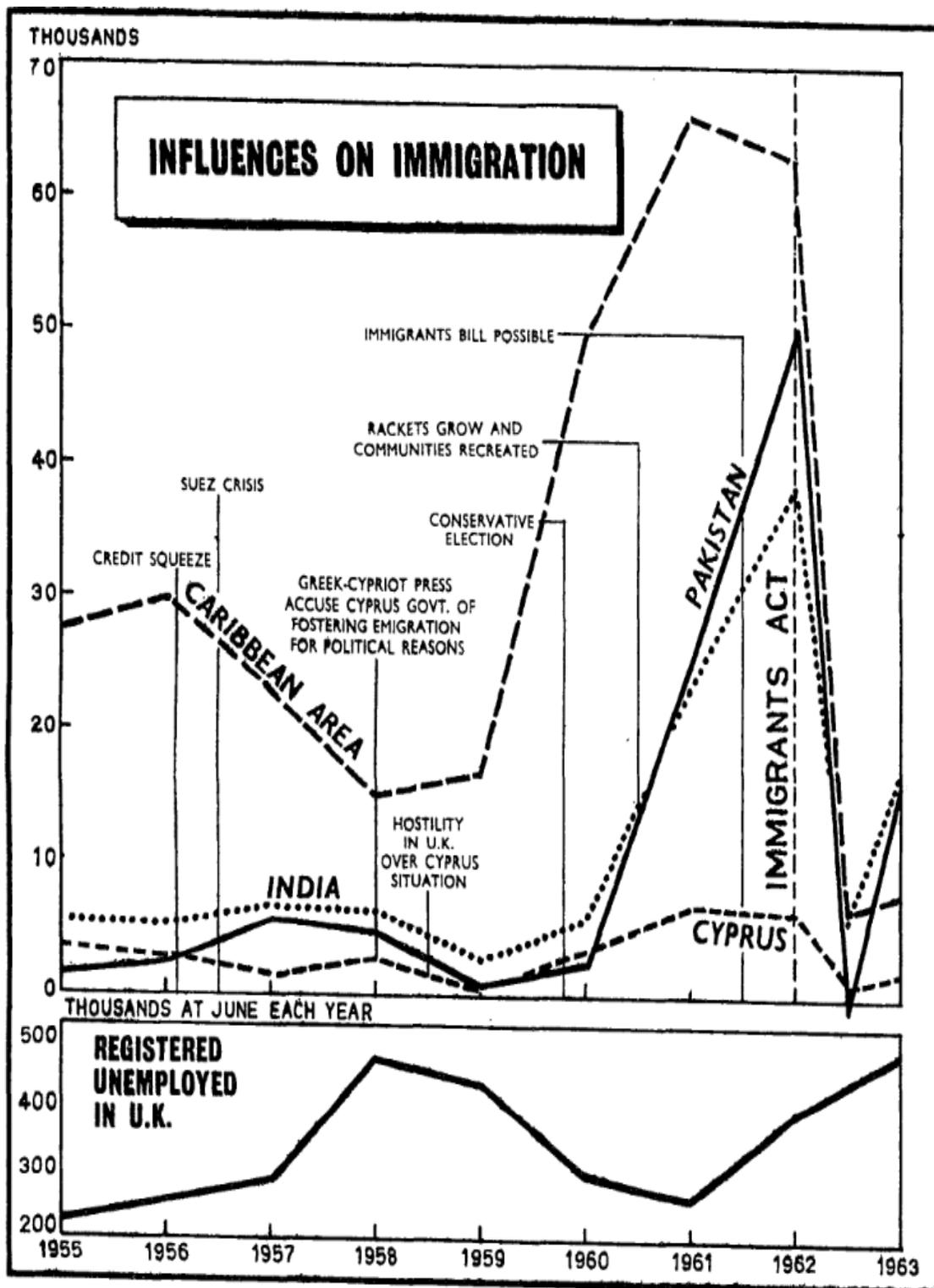


Image 1. Image taken from "The Sikh -- 12 Jobs in 18 Months -- is a Manual Misfit," *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, January 19, 1965; pg. 13.

Though the Government had tried to avoid legislation and hoped to minimize migration through misinformation, by 1961 the Commonwealth Relations Office conceded to support immigration restriction legislation “rather than incur the increasing risk of racial strife in this country.”⁵⁶ The CRO’s position confirms that immigration restriction was not about Britain’s ability to absorb new workers but rather about Britain’s unwillingness to welcome nonwhite people. A brief comparative accounting of migration patterns from European and non-European sources will help to clarify the question of population growth both on quantity alone and the geographic origin of the migrants. According to the 1951 census for Great Britain, 127,000 natives of the Indian subcontinent resided in England and Wales with an additional 9,039 South Asians living in Scotland, which constituted fifty percent of the total Commonwealth population.⁵⁷ By 1964, a report from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government numbered the South Asian population at 330,000, with many migrants arriving prior to the enactment of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in order “beat the ban.” However, the rate of migration from Europe is remarkably understated in this report. Appendix C notes that in 1951 the total overseas-born European residents in the United Kingdom was 745,000 compared to 218,000 non-European. By 1961, though the non-European population grew at a faster rate, the European population numbered 901,000 and the non-European population was 517,000.⁵⁸ In short, the total migration to the United Kingdom was dominated by Europe, which was not subject to the

⁵⁶ Cleary to Chadwick, 12 September 1961. DO 175/55. TNA.

⁵⁷ Great Britain, Census of 1951, “Birthplace of persons born outside the United Kingdom, Islands of the British Seas and the Irish Republic.” General Register Office, 25 September 1956. LAB 8/2867. The Census referred to those born in Pakistan, India, and Ceylon but it hardly needs to be stipulated that in 1951 very few South Asian migrants in Britain would have been born in Pakistan because most migrants were single men who would have been born in colonial India prior to the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Statistics Branch. “Commonwealth Immigrants - I: Geographical Distribution, Age-Sex-Structure and Marital Condition. England and Wales.” January 1965. LAB 8/2867.

Commonwealth Immigrants Act. This phenomenon further demonstrates that the British economy was equipped to absorb migrants, regardless of their origin.

Thus, the issue that necessitated legislation was not the overall number of migrants and the threat of an overwhelmed society, or even with presumed cultural differences that Caribbean and South Asian migrants presented. Rather, the complaint was that black and brown people were in Britain at all. The social strain that the government perceived in the early-1960s was fundamentally an unwillingness on the part of white Britons to tolerate the presence of nonwhite migrants from former colonial possessions whose presence was important in the rebuilding of Britain after the war. The political awakening of these migrants was spurred on by government action that lent validity to racism in Britain and combined with the decolonial movement for peace and friendship enshrined in the Bandung Conference of 1955.

Praxis of Bandung

The Coventry branch of the Indian Workers Association provide early instances of Bandung-inspired resistance from in the mid-1950s to early-1960. South Asian political activity in the early post-war period actively sought the support of municipal agencies and the local Labour Party to combat racial segregation and hiring discrimination by challenging and changing policy. Under the leadership of Rajmal Singh, the IWA in Coventry focused on the hiring practices of the Coventry City Transport Department. In 1955, Gurdev Singh Dhami, the Secretary for the Coventry branch, wrote to the Coventry Trades Council to express the association's gratitude "for the steps [the Council has] taken in dealing with the question of Colour Bar confronting the coloured people in the UK in general and Coventry in particular."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Dhami to Secretary, Trades Council, 13 February 1955. Mss. 5/3/2/44. Modern Records Centre (MRC). University of Warwick.

Nevertheless, the IWA remained vigilant in defense of the right of South Asian, often specifically Punjabi Sikh, migrants to secure employment in the face of blatantly discriminatory hiring practices. In 1960, Rajmal Singh stated that the continued reluctance on the part of the city to hire “coloured crews” underscored the official racism of the city. He further suggested that, in view of contemporary events around the integration of the Arkansas schools in the United States, “in the whole of the Midlands, Coventry City Transport is a Little Rock of Coventry.”⁶⁰ In his reference to the American Civil Rights movement, Singh anticipated that South Asian and Caribbean migrants would begin deploying strategies of non-cooperation and non-violent direct action against racism and colonialism throughout the decade.

The coalescence against racism and colonialism among South Asian migrants in the 1950s was the product of a history of anticolonial resistance and the experience of discrimination in Britain. Though the Final Communique of Bandung served as a list of priorities that focused the activism of migrants, Jawaharlal Nehru’s example and his imprint on international relations in the 1950s was inspirational. As the first Prime Minister of India and long-time advocate for national liberation movements, Nehru’s influence on Indian politics in postwar Britain can hardly be overestimated. As early as 1927, as a convener of the League Against Imperialism’s inaugural conference, Nehru’s status in the international anticolonial movement was well-known and appreciated in Britain. Having supported myriad conferences for national self-determination in Europe, mutual admiration for Nehru helped to draw Indian nationalists and Pan-Africanists closer together as co-agitators in interwar Britain.⁶¹ As an architect of non-alignment and the regional cooperation embodied in Bandung, and the 1954 Colombo agreement, as well as

⁶⁰ Singh to Ritchie, 25 April 1960. Mss. 11/3/23/181. MRC.

⁶¹ See chapter 5 above.

nationalist hero, Nehru was central to Indian demands for just treatment in Britain. Indeed, the gathering at Bandung was largely the result of the determination and collaboration of Nehru, Abdul Nasser of Egypt, and Indonesian President Ahmed Sukarno. Though Bandung allowed Nehru to “consolidate his position as a recognized world leader,” his support for the Five Principles for World Peace was first codified in the Sino-Indian Treaty of 1954. Subsequently Nehru enthusiastically endorsed the Five Principles when he met with the leaders of Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, and Indonesia at the Asian Prime Ministers’ Conference in Colombo later that year.⁶² Nehru’s views on international peace and non-alignment were thus often reflected in the political alliances that Indian migrants forged in Britain.

Nehru was praised as a leader for regional cooperation and as a champion of the oppressed. Chowdry Akbar Khan proudly declared Nehru’s rising prominence in his 1953 pamphlet on the wounds of partition titled *August 14/15*. Reviewing the history of national liberation movements dating to the American Revolutionary War, Khan believed that India had emerged as the defender of the oppressed. Indeed, “if the Africans had any spokesman interested in their freedom it is Nehru of India.”⁶³ For Khan, Nehru embodied the anti-racism that was integral to the spirit of Bandung. Citing manifold examples of “the racial trends and policies ingrained in the Westerners for generations past,” including apartheid, travel bans, and Jim Crow, Khan proclaimed “[n]ature demands and puts forward an agent to stand up for the weak against tyranny and injustice.”⁶⁴ Not only was Nehru an anti-racist and anti-imperialist luminary, but he was also a leader among postcolonial states who was able to secure additional support for

⁶² “World Tolerance is Urged by Nehru: He Says Peace Requires End of ‘Malice’ -- Warns Against Any Interference in Asia,” *New York Times*, 4 May 1954.

⁶³ Khan, *August 14/15*, 4.

⁶⁴ Khan, *August 14/15*, 5.

national liberation movements across the region, including Pakistan and “other Muslims nations represented in the U[nited] N[atations] O[rganization].” With such leadership, Khan added, “a middle block must emerge...a bloc to keep the capitalist and Communist adversaries in check for the maintenance of the sorely needed peace in the world of today.”⁶⁵ Thus, while the non-aligned movement had not yet emerged in earnest and the Bandung conference still nearly two years away, Khan recognized Nehru as a force for peace navigating between bellicose superpowers.

Khan’s reverence for Nehru in the 1950s was expanded into the 1960s through official statements and delegations from the Indian Workers Association. Affording the Association status as an unofficial representative of Indians in Britain, Nehru gave an audience to the IWA during his visits to London during which IWA officers voiced grievances to the Prime Minister about the difficulties Indians experienced in Britain.⁶⁶ “It is a matter of great pride and honour for the Indians,” the IWA Central Executive Committee (CEC) wrote in 1962, “that ever since India became independent it p[ursued] a policy [of] peace in the world.”⁶⁷ Nehru’s perceived abilities to negotiate between hostile parties was on full display during the Berlin Crisis of 1961, which threatened to erupt into violence between the Allies and the USSR.⁶⁸ For their part, noting anxiety over the “present international situation,” the IWA reaffirmed its belief in peaceful cooperation and the rule of law as it issued a press release in support of “the efforts of the Prime Minister Mr. Nehru to promote a solution of the problem through negotiations and not through use of force.” Moreover, in a demonstration of Nehru’s influence on their views on the situation,

⁶⁵ Khan, *August 14/15*, 5.

⁶⁶ Rai to Singh, 11 May 1960. MS 2141/A/4/1/1. Wolfson Center.

⁶⁷ CEC to Nehru, 18 September 1962. MS2141/A/4//16/2. Wolfson Center.

⁶⁸ Robert B. Rakove, “The Rise and Fall of Non-Aligned Mediation, 1961-6,” *The International History Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 995-998.

the CEC emphasized that peace treaties should be signed between East and West Germany and was adamant in its opposition to “any militarization of West Germany.”⁶⁹

Upon Nehru’s death in May 1964, IWA organizer Avtar Singh Jouhl gathered supporters in the industrial Midlands town of Smethwick to mourn him. In his address he noted that “the contribution for which he will be most remembered is in the sphere of international relations. For his attempts to bring about a better understanding between nations he became internationally respected.”⁷⁰ In November of that year, hoping that his successors would follow Nehru’s example, the IWA reached out to Indian Finance Minister TT Krishnamachari and Indira Gandhi, Nehru’s daughter and Minister of Information and Broadcasting, during their time at the Commonwealth Prime Minister’s Conference in London. In this memo, the Central Executive Committee reiterated its support for the “policy of non-alignment based on the five noble principles of peace.” Although the Sino-Indian border dispute would appear to undermine Nehru’s commitment to regional cooperation, the IWA leadership was undeterred: “Shri Nehru had said that it is futile to think either for China to defeat India or for India to defeat China, and he had rightly prophesied that the ultimate solution for this problem can only be found through peaceful means acceptable to both sides.”⁷¹ Through the policies of non-alignment and peaceful cooperation, the IWA was happy to assert its patriotism in the age of Nehruvian Idealism.⁷²

⁶⁹ IWA Central Executive Committee Meeting Minutes. 27 August 1961. MS2141/A/1/1/24. Wolfson Centre.

⁷⁰ Draft Press Statement, No Date [1964]. MS 2141/A/9/1/16. Wolfson Centre.

⁷¹ Joshi and Singh to Krishnamachari and Gandhi, 11 July 1964. MS 2141/A/4/7/1-9. In November 1964, Jagmohan Joshi, Secretary of the IWA, wrote to Lal Bahadur Shastri, Nehru’s successor, to acknowledge that the latter would be unavailable to meet a delegation from the Indian Workers Association. Joshi implored Shastri for a meeting so that he will not return to India “without knowing what is happening to his countrymen abroad.” Joshi to Shastri, 27 November 1964. MS2141/A/4/7/13. Wolfson Centre.

⁷² For a summary of Nehruvian Idealism: Anirudh Deshpande, “Revisiting Nehruvian Idealism in the Context of Contemporary Imperialism,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 52 (30 December 2006-5 January 2007): 5408-5413.

Beyond addressing memos to Indian Government ministers in the wake of Nehru's death, the IWA also attempted to practice a politics of cooperation in the early 1960s in the face of international conflicts involving India. Indeed, the concern that IWA expressed about India's relationship with Pakistan and China in the early 1960s and its belief in international solidarity evokes Chowdry Akbar Khan's notion of an Asian nucleus at the center of Bandung's Third World. Reminiscent of the demands of the Final Communiqué, the IWA issued a press release in July 1964 on China's status outside of the United Nations. It reminded readers that the IWA had been a resolute supporter of China and lamented that "it is nothing but a mockery of such a vast proportion of humanity" that the UN refuses to admit China. The release also called attention to a resolution that the IWA passed at its biennial national meeting suggesting that the UN would remain constitutionally unfit to act as arbiter of international conflict until China was made a member state. Furthermore, directing its ire at the Indian Government, the statement noted that a recent official Indian delegation to Taiwan only serves to "increase tensions" between the two countries in opposition, from the IWA's perspective, to the dictates of mutual non-interference.⁷³

More significant than the IWA's vocal support for China's place at the UN, was the joint effort between the Indian and Pakistani Workers Associations in Birmingham to mitigate against violence during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. According to the *Evening Mail*, Urdu and Gurmukhi pamphlets titled "War Means Ruin" had begun surfacing in Smethwick factories instructing South Asian workers to be civil at work and avoid discussing the war. An English draft of the document, co-signed by K. Ali of the Pakistani Workers Association, and Jagmohan Joshi, began by cautioning that "the fighting between India and Pakistan is causing a great deal

⁷³ Press Release, 8 July 1964. MS 2141/A/4/15/7. Wolfson Centre.

of concern to all peace-loving people.” Not only did the war between the two states not benefit their citizens, but also if “this friction...can only weaken our fight for equal rights and justice” as South Asians in Britain. Not twenty years since the creation of Pakistan and India, the violence of 1947 was fresh in the minds of the authors: “Those of us who saw the terrible days of partition will surely not want to see a repetition of such horrors.” Invoking “our cultural and historical relationship,” Ali and Joshi were confident that “our people...will not get carried away in a wave of ‘jingoism’.” However, fully aware of the salience of nationalism and the bitter relationship between these two states, the pamphlet called on the “extremist sections of both communities...to join us in our appeal to the govts [sic] to end the fighting.”⁷⁴ The published version of the pamphlet pleaded that “[i]t is the foremost duty of Indians and Pakistanis in Britain to live together in peace and harmony;” an injunction steeped in the ideology of Bandung.⁷⁵

The Indian Workers Association recognized the importance of inter-group alliances for mutual benefit and protection. Although coordinating with progressive parties and migrant organizations was not a new approach, it gained new momentum in the post-Bandung period.⁷⁶ The Indian Workers Association, Great Britain (IWAGB), which was established in 1958 to consolidate all branch organizations under a single Central Executive Committee, adopted a Constitution whose aims included “cooperation with Trade Union and Labour Movement” along with the fundamental concern of safeguarding and improving the conditions of life and work for Indians in Britain.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the IWA actively participated in International Worker Day

⁷⁴ Press Statement, no date [1965]. MS2141/A/4/15/101. Wolfson Centre.

⁷⁵ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, no date [1965]. MS2141/A/4/15/103. Wolfson Centre.

⁷⁶ See Chapters 1 and 4 above.

⁷⁷ Indian Workers Association (Hindustani Mazdoor Sabha), Great Britain. Constitution. February 1959. Avtar Jouhl Papers MS 2141/A/3/1. Wolfson Centre.

celebrations in order to demonstrate solidarity with the labour movement. In 1961, the Birmingham branch circulated a flier for that city's May Day march, which was emblazoned with slogans from the labour and anti-colonial movements that epitomized Bandung-era politics, including "For Peace and Friendship," "For Workers Unity," and "For Colonial Freedom."⁷⁸ A year later, Avtar Singh Jouhl, General Secretary of the IWA in Birmingham, distributed a Punjabi call for participation in which he states "there is only one festival which surpasses all the boundaries of nations, nationalities, and religions. This festival of workers of the world is called May Day." Not only does this flier reveal a pedagogical orientation towards its audience seeking to inform local Punjabis about the importance of May Day and the labour movement, but it also affirms the centrality of internationalism to the Indian Workers Association political platform. By subordinating national and religious identity to international class consciousness, this flier appealed directly to the shared demands and common experience of the Indian and British working-class.⁷⁹ That same year, the IWA distributed a separate May Day announcement to protest the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962. The IWA criticized "the foul cankers of racial discrimination" and hoped to "extend out solidarity and friendship to all the peoples still fighting Imperialist Domination." In closing, the flier proclaimed "Long Live the Friendship of the British and Indian Workers. Long Live Peace."⁸⁰ May Day celebrations served as an annual demonstration of the expansive politics of friendship that South Asian activists adopted in the years after the Bandung Conference in the era of decolonization and mass migration.

⁷⁸ IWAGB, Birmingham Branch Circular. "May Day Demonstration." 23 April 1961. MS2141/A/8/2/2/1. Wolfson Centre.

⁷⁹ Jouhl to IWAGB, Birmingham Branch Members. No Date [1962]. MS2141/A/8/2/2/2. Wolfson Centre.

⁸⁰ IWABG, Birmingham Branch, Circular. No Date [1962]. MS2141/A/8/2/4/1. Wolfson Centre.

The Indian Workers Associations mobilized its alliances with the British Labor Movement and the Communist Party of Great Britain to protest war-time provisions that the Indian government refused to repeal. During the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the Indian government had enacted the Defence of India Ordinance, which included the Defense of India Rules (DIR). The Rules dated to the colonial administration during World War I that limited civil liberties in wartime. In an address to representatives of the Indian government in 1963, the IWA leadership maintained a tone of goodwill when discussing the Indian stance on the Chinese crisis. Though they noted that “grave concern was expressed by the Indian community at the armed conflict between the two major nations of Asia,” they expressed satisfaction that “Mr. Nehru has accepted the proposals of the Colombo plan and has expressed his willingness to [negotiate] with the Chinese according to this plan.”⁸¹ The IWA became increasingly critical of the Indian government’s reluctance to repeal the DIR, especially in the face of continued arrests of Indian citizens under the aegis of the Rules. In November 1964, Rattan Singh and Jagmohan Joshi sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri encouraging him to end Emergency Rule including the DIR and “thus restoring democracy in its full sense” to India.⁸² A few months later, in January 1965, Avtar Jouhl, on behalf of the Birmingham branch of the IWA, wrote to Shastri to condemn the arrest of Communist and Trade Union leaders for unlawful assembly, considering it “contrary to the concept of democracy.”⁸³ Through this process, the IWA and its allies came to see the Congress Party as an obstacle to Indian democracy and the suspension of due process for political rivals necessitated an urgent response.

⁸¹ Typescript Speech. No Date [February 1963]. MS2141/A/8/2/2/4. Wolfson Centre.

⁸² Singh and Joshi to Shastri, 28 November 1964. MS2141/A/4/7/14. Wolfson Centre.

⁸³ Jouhl to Shastri, 1 January 1965. MS2141/A/4/16/7. Wolfson Centre.

The news of mass arrests in India led to the IWA becoming a central organizing force in Britain and allowed it to claim support from the British labour movement with a protest rally in London on 28 March 1965 in defense of civil liberties in India. By the end of January, Joshi issued a request for trade union representation and messages of support by invoking the language of worker solidarity: “we feel sure that in the tradition of the British labour Movement which has always extended the hand of friendship to workers in other lands you will support us in this demonstration.” Joshi also invited specific trade unionists and politicians to speak out against the Indian government’s “serious violation of democratic principles.”⁸⁴ In response, Reg Birch from the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), and Rajani Palme Dutt of the CPGB, among others, agreed to address the assembly. Unions and political associations also sent messages in support of the protest. For instance, GH Phillips, of the Shard End branch of the AEU, wrote “may your efforts be crowned with victory,” and the Birmingham Branch of the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers sent a resolution to the Indian High Commissioner in London protesting “the mass imprisonment of Indian Communists without the opportunity of a fair trial through the normal legal machinery.”⁸⁵ The IWA mobilized members of the Association itself by chartering coaches to London from cities with active branches. Incorporating trade unions, political parties, and humanitarian organizations legitimized the struggles of opposition forces in India by making them visible to a wide cross-section of British society.

On 28 March, demonstrators assembled at Waterloo Bridge beginning at 12:30 PM and marched five miles east to the Hammersmith Town Hall. According to the socialist newspaper

⁸⁴ Joshi to Trade Union Representatives, 20 January 1965. MS2141/A/4/17/8. Wolfson Centre.

⁸⁵ Phillips to Joshi, 23 March 1965. MS2141/A/4/17/37. Wolfson Centre; District Secretary to Indian High Commission, 9 March 1965. MS 2141/A/4/17/31. Wolfson Centre.

Keep Left, more than 2000 Indian workers participated in the rally.⁸⁶ Before the event, Jagmohan Joshi and Rattan Singh issued a press release titled “Why we are Protesting,” which outlined the complaints against the Indian government. The release insisted that “the Emergency Rule and the D.I.R. are being used by the Government to suppress the genuine and just demands of the Indian people” and lamented the decline in India’s international prestige since Nehru’s death.⁸⁷ At the rally, one speaker alleged that the Communists had been targeted by the Government in part because of political realities, especially considering the success of the Communist Party in Kerala in South India, but mostly because the Communist Party had highlighted the food scarcity in India that had contributed to near-famine conditions. The message also dismissed the pretext of the arrests given by the Government that those arrested were supporters of the Chinese Communist Party and were therefore a destabilizing force in the years after the border conflict with China.⁸⁸ Dave Ashby, secretary of the Young Socialists, joined Reg Birch and Rajani Palme Dutt on the platform at the Hammersmith Town Hall and pointed out that, in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet doctrinal split, communism itself was not the focus of the government crackdown. While the Indian government continued to accept Soviet weapons, only those who supported the Chinese Communist Party were subject to arbitrary arrest. Though the national emergency was not rescinded until 1968, the mobilizations around civil liberties provided a clear opportunity for the IWA to embody the Bandung ideals of peaceful cooperation and friendship with British workers. The first half of 1965 was a period of transition in the relationship between the IWA

⁸⁶ *Keep Left*, “YS and Indians unite to Demand Freedom for Jailed Communists,” April 1965, pg. 8.

⁸⁷ IWA Circular. “Why We Are Protesting.” No Date [March 1965]. MS2141/A/4/16/35. Wolfson Centre. While this was the first large-scale mobilization against the independent Indian government by Indians in Britain, it is reminiscent of the campaign in support of “political prisoners” that the IWA mounted in 1942-43 in support of those arrested in connection to Subhas Chandra Bose’s Indian National Army. See Extract from New Scotland Yard Report. No. 257. 27 October 1943. L/PJ/12/645. IOR.

⁸⁸ Unsigned Address [Joshi]. No Date [28 March 1965]. MS 2141/A/4/17/50. Wolfson Centre.

and the Indian government. In the years following Nehru's death the rhetoric regarding the Sino-Indian War and the Emergency Rule changed and the IWA became actively antagonistic toward the Indian state.⁸⁹

In addition to espousing peaceful co-existence, the Asian-African Conference in Bandung was a call to arms against racism and colonialism. Indians in Britain participated in a sustained struggle against the vestiges of colonialism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In the Indian subcontinent, the continued Portuguese occupation of Goa in Western India was an animating force. As Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan reminded his readers in 1954, Indian territory remained under the "fascist government of Dr. Salazar" and insisted that "Goa is India, and must be returned to the motherland."⁹⁰ In celebration of the first anniversary of Goa's independence from Portugal, the Indian Workers Association in Birmingham hosted "Goa Day" on 7 January 1962.

Although events in the subcontinent structured the anticolonial politics of Indian activists in Britain, the more expansive view of the Bandung event informed further statements and demonstrations. In "The End of Empire?", a pamphlet distributed in 1960, the Association addresses a series of questions to the British worker:

Why should the Belgians agree to the independence of the Congo and then seek to subjugate it again? Why should the British Government divine the direction of the wind of change and leave Ghana while steadfastly maintaining its hold on Kenya? Why should the United States Government champion the cause of Indian freedom but look askance at the struggle for independence in Puerto Rico?

For the Indian Workers Association, the answers to the questions are rooted in the continued economic subjugation that African, Asian, and Latin American states to Western Imperialism. In these terms, the Association entreated the British labor movement to consider that "the end of

⁸⁹ See Chapter 7 below for a discussion of militant opposition to Indira Gandhi and the Emergency Rule of 1975-77.

⁹⁰ Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan, *Goa*, 1954 (London: Indian Workers Association, 1954), 3-7.

imperialism in all its forms is necessary before Britain itself can become a socialist state.” Thus, the labor movement and the anti-colonial movement were connected through global economic and political currents. Specifically, the Association hoped to impress upon a British audience that economic stagnation in Britain and neo-imperialist intervention in Asia and Africa combined to undermine the welfare of “the down-trodden people of the world” including British workers. Yet, embodied in immigration control legislation was the view that nonwhite migrants were to blame for problems with wages, housing, and education.⁹¹

The spirit of Bandung that informed migrant internationalism in Britain was heavily organized around a politics of anti-racism at home and abroad. Disdain for the South African government and any individual or government that would attempt to have normal relations with the apartheid state was a focal point for activist mobilization. Within the ambit of international politics and intergovernmental organizations that disciplined the proceedings at Bandung, South Africa clearly emerged as a pariah. It is telling that South Africa was among the very few countries that declined to sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.⁹²

The opprobrium directed at the apartheid government resounded among South Asians in Britain. In 1954, Chowdry Akbar Khan, anticipating Bandung’s opposition to “Soviet colonialism” and racial discrimination, observed the double-bind of decolonization in Africa. “Communism would naturally appeal to an African against the civilising mission of his white lord,” Khan opined. Yet, it would nonetheless result in foreign control and therefore “any Red

⁹¹ IWA Leaflet, “End of Empire?” September 1960. MS2142/A/1/6/2/1. Wolfson Centre. For instance, contrary to the justification of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, PW Rumble at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government remarked that “the housing problems of immigrants reflect the housing conditions in the big cities and it is in these cities that some of the most acute housing problems exist.” See Rumble to LeBailly, enclosure, 9 September 1964. DO 175/177. TNA.

⁹² Burke, *Decolonization and the evolution of International Human Rights*, 1.

domination would be as bad as the present white subjection of the Fascist Malanism.”⁹³ In a 1956 pamphlet, Khan made an explicit attack on the “demonic fury of racialism” and remembered that “the seed of hatred was nurtured under the soul-destroying care of Dr. Malan who, during the last war, pleaded his countrymen to join the side of Hitler against the Allies.”⁹⁴ In 1960, the reconstituted Indian Workers Association mobilized in support of Black South Africans as an act of anticolonial solidarity. Announcing a protest meeting at Priory School in Coventry for 3 April 1960, HD Dosanjh, General Secretary of the IWAGB, wrote that “the whole civilization is shocked at the massacre of 71 human-beings at Sharpeville in South Africa, along with the wounding of over 170 other Africans, struck down by the machine gun bullets of the South African Police.”⁹⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre, the Indian Workers Association in Coventry solicited Labour Party support for the inauguration of an Anti-Apartheid Committee.⁹⁶

The events at Sharpeville constituted a turning point for Indian support for Black South Africans and gave way to direct action against the regime and its apologists. In February 1961, the Birmingham Branch of the IWA passed a resolution at its Biennial Meeting against the South African government: “We demand that Dr. Verwoed should not be allowed to participate in the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference unless his Government repudiates its past repressive policies.”⁹⁷ Similarly, in 1964, the IWA National Organization passed a resolution in support of the “liberation movement of South Africa,” expressing both “deep admiration for the

⁹³ Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan, *Uneasy Head* (London: Indian Workers Association, 1954), 7. Daniel Francois Malan, Prime Minister of South Africa from 1948-1954, whose Nationalist Party introduced Apartheid.

⁹⁴ Chowdry Akbar Ali Khan, *Apartheid* (London: Indian Workers Association, 1956), 1

⁹⁵ H.D. Dosanjh, General Secretary, IWAGB. 28 March 1960. Mss. 11/3/23/132/3. MRC. Warwick. Also see Philip Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁹⁶ Singh to Ritchie, 25 April 1960. Mss. 11/3/23/181. MRC.

⁹⁷ IWA, Birmingham, Press Release, 26 February 1961. MS2141/A/4/15/3. Wolfson Centre.

courageous people of South Africa” and strong condemnation of the “obnoxious policy of apartheid and its accompanying fascist measures.”⁹⁸

The IWA further demanded that the British government pursue a program of boycott, divestment, and sanctions on the Apartheid state. The boycott campaign was realized, in part, in Birmingham as the Association demanded the resignation of Oscar Hahn, the President of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and recently appointed Chair of the West Midlands Conciliation Committee of the Race Relations Board. The complaint against Hahn was that he had led a trade delegation to South Africa immediately after his appointment to the Committee. Considering that the Committee was explicitly designed to facilitate migrant transitions to the West Midlands and mitigate racial discrimination, Jagmohan Joshi, the General Secretary of the IWAGB, demanded his resignation because “he does not have the confidence of the immigrant workers.”⁹⁹ Indeed, the appointment of Hahn had immediate ramifications for Indian perceptions of government accountability and commitment to combating racial injustice in the Midlands. In a letter to Joshi, CE Karunakaran reported that he had been refused service at The Star and Garter, a West Bromwich pub, which he admitted “are...no match to the more lasting effect on our people due to deprivation in the vital fields of jobs and houses.” Nonetheless, Karunakaran sought counsel from the IWA rather than the Conciliation Committee because, “As you know, its Chairman is now in South Africa, fraternising with an openly racist state.”¹⁰⁰ When Karunakaran’s complaint came to the attention of Maurice Foley, West Bromwich MP and Chairman of the Committee of Ministers on Immigrant Integration, his response was to

⁹⁸ Indian Workers Association (Hindustani Mazdoor Sabha), Great Britain. Biennial General Council Meeting, 19 April 1964. MS2141/1/1/5/1. Wolfson Centre.

⁹⁹ Joshi to Friends, No Date [1966]. MS2141/A/4/4. Wolfson Centre.

¹⁰⁰ Karunakaran to Joshi, 30 November 1966. MS2141/A/4/4. Wolfson Centre.

unhelpfully reassert the authority of the Race Relations Board and the West Midlands Conciliation Committee.¹⁰¹

On 1 December 1966, seventeen migrant and anti-racist organizations, including the Indian Workers Association, the Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD), the Pan-Africanist Congress, and the Anti-Apartheid Movement, met with John Lyttle, the Chair of the Race Relations Board and, to their surprise, Oscar Hahn, who presided over the meeting. Rather than discussing the migrant community's request that Hahn's appointment be reconsidered, the meeting became an opportunity for Hahn to repudiate allegations against him. According to the minutes of the meeting, Maurice Ludmer "pointed out that when the whole world, through the United Nations and the nonwhite people of S. Africa through their representatives, had called for sanctions, Mr. Hahn's action cannot but be regarded as strengthening the racialist gov't there." In response, Hahn outlined his myriad justifications for trading with South Africa. First, he dismissed the idea of boycotting South Africa and argued that it would necessitate a boycott of all countries with whom Britain "politically disagreed." Second, he claimed that economic engagement benefitted all South Africans and he cited that he had seen black people in cars during his most recent visit. Third, he posited that international trade was the most reliable way to dismantle apartheid because it would expand the South African market and lead to greater economic opportunities for Black South Africans. Finally, and most gravely, he predicted that that sanctions would lead to economic stagnation in South Africa and that "the whites will hit back and there will be bloodshed," as if to suggest, in the aftermath of Sharpeville, that apartheid was not already a bloody regime.

¹⁰¹ Foley to Joshi, 30 December 1966. MS2141/A/4/4. Wolfson Centre.

In a follow-up letter to Joshi, after the meeting in December, John Lyttle wrote that “I do hope that the outcome will be that you and Oscar Hahn can agree to differ on South Africa...I am sure you agree that his views on discrimination in this country are beyond reproach and indeed his views on apartheid too!”¹⁰² To be sure, this was not the consensus of the meeting. The representatives of the activist organizations remained “critical of many remarks made by Mr. Hahn” and sought an additional audience with Mark Bonham Carter, Chairman of the Race Relations Board, to protest Hahn’s appointment and the dissonance between racial conciliation and dismissal of apartheid.

For his part, Hahn, speaking at the Conference on Racial Equality in Employment in February 1967, noted that he “manage[d] a factory on the South side of Birmingham, employing just over 1,000 people of whom something like 120 are coloured and a further 20 are people like myself, who have found refuge in Britain from Nazi or Communist persecution in Europe.” By deploying his personal experience with totalitarianism and fascism in Europe, the effect was to contrast what Hahn considered were the legitimate experiences of oppression among European refugees and the experiences of “coloured” migrant workers. Although he insisted that a lack of nonwhite shop stewards and foremen in factories is the equivalent to a whites-only military command, he reminded his audience that the lack of promotion was, ultimately, due to a “lack of education and a lack of understanding of the mentality of their white workmates and, in many cases, a lack of belonging.” Hahn insisted that there was no “reluctance of the white man to work for a coloured foreman.”

¹⁰² Lyttle to Joshi, 2 December 1966. MS2141/A/4/4. Wolfson Centre.

From the perspective of Indian workers in the Midlands, Hahn's economic ties to South Africa undermined his view that "the purpose of [anti-discrimination] legislation in this field is to harness the support of the people of goodwill and not, in the first instance, to convert the segregationists."¹⁰³ However, by targeting migrants for the pace of integration yet acknowledging that he managed a firm that refused to promote nonwhite workers combined with his reluctance to disavow the trade delegation to South Africa did not assuage concerns about his appointment. As the 1960s ended and British nationalism began to dictate the terms of the immigration debate, the priorities of the Bandung era also began to erode. For Indians and other nonwhite migrants in Britain, Oscar Hahn's rhetoric about fleeing Nazi persecution began to look darkly prescient. From the early 1960s racism had begun to play a visceral role in British elections and by the 1970s the National Front and other anti-immigrant organizations had begun to terrorize communities of color. Thus, the peaceful coexistence of Bandung gave way to militant opposition to fascism and imperialism, abandonment of unresponsive democratic institutions, and a rejection of authoritarianism in Britain and India.

Conclusion

Oscar Hahn's appointment in the West Midlands Conciliation Committee was a local instance of migrant abhorrence for the apartheid regime and the continued imperialist mentality that it represented. Many considered Hahn's position transparent. "You cannot trade with someone on the one hand," *The Times* quoted one anti-Apartheid activist saying, "and condemn his way of life on the other."¹⁰⁴ The oppression of Black South Africans elicited the compassion of nonwhite migrants in Britain in the early 1960s for manifold reasons. Anticolonialism was

¹⁰³ Lyttle to Joshi, enclosure, 28 February 1967. MS2141/A/4/4. Wolfson Centre.

¹⁰⁴ "Trade Mission Back to Race Relations Row," *The Times* (London, England), 24 November 1966.

foundational to the worldview of many South Asian migrants in the 1950s and 1960s who had both lived through the last years of British colonial rule and experienced the tumult of partition. The well-publicized violence in Sharpeville triggered international outrage and contributed to the maturation of the anti-apartheid movement in Europe. The racially motivated violence in South Africa resonated with nonwhite migrants in Britain who had been subject to racial discrimination, segregation, and violence -- the vestiges of imperialism. Apartheid became a mobilizing force for the anti-racism struggle in Britain because its rationale and the atrocities committed in its name were anathema to the peace and friendship priorities of the Bandung Conference.

The theory of a third bloc that Chowdry Akbar Khan presented in the early 1950s was made manifest by Indians and other Commonwealth citizens who came to Britain in the era of mass migration. The Bandung moment in Britain was characterized by anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and broad-front strategies for peaceful conflict resolutions that carried sway among migrants and leftwing activists from roughly the end of the war until the mid-1960s. Yet, the resistance to Hahn and the IWA's subsequent disengagement from the Race Relations Board represents a shift in tactics of migrant politics and activism in the 1960s that reflects a more general repudiation of the dictates of peace and cooperation at the core of Bandung's internationalism. Over the course of the decade, Bandung's focus on peaceful cooperation was eroded and replaced by more radical mobilizations against global power structures and inequality. In part, the limitations of Bandung's message were exposed due to changing geopolitical conditions, especially the escalating violence in Vietnam.¹⁰⁵ However, others have

¹⁰⁵ Slobodian, "Bandung in Divided Germany," 656.

argued that Bandung's determination to function within existing international norms necessarily undermined the more revolutionary demands of liberationist discourses. Itty Abraham has focused on "civilizational thinking" at Bandung and the earlier Asian Relations Conference, which echoed European hierarchies. Such thinking justified the European colonization of more "primitive" societies in Africa and Asia. For the postcolonial elites at Bandung, Abraham argues, this thinking anchored discussions on "backward tribal communities" which were "untouched by civilization."¹⁰⁶ To that end, the pedagogical mode that Bandung adopted functioned to disavow non-western epistemologies and to consolidate power in pursuit of developmentalist aims and Afro-Asian solidarity.¹⁰⁷

This chapter has argued that the demands of the Final Communique represented a worldview that animated migrant activism in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, that worldview, according to Robbie Shilliam, was built on faulty foundations. The declarations, particularly the postcolonial elite's investment in the international relations and intergovernmental collaboration of the United Nations, resulted in a fleeting peace because they relied on an already existing "colonial architecture."¹⁰⁸ Yet, Shilliam agrees with Abraham, the priorities of international relations that subjugated untamed peripheries to settled centers of colonial rule did not obliterate the epistemologies of so-called backward tribes. Thus, an alternative spirit of Bandung emerged out of the irruption of power centers and the unmooring of the tribal, untouchable, indentured, and slave "hinterlands" that colonialism created. In a

¹⁰⁶ Itty Abraham, "From Bandung to NAM: Non-alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947-65," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46, no. 2 (2008): 199-202.

¹⁰⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture," in *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Afterlives*, Christopher J. Lee, ed. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 51-55.

¹⁰⁸ Robbie Shilliam, "Colonial Architecture or Relatable Hinterlands? Lock, Nandy, Fanon, and the Bandung Spirit," *Constellations* 23, no. 3 (2016): 425-435.

rejection of colonial power, the stated goals of peaceful coexistence had to be jettisoned in order to fashion “global designs otherwise to the architecture of colonial rule.”¹⁰⁹ Whereas the organizers of Bandung structured their demands around human rights and sought admission to the United Nations, an alternate possibility emerged that sought to invert global power structures and dismantle the colonial architecture that framed intergovernmental organizations. The next chapter will excavate the militant strategies of acting “other-wise” to the architecture of colonial rule that rejected cooperation with governments that sponsored or sheltered racism and fascism.

¹⁰⁹ Shilliam, “Colonial Architecture,” 426.

Chapter 7

Migrant Militancy and Revolutionary Violence in Britain and India, 1962-1979

The Indian Workers Association first acknowledged the deteriorating conditions for nonwhite migrants in the Midlands in July 1961. “The situation” in Smethwick, AS Rai wrote to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Indian High Commissioner in London, “demands constant vigilance on the part of the authorities.”¹ In April 1963, Avtar Singh Jouhl, newly elected General Secretary and Smethwick resident, wrote a letter to Peter Griffiths, Conservative Parliamentary candidate, stating that the Conservative Party’s plan to deport unemployed migrants was an “unprincipled election stunt” and a “clear exploitation of the situation.” Furthermore, by noting that “we are aware when your Party tried to make the Immigrants a scape-Goat [sic] and passed the Immigration Act,” Jouhl drew parallels between the Smethwick Conservative Association and “Colin Jordan’s and Sir Oswald Mosley’s parties,” who led, respectively, the Neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement in the United Kingdom in the 1960s and the Fascist movement in interwar Britain.²

The campaign for the Smethwick parliamentary constituency was a turning point in South Asian migrant activism in Britain. In this election, Griffiths and the Conservative Association advocated segregated housing and schools as well as deportation of migrants who had been unemployed for six months or more. The IWA formally rejected the Conservative’s platform during a national assembly in 1964. “This Biennial General Council Meeting of the IWAGB,” stated a resolution adopted at the meeting, “strongly condemns the racial activities of the Smethwick Conservative Association” and promised to wage an “unremitting fight” in

¹ Rai to Pandit, 31 July 1961. MS2141/A/4/13/2. Wolfson Centre.

² Jouhl to Griffiths, 11 April 1963. MS2141/A/4/13/4. Wolfson Centre.

response to segregationist policies. Moreover, the IWA endorsed the Brockway Bill, named for long-time ally of Indian Independence and anticolonialism Fenner Brockway, that banned “incitement to racial hatred.” This bill eventually gained the support of Rajani Palme Dutt's Communist Party and the Movement for Colonial Freedom and formed the foundation of the Race Relations Act of 1965.³

As the election campaign entered its final months, the Indian Workers Association continued to dispel the myths of crisis that the Conservative Party sought to promulgate to voters. Having just been elected as General Secretary of the IWA at the April Biennial Meeting, Jagmohan Joshi penned a rebuttal for a series in the *Smethwick Telephone* that had previously detailed the platforms of the Labour, Liberal, and Conservative Parties. In an article titled “Immigrants Look at Immigration in Smethwick,” Joshi reminded the reader that “immigrants in Smethwick are not here from their own choice” but rather have been forced, due to British colonial agricultural policy, to migrate. He emphasized, moreover, that South Asians, at least before 1962, had the right as Commonwealth citizens to come and work in Britain. He acknowledged the manifold challenges to migrants in Britain. But he insisted, in contrast to Griffiths, that unemployment, overcrowding, and criminality were not brought to Britain by migrants. Rather, these issues were all prevalent in British society in the inter-war period, during which there were few South Asian residents.

Furthermore, considering that residents of Smethwick were faced with many of the same challenges, Joshi hoped that the Communist appeal to the British working-class to incorporate migrant workers into the labor movement would address problems of wages, housing, and

³ Indian Workers Association (Hindustani Mazdoor Sabha), Great Britain. Biennial General Council Meeting, 19 April 1964. MS2141/1/1/5/1. Wolfson Centre.

segregation. “Mr. Griffiths’ final racialist sentiment was ‘Let’s clean up Smethwick,’” Joshi reminded his readers. “We want to clean up Smethwick too. We want to put an end to racialism and we can only do this together with the people of Smethwick.” In rejecting the anti-immigrant position of the Smethwick Conservatives, Joshi framed his argument as a claiming of rights: “The immigrants in this town are not begging anything. They are simply demanding their rights.” The Smethwick campaign provided an urgent opportunity for South Asian activists to deploy the politics of Bandung which were rooted in a rhetoric of human rights and international norms that protected them in the face of color-coded nationalism in late-industrial Britain but increasing violence with the tacit support of the government necessitated a different approach.⁴

The rhetoric and politics of anti-fascism emerged among Indians in Britain during and after Griffiths’ election. By the 1970s, the mob violence of so-called “Paki bashers” like the National Front had been validated by a state-sanctioned white supremacy that questioned the presence of nonwhite residents. Anti-immigrant forces deployed a machinery that was codified and reaffirmed throughout the 1960s and 1970s to de-legitimize black and brown claims to citizenship. Simultaneously, Indians in Britain shifted away from Indian nationalism and the Congress party of Jawaharlal Nehru. The 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict revealed a deep skepticism of the Indian government for its treatment of political opponents during periods of conflict. Activists in Britain mobilized against the use of repressive laws that had originated in the colonial period to detain dissidents and quash dissent. The fight against nascent Indian totalitarianism was informed by anti-immigrant legislation and white nationalist abuse in Britain and fully articulated during Indira Gandhi’s government from 1966-1977. Her tenure as Prime

⁴ Jagmohan Joshi, “Immigrants Look At Immigration in Smethwick,” No Date [1 June 1964]. MS2141/A/4/13/12. Wolfson Centre.

Minister was adumbrated by Emergency Rule that suspended the democratic process and enabled the near arbitrary use of anti-communist and anti-terrorist legislation to eliminate challenges to the authority of the Congress Party.

This chapter argues that the dual mobilizations against white supremacy in Britain and totalitarianism in India were mutually reinforcing. In the years following the Bandung conference, the rise in violence against black and brown people in Britain and against adivasis, communists, and trade unionists in India were met with a growing belief in armed self-defense. Indian activists in Britain were inspired by Mao's permanent revolution and informed by Frantz Fanon's views on the inevitability of violence for decolonization. These activists believed, with Malcolm X, in the necessity of protecting one's rights and community by any means necessary. Focused on the linkages between marginalized and disenfranchised communities, the Indian Workers Association maintained a cohesive working-class movement that turned to Marxist-Leninist and Maoist organizations to support the fight against racism and imperialism. The interplay of workers' politics, the international realignment of communism between the Soviet Union and China, and the imposition of anti-democratic policies in India, must be considered together when attempting to understand the salience of Maoist revolutionary thought among Indian migrants in the era of British deindustrialization.

Genealogy of Self-defense, 1964-1968

The election of Peter Griffiths was tacit sanction of racial violence and incitement by the Smethwick electorate and the Conservative Party. In June 1965, the trend toward violence was punctuated by the appearance of a burning cross leaning against Dharam Singh's front door in Leamington, Warwickshire. According to the *Express News Service* account, though this was not the first instance of violence, "the intervention by the [Ku Klux] Klan lends distinction to the latest incident. Apparently, the Klan is spearheading the racist attacks on Midlands coloureds."

The *Evening Mail* added that a former member of the National Socialist Movement, a British Nazi organization, confirmed that the Klan had discussed Dharam Singh's activism in Birmingham the night prior to the attack.⁵ In the aftermath of Smethwick, the belief in collective self-defense, which necessarily abandoned the blanket concept of peaceful coexistence in the face of a violent aggressor, was ascendant. Appeals to white Britons in the early-1960s were couched in the language of friendship that was a cornerstone of the spirit of Bandung. In that spirit, opportunities to work with elected officials to address racial discrimination were taken in the 1950s by some IWA leaders. But the events at Smethwick and the Labour Party White Paper on Immigration of 1965 signified to Indians in the Midlands that the government had abdicated responsibility for Commonwealth migrants.

In response to the intimidation of Dharam Singh, Joshi declared that "we are not afraid even of physical violence. If it is used against us, we will hit back and defend our rights."⁶ In turn, the editorial board at the *Birmingham Post* condemned Joshi's intemperance as the "wrong approach," fearing that "such statements are likely to alienate the sympathy of law abiding [sic] people" and reminding the reader that "the Indian community in this country, like any other minority, can claim the full protection of the law."⁷ Yet, implicit in Joshi's statement was the belief that the British authorities were not willing or able to defend the rights of South Asian migrants and that, until change was achieved, migrants were to defend themselves. Soon after Joshi's statements about self-defense were published, he corresponded with the *Birmingham Post* regarding their condemnatory stance. In a letter dated 11 June 1965, Joshi wrote to DH

⁵ "We Shall Hit Back, Says Indians' Leader," *Evening Mail*, 9 June 1965.

⁶ Sitanshu Das, "KKK Strikes at Indian in Britain," *The Indian Express*, 10 June 1965.

⁷ "Wrong Approach," *Birmingham Post*, 9 June 1965.

Hopkinson, the editor of the *Post*, to protest its editorial. Joshi felt it suggested that he was inciting violence rather than stating that violence will be met with violence. He then rebuked Hopkinson and stated that, without a “satisfactory reply,” he would be forced to take the matter of misrepresentation to the Press Council.⁸

In reply, Hopkinson defended his paper’s reportage and suggested, naively if not disingenuously in light of recent Ku Klux Klan activity, that “you would agree with me, I am sure, that neither Indian nor English people would want to see a situation arising in this country where it was necessary for even non-violent demonstrations to take place.”⁹ Of course, the position of the Indian Workers Association was to advocate for the rights of Commonwealth migrants during a particularly fraught period of anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the country. Though Joshi pointed to African-Americans in the Civil Rights Movement as an example of “‘hitting back’ in their fight for their rights as human beings and yet they are not using violence,” he acknowledged the limitations of non-violent direct action. He evoked Malcolm X and the principle of liberation “by any means necessary,” when he insisted that “members of the Indian community will never initiate violence, but this does not mean that they will remain passive and inactive in the face of racist violence and intimidation. They will hit back.”¹⁰ Thus, to suggest,

⁸ Joshi to Editor, Birmingham Post, 11 June 1965. MS 2141/A/4/6. Wolfson Centre.

⁹ Hopkinson to Joshi, 11 June 1965. MS 2141/A/4/7. Wolfson Centre.

¹⁰ Joshi, draft letter to British newspapers. No Date [June 1965]. MS 2141/A/4/8. Wolfson Centre. At the inauguration of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in Harlem in 1964, Malcolm X said; “‘Since self-preservation is the first law of nature, we assert the Afro American’s right to self-defense...We assert that in those areas where the government is either unable or unwilling to protect the lives and property of our people, that our people are within our rights to protect themselves by whatever means necessary.’” See Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews, and a Letter by Malcolm X* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 41; See also Joe Street, “Malcolm X, Smethwick, and the Influence of the African American Freedom Struggle on British Race Relations in the 1960s,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 6 (2008): 932-950.

as Hopkinson did, that a time for “even non-violent demonstrations” was yet to arrive belies a lack of exposure in the press of the experiences of South Asian and other nonwhite migrants.

Joshi’s evocation of Malcolm X’s philosophy in the aftermath of KKK activity at Leamington Spa was not a coincidence; it was an acolyte’s conviction. In February 1965, Malcolm X came to the Midlands to see first-hand the conditions that nonwhite residents endured and to comment on the need for action. He came to Britain at the invitation of the Africa Society at the London School of Economics after being refused entry to Paris as an undesirable person.¹¹ Malcolm X might have heard about Peter Griffiths campaign tactics in 1964 but he was not originally scheduled to visit the town. After his event at the LSE, Shirley Fossick met him outside and invited him to Smethwick to meet with civil rights activists there, including Avtar Jouhl and Joshi, her future husband.¹²

The invitation did not happen by chance nor was Fossick merely an intermediary for the Indian Workers Association. She had been active in the mobilization against Griffiths and had co-written “Smethwick -- Integration or Racialism” for the Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination in 1965.¹³ In an announcement for “Mazdoor,” an IWA newsletter, she emphasized that “ultimately racial discrimination can only be eliminated when the social structure of Britain is changed so that it is no longer based upon the exploitation of one class by another.”¹⁴ Fossick (who later married Jagmohan Joshi and took his name) remained an active figure in the movement against racism for the remainder of her life an organizer, writer, and

¹¹ Marika Sherwood, “Malcolm X in Manchester and Sheffield,” *North West Labour History Journal*, 27 (2002): 29-34.

¹² Shirley Joshi, “Malcolm X in Smethwick,” a talk given at “A People’s History of the West Midlands,” December 2008. 12:48-14:00. Last accessed on 8 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUl-6Sf2zwM&index=10&list=WL>.

¹³ Birmingham Central Library Local Studies: LP21.85 (8/360).

¹⁴ Shirley Fossick, “Let My People Go,” No Date [1961]. MS2141/C/7/1/3. Wolfson Centre.

speaker. She eventually joined the faculty of Birmingham Polytechnic as a lecturer and published articles on race and racism in Britain in the twentieth century.¹⁵

By the time of Malcolm X's visit, Smethwick had become a symbol of "racialism and colour prejudice" in Britain and the Marshall Street plan was emblematic of that reputation.¹⁶ Despite the Indian Workers Association's efforts, Griffiths had triumphed on a platform of racial anxiety and segregation. Soon after he took office in October 1964, the Conservatives began drawing up a proposal to buy houses in the Marshall Street neighborhood so that immigrants would be unable to move there. The stated rationale was to prevent the creation of migrant ghettos and facilitate greater integration into society. However, the Labour Party leader, E. Lowry, rejected this claim and he considered that the plan "is definitely a colour bar, whatever the Conservatives might say."¹⁷ The Indian Workers Association circulated an "open letter" to residents of Marshall Street, asking them to "come together and, in a spirit of goodwill, achieve harmony." Joshi attacked the plan by referring to American Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater who had recently voted against the Civil Rights Act: "we are fully aware that this Goldwater section of the Smethwick Conservative Party is bent upon fanning racial antagonism in the area" to the point of "lead[ing] to race-riots." Yet, the racial tensions were not limited to the Conservative Party platform. *The Guardian* quoted W. Jolley, a Marshall Street shopkeeper, as saying "Immigrants have been shown goodwill, but they should all learn to live decently," to

¹⁵ "Notes on Contributors," *Immigrants & Minorities*, 6:3 (1987), 1; See Shirley Joshi and Bob Carter, "The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain," *Race and Class* 25, no. 3 (1984): 53-70; Bob Carter, Clive Harris, and Shirley Joshi, "The 1951-55 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration," *Immigrants & Minorities* 6, no. 3 (1987): 335-347.

¹⁶ Dhani R. Prem, *Parliamentary Leper: A History of Colour Prejudice in Britain* (Aligarh: Metric Publications, 1965), 1; Rachel Yemm, "Immigration, race and local media: Smethwick and the 1964 general election," *Contemporary British History* (2018), 1-25.

¹⁷ "Smethwick House Plan Opposed," *The Guardian*, 8 December 1964.

demonstrate that the electorate sympathized with the Conservative line on race relations.¹⁸ Later, Avtar Jouhl reminisced that other than touring Marshall Street, Malcolm X met with him and Jagmohan Joshi for a drink at the Blue Gate Hotel, where they were only served at the bar -- a practice of everyday racism in Smethwick.¹⁹ The rhetoric of vice, overcrowding, and unhygienic behavior among migrants had clearly permeated Smethwick resulting in a hostile environment for South Asians in the Midlands.²⁰

Malcolm X arrived in Smethwick on 12 February 1965 along with the crew from the BBC program *Tonight*.²¹ Brief though it was, X's visit was well documented by the press who, as Shirley Joshi (née Fossick) put it much later, "were always traipsing around after him," in the United States and in Britain.²² He had hoped to have an audience with Griffiths, but the MP was out of town addressing an event at the University of Hull at the time. Without any organized event, Malcolm X only spent a few hours in town before taking the stage at the Birmingham University Students' Union that evening. The *LA Times*, in its coverage of Malcolm X's visit, referred to Smethwick as "the midlands hotbed of racial problems" in Britain.²³ When speaking

¹⁸ "Indians seek 'harmony' in Smethwick," *The Guardian*, 19 December 1964; Joshi to Unidentified newspaper [*Guardian*], 16 December 1964. MS2141/A/4/13/14-16. Wolfson Centre. Some in the press suggested that Griffiths' campaign rhetoric would not transform into actual policy. Writing in *The Guardian*, Dennis Barker believed that Smethwick needed "a period of peace and quiet" and implored his readers to "look through soothing words, whoever says them, and into actual actions." To that end, he came to Griffiths' defense, noting that "his maiden speech in the House of Commons was mild" and "his regular column in the town's newspaper could not since the election be described even by his opponents as inflammatory." The conciliatory tone that Barker adduced did not, however, translate into action (Dennis Barker, "Clearing the air at Smethwick," *The Guardian*, 7 December 1964).

¹⁹ Steve Bradley, "Smethwick activist remembers the day Malcolm X fought Midland racists," *Birmingham Mail*. Last accessed 8 May 2018, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/smethwick-activist-remembers-the-day-malcolm-180083>.

²⁰ "Smethwick Tories May Forget Plan," *The Guardian*, 16 February 1965.

²¹ "Malcolm X's Views Deplored," *The Times*, 13 February 1965.

²² Shirley Joshi, "Malcolm X in Smethwick," 13:48-13:52.

²³ Gene Sherman, "Malcolm X Stirs Up Resentment in Britain: Returns to U.S. After Angering British Midlands City Mayor with Volatile Talk," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 February 1965.

to reporters, Malcolm X remarked that “I have heard that the blacks in Smethwick are being treated in the same way as the Negroes were treated in Alabama -- like Hitler treated the Jews.” The *Washington Post* quoted him as adding “I would not wait for the Fascist element in Smethwick to erect gas ovens.” The apparent intemperance of this statement provoked the ire of the Mayor, Alderman CV Williams, and Cedric Taylor, chair of the Standing Conference of West Indian Organizations alike. But by insisting that he would “not wait” he left open strategies for resistance that would prevent escalated racist victimization in the town. His comments buttressed Jagmohan Joshi’s insistence that black and brown communities must hit back and demonstrate to the “fascist element” that they would protect their rights, themselves, and their communities.²⁴

In 1965, the Labour Party doubled down on immigration restriction first introduced by the Conservatives and providing new evidence to nonwhite migrants that they were second-class citizens. In March, the newly elected Labour Government issued a White Paper on Immigration that proposed stricter controls on immigration than those established by the Immigration Act of 1962. Since the Labour Party had previously pledged to repeal the 1962 legislation, the increased limitations on immigration signified a bait and switch to many migrant and leftwing activists. In response to the White Paper, Britain-born Communist Party theorist Rajani Palme Dutt acknowledged that the initial immigration restriction was passed by a Conservative ministry and remembered that the Labour party in 1962 protested its enactment. Referring to the 1962 Act as the “Color Bar Act,” Dutt lamented the consequences of racism in Western societies and

²⁴ “Malcolm X Pays Smethwick Call,” *Washington Post*, 14 February 1965. Malcolm X left Britain on 14 February 1965. A week later, on 21 February, he was assassinated while speaking to a meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in Harlem, New York.

suggested that “the trade unions and whole labour movement should campaign amongst all their members to strengthen class solidarity and understanding and bring the coloured workers fully into the movement.”²⁵ Subsequently, Dutt issued a “Memorandum for the Political Committee on Racialism” clarifying that economic underdevelopment in Commonwealth and postcolonial countries was the fault of British imperialism and, therefore, Britain was obliged to allow migrants from intentionally underdeveloped countries to live and work there.²⁶ Unmoved by the protestations of leftwing and migrant activists, the White Paper became the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 which limited immigration to those who could prove that a parent or grandparent had been born in the United Kingdom.

Faced with the electoral success of the Smethwick Conservatives and ensuing KKK terrorism, migrants in Britain were forced to consider new strategies for navigating anti-immigration legislation, local policies that promoted racial discrimination, and violence. Joshi had never believed that, in the face of racist persecution, the only option for migrants was to respond with violence -- even if he refused to abjure it altogether -- and he fully intended to “bring about pressure on the Government here to strengthen legislation against racialism.”²⁷ Therefore, in July 1965 the IWA organized a march and rally to 10 Downing Street in London. In a press statement about the march, Joshi reiterated that the IWA intended to mobilize in a way that went beyond “demanding immediate action” from the government. Rather, the IWA sought the formation of “street defense committees” and was determined to coordinate with black and

²⁵ “Stamp out the Racialist Menace,” Communist Party of Great Britain, No Date [January 1965]. CP/CENT/EC/10/06. LHA.

²⁶ International Department, Communist Party of Great Britain, “Memorandum for Political Committee on Racialism,” 12 July 1965. CP/IND/Dutt/18/11. LHA.

²⁷ “Won’t Start Violence,” *Worker*, 10 June 1965.

progressive organizations “to discuss joint action against the ever-increasing racial violence.”²⁸

In short, the capacity of the state to protect the rights and lives of black and brown migrants was questioned and the Indian Workers Association began to disengage from state-led initiatives.

In the wake of the Race Relations Bill of 1965, which created limited restrictions on overt racial discrimination that, importantly, did not extend to housing protections for racial and ethnic minorities, and the Government White Paper of the same year, the Indian Workers Association publicly disavowed government interventions on behalf of Commonwealth migrants. Having pursued a strategy of mobilizing its supporters to pressure the government and demand the repeal of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, while also encouraging them to band together for mutual protection, the Indian Workers Association decided on a new strategy. Livid with the Labour Government’s reversal on the need to repeal immigration control legislation, Joshi and Rattan Singh, the President of the IWA, published “The Victims Speak” which asked “[h]as an Act which was at one time racist ceased to be so?”²⁹ Believing that the White Paper reaffirmed and strengthened anti-immigrant sentiment, Joshi and Singh declared that “[t]he contrast in the statements made by the Labour Party in 1961 during the immigration control debates and their present statements on the Act indicate vividly the deterioration which has taken place in official attitudes on this question”³⁰ To convey the conditions in which migrants lived in mid-1960s Britain, Joshi and Singh quoted a *Guardian* article by Jean Stead from 22 October 1965, which noted that immigrant houses are “knocked up” in the middle of the night in order to determine its

²⁸ “Press Statement issued by the Central Executive Committee of the IWA, GB”. No Date [July 1965]. MS 2141/A/3/2/15. Wolfson Centre

²⁹ Jagmohan Joshi and Rattan Singh, “The Victims Speak: A Comment on the White Paper and General Racial Situation in the United Kingdom,” (The Indian Workers Association, Great Britain, November 1965), 2. MSS.202/5/55. MRC.

³⁰ Joshi and Singh, “The Victims Speak,” 2.

occupants. With a comparison to fascist regimes in Europe, the pamphlet cautioned that “official midnight visits to people’s houses are associated with police states. The fact that it is only the immigrants who are being treated in this way will surely bring to mind the treatment of racial minorities in Europe in the 1930’s [sic].”³¹ Joshi and Singh suggest that eliminating “scarcity and competition in employment, housing, social services, and educational facilities” is the only way to achieve an equitable and multi-racial society.

Heretofore, the IWA encouraged its members to use the democratic process to seek solutions to the problems of racial discrimination and anti-immigration legislation. To do this, the IWA officially endorsed several Labour politicians for parliamentary seats, including Denis Howell and Maurice Foley. However, by the 1966 General Election, the IWA only endorsed politicians “whose stand was against racialism in the true sense.” From this point, the IWA called for abstention from votes in the Sparkbrook and All Saints constituencies of Birmingham, where the candidates espoused views that the Association viewed as unfairly blaming immigrant communities for social problems.³² To indicate the unanimity of the Labour and Conservative Parties on immigration, Joshi and Singh quoted Roy Hattersley, the Labour candidate for the Sparkbrook seat, as saying “we must impose a test which tries to analyze which immigrants, as well as having jobs or special skills, are likely to be assimilated into the national life.” Believing that such a policy would require immigrants to jettison their cultural lives, the “Victims Speak” took it as a sign that any cultural difference was deemed anathema to British society.³³ Instances of abstention like these indicate that a gradual disengagement from the democratic process was

³¹ Joshi and Singh, “The Victims Speak,” 7.

³² IWA Central Executive Committee Statement, No Date [1966]. 2141/A/3/3/5. Wolfson Centre; IWA Circular, No Date [1966]. MS2141/A/3/2/6. Wolfson Centre.

³³ Joshi and Singh, “The Victims Speak,” 13.

occurring. The IWA had lost faith that politicians were willing to modulate immigration policy or sympathetic to the social and economic conditions of black and brown people in Britain.

In addition to shifting away from the democratic process, the immigrant organizations grew increasingly impatient with government entities on the view that they were founded and funded on the government's general policy of reducing the number of Commonwealth immigrants in Britain. That the IWA was losing patience with such bodies was evident in the row around Oscar Hahn's appointment to lead the West Midlands Conciliation Committee in 1966. Nevertheless, the IWA was actively pursuing redress by the Race Relations Board in the interest of continuing a working relationship with the organization. However, the disgust caused by the White Paper on Immigration led the IWA and similar organizations, like the West Indian Standing Conference and the Pakistani Welfare Association, to reject bodies established under its aegis. Speaking about one of the most prominent new agencies in "The Victims Speak," Joshi and Singh argued specifically against the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI): "Because it is the produce of a racialist document it has not the trust of the immigrant communities in Britain. The tragedy is that it is misleading many people into believing that through it a solution can be found to racial intolerance and conflict." Not only was the Committee established on faulty premises, the IWA also believed that the top-down approach of the government undermined the initiatives of grassroots migrant organizations by refusing to consult them.³⁴ The practice of disengaging from government bodies and democratic process because of anti-immigrant racism is reminiscent of the Indian leftwing during World War II who

³⁴ Joshi and Singh, "The Victims Speak," 13.

aligned against Nazism and Stalinism because both were manifestations of fascism and imperialism.³⁵

Though the *Birmingham Post* doubted it, by 1966 the Black American press fully appreciated the crisis that faced immigrants in Britain. According to the *Chicago Defender*, Sikh shop-owners in Royal Leamington Spa had heeded Joshi's words and armed themselves with "double-barreled shotguns and announced they would shoot raiders."³⁶ A few weeks later, the same paper cautioned that "Britain, where racial discord wasn't supposed to happen, has turned into a cauldron of both subtle and violent hate."³⁷ The IWA National Conference in November 1967 gave Joshi an opportunity to outline the Association's policy of "non-cooperation with various Government committees."³⁸ Yet, he acknowledged that the IWA had historically been a social and cultural organization for migrants and was established, in part, to help Indians navigate a hostile environment. Feelings of abandonment among Commonwealth migrants, he believed, had been revived in the late-1960s after having "realized that the Labour Party was to join the Conservatives in their use of racialism as a political weapon" by expanding immigration control to neutralize one Tory campaign strategy.³⁹ Immigration control in Parliament occurred simultaneously with an uptick in threats of physical attack at the street level: "Faced with increasing violence against members of the Indian community the IWA has had several meetings with the police and Mayors of various cities in order to demand greater protection."⁴⁰ Finally, Joshi declared that, in line with decades of Indian activism in Britain, united action with migrant

³⁵ See chapter 5 above.

³⁶ Fanchon M. Watkins, "Race Problem Now Worries Britain," *The Chicago Defender*, 31 December 1966.

³⁷ "Racial Violence Mounting in Britain," *The Chicago Defender*, 21 January 1967.

³⁸ Joshi, "Report of the General Secretary," November 1967, 2141/A/1/4. Wolfson Centre.

³⁹ Joshi, "Report of the General Secretary," 2141/A/1/4. Wolfson Centre.

⁴⁰ Joshi, "Report of the General Secretary," 2141/A/1/4. Wolfson Centre.

and progressive organizations was the only option. “Unity and militancy are our greatest protection.”⁴¹

As Joshi sought to bring progressive forces together, votaries of British anti-immigrant nativism embraced a spokesman. In April 1968, speaking in Birmingham, Enoch Powell, MP for Wolverhampton South West, delivered a speech steeped in anti-immigrant rhetoric and economic torpor, that was a distillation of a decade of racial anxiety that had previously reached its high mark in Smethwick. Unsatisfied with the state of immigration control and repeating the disdain for Commonwealth immigrants that marked the Smethwick campaign, Powell insisted on a policy of “re-immigration” so that the population of nonwhite people in Britain was not just stabilized but obliterated as far as possible. In conclusion, Powell remarked enigmatically, “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood’.” This quotation from Vergil’s *Aeneid* led to Powell’s address being remembered as the “Rivers of Blood Speech” anticipating violence that would accompany continued migration. For his migrant audience, this line appeared to excuse, if not endorse, bloodshed. Subsequently, dock workers marched in London against immigration as an example of “resolute and urgent action” and demonstrating the deep resonance of Powell’s words for some in the white working-class.⁴²

In response to Powell’s speech and the support it had received, Joshi convened a meeting in a Leamington Spa home that was among those to be vandalized by the KKK three years

⁴¹ Joshi, “Report of the General Secretary,” 2141/A/1/4. Wolfson Centre.

⁴² Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 208-263; Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood,” speech to Conservative Association Meeting, 20 April 1968. Last accessed 10 May 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.

earlier. The militant Black People's Alliance (BPA), guided by the Black Power movement and fueled by an effort to focus migrant "anger and resentment" against discrimination and Powellism, emerged out of the meeting.⁴³ According to organizers, who hosted fifty-one immigrant leaders from twenty organizations, the BPA was necessary because "the political parties have now given the green light to the overtly fascist organizations and they are not very active in organising themselves, particularly among the working class."⁴⁴ During the meeting Joshi reflected on the possibility of violent confrontations because of the conditions in which African, Caribbean, and South Asian migrants were forced to live. In a reference to events in the United States during the summer of 1967, he remarked that immigrants "are not the people who create Detroit. Detroit is forced on us."⁴⁵ A year later, the Black People's Alliance organized the "March for Dignity" in London during the 1969 Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference, to demonstrate that "the unity of all oppressed people is the guarantee that Imperialism and Racialism will meet their dam."⁴⁶ Moreover, the March for Dignity marked the distance that Indian radicals had moved from the Bandung-inspired nationalism of earlier in the decade. In a circular for the March, Joshi commented, as if a statement of general knowledge and belief, that

the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth countries are no more than the lackies of Anglo-American imperialism. They do not care about their nationals whether at home or abroad. At home they shoot us, murder us, imprison us and abroad they ignore our sufferings in the face of racialist oppression.⁴⁷

⁴³ Larry Harris, "Immigrants Seek Million-Strong Action Group," *Daily Express*, 29 April 1968.

⁴⁴ David Haworth and Chhotu Karadia, "Immigrants Make Secret Plans to Fight Prejudice in Industry," *The Observer*, 4 May 1968.

⁴⁵ "20 Groups in Britain to Form Black Alliance Against Racism," *New York Times*, 29 April 1968.

⁴⁶ Black Peoples' Alliance (Steering Committee) to Colleagues, No Date [1969]. MS2141/A/3/2/13. Wolfson Centre.

⁴⁷ Joshi, IWA Central Executive Committee Circular, No Date [January 1969]. MS2141/A/3/2/13. Wolfson Centre.

Sivanandan records that approximately 7,000 people marched on the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in support of the BPA.⁴⁸ In reference to the magnitude of the event and as an indication of its success the *New York Times* described the March as the "largest civil rights demonstration in recent British history."⁴⁹

A foremost concern of the newly formed Alliance was the creation of "cells of militant coloured workers in trade union to fight colour prejudice in industry," a need which was highlighted "when," as Joshi put it, "dockers start marching in favour of fascism and strikes take place to defend racialism."⁵⁰ Representatives of the United Coloured People and Arab Association (UCPAA), the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, and the National Federation of Pakistani Associations addressed a meeting in early May. Roy Sawh, of the UCPAA and Black Power movement in Britain, called for militant action to protect black people in London.⁵¹ Because "you are living in a hostile society," Sawh advised, following Joshi's suggestions from 1965, that people should form patrols armed with three-inch knives.⁵² With the support of the Black Peoples' Alliance, the Pakistani Workers' Union was among the first to establish "vigilante groups." In March and early April of 1970, Pakistanis in the Stepney area of London had experienced increased attacks by "white gangs." Following the murder of Tosir Ali on 7 April, the Union held a meeting at the Grand Palais Hall in Commercial Road, Stepney, that

⁴⁸ A. Sivanandan, *Catching History on the Wing: Race, Culture and Globalisation* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 113.

⁴⁹ Thomas A. Johnson, "Britain's Colored Immigrants: Woeful Legacy of Empire," *New York Times*, 11 April 1969.

⁵⁰ "Immigrants to Plan Patrols': Defense Against Violence," *The Times* (London, England), 13 May 1968; "20 Groups in Britain to Form Black Alliance Against Racism," *New York Times*, 29 April 1968.

⁵¹ Roy Sawh had been a leader in the Afro-Caribbean community for a few years and was a progenitor of Black Power militancy in Britain. Sivanandan points to his affiliation with the Racial Action Adjustment Society (RAAS), which Malcolm X had helped establish during his visit in February 1965. Through RAAS, Sawh and Michael de Freitas among others, "more than anybody else in this period freed ordinary black people from fear and taught them to stand up for their rights and their dignity" See Sivanandan, "From Resistance to Rebellion," 122.

⁵² "Immigrants to Plan Patrols': Defense Against Violence," *The Times* (London, England), 13 May 1968.

attracted an audience of over 1000. Abul Ishaque, the Union's secretary, announced that "we are asking our people to move about together and look after themselves." Chairman of the Union's Legal Committee, Sibghat Kadri, clarified that "Pakistanis will not take the law into their own hands, but will adopt self-defense. If you hit back in self-defense, that is all right. Even if you kill in self-defense, it will not be murder."⁵³ On 3 May, the Union sponsored a rally at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park leading to a march to 10 Downing Street whereupon 800 demonstrators issued the warning that "the only answer [to relieve their suffering] lies in self-reliance for their safety and welfare."⁵⁴ Through "anti-Paki basher" troops, the Black Peoples' Alliance and affiliated organizations created a parallel police force that was determined to protect their membership and community in the void left by police inaction.

As the Alliance functioned as centralizing force for migrant anti-racist and anti-imperialist resistance in the late-1960s and early-1970s, it gave expression to two streams of political thought in deindustrializing Britain. First was the belief in the state's abdication of responsibility for the protection of all British residents. Second was the view that postcolonial states who cooperated with western neo-imperialism could not be trusted. The latter view was adamantly held in view of the Indian Government during Indira Gandhi's terms as Prime Minister. Though the Indian Workers Association had been voicing concern about the leadership provided by the Indian Government in the years after Nehru's death, the arrival in power of Indira Gandhi, his daughter, represented the abandonment of Indian migrant laborers in Britain

⁵³ "A Defence Plan to Beat the 'Paki-basher' mobs...Don't Go Out Alone," *Daily Mirror*, 13 April 1970; "Protection Groups to be Formed by Pakistanis," *The Times* (London, England), 20 April 1970.

⁵⁴ Peter Evans, "Pakistanis Protest at No 10," *The Times* (London, England), 4 May 1970; Marika Sherwood has provided an account of anti-immigrant lynching in post-war Britain in her "Lynching in Britain," *History Today* 49, no. 3 (1999): 21-23.

and introduced a new period of repression of leftwing oppositional forces in India. Over the course of the late-1960s and especially during Gandhi's imposition of Emergency Rule from 1975-77, the Indian government mounted a sustained campaign of repression against communists and trade unionists. But, as early as 1959, Gandhi had stated her distrust of leftists clearly. At the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Chandigarh in September of that year, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, who was then the Congress Party President, both condemned the behavior of Communists in the West Bengal Assembly. In protest of the assassination of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, SWRD Bandaranaike, Communist members of the Legislative Assembly were alleged to have thrown shoes at the colleagues. While both leaders voiced their disapproval of the "anti-national" behavior of the Bengali Communists, Gandhi, per a newspaper report, accused the Communist Party of India membership of working against India because they "always supported Communist countries even against their own."⁵⁵

The Rise of Maoism in 1960s Britain

Even though the Bandung spirit defined much of Indian Workers Association activism in the late-1950s and early-1960s, there was another thread of South Asian activism in Britain, embodied by Abhimanyu Manchanda and Roy Sawh, that diverged from this consensus and gradually brought the leftwing of the Indian Workers Association and Association of Indian Communists along. By 1968, armed self-defense among black and migrant organizations was disciplined by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought (MLM).⁵⁶ The rise in militant anti-fascism in Britain that accompanied the rise in anti-immigrant violence was infused with support

⁵⁵ "Mr. Nehru Denounces Anti-National Role of Reds," *Times of India*, 27 September 1959. DO 35/8917. TNA.

⁵⁶ Neil Redfern, "No Friends to the Left: The British Communist Party's Surveillance of the Far Left, c. 1932-1980", *Contemporary British History* 28, no. 3 (2014), 358 n. 80.

for the People's Republic of China and Maoism as the ideology of revolution. The consolidation of Maoism, especially among Indian migrants, marked a new phase in the struggle against white supremacy in Britain and the erosion of civil liberties in postcolonial India.

In 1955, the Trinidad-born Communist revolutionary Claudia Jones arrived in Britain, after having been deported from the United States. In 1958, she organized the publication of the journal *West Indian Gazette*. With her colleagues at the journal, and the support of the Movement for Colonial Freedom and the Indian Workers Association, Jones established the Conference of Afro-Asian-Caribbean Organizations in London. According to Sivanandan, the CAACO did for the Greater London area what the Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination under Jagmohan Joshi did for the Midlands.⁵⁷ Jones' partner, Ceylon-born Abhimanyu Manchanda, took up the editorship of the *Gazette* while Jones was in the Soviet Union undergoing treatment for an illness that proved terminal.⁵⁸ Carol Boyce Davies writes that Manchanda and Jones had a “bond of consistent struggle at the person level” and that through their relationship Jones came to recognize the importance of Afro-Asian solidarity in the struggle against racism, imperialism, and capitalism. Moreover, through this relationship, Manchanda came into the orbit of Black Communism in the late-1950s and learned from Jones about the ideological distinctions between Soviet and Chinese Communism.⁵⁹

The Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-Indian border conflict brought the ideological disputes among British Communists and colonial revolutionaries into sharp relief, especially on the

⁵⁷ Sivanandan, “From Resistance to Rebellion,” 118-122. A fuller discussion of Claudia Jones' career is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For more see Carol Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁵⁸ Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 89.

⁵⁹ Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 227.

grounds that the Chinese Communist Party had rejected the Soviet policy of “peaceful coexistence” with capitalism.⁶⁰ Pushing a hard line against capitalism, which for many anticolonial migrant activists in Britain was necessary in the struggle against imperialism and racism, created space for a wave of Commonwealth defection from the Communist Party of Great Britain. In its wake emerged a more militant political affiliation that aligned with the policy of armed self-defense. In October 1963, Manchanda and his associates began corresponding with the Political Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, specifically with Rajani Palme Dutt, seeking to modify the Communist Party of Great Britain’s stance on the Sino-Indian border dispute. On 25 September 1963, Ranjana Ash, a mutual friend of Manchanda and Jones, wrote to Dutt hoping to secure his support for the newly established Indian Forum and notifying him of a campaign, like that of the Indian Workers Association, to free political prisoners in India who had been detained under the Defense of India Rules.⁶¹ In response, Dutt asked Ash to wait until after she had met with CPGB leadership to “make sure of agreement on the best lines to follow.”⁶² However, that same month, Ash’s group provocatively published the first issue of the *Anti-Imperialist Indian Forum* with the headline “Non-alignment - New Style” and a caricature of Jawaharlal Nehru holding two rifles aloft, the one in his left hand labelled “Made in the USA” and the one in his right labelled “Made in USSR,” while riding in a convertible labeled “Voice of America.” Predictably, the CPGB regarded the publication as evidence of “factional activity” and reprimanded Manchanda, Ash, and their co-conspirators.⁶³

⁶⁰ Lawrence Parker, “Opposition in Slow Motion: The CPGB’s ‘Anti-Revisionists’ in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Against the Grain: The British Far Left in Britain from 1956*, Evan Smith and Matthew Worley, eds. (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2014), 107.

⁶¹ Ash to Dutt, 25 September 1963. Dutt Papers. LHA.

⁶² Dutt to Ash, 1 October 1963. Dutt Paper. LHA.

⁶³ Manchanda to Political Committee, CPGB, 19 November 1963, pg. 1. Dutt Papers. LHA.

The imagery and rhetoric of the new publication not only went against Communist Party line, but also pilloried Nehru for hypocrisy in dealing with China, a radical departure from the nationalistic overtures that the IWA issued in the same period.



Image 2: Cover of Anti-Imperialist Indian Forum, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1963. Rajani Palme Dutt Papers. Labour History Archive, Manchester.

The Political Committee's response to Indian Forum's "factionalist" activities elicited the ire of Abhimanyu Manchanda. In a detailed refutation of each of the Political Committee's points about Indian Forum, Manchanda argues that the CPGB refused to modify its stance, structure, and platform even though its new members who had arrived from postcolonial societies insisted on new political forms that would cut at the heart of neo-imperialism abroad and racial discrimination in Britain. "Some comrades," Manchanda asserts, "are the unpaid apologists for the racialists in defending the discriminatory attitude of reactionary trade unionists pointing to the 'lack of skill of these colonials'."⁶⁴ The behavior of the CPGB, in Manchanda's view, was no different from that of the Labour Party after the 1964 General Election when it reversed its pledge to rescind immigration control. Thus, the parliamentary landscape for migrants in Britain provided no defenders. Furthermore, Manchanda, much earlier than his IWA associates, recognized the emptiness of Congress Party platitudes in India, noting that "while serving the imperialists and monopolists, Nehru masquerades behind his 'socialism', his 'progressive Government' has unleashed a reign of brutal exploitation of the masses of poor people of India, by heavy burdens of taxation, compulsory deposit schemes and the uncontrolled racketeering of high prices of consumer goods."⁶⁵ In concluding his letter, he urged the Political Committee to modify its position on factionalism and to support Indian Party members in Britain to pursue an anti-imperialist and anti-racist program that coheres with Communist Party doctrine but emerges out of lived experience.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Manchanda to Political Committee, CPGB, 19 November 1963, pg. 4. Dutt Papers. LHA.

⁶⁵ Manchanda to Political Committee, CPGB, 19 November 1963, pg. 6. Dutt Papers. LHA.

⁶⁶ Manchanda to Political Committee, CPGB, 19 November 1963, pg. 11. Dutt Papers. LHA.

Initially, Dutt suggested that the question of forming an Indian Communist Party branch in Britain was one that could be discussed more fully in the appropriate setting but otherwise dismissed much of Manchanda's criticism of the CPGB as an articulation of Communist Party of China talking points.⁶⁷ Subsequently, in a letter from John Gollan, the Political Committee concluded that Manchanda's group sought to do nothing but "establish a factional grouping and platform hostile equally to the Communist Party of India and to the Communist Party of Great Britain."⁶⁸ Incredulously, he also demanded substantiation for the myriad charges that Manchanda made against the Party and its leadership. Gollan's attempt to bring Manchanda in line was in vain. Manchanda had become a believer in the communism of Mao Zedong in part because of Claudia Jones' insistence that it represented a "national revolution rooted in the people." At the same time depictions of the Soviet Union were of a decaying and "revisionist" party and the ideological split between China and the USSR had become palpable.⁶⁹ Indeed, though the CPGB may not have recognized it at the time, Manchanda had already broken with the Soviet-backed CPGB. He had begun garnering support for the Communist Party of China and popularizing Maoist thought among the leftwing of the Communist Party and like-minded organizations. In 1962, Manchanda emerged as a leader of nascent British Maoism through the Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity (CDRCU), which was the first Maoist organization in Britain, and later founding the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League.⁷⁰ Thus, the defense of the CPGB and the attempt to call Manchanda to account was an exercise in

⁶⁷ Dutt to Manchanda, 29 November 1963. Dutt Papers. LHA.

⁶⁸ Political Committee to Manchanda, 12 December 1963. Dutt Papers. LHA.

⁶⁹ Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 227.

⁷⁰ Redfern, "No Friends to the Left," 353.

futility. Manchanda had lost hope for the reform of the Party and *Anti-Imperialist Indian Forum* was a declaration of independence.

The combination of the Sino-Soviet split of the early-1960s and Sino-Indian border dispute of 1962 had a considerable impact on the politics and international perspective of Indians in Britain. Abhimanyu Manchanda, in a 1963 letter to the Political Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, stated that “it is imperative to fight for a policy of defeating the imperialist conspiracy of making the Asians fight Asians.” Moreover, Manchanda, through the newsletter *Anti-Imperialist Indian Forum*, which he co-edited with Ranjana Ash, among others, contended that “[thousands] of people are participating in demonstrations, strikes and processions, all over India, against the ‘emergency’ measures” enacted during the war with China, which had resulted in the “unconstitutional” imprisonment of innocent Indians. As these appeals were rejected by the CPGB, Manchanda represented a far-left alternative to South Asians in Britain grasping for greater theoretical engagement with the roots of Indian autocracy, British racism, and Black Power.

Chinese nuclear tests not only allowed for clear statements of support for Mao but also demonstrated close attention to the rhetoric of the CCP among Indian radicals in India. For instance, Zhou Enlai, during a 1963 meeting with a Kenyan African National Federation delegation, asked “Why is there no complete prohibition on nuclear testing...what is the purpose? The purpose is to use this [situation] to carry out nuclear blackmail. Towards whom? Towards countries that do not have nuclear weapons, especially small, weak countries, Asian, African and Latin American countries.”⁷¹ Within a few years, Indians in Britain began to deploy

⁷¹ "Zhou Enlai's Discussion with a Kenyan African National Federation Delegation (excerpt)," 5 September 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Dangde wenxian [Party Historical Documents], vol. 3 (1994),

this language triumphantly. “Chinese atomic weapons are our weapons of [defense] against the imperialists’ nuclear blackmail and aggression,” Manchanda proclaimed in 1966.⁷² The following year, in a statement lamenting “Hooliganism at the Chinese Embassy in Delhi,” Joshi declared that “the friendship of the two peoples is the greatest need of the hour and anything which impedes that must be combated.” Focusing on China’s military prowess, he continued that “the Indian Workers Association...wishes to congratulate the Chinese people on their successful explosion of the H bomb. This can only strengthen the peoples of the world and the forces of anti-imperialism. It will help to combat the nuclear blackmail of the American imperialists and at the same time be a security for the poor nations against big power chauvinism.”⁷³ Thus, over the course of the 1960s, China came to be regarded as an anti-imperialist beacon, whose militant opposition to western power was positioned in contrast to the Indian government’s submission to American imperialism. Indian radicals in Britain embraced China, in part, because it embodied militant resistance that would buttress national and class liberation for “semi-colonial and semi-feudal” states, such as India, and workers and national minorities subject to industrial capitalism.

The respect for Chinese military prowess reflected the urge among leftists in Britain to adopt a more militant stance in opposition to American and Soviet imperialism. Yet, the rise in China’s global status also fed into a Third Worldism that sought South-South cooperation that was first solidified at the Bandung Conference. G. Thomas Burgess has written about China’s relationship with postcolonial Zanzibar in the 1950s and 1960s to suggest that the African nation

pp. 15-16. Translated for NPIHP by Neil Silver. Last accessed 2 November 2018, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114355>.

⁷² Abhimanyu Manchanda, Speech, No. 091, Delivered at the Afro-Asian Writers’ Emergency Meeting. 4 July 1966. MS 2141/A/4/15. Wolfson Centre.

⁷³ IWAGB Central Executive Committee, Statement, 18 June 1967. MS2141/A/4/16/23.

regarded China as the “model for the island’s future.”⁷⁴ Indeed, for Zanzibar and many other newly independent states, the search for a usable future was often more urgent and practicable than looking back at a glorious past. Colonial ruptures had undermined narratives of continuous and ancient nationality. Burgess notes, however, that the collaboration between China and Zanzibar was “a simultaneous embrace and repudiation of Afro-Asian solidarities” because the futurity of Zanzibari freedom, which involved a multi-ethnic state comprised of Africans, Arabs, and South Asians, was frustrated by nascent ethno-nationalist sentiment that sought an ethnically homogeneous African state.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the history of Chinese patronage in Africa opened space for the “Maoist gospel” to co-mingle with Pan-Africanism in support of the revolutionary struggle against capitalism and imperialism. The interaction between the two had profound influence on Black Power militancy in the United States and Britain. “Black Man in Search of Power,” a multi-part series that the *Times* published in 1968, explored the links between African liberation, Chinese patronage, and Black Power. Presented as a study of racial violence and guerilla warfare in southern Africa, the *Times* series centered on the relationships that China had with African liberation movements. “China wants revolution – everywhere,” the series observed, “and China, unlike the goulash communists of the west, can pass herself off as a coloured, have-not nation sent by history to help the black world.” In pursuit of this revolution, the *Times* pointed out that “China’s main contribution to the black revolution is in the supply of arms,” especially the Kalashnikov AK 47 automatic rifle, and that African revolutionaries had received training in

⁷⁴ Burgess, “Mao in Zanzibar,” 197.

⁷⁵ Burgess, “Mao in Zanzibar,” 199-200.

Beijing.⁷⁶ It bears mentioning that China's relationship to African guerilla fighters is thus reminiscent of the connections between the Soviet Union and Communist International, especially the University of the Toilers of the East, and militant nationalists in India that the Ghadar Party helped to forge in the 1920s and 1930s.

As for the influence that China and Black Power had amassed in the United Kingdom, the *Times* indicated that it emerged in the early 1960s with a politics of belonging that alienated nonwhite people and left them to look for alternate sources of pride and community identity.⁷⁷ In the penultimate part of its series, the *Times* profiled Ahmed Gora Ebrahim, who had established the Pan-Africanist Congress in South Africa that had been banned by 1968. Ebrahim made "a significant impact on militant leaders of British immigrants" by "woo[ing] the Black Power movement to the Maoist cause." Ebrahim effectively converted representatives of Black Power and race relations organizations to Maoism during his brief tenure in Britain and stage-managed a mutiny in the ranks of the Committee Against Racial Discrimination via Johnny James, the head of the Caribbean Workers' Movement. Moreover, his influence extended to Ajoy Ghose of the Universal Coloured People's Association and Roy Sawh, who later became instrumental in the Black People's Association.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Ebrahim established links with Manchanda and, by way of the Association of Indian Communists, the Indian Workers Association. In July 1967, the Chief Representative in Britain of Ebrahim's Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) wrote to Joshi at the behest of Manchanda to request the use of an IWA cinema to screen

⁷⁶ "The Council of Three," *The Times*, 12 March 1968.

⁷⁷ "The Voice of the Ghetto," *The Times* 14 March 1968.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that both Ghose and Sawh had been convicted of racial incitement in the years prior to Ebrahim's arrival. The charges against Ghose and Sawh were based in the Race Relations Act of 1965, which was intended to prevent the practice of racial discrimination in public places. Thus, the provision against racial incitement was used against Black Power activists and white supremacists alike.

a film on South Africa as a fundraiser to support “the work of liberating our country from the pangs of imperialism and racism.”⁷⁹ The militancy that Ebrahim brought to the anti-Apartheid movement constituted a new phase in the struggle for which the Indian Workers Association had been issuing resolutions. Manchanda had also been demonstrating against the Apartheid regime. In 1964, along with three South Africans and two Englishmen, Manchanda had begun a seven-day hunger strike to demand the release of political prisoners in South Africa.

The sense that the Apartheid regime was a common enemy of anti-imperialists undergirded the growing allure of Maoist mobilization for Indians in Britain but there were also material connections. The *Times* News Team revealed that Ebrahim and Manchanda linked the Indian Workers Association to a Maoist network in Western Europe. Most directly, this relationship manifested with the printing of the “Peking-line” Punjabi periodical *Lalkar*. Edited by Avtar Jouhl, with Manchanda on the editorial board, *Lalkar* was “part of an effort to convert [Indian immigrants in Britain] to Maoist revolution.” The article goes on to detail how Jacques Grippa of the Belgian Communist Party facilitated the circuitous production of the paper:

Someone, somewhere, loves *Lal Kar* [sic]. It is quite a business to take the raw copy to Heathrow airport on a Tuesday, have it picked up at the Sabena freight office in Brussels next day, spin of 1500 copies at the Rue van der Weyer, send a member of Jacques Grippa’s party from Le Livre International [bookstore] to take it back to Brussels airport on Friday and then have it picked up from the UEA freight terminal at Heathrow. Why go through all this trouble for an eight-page irregular shilling publication?⁸⁰

While Ebrahim had worked with African and Asian organizations and community leaders to consolidate support for Maoist doctrine and the inevitability of the violent revolution, British Maoism ultimately emerged at the intersection of anti-imperialism, trade unionism, and Black

⁷⁹ Make to Joshi, 25 July 1967. MS 2141/A/4/15/73. Wolfson Centre.

⁸⁰ “The Man from Peking,” *The Times*, 15 March 1968.

Power. The Black Peoples' Alliance was a first iteration of this broad-front approach but the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) was the first nationwide Party organized explicitly around the "Peking-line".

Militant worker solidarities that transcended racial divisions were resolutely pronounced at the inaugural meeting of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) in 1968. The CPB (M-L) emerged as an alternative to the Communist Party of Great Britain, which was a subsidiary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union whose power and influence on the British left was deemed untenable by some after the Sino-Soviet split. Reg Birch and William Ash, among others, helped to establish the new party. Birch had been a leading figure in the CPGB and in the Amalgamated Engineering Union through the 1960s. Being a close associate of Jagmohan Joshi, he had addressed the rally in defense of civil liberties in India that the IWA had organized in March 1965. According to Smith and Worley, Birch had drifted from the CPGB because it had failed to support him during a Union election.⁸¹ Others have suggested that Birch's service on the editorial board of *The Marxist*, a journal that served as a lightning rod for nascent pro-Chinese groups, indicates that his sympathies for the CPC were based in ideological, and not electoral, shifts.⁸² William Ash, for his part, became associated with "anti-revisionists" through his wife, Ranjana, who was a close friend of Claudia Jones and Manchanda, and had been active among the Friends of China and the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding.⁸³

⁸¹ Smith and Worley, introduction to *Against the Grain: The Far Left in Britain from 1956* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2014), 9.

⁸² Neil Redfern, "No Friends to the Left," 354; Lawrence, "Opposition in Slow Motion," 108.

⁸³ Redfern, "No Friends to the Left," 354; Carrick to "Sir" [Joshi], 20 July 1967. MS 2141/A/4/1/81. Wolfson Centre.

Although the Party was unable to consolidate the various Pro-Chinese groups, it's resonance for Indian revolutionaries was significant.

Though the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) was only the most prominent Maoist organization in Britain, it did not achieve mass-appeal among British workers. However, as Smith and Worley note, it was able to make inroads with students and South Asian activists.⁸⁴ Among the reasons for the appeal of Maoism for migrants was the salience of anti-Vietnam war campaigning, which had transformed into outright support for the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front, commonly known as the Viet Cong. Clearly, Abhimanyu Manchanda was an early votary of the "Peking-line" from his work with the *Anti-Imperialist Indian Forum*, but by the mid-1960s, the Indian Workers Association was actively coordinating with Pat Jordan, both a secretary for Bertrand Russell's Peace Foundation and member of the Trotskyist International Marxist Group (IMG). Jordan was able to recruit the Indian Workers Association as a co-sponsor for the Vietnam Solidarity Committee, which, according to a report in *The Observer*, was "the only movement since the war which has succeeded in welding together the fissiparous elements of the extreme Left."⁸⁵ When Jordan reached out to the IWA in 1966 with the intention of "promoting solidarity between the people of Britain and Vietnam," Joshi responded enthusiastically that "the Indian workers in Britain pledge their solidarity with the workers and peasants of Vietnam...The Indian workers know that this is a war against [the Indian Workers Association's] fellow Asians as well as a war against the whole of humanity."⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Smith and Worley, introduction, 9.

⁸⁵ Pendennis, "The Word Goes Out: No Martyrs, Please," *The Observer* 27 October 1968.

⁸⁶ Jordan to Joshi, No Date [1966]. MS 2141/A/4/15/33; Joshi to Jordan, No Date [1966]. MS 2141/A/4/15/34.

That same year, 1966, in a joint message to the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, the Indian Workers Association and the Pakistani Workers Association declared solidarity with the movement. The message commemorated the sixth anniversary of the Front and praised the Vietnamese people for “their glorious victories over the most vicious and barbarous aggressor, US Imperialism,” it decried Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s “reign of terror” and her complicity in the war in Vietnam, and it condemned British Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s Labour Government for “impos[ing] hardships on the working people of Britain” and for “support[ing] the criminal war of US imperialism in Vietnam.”⁸⁷ By the same token, at the IWA National Conference in November 1967, Joshi made explicit the diverging paths that India and China had taken in the years after Bandung:

While another Asian power, China, resolutely supports the heroic Vietnamese people, and is ready for any sacrifice to oppose US aggression as it did in support of the great Korean people, the servile Indian Government stabs our Asian brother, Vietnam, in the back. The tattered rag of ‘non-alignment’ cannot hide the naked subservience of the Indian Government to U.S. imperialism.⁸⁸

In response to the IWA’s support, the Vietnamese Union in France sent a message to the National Conference, stating “we are encouraged by the continuous successes you are achieving...against British imperialism, for independence, democracy, peace and social progress in India, and against racialism and in defense of the rights of Indian workers in Britain.”⁸⁹

Buried in the Papers of the IWA at the Birmingham Library is an unsigned speech fragment delivered by a colleague of Joshi’s, possibly Avtar Jouhl or Teja Singh Sahota, at the

⁸⁷ Message to the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, 1966. MS 2141/A/4/15/32.

⁸⁸ Jagmohan Joshi, General Secretary’s Report to the National Conference of IWA, 11 November 1967, pg. 4. MS2141/A/1/2/1

⁸⁹ L’Union des Vietnamiens de France to IWA National Conference, No Date [November 1967]. MS2141/A/1/2. Wolfson Centre.

Communist Party of Britain (M-L) inaugural meeting. This speech, or what remains of it, noted that Mao's writings were "the most important development of Marxism for our times." Further, it elaborated on the importance of engaging the British working-class in the struggle against the vestiges of British imperialism and Anglo-American hegemony. In particular, the speaker mentioned that educating white workers on the function of imperialism and the emergence of "a corporate state in which the workers will be subjected to greater oppression, tyranny and exploitation" would work to rectify the divisions and infighting of the working-class. The speaker diagnosed the persistence of divisions within the working-class movement by noting that "the bogey of immigration is continuously kept before the British people by both Tory and Labour" to facilitate scapegoating black workers as the cause of the social and economic woes of late-industrial Britain. Thus, the role of the CPB (M-L) was not just to align with the national liberation struggles of Asia, Africa, and Latin America or to look toward the Chinese Communist Party as the harbingers of revolution, but also to recognize that British working-class racism was a vestige of imperialism, and the CPB (M-L) vowed to "combat it through and through."⁹⁰

Opposing the State: Anti-Fascism and Indira Gandhi, 1966-1977

When addressing the inaugural meeting of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) the Indian representative took the opportunity to discuss the repression of the insurgency in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal as a way of highlighting the transnational movement against neo-imperialism. "In every country today the people are on the march," the speaker began, "in our own land the peasants of Naxalbari, by taking up arms against the reactionary landlord-capitalist government and breaking with the peaceful road of elections, have

⁹⁰ Anonymous Speech. No Date [1968]. MS2141/C/8/13.

helped the Indian people to begin their freedom struggle.”⁹¹ In May 1967, peasants and cadres of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), commenced a violent uprising against local landlords through a campaign of assassination and dispossession. By July, the insurgents had taken control of up to 300 square miles of territory in northern West Bengal state, tucked between Nepal and what was then East Pakistan. At that point, according to Rabindra Ray, the Centre government coordinated with the Chief Minister of West Bengal, whose state was led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in a coalition government, to quash the uprising. On 12 July, police made seventy-five arrests in a coordinated early-morning raid.⁹² At the end of the police action, nearly two weeks later, more than one thousand communists and peasants had been arrested, which led to “mass surrenders” on 25 July at Kharibari.⁹³ As with Vietnam, the Chinese Communist Party helped to legitimate the insurrection at Naxalbari when a June 1967 broadcast on Peking Radio announced that the peasant uprising was the “front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people under the guidance of Mao Tse Tung.”⁹⁴

The suppression of the uprising in Naxalbari was a cooperative effort between the West Bengal government at Calcutta and the Centre government in New Delhi. However, as the insurgency went underground and became an urban campaign, strategies of containment and resistance also changed. Due to instability, Indira Gandhi’s government declared President’s Rule through which the Centre took control of the state in 1968 and 1971. Furthermore, in 1970

⁹¹ Anonymous Speech. No Date [1968]. MS2141/C/8/13.

⁹² Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.

⁹³ Amitabha Chandra, “The Naxalbari Movement,” *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (Jan-March 1990): 27; Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites*, 88.

⁹⁴ Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980), 115.

the state and Centre mobilized forces to isolate revolutionaries.⁹⁵ After the deployment of police and military troops in Calcutta to enforce a counter-insurgency campaign that involved detaining suspected insurgents through the Defense of India Rules (DIR), Indian observers in Britain shifted from skepticism of Gandhi's government, which was rooted in growing alienation from the Congress Party that had begun in 1962, to fears of nascent totalitarianism. "While posing as the world's largest democracy," Joshi and Teja Sahota wrote in a letter to Indira Gandhi in January 1969, "the government of India has ruled with an iron hand" and "whittled away civil liberties" through the constant threat of state violence. "The Indian government," they continued, "has moved far to the right since the days of Bandung."⁹⁶

Thus, the uprising in West Bengal drove Maoist organizations in Britain and India closer together. The opportunity that Naxalbari gave to Indian activists to consolidate their movement with those on the far left of British politics and trade unionism buttressed the struggle against an Indian state that was considered irretrievably corrupt and despotic. Specifically, the establishment of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969 appeared to represent an identity of purpose between Indian and British Maoists, which was rooted in the belief that the People's Republic of China represented a decolonial and democratic future. In a "Resolution on India," passed at the National Conference of the IWA in 1967, the IWA decried the brutal suppression of the Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal and plans for a program of coerced sterilization of peasants, which ultimately affected roughly 12 million people.⁹⁷ In December

⁹⁵ Jonathan Kenney and Sunil Purushotham, "Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 54, no. 4 (2012): 849-850

⁹⁶ Joshi to Gandhi, 7 January 1969. MS2141/A/4/7/24.

⁹⁷ V. A. Pai Panandiker and P. K. Umashankar, "Fertility Control and Politics in India", *Population and Development Review*, 20 (1994): 91.

1970, the IWA, under Joshi and Sahota, mobilized against the “unprecedented wave of terror” that had descended on Punjab in the aftermath of Naxalbari. According to the IWA, “hundreds of innocent students have been massacred” at the hands of “Indira’s fascist Govt. [sic].”⁹⁸ Though, the characterization of Gandhi’s government as “fascist” began in response to the use of deadly force to repress Naxalite insurgency across India, it was quickly generalized to describe any repressive action by the government. For instance, in 1974 the IWA asserted that the government’s response to the Indian Railway Strike was an expression of the “true fascist nature of the [so-called] Indian democracy.”⁹⁹ This anti-fascist rhetoric had been introduced to Indian worker politics in Britain through battles with the anti-immigrant governments in Britain and the violent organizations they emboldened. Naxalbari focused the Indian diaspora in Britain on the “anti-democratic” practices of Indira Gandhi’s government.

Hostility toward Indira Gandhi’s government culminated in the response to Emergency Rule of 1975-77, which was perceived as a defense of American hegemony. The anti-fascist campaigns that emerged in the fight against racism and racial violence in Britain had been mobilized after the Indian state used violence against armed revolutionaries in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, and elsewhere. The Indian Workers Association explained their stance in a flier for a protest planned for October 1972, which was titled “Why We Demonstrate.” Here, they declared solidarity with the CPI (M-L) and proclaimed “down with fascist Indian government.”¹⁰⁰ Though Indians in Britain had begun to view Gandhi’s ministry as dictatorial,

⁹⁸ IWA Circular, “Mobilise for Sunday 10th December Demonstration: Stop Murdering Students,” No Date [1970]. MS2141/A/3/2/22; See Paramjit S. Judge, *Insurrection to Agitation: The Naxalite Movement in Punjab* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1992), 133-138.

⁹⁹ Draft Resolution on India. No Date [November 1967]. MS2141/A/1/1/29. Wolfson Centre.

¹⁰⁰ IWA Circular, “Why We Demonstrate,” 12 October 1972. MS2141/A/4/16/49.

demonstrations against her government became ever fiercer as the struggle against the “reactionary Indian government” in the early-1970s reached its apogee with the proclamation of a National Emergency in 1975.¹⁰¹ The suppression of Naxalbari and the execution of Emergency resulted in the large-scale imprisonment of political opponents, which was anathema to the democratic principles cherished by the IWA. These incarcerations were justified through a colonial legal apparatus, the DIR, first used after World War I to detain communists and revolutionary terrorists. Thus, the IWA detected the emergence of fascist tendencies within the Indian government, perhaps the Congress party specifically, through the lens of anticolonialism and the politics of anti-racism in Britain.

After Emergency Rule was imposed, the Left throughout Western Europe coalesced around Indian activists and others who had been affected by the revelation of the carceral tendencies of the Indian government. In July 1975, Werner Riebe, a representative of the German Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) and League Against Imperialism, contacted the Indian Workers Association for information and material they could use to “publish a pamphlet on the actual situation in India today,” with reference to the Emergency.¹⁰² In February 1976, Peter Wengen, also of the League Against Imperialism, wrote to invite a member of the IWA to participate in a series of meetings in Germany to “win collaboration of other progressive and revolutionary forces” in opposition to Indira Gandhi. Among those who were instrumental in the growing resistance to Congress and Indira Gandhi in Britain, Mary Tyler, who had been detained

¹⁰¹ For more on Emergency see: PN Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the ‘Emergency’ and Indian Democracy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (New York: Penguin, 2003); Arvind Rajagopal, “Emergency as Prehistory of the New Indian Middle Class,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, 5 (2011): 1003-1049; David Lockwood, *The Communist Party of India and the Indian Emergency* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016).

¹⁰² Riebe to Joshi, 22 July 1975. MS2141/A/4/16/75 Wolfson Centre.

as a Naxalite revolutionary for five years with her husband in eastern India, emerged as an effective and motivated organizer.¹⁰³ Tyler was a well-known activist who had contributed a report on Emergency to the IWA's "Emergency Special" newsletter in October 1975. Soon after her release, she returned to Britain and coordinated with Jagmohan Joshi and others to establish the Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India, which formalized their partnership against the Indian government.

The focus of the Alliance was to highlight the authoritarian nature of the Indian government through direct correspondence with Indian and British officials as well as holding protest demonstrations in London. In January 1976, the Alliance appealed to Prime Minister Harold Wilson to issue "an open statement of condemnation" and suspend normal diplomatic relations with India. Even when Indian elections were announced after nearly two years, the AAFDI and sympathetic organizations believed that Emergency had "destroyed the last remnants of Indian democracy."¹⁰⁴ A pamphlet titled "India's General Elections are a Fraud," observed that India had been under a near constant state of Emergency and President's Rule since 1962. However, that Congress was accused of wielding autocratic power for more than a decade was only a symptom of a larger problem. Congress' political opponents "do not oppose Indira Gandhi because they want to get rid of the present system," the pamphlet asserts, "but because they want to run it themselves."¹⁰⁵ For the IWA, the 1977 election fraudulently represented that there was

¹⁰³ Mary Tyler, *My Years in an Indian Prison* (New York: Penguin, 1978).

¹⁰⁴ IWA Pamphlet, "India's Elections are a Fraud: A Joint Publication of the Indian Workers Association (GB) and the Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India," pg. 1. MS2141/A/4/16/88.

¹⁰⁵ "India's Elections are a Fraud: A Joint Publication of the Indian Workers Association (GB) and the Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India," pg. 4. MS2141/A/4/16/88.

political accountability to the electorate. From the revolutionary perspective of anti-Emergency activists in Britain, the political system was broken, and the government was illegitimate.

Much in the same way that the Indian Workers Association cooperated with the anti-Apartheid movement, demonstrations against Indira Gandhi were intended to expose the Indian government's disregard for human rights and due process. By 1976, a conservative estimate of political prisoners held in India was put at 100,000 whereas Amnesty International believed there were 200,000 political prisoners and untold numbers of executions and extra-judicial killings.¹⁰⁶ Just before Emergency was declared, in March 1975, "peasant rebels" G. Krishta Goud and J. Bhoomaiah had been convicted of murder in Andhra Pradesh and sentenced to death.¹⁰⁷ In protest of their death sentence, Joshi wrote to Braj Kumar Nehru, Indian High Commissioner in London, that "their 'crime' is, that like great martyrs Bhagat Singh and Udham Singh," against oppression and for the liberation of "backward classes."¹⁰⁸ After their execution, Goud and Bhoomaiah became *causes célèbres* of the Naxalite and anti-Emergency movements and gave momentum to mass mobilizations for the liberation of political prisoners. Just as Bhoomaiah and Goud represented injustices against peasants, the IWA reached out to British trade union representative to gain their support against Emergency's preventive detentions of workers. Joshi wrote directly to trade unionists to invite them to participate in a January 1976 demonstration to demand the restoration of the right to strike in India.¹⁰⁹ In June 1976, the AAFDI collaborated with the Committee for Civil Liberties in India for a demonstration in Trafalgar Square to protest

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence Lifschultz, "India Still Holding 100,000 in Jails: India's 'Emergency' Takes on A Semi-Permanent Character, *Washington Post*, 5 March 1976.

¹⁰⁷ Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India to the Indian High Commissioner; No Date [1976]. MS2141/A/4/16/67. Wolfson Centre.

¹⁰⁸ Joshi to Nehru, 23 June 1975. MS2141/A/4/16/70. Wolfson Centre.

¹⁰⁹ Joshi to Nicholas, No Date [1976]. MS2141/A/4/16/72. Wolfson Centre.

the erosion of democratic and civic institutions in the country.¹¹⁰ Just as the question of political prisoners had been raised throughout the history of Indian political mobilization in Britain, those detained during Emergency were not readily released even after the restoration of due process under the Janata Party government of Morarji Desai.

Indira Gandhi continued to receive the ire of Indians in Britain even after she left office. Because the IWA believed that the political system in India was corrupt, a new government could neither heal the wounds of Emergency, nor could Gandhi's departure, albeit short-lived, from power rescue her public image. Just as the Indian Workers Association continued to push for the release of all political prisoners well after Emergency was over, it pursued Gandhi as an enemy of the Indian people. In November 1978, having just been elected to Parliament from a constituency in south India, Gandhi visited Britain and was met with chants of "Indira Gandhi fascist. Go home Nazi. Go back, Go Back!"¹¹¹ In preparation for her visit, the Alliance for People's Democratic India, published a four-page issue of *India Today* with the headline "Criminal Indira Gandhi Not Welcome Here."¹¹² An organization called the Indian Workers Movement (Britain), which was ostensibly associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), issued a broadside exclaiming "Death to Fascist Indira Gandhi," deeming her the "archenemy of the Indian People."¹¹³ At one of her only public addresses to a primarily Indian audience while in Britain, speaking at the Dominion Theatre of the Indian Workers Association (Southall), protesters threw eggs at her, at least one of which "smashed against the

¹¹⁰ Circular, "Join the Great Demonstration on Sunday, 27th June, 76 in London Against 'The Fascist Indra [sic] Dictatorial Rule in India,'" No Date [1976]. PA2600/3/1/20. Coventry History Centre.

¹¹¹ "Strict security for Mrs. Gandhi: A smiling," *The Times*, 13 November 1978.

¹¹² "Special Issue: "Criminal Indira Gandhi Not Welcome Here," *India Today*, November 1978.

¹¹³ Indian Workers Movement (Britain) Circular, "Death to Fascist Indira Gandhi," November 1978. MS2141/A/4/16/110.

marquee and splashed on her pink and black sari.”¹¹⁴ Regardless of her reception at the Dominion Theatre, her British tour marked a return to public office that saw her once again rise to Prime Minister in 1980. Through the early-1980s, her military action against Sikh separatists in Punjab earned her a new kind of political opponent and led to her assassination in 1984.

Conclusion

Foregrounded by the combination of progressively anti-immigrant legislation, dating to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, and the increasingly violent racism of British nationalists, this chapter has examined the emergence of militant anti-imperialism among Indians in Britain in the period of deindustrialization. In the tenth instalment of the 1965 *Times* series “The Dark Million,” devoted to understanding the racial politics of Smethwick, the writer attempted to look toward the future and remained concerned about political extremism in the country. The lesson, for the author, was that “[a]lthough Smethwick has made people aware of the deep feelings on the subject of coloured immigration, it has also led to a hardening of attitudes,” which could lead to a loss of middle ground a policy paralysis.¹¹⁵ But the damage, it would seem, had been done. The experience of racial demagoguery during the parliamentary election in Smethwick in 1964 led Indian migrants to disavow state institutions as unable to protect their rights or lives.

In the wake of Smethwick, Indian activists in the Midlands began to coordinate with migrant and revolutionary organizations in Britain that sought to transform British political and economic institutions, support efforts at decolonialization in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, and commit to mutual self-defense. In this period, Punjabi advocacy for politicians who

¹¹⁴ “Gandhi splattered with egg in London,” *The Sun*, 15 November 1978.

¹¹⁵ “Fascist and Communist Dangers if Action is Delayed,” *The Times* (London, England), 28 January 1965.

would repeal the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was transformed into the belief that mainstream political parties were unable to represent or protect the social, economic, and political interests of the black working-class. Jagmohan Joshi made the point that “we try to make sure that by playing their role in [Trade Union] affairs [migrants] will be contributing something towards white workers’ understanding that black workers are not their enemy but that both have a common enemy.”¹¹⁶ This was a continuation of a long-standing commitment on the part of working-class and radical Punjabis in Britain to work with sympathetic and like-minded organizations for the transformation of British society.

In 1976 the Indian Workers Association circulated a pamphlet titled “Smash Radicalism and Fascism” to explain the dual threats to the black and brown populations in the United Kingdom and to connect their experience to the anti-democratic tendencies in the Indian government. The economic stagnation in Britain in the mid-1970s triggered deep anxieties among the working-class and the turn toward racialism during this period was, the pamphlet explained, fomented by “the servile lackeys of capitalism in crisis” who distributed “anti-black propaganda” to eviscerate the British Labour Movement. As Indira Gandhi was characterized as the arch-enemy of the Indian people, the National Front in Britain was “putting out to the working-class that it is the black people who are responsible” for industrial stagnation. Indian revolutionary organizations in Britain brought racism and totalitarianism into the same political prism. Manifesting as effective single-party rule, repressive policing, scapegoating immigrants and political rivals, and street-level violence, migrant internationalists denounced the rise of

¹¹⁶ Handwritten notes on Industrial disputes, 18 January 1970. MS2141/A/4/14/56. Wolfson Centre.

fascism in Britain and India and pursued strategies in the interest of defending a radical democratic politics of socialism, anti-imperialism, and racial solidarity.

Conclusion

On 3 June 1979, in the streets of London, Jagmohan Joshi, long-time General Secretary of the Indian Workers Association, suffered a heart attack and died. “Black people against state brutality” was emblazoned across the top of a flier for the demonstration that was jointly sponsored by the Indian Workers Association, Awaz and the Brixton Black Women’s Group. The flier advised all interested in attending to assemble at Speakers Corner, Hyde Park, at 1:00 pm on Sunday afternoon. The event was to mark a turning point in South Asian radicalism as it was among the first to simultaneously articulate the uniformity of purpose between the black working class and organizations for the empowerment of black women.¹ At the forefront of this demonstration, like so many before in his thirty-year career as one of the intellectual leaders of migrant internationalism, Jagmohan Joshi was intent on continuing the fight against unjust immigration laws. In an August circular, the IWA reported that Teja Singh Sahota, Joshi’s comrade in the Association of Indian Communists and the Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India, had replaced Joshi as General Secretary.² A year later, Delawar Hosain, General Secretary of the Bangladesh Workers Association remembered, on the anniversary of his death, how Joshi “inspired us with his ideals of proletarian internationalism.”³ At the close of the 1970s, South Asian political articulation in Britain was preparing to undergo a transformation due to circumstances there and in India. Joshi’s death serves as a symbolic close to the era of migrant internationalism.

¹ Flier. “Black People Against State Brutality.” MS2141/A/5/3/4. Wolfson Centre.

² IWA Circular to Branch Secretaries and C.C. Members, 20 August 1979 MS2141/A/1/32. Wolfson Centre.

³ Hosain to Sahota, 5 June 1980. MS2141/A/8/1/88. Wolfson Centre.

This dissertation is a study in colonial capitalism that facilitated South Asian mobility and underpinned the emergence of South Asian communities across the United Kingdom. The period under review was concomitant with growing political will to monitor and restrict the freedom of movement for non-British people. This project has traced the legal history of legislation that was intended to limit the arrival and settlement of destabilizing and undesirable migrants, especially the nationals of aggressor states during wartime. However, as this history demonstrates, questions of belonging in Britain were considered in terms of English-language fluency and, increasingly, skin color and names. Thus, colonial subjects were casually turned into “colored aliens.” Finally, as this dissertation has detailed, the perceptions of difference and economic competition authorized by government ministers and legislative actions, fueled intolerance and anti-immigrant violence throughout Britain.

But, at its core, this dissertation has been a study of resistance and progressive coalitions. Punjabi migrants are at the center of this story as the agents of their own history; rather than the hapless victims of racism, colonialism, and despotism. Although this narrative does not chronicle progressive change over time, it has shown the myriad strategies for survival that migrants have pursued. Initially, noninstitutional networks and informal relationships were vital to navigating social and political complexities. During the 1940s and in the early-postwar period, migrants engaged with political parties and government officials for redress. Yet, by the 1960s and 1970s, a revolutionary ethos emerged that led to the disengagement from the political process and the emergence of militant self-defense. The formalization of migrant politics throughout this period maps onto increasing nativist zeal among white Britons. After the Smethwick elections, anti-immigrant violence became quotidian while the purveyors of violence faced lessened sentences. The murderer of Noor Mohamed in 1925 Glasgow was executed after a short trial. In contrast,

Jody Hill and Robert Hackman, who killed Gurdip Singh Chaggar in a 1976 Southall street-fight, were given four-year jail sentences because the judge in the case maintained that there was no racial animus.

Punjabi emigration from the Jullundur Doab, Hoshiarpur, and Ludhiana, to Britain in the twentieth century, was partly a response to economic opportunity but was fundamentally tied to the mobility of Punjabis as they were incorporated into commercial and martial “webs of empire.”⁴ The effect of that travel was, in many cases, destabilizing to the Raj. Mridula Mukherjee has observed that the “high rate of emigration” from Central Punjab “contributed to the widening of political horizons” for the emigrants as well as for their non-traveling family, friends, and collaborators.⁵ This relationship was the backdrop for the Indian Political Intelligence's position, in 1942, that Hoshiarpur and Jullundur “have for many years past been hotbeds of violent political agitation, and in fact represent the birthplace of the Ghadr [sic] Party.”⁶ The history of migrant internationalism in Britain must be understood both in terms of the mechanisms of travel in the late-nineteenth century and through the twentieth, as well as in the emergence of Punjabi radicalism and anticolonialism, which was evident as early as the 1907 agrarian uprisings but was more fully articulated during World War I and in the interwar period.

The history of South Asian working-class settlers in Britain is rooted in sailors who had deserted ship and sought work on British shores. The Board of Trade, Home Office, and shipping companies intended that South Asian seamen would return to Bombay or elsewhere in India after they were released. The incentives to escape contracts and either sign onto European crews for

⁴ Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, 30-31.

⁵ Mukherjee, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution*, 188.

⁶ Indian Political Intelligence Report. Proposed inclusion of certain Indians on the Suspect List. 15 May 1942. L/PJ/12/645, File 273/42. IOR.

better treatment and pay or to ply a trade in British towns led to the emergence of Punjabi Muslim population centers throughout the country in the 1920s and 1930s. Contrary to common perception, these communities were not ethnic enclaves and they were not created or maintained in isolation from other Britons. Of special importance were the relationships that Punjabi Muslim men formed with English, Welsh, and Scottish women. From the police perspective, relationships between *lascars* and white women, whether sexual or not, represented a matrix of social ills, predation, and naivete. Considering that the Indian diaspora of the early twentieth century was largely male, sex and intimacy emerged out of the social entanglements that presented themselves within the diverse neighborhoods they occupied.

The “typical Ghadar outlook” was a trait that the intelligence community in Britain attributed to many early Indian Workers Association activists and underscores the phenomenon of migrant internationalism. In the 1930s, it was assigned as a kind of *fait accompli* in discussions of radical Punjabis from Hoshiarpur or Jullundur -- sites of regular anticolonial agitation throughout the interwar period. However, the category can be applied more generally to Punjabi radicals throughout the twentieth century. Punjabis who were sympathetic to the aims and methods of interwar iteration of the Ghadar Party and sustained them into the postwar era of mass migration, decolonization, and anti-authoritarianism. It was a shorthand for those who trafficked in Ghadar Party publications and those of sibling organizations, such as the Kirti-Kisan Party or the Communist Party of India. As Maia Ramnath has shown, Ghadar was sustained by a confluence of political and social movements in the years after its 1914 *Ailan-i-Jang* – its declaration of war. Yet, it was neither exclusively a Punjabi movement nor only a movement for national independence. The “typical Ghadar outlook” was an evocative, and perhaps intentionally limited, method of naming a form of radical anticolonialism that co-

mingled with Pan-Africanism and international communism that had travelled back and forth between North America, Europe, and India for decades before finally taking root at the center of empire.

In the late-1960s and early-1970s, the self-defense groups that the Black Peoples' Alliance encouraged and sponsored explicitly refused to be the aggressor. However, during increased nationalist, nativist, and fascist activity throughout the country, the 1970s saw unrelenting violence against migrants and allies who were mobilized against racism and fascism. As this dissertation has demonstrated, anti-immigrant violence was not new in the 1970s. However, as the Asian population grew in the postwar era and was progressively organized into community and political organizations, the response to this violence was more visible. The stabbing murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar was a mobilizing event for Asian youth as it confirmed to them that the National Front was an existential threat to the British Asian community. By 1979, because of government's abdication of the responsibility to protect its citizens and residents, there was open street-fighting between Nazis, often with police backing. In West Bromwich, several Indians were charged with menacing behavior and assault during a National Front rally. Violence erupted during the National Front's General Election meeting in Southall in April 1979, during which Blair Peach, a New Zealand-born teacher and activist, was killed by a Metropolitan Police officer. Southall and West Bromwich represent a turning point for the political organizing among second generation British Asians. Epitomized by the Asian Youth Movements (AYMs) and the Southall Black Sisters (SBS), these shifts sought a distinct path from that which had been blazed by the Indian Workers Association, the Association of Indian Communists, and the myriad anti-Indira Gandhi groups. Although the AYM and SBS continued to resist racism in Britain, this generation of British Asians navigated British social

upheaval using new political alliances that focused on the salience of New Social Movements and cultural expressions that were beyond the vicissitudes of India and unmoored from ideological constraints of a previous era.⁷

As violence erupted on British streets, the Maoist influence on Joshi's IWA became untenable. In January 1979, just after Soviet-backed Vietnamese forces invaded Pol Pot's Cambodia, the secretary of the Workers' Party of Scotland (Marxist-Leninist) appealed to the IWA to join a "solidarity-friendship organization" as a show of support to "Democratic Kampuchea," demonstrating the continued chasm between the votaries of the Soviets and the Chinese in radical politics in Britain. At a demonstration in London on 18 February, the IWA expressed its support for the "Kampuchean people" as a rejection of "Soviet social imperialism" and its manipulation of Vietnamese authorities. In addition to the invasion of Cambodia, the IWA was horrified that the Vietnamese government had congratulated Indira Gandhi on her declaration of Emergency in 1975 "at [Moscow's] behest."⁸

The case of Cambodia provides an important lesson in the limits of the rhetoric of oppression that Indian radicals deployed during this period. Ideologically it was rooted in the mobilizations against Soviet imperialism that had emerged in the era of Bandung. Substantially, the defense of Pol Pot was morally bankrupt.⁹ The genocidal violence of the Khmer Rouge against Cambodians was a magnification of the violence of the Cultural Revolution in China a decade earlier. The annihilation of class enemies was a fundamental Maoist doctrine that was embraced by Naxalites and supported by its sympathizers in Britain. In this moment, the anti-

⁷ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star*, 3.

⁸ Joshi to Ceremonial Department, Scotland Yard, 25 January 1979. MS2141/A/4/15/64. Wolfson Centre.

⁹ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

imperialism of migrant radicalism became unmoored from the moral righteousness of self-defense and was transformed into an apologia for Pol Pot's genocide. During World War II, the forebears of the Indian Workers Association stood for national liberation and against imperialist war. At the same time, the leadership in the era refused to show support for Stalin's Soviet Union because entering the war made it complicit in the maintenance of the imperialism. However, the defense of genocide in Cambodia undermined the moral imperative of decoloniality and the emancipatory politics of migrant internationalism; in short, this was an unusable future.

South Asian migrants and settlers in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s identified as black "as a signifier of the entangled racialized colonial histories of 'black' settlers" in order to "affir[m] a politics of solidarity against racism centred around colour."¹⁰ In Britain, the use of black as a signifier of solidarity manifested in the names of organizations such as the Black Peoples' Alliance, the Southall Black Sisters, and the United Black Youth League. However, the use of "black" as an umbrella designation for those who are subject to race-based oppression began to fade in this moment as identification according to religion and culture began to rise. Ralph Grillo suggests that "the construction of difference and diversity in Britain has moved from 'race'...to 'ethnicity', to 'culture', and thence to 'faith'."¹¹ Thus, for a series of geopolitical reasons, South Asian migrants actively began to cultivate religious identities rather than the inter-racial and international coalitions that were pursued throughout the mid-twentieth century.

The anger that Gandhi provoked in 1978 during her visit to the United Kingdom did not signal the end of her political career. Having been re-elected to parliament in 1978, she formed a

¹⁰ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 13.

¹¹ Ralph Grillo, "British and Others: From 'Race' to 'Faith'", in *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*, Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf, eds. (London: Routledge, 2010), 50.

new government in January 1980, once again as the leader of the Congress Party. Her tactics of violent conflict with dissenting and destabilizing forces continued in her second ministry. In June 1984, Gandhi ordered the Indian army raid of the Golden Temple complex, code named “Operation Blue Star,” because it had been occupied by militant Sikhs who sought greater autonomy for Punjab. The violence that followed the raid caused many Sikhs to flee the subcontinent. It also resulted in Gandhi’s assassination and her memorialization as a victim of ethno-nationalist violence; rather than, as the Indian dissent in the 1970s would have preferred, the architect of Indian authoritarianism.

Operation Blue Star and its aftermath had an immutable influence on Sikh identity formation and political organization. The events of 1984 in Amritsar and the ensuing migration of Sikhs who hoped to avoid mob violence, transformed the way identity was expressed among many Sikhs in Britain and North America. The internationalization of Sikh separatism and the campaign for Khalistan, helped to shift diaspora politics away from the cultivation of affective communities toward that of the ethno-nationalism and religious identity. It is tempting to draw a line between the transnational politics of the Ghadar and Khalistan movement. In both cases, the articulation of place-based identities was deterritorialized due to colonial or postcolonial violence. However, the Ghadar movement actively pursued a future-oriented politics of internationalism that connected struggles against British hegemony and imperialism. Khalistan, in contrast, sought to legitimate the nationalist ambitions of a homogenous religious community.¹² As support for Khalistan eclipsed the politics of race and class solidarity, and as

¹² Others have made this point: Brain Keith Axel, *The Nation’s Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 84; Anne Murphy, review of *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, by Giorgio Shani, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69, 2 (2010), 644.

notions of a Sikh diaspora displaced politics organized around anti-racism and anti-imperialism among Punjabis in Britain, the era of migrant internationalism that characterized much of Punjabi experience in twentieth century Britain dissipated and dissolved.

The immediate post-World War I period was one of heightened British anxiety over aliens and the mobility of colonial subjects, the Communist International's focus imperialism, and economic contraction during the Great Depression; all of which were important factors in diaspora political formation. By the late-1970s, the promise of migrant internationalism appeared to be on the wane and the threads of inter-group alliances were beginning to fray. The limits of armed revolution appear to have had a disintegrating effect on the politics of internationalism and the radicalism of the far left among Indian migrants that were unsustainable. The elections of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Indira Gandhi 1980 indicate that this was a period of profound political reorientation that sharply transformed British Asian and working-class identity. Trade unionism, once a primary source of working-class migrant militancy, was eviscerated as industries shifted abroad, and essential goods and services were privatized. Moreover, Indira Gandhi's aggressive policies toward Sikh extremism facilitated the rise of Khalistani separatism for an independent Sikh state, which transformed Sikh relationships to their subcontinental homeland and led scholars to isolate and define the contours of a Sikh diaspora at the expense of the politics of internationalism.

“Peoples War”¹³

In each heart we shall awaken the flames of rebellion
With Peoples War we shall make conflagration!

This world will return to those who deserve it
The workers, the peasants, the hungry, the poor
The miserable oppressed we shall make them blessed
With Peoples War we shall make conflagration!

Once sense of right awakens, oppression’s days are numbered
Then all the fields are ours, and all the factories too
‘Everything on this earth is ours’ we shall tell the jailers
With Peoples War we shall make conflagration!

With tawdry gimmicks we were sought to be amused
With lies and falsehood our lives were utterly ruined
This monument of lies we will topple with our kicks
With Peoples War we shall make conflagration!

After reflection we have finally unsheathed our sword
Tired of our condition we have snatched up the gun
Now with the blood of the oppressor we will decorate the earth
With Peoples War we shall make conflagration!

Then awoke Telangana and Bengal turned restless too
Then fields lit up with fire and grief burst into flame
With sparks of this fire we will burn down the evil
With Peoples War we shall make conflagration!

O rulers of Delhi: This is our affirmation
O killers and evil-doers: This is our proclamation
You are enemies of humanity, we will wipe you out thoroughly
With Peoples War we shall make conflagration!

¹³ Jagmohan Joshi, “Peoples War,” *Newsletter: Indian Workers Association GB*, no. 3 (July/August 1978). MS2141/A/8/11/7. Wolfson Centre.

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