

Radicals Strike Back: A Memorandum for the Cultural Studies of Black Radicalism in Britain

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the genealogy of the cultural practices of 'British black radicals.' The terms 'black radical' and 'black radicalism' have strong connections with Black Lives Matter (BLM), which is a movement currently centred in the United States. However, as discussed in this paper, black radicalism has a long history and has had considerable influence on particularly the lives of Caribbean immigrants in post-war Britain. I envision this paper as a comprehensive study on the cultural practices based on black radicalism that were popular in Britain from the 1960s to 1980s. By mentioning my previous research, I intend to position this memorandum as an introduction to this general concept.

Two Recent Studies on 'Black'

My research focuses on the Institute of Race Relations in Britain and its long-time leader Ambalavanar Sivanandan, and my doctoral thesis examines the identity politics that was led by Sivanandan and others in the 1970s. Under the influence of Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, and the Black Power Movement in the United States, Sivanandan and others envisioned a solidarity that

was based on their identity of being 'black'; this solidarity transcended their cultural differences and enabled them to develop an anti-racism movement. However, my thesis concluded that their identity politics failed due to the ambiguity in and immaturity of their definitions of the term 'black'.

In recent years, two research trends on the definition of black have become popular. One trend is the re-evaluation of the black radicalism movements that are active in the United States. Black radicalism was originally discussed in detail by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983). In the book, Robinson points out that racism is not a by-product of capitalism but the latter was built on the foundation of the former. Further, he refers to capitalism as 'racial capitalism'. In addition, he argues that the traditional Marxist analysis tends to presuppose European history and experience and, therefore, it is insufficient and inappropriate to base analyses of the history of black people's resistance on Marxist theory alone. Subsequently, Robinson pursues the parallel development of Marxism and the black resistance movement in Europe and the United States and argues that both concepts have influenced thinkers and activists such as W.E.B. Dubois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright and that the latter's works collectively form the black radical

tradition, which is the foundation of counter-thoughts to and cultural practices against racial capitalism. Recent research on black radicalism suggests that the BLM, which was initiated in the United States in 2013, is a part of the lineage of black radicalism. Further, Gay Teresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, who compiled the *Futures of Black Radicalism* (2017), describe the present-day significance of black radicalism as follows:

It is the enduring truth of the black rebellion that its traditions, strategies, and representations aside variously in dynamic intersections of radical thought. Today, Hong Kong's pro-democracy marches are productively linked to the BLM's actions on Staten Island; in Ferguson, Missouri, the violence perpetrated by the Baltimore Police Department is connected to Palestinian subjugation and containment; and in North Dakota, an anti-colonial resistance to an oil pipeline is linked to the environmental justice actions taken by the black communities of Detroit, Atlanta, New York, and Los Angeles. (Johnson and Lubin, p.9)

This 'intersection', or 'intersectionality', is an important aspect of the current social movement. Today, not all discriminations are independent occurrences but intricately intertwined with each other, forming a stronger, more complex structural discrimination that is spreading throughout society. This recognition identifies 'crossover' as the keyword of both the solidarity and diversification of all social movements against discrimination. Tracing its history in detail, Kehinde Andrews, an author of *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century* (2018), further pointed out that although black radicalism has played an important role in various social movements, its importance has been unfairly underestimated.

However, all the aforementioned studies,

including the research by Robinson, focus on cases in the United States. The re-examination of another research trend, black studies in Britain, compensates for this regional bias. Lisa Amanda Palmer, one of the editors of *Blackness in Britain* (2016), suggests that black research in Britain is lagging behind or is stagnant compared to the research conducted in the United States. One reason for this regional difference is that the black resistance movement has always been largely concentrated in the United States. For example, the Black Power Movement in Britain was 'unidirectionally' influenced by the corresponding American movement. Palmer attempted to institutionalise black studies in the British academia and called for the creation of an environment conducive to performing detailed research on black movements in Britain. However, she does not say, 'Get black back from America'; rather, she opines that detailed regional studies and case studies are indispensable for the expansion of international and comprehensive research on black immigrants. Further, the presence of many eminent black immigrant scholars, such as Kehinde Andrews, one of the editors of *Blackness in Britain* and an author of *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century*, in the British academia indicates that the recent popularity of black radicalism and black studies in Britain is not irrelevant. In *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964–1985* (2019), Rob Waters points out that many immigrants who started clarifying the definition of black in Britain in the 1960s recognised themselves as radicals who were influenced by black radicalism and that this self-awareness significantly influenced these immigrants' cultural practices in Britain until at least the 1980s.

The recent attention on black radicalism and black studies in Britain indicates a present-day crisis where many countries use the concept 'bare nationalism' to cover up situations where neoliberal

market forces atomise people and destroy all social relationships and solidarity. Under such conditions, we should urgently form a social space where people can coexist in the face of diversity and tolerate each other while intersecting in various ways without being bound by the state or market logic. This raises the following question: What are the ideal cultural practices and social movements that help in the creation of a social space?

Black Radicals in Britain

Based on the academic background discussed in the previous section, I consider the cultural tradition of British black radicals, which is different from that of similar initiatives in the United States and plan to position my research in a broader context. Further, I believe that the Institute of Race Relations is a part of the black radical tradition. By positioning my research in a broader context, I identify an important interaction between the anti-racism movements of Britain and the United States and clarify how the Institute of Race Relations indicates a failure of black radicalism in Britain. In other words, it answers the question of which cultural practices and social movements can facilitate the formation of a social space where people can coexist and resist diversity while preventing contradictions and conflicts between these people.

In this manner, this study was inspired by the results of recent research on black radicalism and black studies in Britain. However, this study is unique in that it considers people who are influenced by black radicalism in Britain black radicals and clarifies their cultural practices in a genealogical manner.

In accordance with Palmer's claim, to comprehensively understand the genealogy of black radicals in Britain, it is necessary to conduct a

detailed case study. Accordingly, this study focused on John La Rose, who identified himself as a black radical, and the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), which was founded by La Rose and others. La Rose, who was from Trinidad and a poet himself, along with writer Edward Kamau Brathwaite and writer/journalist Andrew Salkey formed CAM in 1966 as a network of Caribbean artists in Britain. Further, La Rose was a board member of the Institute of Race Relations and frequently wrote for its journal, *Race Today*. Subsequently, in his youth, Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ), who made his debut as a poet in *Race Today* magazine and later edited the magazine on his own, joined CAM. It is presumed that La Rose, Sivanandan, and LKJ had similar cultural and ideological perspectives. To develop their perspectives into a genealogical study of black radicals' cultural practices in Britain, the following three points are clarified:

The George Padmore Institute, located in the suburbs of London, collects personal relics of John La Rose. By surveying the collections, as well as CAM's periodicals and La Rose's personal letters, I clarify CAM's founding and activity philosophy and how they were influenced by black radicalism. Further, after visiting the Sivanandan Collection in the University of Warwick Library, Britain, and researching materials related to Sivananda and La Rose and a round-trip letter by La Rose and LKJ, I clarify La Rose's role in the Institute of Race Relations and the relationship between his works published in *Race Today* and black radicalism. Finally, I examine how the ideas promoted by CAM and those of black radicalism influenced LKJ's cultural practices. In addition, I refer to recent publications, such as David Austin's *Dread Poetry and Freedom: Linton Kwesi Johnson and the Unfinished Revolution* (2018), and clarify how CAM and black radicalism have culturally and ideologically

influenced LKJ's activities.

For the Cultural Studies of British Black Radicals

After completing my PhD thesis, I continued my research on the Institute of Race Relations, as well as Sivanandan's theory of social movements and LKJ's contributions to *Race Today*. As I have pointed out in my thesis, Sivanandan and LKJ confronted each other and eventually split up over their disagreements on *Race Today*'s editorial policy. However, even though it is known that both the scholars were involved in the editorial activities of the same journal, the direct connection between their activities and reason for their disagreement are not clear. Therefore, I reconsidered the actions of the Institute of Race Relations in a broader context embodied by the aforementioned black radicalism research and black studies in Britain. In addition, my investigation revealed that both Sivanandan and LKJ had cultural and intellectual interactions with John La Rose, who had identified himself as a black radical. I identify this interaction among Sivanandan, LKJ, and La Rose as the beginning point of cultural studies on British black radicals.

Overall, this research is in line with the purpose and direction of recent black radicalism research and black studies in Britain. However, whereas these studies centre on the United States and emphasise the analysis of various ideas, the current study focuses on the cultural practices that developed in Britain against the background of black radicalism. By defining the term British black radicals and examining the cultural practices of black radicalism, I hope to complement and enhance the findings of related studies.

Conclusion

Now, we return to consider the BLM. It is part of the black radicalism genealogy, criticised racial capitalism, and instigated the development of movements against racial capitalism. Therefore, issues of racism are not independent of the development of capitalism.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the anti-racism movement in relation to various anti-discrimination movements and not isolate the former. Further, the BLM is by no means a recent phenomenon. After the 1960s, discrimination by police was a common occurrence in both the United States and Britain and was opposed by black movements and cultures everywhere. This work examines whether we have listened to the proponents of such movements patiently and politely. The spread of the BLM triggered various actions worldwide, such as the destruction of statues of people involved in colonial rule and slavery. For instance, in Britain, the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oxford University was targeted by protestors. However, the key point of this action is that it demands a renewal of the colonial nature of university education and curriculum. In addition, the fact that terms such as 'Black Lives Matter', 'black', 'black radicalism', and 'racial capitalism' cannot be translated into fluent Japanese proves that we have not yet appropriately considered such concepts in Japan. These concepts related to the BLM form the foundation of my study titled 'Cultural Studies of British Black Radicals'.

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