

University of Bristol

Department of Historical Studies

Best undergraduate dissertations of 2026

Isabelle D'Abadie

**Personalising Anti-Colonialism: Uncovering
the Individual, Embodied Experiences of the
1970 Trinidad and Tobago Black Power
Movement using Oral Histories**

The Department of Historical Studies at the University of Bristol is committed to the advancement of historical knowledge and understanding, and to research of the highest order. Our undergraduates are part of that endeavour.

Since 2009, the Department has published the best of the annual dissertations produced by our final year undergraduates in recognition of the excellent research work being undertaken by our students.

This was one of the best of this year's final year undergraduate dissertations.

Please note: this dissertation is published in the state it was submitted for examination. Thus the author has not been able to correct errors and/or departures from departmental guidelines for the presentation of dissertations (e.g. in the formatting of its footnotes and bibliography).

© The author, 2026

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the prior permission in writing of the author, or as expressly permitted by law.

All citations of this work must be properly acknowledged.

**Personalising Anti-Colonialism: Uncovering the
Individual, Embodied Experiences of the 1970
Trinidad and Tobago Black Power Movement using
Oral Histories**

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the five research participants who I interviewed for giving of their time and energy to tell their stories and make this oral history project possible. Additionally, thank you to The Emancipation Support Committee of Trinidad and Tobago for connecting me with these interviewees.

I would also like to thank the multiple lecturers in the History department at the University of Bristol who supported me during the research and writing of this dissertation, especially my supervisor, Dr. Beth Rebisz for sharing her expert knowledge on conducting oral histories and for her unwavering support, encouragement and guidance over the academic year.

Contents:

Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1: Reclaiming Black Identities.....	15
Chapter 2: Learning ‘Real’ Power.....	20
Chapter 3: Contesting Narratives of ‘Black Power’.....	25
Conclusion.....	32
Bibliography.....	34

Introduction:

‘Massa was quite right; to educate is to emancipate.’¹

On the 22nd of March 1961, just over a year before Trinidad and Tobago became independent from Great Britain, Eric Williams stood in what he called ‘The University of Woodford Square’ before thousands of Trinbagonian citizens and proudly proclaimed: ‘Massa Day Done!’² This was a call for Britain to leave the twin islands after they had endured almost 500 years of colonialism under multiple European powers, as the word ‘Massa’ was commonly used by enslaved people to refer to their European plantation masters. Nine years later however, Williams, the initially incredibly popular first prime minister of Trinbago, who was championed for his role in Caribbean anti-colonialism, bore the brunt of a revolution directed against his predominantly Black government termed, ‘The Black Power Movement’.³ During this uprising, Woodford Square was again used as a ‘university’, but this time to educate Trinbagonian citizens on everything Williams’ government had failed to accomplish despite official independence.

Williams’ statement during this famous speech that education was the key to freedom was thus turned against him in 1970 by a group initially comprising of students at the University of the West Indies (UWI). They reclaimed intellectual, public spaces like Woodford Square, which became known as ‘the people’s parliament’, to re-educate Trinbagonian citizens to fight for what one prominent leader of the movement called, ‘a total revolution’ of Trinbagonian society.⁴ It soon grew to tens-of-thousands of Trinbagonian citizens marching through the streets calling ‘power to the people’ which complicated what the independence and supposed power they had ‘won’ eight years earlier actually meant. Accordingly, after three months, the government declared a state of emergency, detained several of the leaders and ironically, closed many places including Woodford Square to inhibit public meeting there.

¹ Eric Williams, ‘Massa Day Done’ (Public Lecture at Woodford Square, 22 March 1961), *Callaloo*, 20.4, (1997), 724-730, p.730.

² Ibid: Trinbago will be used henceforth to condense Trinidad and Tobago.

³ For Eric Williams’ anti-colonial contributions see for example: Colin Palmer, *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean*, (University of North Carolina, 2006) & Tanya Shields, *The Legacy of Eric Williams: into the post-colonial moment*, (University of Mississippi, 2015).

⁴ Anonymous B, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (4th November 2025).

This dissertation argues that the 1970 Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago was a fundamentally anti-colonial movement with very strong cultural and intellectual ideologies which must be understood as individual, embodied experiences. ‘Embodied’, in this dissertation, expands on the idea of something being personal to describe an experience or trait which one individually takes on and becomes part of one’s identity. I employ oral histories which are essential in revealing how individuals who participated strongly embodied different parts of the movement. The individuality of experience and complexities of opinions within the movement have so far been overlooked in homogenous depictions of Black Power in Trinbago as a mass movement and this dissertation seeks to address that.

Literature Review:

While there has been considerable academic work done on American Black Power, there has been a relative lack of historiography on Trinbagonian Black Power specifically. As such, the works on it encompass a scattered array of different approaches with generally economic or political focuses and there are only a few which are true social histories.⁵ I will contribute to this small sub-field using oral history which has been seldom applied not just to Trinbago but to Caribbean anti-colonial movements generally as compared to African and Asian decolonial histories. While there is still more to be done for these regions, there has been a definite growth in oral history research there in the last couple decades.⁶ This approach has enabled me to build upon some theories which have already been applied to Trinbagonian Black Power, like spiritual citizenship and Black love, and combine them with ideas that have not yet

⁵ For some economic works see: Lou Anna Barclay & Ralph Henry, ‘Black Power and Equitable Business Participation: Forty Years on in Trinidad and Tobago’, *Social and Economic Studies*, 60, (2011), pp.151-182 & Keston Perry and Zophia Edwards, ‘“Power to the People!”: The Catalytic Role of the Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago’s Industrialisation’, *Social Science History*, 47:4, (2023), pp.665-691: For some political works see: Brinsley Samaroo, ‘The Historian’s Dilemma: Eric Williams’ Response to the Black Power Uprising of 1970’, *Journal of Caribbean History*, 54, (2020), 197-207 & Ufot Inamete, ‘Politics and Governance in Trinidad and Tobago: Major Issues and Developments’, *Caribbean Studies*, 25:3/4, (1992), pp.305-324: The few social histories include: Victoria Pasley, ‘The Black Power Movement in Trinidad: An Exploration of Gender and Cultural Changes and the Development of a Feminist Consciousness’, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 3, (2001), pp.24-40 & Keisha Thompson, ‘Loving with Their Consciousness: Black Women in Trinidad and Tobago Black Power’, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 50, (2022), pp.133-158.

⁶ Examples of such include: Rose Miyonga, ‘‘We Kept Them to Remember’: Tin Trunk Archives and the Emotional History of the Mau Mau War’, *History Workshop Journal*, 96, (2023), pp.96-114 & Sumallya Mukhopadhyay, ‘Affective Listening and the Digital Oral History Archive: A Case Study Based on the 1947 Bengal Partition’, *Oral History Review*, 52:1, (2025), pp.22-42.

been applied, like decolonising the mind and the memory studies concept of the master narrative. These have also allowed me to add a more personalised perspective to the debates surrounding the creation of a post-independent Trinbagonian identity.

Black Consciousness

Many scholars of American Black Power including William Van Deburg and Amy Ongiri who considered the movement, ‘the search for a Black aesthetic’, have focused on external qualities of Blackness, especially through reclaiming pride in one’s Black hair and skin which had been seen as inferior to White features for so long.⁷ Victoria Pasley similarly applied this to her gendered study of Trinbagonian Black Power through revealing how it championed the look of the ‘ideal Black man’.⁸ While pride in aesthetic Blackness was definitely important in Trinidad, the personal stories in this dissertation show that there were deeper, individual qualities of Black pride. N. Fadeke Castor in tracing the Ifá religion throughout Trinbagonian history and its West-African roots, where the enslaved African population originated, coined the idea of spiritual citizenship. She defined it as, ‘the power of the sacred to inform new ways of belonging to community’.⁹ This idea of belonging to something greater than a national community through one’s personal, spiritual transformations went beyond the homogenous post-independent national identity Eric Williams was trying to consolidate in Trinidad. Rather, the interviews foregrounded a deeper, spiritual change which focused on reclaiming Africanness rather than aesthetic Blackness. Moreover, this dissertation combines this with the great anti-colonial thinker Walter Rodney’s idea, that the victim of colonialism is taught to hate himself and needs to start seeing Blackness in a positive light to move on from this.¹⁰ Chapter One will therefore examine the individual experiences of Black consciousness in the BPM which have not been adequately addressed in the historiography thus far.

⁷ William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*, (University of Chicago, 1992); Amy Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*, (University of Virginia, 2016).

⁸ Pasley, p.35.

⁹ N. Fadeke Castor, *Spiritual Citizenship: Transnational Pathways from Black power to Ifá in Trinidad*, (Duke University, 2017), p.5.

¹⁰ Walter Rodney, *Groundings with my Brothers*, (Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications, 1969), p.35.

Unlearning Colonialism

Similarly, little has been done on how this Black Consciousness was actually achieved in Trinidad. Keisha Thompson applied the idea of Black love to the Trinidad Black Power Movement (BPM), saying it was something which went beyond the individual to a ‘collective love rooted and centred in the resistance’ which would help to change society.¹¹ She looked at how educated female leaders used their position to educate the masses on how to achieve the ‘power’ they were hoping for, often at the detriment of their personal safety and relationships. The oral histories in this dissertation showcase how education and personal sacrifice were essential but also fill in the necessary first step to this. They identify how the BPM first needed to educate Black people on the inferior position they were in, due to the remaining colonial societal structure. Thus, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s idea of decolonising the mind will be applied for the first time to this movement.¹² According to Walter Dignolo who built upon Thiong’o’s thesis, the first step to changing a colonial system is for the people within it to appreciate that they are in a colonial system.¹³ In Chapter Two where I interrogate how the leaders sought to achieve power through education, I will therefore build on Thompson’s thesis by emphasising the importance for both the leaders and the masses to first individually decolonise their minds before they could make collective changes to decolonise the society.

Trinidadian Identity

Trinidad and Tobago’s incredible ethnic diversity for its size means there has been considerable historiography trying to determine what the post-independent identity of the country was and is today. Scholars like Raymond Ramcharitar and Bridget Brereton have examined the ethnic contestations over identity, particularly between the majority groups of African and Indian descent which in 1970 were estimated as being roughly even in size.¹⁴ While they mentioned the ethnic tensions within the BPM to some degree, they largely focused on the distinct cultural identities that appear to have emerged parallel to each other in Trinidad. They have not thoroughly considered the individual perspectives and debates on which groups the BPM represented which will be addressed in Chapter Three. This dissertation will also be the

¹¹ Thompson, p.134.

¹² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*, (Heinemann, 2005).

¹³ Walter Dignolo & Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, (Duke University, 2018), p.111.

¹⁴ Raymond Ramcharitar, ‘Ethnic Anxiety and Competing Citizenships in Trinidad and Tobago’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47:16, (2021), pp.3752-3770; Bridget Brereton, ‘ “All ah we is not one”: Historical and Ethnic Narratives in Pluralist Trinidad’, *The Global South*, 4:2, (2010), pp.218-238, p.218.

first work to critically analyse how the former leaders of the BPM construct the narrative of it today, by applying David Mwambari's conception of the master narrative to these debates on Trinbagonian identity. While his work is exclusively on the 1994 Rwandan genocide, he explains that for major events, with time, a master narrative is created 'reinforcing emerging terminologies', but this master narrative is never agreed upon by everyone.¹⁵ The contestations which came up in the interviews over the term 'Black Power' over 55 years later aligns with Mwambari's appreciation of nuances within the master narrative, especially since all the interviewees were associated with the leadership of the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), the main organising body of the Trinbago BPM.

Overall, this dissertation weaves this complex web of debates and theories together to illustrate and reflect the individual complexities of Trinbagonian Black Power. An understanding of what Black Power truly meant for Trinbagonian individuals and how it was embodied by them has not been sufficiently addressed in the historiography. This dissertation helps to fill this gap using oral testimonies and bringing together these theories to add this much needed individual dimension to the movement.

Methodology:

This study's main primary source base is oral history interviews carried out between myself and five figures of the 1970 Trinbago BPM. These testimonies are especially important because they allow for the exploration of the individual, embodied experiences of the BPM and the inherent complexities within anti-colonial movements like it. This pushes against depictions of mass movements as homogenous when they are comprised of individuals with different perspectives, experiences and wishes. This is especially pertinent since this project focuses on the cultural and intellectual aspects of Black Power, which as further explanation reveals, were largely individual experiences for all who participated.

The interviews were conducted online as the participants all reside in Trinbago and were semi-structured, with open-ended questions to allow participants to elaborate wherever they

¹⁵ David Mwambari, *Navigating Cultural Memory*, (Oxford University, 2023), p.75.

desired. They lasted between 55 minutes and two-and-a-half hours. There were some challenges with the online interviews, with occasional faulty audio and video connection, but conducting them online was invaluable in allowing their perspectives to be heard despite the physical distance. Three participants wished to have their names shared: the two women, Dr. Olabisi Kuboni and Dr. Eintou Pearl Springer and one of the men, Mr. Khafra Kambon. The other two interviewees chose to remain anonymous so from now on will be referred to as Mr. A. and Mr. B. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by myself. As Alesandro Portelli explained, the ‘orality’ of oral history is what usefully distinguishes it from the written record, so though it is impossible to re-produce every detail from the spoken word into a written transcript, hesitations and changes in pace, volume and emphasis were noted and considered in the analysis of these sources.¹⁶ The capitalisation of words within quotes in this dissertation reflect actual increases in emphasis and volume during the interviews.

As Natalya Vince pointed out, we must be wary of trying to find the ‘most representative’ interviewee since what is valuable is the individuality of opinions.¹⁷ A major value of these interviews was that they proved there was no one representative idea of what Black Power meant and how it was experienced in Trinbago. Despite all the participants being closely associated with NJAC, they had diverging perspectives on important topics. Additionally, all the participants were leaders of the movement, or people closely connected to the leaders, and highly educated. Therefore, these perspectives cannot be seen as representative of the tens-of-thousands of Trinbagonian citizens who participated in the numerous marches and campaigns throughout 1970. However, the interviewees’ education greatly impacted their position as leaders and thus, the movement overall, so their perspectives are very important to consider.

Being educated and living in Trinidad until I was 18 years old meant the interviewees were generally happy and willing to share much about the movement with me, especially after I told them I had not learned much about Black Power at school. Growing up in Trinidad also helped me understand nuances like dialect, slang, and local cultural references in the interviews. Meanwhile, the age difference between myself and the interviewees, who are all over 70 years old, my nationality, and the fact that I am a student eager to learn, may have impacted what they shared with me and how. Alistair Thomson identified when revising his seminal work *Anzac*

¹⁶ Alesandro Portelli, ‘What makes Oral History Different?’, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by R. Perkins and A. Thomson, (Routledge, 2006), pp.61-74, p.65.

¹⁷ Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: nation, memory and gender in Algeria, 1954-2012*, (Manchester University, 2015), p.19.

Memories, that some older interviewees are adamant ‘to convey a moral and political story to a representative of a younger generation’ to ensure the story is told on their terms.¹⁸ Moreover, while oral testimonies taken over 55 years after the movement can be susceptible to issues of forgetting, I believe the passage of time is a strength to this project. It has allowed the interviewees to know what story they wish to be portrayed. Historians like Martha Beard and Alan Munslow have noted that oral history is much more about the narrative-making of history rather than figuring out how ‘it really was’.¹⁹ This narrative construction is another very useful lens for understanding the individual diversity of thoughts within movements like this and will be explored in Chapter Three.

A couple calypsos, a Trinbagonian music genre, which E.M. Phillips noted were prime sources of socio-political commentary between the 1960s to 1990s, have been included in Chapter One as they highlight how conceptions of Black Consciousness were being spread throughout the population.²⁰ Additionally, a couple newspaper headlines have been included in Chapters Two and Three since they demonstrate how the media portrayed the movement in relation to the interviewees’ perspectives.

Structure:

The main contestation which came up during the interviews, showcasing the individuality of anti-colonial movements, was over what Black Power meant for Trinbagonian citizens in 1970. Hence, the structure of this dissertation will follow this by breaking down the term into its constituent parts and examining the individual, embodied aspects of each.

Chapter One will explore the ‘Black’ in Black Power, illustrating the movement’s cultural ideology. It demonstrates that Blackness became something much deeper and more

¹⁸ Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories Revisited: Trauma, Memory and Oral History’, *The Oral History Review*, 42:1, (2015), pp.1-29, p.27.

¹⁹ Martha Rose Beard, ‘Re-thinking oral history- a study of narrative performance’, *The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 21:4, (2017), pp.529-548, p.531; Alun Munslow, *Narrative and History*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

²⁰ E.M. Phillips, ‘Recognising the Language of Calypsos as “Symbolic Action” in Resolving Conflict in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago’, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 52:1, (2006), pp.53-73, p.53.

personal than skin colour; for the first time it was a spiritual experience of embracing Africanness and calling oneself 'Black'.

Chapter Two will then delve into how this ideology was carried out by examining what 'Power' meant in this movement. It showcases the intellectual elements of the movement and how they helped to fundamentally change power dynamics by changing people's mindsets which were rooted in coloniality.

Finally, Chapter Three will address the contestation and narrative construction over what 'Black Power' actually meant. It identifies the different opinions of who this ideology was for in a diverse society like Trinidad and if the term Black Power was even applicable for what happened in 1970.

Chapter 1: Reclaiming Black Identity

‘When I became initiated into Ifá Orisha spirituality... THEN I understood the DEPTHS of enslavement.’²¹

David Trotman has noted that with independence, Eric Williams created a ‘Creole nationalist narrative’, that is, a homogenous Trinbagonian cultural identity which generally represented the African-descended population but which everyone was supposedly meant to ascribe to.²² The statement above by Dr. Eintou Pearl Springer, a former Poet Laureate of Port-of-Spain who has been remembered for her cultural activism in Trinidad and in Britain among the Black Panthers, demonstrates that Black Power starkly revealed the flaws in this cultural homogenising. Rather, the BPM advocated for individual, embodied and deeply spiritual cultural transformations.

While the interviewees all had reservations about calling the movement a complete success, they considered the cultural elements to have been mostly positive. Mr. A, who was part of the radical UWI student guild from which many of the leaders of NJAC came, even implied that the cultural element of the movement was its strongest part.²³ The cultural changes they alluded to went beyond Williams’ idea of a cohesive post-independent identity and rather one which for the first time celebrated ‘true’ African cultural traits that had been forcibly banned under enslavement. Generations later, the descendants of the enslaved therefore used the BPM to go beyond this Trinbagonian identity and root themselves in an Africanness their ancestors had lost. This chapter argues that in the Trinbago BPM, ‘Black’ meant much more than skin colour but rather related to one’s personal identification with their African roots and how this allowed, for the first time, a positive, embodied identification with being Black.

Victoria Pasley, through mainly looking at print culture, greatly focused on the movement’s aesthetic Blackness and identified the BPM’s predominant portrayal of the ideal Black man ‘with Afros and Dashikis’.²⁴ Meanwhile, in the interviews, there was limited discussion of what Dr. Olabisi Kuboni called ‘the externals of Blackness’ like ‘how you wear

²¹ Eintou Pearl Springer, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (23rd October 2025).

²² David Trotman, ‘Performing the History: Contesting Historical Narratives in Trinidad and Tobago’, *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 32, (2007), pp.73-109, p.74.

²³ Anonymous A, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (10th October 2025).

²⁴ Pasley, p.35.

your hair.’²⁵ Kuboni was one of the main educators at the mass meetings during the movement, and while both her and Springer briefly mentioned the upsurge in African hairstyles and clothing in post-1970 Trinidad, these physical traits of Black identity were only touched upon when I asked all the interviewees how the movement changed people’s feelings about Black pride.²⁶ Being Black in this movement, to them, was not just about what someone looked like, but a personal, internal transformation which embraced embodied Blackness and specifically, Africanness. Two of the interviewees, Khafra Kambon and Kuboni changed their names to West-African names soon before or after 1970 and proudly articulated this when I asked them their names at the beginning of the interview. Kambon (formerly Dave Dabreau) was one of the main leaders of NJAC from the beginning, often referenced in the news and imprisoned for seven months during the state of emergency. He spoke of this name choice as an important way of ‘regaining identities’ and that he was ‘LABELLED Dave by [his] parents’ because it was a British colony and picking a British name was expected of them.²⁷ Kuboni did not even bother to tell me her previous name, implying that it no longer has any meaning to her.

Moreover, the idea of Africanness was deeply spiritual. N. Fadeke Castor’s spiritual citizenship can be applied to the BPM as the African spiritual culture which grew out of it was simultaneously anti-colonial and transcended the new proscribed post-independence national identity.²⁸ Kambon and Springer detailed their issues with Christianity being the dominant religion in Trinbagonian society due to its painful, colonial roots and that Black Power tried to address that. Kambon recalled the ‘systematic brainwashing in terms of what represents PERFECTION’ that he experienced during childhood through only seeing White deities and heads of religion.²⁹ Mr. B, one of the main leaders of the Tobago branch of NJAC, also expressed his disdain that the Spiritual-Shouter-Baptist faith, a Trinbagonian religion originating out of a mix of African and Christian traditions during enslavement which is characterised by loud singing, chanting and drumming, had been banned by law until 1951. He exclaimed, ‘making RELIGION illegal? Are we in SAVAGELAND?’ and stated that the 1970 movement was the first time many people of African descent began appreciating this religion and proudly converted to it.³⁰ His use of ‘savage’ is particularly telling of how members of Black Power sought to reclaim colonial terms and ideas on their own accord by turning the idea

²⁵ Olabisi Kuboni, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (20th October 2025).

²⁶ Ibid: Interview with Springer.

²⁷ Khafra Kambon, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (22nd October 2025).

²⁸ Castor, p.5.

²⁹ Interview with Kambon.

³⁰ Interview with Anonymous B.

of ‘savage’, so often applied to colonised peoples the world over, back on the former colonisers, highlighting their hypocrisy.

Furthermore, Springer went into a bit more detail about her conversion to the West-African Orisha faith as evidenced in the opening line of this chapter. When speaking about her prior Christian faith, she questioned, ‘WHAT KIND OF GOD will want to save their people through 400 years of enslavement and dehumanisation?’ and urged that more people understand African spirituality.³¹ She eagerly explained how many parts of Trinbagonian culture stem from African spiritual beliefs which were retained despite enslavement. For example, how the steelpan, now the national instrument, came out of traditional Yoruba drumming practices which were banned for centuries under colonial rule and only became widely celebrated after Black Power.³² While Springer does think Black Power made great cultural changes, she became visibly upset when talking about the Black youth of today. She claimed that ‘the society gives them nothing, NOTHING’ in terms of a culture to be rooted in and blames the youth violence today on there still being ‘no recognition for their colour, their hair, their history.’³³ This certainly aligns with Castor’s idea of needing to be part of something culturally bigger than a homogenous national identity to feel a sense of communal belonging, but demonstrates how this is an innately individual experience. Despite all the tangible things Black Power did, with Mr. B very passionately explaining the leaps that were made in nationalising the banking and insurance industries for example, there are still issues with the intangible, cultural elements.³⁴ For some interviewees, like Springer, these are much more important but harder to ever fully resolve. While there was not a definite consensus over the lasting impact of the cultural changes they enacted, the interviewees clearly saw Black Power as a way to undermine the colonial cultures embedded in Trinbagonian society by harking back to their ‘actual’ African roots.

Beyond going back to these roots, the leaders identified that an essential part of the movement was igniting a positive, personal identification with Blackness throughout the population. Both Mr. A and Mr. B identified how ideas of Black pride extended beyond the mass marches and speeches of 1970 into the calypsos written around that time. Mr. A explained that while NJAC was foremost a political entity, they held events like calypso competitions which enabled a ‘Black awakening in culture’.³⁵ Claudius Fergus in describing the origins of Trinbagonian calypso has emphasised how the art form was created as a means of African

³¹ Interview with Springer.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Interview with Anonymous B.

³⁵ Interview with Anonymous A.

enslaved resistance in Trinidad.³⁶ He quoted Francisco Slinger, popularly known as The Mighty Sparrow, in his 1963 song *Slave* which called calypso, ‘the only medicine’ the enslaved people could use to express the hardships of enslavement and get the masters to listen to them.³⁷ Shortly before and after the BPM, the boom in calypsos celebrating Black pride once again became a form of anti-colonial resistance. Fergus even considered one calypso, called *Black is Beautiful* from 1969, as being ‘the unofficial anthem of the Black Power Movement’.³⁸ In this song, also mentioned by Mr. A and Mr. B, Kelvin Pope, who went under the moniker of The Mighty Duke, called Trinbagonians to ‘Sing it aloud...Say I’m Black and proud’ to ‘Erase completely this feeling of inferiority’.³⁹ The immense popularity of songs like this which called people to proudly sing about their Blackness would have been an incredibly powerful way for individuals to express their own Black identity while being part of a bigger anti-colonial movement.

Likewise, Kuboni noted that ‘a definite shift occurred from thinking of oneself as ‘n*gro’’ to reclaiming the word Black’ in a positive light.⁴⁰ She situated the Trinbago BPM ‘as being part of the embodied Pan-Africanist movement’ and spoke highly of the major thinkers who came before her, especially her mentor at UWI in Jamaica, Walter Rodney, whom she credits as having radicalised her to join the movement.⁴¹ In Rodney’s text, *Groundings with my Brothers*, which urged for Black Power in the Caribbean, he adamantly proclaimed that Black West Indians needed to move on from calling themselves n*gros to calling themselves Africans.⁴² This work was published in 1969, just one year before the Trinbagonian movement broke out. While it has not been remembered as much as his writing on Africa or works with similar messages like the great anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon’s work *The Wretched of the Earth*, it reflects the ambitions for an embodied Black consciousness which Black Power advocates in Trinbago called for.⁴³ Indeed, it was one of the few texts like this coming out of the decolonisation era of the 1950s to 1970s which acknowledged the Caribbean context. For Rodney, for there to be any real change in the region, what was essential was ‘confidence in

³⁶ Claudius Fergus, ‘From Slavery to Black Power: The Enigma of Africa in the Trinidad Calypso’, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 16, (2014), pp.1-26, pp.5-6.

³⁷ The Mighty Sparrow, *Slave*, (1963).

³⁸ Fergus, p.20.

³⁹ The Mighty Duke, *Black is Beautiful*, (Tropico,1969).

⁴⁰ Interview with Kuboni.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Rodney, p.35.

⁴³ Rodney’s famous work on Africa is: Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications, 1972); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (François Maspero, 1961).

ourselves, so that as blacks and Africans we can be conscious, united, independent and creative.’⁴⁴

As such, both for the interviewees and in their hopes for the rest of the population, a major part of Black Power was a personal, embodied experience of African culture and a much-needed sense of pride in being ‘Black’; a racial identity which for so long had been a seemingly insurmountable barrier to much of the population. Through Black Power, this sense of consciousness and pride became essential to understanding one’s identity in a rapidly decolonising world where the first leaders of newly independent countries, like Williams, were so focused on building their new nations that they homogenised what ‘the national identity’ should be. In the process, this neglected the individual people and their cultures that made up these new nations.

⁴⁴ Rodney, p.37.

Chapter 2: Learning 'Real' Power

'I was born into a situation where Whites were in control of your life, but you were not a slave... You could go to school, you could get a good education. But at the psychological level, you are given an education DESIGNED by the British and part of the DESIGN is to make you grateful for the fact that your people have been colonised and now you live in civilisation.'⁴⁵

When Trinidad and Tobago became independent on August 31st, 1962, it was officially no longer a British colony, and the people had political power through a democratically elected government. So, what was the 'power' the participants of Black Power were fighting for eight years later? Kamdon's statement above proves that it went beyond the political labels of independence and decolonisation; it was a deeper-rooted issue which needed to be overturned on an individual, psychological level.

Kate Quinn's sentiment that there was only 'flag independence' in many post-colonial Caribbean nations well into the 1980s was reflected by Kuboni on multiple occasions.⁴⁶ Kuboni even made air quotes with her fingers when saying the word 'independence' after I asked her what she thought independence did for Trinbago. She talked about how 'we had our own flag and anthem' but that meant little to the lived reality.⁴⁷ Springer even declared that 'independence had nothing to do with Black Power', because in her eyes the political changes enacted in 1962 had barely scratched the surface of what needed to change for there to be real independence.⁴⁸ There has been some work done on the economic and political divides inherent in Trinbagonian society based on race in this period which restricted the practical power of the non-White population. For instance, Lou Anna Barclay and Ralph Henry looked at Black Power's economic impacts over the 40 years following 1970 and identified how the movement kickstarted more racially equitable business participation.⁴⁹ These sentiments did come up throughout the interviews, particularly in terms of how the White and foreign minorities owned most of the businesses and hence amassed most of the wealth. However, this chapter focuses on how the 'power' individuals in this movement were hoping for also involved overturning the

⁴⁵ Interview with Kamdon.

⁴⁶ Kate Quinn, 'Introduction: New Perspectives on Black Power in the Caribbean', in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. by Kate Quinn, (Florida University, 2014), pp.1-24, p.3

⁴⁷ Interview with Kuboni.

⁴⁸ Interview with Springer.

⁴⁹ Barclay and Henry.

deeper colonial values which still existed in 1970 and enabled these disparities, and how Black Power tried to address that on an individual, intellectual level through education.

Education was very important to all the interviewees personally and was something which they saw themselves as able to pass on to the masses. As previously mentioned, Black Power emerged from a university student movement which Mr. A and Kambon both stated that they were part of. Springer, Mr. A and Mr. B all spoke about being some of the first in their families to have achieved secondary education and Kuboni spoke passionately about how transformative her time at UWI in Jamaica was and she even became a lecturer herself. Nonetheless, these interviews prove that the intellectual element of this movement was not only about a few educated leaders enlightening the masses on new political philosophies as Eric Williams had done. The BPM was also a way to help Trinbagonian citizens unlearn the colonial ways of thinking they had been indoctrinated with through the remaining British education system and unequal power structures. This was the necessary first step before true ‘power’ could be attained. Just like embracing Blackness and African cultural and spiritual traits, intellectually, Black Power was an innately personal, embodied experience of unlearning coloniality, or as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o aptly coined it, ‘Decolonising the Mind’.⁵⁰

Mr. A hardly spoke about his personal experiences and actions during the movement itself. This was possibly because he admitted to becoming afraid when the mass marches and violence started and so he stuck to being a background support to his friends through making placards and managing logistics, rather than marching and being in the spotlight himself.⁵¹ Despite this, he did speak candidly about why he thought the movement was necessary, especially about his personal experiences of being upset in secondary school that he was still learning the British curriculum though Trinidad was independent. He even gave a short anecdote of getting ‘in serious trouble’ for writing an essay which ‘criticised the education system with the heavy, European influence’.⁵² For Kambon, the main reason he personally joined the movement and why the movement was necessary in his eyes was also that the education system was still colonial and was causing Trinbagonian citizens to retain a ‘colonial mentality’ which needed to be unravelled before there could be any fundamental change in society.⁵³ Kambon spoke of the ‘miseducation’ and ‘psychological manipulation of non-whites through the education system’ where the people in his generation were ‘shaped to be good

⁵⁰ Thiong’o, p.1.

⁵¹ Interview with Anonymous A.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Interview with Kambon.

colonials’ by being told ‘all the good things the British did for [them]’.⁵⁴ For him, Eric Williams, in leading the independence movement, had dealt with the political battles of decolonisation but had failed to incorporate the ‘psychological and cultural dimensions’ which Kambon’s generation added through Black Power.⁵⁵ This links to Walter Mignolo’s idea, which built on Thiong’o’s thesis of decolonising the mind, that ‘coloniality is a decolonial concept’.⁵⁶ For Trinbagonian citizens, to make real change, the first step was to acknowledge and understand the colonial power structures in play. The fact that coloniality was still so apparent in Trinidad eight years on from independence, especially through education, urges the need to understand this as an anti-colonial movement.

Not only was this ‘miseducation’ and its subsequent colonising of the mind a cause of the movement, but all the interviewees also highlighted the role of education in carrying out the movement. Mr. B even called the meetings they had in public spaces, like Woodford Square, ‘schools in motion’ where there was education on everything from ‘economics to politics to womanhood to family’.⁵⁷ This further highlights the failure of Williams’ ambitions which he proudly articulated in this very space nine years earlier. In fact, Mr. B then went on to say that the sharing of new perspectives through this education made deep personal changes to individuals which even he was surprised by. He told the story of a man in Tobago who was known locally as ‘Tony Rum’ for his drinking problems. Through attending these meetings and seeing new perspectives however, he ‘committed to change his life’.⁵⁸ The marches became a positive activity for him to spend his time doing something for a bigger cause, but also for himself and he stopped drinking completely. Mr. B aptly pointed out that ‘we don’t talk about the softer things that we did’, like helping people with personal mindset shifts.⁵⁹ He also proudly described the headway they made with overturning the colonial education system when he explained that the Caribbean Examinations Council which slowly took over from the British system for secondary education was established in 1971, just one year after the peak of the movement.⁶⁰

Kuboni stated that being educated alongside the rest of the population ‘was a very soul-searching time’ for everyone.⁶¹ She explained that her main leadership role in the movement

⁵⁴ Interview with Kambon.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mignolo & Walsh, p.111.

⁵⁷ Interview with Anonymous B.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Interview with Kuboni.

was leading educational talks ‘to deepen our understandings of the nature of our society’.⁶² This links to Keisha Thompson’s work on Black love where she also employed oral histories to understand how women gave up much personally to become the main consciousness-raisers of the population, especially after many of the male leaders of the movement were detained in April 1970.⁶³ Through my interviews, I noticed a similar trend in the gendered divide of roles. While all the participants were eager to tell me about the educational initiatives of Black Power, Kuboni and Springer, the two women, spoke of their homes being raided and then being threatened by the police for having educational, revolutionary and even theatrical literature which was banned. Springer even said that a gun was once put to her head and the police officer told her mother, ‘We have a bullet waiting for she!’⁶⁴ This gendered element exposed by oral histories adds another layer of complexity to the individual experiences within the movement since these women risked their lives to ensure the rest of the population experienced personal mindset shifts alongside them. Furthermore, it highlights how education on topics like decolonisation, revolution and colonial thinking was incredibly effective since the government clearly saw it as a threat.

For Springer, pride in one’s African roots through education was the only way to achieve any sort of power. She was adamant that ‘theatre and the arts CAN and MUST BE SEEN as the possibilities of transforming the society’.⁶⁵ For her, education, especially through theatre, was the prime avenue for showcasing the strength of the African-descended population. This would help to change each person’s beliefs about themselves and remove the colonial ideas of inferiority they had harboured for so long. To this day, Springer still runs the re-enactment of the Canboulay riots every year in Trinidad, something which she says came out of the theatre performances she organised during the mass meetings of the BPM.⁶⁶ Canboulay aims to show that much of what is carnival in Trinidad today was actually a form of enslaved African resistance which is often lost in the national story.⁶⁷ She also pointed out the personal impact this has, especially for the young people who take part in it every year saying, ‘by the end of the first session they are in tears because they never learnt anything like this’ and now they understand their history and roots better.⁶⁸

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Thompson, p.134.

⁶⁴ Interview with Springer.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ John Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay & Calypso: traditions in the making*, (Cambridge University, 1998).

⁶⁸ Interview with Springer.

Hence, Black Power in 1970 was fundamentally a movement seeking to decolonise the mind, even though this scholarly concept was only articulated in the 21st century. To do this, education in different forms was essential at both the level of the mass movement and at an individual level, making real changes to people's mindsets, helping them to decolonise their thinking and have true power, beyond just the technical power which came with independence. It demanded that there be a change in the formal education system, but more importantly, an intellectual and psychological transformation which would accompany the more outwardly apparent economic, political and cultural transformations that were evident at the time. Thus, 'power to the people', though called out by tens-of-thousands of Trinbagonians as they marched throughout the twin-island-nation can be seen as a call for a personal sense of embodied power within each individual, both leaders and the general population alike.

Chapter 3: Contesting Narratives of 'Black Power'

'If you use the term Black Power...it shrinks the movement into a small, small area. So you hear about the movement, the first person thinks its Black people about being Black. They only promote ONE thing, ONE achievement.'⁶⁹

This quote by Mr. B clearly identifies the major contention that came up in the interviews: the term 'Black Power'. While these interviews have illustrated the importance of appreciating the individual aspects of the movement through its embodied cultural and intellectual elements, they are also vital in showcasing the individual opinions about the movement itself. As shown earlier, priority seemed to be in reinstating African cultural customs, therefore 'Black' seemed to refer to those of African descent. However, the contrasting opinions amongst the interviewees on this matter demonstrate that it was much more nuanced than this. All the interviewees, despite being associated with NJAC and its leadership, did not see eye-to-eye on who Black Power was for or if the term was even appropriate. Hence, this chapter will explore these individual complexities of opinion and the narratives the interviewees wished to portray over 55 years later. Kate Quinn has noted that post-colonial racial problems in Caribbean nations 'could not be reduced to a conflict between "black" and "white" ' like it was in America, due to their ethnic diversity.⁷⁰ This is especially true of Trinidad with its large population of Indian descent. None of the interviewees claimed Indian identity so this project does not promise to showcase the Indo-Trinbagonian experience. Nevertheless, understanding the varying opinions these leaders of NJAC had on the involvement of the large Indian-descended population is very useful in illuminating the complex beliefs surrounding racial identity in this movement.

Mr. A, Kuboni and Kamron all acknowledged that culturally the movement was more focused on reclaiming African traditions, but believe they also fought for people of Indian descent. The main thing Mr. A wanted me to take away from the interview was the common NJAC mantra of 'Africans and Indians unite' but he was adamant that this unity did not last beyond 1970.⁷¹ He described the march to Caroni, a predominantly Indian area. Despite the march being extremely significant to the movement and newspapers estimating it as comprising

⁶⁹ Interview with Anonymous B.

⁷⁰ Quinn, p.18.

⁷¹ Interview with Anonymous A.

at least 10,000 people, (though Mr. B claims this was a gross under-estimation) Mr. A believed it was merely a symbolic way to express the unity they desired for the society.⁷² Ultimately, Mr. A concluded that while there may have been momentary solidarity in 1970, he said ‘I honestly don’t think the Black Power Movement did anything to improve the relationships between the two races.’⁷³ This links to the growing literature on the ongoing racial tensions between those of African and Indian descent in Trinidad today, such as Bridget Brereton’s aptly titled, *All ah we is not one* where she explained the seemingly clear-cut divisions in everything from the arts to politics between the groups throughout Trinidad’s history.⁷⁴

Yet, in his interview, Kambon was much more positive about race relations and was adamant that Black Power stood for all ‘dark-skinned people.’⁷⁵ He saw all Africans and Indians as being ‘Black’ since both groups were greatly marginalised due to the systems they were under historically, enslavement and indentureship respectively, which denied them the wealth and power that White people had.⁷⁶ He saw the unity of Africans and Indians during 1970 as incredibly positive for Trinidad and believes it changed both their places in society for the better. In fact, he saw prior racial divisions between these groups as ‘part of the colonial project’ to keep the White minority in power. Due to their much smaller numbers, they could not compete with these larger groups if they were unified.⁷⁷ He gave a particularly vivid account of the hospitality and unity during the march to Caroni:

‘I remember when I said we were going to march to Caroni, the number of people who came to us who said ‘don’t do that march it’s going to have violence because people are waiting in the cane fields with GUNS’[...] Far from people hiding with guns in the cane fields to SHOOT US[...]right along the route we were offered refreshments to keep us going![...] people were coming and joining the march[...] It was the largest demonstration the country had ever seen.’⁷⁸

⁷² Bob Codallo, ‘Black Power Goes to Caroni’, *The Express*, 13 March 1970, p.19: Interview with Anonymous B: Interview with Anonymous A.

⁷³ Interview with Anonymous A.

⁷⁴ Brereton.

⁷⁵ Interview with Kambon.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

For him, Black Power represented the beginning of the end of racial hostility between the two majority ethnic groups, and he saw the entire movement as having a much more successful outcome than some of the other interviewees. One's exact ancestry therefore was not as important to Kambon as the experiences individuals of marginalised groups had faced and overcome. Similarly, for Kuboni, Black Power was not necessarily fixated on a certain race. She also concluded her interview by reiterating the dominant NJAC mantra of 'Africans and Indians unite', but she believes the need for racial harmony went deeper.⁷⁹ While she thinks it has not achieved its fullest potential, for her, what the BPM tried to do was encourage everyone 'to develop a deeper understanding of what each group has brought to the creation of the society' at 'the personal, community, AND NATIONAL level.'⁸⁰

Furthermore, both Kambon and Kuboni positively acknowledged the term 'The Black Power Movement' itself as something which Trinbagonians borrowed from the American movement but applied to their own situation. Kambon even proudly articulated that it originally 'came out of the mouth of a Trinidadian', Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture), one of the main leaders of American Black Power.⁸¹ He stated that 'we adopted the term Black Power, but for us it meant something different' because of Trinidad's racial diversity.⁸² Likewise, Kuboni stated that they were not 'copying' the events in America, but Black Power 'MEANT something to us in OUR OWN SITUATION' since 'REAL independence' had not been achieved and it became a well-known motivational slogan.⁸³ She said that using a term like 'Black Power', with its racial connotations, helped to confront the 'myth' of racial freedom alluded to in the Trinbagonian national anthem's closing line which she repeated: 'every creed and race finds and equal place.'⁸⁴

Mr. B's interpretation of the term, however, was much more cynical. While he also championed the African and Indian unity in NJAC's narrative, he was adamant throughout the interview that the term Black Power created a 'false emphasis' on the African-descended population and to him, 'It is clear that the power elite stamped the movement as Black Power to ALIENATE all the other groups that were part of it.'⁸⁵ He spoke heavily of newspaper headlines, and claimed that the term was first used for the movement in *The Express* headline

⁷⁹ Interview with Kuboni.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Interview with Kambon.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Interview with Kuboni.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Interview with Anonymous B.

‘Black Power Stuns the City’ on March 5th 1970.⁸⁶ He stated that this was done by those in power who controlled the media to make it seem like the movement was just for one racial grouping and to promote it as being much more violent than it actually was because of the violence associated with American Black Power at the time.⁸⁷ He therefore did not see it as something which could be embraced like the others, but something intentionally set to limit the movement.

Throughout the interview Mr. B often quoted Makandal Daaga (formerly Geddes Granger), the now deceased leader of NJAC, and acted somewhat like a mouthpiece for him. He was adamant that I know ‘the truth’ about NJAC’s story of the movement.⁸⁸ The major contention for him surrounding this truth was the term Black Power and he stated that ‘I use the term Trinidad and Tobago Revolution of 1970’ since Daaga never called it Black Power.⁸⁹ He became especially annoyed when talking about a documentary made about the movement. He claimed that when Daaga was interviewed for it, he spoke about the misuse of the name, but that part of the interview was never published.⁹⁰ While Mr. B saw the positives of embracing African cultural identity, to him, the 1970 movement transcended race and therefore the label of Black Power which alluded to a singular racial grouping. Instead, it encompassed the need for ‘economic, cultural and social changes to guarantee equal rights for all, not only those of African descent.’⁹¹

Conversely, Springer saw the movement as fundamentally racial and only applicable to the Black African population who she believes has historically been the most oppressed.⁹² In response to whether she thought Black Power appropriately described the movement, she asserted:

‘The Black Power Movement wasn’t out to represent anybody but African people[...] AFRICAN people went through enslavement, AFRICAN people were the only ones NOT permitted to work in banks! AFRICAN people were the only ones whose hair was deemed to have something wrong with it! [...] I am UNASHAMEDLY, UNAPOLOGETICALLY saying that the Black Power Movement was not out to

⁸⁶ ‘Black Power Stuns the City’, *The Express*, 5 March 1970, p.1.

⁸⁷ Interview with Anonymous B.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ *1970 Remembering a Revolution*, dir. By Alex de Verteuil & Elizabeth Topp, (Trinidad and Tobago, 2010).

⁹¹ Interview with Anonymous B.

⁹² Interview with Springer.

represent anybody but ME, who I was and the indignity I suffered because of my Blackness and because of my history. I make no apology!’⁹³

Despite Springer also being part of NJAC, she clearly had no reservations in going beyond the common NJAC narrative of racial harmony which the other participants sought to portray to me. Throughout the interview she also shared much more of her personal testimony than the other interviewees. Springer went into detail about being openly discriminated against while working in a library as a young adult including being spat on in the face. She even spoke in a mocking, high-pitched voice when repeating a common phrase she had often heard about herself: ‘she only Black but she well bright, so keep your place little Black girl.’⁹⁴ Perhaps due to these innately personal prejudicial experiences, for her, pride in being a Black African was at the crux of the movement and more important than any big economic changes which she hardly mentioned in comparison to the other interviewees.

Springer acknowledged the Indian population but saw them as ‘brothers and sisters who UNDERSTOOD what we were talking about’ rather than the cause representing them as well.⁹⁵ Her final thoughts of the interview were; ‘if Trinidad and Tobago is really to be an egalitarian society it is not by fusing and ‘callaloo-ising’ the peoples but by giving RECOGNITION, VISIBILITY to each component part.’⁹⁶ Callaloo is a Trinbagonian dish that has been influenced by the many cultures which make up modern Trinbagonian society so is often used to describe how the different cultures have blended over time. Her strong aversion to this notion, even using the word ‘loathe’ when speaking about it, proves her adamance that the movement was for people to individually reclaim their previously oppressed racial identities in their original form, pushing once again against a homogenous post-independent identity.

The different narratives of the movement which each interviewee wished to portray to me showcases how oral histories are integral in exposing the individual complexities of ideas within anti-colonial movements. David Mwambari wrote about ‘the master narrative’ saying that over time terminologies become dominant, in this case, the 1970 movement becoming synonymous with ‘Black Power’.⁹⁷ The 55 years that passed between the movement and the interviews and the constant reinforcement in the media, published photographs and

⁹³ Interview with Springer.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Mwambari, p.75.

memorialisation of 1970 as a Black Power Movement where Africans and Indians united has clearly translated through these interviews as the master narrative, whether the interviewees ascribed to this or not.

For Kambon, portraying the movement so positively and aligning to this narrative was perhaps a way for him to forget his potentially traumatic memories or shirk away from possible repercussions to his reputation. He skirted around the issue of his detention even when I asked him directly about it. Only when someone helping him with the interview mentioned it did he laugh and say, 'You trying to make me look like a criminal now!' before jokingly giving a brief description of his imprisonment on Nelson Island, even saying 'It was like a holiday!'⁹⁸ This links to Dominick Lacapra's idea that silences and trivialisations of events are often not actually a product of forgetting, but have a 'performative dimension' and clear reason.⁹⁹ Kambon remains in a high position on the board of The Emancipation Support Committee of Trinidad and Tobago, the main group which memorialises the BPM each year so it makes sense why he wants to uphold his reputation on his terms. Similarly, Mr. B's position as an active politician representing NJAC into the 2010s could explain his insistence that what he considers the 'true' NJAC narrative be told. However, his insistence that this 'true' narrative has been overshadowed by the 'Black Power' master narrative demonstrates the nuances within dominant narratives that Mwambari identified. These two men have been the most publicly associated with NJAC and the memorialisation of 1970 out of the interviewees. Yet, their diverging opinions on some aspects of the movement are especially telling of the need to understand how each person's individual experiences during and after a movement shape how they wish their actions and the events they were part of to be portrayed.

For Kuboni and Mr. A whose names are not as popular in Trinbagonian memory, they may not have a fixed personal motive behind mostly sticking to the master narrative. Their tendency to story-tell rather than detail their own actions or opinions could simply be because so much time has passed that what is remembered aligns to the dominant, often reiterated narrative. Both interviewees gave a lot of description about popular events from the movement like the first official march on February 26th, 1970, where the leaders of NJAC broke into the Port-of-Spain Cathedral and covered the statues in black cloth.¹⁰⁰ While other interviewees also mentioned these touchstone events, they strayed from the master narrative in their personal

⁹⁸ Interview with Kambon.

⁹⁹ Dominick Lacapra, 'Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?', *History and Theory*, 55, (2016), pp.375-400, p.377.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Kuboni: Interview with Anonymous A.

opinions. For Springer and Mr. B, with their divergences from the master narrative, time has acted as a means of personally re-affirming specific perspectives which these interviewees wished to have heard, rather than causing them to succumb to the dominant story.

Thus, looking at individual perspectives for the Trinbago BPM is vital in understanding the internal contestations about what the movement was meant to do or who it was even for. The interviews illustrate that even amongst leadership all from one organising body, especially in a complex, post-independent, multi-ethnic society, there were and still are differences of opinion. Indeed, as Mr. B repeated many times, Black Power was made up of and done for ‘the people’, and all people come to a movement with their own perspectives, experiences and ambitions.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Interview with Anonymous B.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, anti-colonial movements are far more personal, embodied experiences than are often appreciated, especially when they fall under the blanket of ‘mass movements’. While looking at anti-colonialism on this mass scale is crucial in showing its significance to society at large, it is essential as historians not to neglect the experiences and perspectives of the individual people who comprise these masses. This study encourages further research like this into Caribbean anti-colonial movements where oral history is decidedly lacking. The complex situation of having a fundamentally anti-colonial movement almost a decade after formal ‘decolonisation’, with a democratically elected government and world-renowned anti-colonialist as a prime minister, especially urges this individual perspective to understand Trinidad’s BPM. The personal, embodied experiences and transformations the leaders went through and hoped to translate to the rest of the population have not been adequately addressed in other historiography on the movement. This must be considered alongside the economic and political changes the BPM enacted to understand the complete picture of what the movement sought to do and did for Trinbagonian society.

Chapters One and Two in breaking down the concepts of ‘Black and ‘Power’ within the movement showcased that its cultural and intellectual ideologies were incredibly strong but that they went deeper than just supporting a Black aesthetic and the calls for ‘power to the people’. A personal reclamation of Blackness through an understanding of one’s roots and how the colonial legacies of the society around them had warped their perceptions of themselves, was vital to make true change in Trinidad beyond the political enfranchisement they ‘won’ eight years prior with independence.

Subsequently, Chapter Three highlighted also how important looking at the individual dimension is to appreciate the individuality of opinions within Black Power in the memory and narrative construction of it today. The depth of debates amongst leaders from the same organising body over 55 years later over who the movement represented, further emphasises the importance of not just looking at anticolonial movements at face-value with the one clear agenda portrayed in the media. Each person’s experiences before, during, and after a movement shape their beliefs, what they bring to that movement, and how they wish it to be portrayed. This must all be considered when trying to understand the complexity that is anti-colonialism and revolutionary movements generally, since fundamentally, they are made up of and represent

people who all experience things differently and bring different things to the table. Oral history, especially to movements and regions like this where it has been sparingly applied should therefore be given more consideration when writing social histories of anti-colonial movements.

This dissertation only had the scope to truly consider the perspectives of five individuals who were all closely connected to the leadership of the movement, but for the Trinbago BPM there is much more to be explored using oral history. Brinsley Samaroo is the only historian thus far to have dedicated significant work to understanding the Indo-Trinbagonian perspective on Black Power.¹⁰² Collecting oral histories of surviving participants of Indian descent and other ethnic minorities in the nation is essential to see how they also experienced Black Power. Another major gap is the lack of work, both utilising oral histories and not, on anti-colonial groups in the 1970s in Trinbago beyond NJAC. Other movements did exist during and after NJAC's highly publicised actions between February and April 1970 which are often seen as the entirety of the BPM. One key group is The National Union of Freedom Fighters (NUFF). Though ultimately unsuccessful, this group believed that NJAC had not done enough and turned to guerilla warfare which rocked Trinbago at the time but has been practically obliterated from Trinbagonian memory. In fact, the only academic piece dedicated solely to NUFF is a 1999 article by Brian Meeks.¹⁰³

Ultimately, the Black Power Movement of 1970 in Trinidad and Tobago was a movement calling for radical change in an already formally independent society. Though also important, this was not just the big structural changes that would occur in the following years regarding the nationalisation of foreign-owned industries and banks on a tremendous scale. It was also the personal changes of reclaiming pride in who one was regardless of the social barriers imposed upon them, especially those associated with race. Eric Williams' statement that 'to educate is to emancipate' came full circle as less than a decade later his people were educated to free themselves by changing their mindsets and reclaiming cultures which had been forcibly stripped of them by centuries of colonial domination.¹⁰⁴ Consequently, the banners proclaiming 'power to the people' which were paraded throughout the streets of Trinbago in 1970 were not just a call for change on a governmental level but for a personal change which would make those words mean so much more.

¹⁰² Brinsley Samaroo, 'The February Revolution (1970) as a Catalyst for Change in Trinidad and Tobago', in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. by Kate Quinn, (Florida University, 2014), pp.97-116.

¹⁰³ Brian Meeks, 'NUFF at the Cusp of an Idea: Grassroots Guerillas and the Politics of the 1970s in Trinidad and Tobago', *Social Identities: Race, Nation and Culture*, 5:4, (1999), pp.415-439.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, p.730.

Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

Interviews:

Anonymous A, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (10th October 2025)

Anonymous B, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (4th November 2025)

Kambon, Khafra, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (22nd October 2025)

Kuboni, Olabisi, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (20th October 2025)

Springer, Eintou Pearl, interview, Online Microsoft Teams, (23rd October 2025)

Documentary:

1970 Remembering a Revolution, dir. By Alex de Verteuil & Elizabeth Topp, (Trinidad and Tobago, 2010)

Newspapers:

‘Black Power Stuns the City’, *The Express*, 5 March 1970

Codallo, Bob, ‘Black Power Goes to Caroni’, *The Express*, 13 March 1970

Songs:

The Mighty Duke, *Black is Beautiful*, (Tropico, 1969)

The Mighty Sparrow, *Slave*, (1963)

Speech:

Williams, Eric, 'Massa Day Done' (Public Lecture at Woodford Square, 22 March 1961),
Callaloo, 20.4, (1997), 724-730

Secondary Sources:

Ballengee, Christopher, 'Music competitions, public pedagogy and decolonisation in Trinidad and Tobago', *South Asian Diaspora*, 11:2, (2019), pp.145-161

Barclay Lou Anna & Henry, Ralph, 'Black Power and Equitable Business Participation: Forty Years on in Trinidad and Tobago', *Social and Economic Studies*, 60, (2011), pp.151-182

Beard, Martha Rose, 'Re-thinking oral history- a study of narrative performance', *The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 21:4, (2017), pp.529-548

Berger, Mark T., *After the Third World?*, (Routledge, 2009)

Brereton, Bridget, ' "All ah we is not one": Historical and Ethnic Narratives in Pluralist Trinidad', *The Global South*, 4:2, (2010), pp.218-238

Carmichael, Stokely, "*Stokely Speaks*" *Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism*', (Vintage Books, 1971)

Castor, N. Fadeke, *Spiritual Citizenship: Transnational Pathways from Black power to Ifá in Trinidad*, (Duke University, 2017)

Cowley, John, *Carnival, Canboulay & Calypso: traditions in the making*, (Cambridge University, 1998)

Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (François Maspero, 1961)

Fergus, Claudius, 'From Slavery to Black Power: The Enigma of Africa in the Trinidad Calypso', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 16, (2014), pp.1-26

- Inamete, Ufot, 'Politics and Governance in Trinidad and Tobago: Major Issues and Developments', *Caribbean Studies*, 25:3/4, (1992), pp.305-32
- Lacapra, Dominick, 'Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?', *History and Theory*, 55, (2016), pp.375-400
- Meeks, Brian, *After the Postcolonial Caribbean: Memory, Imagination and Hope*, (Pluto Press, 2023)
- 'NUFF at the cusp of an Idea: Grassroots Guerillas and the Politics of the 1970s in Trinidad and Tobago', *Social Identities: Race, Nation and Culture*, 5:4, (1999), pp.415-439
- Mignolo, Walter & Walsh, Catherine, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, (Duke University, 2018)
- Miyonga, Rose, ' 'We Kept Them to Remember': Tin Trunk Archives and the Emotional History of the Mau Mau War', *History Workshop Journal*, 96, (2023), pp.96-114
- Mukhopadhyay, Sumallya, 'Affective Listening and the Digital Oral History Archive: A Case Study Based on the 1947 Bengal Partition', *Oral History Review*, 52:1, (2025), pp.22-42
- Munslow, Alan, *Narrative and History*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007)
- Mwambari, David, *Navigating Cultural Memory*, (Oxford University, 2023)
- Ongiri, Amy, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*, (University of Virginia, 2016)
- Palmer, Colin, *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean*, (University of North Carolina, 2006)

Pasley, Victoria, 'The Black Power Movement in Trinidad: An Exploration of Gender and Cultural Changes and the Development of a Feminist Consciousness', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 3, (2001), pp.24-40

Perry, Keston & Zophia Edwards, Zophia, ' "Power to the People!": The Catalytic Role of the Black power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago's Industrialisation', *Social Science History*, 47:4, (2023), pp.665-691

Phillips, E.M, 'The Language of Calypso as "Symbolic Action" in Resolving Conflict in The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 52:1, (2006), pp.53-73

Portelli, Alesandro, 'What makes Oral History Different?', in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by R. Perkins and A. Thomson, (Routledge, 2006), pp.61-74

Quinn, Kate, 'Black Power in Caribbean Context', in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. by Kate Quinn, (Florida University, 2014)

- 'Introduction: New Perspectives on Black Power in the Caribbean', in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. by Kate Quinn, (Florida University, 2014), pp.1-24

Ramcharitar, Raymond, *A History of Creole Trinidad 1956-2010*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021)

- 'Ethnic Anxiety and Competing Citizenships in Trinidad and Tobago', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47:16, (2021), pp.3752-3770

Rodney, Walter, *Groundings with my Brothers*, (Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1969)

- *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Bogle-L'Overture Publications, 1972)

Ryan, Selwyn, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: a study of decolonization in a multi-racial society*, (University of Toronto, 1972)

Samaroo, Brinsley, 'The February Revolution (1970) as a Catalyst for Change in Trinidad and Tobago', in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. by Kate Quinn, (Florida University, 2014), pp.97-116

- 'The Historian's Dilemma: Eric Williams' Response to the Black Power Uprising of 1970', *Journal of Caribbean History*, 54, (2020), 197-207

Sheller, Mimi, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*, (Duke University, 2012)

Shields, Tanya, *The Legacy of Eric Williams: into the post-colonial moment*, (University of Mississippi, 2015)

Thompson, Keisha, 'Loving with Their Consciousness: Black Women in Trinidad and Tobago Black Power', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 50, (2022), pp.133-158

Thomson, Alistair, 'Anzac Memories Revisited: Trauma, Memory and Oral History', *The Oral History Review*, 42:1, pp.1-29

Trotman, David, 'Performing the History: Contesting Historical Narratives in Trinidad and Tobago', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 32, (2007), pp.73-109

Van Deburg, William, *New Day in Babylon: The Black power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*, (University of Chicago, 1992)

Vince, Natalya, *Our Fighting Sisters: nation, memory and gender in Algeria, 1954-2012*, (Manchester University, 2015)

wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*, (Heinemann, 2005)