**Editorial**

‘We’re not at this conference to reminisce. We’re here to re-commit!’ These words, spoken by the then Chair of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) Colin Prescod in conversation with Jenny Bourne (Editor of *Race & Class*) at the ‘New Circuits of Anti-racism Conference’ (IRR50) on 15 October 2022 at King’s College, London, define both the day and this special issue. The IRR50 conference[[1]](#endnote-1) marked the endpoint of a year-long celebration of the radical reorientation of the IRR in 1972 by its then membership and staff that wrested control of it and its journal *Race* (later to become *Race & Class*) away from the multinationals, white establishment, and conservative ideas of objective race relations.[[2]](#endnote-2) Covering contributions from the IRR50 conference and some extensions of their ideas in specific articles, this special issue of *Race & Class* offers reminiscence in the cause of recommitment. This is our recommitment to keep struggling on, staying strong for anti-racism, internationalism, and liberation.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In the first contribution to this issue, the conversation between Bourne and Prescod walks us through the past fifty years of the IRR. Bourne provides us with a glance into the events of 1972, and the context of radicalism that drove the IRR’s workers, but also outlines the aftershocks of cutting ties with the rich and powerful in the cause of aiding the poor and dispossessed: the restricting of funding and need to rebuild the IRR, literally from the ground up. What emerges from this landscape is a radical idea of comradeship – which would include those who came to work at the IRR, like its now Director Liz Fekete and *Race & Class* co-editor Hazel Waters, others who came to collaborate with the Institute and its journal, such as Basil Davidson, John La Rose, Cedric Robinson, Edward Said, Walter Rodney and Angela Davies; and the community groups and social movements who used the IRR as a hub or stop point for their own activism. This sense of the IRR calling to fellow travellers also defines Prescod’s reflections – which cover his own journey through Marxism, Pan-Africanism, the academy, and his eventual arrival at the door of the IRR’s King’s Cross basement. Prescod highlights how his own path-breaking work in activism, film-making and teaching was underpinned by his being immersed in the IRR’s commitment to understanding the link between race and class, and the need to link anti-racism over here to anti-imperialism over there in the Third World. What both Bourne and Prescod make clear is that the IRR’s mission – which is linked to a broader liberation movement – is not complete and has had to consistently move with the times.

Running throughout the IRR50 conference, where we launched the new website repository of his writings – and of course across the history of the IRR – was the enduring image of A. Sivanandan’s directorship of the Institute.[[4]](#endnote-4) Sivanandan was, and remains, the conscience of the IRR and anti-racism in Britain – pushing our ideas and practice to encompass the links between race, capital and imperialism, and a radical form of solidarity and internationalism. In this issue, Sivanandan’s legacy is reflected upon in three different but interrelated ways. Miriyam Aouragh’s reflection from IRR50 recalls how Sivanandan’s (Third World) Marxism and the expansive nature of his ideas of solidarity and internationalism helped underpin her own writing and activism. [[5]](#endnote-5) Here Aouragh places Sivanandan in a lineage with Claudia Jones, C. L. R. James, and Stuart Hall and others who sought strategies of resistance, and the undoing of capital, through taking racialised identity as an objective social relation rather than an end in itself. Priya Guns’ contribution is also personal and covers her finding of ‘Siva mama’ as her ‘political awakening’. Narrating her own trajectory, Guns outlines how Sivanandan’s writings spoke to that urge and desire to set the post-colonial world on fire in the cause of justice. My own piece in this issue briefly returns to Sivanandan’s disagreement with Stuart Hall over neoliberalism and what he called the ‘new circuits of imperialism’ to foreground the legacy of Sivanandan’s international political economy. What I argue is that Sivanandan’s political economy is no museum piece, his anchoring of anti-racism to an anti-imperial international political economy must be at the heart of how contemporary anti-racism addresses the current crisis of neoliberal globalisation.

One of Sivanandan’s great teachings was that racism and capital never stand still – hence the IRR’s tracing of this movement across the colour-line of empire and the emergence of xeno-racism within the new circuits of imperialism. As such, anti-racism also can’t stay still and must adapt to the new configurations and relations between capitalist exploitation and deadly forms of racism. What then are the new circuits anti-racism must forge to confront these ever new circuits of imperialism?

The IRR50 conference focused on this question through examining the nature of the international and internationalism, and through delving deeper into the politics of abolition. Here, Avery Gordon’s contribution from IRR50 provides a view of the new set of global conditions, which are haunted by the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the loss of US primacy and the rise of inter-capitalist and inter-imperialist rivalry, and an ever-expanding state authoritarianism at home. In a context punctuated by war, debt and economic crisis, Gordon asks: ‘From what experiences and traditions of struggle does one develop and articulate both the radicalism and the internationalism?’ Akram Salhab takes this question head on and attempts to grapple with the unfulfilled and unrealised internationalism of the social movements that underpinned ‘Corbynism’. As Keir Starmer’s Labour Party renounces internationalism and solidarity with Kashmir and Palestine, and causes such as nuclear disarmament and police abolition, Salhab turns to nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories of London. Here the examples of a radical socialist and Black socialist internationalist London, and their writing and organising and disagreeing, provide a hope for the return of the link between anti-colonialism and anti-racism in an era of state authoritarianism. If Gordon and Salhab attempt to grapple with the immediacy of the present order, Jason Mueller’s piece reminds us about the legacy of the immediate past. In an era where George W. Bush has been rehabilitated as a painter, and the years of Blairism are recalled with relish by centrists, Mueller argues that the US owes Somalia reparations for the racialised death and destruction of the GWOT. What Mueller’s piece reminds us is that the debts of the world system are ever mounting and our internationalism and desire to repay these debts cannot remain static and locked in the past.

The final three pieces in this issue all reckon with the relationship of anti-racist activism to such a new set of global conditions. The common theme that runs through them is how the 2020 extra-judicial murder of George Floyd, and the second iteration of #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) uprisings across the US and beyond, re-energised anti-racism. BLM highlighted the institutional racism of policing and opened conversations about racism in employment, education and health. Such contemporary anti-racism has largely been animated by an abolitionist framework.[[6]](#endnote-6) Abolitionism rejects a longing for state authority, through highlighting the links between state violence, capitalist exploitation and the reproduction of racism and patriarchy. The abolition of prisons, policing and borders is tied with building new institutions that liberate us all. Adam Elliott-Cooper takes the fallout of 2020 by showing how BLM’s abolitionism in the UK threatened the legitimacy of the UK state and laid the ground for the counter response of the now widely discredited Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED).[[7]](#endnote-7) What Elliott-Cooper shows is that BLM put forward an idea of institutional racism that went beyond the limitations of the concept found in the Macpherson Report through recalling ideas associated with the era of British Black Power. In a transcript from their roundtable conversation at the IRR50 conference, Barbara Ransby and Derecka Purnell offer an intergenerational US-focused conversation on abolitionism, Black feminism and the Black liberation struggle. In their wide-ranging discussion, they cover the carceral state, the targeting of surplus Black workers, internationalism and how queer and trans activists expand the idea of liberation.

And finally, this issue brings together five key UK-based anti-racist writers and activists – Azfar Shafi and Ilyas Nagdee, Shanice Octavia McBean, and Remi Joseph-Salisbury and Laura Connelly – to discuss anti-racism today.[[8]](#endnote-8) Shafi and Nagdee attempt to put the current moment of abolitionism into the *longue* *durée* of British anti-racism, specifically the Black Power era, to provide an internationalist liberatory anti-racist framework for current activism. McBean provides a history of UK abolitionism and austerity, and the current fight against gender violence and state authoritarianism. Salisbury and Connelly take the cause of scholar activism and the site of the university, and ask uncomfortable questions about the academy and co-option.

Their conversation shows an urgency to meet the present conditions of race and class that remain alive within the communities of resistance across Britain. But these authors also highlight the rich resources − of history, practices and ideas − that sometimes remain untapped by those rushing to meet the immediate crises that confront us. We hope that this issue continues the IRR’s and *Race & Class*’s tradition of offering some of those resources to those who are rushing to meet those emergencies. By doing this, we continue the ethos that has underpinned the IRR for fifty years: the need to create cultures of resistance, to build communities of resistance, and win a world for all. Fifty years on, the IRR is still committed to helping empower the new circuits of anti-racism.

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**John Narayan**

**Guest Editor**

**References**

1. A live stream of the IRR 50 conference can be found here, at [https://youtube.com/live/uTy5KZAx5vY](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutube.com%2Flive%2FuTy5KZAx5vY&data=05%7C01%7Cjohn.narayan%40kcl.ac.uk%7C34710c0a009c46a0cc7208db2ace8260%7C8370cf1416f34c16b83c724071654356%7C0%7C0%7C638150838657613945%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=KY6UqYtwUtlxui1dAxNLc8KiDpg2oVwb%2BX29KzCltns%3D&reserved=0). The Surviving Society podcast series which recorded each panel will also be launched in April 2023, with an opening episode featuring IRR’s Sophia Siddiqui and Liam Shrivastava. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The details of the revolutionary act are covered in a special issue of *Race & Class*, see J. Bourne, ‘IRR50 and the revolutionary act’, *Race & Class* 63, no. 4 (2022): pp. 3–4, available at https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968221087134. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This history and our recommitment to the future is covered in the IRR50 film *Struggling on, Staying Strong* produced by The Rainbow Collective, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\_aE0vMDqLQ](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3De_aE0vMDqLQ&data=05%7C01%7Cjohn.narayan%40kcl.ac.uk%7C34710c0a009c46a0cc7208db2ace8260%7C8370cf1416f34c16b83c724071654356%7C0%7C0%7C638150838657770177%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=gs8K9oEv3upUx7eQ%2F12LtDQ65AnGBwC5Td8Y2bVKeOI%3D&reserved=0). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See <https://asivanandan.com/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Also see M. Aouragh, ‘“White privilege” and shortcuts to anti-racism!’, *Race & Class* 61, no. 2 (2019): pp. 3–26. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For the US context, see Derecka Purnell, *Becoming Abolitionists: police, protests, and the pursuit of freedom* (London: Verso, 2021); for the UK context, see Adam Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021) and Aviah Sarah Day and Shanice Octavia McBean, *Abolition Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For more on the CRED report ,see J, Bourne, ‘Sewell: a report for neoliberal times’, *IRR* News, 2021, available at

   <https://irr.org.uk/article/sewell-a-report-for-neoliberal-times/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. All five were invited to talk around and through key books they had recently published. See A. Shafi and I. Nagdee, *Race to the Bottom: reclaiming antiracism* (London: Pluto Press, 2022), A. S. Day and S. McBean, *Abolition Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2022) and R. Joseph-Salisbury and L. Connelly, *Anti-Racist Scholar-Activism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)