

Makalani, Minkah: *In the Cause of Freedom. Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8078-3504-3; 309 S.

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What happens when we are shown a political landscape of transatlantic interwar radicalism to find that the white left is not occupying its customary place in the central foreground? First, feelings of disorientation in the face of the unfamiliar, perhaps, or maybe excited anticipation at this needed rearrangement. Then, an ability to see the previously unseen. Welcome to Minkah Makalani's *In the Cause of Freedom*, a book that makes many contributions. Setting out from World War I-era New York and arriving in London on the eve of World War II, with stops in Chicago, Moscow, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Brussels, and Paris along the way, it tracks an evolving Black radicalism that revised but did not reject Western Marxism.

Makalani's study is a history of a politically engaged conversation rather than that of any particular organization, and while this approach clearly entailed prodigious research to connect as many dots as it does, the book wears its archival learning lightly to tell a fascinating story about a group of Black radicals who sought nothing less than the overthrow of racial capitalism. Indeed, by not sticking to the archival path of one institution, *In the Cause* features an extended dramatis personae, including Cyril Briggs, Grace Campbell, W. A. Domingo, James Ford, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Marcus Garvey, Hubert Harrison, Ho Chi Minh, Otto Huiswoud, C.L.R. James, Sen Katayama, Garan Kouyaté, V.I. Lenin, Jay Lovestone, Ras Makonnen, Claude McKay, Robert Minor, Richard B. Moore, George Padmore, William Patterson, M.N. Roy, Lamine Senghor, and I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, among others. Makalani shows how this diverse array of individuals and their organizations were part of a wide circle of mutual influences in which theory and praxis were shaped and reshaped to confront intersecting structures of power

amid shifting historical circumstances.

Even for readers who already know something of the individuals and groups that Makalani considers, there is much to learn from the story this book tells: about, say, the complexities of race, class, and nation in 1920s Harlem; about the ongoing significance of Asian activists to the development of Black radical thought; about Claude McKay's pivotal role in convening Soviet Communism and the Black radical tradition; about the consistent objections by national Communist parties of countries like France, South Africa, and the United States to giving race its theoretical and practical due as a useful category of analysis; or about the countless moments of autonomy by activists and intellectuals of color within and without the interwar world of what Makalani calls „organized Marxism.“

Perhaps more important than these lessons are those that the study holds not only for scholars familiar with interwar Communism and Black radicalism but also for readers interested more broadly in transnational twentieth century history and histories of racism and resistance. Let me note three relationships in this vein which this book sheds light on: that between activists and organizations, between race and class, and between evidence and argument. In contending that for interwar Black radicals, „organized Marxism represented less the source and more the moment of their politics,“ Makalani presents a generative case about the relationship between individual activists and the movement organizations they sometimes form, build, join, transform, are frustrated by, or leave. Black radicals and their allies made use of the tools on offer in the world of Communist politics in order to gain ground on visions of freedom that preceded the Bolshevik Revolution; they did not become entranced with Soviet Marxism and work compliantly to carry out Moscow's orders. The specific debate closest to hand here is that over the extent of member adherence to the Party line of a given Communist organization, and *In the Cause* has the effect of rendering the terms of that entire debate somewhat outmoded. But there is also food for thought here for anyone hoping to better understand the complex dynamics of people and political organizations more generally.

In terms of the vexed intersection of race and class, Makalani shows how the intellectuals he writes about did not reject Marxism but rather extended it, even transformed its scientific pretensions to objective materialism into a more precise analytical framework that might account for the irreducibility of race. The book departs from Cedric Robinson's indispensable study of this issue, yet in Makalani's deft handling we can find compelling his point about Black radicalism's proximity to Marxism while also appreciating the intellectual history that both he and Robinson contribute to, a history in which we can recognize that Makalani's argument appears in a field already cleared by Robinson's earlier and necessary move that clarified Marxism's distance from the Black radical tradition. From Makalani and from the theorists he documents, we are reminded that while capitalism assuredly creates inequality, it is also true that the hidden abode of production cannot reveal all the secrets of a racially ordered totality. Makalani writes about the interwar years, but reading this book in 2015, events since its initial publication in 2011 have proved this point especially relevant and, in a context of continuing racialized police brutality and renewed social movement mobilization in and beyond the United States, all the more timely.

A third large lesson that we can draw from this book pertains to how evidence relates to argument. In contrast to the default empiricism that animates too much historical scholarship, and is too often presented as somehow atheoretical, *In the Cause* is clear and convincing about the inescapability of interpretation and the implications thereof. As Makalani points out, historians narrate, and while evidence obviously matters, our emplotments involve choices that are not solely driven by archival discovery. As already mentioned, this book rests on solid and extensive research, but it is also the „process of repositioning evidence“ that makes Makalani's account as innovative and important as it is.

As to the criticisms, a fuller explanation as to why the racial attitudes of white Communists were so consistently obtuse, a little more information on the relationship between World War I-era Black internationalism and the Industrial Workers of the World, and a few

more words on the overlaps and divergences between anticolonialism and antifascism would have filled in areas alluded to but perhaps beyond the scope of the book. Overall, though, *In the Cause* is clearly a significant work, one that builds on excellent existing books by such historians as Robin Kelley, Mark Solomon, Gerald Horne, Winston James, Kate Baldwin, Glenda Gilmore, and Susan Pennybacker, is complemented by subsequent scholarship by Dayo Gore, Erik McDuffie, Meredith Roman, Adam Ewing, and Leslie James, and is sure to be added to by the widely anticipated forthcoming studies by Mark Matera and Ani Mukherji. The historical conversation that it traces is certainly a rich one. So too is the historiographical one that it participates in.

Here, then, are some of the ways that readers will be able to see something new after exploring the political and intellectual terrain mapped out in Minkah Makalani's first-rate book. But sight is not the only relevant register here. Recalling Stuart Hall's insightful image of „working within shouting distance of marxism,“ we are reminded that there's new things to be heard here as well. So read this book, and sharpen your senses.

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