

[The Manchanda Connection](#)

- a political memoir by Diane Langford

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Adapted from a political memoir, *The Manchanda Connection* by Diane Langford July 2015

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[The Manchanda Connection](#) - a political memoir by Diane Langford

'As Richard Wright found long ago in America, black and white descriptions of society are no longer compatible'

Salman Rushdie

The Campaign Against Racial Discrimination operated from a grimy cubbyhole in a tenement off Brick Lane, behind the Toynbee Hall. I volunteered there most evenings throughout 1966-67. By day, I was a temp, courtesy of Kelly Girl. If you were white, it was easy to get jobs back then. If you didn't like the work, you could walk out at lunchtime and the agency would send you elsewhere in the afternoon. Whenever I could afford to, I'd take a sickie and work all day at the CARD office.

Julia Gaitskell and Antony Lester were two establishment figures that displayed an attitude of ownership over CARD, while Dr David Pitt and Jocelyn Barrow were among the campaign's eminent Black co-founders. Claudia Jones was briefly involved, shortly before her untimely

death.

The office was managed by Jamaican activist, Ralph Bennett, whose wages were paid directly out of the pocket of Dr Pitt. I typed fund-raising letters, was intermittent filing clerk and discreet eavesdropper when Gaitskell and Lester dropped by and talked revealingly amongst themselves about their respective political ambitions. Johnny James of the Caribbean Workers Association was a frequent visitor, though never at the same time as Lester and Gaitskell, who only turned up occasionally to check up on things.

It was from James, who always wore a Mao button on his lapel, that I first heard the name 'Manchanda.'

'They're saying Manchanda sold Claudia Jones' ashes to the Chinese,' he reported. Who was Manchanda and why would he sell Claudia Jones' ashes to 'the Chinese?' Nobody knew the answer.

During my time at CARD, Gaitskell and Lester were swept from power by an overwhelming vote at an AGM, described by them as a 'coup.' The pair immediately called a press conference blaming 'Maoists' and 'Black Power' advocates for the unexpected and apparently unacceptably high number of Black and Asian people who'd turned up at the Conway Hall to vote them out. Bennett and I had been knocking on doors in Brixton, Hackney and Southall to mobilise people to come along. Coach loads did. Amazement and horror was reflected on the faces of the old white guard when they arrived to find the hall packed with delegates from the Black and Asian communities.

The Sunday Times Insight Team produced a scurrilous, sensationalised account of the event in their book *Black Man in Search of Power* accusing Dr Pitt of 'opening the palace gates from within.' Years later, David became one of the first Black Lords, preceded only by the cricketer, Learie Constantine. He took the name Lord Pitt of Hampstead, not for Hampstead, London NW3, though that was where he then lived, but Hampstead in Trinidad.

By 1967, anti-Vietnam war protests were hotting up. I joined Australians and New Zealanders Against the War that met every Friday night at the Marquis of Granby in Cambridge Circus. I remember a dry as dust presentation by Eric Hobsbawm and later being handed a much more interesting Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front leaflet by a bearded Aussie.

The first time I saw Manu was at the front of an anti-Vietnam war demonstration, going along Park Lane. A line of policemen with riot shields blocked the road. A senior officer wearing a peaked cap, his uniform covered with silver badges, stepped out and held up his hand like a traffic cop. We straggled to a halt. A middle-aged man went forward from our side to meet him. I was near enough to hear the conversation. Manu was much shorter than the policeman but his presence was far more powerful. His face was calm; panda eyes behind tinted NHS spectacles. He wore an astrakhan hat and a grey overcoat. From his pocket he produced a crumpled map. His movements were graceful, the absence of machismo striking. As I observed this tableau, I was exhilarated by his complete lack of awe.

'This is the route we agreed,' he said, without raising his voice. 'We're going forward.'

He lightly prodded the inspector's chest with a forefinger, causing the policeman to step back with a surprised expression. The crowd surged forward and the line of police melted away.

Later, I heard Manu's voice on the radio. Cartoons had appeared in the red-tops depicting the two 'resident aliens,' Tariq Ali and Manchanda, locked in a dispute about where the next national demonstration should take place.

A prim BBC announcer asked, 'So, Mr Manchanda, can you explain the controversy over the route of the march on Sunday?'

'Tariq Ali is a revisionist playboy who's planning to take people on a guided tour of the West End and into Hyde Park. The lair of U.S. imperialism is the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square and that's where the protest should be made.'

I liked Manchanda's melodious, ironic tone.

When I saw him next, in a packed meeting at a flat in Golders Green, I noticed his clean-shaven, smooth skin, dark eyes, dainty hands and feet. He held his head slightly to one side as he listened, with a far away, slightly depressed air.

Life on earth, I'd previously believed, consisted of millions of tiny coincidences. Now I began to understand that there was a system at work. Nothing happens spontaneously and spontaneous action cannot change the system under which human society is structured. We have to organise for change!



Vietnamese woman atop a downed US plane



'...their statement [WLF] is one of the most feminist pieces of literature to emerge from any women's group in Britain' - Irma Kurtz, Boadicea Rides Again, Sunday Times, Sept.21, 1969)



Diane with portrait of Mao, photo by Sunday Times, September 1969

On Sunday, October 27, 1968, I waited at the corner of Northumberland Avenue with Mary Tyler, a teacher and fellow-volunteer I'd met at the CARD office. We were given a bit of

pasteboard with the name of a solicitor printed on it in case of arrest, and an invitation to go to the Union Tavern, a pub near Kings Cross, afterwards, to check who was missing and possibly in need of rescue from a police cell.

We heard the marchers approaching, shouting, banging drums, blowing whistles. Police on horses rushed past. As the demonstration reached the corner at Trafalgar Square, a group of running men and women with loud hailer worked the crowd, 'Don't be diverted. Follow the red banner to the US Embassy!'

Mary and I inserted ourselves into the swathe of bodies that peeled off in the direction of Grosvenor Square. Tall men on either side of me linked arms and I felt myself being lifted off the ground. All I could think about was staying alive in the crush. When we reached the US Embassy the police were waiting, riot shields poised. Horses were snorting and steaming and we felt the terrifying thunder of hooves resonate under our feet. Mounted police were waving batons and, as the crowd poured into the square, we came face to face with a wall of shields and sticks. Charge after charge was launched, the police lashing out with furious, twisted faces. Batons connected with heads, blood poured. A lilting voice I recognised as Manchanda's was calling, 'Don't be provoked! Remain calm.'

A giant with a straggly, ginger beard had tripped and fallen backwards as he tried to push his way through the surrounding hedge into the centre of the square. He'd succeeded in forcing an opening, and then lay helpless as demonstrators used his stomach to leapfrog into the breach. I hesitated for a second then joined the others who were taking advantage of the man's great belly to propel themselves into the green in front of the embassy. A woman, limbs akimbo, was beaten repeatedly between the legs. Atop the embassy building, marines with machine guns, were silhouetted against the sky. The Battle of Grosvenor Square was enjoined.

After the violence had subsided and a stand-off was achieved between ourselves and the police we made our way to the Union Tavern, drawn by the opportunity to hear Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl singing live.

In the downstairs bar we watched the TV, helpless with laughter, as Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn whistled the Red Flag into a microphone at Hyde Park. Upstairs, Peggy and Ewan were singing the anthem of the movement. Peggy had arranged her many instruments on the floor in front of her music stool: guitar, ukulele, flute, drums, accordion.

"Far away, across the mountains,
Way beyond the sea's eastern rim,
Lives a man who is father of the IndoChinese
people and his name is Ho Chi Minh
Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh... "

Downstairs, a Canadian woman with a Prince Valiant haircut was telling a story about Manchanda, while he gave a press conference in a side room. I recognised the man whose stomach I'd stepped on, Big Mike.

'Manu was studying law at the Inns of Courts when the Duke of Edinburgh paid a visit. The

Duke was going round greeting students, most of them from overseas. "Where do you come from?" he asked them one by one. When he got to Manu, Manu said, "Hampstead." ' I leaned in, straining to hear the story above the music. 'Quick as a flash, the Duke says, "What part of India is that?"'

The woman was gasping with mirth, 'Guess what Manu said...

"What part of England is Greece? Oh, but you're OK aren't you? Didn't you marry an English girl?" '

At that first evening at the Union Tavern I was given a quick lesson on what a 'Trot' was - a Trotskyite - and was informed that they didn't support national liberation movements because 'peasants' usually led them. Why would subsistence farmers join a socialist revolution that may collectivise their small land holdings? Neither did the 'Trots' support the slogans 'Victory to the NLF' and 'Long Live Ho Chi Minh.'

Chris described how Manchanda had anticipated a walkout over these issues from the inaugural meeting of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in June 1966. He'd booked an alternative venue nearby so that comrades who walked out could get together quickly to form another organisation that did support the NLF and Ho Chi Minh. Chinese observers from the embassy and the Hsinhua news agency, the Vietnamese News Agency representatives, all the African Liberation Movement delegates who were in the pro-Chinese camp, including the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, SWAPO and ZANU, walked out together. The CPGB and other pro-Soviet groups remained in the Trotskyite-dominated VSC.

After the demo an article by Mary McCarthy appeared in *The Sunday Times* and *New York Review of Books*. The woman who'd written *The Group* was taking sides, and had come down on what I had begun to think of as my side, my group. I remembered crying in the darkened cinema when the lesbian character in *The Group* killed herself.

'Mr Manchanda, a former teacher, was an old-fashioned classical Marxist,' McCarthy wrote. 'Like many of those men, he had a witty mind...'

'What came out of our meeting with Mr Manchanda, following on our meeting with Tariq Ali, was a series of paradoxes...the style of Tariq Ali was radical; the style of Mr Manchanda was modest petty bourgeois, recalling the home lives of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky himself. Maoist China, they say, is hermetic, suspicious, hostile to foreigners, yet the Maoist cell in Hampstead was open as the Laundromat where Mr Manchanda had been doing his smalls. Though we came from the bourgeois Press, we were not treated as trespassers but simply as guests - the reverse of what happened in Carlisle Street.x

'This, too, perhaps a lesson in the persuasiveness of non-violent techniques on the plane

of human relations, for the next afternoon, marching up from the Embankment, when we came to the crossroads of choice at Trafalgar Square, whether to turn left with the Maoists to Grosvenor Square, I had no real hesitation in making up my mind, and what slight hesitation I had was purely journalistic...on these issues I found myself agreeing with Mr Manchanda: the main enemy is in Grosvenor Square; march on him there...'

It wasn't long before I became familiar with all the comrades, and the shabby rooms at Lisburne Road, the chaise longue, which Manu used as his bed, the heavy dresser, the cloth portraits of Marx, Engels, Stalin, Lenin and Chairman Mao and framed photograph of Claudia Jones.

I became detached from my past, like a snake shedding a skin, individuating from existing family and friends, feeling rage at all I knew who'd refused to move on with me. Having acquired the facility to name things, racism, sexism, capitalism, imperialism, there was no turning back. Naively, I wrote long, ranting letters to my parents, berating them for their racism, ignorance and refusal to acknowledge the dispossession of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand which enabled them to call themselves 'New Zealanders' and lead privileged lives.

Of the group I'd joined and idealised, all of them knew I'd more than I, all were braver, like perfect beings. It was a long time before I began to see them as flawed individuals or, in the case of one or two, actually deeply unpleasant characters.

For the moment, I loved all the comrades and took for granted that whatever faults became apparent as time went by, they all genuinely wanted to share the Earth fairly, stop war and imperialism, rid the world of super-exploitation and racism. I was swept up in the notion of human solidarity, progress and socialism. Hippies and pacifists were ridiculed. White liberals were beneath contempt.

One evening, I'd turned up at Lisburne Road half an hour late to find a meeting already in progress. A man from the Campaign for Homosexual Equality was speaking about the persecution of gay people. Flabbergasted that this was being discussed, I felt my position as the only gay person in the RMLL closet was under threat. The body language of the listeners was tense; everybody was uptight except Manu, relaxed in the lotus position, making roll-ups with his cigarette machine. After the guy left, there was nervous laughter.

'Why did you invite him?' demanded one of the Mikes.

'He's a sincere comrade' said Manchanda. 'They're getting organised.'

When everyone else had gone home, he asked me, 'Where do you go, after our meetings?' I told him the name of the woman I was seeing, who he knew was an out and proud lesbian.

Had the CHE man had been invited especially for my benefit? Did Manu expect me to 'out' myself in the meeting? In front of all those conservative 'revolutionaries,' whose most

progressive opinion on the subject was that gayness is an illness in need of treatment? Around that time, I heard many on the 'left' speak of homosexuality as 'a bourgeois excrescence.'

After the coup within CARD, I'd given up going to their office. All my time, energy and spare cash went into the projects directed by Manchanda from 58 Lisburne Road. I began staying over, learning how to print from a gestetner machine and operate a cumbersome typesetting machine called a Varsityper. Manu was generous in sharing practical and journalistic skills honed from his own experience which enabled people to gain confidence.

Eventually, Manu's invitation to live with him at Lisburne Road seemed a wonderful opportunity to begin a meaningful existence. I didn't hesitate. Revolutionary politics came way above and before the personal. I had a few years to go before I completely got the message: the personal is political. Meanwhile I was still busy making leaflets that read: 'Class War, not Sex War!'

Manu was lonely, despite being surrounded with people most of the time and I came to appreciate that he was still missing Claudia both personally and politically. Who else shared so completely his revolutionary politics? Who else embodied such a rich experience of organising and analysing?

By the time I'd arrived on the scene, it was obvious that membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain was not an option for anyone interested in joining the anti-imperialist movement. As for theory, dialectical and historical materialism, political economy, surplus value, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the lot, I completely embraced, and, mostly, still do. We even had jokes: what do you get if you buy a pig for 10 kopeks and sell it for 12 kopeks? Answer: six months hard labour.

Manu educated me about the partition of India, the slave triangle, the Russian Revolution, and even the Dublin uprising. My grandmother had often spoken of seeing the Black and Tans coming over the hill, but as soon as I was wise enough to check the dates, I found she was deluded or confused, as her parents had already migrated from Ireland to New Zealand when she was born.

I devoured *A People's History of England*, *Ireland Her Own*, *Man's Worldly Goods*, *Mao's On Contradiction*, and the rest. For the first time, I read Shelley's words – 'Rise Like Lions after slumber in unvanquishable number...yea are many, they are few...'

Membership of the inner core, the Revolutionary Marxist Leninist League, was not open and could only be acquired by working for some time in one of the 'front' groups such as Friends of China or the Britain Vietnam Solidarity Front. A period of candidate membership followed, and attainment of full acceptance felt like an achievement. According to Manu, he and Claudia had been aghast at how easy it was to join the Communist Party of Great Britain. Claudia used to make fun of the CPGB,. 'All you have to do is fill in a form on the back of the *Daily Worker* (now *Morning Star*) and you could become a member.'

Mike and Helen were art students at Goldsmiths. Big Mike and his sister Chris were from Canada, who along with their respective spouses formed a bloc within the inner core of the

RMLL; Roberta, who'd always arrive late for meetings, made us laugh when she said she'd 'braved hardship and death' to get to a meeting (it was raining, or she'd missed the bus); Ed was leader of the London Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation. He sulked when his partner, Barbara, 'got it' and he didn't 'get it' during a study session on surplus value. He later split with us to form an Irish Liberation solidarity group, denouncing Manchanda for 'crimes against Marxism-Leninism.'

Harpal and Maysel Brar, lecturers in law, soon broke away to form yet another tiny Maoist sect, having 'denounced' Manchanda for more such crimes. These centred on the creation of Bangladesh which Manu saw as a further partitioning of the subcontinent along religious/colonial lines. He identified Soviet and Indian meddling as a form of social imperialism. This was evidenced, he said, by the dismantling and taking to India of East Pakistan's jute factories. But, in any case, on principle, he opposed all forms of partition. Comrade N.M. Seedo, a writer from Minsk, lived on nuts and seeds. Was 'Seedo' her real name? At her flat overlooking Clissold Park she'd fashioned a three-piece suite from remaindered books covered with shawls. Her writing reminded me of Natalie Sarraute, only less intelligible. She was tiny with raisin eyes, white makeup, red lipstick and jet black hair. She wore a white fake fur coat, black leggings, and a beret at all times, even indoors.

In 1969, after ordering the carpet-bombing of Cambodia, the US President visited London, staying at Claridges Hotel. We set up the Hot Reception for Nixon Committee. The police corralled a section of the crowd outside his hotel. Seedo and I became caught up in that cordon of police horses and were kept there all night, tough on an elderly woman with a weak bladder.

I pleaded with the police to allow her to leave. But they kept making the circle of horses smaller and smaller until we were squeezed so tightly we were forced to stand.

In solidarity with the Black Panthers, I remember marching to the U.S. embassy to support Huey Newton. A handful of us were accompanied by hundreds of police and as we approached the embassy we saw rows of black vans parked up in the side streets.



Huey P. Newton of the Black Panther Party

Manu, one of the Mikes and I went to Algiers for an international conference in support of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. We spent Christmas of '69 in Paris before flying south in a corkscrewing plane. As the aircraft buffeted, nosedived and turned upside, the comrades continued their bright chatter as if nothing unusual was going on. A joke was made about Vuse Make's bulk. [Vusumzi L. Make, Chief Representative of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC)]. Someone sent Vuse a note purportedly from the pilot asking him to move to a different part of the plane as his weight was making the plane lopsided and difficult to fly.

The conference opening was delayed for an hour when Tom Murray and Matt Lygate of the Workers' Party of Scotland refused to sit behind a nameplate that read 'United Kingdom.' Arafat waited patiently to make his keynote speech, chatting and sipping water. Eventually, a wooden board was produced with the word 'Scotland' scored into it.

Every seat was equipped with headphones. A phalanx of translators sat in a glass box at the back. Arafat's speech lasted nearly two hours and at the end of it, everyone in the hall knew the history of Palestinian dispossession and resistance.

I was badly in need of educating. For years, I had no idea that the State of Israel had not existed before 1948 and that 750,000 Palestinians had been forcibly removed from their homes and land to make way for it, or that in 1967 in a blitzkrieg that lasted six days they'd lost the remaining 22 per cent of Palestine. The inalienable right of return of refugees, normally upheld by international law, has never been implemented in the case of the Palestinian people.

Louis Eakes of the Young Liberals, a courageous campaigner for gay rights as well as for the cause of the Palestinian people was at the conference. Manu was co-opted onto the drafting committee for the declaration to be issued that would proclaim international solidarity with the Palestinians and set out their political demands for national sovereignty and self-determination, including the right of return to their homeland.

Our beachside hotel was formerly Tshombe's place of incarceration, located on cliffs with the sea beating below.

As with the sumptuous food served at banquets we attended at the Chinese Embassy, the food at the PLO conference was spectacular. Every meal was a banquet with wine flowing. Eldridge Cleaver and his many wives were at the main table with Yasser Arafat and other international figures.

When it was my turn to give a report about solidarity work in London to support Black Panthers in prison, I said 'Huey Long,' by mistake, instead of 'Huey Newton.' Everyone laughed. I felt a fool but was comforted by an American comrade from the Bay Area Revolutionary Union. Her comrade, Leibel, had dressed as a woman to throw the FBI off the scent, and they'd arrived at the conference after swapping planes several times.

The American comrades chose exciting names for their groups: Verencemos and The Weathermen, from the Dylan line – 'you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.'

Our wedding, soon after we returned from Algeria, was an international gathering. I wore a mini-skirt to the registry office in Hampstead and a sari to the party afterwards. Photographs were taken by Romano Cagnoni, a brilliant photo-journalist, as a generous wedding present. Our friend and comrade, Richard Gibson and his partner, Sarah, opened their house in Stamford Bridge for a great party in the evening.



Diane with Asha, Manu and his sister Chandra in background.



Signing the register at Hampstead Registry Office as our comrades look on.



Wedding guests Diane Masaya and daughter, with Elton Razemba.

Richard was a multi-lingual, African-American journalist who'd become stateless through helping Robert F. Williams to escape to Cuba. Williams, a member of the Black Panther Party, was accused of kidnapping a Klanswoman who'd taken shelter in his car during a KKK attack. Despite her affiliation with the KKK she gave evidence that should have cleared Williams' name but the FBI still pursued him on the kidnapping charge.

The comrades had decorated the walls of Richard and Sarah's house with pictures of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao and they presented us with a leather-bound set of the complete works of Joseph Stalin, printed by the People's Publishing House, Peking. My brother played the piano and I sang.

My piano-playing brother, Bill, was a member of the RMLL and joined a group of revolutionary

students at the Royal Academy of Music. He was often called upon to accompany the singing of revolutionary songs and a few years later, played The East is Red at the funeral of [Olive Morris](#).



Bill on piano, Maria and Diane on vocals, Manu the compere, at a the Camden Studios.

Among the guests were representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the Pan African Congress, Zimbabwe African National Union, and freedom fighters from Mozambique, South West Africa and elsewhere.

Manu's sister and nieces had dressed me in a sari that kept unraveling. His family was hugely welcoming and I quickly became close to them, even those who lived in India. His sister Raj visited London frequently. His nieces, Asha and Meena adored their uncle who had looked after them for a while as young teenagers after they arrived in London expecting to be met by their father, who had tragically passed away while they were on the plane. We visited India several times and spent wonderful times with his family, friends and comrades.

My first inkling of the Women's Liberation Movement came from reading Maoist-inclined American journals such as *Red Papers* and *The Guardian* that published articles by Roxanne Dunbar and Charlotte Bunch. International papers and pamphlets were constantly dropping through the letterbox at Lisburne Road, including *The Crusader* published in Peking by Robert F. Williams on fine, airmail, tissue-paper, the Daily Hsinhua Report, Peking Review, Women of China and journals of the African Liberation Movements and Communist Party of India (M-L). In tune with the general atmosphere of liberation and change, British women had begun

forming consciousness-raising groups, many within the framework of the Women's Liberation Workshop. After the wedding, Manu started reading my unopened copy of *The Dialectics of Sex* by Shulamith Firestone (1970), making his own underlinings and notes in the margins, rendering the book even more difficult to read.

Claudia Jones had been a feminist and, if it was good enough for her, our women comrades had better get with the programme.

Manu reminded us that Claudia was deported from the US over her article commemorating International Women's Day.

'Super exploitation' was an expression with which I became familiar, as applied by Claudia and Manchanda to Black women's labour and to the world at large in terms of colonial exploitation. An article published on International Women's Day, 1951, had triggered Claudia's arrest by the FBI. Her writings on race and gender pre-dated the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement by 20 years.

The comrades tasked me with writing a leaflet about International Women's Day. Everything I read while researching the piece patronisingly described the event as being inspired by a 'match girls' strike.

In Vietnam, women's brigades were marvellously proficient at shooting down American planes. A visiting women's delegation presented us with an engraved vase made of metal from a plane downed by women. But still our comrades were not wholly persuaded about the Women's Liberation Movement.

'Why would we want to join those petit bourgeois gits,'

Comrade Chris wanted to know. 'They're just a bunch of man-haters.'

'Women are exploited and oppressed. Women's Liberation is part of the struggle,' Manu argued. 'Read Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.'

Although Engels' historical approach explained a lot, I didn't see the lives of my mother, my aunts, or my grandmother reflected in the Marxist classics or in the theoretical writings of feminist writers such as Firestone. A friend of mine had died from blood poisoning after a back street termination two years before the 1967 Abortion Act was passed. In my grief, I'd raged against 'the system' but had no name for it. Now, the Women's Liberation Movement was shining a spotlight on patriarchy. The phenomenon had been named before, but naming alone had not succeeded in spreading consciousness like wildfire. The unrelenting mockery of the WLM by the mass media made everyone aware of 'women's lib,' as they sneeringly called our liberation movement.

Everywhere I looked I saw women's powerlessness, lives of domestic drudgery and boredom, lack of education, low self-esteem. I remembered the small-town bitchery, lack of solidarity between women and suppression of women's talents and potential within my own family. I was attracted to the notion of liberation in relation to women, which expressed a link with the national liberation movements. The outraged cries of the male-dominated press, the disdainful attitude of the judiciary, educational and cultural establishment all helped to fuel the movement. Arguments about the 'male wage' surfaced in the unions; gender discrimination

could no longer be ignored.

At Manu's insistence, Chris and I attended the preparatory meetings for the first national Women's Liberation conference at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1970. With trade union women we set up the Women's Equal Rights Committee – a 'broad front' – leftist terminology for an organisation the masses can join, but is usually controlled by the vanguard cognoscenti. For women who shared our international liberationist outlook, the RMLL created the Women's Liberation Front.

Chris, a teacher, and I brought to these preparatory meetings the proposal that aiming for women's right to equal education should form one of the founding principles of the WLM. We researched and wrote about the situation intensively; I accessed statistics from the House of Commons library by claiming the information was requested by a Labour MP I was working for at the time, narrowly escaping being sacked. This work culminated in the adoption of the second of the movement's four original demands: Equal Education and Work Opportunities.

A unique meeting organised by the Women's Liberation Front was held at the Regent Street Polytechnic at which there were women speakers from Vietnam (Lin Qui), Palestine (Leila Mantoura) and Azania (Elizabeth Sibeko).

I recently found a leaflet advertising another meeting entitled 'Women with Guns', dating from around the same time. Peggy Seeger, Buff Orpington and other women musicians performed at gatherings organised by the Women's Liberation Front at the Camden Studios. Our Turkish women comrades made a massive banner depicting a woman raising her fist with broken shackles.



The Women's Liberation Front passes through Trafalgar Square on March 6th, 1971.

Juliet Mitchell later appropriated the image for the cover of her book *Women's Estate* (1971) without acknowledgement. Inside she alleged of Maoist women, 'sweetly, they call their leader, "Man,"' and referred to Manchanda as 'the Chairman Mao of Britain.'

A comrade from Zimbabwe, Eileen, came with us to Oxford. In the bathroom, a woman came over and grabbed a handful of her hair. 'Ooh, it's just like pubic hair,' she exclaimed. Eileen calmly carried on washing her hands, running the water between her fingers and splashing her face.

'Are you all right?' I asked her.

'Oh, you don't have to worry about me,' she said, 'I've had worse.'

'But I shouldn't have put you in this position.'

'On the contrary, I'm glad I came. It's been interesting.'

I'd persuaded her to accompany me imagining that, if she addressed the conference, the women gathered there would embrace the idea of international solidarity. She wasn't even called to speak, one of the few Black women at the event, and a very experienced organiser of the women's movement in Zimbabwe.

Roberta and I volunteered to help transcribe the speeches at Ruskin and worked hard on tapes and notes, producing reams of interesting material, verbatim testimonies of women from dozens of different groups around the country as well as individuals with personal stories.

When I delivered the transcript to the home of the well-known feminist writer who'd undertaken to publish the proceedings in a book, I was amazed by the grandness of her surroundings: the Ming vases and leopard skin rugs. 'Just leave it over there,' she said, apparently irritated by my intrusion. She had her feet up on a luxurious sofa and was sipping wine with a bunch of friends, recognisable faces from *New Left Review*.

At subsequent Women's Liberation Workshop meetings, I kept asking when the transcript was going to appear in book form. But as far as I know nothing ever came of the book project, and I wondered what had become of the transcript. In 2014 I read about the Women's Library's move to the London School of Economics which referred to items included in the collection.

'Flimsy-typed pages are the only original surviving records of the first UK Women's Liberation Conference, held at Ruskin College in 1970, which voted for equal pay and education, free contraception and abortion on demand, and 24-hour state nurseries so that any woman could return to work.' [Maev Kennedy, *The Guardian*, 10 March 2014.]

My first experience of public speaking was delivering a paper that Manu and I had written together. We borrowed from a pamphlet that had belonged to Claudia that consisted of American feminist writings on sexist language such as 'chairman' when referring to women and the misogynist teachings of various religions. As I'd never read any scriptures, this was the first I'd heard of the 'thanks, god, for not creating me a woman' tendency in Judeo-Christianity. Was it Leeds University where I'd made my speaking debut? Men were still being admitted to women's liberation meetings although Manu never attended. Chris was going up and down between the rows of students in the tiered lecture hall distributing papers that I imagined were our usual Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation bumpf.

'Although religion doesn't have the grip on women's lives it held a century ago,' I said into the

mic, 'its roots still go deep into our culture, and its conception of a woman's place forms a large part of the unconscious thinking even of non-religious people. All major religions hold women to be a sort of necessary evil...'

The audience was behaving oddly, their lips moving in synch with mine, a low hum became a drone, then a chorus. They were reading my speech along with me. Chris had handed out the transcript of my speech. My voice dried up and I wanted to disappear. Then I got angry and suddenly found my own voice rather than following the script.

Before the Skegness Women's Liberation Conference, Chris MacKinnon and I met with Juliet Mitchell, Lois Graessle, Janet Hadley and others to put forward an idea that might solve to the problem of larger groups (code-name for Trots) dominating the movement. Our solution was to rotate the venue and chairing of each national conference. Every group would have equal access by a system of pooling resources. The host group would edit an issue of the magazine '*Women's Struggle*.'

This would give a tremendous boost to smaller groups. Imagine hundreds of women turning up in a small town for such a conference! The women from the workshop accepted this plan. It never came to pass, only one issue of the paper was brought out. Maoists became persona non grata in the Women's Movement after the debacle in Skegness when Harpal Brar jumped onto the stage. In any case, by time the conference came round, Manu and I had been expelled from the Women's Liberation Front and all the other 'fronts.'



Manu with our baby daughter, ChuChu (Claudia)

Our baby, born in December 1970, was named after Claudia Jones but we mostly called her Chu Chu. Manu undertook to do the major part of the childcare after I went back to work. He bottle-fed her as he conducted meetings. In the middle of a discussion, he changed her nappy on the chaise longue. Whenever I did it, he would undo the safety pin and re-do it the correct way.

The comrades presented us with a red plastic carrycot. Manu found a broken pushchair on a skip and we used that for wheels. The back of the chair wouldn't stay upright, so we kept it flat and placed the carrycot on top.

'The best support we can give the Vietnamese people is to have a revolution here,' Comrade Chris asserted.

'Have a little humility, comrades,' pleaded Manu, rocking the baby on his knee. 'Do you think the British working class is going to make a revolution any time soon? Stop all this arrogant nonsense that the British working class is the most advanced in the world. They're the most backward in the world, the most racist in the world. The British working class benefits from

imperialism every day.'

Comrade Chris flounced out of the room and, as she attempted to slam the door, her handbag became entrapped and she was forced to return, which I found very funny. Laughter soured my relationship with Comrade Chris.

The comrades were becoming impatient, tempers fraying. We were in a hurry to make the revolution happen, ever waiting for the proletariat to kick into action. Surely the revolution was just around the corner, like the next bus?

For the first six years of Chu Chu's life, we lived in the ground floor flat at 58 Lisburne Road in Hampstead, the place where Claudia Jones died on Christmas Day, 1964. As I write, campaigners are still petitioning the London Borough of Camden to place a blue plaque on the house. Had Claudia spent her last hours reclining on the same battered chaise longue upon which Manu rested and worked as long as we lived there? Every day I'd carry the baby upstairs to be washed in the

bathroom we shared with the family living on the upper floors. There was no lock on the door and where the lock should have been was an eye-sized hole, which the kids liked to peek through while we were taking baths. Our lavatory was in the garden outside the back door. We became used to the white van with cables and aerials protruding from its roof that was permanently parked in Lisburne Road.

'Special branch,' Manu said. Once, when we were on a bus on the way to a demonstration, Manu mischievously asked the conductor to collect our fares from two men who'd been clumsily tailing us. They paid up. I found it difficult to comprehend why our puny efforts caused so much concern to the authorities when everything we did was within the law and totally transparent..

'You can go down to Speakers' Corner and let off as much steam as you like,' Manu explained, 'and the nice, docile policemen will stand by, smiling. But if you challenge the state directly and start to turn public opinion about the war, that has to be quashed.'

He didn't live to see over a million people march through the centre of London against the Iraq War, their voices ignored by the Prime Minister of the day.

From time to time the police infiltrated our group. A moustachioed Scottish man, Dave Robertson, aroused suspicion because he was always driving a different car. When challenged he claimed to be working for a car rental firm. On another occasion he'd told me he worked at a club called the Tatty Bogle. One of the comrades went down to check it out and found this to be untrue. At Manu's suggestion, we didn't confront Dave, but assigned him the most onerous tasks: collecting heavy banners and placards in his car and carrying them on marches. He was always called upon to buy everyone drinks and asked to memorise long passages from James Maxton, an obscure Scottish Marxist.

The funny thing was, I quite liked Dave. He was always good-natured and went along with the aggravation. Then all that changed. The sinister nature of his work revealed itself.

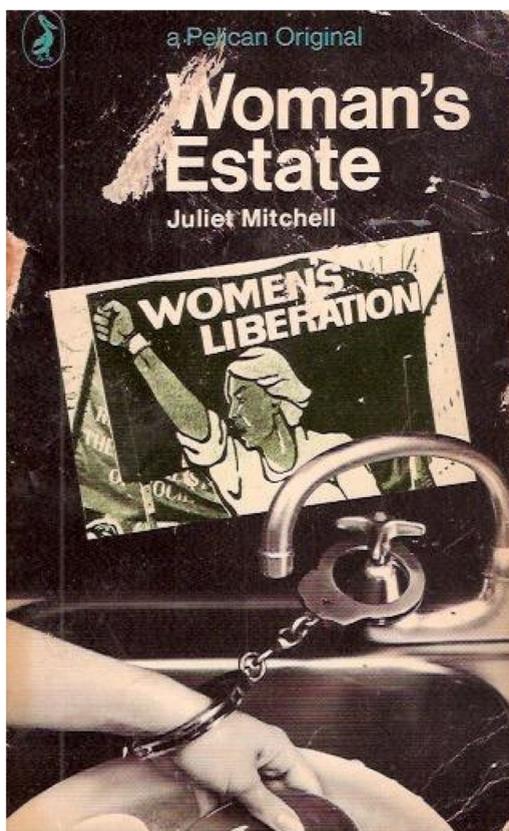
Through the Union, I'd got a job at the *Daily Mirror* and an Irish workmate, Ethel, came along with me to a meeting at the London School of Economics. John Gittings, a Guardian writer, Malcolm Caldwell of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Manu and Pat Jordan of the

International Marxist Group were getting an Indo-China Solidarity Committee together to respond to Nixon's bombing of Cambodia. Ethel was interested in becoming involved. Dave was there. When Ethel saw him, she greeted him brightly. 'Oh, I know Dave,' she said. He grabbed her by the wrist and said, 'I want to talk to you outside.' They didn't come back.

Next day at work, Ethel was cool and awkward with me. After a week of this she asked me to meet her for a drink.

'Dave works for the special branch,' she told me. 'He's threatened that if I tell you or Manchanda, he'll cause something nasty to happen to my family in Ireland.'

Dave disappeared off the radar and was never seen again. For a few months I scrutinised the faces under policeman's helmets, wondering whether Dave had been demoted back to pounding pavements as a beat bobby.



Poster featuring actor Sheila Allen

The Maoist precept of criticism and self-criticism was being acted out in a manner that guaranteed conflict. The issue of sexism in the group was endemic. One man who was accused of sexually harassing a woman comrade 'defended' himself by saying, 'She's too ugly to rape.' This was not an isolated incident, as soon it emerged that there was also at least one case of domestic violence within the group. 'Patriarchy within the organising space' was a horrible reality.

By challenging this behavior, Manu was supported by some in the RMLL, but the group was disintegrating.

On a visit to Birmingham, where I spoke on behalf my Union branch at a rally of Midland car workers, Manu, a French comrade, Mireille, Chu Chu and I stayed with an old comrade in the

leadership of the Indian Workers Association. After his wife had cooked us a wonderful meal, we began drinking whisky. The men were shouting in Hindi. At first Manu was reluctant to translate. One of the 'comrades' had made a sexist comment about French women, directed at Mireille. When Manu objected, the 'comrade' leapt out of his chair and caught Manu by the throat.

After we all piled in and dragged him off, Manu fainted. After he recovered, we quickly packed and left the house.

'The Woman Question' loomed over all our proceedings now.

Privacy was a thing of the past. Long, wrangling meetings delved into relationships. An RMLL member in Coventry filed a complaint against her shop steward husband who was in charge of the group's local branch. She wrote a letter to Manu outlining the trade unionist's affair with a student the same age as their daughter.

The young woman was a candidate member of the RMLL. In his defence, the Coventry man pointed out that Chairman Mao was married four times. He accused his wife of being a counter-revolutionary because she refused to allow him to hang a portrait of Chairman Mao in their front room.

I was hearing of self-styled radical groups where sexual liberation was held to be the right of men to sleep with as many women as they liked, and the duty of women to oblige. Refusal led to accusations of a petit bourgeois attitude.

During a period of intense activity, from 1968 to the early seventies, I was attending London Women's Liberation Workshop meetings in different areas all over London. There, women spoke of 'gut feelings,' not the politics I was used to or, at other times, academic women used a jargon that I found incomprehensible.

The Women's Liberation Movement was supporting striking telephonists, called 'hello girls' in the press. Before the digital age, telephone exchanges were manually operated and this job was designated 'women's work.' The operators worked long, unsocial hours, and were obliged to ask permission to go to the toilet, like school children. Night cleaners had formed a support group around May Hobbs. But the heroines of the trade union movement, credited with kicking off the struggle for equal pay, were Ford machinists, who had brought the factory in Dagenham to a standstill.

In the early seventies I was elected NATSOPA, later SOGAT, Mother of the Chapel, an archaic print union title that had to be adjusted from the more usual Father of the Chapel, at the Press Association in Fleet Street. I was to remain in that post throughout the Wapping dispute with great support from Manu both personally and politically.

A few years later, in 1974, all the women's organisations, supported even by the TUC, joined together to hold a massive equal pay rally at Alexandra Palace. Our political grouping was already defunct by then, but a few of us who were still in touch decided to use the occasion to promote the memory of Claudia Jones. All her photographs and articles were blown up for display. We borrowed heavy exhibition panels from the ICA, persuaded some poor sap to lend us a van, and set up our own stand at the gathering. We produced a Women's Liberation Front magazine featuring Claudia on the cover, containing her speech to the court before her

deportation. There were few Black people present and no one was interested. I'd sat up all night assembling the magazine, with Letraset, cow gum and a Stanley knife. The milkman come and then, after what seemed only minutes, I heard the bottles clinking again. I'd been at it for 24 hours. But the proofs must be ready in time to go to the printers. Manu knew how to convey a sense of urgency; our leaflet production was considered matter of life and death. It wasn't surprising that few came near our display at Ally Pally. The reputation of the Maoists within the Women's Liberation Movement was rock bottom. Women were trying to develop a new, autonomous movement and we were seen as male-dominated and spouting tired old anti-imperialist rhetoric. In particular, women long remembered the incident at the national WLM conference in Skegness in 1971 when Harpal Brar leapt onto the stage and wrestled the microphone out of a woman's hand. After that, conferences were solely for women but that didn't stop some men from trying to gatecrash and even assault women attending.



Lin Qui and Family came to dinner at Lisburne Road (1970)



Manu, Diane and Tom Murray (Workers Party of Scotland) at the Lisbon Conference for a boycott of the Moscow Olympics (1979)

Mrs Gandhi's State of Emergency, declared in 1975, sparked demonstrations all over the world. Although the RMML had imploded by then, a large circle of comrades, old and new, came together to co-ordinate protests in the Midlands and Southall where the Dominion Cinema became a focus of meetings and rallies. A slogan, adapted by ChuChu, went: 'Indira Gandhi, chum, chum, chum, Indira Gandhi, kick her on the bum!' But we also shouted 'Charu Mazumda, zindabad!'

The great Filipino artist and amazing dancer, David Medalla, with other comrades from Artists for Democracy, staged a brilliant performance in support of the anti-emergency campaign. The arts centre founded by David in Fitzrovia was a frequent venue for international solidarity gatherings.

Manu had been involved in the cultural movement in India before his exile and was always keen to have music, art and food as part of our gatherings. He loved the music of The Mighty Saighal and we went to see Ram Gopal together and attended events celebrating Indian film.

There was a performance of Genet's *The Blacks* at the Roundhouse (1970) in which Nadia Cattouse was performing and where I first had the honour of meeting her.

On April 30th, 1975, Vietnam became whole again when the south was liberated amidst incredible scenes of U.S. personnel scrambling into helicopters from the roof of the embassy in Saigon. The Vietnamese comrades in London had been operating a defacto legation while, for legal reasons, calling themselves journalists. They threw a wild celebration party at the building in West London that had previously been occupied by representatives of the puppet regime, as we used to call such proxy governments in those days. At the party, John Pilger, who I knew vaguely from my *Mirror* days, asked me: 'Diane, are you with that tipsy little Indian gentleman?'

Most on the left were campaigning against Britain's membership of the EEC ahead of an in-out referendum. Although our group didn't pay much attention to the issue, it was taken for granted that the UK should become a member as a counterbalance between the two super-powers. The Europeans were suspicious of Britain's motives, because of the 'special relationship' with the USA that the UK likes to foster.

China was still unrecognised by the United Nations when Claudia Jones spelled out her analysis in a prescient letter that she wrote to Manu while in Moscow in 1964:

"Last night I read an article by a leading economist here which puts some interesting questions. Some excerpts will illustrate the point: "Having failed in their attempts to oppose the EEC with her seven nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Britain has been driven to negotiations for Common Market membership. The reason for this is that Britain can neither destroy nor neutralise the Common Market nor afford to remain outside. At a time when the British Empire is on its last legs and British imperialism is seriously weakened Britain cannot afford to keep out of the squabble for markets or to leave, voluntarily at least, the initiative in the hands of her principal rival in Europe, West Germany.

"Non participation in the Common Market threatens Britain with the loss of her role in the aggressive North Atlantic alliance. British imperialism is clinging desperately at the illusory 'Atlantic unity' in the face of the steady strengthening of the world socialist system and the decline of world capitalism..."

After the Cultural Revolution exploded on the scene in China, there were protests in Hong Kong when the colony was used as a stopover for American planes. Chinese Embassy personnel in London were confined to their building in Portland Place. They burst out of the building with baseball bats, wearing Red Guard uniforms and tried to take on the press and police who were placing them under siege. There had been previous incidents in 1967 when the police had obstructed embassy cars in retaliation for events in Hong Kong.

Our comrades went to the Hsinhua New China News Agency's house in Ferncroft Avenue to show solidarity. The Hsinhua comrades invited us to dinner.

Mao Tai tasted like the pocheen friends brought from Ireland. The tables were piled with glistening food: duck, sweet rice. The bunch of left wing guests descended like locusts, filling their plates over and over until they were stuffed.

Manu was wearing a red and gold Mao button on his smart blue Mao jacket, the same one I gave to the funeral director a few years later to dress him for his cremation. He kept proposing 'a toast to Chairman Mao.' We all quaffed the deadly Mao Tai, then a few minutes later, another toast, this time 'to comrade Chou En Lai.'

In the small hours, a tiny man offered to drive us home in the official Rolls, which flew the flag of People's China on the bonnet. The regular driver had gone to bed hours earlier. Our host was too small to see over the steering wheel, and was thoroughly pissed. Maybe I should offer to drive? But I hadn't driven since I lived in NZ and then only a mini.

We sat stationary in the garage for about 20 minutes while he pulled levers activating the windscreen wipers, the electric windows, jets of water. Then we began to move slowly and sedately along the road, with Chu Chu asleep on the back seat; five mph all the way to Swiss Cottage. I went to work the next day feeling like death warmed up.

'East is East and West is West and ne'er the twain shall meet,' my mother parroted drunkenly on a visit to the air-raid shelter, her name for the basement flat in Swiss Cottage.

'I'll do a deal with you,' Manu told her. 'If you bastards get out of all the countries you've colonised, I'll go back to live in India.' The two of us fell about laughing. 'This island would sink without trace under your weight,' he chortled.

In 1979, Manu, ChuChu and I were in India when we heard of Margaret Thatcher's election. ChuChu was left with Manu's mother and sister while we visited friends, including a Supreme Court judge, Daniel Latifi, in his Chambers, and, by contrast, many others who lived hard lives in tough surroundings. We were invited to a rally in a massive park, a sea of red flags! Manu was recognised by young and old and greeted with affection and respect.

In the summer of 1980, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Manu and I joined with Richard Gibson and Tom Murray of the Workers' Party of Scotland in a trip to Lisbon to attend an international conference for the boycott of the Moscow Olympics. We'd made an alliance with the Tory MP, Sir Frederic Bennett, a member of the Council of Europe, and Margaret Thatcher's PPS, Matthew Parris. Captain Tomas Rosa, one of the revolutionaries within the Portuguese armed forces who helped overthrow Salazar and who rode into Lisbon astride a tank, came to stay. Matthew Parris was invited to dinner to meet Captain Rosa and bizarrely, by coincidence, my mother was staying at the same time. A stranger gathering, I couldn't imagine.

'Mrs Langford, I like your accent,' Matthew Parris told my mother. 'What exent?' she said. About this time, a number of Marxist-Leninist groups tried again to forge unity. Manu persuaded a friend to lend us her big family home for a meeting of comrades from various groups, including the Workers' Party of Scotland. Over a two-day period an agreement was drafted for joint work, taking as its premise the newly-minted Maoist 'Theory of Three Worlds.' The Chinese Communist Party had assumed leadership of 'Third World' and was ready to make alliances with the 'Second World' to thwart US imperialism and Soviet 'social-imperialism.' It was in this spirit that the visit to Lisbon had come about.

Soon after our return from that trip, a flood caused our landlord to decant us into a place beside the main northern railway line which rattled and jiggled every time a train went by. I told Manu that if he brought his junk to the new flat, I'd leave him. Riding home on the top deck of the No. 46 bus after work, I spotted Manu going down the road pushing ChuChu's old baby carriage. As the bus swept past, I saw the typewriter with missing keys, the clock with no hands, the duplicating machine without rollers, a tennis racquet with no strings. The pram had been lifted from a skip when our daughter, Chu Chu, now turned ten, was born. It was the same pram that had been rocked by skinheads as we walked with our newborn baby through a council estate to get to Queens Crescent Market.

Somewhere in there, I knew, was a collection of gowns damaged by the flood, which had belonged to Claudia Jones. After the deluge, he'd hung them on the clothesline and the weight of water and mold stretched them to the ground. Then he'd tried to dry them over the radiator, making the whole flat reek of musty satin.

He'd kept all her stuff: passport, papers, betting slips even. There was a letter from her bank manager that said, 'Dear Miss Jones, I wonder whether you would mind being a little less exuberant in the issuing of cheques. Perhaps you would be kind enough to visit my office so we can discuss your overdraft.'

There was a cabin trunk full of worn, pointy shoes, costume jewellery, baubles, depleted perfume bottles no longer bearing her scent, an electric contraption she used for relaxing her hair, and an alarm clock with a large bell. All saved. A wooden cube with a Perspex lid, lined with vermilion felt, contained blood-drenched pebbles gathered from a beach on which dozens of Chinese communists had been massacred by the Kuomintang. As honoured guests of the People's Republic, either Claudia or Manu had been presented with this relic of revolutionary martyrs.

I, too, was awed by Claudia's life and loved listening to Manu's stories about her: the driving lessons, the time she bought an old banger and the engine fell out as soon as she tried to drive it off, the American way she called everyone, 'baby' or 'darling,' the time she walked out of a Communist Party social gathering when the hostess invited the guests to join in singing, 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves...'

'If she had a few shillings in her pocket she'd always take a taxi rather than public transport,' he'd told me.

Compared to Lisburne Road, the basement flat at Swiss Cottage was a palace. Clean, freshly painted, and, best of all, our own bathroom and modern kitchen. The woman next door had a mangy old cat called Fur, whose tail had been severed in a road accident. Chu Chu loved playing with that cat. There was a kid about her age in the flat upstairs. And there was a great school nearby, on Fitzjohns Avenue, the same sloping road down which gallons of water had descended the day of the flood. Now we'd lost our beautiful new flat and I blamed Manchanda. We should have stood our ground and refused to move out while the landlord put in a damp course. I couldn't understand why he'd become so meek. I suspected he'd taken a

fancy to the flat by the railway because the rooms were larger, allowing more space for his hoarding to expand.

'What do you want with 20 years back copies of *Peking Review*?' I demanded.

'One of these days, when I'm feeling well, I'll sort everything out,' he said.

When the landlord gave us notice that we were going to be decanted, I issued an ultimatum about the junk. I'd gradually moved Claudia's letters, photographs and any other material relating to her that I could find, into a metal filing cabinet that I'd bought from a second hand office furniture shop in Farringdon Street. But because of the volume of stuff, I knew there was more to be excavated.

Manu always noticed when the papers had been disturbed and, if he suspected that I'd thrown anything out, he'd go through the garbage cans.

He was ill for years, his health damaged by imprisonment in India, overwork and diabetes mellitus that had gone undiagnosed for far too long. As he grew older he became exhausted, spending most of the time dozing on the chaise longue or watching daytime television on the set we'd first acquired to watch the Watergate hearings. When his diabetes became worse, he was prescribed insulin injections.

'You'll have to help me,' he said. But I was too squeamish.

'I can't.'

Soon he became adept at plunging the needle into his gut. He even enjoyed shocking people by suddenly lifting his shirt and sticking in the needle during a meeting.

When after ten years I realised I needed to leave, I agreed to Manu's suggestion of seeing a counsellor at Relate. She asked us each to make a list of our problems. Manu produced a wad of closely written pages. I gave her a piece of paper on which I had written: 'He's a man, and I'm a lesbian.' She agreed that, rather than marriage guidance, a lawyer was what I needed. We separated in 1982 but were always in touch and we had joint custody of ChuChu. After a while we were able to be friends. He was terribly depressed that his predictions about the direction China had taken had come to pass. He'd begun formal training as a homeopath although he had studied the subject on his own for years. In India homeopathy was used ahead of allopathy for minor illnesses. When ChuChu was ill on our last visit, we stood in a long line outside the flat of a highly-rated practitioner who dispensed from a board placed over the entrance to his front door. He chain smoked as he rolled the tiny pillules into paper envelopes. ChuChu's fever came down after taking them.

Last time I saw Manu was shortly before he died. We'd been to hear Bernadette McAliskey (formerly Devlin) speak in support of the miners' strike at a packed meeting at the Camden Town Hall.

A few weeks later, on October 25th, 1985, I was having breakfast for the last time in a house in Stoke Newington, after splitting with my then partner, when I received a call from a mutual

dear friend, Mohammed Jogee. Manu had suffered a massive heart attack. Chu Chu and I rushed to the Royal Free in Hampstead and were told not to expect him to recover. Friends and family thronged the hospital. ChuChu and I were given a room to enable us to stay with him overnight. He died in the early hours of October 27th, the anniversary of the Battle of Grosvenor Square.

After the funeral I went back to sort out his flat by the railway line. It was all changed: still a mess, but a different kind of mess. Manu had set up one of his old typewriters on an expansive desk, the kind you saw in doctors' surgeries before computerisation. A certificate from the London College of Homeopathy was pinned to the wall. An appointment book lay open on the desk with names pencilled in. All political traces had been expunged. Gone were the portraits of the five patriarchs, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. The bookshelves were lined with homeopathic materia medica, and symptom-finders.

As I contemplated the changed scenario, the phone rang. Who rings a dead man? Gertrude Elias.

'Dee-ah-na! Can I come and have a look through his papers? There might be something of interest for my researches.'

The room that should have been our daughter's bedroom when we all lived together was still full of papers, which I now began to think of as archival material. Gertrude and I sat amongst piles of bursting cardboard boxes and made a start. I'd brought along plastic bin liners to dispose of unimportant items. Gertrude put on her thick reading glasses. 'No use, no use' she said, as she discarded papers, dropping them on the floor, but I picked them up to check in case our estimation of what was interesting or valuable did not coincide. My search turned up letters from Manu to the central committee of the Communist Party taking them to task for their treatment of Claudia Jones, written shortly before his expulsion from the party in 1965. I paused to read posthumous news of Claudia's friends and comrades in America: Esther Jackson, Heloise Robinson, Lorraine Hansbury, Ossie Davis and the Robesons, all long dead. Heloise's handwriting, which in earlier letters was strong and distinctive, had become spidery and shaky as a result of declining health. Her style was always exuberant, gossipy. She punctuated droll remarks with the word 'smile!' in brackets – or '(smile, girl!)' – foreshadowing the emoticons that people use these days.

I unfolded a square of paper: the death certificate of Kelso Cochrane. From a yellowing newspaper, the front page of a yellowing Observer, Manu's face peered out. It was a story about the anti-apartheid hunger strike at St Martins-in-the Fields. Manu had told me that one of the comrades used to disappear during the night for trips to a 24-hour Wimpy Bar.

As we sat there, the enormous responsibility that I'd inherited began to sink in.

'Did Manu like me?' Gertrude interrupted. 'He always crossed to the other side of the road when he saw me walking around Hampstead.'

'Oh yes,' I said, 'he was short-sighted and terribly absent-minded. I'm sure he was very fond of

you.'

'He didn't suffer fools gladly,' Gertrude said, 'I once heard him call Bertrand Russell an "upper class twit."'

'He was an upper class twit.' A train rattled past. It was raining outside.

A few weeks later, at a memorial meeting for Manu at the Royal Commonwealth Institute, Gertrude made a speech in which she said she admired me because 'you haven't fallen prey to petit bourgeois feminism – you had a wonderful political partnership with Manchanda and you've honoured both him and Claudia.'

Gertrude seemed surprised that I didn't see Claudia as some kind of rival. This irritated me, because Manu's association with Claudia was part of his identity.

I felt their presence as I held Claudia's passport in my hand and read her letters to Manu from the Soviet Union, Japan and China. 'Today I lit a candle and floated a flower in both our names,' she'd written on a postcard from Nagasaki, while in Japan for a conference against A and H-bombs. For a large part of my life the two of them had inspired my own journey to political awareness and feminist activism. Linking 'petit-bourgeois' with 'feminism' was a way of undermining the Women's Liberation Movement.

A couple of years after Manu's death, Gertrude rang us on the evening a Channel 4 film, "*Claudia Jones - a Woman of our Time*," was broadcast. She was upset by the imputation that Claudia died alone, bereft of friends. Manu just happened to be away in China when Claudia died.

Gertrude was also upset by a Guardian article by Michelle Hanson, another example of the way in which Claudia has been portrayed as being friendless and alone. Gertrude demanded that I write to *The Guardian* to refute the cosy relationship Hanson presented between Claudia and the Communist Party,

Gertrude was utterly distraught at the Channel 4 programme's depiction of both Claudia and Manu, especially at the utterances of Mikki Doyle of the Communist Party. The interviewer asked,

"Was there a man in her life?"

"Yeah, there was, Heck, I don't wanna speak ill of the dead. But he lived off her. He would never have been invited to China if it wasn't for Claudia, One shouldn't speak ill of the dead but..."

The producer of this programme was completely duped by Mikki Doyle and was preparing to broadcast an unquestioning version of her assertion that she organised Claudia's funeral - until the film crew came to visit us and was shown documentary evidence that Manu had bought the plot in Highgate Cemetery and organised the funeral and memorial service. A brief rebuttal by Donald Hinds, which had previously been cut from the film, was hurriedly reinstated and we are left with a few seconds of Donald saying,

"If Manchanda had not taken out an injunction, Claudia would have been buried in an unknown grave."

Chu Chu and I took Manu's ashes to India in 1991 and, as women are still debarred from doing so, a male relative scattered them into the Jumuna while we watched from the riverside as he almost tumbled in. I imagined Manu remonstrating: mumbo jumbo! But the urn had been sitting in my airing cupboard for long enough and our visit comforted his sister, Raj, who was ill and didn't want family business left unresolved.

Not until that trip, and the subsequent delivery of Claudia's papers to the Schomburg Center in Harlem in 2002, did I feel I'd fully honoured my commitment to Manu and Claudia. The story of my meeting with scholar Carole Boyce Davies and her work on the archive is told elsewhere.

Now, with the help of Carole, the papers are in their proper home, the national archive of African-American history and culture, referenced as The Claudia Jones Memorial Collection. Claudia had always considered herself an American, despite the state withholding formal citizenship. Her friends and comrades in the USA never stopped longing for her return and campaigning for it.

The repatriation of her personal effects was no substitute for the homecoming she was prevented from making during her lifetime, yet the establishment of the collection remains a powerful symbol of return and a permanent memorial to her life and legacy. As I have written elsewhere, the archivist at the Schomburg told me that Claudia's papers were like the missing pieces of a jigsaw which fitted with material already deposited in the Library.

Channel-hopping in 2005, twenty years after Manu's death, I came across a programme about the Notting Hill riots. For a brief moment, I saw him standing outside the church during the funeral of Kelso Cochrane, the young Antiguan carpenter murdered by racist Teddy Boys in 1958. Manu was wearing the same tinted specs, had a cigarette in his mouth, and a rolled-up newspaper under his arm.

We have been approached by, and have cooperated with, various researchers conducting projects about Claudia and Manu. To our disappointment - with the exception of Carole Boyce Davies, whose work honours their politics - we found the resulting material to be distorting and disrespectful of their relationship. In 2015 Claudia Jones' 100th birthday was celebrated. Again, malicious stories were circulating about Manu. Again, my daughter and I were forced to defend his legacy.

Many statements about Manu, ostensibly about his character, actually have a deeper meaning when they are made by people with sectarian positions who have not changed over time and who wish to discredit him politically. Unfortunately, character assassination is an appalling feature of the political landscape and one of the tactics used by vested interests. It is necessary therefore that researchers, film-makers and authors are aware that people talking of Manu and/or Claudia now may still be viewing them through the distorting prism of dogmatic historical antagonisms - they are not simply giving personal opinions in good faith which can be taken at face value. It is known that the Communist Party did not treat Claudia well - despite posthumously claiming her as 'their' hero - and that attacking her and her politics through

Manu became a modus operandi.

Amongst the reasons for the problematic relationship between Claudia and Manu, on the one hand, and the CPGB on the other, was the fact that they were too progressive, too radical, for the CP. They challenged the party on issues of racism and gender, both in society at large and within the party itself. Claudia wrote that the 'open door' of the CPGB, if it did not deal with the issues of women's and Black people's oppression, would become a 'revolving door.' i.e., that to appeal to and include all oppressed people, the party had to move from its narrow focus on economic class to developing analyses of the super-exploitation of Black women, e.g. (moving 'to the left of Karl Marx' by developing and extending theory and practice.)

Additionally, within the party, both of them obviously had to deal with white supremacist attitudes as manifested by 'comrades'. There is evidence that those in power within the CP did not want Black people - 'colonials' either of African-Caribbean or Indian heritage - to play prominent roles in the struggle.

That the organising space is itself a site of struggle is obvious these days. This was long before the Women's Liberation Movement had to deal with the 'straight left' trying to shut feminists up by insisting that women's liberation must wait until after a class revolution, or Black women having to insist on what is now known as 'intersectionality' within feminism. Claudia was way ahead in her political analysis and knowledge.

My belief and hope is that anyone documenting this political history needs to think carefully and responsibly about these issues, and incorporate them into their work, otherwise they are contributing to the building of a narrative that is not seeking truth so much as reiterating and keeping alive past untruths. This matters not only because it is upsetting for living family and denies them the space to counter lies, but because it perpetuates invalid versions of history.

Diane Langford, July 2015

