

# **David Oluwale: making his memory and debating his martyrdom**

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## **Introduction**

David Oluwale stowed away on the Motor Vessel Temple Bar which left Apapa Wharf in Lagos, Nigeria on 16 August 1949. He and two others evaded detection as the ship was preparing to leave but they were found during the voyage. They arrived at the port of Hull, on the north east coast of England, on 3 September. As British citizens, who had simply breached maritime regulations, they were merely sentenced to 28 days in jail. Oluwale was transferred to Armley Prison in Leeds, West Yorkshire, UK.<sup>1</sup> He was among the 1,600 stowaways estimated to have arrived in Britain between 1945 and 1951, two-thirds of whom came from West Africa and the rest from the West Indies.<sup>2</sup> Like them, Oluwale soon went to work in the least desirable manual occupations of 1950s Britain. Much of his twenty years in Yorkshire were spent in a psychiatric hospital in Leeds. On 4 May 1969 his body, bearing the marks of assault, was spotted by some children in the weir at Knostrop cut, in the Aire/Calder canal, a mile or so east of Leeds' city centre. He was drowned, floating back towards Hull. On 23 November 1971, Inspector Geoffrey Ellerker and Sergeant Ken Kitching were found guilty of assaulting Oluwale, but, on the direction of Judge Hinchcliffe, they were acquitted of his manslaughter.

David Oluwale's story was largely forgotten after the publicity generated by the court case until two books appeared in 2007: Kester Aspden's *Nationality Wog — The hounding of David Oluwale* and Caryl Phillips' *Foreigners — Three English lives*, which included a long chapter titled 'Northern Lights', about Oluwale. To initiate a discussion on whether David Oluwale might become a martyr, this chapter will examine in some detail the different ways these books, and several other texts, including essays, plays, poems, songs and a film, have responded since 1971 to his complex and tragic life.<sup>3</sup>

In interrogating these texts, the chapter does some of the work that always has to be done for a claim of secular martyrdom to be made. It examines the historical record, sifting through the material that might be taken as fact. Crucially, it works through the value-positions that have inflected the various texts, and debates whether or not an account can be produced of the life of a person who may be positioned as a martyr. The premise of this essay is that martyrdom is a sociological and political process during which a particular narrative about the life and death of the candidate for martyrdom is developed. This account must include certain elements. One of these is the meaning of the candidate's life, which normally includes his or her moral status and what she or he believed in and stood for. Another is the circumstances in which the person died; martyrs' deaths are untimely and ethically unjustifiable (at least by the standards of the time in which martyrdom is established). Then some agents have to make a concerted effort for the candidate's claim to be widely legitimated. This will involve educational and campaigning work, often creating a public memorial of some sort. As this chapter will show, some of these elements seem to be in place for David Oluwale, but others remain moot.

### **Positioning David Oluwale**

There is a great deal of material in the National Archives which show how officialdom responded to David Oluwale as he crossed the paths of employers, police and prison officers, medical and welfare personnel. His friends have been interviewed, providing personality to the narrative. When the

police officers were in court, much more information entered the record. But the process of framing this story is more complex, requiring writers to foreground their value standpoints. ‘Martyr’ is one such framing device. But in the case of David Oluwale, there are other ways of contextualising his life which may be more useful.

Paul Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic provides one abstract framing of David Oluwale’s story.<sup>4</sup> David’s life and death bear out some of the key points in Gilroy’s exposition of the Atlantic not simply as an ocean, but as a conceptual space. David was a child of the British Empire, growing up in Lagos, Nigeria. We don’t know whether he was born in 1926, 1929, 1930 or 1931. This tells us straight away that he was born poor, and outside the full rigour of the colonial bureaucracy. His father worked in the fishing trade. In one of the artistic representations of David by Oladipo Agboluaje, his mother is depicted (on stage, though not in the published script) as a lively market trader.<sup>5</sup> In Jeremy Sandford’s 1974 radio play, David is portrayed as ambitious, stowing away on a cargo ship in order to realise his dream of becoming an engineer in Britain. But there is little certainty about his early life in Africa. He left school at 14 and worked as an apprentice tailor. “Subject is not recorded in this country” is the fitting sign-off when Interpol in Nigeria was asked in 1970 to investigate David’s history in that country.<sup>6</sup>

The Atlantic erases black bodies and it erases memory; thus the histories of impoverished black people are usually made invisible. David’s ambition to escape poverty and create a new life in the ‘mother country’ relates directly to several aspects of Gilroy’s conceptual scheme. David was forging a thoroughly modern existence out of the tools supplied by the industrial West as they merged with an African sensibility, at least partly shaped by a British colonial regime. He secreted himself on a merchant ship in 1949 and he was soon labouring to re-build dirty, derelict post-war Britain. David’s African-ness was already imbued with North American-ness: his West African friends in Leeds in the early 1950s called him Yankee, such was his admiration for the films and music that were pulsing out of the USA and forming their global audience. Agboluaje touchingly

imagines David talking to his mother, Alice, saying “I’m gong to the labour exchange tomorrow.<sup>7</sup> They say there is tailoring work for me there. I will sew Yankee trousers and people will say, is that not Alice’s son looking like John Wayne?”<sup>8</sup> As Gilroy has established, and all of Caryl Phillips’ novels exemplify, this crossing of the ocean is also a crossing-over, an interweaving, of bodies and the cultures they carry. In this early post-1945 period of British history, still burdened with Empire, yet to acquire the double-edged sword of ‘post-coloniality’, most of the incoming bodies were poor, but physically and mentally agile.

Between 1946 and 1948, 102 stowaways came from Nigeria. Between the summer of 1948 and summer 1949, 83 stowaways arrived in Hull. Thirty (non-British) were immediately sent home, while 45 of the 53 the British Colonials received, like David, 28 days in jail.<sup>9</sup> Another source suggests 392 Nigerians arrived as stowaways between 1946 and 1949.<sup>10</sup> Michael Banton stated that ‘illiterate’ West Africans were lured to Britain by seamen ‘who spread . . . exaggerated tales of a luxurious standard of living’. Some of the earlier stowaways ‘were unemployed, others were adolescent delinquents’; there is no evidence that David or his fellow stowaways were in the latter category. Banton continued: ‘in recent years nearly all the stowaways have been ambitious young literates. The view held by some persons in official positions that stowaways are the “dregs” of their own countries cannot be upheld’. (As scrutiny tightened, only 25 Nigerians made it in 1953, six in 1952.)<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Adams explained the situation succinctly in Corinne Silva’s film *Wandering Abroad*. In 1948, in Lagos, he said: ‘There was no prospect of a better life for me in my home town, with no education, so I decided to stow away, with six of us’. They spent 23 days on the SS Duke of Sparta.<sup>12</sup> Like David Oluwale, Adams got a month in jail. Between 1949 and 1953 David took a succession of unskilled jobs in the small tailoring workshops, the railways, engineering factories, on building sites, in an abattoir, in the meat market and at a gas company in Bradford, Sheffield and, mainly, Leeds. One of his friends, Vincent Enyori, said, recalling the job he did with David at Croft Engineering in Bradford: ‘They didn’t allow you to touch machines so that you might have made

some money'.<sup>13</sup> His rapid circulation through the labour market was one of many signs that David was not a victim. First generation Caribbean migrants to Leeds have told me that, however bad the jobs were and however noxious the racism they encountered, they always knew they could jack it in and get another, possibly better job a few hours later. Like them, David clearly did not stand still. Nevertheless, these migrants were not the relatively privileged African and Caribbean students who came to British universities in this period. David and his friends were blatantly exploited by capital in northern England.

After four years in manual jobs, David had a number of short stays in prison, almost ten years (1953 to 1961 and 1965 to 1967) in a psychiatric hospital, and two years as a destitute rough sleeper. During that last period he was systematically abused by two Leeds policemen, Ellerker and Kitching, who 'hounded' him to his death in the River Aire in 1969. ('Hounded' is the term used by the prosecutor when Ellerker and Kitching came to trial in 1971. Its deliberate ambiguity is discussed below.) With this sorry tale we pick up another point of Gilroy's conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic: David Oluwale provides us with a tour of the hideous underbelly of modernity. If genocide — of Africans and Jews in particular — was the extreme negative point of modernity, the routine brutalisation of working class, black African and Caribbean bodies was its daily operation in David's time.

Gilroy, however, also stresses the positive, syncretic aspects of the Black Atlantic. His notion of a Black Atlantic prompts us to remember David Oluwale as a man who bears a reading of the modern period that highlights both the barbarism and the optimism that can arise when borders are crossed, boundaries are broken and interchange occurs. This conceptual overview is very important. Framing the Oluwale story in this nuanced way is more useful than the simpler notion that David was a victim of racism and police brutality. It is important to record the racism and police violence that marked David's life and death, but the Black Atlantic frame allows us to include those

foul acts while elaborating on David's agency, his dignity and his moments of pleasure in England's north.

A committee to investigate a memorial to David Oluwale started, at Caryl Phillips' suggestion, in 2007-8. The David Oluwale Memorial Association was established as a charity in 2012. To date, it has not used the terminology of martyrdom. Its framework respects Gilroy's Black Atlantic but is slightly different.<sup>14</sup> It tells David's story but also points to the positive changes that have taken place in the city of Leeds since his death in 1971. Black labour is still exploited, but the sites are cleaner and less dangerous. Black people are still the object of racism and police malpractice, but less so than in David's day. Secondly, it adopts an 'intersectional' approach to Oluwale's life and death. A range of structural forces collided on David's life and death, particularly institutional racism and class exploitation. If we recall his characterisation (during the trial of the officers accused of his manslaughter) as a biting, fighting 'miniature Mr Universe, as lithe as a panther'<sup>15</sup> we would add the structuring factor of racialised masculinity to class and race. Oluwale's mental ill-health and destitution can be seen as the abject outcomes of the operation of those intersecting forces on one man's body. Thirdly, with the charity's memorial garden it aims to insert a narrative of hope into this story. The garden will be close to point on the River Aire in the centre of Leeds where it is thought that David was last seen in 1969, pursued by two men in police uniforms. It will be a place of beauty, growth, tranquility and reflection, containing world-class public art. It will be a site for cultural expression and discussion, using information accessible via smart phones, helping the city of Leeds to think about and redress contemporary exclusions. One of those discussions will be whether or not David Oluwale might be positioned as a martyr. In staking out these ideas and activities, the charity is doing the kind of work that is done when martyrdom is being proposed. In its early days as a working party, it requested and obtained support from both the Christian Bishops in Leeds, from the leader of Leeds City Council, the chair of the Leeds West Indian Centre, the president of Nigerian Community Leeds, from the Chief Constable, and from the editor of the York-

shire Evening Post. As a charity, it has carefully assembled a Board composed of people with high credibility in civic life in Leeds. At its opening ceremony, on the land destined to be the interim memorial garden, the Lord Mayor was invited to make the key welcome address, and she enthusiastically agreed. (A photo of Cllr Ann Castle, Lord Mayor (sic), in her chain of office, flanked by Martin Patterson, the charity's first chair and a senior manager at St George's Crypt, the leading homelessness charity in Leeds, appears on page . . . )

### **Martyrdom: does David Oluwale fit that frame?**

In creating a garden with an iconic sculpture in the name of David Oluwale, the charity is clearly engaging in another aspect of the work required for martyrs. Its activities legitimate the claim that Oluwale is a person most worthy of our memory, and the charity is mobilising resources needed to establish a permanent memorial. This work has a significant origin. The idea for an Oluwale memorial in Leeds came to Caryl Phillips as he read a plaque for the Jews who lived in the ghetto imposed upon them by the Venetians (1516-1797). Phillips grew up in the city of Leeds at the time when Oluwale lived and died there. He researched David Oluwale's life and published his reflections in 2007. The Jews exterminated by the Nazis have been established as collective martyrs. Similarly, as described in this volume, the people who were killed at Tolpuddle are a (much smaller) group now seen as secular martyrs. In the religious tradition, however, martyrs were individuals who were persecuted and killed because of their defiance in standing up for their religious beliefs. Later, martyrdom has been granted to people who died for their political beliefs. David Oluwale was not known for his beliefs. On the face of it, therefore, he only fits one element of that narrative: his utter refusal to give in to the police officers' efforts to beat him out of the city centre. As we shall see, Oluwale was an enormously courageous man. But so far as we know, he did not die for any ideology. What we know, and what we can only speculate about David Oluwale, is investigated in the following sections in order to provide a platform for further discussion of the applicability of

martyrdom to this man. Thus, in discussing whether or not David Oluwale might be added to the pantheon of martyrs, I will address the following questions. What are the sources for our knowledge of David Oluwale? How credible are the portraits that emerge from these sources? Was David Oluwale killed, and if so, under what circumstances? What did David believe in? What did he stand for? Can his death be understood ideologically? In what sense of the term might David Oluwale be seen as a martyr?

### **How do we know David Oluwale? The problem of memory, the problem of writing.**

*(1) Examining texts by Jeremy Sanford and Kester Aspden.*

The evidential status of memory is a key problem when we examine in detail the various representations of David Oluwale. Since this is a relatively recent history, the key texts — which I take as Sanford, Aspden, and Phillips — utilise the recorded memories of people who knew David, as well as, in varying amounts, relevant histories of the time, other records (particularly those in the UK's criminal justice archives) and, in Phillips' case, complex shifting points of view, including one which is Phillips' own viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> Corinne Silva's short film, *Wandering Abroad* (2009), also employs three first person narratives reflecting on David Oluwale. So the first issue to be addressed is what we make of personal memories, particularly those of people who are asked to recall events more than 40 years after someone's death.<sup>17</sup>

The trial in November 1971 of police officers Ellerker and Kitching, accused of David's manslaughter and of actual and grievous bodily harm, made Oluwale something of a cause célèbre in Leeds, and to some extent nationally. Thus, many of those interviewed have had cause to reflect over the years. In that process of reflection all sorts of things that have been heard, read and thought about on other occasions will interrupt, and interact with, the recall of an incident. Jeremy Sanford relied so heavily on the memory of Maureen Baker that a character called Maureen appears in his play *Smiling David* (broadcast by Brighton BBC radio in May 1972). Sanford had interviewed

Maureen extensively just a year after the trial. Maureen Baker was an important figure in anti-racist organising in Leeds from the 1960s until shortly before her death in 2012. She formed the Leeds branch of the Congress of Racial Equality and the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination. For many years she was a leading figure in the Council for Community Relations in Leeds. She served as the UK Immigrant Advisory Service officer in Leeds. In conversation over the years, she told me she was of Irish origin, drawn to the West Indian community in Leeds when she shared the doctor's surgery in Chapeltown, Leeds, in the mid-1950s with other young pregnant women. Sanford frames his account of David Oluwale as a 'true story' based on facts provided to him by Maureen and by statements made under oath in court. For Maureen's account, as rendered by Sandford, to be absolute fact, she would have had to be meeting David Oluwale in Leeds, more specifically, with David in a club in Leeds, some time before he was incarcerated at Menston hospital on 11 June 1953. But, according to my communication with Maureen's daughter Abi Clay, Maureen was in London in 1953. She was pregnant in 1955, which is no doubt when she met the West Indian women she told me about.<sup>18</sup> By this time David was undergoing ECT and largactyl in Menston Asylum.

There is a literature on the use of personal narratives in the writing of history which emphasises the problems therein. As Lynn Abrams has pointed out: 'memory is an active process . . . a complex, fluid and contingent thing'.<sup>19</sup> Working on the personal statements assembled over many years by the Mass Observation archive at Sussex University, James Hinton has observed that people's memories are 'shaped by the public memories of the times they had lived through'. Implying that historians are not so different from the 'mass observers', he added that in writing history we are finding 'meaning in our lives, reflexively standing outside ourselves sufficiently to understand ourselves as creatures of our times'.<sup>20</sup> Gunter Grass wrote: 'Memory likes to play hide-and-seek, to crawl away. It tends to hold forth, to dress up, often needlessly. Memory contradicts itself; pedant that it is, it will have its way.'<sup>21</sup> This brings to mind the trickster figure beloved in West African and Caribbean culture.<sup>22</sup> The complex interaction between memory, the public discourses of the times

when memories are formed, and, I would add the values held by those whose memories are being sought and those making the interpretations, should be born in mind throughout this chapter. Recognising the complexity of the process of making history helps us to understand the lacunae and even the contradictions among the people interviewed in pursuit of David Oluwale's story, and it explains the wide differences in the analysis of this life among those who have spoken to criminal investigators, or written, recited, sung and made films based on the stories they have absorbed.

Grass' view that memory dresses itself up is a poetic way of approaching Maureen's Baker's recollection. The early period that Maureen described — the smiling, dancing, would-be engineering student David Oluwale — was the period before Maureen arrived in Leeds. She can have no memory of this. But she might well have heard that story told by David's early friends. Abi Clay refers, with affection, to her Mum's 'fable history'. The same story, reproduced by Sandford, is spoken by Arthur France, a good friend of Maureen Baker, in Corinne Silva's filmed interview with him: 'David used to like dancing.'<sup>23</sup> Arthur France arrived in Leeds in 1957 (France, 2003). If David did enjoy dancing, and it is likely from other accounts that he did, this would have been between 1949 and 1953, long before Arthur France became aware of him in the 1960s.

Aspden interviewed Maureen Baker. He simply summarises what she said to him in a brief appendix to his book.<sup>24</sup> His main text bears little or no relation to Maureen Baker's memory, or Sandford's version, derived from interviews with Mrs Baker. Aspden interviewed several of David's contemporaries, who were reporting their memories of time they spent with David both in the early 1950s and in the 1960s when he emerged, broken, from Menston Asylum/High Royds Psychiatric Hospital (the latter was the new name for Menston). Since these were David's actual friends, it is understandable that Aspden relies on their accounts, and presents them as true. But it is important to acknowledge that these are still memories, subject to the tricks that memory plays. These friends' accounts do speak to the 'happy' David, in his early years in Leeds, summarised in Sandford's title *Smiling David*.<sup>25</sup>

The portrait that emerges here is worth considering since it adds to the bathos of David's life. David seems to have come to Leeds because his fellow stowaway, Johnny Omaghomi, had friends in that city.<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Adams, known as Gayb, one of Johnny's Nigerian friends in Leeds, told me how much they enjoyed themselves in the pubs and clubs of Leeds.<sup>27</sup> They soon found ways around the hostility of white men when white women agreed to dance with them. Aspden also interviewed Gayb, and records him persuading the DJ to announce a 'general excuse me' dance, which allowed the black men to cut in on white couples.<sup>28</sup> He speaks of this, smiling broadly, in his interview with Corinne Silva.<sup>29</sup> In Silva's film Arthur France also talks of wearing his three piece suit and polished shoes when he went out dancing with his friends in 1950s and 1960s Leeds. Silva inserts an extract from one of Lord Kitchener's lovely 'London' calypsos at this point, with rather more subtle sexual references than Kitchener used in his Trinidad recordings:

On her wedding day  
We danced the modern way  
She said 'Kitch I have been told  
That you know how to rock and roll, darling'  
Chorus: I like to rock, right round the clock  
Rock and roll me, rock and roll me  
Right around the clock

Lord Kitchener<sup>30</sup>

In case independent evidence of the pleasurable encounter between black men and white women is needed, Sheffield's Chief Constable reported to the British Cabinet in 1952 that African and Caribbean men were very popular with white women, because they dressed so well and smelled so good.<sup>31</sup> So, although neither Maureen Baker nor Arthur France could have witnessed this kind of happiness among David and his friends, there might be some truth in her 'fable memory', faithfully transcribed by Jeremy Sandford.

Gabriel Adams and many other West Africans married and/or had children with white women. Adams described himself to me, now in his 80s, as a contented British citizen, with two successful daughters, enjoying old age with his second white wife. It has been suggested that David had children too. Jeremy Sanford's radio script includes a scene where David dances with a white woman and the published script includes a photo of 209 Belle Vue Road, a house in the Hyde Park area of Leeds, with a caption stating that this is where David and Gladys lived in the early 1950s.<sup>32</sup> Sandford's text also includes David saying he has two children. I presume this idea came from Maureen Aspden confirms David lived there,<sup>33</sup> and that David and Gladys did have a relationship, but none of David's friends attests to there being children. Nor does Aspden report anyone saying that David had high aspirations, or that he went to night school to study engineering, as Maureen ascribed to him, as related in Sandford's text. A happy life with wife and children brutally cut short are not sufficient criteria for martyrdom, so whether or not this is an entirely true picture of David Oluwale is irrelevant to the wider discussion here, but it is important to recognise that there is no objective truth about David Oluwale. The point made by Alessandro Portelli in discussing the importance of oral history is exemplified in these constructions of David's story: 'There are no "false" oral sources'. He wrote that the historian checks them against other evidence, and he is correct to say that "'wrong" statements are still psychologically "true", and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts'.<sup>34</sup>

## *(2) Examining texts by Caryl Phillips*

Kester Aspden adopts the voice of a hard-bitten, objective historian, while Caryl Phillips takes an entirely different approach, as enthusiasts for his novels would predict.<sup>35</sup> Phillips presents his Oluwale text in several different voices: as imaginative novelist; as historian of the facts about Leeds; as transcriber of the memories of people he has interviewed; as purveyor of retrieved docu-

ments (mainly from court statements); and as an omniscient narrator, interrogating his subject, sometimes writing in the first person, taking the stance of a contemporary researcher into David's life in Leeds, even presenting his own opinions. These narrative styles sit alongside each other without any sub-headings and the reader is pulled through a variety of standpoints. The effect is to make each of us a critical reader, continually questioning the ideological status of each section of the text, and thus always being reminded of the precarious nature of truth. In this sense, Phillips might appear to have adopted a postmodern approach to writing about past events, but I suggest this is a prime example of the genre-breaking polyphonic form many have enjoyed in his novels. John McLeod's observation that in *Crossing the River* (Phillips' 1993 novel) the reader experiences 'a sonic space of difference, polyvocality and variation' applies to Phillips' representation of David Oluwale.<sup>36</sup> (Since Phillips writes about Oluwale in many voices, moving between fiction and fact, perhaps we could coin the term 'faction' for his style here?)

The chapter on David Oluwale in his book *Foreigners* is titled 'Northern Lights'. Phillips' novels are always interested in the particularities of place and when it comes to his northern home city, Leeds, he is even more specific. Phillips arrived in Leeds in from St Kitts in 1958. David's territory, as he persistently carved out some warmer space for himself in shop doorways in the centre of Leeds, was not far away from Caryl Phillips' childhood home. In those sections of 'Northern Lights' where place is named, particularly where Leeds' history is set out, the text gives the appearance of verisimilitude. Phillips' approach to telling the history of Leeds bears importantly on the ideological context in which any claim to Oluwale's martyrdom might be placed. His first historical section on Leeds has two main points. First, we see the crucial importance of water to the city's growth and prosperity. David crossed an ocean and drowned in the River Aire which flows through the city centre. The river is the reason for the first settlements in this part of northern England. (Corinne Silva's beautiful film uses long shots of the River Aire interspersed with her interviews. Phillips' essay (2009) in the catalogue that accompanied the film is called 'The City by the Water'.)

Second, this passage reminds us all that, since the earliest days of settlement, Leeds is a place of immigration, attracting Celts, Romans, Anglo Saxons, Vikings and Normans.<sup>37</sup> A later history section takes us from the Eighteenth Century to the present, again emphasising the city's connections by water. By 1816 a waterway linked Leeds to Liverpool; the canal to Hull was already in place. Thus Leeds was a global city by the early Nineteenth Century. Phillips did not feel the need to make the point that this connection to Liverpool was Leeds' connection to slavery. In this section Phillips picks up his abiding concern with the widening gap between rich and poor, among whom drunkenness, crime and destitution were already rife. Requiring readers to think of Oluwale, he writes: 'The Leeds Workhouse was always full', and 'vagrants and paupers [were] on the streets'. We learn that Armley jail, one of David's prisons, was built by 1847 'to cope with vagrants and other undesirables'.<sup>38</sup> A third historical section (pp. 209-26) brings the migration story up to date. Phillips describes the arrival of the Jews and the Irish in the Nineteenth century, noting their status as unwelcome outsiders, and the miserable conditions of existence that they endured. Africans and Caribbeans only settled in very small numbers in David's time (107 from the Caribbean and 45 from Africa in 1951; by 1961 just over 2,000 black people were in Leeds which meant they were 'visible and vulnerable'), but still 'a community was being formed'.<sup>39</sup> While these history pages mainly take an objective tone, a curious break appears where Phillips includes, with my name attached, an email I sent him in 2006. My comments are manifestly sociological, mixing facts about Chapeltown's buildings with interpretation based on my long study of that area of Leeds in which most black and Asian people had settled since the 1950s.<sup>40</sup> This authored section serves to remind readers that Phillips is constructing his history from a variety of texts infused with their writers' values. The stress on migration, poverty and vulnerability in the story of Leeds that he has produced exhibit Phillips' own values.

Phillips moves easily from history to speculative reconstruction. The opening few pages of 'Northern Lights' stage a meeting between a West Indian adolescent and David Oluwale on Chapel-

town Road. At first a reader might think this was Caryl Phillips' own youthful meeting with David. Then we learn that this is the voice of a young black woman.<sup>41</sup> So anyone who has taken the trouble to learn that Caryl Phillips is not Carol Phillips<sup>42</sup> is made aware that the author is revisiting his work as a novelist here. There are other parts of the complex narrative that Phillips has constructed, in which readers will assume from the authorial voice that they are getting the facts about David. The home at 209 Belle Vue Road in which Oluwale sometimes lodged is referred to — but, for Phillips, it is a discordant, polyglot place, and he makes no mention of Gladys or children.<sup>43</sup> Phillips repeats the dubious engineering aspiration, putting him in college on some nights of the week (p. 183), probably derived from his own interview with Maureen Baker.

The next section, separated only by a blank line, reverts to the first person, but it is not the young girl's voice from the opening section. I can recognise this as the voice of Maureen Baker, constructed from Phillips' interview with her. (This is confirmed by Abi Clay, Maureen's daughter.) We now know that this section is fictitious, because the narrator gives the date as 1950 or 1951, and Abi told me that Maureen was in Ireland in those years. In this 'memory', this informant noticed that David was in The Cambridge Pub on North Street, one of the few that did not operate a colour bar, and that he was smartly dressed. There actually was a Cambridge public house, but it was on Chapeltown Road,<sup>44</sup> not North Street, and it probably did admit black clientele. Mrs Baker is transcribed as saying she saw him leave the pub in a different direction to the other Africans. David went, according to Maureen's fable, towards the university area of Leeds, so she assumed he was a student, while the other Africans were workers.<sup>45</sup> Again, there are potential truths to be excavated here. David might well have had a drink in the Cambridge in the 1950s and even in the 1960s. (It was demolished in the late 1960s.) Maureen might have seen him there in the mid-1960s. Since he did sometimes live in the Hyde Park area (his occasional lodging place in Belle Vue Road is in Hyde Park), which is where the old university is, he would sometimes have walked off in that direction. The only photo of David, taken by the police, shows him in a suit. There was a group of West

African university students in Leeds in the mid-1950s, including Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiongo. (There were at least 2,548 West African students in UK universities in the academic year 1952-3.<sup>46</sup>) But Caryl Phillips told me that his friend Wole Soyinka told him that the West African students in Leeds did not drink with their working class compatriots.

Oluwale's friend Gabriel Adams said to me that in this period no Africans walked alone in Leeds, because there was always a chance they would encounter violent racism. That is a view confirmed by one of Phillips' narrators, another Nigerian stowaway who arrived in Leeds just after David. This man fills out David's character, stating that David strongly objected to the racism they were subjected to, saying that David could be highly verbally aggressive, especially with the police, 'always telling them to "fuck off"'. He said that David, unlike the rest of them, would walk off on his own, because he was a loner.<sup>47</sup> The important question of whether or not David was mentally ill before he reached Menston in 1953 requires more research, but it is significant that this narrator, as set out by Phillips, said that David 'wasn't crazy, he just didn't understand the system, that's all'. The clear implication is that, in this person's opinion, David did not follow the informal rule of the other Africans at this time that you put up with racism and police abuse; you do not contest it. He described David as short and stout (p. 190); Maureen described him as slim (p. 186). Police records imply he was short and stout. Police records are assumed to be accurate — but they are not, always. It has to be stressed that here, just as with Maureen's eloquence, we are dealing with individual memory, which can dress itself up. With the court records, and with the email inserted from me, names are given. This technique again prompts us to ask questions about the truth claims of each section of Phillips's story. Maureen then appears for a third time.<sup>48</sup> Her account is confusing about dates. Was the meeting she described on Woodhouse Moor with David, now severely ill, in the 1961-5 period, when he was out of hospital, or 1967-9 after his second spell in hospital? Because Mrs Baker mentioned the Black Power movement starting in Leeds, and said that David was sleeping rough in the city centre, it is probably the latter period. She said she and her husband sometimes

took David into their house near Woodhouse Moor for the night. That is corroborated by Abi, her daughter, who told me that she remembered as a child being frightened by this dishevelled, mute man in her family's kitchen.<sup>49</sup> Maureen said to Phillips that he would read the *Guardian*, stoutly refuse any further help and go on his way. No-one else ever spoke of David as someone who might read the *Guardian*, and it was one of Mrs Baker's trade-marks to remind everyone that black migrants to Britain were much smarter than white people ever recognised. In Kester Aspden's book we also read of David's pride, dignity and resolute independence, even at the end of his time. So again I feel that there is something real in Maureen's statement. In her brief fourth appearance in Phillips's account of David Oluwale (pp. 218-9), Maureen makes an observation which strikes me as highly important. She points out that David could have avoided the brutality of Ellerker and Kitching by sleeping outside the city centre. But he kept going back to their city centre beat (pun intended). '[H]e wouldn't give up.' David Oluwale wanted to 'claim his right to be in the city'. All this bears on the question of who David Oluwale was, and what he stood for. My conclusion is that he was a proud and dignified man, whose agency was not obliterated by the forces of abjection to which he was subjected.

### **The ideological context**

The ideological context of Oluwale's story is beginning to emerge. When Mrs Baker spoke of Oluwale staking out his claim to the right to stay in the centre of Leeds, the words 'to be' in Maureen Baker's sentence quoted by Phillips hold great poignancy. David Oluwale was denied the right to 'be'. In this he had something in common with all the black people I have interviewed and worked with since the 1970s in Leeds. It was very rare for a black person to go into the city centre at night. The reggae singer Paulette Morris made this very point at the Remember Oluwale Partnership Symposium (in Leeds, on 17.5.2015), marvelling when her teenaged daughters blithely announced a few years ago that they were 'off to town'. Some of today's older black people in Leeds

remember the physical battles they fought in the mid-1980s with racist whites to stake out their 'right to be' in the city centre's newly burgeoning night-time economy. David was their pioneer.

Earlier, the politics of Oluwale's story were set out in graffiti. I am one of many who first enquired about David's case because, in 1972, I saw the words REMEMBER OLUWALE, painted large in white on the dark Yorkshire stone wall near the Hayfield Hotel on Chapeltown Road. A member of the West Indian Afro Brotherhood, a militant Black Power grouping active in Chapeltown at this time, had written these words some time after the trial of Ellerker and Kitching in November 1971. This stimulates reflection on 'collective memory'. The Brotherhood (which included women) saw Oluwale's fate as symptomatic of the plight of all black people not only in Leeds but across the UK in the 1970s. This claim is controversial. Reference to black people as a collective, remembering Oluwale and responding to his life and death as a group, is refuted in Kester Aspden's account of David Oluwale's life and death. Responding to his interview with me, Aspden wrote:

In Chapeltown, 'Remember Oluwale' was daubed on a wall near the Hayfield pub but in truth Chapeltown never really knew him. In what sense was he really part of a 'black community', any community for that matter, this man who died on the streets protected by nobody. This man who twice went to the grave unmourned.<sup>50</sup>

There is no question mark here because Aspden appears not to accept the notion that people sometimes think collectively and, in this case, advocate active remembering as part of a political project, however they may respond to an individual. (The testimony Aspden quotes in his book from African friends of David, and Maureen Baker and her husband Paul, who did try and help him, somewhat contradicts his claim that individuals abandoned him.) But Aspden might be hinting at a wider point about this graffiti. It might allude to guilt that people felt when they recognised, too late, that David had been cruelly failed by individuals and institutions in the city.<sup>51</sup> It is clear, however, that Aspden takes a literalist view of 'community'. He ignores evidence, such as the material I included in an earlier reference to David Oluwale, that not only people of African origin, but leaders

of both the Indian (Sikh and Hindu) and Muslim (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) populations in Leeds placed on record to a 1972 Parliamentary Select Committee that David's death demonstrated 'racial prejudice' and incited 'the ordinary man's suspicions about the partiality of the police'.<sup>52</sup> Aspden merely notes their 'reference' to Oluwale.<sup>53</sup> These leaders stretched beyond the boundaries of ethnicity to see the connections between this African man's brutalisation and the fate of all people of colour in Leeds. For them, 'community' is wide. Aspden presumably rejects the argument I and others have made that 'community' is an ideal, something yearned for, as well as something with real, practical components. The treatment of David Oluwale by 'official' Leeds demonstrates the polar opposite of the ideals of 'community' that so many of us espouse and struggle towards.

The ideological context in Leeds in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, of racial prejudice and anti-racist solidarity, often crossing colour borders, is crucial to a full understanding of the plight of David Oluwale. That prejudice was well documented by the time of Oluwale's death and provided part of the basis for the anti-racist movement that was forming. The most authoritative survey at the time, by Policy and Economic Planning, reported in 1967. It examined 500 potential discriminators (including employers, trade unions, housing providers, and services such as insurance companies) and showed that discrimination was demonstrated in 90% of the 'situation tests' they set up, where experiences of immigrants of African, Caribbean, South Asian, Cypriot and Hungarian were documented. In an employment test, fifteen white English and ten white Hungarians were told there was a vacancy and they should apply, but only one 'coloured immigrant' was informed that they should. Three out of four housing accommodation agencies were practising racial discrimination, two out of three estate agencies were doing the same.<sup>54</sup> Other surveys were similarly emphatic. One in north London in 1964 established that 49% of residents objected to having a black neighbour. In another, 62% of people polled by the Institute of Race Relations justified their hostility to immigrants with the (erroneous) argument that immigrants took more from the welfare services than they put in via taxation.<sup>55</sup> Racists attacked Asians in Leeds shortly after David Oluwale died. A small white gang

set upon Bhupinder Singh and Dian Singh Ball and other Asians in the Burley area of Leeds, just north of the city centre, on 27th July 1969. One of them, Kenneth Horsfall, was killed. A few days later, somewhere between 800 and 1,000 white men and women surged into Hyde Park Road, attacking Asian-owned shops and setting fire to a car believed to be owned by a Pakistani. Humphry and John reported: ‘Nazi salutes were given and cries of “Sieg Heil” as scuffles between the police and the crowd broke out. Four policemen were hurt making twenty-three arrests’.<sup>56</sup> This was the context in which Maureen Baker, her friends in the United Caribbean Association and others took up Oluwale’s cause and many other instances of racism in Leeds, often organised under the auspices of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination.<sup>57</sup> Racism, Black Power, and the multicultural anti-racist movement in this period provides one leg on which a claim to martyrdom might stand. Even if David Oluwale did not actively proclaim a set of beliefs, he might be positioned as representing all those black and brown people who were subjected to vicious racism in the UK from the 1950s onwards. As we have seen, in his own way, he resisted. ‘He died for us’ might be said of David Oluwale.

### **Was David Oluwale murdered by two police officers in Leeds?**

*Examining texts by Leeds United fans, Ian Duhig, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dave Whittaker, Kester Aspden Jeremy Sandford, Oladipo Agboluaje and Caryl Phillips*

For Oluwale to be positioned as a martyr, the circumstances of his death have to be agreed upon. If he was murdered by two white policemen because he was black, in a context of widespread racial prejudice, the case would be strengthened for stretching the parameters of martyrdom to include David Oluwale. Proponents of his martyrdom might argue that David Oluwale stands for the rights of all black people to live in dignity and for the human rights of all members of a society. They could argue that he was murdered by two people who denied him his autonomy and his rights, and

that his killers stood for the wider forces of racism operating in Britain. ‘David was martyred because he was black in a racist society’ might run in parallel with those who say ‘the Tolpuddle demonstrators were martyred standing up for the rights of their class in a society where the working class are oppressed and exploited by a ruling class’.

Was David Oluwale murdered by Ellerker and Kitching? On this there is a clear contradiction between what the judicial record established and what most commentators, particularly in published poetry and song, have argued. There is no doubt that he drowned in the River Aire. The question that remains for everyone who lacks confidence in the British judicial system is whether or not he was deliberately killed.

Leeds United football fans, sections of whom were openly racist at the time, made their answer to that question very clear. In the early 1970s, after the trial of these infamous officers, to the tune of ‘Michael, Row the Boat Ashore’, they chanted this to the force assembled to keep them in order at each home game:

The River Aire is chilly and deep - Oluwale

Never trust the Leeds Police - Olu-wa-a-le

To the tune of ‘My Old Man’, they would sing:

Policeman said ‘Get in the van,

Don’t dilly dally on the way’

The had him in the van and in half a minute

They were down by the river and they chucked him in it

Cos he dillied and he dallied, dallied and dillied

Lost his way and dint know where to roam

And you can’t trust a copper if your name is Oluwale

When you can’t find your way home.<sup>58</sup>

It is doubtful that the Leeds United fans knew just how poignant was the last line: ‘When you can’t find your way home’. In Yoruba, ‘Oluwale’ means ‘God comes home’. The critically-acclaimed Leeds poet Ian Duhig included these lines about David Oluwale in his poem ‘from ‘The Masque of Blankness’.:

He was a paradox, a Christian  
and godson of Oceanus and Oshun  
whose surname *Oluwale*’s Yoruba  
in English ‘God Comes Home’ — God’s own County  
Yorkshire! What could be more right than that?  
His last home was our Holy City Centre  
final circle of his Christian hell.<sup>59</sup>

Duhig refers directly to the football chant in another poem, ‘Via Negativita’, in its final stanza, the only one which uses Oluwale’s name. This powerful poem does however remind us of the ECT and largactil imposed on David in hospital, and it is redolent of the insult to Christianity that David’s life represents. In Duhig’s poem, Leeds is ‘Not City of God but Motorway City’; David inhabits ‘Not My Father’s Mansion but Chapeltown slum’. David is ‘Not fisher of men fished from a weir’. Duhig places David ‘Wandering Abroad’ in the centre of Leeds. Since this poetry collection was published the Oluwale paradox in Leeds has intensified: a glittering new shopping mall called Trinity has arisen at the rear of the Holy Trinity church on Boar Lane. That church, dating from 1727, was one of David’s sleeping places and is close to the river. In another poem, ‘Flooding Back’, specifically in memory of David, Duhig writes ‘masked gods walk among us as a test/for hospitality’s a sacred duty/binding all who claim morality’.<sup>60</sup> Leeds’s ‘Holy City Centre’ hardly matched that duty. If a poem about Oluwale the martyr was to be written, Ian Duhig would be the person to turn to.

Ian Duhig doesn't answer the 'murder' question. Two other artistic responses to Ellerker and Kitching's trial appeared in 1975 and 1979 from an equally illustrious source, but took a different approach. In the poem 'Night of the Head' Linton Kwesi Johnson (1975) wrote:

Such a victim of terror as he was,  
Oluwale on the last onslaught,  
just broke into pieces and died.<sup>61</sup>

In his later poem 'Time Come', Johnson, backed by Dennis Bovell's dub band, went further :

When yu fling me inna prison  
I did warn yu  
When yu kill Oluwale  
I did warn yu  
When you pick upon de Panthers  
I did warn yu.<sup>62</sup>

It is important to note that Johnson has no hesitation in saying that Oluwale was a victim of terror, who died 'in the last onslaught' and, just in case there is any ambiguity, he adds 'you' killed Oluwale. I read 'you' here not as 'the police', but as 'you white British'. The second poem, with its overt reference to the Black Panthers in London, of which Johnson was a member in the early 1970s, is redolent of the political rage of black Britain.

Another poetic response, this time from Dave Whittaker, a Leeds taxi driver, appeared in 2013. Whittaker told me he had known Ellerker's son Gary while they were at college learning the printing trade. 'Gary was a complete twat', he said (Conversation 17.2.15). Like everyone else in the class, Dave knew that Gary's father, Geoffrey Ellerker, had been imprisoned for the abuse of David Oluwale, so when Aspden's book appeared many years later he read it, set up a Facebook page, summarised David's story and wrote his own poem. Whittaker's prose sticks to the material

presented in Aspden's book, but in his poem he clearly states what he thought had actually happened:

Kicked and battered and abused once more,  
He lay there helpless at the hands of the law,  
They'd had their fun and an almighty bash,  
It was made complete with an almighty splash.<sup>63</sup>

'He' in this poem is Oluwale and 'They' are Ellerker and Kitching. After their 'bash' they had chucked David in the river, according to Whittaker. Gabriel Adams concurred: 'Then they chase him into the River Aire, the police'.<sup>64</sup>

But the judicial system rejected the charge of murder, proposed by the extremely thorough Metropolitan Police investigator, Chief Superintendent John Perkins. Kester Aspden (2008) presents a lucid account of the material he examined in the UK's National Archive at Kew, London, released after being held for the statutory 30 years after the trial. The office of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) argued that, although the court would hear evidence that two men in police uniforms chased an elderly man along the bank of the River Aire in the centre of Leeds, there was no evidence that these men, or anyone else, deliberately drowned David Oluwale.<sup>65</sup> Instead, the DPP charged them with manslaughter, actual and grievous bodily harm. Speaking about David Oluwale, the prosecutor, John Cobb QC, told the jury that Ellerker and Kitching 'hounded him, harassed him and assaulted him: they teased him cruelly, and they made a torment of his life . . . they unlawfully brought about his death by causing him to fall or jump into the River Aire, whence he never emerged, save sixteen days later as a corpse'.<sup>66</sup> His faintly antique prose provided an appropriately macabre tone to his opening address. The *Yorkshire Post* summarised: 'Police hounded "loner" Oluwale to death — QC'.<sup>67</sup> 'Hounding' is now inserted into one of the key texts that help us approach David's death: the term artfully leaves open the precise circumstances of his death, while capturing the iniquity of these policemen's brutal work on David's body.

Several officers gave evidence of a catalogue of assault and other types of abuse by Ellerker and Kitching, including PC Batty who saw him being urinated upon outside the John Peters store, in whose doorway David often slept.<sup>68</sup> Ex-police officer Hazel Ratcliffe testified that, while in the custody area at Millgarth station, David had been kicked in the genitals so hard that he was raised off the ground. Hazel said he offered no resistance of any sort. Her husband, Phil, who resigned from the force with his wife because of what they had witnessed, told the court that David was a broken man.<sup>69</sup> In Corinne Silva's film, Arthur France,<sup>70</sup> a founder of the United Caribbean Association, friend of Maureen Baker, and life-long campaigner for social justice and equality, who attended the trial and read the press reports, speaks of this incident as though he was there.<sup>71</sup>

Bus conductor David Condon's crucial evidence that he had seen two men in police uniform pursuing a scruffy man down Call Lane was challenged in court. Call Lane is adjacent to the River Aire, which is accessible via an alley near the Leeds Bridge, thus Condon's sighting potentially linked Ellerker and Kitching to David's body subsequently being found in the river. Under cross-examination, Condon admitted he could not identify the officers and he could not say whether the man being pursued was white or black because it was dark.<sup>72</sup> Judge Hinchcliffe told the jury that this insubstantial evidence meant that he would direct them not even to consider the charge of manslaughter against Ellerker and Kitching. He also directed them that there was no evidence of grievous bodily harm (GBH), merely actual bodily harm, so they must not consider the GBH charges.<sup>73</sup> In his summing up, Hinchcliffe described David as a 'menace to society', a 'frightening apparition to come across at night', while policing was a 'fine and splendid profession'.<sup>74</sup> When the jury found them guilty of assault, he admonished Ellerker and Kitching with these words: 'By your wicked misbehaviour to this coloured vagrant, you bring disgrace not only on your wives and family, but on the whole of the police force of this country'.<sup>75</sup> On 24 November 1971, Ellerker was found guilty of four charges of assault and was sentenced to three years in jail; Kitching was found guilty of three charges of assault and got 27 months.<sup>76</sup>

Jeremy Sandford's radio script dealt with the 'murder' question by providing these stage directions: 'David is limping along. The TWO POLICEMEN have given chase. Riverside. There is the sound of single running feet, then DAVID runs towards us, trips and falls into the River Aire. He screams as he falls'.<sup>77</sup> Here he treats David's death as an accident. But in a stimulating postscript to the publication of his playscript, with the sub-title 'Some thoughts on the death of David Oluwale', Sandford lists a series of possible answers to his question 'Who is responsible for the death of this man?' His list of culprits includes (all with question marks after them): two 'sadistic' members of Leeds police; David committing suicide; the psychiatric hospital; the prison welfare service; the Mental Health Act (1959); the Supplementary Benefits Commission (for closing down hostels); local authorities; charities; and the 'curious custom of moving vagrants on?' He concluded with a quote from a Midlands councillor who said on BBC radio that 'one must exterminate the impossibles'. This man replied 'Why not?' when asked if he really meant what he said.<sup>78</sup> If listeners to Sandford's radio play thought that David simply tripped and fell into the river, reading the postscript to his book would lead to quite different conclusions. Significant to the discussion of the wider context of Oluwale's death, Sandford indicts a series of institutional failures in the health welfare system in the UK, as well as two sadistic policemen.

Dramatising Aspden's book for Dawn Walton's Eclipse Theatre,<sup>79</sup> Oladipo Agboluaje dealt with the 'murder' question by giving prominence to Chief Superintendent John Perkins' view.<sup>80</sup> Perkins was certain that Ellerker and Kitching should be charged with the murder of David. On stage, Perkins says this:

In my opinion there is evidence to suggest Inspector Ellerker and Sergeant Kitching had continued their pursuit down to Warehouse Hill and as a result David Oluwale had jumped or been forced to jump into the river. These despicable individuals had little or no regard for Oluwale as a human being and as such they desired to get him out of Leeds.<sup>81</sup>

The DPP's 'lack of evidence' response is then provided. Agboluaje had already shown the audience a scene with Ellerker and Kitching encountering David in a doorway and beating him. Immediately following, the stage directions are 'DAVID escapes and runs clutching his bag. Darkness. The sound of waves lapping against a shore. Then a loud splash'. At that point, Agboluaje follows Aspden's agnosticism on 'murder'. It is possible that some in the audience will accept Judge Hinchcliffe's view, while others will side with Chief Superintendent Perkins, Leeds United fans, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dave Whittaker and Arthur France.

Kester Aspden and Caryl Phillips were, coincidentally, writing their books at the same time. The forensic, 'true crime' approach taken by Aspden was not Phillips'. Aspden sticks to what he takes to be the facts, and is non-committal on the question of murder. Phillips, on the other hand, slowly builds his picture of the circumstances of David's death through interviews he conducted and documents he accessed. A policeman who drove a van and witnessed the 'merciless, merciless' beatings described David as 'courageous' in coming back into the city.<sup>82</sup> Straight after that transcript, Phillips presents a man who describes himself as a 'West Indian community leader' who said that it 'created a very bad feeling in the West Indian community when we found out [David Oluwale] had been killed'. These are the words of Arthur France, referred to above.<sup>83</sup> From the 1960s to the present, France has organised politically for black people's rights. He has also been the originator and backbone of the Leeds West Indian carnival, which he sees as another limb of black emancipation,<sup>84</sup> and he was among the founders in 2008 of the first Oluwale Memorial committee, established at what is now Leeds Beckett University. He is a man whose memory I know to be prodigious. But here too we are dealing with an individual's recollections, some from the time of David's death, when other people's memories are coming to the surface, which perhaps merge with memories of his own encounters with David. Just as Linton Kwesi Johnson had no doubt about what had actually happened, whatever the Judge had decided, Arthur France used the word 'killed' in his interview with Caryl Phillips. France said he remembered David from the early days at

dances, and then noticed him much later, on the side of the road, crying. France's testimony is crucial for Phillips' understanding Oluwale's story, and points to the ideological context of his death:

It was very painful when we learned that he had been hunted like a fox by the police . . . It just made things got worse for the police. We used to tell them right out, if you want another Oluwale then they were not going to get another one from us. We now knew exactly what we were dealing with when it came to the British policeman.<sup>85</sup>

As noted above, militant black people in Leeds had exhorted the city to REMEMBER OLUWALE. Within a couple of months of the trial, another advocate of Black Power, Ron Phillips (no relation to Caryl), wrote that the case demonstrated that 'racism dominates all the important institutions of social control in Britain'.<sup>86</sup> Ron Phillips was reporting in detail on the trial for the publication *Race Today*, published by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).<sup>87</sup> He recorded that PC Seager told the court that Ellerker had said 'A lot of them would be better off if they went for a swim like David'.<sup>88</sup>

In his commentary on the case, Ron Phillips argued that:

[T]he destruction of David Oluwale represented the inevitable result of contact between a powerful institution and a powerless individual, where that individual is defined as threatening or superfluous . . . If Ellerker and Kitching did chase or throw David Oluwale into the river Aire, they would have been acting, as they saw it, in defence of a society which defines black people as a threat.<sup>89</sup>

It seems likely that 'If' was placed in that last sentence to save the IRR from libel action.

Caryl Phillips weaves a series of documents that form a heartrending image of David's life and death in the reader's mind. There is a list of the dates David went in and out of prison (pp. 238-9), a list of his clothing on his final release on 10th April 1969 ('most . . . in poor condition') (p. 240), the prison discharge report on that date ('It is increasingly obvious that he is unable to function on the outside') (p. 241), and a list of the items found in his pockets when the police frogman pulled him out of the river at Knostrop weir, including '2 Photos', '2 After Care forms', '6 Forms

103' and 'A Blue bead necklace with a crucifix' (p. 246). Then we find a list of places where Sergeant Kitching told Detective Superintendent Fryer (part of the investigatory team) that he had found David sleeping and 'kicked his behind'. There are seven places, including Holy Trinity Church in Boar Lane, referred to by Ian Duhig (p. 254).<sup>90</sup> The central question that every reader must be asking — did they kill him? — is quietly answered among these documents. In the authorial voice, Phillips wrote:

At 3 a.m on the morning of 18 April [1969] former Inspector Ellerker and Sergeant Kitching found David in the doorway of John Peters' furniture shop in Lands Lane in the centre of Leeds. They 'moved him on' . . . David ran down Call Lane in the direction of Warehouse Hill. He entered the River Aire at the bottom of Warehouse Hill, just by Leeds Bridge. On 4 May, 1969, Leeds police frogman Police Constable Ian Haste recovered David Oluwale's body from the River Aire some three miles east of the city centre at a point near Knostrop Sewage Works.<sup>91</sup>

Phillips' cool prose here is counterpointed by his italicised insertions: 'We dragged him to his feet and I booted his backside. I did not kick him hard, just enough to wake him up. He screamed, but then he always screamed when I dealt with him.' Sergeant Kitching. (p. 244). Phillips waits till the end of his text to offer this answer to the murder question: 'You did not jump, David'. Phillips repeats this three times (p. 257). Then readers will want to know 'Why did they commit this appalling crime?' Phillips signs the book off with another quote from a friend of David's (perhaps the one we heard from before),<sup>92</sup> who met him when they were about 15, and then again in Hatfield Steelworks<sup>93</sup> [in Sheffield] in the early 1970s:

I was really happy to see a face from Lagos, but I worried about him. He wouldn't let anything go . . . and his attitude was getting him into trouble. If the foreman said anything to him, it would be 'fuck off' and there wasn't any point in talking to him . . . [David] was a stubborn fighting man who simply found it impossible to back down and work the system.<sup>94</sup>

Caryl Phillips eschews the didactic style of Ron Phillips, nor does he reference the macabre quotation from the councillor quoted by Jeremy Sandford, but their conclusions are similar. David was killed by two Leeds policemen because he was, in their view, a threatening excrescence. All of Phillips' work is complex and nuanced, and his subtle prose in this essay does not allow for that blunt view. So the book ends with a melancholic rumination on David's pauper's grave in Killingbeck cemetery, on a rising hill, overlooking the city. This reader at least extracts a glimmer of hope from Phillips's closing words: 'Everybody can rest peacefully. You have achieved a summit, David. Climbed to the top of a hill, and from here you can look down. You are still in Leeds. Forever in Leeds.'<sup>95</sup>

### **What did David Oluwale stand for?**

There is no clear evidence of what David Oluwale believed in. The rosary found in his sorry list of possessions implies he was a Catholic, but there is no record of him attending church. Nor do any of his friends speak of connections with social or political causes during the period that we hope was a relatively happy one for him between 1949 and 1953. After the brutal experience of prison, psychiatric hospital, destitution and beatings on the streets of Leeds, it is understandable that he had little to say for himself. But a picture has emerged in the testimony and analysis offered above of someone of real substance around whom some important principles may circulate.

At the beginning of this chapter I related the framing of David within the Black Atlantic paradigm and within the ambitions of the David Oluwale Memorial Association. The charity aims to establish a narrative for the city of Leeds based upon the Oluwale story. This speaks of progress since David's time, but of much more that has to be done to bring the marginalised and excluded into their proper place within a city, one that we say must speak for social and economic justice. The charity has not considered the question of whether or not David Oluwale might be considered a martyr. Nevertheless, we can begin to set out what he stands for, set out schematically:

- David Oluwale was an agent in his own right, not simply a victim. We have seen that, faced with racism and police brutality, he never backed down.
- David Oluwale endured a myriad of problems after he decided to seek a better life in Britain. Although he was a British citizen, his plight reminds us of the extraordinary difficulties and hostilities faced by refugees and asylum seekers. His resilience is an inspiration. His death was an omen.
- David Oluwale was an emblem of the struggle for black people to be treated equally and fairly wherever they choose to live.
- In drawing people of all colours and classes together in a campaign for memory and for social progress, David Oluwale stands for the longing for all types of people for sanctuary, community, conviviality and equality.

### **Conclusion: the David Oluwale Memorial Association and the ‘martyr’ question**

I am secretary to the charity which is quite deliberately memorialising David. In building a garden containing iconic public art in his name,<sup>96</sup> we are engaging in a social practice similar to those who seek legitimacy for their efforts to transform an historic figure into a martyr. We are treating him as an icon, a symbolic marker of an interlocking series of challenges that he faced during his twenty years in the north of England: mental ill-health, destitution, homelessness, incarceration in prisons and psychiatric hospitals, possible alcohol problems, police brutality. All these were predicated on the racism inflicted on him because of his status as an immigrant from Nigeria. We construct David Oluwale not as a passive victim but as one who, in effect if not by design, bore steadfast witness to the cruelty, injustice and inhumanity of British society. In deliberately intervening in urban space, creating this memorial, and in evaluating the records and engaging in further research in order to construct a compelling narrative, we are behaving much like those who have already established the status of martyr for their subjects. The fact that there is no settled view about whether or not David

Oluwale was killed by the two policemen has implications for the question of whether or not he is positioned as a martyr. It is my opinion that they did kill him, but I am unsure if David is best understood as a martyr. I see him more as a proud man utterly victimised both by two policemen and by welfare institutions entrapped in prejudice. David Oluwale was a man who was chewed up and spat out by professionals of various types who would not rid themselves of the confines of their racialised mentalities. As such, he can be represented as a model of what happens to people who are relentlessly subjected to violently oppressive social structures, but who struggle, in their own ways, against that oppression. Since martyrdom is a category claimed by the supporters of that person's or group's struggle against terrible odds, and since it requires much historical and contemporary work to legitimise that claim, over a period of time it might be that David Oluwale is inserted within the 'martyr' paradigm. But for me, it suffices to remember him with enormous respect in order to contribute to a new narrative for the city of Leeds, as a place which welcomes the Other, and treats everyone, whatever their status, as an equal.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Kester Aspden (2008) *The Hounding of David Oluwale* (London: Vintage), the revised version of his 2007 publication with a similar title. This work contains meticulous research by a professional historian writing in a lively and accessible style. It is the source for most of the facts in this chapter, unless otherwise referenced.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Kushner (2012), *The Battle of Britishness - Migrant Journeys 1685 to the Present*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press), Chapter 8.

<sup>3</sup> David was first inscribed in local consciousness by the words REMEMBER OLUWALE, painted in huge white letters on the wall of Chapeltown Road, Leeds, UK in 1971. At the time of writing, the principal responses to the life and death of David Oluwale are as follows. An article by Ron Phillips (1972), 'One Lame Darkie' in *Race Today*, January. There was a song about Oluwale made up by Leeds United fans. After the trial, a radio play by Jeremy Sandford (1974), *Smiling David* (London: Calder and Boyars) was produced. There were also poems by Linton Kwesi Johnson (1975, 1979), ('Time Come' on *Forces of Victory* CD, with Dennis Bovell Band, Island Records. Track available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chIHgTqX3Dk>. ) Much later books by Caryl Phillips (2007) *Foreigners - Three English lives* (London: Harvill Secker) and Kester Aspden (2008), *The Hounding of David Oluwale* (London: Vintage) and (2007), *Nationality: Wog - The hounding of David Oluwale* (London: Jonathan Cape) appeared as well as a stage play by Oladipo Agboluaje (2009), *The Hounding of David Oluwale by Kester Aspden, adapted for the stage by Oladipo Agboluaje* (London: Oberon Books). Corinne Silva's short film *Wandering Abroad* (2009), Leeds Art Gallery, curated by Nigel Walsh, Leeds City Council, was produced and is available at <http://corinnesilva.com/index.php/project/wandering-abroad-2009/>. Ian Duhig's three important poems reflecting on David's death appeared (2010) in *Pandorama* (London: Picador Poetry). Leeds-based writer/performer Zodwa Nyone's poem (2011) dedicated to David's mother, 'A Letter for Mama Oluwale' is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZgOtf-SQKk>. Sail Roads (2012) 'Oluwale' is available here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlbDvVtc\\_vg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlbDvVtc_vg). Leeds taxi-driver Dave Whittaker's synopsis of David's life and his poem (2013), is available at the 'Remember David Oluwale - Support the Memorial' a Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/42111313783/?fref=ts>. Gary Kaye's song about David (2014) 'Me Fe Lo Le' available on You Tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8PpqKvqsU> Historian Tony Kushner (2012), *The Battle of Britishness - Migrant Journeys 1685 to the Present* ( Manchester: Manchester University Press), also included David in his account of 'stowaways and others' arriving in Britain from Africa in the 1940s and 50s.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Gilroy (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*, (London: Verso).

<sup>5</sup> Agboluaje *The Hounding*.

<sup>6</sup> Aspden *The Hounding* , pp. 41-2.

<sup>7</sup> Agboluaje, *The Hounding*, p.111.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Kushner *The Battle of Britishness*, pp. 194-5.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Banton (1955), *The Coloured Quarter - New Immigrants in an English city* (London: Jonathan Cape). p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-55.

<sup>12</sup> Silva, *Wandering Abroad* .

<sup>13</sup> Aspden, *Hounding*. p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Information on this charity may be obtained from its website [www.rememberoluwale.org](http://www.rememberoluwale.org) and from Facebook and Twitter at RememberOluwale. The author of this chapter co-founded this charity and is its secretary.

<sup>15</sup> Said by defence counsel Gilbert Gray QC, cited by Aspden in *Hounding*, p. 221.

<sup>16</sup> Sandford, *Smiling David*; Aspden (2007), *Nationality: Wog*; Aspden, *The Hounding*; Phillips, *Foreigners*.

<sup>17</sup> Tony Kushner not only provided important facts about stowaways derived from government reports, he also used the books by Caryl Phillips and Kester Aspden, Sanford's and Agboluaje's plays and a poem by Linton Kwesi Johnson to set out David Oluwale's story. These contribute to his project of restoring the subaltern's voice to the history of stowing away. He also referred to the work I've been doing in creating a Memorial Garden for David. Kushner points out that 'In spite of the efforts of Sandford, Farrar, Johnson, Phillips, Aspden and Agboluaje, memory work of this Nigerian stowaway is still in its infancy and relatively marginal.' By implication, perhaps we know too little to frame Oluwale as a martyr. See Kushner *Britishness*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>18</sup> Abi Clay, email correspondence with me, April 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Lynn Abrams 'Memory as both source and subject of study: The transformations of oral history' in Stefan Berger and Bill Niven (eds) (2014) *Writing the History of Memory (Writing History)* (London: Bloomsbury).

<sup>20</sup> James Hinton (2016) *Seven Lives from Mass Observation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Lee and Ben Knight (2015) 'Gunter Grass, giant of literature, dies at 87', citing Grass's *Peeling the Onion* (2006), *The Guardian*, 14 April 2015, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Emily Zobel Marshall explains the origins of the trickster Anansi in West Africa and its transition to the Caribbean. Memory may be best understood as a trickster. See Emily Zobel Marshall (2012) *Anansi's Journey - A story of Jamaican cultural resistance* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press).

<sup>23</sup> Sandford, *Smiling David*; Silva, *Wandering Abroad*,

<sup>24</sup> Aspden, *Hounding* 2008, pp. 231-2.

<sup>25</sup> Sandford, *Smiling David*.

<sup>26</sup> Aspden, *Hounding*, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> My filmed interview with Gabriel Adams, 27.2.13.

<sup>28</sup> Aspden, *Hounding* p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Silva, *Wandering Abroad*.

<sup>30</sup> 'Rock n Roll Calypso' was released originally by Melodisc, title no. 1400, some time between 1956 and 1958. On Melodisc, see the Wiki entry here [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melodisc\\_Records](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melodisc_Records), accessed 27.5.15. Lord Kitchener's career is outlined here [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord\\_Kitchener\\_\(calypsonian\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Kitchener_(calypsonian)) accessed 14.5.15. The song is available on Vol. 4 of *London Belongs to Me* (Honest Jons Records, 2006) available here <http://honestjons.com/shop/search/london%20is%20the%20place> accessed 27.5.15

<sup>31</sup> This quote from Sheffield's Chief Constable's report in 1952 told it so well: '...the West Africans are all out for a good time, spending money on quaint suits and flashy ornaments and visiting dance halls at every opportunity. The Jamaicans are somewhat similar, but they have a more sensible outlook and rarely get into trouble. They take great pains with their appearance and use face cream, perfume etc. to make themselves attractive to the females they meet at dances, cafes etc. One feels, however, that they only attract a certain type of female by reason of the fact that they have more money to spend than the average young Englishman' Note the representation of Jamaicans as sensible and law-abiding. See Bob Carter, Clive Harris, and Shirley Joshi (1987), *The 1951-5 Conservative Government and the Racialisation of Black Immigration* (Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, Policy Paper No. 11, October 1987. Available at [https://web.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/CRER\\_RC/publications/pdfs/Policy%20Papers%20in%20Ethnic%20Relations/PolicyP%20No.11.pdf](https://web.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/CRER_RC/publications/pdfs/Policy%20Papers%20in%20Ethnic%20Relations/PolicyP%20No.11.pdf) Accessed 23.3.15

<sup>32</sup> Sandford, *Smiling David*.

<sup>33</sup> Aspden, *Hounding*, p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Alessandro Portelli (1991) cited by Andrew Perchard (2013) "'broken Men" and "Thatcher's Children": Memory and Legacy in Scotland's Coalfields' in *International Working-Class History*, No. 84, Fall 2013, pp. 79-98.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, *Hounding*; Phillips *Foreigners*.

- <sup>36</sup> John McLeod (2009) "A sound that is missing": writing Africa in the anglophone Caribbean, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 7: 3, 337.
- <sup>37</sup> Phillips, (2007) 'Northern Lights' in *Foreigners*, pp. 176-81.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 194-9.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 'Northern Lights' p. 215.
- <sup>40</sup> Max Farrar (2002), *The Struggle for 'Community' in a Multi-ethnic, Inner city Neighbourhood: Paradise in the making* ( New York and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press).
- <sup>41</sup> Phillips, 'Northern Lights' p. 169.
- <sup>42</sup> In an interview with Francesca Wade coinciding with the issue of Caryl Phillips's 2015 novel *The Lost Child*, Phillips makes fun of the confusion some people have about his gender. It's available here <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/11470135/Caryl-Phillips-If-they-dont-look-at-my-picture-they-think-Im-a-woman.html> Accessed 27.4.15
- <sup>43</sup> Phillips, 'Northern Lights', pp. 182-3.
- <sup>44</sup> The Leeds historian Janet Douglas explained to me: 'Barry Pepper [a historian of public houses]. . . mentions the Cambridge as being above the [St Clement's] church, and when you look at the OS 1908 map, on the corner of Chapel-town Rd and Barrack St is a building labelled PH [Public House] which I am presuming was the Cambridge. On the opposite side of Chapeltown Rd were Roscoe Terrace, Barrack Rd, Cambridge Place, Cambridge Terrace, Cambridge Row, and the next street off Chapeltown Road was Leopold Street - this helps to orientate you. Barrack Road led to Chapeltown Cavalry Barracks.' [Email from Janet Douglas, 26.4.15]
- <sup>45</sup> Phillips, 'Northern Lights', pp. 183-5.
- <sup>46</sup> Banton, *Coloured Quarter*; p. 56.
- <sup>47</sup> Phillips, 'Northern Lights', pp. 190-2.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-8.
- <sup>49</sup> My filmed interview with Abi Clay on 25.9.14.
- <sup>50</sup> Aspden, *Hounding*, p. 223.
- <sup>51</sup> I'm grateful to Dr Andrew Warnes, School of English, Leeds University, for this point. Warnes assisted Caryl Phillips in his research on David Oluwale.
- <sup>52</sup> Farrar, *The Struggle for 'Community'* p. 222.
- <sup>53</sup> Aspden, *Hounding* p. 224
- <sup>54</sup> W. W. Daniel (1968) *Racial Discrimination in England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books..
- <sup>55</sup> Dilip Hiro (1973), *Black British, White British*, Harmondsworth: Pelican Books.
- <sup>56</sup> Derek Humphry and Gus John (1972) *Because They're Black* Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972) p. 151.
- <sup>57</sup> Maureen Baker's role in CARD is described in Benjamin W. Heineman (1972) *The Politics of the Powerless: A Study of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination*. London: Oxford University Press, for the Institute of Race Relations.
- <sup>58</sup> Aspden *Hounding* p. 195.
- <sup>59</sup> Duhig, *Pandorama*, p. 19.

- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-18.
- <sup>61</sup> Linton Kwesi Johnson (1975) 'Night of the Head' in *Dread Beat and Blood*, London: Bogle l'Ouverture Publications, pp 34-5. This poem is also cited in Kushner *Britishness* p. 196.
- <sup>62</sup> Linton Kwesi Johnson (1979) 'Time Come' on *Forces of Victory* CD, with Dennis Bovell Band, Island Records.
- <sup>63</sup> Whittaker, 'Remember David Oluwale'.
- <sup>64</sup> Silva, *Wandering Abroad*.
- <sup>65</sup> Aspden, *Hounding* p. 204.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 192-4.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 195.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 199.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 203.
- <sup>70</sup> On Arthur France, see *Arthur France MBE* National Archives. Available here <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.movinghere.org.uk/stories/story125/story125.htm> Accessed 8.5.15.
- <sup>71</sup> Silva *Wandering Abroad*.
- <sup>72</sup> Aspden *Hounding* p. 204.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 207.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 221.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 222.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 222. Ian Duhig told Kester Aspden that he met Kitching soon after Kitching was released from prison. Kitching was the security man at Hepworth's cloth warehouse where Duhig worked in 1974. Duhig said he was a cold man, resented by his workmates because he'd 'shamed their city', and got this 'soft job' straight after his 'short and soft' spell in prison. Kitching 'treated Oluwale hatefully as a pariah, then Kitching was a hated pariah', which Duhig took as a moral example, reprising the old adage 'You become like what you hate' (Aspden *Hounding* pp. 238-9).
- <sup>77</sup> Sandford *Smiling David*, p. 88. Sandford seems to have converted his earlier radio script into a screenplay.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-5.
- <sup>79</sup> See <http://eclipsetheatre.org.uk/about-us/> for information on this important company. Accessed 21.10.2016.
- <sup>80</sup> Agboluaje, *Hounding*.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 107.
- <sup>82</sup> Phillips 'Northern Lights' p. 227-8. We now know that this person was a former Police Constable named Alex Wooliams. Wooliams, a young PC, left the Leeds force because of the antipathy between him and Inspector Kitching. A transcript of Caryl Phillips's extraordinary interview with this brave police officer has been published. See Caryl Phillips (2010) 'David Oluwale (1930-1969), an interview', in *Présence Africaine en Europe et au-delà/African Presence in Europe and Beyond*, (ed.) Kathleen Gyssels & Bénédicte Ledent (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), pp. 93-108.
- <sup>83</sup> Arthur France has given me permission to use his name here (telephone conversation, 8.5.15).
- <sup>84</sup> See Geraldine Connor and Max Farrar (2004) 'Carnival in Leeds and London, UK: Making New Black British Subjectivities' in Riggio, Milla, C (ed.) (2004) *Carnival: Culture in Action — The Trinidad Experience* (London and New York: Routledge).

<sup>85</sup> Phillips, 'Northern Lights' p. 229.

<sup>86</sup> Phillips, 'One Lane Darkie', p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> Two years later a political challenge to that regime resulted in a Marxist Institute of Race Relations led by A Sivanandan, publishing *Race and Class*, and a Jamesian-Marxist collective led by Darcus Howe, including Linton Kwesi Johnson, which published *Race Today* (Farrar 2004).

<sup>88</sup> Phillips 'One Lane Darkie' p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>90</sup> Phillips 'Northern Lights' *passim*.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 244-5.

<sup>92</sup> Caryl Phillips informed me (email 27.7.15) that this man was Joseph Odeyemi, interviewed in Sheffield on 28.4.04.

<sup>93</sup> 'Hatfields' was actually called Hadfield's Steelworks, in Sheffield, on the site where Meadowhall now stands. See Sheffield Forum thread here <http://www.sheffieldforum.co.uk/showthread.php?t=208673> Accessed 5.5.15

<sup>94</sup> Phillips 'Northern Lights', pp. 258-9.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>96</sup> The charity aims to open an interim Memorial Garden for David Oluwale in the centre of Leeds in 2017, near the place where David Oluwale was last seen. This will provide a different kind of text, as well as a particular kind of place, in which David's life and death will be contemplated. Its planters may be read as signs of productive growth. The river running nearby might signify David's passage to Leeds — and that of so many other migrants from the British Empire. It reminds us of the centrality of water transport to the emergence of Leeds as a global city. The web-linked information points in the garden will provide a cornucopia of texts about David, about the marginalised and excluded in Leeds today, and the Remember Oluwale charity's educational and campaigning work. In the permanent garden (projected for 2018-9), world-class public art will be open, as with all great art, to multiple readings, some of which will further the charity's vision of hope, inclusion, equality, diversity and social justice. [www.rememberoluwale.org](http://www.rememberoluwale.org)