Bournemouth University

Exploring Anti-Fascism in Britain Through Autobiography from 1930 to 1936

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Copyright Statement

Abstract

The principle aim of this thesis is to explore and examine the way anti-fascist activists in the 1930s represented themselves, the movement, and their social and political communities through autobiography. It establishes a deeper understanding of the practical outworking of their philosophy and ethos. It is hoped that this piece of work will build on and add to scholarship that already exists around the usefulness of using memory sources in historical research. This will be achieved by focusing on the retelling of stories from ordinary people who lived during this time.

During the inter-war years, the anti-fascist movement achieved its peak in 1930-1936, therefore this thesis is limited to those years. In 1936 the Battle of Cable Street contributed to a decline in British Union of Fascists' activity and support; this became a climatic event for the movement. The research stops here as following this event the anti-fascist movement became much more complex due to World War 2 and the breakdown of the Communist Party. Whilst the autobiographies studied cover many international events and activities; this thesis will be limited to what happened in Britain during this period.

Primary sources in the form of autobiographies are used to research this topic, which provide a unique contribution to the history and practices of the anti-fascist movement. Five case-study autobiographies were selected, four are written by men from a strong working-class background, and one woman from a wealthy background who had a "political awakening" later in life resulting in her dedicating her time to the working-class struggle. The stories are all written with a 'history from below' approach and allows the reader to gain an understanding of grassroots organisations and community politics at the heart of the movement. The autobiography written by Yvonne Kapp provides a female perspective of the time and in my opinion offers a more balanced examination and interesting analysis of the movement.

Chapter one provides a background to the era studied and examines historiographical discussions of memory sources, the Left and the anti-fascist movement through a comprehensive literature review. This is followed by chapter two which discusses the

authors' community activism, highlights their grassroots community politics and how they sought to improve their community. This in turn exposes their anti-fascist identity and its relevance to their lives. Chapter three assesses whether the authors considered the Labour Party, Communist Party and Jewish community to be a united front against fascism. It goes on to observe how each of the autobiographies explain their clashes with the authorities and how their campaigning worked out in practice. Finally, chapter four highlights the authors' recollections of the Battle of Cable Street and evaluates its contribution and significance to the fall of the British Union of Fascists.

The results from this research suggest there are contradictions between the opinions of and information provided by each author. However, they all emphasise that the anti-fascist movement was a success due to the skill, commitment and dedication of working-class people. This was despite the fact that the police and government appeared to side with the British Union of Fascists, and they experienced much brutality from the authorities, but this did not deter them.

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this submission is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified.

Signature……

Introduction

Memoirs written by British citizens who lived through the 1930s are often clouded by extraordinary events, such the Great Depression and the Second World War. However, the memories of ordinary British citizens who were affiliated with the Left, the working-class or Judaism and those opposed to far-right extremism on a humanitarian basis are inextricably bound with memories of anti-fascist activism, Oswald Mosley, and the British Union of Fascists (BUF). It has been argued by a variety of historians that the rise of Fascism in Britain was parallel with a rise of fear, poverty, and a faith in the British government,[1] and literature that explores the 'inevitable' rise of Fascism in Britain is plentiful.[2] This thesis aims to provide a unique insight into the day-to-day lives and activities of the brave men and women who fought against the rise of fascism in Britain during the 1930s. This will be done by examining the life stories of five ordinary British citizens who were devoted anti-fascists. Their autobiographies will be analysed to assess how each author represent themselves, the movement, and their social and political communities.

The case-study autobiographies being investigated are, *One Bloke: A Manchester Man's Tale of Two Decades* by Paul Graney (2011);[3] *Out of the Ghetto: My Youth in the East End Communism and Fascism 1913-1939* by Joe Jacobs (1991), originally published in 1978;[4] *Time Will Tell, Memoirs* by Yvonne Kapp (2003);[5] *Unfinished Journey* by Aubrey Morris (2006);[6] *Our Flag Stays Red* by Phil Piratin (2007), originally published in 1948.[7] These sources will aid this research in addressing current gaps in

[1] J. D. Gregory, 'The Power of Fascism', ed. Douglas Jerrold, *The English Review, 1908-1937; London*, March 1932, 284; Arthur Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States*, (London: Macmillan, 1979), 95.
[2] Richard C. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front*, (London: Tauris, 2009); Paul Stocker, 'Importing Fascism: Reappraising the British Fascisti, 1923–1926', *Contemporary British History* 30, no. 3 (2 July 2016): 326–48,; 'East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-40', Routledge & CRC Press, accessed 5 November 2020, Gary Love, '"What's the Big Idea?": Oswald Mosley, the British Union of Fascists and Generic Fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 3 (2007): 447–68.
[3] Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto: My Youth in the East End: Communism and Fascism, 1913-1939*, 2nd ed. (London: Phoenix Press, 1991).
[4] Paul Graney and Barry Seddon, *One Bloke: A Manchester Man's Tale of Two Decades* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 2011).
[5] Yvonne Kapp, *Time Will Tell: Memoirs* (London: Verso, 2018).
[6] Aubrey Morris, *Unfinished Journey* (London: Artery Publications, 2006).
[7] Phil Piratin and John Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, New ed (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2006).

anti-fascist literature by focusing on the individual experience rather than the collective. Furthermore, this thesis will form a positive argument for the use of memory sources in historical research. Historian Karl Weintraub argues that "an autobiography an only be understood if the 'place' the authors themselves occupy in relation to their lives can be reconstructed by the reader."[8] In compliance with this view this thesis has included a variety of contextual research, provided by secondary sources, that covers a collection of themes and topics relevant to this thesis. Such topics will be briefly presented within this introduction and will be explored in more detail throughout the remaining chapters.

The arguments in this paper offer a valuable addition to scholarship on autobiography and anti-fascism for many reasons. Firstly, highlighting the accomplishments of the anti-fascist movement endorses the view that grassroots activism and community politics are an extremely effective political tool. The stories told by the autobiographers can act as inspiration for future generations of ordinary, or working-class citizens to unite, and fight against oppression. Whilst arguing there is strength in numbers when it comes to activism, this thesis also emphasises the importance of the individual experience. Using one person's experience as a lens for examining historical events makes the stories, and analysis, more accessible to the reader. It allows the reader to put themselves in the shoes of the narrators in order to truly understand the motivations, actions and effects of the event or era being examined. It is especially significant that the individual stories that have been chosen are written by less heralded figures involved in major political events. The literature review will examine the imbalanced representation of class within memory sources, and history in general. The sources being used in this research show that 'ordinary' people are capable of changing the political landscape of their country and the effectiveness of grassroots activism should not be underestimated. Historian Anne Smith claims that memoirs with famous and elite subjects are guilty of adding to "the destructive myth of the mass media, that the value or significance of any individual is directly related to the degree of fame or notoriety he or she manages to achieve."[9] This paper will show that one's level of fame does not correlate with the significance and importance of one's life.

[8] Linda Anderson, *Autobiography.* (Routledge, 2010), 3.
[9] Anne Smith, *Women Remember: An Oral History* (London: Routledge, 1989), 3.

Consequently, this thesis will show that autobiographies are useful and exciting historical sources, regardless of questionable reliability. Autobiographies explore a variety of opinions, address false, or missing information and can be used as a source for both the time it was written and in which it was set. They are arguably one of the most valuable sources for examining the real-life effects of political, social and economic developments in history.

Background – 1930s Britain and the Rise of Fascism

Following the First World War, economic instability and mass unemployment created an urgent crisis for Britain.[10] Essential industries suffered greatly and Britain's position as one of the largest trading economies in the world swiftly declined.[11] Economic distress in Britain was paralleled with a political crisis.[12] The Labour Party took power for the first time in 1924, and initially the party was invigorated after WWI with their member numbers soaring.[13] However, by the late 1920s Labour was a "house divided against itself."[14] Sassoon argues that in the late 1920s and early 1930s Labour policies were "indistinguishable from those of the Conservatives," which eventually led to a cabinet split in 1931.[15] This split led to the Labour and the Conservative coalition with Macdonald and Baldwin forming a National Government.[16] The coalition was somewhat popular for its noble attempt at providing unemployment support, and for giving the British people a hopeful glimpse of stability.[17] Although, Thurlow argues that the 1920s Labour government, and the National coalition failed to provide sufficient support for veterans, and it could be argued this was a big contribution to a rise in fascism.[18] The Labour Party themselves claimed that "fascism tended to occur where the tradition of parliamentary democracy was not well established, where government had been weak and discredited."[19] With little work available, no money in their savings

[10] Richard J. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation: 1919 - 1939* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), xx.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Tauris, 2013), 57.
[13] James Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain: 1931-1941*, (London: Routledge, 1982), 2.
[14] "The Labour Party Conference," *The English Review*, December 1928, 649.
[15] Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 57.
[16] David J. Wrench, "'Conservatives were Cashing-in': Parties and the National Government, August 1921 – September 1932," *British Studies* 23, no.2 (Spring 1984), 136.
[17] "Huge Increase in Unemployment," *The Guardian,* January 7th, 1931.
[18] Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 15.
[19] Michael Newman, ''Democracy versus Dictatorship: Labour's Role in the Struggle against British Fascism, 1933-1936', *History Workshop*, no. 5 (1978): 70.

and little faith in their political leaders (and monarchy),[20] British civilians were beginning to be enticed by the promise of a better Britain under Mosley's BUF.[21]

Fortunately, the BUF were never able to infect British society and politics to the same extent as their German and Italian counterparts.[22] The recollections provided by the case-study authors demonstrate that this was largely due to the efforts of the anti-fascists. Thurlow argues that "apart from a few regionally isolated areas like the north-west of England before 1934 and the East End of London after 1935, fascism was not of major political significance."[23] Those being targeted by the fascists would arguably disagree and as BUF membership rose during the 1930s it was not yet clear they were an insufficient threat. Fascism was infecting a large part of British society, from factory workers to influential novelists and poets, such as Williamson, Lawrence, and Yeats.[24] By 1934 BUF membership had reached an estimated 40,000.[25] Mosley's Blackshirts were predominately active in the north-west and East End of London, and the politically active, as well as the working-class and the Jewish community in these areas, had no choice but to focus on the physical and ideological threat of the BUF.[26] The BUF were an extreme right-wing political party, and their ideologies favoured the elite and ruling classes in Britain.[27] Consequently, the opposition to fascism is mostly comprised of Left-wingers, socialists and the working-class. Due to the anti-Semitic campaigns carried out by the BUF, Jewish citizens were also deeply involved in the anti-fascist movement. Copsey lists the People's Defence Force and the National Union for Combating Fascismo as two of Britain's earliest fascist opposition parties.[28] One of the earliest records of a British anti-fascist resistance was in 1923 "when Communists disrupted the inaugural meetings of the British Fascisti."[29] Anti-fascist protestors were responsible for disrupting a large number of events organised by the

[20] Kara McKechnie, "Taking Liberties with the Monarch: The royal bio-pic in the 1990's," 226.
[21] Gregory, 'The Power of Fascism', 284.
[22] Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 14.
[23] Ibid., 14.
[24] Otto-Ernst Schuddekopf, *Revolutions of Our Time - Fascism* / (Praeger Publishers, 1973), 122.
[25] G. C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, no. 4 (1984): 575.
[26] Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 14.
[27] Love, ''What's the Big Idea?', 452.
[28] Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 2000 edition (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 2.
[29] Ibid., 1.

BUF,[30] including 20,000 people obstructing Mosley from speaking in Finsbury Park, and the Olympia rally disruptions; both in 1934.[31] It was found that in 1936 "57 of the British Union of Fascists public meetings…were disrupted or prevented by the actions of anti-fascists."[32] The most notable of these anti-fascist demonstrations was the Battle of Cable Street, which took place on the 4th of October 1936 and has been referred to as the "most celebrated anti-fascist event in British history."[33] Due to the notoriety and supposed significance of this event, an exploration into the case-study authors' representation of Cable Street will be the concluding chapter of this thesis. The Battle of Cable Street, and the year of 1936, has been selected as the climatic and final 'event' in this paper for a multitude of reasons. First and foremost, the aim of this research is to explore each authors representations of the anti-fascist movement, not assess the movements significance in decreasing BUF activity. Therefore, continuing analysis post 1936 would overcomplicate the aim of this paper and venture toward an assessment of the success of the Battle of Cable Street. Furthermore, the debates and analysis featured within this thesis have been led by the experiences and emotions portrayed in the case-study autobiographies, and the focus on the anti-fascist movement decreased considerably in the years following 1936.[34] The authors became distracted by their role in the war effort, and for the Communist authors, their work was disrupted by the scepticism surrounding them following the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939.[35] Thus, in order to not overcomplicate an already complicated situation, the case-studies representations of involvement in the Battle of Cable Street will conclude this thesis.

Background – The Case-Study Autobiographers

The final section of this introduction will highlight the comparisons and contrasts between the case-study authors, whilst also providing brief background information about their lives and personalities. This will assist the reader to appreciate the value of these five autobiographies and understand why they have been selected as the

[30] Keith Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism, 1919 - 39* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2010), 137.
[31] Ibid., 136.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Colin Holmes and Anne J. Kershen, eds., *An East End Legacy: Essays in Memory of William J Fishman* (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 130.
[34] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 185; Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 271; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 207; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 59; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 49.
[35] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 217.

case-study sources. In turn this will assist the reader to process the arguments and analysis presented throughout this paper. The life stories being analysed in this thesis belong to Paul Graney (1909-1982), Joe Jacobs (1913-1977), Aubrey Morris (1919-2008), Phil Piratin (1907-2006) and Yvonne Kapp (1903-1999). All of whom were Left-wing activists who dedicated a large portion of their life to fighting against the rise of fascism, and a variety of other important issues such as racial inequality, housing, unemployment, and workers' rights.[36] These activists, turned autobiographers, were born and raised during the turbulent era of the early twentieth century and had to confront the instability of that era as well as the rise of fascism.[37] All five authors are connected by their ideological and geographical communities and represent themselves as remarkably dedicated social and political activists. Despite their obvious similarities, there are also stark contrasts between each autobiographer, which makes their additions to this research project even more fascinating.

Joe Jacobs, born in 1913 in Whitechapel to Eastern European Jewish immigrants, was a keen member of the Communist and the anti-fascist movement, regularly claiming that his "work in the party always came first."[38] His autobiography was originally published in 1978 by Calverts North Star Press, it was the most accessible of all five case-studies as it was frequently referenced in secondary literature about the anti-fascist movement. Sadly, Jacobs died from a sudden heart attack in 1977 before he was able to complete his life memoir.[39] Thus, the autobiographies' editor, Janet Jacobs Simon, used his manuscript and various unfinished drafts and post-it notes to complete his autobiography.[40] Jacobs and Piratin have many similarities, they are both Communists, both working-class, both Jewish, they both grew up in the East End, they are both committed activists, and are of a similar age. However, their autobiographies show contrasting opinions through their representations of the Communist party.[41] Phil Piratin, born and raised in Stepney since the 15th of May 1907, was also a devoted, life-long member of the Communist Party. He spent the majority of his life campaigning

[36] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 18; Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 150; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 13; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 208.
[37] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 14; Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 12; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 22; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 1; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 40.
[38] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 169.
[39] Ibid., 270.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 151; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 17.

in the East End and in 1945 he was elected as the MP for his beloved Stepney.[42] Piratin's autobiography was originally published in 1948 by Thames Publications and resembles a propaganda piece due to the overwhelming praise of the Communist Party throughout the memoir.[43] Whereas Jacobs was not afraid to express his true, and often negative, opinions of the Communist Party leaders.[44] Jacobs being expelled twice from the Communist Party, and the original publication date of Piratin's autobiography, are possible components that justify the differing opinions of the two men. Deeper analysis of the contrasts between Jacobs' and Piratin's autobiographies will be featured throughout the subsequent chapters.

Piratin and Jacobs can also be compared to Morris and Kapp as they are all descendants of Jewish immigrants, although faith is not a dominant theme within their autobiographies.[45] Of all the Jewish authors, Morris appears to be the most committed to his religious heritage.[46] Aubrey Morris was born in Whitechapel on the 20th of May 1919 into a poor working-class family.[47] He eventually built his own travel company and became a wealthy businessman with the ability to provide for his family in a way his parents were unable to throughout his youth. with all the things he missed out on as a child living in poverty.[48] Morris was a proud member of the Labour League of Youth and the only Labour member among the five autobiographers, therefore, his autobiography allows the thesis to provide a broader analysis of the different political parties involved in the anti-fascist movement.[49] Despite the fact Morris spent his life working his way out of the slums of East London, his autobiography makes it abundantly clear that being a political and social activist was an essential component of his personality, and existence.

[42] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, xix.
[43] Ibid., 17.
[44] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 163.
[45] Ibid., 31; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 23; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 31; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 3.
[46] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 33.
[47] Ibid., 22.
[48] Ibid., 22, 129.
[49] Ibid., 59.

Morris shares a connection with the other three male autobiographers due to their experience with poverty and working-class culture.[50] Each of the male authors suggest that their interest in community engagement and grassroots activism stems from their encounters with social injustice and financial hardship during their childhood. Contrastingly, Kapp was born into a middle-class family and was educated at private school and attended a Swiss finishing school. Kapp's account stands out among the case-studies as she was not born into Left-wing life as the other authors claim to be. Which makes her journey into becoming deeply involved in grassroots activism and working-class lifestyle all the more interesting, her transition to the East End will be explored in more detail in the subsequent chapters. As well as being the only non-working-class born author, she is also the only female author. The inclusion of Kapp's autobiography has allowed this thesis to compare gender roles within Left-wing political groups and the anti-fascist movement, as well as offering a unique insight into the female experience.

One of the aims of this research project is to highlight individuality within the anti-fascist collective. Therefore, Kapp's autobiography is an important inclusion due to the different perspective she can offer. Graney's autobiography was selected as a case-study for the same reason. Paul Graney was born in Bradford, Manchester on the 3rd of August 1908 and shortly after he was born his mother moved their family to Nelson, Lancashire.[51] His account is distinctive as the majority of his campaigning took place in and around Manchester and Lancashire, rather than in the East end. Furthermore, Graney is the only case-study author to claim he was 'non-political', he stated, "I was never into politics, but I certainly lived amongst politics."[52] He was however an influential member of what he called "the anti-Blackshirt squad," and lists a variety of social clubs and movements that he was involved in throughout his life; two of the most regularly mentioned were The National Unemployment Workers Movement and the Social Democratic Federation's Hyndman Hall Club in Salford.[53] Graney's claim to be non-political provided an opportunity to analyse how far the anti-fascist movement was politically charged which will be explored in more detail in chapter two.

[50] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 75; Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 18; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 13; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 1.
[51] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 14.
[52] Ibid., 147.
[53] Ibid., 256.

The recollections of these extraordinary individuals show that the 'ordinary' people of Britain were undeterred by fear and used their skill and determination to organise themselves into a small army effective enough to disrupt Mosley's accession to dictatorship. Despite being referred to as ordinary throughout this thesis, "their talent, virtues and accomplishments are not ordinary at all."[54] An exploration into the historiography and significance of the term 'ordinary' will be examined within the coming literature review. This comprehensive literature review will provide historiographical context for histories of the Left, anti-fascism, and the use of memory sources. Debates and discussions from academics on these themes will be analysed, compared, and linked to this paper's research question. This review will report limitations in current literature and offer examples of how this paper will address those gaps. The arguments presented by the academics in the review will be developed to provide historiographical context for the main analysis chapters.

[54] Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), xv.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

There is an abundance of academic literature that explores the practice and purpose of autobiographies, and other memory sources, such as oral history interviews.[55] However, it is beyond the scope of this research project to fully investigate the large number of secondary literature that explores memory, or the anti-fascist movement in 1930s Britain. Whilst it is important to provide a variety of secondary sources for contextual support, not all notable works on the British anti-fascist movement and autobiography have been included. Sources that do not conform with, or could alter the readers understanding of, the aims and structure of this thesis have been omitted. The selection process for the secondary sources used within this literature review, and throughout the paper, was determined by each source's relevance to the prevalent themes in the case-study autobiographies. The secondary sources selected for this research mirror the central discussions and themes of this paper, such themes include, but are not limited to – grassroots activism, working-class lifestyle, 'ordinariness', the anti-fascist movement as a united front, Labour and Communist involvement in the movement, gender and feminism, self-exploration and individual vs collective memory.

There is an imbalanced representation of gender within the case-study sources, with only one out of the five being authored by a woman. Therefore, this research project has attempted to rectify this imbalance by supplementing the case-study sources with secondary literature written by female historians. Notable female historians included in this paper include Linda Anderson, Lynne Segal, Barbara Prys-Williams, Chiara Bonfiglioli and Celia Hughes. Two of the most important papers that relate to this research project are Bonfiglioli's study of Italian female anti-fascist autobiography, and Hughes' exploration into the lives of young radical left-wing activists through oral history. The ideas and debates presented by Bonfiglioli, and Hughes have been developed and adapted to fit the context and aim of this paper. Bonfiglioli uses autobiography as a lens to reflect on changes to the gender subjective within radical and revolutionary politics, she focuses on the influence of the Left and Communism within the Italian anti-fascist movement in the years following the Second World War.

[55] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 1 edition (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2010); Anderson, *Autobiography.*; Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,U.S., 2008).

The approach taken by Hughes is more relevant to this thesis rather than the content, she uses oral history interviews from young activists in the 1960s to uncover the links between Left-wing radical cultures and everyday life. Another crucial work that has been used for this paper is James Jupp's study of the radical Left in Britain. Whilst there is a variety of materials that could have acted as a key secondary source, Jupp's discussions resonated with the aims of this project and therefore his book is heavily relied on for contextual support. Furthermore, Jupp's book has a large amount of information about the Communist involvement in the anti-fascist movement, which is significant as the majority of case-study authors are Communists. Other materials that could be useful for similar projects and future research include works by historians David Renton and Tom Buchanan.[56]

The first section of this review will assess arguments centred around the history of memory, the Left and anti-fascism. The subsequent section will discuss the historiography of memory sources more broadly, debates include assessing the value, and reliability of using memory as a historical source. The discussions presented within this review have been selected for a specific study as they feature themes that are prevalent throughout this thesis. This review will examine accounts that use both secondary sources and memory sources within their writing, this will provide historiographical context as well as justifying the approach of this thesis. The primary focus and approach is to use autobiography sources to gain a better knowledge about the inner workings of the British anti-fascist movement in the 1930s. However, for a more robust analysis this literature review will examine the historiography of autobiography alongside oral history and will in turn highlight their influence within academia.

[56] Please see list for useful sources by Renton and Buchanan, David Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), https://www.amazon.co.uk/Fascism-Theory-Practice-Dave-Renton/dp/8189833316; Dave Renton, *Red Shirts and Black: Fascists and Anti-Fascists in Oxford in the 1930s* (Oxford: Ruskin College Library, 1996); Julie V. Gottlieb, 'Feminism and Anti-Fascism in Britain: Militancy Revived?', in *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State*, ed. Nigel Copsey and David Renton (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), 68–94, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230522763_5; Nigel Copsey and David Renton, *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State*, 1st ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), https://www.amazon.co.uk/British-Fascism-Labour-Movement-State/dp/1403939160; Tom Buchanan, 'Anti-Fascism and Democracy in the 1930s', *European History Quarterly - EUR HIST Q* 32 (1 January 2002): 39–57, https://doi.org/10.1177/026914200203200156l; Tom Buchanan, 'Britain's Popular Front?: Aid Spain and the British Labour Movement', *History Workshop*, no. 31 (1991): 60–72.

Memory, the Left, and Anti-Fascism

As fascism is an extreme right-wing ideology, it is clear why anti-fascist movements are mostly comprised of Left-wing and socialist thinkers.[57] The case-study authors are Left-wing political activists and socialists and therefore, this section will evaluate debates surrounding anti-fascism and the Left in memory sources. Relevant themes include the concept of the 'ordinary', feminism, the anti-fascist movement as a united front, self-exploration, religion and political affiliations.

A number of authors have approached the anti-fascist movement in the 1930s Britain with a focus on the aspect of the united front. Jupp analyses anti-fascism as a "united front from below," and argues this is a significant aspect of the movement.[58] Alberti's examination of feminist anti-fascist autobiographies provides evidence that both the Liberal and Labour Party's women's groups supported the anti-fascist movement in 1930s Britain.[59] In Bullock's history of the Independent Labour Party he argues that the relationship between Labour and the Communists in the 1930s "altered the landscape of the British Left."[60] Copsey offers a broad study of the British anti-fascist movement from the 1920's to 1939, with a concentration on history from below and anti-fascism as a united front.[61] He argues that, "regardless of their ideological orientation, be it Communist, social-democratic, liberal or Conservative, all anti-fascists oppose fascism on the basis that fascism is a negation of human dignity and natural rights."[62] In the following chapters these arguments will be investigated in more detail alongside the views and experiences of the case-study authors, in order to assess the presence and significance of a united front.

Tilles delivers a more specific study of anti-fascism, he provides a balanced argument that assesses the effectiveness of the Board of Deputies of British Jews in combating

[57] Barbara Goodwin, *Using Political Ideas*, Sixth edition (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2014), 199.
[58] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, 26.
[59] Johanna Alberti, 'British Feminists and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s', in *This Working-Day World: Women's Lives And Culture(s) In Britain, 1914-1945: Women's Lives and Cultures in Britain, 1914-45*, ed. Sybil Oldfield (London ; Bristol, PA: CRC Press, 1994), 114.
[60] Ian Bullock, *Under Siege: The Independent Labour Party in Interwar Britain* (Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasca University Press, 2017), 3.
[61] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, xvii.
[62] Ibid.

fascism.[63] Several accounts of Jewish and anti-Semitic history references the involvement of the Jewish community in the fight against fascism.[64] Tilles' article clearly reflects the influence of the Jewish community in the battle against fascism, claiming that there was a considerable number of Jewish people involved in the movement even prior to the BUF's adoption of an anti-Semitic campaign.[65] Discussion about the influence of the Jewish community within the anti-fascist movement is an important aspect of this paper. Four of the five autobiographers have Jewish families and heritage, albeit some do have a complicated relationship with their faith.[66] McCrindle and Hollow offer corresponding analysis centred around the idea that religion and communism incites the weak-minded.[67] They also both discuss the similarities between religion and communism and claim one is almost always substituted with the other.[68] Lineham also considers the notion that communism can act as a form of religion, claiming that "inter-war British communism functioned as a type of 'political religion' or 'political sacralisation'."[69] Communism and religion are prevalent themes within the case-studies and the connection between them shall be considered throughout this thesis.

Halfin and Steedman assess the history and influence of family, childhood and background in memory sources.[70] Steedman argues that the study of memory sources in the past two centuries has focused on the connection to childhood memories and states that "the idea of the child was used to both recall and express the past that each

[63] Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
[64] Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (London: Routledge, 2015); John Newsinger, 'Blackshirts, Blueshirts, and the Spanish Civil War', *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 3 (2001): 825–44; Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40*.
[65] Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40*, 135.
[66] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 172; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 20; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 3; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 34.
[67] Matthew Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples: Self-Technology in the Autobiographical Writings of Ex-Communists', SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 4 May 2009), 5,; Jean McCrindle, 'The Hungarian Uprising and a Young British Communist', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 62 (2006): 194.
[68] Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 8; McCrindle, 'The Hungarian Uprising and a Young British Communist', 194.
[69] Thomas Linehan, *By Thomas Linehan Communism in Britain, 1920 - 39: From the Cradle to the Grave* (Manchester University Press, 2008), 2.
[70] Igal Halfin, 'From Darkness To Light: Student Communist Autobiography During NĖP', *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 45, no. 2 (1997): 212; Carolyn Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', in *Feminism & Autobiography : Texts, Theories, Methods*, ed. Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2002), 27, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203185995.

individual life embodied."[71] This is important as it can assist the reader in gaining a deeper understanding of the authors' characteristics, and the motivations behind their life choices. These discussions are especially relevant when historians write with a psychoanalytic approach.[72] Halfin examines autobiographies written by students who were members of the Communist Party during Russia's New Economic Policy.[73] In the early years of the Soviet regime the Bolsheviks were weary of students joining the Communist Party and requested an autobiographical piece as part of their application.[74] Halfin claims that in the recommended brief, topic probes included, "how and in what kind of atmosphere did I spend my childhood? Was it happy or joyless?"[75] This emphasises the implicit link between childhood experience and self-exploration within autobiography. Hughes considers the concept of the self and self-exploration within her writing and aims to "tell the story about the making of a post-war radical self."[76] She proposes the question, "what historical value is to be gained from studying a minority of radical young people."[77] This is followed by an argument for the significance of exploring the "historical relationship between the young post-war self and the social, the emotional and the political."[78] The arguments presented in Hughes' study of memory sources from the 1960s have extreme similarities to the arguments being presented within this thesis. The analysis of the case-studies will similarly examine the historical value of exploring grass-roots radical activism, as well as exploring links between self-exploration and social and political affiliation.

Jupp's broad history of the Left in Britain focuses on radical Left-wing politics.[79] He discusses the difficulty of the inter-war years and its effect on the rise of fascism and anti-fascism, with a particular focus on the working-class.[80] The impact of working-class and grassroots activism is a prevalent topic within current literature on memory,

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[71] Carolyn Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', in *Feminism & Autobiography : Texts, Theories, Methods*, ed. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2002), 27.
[72] Halfin, 'From Darkness To Light', 212.
[73] Ibid., 210.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 212.
[76] Celia Hughes, *Young lives on the left: sixties activism and the liberation of the self* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 1.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 2.
[79] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, vi.
[80] Ibid., 1.

and social historians are increasingly arguing in favour of exploring the experiences of ordinary people. In McCrindle's autobiography about her abandonment of the Communist Party, the everyday experiences of her life are central to the recitation.[81] Therefore, allowing the reader to form a true image of what her life in the Communist Party was like. Langhamer assesses 'ordinary' as a category for historical analysis, she explores "the range of values, styles and specific behaviours that gave meaning to the claim to be ordinary."[82] She references a quote from a woman who was interviewed for the Mass Observation Project that both defines what it means to be ordinary and highlights the limitations of being an ordinary person. The woman argues,

> I don't think ordinary people get the same chance as many perhaps academics, or so-called educated people, and people in the media, to have their say…. I think ordinary really, you think of yourself as someone who hasn't perhaps achieved fame, or great success; just live a sort of normal, everyday life, going to work and with your family.[83]

Orleck also discusses the concept of ordinariness in her exploration of grassroots campaigns against the war on poverty in 1960s America.[84] Her writing coincides with the aim of this thesis, which is to explore a "largely ignored perspective: that of the men and women in impoverished communities."[85] She contends that stories of working-class activism are an essential component of understanding the social and political landscape of the era in question.[86] Jupp argues that the elite and ruling classes were "incompetent and reactionary, and it was unable to comprehend what was happening within Britain's relationship with the rest of the world."[87] Thus providing evidence for the argument that investigating the lives, actions and opinions of ordinary citizens is the greatest way of understanding the true effects of societal change.

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[81] McCrindle, 'The Hungarian Uprising and a Young British Communist', 195.
[82] Claire Langhamer, '"Who the Hell Are Ordinary People?" Ordinariness as a Category of Historical Analysis', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28 (December 2018): 1.
[83] Ibid., 17.
[84] Annelise Orleck, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2011).
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, 1.

Histories of the ordinary are "largely untold,"[88] and unfortunately the same can be argued for histories of feminism and gender.[89] Alberti highlights the feminist reaction to the rise of fascism and explores their involvement in the anti-fascist movement.[90] She uses a plethora of media sources from female journalists which illustrate the sense of fear felt by women who were facing fascist threat, suggesting that many feminists of the period understand that "behind those policies and practices lay a deep fear and even hatred of women."[91] Bonfiglioli and Sayner also examine autobiographies from female anti-fascists in Germany and Italy and both condemn the male narrative's tendency to overshadow the female experience.[92] Sayner claims that "wars, and hence the memories of wars, are owned by the male of the species and fascism is decidedly male property, whether you were for or against it."[93] She continues, "besides, women have no past, or aren't supposed to have one."[94] Discussions surrounding gender, and the presence of women with the anti-fascist movement are ubiquitous themes within this paper as this thesis has found that anti-fascist history is also guilty of silencing the female narrative. One of the five case-studies is authored by a woman, more would be included in analysis if they were accessible. Unfortunately, female anti-fascist memoirs are much harder to locate than those written by men and this is evident within the imbalanced representation of gender within this thesis.

Discussions of Autobiography and Oral History

Attention now turns to broader debates and discussions about autobiography and oral history. This section covers a variety of themes including, the complexity of studying memory sources, reliability, and methodological concepts. As well as continuing to develop arguments surrounding the imbalanced representation of class and gender in history sources, and the value of using memory in historical research.

[88] Orleck, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980*, 2.
[89] Alberti, 'British Feminists and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s', 112.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Chiara Bonfiglioli, 'Red Girls' Revolutionary Tales: Antifascist Women's Autobiographies in Italy', *Feminist Review*, no. 106 (2014): 61; Joanne Sayner, *Women Without a Past?: German Autobiographical Writings and Fascism* (Rodopi, 2007), 2.
[93] Sayner, *Women Without a Past?*, 2.
[94] Ibid.

Cosslett, Gilmore and Hollow highlight the complexity of analysing memory sources.[95] Gilmore describes the method as an "increasingly transdisciplinary" academic practice.[96] In Hollow's study he emphasises the difficulty of defining themes or disciplines when examining personal testimony, he states that the three case-study autobiographies being analysed within his paper "defy easy categorisations."[97] Furthermore, Cosslett argues that autobiography is "difficult to define…on the borderline between fact and fiction, the personal and the social, the popular and the academic, the everyday and the literary."[98] However, she continues to say that this element of complexity within autobiography and oral history is what makes them exciting.[99] Approaches to studying memory can include, but are not limited to, memory and feminism, post-structuralism, post-modernism and psychoanalysation.

Hollow makes multiple references to psychoanalysation within his study of autobiographies authored by former Communists, he argues that each autobiography being analysed begins with a "quasi-Freudian self-analysis of the author's childhood."[100] It has been claimed that "a paradigm shift in autobiographical writing got under way in the late nineteenth century, when the new science of psychology radically changed beliefs about human motivation."[101] Prys-Williams argues that writing a decent autobiography "requires an encounter with oneself that can involve the need to confront potent elements from one's past, a sort of wrestling with personal dragons."[102] The aspect of self-exploration and recalling childhood memories are heavily featured within the five case-study autobiographies and therefore, discussions on this topic will be analysed throughout this thesis.

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[95] Tess Cosslett, 'Feminism and Autobiography', in *Feminism & Autobiography : Texts, Theories, Methods*, ed. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2002), 1,; Leigh Gilmore, 'The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography and Genre', in *Autobiography & Postmodernism*, ed. Kathleen M Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 3,; Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 1.
[96] Gilmore, 'The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography and Genre', 3.
[97] Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 1.
[98] Cosslett, 'Feminism and Autobiography', 1.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 5.
[101] Barbara Prys-Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography*, Writing Wales in English (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 3.
[102] Ibid., 1.

Anderson compares the relationship between autobiography and post-structuralism, claiming that post-structuralism has "opened the debate of the function, or indeed the necessity of the personal…within criticism."[103] Whereas, Gilmore explores autobiography and post-modernism and states that the "insights of post-modernism…offer an occasion to rethink the relation between autobiography and its tradition, as well as the state of autobiography as a genre."[104] Gilmore's argument is also relevant to discussions about feminism and autobiography, she argues that feminist writing has provided new insights to the study of memory sources in a similar way to post-modernism.[105]

The question of reliability dominates discussions about studying memory sources and it is regularly argued that an individual's memory cannot be completely trusted or verified and therefore, it should not be considered a valuable historical source.[106] Acclaimed historian Hobsbawm was among those who criticised memory sources for being unreliable.[107] However, Segal observes that men of Hobsbawm's generation often found autobiography to be too self-indulgent, which led them to overlook the many benefits of studying memory.[108] Furthermore, Prys-Williams states that the autobiographies being analysed in her paper are "powerful personal constructions of a time and place. They should not, however, be mistaken for accurate historical record."[109] This thesis would argue that although the information might not always be one hundred percent accurate, for example, if a personal testimony is warped by popular culture, it is still useful as it can act as a source for exploring the effect of popular culture on recalling memories. The source can also provide an insight into the important events that were happening during the era that is being discussed, and in which it was written. Summerfield claims that the way in which a narrator chooses to present themselves "provides clues about how the narrator sees herself in relation to social structures and processes, as well as about the cultural constructs at her

[103] Anderson, *Autobiography.*, 125.
[104] Gilmore, 'The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography and Genre', 5.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Lynne Segal, 'Lost Worlds, Political Memoirs of the Left in Britain', *Radical Philosophy*, 2003, 7; Penny Summerfield, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice', *Miranda*, no. 12 (24 February 2016): 3.
[107] Segal, 'Lynne Segal', 7.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Prys-Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography*, 1.

disposal."[110] She presents an example for the value of studying memory sources regardless of the assumed 'disadvantages'.

Noteworthy concepts tied to discussions of reliability of memory include, repressed and deep-lying memory,[111] outside influences or the 'cultural circuit',[112] the importance of prior knowledge,[113] and intention.[114] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to incorporate them in this literature review however, the relevant concepts will be explored throughout the thesis where applicable. Discussions about the imbalanced representation of class and gender has been briefly introduced in the former segment of this literature review and will additional sources surrounding this debate will now be introduced. Traditionally, autobiographical writing has been reserved for elite members of society, causing an imbalance in the representations of class, gender and race within the history of personal testimony.[115] The voices of women, the poor and non-western civilisations are predominately absent from autobiography and this is supported by Anderson who says autobiography has been "implicitly bound up," with representations of male, white, elitist members of society.[116] She states, "autobiography has been seen as promoting a view of the subject as universal, it has also underpinned the centrality of masculine – and we may add, Western and middle-class – modes of subjectivity."[117] Autobiographical writing has been a long-established practice, and interest in the lives of the working-class has only developed in modern history.[118] Hence it is not surprising that the most accessible memoirs are those written by the elite. Smith condemns this imbalanced representation and claims that memoirs with famous subjects "contribute to the destructive myth of the mass media, that the value or significance of any individual is directly related to the degree of fame or

[110] Summerfield, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice', 9.
[111] Anderson, *Autobiography.*, 131; Prys-Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography*, 3.
[112] Summerfield, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice', 6; Joan Tumblety, ed., *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, The Routledge Guides to Using Historical Sources (London: Routledge, 2013), 7.
[113] Anderson, *Autobiography.*, 3; Smith, *Women Remember*, 5.
[114] Anderson, *Autobiography.*, 6; Smith, *Women Remember*, 6.
[115] Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', 25.
[116] Anderson, *Autobiography.*, 3.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Saul Benison, 'Reflections on Oral History', *The American Archivist* 28, no. 1 (1965): 71–77; Alison Flood, 'Margery Kempe, the First English Autobiographer, Goes Online', *The Guardian*, 20 March 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/20/margery-kempe-first-autobiographer-digitised-british-library.

notoriety he or she manages to achieve."[119] Feminist literature has repeatedly "scrutinised the long-term European project of creating an autobiographical canon…being almost entirely made up of times of masculine self-writing."[120] This notion of 'masculine self-writing' will be examined further alongside discussions about gender representations in the case-study autobiographies.

Furthermore, Steedman highlights that "the difficulty of autobiography…is that it composes a 'master' narrative," and Anderson reflects on the consequences of this.[121] She declares, "what is at stake is who speaks or rather who is authorised to speak.[122] An objective critical stance which 'claims to speak for everyone; has…been exclusive and has disenfranchised alternative points of view."[123] This is especially true with literature that explores the fascist, and anti-fascist movements in Britain. Research for this thesis suggests that studies of British fascism tend to focus more on Mosley as an individual rather than the BUF as a collective. [124] Whereas, studies of anti-fascism in Britain tend to focus on the opposite, it appears that sources centring around anti-fascism tend to assess the movement as a collective, rather than focusing on the individuals who formed the movement itself.[125] Furthermore, it appears that secondary literature about fascism is more accessible than literature about anti-fascism, Copsey summarises this argument by stating that, "a voluminous body of scholarly literature existed on the protagonists of British fascism, yet very little attention had been directed towards its antagonists."[126]

Steedman argues that the modern interest in the history of working-class individuals, and collectives has "bought about an equal shift of attention, from the chronicles of the privileged to the annals of the labouring poor."[127] However, she continues to say that there is room for improvement concerning "modern autobiographical theory," and

[119] Smith, *Women Remember*, 3.
[120] Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', 25.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Anderson, *Autobiography.*, 126.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Stephen Cullen, 'The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932-40', *Journal of Contemporary History* 22, no. 1 (1987): 115.
[125] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*; M. Testa, *Militant Antifascism: A Hundred Years of Resistance* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015).
[126] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, XIV.
[127] Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', 25.

working-class autobiographical and oral history accounts.[128] These discussions outline an objective of this thesis, which is to continue adding and building on historiography that is dedicated to the important work of exploring and sharing the history of the working-class, 'ordinary' citizen. Hodgson claims that,

> The extent of the conflict between fascists and anti-fascists in Britain has often been underestimated…partly because evidence of it is scattered across local and regional newspapers, the records of county constabularies, magistrates' courts…small circulation publications of the Left-wing anti-fascist groups.[129]

Hodgson's argument exemplifies the importance of educating oneself through the use of memory sources. Significant details of the inner workings of the anti-fascist movement could potentially be unrecoverable if the memories of those involved were not recorded. Oral history interviews and autobiographies allow academics access to information about how social, political and economic advances and challenges affect citizens at a direct level. The case-study autobiographers are not just narrators, but real-life characters bringing their memories to life in order to educate the public and commemorate the outstanding contribution of the anti-fascists in Britain's fight against fascism. Steedman asserts that "…it is a common academic assumption that the written productions of working-class people belong to some realm of 'fact' or 'reality', rather than to 'literature', and are thus the province of the historian rather than the literary critic."[130] Strengthening the argument that working-class autobiographies are useful historical sources, and further highlighting the significance of studying the memoirs of the ordinary.

Another fundamental use of personal testimony is its ability to recover 'lost' information and widen knowledge about the histories of lesser known people, places and movements.[131] An exceptional example of this is provided by Summerfield, she examines an oral history interview with a woman named Kathleen Holmes who was a Home Guard officer during the Second World War.[132] In 1941 an article in *The Times* claimed that women were unable to join the British Home Guard, Holmes' testimony about her time working as a Home Guard officer clearly proves this article was

[128] Ibid., 26.
[129] Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 136.
[130] Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', 26.
[131] Summerfield, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice', 4.
[132] Ibid.

inaccurate.[133] Moreover, Hollow argues that the ex-Communists in his study were able to fill a "journalistic role for the public, providing eye-witness accounts of inaccessible events and places."[134] This argument is central to this papers analysis of the case-study autobiographies and the insight offered by the narrators will provide an extraordinary view of the anti-fascist movement.

[133] Ibid.
[134] Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 1.

Chapter 2: Identity and Community

This chapter will follow discussions about writing the self that feature within the literature review and investigate how the case-study authors approach the complex task of writing about their lives. The question of how the authors represent themselves is relevant to every chapter in this thesis, however in this chapter specific examples are provided as an introduction to the later analysis. There will be an exploration into the notion of a political, and working-class identity, and how each author represents this differently. There will also be an acknowledgement and investigation into the autobiographers' dedication to community activism and grassroots politics. Each of these factors will demonstrate the characteristics and motivations of the 'anti-fascist identity'.

Abrams emphasises the significant relationship between memory and identity, she argues that "memory is key to our identity; without memory we have no social existence."[135] There is no one issue or aspect that formed this identity, it was a conglomeration of various experiences which resulted in them joining the anti-fascist movement. These included their working-class background or experience, their political and social affiliations and their community activism. Analysis surrounding these themes is the main feature of this chapter as this thesis argues they are the most important aspects of what formed the authors' anti-fascist identity. Black and MacRaild offer a definition of identity and community that will inform this research. They state that "identity refers to a sense of belonging, rooted in notions of what people feel an affinity for: group, class, locality, town, region, nation, etc. By contrast, community is a term used by historians with impunity but rather less critically assessed."[136] They continue to say that "community, like class or gender, is value-loaded, meaning different things to different people."[137] It is important to note that although this thesis focuses on the years between 1930 and 1936, references to the

[135] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 82.
[136] Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Studying History*, 3rd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 146.
[137] Ibid.

authors' childhood, and lifestyle post-1936 are included within this chapter to provide an insight into each autobiographers anti-fascist identity.

Writing the Self

All of the case-studies make references to the practice of writing the self and the purpose and impact of sharing one's life stories. Piratin is of the opinion that "the world would never had moved forward if each one had to learn from his own experience. Perhaps we ought to spend more time in the exchange of experiences, pay more attention to others."[138] Morris found it challenging to piece together his autobiography and content with the "ego trip involved."[139] He continues to note the potential value of his work, wishing that "it will give readers some new insights."[140] Jacobs, Graney and Kapp address the potential limitations of their work and disclose that their writing should not necessarily be taken as fact.[141] Jacobs' states that his book was not intended to be a historical account but more of an eye-witness testimony of what he and his friends were doing.[142] He continues, "I am not deliberately seeking to influence anyone towards an acceptance of my ideas, although these ideas do influence my unavoidably selective and incomplete account."[143] Similarly, Kapp warns that her "reminiscences lack gravity," and that even if she were to have kept a diary she would not have consulted it whilst writing, instead she opts to rely on her "fallible, fitful and selective memory, fully aware of the pitfalls that presents."[144] Graney concludes his autobiography with the line, "that's my view, anyway. But I'm only one bloke."[145] By using this phrase Graney unfortunately diminishes the value of his views, but also reinforces potential issues when trusting the opinion of just one person. The acknowledgment from the authors of the potential limitations and effects of their writing being published shows that they were aware of the impact of autobiographical writing, and it is reasonable to argue that this will have affected how they approached this task.

[138] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 10.
[139] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 15.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 307; Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 233; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, foreword.
[142] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 307.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, foreword.
[145] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 233.

The autobiographers' write about their life stories in various ways. Graney's recollections are remarkably specific and recalls his memories as if he was reliving them.[146] It should be reiterated that Graney's memoirs were originally recorded on tape and put into autobiography form by the books editor, Barry Seddon and this is a potential factor for the style of writing in Graney's autobiography.[147] Jacobs recalls his memories in a similar way to Graney, as if he were in an oral history interview and thinking on the spot, rather than having time to reflect and organise his thoughts. He jumps between events and often does not link the subjects together.[148] In one part of the book he discusses Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, then his holiday to Belgium and a couple of paragraphs later begins discussing the situation in Abyssinia again, whilst providing no link between the two.[149] Jacobs' regularly interrupts himself with facts and opinions about similar social and political struggles internationally, which suggests the international effort was as important to him as the fight against oppression at home.[150] Jacobs and Kapp both exemplify a desire for authenticity within their writing and were more than happy to 'set the record straight' about events they attended.[151]

Historian Lynne Segal highlights that in memory sources, "the public realm folds itself back into stories of individuals and their ways of coping with the shared hurdles and harms of life, fragmenting and dissolving in the process."[152] References to the negative effects from events happening outside of the authors' personal life are relevant to the examination of a political and social identity as well as psychoanalysis of their mentality and characteristics. Self-reflection and analysis of how the authors handled and processed events they deemed to be crucial to their development feature heavily within the case-studies, whether it be a conscious confession or not. The authors provide some examples that suggest they were aware of the psychological repercussions of certain events in their past at the time. When Jacobs was young he suffered with trachoma and had to have one of his eyes removed and replaced with a false one, he portrays that whilst suffering with this traumatic event he was aware this

[146] Ibid., 168.
[147] Ibid., 9.
[148] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 179.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid., 295; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 178.
[152] Segal, 'Lynne Segal', 6.

would have consequences to his development.[153] He recalls that he "became very self-conscious and shy," and this led to an intensification of his bad temper.[154] Morris references the psychological effect of the distressing reaction of his father following Britain's declaration of war in 1939, "he struck me a hard blow across the face. This came as a terrible shock, despite years of having expected it, and his fierce attack was also devastating psychologically."[155] Furthermore, autobiography writers are forced to self-reflect and consider "forces or memories that may have been repressed or distorted because of their potential to cause pain."[156] The process of reviewing one's life gives the narrator an opportunity to reflect, understand and process emotions and events that they did not understand at the time. Jacobs recalls being bullied at school for being Jewish, he states he was unaware at the time that he was experiencing anti-Semitism and knew nothing about it and remembers being extremely frightened. Upon reflection and after a lifetime of experience it was clear to him this bullying was anti-Semitic.[157] Kapp psychoanalyses her anxiety following the death of her grandmother, some years later she concluded that she was probably suffering due to the "unbearable guilt of wishing that it had been she [Kapp's mother] who died," instead of her grandmother.[158] It appears that Kapp was more conscious of self-reflection and the practice of psychoanalysis than the other authors. It could be argued that this was due to her experiences of psychoanalysis in her 30s, when she questioned the validity and usefulness of her life, and consulted "a strict Freudian, for psychoanalysis."[159] She argues that the "lasting appeal of psychoanalysis," is due to the personal satisfaction one finds when discussing emotions and events from their past.[160] Historian Prys-Williams uses a psychoanalytic approach when analysing the autobiographies in her study in an "attempt to unlock troubled areas of the writer's sense of identity, which…have sometimes seemed inaccessible to them at the time of writing."[161]

This thesis in its entirety represents the case-study authors as anti-fascists whose involvement is built on their dedication to political and social activism, and a deep

[153] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 19.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 36.
[156] Prys-Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography*, 2.
[157] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 18.
[158] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 25.
[159] Ibid., 147.
[160] Ibid., 17.
[161] Prys-Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography*, 3.

affection for their communities abroad and at home. The descriptions and opinions about their stories provide an insight into the characteristics and values of the authors. An example of this can be seen within Graney's recollections of an argument he had with a bailiff when he was out of work and on benefits.[162] He explains that he stopped a bailiff halfway through his search of the house, he was made aware that if he continued to resist he would be sanctioned and would no longer receive benefits, Graney's reply was, "I would rather do without the money and keep my self-respect."[163] This portrays that he had extremely strong values and was so headstrong that even the threat of financial destitution would not deter him. However, it also presents him as being stubborn and quite foolish as this confrontation led to him being cut from the unemployment benefit programme and becoming homeless. It could be argued this was also due to his pride, as he stated there were thousands like him who were "just too ashamed to rely on their parents or families."[164] Notions of pride and knowing one's self-worth are common themes within analysis of the working-class, and anti-fascist identity. A key aspect of writing the self is deciding on how one should represent themselves, and if certain events that may portray the author in a negative light should be omitted. Kapp's writing is brave and honest, she speaks freely about a number of personal subjects, some of which would have been considered 'taboo' in the 1930s.[165] She openly discusses her sexuality, her divorce, her mental anguish and her decision to agree to let her child be temporarily removed from her care.[166] In the foreword of her book Kapp notes that writing an autobiography in old age means that she will be dead before it is published, where she is "beyond the reach of ridicule and criticism; therefore I am not deterred by apprehension nor inhibited by false shame."[167] Which is a clear indication that she intended to write as honestly as her memories allowed. Kapp's writing disrupts the boundaries of what the typical 1930s housewife 'should' be, her unique life experiences are inspirational, and her fearless writing is a fascinating addition to this thesis.

[162] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 67.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid., 75.
[165] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 58.
[166] Ibid., 146.
[167] Ibid., 147.

Working-class Identity

Fascism is an extreme right-wing ideology, consequently the opposition in most countries is comprised of Left-wing and socialist thinkers.[168] In Jupp's broad history of the Left in Britain he discusses the difficulty of the inter-war years and its effect on the rise of fascism and anti-fascism, with a particular focus on the working-class.[169] The notion of a working-class identity is a focus of this thesis as the anti-fascist movement was mostly comprised of Left-wing activists with working-class backgrounds. There are a variety of factors that contributed to a working-class led anti-fascist movement, the most prominent being that the BUF were an anti-working-class force. It became rapidly apparent that Mosley only "represented the interests of a ruling elite and that their radicalism and intolerance were opposed to the natural feelings of working-class solidarity that characterised many communities at the time."[170] Morris recalls that "news from Europe began filtering through…about the seemingly inevitable rise of fascism persecution of socialists, Communists, the Jews and other minorities."[171] Fear was beginning to intensify among those who opposed the BUF's ideologies and Jacobs claimed that by 1934 "Mosley was now making a big effort to break into working class districts."[172]

The stories told in the autobiographies emphasise the spirit and determination of the working-class communities in East End London and Manchester. During the 1930s a large percentage of the population were suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, Piratin recalls that 11,000 people in Stepney alone were unemployed and he remembers "widespread discontent and bitterness. Life in Stepney was grim."[173] Morris claimed that the bailiffs were at his home so often, "they could have been live-in lodgers," and Graney worked full-time from only 12 years old and faced life as a vagabond for a number of years in his young adulthood.[174] Left-wing historian James Jupp emphasises that "the period between the wars was an unhappy one for people in general, and particularly for the majority who belonged to the industrial working

[168] Love, ''What's the Big Idea?', 452.
[169] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, 1.
[170] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51.
[171] Ibid., 150.
[172] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 190.
[173] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 13.
[174] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 64; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 30.

class."[175] Kapp's description of her first ever Communist Party meeting provides a clear image of the squaller in which people in the East End were forced to live,[176] she explains there were children present who were clearly malnourished and wore nothing on the bottom half of their bodies, with the top half draped in holey, dirty t-shirts; and the home in which the meeting was held was "'not fit for pigs to live in'."[177] These activists had to face extremely tough living conditions, and due to their working-class background had limited supplies and almost no money available for the movement.[178] In Kaufman's study of grassroots democratic organisations he states, "the problem is that those who suffer the most under the status quo…do not have ready-made means to change either their lot in life or the societies in which they live."[179] This is evident throughout the case-study autobiographies, Graney asserted that they "had no money for leaflets,"[180] and would "just tell as many people as possible in the week beforehand."[181] Graney's recollection of the Jarrow March of 1936 accentuates the steadfast willpower of these activists; he describes the horrific injuries of a 60-year-old man's feet, claiming that he had "never seen anything so ghastly. It was just as though somebody had skinned them. They must have been absolute agony, but he refused to give up."[182] However, examples of the woes that come with living in a poor and overcrowded community are balanced with enlightening tales of neighbourliness, willpower and capability. Graney describes how some of the younger men involved in the march decided to take turns in carrying the injured man to the end.[183] He also states that during the march "people would come along with packets of sandwiches…they often had no more money than we had, but they were prepared to sacrifice their own food for us."[184] As well as highlighting the struggle of working-class life, Jacobs emphasises the positive aspects of living amongst a working-class community. He explains, "you'd be wrong if you think from what I told you that everything in my scene was grim and tragic. The humour was rich, comprehensive,

[175] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, 1.
[176] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 176.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 151.
[179] Michael Kaufman, *Community Power & Grassroots Democracy: The Transformation of Social Life*, ed. Haroldo Dilla Alfonso (Intl Development Research, 1998), 6.
[180] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 151.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 156.
[183] Ibid., 159.
[184] Ibid., 157.

full of wit."[185] Undeterred by their limited access to resources, and the endless personal difficulties that were inextricably bound with living through one of Britain's most turbulent era's, these activists constantly proved that commitment to their beliefs and unwavering hopefulness could not be defeated by the trials of the time, and the threat posed by the BUF.

The case-study authors regularly refer to the working-class as a collective identity rather than analysing individual struggles and differences among their community. There are discussions about the differences between the Jewish and the 'gentiles,' and "the two nations, the rich and the poor."[186] However there is limited analysis about the contrasts and variations in the authors' communities. It should be noted that the information and opinions provided by the autobiographies do not speak for the entire working-class in Manchester and London in the 1930s, it should be emphasised that as the analysis is built upon information provided by the autobiographies and not all working-class people in Manchester and London in this era would have had the same experiences, opinions of beliefs as them. It is challenging assessing Kapp's description of working-class lifestyle in conjunction with the other autobiographies as her background and upbringing differs greatly.[187] Kapp was born into a fairly wealthy middle-class family, she recalls thinking that her mother's childhood home was so large it must have required a horde of servants to maintain it.[188] Whereas Jacobs explains that his home was so small that he had to sleep on the floor with his brother, whilst his mother and sister slept in the bed of the same room, and one sister forced to sleep on the sofa.[189] Jacobs, Morris, Graney and Piratin are connected via their experiences of poverty. These authors make it clear that their political and social awareness stemmed from the poverty and injustice due to their background and upbringing. Morris categorises himself as one of the "youngsters who came into Left wing politics as a result of their family background, the demands of the times and a yearning for justice and an end to poverty."[190] Furthermore, Graney contends that "when you're down at the bottom," you are more inclined to follow Left-wing politics

[185] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 21.
[186] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 122.
[187] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 3.-
[188] Ibid., 2.
[189] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 18.
[190] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 13.

and live a "sort of Left-wing life."[191] Whereas Kapp's involvement to follow Left-wing ideology and immerse herself in working-class activism was a "difficult and serious decision."[192] Upon introduction to the Communist Party and the East End slums, she was forced to confront her "complete ignorance of working-class people and working-class life."[193] Kapp's writing and reminiscences provide a unique and thought-provoking addition to the case-studies. Her experiences of the anti-fascist movement and Communist Party in 1930s Britain are interesting as she chose to step away from her 'comfortable' lifestyle and dedicate herself to the fight against oppression. Whereas, as they have themselves admitted, the other authors were somewhat forced into the anti-fascist movement and general Left-wing activism due to their disadvantaged background. It is interesting to question whether the four authors' who grew up among poverty would have made the same choice as Kapp.

Despite the clear distinctions between the families and backgrounds of Kapp and the other authors, they do all make note of a strained relationship with certain members of their family and an aversion to authority from a young age. Kapp was not close to her parents and made several references to her mother being unnecessarily nasty to her throughout her life.[194] Although she does not reference facing physical violence at the hands of her parents, she does imply there were severe consequences in the form of mental anguish due to her mother's cruelness.[195] In contrast, Graney, Morris and Piratin refer to physical altercations within the home, at school, at work and in their communities in general, as a common occurrence.[196] Piratin recalls being "welcomed with a clout," upon returning home from a late night jaunt as a young boy.[197] He claims that "these things happened to most East End London children," and believes this was due to the hectic and tough lifestyle of their parents who had no spare time to learn about or understand their children.[198] Morris recalls witnessing violence between his mother and father, he says that one of the clearest and most distressing memories from his childhood is being woken in the night as his mother was beating his father for

[191] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 221.
[192] Ibid., 137.
[193] Ibid., 147.
[194] Ibid., 31.
[195] Ibid., 17.
[196] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 21; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 182; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 2.
[197] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 2.
[198] Ibid.

losing all of their money gambling.[199] Gambling was a common pastime in working-class communities and a lot of children and adults partook regularly.[200] Graney discusses his experiences with violence as a child at his work-place and at school. Due to the poverty he and his family faced, Graney was working full-time from the age of only 12.[201] He describes being beaten by his boss at the mill and his teachers at school and despaired over the fact he and children like him had no rights. He continues to say that nobody ever stood up for them, and even at a young age he understood and "felt the injustice."[202] This is an important comment from Graney as it shows he had an awareness of social injustice and oppression from early on in his life, and it is reasonable to claim this contributed to his journey into political and social activism, and his anti-fascist identity. Discussions about violence within the home raise questions about gender roles within this era. It appears from the authors' experiences that they only faced physical abuse at the hands of their fathers, or other male characters in their lives. Whether it is intentional or not, Morris speaks with a much more negative tone when talking about the men in his family compared to the women.[203] He also interestingly describes them as a collective of gamblers, drinkers and money wasters rather than individual people.[204] The only man he does speak highly of is his Uncle, who he credits for developing his social conscience.[205] Jacobs did not have a fatherly figure in his life, and this could be a potential reason as to why he does not mention violence within the home. His father died when he was very young and it left his mother alone to look after five children under the age of eleven which contributed massively to the misfortune they faced.[206] In discussing his father's death Jacobs provides an example of the effects of the 'cultural circuit' when recalling memories, he states that he was too young to remember the funeral, however "one story was repeated so often I have come to regard it as an experience I actually remember."[207] Abrams highlights that when one person's story is shared and re-told

[199] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 23.
[200] Ross McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling in Britain 1880-1939', *Past & Present*, no. 82 (1979): 155.
[201] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 21.
[202] Ibid., 24.
[203] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 61.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid., 23.
[206] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 14.
[207] Ibid.

amongst their community it is no longer an individual's memory but rather a "socially shared experience."[208]

Both Morris and Kapp indicate that their strained relationships with their parents contributed to their predisposed resentment towards authoritative figures. Morris describes his father as "the boss," of their family who was "entitled to complete obedience, and as my father even more so."[209] His relationship with this father worsened as he grew older and gained a deeper understanding of his contempt for injustice and tyranny.[210] From a very young age Kapp noticed that she "enjoyed the deep satisfaction of defying authority."[211] She also makes a significant observation by comparing the oppression she faced by from her parents to examples of political and social injustice, "on the whole children and parents confront one another as two classes in which all the political power is on one side; and the results are not at all unlike what they would be if…one were white and other black, or one enfranchised and the other disenfranchised."[212] There is a familiarity in the way the autobiographers describe their relationship with authoritative figures in their childhood and their relationship with the police and fascists in the 1930s. Multiple references to brutal attacks from the BUF and police are present throughout the autobiographies and this thesis, detailed descriptions of harassment and emotional language assists with gaining sympathy from the reader and solidifies the narrator as the victim in the story. Sociologist Anthony Giddens understands autobiography to be "not so much as a form of writing, not as a literary genre, but rather as a way of thinking and feeling – a mode of cognition."[213] Contending with this view, this thesis attempts to highlight the emotional discourse within each autobiography and its relevance to our understanding of the anti-fascist movement in 1930s Britain. Emotive language is present within all five case-studies, especially during discussions about the authors' childhoods. The cathartic act of writing an autobiography allows the authors to share their true opinions, and make statements about their parents, bosses, and teachers that they were unable to say to them at the time due. Discussing these events and emotions after they had

[208] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 79.
[209] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 130.
[210] Ibid., 30.
[211] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 18.
[212] Ibid., 55.
[213] Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', 25.

escaped their parents' authority allows them to write freely without fear of the consequences. Which in turn allows the reader to appreciate the importance of their childhood experiences and how it affected their development. Steedman argues that the study of memory sources in the past two centuries has focused on the connection to childhood memories and states that "the idea of the child was used to both recall and express the past that each individual life embodied."[214] Although the authors with a working-class background make it seem as if strained relationships and violence were common themes of working-class identity, it is important to remember that not all relationships suffered in the same way. These specific stories have been included as they provide a deeper insight into the making of these anti-fascist activists.

Political Development

The development of each authors' political conscience and lifestyle is an important aspect of this thesis as the case-studies infer that the anti-fascist movement in the 1930s was spearheaded by political thinkers, socialists, and Left-wing supporters. Political and social issues are rarely separated in historical analysis, and this is certainly the case with the recollections from the case-studies. The autobiographers' 'social conscience' and focus on social issues are enmeshed within their political beliefs and anti-fascist duties. The following section of this chapter will further identify and analyse each authors' political affiliations and their journey into political and social activism. An assessment of how far the anti-fascist movement was politically charged will open this section.

Jacobs argues that not "all the Jewish workers were either Socialists or Communists, or even just 'Left'."[215] The same is true for the anti-fascist movement. Therefore, it is important to note that whilst all of the case-study authors discuss their political activism, and anti-fascist engagement in unison, not all anti-fascists were political and not all Left-wingers and members of the working-class were anti-fascists. Specific examples of the BUF's anti-Semitic attacks and general violence towards anti-fascists will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. However, it is crucial to mention it here to demonstrate that a lot of anti-fascists were not involved in the movement because of their political ideologies, but due to the need to protect

[214] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 27.
[215] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 50.

themselves from further harassment. When discussing preparations for physical altercations with the BUF Piratin recalls telling the younger boys that "there was to be no politics when they were having a couple of rounds on the mat with the fascists."[216] This indicates that the animosity between the fascists and the anti-fascists was layered and went beyond a mere political disagreement. Furthermore, Graney, Piratin and Kapp were all involved in the anti-fascist movement outside of their respective political and social groups. It appears that Graney was never a member of any political party, and Kapp and Piratin claim to have been dedicated anti-fascists prior to joining the Communist Party.[217] Which further indicates that anti-fascists were not necessarily reliant on political affiliations, for some an understanding of the potentially devastating effects of fascism was enough for them to support the movement.

Morris was a keen member and supporter of the Labour League of Youth, however, contrastingly, he does recall being "highly critical of the Labour Party – particularly its leadership," throughout many stages of his life.[218] Testimony from subjects of both oral history and autobiography are moulded around the "social and cultural context" of the time in which they were recorded.[219] Morris' negative opinions of the Labour Party in the 1930s are reflective of his opinions of New Labour in the era in which he was writing his autobiography, in the final pages of his memoir he shares the belief that "New Labour has been a force for evil."[220] Following the dissolvement of the youth league Morris states that he remained loyal to his political beliefs and was persistent with participating in community activism.[221] Both Morris and Piratin reference their reaction to the tragedy that followed World War One as an influential factor for the development of their Left-wing beliefs.[222] This is a further example of how the male autobiographers' experiences, and the events they witnessed, acted as the driving force behind their interest in political and social issues. Piratin refers to himself as a 'self-taught' Communist and had no political guidance in his youth.[223] When referencing some of the literature he used to educate himself on Communist and

[216] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 17.
[217] Ibid., 5; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 172.
[218] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 59.
[219] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 79.
[220] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 205.
[221] Ibid., 59.
[222] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 3; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 38.
[223] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 4.

general Left-wing ideology, he mentions *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* as one of his first political reads.[224] Due to the sexist rhetoric for both women and men in that era, it can be assumed that a lot of men would not have chosen to buy something that was advertised for women, let alone admit it publicly. Piratin does not list a reason for using this book but his entire autobiography presents him as a progressive thinker, and it would be reasonable to assume that he would not be deterred by the pre-existing gender philosophies of that era. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest that all of the autobiographers were 'self-taught', as none of them specifically refer to their parents as being interested in politics. This is significant as it shows the authors wanted to pursue an activist lifestyle on their own accord and were not pressured into it by their families. In comparison, Jacobs, Piratin and Kapp imply that they were somewhat 'pressured' into following the Jewish faith as their parents all had a strong Jewish heritage.[225] – Popkin makes interesting comment in his study of autobiography about Jewish autobiographers who do not have a close relationship with the past – writing about their families and childhood experience of Judaism allows them to credit it – Popkin states this "autobiographical act" might be the first time in years that the author has recognised this part of their life.[226]

Kapp's journey into politics, socialism and community activism began far later in her life than it did for the other authors. In 1935, when Kapp was in her mid-30's she met Communist Party leader Harry Pollitt on her journey home from a visit to the Soviet Union and describes the trip as a "crucial turning point."[227] It was on this trip that she was convinced by Harry to become a member of the Communist Party after firstly insisting that she had no intention to become a Communist, or join any other political party.[228] Kapp insisted she was already a dedicated anti-fascist and Harry demanded that she would achieve much more if she was officially aligned with the Communists.[229] Despite her initial reluctance to join, like Piratin she remained a devoted Communist member till her death.[230] Jacobs refers to the General Strike of 1926 as one of his first

[224] Ibid.
[225] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 16; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 3; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 53.
[226] Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 243.
[227] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 172.
[228] Ibid., 173.
[229] Ibid., 137.
[230] Ibid., 295.

experiences with grass-roots activism and recalls offering his assistance with distributing leaflets and other grunt work. He continues to claim that this was the start of his hatred for the police, and he was "profoundly affected," by his sympathy for the miners.[231] Graney also names the General Strike as crucial to his political development and labels it as an inspirational grass-roots effort, claiming that "most people had never seen or envisaged anything like it."[232] As previously stated, Graney differs from the other autobiographers as he was not aligned to a specific political party.[233] He distinguishes himself from his fellow Left-wingers by claiming he was a doer and not a thinker, he did not read manifestos or take part in political debate, instead he felt his commitment was better spent on campaigning and fighting in the streets.[234] Graney demonstrates that one does not need to be a member of a political party to have an interest in political and social issues, which consequently highlights the power of community organisation. Jacobs' experience with the Communist Party could act as an example of why being an 'independent' social and political activist might have made it easier for him to pursue the tactics he believed would be most beneficial. He contends that his relationship with the Communist Party was rather complicated and he was expelled from the party twice, once in 1938 and once in 1952.[235] The reason for each expulsion completely contradicted the other and this Left Jacobs feeling exasperated, and unlike the first expulsion he made no attempt at appealing the decision.[236] Jacobs offers a variety of examples of his clashes within the party and disagreements with Communist Party leadership which will be analysed within the subsequent chapter. In fact, all of the authors recall questioning, and being disappointed by, the ideologies and leadership of their respective political and social groups, especially with regards to the initial plans for the Cable Street defence, which will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter These doubts are significant as the authors continued to pursue a Left-wing, activist lifestyle regardless of their reservations, therefore emphasising the importance of grassroots activism and socialism.

[231] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 27.
[232] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 47.
[233] Ibid., 147.
[234] Ibid., 221.
[235] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 306.
[236] Ibid.

McCrindle and Hollow discuss the presence of apparent resentment and embarrassment within memoirs from ex-Communists. Hollow noted how one of the autobiographies in his study was representative of "an entire generation of the Continental intelligentsia, baffled, angry and insecure."[237] Additionally, McCrindle references her own resentment of her Communist Party membership and clearly labels the tragedy of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 as the main reason for her abandonment and condemning the party.[238] Historians E. P Thompson and John Saville were among those who left the party in 1956.[239] She also writes of her disbelief when some of her former comrades "went into the revamped 1970s Communist Party…as if Hungary and what it meant had been forgotten."[240] In Kapp's autobiography she too mentions the Hungarian Uprising and the animosity it caused and claimed it "marked a turning point" in Communist history.[241] Kapp recalls having to reassess her beliefs and opinions of the Soviet Union and the CPGB's relationship with them, however she states her and her comrades "were not deflected from our course," and continued to support the Communist Party at home and abroad.[242] In Jacobs autobiography he references and criticises something that Piratin had said in his autobiography,

> 'In fact, Piratin in his book says, there were people who were saying 'Bash the Fascists wherever you see them'. That is not what we were saying at all but interpreting what we said in this way made it possible to make us look irresponsible and we could be called 'leftists.[243]

Jacobs' statement indicates that he is embarrassed to be referred to as a 'leftist,' which is odd as he was (at one time) dedicated to a party that sat firmly on the Left of the political scale. It is fair to argue that Jacobs' disapproving choice of words is due to the fact that he wrote the autobiography after being expelled from the Communist Party.[244] Unfortunately, Jacobs died unexpectedly before he could finish his

[237] Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 9.
[238] McCrindle, 'The Hungarian Uprising and a Young British Communist', 194.
[239] John Callaghan, 'The Left in Britain in the Twentieth Century', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 57 (2000): 105.
[240] McCrindle, 'The Hungarian Uprising and a Young British Communist', 198.
[241] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 265.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 151.
[244] Ibid., 298.

autobiography and therefore the final chapters are written by the editor.[245] Thus, it is difficult to comment on Jacobs' opinion of the Communist Party in his final years, though, it is clear that Jacobs' expulsion caused him to be resentful.[246] Consequently this supports the argument made by the aforementioned historians who claim that memoirs written by ex-Communists are riddled with negative connotations of shame and embarrassment. More analysis surrounding the case-study authors' views of the Communist Party, Labour Party and general Left-wing organisations will be present within the next chapter.

Community Engagement

Social historian Clare Langhamer argues that "all the ordinary people want, I believe, are three things – Happiness, Contentment and Security."[247] Her statement is supported by the stories provided by the case-study authors recollections of community activism. The authors, and their peers do not appear to be striving for power or extreme wealth and political gain, instead they are simply fighting for better conditions, fairer opportunities and safety from the potential rise of fascism. The final section of this chapter will highlight the case-study authors' dedication to community activism throughout their lives. Stories which emphasise their commitment to fighting oppression and improving their circumstances will demonstrate that political and social activism formed a large part of the authors' identities. Hunt argues that "it was locally that the majority of women (and men) engaged in or encountered politics," and this is evident within experiences of the autobiographers.[248] It seems from the content within their autobiographies that Graney, Jacobs and Piratin spent more of their life working as political and social activists than Morris and Kapp. However, it is clear within all of the autobiographies that neighbourliness, activism, and a dedication to Left-wing ideology was an important component of all their lives. Jacobs and Piratin use language that infers the East End was 'theirs', emphasising their strong connection to their community.[249] Jacobs makes references to intimate and supportive relationships between his family and others in the East End, he claims "the 'poor helping the poor'

[245] Ibid., 9.
[246] Ibid., 303.
[247] Langhamer, ''Who the Hell Are Ordinary People?', 18.
[248] Karen Hunt, 'The Local and the Everyday: Interwar Women's Politics', *The Local Historian Journal* 42, no. 4 (November 2012): 267.
[249] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 10; Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 11.

was a well-known fact of East End life," and this is demonstrated throughout this section.[250]

Despite her late bloom into socialism and communism Kapp was a devoted community activist and during the 1930s she opened her home to refugees from countries facing fascist threat and invasion.[251] All of the authors regularly reference their associations with, and support for international socialist and anti-fascist movements which emphasises their communities were not simply formed by geography but a connection through their ideologies and beliefs. The International Labour Defence and campaigns surrounding the Spanish Civil War are the most prominent examples and examples of this will be scattered throughout the remaining chapters. Kapp's autobiography reaffirms the 'typical' role of women in political organisations during that era, they are usually selected to handle administrative roles rather than being 'trained' for street battles or official party meetings. If a woman were involved in an official party meeting it would be fair to assume she was acting as the secretary. Kapp explains how she "formed a little band of local [Communist] Party women who…were willing to give their services to the Care Committee."[252] According to her, this was "a move that proved not at all acceptable in official quarters."[253] The other autobiographers rarely mention the involvement of women within the anti-fascist movement, or in community activism in general. Jacobs' references Labour MP Helena Roberts, as well as a dedicated Communist Party member named Mary Hughes, however there is no more than a couple of sentences for each woman and there is little praise for their participation in the anti-fascist movement.[254] Morris and Jacobs' describe their girlfriends (future wives) as anti-fascist supporters but make little reference to their physical involvement in the movement and Morris provides an example of his partner assisting him with administrative work such as "the usual folding and distribution of leaflets."[255] Jacobs recalls feeling guilty about not spending enough time with his mother and partner, but as they were not involved in the movement to the same extent he was, he was unable to give them the attention they required. He does however show an awareness and

[250] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 15.
[251] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 183.
[252] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 175.
[253] Kapp 175
[254] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 195.
[255] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 86.

appreciation of the women in his life, “I was lucky in having two women to see that I was looked after and loved.”[256] This statement also implies that regardless of their separation from the movement, his mother and partner were an essential part of his life and he needed their support. Kapp describes her experience with the Care Committee as a “terrible and wonderful experience,” she offers harrowing stories of tending to families and children who were visibly malnourished with rotten teeth and poor hygiene.[257] Kapp then explains their reasoning for keeping detailed records of the families whom they had helped, “we believed it would awaken, as it had aroused in us, an awareness of how millions of our fellow citizens were living and provide a moving account of a sample of London working-class life in the years 1936 to 1938.”[258] Kapp explains their reasoning for keeping detailed records of the families whom they had helped, “we believed it would awaken, as it had aroused in us, an awareness of how millions of our fellow citizens were living and provide a moving account of a sample of London working-class life in the years 1936 to 1938.”[259] Unfortunately, the Care Committee’s records were deemed to be ineffective and were destroyed during the air raids of World War Two.[260] Historians Hamilton and Shopes stress the value of memory sources as a way of “uncovering unknown stories.”[261] Kapp’s recollections about the Care Committee raises awareness of autobiographies ability to recover lost information as she reshares some of the data that was lost in the original records. Her reminiscences of being a part of the Care Committee continues to shed light on the insurmountable trauma and poverty that working-class families had to endure, and the communities’ willingness to help where possible.

Some of the case-study authors review their participation in campaigning for issues such as low wages, poor living conditions and supporting workers’ strikes. Jacobs reminisces a time when local Communist Party members worked alongside “militant trade unionists,”[262] to support those who were involved in the Fairdale strike. He states that a lot of hard work went into planning and executing fundraisers with the goal of raising money for those affected by the strike; an example of this is provided in Jacob’s

[256] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 189.
[257] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 175.
[258] Ibid., 176.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories*, viii.
[262] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 123.

description of a charity ball that was held in a local town hall.[263] This reaffirms that Jacobs was committed to grassroots activism, especially with regards to improving his community and helping his peers. Graney also recalls grassroots campaigns that he was involved in outside of the anti-fascist movement, with two entire chapters of his autobiography dedicated to the Jarrow March.[264] This march symbolised, and aimed to draw attention to, the suffering that many people throughout Britain were forced to withstand during this era.[265] Graney's memories of the demonstration paints a picture of an extraordinarily tiring and painful experience.[266] However, examples of extreme kindness, perseverance and hope are also enmeshed within his story.[267] These attributes are also present within most of the stories provided by the autobiographers which shows their dedication to the cause and support of one another compensated for the suffering. Stout argues that assessing stories of grassroots political organisations will allow the actual political practice of ordinary people to influence our vision of the politically possible."[268] Graney's provides an inspirational account that has the potential to encourage future generations facing similar struggles to organise themselves, remain positive and fight for a better life.

There are multiple examples in Jacobs' and Piratin's autobiographies that focus on tenants issues as a leading cause for concern in the East End.[269] Jacobs recalls memories of when he, and other members within his Communist Party branch worked with the National Unemployment Workers' Movement in order to assist "a woman and her three small children became destitute and were threatened with eviction, from their home."[270] He describes how they found temporary location for the woman and her children to stay whilst they barricaded the themselves within her property, after a standoff with the police the woman was granted an extension on her rent payments.[271] Piratin recalls a similar event, however the families whom he and his friends were helping were actually BUF supporters.[272] Piratin says that the families they helped told

[263] Ibid.
[264] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 149.
[265] Ibid., 151.
[266] Ibid., 157.
[267] Ibid., 160.
[268] Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*, xvi.
[269] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 115; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 35.
[270] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 114.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 29.

them the BUF had never provided such hands-on support in the way the local Communists and their neighbours did that day, and their "BUF membership cards were destroyed voluntarily and in disgust."[273] This story places the anti-fascists in an extremely positive light to the reader, it proves that Piratin and his comrades were committed to doing anything within their power to help their community, regardless of their political affiliations and ideological differences. The following chapter will trail the themes of community and grassroots organisations that are present within this one whilst more specifically examining its presence within the anti-fascist movement.

[273] Ibid., 32.

Chapter 3: Masses Against Mosley

This thesis focuses on the experiences of anti-fascists aligned with the Jewish community, the Trade Unions, the Communist Party or the Labour party, and their involvement in the anti-fascist movement is the dominant theme of this chapter. The case-study autobiographers' representations of their respective political and social groups' grassroots campaigns against the BUF and the formation of the anti-fascist movement will be the centre of this chapter. An assessment of the authors' discussions about the united front and their views on its significance will also be featured. Day-to-day anti-fascist activities, demonstrations, and the autobiographers' discussions and opinions of the police and British government will be analysed to conclude this chapter.

Was the Anti-Fascist Movement a United Front?

Before assessing the autobiographers' representations of the united front, it is necessary to explore the involvement of individual social, political and religious factions. Lunn and Thurlow call attention to the increasing fear among the Jewish communities in Britain at this time, which is reflected in the *Jewish Chronicle* from 1912 with a steady increase until after the Second World War.[274] Prior to Mosley other fascist groups, such as the British Brothers League had published anti-Semitic propaganda as well as threatening and bullying local Jewish communities. However, it has been argued that anti-Semitism was not of significant concern until WWI.[275] Case-study authors Piratin and Graney make known the specific acts of violence that were set upon Jewish residents of East End London and Manchester, Piratin claims that "Jews were attacked every time when they were outnumbered or in no position to defend themselves, such as elderly people or children."[276] Whereas Graney states that Mosley "did hold provocative meetings in Jewish quarters," but the BUF refused to claim accountability for the defilement and burning-down of local synagogues.[277] Historians Bourke and Copsey describe horrific scenes of "Jew-baiting," which involved "'the impaling of pigs' heads on poles wrapped in Union Jacks and placed in

[274] Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow, eds., *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain*, First Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), 22.
[275] Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 11.
[276] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 16.
[277] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 163.4

front of synagogues," and members of the Jewish community being followed home and viciously assaulted.[278] Bourke continues to state that "fascist graffiti, and the destruction of Jewish property expressed the willingness of many East End residents to make Jews into scapegoats for local social and economic ills."[279] Jacobs recalls seeing this graffiti and claims that the slogan "Kill the Jews" was seen across the East End.[280] Jacobs describes his experience with anti-Semitism as a very young age, claiming that he was bullied for being Jewish by the other children as well as the teachers and other members or staff.[281] His autobiography does not have a lot of emotive writing but it is clear he struggled with this time in his childhood, he states he "became very frustrated and developed an uncontrollable temper."[282] Piratin recalls that the BUF "began to change the direction of their propaganda as the circumstances in Britain themselves changed."[283] Historians regularly discuss Jewish immigrants' susceptibility to fascist intimidation, as Tilles argues they were "ready-made scapegoats for local discontent," which was rife in the United Kingdom due to the devastating effects of the First World War and the Great Depression.[284] Details of the relentless attacks against the Jewish people are scattered across the pages of each case-study autobiography. Emotive language is used constantly throughout the autobiographies but especially when referencing the vicious and discriminating attacks they faced at the hands of the BUF. This is an important aspect of their stories as it firmly places Mosley and the BUF as the 'enemy' in the eyes of the reader. It could be argued that any violence on behalf of the anti-fascists is justified by the haunting facts in their narration.

When the BUF adopted their anti-Semitic campaign the Jewish community looked to the Communist Party for an alliance against a common enemy.[285] However, Bourke makes it clear that this was "not because of any strong Communist conviction, but 'in the desperate belief' that Communists were the only group vigorously defending their

[278] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 37; Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 199.
[279] Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, 199.
[280] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 195.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid., 18.
[283] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 15.
[284] Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40*, 130.
[285] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51.

general interests."[286] The Communist Party regarded themselves as the leaders of the united front and this is starkly highlighted within Piratin's recollections of the movement.[287] He describes the Communist Party as the commanders of the united front, and despite mentioning the contribution of those not affiliated with the Communists, he is clearly reluctant to give praise to anyone besides his own comrades.[288] One of many examples of this assertion of Communist dominance can be found in Piratin's conclusion of the Battle of Cable Street, "the Communist Party had shown itself capable of leading the working class in keeping the fascists off the Stepney streets when the Government and the police, ignoring the requests of the London citizens, had attempted to foist the fascists upon them."[289] Piratin's claims draw attention to discussions surrounding the concept of intention within memory sources. Prys-Williams stated that Coombes' autobiography *These Poor Hands* "is shaped by an awareness of what would be successfully marketable in the ethos created by The Left Book Club in the 1930s, when solidarity, heroism and the decency of working men was seen as a powerful force in the fight against fascism."[290] If Piratin was aware of the potential popularity of his autobiography, it is reasonable to argue that it would be difficult to abstain from overly praising the Communist Party. Furthermore, Stout claims that personal testimonies from authors who were "engaged in conflict," will often be, "to some degree self-serving, self-deceived, biased…or based on wishful thinking."[291] This is evident within Piratin's assertion that the Communist Party were the most important and influential faction of the movement. It should be considered that Piratin's positive perspective on the importance of the Communist Party in the fight against fascism is due to the time in which he wrote his memoirs. His autobiography was published in 1948, prior to the aforementioned Hungarian Uprising crisis of 1956 and the path to the Second World War which Clarke argues, "exposed…the wild oscillations in Communist policy."[292] In comparison, Jacobs regularly refers to the excellent work carried out by the Communists in the anti-fascist movement, however this is paralleled with negative comments about

[286] Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, 201.
[287] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 17.
[288] Ibid., 25.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Prys-Williams, *Twentieth-Century Autobiography*, 2.
[291] Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*, xvii.
[292] Oscar Clarke, 'The End of British Communism', *History Today*, 11 November 2019, https://www.historytoday.com/history-matters/end-british-communism.

Communist leadership and ideology.[293] Jacobs' autobiography was written after he had been expelled twice from the party, this a potential reason to why Jacobs' writing has more negative aspects in comparison to Piratin's.[294] Regardless of Piratin's proclamations, Jupp argues that the Labour Party, "with considerable justification, saw itself as the 'United front of the working class' and found little reason for joint activity with secretariat minorities on the Left."[295] Alongside the Jewish community, trade unionists were a preferred target for the BUF.[296] Graney recalls how the BUF used to gain access to the addresses of trade unionists who were on strike, so the fascists knew exactly where to locate them for intimidation purposes.[297] Graney argued that it was obvious the BUF were bankrolled by local business men in the industrial sector "particularly when you look at their favourite target – the trade unions."[298] Links between the BUF and local business men, police and the government is a common theme within the case-study autobiographies and will be explored further later in the chapter.

When fascism began to rise in Britain the individual political parties, religious and social groups that opposed fascism were reluctant to set aside their differences and pursue a unified defence against Mosley.[299] Piratin specifically highlights the hostility between the Communist and Labour Party members, claiming that "the Labour Party shrieked to their members, directly and through the *Daily Herald*, to keep away and not be misled by the Communists."[300] At a trade union congress in 1923, it was recorded that Labour MPs urged the congress to "not allow itself to be side-tracked into expressions of sympathy with people who are just as big enemies to the Labour Movement as the Fascists are".[301] Hodgson underlines the unwillingness from the Labour Party and trade unions to fight with the Communists,

> The Left were divided over the question of how best to respond to Hitler's success…as he had drawn nearer to power, Labour and the TUC did not allow

[293] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 151.
[294] Ibid., 306.
[295] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, 25.
[296] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 163.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 17.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 85.

> unalloyed anti-fascism to outweigh their opposition to communism, and they dismissed calls for a united action with other parties of the Left in Britain or abroad.[302]

In 1933 the Labour Party's determination to escape coalition with the Communists was tested when the "Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism," was formed which employed both Communist and Labour members.[303] Refusal to approve this committee was decisive across the Labour Party, and "Labour leadership banned its members from having links with the CPGB."[304] An article from *The Times* in 1933 shows that the Labour Party advised their supporters to avoid being drawn into organisations that have a large number of Communist members, some of named organisations included the East London Anti-Fascist Committee, and the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism.[305] Labour, along with the TUC, were formidable in their determination to not let the looming threat of fascism outweigh their disdain for the Communists, in Britain and abroad. In Bourke's analysis of working-class cultures in Britain she references ant-Semitism within journals published by Labour and the Trade Unions, "one editorial said, 'alien' immigration would 'besmirch the fair name of England and corrupt the sweetness of our national life and character."[306] Moreover, Copsey discusses claims that the Stepney Labour Party were guilty of extreme anti-Semitism.[307] The recollections in the case-study authored by Morris, somewhat invalidates this view, he was both Jewish and a Labour supporter in the East End, and does not reference any experience of anti-Semitic discrimination from his friends and peers within the Labour party in the Stepney area. One person's views and experiences can act as evidence for historical research, but it cannot always be considered as factual as one person's experience and opinions does not speak for a collective and it is important to remember when analysing memory sources. References to the Labour Party's and Trade Unions' aversion to working with Communists speaks to the possibly damaging public opinion of the Communist Party during that era. In chapter two there is a reference to Morris' father attacking him after

[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid., 86.
[304] Ibid.
[305] The Times, 'Communism And Labour', *The Times*, 25 May 1933, 18, The Times Digital Archive.
[306] Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, 200.
[307] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 38.

Britain declared war as he believed it was the Communists who were at fault.[308] His father's reaction is representative of the negative public opinion towards the Communists at the time.

The autobiographers do reference working with those outside of their respective groups, however in their writing they do not make a clear statement on whether or not they considered this to be an important aspect of the movement. Graney speaks to the value of mass attendance at demonstrations by stating that "one small group of a dozen could not do much good, but eventually all the little anti-Fascist groups began to work together."[309] He recalls witnessing "various trades union and Socialist groups, the Young Communist League, the Communist party, and the Jewish community themselves…banding together to fight back."[310] Although he does state this was only successful to a "certain extent."[311] When fascist intimidation increased in the mid-1930s, the Communist Party decided to replace the slogan 'class against class' and move forward as publicly "in favour of the Popular Front."[312] Jacobs provides a substantial amount of information about the Communists effort to form, and maintain a united front.[313] He declares that, "in Stepney, we were holding more open branch meetings in order to bring in people from the Trade Unions and Labour Party and other, for more discussion of our full programme, including our objective, Social Revolution."[314] The choice to use the phrase 'social revolution' is extremely bold, and exemplifies the intensity of Jacobs' (and the Communist Party's) belief that Britain was in need of a social and political transformation. Jacobs also comments on how many Jewish people, trade unionists, Labour and Communist members already had experience working with one another in the local factories and during workers strikes, which laid a foundation for communication about a united front.[315]

Another example of the Communist Party's attempts to sustain a unified and durable coalition comes from Jacobs' recollections about a week-long exhibition, planned by

[308] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 36.
[309] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 165.
[310] Ibid., 164.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 172.
[313] Jacobs
[314] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 200.
[315] Ibid., 123.

the local activists which was aptly named the “Week of Peace and Democracy.”[316] Jacobs recalls the opening speech from Labour MP Helena Roberts,

> when councillor…Roberts opened the exhibition, she said ‘I did not consider who had sent the invitation, at least we are some people prepared to do something. I’m tired of speeches only’. This was a clear reference to the fact that she, along with other Labour people, were in fact working with the Communists and being prepared to do so in the face of threat to peace and democracy. For this was the ‘United Front’ in action.[317]

Within Jacob’s summary of the exhibition, it is clear within his writing that he was proud of what he and his comrades had achieved, “I felt we had done a good job in making direct contact in a concrete way, with so many people who had always regarded us Communists with great suspicion if not hostility. He describes this as the real ‘United Front’.”[318] Jacobs and Piratin provide extensive details about the efforts made by the Communist party to include all anti-fascists, regardless of their social or political background, in the demonstrations and marches they had planned. For an opposition march to Hyde Park in September 1934, the Communists released "leaflets in Yiddish to Jews to warn them they must learn the lesson of Germany."[319] Jacobs explains this “was done because 9th September happened to be the eve of the Jewish New Year when most Jews would be in their synagogues. We called on Jews to do their ‘duty’ and go to Hyde Park.”[320] Another example offered by Jacobs discusses a demonstration arranged at Trafalgar Square, he claims that “we were getting a big response from the Labour Party members for our demonstration on June 7th.”[321] Piratin recalls approaching “trades councils, trade unions and Labour Parties to participate,” in the infamous Battle of Cable Street.[322] He continues, "for the Cable Street defence, we called particularly on the local dockers and other inhabitants; they rallied to a man."[323]

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[316] Ibid., 195.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Lunn and Thurlow, *British Fascism*, 91.
[320] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 144.
[321] Ibid., 205.
[322] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 20.
[323] Ibid., 21.

Whilst the autobiographers do offer examples of when they worked with those outside of their regular social and political groups, it appears that there are more examples of the day-to-day activities carried out by each author's individual faction. It should be remembered that the East End had a variety of inhabitants and was a multi-ethnic area, and therefore, it could be argued that political and social movements within the East End are likely to have supporters with from mixed political, social and religious groups.[324] The recollections provided by the autobiographers' suggest that the united front was formed sporadically and temporarily throughout the 1930s and it appears that the individual factions were only interested in forming a coalition for the large demonstrations such as Cable Street and Olympia. Therefore, this thesis concludes that a coalition was only formed when it seemed 'strength in numbers' was the best tactic. Graney even stated that he believes "when you're physically involved in this sort of thing, you only see your immediate circle."[325] This thesis has concluded that the aspect of the united front was not as significant to the autobiography authors as it appears to be in historical scholarship. Academics have access to decades worth of information about the 1930s anti-fascist movement and thus they are able to assess the movement with a wide lens. Researching the multiple groups that were involved in the movement could make it seem like a united front was a significant aspect of their success. Whereas the autobiographers are using own memory and perspective to recall the movement and cannot adopt a 'birds eye view' to their writing. Graney synopsises this argument by stating, "I never saw the whole picture, because only the intellectual who stands at the back and reads the books ever sees the whole picture. The bloke at the front getting his ribs kicked in sees nothing except the bloke who is kicking him."

From the information and opinions in the case-studies it can be concluded that the main forces of reluctance to form a coalition came from officials within the respective political, social, and religious groups. Jacobs' makes this clear when stating it was the "forces at the top who were critical," when it seemed to him that "all the positive activity going on, was very often initiated at the local level."[326] Bourke claims that one of the

[324] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 20.
[325] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 221.
[326] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 151.

reasons the Jewish community looked to the Communists for protection was because they felt disappointment by the feeble attempts of British Board of Jewish Deputies to do so.[327] This implication that the non-leading members of the anti-fascist factions were willing to work together regardless of the animosity between their respective officials highlights a difference between grassroots and 'official' politics. The grassroots organisations are able to put aside their bias and pursuit of power in order to fight a common enemy. As the ordinary citizens were the ones facing the brunt of the BUF's violent attacks, it is fair to assume that finding a solution and forming a mass opposition would be more urgent for them.

Anti-Fascist Grassroots Activism

An essential component of the anti-fascist movement's success in contributing to the fall of the BUF was the skill and dedication that went into the grassroots campaigning carried out by the anti-fascists. Hunt claims that in the 1920s and especially the 1930s, the power of grassroots organisations was "recognised by all the political parties which made a greater effort to build up a grassroots membership and to engage with the new electorate."[328] The anti-fascist movement in 1930s Britain was comprised of mostly working-class activists who campaigned on city streets, organised protests and meetings, supplied anti-fascist propaganda and held powerful street corner speeches.[329] The previous chapter examined the case-study authors' experiences with local activism and the sense of community that was present within all of their lives. This chapter aims to build on that discussion with regards to grassroots campaigning that specifically references anti-fascist demonstrations.

Small anti-fascist brigades were scattered across the country and their willpower and ability to organise themselves successfully, proved fatal to Mosley's attempts at overthrowing British democracy.[330] This is evident within each of the case-studies, and their grassroots anti-fascist work and dedication to community politics is the main feature of this chapter. The recollections being analysed within this chapter range from non-militant campaigning to specific details of anti-fascist marches and demonstrations, such as Olympia and Hyde Park, and especially the Battle of Cable

[327] Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, 201.
[328] Hunt, 'The Local and the Everyday: Interwar Women's Politics', 267.
[329] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 52.
[330] Ibid.

Street. Piratin proudly claimed that there was never "such unity of all sections of the working class as was seen on the barricades of Cable Street."[331] His memories and evaluation of this infamous battle will be evaluated alongside the other case-studies to emphasise the significance of this event, and to highlight the extent of the efforts made by the working-class anti-fascists. As well as this, there will be an exploration into the descriptions of police violence towards the anti-fascists, and an examination of claims that the BUF were 'supported' by the police and the government. Stout argues that "one needs to look away from the centres of elite power and ask ordinary citizens what they are actually doing in their own communities to organised, exert power and demand accountability."[332] His study of grassroots democracy within third-world countries aims to highlight the influence of local political organisations in order to encourage this kind of democracy in contemporary society. Similarly, the work carried out by the 1930s anti-fascist movement was incredibly significant and drawing attention to this highlights that grassroots activism is an effective political tool.

Jacobs provides an example of a non-militant tactic used by the anti-fascists, where they put pressure on local city and town authorities to deny the BUF's requests to use various venues for meetings and speeches.[333] Jacobs recalls that along with some of the Communist Party branches in East London, he canvassed for the BUF headquarters in Hackney to be closed.[334] Regrettably, he does not offer a conclusion to this story or any information about whether or not it was a success. This acts as a reminder that autobiographies are comprised of memory, rather than recorded fact, and unfortunately it is not uncommon for unfinished stories to be scattered throughout a person's memoirs. However, Jacobs does provide an example of when their non-militant tactics were triumphant, in Oxford the anti-fascists were able to get the BUF's permission to use the Oxford Town Hall for their meetings revoked.[335] Autobiographies are often written by elderly people, who want to reminisce and reflect on their life, Summerfield refers to this as the "process of 'life review'."[336] She claims that this "occurs in reminiscence in old age and typically involves three features; looking back

[331] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 23.
[332] Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*, xiii.
[333] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 180.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid., 196.
[336] Summerfield, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice', 2.

questioningly to evaluate a life as it was lived; comparisons of the self with other individuals or of the younger with the older self; and the search for self-affirmation."[337] However, this thesis challenges this view by analysing the juxtaposition between memories which have been forgotten and those which are remembered vividly. There are a few examples in Jacobs' autobiography where he leaves stories unfinished or scatters them in an unchronological order. Whereas there are also examples of Jacobs' providing extreme detail about his involvement in anti-fascist battles, and stories about friends and family.[338] He offers precise and intricate information about the Battle of Cable Street, and very specific detail about conversations between friends.[339] For example, he dedicated almost a whole page retelling a story about when Nat Cohen decided to cycle to Belgium, even though he could not ride a bike at the time and was certain he could learn within one day.[340] In a story about local Communist Party member Mary Hughes, Jacobs can even recall what colour her coat was.[341] Why does he remember these people and events so clearly and not others? It is possible to argue the incomplete or undetailed memories are less important to the narrator's life and therefore less important in their life story. Nat Cohen and Mary Hughes had an impact on Jacobs' life, and therefore even insignificant details about them are clear within his mind. Memory is unreliable, and it is reasonable that historians deem this a disadvantage to studying memory. However, even if an autobiography is not reliable about the specific subject in discussion, it does not mean that the source is useless. It can be analysed through a variety of approaches and provide valuable information about a range of disciplines.

Similarly to Graney and Piratin, Jacobs recalls memories of doing what he describes as "donkey work," which included "advertising, canvassing and literature sales."[342] Piratin discusses the disagreements among the Communists and the united front on how best to move forward with the anti-fascist movement, he states that he "took matters into his own hands," and pushed his comrades to take their campaigning into the fascist dominated areas of East London."[343] He and his friends infiltrated one of

[337] Ibid.
[338] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 251.
[339] Ibid., 236.
[340] Ibid., 175.
[341] Ibid., 195.
[342] Ibid., 113.
[343] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 27.

Mosley's closed member speeches by impersonating a BUF supporter. Piratin describes his shock and disappointment when he recognised some of the BUF members and "some of the men wore trade-union badges," even though the trade-unions were one of the BUF's main targets.[344] He wrote that he believed a rise in anti-Semitism in Britain was a contributing factor to why trade-unionists, and other working-class men and women may have supported Mosley. In that time it was unfortunate that racism had "a strong backing in British institutions and explicitly racist organisations have won considerable support within working-class districts."[345] Bourke calls attention to the ironic fact that the BUF resided in the East End of London, which housed a large population of the Jewish community.[346] She continues to state that "in the London County Council elections of March 1937, the British Union won 23 per cent of the vote in North East Bethnal Green, 19 per cent in Stepney (Limehouse), and 14 per cent in Shoreditch."[347] Piratin then states that he believed it was Mosley's promises of a restored economy and a more prosperous future that enticed them to join the BUF, he said "these people, like most in East London, were living miserable, squalid lives. Their homes were slums, many were unemployed."[348] Bourke supports this by claiming "the depression had politicised the working-class man," and Mosley took advantage of those who were susceptible to rhetoric. This highlights a valuable aspect of studying memory sources as Piratin has provided a window into the struggles and emotions of the 1930s.

As well as the non-militant tactics, the anti-fascists also engaged in demonstrations, marches and protests, which were often violent. Hodgson highlights that "violence on the streets increasingly moved from the Distressed Areas to London, Manchester and other major cities in reaction to the rise of the BUF."[349] Face-to-face combat was becoming increasingly common throughout the 1930s, and it became clear that many anti-fascists thought physical combat was the only non-exhausted tactic remaining. Morris claims that altercations were so common that most days there was a "steady stream of anti-fascists appearing at Old Street Magistrates Court, to be fined or in

[344] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 163.
[345] Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, 198.
[346] Ibid., 200.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 18.
[349] Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 2.

some cases imprisoned for 'causing an affray' or a 'breach of peace."[350] Copsey asserts that the anti-fascists were guilty of inciting violence with the BUF as they knew the fascists had were easy to provoke.[351] Therefore the anti-fascists "looked to use fascist violence as a way of denying the BUF political and social respectability."[352] Graney's memories support this as he recalls that in preparation for a counter-rally at Queen's Park his fascist brigade trained one another to fight and gathered as many make-shift weapons as possible.[353] He also admits to being part of a group who were organising physical clashes and gathered "about 200 or 300 blokes willing to battle it out."[354] Violence as a motif for working-class identity was discussed in the previous chapter where the authors recalled witnessing and experiencing violence often within their childhood. It is clear from the aggressive reactions being described here that the presence of violence within their communities was as relevant to their adulthood as it was to their childhood. Piratin claims that a commonly used phrase among the Communists in the East End was, "bash the fascists whenever you see them."[355] Which indicates that the Communist Party was among those who supported militant tactics, however, in Jacob's autobiography, he references this exact quote from Piratin's autobiography and condemns his support of the phrase.[356] In contrast to Piratin, Jacob's autobiography suggests that the Communist Party were not among those who were in favour of violent campaigns. It is intriguing that two men with a similar upbringing and lifestyle should have completely differing opinions on a subject that they are both entangled in. This contradiction foreshadows the aforementioned clashes within the Communist Party during the 1930s.

Despite the claim that anti-fascists often instigated physical combat with the BUF does not diminish the fact that they were an extremely violent political organisation. Graney asserts that if you were caught by the fascists at one of their rallies "you were usually a hospital case."[357] On 7th June 1934 Mosley organised another mass fascist rally at the Olympia stadium in London.[358] Piratin recalls that as he stood outside of the

[350] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51.
[351] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 15.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 165.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 18.
[356] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 151.
[357] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 169.
[358] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 23.

Olympia stadium he "watched the anti-fascists ejected from the building, many in a state of collapse, bleeding profusely, clothes torn and tattered."[359] Olympia rally attendee and anti-fascist activist Lou Kenton claimed that this demonstration was an important event as it was one of the first times that the BUF's terrifyingly violent nature was bought to the attention of the media and the general public.[360] This is evident within the reactions of 'neutral' witnesses, an example of this is provided by Piratin quoting a scathing review of the BUF's violent debacle at Olympia.[361] Baldwin's Parliamentary Private Secretary Geoffrey Lloyd stated, "I can only say it was a deeply shocking scene for an Englishman to see in London…I came to the conclusion that Mosley was a political maniac, and that all decent English people must combine to kill this movement."[362] Coverage of the chaos at Olympia and a realisation that the BUF were mirroring the violent tactics of their German counterparts caused BUF membership to plummet.[363] And Copsey claims that Olympia "was the catalyst for a surge in anti-fascist feeling throughout London and elsewhere."[364] Furthermore, Pugh argues that once Mosley's violent tactics were publicised he alienated himself from "a public deeply committed to British traditions of free speech and fair play."[365] At the Olympia rally the movement accomplished their goal of disrupting Mosley's speech, but they also managed to publicise the danger that was being afflicted on certain communities at the hands of the fascists. This event could be considered a turning point in the fight between the BUF and anti-fascists and therefore the authors' recollections and unique additions are important.

Copsey draws attention to the anti-fascist activity that took place in towns and cities outside of London, and specifically references Manchester as city with a large population of Jewish citizens that was targeted by Mosley's anti-Semitic crusade.[366] He continues to state that the Jewish branch of the Young Communist League were instrumental in the fight against fascism in Manchester and were regularly leading

[359] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 7.
[360] Imperial War Museum, 'Kenton, Louis (Oral History)', Imperial War Museums, 2008, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80032703.
[361] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 7.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 267.
[364] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 21.
[365] Martin Pugh, 'The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia Debate', *The Historical Journal* 41, no. 2 (1998): 531.
[366] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 40.

physical altercations with the BUF.[367] As Graney's anti-fascist activism centred in and around Manchester it might appear difficult to analyse his autobiography alongside the other authors' experiences. However, despite the different settings, all of their stories mirror one another, and a true dedication to the cause is present throughout all five memoirs. Kaufman argues that regardless of location, different people or the nature of the conflict, the story is always the same.[368] The inclusion of Graney's autobiography within this thesis highlights that the anti-fascist movement was not just central to the East End and other cities were just as valuable in the fight against fascism. Queen's Park in Manchester and Hyde Park and Olympia stadium in London are examples of parallel counter-rallies that took place in the 1930s.[369] These events also show that as well as holding their own meetings and demonstrations, a popular tactic was to disrupt as many BUF rallies as possible.[370] In fact there were 117 public meetings run by the BUF in 1936, and of these it is noted that 57 were prevented from taking place in an orderly fashion because of the actions of the anti-fascists.[371]

It appears that preventing Mosley from being able to deliver his speeches was a common aim for the anti-fascist counter-rallies, and this can be seen in Graney's recollections of the events at Queen's Park. Mosley planned to hold an open rally in Queen's Park in the early 1930's and the anti-fascists in the area decided to hold a counter demonstration in the same location.[372] Upon arriving at Queen's Park the anti-fascists realised that the BUF had a large van which they had transformed into a platform with multiple speakers on top.[373] Therefore the anti-fascist speeches could not be heard and the counter-rally had to be briefly abandoned.[374] Graney states that he and his friends decided to "sneak round and try and upset the amplifiers, cut the wires or something, pull the leads off the batteries, we did manage to pull a few wires

[367] Ibid., 41.
[368] Kaufman, *Community Power & Grassroots Democracy*, 1.
[369] Julie V. Gottlieb, 'Feminism and Anti-Fascism in Britain: Militancy Revived?', in *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State*, ed. Nigel Copsey and David Renton (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), 118,_5; Paul Graney and Barry Seddon, *One Bloke: A Manchester Man's Tale of Two Decades* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 2011), 165; John Newsinger, 'Blackshirts, Blueshirts, and the Spanish Civil War', *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 3 (2001): 834.
[370] Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 136.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Manchester Central Library, 'The Life and Sounds of Paul Graney', 9 June 2016, https://manchesterarchiveplus.wordpress.com/2016/06/09/the-life-and-sounds-of-paul-graney/.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Ibid.

out and stop the speakers."[375] This story is representative of the skill and cunning that allowed the anti-fascist to fight against an organisation with what seemed to be unlimited funding. Despite their limited access to resources, the case-studies tell stories of "how the poorest of the poor, despite daunting obstacles, transformed themselves into effective political actors who insisted on being heard."[376] Jacobs' summary of the success of Olympia also supports the analysis that the anti-fascists did not want Mosley's harmful rhetoric to be heard, "so effective was our penetration into Olympia that despite repeated attempts, Mosley was unable to make his speech because of the noise and the fighting."[377]

In September 1934 Mosley planned a mass rally at Hyde Park, and similarly to the events of Queen's Park and Olympia, the anti-fascists decided to interrupt and take control of the meeting and turn it into their own demonstration.[378] Jacobs' states that they used advertisements to announce their plan to the local community and attempt to assemble a large group of protesters.[379] The *Daily Worker* printed the headline, "'Turn Fascist Rally into Anti-Fascist Triumph'," [380] and more than one million leaflets were circulated throughout London. The advertisements seemed to be effective as Jacobs' claims there was a crowd of over 150,000 anti-fascists.[381] He continues to describe the rally as an "utter fiasco," with police charging in all directions,[382] however, a clip published by the British Pathé Gazette claims the opposite.[383] The narrator of the clip speaks over images of the enormous crowd at Hyde Park and states, "so excellent was the police organisation…that there was little or no trouble."[384] The report from British Pathé Gazette appears to be disregarding the level of catastrophe that occurred at the Hyde Park demonstration, potentially because they do not want to advertise the extreme disorder of British politics and society during this era. Whereas it could be argued Jacobs' is writing with the intent of emphasising the damage he and

[375] Ibid.
[376] Orleck, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980*, 2.
[377] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 139.
[378] British Pathé, 'Fascist and Anti - Fascist Meeting', accessed 10 February 2021, https://www.britishpathe.com/video/fascist-and-anti-fascist-meeting.
[379] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 143.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid., 145.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Pathé, 'Fascist and Anti - Fascist Meeting'.
[384] Ibid.

his comrades caused at the fascist rally. And therefore, would not downplay the chaos of the event. Jacobs concludes his reflections about Hyde Park with another reference to *Daily Worker* and reiterates their summary of the event, "the front page of the Daily Worker reported this as, 'Only the first step in organising our might forces'. It said, 'Drown the Blackshirts in a sea of working-class activity!"[385]

Graney refers to a BUF meeting at Hulme Town Hall as "one of the biggest fascist meetings…in Manchester," he states that the anti-fascists were forbidden from gathering in large crowds, so their strategy was to remain in smaller groups and wander around the hall.[386] Graney's statement that "anti-fascist demonstrators were not allowed to collect in crowds," suggests that it was only the anti-fascists who were prohibited from assembling. This suggests a potential bias of the police in favour of the fascists. Graney says that he stayed in the area until the early hours of the morning "practising guerrilla tactics."[387] His use of this phrase shows that he aims to represent himself, and the movement, as soldierly. Similarly, prior to the Olympia rally, "two or three leading members of the CPGB had made a 'tour of inspection' of Olympia's surrounding neighbourhood in order to familiarise themselves with the layout."[388] Which again presents the anti-fascist movement as an extremely organised, almost military-style operation. In Kaufman's study of the 1990 election in Haiti, he states that "people were creating grassroots organisations that…seemed to have the potential of turning the common people into the shapers of their own destinies."[389] This statement is also applicable to the 1930s British anti-fascist movement, the stories that have been analysed in this section show that ordinary men (and women) were more than capable of controlling their own destinies and shaping the political landscape of their country.

Authority Against Anti-Fascists

A recurring theme within the case-studies is a focus on police brutality and the incompetence of the law in protecting Britain against the fascists. Graney's, Jacobs', Morris' and Piratin's recollections it appears the authors are aiming to draw attention

[385] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 145.
[386] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 170.
[387] Ibid., 171.
[388] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 18.
[389] Kaufman, *Community Power & Grassroots Democracy*, 11.

to the unfortunate presence of police brutality and fascist sympathising within history in order to spread awareness and praise those who oppose it. With a sense of exasperation Graney states that "everything was designed to protect the fascists," and has never been able to comprehend the thought process behind the police and the government's apparent 'support' of Mosley.[390] Kapp does not offer much information or analysis about police brutality, it is possible to argue this is because, as a woman, she was not involved in the street brawls where the alleged brutality would have taken place. It is also worth noting that the male autobiographers' working-class upbringing contributed to their aversion to the police, and as Kapp did not have the same upbringing she might not have had the same predisposed negative view of the police force. Academics have highlighted the conflicting within historical accounts "the Left claimed that the government and police were prejudiced in favour of Mosley and were convinced that the National Government was favourable to fascism," though the fascists argued the contrary.[391] The following section of this paper will analyse the case-study authors experiences with police violence and their opinions of the effectiveness of the government in dealing with the BUF.

Graney and Morris both provide examples of the unfair ways in which they and their friends had been treated by the police and the law outside of anti-fascist rallies.[392] In Graney's retelling of his involvement in the Jarrow march he states that at one point during the march the police cornered the activists and began attacking them. He continues to say that it still makes him angry when he thinks about the unfair way in which they were treated, "we had been given permission…but as soon as they had us sealed off in a quiet corner, they just laid into us."[393] During his description of the planning that took place before the march, Graney states that they had to confirm they knew the rules for procession before they could be granted permission.[394] According to Graney they were not allowed to "march neither in steps, nor in fours," as marching in unison was reserved especially for the Army.[395] Morris claims that Mosley "introduced the uniformed marches and political violence to the streets of the East

[390] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 167.
[391] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, 50.
[392] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 153; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 52.
[393] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 153.
[394] Ibid., 151.
[395] Ibid.

End."[396] The fact the BUF were able to do this and the anti-fascists were not shows a clear bias. Morris recalls a story told by one of his closest friends and fellow activists Joe Morrison, he was out selling their League's newspaper when a large group of fascist brutes began to assault him.[397] Morrison ran into a local police station to seek help, "only to find himself charged with creating a disorder."[398] These instances clearly represent the unethically different ways in which the fascists and anti-fascists were treated by the law.

Piratin and Jacobs discuss police reaction to anti-fascist presence at BUF rallies and at their own demonstrations and speeches. Jacobs' names a rally at Victoria Square Park as a notable example of police brutality and claims the officers forcibly assaulted them with no hesitation.[399] From Jacobs' memories it appears the police used any excuse to begin an attack, even if an anti-fascist were to "press forward to ask a question…was immediately set upon by the police."[400] In Piratin's' recollections of the Olympia rally he states that as he and his friends were spectating from outside the stadium when they were aggressively pinned against a wall by the police.[401] He continues to state that when one of them shouted to an officer that they should be concentrating their efforts on what was happening inside, the officer shouted back, "get back to your slums, you Communist bastards."[402] Following the events of Olympia the Home Secretary fought for a larger police presence at political rallies, and Jacobs' argues that this was "very clearly aimed at the anti-fascists."[403] In Jacobs' description of his participation at Olympia he states that he arrived late and therefore did not succeed in getting in inside the stadium, however he and his friends did "manage to keep things alive even if we were not all in direct contact with actual Mosley supporters other than the police."[404] The way Jacobs' has phrased this sentence suggest that it were an undisputed fact, he very casually names the police force as outright BUF supporters. All of the case-study authors write as if their experiences of police violence were undeniably true, they also write as if the subject of police brutality were not a

[396] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 50.
[397] Ibid., 52.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 174.
[400] Ibid.
[401] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 7.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 174.
[404] Ibid., 139.

taboo topic and were a common point of discussion. The authors' writing implies that they did not doubt the polices' negative intentions towards them and write as if police brutality was an undeniable fact. It is possible to argue that this is a common feature of discussion within their autobiographies as the case-study authors might find closure in writing about their experiences, and perhaps compensate for the justice they did not receive at the time.

The autobiographers implied that the government and the courts as being biased in favour of the BUF. Morris claims that "in those days the police and legal profession tended to sympathise more with fascists than with their opponents," and therefore it was usually the anti-fascists who were arrested rather than BUF members.[405] Piratin recalls a time when the fascists caused an altercation in the streets of Stepney and a young girl ended up being hurled through a window causing her to lose an eye, and none of the fascists involved were arrested for the crime.[406] He continues to claim that even when fascists were arrested, they "were treated benignly in British courts."[407] Jacobs' states that in Shoreditch violence against the Jewish community was rising, so they created a petition that requested greater protection from the fascists and managed to collected over a thousand signatures.[408] The petition was presented to the Home Secretary who, according to Jacobs "promised to have the matter investigated."[409] Jacobs does not comment any further on the outcome of this, but as the autobiographies show, not a lot came of it. It is difficult to decipher what year this petition and promise was made as Jacobs does not write in much of a chronological order and certain stories are scattered across multiple pages, however it can be assumed that this was before the 1936 Battle of Cable Street. Piratin claimed that there were a lot of Conservative Party members that would openly admit to being supporters of the BUF.[410] There has also been suggestions among historians that there was proof that Mosley had been linked to the Baldwin administration.[411] Despite the BUF claiming that they did not have the police and the law on their side, if one were to base their opinion solely off the recollections of the case-studies it would be

[405] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51.
[406] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 26.
[407] Ibid., 6.
[408] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 195.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 6.
[411] Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 99.

easy to conclude the this was in fact false. Although, it is not unreasonable to argue that the extent of the violence from the police, and the lack of protection from the government were over emphasised within their stories. Each author is writing with the intent of framing the anti-fascists as the victims, and therefore they need to ensure the reader believes the were treated unfairly.

The autobiography authors state it was clear that Mosley and the BUF were receiving a lot of monetary support from capitalist industrialists and businessmen. Graney claims that it appears "millions of pounds were being poured into his movement," and that the industrialists were supporting Mosley on the basis that he was dividing the working-class and this was in their best interests.[412] And Jacobs states the BUF's promising financial position was clear from looking at their headquarters in Chelsea, which was "defended like a fortress."[413] Graney makes a bold claim by arguing that due to the support he received from industrialists, the police and the law, "if it hadn't been for the war I think he would have taken control of the country.[414] However, multiple academics have not shared this concern and have in fact argued that the BUF "never showed any evidence of becoming an effective political force."[415] Hodgson argues that Britain's economy and society was relatively stable in comparison to other nations following the disasters of WWI, and therefore as a country "did not face the same 'crisis of legitimacy'," that led to a rise in fascist support in other countries.[416] He also claims that the BUF were unable to claim political power as any encouragement they did have did not outweigh the minimal level of anti-Semitism within Britain.[417] Though many Jewish citizens who lived through 1930s Britain would most likely disagree with this statement, it has been shown throughout this paper that the Jewish community were verbally and physically terrorised far too often. It is important to consider that the answer to whether or not anti-Semitism resonated with British citizens would depend entirely on who was asked. Anyone who Jewish or had friends and family who were Jewish and had witnessed, or been the victim of, an anti-Semitic attack at the hands of the BUF would most likely answer yes. However, if someone

[412] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 172.
[413] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 117.
[414] Graney and Seddon, *One Bloke*, 172.
[415] Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*, 50.
[416] Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism*, 98.
[417] Ibid.

had no personal links with the Jewish community and had neither heard nor seen such attacks, they would most likely answer no. Regardless of the 'truth', the case-study authors reference the BUF's anti-Semitic campaigns throughout their autobiographies and evidently, they believe it is important enough to be addressed repeatedly. Analysis surrounding the autobiographers' experience with, and opinions of, the police and the government will continue within the next chapter which focuses on the infamous Battle of Cable Street.

Chapter 4: The Battle of Cable Street

On the 4th of October 1936 Mosley's BUF planned to gather at Tower Hill and march through the predominately Jewish and working-class inhabited areas of East London.[418] In his autobiography Morris recalls that the infamous BUF march "intended to demonstrate their gathering strength…and to show the Jews and the Leftists that they were at his mercy."[419] The Battle of Cable Street has been hailed as the most celebrated and well-known anti-fascist demonstration in British history, a claim has been made by the autobiography authors and in historic scholarship.[420] The battle has influenced both non-fiction and popular culture, featuring variety of novels, plays, films and television programmes – there is also a mural memorialising the demonstration on one of the houses on Cable Street which is still there today.[421] This final chapter will tell the story of Cable Street through the experience and memories of the autobiographers.

Three of the case-study authors – Jacobs, Piratin and Morris, all had a personal connection to the East End. As discussed in chapter two, they were all born and raised around the Cable Street area. It is therefore not surprising that the Battle of Cable Street features heavily within their recollections. This is specifically the case in Piratin's and Jacobs' account, their detailed descriptions of the planning, preparation and actions of the day are the most comprehensive. Piratin's autobiography was originally published in 1948, only twelve years after Cable Street which is a potential reason as to why his account is so detailed, the memories of this event appear to be clear within his mind. Jacobs' autobiography was assembled and published in the 1970's, much later than Piratin's, so he is able to use a wider lens to assess the significance of Cable Street. In contrast, Kapp does not discuss the event in great depth.[422] This thesis raises the question of why Morris and Kapp did not dedicate more of their autobiography to the retelling of this important day. It could be concluded that they did not see as much value in Cable Street and its effects than the other case-study

[418] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 177.
[419] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 52.
[420] Daniel Tilles, 'Winning the Battle, But What About the War? Cable Street in Context', ed. Colin Holmes and Anne J. Kershen, 130, accessed 5 November 2020, 130.
[421] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51.
[422] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 177.

authors, and therefore did not feel the need to excessively discuss the event. Or it could be that Morris and Kapp deem the information provided to be influential in their retelling of the event and what it meant to them. Both authors compose their autobiographies in the last stage of their life, so their opinion on what is important or relevant to mention may have changed since the event itself. As historian Abrams has argued, "certain things, events, experiences will be remembered and reconstructed in different ways depending on the stage in one's life."[423] The recollections of Cable Street in the case-studies provide a unique view into the emotional response of anti-fascists rather than focusing just on a collective or statistical exploration of the event.

Reaction and Preparation

Jacobs states that as soon as Mosley's plans for the 4th of October were published and rumours began to spread, "the immediate response was that this could not be allowed to happen and if it did, it would be disastrous."[424] Attempts were made by variety of different groups and individuals to prevent the fascist march from going forward. Piratin recalls that the Jewish Board of Deputies and five of the East London Mayors implored the Home Secretary to outlaw the BUF's march but their requests were denied.[425] The Home Secretary was accused of inhibiting the anti-fascist campaign by refusing to ban the BUF's planned march, and the failed Shoreditch petition and passive aggressive comments about increased police presence at anti-fascist events. On the 4th of October the Ex-Servicemen's Anti-Fascist Association had organised their own demonstration in the East End, had their plan submitted for approval before Mosley announced his demonstration for the same date.[426] Jacobs argues that the ex-servicemen were refused permission on the basis that the fascist march took precedence.[427] Once it was clear that the fascist march would not be prohibited by the government and police force, the attention turned to uniting the opposition and planning their counterattack.[428]

[423] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 79.
[424] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 235.
[425] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 19.
[426] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 237.
[427] Ibid.
[428] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 20.

Jacobs, Piratin and Morris suggest that the leaders and official members of the Communist Party, Labour Party, and various Jewish community boards and establishments were reluctant to support an attack on the BUF's mass march. Negative comments about their leaders' hesitancy to plan a campaign against Mosley on the 4th of October correlates with discussions about the autobiographers' aversion to authority. Morris recalls that *"*The Labour Party and the Jewish establishment advised everyone to stay out of the way; 'ignore it', was the watchword."[429] The Jewish Board of Deputies stated in the *Jewish Chronicle* that anyone who attended the Cable Street demonstration would only be assisting in the rise of anti-Semitism.[430] He continues to claim that despite proclaiming themselves to be the leaders of the anti-fascist movement, even the Communists were hesitant to support the opposition demonstration.[431] There was a youth rally already organised and advertised for the date of the 4th, and Piratin states there were disagreements about whether they should concentrate their efforts on the Cable Street defence.[432] The Communists also had an event planned for the same date, a fundraiser for those affected by the Spanish Civil War had be arranged at Trafalgar Square.[433] Once intentions were set upon opposing the BUF march the Communist Party District Committee instructed all party members to first attend the event at Trafalgar square and then join the opposition march later in the day.[434] Jacobs argued that if they adhered to these instructions, it would have been catastrophic and "the CP would be finished in Stepney."[435] After the District Committee finally agreed to plan a Cable street defence, Jacobs requested a meeting with one of their representatives to discuss arrangements for the day, the meeting request was declined and Jacobs' instead received a letter outlining the Communist Party's advice and guidelines for the march.[436] One of the points in the letter reads, "keep order: no excuse for Government to say we, like BUF are hooligans. If Mosley decides to march let him. Don't attempt disorder (Time too short to get a 'They shall not pass' policy across)."[437] This response left Jacobs extremely exasperated, and according to him "'They shall not pass' was already on everyone's

[429] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51.
[430] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 51.
[431] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 52.
[432] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 19.
[433] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 238.
[434] Ibid.
[435] Ibid.
[436] Ibid.
[437] Ibid.

lips and being whitewashed on walls and pavements."[438] The case-study authors representations of the leading bodies of their respective political and social groups is significant as it implies, they did not consider Mosley to be enough of a threat to justify this kind of large-scale confrontation. One could also conclude that the leaders were less interested in the anti-fascist movement in comparison to other social and political issues and therefore did not feel it was necessary to open themselves up to scrutiny from the press and negative attention from the police.[439] It also amplifies earlier arguments within this thesis that point to the influence and importance of local community effort and grassroots politics. It appears that the authors' recollections of Cable Street are influenced by their 'neighbourly' activist experience. After much deliberation it was decided that all parties would cancel any previously planned events.[440] All efforts were to be focused on coalescing and showing the fascists that the working-class in the East End were more than willing to defend themselves and their principles.[441] Piratin remembers that on the days leading up to Sunday the fascists created a "terrorist atmosphere in East London. Windows were smashed, old men beaten up."[442] Regardless of the fascist's intimidation tactics the anti-fascists could not be deterred and were more than prepared for action.[443]

Jacobs' and Piratin's' focus on the planning and preparation for Cable Street shows that they wanted to represent themselves as experienced grassroots activists and political organisers. Piratin provides a detailed account of the preparations that were underway on the morning of October 4th,

> There was constant communication between responsible Communists 'at the front' and headquarters. Motorcyclists and cyclists were organised and were indispensable in ensuring contact. First-aid depots in the care of anti-fascist

[438] Ibid.
[439] For more information about the Communist Party's and the Labour Party's position in the 1930s see, Laura Beers, 'Education or Manipulation? Labour, Democracy, and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 1 (2009): 131; Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, 1st edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1; Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 85; Evan Smith, '"Class before Race": British Communism and the Place of Empire in Postwar Race Relations', *Science & Society* 72, no. 4 (2008): 457.
[440] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 51.
[441] Ibid., 52.
[442] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 20.
[443] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 254.

doctors and nurses were opened up in a number of shops and houses near the scenes of the battle.[444]

Recollections of the groundwork that was laid for the Cable Street defence are important aspects of the story. The case-study authors have shown that despite a problematic start with preparing for the opposition, they had the skill and savvy to create a plan that saw Mosley retreat from the East End on that infamous day. The anti-fascist's ability to gather such a vast number of protestors in the little time they had emphasises their skill and experience, as well solidifying that the heart and power of the anti-fascist movement lay within the ordinary communities. As well as suggesting that many people were ready and willing to take action against the fascists at any moment. An example of this is provided by Piratin when he reiterates a story about fascists being spotted in Whitechapel, according to him a local Communist member ran into a local cinema and shouted, "Communist Party calls out: Fascists in Whitechapel," most of the audience left, pushed out the fascists and returned to their movie.[445]

Battling It Out

The BUF planned to begin their march at 2.30pm but the anti-fascists began rousing spirits and marching through East London in the early hours of the morning.[446] Multiple areas had been designated by the anti-fascists as potential routes for the BUF, therefore they dispersed throughout the East End to cover these potential routes, which again speaks to the anti-fascists excellent organisation and military style preparation.[447] Jacobs recalls that from around 12pm the police ceased observing and began instigating brawls.[448] The younger and more agile anti-fascists climbed onto high points in the area to wave banners and direct those on the ground to zones where there were less police.[449] Tower Hill, Gardiner's Corner and Cable Street were some of the areas where the anti-fascists positioned themselves ready for battle. Piratin claimed that there were an estimated 50,000 anti-fascists defending Tower Hill when

[444] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 21.
[445] Ibid., 26.
[446] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 254.
[447] Ibid.; Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 52; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 23; Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 177.
[448] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 254.
[449] Ibid.

BUF members arrived via coach from all over the country.[450] He continues to state that "every chief police officer in the Metropolis was on duty," indicating the police were aware of the inevitable violence and mass disorder that was looming.[451] The defence at Tower Hill was successful as Morris explains the fascists were surrounded and trapped by an impenetrable wall of anti-fascists formed by "thousands of Jews, trade unionists, socialists, Communists and other ordinary people, determined to see justice defended."[452]

Turning to Gardiner's Corner where Morris described the area as "a sea of heaving bodies," with hundreds of police, on both foot and horseback, charging the crowd in an attempt to separate them.[453] Although Kapp spends a limited time discussing the Battle of Cable Street in her autobiography, in the brief recollection of this event, she also points to the brutality of the police. She claims that the repeated charging by police was "more to terrorize than to disperse."[454] She continues to say that she witnessed a great scene of community effort when the surrounding streets of Gardiner's Corner were made impenetrable to mounted police due to "the inhabitants of the houses lining the street had thrown from their windows every bottle they could lay their hands on."[455] The Cable Street defence exemplifies the impact of community effort and engagement, Kapp's description highlights that it was not only those who were involved in the anti-fascist movement that contributed to the opposition. Kapp offers little description of the events of the day and a quarter of that description focuses on the different scents she can remember being present. Kapp says "the most overwhelming and lingering impressions of that day," were the memories of particular scents that filled the air.[456] She recalls smelling a culmination of "camphor, vinegar, vanilla essence, eucalyptus, kerosene, ammonia, cough syrup, brilliantine, cheap scent and methylated spirit."[457] Memories often reappear in the mind when jolted by a familiar scent, sound or emotion.[458] It is clear from her description that the remaining memories of Cable Street are enmeshed with particular smells that, for Kapp,

[450] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 23.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 53.
[453] Ibid., 52.
[454] Kapp, *Time Will Tell*, 177.
[455] Ibid.
[456] Ibid.
[457] Ibid.
[458] Anna Harris, 'Eliciting Sound Memories', *The Public Historian* 37, no. 4 (n.d.): 14.

encapsulate the working-class identity in the East End. Jacobs asserts that whilst writing his autobiography he found it impossible to separate the memories from "the blood, the tears, the laughter."[459] Jacobs and Kapp both illustrate the instinctive relationship between emotion and memory. Importantly, their memories thus give us further sensorial and emotional insights into this event.

The BUF and police were unable to penetrate the barricades set up by the anti-fascists on Tower Hill, Gardiner's Corner and the other various points of defence across the East End.[460] They regrouped and began to head towards Cable Street, where the anti-fascists had prepared yet another impassable barricade.[461] Morris states that he and his comrades had already been walking for several miles before turning their attention to Cable Street, which emphasises their dedication and highlights the vast amount of ground covered by the anti-fascists on the 4th of October.[462] He continues to say his reasoning for choosing to head for Cable Street was because he knew the area well as he grew up there, and his grandmother still owned a bakery on the street.[463] As Morris was raised on Cable Street it could be suggested that he had an emotional connection, not just a physical one, to the pursuit of victory in this area. As the fascists drew closer to Cable Street thousands of anti-fascists fled their bases and ran to assist building the barricade. A group of men dragged a large lorry into the middle of the road and any available furniture from surrounding shops and houses was thrown on top.[464] Piratin recalls that as the police lunged into attack "they were met with milk bottles, stones and marbles," with the owners of surrounding houses throwing bottles from their windows.[465] He continues to say that during the battle he witnessed some of the police surrendering voluntarily, although Morris questions this claim.[466] As violence increased it was clear there would be many casualties for both police and anti-fascists if one of them did not abandon the fight, and due to the "overwhelming strength and determination of the anti-fascist resistance," the police grudgingly withdrew.[467] Jacob's states that pressure was mounting for the Police Commissioner as the casualties and

[459] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 306.
[460] Ibid., 256.
[461] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 23.
[462] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 53.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 23.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 55; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 23.
[467] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 55.

arrests amplified so he made the decision to call an end to the battle and move Mosley's forces out of the East End.[468] Jacobs explains how he never went to Cable Street on the day so he did not witness the victory first hand, but "as the news spread, cheers could be heard all over the area and into surrounding streets some distance from the battle-ground itself."[469] In Piratin's description of the victory he proudly proclaims, "the working class had won the day."[470] His emphasis on the success of the working-class exemplifies that defending their neighbourhood and community from the BUF was just as important as defending their ideologies. It also highlights the emotional response of the anti-fascists to the BUF's attack on 'their' East End.

Reviewing Cable Street

This chapter has shown that the success of the opposition at the Battle of Cable Street is a testament to the power and proficiency of grassroots activism. Attention will now turn to the case-study authors' insights about the immediate and long-term effects of Cable Street, and how far they believed it contributed to a decline in fascist threat. On the evening of the 4th of October "dozens of meetings were held in parts of Stepney and East London to teach the lessons of the great day of victory."[471] Morris recalls running through the streets of East End London with his friends to celebrate their victory and re-claim their neighbourhood.[472] A week later an official celebratory march was organised, which took place in the same area where the fascists were defeated.[473] This victory celebration was especially significant for Morris as this is where he met his future wife, Lily, with whom he remained married to until his death.[474] Despite being planned in a short amount of time, thousands of people turned out to celebrate and commemorate their momentous win.[475] Jacobs argues that one of the most significant immediate effects was the publicity surrounding the events of Cable Street, and its celebratory rally caused a spike in interest about Mosley's operation in the East End.[476] After the celebrations attention turned to assisting those who were arrested or injured

[468] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 256.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 24.
[471] Ibid.
[472] Morris, *Unfinished Journey*, 56.
[473] Ibid., 55.
[474] Ibid.
[475] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 262.
[476] Ibid.

during the altercations at Cable Street.[477] Piratin claims that 150 people were taken to court following their altercations with police and for causing damage to public property, whereas Jacobs claims there were only 84 people charged.[478] Both estimations are high, so irrespective of the contradiction between the two authors, it still emphasises the excessive levels of violence at the BOCS as so many were arrested during a short amount of time. It also provides further evidence that the police and the anti-fascists were not afraid to clash with one another. Overy explains that the Police Commissioner had earlier argued to outright ban the fascist movement completely, but the government denied him as they did not believe Mosley was anything but a political pest and posed no real danger.[479] What preceded and followed Cable Street in terms of fascist intimidation diminished the governments assertions that the BUF were not a danger to British society.

The previous chapter featured a debate about the presence and significance of a united front within the anti-fascist movement. It is difficult to offer a definitive answer, however, the Battle of Cable Street is an exemplary representation of anti-fascist unification. The details provided by the autobiographers show that the working-class planned and executed a successful grassroots campaign with those outside of their regular political and social groups. They fought side-by-side in the streets, supporting one another, defending themselves from the police whilst simultaneously defending their beliefs and ideologies, however varied they may be.[480] Individual factions did not integrate but operated alongside other factions to form barricades that rendered the East End inviolable.[481] This thesis concludes that one of the main reasons the Cable Street defence was such a triumph was because of the sheer volume of activists present. On the lead up to the battle, Jacobs describes the East End as a "hive of activity," and "every kind of Anti-Fascist organisation was full out."[482] Piratin portrays the anti-fascist force as an "immense human barricade," and despite using all the tools at their disposal, the police were left with no choice but to retreat or surrender.[483] Piratin claims that Cable Street was the first time he had witnessed, or even heard of, the

[477] Ibid., 258.
[478] Ibid., 260; Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 25.
[479] Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 268.
[480] Testa, *Militant Antifascism*, 134.
[481] Tilles, 'Winning the Battle, But What About the War?', 131.
[482] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 245.
[483] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 23.

police surrendering to the anti-fascists.[484] Therefore insinuating the police were aware they were vastly outnumbered and had to submit to the anti-fascists as a last resort. As well as the various anti-fascist factions, there was a large amount of attendees at Cable Street that were not affiliated with any kind of anti-fascist or political group.[485] Jacobs states it was the first time many of them had taken part in a political or social demonstration which made the Cable Street defence even stronger and even more influential.[486] Piratin argues the Battle of Cable Street inspired many of these working-class people to join the Communist Party and continue nurturing their new found thirst for activism.[487] This would have been a significant outcome for the Communists as their membership began to fall earlier that year.[488]

Jacobs' and Piratin's 'post-mortem' on the Battle of Cable Street is representative of the contradicting views about how far Cable Street contributed to deterring Mosley and the BUF. Piratin proudly proclaims, "the effects of the 4th of October were many."[489] According to him, the spirit of success was felt by those at home, and abroad with those who "were fighting the same fight."[490] Furthermore, Piratin recalls the rejoicing in their success as he believed "the 'terror had lost its meaning."[491] He also believed that the ordinary people among his community "now knew that fascism could be defeated if they organised themselves to do so."[492] His analysis is representative of how the recollections provided by all the autobiographers emphasise the power and ability of working-class people to contribute to changing the political landscape of Britain. This chapter has shown that Jacobs recalls his memories of Cable Street with pride and is boastful of the anti-fascist's skill and cunning. However, in his conclusion of the battle he makes it very clear that he in no way shared Piratin's view, or the "official Party view that the events of that day in any way represented a victory for the Communist Party and anti-fascist forces in general."[493] He continues to defend this

[484] Ibid.
[485] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 245.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 25.
[488] Andrew Thorpe, 'The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945', *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 3 (2000): 796.
[489] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 25.
[490] Ibid.
[491] Ibid.
[492] Ibid.
[493] Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto*, 279.

view by reminiscing BUF's retaliation after their defeat at Cable Street. Jacobs recalls that two days after the battle, Stepney was stormed by bitter BUF members as they attacked elderly people and private property.[494] He argues that the fascists humiliating defeat led to them be "more determined than ever to keep up the terror campaign," and by the end of 1936 they had reverted to terror tactics regardless of the Public Order Act.[495] Jacobs boldly claims that "the fight had only just begun."[496]

The vast contradictions between Piratin's and Jacobs's views of Cable Streets' success could be due to their differing intentions and perspectives in their writing. Hollow argues that "each autobiographical persona should be understood…as reflective of the spatial, social and political situation at the time of writing."[497] Piratin's writing is embedded with a yearning for nostalgia, and it can be assumed his positive reflections of Cable Street are reinforced by the high spirits following the defeat of Italy's and Germany's fascists. It appears from his autobiography that Piratin was not drafted and instead continued the fight at home, he notes that "when the war broke out the Communist Party was the only political organisation in Stepney to maintain its activity."[498] It is possible that since Piratin, unlike most in his community, remained at home during the war, his reiterations of his involvement and commitment to the anti-fascist movement is an important aspect for him to highlight in order to justify himself feeling like he too had contributed to the defeat of Hitler and the Axis'. For the other male autobiographers who did enlist, what was arguably the most important battle of their lives was yet to begin and therefore Cable Street might not have been as important to their life story as a whole.

The representations of the Battle of Cable Street offered by the autobiographers who were present imply that this battle was emotionally charged. Frustration over the incompetence and reluctance of the government to assist in defending Britain against fascism, and a determination to protect themselves, their families and their neighbourhood from fascist and police violence, caused the East End to erupt on the 4th of October 1936. In chapter two of this thesis there is a discussion about anti-fascist

[494] Ibid., 260.
[495] Ibid., 261.
[496] Ibid., 257.
[497] Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 3.
[498] Piratin and Callow, *Our Flag Stays Red*, 68.

supporters wanting to defend themselves against the BUF for reasons other than disagreements over political ideology, and their deep personal connection to their community. This paper concludes that this is also evident within the autobiographers' depictions of Cable Street. It appears that the most significant outcome of this infamous event was the pride felt by all who participated, ordinary people who now knew their contribution was valuable, and appreciated. In Piratin's review of Cable Street he supports this conclusion when recalling that,

> nothing had changed physically. The poor houses, the mean streets, the ill-conditioned workshops were the same, but the people were changed. Their heads seemed to be held higher, and their shoulders were squarer – and the stories they told! Each one was a hero.[499]

[499] Ibid., 25.

Conclusion

Providing a succinct analysis of how one represents oneself is a convoluted task, there are an endless number of differing aspects that form a person's identity and life experience. A variety of conclusions have been drawn from the information provided by the case-study autobiographers, ranging from class and politics to religion and relationships. The central research question of this paper asks how each author represents themselves, and their experience in the anti-fascist movement. Determination, commitment, integrity, pride and dexterity are the most prominent traits within all of the case-studies. The authors' entire personalities and life experiences cannot be summarised by these few traits; however, it is clear from their memoirs that their activist lifestyle was fuelled by those qualities. The authors differ in many ways but are all linked through their passion for social and political justice, as well as their aversion to authority and fascism. Their recollections and representations show that people who can be considered 'ordinary' are capable of achieving extraordinary things.

The autobiographers' unique and fruitful accounts of anti-fascism in 1930s Britain demonstrates the usefulness of recording and studying memory. As Hollow highlights, "autobiography not only deals with what the author has seen and where they have been, it also investigates the type of person the author is."[500] Using the individual experience as a scope into exploring the movement provides new insights and information that is perhaps not present within academic accounts. It also allows researchers to explore anti-fascism with a cultural and personal perspective, rather than with a strictly political or national approach. Anderson contends with this view by arguing "while autobiography supplies few certainties or answers, its study leads to engage with some of the most intractable and important cultural questions of our time."[501] The answer to how far the anti-fascist campaigns actually contributed to the decline of fascism in Britain appears to be subjective and varies throughout the case-studies and academic scholarship. Regardless of this, the anti-fascists' ability to disrupt Mosley's demonstrations and spread awareness of the dangers of fascism is

[500] Hollow, 'Disillusioned Disciples', 2.
[501] Anderson, *Autobiography.*, 139.

undeniable. Therefore, their accounts both educate and inspire those interested in grassroots politics and community activism.

Each chapter within this thesis has analysed and drawn specific conclusions about the various aspects of the self and anti-fascism that are prominent within the case-studies. Discussions have centred around the task of writing the self, political and personal development, community activism, anti-fascist campaigns, the differing factions in the movement, the authors' relationship with authority, and the Battle of Cable Street. All five authors discussed the value and limitations of writing and recording their memoirs, and a tendency to psychoanalyse their past is present throughout. The autobiographers' attention to detailing their childhood experiences and its relevance to their political development has allowed this paper to explore the link between their aversion to authority and sense of injustice, in both their adolescence and adulthood. It is clear that an activist lifestyle appealed to all of the authors and they spent the majority of their lives chasing their desire for a fairer world with greater opportunities.

The recollections provided by the autobiographers describe the anti-fascist movement as being working-class led, with the majority of opposition work being carried out by ordinary citizens rather than their respective party leaders or the government. The authors' views are obviously subjective and other accounts may not suggest the same. However, it is clear from the stories provided that the authors represent themselves as the leaders of the movement. The information offered about their day-to-day lives and involvement in the anti-fascist movement highlights the skill and bravery of those who fought against the BUF in the city streets of Britain. Many of the battles against the fascists took place in the streets of Manchester and the East End of London. Graney, Jacobs, Piratin and Morris highlight that their connection to their geographical communities enabled them to outmanoeuvre the fascists on many occasions. The four male authors emphasise that physical combat was a preferred method of campaigning and references of 'scraps' and 'battles' fill the pages of their autobiographies. Whereas the only female autobiographer, Kapp, draws attention to the 'typical' role of women within politics and social and political movements. Further research into the exploration of feminism and anti-fascism would provide an interesting and unique addition to academic scholarship, as well as being a fascinating successor to this paper.

All five autobiographers discuss their joint experiences with the different political, social and religious groups that were involved in the anti-fascist campaigns. The aspect of a united front is definitely a feature of the case-studies but its significance to the success of the movement is not stressed by the authors. In their recollections of community activism unrelated to the anti-fascist movement, such as the Jarrow march and the tenants strikes, it is clear that working alongside people outside of their particular political or social community was common in the East End and Manchester. This paper has argued that perhaps the authors were so used to living and working in a multicultural neighbourhood they did not deem the united front to be a noteworthy feature of the movement. Multiculturalism was a part of the working-class identity, and it appears from the case-studies that animosity towards the police and the government was also common among the working class. Graney, Jacobs, Piratin and Morris make numerous references to their aversion to authority and belief that as anti-fascists, and members of the working-class, they were targeted and unsupported by both the police and the British government. This further implies that opposition to fascism in 1930's Britain was led by grassroots campaigners as they claimed to have no assistance from the police or the government.

The Battle of Cable Street has been regularly named as one of Britain's largest and extraordinary confrontations between fascists and anti-fascists. Therefore, an exploration into how the autobiographers discussed their experiences of Cable Street was an important addition to this thesis. The investigation into the Battle of Cable Street was mostly centred around these research questions, how involved were the autobiographers in the battle? How did they remember it, and what aspects stood out? Did they attest to the view that this is was influential as is claimed in some academic scholarship? Jacobs and Piratin provide an outstanding number of details about the planning and preparation for the battle carried out by the Communist Party and the various other anti-fascist factions. Their descriptions show that they were not amateurs and were vastly skilled and experienced in political combat. They had prepared themselves like a small army, with a large portion of East London being covered by various anti-fascist bases. Analysing the influence of the Battle of Cable Street on the decline of the BUF is challenging, as the situation is muddled by the impending threat of international fascist invasion. All of the East End authors, and Graney, slowly begin

to decrease their focus on anti-fascism after 1936. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the Battle of Cable Street was a climatic event for these anti-fascist activists. Though they remained dedicated to their political beliefs and ideologies, their focus shifted to local issues and World War Two.

Many aspects of personal and political life are featured within each of the case-studies and therefore a wide variety of themes and discussions are available for analysis within the sources. The autobiographers have many similarities, mostly centred around their Left-wing beliefs, however, there are also stark differences between each author. They each offer their own unique addition to this research through their contrasting lives and personalities. Some of the most notable distinctions between the authors include, but are not limited to; Graney, Morris and Kapp feature their entire life story, whereas Jacobs and Piratin focus on their more youthful years; Graney's memoirs were originally recorded via tape and then transferred into an autobiography; and of course, Kapp offers the only female and middle-class account. The individual experiences of the case-study authors have ignited an interest in further research surrounding gender roles within the Communist Party, the working-classes predisposition to following Left-wing ideology, and anti-fascism in Britain after the fall of the Communist Party of Great Britain. As with all autobiographies, the authors' lives are not defined by just one era, or one movement and therefore, their autobiographies can be used as sources for more than just an exploration into anti-fascism.

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