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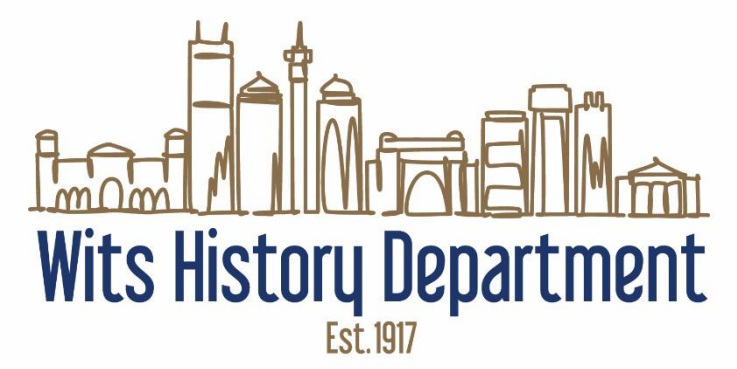
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Ensemble study and struggle: A history of the Yu Chi Chan Club and the National Liberation Front

by Asher Gamedze

Student number: 2413181

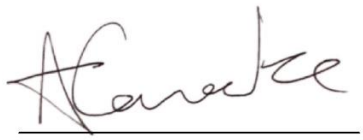
Supervisor: Professor Noor Nieftagodien

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD in the Department of History, School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand.

22 March 2024

Declaration

This is an original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another university. It is being submitted for the Degree of PhD in History at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Where use has been made of the work of others it has been duly acknowledged in the text. The ethics clearance number for the project is H21/01/07 Gamedze, A (Mr).



Name: Asher Gamedze

Date: 22 March 2024

Abstract

This dissertation is a history of the relationship between study and struggle in the lives and afterlives of two formations who were part of the South African (SA) and Namibian national liberation struggles – the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC) and the National Liberation Front (NLF) – which were founded in the early 1960s in the turn to armed struggle. The YCCC was a study group on guerrilla warfare with a commitment to fighting for socialist democracy and the NLF, founded by the YCCC, was an underground network of cells of guerrillas, a series of overlapping ensembles that sought to unite the various armed forces of the liberation movement. Their personnel, modes of analysis, orientations, tendencies and strategies were present in the earlier and subsequent decades of struggle, finding expression in a wide range of political and intellectual forms –united fronts, underground study groups, education projects, publications, and independent political actions. The project's scope extends from the late 1950s until the late 1980s, and explores various responses to the changing conditions of apartheid and capitalism in South Africa and Namibia. This radical trajectory of study and struggle was formed outside of a single or stable political home and it evolved through continual experimentation and collaboration with other political organisations. While some of these experiments, and the individuals that constituted them, have been written about in isolated ways, a longer trajectory of these formations that attempts to understand its development over time, has not, up until this point, been written. To research this topic, the dissertation's process has undertaken semi-structured interviews and done archival work in both officially constituted collections, and personal and private collections of individuals and families who were participant in the history.

The work makes an original contribution to the existing literature in three ways. Firstly, by writing this history – the longer tradition of the YCCC/NLF's study and struggle – for the first time. Secondly, by illuminating their alternative perspectives and alternative approaches within major conjunctures in the liberation struggle, it contests the often-assumed inevitability of the political dispensation of the present moment which is based on a teleological account of the liberation struggle. Thirdly, the dissertation elaborates and develops, as organisational form and a method of historical research, the concept of ensemble. Bands in the black creative music tradition are taken as the paradigmatic expression of ensemble and this is transposed to consider the evolution of the minoritarian tradition of the YCCC/NLF over time. This opens up an affinity for narrative

and the contradictions that emerge in the course of struggle, understanding the process, and an attentiveness to it, as important in the experimentation and elaboration of an alternative approach to writing and thinking about history that is informed by the need for ongoing struggle. The dissertation argues that the significance of the history of the YCCC and the NLF cannot be understood only within the moment of their existence and instead needs to be considered in relation to the longer trajectory of their political ideas and practices.

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The relationships I am fortunate enough to have in this life are the basis – at a conceptual/experiential and actual level – of this project. I mean that in many ways, some of which will hopefully become more apparent in the course of reading it. The first way is from my own experience in relationships that traverse the boundaries of friends, comrades, bandmates, siblings, elders, teachers, etc. It is in these spaces that I have learnt, got involved in various struggles, played, drank, organised, laughed, listened, debated, cried, danced, etc. Fundamentally these relationships are where I live. It has been my own experience of them in the eccentric and idiosyncratic politicised community of which I am a part, that has opened up my own curiosity about the social life of politics of others. Secondly, the question, the initial interest for this project, both emerged from collective work and the process of research was made possible by these relationships. While I hope the dissertation's orientation holds the gratitude I feel towards everyone who has been a part of this process, the form of the dissertation is restricting in the ways in which one can make that visible. What I feel and want to express towards everyone is both a deep sense of gratitude, and also an acknowledgement that this project could not have been happened without your kindness.

To everyone that agreed to be interviewed, I owe my deepest debt to you. I know many people were hesitant, reluctant, or even suspicious of me and the process initially (perhaps you still are!), so I want to thank you for trusting me and opening up your thoughts, experiences and memories. I don't take that for granted in any way, especially given the complex and at times traumatic memories associated with many of the conversations. It is very possible that many of you have strong differences with, disagree with, or are disappointed by what I have presented here and my orientation to the work. This is something I had to grapple with myself. While it doesn't feel good to disappoint people, especially those you respect and owe a debt, I hold on to the belief that disagreements especially amongst comrades are – or at least can be – generative.

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To all my comrades I organise with, and musicians I play with, for the meetings and gigs I have missed, sorry. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

…

One time for the Yu Chi Chan Club!

Two times for the National Liberation Front!

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAC	All African Convention
AACRLS	Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle
ADC	Alexander Defence Committee
ALC	African Liberation Committee of the OAU
ALF	Azanian Liberation Front
ALSC	Azania Liberation Support Committee
AMT	Azanian Marxist Tendency
ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
Anti-CAD	Anti-Coloured Affairs Department
APDU	African People's Democratic Union
APDUSA	African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa
ARM	African Resistance Movement
ASA	African Students' Association
ASB	Afrikaner Studentsbond
ASUSA	African Students Union of South Africa
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
AZASM	Azanian Students' Movement
AZASO	Azanian Students' Organisation
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCP	Black Community Projects
BPC	Black People's Convention
CAHAC	Cape Areas Housing Action Committee
CAL	Cape Action League
CAP	Community Arts Project
CATA	Cape African Teachers' Association
CBD	Central Business District
CC	Herero Chief's Council
CPP	Convention People's Party

CLPP	Coloured Labour Preference Policy
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPC	Coloured People's Congress
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CPSU	Cape Peninsula Students' Union
CRC	Children's Resource Centre
CUC	Catholic University College in Basutoland
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa
DBAC	Disorderly Bills Action Committee
DSU	Durban Students' Union
FI	Fourth International
FIOSA	Fourth International Organisation of South Africa
FLN	Front de la Libération National (Algeria)
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
KBV	Khomasdal Burger Vereniging
KYC	Know Your Continent
LACOM	Labour – Community Subcommittee of SACHED
LAGUNYACRO	Langa Gugulethu Nyanga Crossroads Civic
LOGRA	Lotus River – Grassy Park Civic
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
ManComs	Management Committees
MDC	Movement for the Democracy of Content
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe
MPCC	Mitchell's Plain Coordinating Committee
M-Plan	Mandela Plan
MWT	Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC
NANSO	Namibian National Students' Organisation
NAWA	Namibian Women's Association
NCL	National Committee for Liberation
NEF	New Era Fellowship
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NF	National Forum

NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NLF	National Liberation Front
NNF	Namibian National Front
NNPCC	Namibian Nationhood Project Coordinating Committee
NOW	Natal Organisation of Women
NUBS	National Union of Basutoland Students
NUM	New Unity Movement
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
NUTW	National Union of Textile Workers
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OPC	Ovamboland People's Congress
OPO	Ovamboland People's Organisation
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
PNSO	Progressive National Students' Organisation
PUFLSA	People's United Front for the Liberation of South Africa
SACHED	South African Committee for Higher Education
SACOS	South African Council for Sport
SACP	South African Communist Party
SAHO	South African History Online
SAPET	South African Prisoners' Education Trust
SASM	South African Students' Movement
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SAUF	South African United Front
SDS	Socialist Students' Union
SOYA	Society of Young Africa (1950s)
SOYA	Students of Young Azania (1980s)
SWA	South West Africa
SWANLA	South West African Native Labour Association
SWANLIF	South West African National Liberation Front
SWANU	South West African National Union
SWAPA	South West African Progressive Assocation
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation

SWAPO-D	South West African People's Organisation -Democrats
SWAPO-N	South West African People's Organisation -Nujoma
SWASB	South West African Students' Body
SWATF	South West African Territorial Force
SWAUNIO	South West Africa United National Independence Organisation
TCM	The Children's Movement
TLSA	Teachers' League of South Africa
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UDW	University of Durban-Westville
UM	Unity Movement
UMSA	Unity Movement of South Africa
UN	United Nations
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNNE	University of Natal Non-European Section
UNO	United Nations Organisation
UWC	University of the Western Cape
UWO	United Women's Organisation
VOWSA	Volks Organisasie van Suid Wes Afrika
WCCA	Western Cape Civic Association
WILSA	Workers' International League of South Africa
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
YCCC	Yu Chi Chan Club

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Introduction. Ensemble as method

Perhaps it is the supplement of description that allows description; for description of the phenomenon or experience of ensemble is only adequate if it is also itself the phenomenon or experience of ensemble.[1]

A subject—or better yet, a "point of subjectification"—that would not be measured by the localized control that it exerts over its desires, but rather be valorized by the intensification of conjunctures and encounters of which it is capable. A "subject" without center; "there are no more subjects but dynamic individuations without subjects, which constitute collective assemblages," says Deleuze… Although minoritarian, these processes affect the totality of the social.[2]

Why the history of a minoritarian tendency?

This all started for me as a radical-history-nerd-interest in the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). I became intrigued by these minoritarian figures of the liberation struggles in South Africa and Namibia and started asking: What was the YCCC? - this small study group that took its name from a Mao Tse Tung pamphlet was reading about guerilla warfare, founded in the Cape Town underground in 1962 and only existed for about nine months? At the time of its emergence the embryonic YCCC included the following people: Marcus Solomon, Elizabeth van der Heyden, Ottilie Abrahams (nee Schimming), Fikile Bam, Kenneth Abrahams, Neville Alexander, Andreas Shipanga , David Haufiku, Don Davis , Gerald Giose, Peter Kaluna, Xenophon Pitt and GorDon Davis Hendricks. And the NLF – this broader network-being-built of underground cells across South Africa and Namibia founded by the YCCC with the ambition of coordinating and carrying out the overthrowing of the apartheid state through armed insurrection, arrested before it got off the ground? This interest and the sense of intrigue grew out of organising work I was doing and relationships with comrades, and research we were doing for African history education. The YCCC became this obscure, sort of vague spectre, shrouded in mystique. It seemed to be following me around – popping up in interviews with elders and in books where it was seemingly only ever mentioned in footnotes, it was appearing and disappearing in talks and seminars and becoming a topic of discussion with friends.

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[1] Moten, F. *In the Break: The aesthetics of the Black radical tradition,* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2004), p.92.
[2] Néstor Perlongher, "Minoritarian Becomings", 1991, Available online at: https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-102/10-2-essays/minoritarian-becomings.html [accessed on 8 January 2024].

In the transformation of this vague interest into a slightly more organised process of inquiry, the scope expanded beyond the moment of the YCCC and NLF's constitution and existence in the early 1960s. One of the major reasons for this expansion was a particular characteristic of the group of activists that was at one stage constituted as the YCCC: Almost all of them remained politically engaged and involved, in a variety of ways, in the activities and ideas of the liberatory movement from their youth all the way into the latter years of their respective lives. (In the case of one member, Ottilie Abrahams, she was organising meetings from her hospital bed in the weeks prior to her passing!). For all of its members, the YCCC was significant in their lives – in terms of their political trajectories, their intellectual formation, their relationships, and it was that which landed most of them in prison. I wanted to think about the short time in the YCCC within the context of long lives of committed political work.

A particularity of almost all of YCCC members' involvements in the liberation struggle was that they took place outside of any single, or stable political home. In other words, they didn't belong to a single party or organisation that spanned the duration of their active lives. From this position it was more often relationships than any kind of organisational infrastructure or procedure that was the thread of its sustenance and reproduction from one period to the next. This out side position both produced and produced the necessity for a process of ongoing autonomous political experimentation that encompassed ideas, politics and activities, as well as their organisational form. This continual experimentation – the search for a new politics and a form capable of expressing it – was continually inspired by a practice of collective study, reading about contemporary and historical struggles and considering their relevance to the unfolding conditions within their own context and challenging apartheid capitalism. This practice of study and struggle had at its base relationships amongst comrades – which is also to say siblings, friends and neighbours, lovers and partners – these were its social thread of possibility. To get at this thread and its sociality, these relationships on which this outside tradition of study and struggle was built, sustained and continually reinvented and reconfigured, I have used the concept of "ensemble." Drawing on the idea of a musical collective, or a band in the black creative music tradition, the word grasps towards an alternative language of political form that gestures towards that which endures beyond the politics' transitory expression in parties, organisations, fronts and reading groups.

The project thus became about a fascination with the process and ongoing development of these peoples' ideas and activities within the liberation movement, exploring how politics – as study and struggle and social life – was remade by members of the YCCC in a series of different experiments and ensembles over time. It evolved into an interest not just in the YCCC itself, but in a longer trajectory of the ensemble's politics, taking the YCCC as one nodal point within an ensemble of experiments. As such it expanded to consider both the members' involvement in the periods preceding the YCCC, its antecedents if you will, as well as its afterlives or successors.

Genesis and the social life of the question

A number of overlapping ensembles of study and struggle constitute this project. Along with countless other people, I was involved in the struggles for decolonisation at universities in South Africa in 2015-2017 – often referred to as Rhodes Must Fall, Outsourcing Must Fall, and Fees Must Fall. This moment generated a massive upsurge in creative self-activity and a large number of autonomous projects and initiatives of different types grew out of and alongside these movements. These experiments were interested in building solidarity with organisations, unions, community groups and activists in sectors outside the university. A lot of the projects in which I was involved shared a loose and emergent political style and an intellectual orientation inspired and informed by debates about decolonisation that took place in the student movement. These activities also constituted new ensembles of activists of a range of political traditions coming together to work on various issues that emerged out of the struggles waged against racism, and privatisation, against outsourcing and for free education. These two factors – the creation of ensembles and an emerging orientation through involvement in a range of different experiments in politicised cultural work – are central to the origins of this dissertation. The initial interest emerged from the relationships on which these experiments were built and those relationships were the condition of possibility of undertaking this research. And fundamentally, my intellectual orientation and political style has been formed in these ensemble experiences of study and struggle in the present.

Publica[c]tion was process in 2016-2017 that produced a publication, the first of its kind, featuring contributions from mainly black student activists and some workers from twenty-one different universities in South Africa.[3] It was an intervention in the public discourse about emerging student and worker struggles the coverage of which was written predominantly by journalists focusing on spectacular moments and academics who had been largely removed from the actual process of organising, thinking and planning.[4] It intended to both function as an archive of that moment, and for students to independently contribute their own thoughts and reflections on the process in which they had been involved.

> Central to the mode of Publica[c]tion's production… was a methodology of, and a commitment to dialogue. The process's ontological basis was collective. The collective's basis was a shared political project – dynamic, multiple, divergent, contradictory and even incoherent as it was at particular moments. The foundation of getting together was an involvement in Black student politics. This co-involvement profoundly shaped the nature and character of the process. This entailment, this "openness to being affected by others, dispossessed

[3] Gamedze, A., Magano, T. and Naidoo, LA. *Publica[c]tion.* (Publica[c]tion Collective: Johannesburg, 2017).
[4] Gamedze, A. and Naidoo LA. "Publication as collective process: The mustfall mo(ve)ment and the emergence of Publica[c]tion," in Choudry, A., and Vally, S. (eds.), *The University and Social Justice: Struggles across the Globe*, (Pluto Press: London, 2020).

> and possessed by others" (Harney, S. & Moten, F. 2013, pp. 116), this entanglement with one another, all this raised serious questions about hierarchies, roles, divisions of labour, power and responsibility within publishing.[5]

Part of what the process of collectively producing *Publica[c]tion,* and the broader moment of which it was a part generated, was a critique of normative modes of academic production and how those were rooted in extractive methodologies and unequal relations of power. In the process we argued that an orientation of generosity and openness amongst comrades should take primacy over an academic orientation to ruthlessly critique or take down others' positions. An attentiveness to contradiction and the complex and messy dynamics of the process of struggle were more important in writing about that moment than formulating a single argument, thesis statement, or a reiteration of "the line."

As the massacre of miners at Marikana and the prevalent uprisings dubbed "service delivery protests" had, the 2015-2017 struggles for decolonization at South African universities played a role in shattering the myth of the post-apartheid rainbow nation. This generated a renewed interests amongst students in history. The collective feeling and critique was that the history we had been taught in schools, museums and in the mainstream media was limited and limiting. It was Eurocentric, produced an ignorance about African history, equated the liberation movement with the ANC and served the maxim that there was no alternative to the morass of the present.[6] The search was on for submerged, silenced and marginal histories of the liberation struggle to inform building alternatives in the present. The search was not only for alternative histories but an alternative way of engaging it. There was a critique of the teleological way that the versions of history we had been brought up on foreclosed imaginative possibilities and there was an interest in an approach that was intensely interested in process and contradiction. Out of the experience of political fracturing what was needed in the present was a way of organizing that is capable of holding contradiction and holding together.

Two projects that grew out of this renewed interest were Living Histories and Know Your Continent (KYC). Living Histories was a series of interviews conducted by myself and Koni Benson with activist elders who had been involved in the liberation movement from the 1950s – 1990s. The intention was to get their life histories, reflections on how movements got demobilised in the transition to democracy, and their thoughts on the present juncture. Between 2016 and 2019, in addition to a number of other people, we interviewed Marcus Solomon, Ottilie Abrahams, and Elizabeth van der Heyden. When we met Ottilie Abrahams in November 2016 in Windhoek we discussed the possibility of writing her incredible life history, a suggestion about which she was ambivalent. However, she thought that a history of the various minoritarian political organisations and projects she had been involved with could be politically useful.

KYC similarly grew out of what we called the "urgency of African history" which was an approach that was informed by Walter Rodney's assertion that the study of African history was fundamentally about the

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Saul, JS. "Cry for the beloved country: the post-apartheid denouement." *Review of African political economy,* 28:89, (2001): 429-460.

unfolding struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism and imperialism.[7] A group of us – Koni, myself and Akosua Koranteng as the core – organised and facilitated a popular education course with activists involved in different struggles across Cape Town that introduced major debates and processes in African history as a way of stimulating discussions about the political situation in the present. The original KYC was initiated by Neville Alexander when he was working at the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) in the 1980s and we drew on some of the materials he had developed for that initial course.[8] Via Leigh-Ann Naidoo, this work also connected us to her father, Derrick Naidoo who was a long-time friend and comrade of Neville Alexander's and others mentioned. Through Derrick we got involved with Youth Without Borders, an anti-xenophobic youth activist network, organising youth workshops and camps in Namibia and in South Africa where we would do versions of KYC sessions as a way into discussing relevant political questions facing us in the present.[9]

Through these and other projects,[10] a loose group of comrades and friends, an ensemble outside of any partisan or organisational home who were organising across multiple spaces, become connected to a number of people who had been involved in the YCCC and/or worked with some of its members in later periods. With questions fuelled by the fire of unfolding struggles, an interest in alternative and minoritarian histories in the liberation movement, and with an orientation toward understanding the complexity and contradiction of the process of organising, I became more and more interested in the YCCC.

The Yu Chi Chan Club/National Liberation Front in history

As I embarked on this project, I kept wondering why no one else had been as fascinated (or perhaps fixated) on the YCCC and the NLF as I was: Because surely if others had been, they would have written something – right? What I discovered in the process of this question was that others, only a minor few, had been interested and written somethings. Two or three years in, I found out that August "Augie" Matsemela had written an unsubmitted, and now missing, MA dissertation on the YCCC. Matsemela was a close associate of many in the YCCC and subsequently a member of the national network of guerrilla

[7] Rodney, W. *The groundings with my brothers*, (Verso: London, 2019).
[8] Benson, K., Gamedze, A. and Koranteng, A. "African history in context: toward a praxis of radical education," In Choudry, A., and Vally, S. (eds.) *Reflections on knowledge, learning and social movements: History's schools,* (Routledge: London, 2018), p.106.
[9] Benson, K. and Gamedze, A. "Beyond a Classroom: Experiments in a Post-border Praxis for the Future." In Choi, S., Selmeczi, A. and Strausz, E. (eds.) *Critical Methods for the Study of World Politics*, (Routledge: London, 2021), pp. 121-135.
[10] Benson, K., Gamedze, A. and Mushaandja, N. "Radical histories ii: Ottilie Abrahams Speaks." *Owela,* 1:1, (2018): 40-41; Gamedze, A. "Pathways to free education: Knowledge production, community and solidarity." *The Funambulist,* vol.22, March 2019, Available online at: https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/22-publishing-struggle/pathways-free-education-knowledge-production-community-solidarity-asher-gamedze-pathways [accessed on 22 February 2024]; Benson, K. and Gamedze, A. "Radical Histories i: SACHED and some others." *Pathways to Free Education*, vol.3, 2016.

cells that they were in the process of setting up – the National Liberation Front (NLF). His wife, Etta Matsemela, told me that he had been doing this research independently in the late 1980s into the early 1990s, funding his research expenses himself, working full-time in other in other jobs to pay for it. At some point he registered for an MA programme and had apparently finished a draft of the project that was close to completion but passed away before he managed to make the final changes and submit it. After August Matsemela passed, Etta Matsemela recalled delivering the manuscript to someone at Neville Alexander's office who promised to give it to Alexander, with the hope that he might know what to do with it – get it published, archived or something. She didn't get an acknowledgement of receipt nor did she hear back from Alexander. Knowing he was so busy and not knowing him very well, she didn't want to hassle him and didn't end up following up further.

This story of Matsemela's lost MA is truly tragic for a range of reasons. At a sentimental level, for him and for Etta it is tragic because he worked so hard on it amidst other commitments, it was a labour of love and he was so close to completion. As a history, the fact that he was so close to the YCCC and involved in the NLF, it would have been so incredibly interesting to see his narration of that period and his and his comrades' reflections on that experience, thirty years ago then, from the vantage point of the 1990s in the heat of the "transition". Matsemela was undertaking the research within a moment when the ANC had consolidated a position of hegemony within the anti-apartheid movement and was co-opting and appropriating the memory of the national liberation movement. His work would have been an important stake in that struggle over the history. Even as his work was never published, the traces that do remain of his research process have been useful. Etta Matsemela still has in her possession a few folders titled with the various sub-themes of the project such as "The Rehoboth Incident. SWAPO history." Inside the folders are pages of hand-written notes scribbled with a calligraphic sensibility that is like a secret code of its own, surely forged in underground organising where one had to make sure that if your notes were discovered, they would sure as hell not be legible(!). These notes are based on his interviews with other members of the YCCC. In addition to these, some recordings of his interviews, even though he is not listed as the interviewer, are archived in a depository online through the University of Cape Town's Centre for Popular Memory (CPM) website. With the passage of time, these interviews in particular have taken on an additional significance as the interviewees who were members of the YCCC – Ottilie Abrahams, Kenneth Abrahams and Fikile Bam – have all passed away over the past decade or so.

As I said/asked, surely others must have shared my fascination (?). August Matsemela proved me right, as did Allison Drew – many times over. On the whole Drew's work on the YCCC/NLF has been incredibly useful to my own project, and more broadly than that, it is a valuable contribution to the historiography on the liberation struggle in South Africa. She has published collections of documents from "South Africa's radical tradition"[11] and since 2015 has authored papers on various aspects of the history of the

[11] Drew, A. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, vol. 1,* (Mayibuye: Belville, 1996); Drew, A. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, vol. 2,* (Buchu: Cape Town, 1996).

YCCC and the NLF, including the influence of the Algerian war on their ideas and strategies,[12] and a gendered reading of the groups, their membership and activities.[13] She is currently working on a book project with the working title of "The State versus Neville Alexander and ten others: The causes and consequences of a political trial."[14] One of the intentions of this latter work has been to position the YCCC/NLF as an exponent of the "New Left" in South Africa.[15] This endeavour might well generate some interesting insights as a fairly novel approach to the history which may open it up to new questions and lines of inquiry. However, the impulse to situate it within the New Left – a political movement that developed and was theorised as such primarily in Europe and the USA, and to a lesser extent in Japan[16] – partly through the influence of Third World struggles, seems to privilege a Northern framework. This making it legible within the framework of the New Left potentially undermines the local context of its development within the liberation movement in southern Africa and in so doing obscures it and subverts its meaning, appropriating its history for an internationalism that privileges the metropolitan centre. My own inquiry both expands on and diverges from Drew's. It expands on it in that the dissertation is interested in the longer trajectory of the ensemble that was at one stage constituted as the YCCC. It diverges as it is interested in the ensemble, their ideas and actions, within trends and dynamics of the liberation movement in South Africa and Namibia and how they drew on international experiences of revolutionary struggle in order to make a contribution to their own context. I argue that the YCCC/NLF and the longer trajectory of their study and struggle produced an idiosyncratic and differentiated tradition of politics beyond the confines of the New Left paradigm.

The Unity Movement in history

The exceptions above – of Matsemela's and Drew's work – notwithstanding, the YCCC and the NLF, as well as their antecedents and their descendants, have largely escaped focused historical attention. This disappearance is part of a broader trend associated with the precarious place of the UM – the political home from which the YCCC emerged – within broader literature on the liberation struggle in South Africa. The "UM" refers quite loosely to a grouping of organisations that developed in the liberation

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[12] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front during South Africa's Transition to Armed Struggle." *International Review of Social History,* 67:S30, (2022): 179-207.
[13] Drew, A. "Visions of liberation: the Algerian war of independence and its South African reverberations." *Review of African Political Economy,* 42:143, (2015): 22-43.
[14] Drew, A. *The State versus Neville Alexander and ten others: The causes and consequences of a political trial,* (Forthcoming). The book project's website can be viewed on the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study website: https://stias.ac.za/fellows/projects/the-state-versus-Neville Alexander-alexander-and-ten-others-the-causes-and-consequences-of-a-political-trial/ [accessed 23 February 2024].
[15] Drew, A. "When Thought was a Crime: Neville Alexander and South Africa's New Left, c. 1957-1963," 11 October 2022. *Rethinking Africa Seminar Series 5,* Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town.
[16] See for example: Mewes, H. "The German new left." *New German Critique,* 1 (1973): 22-41; Teodori, M. *The New Left: A Documentary History,* (Bobbs-Merrill: New York, 1969); Lin, C. *The British new left*, (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1993); Gosse, V. *Rethinking the new left: An interpretative history*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2005).

movement in South Africa from 1943 onwards. 1943 was the year of the founding of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the abbreviated name of which (the Unity Movement) has since been used to encapsulate the political tendencies, and sensibilities of people and organisations associated with, and derived from it. If you ask a UM-adherent what the key tenets of the UM's politics are, they will almost definitely respond with three things: non-racialism, non-collaboration with the instruments of the oppressor, and adherence to the Ten Point Programme.

Non-racialism is a political orientation to race or racialism founded on the understanding that there is no scientific or biological basis to the logic of race, that it is a socially constructed category. Ndumiso Dladla suggests that there are liberal and liberatory or radical variations of non-racialism.[17] The former, liberal non-racialism, often amounts to a colour-blindness or a dismissal of race and a failure to take seriously and respond to the realities of racism and its social reality – the way it has shaped and continues to shape life, the world and relations in society in material ways. The latter proceeds from the same premise but suggests that the critique of race's logic is merely the departure point. The relations of race and racism require continual struggle against the ways in which they configure all aspects of life, even amongst comrades. As Adhikari has suggested, non-racialism in the UM existed across this spectrum, at times proving an incisive weapon to challenge apartheid racism, at others making concessions to its logic and reproducing reactionary forms of "Colouredness."[18] Non-collaboration is a political principle to refuse to work with the instruments of the oppressor. The boycott flows from non-collaboration as the weapon of struggle.[19] Like non-racialism, the practical application and adherence to non-collaboration has an uneven history in the UM. It was at certain moments able to unite the oppressed against working the instruments of their oppression – such as in the boycott of the bhunga councils in the 1930s and the Coloured Affairs Department in the 1940s[20] – at other moments it was used as a justification to avoid getting involved in mass struggles.[21] The Ten Point Programme was the basis on which the NEUM was founded in 1943. It was basically a social democratic programme touching on most major social and economic issues – universal franchise, free and compulsory provision of education, inviolability of a person and property, freedom of movement, speech and association, equality of the sexes and a revision of the tax regime, land question, and the legal system.[22] (Interestingly, it was developed more than ten years prior to the more well-known Freedom Charter of the Congress Alliance, in 1955). For UM adherents, the combination of non-racialism, non-collaboration and the Ten Point Programme were the constituent elements of "the

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[17] Dladla, N. *Here is a table: A Philosophical Essay on History and Race in South Africa,* (African Sun Media: Stellenbosch, 2020).

[18] Adhikari, M. "Fiercely non-racial? Discourses and politics of race in the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943–70." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 31:2, (2005): 403-418. For a recentengagement with the some of the limits and contradictory of non-racialism, see Pillay, S. "Why I am no longer a non-racialist: Identity and difference." In Mangcu, X. (ed.) *The Colour of Our Future: Does race matter in post-apartheid South Africa*, (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2015), pp.133-152.

[19] Tabata, IB. *Boycott as a weapon of struggle,* (Prometheus: Durban, 1952).

[20] Ibid., and Tabata, IB., *The awakening of a people.* (Spokesman Books: Nottingham, 1974).

[21] Alexander, N. "Aspects of non-collaboration in the Western Cape 1943–1963." *Social Dynamics,* 12:1, (1986): 1-14.

[22] Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and political thought of The New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s,* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2019), p.129-130.

new road" – the basis of principled struggle for the liberation movement.[23] The contents and interpretation of the Ten Point Programme were sites of major struggle internal to the UM. Some of the dynamics of the resulting split will be engaged in Chapter One. Other concepts crucial to the study include the related principles of non-partisan and non-sectarian. At a basic level these refer to an orientation to political collaboration which is open and committed to working in solidarity across partisan affiliation and ideological or political differences.

I suggest that the precarious place of the UM in the broader literature is largely a problem of isolation. Tendencies with regards to the peculiarity of the UM's isolated place in literature can be broadly categorized into three. The first group of literature is works whose central focus is on processes in the liberation movement focused on events, process or organisations in which UM formations either doesn't feature at all, are reduced to exponents and expressions of "coloured politics" or play a range of minor roles – from cameos, to footnotes, or strawmen.[24] Broader liberation movement historiography generally treats the UM as an eccentric group of people in Cape Town often characterized as armchair revolutionaries, or loosely labelled as Trotskyists, of whom any serious consideration should be self-evidently unnecessary.[25] The effects of this are to ignore, downplay or dismiss the role of the UM and obscure it. While some of these caricatures undoubtedly gesture toward a historical truth – that many UM organisations at various moments tended to isolate themselves from broader political processes in the liberation movement – it is most definitely not the entire story. The UM, as a federally constituted body, had affiliated organisations across the country and across time and space its history is incredibly uneven.

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[23] Tabata, IB., *The awakening of a people.*

[24] Solomons, CM. "Reading the voices of a fractured Coloured elite: Coloured intellectuals and newspapers in the Cape, c. 1959-1966." PhD diss. Stellenbosch University, 2022; van der Ross, R. *In our own skins: A political history of the coloured people*, (Jonathan Ball Publishers: Cape Town, 2015); van der Ross, R. *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid: A Study of Political Movements among the Coloured People of South Africa, 1880-1985*, (Tafelberg: CapeTown, 1986); Lewis, G. *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African "Coloured" Politics,* (David Phillip: Cape Town, 1987).

[25] Examples for this are plentiful. A couple of pointed ones suffice to illustrate the point. The UM plays a minor role in McKay and Larkin's projects on the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) the white-dominated liberal student formation. They both acknowledge the presence and counterveiling force of UM politics and ideas in black student politics in the 1940s-1960s with particular reference to the contestations for political space between NUSAS, the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) and SOYA. Larkin, C. "Becoming liberal: a history of the National Union of South African students: 1945-1955." MA thesis. University of Cape Town, 2001; McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS): 1956-1970." PhD diss. University of South Africa, 2015. For an example of a UM cameo, Tom Lodge pays very little attention to the UM generally but he acknowledges a few specific moments or contributions. One of these is the Society Of Young Africa (SOYA) branch in Sharpeville which was the primary organized political grouping in the area and played a key role in mobilizing people in the pre-1960 era; Lodge, T. *Black politics in South Africa since 1945,* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1983). More common than both the cameo and the minor role is the UM featuring as a footnote – actually or essentially – which is often a mode of dismissing it as an eccentric Trotskyist tendency, of which any serious engagement is unnecessary. Ziyana Lategan accurately captures this tendency here: "Over some time, the NEUM has come to be thought of as Trotskyist in orientation, predominantly 'Coloured', and passive in its political acts, relying mostly on the boycott as their primary 'weapon of struggle.'" Lategan, Z. "The Concept of Capitalist-Colonialism in the political thought of Hosea Jaffe." MA thesis. University of Cape Town, 2018, p.21.

It had affiliated organisations across the country, not just in Cape Town, and in different moments these organisations were some of the most active within their respective local struggles.[26]

Secondly, as one of the major contributions of the UM was intellectual production, a fairly substantial amount has been written about various aspects of the UM by people who were involved in its formations.[27] A trend within this category is a focus on the UM's ideas and its political principles in a way that situates its contribution to the broader struggle as the movement which achieved the distillation of the "correct" analysis and the distillation and application of the "correct" political principles. A third category includes scholarly work on UM individuals, organisations and ideas.[28] The majority of these works were written by people who were themselves either involved in UM formations or have been influenced by UM ideas or individuals. A trend within many of these writings, in responding to the UM's position of relative marginalization within the broader literature, has been to focus almost exclusively on the UM, its individuals, ideas and the dynamics internal to it. I argue that the unintended effect of this has been to exacerbate and perpetuate the image of a fairly isolated political tradition. A few notable outliers exist which have considered aspects of the UM more broadly within South African society and the liberation movement, and provided some critical reflection on its ideas and politics through that engagement.[29] These exceptions notwithstanding, the cumulative effect of these tendencies has generally been to exacerbate both aspects of the its isolation, as it often existed in history and as it exists in historiography.

This problem of isolation lends itself to, or tends towards, exceptionalism. One of the most recent historical works on the UM and some of its predecessors is Crain Soudien's *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and political thought of the New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s.* The book is both a wonderful contribution to

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[26] See for example Kayser, R. "Land and liberty: the Non-European Unity Movement and the land question, 1933-1976." MA thesis. University of Cape Town, 2002; Rassool, C. and Witz, L. "The 1952 Jan Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History in South Africa." *The Journal of African History,* 34:3 (1993): 447-468.

[27] Jaffe, H. "Signposts of the History of the Unity Movement: Two Lectures." *University of Cape Town History Department Seminar,* (1992); Kies, B. *The contribution of the non-European peoples to world civilisation*, (Teachers League of South Africa: Cape Town, 1953); Mokone, S. *Majority rule: some notes*, (Teachers' League of South Africa: Cape Town, 1982); Tabata, IB. *The awakening of a people*, (Spokesman Books: Nottingham, 1974); Rassool, J. "Notes on the History of the Non-European Unity Movement in South Africa, and the role of Hosea Jaffe", Available online at: https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/supplem/rassool.htm [accessed on 29 September 2023].

[28] Hendricks, PR. "A principled engagement?: non-collaboration and the Teachers' League of South Africa in the Western Cape, 1990-2003." PhD diss. University of Cape Town, (2010); Kayser, R. and Adhikari, M. 'Peasant and Proletarian: A history of the African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa,' *African Historical Review*, 36:1, 5-27, (2004); Lategan, Z. "The Concept of Capitalist-Colonialism."; Omar, Y. ""In my stride": a life-history of Alie Fataar, teacher." PhD diss. University of Cape Town, 2015; Nasson, B. "The Unity Movement: Its legacy in historical consciousness." *Radical History Review*, 46-47 (1990): 189-211; Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa." PhD diss. University of the Western Cape, 2004; Sandwith, C. "Civility in Question: Cultural Debates in the Non-European Unity Movement." *University of Kwa-Zulu Natal History Seminar.* (2011); Sandwith, C. "Contesting a 'Cult (ure) of respectability': Anti-colonial resistance in the western cape, 1935–1950." *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa,* 16:1 (2004): 33-60; Soudien, C. "The contribution of radical Western Cape intellectuals to an indigenous knowledge project in South Africa." *Transformation,* 76:1, (2011): 44-66.

[29] Adhikari, M. "Fiercely non-racial?"; Alexander, N. "Aspects of non-collaboration."; Chisholm, L. "Education, Politics and Organisation: The Educational Traditions and Legacies of the Non-European Unity Movement (1943-1986)." *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa,* 15, (1991): 1-24.

historical work on the UM and the ideas of the liberation movement, and is beset with, and reproduces, some of the major issues that I have suggested characterize much of the literature on the UM, its ideas, individuals, politics and organisations. Soudien's central contention, or contribution, is that intellectuals in the New Era Fellowship (NEF), and what they produced, were "exceptional" in South Africa and in the world for their unprecedented thought on race, suggesting that they were the first to properly critique race as a social construction and expose it as a myth.[30] There are many issues with this claim in particular and a claim of this nature. One would assume that to make a claim of a particular group's thought being exceptional within a given context, they would at the very least have to survey the other thought within that context. This is not done in *Cape Radicals* either in the South African or the global context of the given time periods. The result of this is that the reader is given no sense how the NEF related to other intellectuals' ideas, what the advances they made on them, or what their critiques of them were such that their own contribution stood in a category of its own. The reader is only told that they were exceptional. This is problematic for the basic reason that the only person in a race is always going to be the fastest. In this particular case there were obviously other people in the race and further, members of the NEF themselves were engaging with them and their work, Soudien himself acknowledges this. For example, someone presented a review of CLR James' *The Black Jacobins* at an NEF session, and some members had even corresponded with the Caribbean radical.[31] While the James session is mentioned, his ideas are not and there is, more broadly, a curious paucity or basic absence of the state of discourse and debate on race and racism and the contributions of black intellectuals and black movements across the country and internationally to it. Exceptionalism as a paradigm seeks and produces isolation rather than connection precisely because the latter would trouble the claim of exceptionalism – situating the phenomenon within the actual context of its existence raises contradictions and challenges to the claim and shows inter-connections. My own sense is that this orientation undermines the claim of the NEF's significance rather than enhancing it. It would be far more interesting and important to be able to understand the NEF as part of an ongoing global debate and making a unique contribution to that; this would be an approach that would emphasise connections, contradictions and contestations with others' ideas rather than situating the NEF in a class of their own, or an exception to the trend.

Crain Soudien's book and his claim are not exceptional but are part of a broader tendency in much writing by, and on the UM. This dissertation is an attempt to have an alternative kind of engagement with the UM that is modelled by the relationship that the YCCC, its antecedents and descendants, had with it: largely influenced by, and intellectually formed within it, yet critical of many of its sensibilities and seeking a political existence outside of it. The results of this search for independence were uneven as they both

[30] "As innovative as the NEF was at the local level, on a much higher level it was groundbreaking. Its members were the first in South Africa's history to locate wider global discussions about 'race' and class in a larger discourse about the nature of domination. They arrived at the understanding – and this constituted the core of their global contribution – that the primary framing upon the modern world was constructed, namely, race, was false." Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals,* p.1-2.
[31] Ibid., p.31 and p.106.

departed from many aspects of the UM's politics and reproduced others. It was the desire and the attempt to connect with, collaborate with and be widely involved in the liberation movement that stretched the YCCC beyond some of the more isolationist sensibilities of the UM. The dissertation takes its cue from this orientation. It understands that the UM tradition – its adherents, activities, ideas and its tendencies – has made important contributions to the liberation movement in South Africa, and to a lesser extent in Namibia (through Namibians who studied or worked in South Africa). It is an attempt to produce a history of a group of activists in the liberation struggle, most of whom were formed in the UM but, critical of it in some ways, continually sought to create a political existence outside of, and independent of it. A history of this kind, of an ensemble on the outsides of this outside tradition (UM), from the late 1950s through to the mid-1980s, has not yet been attempted.

While no one has written a history of this group of activists' trajectories on the fringe of the UM and as part of the broader liberation movement, some of the individuals have been written about and some more so than others. Neville Alexander is the individual whose name and work are best known and there is a contemporary surge of interest in his ideas and writings.[32] Within this surge I have argued, unpopularly I might add, that there is a danger of fetishization and reification of Alexander as an individual in a way that abstracts him from the relationships of study and struggle in which he emerged.[33] This serves to undermine his own orientation – a number of people who were close to him say that he'd roll in his grave at all the honorifics and attention on him as an individual – and silences and obscures the other people who he studied and struggled with.[34] Dulcie September is, along with or after Alexander, probably the individual whose name is most recognisable in the popular memory of the liberation struggle and the struggle over her legacy presents a related but different set of challenges. She is probably remembered less for her own ideas, fortitude or militance than for being assassinated in Paris in 1988 as the ANC's chief representative in France, Switzerland and Luxembourg.[35] Within this, her history of intellectual and political formation within UM structures and her involvement in the YCCC/NLF is generally obscured or completely ignored.[36] Others are lesser recognized but better known for their contributions in "post-apartheid" society, such as Fikile Bam who worked for many years as the president of the Land Claims

[32] Dollie, N. "Dialogical narratives: reading Neville Alexander's writings." PhD diss. University of South Africa, 2015; Dollie, N. "The dance of an intellectual mandarin: a study of Neville Alexander's thoughts on the language question in South Africa." MA thesis. University of South Africa, 2011; Vally, S. and Motala, E. (eds.) *Against racial capitalism: Selected writings, Neville Alexander,* (Pluto: London, 2023); Zinn, A. (ed.) *Non-racialism in South Africa: The Life and Times of Neville Alexander*, (African Sun Media: Stellenbosch, 2016). Na-iem Dollie and Crain Soudien are also working on a biography of Neville Alexander, Interview with Na-iem Dollie. 6 April 2022. Cape Town.
[33] Gamedze, A. "The fetish of the individual in historical imagination: The case of Neville Alexander." *Neville Alexander Commemorative Conference*, University of Cape Town, 25-26 November 2022.
[34] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town; Interview with Yvette Abrahams. 1 & 7 February 2022. Gordon's Bay.
[35] Groenink, E. *Incorruptible: The Story of the Murders of Dulcie September , Anton Lubowski and Chris Hani,* (Evelyn Groenink: Cape Town, 2018); *Murder in Paris: The assassination of Dulcie September* . (Directed by Enver Samuel, South Africa, 2021); *They killed Dulcie September* [Podcast Series]. (Open Secrets and Sound Africa, 2019).
[36] "Webinar to commemorate the life of Dulcie September ." 29 March 2021, (Dullah Omar Institute and the South African Embassy in France), recording available online at: https://dullahomarinstitute.org.za/videos/recording-webinar-to-commemorate-the-life-of-Dulcie September -september [accessed on 24 February 2024].

Court, Marcus Solomon who remains involved as a community activist, and Ottilie Abrahams who was the principal of Jakob Marengo, the independent school she founded in Windhoek in 1985, until she passed on in 2018. The present project plays a significant role as it situates these and other individuals' ideas, activities and contributions within the group context of their involvement showing that they were always studying and struggling in collective, in ensemble.

Ensemble: An alternative methodology and organizational form

In the absence of a single unitary party, an organisation, a Movement, a faction, even a tendency or a Congress that spans the entire period of political thought and action under investigation, that is, late 1950s to mid-1980s, how does one capture the sense of organisational form and continuity? What is the thread? The absence of a single or recognisable form over time is not necessarily the absence of a form. Cabral, in "National Liberation and Culture", illustrated and explained that the form of expression of the struggle and movement for national liberation will necessarily change under different historical conditions.[37] At a certain moment the primary mode of struggle might be military, at others, it might take the form of education programmes, and at others it might focus on building up forms of economic autonomy. In the course of struggle, there are also, necessarily, moments and periods of intense action of a certain kind, and others of reflection, study and planning.[38] The dissertation thus asks: what was the thread that held this alternative tradition together? Was it the people, their choices, their collectively-evolved and dynamic sensibility, their context of socialisation? Does "ensemble" allow us to conceive of a historical subject that finds expression in different moments in a variety of forms – study groups, friendship groups, national forums, guerrilla cells, etc. – while there is some continuity with regards to the project or character of those forms? In other words, does it potentially provide another way of listening for whether they have, or carry a tendency/sensibility that is made, held and evolved by people, the ensemble?[39]

Saidiya Hartman develops the concept of the chorus which, in the historical and literal sense, refers to the collectives of black women who danced and sang-in-concert in shows and in concerts in music halls,

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[37] Cabral, A. *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amilcar,* (Monthly Review Press: New York and London, 1979).
[38] The Freirian notion of praxis is useful here, to be thought on a longer historical timeframe. In other words, while action and reflection influence and constitute each other in any cycle of political action, there might be long periods where the dominant pursuit is reflection on previous chapters of action, and planning for the future action. Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed,* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972).
[39] This approach resonates somewhat with CLR James's "labour" in *Notes on Dialectics,* in which he analyses the various phases of the European labour movement over time, captured trans-historically by the term "labour", through an application of the method of Hegel. The book was the philosophical basis of the Johnson-Forest Tendency and the logical treatise for their break with Trotsky. James, CLR. *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin,* (Allison & Busby: London, 1980).

cabarets and private parties in New York and Philadelphia in the USA in the early 20th century.[40] About a prison revolt in which black women were incarcerated in a social context where modes of livelihood-making that were available to them were extremely limited and/or criminalised, she extends the notion:

> All of them might well have shouted, *No slave time now. Abolition now.* In *the surreal, utopian nonsense of it all*, and at the heart of riot, was the anarchy of colored girls: treason en masse, tumult, gathering together, the mutual collaboration required to confront the prison authorities and the police, the willingness to lose oneself and become something greater — a chorus, a swarm, an ensemble, a mutual aid society. In lieu of an explanation or an appeal, they shouted and stomped and screamed. How else were they to express the longing to be free? How else were they to make plain their refusal to be governed?[41]

Here the chorus is constituted by the striking incarcerated whose noise-making-as-refusal, stretches the concept beyond its historical and literal context to something more open - a collective form of the downtrodden in which an individual is subsumed as the ensemble emerges as a resisting subject. Dialectically, it is in that process of communal subsummation and subjectification, that the individual also finds themselves and their voice in the collective's.

In the break, the ensemble is a collective mode of being and doing together. It is based in the black tradition of improvisation and that tradition's repertoire of knowledge and technique. Moten's concept begins around there and moves outwards in multiple directions.

> That's why it calls for and tries to open a new analytic way of listening and reading, an improvisation attuned to the ensemble of work's organization and production, the ensemble of the politico- economic structure in which it is produced and the ensemble of the senses from which it springs and which it stimulates. This would be something like a channeling—in and through history— of something more fundamental than the mark of locality.[42]

Moten's ensemble here challenges us to hear history and struggle differently: Ensemble, as the historical subject, is an improvisor. Ensemble asks a question and, again, following and reiterating Moten, "*tries to open a new analytic way of listening and reading*" history. In the absence of a Party that spans the entire period of political action, organisational form is emergent, or improvised, as is any form of action, product of improvisation, in which the ensemble engages. What was the YCCC/NLF's mode of being and doing together? How did it develop over time through the praxis of improvisation – the ongoing cycle of collective study, action and reflection? And what was it about it that resulted in its various forms over time?

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[40] Hartman, S. *Wayward lives: beautiful experiments: Intimate histories of social upheaval,* (Norton: New York, 2019), and Hartman, S. "The anarchy of colored girls assembled in a riotous manner." *South Atlantic Quarterly,* 117:3, (2018): 465-490.
[41] Hartman, "The anarchy of colored girls assembled in a riotous manner.," p.31
[42] Moten, F. *In the Break,* p.67.

Crucial to how ensemble is deployed is the insurgent intellectuality that is theorised in the undercommons wherein study is critical:

> When I think about the way we use the term 'study,' I think we are committed to the idea that study is what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice. The notion of a rehearsal – being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, or old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory – there are these various modes of activity. The point of calling it 'study' is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present… To do these things is to be involved in a kind of common intellectual practice. What's important is to recognize that that has been the case – because that recognition allows you to access a whole, varied, alternative history of thought.[43]

In the history under investigation there are two senses of study. The first is the intentional, direct, semi/organised process of learning and knowledge production which encompasses the practices of reading, writing and debate. The second sense insists that study does not only take place in the time specifically dedicated to 'learning' but, as Moten describes above, it encapsulates the broader intellectuality that is actually the fabric of particular relationships. In actuality, the first study can actually be subsumed within the second.

Ensemble is not necessarily a smooth structure in which everyone is harmoniously equal in any abstract sense. It's a complex space of difference in which there is an uneven distribution of power. Because my intention is not to recover this history decry its disappearance and make a grand claim about it being the most radical, the most important, or the most exceptional, my approach requires an attunement to these dynamics and the messiness of individuals. The concept of the ensemble has inevitably to contend with the concept and ideology of the individual. Marx's concept of the commodity fetish suggests that the form in which we encounter commodities in the marketplace of capitalism obscures the actual relations of production that were their condition of possibility in realising that form.[44] The product hides the process. In order to understand what a commodity is in a real sense, it becomes necessary to demystify and reveal its actual process of production including the labour that went into the product's creation. While the figure of the powerful man as the protagonist of history has long been critiqued by feminist, socialist and other radical historians, particularly in the realm of liberation histories, the big man dies hard. Amilcar Cabral and the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party (CPP), etc. etc. etc. The memory of entire organisations becomes subordinated to the symbol of single men, often those who wrote. They and their writings often confront us as a corollary to commodities in historical memory, hiding the true social process of their creation. In all of these instances, these men are product of a much broader historical moment and it is the efforts of many people that have produced the ideas they became known for and the

[43] Moten, F. and Harney, S. *The undercommons: Fugitive planning and Black study,* (Minor Compositions: Brooklyn, 2013), p.110.
[44] Marx, K. *Capital: Volume I,* (Penguin: London, 2004).

very conditions for them to get the recognition they did.[45] Ensemble insists on listening for the harmonic and the discordant in the spaces between people.

Regarding what is obscured, Jean Allman uses the concept of 'disappearing' which might be considered part of the arsenal of silencing.[46] Writing about Ghanaian nationalist and organiser supreme, Hannah Kudjoe, who all but vanished from narratives about Ghana's independence struggle despite her important role in it, Allman presents a critique of a common impulse in historical writing about marginalised and oppressed people and groups: It is not enough to assume that women have been excluded or marginalised in the production of history and then, as a corrective, include it in the narrative.[47] The radical historian has to take it further to consider how they were disappeared; critique the power relations operating in the historical event or process as well as in the process of that history's writing. The task is to demystify and defetishise the related processes of the production of some figures as heroes and the disappearance of others in a historical narrative, because it is through that that we are able to unmask relations of power that led to their mystification. Ensemble is a framework that tries to reconfigure our listening beyond (or after) the Party and the collective form of a band offers an entirely alternative way to see, hear and read the organisational form of political life and its development over time.

The Classic Quartet

The paradigmatic ensemble is for me a musical one, in general from the black creative music tradition/s which some have labelled jazz, and in particular, John Coltrane's "Classic Quartet" consisting of himself, drummer Elvin Jones, pianist McCoy Tyner and bassist Jimmy Garrison. Known as one of the greatest quartets of modern music, this band got together in 1962 and played together as a unit until 1965, recording eleven albums and touring endlessly. Through their work on the bandstand, in the studio and time together on the road, the ensemble established an idiomatic and idiosyncratic mode of collective musical improvisation which was constituted by particular sensibilities, practices, repertoires and ways of playing together. These influenced and were influenced by the ensemble's contemporaries and have shaped much of the music produced in their wake.

John Coltrane, having pushed bebop – the predominant revolutionary current in jazz in the 1940s and 1950s – to some of its outer edges, [48] had a spiritual reawakening in 1959 and felt called to pursue music in a way that responded to that new sensibility. His quest led him to seek out old musical and spiritual

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[45] Borges, SV., *Militant Education, Liberation Struggle, Consciousness: The PAIGC Education in Guinea Bissau 1963-1978*, (Peter Lang: Berlin, 2019).
[46] Allman, J. "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: nationalism, feminism, and the tyrannies of history." *Journal of Women's History,* 21:3, (2009): 13-35.
[47] Ibid.
[48] For a discussion of some of these processes and their philosophical implications, see Gamedze, A. "Speculative ontology." In Miracle Workers' Collective (eds.) *A greater miracle of perception,* (Archive Books: Berlin, 2019).

traditions, particularly from Asia and Africa. In his study of these musical forms, he discovered old ways of playing, writing and hearing music. These old ways were new to him and the musical context he was working in and he was eager to incorporate these new-old ideas into an ensemble's sound and approach. In the early 1960s he was searching for a musical context that could be the vehicle through which that quest found expression. By 1962 he had assembled that vehicle, an ensemble: the Classic Quartet. One of the major innovations that his group developed was in modal improvisation, which was, in the world of modern jazz, a revolutionary new approach to harmony – the structural basis of the music.[49]

McCoy Tyner, only 22 when he started playing with Coltrane, remembers the time in his bands as a period of study, himself as a student and Coltrane showing and teaching him new possibilities in the music.[50]

> That period of time was a milestone in my life and had a tremendous influence on me. It was good for all of us. This was not "just his band," but it was a unit of men with a variety of ideas playing together. He was like the conductor. There wasn't an overemphasis of leadership, but we each gave our all. The unit was like a train; its parts make it what it is. Of course, 'Trane had more experience than the rest of us, that's why he was the conductor, the leader. He was like an everflowing spring. Always giving. People like him are the ones who have contributed great things to music.[51]

The student-teacher relationship was transcended on the bandstand where the ensemble played as a unified force, as co-conspirators in the sonic experience. Tyner, through his ground-breaking work on the ivories, became a leading light of the piano in how he interpreted harmony and voiced chords. The individual players in that ensemble were at the forefront of the music at that time and the ways they played in that band changed forever the horizons and roles of their respective instruments. For example, Ron Carter, one of the great bass players in the tradition said that easiest way to assess Elvin Jones' influence on drumming is to listen to pre-Elvin drummers, listen to Elvin and listen to post-Elvin drummers and the impact is clear – he fundamentally changed the possibilities of playing the drum kit, in its entirety as an instrument.[52]

Elvin himself reflected on the experience of playing in the quartet:

> The years that I was with John Coltrane… yeah… it's very special, it's something very special. First of all it was an opportunity for me, and certainly for the other members of the quartet to, ah, articulate all of the, all of our accumulated knowledge up to that point and to have a way of expressing it and making it a cohesive sound

[49] For a broader understanding of this tendency and these movements in the music, see Kelley, RDG. *Africa speaks, America answers: Modern jazz in revolutionary times,* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2012).
[50] "McCoy Tyner Interview" [youtube video]. Available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrM0GcAkkvQ [accessed on 28 March 2023].
[51] Tyner, M. "The Black scholar interviews: McCoy Tyner" *The Black Scholar*, 2:2, (1970), p.45.
[52] "Different Drummer/Elvin Jones (complete) 1979" [youtube video]. Available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igdN9kFCM-s [accessed on 9 May 2023].

> within that context; and it ah... in a few words, I suppose it gave us an opportunity to play our music the way we felt about it, the way it moves spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, yeah, in that fashion.[53]

The ensemble became a place to assimilate and synthesise all of the members' individual ideas and approaches and realise them to their fullest extent in their collective musical, spiritual and emotional practice.

The nature of work as a jazz musician in 1960s USA tended to be constituted by a tapestry of multiple engagements that varied in terms of time – a gig could be a one- or two- day studio date, a six-week stint at a single club, or a three-week international tour, for example. As Coltrane's quartet was in high demand, so too were the individual musicians who were, at the time regarded as some of the best on the scene. In hindsight they are still held in that high, if not higher, regard. They all regularly played gigs and did sessions with other musicians in between Coltrane's commitments. Occasionally other musicians would enter the quartet when the original members couldn't make it and Coltrane would also bring in additional horn players to augment the ensemble. In this way, they were connected to the contemporary currents flowing in the rivers of African-American improvised music, and indeed they were part of it and part of shaping it in particular ways. One example of how the Classic Quartet influenced the broader scene is by playing together on other musicians' records. Elvin, McCoy and regular Coltrane collaborator, bassist Reggie Workman played on saxophone player Wayne Shorter's 1965 album *JuJu,*.[54] Another is Tyner's own *McCoy Tyner Plays Ellington* on which both Elvin and Garrison feature.[55] There are multiple examples of this nature, of the ensemble's tendencies infecting the broader development of the music beyond Coltrane's band. In that way, the ensemble of four had a major impact on the directions of "jazz" at the time of the quartet's existence and, probably even more so, afterwards.

Around 1965, the music that Coltrane was playing, where his spiritual quest was taking him, led him to bigger ensembles and an even more free, "avant-garde" approach to music. He added additional members to the ensemble and started working with some different players. Saxophonist Pharoah Sanders became a regular in the band and many other horn players including Archie Shepp, Marion Brown, Dewey Johnson and Freddie Hubbard.[56] After a short time with two drummers, both Elvin and young firebrand Rashied Ali in the band, Elvin said that he could no longer hear himself in these new expanded contexts and felt he couldn't contribute to the new music so he left. Ali picked up where Elvin left off, he abstracted Elvin's propulsive polyrhythmic concept to a more open, loose way of playing time, what he called "mutli-directional rhythms."[57] Tyner was replaced on the piano by Alice Coltrane whose oceanic and fluid-like swelling sensibility as a player built on her predecessor's and took it to further out territories.

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[53] "Elvin Jones - Elvin Jones Interview - 8/18/1990 - Newport Jazz Festival (Official)" [youtube video]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmaq1aXnVR8 [accessed 26 august 2021].
[54] Shorter, W. *JuJu* [album]. (Blue Note: New York, 1965).
[55] Tyner, M. *McCoy Tyner Plays Ellington* [album]. (Blue Note: New York, 1965).
[56] Coltrane, J. *Ascension* [album]. (Impulse!: New York, 1966)
[57] Wilmer, V. *As serious as your life: John Coltrane and beyond,* (Serpent's Tail: London, 1992).

Jimmy Garrison was the only one from the Classic Quartet who stayed the course, sticking with Coltrane through his further out explorations.[58]

Other than Garrison and the impulse of the music, one of the continuities in Coltrane's post-Classic Quartet groups was the repertoire. Some of his songs became staples of his bands across time and line ups, becoming common symbols and practices associated with the ensemble. Fred Moten reflects on the process of being in a long-term conversation, an ongoing process of thinking with others, which is analogous to Coltrane's practice of repertoire: "It feels more like there are one or two things that I've been talking about with people forever. And the conversation develops over the course of time, and you think of new things and you say new things."[59] "My Favourite Things" was one of Coltrane's most famous and popular tunes, a rendition of a song that was originally composed by Richard Rodgers for the film *The Sound of Music.* Coltrane originally released it on an album with the song's name in 1961 with Elvin, McCoy and Steve Davis on bass.[60] The song was critically acclaimed and popularly adored, a major mainstream breakthrough. Coltrane played it with many of his bands in concert for the rest of his career and these recordings provide a marker for the ensemble's musical sensibility at a specific moment. Over time the song lengths of "My Favourite Things"' performances stretched with the excursions into the further out avant garde textures. The original clocked in at 13:41, *Newport '63* featured a 17 minute version of it by the three quarters of the Classic Quartet with drummer Roy Haynes in place of Elvin,[61] the Classic Quartet played "My Favourite Things" for 20 minutes at Comblain La-Tour in Belgium in August 1965,[62] and , in one of Coltrane's major late career statements, on *Live In Japan,* with Jimmy Garrison, Alice Coltrane, Rashid Ali and additional saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, they play the tune for an astonishing 57 minutes, bearing little immediate resemblance to his original version![63]

In 1967, at only 40 years of age, having challenged the orthodoxy of the saxophone and opened up major new directions in free music, Coltrane died of liver cancer. At his funeral, two other saxophonists, Albert Ayler and Ornette Coleman, both good friends who had been influenced by Coltrane on personal, spiritual and musical levels, and who each represented other strands of free music, played once more for their departed friend.[64] The funeral was a site of paying tribute to Coltrane as well as, through playing, recounting and reciting the idiosyncratic currents of the tradition of free music to which he gave his life. After Coltrane, the members of the Classic Quartet, all had long and illustrious careers (and in the case of Tyner, is still having!). They led their own bands and played in others', and collectively appeared on hundreds of records, sometimes playing together and other times with different musicians. One can hear the influence of that intensive, if short, period of collective study with each other in Coltrane's band in

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[58] Wilmer, V. *As serious as your life.*
[59] Moten, F. and Harney, S. *The undercommons,* p.104.
[60] Coltrane, J. *My Favourite Things* [album]. (Atlantic: New York, 1961).
[61] Coltrane, J. *Newport '63* [album]. (Impulse!: New York, 1993).
[62] "John Coltrane Quartet My Favorite Things Live in Comblain-La-Tour 1965" [youtube video]. Available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehYM_cg2DHI [accessed on 24 February 2024].
[63] Coltrane, J. *Live in Japan* [CD box set]. (Impulse!: New York, 1991).
[64] Wilmer, V. *As serious as your life.*

their individual playing on many of their subsequent recordings. The quartet became, not only a vehicle for Coltrane's self-expression and the pursuit of his vision, but a space of collective improvisation where each player had the space to explore and develop their own voice on their instrument within a collective context to the fullest extent. That collective experience was a major touchstone in all of their lives and the ensemble's influence on each of them and their playing was significant and is something that shaped their contributions to the future developments in the music in profound ways.

Process: Interviewing comrades and assembling an archive

Following the paradigm of Coltrane's bands, this dissertation's research method is ensemble and its condition of possibility are relationships with comrades with whom I have organised in the various projects that I have described above, and others. "Study" as conceived in the undercommons is my entry point into thinking about ensemble as method. As Alex Haley has indicated, what has become labelled "oral history" is the predominant mode through which the transmission of memory and history in black families and communities takes place.[65] Similarly, as Trevor Ngwane indicates, it is often in the context of political organising in which activists learn history with and from their comrades, particularly from those older than themselves.[66] These reflections suggest that there is something everyday and incredibly familiar about the practice of engaging people within one's community – whether in families, organisations or communities – about their lives, their memories, their perspectives and desires. Anna Green raised a critique of a tendency in "oral history." She said that: "Historians are increasingly focusing upon the ways in which individual recollections fit (often unconscious) cultural scripts or templates." Resultantly, she argued: "There is apparently little space for the consciously reflective individual, or for the role of experience in changing the ways in which individuals view the world."[67] With Green, I am critical of this sensibility. Ensemble as a method takes for granted the sophistication of the conscious intellectual capacities of the people in the study and that they all have their own idiosyncratic modes of meaning-making that has been shaped by their socialization and their conscious choices over the course of their lives. Like in all social interactions, the power dynamics, context and the personalities of the characters involved shape what and how things are asked, said and unsaid. Involved in these interactions is always a process of criticality, whether voiced in the interaction or internally. In other words, critical reflection on the reliability of memory, aspects of testimony as performance, and other debates in "oral history" are

[65] Haley, A. "Black history, oral history and genealogy." In Perks., R. and Thomson, A. (eds.) *The oral history reader,* (Taylor and Francis: Abingdon, 2003), pp.9-20.
[66] Ngwane, T. "Learning in struggle: An activist's view of the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa." In Choudry, A., and Vally, S. (eds.) *Reflections on knowledge, learning and social movements: History's schools,* (Routledge: London, 2018), pp.168-186.
[67] Green, A. "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates." *Oral History,* 32:2, (2004), p.66.

part and parcel of everyday dialogue. As Moten insists, "The point of calling it 'study' is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present."[68]

The possibility of interviewing people came from relationships built through collective political work. Access to personal and family collections of materials has also been made possible through relations of trust, the origins of which predate the PhD. In and through the process of study that was the research methodology, many categories associated with normative social science research methodology have felt extremely foreign to the methodology of this project and have been configured and shaped by existing relationships rather than an academic taxonomy. The field, as a conceptual and real terrain outside of the researcher, somewhere the researcher goes for research and supposedly returns from to their regular life, does not in any way adequately capture the space in which the method has been carried out. Similarly, the notion of 'data' rings wrong to my ears when I consider the actual, intimate company of the interviews. The space and time around the interview – as company, drinking tea, shooting the breeze, talking about residual memories and discussing the unfolding political situation – was richly drenched with the nitty gritty of daily life that cannot be captured as or by 'data.' Many of the people who I have interviewed in the context of the project, have been people that I have had existing relationships with from various organising endeavours as part of my regular life. These relationships have remained a thread throughout the process and are the social basis of the research.

I did interviews with 33 people, mostly one-on-one but sometimes in ensembles of two or more and many of them took place over a few different sessions. These were conducted with members of the YCCC, its predecessors and afterlives, as well as family members of these people. I was already connected to many of these people through organizing work I had been involved in or other connections. Some people that I didn't know, or didn't know well, prior to the commencement of the project were reluctant to be interviewed for it. Reasons for reluctance often related to the repression people had experienced, particularly in underground organizing.[69] The intensity of organising in repressive conditions necessitated various forms of secrecy and people were often hesitant to break the silence about those experiences – particularly about other comrades who hadn't either publicly been exposed or disclosed aspects of their own involvement – despite the changed conditions. Those experiences also entailed many traumatic aspects and memories themselves might be repressed by individuals at the level of their psyche. And finally, some interviewees refused to share certain details because the history was linked to ongoing operations; they felt that the disclosure of particular information would compromise said operations. In certain instances it was the intervention of comrades I do know well that made introductions and

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[68] Moten, F. and Harney, S. *The undercommons,* p.110.

[69] For an elaboration on multiple aspects of how repression shapes memory and oral history testimony, see: Adler, N., Leydesdorff, S., Chamberlain, M., and Neyzi, L. (eds.) *Memories of mass repression: narrating life stories in the aftermath of atrocity.* (Routledge: London, 2017); Anstett, E. "Memory of political repression in post-Soviet Russia: the example of the Gulag." *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence,* 13, (2011): 1-1; Boyd, NA., and Roque Ramírez, FN. (eds.) *Bodies of evidence: The practice of queer oral history*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2012); and Hanafi, S. "Haifa and its Refugees: The Remembered, the Forgotten and the Repressed." *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 3:1, (2009): 176-191.

vouched for me as someone who, through our experience organising together, they considered trustworthy. As a result, I was able to interview some of the reluctant.

The interviews were a space of inter-generational study where I was often lectured on various aspects of history, contemporary politics and even received unsolicited supervisory advice on how to approach my dissertation. This indicated a certain investment in the project and a desire to influence it or contribute to it in some way. Another expression of this was interviewees generously giving, lending or showing me various kinds of documents or paraphernalia that had a relationship to the historical process we were discussing. Often they would have pulled something/s out prior to the interview and then gave them to me before we started, or something I asked or something they said triggered a memory and off they would go to a bookshelf, box of documents or filing cabinet and come back with something pertinent to the conversation. Elizabeth van der Heyden gave me a copy of "Neville Alexander: Remembering and Celebrating an Extraordinary Life", the brochure for his memorial service which was held at Belgravia High School in Cape Town on 8 September 2012. Marcus Solomon had a folder of newspaper clippings about the YCCC/NLF's arrest and trial in 1963/64 and some documents relating to the Cape Peninsula Students' Union's (CPSU) history, he lent this to me and allowed me to make my own copy of the documents. Karen Press has a collection of Neville Alexander's writings and documents at her home, she invited me to come anytime to look through it, an offer I took her up on. Frank van der Horst gave me a document titled "Tribute to Dr Kenneth G. Abrahams" which was a speech about the CPSU and the YCCC which he gave at Abrahams' memorial in 2017 at their alma mater, Trafalgar High School. In Windhoek when I met with comrades Shaun Whittaker and Harry Boesak, the latter gave me a document titled "Tribute to Ottilie Abrahams" which was an obituary piece that he authored after she passed. One anonymous person – who some spoke about as the "unofficial archivist" of "Neville's Group" from the late 1970s – had in their personal collection copies and some originals of publications, posters, pamphlets, cassettes, photos and a whole range of other items relating to the National Forum, Cape Action League, SOYA (Society of Young Azania) and other activities of that grouping in that period. They, and others such as Salim Vally and Imelda Whittaker, kindly lent me a substantial amount of their personal materials for an extended period. Additionally, sometimes I would also bring an archival document to an interview, and the engagement with it often ignited other memories, stories or thoughts in the process of remembering. In the above-described senses the interviews and the archives were completely connected and entangled. Both were part of an assemblage of a research process rather than entirely discreet methods.

The social conditions brought on as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and how that affected elderly people in particular, also shaped the dynamics of interviews. The interviews were only conducted when it was considered safe to do so and in observation of recommended safety protocols – wearing masks, keeping areas well-ventilated and physically-distanced. The anxiety of the situation often made the atmosphere a bit clunky and somewhat difficult for an interview. Observing recommended regulations – sitting far apart, wearing masks and keeping windows open or sitting outside – often meant that we did

not always hear each other very well and we could not see each other's facial expressions. Isolation regulations and the threat of getting, potentially fatally, sick, particularly for elderly folks, meant that many people's social lives contracted substantially. In this context the social space of the interviews sometimes took on additional significance. The experience of getting old, generally, can be a lonely experience. As people stop working, become less mobile and have less energy, as friends and siblings pass on and family members move away, older folks often see people less. This was all compounded by the pandemic. Interviews then sometimes became instances of company in a fairly solitary chapter of life and often, the opening up old memories, ignited the desire for further conversation and company. Long after the recorded interview ended, often I would stay and chat for over an hour with people, I was offered tea, invited for dinner and drawn into protracted processes of saying goodbye (which are very common amongst many people in our part of the world). These invitations – both implicit and explicit – were of course also about the kindness, generosity and hospitality of people and the interviews themselves were moments of company in mine and other people's social lives which had been reconfigured by the prevailing conditions.

During the course of undertaking the research for this project I have actually spent very little time inside of archives as normatively conceived. "The archive" – an assemblage of various dispersed and fragmented sources across time and space – of this project was shaped significantly by the minoritarian position of the ensemble within contemporary historical memory, the personal collections of individuals and contemporary societal processes. The first year of this project coincided with the first year of the Covid pandemic. As a result, and under the severe lockdown regulations imposed and policed by the South African government, archives, amongst most public facilities, were closed or largely inaccessible for the majority of 2020 and 2021. During this initial period of covid closure, staff at UCT's Special Collections Library – which housed many collections important to my project including the Neville Alexander Papers, the Unity Movement of South Africa/Tabata Collection, and others – kindly digitised a portion of the materials that I needed. On 18 April 2021 a devastating fire destroyed the Reading Room at UCT's Jagger Library, which is where researchers could view items in Special Collections. The fire destroyed shelves, books, desks, computers, chairs, as well as some of archival materials. Much of what wasn't destroyed by the fire got damaged by water in the efforts to quell the flames. A massive effort to salvage what could be salvaged, to air out and safely dry and store what was wet and reconstitute the collection in a new location got underway but, to this day, Special Collections' activities have still not resumed normal operating. While the above-described coalition of disasters – covid and then the fire – refers in particular only to collections housed at UCT's library, it is significant because those collections are not officially archived anywhere else in their entirety. In the context of my project this has meant that over its entire duration it has not at a single point been possible for me to go into this particular archive and as a result I have only ever had partial access to some of the collections that I initially thought would be central to the research.



Figure 1. The container/ archive of the Abrahams materials at Jakob Marengo High School. Photograph in author's possession, August 2021.

Other archives have thus ended up being central to this project. These have been personal and family collections of materials that people have held onto and kept at home which range massively in terms of size, and level of organisation. In Windhoek, the Abrahams family has thousands of Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams' documents which are spread out across containers and offices at the independent school they founded in 1985, various rooms in their house, and cupboards, shelves, filing cabinets, and stacks on the floor. I spent many many, many hours clearing out the container which was storing old televisions, mattresses from youth camps, surplus and broken desks as well as decades of boxes filled with files, documents, papers, posters, patient records, receipts, books, journals, magazines, minutes from meetings, etc. Inside those boxes there would be 5-10 smaller folders, mostly full, each of which could contain any combination of old publications, medical records, draft papers, minutes from meetings, unopened letters, correspondence and letters to the editor of *The Namibian Review*, conference proceedings, etc. I encountered a similar situation in various nooks and crannies of the school and in some of the rooms and cupboards at the family's house. While I was there, Windhoek was under Covid-19 lockdown regulations, one of which was a 9pm curfew. A few times I worked until the early hours of the morning at the Abrahams' house and was invited to stay the night on a couch or mattress in the lounge instead of going to my accommodation. Kenneth Abrahams (Jr.) set me up with a little desk in the corner of the lounge where I had piles of documents I was looking through while various members of the family were going about their business - passed out on the couches, watching television or chatting to me about what I was doing and their memories of Kenneth and Ottilie Abrahams.



Figure 2. Author in slightly more organised container/ archive. Photograph in author's possession, August 20221.

It was the generosity of people and my existing relationships with many people that enabled me to get access to these collections. Their generosity is the condition of possibility of this work and they have not only been participant in but have profoundly contributed to the production of this history. In that sense the research is really an act of ensemble and "the archive" is an ensemble of comrades' collections: dispersed, personal, often disorganised, familial, homely, decentralised, incomplete and autonomous. The arduous, yet enjoyable work of assembling a narrative from these various collections and interviews has necessitated a reflection on the various layers of sound and silence in the history.

Layers of time and silence in the soundscape of history

In his seminal *Silencing the past,* Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that silence enters the process of history's production, ie. after the 'event', at four main points.[70] These are the creation of sources, the assembling of archives, the retrieval of 'facts' in the construction of a narrative, and in the retrospective significance of

[70] Trouillot, MR. *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*, (Beacon Press: Boston, 1995).

elements of the narrative. All of these stages are undertaken and produced by individuals who have their own ideological persuasions and preferences, political tendencies and blind spots. More broadly in the book, what I think Trouillot gives us is a set of tools that assist us in unveiling the conditions of history's production and which make possible the defetishising of silence. The idea of silence in history opens it up to what Fred Moten terms the ensemble of the senses,[71] we should be able to hear it. Silence is fundamentally a relation, to sound. A low-volume sonic frequency can be interpreted as silence, or the lack of sound, based on what levels and volumes precede, succeed and surround it. That same 'low' level of sound could 'sound louder' if something quieter came before it, or what other sounds are around it. There are sounds in the silence and the broader soundscape affects how we hear the various sonic elements. Remembering that history is a product, and that its production is rooted in and emerges from particular social relations and classed, raced and gendered interests, is useful because silence then emerges not as a blank sonic space to be filled with sound but a site rich in information about its sonic nature because of its relation to the sounds around it. Sometimes this (silent) information is possible to read through an engagement with other silences and the last heard sound. Other times it is too encrypted and we can only speculate as to what it means.

The practice of 'sampling' is a music or sound production technique associated most particularly with hip-hop. It involves taking 'samples' – little sections, sounds or pieces of other sonic records – and using them to build a new song, or a new soundscape, thereby re-contextualising the samples in the process of creative production. What is produced is then a complex of multiple times heard and experienced in a single moment. History is the same. The sources of this history, the topic of the present investigation, are multiple. Broadly they fit into three categories or layers. The first layer is made up of documents and materials from the time under investigation – publications, posters, newspapers etc. The second layer consists of interviews with people involved in the history that were done by people other than myself. The majority of these were done in the late 1980s and the early 1990s in the heyday of 'social history' in South Africa. The third layer is interviews I have done and time I have spent with people involved in this history and some people close to them during the period of the PhD – since 2020 – and, in some instances, before that, since 2015. The fourth layer is constituted by what others have said or written about the history, in other words, secondary sources. Like the soundscape of sampled music, these layers and the boundaries between them are not always completely clear, they are never wholly separate and they continually speak to and with each other in the production of this history. Each of these sources are shaped by various dynamics of the moment in which they are produced, each holds memory and knowledge not only of the historical event or process under investigation, but also of the historical moment of recollection and indeed the intervening period since the moment being recollected. The composite production or composition of history is thus a complex soundscape of multiple times and silences.

[71] Moten, F. *In the Break*.

Orientation: The argument's narrative

Coltrane's bands and their long-form improvisations required a new way not just of playing music, but of listening. Their extrapolation of and away from the theme, its abstraction to hitherto unchartered planes emphasised that you couldn't skip over or predict what happened between the beginning and the end of the song – the statement and restatement of the theme (which for that matter, may or may not happen). Improvised ideas may have opened up new directions, charted fresh and unexpected trajectories, they may not. Every moment was part of the process, part of the search. In formulating and trying to make explicit my own orientation to this search, this work, I draw on three radical scholars who have made major, if minoritarian, interventions into the question of how to write in a way that, to me, resonate with that improvisational sensibility, the importance of process and relate to the task at hand.

Leigh-Ann Naidoo, in her dissertation about black student intellectuals in Rhodes Must Fall, articulated a particular aversion to the dominant mode of claim-making, theorization and argumentation within academic production, particularly in the PhD as a form. She wrote:

> I have tried to create a thick description and an entailed analysis that stays close to the terms, people and complexities of the movement as it unfolded. I have tried not to move too quickly into my own conceptualisation or analysis for fear of working in an extractivist or simplistic way through the lives and material of the people involved.[72]

Billy Keniston made the proposition that interventions in the histories of the South African liberation struggle need to be made *at the level of narrative*:

> Much of the literature on the anti-apartheid struggle is dominated by… the "liberation script," a narrative arc that assumes the ascendency of the African National Congress as an inevitability. To write histories that confront, oppose, or offer alternatives to this nationalist teleology, it is necessary to make an intervention at the level of narrative.[73]

Finally, Robin Kelley, in framing *Freedom Dreams,* wrote about the orientation of that work in the present:

> I conceived of *Freedom Dreams* as a preliminary effort to recover ideas – visions fashioned mainly by those marginalised black activists who proposed a different way out of our constrictions. I'm not suggesting we wholly embrace their ideas or strategies as the foundation for new movements; on the contrary, my main point is that we must tap the well of our own collective imaginations, that we do what earlier generations have done: dream.[74]

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[72] Naidoo, LA. "Black student intellectuals and the complexity of entailment in the# RhodesMustFall movement." PhD diss. University of the Witwatersrand (2020), p.299.
[73] Keniston, W. "Cover Stories & Undercover Stories: Apartheid South Africa, 1969 -1984," *Stokes Seminar*, 19 November 2021, Dalhousie University, p1.
[74] Kelley, RDG. *Freedom Dreams,* (Beacon Press: Boston, 2002), p.xii.

I take these profound propositions and build on them. I share Naidoo's aversion to assuming the position of the expert – a position into which a student is disciplined by the academy and expected to demonstrate in the dissertation. In her case, this is informed by a politics of entailment with the black students about whom she writes and a resultant commitment to an anti-extractivist orientation. Similarly for me, I am interested in not only the major details, of the organisations, the directions and the decisions, but also the process of how people moved, transformed and grew. This requires an attendance to what happens "in the break."[75] In a related fashion, Keniston's intervention suggests to me that it is not enough to move against, critique or make an argument against the "liberation script." It is necessary to provide and enact alternative/s and this takes place at two inter-articulating levels – at the level of the alternative history of the ensemble and in ensemble as an alternative mode of research and writing history in the present. This can only be achieved through the slow work of narrating the process through which various groups enacted alternatives in the historical process in which they were participant. The narrative itself, sensitive to contradiction, multi-directional rhythms and a multiplicity of contending positions, enacts an alternative. It refuses the very logic of teleology from which the "liberation script's" inevitability draws. The intention here is that the narrative produces an effect which gives some glimpse into, or sense of the experience of ensemble rather than merely formulate itself antagonistically in relation to a dominant tendency. This moves towards Kelley's quote which articulates the political orientation of the work – researching and writing a history of a minoritarian black radical tradition in order to develop our own capacities to struggle in the present and the future. Not in any way intended to be a blueprint, the effect of the narrative is intended to stimulate our imaginations for what outside and creative positions and solutions existed historically. And by demonstrating that there were always alternatives at hand, we might better be able to improvise alternatives in the present.

The dissertation does not attempt to make any grand claim about the history of the liberation struggle. The narrative's argument suggests that the significance of the YCCC and the NLF cannot be understood only within the moment of their operative existence. There is an obvious resonance here with this Robinson's proposition that "Black radicalism… cannot be understood within the particular context of its genesis."[76] Particularly in Parts 2 and 3, Robinson enacted a method of historical analysis for considering the emergence of minoritarian traditions of black struggle which pays attention to the long process of development, spanning decades and even centuries. While this dissertation is a far more humble project, it takes a cue from this method, refusing to confine its analysis to a bounded period and instead insisting on the longer process. There are four connected components which underlie this refusal. One: Most of the members of the YCCC/NLF were formed in the political and intellectual tradition of the UM. This socialisation imparted on their politics a complex inheritance. The fixation on and commitment to study and debate remained a core part of their political culture and was a dynamic of its development. Many of

[75] Moten, F. *In the Break.*
[76] Robinson, C. *Black Marxism: The making of the black radical tradition,* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2020), p.73.

their experiments were formed through the ongoing, uneven process of pursuing a position independent of the UM. Two: The question has emerged out of struggles in the present period and the interest in the history is intrinsically therefore bound up with and connected to those. It is an intervention in the present. Three: The sources drawn on to write this history are based on both those produced in the given periods of inquiry and on those produced in later moments. This layering imparts the character of the moments of recollection onto the period being recollected. Four: Related to the previous point, the experience of the YCCC/NLF and reflection on it informed members' directions and decisions in subsequent periods. Many practices and principles of its repertoire were repeated and revisited in the evolving process of re-constituting and re-envisioning formations of resistance in the South African and Namibian liberation struggles.

My approach to writing this history has three interconnected aspects which collectively elaborate the argument. Firstly, the archiving of a minoritarian tradition. Given the situation that this trajectory of politics within the South African and Namibian liberation struggles has received such scant attention, and I, having undertaken this research, am fairly uniquely placed to write about them, part of the contribution is in the compilation of their thought and activities for future work to pick up and build on. This necessity to constitute an archive and the decision to not cut all the narrative and descriptive texture in subordination to an argument means that overall length slightly exceeds the recommended length of a PhD. Secondly, this process of archiving illuminates the reality that various key moments and processes in the struggle against apartheid, a regime of racial capitalism, were constituted by multiple positions. There were always alternative approaches to the dominant ones both in terms of the conception of the struggle and the organizational form. These were informed by a complex of often contradictory aspirations, principles, sensibilities and possibilities. This reveals that the current morass in which we find ourselves, under the regime of the neo-liberal ANC in which racism, capitalism, and sexism prevail, was no inevitability – as scholars like Kensiton have proposed. But further than this it shows, following Kelley above, that these alternatives "proposed a different way out of our constrictions." Thirdly, following Walter Rodney's assertion that the study of African history must be located in the contemporary struggle against colonialism and capitalism, this approach is intended to contribute to present and future alternatives. For that reason, the openness, the fluidity, the multi-directional nature and indeed the contradictions that collectively resist a single or simple conclusion or argument, have intentionally been and held open as a crucial part. It is imperative in our organizing that we develop the capacities for holding contradictions and holding together as comrades through conflict. The orientation of the work attempts to enact this politics.

Overview

The dissertation has six chapters excluding the present introduction and the conclusion and three interludes. The narrative effect takes place over almost three decades and the period is bookended on the earlier side by the mid-1950s at the beginning of high apartheid, and on the later end in the mid-1980s with apartheid in crisis.[77]

Chapter One explores the process of "Emergence" of a *cohort* of students as activists in the struggle against apartheid in the late 1950s. In resistance to firstly, the government's intention to deepen segregation and extend apartheid at the university level and secondly, the dominance of white liberals' limited and isolated response to "university apartheid", these students established the Cape Peninsula Student's Union (CPSU) in 1957. "Emergence" argues that the process of and pursuit of independence from the UM was contingent and contradictory process. It advances the dissertation's argument by suggesting that part of the significance of the CPSU was that it created a cohort of activists "born in the battle for truth" (their slogan) many of whom became committed and widely involved in the liberation struggle over the coming decades. One group of that cohort, was the core that established the YCCC.

Chapter Two deals with the process of "Constitution" of the Yu Chi Chan Club, the ensemble, as a study group on histories and strategies of guerrilla warfare within the broader turn to armed struggle in the South African liberation movement. The YCCC's significance within the moment of its constitution was in its internationalist commitment and composition – with members from both South Africa and South West Africa – its independent socialist orientation and its non-sectarian aspiration, and the commitment to guerrilla warfare specifically. Within the arc of the dissertation's argument, it suggests that the YCCC was constituted in an aspirational sense, always existentially committed to, and with some degree of overlap with the network of guerrillas they planned to establish – the National Liberation Front.

One member of the YCCC, Elizabeth van der Heyden, described the transition from into the NLF as "spreading [ourselves] into cells."[78] This process of "Proliferation", which took place from late 1962, animates Chapter Three. There was no clean break between the YCCC and the NLF. A great deal of overlap existed between the organised formations of study and of struggle respectively, suggesting that these two activities continually informed, constituted and articulated each other in various ways. "Proliferation" argues that the distinctive contribution of the NLF within its moment of existence was in the organisational form that it proposed in the armed struggle. They argued that the ideological differences between groups were non-antagonistic and advocated for the formation of a front to coordinate armed activities. The experience of the NLF informed the members' later contributions to the liberation movement and the non-sectarian ambition and aspiration to unite the liberation movement evolved and was realised in different ways in later periods under reconfiguring conditions.

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[77] O'Meara, D. *Forty Lost Years: the apartheid state and the politics of the National Party 1948-1994,* (Ravan Press: Randburg, 1996); Posel, D. "Language, legitimation and control: the South African state after 1978." *Social Dynamics,* 10:1, (1984): 1-16.

[78] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.

Chapter Four is titled "Inter-nationalism" and it explores the multi-directional involvement of members of the YCCC/NLF in the Namibian liberation struggle from 1963 until the late 1980s. Uniquely for the time, the YCCC's conception of South Africa always included South West Africa (SWA), and understood the liberation struggles to be intrinsically linked and SWA formed a key part of the NLF's strategy. The chapter argues two things. Firstly, that YCCC members contributed to a dissident current within the dominant organisation in the liberation movement South West African Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) until they were either suspended or extra-judicially incarcerated by its leadership. Secondly, outside of SWAPO, their independent experiments broadened the terrain and repertoire of the liberation movement, and that these were sites of possibility and contradiction. Together these arguments make a contribution to Namibian historiography on the liberation struggle by centring a narrative of contestation within a context of SWAPO's hegemony in the history and the present. In this sense it develops the dissertation's argument by suggesting that the experience and relationships built in the YCCC/NLF were continually and unevenly drawn on in various ways the process of creating alternative approaches to liberation in the Namibian movement.

The "Interlude on Incarceration" constitutes Chapter Five and is a compilation of reflections, organising, relations and experiences of incarcerated ensemble members that highlights their autonomous self-activity and the unevenwithin conditions of extreme oppression. The harsh time spent in prison, between 1964-74, was also spent studying, struggling against apartheid in the prison, organising cultural activities, playing sport, and navigating relationships with comrades from across the spectrum of the liberation movement and the country. The experience of incarceration itself was unprecedented for the ensemble, also unprecedented was the level of sustained interaction they had with comrades from various parts of the country, cultural backgrounds and political tendencies. It argues that the radically different experiences of men and women in prison shaped not only their experience in prison but also their propensity and possibilities for getting involved in the struggle in the subsequent period in uneven ways.

Chapter Six is titled "Re-configuration" and the processes it deals with unfold in the liberation movement underground in South Africa in the late 1970s under conditions of severe repression and the ideological hegemony of apartheid's counter-revolution. Reconfiguration takes place at two inter-articulating levels. Firstly, at the level of (ex)ensemble members' lives which were significantly shaped by the personal restrictions imposed by five year banning orders. This period was one in which the ensemble was mostly scattered even as some of them continued worked together. The second level was a broader process of reconfiguration of the liberation movement. The chapter makes the argument that the repertoire of the ensemble – constituting study groups and building fronts – was expanded upon as ensemble members entered processes of learning with younger activists particularly from the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Within the predominance of an ethos of non-sectarian collaboration, their repertoire was drawn on as part of a broader process of both sustaining the liberation movement and agitating for building unity in adverse conditions.

Chapter Seven is "Articulation" which explores the emergence of the front as a predominant political form within the contestation for political space that was characteristic in the early 1980s and in which the influence and hegemony of the ANC on the rise. This was a period in which (ex)members were not constituted as "the ensemble", but were broadly involved in the movement, at various levels – in women's organisations, civic struggles, alternative education programmes, and, in the trajectory of the NLF, building fronts. The non-sectarian ethos of the previous period was eroding and more difficult to sustain as a dynamic of competition, expressed in a variety of ways, entered the movement. Within this atmosphere, a section of the independent socialist network articulated itself as a tendency – the Azanian Marxist Tendency – which, along with elements of the BCM, built the National Forum. I argue here that the National Forum was a significant moment within the liberation movement as an experience of coming together, struggling and learning together around a radical synthesis of independent socialism and black consciousness and constituting an anti-capitalist and anti-racist pole within the struggle in the emerging era of fronts where the dominant orientation was confined to an anti-apartheid programme. As an expression of principled unity, the relationships at the centre of the National Forum held open space for political and intellectual growth, development and movement. Within the dissertation, the chapter argues that the attempt to build the NLF imparted a distinctive independent socialist character on the National Forum.

"Conclusion: Retrospective significance" reflects on the contribution and significance of the mutli-directional trajectories of experimentation that collectively constitute the history of ensemble. It does this in two ways. Firstly, it attempts to cohere and connect the distinctive components of the ensemble's politics by revisiting aspects of its core repertoire. Secondly, it considers the resonance and reverberation of that tradition in and through ensemble as a method of historical research and writing. These reflections cumulatively reiterate that the significance of the YCCC and the NLF is scattered across multiple periods both between and before its period of operative existence, as well as in the present and the future.

The project's value, as an effect taken as a whole, is the sense it gives of the various dynamics of the ongoing reproduction of this political tradition – the decisions, the coalitions, the divergences, and the principles. This is important why? We continue to need radical experiments in contemporary society. Especially with the lack of imagination and organisation of progressive forces, and the continual rise of right-wing politics internationally. An independent and creative politics that is based on and produces close relationships, has a radical critique of white supremacy and racial capitalism, and is inspired by and rooted in anticolonialism, antisexism and internationalism will always be necessary. We need as many expressions and multidirectional forms that can take as possible.

Chapter One. Emergence. "A new generation born in the battle for truth" [79]: The cohort, contingent independence and the Cape Peninsula Students' Union, 1957-1961

In my student days it became a matter of principle, a matter of high dignity not ever to be seen talking to or in any way having anything to do with any liberal. And we were real Jacobins, totally narrow-minded, bigots almost… Fortunately we were only students and we couldn't do much harm.[80]

Introduction

A cohort of student activists emerged out of the Unity Movement (UM) in Cape Town in the late 1950s in the tumult of early apartheid. Political developments in 1950s South Africa were intense and accelerated. Verwoerdian designs and the architecture of apartheid were being fast-tracked as a series of Bills and Acts getting pushed through parliament. This was partly in response to the mounting fervour and militance of the liberation movement which had been growing in confidence, breadth and numbers markedly since the 1940s as the urban black population increased and people organised miners' strikes, women's marches, defiance campaigns, and boycotts of apartheid structures. The liberation movement was resisting and challenging the implementation and oppression of apartheid and the methods of contestation were, too, a site of struggle.

The pressures of that historical moment manifested in the UM in a monumental split in 1957.[81] At one level, the split was over the interpretation of the Land Question and, to a lesser extent, the Language Question as enshrined in the UM's 1943 Ten Point Programme. At another level it was a conflict between two opposing factions led by big men representing different constituencies. The Jaffeites, or the Kies-Jaffe faction, led by the controversial figures of Hosea Jaffe and Ben Kies, who were mainly, although not exclusively, a "Coloured" urban intellectual class rooted organisationally in Cape Town. The Tabata

[79] CPSU slogan. Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *The Student,* May 1958.
[80] UCTMA BC1538 A2.5. Interviewer unknown. Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p35.
[81] For literature on the split, see: Hirson, B. "A short history of the Non-European Unity Movement: An insider's view." *Searchlight South Africa,* 12, (1995): 64-93; Omar, Y. ""In my stride": a life-history of Alie Fataar, teacher." PhD diss. University of Cape Town, 2015; Rassool, Joe. "Notes on the History of the Non-European Unity Movement in South Africa, and the role of Hosea Jaffe", Available online at: https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/supplem/rassool.htm [accessed on 29 September 2023]; Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and political thought of The New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s,* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2019).

Faction or Section, led by the Isaac Bangani (or IB) Tabata, consisted of predominantly "Africans" from organisations in rural areas in the eastern Cape and Natal, also with a strong presence in Cape Town. Most fundamentally, the split was about rival visions of the UM and how it would respond to the rapid and oppressive changes underway in apartheid South Africa.[82]

When the government announced its intentions, in 1957, to pass the Extension of Universities Act in 1959[83] - which would further segregate the already-racist university system in South Africa by closing down options for black students to study at the 'open' institutions and establishing new, segregated institutions for specified racial groups – the above-mentioned cohort of students resisted. They formed an organisation of their own to challenge it. It was constituted by students, both at secondary and tertiary levels, those whose lives would be affected by the Act. Although the initials were identical, it was not after the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that they named themselves; they called their organisation the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) and launched it in 1957. The CPSU's slogans were: "A new generation born in the battle for truth," indicating a vision of themselves as a group of age-mates emerging in the particular struggle of their time, and "For a democratic education in a democratic South Africa." The cohort, that emerged in and through the experience of the CPSU, saw the issues that black students faced firmly within broader apartheid society, and thus understood their struggles as part of the national liberation movement.

The CPSU was distinctive in the moment of its existence as an autonomous organisation of high school and tertiary level students that understood black student struggles as part of the broader national liberation movement, but attempted, initially at least, to maintain independence from a political organisation. Its other distinguishing features were its commitment to the practice and politics of non-racialism, its critique of liberalism and ruling class influence and its emphasis, in the realm of student politics in the late 1950s, that it was necessary for black (they would have used the terms "oppressed" or "Non-European") students to organise independently in that regard. While the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), founded in 1944, had a strong base of "African" students, mainly at Fort Hare, it was not specifically a students' organisation. Other black student organisations in that period were branches of political organisations – such as African Students Association (ASA) which was founded in 1961 and was affiliated to the African National Congress (ANC), and the African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA), also founded in the early 1960s and affiliated to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Both of these restricted membership to "African" tertiary students and were established more than four years after the CPSU in a different political moment – after Sharpeville – that reoriented the priorities of the black student movement into being a recruiting ground for parent organisations. At the time of the CPSU's existence, with the exception of the Durban Students' Union (DSU) to which it was connected, there was no other black student organisation of its kind in the country committed to

[82] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated.
[83] The Separate University Education Bill was tabled in parliament in March 1957. du Pisani, K. "John Vorster and the Extension of University Education Act, 1959." *Historia,* 68:1, (2023): p.35.

resisting apartheid *as students*. The CPSU was also distinctive in obvious ways from its nemesis, the liberal, white-dominated and multi-racial National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), whose resistance to "University Apartheid" was superficially limited to academics and was in defence of apartheid generally. And while it shared much with the UM, it was distinct from it too. Rather than learning under the tutelage of a well-read male elder as was the UM way, as an organisation independently formed by students, the CPSU became a vehicle that facilitated and encouraged their collective learning and becoming-activists together as friends, peers, siblings, lovers and comrades. It was this through this self-activity that they emerged as a cohort.

This chapter is in three sections. The first section briefly explores and establishes the context of, and literature on, black student struggles in the 1940s and 1950s. The second section introduces some of the key members of the CPSU and their routes into and relationships with the UM. Thirdly, the chapter turns its attention to the CPSU itself – its ideas, activities, aspirations and the uneven sense of what it achieved. The CPSU as the cohort's first independent experience of politics. By 'independent' here I mean two things, first that the students' union wasn't linked to any external or parent organisation pulling strings or dictating their direction and second, being free from liberal or ruling class influence. As we will see, independence was a non-linear process full of contradictions and contingencies. The combination of the discontents of contingent independence from the UM and developments within the country – the events of the early 1960s, the mass repression and the turn to underground and armed struggle – shifted political priorities and sifted many activists of their generation head-first into national liberation politics, spelling an end to their activism *as students.*

Within the argument of the dissertation, "Emergence" shows that, notwithstanding the uneven results of the pursuit of independence, the process was key to the formation of the YCCC in terms of both the personnel that constituted it and in the experience of building an autonomous ensemble outside of an established political home. It is particularly long because it does the important work of introducing the individuals who constituted the cohort and later the ensemble. This is necessary not only to decentre the key individuals and broaden the imagination of the collective project but also to give a sense of the activists' backgrounds and their socialisation within the pedagogies and politics of the UM, which imparted a character on their own tradition of study and struggle.

Black student and youth politics in the 1940s and 1950s[84]

[84] A note of clarification is necessary with regards to 'black.' From the vantage point of the present and the shift in consciousness, language and politics that the Black Consciousness Movement initiated, my usage of black refers to the positive expression of the condition of being racialised, as non-white. It therefore includes various people classified by the apartheid regime as 'Indian', 'Coloured' and 'African/Bantu/Black.' I recognise that there is a possible anachronistic slippage at play in this as this mode of political identification was not current in the time

Literature on black student movements in South Africa in the broader context of the liberation struggle have mainly been focused on the activities and impacts of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in the late 1960s[85], the uprisings starting in Soweto in 1976[86], and in the various struggles of the 1980s around, for example, the successive states of emergency, school boycotts, the crisis in the bantustans, etc.[87] Since 2015 in the wake of the wave of black student and worker mobilisations at universities in particular, there has been a renewed interest in some of these histories as well as a plethora of literature about those struggles referred to as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and #OutsourcingMustFall.[88] Within this broader literature, what is scantly addressed is the period prior to SASO's emergence. There are some historical reasons for this. Black student action was more limited in that period partly because of the very small numbers of black students at universities. This changed with the passing of the Extension of Universities Act in 1959 and the opening of universities for apartheid-defined 'racial' and 'ethnic' groups in the 1960s. From then on, substantially more black people had access to university and built a critical mass resisting their conditions and the broader conditions of black life in South Africa. Relatedly, the national student population was dominated by white students and the political scene, dominated by their organisations – in the main, the National Union of South African

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period being written about. There are resultantly two senses (mainly) of 'black' within this chapter and others – one comes from quotes or literature where people refer to the racialised group as per apartheid categories, and the other is my usage which comes out of the philosophy of Black Consciousness. Where it becomes necessary to refer to groups defined by apartheid I tend to use inverted commas, e.g. 'coloured', or 'African.'

[85] See for instance: Badat, S. "Biko, The South African Students' Organisation and the Black Consciousness Legacy." *Colloquium on the intellectual, political and social legacy of Steve Biko, Grahamstown*, 17 September 2007; Badat, S. *Black student politics: Higher education and apartheid from SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990*, (Routledge: London, 2016); Naidoo, LA. "The role that radical pedagogy plays in resistance movements: A case study of the Black Consciousness Movement's use of Paulo Freire's pedagogy." MA thesis. Wits University, (2013); Naidoo, LA. "The Role of radical pedagogy in the South African students organisation and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, 1968–1973." *Education as Change,* 19:2 (2015): 112-132.

[86] See for instance: Diseko, NJ. "The origins and development of the south African student's movement (SASM): 1968–1976." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 18:1, (1992): 40-62. Heffernan, A. and Nieftagodien, N. (eds.), *Students must rise: Youth struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto'76*, (NYU Press: New York, 2016); Nieftagodien, N. *The Soweto Uprising*, (Ohio University Press: Athens, 2014); Brown, J. *The Road to Soweto: resistance and the uprising of 16 June 1976*, (Boydell & Brewer: Martlesham, 2016); Mukonde, KT. "'If you belong to my generation and you never read James Hadley Chase, then you are not educated': Everyday Reading of High School Students in Soweto, 1968–1976." *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2023): 1-20; Hirson, B. *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: the Soweto schoolchildren's revolt that shook apartheid.* (Bloomsbury: London, 2016); Thomas, C. "Finding voice, vocabulary and community. The UWC Student Movement 1972-1976." *Journal for Contemporary History,* 39:1, (2014): 19-37.

[87] Bundy, .C "Street sociology and pavement politics: aspects of youth and student resistance in Cape Town, 1985." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 13:3, (1987): 303-330; Gillam, K. "'Until the people govern": the Black students' movement at Rhodes University in the 1980s." *Safundi* 23, no. 1-2 (2022): 11-18; Lodge, T. and Nasson, B. *All, here, and now: Black politics in South Africa in the 1980s*. (New Africa Books: Cape Town, 1991); Thumbran, J., and van Kessel, I. "'From confusion to Lusaka': the youth revolt in Sekhukhuneland." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 19:4, (1993): 593-614.

[88] See for instance: Bosch, T., Luescher, TM., and Makhubu, N. "Twitter and student leadership in South Africa: The case of# FeesMustFall." In Taras, D. and Davis, R. (eds.) *Power Shift? Political Leadership and Social Media,* (Routledge: London, 2019), pp.220-234; Ahmed, AK. "#RhodesMustFall: Decolonization, praxis and disruption." *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education,* 9:Fall, (2017): 8-13; Naidoo, LA. "Black student intellectuals and the complexity of entailment in the# RhodesMustFall movement." PhD diss. University of the Witwatersrand (2020); Naidoo, LA. "We shall not be moved or led astray-the emergency of the student movement." *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy* 2015, 60, (2015): 12-14; Booysen, S. (ed.) *Fees must fall: Decolonisation, higher education and governance in South Africa*, (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2016); Kruger, L. "The Soweto uprisings forty years on: Usable pasts and uncertain futures." *Research in African Literatures,* 48:4, (2017): 250-255; and Heffernan, A. and Nieftagodien, (eds.) *Students must rise.*

Students (NUSAS) and the Afrikaner Studentsbond (ASB).[89] Black students were completely excluded from the latter, and in the liberal 'multi-racial' former they were able to join in minute numbers from 1940 but met with various barriers to their full participation.[90]

However, there was black student action and organisation in the period prior to SASO and there is some literature, albeit limited, on particular instances of it. Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu has written an article on the formation of the African Students' Association (ASA) which was an ANC-affiliated student group launched at the end of 1961, one had to be 'African' to qualify for membership.[91] ASA was fairly short-lived, it's activities largely became absorbed into the ANC Youth and Student Section and became a ground for recruiting people for Mkhonto WeSizwe (MK).[92] Larkin wrote that: "students as an intellectual elite should play a leading role in the struggle and one of the tasks of ASA was to find recruits for a liberation army. This could not be done from the confines of non-violent NUSAS and this the establishment of ASA was presented as a breakaway."[93] Another black student organisation, aimed at 'African' students, established at the same time of ASA was the PAC (Pan African Congress)-affiliated African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA) about which there is even less literature.[94]

An oddity about Ndlovu's article is that he says students at Fort Hare, which was, along with the University of Natal Non-European section, the only black university until 1959 and the site of the majority of black student political action, affiliated to the ANC in 1959 to strengthen resistance to the Extension of Universities Act.[95] What is odd about this is that there is no reference or indication of what the form of affiliation was – whether individual students, the SRC or a society of sorts. The ANC Youth League (ANCYL), established in 1944, had made Fort Hare a priority as a site of organisation and recruitment and an active branch had been established there since 1948 (over ten years prior to Ndlovu's 'affiliation' date).[96] The ANCYL manifesto said: "The Congress Youth League must be the brains-trust and power-station of the spirit of African nationalism" and the historic university was a key place producing the intelligentsia which the organisation planned to lead the struggle so it seemed to follow logically that they would focus a branch there. The two main political forces vying for influence on the campus were the ANC and the Unity Movement (UM). In the 1940s the UM had a stronger influence largely through high school teachers who were affiliated to the UM-aligned Cape African Teachers

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[89] Larkin, C. "Becoming liberal: a history of the National Union of South African students: 1945-1955." MA thesis. University of Cape Town, 2001; Legassick, M. "The National Union of South African Students: ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities," *Occasional paper no. 4,* (African Studies Center: University of California Los Angeles, 1967); McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS): 1956-1970." PhD diss. University of South Africa, 2015.

[90] See SASO's critique of NUSAS's liberalism with regards to the participation of blacks in Biko, S. *I write what I like,* (Picador Africa: Johannesburg, 2004).

[91] Ndlovu, SM. "Brief history of the African Students' Association." In Heffernan, A. and Nieftagodien, N., (eds.) *Students must rise: Youth struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto'76*, (NYU Press: New York, 2016); pp.6-15.

[92] Ibid.

[93] McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS): 1956-1970." P.307-308

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ndlovu, SM. "Brief history of the African Students' Association."

[96] Holland, H. *The struggle: A history of the African National Congress,* (George Braziller Inc: New York, 1990).

Association (CATA) who schooled their students, many of whom went on to Fort Hare, in UM politics.[97] The balance shifted with the establishment of the ANCYL on campus, and Fort Hare became a centre of struggle between the UM and different sections of the ANC – the militant Youth Leaguers with people like Robert Sobukwe, Godfrey Pitje and AP Mda, and the more moderate older generation of people like ZK Matthews.[98] An important development in this struggle was the critique that Youth Leaguers unapologetically levelled against the particular form of white liberal custodianship that was prevalent at Fort Hare which was reflected in the staff composition and relations, for example. The Youth Leaguers, like Sobukwe, were more willing to take these issues on publicly and in this they found some common ground with UM adherents. [99]

With regards to the contesting of campus political space, Donovan Williams wrote: "[As] a foil to the ANCYL, the NEUM established its own youth league: the Sons [sic] of Young Africa. Its first conference was held in Durban on 20 December 1951 and it was active on campus by 1952."[100] At the inaugural conference of the *Society* of Young Africa (SOYA), whose slogan was "we fight ideas with ideas", Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) president at the time, IB Tabata, in his characteristic prose and sense of occasion provided some of the poetic and political context to its founding, and situated it as a contemporary manifestation of a longer development of the struggle against oppression:

> The young Soyans belong to the present. They are rooted, not in the past, but in the present. Their whole thought process is rooted in the ideas of today; their attitude and their approach to problems are moulded by the intellectual atmosphere in which they live and move. *I see the birth of a new Youth, born out of the pressure of the time!* In the formation of SOYA, which bodes forth the consciousness of this new Youth, I foresee the shape of things to come…
>
> Like everything else that is born, the Society of Young Africa must grow, and it will grow if it adjusts itself to its environment, growing with the struggle and in turn contributing to it. By growth I do not mean merely an increase in numbers. This is taken for granted. I refer rather to progress in the realm of ideas. The Soyan Youth must integrate themselves with the Movement for liberation, draw sustenance from it, expand their intellectual horizon and in turn make their contribution to the Movement. This is a challenge to SOYA. History itself presents its challenge to the Youth. I foresee a great future for SOYA if it takes its tasks seriously.[101]

The reasons for SOYA's founding were multiple. The UM felt that the increased influence that the ANC Youth League was having on the country's youth and students, and their "rabid racialism" (UM's non-racialism felt that their espousal of African nationalism reproduced the logic of racialism rather than

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[97] Williams, D. *A History of the University College of Fort Hare, South Africa, the 1950s: The Waiting Years*, (Edwin Mellen Press: New York, 2001).
[98] White, TRH. "ZK Matthews and the formation of the ANC Youth League at the University College of Fort Hare." *African Historical Review,* 27:1, (1995): 124-144.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Williams, D. *A History of the University College of Fort Hare, South Africa, the 1950s*, p.30.
[101] UCTMA BC925 3.7. Tabata, IB. "Opening address to the first conference of the Society of Young Africa," 20 Dec 1951, p.2 Emphasis added.

challenged) needed to be countered.[102] They also felt that they needed a youth wing of their own that would develop a layer of theoretically-astute leaders who would go on to become leaders in the movement. Finally, SOYA was intended to address something that had disturbed Tabata for a long time, the over-representation of 'Coloured' people in the UM and its distance from 'African' youth. As a matter of strategy, membership of SOYA was initially restricted to those classified 'African' in order to build a confident bloc of articulate and critical youth capable of holding their own, participating and taking up leadership positions in broader forums in the national liberation movement.[103] SOYA grew fairly rapidly, establishing branches in many places in the country, notably Cape Town, at Fort Hare, in Durban and Dundee in Natal, in Johannesburg and in Sharpeville.[104] At Fort Hare, while the SOYA – ANCYL conflict remained present and active, by the late 1950s, only 10% of the campus population belonged to it as members and SOYANs developed a reputation of being more "prone to theoretical politics rather than action."[105]

Despite the fissures between the political tendencies on campus, Fort Hare students united on a decision to disaffiliate from NUSAS in 1952 – militant Africanists in the ANCYL and non-collaborationists in the SOYA found common ground. There were pressures acting on NUSAS, from within and without, to define its politics to the right or to the left. The apartheid-aligned ASB and their sympathisers were forcing them one way and the liberation movement, the other. The political climate of the period – with the ANC planning its Defiance Campaign, and the UM organizing the boycott of the Van Riebeeck festivities that were celebrating three hundred years of settler colonialism in SA[106] – placed increasing pressure on NUSAS to take a stand on the political issues facing black people. Larkin wrote:

> Fort Hare students voted 147 to 47 to disaffiliate from NUSAS on the grounds that the national union was "a non-political organisation, unequal (sic) to approve (sic) the ideals of equality held by African nationalism." NUSAS was accused of "unequivocally" rejecting political equality, of meting out "unsatisfactory" "treatment" to black students, of being no practical value… the NUSAS president attributed the disaffiliation to the refusal of NUSAS to pass the Fort Hare "politics motion" in 1951… [he] held SOYA and the AAC responsible for the disaffiliation, but… collaboration between SOYA and Youth Leaguers of that period over membership of NUSAS was entirely consistent, as many Youth Leaguers of that period had strongly Africanist views and were opposed to collaboration with whites.[107]

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[102] Ntantala, P. *Life's Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala,* (Jacana Media: Johannesburg, 2010).
[103] UCTMA BC1538 A2 (2.2), p.46-47.
[104] Lodge, T. *Black politics in South Africa since 1945,* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1983).
[105] Williams, D. *A History of the University College of Fort Hare, South Africa, the 1950s*, p.30.
[106] Rassool, C. and Witz, L. "The 1952 Jan Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History in South Africa." *The Journal of African History,* 34:3, (1993): 447-468.
[107]The "politics motion" to which she refers, she describes as the "motion that NUSAS recognize political and social equality for all [which] was rejected on the grounds that it would have transformed NUSAS into a political organisation." This points to a much broader trend and interest around how white student politics were able to remain in the terrain of student politics whereas black student politics almost inevitably became part of the much broader political agenda of the liberation struggle. Larkin, C. "Becoming liberal", p.87.

In addition to Fort Hare, black students at University of Natal Non-European Section (UNNE) in Durban and Hewat Teacher Training College in Cape Town disaffiliated from NUSAS in 1952.[108] NUSAS's rejection of the possibility, and invitation, of becoming more politically involved and more genuinely attendant to the conditions facing black students and black people general, was a recurring frustration for black students for the next four decades. In the broader literature already cited, the critique of white liberalism made by SASO in the late 1960s and 1970s is given pride of place but this history clearly shows that black students had critiqued and struggled against this tendency since at least the 1950s.

Tensions in the first half of the 1950s persisted in NUSAS between different rival factions that were pushing the union in various directions. Larkin wrote that in 1955, a liberal bloc defeated the radicals in NUSAS resulting in the "liberals taking full control of the national union, defining it as a liberal humanist organisation."[109] This was seen through its rejection of Fort Hare's abovementioned "politics motion" as well as its disaffiliation from the International Union of Students (IUS) – an eastern bloc international students union – and joining a western union – the Co-ordinating Secretariat. Contradictions aside, "they felt that a non-political body like NUSAS could not remain in an organisation with a specific ideological orientation."[110] At Fort Hare through the mid-1950s, parallel to the ANC pursuing the Congress Alliance, the ANCYL's activity declined and student politics in general became more insular, focusing on local campus issues[111] and in 1957 Fort Hare students decided to reaffiliate "to NUSAS to participate in the national union's campaign against the imposition of apartheid at universities."[112] Other black students, like the DSU and the CPSU, organized against *both apartheid and the influence of liberalism*.

Both NUSAS and SASO mention in some of their documentation from the early 1970s the existence of the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU), and the Durban Students' Union (DSU). Under "Black Student Organisations", in NUSAS's "A history of student action in South Africa" they mention the following organisations founded in the early 1960s: ASA, ASUSA, the PNSO (Progressive Students' National Organisation) and the "DSU and CPSU, 1961-62, individual enrollment, small membership, non-racial but non-collaboration with anyone."[113] SASO's "Historical Background" reads as follows:

> Dissatisfaction with the white dominated NUSAS led to the establishment of several black student organisations. The Durban Students' Union and the Cape Peninsula Students' Union who later merged to form the Progressive National Students' Organisation, were fanatically opposed to NUSAS initially and adopted the emotional slogan of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) "non-cooperation with the collaborators." The CPSU refused

[108] Legassick, M. "The National Union of South African Students," p.25.
[109] Larkin, C. "Becoming liberal", p.4-5.
[110] Ibid.
[111] White, TRH. "ZK Matthews and the formation of the ANC Youth League at the University College of Fort Hare." *African Historical Review,* 27:1, (1995): 124-144.
[112] McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)", p.3.
[113] National Union of South African Students, "A history of student action in South Africa, plus a brief history of English/Afrikaans/non-white student relations," 1971, Available online at: https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/cir19710000026022000 [accessed 17 September 2023].

> to co-operate with NUSAS in their protests and other forms of activity. They saw NUSAS as a student wing of the imperialist front whose interest was to control the blacks.[114]

Despite getting a few historical details incorrect – contrary to NUSAS's recollection, the CPSU was founded in 1957 and the UM slogan was "non-collaboration with the oppressors" – and while they were regarded somewhat scornfully, it is clear from these notes that they were known about by students who were organising in the 1970s. While this consciousness existed in the student movement, it has not generally been replicated or indeed extended in historical scholarship apart from where the CPSU and/or the DSU are mentioned in shorthand as UM formations, as a brief moment in member's biography,[115] or in a number of texts whose primary focus are on NUSAS.[116] The present chapter writes a history of the individuals and the groups that founded these organisations and the political environment in which they emerged. It is an attempt to pay close attention to their relationships, ideas, their actions and their strategies and suggests that while they did not succeed in stopping the passing of the Extension of Universities Act in their moment of existence, their ideas and a history of their aspiration and attempt is significant as it formed the basis for future experiments, such as the YCCC.

Unity (and) Split

The above review laid out some developments within the terrain of black student politics in the 1940s and 1950s and the precarious place of the CPSU within that literature. The present section shifts focus and zooms into the texture of the organizational milieu of the UM in Cape Town in the mid-1950s. It does this through introducing some of the historical subjects of the chapter – IB Tabata's "new Youth, [born] out of the pressure of the time"[117] – who would go on to found the CPSU, adopting the slogan, which resonates with Tabata's, "a new generation born in the battle for truth." The section pays attention to these youths' backgrounds socially, intellectually and culturally and the relationships they constructed and it considers how they experienced and encountered the political and intellectual spaces of the UM.

One of the youths was Elizabeth van der Heyden who came from a "free-thinking" family in Athlone where debate and political discussion was common.[118] Her father, who worked as a carpenter, would encourage his eight children to critique any opinion or position that they didn't agree with, even if it was

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[114] ZA HPRA AD2189 A A5, "Historical background," 1970, p.1.
[115] Benson, K., Gamedze, A. and Mushaandja, N. "Radical histories ii: Ottilie Abrahams Speaks." *Owela,* 1:1, (2018): 40-41; Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front during South Africa's Transition to Armed Struggle." *International Review of Social History,* 67:S30, (2022): 179-207; Drew, A. "Biography of Elizabeth van der Heyden," unpublished paper, date unknown; Scanlon, H. *Representation and reality: Portraits of women's lives in the Western Cape, 1948-1976,* (HSRC Press: Cape Town); Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals.*
[116] Larkin, C. "Becoming liberal"; McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)"; Legassick, M. "The National Union of South African Students."
[117] UCTMA BC925 3.7. Tabata, IB. "Opening address to the first conference of the Society of Young Africa," 20 Dec 1951, p.2.
[118] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.186.

his own, as long as they could back up their own opinion with facts.[119] Her mother, who worked in the family home was less encouraging of her many children's ability to endlessly debate. Elizabeth van der Heyden, or Betty, or Lizzie as she was often affectionately called, attended Wynberg and Athlone high schools where, at both, she had a few good UM teachers. In particular she remembers Edgar Maurice who taught her English at Wynberg High School and Reggie Crook who taught her history at Athlone High School.[120] Her first involvement in the UM was in the area-based Fellowships. These were offshoots of the New Era Fellowship and they existed in different areas in and around Cape Town, such as the Cape Flats Fellowship, the South Peninsula Education Fellowship, and so on. The Fellowships hosted study groups and discussions about politics and various cultural topics.[121] Elizabeth van der Heyden went on from school to train as a teacher and became an associate member of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) as a student. The TLSA was initially formed in 1913 "as the first professional association for Coloured teachers" with branches across South Africa with a stronghold in the Cape and particularly in the Peninsula.[122] It was an affiliate of the NEUM from 1943 when a group of "young Turks" achieved a position of ascendancy in the organisation, ousting an older generation of more conservative "coloured" teachers in favour of a commitment, uneven in practice, to unity of all the oppressed.[123] In the 1950s, it was a major base of the Kies-Jaffe faction.

The UM was constituted by many area-based branches that were affiliated to the federally-structured organisation. One of the impacts of area- or neighbourhood-based organising was that the composition of the various area groups reproduced apartheid's racialised construction of space. van der Heyden recalled from her early experiences in the UM that the composition of the groupings she was part of and exposed to was 'coloured' people. She said that they never "had much contact with the Black part except now if you met SOYA people or you met people of the AAC (All African Convention), but as huge groups, we didn't do that. We never really got into the black townships you know. We rarely did."[124] The reality of "African" people's precarious place in Cape Town and the relatively more stable position of "Coloured", particularly middle-class, people under apartheid was one of the factors that shaped the composition of the UM in Cape Town.

As mentioned, the split had multiple overlapping dimensions, at one level it was a conflict between two constituencies – a predominantly "Coloured", Cape Town based intelligentsia, and a predominantly

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[119] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[120] Drew, A. "Biography of Elizabeth van der Heyden," unpublished paper, date unknown.
[121] Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals.*
[122] Adhikari, M. "Coloured identity and the politics of coloured education: the origin of the teachers' league of South Africa." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* 27:1, (1994), p.101.
[123] On the inconsistencies in this commitment, see Adhikari, M. "Fiercely non-racial? Discourses and politics of race in the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943–70." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 31:2, (2005): 403-418. For notes on the ascendancy of the young turks, see Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals,* p.114-118.
For more on the TLSA, see: Adhikari, M. *Let us live for our children: The Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1940,* (Buchu Books: Cape Town, 1993); and Hendricks, PR. "A principled engagement?: non-collaboration and the Teachers' League of South Africa in the Western Cape, 1990-2003." PhD diss. University of Cape Town, (2010).
[124] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.

"African" group with peasant backgrounds in the eastern Cape. The conflicts over the Land and Language Questions, emerged partially from this dynamic. About this split unity environment, another young activist, Kenneth Abrahams said that "we were dumped in a controversial situation and had to take a stand on the subject."[125] It was a situation that developed between people of an older generation to him, those who were his generation's teachers and mentors. Many years later with about thirty years of reflection, he said that the whole conflict was actually quite absurd. With regards to the conflict over Point 7 of the Ten Point Programme on the land question, in his analysis, "as it happened both sides were wrong."[126] The distance of reflection from this interview, most likely from the late 1980s, highlights the multiple layers of time in the soundscape that constitutes this history.

Kenneth Abrahams was born in Cape Town in 1936, educated at Trafalgar High School, affectionately Trafalgar , where he came under the influence of teachers such as Helen and Ben Kies, and the history teacher, Polly Slingers, all brilliant intellectuals, Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) members with the political commitments of the UM. This was his route into UM politics – through his teachers. He attended UCT in the mid-1950s, initially completing a Bachelor of Science with excellent grades, after which he applied for a junior lecturer position in archaeology, his first love, a post that he did not get. After this Kenneth Abrahams turned to what became his long life's work, studying and practicing medicine. He enrolled at UCT's medical school where a mere handful of black students were admitted (and not permitted to be present in a room with white cadavers!) and became a doctor. [127]

From outside of Cape Town came a very close friend, co-thinker, and lifelong comrade of Kenneth Abrahams', Neville Alexander. The second of six children, Alexander was born in 1936 in the Eastern Cape town of Cradock and mostly grew up there apart from a few years in Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha).[128] In terms of a complicated inheritance, he recalled that his father had a strong 'anti-white' tendency and he realised about his father's family something pervasive in many 'Coloured' families: "because they have so-called white blood, they resented being treated as inferior. They felt that they were equal because they had 'white blood' and… would insist on their right to be treated as equals."[129] With regard to his orientation to black people, Alexander's father employed many 'African', isiXhosa-speaking people in his carpentry business and taught his children that it was important to learn isiXhosa and play with the workers' kids and that they were ultimately not different to them. His mother's influence he said, was "less tangible but more all-embracing" as she raised him and his siblings alone after their father left for the war.[130] She encouraged reading, for which Neville Alexander and his siblings developed a love. Alexander came to Cape Town to study at UCT in 1953 and immediately met someone who became his

[125] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated, p.13.
[126] Ibid., p.35.
[127] Interview with Yvette Abrahams. 1 & 7 February 2022. Gordon's Bay.
[128] Busch, B., Busch, L. and Press, K. *Interviews with Neville Alexander: The Power of Languages against the Language of Power,* (UKZN Press: Pietermaritzburg, 2014), p.15.
[129] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p.5.
[130] Ibid.

"bosom friend", Ronnie Britten through a connection with some Cradock friends who were part of the Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA). Britten, a slightly older student born in Paarl in 1928, was studying History at UCT, and was close to IB Tabata and embedded in the UM. [131] He introduced the young Cradockian to a political context and ideas that quite quickly transformed and replaced the largely Christian framework Neville Alexander had imbibed during his Catholic schooling:

> Studying the life of Martin de Porres, his particular dedication to the poor, living with the poor, praying with them, working with them etc. had a tremendous influence on my whole attitude towards poverty, towards inequality, towards the structural trap in which most of humanity lives. And I think that does explain a lot about my own political commitment to liberating – liberation was the same thing for me as salvation… the whole idea of redemption, salvation and of helping other people to save themselves was almost naturally transferred to the idea of liberation.[132]

It was the UM that acted as the trigger for transforming the "anti-whitism" and Christian metaphysics into a political consciousness that understood these things in a material and social, rather than ideal or divine, and individual way. By June of 1953, the same year he moved to Cape Town, Alexander had become an associate student-member of the TLSA, in a moment, before the split, when he remembered that there was a sense of real unity in the movement.[133]

Like Alexander, Marcus Solomon also came to Cape Town from the Eastern Cape to further pursue his studies. With his three younger siblings, he had grown up mostly in Grahamstown (now Makhanda), with a short stint in Durban and another in Port Alfred where he developed a love for swimming in lagoons and the ocean. Solomon's father was from Durban, spoke both Tamil and English and he worked in a local hotel as a waiter where Marcus Solomon also later worked as a page-boy.[134] His father met and spoke with many people at the hotel, and read avidly – the newspapers in the hotel as well as many other books. Since his father's family was Hindu, they would celebrate Deepavali with other Hindu families in the area. Solomon's mother came from a Christian family and that was the dominant religious influence on his young life. By the time he was in secondary school, Solomon was going in the direction of becoming a preacher, accompanying the minister in the community and even saying a few words at street gatherings. In the local church there were both Afrikaans and isiXhosa-speaking members in the black congregation and each week the direction of translation would change – one week the sermon would be in isiXhosa and translated live into Afrikaans, and the following week the reverse.[135] Translation was thus an everyday aspect of social and religious life.

Marcus Solomon's mother, a constant and solid fixture in his life, passed away fairly suddenly from cancer while he was still at school, an incredibly traumatic incident for him and the rest of his family. As a result,

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[131] Smith, Tina-Louise. "Obituary for Ronald Britten." 19 July 2013, Available online at: https://attentiontodetail.wordpress.com/2013/07/19/obituary-for-ronald-britten/ [accessed on 22 February 2024].
[132] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p.18.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[135] Ibid.

his younger siblings went into care of an orphanage as their father, who had been drinking heavily for a number of years, was unable to look after them all.[136] Solomon first visited Cape Town when he worked as a "bedding boy" on trains between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. The "bedding boys" made up beds for those who paid for them on the overnight journey and those trains would stay overnight in Cape Town and, on those nights off, some of the older workers on the trains would show the youngsters, like Solomon, around town. Those initial experiences of the city, were mesmerising for Marcus Solomon who had only lived in rural towns and he dreamt of spending more time there. He moved to Cape Town to complete his high schooling in 1957. He got into Trafalgar where, as mentioned, a number of UM teachers held sway – Cosmo Pieterse, a Shakespearean actor, taught him English and Polly Slingers, history. In class at Trafalgar the curriculum was broad:

> [It] wasn't just about the syllabus. The French Revolution was very much related to what was happening at that particular moment… I mean Polly was very sophisticated. 'Class you must read now. Go and read Dickens.' And he didn't want us to come report or anything, just read it. Ya, but he would say the contending, the nobility, the feudal lords, the monarchy… the class thing. So constantly that but there were things happening… so there was the classroom, the new intellectual academic stuff. Then there was the world outside.[137]

This was the school environment, replete with European literature and history used to understand unfolding national and world events through the new terms of class and struggle, that led into the world UM politics in which Marcus Solomon quickly found himself.

Also joining and finding their way in this world was Fikile Bam who was born in 1937 in Tsolo in the Eastern Cape and grew up between there and in Johannesburg where his family moved after WWII ended. Bam came to Cape Town to study law at UCT on a scholarship in 1958. His life and political exposure brought a different angle to the young crew that was cohering in Cape Town. For people like Neville Alexander, Marcus Solomon, Elizabeth van der Heyden and Kenneth Abrahams, the UM was their first, and up until that point their only experience of politics. Neville Alexander reflected that he assimilated some of the UM's worst 'petty bourgeois conservative prejudices' with respect to their orientation to and distance from mass struggle – which was justified through the doctrine of non-collaboration – and their anti-ANC sentiments.[138] Bam had a different experience and grew up in a context where the ANC was the dominant, or de facto, *the* political influence. He had been taught at school by Oliver Tambo and progressive Christian teachers under the guidance of Trevor Huddlestone at St Peters high school in Rosettenville in the south of Johannesburg.

> I was really raised within the ANC, in the sense that in Gauteng, where I grew up, in Sophiatown, in particular, the ANC was the only known political movement, and the leaders of the ANC were the only known political leaders – Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Duma Nokwe. A whole range of other prominent people in Johannesburg in those years all belonged to the African National Congress, and this is the milieu in which I grew

[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.1. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.50.

> up. It was hardly necessary to be a card-carrying member of the ANC to be ANC in that era, so I never joined. The rest of my family, though, were ANC members, my parents and my elder sisters.
>
> But I never joined until I came down to Cape Town, to university, and there what really excited me was the new kind of politics which I was learning on campus, which was all about socialism. That's what really attracted me, and so I joined the Unity Movement, which was an openly socialist movement – Trotskyist movement, some people say. That's when I first sort of identified myself with a political party, and I joined the youth movement of the Unity Movement [SOYA].[139]

Whether or not the UM was an "openly socialist movement" is certainly up for debate. For example, Fikile Bam's peer Kenneth Abrahams insisted that actually the UM, judged on the relationship between its ideas and what it achieved and got involved in in terms of popular struggles, was never socialist.[140] While the question is certainly interesting, defining the terms of that debate and making that assessment is slightly beyond the terms of the current project. The important thing to take from Fikile Bam's story in the context of this project was that the UM was the forum in which he encountered socialism as a tradition, a politics and a set of ideas for the first time.

Another person who entered the fold around the same time as Fikile Bam was Archibald Boyce Monwabisi Mafeje. Born in 1936 to teachers in Engcobo in the Eastern Cape, Archie also had UM influence on his early years. He was taught by Livingstone Mqotsi who was close to Tabata, a stalwart member of the CATA and one of those who had managed to get that organisation to affiliate to the AAC and the NEUM.[141] Mafeje attended Fort Hare for one year as a Zoology student where "like many other students of the day, he fell foul of the university authorities for his political activism. Like many other students who were involved in political activities he had to leave the university."[142] After Fort Hare Mafeje moved to Cape Town to enrol at UCT to study (and radically critique) Social Anthropology.[143] This was in 1956.[144] Once in Cape Town, already with the latent influence of their politics and ideas from Mqotsi, Archie got involved in UM politics and became a member of SOYA which, by the late 1950s, the Cape Peninsula branch was at least 100 members and was constituted by "working youth in the city's townships and students at tertiary institutions such as the UCT."[145]

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[139] Morris, Len. Interview with Fikile Bam. 2 August 1999. Available online: Accessed on 25 January 2024 https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/carnegie/cul:sbcc2fr0sx [accessed on 25 January 2024], p.6-7.
[140] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated.
[141] Kayser, R. "Land and liberty: the Non-European Unity Movement and the land question, 1933-1976." MA thesis. University of Cape Town, (2002).
[142] Funani, LS. "State, democracy and development: An exploration of the scholarship of Professor (Archie) Monwabisi Mafeje." MA thesis. University of the Western Cape, (2016), p.42.
[143] For some of Mafeje's groundbreaking writings, see Mafeje, A. "The problem of anthropology in historical perspective: an inquiry into the growth of the social sciences." *Canadian Journal of African Studies,* 10:2, (1976): 307-333; Mafeje, A. "The ideology of 'tribalism'." *The journal of modern African studies,* 9:2, (1971): 253-261.
[144] Nabudere, DW. *Archie Mafeje: scholar, activist and thinker*, (African Books Collective: Oxford, 2011); see also: SAHO. "Archie Mafeje." Available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/archie-mafeje [accessed on 22 February 2024].
[145] Nabudere, DW. *Archie Mafeje: scholar, activist and thinker*, p.5.

As well as drawing and politicising black youth from across various parts of the city and the country, there was a transnational character to the group of students that was cohering in Cape Town in and around UM politics and schools. The Schimmings were one of very few black families from South West Africa (SWA) who were able to send their children to secondary and tertiary education institutions in South Africa. The Schimmings owned a dairy business and later a shop in the Old Location in Windhoek where they lived until the Old Location Uprising and the removals that followed in 1959, after which, as a family classified as "coloured", with Herero, German and other roots, they moved to Khomasdal.[146] Like the van der Heyden household, the Schimming family was large – with four boys and four girls and many extended family members and other visitors in the house. It was full, and full of activity and discussion. Ottilie, or Ottilie, one of the Schimming daughters, said that "we grew up in a very different kind of family," their mother was a feminist and the family was encouraging and accustomed to women doing their own thing and all the boys and the girls got educational opportunities.[147]

From very early on in her life Ottilie Abrahams had a budding political consciousness. She attended a reading group at Tigers' Sports Club where youngsters were exposed to ideas of Marcus Garvey and other black radicals when she was in primary school.[148] When she came to Cape Town in 1953 initially to study at Zonnebloem and then at Trafalgar in 1955, she came with a mission. Politically, Ottilie Abrahams considered SWA to be "in the wilderness" and during her time in South Africa she planned to learn from the political movement in order to contribute to the liberation of her country to which she always planned to return.[149] She sought out people and circles that could contribute positively to her mission. Through teachers at school she was drawn to and drawn into the UM culture of learning and debating politics and was also introduced to some of its organisations such as TLSA, and the New Era Fellowship.[150] For her, as with other members of the cohort, this intellectual culture – this particular relation of study to struggle – was central to how she imagined herself as a political subject and a person thirty years later and more.[151] It was part of the dynamic of how to think with people about how to remake politics in various moments. While Ottilie Abrahams was very involved in local Cape Town politics, she was also involved in Namibian student formations, this will be discussed further in Chapter Four, "Inter-nationalism."

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[146] Benson, K., Gamedze, A. and Mushaandja, N. "Radical histories ii: Ottilie Abrahams Speaks."; On the Old Location and forced resettlement, see Melber, H. "We will not move' from the Old Location to Katutura: Forced Resettlement in Windhoek, South West Africa (1959-1968)." *Historia,* 68:1, (2023): 54-85; on the classification of coloured people see Reddy, T. "The politics of naming: The constitution of coloured subjects in South Africa." In Erasmus, Z. (ed.) *Coloured by history, shaped by place: New perspectives on coloured identities in Cape Town,* (Kwela Books: Cape Town, 2001), pp. 64-79.
[147] NAN A679, Dag Henrichsen interview with Ottilie Abrahams, 14 April 1996.
[148]Benson, K. et. al. "Radical histories ii: Ottilie Abrahams Speaks."
[149] NAN A679, Dag Henrichsen interview with Ottilie Abrahams, 14 April 1996.
[150] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[151] Ibid.

A few of Ottilie Abrahams's siblings were also in Cape Town – her younger sisters, Nora and Charlotte, followed in her educational footsteps and Harold, or Haki, her elder brother, was studying medicine at UCT. The Schimming siblings were very close and they spent time together socially and shared many of the same friends. Harold Schimming and Kenneth Abrahams were very close friends as black medical students and it was through their relationship that Ottilie Abrahams met Kenneth Abrahams who became her co-thinker and comrade in many organisations and projects, as well as her life partner, and husband.[152] Romance was as much a part of these young people's lives as politics and Charlotte Schimming and Marcus Solomon too, shared a special connection and a young romance. Although their relationship did not have the longevity of Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams's, if you mention Charlotte Schimming to Marcus Solomon now, his eyes still light up, sixty years on. Solomon always emphasised that they grew up in an environment and, in emphasising that, he meant that all of the various aspects of their life – school, politics, friends, romance, consciousness, world events, literature, sport and family – were part of a whole experience and a process of becoming, together.[153] Politics was thus one part of a broader process of development and experiencing life together. An approach to the dissertation that would subordinate the writing to the details or activities of the political organisation, or to a clean argument would miss out on the complexity and richness of these processes and might misunderstand the dynamics of how political life is remade by groups of people involved in a continual search holding the possibility of transformation.

Young Africans

Around 1955/56 SOYA's membership, previously protected for 'Africans', was opened up and a large number of young people who were classified as 'Coloured' were able to join, which they did, if they were invited. Like some other UM formations, SOYA was an invite-only organisation. Students had to 'prove' themselves to be committed readers and incisive debaters in forums like the Fellowships to then get invited to the more 'serious' study groups constituted by the 'real' theoreticians and stalwarts. Marcus Solomon, who was to join SOYA in 1960 or 1961, speculating on why he was invited and poking fun at the exclusivity and eliteness of the whole thing, said it was "because they probably saw *potential*, or whatever shit they had - I mean whatever criteria."[154] Entrance requirements aside, SOYA was a quite remarkable space of political education for these youngsters. It was a school of revolutionary history, thought and strategy. Committed to the resolution of the national question, its broad sensibility was captured by Tabata:

[152] NAN A679, Dag Henrichsen interview with Ottilie Abrahams, 14 April 1996.
[153] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[154] Ibid. "potential" was said with a degree of sarcasm.

> Along the road SOYA will fight for and defend those ideas that assist in the building of the South African Nation, which will include all men and women, irrespective of colour or creed, whose home is South Africa. In this connection SOYA can, for instance, assist in bringing to the consciousness of wider sections of the people the two-fold nature of oppression: National Oppression and Class Exploitation. It is generally recognised that the Non-Europeans are oppressed as Nationalities and most people see the struggle as simply between the oppressed Non-Europeans and the White oppressor. It is not so commonly realised that there is another more fundamental form of oppression, namely, Class Exploitation. When we consider this last, we find that in the final analysis the conflict is not basically that of colour. This circumstance determines the method of organizing our forces for the struggle.[155]

While the synthesis of race and class was slightly clumsy, and tends to ultimately fold into a more reductive analysis of their articulation, SOYA is undoubtedly part of the trajectory and tradition of grappling with that dialectic. It is significant in the national liberation struggle as a non-Stalinist political education for young black intellectuals that took the relationship between racist oppression and class exploitation seriously. For IB Tabata and Jane Gool and the rest of their generation, the paradigmatic historical model was the Russian revolution. They spoke of themselves as the first cohort of black activists who didn't come up through the tutelage and influence of the liberals but learned with immigrant and exiled European radicals in the formations like the Lenin and Spartacus Clubs – Marxist groups in Cape Town in the 1930s – and it was partly from them that they assimilated Trotskyist and anti-Stalinist sensibilities.[156]

Like most UM formations, SOYA has received scant historical attention.[157] A quick note of clarification is necessary here. Two related SOYA's existed. The first was the Society Of Young Africa, formed in 1951. The second was the Students Of Young Azania, formed in 1984 out of black student struggles in Cape Town in the early 1980s. The initial SOYA is the topic of the present discussion and of relevance to the chapter. Crain Soudien has written the most extensive scholarly work on the organisational milieu of which SOYA was a part in his book on the NEF.[158] SOYA however only features a few times as a reference in someone's testimony or, like CPSU, as "one of the fellowships and societies that had grown

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[155] UCTMA BC925 3.7. Tabata, IB. "Opening address to the first conference of the Society of Young Africa," 20 Dec 1951.

[156] Anonymous interviewer. Interview with Jane Gool and Isaac Bangani Tabata. Date unknown. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104465 [accessed 25 January 2024]; Hirson, B. "A short history of the Non-European Unity Movement: An insider's view." *Searchlight South Africa* 12 (1995): 64-93; Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals.*

[157] SOYA is mentioned in passing in some survey histories such as Ntsebeza, L. "Resistance in the countryside: The Mpondo revolts contextualised." In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years,* (Brill: Leiden, 2011); Nieftagodien, N. "Popular movements, contentious spaces and the ANC, 1943 -1956." In Lissoni, A., Soske, J., Erlank, N., Nieftagodien, N. and Badsha, O. (eds.) *One hundred years of the ANC: Debating liberation histories today,* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2011)*;* Lodge, T. *Black politics in South Africa since 1945,* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1983). SOYA is given brief attention in some of the scholarship on histories of student politics that have already been cited such as: Larkin, C. "Becoming liberal"; McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)"; White, TRH. "ZK Matthews and the formation of the ANC Youth League."; Williams, D. *A History of the University College of Fort Hare.*

[158] Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals*.

around the NEF.[159]" Soudien's book is not intended to be on SOYA so one can forgive him the lack of attention it is given. What I do find problematic though is that according to Soudien, Tabata's assessment that "organisations, like the NEF, had difficulty in communicating their message to ordinary people" was only maybe "partially correct."[160] To me this undermines not only Tabata's strategic logic and the distinct character of SOYA in responding to a problem in NEF and the UM more broadly, but it also fails to fully appreciate the critique of the UM's limitations. It resultantly treats SOYA as an appendage of the NEF rather than an attempt to move beyond some of its contradictions. The present chapter views SOYA as part of the process of emergence of a cohort of young activists who studied in it.

For Neville Alexander, one of those who had been mobilising for the opening up of SOYA's membership and joined it in the mid-1950s, SOYA was a formative experience: "the most important thing about SOYA was in fact their study group activity. In SOYA we learnt more about revolutionary politics than I learnt in any other organisation; no matter where I was in the world at any time."[161] While he recalled that the NEF was "that intellectual climate and cultural climate in which basically we learnt the best aspects of European politics, European philosophy and modern international attitudes,"[162] in SOYA there was an accent on recent and unfolding anticolonial and anti-imperialist revolutionary processes. These young activists were formed in relationship with each other and in the exposure to variations on the UM politicised pedagogies. Marcus Solomon remembered learning about the revolution in Cuba in SOYA by reading Huberman and Sweezy's classic book *The anatomy of revolution*.[163] For the cohort, the SOYA generation, Kenneth Abrahams said that the Chinese and Algerian experiences became paradigmatic for them as the frameworks for thinking about revolution.[164] Resonating with this, Alexander also recalled that the study of China – its history, politics, and thought – was central to the SOYA experience and curriculum and in fact, it was because of SOYA he knew Chinese history better than South African until he studied it later in his life:

> At that time that knowledge of China actually became most relevant in my life – in our lives. The most important reason why we studied China at the time was that it was presented to us by Tabbie and others as the alternative to India – the Chinese road out of colonial oppression was put to us as the alternative to the Indian road. And it was an absolute alternative in the sense both of methodology, method of liberation as well as the goals of liberation and the process of liberation.[165]

SOYA gave them an avenue to consider and debate political questions in other colonial and Third World countries and relate it to the state of the struggle in South Africa. In spite of this, the minority of African history was a broad issue in the UM consciousness as the majority of its intellectuals and the political

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[159] Ibid., p.151.
[160] Ibid., p.149.
[161] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.48.
[162] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p.43.
[163] Huberman, Leo, and Paul Marlor Sweezy, *Cuba: Anatomy of a revolution*. (Monthly Review Press: New York, 1960).
[164] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[165] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.55.

traditions they drew on were very Europeanised. While it didn't correct a certain neglect of the continent, SOYA represented an alternative internationalist focus to the dominant tendency in the NEF. Interestingly, despite how influential the Chinese anti-colonial experience was, Alexander said they never thought, strategically in terms of guerrilla warfare at that time.[166] It was only later, with the shift across the liberation movement in 1960/61 that the guerrilla experience of China resonated as a possible method.

Tabata, whose idea SOYA was, had been banned by the state under the Suppression of Communism Act in 1956. His writings, activities and statements "allegedly made by Tabata at meetings across the country between 1948 and 1955" were taken as "evidence of furthering "the achievement of the objects of Communism", of "vilifying the majority of the European inhabitants of the Union as oppressors" or of "inciting the non-Europeans to resist.""[167] Under a banning order, the banned was often kept under police surveillance, was prohibited from speaking or writing publicly and had restrictions on the number of people they could be with. Ciraj Rassool has argued that one of the major effects of Tabata's banning and the conditions it initiated was that it contributed to the process of his individuation. In absentia in UM forums he was vilified by the Kies-Jaffeites and defended, praised and lauded by his followers to the extent that his name and biography seemed to take on powers of their own.[168] I find Rassool's argument convincing and it has relevance to the story being told. Of related relevance is the effect that the restriction on Tabata's life placed an importance on the home. Jane Gool and IB Tabata lived together at 8 Milan Street, on the fringes of District Six. [169] Theirs was a house well-visited, where young and eager UM activists would come to sit at the feet of the elders. The iconic Milan Street was the intimate space in which they would discuss politics with these two seasoned activists who were and became parental-type figures to many of the young generation.[170] It was a site of organising, meeting, familial sociality, communing and mentorship. What I'm trying to get at here is the texture of a particular kind of political culture, how that was formed in the home and what that meant. It was a politics in the home but not necessarily *of the home*. The issues that were taken up in the organisations to which they were affiliated were not about the politics of the home or the reproduction of life, despite the home being a key site of those politics' reproduction. The context of the home developed a very real sense of intimacy where the lines between parents, mentors and teachers merged in the relationships of learning and political tutelage. Due to his banning, this was Tabata's available space of influence and his relationships with many of the youth entailed all these various dimensions.

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[166] Ibid.
[167] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa." PhD diss. University of the Western Cape, (2004), p.374.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., p375; Tabata, IB. *The Pan African Congress venture in retrospect,* (APDUSA: Cape Town, 2006), p.2.
[170] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa."

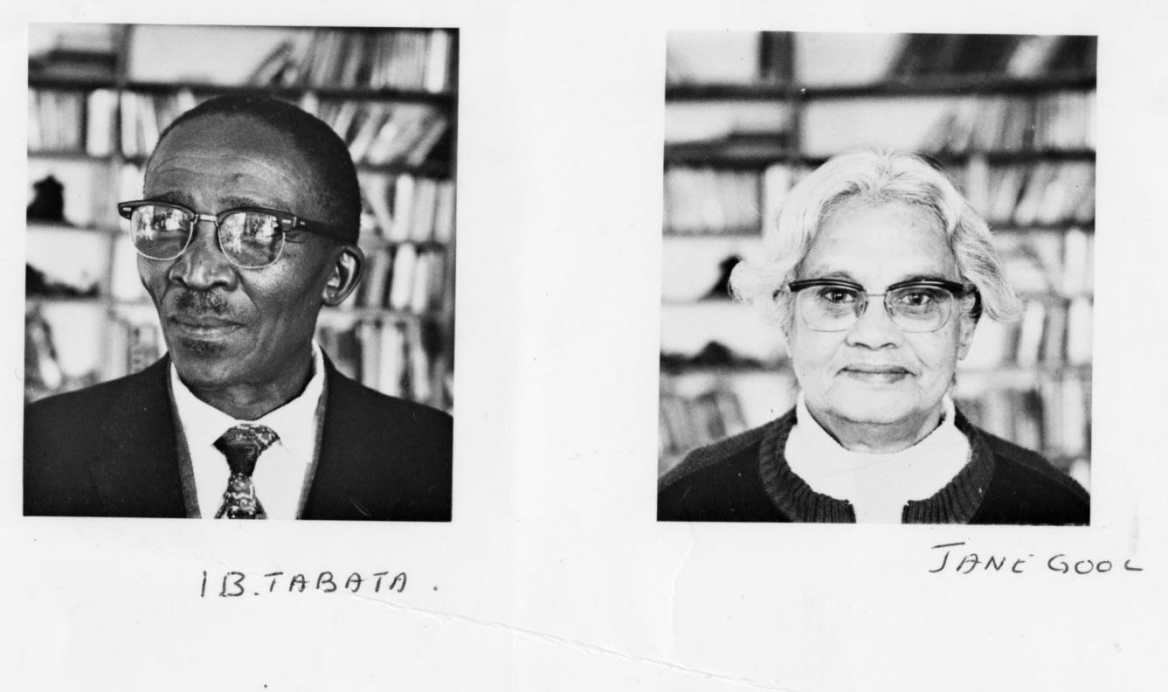


Figure 3. Isaac Bangani Tabata and Jane Gool. UCTMA BC 925, Image 004.

One of the pairs that frequented 8 Milan Street was Gwen Wilcox and Neville Alexander. Gwen Wilcox, older sister of Robert (cited above), was from a working-class Cape Town family of six children, almost all of whom eventually became active in UM politics.[171] She was the editor of *The SOYAN,* SOYA's publication. Of all the various kinds of relationships that Neville Alexander had in his early years in Cape Town, with regards to learning about the UM, Neville Alexander said that:

> Most important of all was Gwen Wilcox who became my lover after some time and was much older than myself, very experienced as far as the Unity Movement was concerned… and through whom I really learnt the politics of the movement from very, very different sides than the ones that Ronnie used to emphasise. I got to know the texture, the personalities, their biographies in various ways and as a result really can claim today that I really got to know the Unity Movement in [a] most intimate sort of way, in a way that most other young people of my generation didn't have access to.[172]

This intimate (and) learning relationship existed in the context and within a crew of other young UM people that cohered around Tabata, Jane Gool and Jane's sister Minnie Gool/Fredericks in the mid-1950s. That evolving crew included people like Minnie's daughter Nina Fredericks and Kenneth Abrahams, who were romantically involved at the time (prior to Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams getting together), as well as Karl Brecker and Ronnie Britten who had introduced Alexander to the whole milieu.

[171] APDUSA. "Gwendolyn Wilcox: A tribute." Available online at: https://www.apdusa.org.za/gwendolyn-wilcox/ [accessed on 22 February 2024].
[172] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p.30.

Emerging Splitting: "Because you are attacked for that position, you become that position"[173]

As the decade wore on, lines were drawn across that milieu. The polemic between the emerging camps in the UM – around Tabata and around Hose Jaffe and Ben Kies – heated up and the possibility for a non-aligned position eroded. For varying reasons, the young people, the subjects of our discussion, whose emergence as activists was unfolding in this context, who later went on to start the CPSU, were in the Tabata camp. Elizabeth van der Heyden, having come into contact with the UM through the Fellowships and then the TLSA, around the split, laid it out:

> There was the split in the Unity Movement, with the Van Schoors and Dudleys and Kies on one side and Fataar and Tabata and Gool on this side, and the AAC, and the Black Teachers League [CATA] and SOYA. And I linked up with the Tabata Group… And that was a matter of, you know what I think of now, at that time I was not so sure of my politics... But there seemed to be more activity in the [Tabata] group, more positive activity than in the other group. And, also, the arguments seemed to be more about personalities than really about the language and land issue which were the two big arguing points. But I don't think that was the reason for the splits.[174]

For Elizabeth van der Heyden then, who acknowledged that she wasn't so sure of her politics at that stage, it was the level of activity in the Tabata camp that drew her towards it. She also points out that the arguments were probably less about political positions on the points of land and language, and more about the personalities of the big men.

As the factions hardened, as Kenneth Abrahams mentioned, youngsters entering and trying to find their way in the UM context, had to choose between two positions that weren't of their making but, as the polarised situation demanded, had to be of their taking. If they didn't explicitly make a decision, by virtue of who they spent their time within the movement, they were interpreted and interpolated to belong to one or the other group. Marcus Solomon recalled being attacked by another UM youngster, who went the way of the Jaffeites, for 'his position.' While Solomon hadn't actually taken a position in the argument, it was assumed to be that of the Tabata faction because of who he spent time with:

> [He] would say 'ya point 7?' - The right to buy and sell land. - So you are actually capitalist?!' Fuck what is this guy talking about? So maybe you keep quiet for a while and then you go and read, you know. So you also begin, you already, *because you are attacked for that position, you become that position*. Because your friends are there… So then you sit and listen, how does Charlotte, how's Ottilie answering that question? How is Nora? Oh okay, and then it becomes part of your armoury.[175]

In this sense, the factions were less political that associative. One's political position became inseparable from the company one kept. This was a dangerous situation in an organisational culture because the

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[173] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[174] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[175] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

conditions for talking across factions broke down and, even in one faction, shared positions and acquiescence became assumed by virtue of where one found or placed themselves. As Solomon said, you became the position for which you were attacked even as the antagonism heightened an impulse to learn and study the issues in order to better defend oneself in the battle of ideas.

Frank "Franky" van der Horst came under the influence of politicised and politicising UM teachers at Trafalgar where he was in Ottilie Abrahams's class.

> Polly Slingers was our history teacher, Benny Kies was our English teacher. We had a very good set of teachers as we came through matric. In fact after matric a lot of them were wiped out of education. Benny Kies was banned, and couldn't teach, Polly Slingers was banned, also out of teaching. But they all played a very powerful role and a lot of other teachers played a very constructive role in encouraging us to go to meetings and discussion groups, to form discussion groups, go to lectures and so on. And it was a widespread thing and we passed it on as we went along.[176]

While Kies was his teacher, and a very positive influence on his life and development, when asked about his UM factional allegiance, van der Horst was clear:

> Now I'll be very clear with you. I grew up in the Tabata faction. But I wasn't blind. I went to go and read up to find out what it's all about. I went to check out, I went to ask questions, and they were very open in their discussions with us, the internal groups. The land question was fundamentally a primary moving force in as far as the, it underpins the migratory labour system and the economy, and the imperialist struggle and it links the rural struggle with the urban struggle, the migratory struggle with the workers' struggle, the workers and their leadership, and it built a unity of the struggle across boundaries and across barriers of national boundaries.[177]

Frank van der Horst, like Solomon, "grew up in the Tabata faction." He went to study the positions and the debates and came out if it convinced that the analysis of the Tabata-ites, was correct, or at least more correct than the Jaffeites. A cohort was emerging as part of the "new Youth" that Tabata envisioned and whose development he facilitated and support through organisational work, writing and home visits and mentorship. This was a cohort that had been influenced by UM ideas through teachers, intellectual clubs and the organisations of the movement. In this environment they were encouraged to attend meetings, study and to organise their own study groups, to interrogate and discuss various political and cultural matters, learn history and take positions. By around 1957, most of this cohort was in higher education. Solomon was finishing matric and, without the means to study at UCT, would then go on to Hewat Teacher Training College to study to become a teacher, Elizabeth van der Heyden was in a teacher training course. Neville Alexander, Kenneth Abrahams, Ottilie, Archie Mafeje, Frank van der Horst, Ronnie Britten, and Fikile Bam were studying various courses at different levels at UCT, one of the many quarters where the debate about resistance to the state's apartheid plans for universities was heating up.

[176] Interview with Frank van der Horst, 23 June 2021. Cape Town.
[177] Ibid.

University Apartheid

Contestation in the ruling Afrikaner Nationalist camp, about how to approach university education for black people within the apartheid project, had been taking place since the late 1940s.[178] Two reports commissioned around that time captured different approaches to the maintenance of white supremacy and the ongoing accumulation of capital in South Africa, these were the Fagan Commission (1948) and the Sauer Commission (1947). About these, Ivan Evans wrote:

> In sharp contrast to the laissez-faire liberalism of the Fagan Commission report, the report of the Sauer Commission demanded a strong, interventionist state. The document sketched a comprehensive program of state intervention to reverse African urbanization, diminish the dependence of whites on African labor, and promote tribal self-government in the reserves. Its object was to achieve the "eventual ideal and goal" of "total apartheid between whites and Natives"; to this end, it advocated "the gradual extraction of Natives from industries in white areas, although it is recognised that this can only be achieved in the course of many years."[179]

The Sauer Report actually paid very little attention to the question of blacks and university education but mentioned the intention of eventually having separate institutions for black people "in their own areas." The Eiselen Commission, whose report was published in 1951, and was the theoretical and practical basis of Bantu Education amongst other apartheid designs, "recommended that the state should plan for "the eventual founding of an independent Bantu university.""[180] Eiselen though, made no suggestions of practical steps to that end at that point. In 1953 the Minister of Education raised the "difficult and delicate matter… of non-Europeans at our universities" and gave a memorandum on "Apartheid at Universities" to the cabinet.[181] At the end of that year a commission was appointed, chaired by a Dr JE Holloway, formerly in the Treasury, to assess the monetary and practical considerations associated with providing separate universities for blacks. In order to segregate the institutions further to encourage, deepen the practice of 'separate development' and, in so far as possible, get black students out of white universities, the Holloway Report's (1955) major recommendation was that "black students should be concentrated in the parallel classes at the University of Natal in Durban, and at Fort Hare." [182] Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, extended the apartheid impulse and recommended that separate institutions be established to "prepare them [blacks] for service in their own communities."[183] These would entail the creation of four new institutions – for the 'Sotho,' 'Zulu', 'Indians' and 'Coloureds' – and the transformation of Fort Hare, which at the time admitted all black people, into an exclusively 'Xhosa'

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[178] du Pisani, K. "John Vorster and the Extension of University Education Act, 1959."
[179] Evans, I. *Bureaucracy and race: Native administration in South Africa*, (University of California Press: Berkely, 1997).
[180] Beale, MA. "The evolution of the policy of university apartheid," *Collected Seminar Papers. Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, 44, (1992), p.83.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., p.85
[183] du Pisani, K. "John Vorster and the Extension of University Education Act, 1959," p.34.

university, take its trusteeship away from the church and put it in the state's hands. These recommendations were streamlined into a White Paper which was used to inform The Separate University Education Bill which was tabled in parliament in March 1957 and then:

> An amended bill, introduced in April 1957, assigned control of the proposed university colleges for black students to the Minister of Native Affairs. The institutions for coloured and Indian students would fall under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Education. Admission to universities would be on the basis of race… No black student could be admitted to a university without the consent of the Minister of Education. Black students would be required to attend the university college allocated to their particular designated racial or ethnic group.[184]

These policies eventually became the Extension of Universities Act (1959) which would, and, with hindsight did, have far-reaching consequences on the youth of the whole black population and indeed the whole country.

The Act was resisted from many quarters in South African society. The liberatory movement resisted it as part of the broader machinery of apartheid. The far right wing of Afrikaner Nationalists didn't think black people's education should be paid for by the state, conservatives supported the segregation of universities, and the liberals were not in favour of it: University administrations of the liberal tinge registered their dissent and resisted their autonomy being taken away from them and the NUSAS, with the liberals in the ascendancy, was galvanised into action, critiquing the infringement of apartheid on the academic life of the university.[185] Another liberal response to the Act was the establishment of the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED):

> A group of academics, learners, church people and others committed themselves to struggle against the effects of these laws in a most practical way, through attempting to provide access to tertiary education for young black people which would be outside the apartheid framework but within the law to ensure survival.[186]

The founding of SACHED was significant in the lives of many of the emerging cohort members not just because they share an origin story in resistance to the Extension of Universities Act, but also because almost two decades later, many of them contributed to a major progressive shift in SACHED as they worked in and through the organisation as part of the alternative education agenda of the liberation movement in the 1980s. Some of this will be discussed in "Chapter Seven. Reconfiguration."

In the UM education was always conceived as a top priority, this was seen in the commitment of its adherents to the practice of teaching and the accent on education through study groups, lectures, and

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[184] Ibid., p.35.
[185] Ibid., p.36.
[186] Nonyongo, EP. "The South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached) Trust." In Nonyongo, EP. and Ngengebule, AT. (eds.) *Learner support services: Case studies of DEASA member institutions,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 1998), p.116.

fellowships. Many in the movement also harboured a certain kind of fetishisation of UCT. A number of UM teachers had attended it and they would often encourage those considered to be their brightest students to apply to UCT.[187] Neville Alexander remarked on the period after the announcement of the Act:

> [From] that time onwards, particularly in Unity Movement circles, which were extremely education-oriented, the entire question of university apartheid, was – became one of the most central questions and agitated everybody. In fact, its quite an interesting observation in retrospect, that it was a question like university apartheid – tertiary level apartheid – that really got everybody in the Unity Movement moving as it were because even though Bantu education and the first stirrings of coloured education, in education had given rise to a large – quite large scale mobilisation against these acts, the leading elements in the Unity Movement weren't as agitated about those particular developments as they were about university apartheid. My view is that in retrospect that one sees quite a lot of the depth of liberal influence on the Unity Movement – the individuals and even the kind of mystique, or perhaps it was just a kind of habituation, which an institution like UCT had acquired amongst black intellectuals, particularly amongst the coloured intelligentsia in the western Cape.[188]

A certain tendency of the UM could perhaps be summed up in this fashion: their politics was generally more concerned with wanting (what they considered to be) the best, or preserving their privileged access to it, rather than responding to the conditions of people who were experiencing the worst. This was not the politics that Fred Moten speaks about as refusing what has been refused to us.[189] This was desiring what has been refused to us. Neville Alexander reflected on an "anti-white" tendency that was shared amongst many 'Coloured' people that helps to understand this. He suggested that many 'Coloured' people despised being treated as inferior to white people "because they have so-called white blood." And on that basis, not because of a broad critique of and resistance to racism and white supremacy, they insisted on being treated as equal to whites. [190] Relatedly, Kenneth Abrahams said about the UM that "[there] was never any indication that they actually wanted anything more than what the whites enjoyed."[191] This sensibility is easily supported by the pervasive caveat in the founding document of their principled method of struggle, the Ten Point Programme which makes demands or claims for various social, political and economic rights *on the same equal basis as enjoyed by the Europeans.*[192] After the Act had been implemented, a common UM attitude was to scoff at the newly established "bush colleges"; some went so far as calling for and carrying out a boycott of them – either never minding or being totally ignorant of the fact that these were the only opportunity for black youth outside of small elite circles to attend

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[187] Chisholm, L. "Education, politics and organisation: The educational traditions and legacies of the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943-1986," *Transformation,* 15, (1991), 1-24.
[188] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.57-58.
[189] See for instance: Moten, F. "The Subprime and the beautiful." *African Identities* ,11:2, (2013): 237-245; Moten, F. *Stolen life: Volume 2,* (Duke University Press: Durham, 2018).
[190] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p.5
[191] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated, p.17.
[192] *Ten Point Programme,* (Non-European Unity Movement: Cape Town, 1943).

university. Refracted through its particular raced and classed character, resistance and critique of University Apartheid was complex in the UM.

The emerging cohort was looking for an avenue to cohere and channel their own resistance to the impending Act. They felt that the NEF was too elite and SOYA was not suited to that kind of action. Most black students, who were not activists per se but were nonetheless disturbed by, and would be affected by the university apartheid, felt distanced from the intellectual clubs. Neville Alexander further articulated and identified the need for an organisation for student issues:

> We should politicise education but not lead to people having to study Marxism or the history of the Chinese revolution unless they obviously wished to do so but who would mobilise against university apartheid, against Bantu education and so on. In other words, issue oriented organisations - student organisations in that sense. And we should also take up more academic educational questions that might or might not be linked to more – to broader cultural issues. I think, you know that ought to be very clear that most people simply don't join organisations of activists, they don't. They join mass organisations where an issue is the basis for that organisation. [193]

Since NUSAS dominated politics on the 'open' campuses, without an alternative political space dealing with student issues, disaffected black students would end up in the liberal union. The recent re-affiliation of the Fort Hare student body to NUSAS proved that even the black university could go that way if an explicitly anti-liberal critique and organisational alternative was not established. Alexander recalled thinking with many others but principally a trio at UCT including himself, Dullah Omar, a Trafalgar graduate who started his LLB in 1956, and Hassan Bavassa, a BA student, about the prospects for organising student resistance. They discussed it in social circles with other black students and in UM spaces and they resolved to establish a student organisation which would aim to connect those already studying at universities and colleges with younger high school students whose futures would be affected by the legislation. Further than linking the struggles at the various types of education institutions, it would attempt to make links with students across the country with the view to establishing a Progressive National Students Organisation. [194]

The youngsters planned to discuss their proposal to start a student organisation with elders in the UM, to get advice and see if and where they might like to support. The different sections of the UM leadership, the NEF and the SOYA, both forums where the issue had been discussed, had radically different responses to the proposition of starting a student organisation. Kies, Jaffe and Victor Wessels, the latter who was later known by the pen name Sarah Mokone, opposed the whole idea. The grounds on which they did this, Alexander felt were quite absurd:

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[193] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.67.
[194] Ibid., p.61-62.

> [They] claimed that student organisations had never played a progressive role in history first of all. Secondly, that students were not a class and therefore they didn't warrant an organisation of their own. And thirdly that students would simply become adventuristic and eventually even reactionary.[195]

So it was clear that the Kies-Jaffe faction was not going to be supportive of this venture. (An aside is that their position looks even more absurd now, particularly after the world events of a year like 1968 in which students all over the world agitated for radical transformation not only in the university but in society more broadly.)[196] This kind of reasoning and the sensibility it produced to not get involved in struggles was described by Kenneth Abrahams as a more general orientation of the Jaffeites:

> [The] whole Jaffeist group, even though they said they were fighting for socialism, were actually fighting for the preservation of their privileged state as elitist coloured teachers. But obscuring all this by this smoke screen of being ultra left and socialist. And this is an old tactic…But whatever they said, amounted to the fact that under concrete conditions they did nothing… They adopted ultra left attitudes which in practice means they do not engage in the day to day struggles of the people because they are always holier than thou because the cause for which they are striving is too grand to have their hands sullied or dirtied by petty actions you see, the short term things and whether it is a boycott or whatever because they are for grander things.[197]

Around the same time, others in the country encountered this sensibility that Kenneth Abrahams outlines. Activists in Johannesburg who wanted the UM to get involved in popular struggles such as the Alexandra bus boycott in 1957 ended up breaking with it. Roseinnes Phahle, one of those activists said that: "The most important of the issues was NEUM's habitually sinking its head in the sand whenever attempts were made to raise the social question."[198] Phahle, not incidentally, was one of the students on the Wits SRC who "argued that it was dishonest to defend the concept of academic non-segregation, [presumably] because of the practice of social segregation. presumably because of the practice of social segregation."[199] Phahle too, was part of a generation emerging from the UM extending the politics in their own capacity in resistance to the implementation of apartheid in the terrain of education.

Tabata, on the matter of starting a students' organisation, "never tried to curb our activism", the young militants discussed the idea with him and consulted him, looking for advice on certain points of

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[195] Ibid., p.60.
[196] See for instance: Hardy, S. "A brief history of student protests," *Chimurenga Chronic: Reform and revolution: The destruction of the University,* (Kalakuta Trust: Cape Town, 2016), p.3; Monaville, P. "How Third World students liberated the West" and "Reform and revolution at the University of Lovanium", in *Chimurenga Chronic: Reform and revolution: The destruction of the University,* (Kalakuta Trust: Cape Town, 2016), p10-13; Goodsell, JN. "Mexico: Why the Students Rioted." *Current History,* 56:329, (1969): 31–53; Chen, J., Klimke, M., Kirasirova, M., Nolan, M., Young, M. and Waley-Cohen, J. (eds.) *The Routledge handbook of the global sixties: between protest and nation-building*, (Routledge: London, 2018).
[197] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated, p.34-35.
[198] Phahle, R. "Reminiscences of the Arrest of Fikile Bam & Marcus Solomon in 1963."August 2019, available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/reminiscences-arrest-fikile-bam-Marcus Solomon-solomon-1963-roseinnes-phahle-august-2019 [accessed on 23 September 2023].
[199] McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)," p184.

organisation and strategy.[200] The conflict over support for the youngsters' independent action, in addition to the broader critique of the Jaffeites had the effect of putting most of the cohort more firmly into the Tabata camp. With the encouragement from Tabata, a group including Bavassa, Omar, Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams, van der Horst, Alexander, Peter Meyer, Pat Naidoo, Carl Brecker, and others, began going to local high schools and colleges and setting up meetings with students, "[and] we used to meet in places like the gardens and at various houses."[201] In the Fellowships, the Kies-Jaffe group continued taunting and patronising the student activists, attempting, by use of abstracted historical analogies, to make their attempts to form a student union appear childish and ill-advised. Eventually due to this pressure both Omar and Bavassa caved in, went over to the Jaffeites and pulled out of the emerging student formation. Alexander recalls that he, Kenneth Abrahams and Carl, still members of the NEF despite the fallout – they had actually been encouraged by Tabata to continue attending – had one last "shoot out" at the NEF after which they withdrew from the it completely and most of the students followed. "It was that tactic that led to the formation of the CPSU eventually."[202]

Organisation's memorial

In the period since its operative organisational life, outside of shorthand mentions in UM histories, and biographical details, the memory of the CPSU has existed ephemerally in a highly dispersed manner. This largely goes for the other chapters in the dissertation too. The present chapter is the first time where the various disparate layers of the CPSU soundscape of time have been cohered produced into a narrative. This fragmented soundscape is constituted by CPSU documents from the time of its existence, interviews conducted by Matsemela with Fikile Bam, Neville Alexander, and Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams in the late 1980s, some secondary scholarly work, and interviews that I have recently done with Elizabeth van der Heyden, Marcus Solomon, Robert Wilcox, Frank Musson, and Frank van der Horst. Another key site of the production of the CPSU's history has been at memorials of ex-members who have passed away.

I would like to speak a bit more about the phenomenon of the memorial. At Kenneth Abrahams' and Fikile Bam's memorials, held on the 20 May 2017 and 6 January 2012 respectively, ex-members took the occasion to revisit some of the history of the CPSU as a way of not only remembering and paying tribute to their departed friends and comrades but also keeping alive the memory for themselves and other members of their cohort who were there. There is a sense of the death of someone being linked to the passing of their memory and the anxiety of this history, which was of critical importance to the social and political lives of this cohort, also slipping away. This anxiety is heightened for a group of people who come from a political tradition that has largely been ignored in the historiography of the liberation

[200] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.50.
[201] Ibid., 64.
[202] Ibid.

movement. The memorial then becomes a mode of re-asserting their collective identity as a "generation born in the battle for truth," the social fabric and origin story of their cohort. These are some of the social functions of this kind of memory. Some of the other distinctive features of this mode of memorialising are its effervescence, its transience and the convergence of the historical actor, rememberer and narrator. These factors, and the decorum of a memorial event mean that the history that is remembered, retold and recollected is not necessarily presented as a site of or for contestation over details, significance or evidence. I begin this section on the history of the CPSU by drawing on these memorials – the sites of this history's contemporary production and reproduction – as they provide some of the best introductions of the organisation. I begin in this way and move inwards and outwards from there, to deepen, question and give texture to the memory.

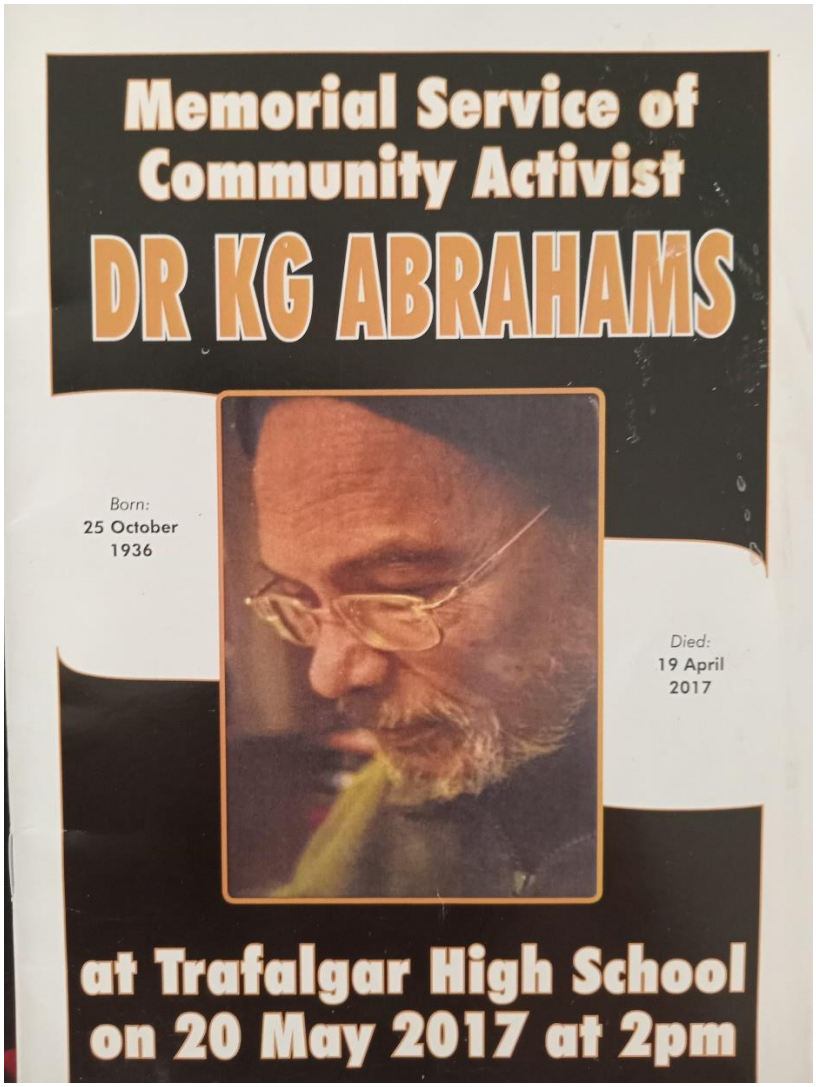


Figure 4. Programme for Kenneth Godfrey Abrahams' memorial. Abrahams family archives – documents.

At Kenneth Abrahams' memorial service, remarkably, one of those present at the memorial was his history teacher, Polly Slingers, who had an incredible impact on so many of his students as the previous section of the chapter illustrated. One of the speakers at the memorial was Abrahams' long-time friend

and comrade Frank van der Horst, who used the platform to give a historical lecture on the union and gave pride of place to the departed in his memory:

> The Cape Peninsula Students Union (CPSU) was launched in 1957. Kenneth Abrahams was elected President, Peter Meyer Vice-President, Neville Alexander Editor, Carl Brecker Secretary, Nashiba Jardine Treasurer and Frank Van der Horst Organising Secretary. The CPSU became a dynamic learning body with collective leadership, operating on consultative democratic principles and discussions to consensus agreement rather than voting. Kenneth Abrahams was a thoughtful incisive leader who could quickly summarise all options and provide good guidance. Students learned from his skills and had deep respect for his insights, knowledge and political wisdom. He was a good medical student with heavy study schedules but made time for the many demanding meetings and public lectures.
>
> Under his inspiring team leadership, the CPSU organisation grew rapidly and formed many branches… [Active] and dynamic groups existed at UCT, the teacher training colleges like Hewat, Zonnebloem, Wesley, St Augustine, Roggebaai and high schools like Trafalgar, Livingstone, Athlone, Alexander Sinton, Grassy Park, Harold Cressy. Fraternal student organisations were formed like the Durban Students Union and Lesotho Students Union (ROMA College University). Embryonic student groups existed at Fort Hare and Wits universities, in the Transkei, South West Africa (Namibia) and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).
>
> The CPSU worked with principled organisations like the Society of Young Africa (SOYA), Cape African Teachers Association (CATA), African Peoples Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA), All African Convention (AAC), New Era Fellowship (NEF), South Peninsula Fellowship (SPEF), Cape Flats Fellowship (CAFEF), Elsies River Fellowship (ERF), Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA), ANTI-CAD, Non-European Unity Movement, Pan African Congress of Azania (PAC), and Muslim Students Movement (MSM).[203]

In addition to the leadership that Frank van der Horst mentions above, for the record, a list of some of the people who were CPSU members at one time or the other includes: Elizabeth van der Heydenand Leslie van der Heyden, Dulcie September , Joe Peterson, Cyril Jacobs, Eric Rossouw, Nashiba Jardine, the Abdurahman sisters, Abe Fataar, Robert Wilcox, Audrey Meyer, Marcus Solomon, the Schimming contingent of Ottilie, Norah, Michael, Bella & Charlotte, Antoinette Wilcox, Nina and Daria Fredricks, Lionel Davis Jacobs, Charles Kauraisa, Archie Mafeje, Fikile Bam, Rita Edwards, Frank Musson, Ronnie Meyer, Bruce Simons, Ambrose George, Johnny Klaasen, George Botha, and the Jordan siblings, Nandi and Pallo.[204] Membership in the CPSU was dominated by students who were men and were classified as Coloured. There were also women members, men classified as African and a few white students also joined their ranks.[205] Van der Horst also mentions "an active support committee consisted of mothers like Mrs Abrahams, Mrs Brecker, Nurse Federicks, Mrs Meyer, Mrs Van der Heyden, Mrs Abdurahman,

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[203] Frank van der Horst personal collection. "Tribute to Dr. Kenneth Abrahams G. Abrahams: 20 May 2017."
[204] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; Sellström, Tor. Interview with Charles Kauraisa. 20 March 1995. Available online: https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/charles-kauraisa.html [accessed on 22 February 2024]; and Frank van der Horst personal collection. "Tribute to Dr. Kenneth Abrahams G. Abrahams: 20 May 2017."
[205] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

Mrs Ursula Fataar, etc"[206] acknowledging the labour done by the student activists' mothers to reproduce the work and life of the organisation, exactly the nature and amount of work and how it was organised is unclear.

While Frank van der Horst centres the figure of Kenneth Abrahams (it was his memorial after all), he provides a good executive summary of some of the key organisational details of the CPSU. He almost certainly embellishes the memory and ambiguously phrases certain things which gives a potentially-overinflated sense of some aspects of the history. For example, the relationships that the CPSU had with other student groups in the region seem to have been slightly less developed than he suggests,[207] and his description of their work with other "principled organisations" forgets or conceals the fact that the CPSU was engaged in a deep polemic with the Jaffeite organisations – such as the NEF and the TLSA – in the late 1950s and had no formal links with them. Along with others, these are matters that will be discussed further in the coming sections.

Fikile Bam's memorial was held five years prior to Abrahams', on 6 January 2012 at the Children's Resource Centre in Athlone, Cape Town. Marcus Solomon acted as the MC and gave an introduction to the programme and introduced Kenneth Abrahams, the first speaker. Like Frank van der Horst would do at his memorial five years later, Kenneth Abrahams took the opportunity of Bam's memorial to reminisce on and revisit the CPSU history including the political context of its formation and the editor-as-leader:

> I was the first president of an organisation which we started as students way back in the mid-fifties. And at that time the government was introducing a series of bills. Included in that group of bills was the, the way they usually put it, the Extension of University Education Act. I see this government has the same kind of dry sense of humour, whenever they take something away, they start by using the word 'extension.' And that Act provoked of course an enormous reaction from everyone affected by the educational system which was of course all of us. And we were at university at the time, the university itself adopted the policy of what they called in their typical euphemistic way 'non-academic segregation, ' [Neville Alexander interjects with 'academic non-segregation'], academic non-segregation, thank you… At that time there was the reaction at university level, within society itself and also amongst students in general – in high schools as far as I know not in primary school but in high school. And that is where I met Fikile Bam, as part of this movement, well we came together because we had a common Unity Movement background, and we of course decided to organise against this Act. And we established at that time the Cape Peninsula Students' Union, the CPSU. Fikile Bam was one of the founding members. I was president but it was obvious, it became very clear that it wasn't the main post. In a very strange way, the senior leadership position, and you'll never believe it, the senior leadership position went to an obscure individual who had himself elected as editor of the magazine. And that magazine of course showing great originality was called 'The Student.' And it was very strange being in an organisation which was led by the editor of this magazine.[208]

[206] Frank van der Horst personal collection. "Tribute to Dr. Kenneth Abrahams G. Abrahams: 20 May 2017."
[207] I found no other evidence to confirm whether the CPSU had or didn't have relationships with student formations in the Transkei or Zimbabwe, or that they worked with the PAC or the MSM.
[208] Marcus Solomon personal collection. *Fikile Bam Memorial* [film]. 6 January 2012.

In addition to introducing his relationship with Fikile Bam beginning in the context of the CPSU, Kenneth Abrahams wryly reveals two important things here that I want to pick up on. Firstly, the objects of the CPSU's resistance which were the introduction of Extension of Universities Act and the universities' liberal response – academic non-segregation – which was largely the position shared by their other nemesis – NUSAS – which Abrahams does not mention. Secondly, how what he says tends to reveal or suggest something about Alexander's role and position in the organisation, and here there are three things to mention. Before he even begins, in joking deference, but deference nonetheless, Abrahams said that he didn't want to follow the 'big act' of Neville Alexander and asked if he could speak first as "the warm-up act."[209] Then there is the benign correction that Alexander provides in the middle of Abrahams's speech on the matter of 'academic non-segregation' and thirdly, the anecdote that the real leadership position, the position of real power and influence in the CPSU, wrested with the editor, which we remember from Frank van der Horst's speech to be none other than Neville Alexander. All of this points to the regard in which people held Alexander, even his peers and comrades, and also that he played a (or even 'the') leadership role in the formation organisation even though he didn't bear the office. While he was undoubtedly a key thinker, strategist and organiser in the initial phase of the CPSU's thinking, he was actually in Germany studying for his PhD from mid-1958 until 1961, so was not actually present during most of the union's existence. The chapter, and the dissertation at large, makes the attempt to decentre and defetishise the individual to show the collective process even as the influence of certain characters loom large.

The rest of this chapter discusses the personnel, the politics, the activities and the aspirations of the CPSU. It does this in three sections. The first section extends and explores some of the social and organisational elements of the union that were introduced above by Frank van der Horst, through the people and their routes into the organisation, their activities, the branches and the CPSU's life in Cape Town. The second section moves beyond Cape Town to consider their aspiration to form the Progressive National Students' Organisation and the dynamics of the relationships they started and maintained with other student groups. Third we look at aspects of their politics – such as the simultaneous resistance to apartheid and the critique of liberalism in particular in the form of NUSAS – and the dynamics of independence in their relationship with the UM. We consider the CPSU's relationship with the UM as it changed over its lifespan within the context of the national politics in South Africa and the contingencies and contradictions of the cohort's quest for independence and how the UM, to a great extent, both ideologically and organisationally shaped the politics, trajectory and fate of the CPSU. Thereafter, the chapter closes with reflections on the significance of the CPSU within the history of black student struggles in South Africa and its role in producing a cohort of activists who would go on, over the next fifty years plus, to participate in liberatory struggles.

[209] Ibid.

Extension of solidarities, "learning on our feet"[210] and the politics of social life in Cape Town

The CPSU was formally launched at its inaugural conference which was in the first half of 1957 in the Woodstock Town Hall. The proceeding of the conference, featuring speeches and articles by members of the union's leadership, were printed – not cyclostyled, an achievement of which they were very proud – paid for by their own fund raising, and published as the May 1958 edition of *The Student* titled "1st Annual Conference: 3 Addresses."[211] Prior to the launch the students had already done months of preparatory organisational work. Neville Alexander recalled that:

> That conference was clearly the culmination of months and months of very hard daily work at the schools mainly and at universities. Sometimes we had two, three meetings a day at different schools and were constantly writing articles and helping to distribute articles [and] newspapers and so on… And we from the start organised not only protest and resistance with placard demonstrations and all the rest of it whenever we could but also study groups.[212]

The organisation's activities included holding regular meetings at the various institutions where they had or were trying to establish a branch or presence, organising lectures, study groups and discussions, fundraising and organising protests, independently producing and publishing *The Students' Journal* – later just *The Student*, critiquing NUSAS, keeping tabs on developments in national student politics and the liberation movement more broadly, and building relationships with other black student groups.

Marcus Solomon, who was initially recruited into the CPSU by Frank van der Horst, was at Hewat College, a teacher training institution, where he ran for the SRC at Hewat and was central to organising the CPSU on that campus. [213] He recalled the approach:

> The main thing was to organise where you are, the institution where you are at, Hewat. And then those two years were very involved with organising students, giving chats, making, speaking to people who I thought were potential members and then inviting them to lectures at say the Mowbray town hall, functions… So it was very [much] interacting with members where you are, at least once a week we had a meeting, discuss the agenda.[214]

This approach meant that the CPSU had branches in various areas of Cape Town, and at a number of education institutions. These were mostly in areas and schools for people classified as 'Coloured.' Neville

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[210] Interview with Frank van der Horst, 23 June 2021. Cape Town.
[211] Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *The Student,* May 1958; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.78-79.
[212] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.78-79.
[213] Robert Wilcox recalled that he was instrumental in getting Marcus Solomon signed up and was the one to teach him the history of the organisation. Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[214] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

Alexander mentioned that they had a presence at some schools in Langa and Nyanga but these, and 'African' students were by far in the minority.

One of the important features was that their conception of 'student' was broad.[215] The core of the CPSU was composed of UCT students and the university was central to its emergence and was the site of its ongoing struggle with NUSAS where the rival student groups organised debates in close proximity to each other and they would frequently heckle each other's events.[216] Regarding other tertiary institutions, they had a presence in many of the teacher training colleges as well as a strong branch of students at the new "bush college" of University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Bellville. They also placed a lot of emphasis on high school students as they understood that these were the people whose lives and future educational options would really be affected by the Act. Beyond students, at some point they introduced an affiliate membership category which allowed people who were not students, such as those who had graduated and others who were teachers, to join the CPSU.[217]

Something that Marcus Solomon would always emphasise to me in interviews was that politics was part of a much broader life and societal processes that were international in scope. The experience of 'becoming politically conscious' took place within a social environment, with and among people, teachers, partners, comrades and friends.[218] Relationships between CPSU members were the fabric and in many senses the basis of the organisational aspects and their circles were or felt part of some kind of alternative cultural phenomenon:

> You see that's the thing with the CPSU that was the other thing. We went to the [Table] Mountain, the whole group…It was like a camp for youth. It was a weekend out, we went the Friday we came back the Sunday morning. Spent time, we chatted, played guitar, sang etcetera. There were the weekend [hiphops], it was a fundraiser at the Mowbray town hall… So it was a whole thing, it was a different circle in other words. People drank but it was not a drinking thing. It was about the politics…So there was a whole… group outside the normal functioning of student life and cultural life… it was a friendship, comrades, whatever. Although we didn't call each other comrades then, that was a later thing. So what I'm saying is that there was an overlapping, go out together… ya, And I think that strengthened your own attraction to whatever was happening, it was not just an intellectual thing, it was an emotional thing.[219]

These relationships were part of these young people navigating life in 1950s South Africa. Resisting apartheid organisationally, but also resisting racism interpersonally. Marcus Solomon regaled me with a

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[215] Interview with Frank Musson, 16 August 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Frank van der Horst, 23 June 2021. Cape Town; Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town.
[216] Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *The Students' Journal,* November 1958; Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *Students' Journal,* October 1959; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[217] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[218] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[219] Ibid.

story about one day when a group – of about five or six – were going home from a CPSU meeting and encountered and resisted the everyday arrogance of white racism:

> Ya we were coming from, it wasn't late, I think it was an afternoon thing from Mowbray Town Hall and most of us stayed in Woodstock. Now some, close to I think, close to where we were going to get off… two white guys came up. Now normally blacks are supposed to sit upstairs the whites downstairs. These guys came up and I think it was full downstairs and they, we were sitting in front and they wanted to sit, and they said 'hey kaffirs' or whatever, they make some very racist, aggressive remark. So Fikile Bam and Archie got up – huh? – so unfortunately for them [the racists] they were not very big guys. Ya so it was easy for [Fikile Bam and Archie to beat them up, which they did], now of course the rest of us said 'hey chaps you must abort this bus now, jump ship.' Because they were sitting here, Archie and them, Fikile Bam of course went down, next stop they were off and of course, next stop, we were off.[220]

Clearly the emerging cohort's resistance to white supremacy took place on multiple levels. The casual afternoon treatment of racists was part of the broader project and it was part of the same social life as the students' union. Fikile Bam and Archie Mafeje were some of the few people within the CPSU fold who were racialised and classified as 'African' or 'Bantu'. The particular dynamics, strategies and history of white supremacy in the Cape meant that they would likely have had been subject to racism – structurally and interpersonally – in different, often more intense and direct ways compared to many of their 'coloured' comrades.[221] The overall black experience of racism in society and involvement in liberation organisations led the CPSU to understand the particular legislation aimed at segregating the university within their overall experience of oppression and the general programme of the apartheid government. They insisted that the extension of apartheid at universities had to be resisted as part of that overall strategy rather as an isolated and exceptional singularity.

Leslie "Les" van der Heyden, was Elizabeth's younger brother by about 18 months. He had an opportunity that his sister didn't – to attend university. Leslie van der Heyden was at UCT in the late 1950s and became involved in CPSU. Elizabeth van der Heyden, while she wasn't a student at the time, was influenced and joined the organisation through her brother:

> My brother was at UCT, right, at that time. They were among the last group of graduates at UCT when it was still open before the Bellville College opened. And they, Neville Alexander, had collected this group of students as opposed to the NUSAS group, the [Adrian] Leftwich group. And of course my brother influenced me. So I joined. Because they were going my way, you know, so I joined them. I was at that stage a member of the [TLSA] already because by the time he went to university I was already teaching, that is, he started his university the year I started teaching. And I became an associate member of the Cape Peninsula Students Union, 'Alexander's Ragtime Band' as they [NUSAS] called us.[222]

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[220] Ibid.
[221] Goldin, Ian. "The coloured labour preference policy, co-option and contradiction." *Collected Seminar Papers: Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, 33, (1984): 108-120.
[222] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.

In her memory and description of the CPSU, whose introduction was a family affair, Neville Alexander was the central character and the epicentre was UCT and one of its main activities was engaging in debates with NUSAS. She also points something else interesting out, that the NUSAS developed a deprecative nickname for the ensemble – Alexander's Ragtime Band – which suggests something about NUSAS but also about the perception of the CPSU as being under Alexander's conduction.

Another family connection introduced a young activist to the CPSU. The Wilcoxes, of which Gwen, who was the editor of *The SOYAN* as mentioned above, were a family of eight – the eldest four siblings, girls and the youngest, boys – and many of them were involved in the UM. Their family had been treated for many years by the physician Dr. Goolam Gool, a UM stalwart and sibling of Jane Gool, and he had introduced the children to the UM.[223] Robert "Robert Wilcox" Wilcox had been taken by his elder sisters to pamphleteer whenever the UM was organising any actions in the late 1940s and early 1950s from when he was eleven or twelve years old. Gwen Wilcox also got him to distribute the SOYAN at his school. After he finished school Robert Wilcox went to work at a factory that made stockings and got dismissed for organising outside of the unions who had 'an arrangement' with the bosses.[224] After that he decided to go and study at UCT in 1959. Before that though, he met some of the CPSU comrades through his sisters:

> We moved to Cape Town, District Six, with two of my sisters were staying with another friend, quite a big house. And there I came into contact with some of the CSPU members before I was at varsity… and this was a new breed of student that I met there, I've never known students so interested in politics, and it was quite interesting to me… Others would come there to have meetings of the Society of [Young] Africa there, I would meet members there.[225]

By the time he started at UCT, having already been acquainted with this "new breed" of politically interested students, he immediately got involved with the CPSU and was elected as treasurer.[226] So for Robert Wilcox it was the family connection and the home he shared with his sisters that became the environment in which he became introduced to the CPSU and ultimately facilitated his involvement.

Frank van der Horst was also a UCT student and was an office bearer in the CPSU since its inception as the Organising Secretary. He acknowledged that he was politically very inexperienced initially and learned in the practice and experience of organising from the more experienced comrades in the organisation:

> I was a founder member, but I was a rookie, a new young student, completely uninformed, I didn't know what I was doing, I just went in like most others. The only people who really knew what they were doing were Neville Alexander, Carl Brecker, Fikile Bam, Ronnie Britten, Archie Mafeje, Pat Naidoo, they were experienced members, they had a background in what they were doing and we were new, we used to learn from them. And they gave us posts and jobs to do and, as we developed, we learned on our feet and in debates with the liberals at

[223] Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

> UCT. And we learned to understand that imperialism and capitalism controlled UCT, Cecil John Rhodes, it was the feeding ground for leaders to maintain the capitalist system and imperialism in South Africa, and the control over the education. And all their policies of academic non-segregation were all false policies. [There was] no segregation in academics but the hostels were segregated, sports was segregated, the social life was segregated. And we used to expose that, and all their big buildings were named after imperialists, like the Jagger Library at UCT, the big billionaire, Jameson Hall, Fuller Hall, most of the buildings, De Beers, the Mathematics building and so on, Shell always used to come and donate big buildings. And we would expose it that this is a capitalist institution.[227]

Frank van der Horst, and many others like him, learnt on his feet and in the white heat of debate where the CPSU members developed and articulated a critique not only of their sparring partners in NUSAS but also of the colonial institution too, and the connection of liberalism between them. It was many of their first experience in organising and, while they had some possibilities for mentorship from older members in the Tabata faction of the UM, they basically learnt together from each other, as a cohort.

As Organising Secretary, Frank van der Horst was central to recruiting a number of people and the process of establishing the UWC branch of the CPSU. To tell that story, I need to introduce another Frank. Frank Musson was studying at UWC. Born in Kimberley in 1931, Musson was older than most other undergraduate students. He came to Cape Town from the world of work to study to become a librarian at the newly-opened UWC in Bellville.[228] He describes his introduction to the cohort:

> We had a meeting off course that was organized by the NUSAS, you heard about them? Now of course we had no idea what was going on, so we thought that NUSAS, okay they're against apartheid so that's good. And the strange part is that I had organized then a meeting off the campus and lo and behold a chap by the name of Frank van der Horst heard about it and he was present there. And he's a very forceful speaker. And that was the first time I realized what's happening, that NUSAS wasn't the progressive organisation I thought, you know, they were just sort of smoothing over the cracks in the liberal font you see. And so that's how the CPSU [formed], we then had regular meetings on a Friday afternoon at the place I was staying at. So that was my introduction to the struggle.[229]

Musson recalled that those meetings, held in the living room of the home where he was boarding, were sometimes extremely crowded but, as the pressures of the semester went and the rhythms of student life ebbed and flowed, so did the turnout. Nonetheless, the UWC group in Bellville became a strong branch, and people like Frank van der Horst, Marcus Solomon and Peter Meyer and others used to often attend their Friday meetings.[230] The extension of solidarities to the new 'bush' university and the building of connections between UWC, the elite UCT, teacher training colleges, high schools was significant as the CPSU cohered all these struggles and it was in this cohering that the collective subject of the student activist emerged as a cohort. While they built these connections across different spaces in the Peninsula,

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[227] Interview with Frank van der Horst, 23 June 2021. Cape Town.
[228] Interview with Frank Musson, 16 August 2022. Cape Town.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.

the CPSU's aspiration was much broader. They wanted to connect with other black student formations to build the Progressive National Students' Organisation that would both resist apartheid and liberalism.

The Progressive National Students' Organisation: The attempt and uneven results

In Kenneth Abrahams's address at the inaugural conference, he discusses their aspiration (he actually refers to it as a fact) to transcend a "Cape Peninsula Mentality" to become a national organisation. The basis of this was rooted in their conception of the relationship between the struggles of black students and the broader struggle of the liberation movement. Understanding the CPSU to have emerged from the Liberatory Movement and to be, itself, embedded in it, Abrahams said:

> Because students would be influenced to join other organisations in the Liberatory Movement once they ceased to be students – it was a *channel* to the Liberatory Movement. It arose out of the Liberatory Movement and had quite definite and definable *ideological ties* with the Liberatory Movement… Although situated in the Cape Peninsula – it really had members from all over Southern Africa and did not have a "Cape Peninsula mentality," but approached all students and other affairs on a *national scale.* It was a representative and a *symbol* of the more progressive students of the land, and an active *campaigner* and *awakener* of students throughout the country – bringing all to greater political consciousness, and following from this, it had set itself the task of taking the initiative and leading the way to a *National Students' Organisation.*[231]

There are a number of important points to pick up here that Kenneth Abrahams laid out. The description of the character of student politics and the understanding that, under most conditions, people stop being students at a certain point, ie. when they graduate, fail, run out of money or walk out, is important. This influenced them to conceive as the CPSU as a channel or a funnel - facilitating the development of student activists who would then go on to join the organisations of the liberation movement after having been "awakened" and brought to "greater political consciousness" by the CPSU. The funnel analogy places an importance on the task of producing activists rather than a narrow focus on building the organisation. There is certainly also some degree of precociousness to how the CPSU viewed themselves within the national context – as the most politically sophisticated and theoretically advanced section of the student population. Their conviction in the correctness of their position shaped how they went about their (own) mandate to build the PNSO and their relationships with other groups.

By far the closest other student grouping to the CPSU, politically and ideologically, was the Durban Students' Union (DSU). DSU was founded in 1959 by a small core of students at the University of Natal Non-European section (UNNE) along very similar lines as the CPSU. One of its members was John Samuel who had grown up in the Tongaat district of Natal and was made familiar with the national political situation through one of his neighbours, Gopallal Hurbans who was a prominent figure in the

[231] Abrahams, KG. "Presidential Address," *The Student,* May 1958, p.4-5.

community as a businessperson as well as having helped to establish schools for Indians. [232] He was also part of the Natal Vigilance Committee which resisted aspects of the Group Areas Act. As a member of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) he had been arrested in the Treason Trial.[233] This experience had exposed a young John Samuel to some of the political context of the time through the lens of the NIC.

Samuel considered himself lucky when he, in his final year of high school, became a friend of Ivor Chetty who was already a student at Natal University and was UM person very close to Jane Gool and IB Tabata. By 1959 when John started at the UNNE – whose site was an old factory that university had leased, physically separated from the white section – he was excited by, and was already acquainted on a basic level with some of the UM ideas through Chetty and had shifted from an NIC outlook that focused on 'Indian' issues.[234] In that year there was a student body meeting to discuss, debate and decide on whether the UNNE student body would affiliate to the NUSAS or not. Sameul recalled being in the UNNE common room:

> One day I was in the common room and this chap from NUSAS, who I later on realised was the president of NUSAS, appeared in the common room and a kind of discussion started and I was barely you know six months at university but I had already picked up some ideas and so I challenged him. But I was rapidly beginning to realise that I was soon going to be out of my depth because I think I had run out of my arguments [laughs]. And so I said to one of my friends ' go and call Kader.' Kader Hassim was my senior and he was, you know, he'd already been three or four years at university. And so they brought Kader in and there was this debate that started. But what had happened was that a student body meeting had been convened to talk about this issue – affiliate or disaffiliate. And so, and though even though we were in a tiny minority we almost won the day, we lost thing by about a couple of votes so the decision was to affiliate with NUSAS… as the University of Natal Non-European Section.[235]

In addition to Ivor Chetty and John Samuel, some of the people who were involved in the DSU included Jivan Desai, Moogam Moodleyaar, Thylan Reddy, Vishnu Thiwary, and Navi Pillay. There were a few older students who were UM people who weren't actually members of the DSU but were always around, this includes Kader Hassim, who John mentioned above, and VS Rajah. Samuel recalled that the core group was around eleven or twelve. [236] Outside of the UNNE campus, and countering the liberal NUSAS, the DSU was involved in work connecting with and organising with other local students:

> And so the DSU focused, I think, on a couple of things, one is to build a larger membership base. So all eleven of us would spend hours in going to high schools to try and recruit students, have meetings and secret meetings and all of that kind of thing. And also we spent a lot of time, because at that time, in '59/'60, was the beginning of the tribal universities. And in Durban it was, what later became Durban Westville, they started on a little

[232] Interview with John Samuel. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg.
[233] "Gopalall Hurbans." Online directory of *Digital Innovation South Africa.* Available online at: https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/gandhi-luthuli-documentation-centre/gopalall-hurbans [accessed on 22 February 2024].
[234] Interview with John Samuel. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.

> island in the bay. It was called Salisbury Island in the bay and so we would make trips there and quite often we would be kicked out because it was a little island so it was easy for the authorities to. But again, you know, we spent a lot of time doing student politics but also adult politics, Unity Movement politics. Because this was the time, you must remember, post the banning, post Sharpeville, and so there wasn't what I would call a lot of obvious political activity, certainly not in Durban and that was primarily because the political organisations – the PAC, the ANC – were banned. And so student politics became an important space to take it up. But in very typical Unity Movement style I mean we were politically educated, you had to read up a lot, you know, there was a great tradition of intellectual discipline. You read, you understood, you discussed, you know, that was just as important in a way as going out and recruiting students to join the organisation.[237]

The DSU shared much with the CPSU. They shared a common grounding in the politics of the UM and the critique of NUSAS and liberalism. They also shared in their approach to linking black students at the 'open' universities, in the DSU's case, UNNE, with newly established black universities, in the DSU's case University of Durban-Westville (UDW). As the following cadre shows, they also shared in their work with high school students. Enver Motala moved to Durban when he was sixteen or seventeen around 1960/61. He had grown up in Dundee, about 300km inland. Many of Motala's family members had been involved in the Congress movement and some were part of the Treason Trial and from the time he was about twelve years old he had attended small home-based UM meetings that were organised by Dr Limbada, a central figure in the Natal UM milieu.[238] There they discussed things like the Ten Point Programme and the land question and from that young age he was reading both UM and Congress literature. When he moved to Durban it was to attend the newly established Durban-Westville. The DSU, whose base was UNNE, had already been in operation for a year or two by the time he got involved. The form of his involvement was attending regular meetings and participating in a number of discussion sessions with local high school students about the general political climate.[239]

As mentioned in the literature review at the beginning of this chapter, students at Fort Hare, having been frustrated with the NUSAS inability to commit itself to the principles of social and political equality for all, had disaffiliated from the national union in 1952. Interestingly, in the attempt to build their national structure, the CPSU doesn't seem to have made any overtures towards the ANCYL which was the primary force of organised black youth in the country. The founding of SOYA had been in many ways a direct response to the influence of the ANCYL particularly at Fort Hare, and even as there was a coherence of opinion amongst militant Africanists and non-collaborationist SOYAns regarding their position on NUSAS at that moment, the anti-ANC sentiment harboured by elements of the UM was reproduced by the emerging cohort.[240] As NUSAS claimed to "represent all those opposed to university apartheid," securing the allegiance of Fort Hare was critical for their optics and they worked hard to get

[237] Ibid.
[238] Interview with Enver Motala. 5 April 2022. Online.
[239] Ibid.
[240] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2 -2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

them to re-affiliate.[241] These attempts included the following account: "NUSAS visitors attended a college social and so as to avoid accusations of social snubbing and racism, danced 'wildly' with as many students as they could, raising the eyebrows of some members of the college staff."[242] In 1957, in order to join the "united front" against the imposition of the Extension of Universities Act, under an "SRC, markedly more inclined towards the now dominant non-racial orientation of the ANC" despite the fact that "much of the student body remained sympathetic to the anti-collaborationist SOYA and militant Africanist position," Fort Hare re-affiliated to NUSAS.[243] This, what the CPSU referred to as "The Fort Hare Debacle" was reported in their journal.[244]

Under the conservative rector John Jurgen Ross, appointed as part of the process of transferring the control of Fort Hare in 1959 away from the church and to the apartheid state, NUSAS were considered to be trouble-makers and Ross took it upon himself to inform NUSAS that the SRC would no longer be affiliated to them.[245] This situation prevailed until:

> Early in July 1962, NUSAS officials visited Fort Hare and managed to revitalise the national union on the campus. However, the level of this support was soon tested with the second visit to the campus of the Unity Movement's Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) propagating its new radical student organisation, the Progressive National Students' Organisation (PNSO).[246]

On two occasions, the CPSU had sent a delegation to Fort Hare to meet with the SRC in the hopes of getting them to disaffiliate from NUSAS. Once in the late 1950s and once in 1962. Robert Wilcox recalled that their aim to build this national formation led them to Alice to the historic campus of Fort Hare:

> Then we worked to get Fort Hare also involved into this and then form a national students' organization. So we went on a trip to Fort Hare which was consisted of myself, Fikile Bam, Frank van der Horst, Joe Peterson…. One two three four, I think we were five, I can't remember the fifth, maybe Archie Mafeje. And there we had a very successful meeting with the students, we had a series of meetings over… I think it was 1960 wouldn't have been later. And as a result of that meeting Fort Hare disaffiliated. They were affiliated to NUSAS and as a result of that series of meetings with them, they disaffiliated from NUSAS and we considered that a big victory. [247]

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[241] McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)", p.114.
[242] Ibid., p.118.
[243] Ibid., p.116.
[244] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2 -2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[245] Interestingly, this was the same year that the PAC founded a branch on campus. McKay wrote: "With the establishment of a branch of the PAC at Fort Hare in 1959, there existed the possibility of the further radicalisation of the student body. However, unlike the militant national organisation, the Fort Hare PAC branch did not play an active role in campus politics but concerned itself largely with discussion groups on Pan-Africanism." McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)", p.262.
[246] Ibid., p.278.
[247] Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town. Wilcox's recollection of the date of events from his testimony earlier about their trip to Fort Hare and the resultant disaffiliation being in 1960 is possibly incorrect. It seems most likely that either it was in 1959, in which case, the campus had already been disaffiliated from NUSAS by Ross the Rector, or it was the later trip in 1962 which resulted in the brief disaffiliation.

NUSAS claim that proponents of the PNSO (Progressive National Students' Organisation) attacked them, saying that their organisation was "funded by the Chamber of Mines and was the student wing of an unnamed political party, probably the Liberal Party." McKay wrote that Fort Hare PNSO adherents engineered the campus's disaffiliation in 1962 but that it was short-lived as NUSAS, now under a more activist guise, petitioned the SRC to return.[248] While the effects of the disaffiliation did not last long, the significance in terms of thinking about the CPSU historically is in its aspiration and the attempt to build the national students' organisation and that there was a true attempt to realise it. This aspiration also took them to Maseru in 1959.

At the end of 1958 students at the Catholic University College (CUC) in Basutoland disaffiliated from NUSAS. In July 1959 the National Union of Basutoland Students (NUBS) was launched at a conference in Maseru and a joint group of three delegates attended the gathering from DSU and CPSU.[249] Despite disaffiliation from NUSAS, certain principles and positions held by NUBS were considered "diametrically opposed" to those of the CPSU and DSU. The South African student formations felt that NUBS's non-partisan political outlook was apolitical and alleged that it was "effectively under control of the authorities" particularly in the form of the Rector of CUC and the close relationship that the group had with some government officials. This disagreement over certain principles took place through a series of statements and letters prior to the gathering and led to the latter two organisations deciding to send their people as 'observers' rather than 'delegates'. In the joint statement penned by the CPSU and the DSU to the conference, they wrote:

> As we have repeatedly stated in the past with regard to NUSAS, our organisations are definitely partisan in political outlook and we have adopted the policy of Non-Collaboration with the oppressor, its agents or agencies. We support a definite set of ideas that we believe will bring freedom and full democratic rights to all the oppressed people of South Africa. Although there is much in the publication of NUBS with which we are in agreement, we find that the lack of exactness in the formulation of your aims, objects and policy makes it impossible for our organisation to have official relations with your organisation until such a time as these vital matters are stated clearly and unambiguously.[250]

And further, with some degree of (perhaps unintended) irony:

> The CPSU and the DSU further wish to make it known to the Conference of NUBS that at no time have we aspired or attempted to dictate policy to, or control NUBS in any of its activities. Our association with all organisations is on the basis of equality and those organisations maintain complete autonomy.[251]

The CPSU and DSU's line here is not exactly 'my way or the highway,' but it's definitely not far off. The synthesis between the two above quotes is an interesting one and taken together essentially means that if

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[248] McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)", p.278.
[249] Joint Executives of the CPSU and DSU, "A Joint Statement from the CPSU and DSU to the Conference of NUBS", *Students' Journal,* October 1959, p.6.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.

the Basutoland students wanted to have an official relationship with CPSU and DSU then they had to develop and make explicit aspects of their politics, their programme, principles and policy. Without meeting that condition there was no possibility of formal collaboration. However, they were very keen to articulate that they saw every organisation as equal and autonomous and they would never dictate or control them. The autonomy and equality of organisations that the CPSU and DSU envisioned was clearly within parameters they had themselves imagined and decided upon. The basis for building a national organisation was their own programme not necessarily something to be debated and planned together with other black students. Other organisations were expected to make politics legible within the frame that the CPSU and DSU recognised as progressive.

This was somewhat of a conundrum – on the one hand there was the attempt to build a broad national organisation, at the same time there was the pursuit of some kind of quite narrow ideological purity. Their resolution of the conundrum in this instance meant that they didn't work with NUBS and this is odd in a sense because the political reasoning behind their organisational form – the federal structure – was supposed to make space for local bodies who had different political sensibilities and outlooks. Frank van der Horst explains his understanding of it:

> We were busy preparing the groundwork for the subcontinent to develop indigenous organisations in all areas eventually with a view to merging, cooperating, collaborating, working together with unifying principles, policies, programmes and eventually growing together. With each one concentrating on their own local area issues and so on but then a broad perspective having a common vision, a common direction… it allowed for a lot of unequal and uneven development. In fact there were people who were very advanced and others who were, I won't say backward, but they were victims of their own prejudices, racism and cultural backgrounds and so on. And the way the government manipulated them. And some of the indoctrination that came through actually stuck quite a long time before people started identifying it. So we had to accommodate for all those little developments that took place in order to bring them all together.[252]

In the particular instance with NUBS, the theory snubbed the practice. As Frank van der Horst described it, the shape of their organisation should provide space for organising with and across difference but as the NUBS incident suggested, in the messiness of practice and perhaps the pursuit of political purity, it didn't. There is the assumption that there were people who were victims of their own prejudices, and the implication that the CPSU had transcended their own prejudices. While they stated themselves to be against a "Cape Peninsula mentality",[253] they seem to have transposed the conditions, analysis and programme developed in Cape Town, in particular at UCT and out of a particular political tradition – the UM, onto the national context. In other words, what made sense in challenging the particular kind of problem that NUSAS presented at UCT was potentially not universal across the national context. Their

[252] Interview with Frank van der Horst, 23 June 2021. Cape Town.
[253] Abrahams, KG. "Presidential Address," *The Student,* May 1958, p.3-4.

political inexperience and outlook, shaped in and by the UM, hadn't prepared them for navigating the messiness of organising as opposed to the posture of political or theoretical purity.

In/dependence: The cohort, liberalism and the Unity Movement

> *[T]hese students reacted in a manner compatible with that particular set of ideas… the principled unity of the oppressed on the basis of [a] Programme aimed at political democracy for all; a recognition of a federal form of organisation as the only means of realising this unity, a policy of non-collaboration with the Herrenvolk and the use of the weapon of the boycott.* [254]

As illustrated in the literature review of this chapter, black students had been struggling with, in and against NUSAS since the 1940s. In the UM, the role of liberalism in the process of colonisation in South Africa had been studied and thoroughly critiqued by members of the UM and it was core to that tradition to not collaborate with liberals.[255] Neville Alexander said that even before he really understood Marx or the dynamics of class struggle, he had learnt to despise liberalism. Through people like IB Tabata and Ronnie Britten he had been taught the dangers of liberalism and, while he reflected later that it was not necessarily correct, at that early point in his political life he saw it as more dangerous, politically, than Afrikaner nationalism, due to its supposed sophistication and grasp of modern politics.[256] In the national student politics scene, NUSAS embodied and represented the liberalism that they hated and the CPSU used to debate its adherents when and wherever they could. Robert Wilcox went so far as to say that: "*Our main fight* was against NUSAS in the liberal ideology of simply narrating conditions of Apartheid but not really getting to the crux of the things you know. So, we fought a lot with them."[257]

Kenneth Abrahams laid out, in his "Presidential Address" at the CPSU inaugural conference, his and the organisation's (essentially the UM's) understanding of Herrenvolk:

> *Herrenvolk* – by this I mean that group of people who believe that they, as a race, are superior to some particular or every other race in the world. And *Herrenvolkism* is the belief that this race is the Master Race. A result of a belief in Herrenvolkism is the domination or attempted domination of all other races assumed or believed to be inferior to the Master Race. Thus the Herrenvolk are those people who believe that they have a divine right to be rulers.[258]

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[254] Ibid.
[255] See Majeke, N. *The role of missionaries in conquest*, (Society of Young Africa: Cape Town, 1952); Mnguni. *Three hundred years*, (New Era Fellowship: Cape Town, 1952); Nasson, B. "The Unity Movement: Its legacy in historical consciousness." *Radical History Review*, 46-47, (1990): 189-211; Nosipho Majeke, and Tabata, IB. *The awakening of a people*, (Spokesman Books: Nottingham, 1974).
[256] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2 -2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[257] Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town. Emphasis added.
[258] Abrahams, K.G. "Presidential Address," *The Student,* May 1958, p.2.

This concept is important in grasping UM politics as it attempted to combine and synthesise a critique of white supremacy and capitalism. Herrenvolk could refer to all white people who believed in the project of white supremacy and was closely linked to their usage of 'the ruling class' which was imagined as the class who held the reins in state and economy, who designed and implemented the project of the Herrenvolk. The ruling class had a stake and an interest in the status quo and in prolonging conditions conducive to ongoing capital accumulation and therefore their organisations shared and perpetuated that interest. The tendency of a section of ruling class politics was toward liberalism, the soft coating for the hard status quo. The policy adopted to deal with the Herrenvolk was non-collaboration.

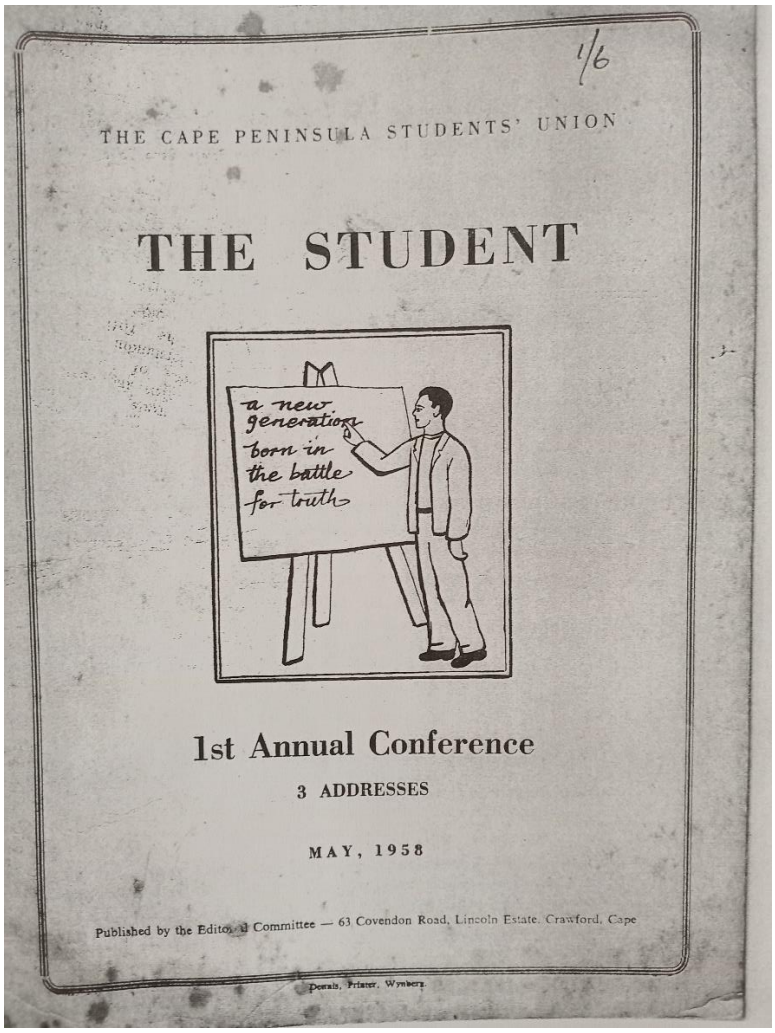


Figure 5. Cover of "The Student", May 1958.

Non-collaboration basically meant that you should not work with the organisations or instruments of the Herrenvolk or the ruling class as their interests were diametrically opposed to those of the oppressed and any influence would contaminate and confuse the politics. According to people like Tabata, it was supposedly in this way theorised as a mechanism of class independence, to build independent working class organisations.[259] The principle was unevenly theorised, understood and applied. In theory, the

[259] Tabata, IB. *Apartheid Cosmetics Exposed*, (Prometheus: Amherst, 1985), p.82.

relationship or synthesis between class and "the oppressed" was often under-developed or ambiguous.[260] It was also generally articulated in a veiled way due to fear of censorship and other more serious repercussions in the context of communist suppression.[261] And it was frequently wielded by elements of the UM to actually avoid involvement in popular struggles.[262] The specific weapon of struggle that flowed from the policy of non-collaboration was the boycott.[263] The use and effectiveness of the boycott was highly uneven. Institutions such as the bhungas or the 'dummy councils', which were mechanisms of colonial state power reformed and introduced in the mid-1930s around the Herzog Bills, and the Coloured Affairs Department, were boycotted as were liberation movement activities such as the Alexandra bus boycott and the ANC's Defiance Campaign by elements of the UM tradition.[264] These tensions and contradictions shaped many aspects of the UM's politics and I would argue that they were present in the CPSU. Frank Musson gave his understanding of the UM's "ultimate goal" of non-collaboration as "divid[ing] the working class," "which in SA meant the non-whites," "from the, you know, people who controlled the means of production."[265] For Musson, the category of race was essentially equal to, or a proxy for, class in that sense.

Many scholars and students have struggled against and pointed out that liberalism is the dominant mechanism of the reproduction and maintenance of white supremacy, capitalism and imperialism at UCT.[266] And at UCT, the epicentre and spiritual home of CPSU, NUSAS became the expression of liberalism in the terrain in which they were struggling. At the level of the CPSU and their resistance to NUSAS, Kenneth Abrahams said that:

> We were insisting, for example, that all debate on questions affecting the oppressed should take place in the organisations of the oppressed and not in the organisations of the ruling class. And that if we are going to

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[260] Non-collaboration was employed as a central principle, policy and method or strategy of the Movement. The ambivalence around the definition of noncollaboration gave rise to intense debate within left circles as to what the differences and similarities were between non-collaboration and the boycott and consequently what it meant tactically and strategically for the struggle. These differences and their accompanying tensions remained unresolved and surfaced periodically." Hendricks, PR. "A principled engagement?" p.38.

[261] "Now you must remember at the time, of course, we had had the introduction of the Suppression of Communism Act. And subsequently the General Laws Amendment Act and then subsequently the Sabotage Act and the Terrorism Act so that the dialogue not be a free dialogue to say that what we are fighting for is socialism. This is another confusing factor… [In] the context of the late '50s with the heavy hand of the state coming down very viciously on everyone, you could not use any phrases that even smacked of socialism. We must not remove the climate in which the controversy was being carried out." UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated, p.31.

[262] The practical existence and application of 'non-collaboration' was messy and contradictory to say the least. see Alexander, N. "Aspects of non-collaboration in the Western Cape 1943–1963." *Social Dynamics,* 12:1, (1986): 1-14.

[263] Tabata, IB. *Boycott as a weapon of struggle,* (APDUSA Views: Cumberwood, undated, original published in 1952).

[264] Ibid.; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024]; Phahle, R. "Reminiscences of the Arrest of Fikile Bam & Marcus Solomon in 1963."; Tabata, IB. *The awakening of a people*, (Spokesman Books: Nottingham, 1974).

[265] Interview with Frank Musson, 16 August 2022. Cape Town.

[266] Barnes, TA. *Uprooting university apartheid in South Africa: from liberalism to decolonization*, (Taylor & Francis: Abingdon, 2018); Naidoo, LA. "Black student intellectuals and the complexity of entailment in the# RhodesMustFall movement." PhD diss. University of the Witwatersrand (2020); Rhodes Must Fall Writing and Education subcommittees, *The Johannesburg Salon,* vol.9 (2015).

> address the questions that affect these people, we have to speak to them and not amongst the ruling class so to speak, simply, purely and simply.[267]

"The oppressed" here, as in most UM discourse, refers to all those defined by the apartheid state as "non-white." Under the UM's definition of the Herrenvolk, NUSAS was a herrenvolk organisation understood to be populated by the "sons and daughters of the captains of industry,"[268] and non-collaboration was used to maintain the oppressed's, students in this case, autonomy from their liberal influence in their quest for an independent struggle against apartheid.

NUSAS was attempting to build a "united front" against what they called "university apartheid" and they claimed to represent all those opposed to the Act.[269] In order to do this, to build the broadest possible resistance, their politics reflected the approach of the lowest common denominator as they attempted to recruit black and white people from across the political spectrum in order to "[craft] a sophisticated, broad-based, national and international campaign against university apartheid founded on the tactically inclusive but limited defence of academic freedom and the autonomy of the university from state interference."[270] The Progressive National Students' Organisation was an attempt to build a countervailing force, or a front of the oppressed, to NUSAS because the CPSU disagreed fundamentally with the nature and parameters of NUSAS's resistance to apartheid.

An article entitled ""'Academic Non-Segregation" and "University Autonomy"" appeared in the CPSU's November 1958 edition of *The Students' Journal.* The piece chops up the two terms that constitute its title, two terms that refer to NUSAS's opposition to University Apartheid. It showed the contradictory nature of NUSAS's position and ultimately how it was oppositional to the political aspirations of the oppressed in general.[271] The anonymous author showed that apartheid at university level flows directly from a Herrenvolk policy and its vision of society. They also dispelled the myth that there are or ever were any 'open' universities in South Africa. There were only ever miniscule numbers of black students at Wits, Rhodes and UCT, certain courses of study were always prohibited to black students, and "even in courses where study is permitted, the Non-Europeans suffer under gross and savage discrimination."[272] They insisted that the Extension of Universities Act was *the extension of apartheid* at the 'open' universities rather

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[267] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2 -2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.72.
[268] Interview with Frank van der Horst, 23 June 2021. Cape Town.
[269] I use quotation marks here to show that the terminology of the "united front" was the sense in which the NUSAS conceived of their work. In the Marxist tradition, a front organised by liberals sympathetic to capitalism might more accurately be described as a "popular front." McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)," p.452.
[270] Ibid. McKay further suggests that NUSAS drew inspiration from the ANC's "united front" policy in the late 1950s that attempted to build as broad an anti-apartheid front as possible. She wrote: "Finally, in December 1956, almost the entire leadership of the ANC and Congress Alliance was arrested for treason, the resulting five year trial based on *inter alia*, the charge that the Freedom Charter was a revolutionary communist document. The cumulative effect of all of this was that the ANC found itself seriously weakened by 1956. It accordingly 'amended its militant African nationalism' and committed itself to building a united front of all those opposed to apartheid, which could even include some within the NP camp," p.92.
[271] Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *The Students' Journal,* Nov 1958, p.i.
[272] Ibid.

than its introduction. NUSAS opposed the Act on the ground that it impeded 'University Autonomy' and academic freedom, a view they shared with much of the liberal staff of these institutions.[273] Their view was that the university should maintain the right to "to decide whom and what it shall teach." The CPSU exposed this position for what it was:

> To make a demand for University Autonomy in a Colour Bar society is to serve the interests of the Colour Bar! – for the demand is for the right to practice apartheid by choice; to be a Europeans Only University by choice; and under the right to "decide what to teach", it permits the University to indoctrinate the students with all sorts of unscientific mish-mash, to debar research into certain fields of thought, etc. etc. This barbarism Nusas demands as a right!
>
> … We accuse Nusas of expression of opposition to the Bantu Education only because it desires/prefers the segregated system that existed before the Act was introduced. This is the essence of their stand.[274]

NUSAS's resistance to 'segregation' and its demand for 'non-segregation' was thus limited to the realm of academic study at universities and the autonomy of university administrations to practice racism how and when they chose to. In other words it had no problem with 'segregation' in the social activities and other realms of the university, and implicitly supported it in society at large. In the author's analysis, this mischievous position was in full support of the preservation of the Colour Bar – the euphemism used to describe the racist society of apartheid.

John Samuel described the DSU's position which, unsurprisingly was extremely close to that of the CPSU. He echoed their position on NUSAS:

> I mean the DSU position was clear, right, and basically… our foundational argument was that as white liberal students, they could not understand nor could they participate in the liberation struggle. And that confining the discussion about South Africa to student politics was a half-arsed approach, that you had to locate what was happening to us at UNNE in the larger context of oppression and exploitation in South Africa. That was the kind of, you know, rock solid argument that we would make.[275]

The UM background – the shared analysis of liberalism, and the associated grammar and repertoire of politics – made the CPSU and the DSU natural or easy allies. The fundamental aspect of their position, as articulated by John, was that, given the broader conditions of South Africa and the exploitation and oppression that black people were subject to, and resisting, the restriction of terrain of struggle to student issues, which the liberals were trying to do on a national level, was "half-arsed." The CPSU understood the education system – what was taught, how it was structured and segregated – to be a key player in the establishment and maintenance of racism and they resisted the Act, and critiqued NUSAS from this position. They laid out their position as follows: "We reject the status quo and the University Apartheid Bills. We demand, and fight in the liberatory movement to attain, nothing less than a democratic system

[273] McKay, CEA. "A History of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)."
[274] Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *The Students' Journal,* Nov 1958, p.i-ii.
[275] Interview with John Samuel. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg.

of education in a democratic South Africa."[276] They understood the intention of that movement, of which they understood themselves to be a part, as struggling for universal franchise and the abolition of the Colour Bar society and they distinguished their politics from NUSAS in that way.

The common political tendencies, principles and orientations explored above show the ideological dependence of the CPSU and the DSU on the UM. Further indicating this affinity, the CPSU published the "Ten Point Programme" on the back cover of the October 1959 edition of *The Students' Journal.*[277] Kenneth Abrahams reflected that "when the Ten Point Programme was drawn up in 1943, what people had in mind at that time was the abolition of apartheid and the formation of an apartheid-free bourgeois democratic society and nothing more than that."[278] Tabata's stated programme was to get political rights, get into parliament, and from there analyse the balance of forces and see what more was possible within those conditions.[279] Kenneth Abrahams remembered him saying: "We may be socialist in our hearts, we may want socialism, but the UM is not a movement fighting for socialism."[280] The CPSU's political programme was formed in this context and it never went further than the UM's 1943 programme. The gaining of formal political rights was viewed as the primary task of the time. The success of that would, it was expected, open up possibilities of resolving various social and economic questions. While many of the members may have harboured more radical ambitions and visions of societal transformation, having been exposed to histories of revolution in the NEF, SOYA and other forums, the organisation's official policy did not reflect that.

Following on from this, the question arises as to whether the CPSU and the DSU were merely just the student formations or student wings of the UM. The answer to this question is complicated and changed over time. Robert Wilcox gives his recollection:

> The CPSU was an independent organization, it didn't belong to the Unity Movement. It was felt that it should not belong to the Unity Movement, to make it open to everybody, as open as possible to everybody put it that way. But after two years, this is from 1959, 1960, we found it impossible to separate ourselves ideologically from the Unity Movement.
>
> And then we decided that we want to join. My sisters said that's not a good idea. But we said… we are so identified with the Unity Movement, we might as well join. So we joined the All African Convention. And there we played a role in attending conferences of the Teachers League of South Africa. The Unity Movement had already split and we supported the All African Convention and the Cape African Teachers Association, at their conference at the TLSA conferences here in Cape Town. So we accomplished all that.

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[276] Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *The Students' Journal,* Nov 1958, p.ii
[277] Cape Peninsula Students' Union. *The Student' Journal,* Oct 1959, back cover.
[278] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated, p.5-7.
[279] Anonymous interviewer. Interview with Jane Gool and Isaac Bangani Tabata. Date unknown. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104465 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[280] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated, p.32.

What Robert Wilcox is referring to in terms of what they accomplished was framed in the context of The Split. Kenneth Abrahams reflected that it was, with hindsight, the wrong decision to affiliate to the NEUM in 1959 even as there were real pressures operating at that juncture to which the move was a response. He said that: "it changed the CPSU from being a politically active but non-party political student organisation into a student organisation with distinct and discreet political affiliations."[281] The organisation lost its identity and this undermined its capacity to hold an open space for all students as it embroiled the organisation in dynamics that should have been external to them such as the antagonism with the Jaffeites. Although, to a large extent, the attack on the Jaffeites had been a foundational activity in the CPSU.

In his "Presidential Address", Kenneth Abrahams defined NUSAS as "The Enemy Without." The designation of "The Enemy Within" is never explicitly named but points fairly unambiguously to the Kies-Jaffe camp. "This antagonistic group (which includes both students and teachers)" is identified by irrational positions they hold in relation to the CPSU, such as "Students are by their very nature reactionary,"[282] (which we might remember was the original justification of that camp's refusal to support the creation of a student organisation). He concludes that this "antagonistic" camp's actions, by opposing the formation of principled organisations of the oppressed, has announced itself as reactionary on a level with NUSAS and therefore, unwittingly, as a defender of Herrenvolkism.[283]

Further than the thinly-veiled polemic in the president's opening address, the factional dynamics of the UM split were never far away. Some articles make reference, explicitly or implicitly, to alleged Jaffeist attempts to undermine the CPSU, to a "CPSU-Fellowship feud",[284] and the recent examples of "NEF Immorality."[285] Some issues ran a series on "Jaffeism" where that camps' positions were analysed and trashed, and the latest scandals in the aftermath of the split were reported. The language gives some sense of the intensity of the conflict:

> Because only the Herrenvolk will benefit from this opposition to progressive students – the JAFFEISTS ARE THUS ACTING IN THE INTERESTS OF THE HERRENVOLK! (I trust that this is clear enough).
>
> Thus because they in effect already serve the Herrenvolk WHAT THEY FEAR MOST IS NOT EXPOSURE TO THE HERRENVOLK BUT TO THE NON-WHITE OPPRESSED. Ignorance only plays into their hands – their opposition to my attack derives its energy from this source. Like a fungus the instant Jaffeism is exposed to the light it starts to wither and rot away. It thrives only in darkness and ignorance, silence, dumb acceptance, absence of criticism and rejection of all analysis. This is why the Jaffeists show no inclination to have their ideas thrashed out in public. The absurdity of their position is worsened by the obvious fact that there is a

[281] Ibid., p.47.
[282] Abrahams, KG. "Presidential Address," *The Student,* May 1958, p.8.
[283] Ibid.
[284] "Editorial: Current trends at the UCT", *Students' Journal,* October 1959, p.1.
[285] K.G, "A Recent Example of NEF Immorality," *The Students' Journal,* November 1958, p.10-11.

> limit to how far any group can go in organising eleven million oppressed people without some time or another explaining in clear, concise terms its: programme, policy and principles of action.[286]

It was evidently a matter of great importance, even prior to the CPSU's affiliation, to thoroughly trash the Jaffeites in their mouthpiece. As the excerpt shows, the conflict was loaded, and the antagonism was voiced incredibly harshly, truly as an attack on the programme, politics and intelligence of the opposing camp's characters.

Many of the teachers at the high schools that the CPSU members were organising in, which included Langa High, Trafalgar, Livingstone and others, were affiliated to the TLSA. The CPSU's militant stand against Bantu education put teachers in a tight spot, sharpening the contradictory position of their location in society.[287] Many partisan headmasters and teachers made it difficult for the CPSU to meet and organise with high school students – the group for whom the effects of the Act would be most severe. This, as well as the rhythms of student life and the resultant difficulty of organisational continuity, had the effect of isolating the CPSU from high school students, making it more of a tertiary student union. It already "depended very much on university students in leadership" because, according to Robert Wilcox, "[you] couldn't run the organization of that size with high school students. They didn't have the calibre or the training to do it yet."[288] In other words, the already university student heavy organisation became more isolated from those high school students it intended to organise partly as a result of The Split's aftermath. If we cast our minds back to Frank van der Horst's speech given at Kenneth Abrahams's memorial we might recall that he claimed that the CPSU worked with all "principled organisations" including the Anti-CAD, NEF and the TLSA. Kenneth Abrahams's speech shows that, in fact, the CPSU, even at the time of its inauguration, did not consider the organisations on the other side of The Split to be principled, in fact they considered them to be doing the work of the Herrenvolk! Oh the vagaries of memory.

In the same year in which the PAC was formed, as an organisation of the ideology of Africanism that had some of its roots in the ANCYL, and as the manifestation of a critique of the kind of politics the ANC was embroiled in in the Congress Alliance, the CPSU affiliated to the AAC. The year after that was the protests, and resultant massacres, in Sharpeville and Langa organised by the PAC. At a time when the ANC was embarking on a popular front, based on a lowest common denominator politics of being "anti-apartheid", the CPSU and the DSU refused to have the influence of the liberals and the ruling class in their organisation. Their politics, although framed in different terms, resonated with the Africanist critique of the Congress Alliance and the breakaway to form the PAC. Students at Hewat, like Marcus Solomon and other CPSU members, joined the PAC march into town as it came past their campus. It was a significant experience for them in participating in a major moment and event in the national

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[286] "Valerie." "Jafffeism – An Enemy Exposed," *The Students' Journal,* November 1958, p.2-3 & 10.
[287] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated.
[288] Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town.

liberation movement beyond their usual organisational milieu.[289] Fikile Bam said that it was largely in response to the formation the PAC and the wide success it was having, that the UM launched the African People's Democratic Union (APDU, which shortly after added "Southern Africa" to the name to become APDUSA) in 1961.[290] With regards to the impact of this - the formation of the UM's first formation to which individuals could join directly in the effort to build a mass organisation – on the CPDU, Robert Wilcox said:

> The net result of APDUSA being formed is that everybody wanted to join APDUSA, so long as you're over the age of 18, you were eligible to join APDUSA and all the CPSU members are going, flocked into APDUSA and forgot about the CPSU. And then the CPSU eventually came to standstill. It lasted for the year 1961, by 1962 would have died away.[291]

Simultaneously, John Samuel also remembered that, in Durban, the lines between the student union and other UM formations had never been particularly clear, so when APDUSA was formed, it was basically automatic that DSU members attended its launch and became APDUSA members.[292]

The accelerated events and developments in the country and the fact that many members were graduating or leaving institutions to go to work, overtook and in some ways swallowed the fledgling formation. While the organisation was overtaken and failed to sustain itself through the massive changes in the national political scene in the first years of the 1960s, in its ingurgitation by APDUSA, it developed a cohort of activists in and for the liberation struggle. For Neville Alexander, the experience of the CPSU was extremely important to him in the sense of learning to organise – how to talk to people and how to lead an organisation. He also recalled that it was partly formed because the UM did not provide the space to develop those skills as an organiser as it was not doing much organising in Cape Town in the mid-1950s.[293] Even as it was basically limited to the UM, this was one of its foundational intentions, to act as a funnel that would politicise students and lead them into the organisations of the liberation movement. The CPSU's relationship with the UM can perhaps be compared to an adolescent who leaves home, intent on forging their own path, returns weekly to do their laundry, eat their parents' food and occasionally spend the night and eventually moves back in because rent is too expensive. Independence is a process, it is contingent and contradictory. When the CPSU is remembered as a UM formation, or as the student wing of the UM, what is silenced in that narrative is not only the facts but the process of change and the dynamics of that in/dependence.

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[289] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[290] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[291] Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town.
[292] Interview with John Samuel. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg.
[293] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2 -2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.57.

Conclusion: "The scope of their goals was too wide"?[294]

In an essay on NUSAS, Martin Legassick dismissed the importance and significance of "non-white" student organisations, in the late 1950s, such as DSU and CPSU, by saying that: "A mark of the ineffectiveness of these groups is that none, *as an organisation,* has been harassed by the Government," and that none of them "did much more than talk politics. In fact they were too localized, too short of funds and cadres, and the scope of their goals were too wide."[295] In other words, some of the grounds on which he dismisses them are structural issues – their lack of access to resources (which forced them to be localized and limited the extent of campaigns they could run), a race which obviously NUSAS would win, and because their goals were too wide – not merely to reform apartheid but to challenge it at its core. This dismissal operates with the backdrop of Legassick suggesting that NUSAS's importance through the 1950s and 1960s was "as one of the few remaining forms for contact among the races" and that, in the mid-1960s it was "the most radical lawful organisation in opposition to the philosophy of white supremacy."[296] The link between these propositions is clear. Legassick's dismissal of the CPSU and the DSU was clearly also either an ignorance or a dismissal of their ideas. These black students critiqued the very same NUSAS and its multi-racialism under the guise of white-domination for being an expression of white supremacy and a liberal apology for apartheid! Just a year after Legassick's paper was published, students in SASO would make the very same argument about NUSAS. Legassick attempted to analyse the CPSU and the DSU in comparison to NUSAS, on the terms and basis of a group of apartheid benefactors and sympathisers and resultantly was completely unable to recognize their significance within their moment of existence and in the longer trajectory of black student organizing. He was able to dismiss the CPSU and the DSU by way of comparison to what was to him, the gold standard of student politics, the white-dominated NUSAS, and on the basis that "the scope of their goals was too wide." He also suggested that "The success of NUSAS… has been to formulate an intermediate position which has held whites and non-whites together to a common political stance."[297] While for white students, this might have seemed like a success, for black students, like those in the CPSU, in the face of apartheid oppression and exploitation, an intermediate position could only be a compromise, a reformist orientation and a legitimation of their conditions. Legassick's limitation here is at least two-fold. Firstly, to base his analysis of these black student groups in comparison to the activities of white liberal students and secondly, to confine his analysis to this restricted time period. I argue that we cannot fully understand the CPSU only within this period and on the terms he sets. It was only a few years later that many of the core of this organisation did indeed get "harassed as an organisation by the Government" as they went on to form the YCCC/NLF and this formative experience of the cohort was central to that.

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[294] Legassick, M. "The National Union of South African Students," p.26.
[295] Ibid., p.12 & 26.
[296] Ibid., p.43 & 6.
[297] Ibid. p.6.

My attempt has been to consider these organisations on their own terms and in relation to their own aspirations. Like other black students before and after them, the CPSU critiqued and struggled with NUSAS over this position in the time of their existence. While the critique of liberalism and ruling class influence was a core part of the CPSU's politics, it was by no means its sum total. What it shared with other black student and youth formations was that it saw black student struggles as part and parcel of the liberation movement and understood part of its role to be funnelling students into its organisation. It was also distinct from other black organisations like ASA and ASUSA, which were established four years after the CPSU, in the composition of its membership. The former two organisation were exclusively for "African" students at tertiary level, the CPSU and the DSU were, firstly, in the tradition of the UM, non-racial, and secondly, open to high school and tertiary students. The memberships of the DSU and the CPSU while they had a broader cross-section of black students, they were predominantly "Indian" and "Coloured" respectively. This a reflection of the UM's base, the student populations in the respective areas and the difficulty of organising across apartheid racial categories, which were refracted spatially and socially. They were also distinguished from ASA and ASUSA in their independence from political organisations, at least until 1959 when they affiliated to the UM. This was significant because the students learnt to run an organisation together, themselves, and their direction was not determined by a parent organisation with its own broader agenda. While in many ways the CPSU was a UM formation – it drew on the UM ideologically, shared a political sensibility, and it eventually did affiliate to it – the significant contradictions and contingencies in the process of independence are lost in that perspective. That kind of perspective, in addition to missing out on the narrative, the characters, and the dynamics of the actual process, misses out on the aspirations of the union. I am putting forward that this last point – the aspirational politics of the CPSU – is critically important to thinking about its place in history. In other words, the point is not that they failed, but what they aspired to, what they were inspired to do and what the process produced.

It would be a disservice to also not mention its place in the broader trajectory of black student politics in South Africa. John Samuel reflected: "[In] many ways we had anticipated the arguments that were going to come up when Biko and the black students movement started making their presence felt."[298] Coming a few years after students at Fort Hare under the influence of the militant ANCYL, and (to a lesser extent) SOYA, disaffiliated from NUSAS, the CPSU and the DSU were a critically important link in the lineage of the critique of white/herrenvolk liberalism and the political position for black students organising independently in the terrain of national student politics. That critique and the creative impulse that was its dialectic opposite, as well as the aspiration of building a Progressive National Students' Organisation, were picked up anew and taken to new philosophical and organisational zeniths in SASO. Ironically, SASO's condition of formation was a result of the Extension of Universities Act being passed which produced a critical mass of critical blacks in universities who constituted a new cohort of student activists

[298] Interview with John Samuel. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg.

who also became activists in the liberation movement. The fact that SASO cited the CPSU and the DSU as their predecessor's is not insignificant, especially in light of the fact that scholars have not by and large paid them any due.

This history of in/dependence illuminates something about the nature of black student politics under apartheid, as well as/in particular in the political moment of its emergence in the late 1950s. Black student politics in this period were precarious and unstable. And they were these things for at least two interrelating reasons. The first being, in general, the transient nature of students as a social category – most people do not remain university-attending students forever (the process of learning is obviously life-long), they study and then they go on to other work and life pursuits. This had ramifications for the reproduction of student politics and particular ones for black students in apartheid society where both numbers of tertiary students were low and largely unconcentrated, and resources for organising were incredibly limited. The second reason draws from the general logic of the first and relates it to the broader conditions in which they were organising. As the liberation movement was resisting the increasing and various forms of oppression directed by the apartheid state at the lives of black people, student resistance, focusing explicitly on student issues, became untenable. And it became untenable for reasons that were put forward by groups like the CPSU and the DSU in their critique of liberalism – it is impossible to address issues affecting black students in isolation from the broader contradictions of racist and classist oppression that constitute racial capitalism in general and in its specific form in the apartheid project. When the crisis of the early 1960s, in the wake of Sharpeville, occurred, and the priorities and methods of the liberation movement shifted, the black student movement got swallowed by the movement's major organisations. ASA became a recruiting ground for MK, ASUSA similarly for the PAC and the lines between CPSU and the DSU and APDUSA became so blurred to the point of making the student organisations defunct as student organisations. When I say that the possibility for black student politics was precarious, what I am also then saying is that the distinction between black student politics and the politics of the liberation movement in general became, or becomes, eroded as students entered the organisations of the liberation movement 'proper' as a cohort.

In the story that this dissertation is attempting to tell, the CPSU is important as the formation of this independent student organisation is simultaneously the formation of a cohort. This cohort was part of a broader generation that had grown up under apartheid and were coming of age as activists in the fire of the late 1950s and the early 1960s. The CPSU was their first effort at carving their own path, making their own political way and the terms of that were important: A fierce resistance to and critique of apartheid, an abhorrence of liberalism, a desire and an aspiration to transcend the "Cape Peninsula Mentality", be connected and to work, on a principled basis, with activists across the national context and to build a formation that would cohere and facilitate cooperation and involvement in the liberation movement. The aspiration of the Progressive National Students' Organisation could be read as an attempt to build a front of anti-apartheid and anti-liberal students. After joining APDUSA, many of the cohort that emerged in the CPSU, initially excited by the prospects of joining a mass organisation, became frustrated by the

leadership's hold on the organisation and the resultant pace of change. This was the context in which the ensemble, that is decentral focus of the PhD, constituted themselves as the Yu Chi Chan Club from the ranks of the cohort and comrades from the South West African People's Organisation in their attempts to join the general march of the movement whilst maintaining their own sense of independence.

Chapter Two. Constitution. The Yu Chi Chan Club, the "guerrilla'ist tendency" and ensemble study, 1961-1962

In the tradition of the left, let's study this issue a bit, and that's where the YCCC came in.[299]

Constitution's context: The turn to armed struggle

Within the early 1960s many individuals and organisations in various sections of the liberation movement came to the conclusion that some form of armed struggle was necessary and/or inevitable to challenge the increasingly violent and repressive apartheid state. The exact form of armed struggle was an open question and these groups all developed their own distinctive approaches to it. The literature on the early period of armed struggle in South Africa in the first half of the 1960s, is dominated by uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), launched by the alliance between the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the African National Congress (ANC), to a lesser extent, *Poqo*, which emerged from a section of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and to an even lesser extent the African Resistance Movement (ARM). Basically excluded from this period are the Yu Chi Chan Club and the National Liberation Front (NLF), whose history provides another perspective on that moment and the process of the shift to armed struggle. This chapter narrates the process of the Yu Chi Chan Club's (YCCC) constitution as an ensemble and examines their aspirations, their multi-faceted practice of study and their guerrilla'ist tendency.

The effect on the liberation movement of the brutal massacre in 1960 of black people in Sharpeville, and in Langa, at the PAC-organised "Positive Action Campaign"[300] protest against passes has been well-documented and spoken about. [301] It is generally referred to as a decisive turning point, or a watershed moment, an "event"[302] in the struggle against apartheid. Struggles in rural contexts against Bantu

[299] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[300] Kondlo, K. *In the Twilight of the Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) 1959-1994* (Switzerland, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009).
[301] Cherry, J. *Spear of the nation: Umkhonto wesizwe: South Africa's liberation army, 1960s–1990s*, (Ohio University Press: Athens, 2012); Lodge, T. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945,* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1983); Pahad, A. "Some Personal Reflections on the Road to Armed Struggle." *Thinker,* 80, (2019):22-24.
[302] Jacques Depelchin, drawing on Badiou, wrote that the difference between a situation and an event is that "An event… is a situation 'which forces us to decide on a new way of being.'"[302] He applies this concept to the genocide in Rwanda, suggesting that "To be faithful to the event as a genocide means to force oneself to 'invent' a new way of being and acting in this new situation." Depelchin, J. *Silences in African history: Between the syndromes of discovery and abolition,* (Mkuki Na Nyota: Dar es Salaam, 2000), p.30.

Authorities and Rehabilitation Schemes had developed into some isolated and improvised forms of armed struggle.[303] The search for new methods had been taking place in various pockets of the movement since at least the early 1950s and Sharpeville gave a renewed impetus to that search.[304] Over the last twenty years SA's armed and underground struggle period has attracted a growing amount of interest and writings on MK have been buoyed partly the coincidence in recent years with/in the wake of the ANC's 100 year anniversary.[306]

The process of MK's formation involved the collaboration between the ANC and the SACP, their respective and collective transitions to underground organising, and the process of convincing the ANC's leadership of the necessity to commit to an armed struggle. [307] It also involved the cohering of a number of groups who, post-Sharpeville, were independently planning attacks "to postpone their plans in favour of a coordinated approach."[308] MK's strategy in the early period was based on sabotage, or "armed

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[303] Kayser, R. "Land and liberty: the Non-European Unity Movement and the land question, 1933-1976." MA thesis. University of Cape Town, (2002); Magadla, S. *Guerrillas and combative mothers: Women and the armed struggle in South Africa,* (UKZN Press: Pitermartizburg, 2023); Magubane, B., Bonner, P., Sithole, J., Delius, P., Cherry, J., Gibbs, P., and April, T. "The turn to armed struggle," in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2004), pp.53-145.; Sukude, M. and Ntsebeza, L. "Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland, 1960-1963." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2004), pp. 755-782.

[304] In 1953 Walter Sisulu was invited to Bucharest for the World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship. Mandela wrote: "I was convinced, despite my reprimand from the Executive, that the policies of the Nationalists would soon make non-violence an even more limited and ineffective policy. Walter was privy to my thoughts and, before he left, I made a suggestion: he should arrange to visit the People's Republic of China and should discuss with them the possibility of supplying us with weapons for an armed struggle." Mandela, N. *Long Walk to freedom,* (Abacus: Ilford, 1994), p.184. Raymond Mhlaba is described as one of the cadres who was consistently, from at least 1958, making arguments for armed struggle in ANC circles; Magubane, B. et al., "The turn to armed struggle," p.55. In the early 1960s, spurred by Sharpeville, Mandela embarked on an intensive programme of study, reading about various movements that had employed armed struggle in wars of national liberation, Landau, PS. "Mandela the reader, 1961." *Thinker,* 80, (2019): 56-59.

[306] See for example: Houston, G. and Magubane, B. "The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2004), pp. 371-451; Houston, G. "Military bases and camps of the liberation movement, 1961-1990", *Democracy, Governance, and Service Delivery (DGSD): Human Sciences Research Council Research Report*, (August 1st, 2013); Magubane, B. et al., "The turn to armed struggle"; Legassick, M. *Armed struggle and democracy: The case of South Africa*, (Nordic Africa Institute: Uppsala, 2002); Nieftagodien, N., Lissoni, A., Soske, J., Erlank, N. and Badsha, O. (eds.) *One Hundred Years of the ANC: debating liberation histories today,* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2012); Jordan, P. and Maharaj, M. South Africa and the Turn to Armed Resistance." *South African Historical Journal*, 70:1, (2018): 11-26; Landau, PS. "The M-Plan: Mandela's Struggle to Reorient the African National Congress," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45:6, (2019): 1073-1091; Landau, PS. "The ANC, MK, and 'The Turn to Violence' (1960–1962)." *South African Historical Journal*, 64:3, (2012): 538-563; Suttner, R. "Rendering visible: The underground organisational experience of the ANC-led Alliance until 1976." PhD diss. Wits University (2005); Davis, S. *The ANC's War against Apartheid: Umkhonto We Sizwe and the Liberation of South Africa,* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2018); Ellis, S. "The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa, 1948-1961." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37:4 (2011): 657-676; Simpson, T. *Umkhonto We Sizwe: The ANC's Armed Struggle,* (Cape Town, Penguin Books, 2016), and the Special edition of *The Thinker: Mkhonto We Sizwe, The people's army,* 2:80, (2019).

[307] Suttner, R. "Masculinities in the African National Congress-led liberation movement: The underground period." *African Historical Review*, 37:1, (2005):71-106; Suttner, S. *The ANC Underground in South Africa, 1950-1976* (Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boukder, 2009); Suttner, R. "The African National Congress (ANC) Underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia." *South African Historical Journal,* 49:1, (2003): 123-146; Suttner, R. "The (Re-) Constitution of the South African Communist Party as an Underground Organisation." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 22:1, (2004): 43-68; Landau, PS. "The M-Plan: Mandela's Struggle to Reorient the African National Congress," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45:6, (2019): 1073-1091.

[308] Ellis, S. "The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle."; Magubane, B. et al., "The turn to armed struggle."

propaganda" as Kasrils has called it.[309] At the same time there was a strong interest in and lobby for guerrilla warfare from many camps within MK even as it was only in 1969 after the Morogoro Conference that it made the theoretical commitment to it as a method.[310]

Poqo emerged from within a section of the PAC that was predominantly migrant workers from the eastern Cape who were resident in urban areas. Poqo planned armed attacks that they thought would inspire uprisings that would coalesce into a national insurrection capable of overthrowing the state.[311] *Poqo* utilised whatever weapons they could either access or make themselves – very few guns, pangas and axes etc. – and they targeted white society in general – government buildings, police stations, white people etc. Kwandiwe Kondlo has summarised *Poqo*'s strategy as follows:

> Poqo was founded… on the idea that the armed struggle was a necessity in order to mobilise the rural poor whom the PAC regarded as the peasantry, into a conscious political force which can not only overthrow the government but also seize and mould the country's political economy to meet their own ends.[312]

A significant factor in *Poqo's* emergence and early actions was the leadership vacuum that pertained in the organisation in the wake of the post-Sharpeville crackdown.[313] On the differences between MK and *Poqo,* Tom Lodge reflected that "the PAC insurgents were very much more numerous than the Umkonto activists. Whilst the latter operated as an elite within the framework of a larger clandestine and sometimes less committed 'support organisation' the Poqo insurgency in certain localities attained the dimensions of

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[309] Kasrils, R. "How the armed struggle succeeded", 16 February 2017. Available online at : https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/how-the-armed-struggle-succeeded [accessed on 14 February 2024]; Simpson, T. *Umkhonto We Sizwe: The ANC's Armed Struggle* (Cape Town, Penguin Books, 2016).

[310] Martin Legassick wrote that Operation Mayibuye – a plan for rural guerilla warfare which was seized in July 1963 in the Rivonia raid– seems to not have been fully endorsed at the time. Legassick, M. "Armed Struggle in South Africa: Consequences of a Strategy Debate." In H. Melber (ed.), *Limits to Liberation in Southern Africa: The Unfinished Business of Democratic Conolidation,* (HSRC Press: Cape Town, 2003), p.156; Kasrils, R. "How the armed struggle succeeded", 16 February 2017. Available online at : https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/how-the-armed-struggle-succeeded [accessed on 14 February 2024]; Stevens, S. "Violence, Political Strategy and the Turn to Guerrilla Warfare by the Congress Movement in South Africa." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47:6 (2021): 1011-1028.

[311] ka Plaatjie, T. "The PAC's Internal Underground Activities, 1960–1980." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2004), pp.669-701; Lodge, T. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945,* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1983); Lodge, T. "Are you with us? The Story of a PAC Activist, Mxolisi'Bra Ace'Mgxashe: book review." *South African Historical Journal,* 60:1, (2008): 157-162; Mgxashe M. *Are you with us?: the story of a PAC activist*, (Tafelberg Publishers: Cape Town, 2006).

[312] Kondlo, K. "In the twilight of the Azanian revolution: The exile history of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa), 1960-1990." PhD diss. University of Johannesburg, 2004, p.289.

[313] Most of their initial leadership was incarcerated or in exile and the organisation was being led by Potlako Kitchener Leballo from Maseru, Lesotho. Leballo infamously "revealed to the world that on a certain day in April [1963], he would command an army of 15000 men trained in Basutoland and would invade South Africa. He declared that the people of South Africa were ready for such an uprising." Kondlo, K. *In the twilight of the Azanian revolution,* p.133. In order to mobilise support, he also "Promised external support to the Poqo uprising…. Leballo promised Poqo activists that "a ship full of arms of war donated by President Abdul Gamal Nasser of Egypt would dock at Port St. Johns before D-DAY at night,"" The results of the announcement were catastrophic, over 10000 PAC members and suspected members were arrested, sentenced and incarcerated in the aftermath and the invasion didn't happen. Kondlo, K. "In the twilight of the Azanian revolution: The exile history of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa), 1960-1990." PhD diss. University of Johannesburg, 2004, p.289.

a mass movement."[314] Similarly to the ANC, however, was that it was only later in the 1960s, once the PAC founded the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) in 1968 that they committed to an armed struggle programme of guerrilla warfare.[315]

The ARM, also known as the National Committee for Liberation (NCL) was a small group of activists whose members came from a wide variety of uncohered ideological persuasions - it contained liberals, Trotskyists, independent Africanists and communists who had left the Party. It was mostly, but not exclusively, white middle class activists between the leadership and general membership there was little to no distinction.[316] Their military strategy was, like MK in the early 1960s, based on sabotage, and, as Andries du Toit has written, it attempted to appeal to whites "to come to their senses before their policies plunged South Africa into an irreversible conflict, and simultaneously to inspire blacks "to rise of their own accord."[317] It was intended as a fairly naïve but interesting message to other organisations to transcend their ideological differences and unite against their common enemy.[318]

Aspects of the armed struggle debate and trajectory in the UM have been dealt with briefly in relation to other topics by Ciraj Rassool, Allison Drew and Robin Kayser.[319] While MK and *Poqo* had announced their presence by the end of 1961, only in early 1963 did the UM accept and make plans to join the armed struggle.[320] To get to that point there was a struggle over strategy, policy and the use of armed methods within the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA). Two sides in that struggle were members of the cohort that emerged in the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) which had largely been absorbed by the APDUSA and their political mother and father – Isaac Bangani Tabata and Jane Gool. The young turks felt like they were behind the general momentum in the national movement and resultantly became frustrated at the pace of change, restriction of the flow of ideas, and the tight reins that the leadership held over the organisation. The resolution of that struggle was one of the beginnings of the YCCC which was constituted as a study group searching for its own identity and distinctive approach within the broader process of the turn to armed struggle in South Africa and SWA.

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[314] Lodge, T. "Insurrectionism in South Africa: The Pan-Africanist Congress and the Poqo Movement, 1959-1965." PhD diss. University of York, 1984, p.189-190.
[315] Kondlo, K. "In the twilight of the Azanian revolution," p.281.
[316] Du Toit, A. "The National Committee for Liberation (" ARM"), 1960-1964: sabotage and the question of the ideological subject." MA thesis. University of Cape Town, 1991; Gunther, M. "The National Committee of Liberation (NCL)/African Resistance Movement (ARM)." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2004); Sharp, T. "Peace Profile: The African Resistance Movement." *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice,* 17:4, (2005): 455-462; Lewin, H. *Stones against the mirror: friendship in the time of the South African struggle*, (Umuzi: Durban, 2011).
[317] Du Toit, A. "Fragile defiance: The African Resistance Movement." In Liebenberg, I., Nel., B., Lortan, F. and van der Westhuizen, G. (eds.) *The long march: The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa,* (HAUM: Pretoria, 1994), p.100.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front during South Africa's Transition to Armed Struggle." *International Review of Social History*, 67:S30, (2022): 179-207; Kayser, R. "Land and liberty."; Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa." PhD diss. University of the Western Cape, 2004.
[320] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.2, April 1963, p.10; Kayser, R. "Land and liberty."

The YCCC's approach to armed struggle in that moment was distinctive in three key ways. Firstly, from the outset they were committed, theoretically, to guerrilla warfare as the preferred, and in their analysis, necessary method of armed struggle. This differed to the sabotage campaign of the ARM and MK, and to *Poqo's* conception of armed activities as igniting a general insurrection rather than, in the YCCC's case, the conception that localised uprisings – which they sought to be involved in as members of mass organisations – would take on more of an armed component, which they sought to be in a position to coordinate and intensify. Secondly, their conceptualisation of the terrain of struggle encompassed both South Africa and SWA – an internationalist commitment that was reflected both in their practice of study and the composition of the ensemble. Thirdly, their understanding of the nature of the struggle was as a civil war and, although it was unelaborated, they were fighting for socialist democracy. In spite of its distinctive character within this moment, the YCCC cannot be understood merely within this moment. The experience and pursuit of independence in the CPSU formed the basis of their process of constitution and their background in the intellectual culture of the UM informed their praxis of study and struggle. The process of constitution was still in flux and was never complete. The YCCC always imagined and articulated itself in the aspirational sense, linked existentially to the NLF, and its process of constitution was largely shaped by the growing over into that formation. In later periods of struggle it was the repertoire and experience in the YCCC/NLF that enabled them to build new ensembles with other elements of the liberation movement.

Tempo, tension and suspension

As indicated, the reverberations of Sharpeville were felt across the liberation movement. This was true for the young members of the cohort that emerged in the CPSU. In early 1960, Marcus Solomon was studying to be a teacher at Hewat College which was in Cape Town's CBD, where was also on the Students' Representative Council (SRC).[321] He recalls that on the 30th of March 1960, when 30 000 black people marched from Langa township to the parliament buildings to express anger and discontent at the massacres of peaceful protestors at Sharpeville and in Langa,[322] the campus was shut down for the day. Many of the students joined the march from Langa as it passed them on Roeland Street in the CBD.[323] As Elizabeth van der Heyden pointed out, in the UM, those classified as "Coloured" had only isolated meetings and connections with 'African' people and activists across the racist city.[324] In addition, the UM had largely isolated itself from many of the mass struggles in the 1950s.[325] So the joining of the march,

[321] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[322] Lodge, T. "The Cape Town Troubles, March-April 1960." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 4:2, (1978), pp. 216-239.
[323] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[324] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[325] Alexander, N. "Aspects of non-collaboration in the Western Cape 1943–1963." *Social Dynamics,* 12:1, (1986): 1-14; Phahle, R. "Reminiscences of the Arrest of Fikile Bam & Marcus Solomon in 1963."

for Marcus Solomon and others, was a major moment both of connection to a section of the black population they were fairly isolated from and of participation in a broader liberation movement activity. Reflecting on the tempo of that time and recalling one of his favourite English lessons, Marcus Solomon said that: "Things happen[ed] very quickly. It was a time; 'the best of times, the worst of times.' You had to learn quickly or you were forced to learn quickly, the process was accelerated."[326] The young generation was aware that things were moving quickly. They were moving with, and hoping to move time along, at their own pace.

From 1958 until mid-1961 Neville Alexander was in Germany involved in both study and struggle. In addition to his PhD on "Stylechange in the dramatic work of German playwright Gerhart Hauptmann"[327] which he completed at Tubingen University, he had been very broadly involved socially and politically. As part of the SDS (Socialist Student Union) he had become involved in solidarity work with the Algerian revolution. He even went to Tunisia with an SDS grouping to do some solidarity work in the form of bringing medical supplies for the war. Through that work he met with some Algerian student activists and got to exchange views and experiences.[328] In his reflection, with regards to the Algerian experience, the "most important thing was that the struggle and [my] very close association with it at the time had a lasting impact on my mind." Specifically, this was one of the seeds that got him thinking seriously about guerrilla warfare as a method of struggle.[329] As well as Algeria, the Cuban revolution had a huge impact.

> The important thing about the Cuban Revolution was simply that it reinforced the *guerilla'ist tendency* inside me so to speak. In fact it seemed to confirm the kind of developments in Algeria. All that made it seem more relevant. Guerrilla warfare more relevant to our South African situation. All it needed as I'm going to say later on – all it needed was Sharpeville to make me realise that this was the road we had to go.[330]

Learning about international experiences of armed struggle seemed to seed something in Neville Alexander. Prior to leaving for Germany, while he was still attending New Era Fellowship it was a lecture that programmes, in the late 1950s, Ben Kies gave on Spartacus and the slave revolt and it was that which convinced him of the importance to struggle and to use violence if that is necessary in certain conditions.[331] Sharpeville ignited, or watered the seed – the guerrilla'ist tendency.

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[326] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[327] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988;
and "Obituary: Dr Neville Alexander," 3 September 2012. Available online at:
https://old.linguistlist.org/issues/23/23-3655.html [accessed 24 February 2024].
[328] The story about the Algerian connection in this instance goes much deeper. Neville Alexander had been one of the people internal to the SDS that had strongly pushed the Algerian issue. The SDS's parent body was the German Social Democratic Party who didn't want to antagonise the French over the issue of Algeria. A radical current in the SDS pushed for solidarity with the Algerian cause and this eventually resulted in a split with one faction towing the social democratic line and another supporting the anti-colonial revolution. UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[329] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.1. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.27.
[330] Ibid., p,37. Emphasis added.
[331] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p. 40.

When he first learnt about the massacre, whilst still in Germany, Alexander went into a bit of a downward spiral, drinking a lot with the situation back home weighing on him heavily. After he got out of that he flung himself more seriously than before into organising with a renewed vigour and a renewed focus and conviction that the path to liberation was going to be through arms.[332] Whilst still in Europe he made connections with a grouping from the Fourth International (FI), even attending their congress in Cologne in 1961 where he met some of the leading figures of the Algerian struggle. One of the FI revolutionaries had given Alexander the following message to deliver to the UM on his return to SA: "they are willing to locate financial and logistical support if the UM "wished to raise a guerrilla army.""[333] On his return in 1961, Alexander brought that message and also felt that his experience of organising internationally had given him both a wide international network of comrades, and a different perspective on the struggle in South Africa and he felt that his ideas and his strategies were superior to the thinking of the UM leadership at the time.[334]

It was a time of new ideas, new possibilities and the urgency of new responses and many activists of the CPSU cohort, who joined APDUSA at its formation, had become frustrated in the organisation. Ottilie Abrahams recalled that after CPSU had affiliated to the UM, they felt that they had outgrown the organisation and felt stifled within it.[335] Fikile Bam said that they wanted to ask questions, exchange ideas, and debate strategies but felt that within the UM at that time, this was discouraged. He felt that the atmosphere of 'fighting ideas with ideas' had closed down and there was less space to debate various strategic issues relating to the organisation's path.[336] Bam had sought other spaces for study and debate and prior to Alexander's return, had been part of a group of students at UCT who had been reading about armed struggle.[337]

Major concerns held by the young cohort were the tempo of societal change that APDUSA ascribed to, questions of strategy and method of struggle, and importantly, the composition of the organisation's membership and its distance and disconnection from working class people.[338] Marcus Solomon said that they felt that:

> [B]asically there's an element that's missing in our organisation, what is that, for that change to take place? But again it's because of what's happening internationally. How do you bring change? If you say the class brings it about, where is the class that's bringing about change?... The issue of the class was raised in APDUSA and in

[332] Ibid.
[333] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa," p.465.
[334] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.39.
[335] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[336] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[337] Ibid.
[338] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front."

> APDU, where is the class. We keep on talking about the class but when are we going to go and organise at factories, stand at factories like the unions do?! [339]

APDUSA in Cape Town, like many UM formations, was composed in the main by students, teachers and professionals.[340] The critique of the composition of the organisation and the lack of urgency in its programme became shared by a number of the young militants.

The experience of independent study, something encouraged in the UM, inspired and stimulated the cohort. Buoyed by the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist revolutions in various parts of the world, they continued questioning. The leadership, particularly Jane Gool and IB Tabata, the political parents of many of the young militants, according to Neville Alexander, did not like to be challenged, especially by their political children.[341] Gool felt that the youngsters were becoming counter-revolutionary by questioning what was happening in the movement and, from her perspective, challenging what they had built. Alexander said:

> We seemed to be questioning we weren't really. Basically, what we were saying was look should we be reviewing policy, given the circumstances after Sharpeville? Given the sort of thing that was going on in Algeria and Cuba and so on… shouldn't we be reviewing policy and beginning to, in a sense, gear our movement for a different period? [342]

As a response to this emerging critical current and the line of questioning, Tabata warned Alexander to not raise that question in the open forums particularly with youth present, considering it too dangerous at the time. The pressures of the intensifying political moment and developments in the liberation movement broadly were evidently pressing in on APDUSA. Allison Drew wrote:

> The NEUM was already squeezed by the Congress movement's expansion and marginalized by its own reticence to engage in mass protests. Concerned that it would be further diminished if it did not plan for armed struggle, Alexander conveyed the Fourth International message to the leadership. Fearing the NEUM would be banned if it came out for armed struggle, they forbid him to speak about it. However, he was invited to a secret leadership caucus, where he "crossed swords with Jane [Gool]" and decided not to attend any further leadership caucus meetings.[343]

This incident and all the dynamics around it – a strategic disagreement about what was necessary at the time, the challenge of pseudo-parental paternal authority, and probably Alexander's precocious tendencies – were all refracted through the organisational and interpersonal grounds of the UM. The combination

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[339] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[340] Robert Wilcox stated that his brother was first working-class person to hold a position of office in APDUSA. Interview with Robert Wilcox. 14 March 2022. Cape Town; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated.
[341] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.39.
[342] Ibid., 40.
[343] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.191.

precipitated a rupture. Alexander felt a certain distance open up between him and Tabata and Gool, who he had been close to and learnt so much from for many years. Their relationship deteriorated:

> Tabata made a point of attending SOYA meetings, and attacked Alexander whenever he "raised any question", saying that "Neville Alexander knows where he should come if he has problems". By that time, Alexander had become hostile in the face of the reluctance of Tabata and the Unity Movement leadership to discuss "issues of practical revolution". Thereafter, Alexander and his comrades set out deliberately to cause a "split" in APDUSA. Alexander's "appearance on the scene" was seemingly a catalyst for "general discontent" inside APDUSA.[344]

Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander refused to back down and continued to agitate along the question of strategy and pushed an armed struggle line in APDUSA and SOYA forums, speaking from the floor at meetings, discussing the issue with other young cadres and asking questions that had been taken up across the liberation movement.

Robert Wilcox, an old CPSU comrade and a long-time loyal APDUSA member, recalled another aspect of the "general discontent" being fomented. He said that Alexander and others were working clandestinely in APDUSA in a way that undermined organisational integrity and attempted to subvert the leadership's bureaucratic hold:

> When APDUSA was established, members in the Western Cape formed themselves into small organising teams, each working in a different area in the peninsula and further afield. These teams met weekly to report to one another on progress made and any difficulties encountered. Work done was mainly house-to-house visits and literature distribution. It was soon found that a few members, under the aegis of Neville Alexander, were organising clandestinely in some of the same areas, even attempting to involve persons being organised by one of the recognised teams. Those responsible for this clandestine organisation did not report their activities to Apdusa. Needless to say, having two groups purporting to represent Apdusa caused confusion amongst new and potential recruits and this became an issue in report-back meetings. Neville Alexander was subsequently confronted in a meeting of Soya and it was pointed out to him that the difference was not just organisational but political and there were avenues through which such matters could be addressed.[345]

The frustrations of the youngsters with the lack of dynamism in the organisation and the fallout with the leadership led to them use organising techniques to independently recruit others sympathetic to their views. This approach exacerbated the tensions.

A current was emerging within APDUSA as small groups of young militants began meeting independently and discussing their frustrations of the organisation and contemplating other ways forward. Allison Drew described two independent groups of dissident and dissatisfied young APDUSA members, one in Lansdowne and the other in Athlone. These groups included Dorothy Alexander, a "live wire" who had been teaching in Maitland since 1960, and a member of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) since 1956; Brian Landers, a student at the University of the Western Cape (UWC); Franz Lee

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[344] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa," p.466-467.
[345] Wilcox, R. Personal correspondence [Email]. 16 June 2022.

who worked as a clerk and studied via correspondence at the University of South Africa (UNISA); Ursula Wolhuter who had also studied at Hewat and was teaching at Grassy Park High School; as well as Elizabeth van der Heyden, Dulcie September and Marcus Solomon.[346]

> As September put it, "the [APDUSA] leadership […] had a bureaucratic hold over the organisation […] no progressive work could be done and the suspension of Drs. Alexander and Abrahams caused a rift in the organization […] many of the members were contemplating leaving". The caucus met fortnightly to discuss revamping APDUSA.[347]

In addition to discussing possible ways to shift things in APDUSA, these groups embarked on a study programme of their own. They invited their comrades Neville Alexander and Kenneth Abrahams to come and speak to them about guerilla warfare, the revolutions in Cuba and Algeria, and the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the struggle in South West Africa (SWA).[348] In addition to these organising strategies, Alexander and Solomon were running "under-the-radar study groups" in APDUSA with sympathetic young comrades.[349]

Another dynamic in the building tension in APDUSA implicated SWAPO and their line on armed struggle. There were many points of intersection and overlap between the struggles in SWA and SA in this period (not least both people being under the boot of the apartheid regime!). Many contract workers and students from SWA were in Cape Town and were politically inspired and involved. There were a number of Namibian students in the CPSU and SWAPO's antecedents were in the legendary Sea Point barbershop (more on all this in "Inter-national" chapter).[350] In addition to belonging to the CPSU and being affiliated and involved in the UM, Ottilie Abrahams and her sisters Norah and Charlotte Schimming were all SWAPO members (as were Kenneth Abrahams and Marcus Solomon, who were the boyfriends of Ottilie Abrahams and Charlotte respectively). They introduced comrades from the SOYA and CPSU fold to SWAPO comrades, and invited the latter to debates and lectures hosted by the UM.[351] Through friendships and romances forged at school and in struggle, as well as through political interest and mutual solidarity, there was a space of learning and overlapping involvement that developed between the developing struggles. Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams, Andreas Shipanga and Neville Alexander were producing literature and organising study groups for SWAPO, and were involved in developing their position on armed struggle and writing their first constitution.[352] In fact, this had been a factor in the

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[346] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front."
[347] Ibid., p.192.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid., p.195.
[350] The Ovamboland People's Congress (1957) and the Ovamboland People's Organisation (1958) were both also formed in Timothy Nangalo's barbershop. Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024]; NAN A679, Dag Henrichsen interview with Ottilie Abrahams, 14 April 1996; Ngavirue, Z. *Political parties and interest groups in South West Africa (Namibia): A study of a plural society (1972), Introduction by Christopher Saunders,*" (P. Schlettwein Publishing: Switzerland, 1997); Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom: The Andreas Shipanga story as told to Sue Armstrong,* (Ashanti: Cape Town, 1989), p.35-40.
[351] NAN A679, Dag Henrichsen interview with Ottilie Abrahams, 14 April 1996.
[352] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.49-52.

tension between the young guerilla'ists and the UM leadership. SWAPO's position was in support of armed struggle, a position that Ottilie, Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander had helped to develop. In a UM forum, Kenneth Abrahams had pushed the SWAPO line and been defended by Neville Alexander.[353]

This resulted in a widening of the gulf between Tabata and the young turks as well as with some of their closest comrades:

> In the case of Karl [Brecker] there had been a terrible blow up between himself and us on the question of his what we considered perhaps a bit too harshly as betrayal of our confidence because Karl had basically carried to Tabbie, Tabata and other, the discussions as well as even the literature we should produce for SWAPO and with SWAPO at a time when they were labelling SWAPO as collaborationist and so on. And this of course upset us very, very much. Because all that had been done in great confidence since we felt that the leadership would eventually come round to our point of view but that we weren't going to halt our activities with SWAPO while they sorted themselves out.[354]

These mounting tensions evidently had reverberations on interpersonal and organisational levels. Organisationally, they culminated at APDUSA's annual meeting in December 1961 where Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander were suspended, and later expelled, from SOYA, APDUSA and other UM-affiliated organisations.[355] They were "accused of introducing "foreign ideas into APDUSA"" and fomenting discontent.[356] Kenneth Abrahams recalled it being IB Tabata and Jane Gool who "sort of held the whip and [were] instrumental in getting us suspended."[357] At the same meeting, Leo Sihlali, the NEUM president at the time, "came out strongly against guerrilla warfare" likening it to terrorism and insisting that it was not a substitute for political education.[358] In less than two years, the new line in APDUSA had shifted to support for armed struggle and in 1965 sent some comrades to train as guerillas in Ghana.[359]

Ensemble's constitution

The rupture was a political break as much as it was a family dispute, a generational tension as much as it was a strategic disagreement about what time it was.[360] While Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander

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[353] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.192.
[354] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.49-52.
[355] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa.," p.465-467.
[356] Ibid., p.467.
[357] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[358] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa," p.468.
[359] Kayser, R. "Land and liberty."
[360] In Leigh-Ann Naidoo's Ruth First Memorial Lecture 17 August 2016, titled "Hallucinations", she suggests that a central conflict in the 2015-2016 black student struggles at South African universities was between a cohort of university managers and executives, many of which had been involved in the liberation struggle, and us, the black

were expelled as individuals, they were part of a cohort and an emerging ensemble: a collective of people quite close in age, friends with a social life linked to, but also in excess of organisation, sharing a political background with experience in the independent activity of the CPSU and a common reference point in the politics and pedagogy of the UM. Without an organisational home, outside of any mass structure to take underground, the ensemble constituted themselves anew as a study group formed around an interest in armed struggle, guerrilla warfare in particular, with the view to employing it within the South African revolution. Already embryonic prior to the suspension and expulsion, it had been in a process of formation since at least October 1961 in the dissident APDUSA factions and study groups formed out of some remnants of the CPSU. [361] They adopted the name the Yu Chi Chan Club, suggested by Kenneth Abrahams and taken from a Mao pamphlet on guerilla warfare, [362] and in April 1962, began meeting every two weeks at the Abrahams' home.[363] On the YCCC's formation, Ottilie Abrahams emphasised that the study group was something that they collectively grew into.[364] It was fluid and it emerged through the coming together of the multiple abovementioned processes that were already underway and as an underground formation there was no official launch or inaugural gathering that may have, under other conditions, more clearly marked its beginning.

As the beginning of the YCCC was more process than event, its membership too evolved over time, with different people joining at different points. With the vagaries and variations of memory and different historical sources, pin-pointing the precise personnel at the point of its establishment is tricky. Accounts on the composition of the initial YCCC group varies depending on the source, who is remembering, and what moment they are remembering from. Most members' recollections of the initial YCCC group put its membership between ten and twelve and most of the people are consistent across people's memories, with a few discrepancies depending on when people joined amongst other things. The group was constituted by the following people: those from CPSU and APDUSA including Ottilie Abrahams and Kenneth Abrahams, Neville Alexander, Fikile Bam, Marcus Solomon, Xenophon Pitt and Elizabeth van der Heyden; and then Gerald Giose and Gordon Davis Hendricks - community activists from Elsies River "from the Anti-CAD fold" – who later recruited the unorthodox traveling preacher Don Davis , and the SWAPO contingent which included Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams as well as Andreas

students, over the issue of what time it was: whether it was the time for pragmatism and concession to the status quo, or to resist it and insist on instituting another time. Naidoo, LA. "Hallucinations." In Gamedze, A., Magano, T. and Naidoo, LA. *Publica[c]tion.* (Publica[c]tion Collective: Johannesburg, 2017), p.49.

[361] Both Fikile Bam and Neville Alexander recall that the YCCC was established prior to Kenneth Abrahams and Alexander's suspension and subsequent expulsion which took place in early 1962. Neville Alexander gives the date of October 1961 as the formation of the YCCC. Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024]; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

[362] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].

[363] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front."

[364] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

Shipanga , David Haufiku and Peter Kaluna, the latter two being the least frequently recalled as members.[365] While that was the full constitution of the YCCC, and a synthesis of the various members' memories, it was a dynamic process with different getting people recruited and joining the fold over time.

In addition to the maturing of memory, the distinction between the YCCC and the National Liberation Front (NLF) slightly blurs the former group's constitution and dissonance emerges between and amongst the details of the groups' documents from the time of their existence and the memories thereafter. The transition or the gradual growing over from YCCC into the NLF, which will be dealt with more closely later, obscures the details on various historical levels. "Pamphlet No. III: Organisational and Technical Aspects of the Y.C.C.C.", which was written by Kenneth Abrahams and published by the YCCC in 1962 says the following about the Club: "The YCCC is a wide network of hundreds of cells, (one cell to each major town in South Africa)… This Club is organised in breadth and in depth. The plan is to establish guerrilla units all over South Africa rather than establish numerous units in only a few important areas."[366] Elsewhere in the same publication, the YCCC is described both as setting out to establish a network of guerrilla cells and itself being that network with the ultimate imagined membership as 2500.[367] Here the YCCC explained its existence in an aspirational sense – as what it intended to eventually become – a national network of cells constituted by guerrillas. That network, in the memories and publications of the ensemble is later remembered as the NLF. Over time more of a distinction emerged between two formations but that was not the case from the outset.

The first volume of *Liberation*, the NLF's mouthpiece, recounted the following:

> Formation and growth of National Liberation Front:
>
> 1. The Y.C.C.C. was formed in April 1962 with a membership of 5.
>
> 2. The aim of the club was to introduce the idea and the techniques of armed insurrection into the national liberatory struggle in South Africa.
>
> 3. The name by which our nation-wide organisation is to be known is the National Liberatory Front.[368]

In the above quote there is a much sharper distinction between the YCCC and the NLF. The YCCC is also spoken about in the past tense ("The aim of the Club *was* to introduce…") suggesting that it was dissolved by the time of writing, when the NLF was formed. This is in some contradiction with what the previously cited publication, "Pamphlet No. III," said about the YCCC which suggested no difference between the YCCC and the NLF. Additionally, the number of people in the YCCC, five, quoted above in *Liberation,* is different to what was later remembered by the members. In the historical moment of its

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[365] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front."; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.49.
[366] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962.
[367] Ibid., p.1-2.
[368] National Liberation Front. *Liberation*, vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.5.

existence, the imagination of what exactly the YCCC was, was being shaped in, through and by the process of establishing itself within its context. To use Marcus Solomon's phrase, "it was emerging."[369]

Most people in the YCCC were recruited or invited to join by either Kenneth Abrahams or Neville Alexander and it seems they were the primary strategists, decision-makers and teachers in this early period.[370] Within the political conditions of severe state repression the primary considerations for who was selected and invited to join were based on who they already knew from existing networks, if they were from the UM fold, how close they were to Tabata (with whom Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander had fallen out of favour), if they considered them interested in and committed to a strategy of armed struggle, trustworthy, and having the disposition for clandestine organising (keep in mind the fact that none of them had any real experience in that regard!). As always, what and who is excluded from a certain collective, friend group, organisation, social engagement, etc. is often as important as, or even more important than who is included. With regards to the SWAPO contingent, Ottilie Abrahams said that they decided not to invite others because they felt that if more of them were caught it could be devastating for the organisation.[371] In the case of those who the ensemble was close to from experience organising and socialising in CPSU, SOYA and APDUSA, there are a number of individuals who were specifically excluded for various reasons, mainly relating to their proximity to Tabata and the existing group's imagination of their character. Neville Alexander:

> [J]ust before we were to start it formally, we decided to exclude certain people – not to invite them. Specifically Archie Mafeje, Karl Brecker, Frank van der Horst, Peter Meyer. People, all of whom we had considered inviting into the group. The reasons were various… [We] felt that Karl had absolutely betrayed our confidence by carrying these stories as well as literature which we had produced for and in SWAPO to Tabata and company and by giving them ammunition as it were to attack us you know under conditions that were from our point of view quite unfavourable… Archie Mafeje for similar reasons to Karl, although more because we just generally didn't consider him to be trustworthy in terms of maintaining our confidence. And we also felt that he would probably be quite scared, although now in retrospect I'm not sure of that. It was a very subjective decision to exclude him. But he did obviously in the public debate between us and Tabata and company take the Tabata side by and large. And to that extent you know, it became for us somebody that we couldn't invite him to a confidential group – the study group. With Frankie and Peter it was a very unfortunate because Frank at the time, he is now a very different man of course. But at that time he was very loquacious and used to speak very freely…. As I say it was a very subjective decision but we excluded Peter on the grounds that he was too close to Frank not because of any particular personal feature of his character. Frank as I say, you know, I'm being very

[369] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[370] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town; Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[371] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

> honest and I'm sure he wouldn't mind this being said now. He's really big enough to know that these were the views that people had at the time. But he was a bit too – you know, too talkative. [372]

It's useful here to reflect on the centrality of Neville Alexander narrative and recollections in this history. There are a number of factors to consider regarding the interview which is the most detailed source for the history of the YCCC and I draw on it extensively. The interview was conducted about twenty five years after the YCCC's existence – in 1988 by August Matsemela. None of the other interviews that Matsemela conducted, or at least the ones that are traceable – with Fikile Bam, and Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams, are as detailed as this one on the YCCC/NLF period. Alexander was both a historian and a central figure in this history. The level of detail with which he remembered things was related to his position in the process and his intellectual proclivity for history. The interviews that I have conducted in the present period, with Elizabeth van der Heyden and Marcus Solomon for instance, took place more than thirty years after Matsemela's and sixty years since the YCCC/NLF period. They are understandably more hazy on details and process and give a more impressionistic version of the history. The result of this, even in the effort to decentre Alexander in the interests of telling an ensemble story, has unquestionably centred his narrative. In the case of the above quote, it is both Alexander's recollection and in the YCCC period, it seems to have been his decision and justification as to the exclusion of their mentioned comrades and friends.

Frank van der Horst, a CPSU and APDUSA member and a close friend and comrade of the ensemble for many decades later, said it "natural and logical" that, at that time, people didn't discuss their existence or analysis "outside of their formations" "for security reasons."[373] On whether he knew about the existence of the YCCC – that this group of people, composed of close friends and comrades were embarking on the path of underground study and planning for guerrilla warfare – he said the following:

> Not initially. In retrospect I discovered, I should have, I learnt that, for example I once went to a meeting, to deliver a letter, and I walked into a Yu Chi Chan meeting. They were very embarrassed… and they ushered me out so quickly there that I could see that I was intruding and I realised that I was intruding on something I shouldn't have been. And I realised there was something going on, I became aware of it. But shortly after that, the rest started and it was confirmed.[374]

He said he didn't necessarily feel left out of the ensemble but did feel that "there were certainly areas where they could have opened up."[375] As it went though, they didn't open up and opted for a closed and secretive structure that they thought, given the conditions, would enable them to best fulfil their self-given mandate to study histories, strategies and various other aspects of guerilla warfare.

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[372] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.49-52.
[373] Interview with Frank van der Horst, 23 June 2021. Cape Town.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid.

Guerrillas study

Our current task is to find the basic principles of this kind of war and the rules to be followed by peoples seeking liberation; to develop theory from facts; to generalize and give structure to our experience for the benefit of others.[376]

Constitution, beyond the bringing together and assembling of members, included also the process of developing a method - a set of practices, ideas and principles, a way of doing things - characteristic to the ensemble. The YCCC is remembered as a study group or a reading group. At various moments it articulated itself as an entity whose mandate far exceeded even the most *avant garde* description of a reading group. "Pamphlet No. III" described their mandate as follows: "to do ALL that is necessary to prepare for, plan and carry through the military phase of the Revolution in South Africa."[377] Here again is the description of the group in an aspirational and rather grandiose sense, clear about what they intended to do and setting themselves no small task. Elizabeth van der Heyden's recollection is that "that study group was meant to be a study group, it wasn't supposed to be an organisation, it was a study group. We called ourselves a study group anyhow."[378] The aspiration notwithstanding, the group constituted themselves primarily through a collective process of learning and producing knowledge to assist them in their magnanimous task.

Marcus Solomon' epigraph at the beginning of this chapter situates the YCCC's practice of study in the "tradition of the left."[379] Most of the ensemble had some of their formative political learning experiences in UM-associated structures such as the NEF, SOYA and CPSU. Exceptions here would be Andreas Shipanga , Peter Kaluna and David Haufiku, the SWAPO contingent, who while they might well have attended some UM events, did not share the same trajectory. Andreas Shipanga had developed his own serious practice of reading political and cultural literature whilst still in SWA, reading South African publications such as *Drum* and the SACP's *Advance,* which later became *New Age.*[380] SWAPO's practice of study in Cape Town was social and conversational. In the early days at Timothy Nangolo's barbershop, 35 Somerset Road, people would gather, generally after work, and discuss the experience of missing home, as well as events and developments taking place in SWA and SA, and what to do about them.[381] One of the most distinctive characteristics of UM culture was a strong emphasis on education and one of the paradigmatic expressions of that culture was the reading group. Whether in the area-based Fellowships, New Era Fellowship, SOYA or some other UM formation, reading groups were ubiquitous

[376] Guevara, EC. *Guerrilla Warfare,* (Ocean Press: Melbourne, 2006), p.15-16.
[377] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.1.
[378] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[379] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[380] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom: The Andreas Shipanga story as told to Sue Armstrong,* (Ashanti: Cape Town, 1989), p.12.
[381] Ibid.

as spaces of learning not just a particular understanding of the content of a given text but also of learning a way of learning that was shared across radical activist cultures internationally.[382]

The YCCC met in different members' homes keeping their existence and activities secret from close friends such as those mentioned above who were excluded as well as family members who shared their homes. Meetings were usually every week or second week. The group would meet at different people's homes in the ensemble, at Xenophon Pitt's residence, sometimes at Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams's in Athlone and sometimes at Solomon's house in Walmer Estate where he lived with his younger siblings for whom he was their primary guardian.[383] Most of the members were teachers at the time or worked other jobs, so they had to meet after work hours or on the weekend when they had time off. According to Elizabeth van der Heyden, "of course it wasn't smooth going. There were times where everyone couldn't attend for one reason or the other."[384] The rhythm of their collective study was shaped to a great extent by their lives as intellectual workers.

van der Heyden recollected what the study group sessions were like for her:

> [We] would all read and then someone would start off the discussion. And others would join in., But I tell you what. I have never in my life read as much in my life as I read in that study group. Dialectic materialism… Oh God! You know?! When I think of the studying I did then, without being forced to for writing an exam, and how committed I was to that, when at school you were just – ag another exam you know. But it really, Neville Alexander was a hard task-driver you know. And you must remember, Neville Alexander was beyond clever, he was brilliant. I mean he could read and then leave the page and then almost verbatim give you what he'd read, whereas you would have to read it three or four times before you even understood what was there. Yes we did a lot of studying, and it was hard going for those of us not used to reading, concentrating so hard on reading for implementation, not just reading for writing an exam.[385]

van der Heyden highlighted some important aspects of the group's dynamics here. Neville Alexander who had a PhD at the time, had the widest academic experience and was, as she says, the "task-driver" and that he was remarkable in his intellectual capabilities, that "he could reason so well, he could convince you so well."[386] She considered herself to be a "follower" at that stage and it was Kenneth Abrahams, who recruited her and was already a medical doctor at the time, and Neville Alexander took the lead in the group. For herself the level of reading was intense and she never read more in her life than in the YCCC. She said that the mode of study was difficult for people like her who were not used to reading that volume of material.[387]

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[382] See for example, two books: Borges, SV., *Militant Education, Liberation Struggle, Consciousness: The PAIGC Education in Guinea Bissau 1963-1978*, (Peter Lang: Berlin, 2019); Choudry, A., and Vally, S. (eds.) *Reflections on knowledge, learning and social movements: History's schools,* (Routledge: London, 2018).
[383] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town; Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[384] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid.

YCCC's process of inquiry was described by Marcus Solomon as follows:

> It was about okay, you had to prepare a point, a discussion: What is guerrilla warfare? Where did it take place? Where was it successful? Why? Theoretically, why not a revolution? What's the difference between a mass uprising and guerrilla warfare? Why was it done? Where?... Where did this happen in history? Etc. Etc. So it was a theoretical thing.[388]

This "theoretical thing" took place in the context of post-Sharpeville repression and the lull in above-ground political activity. The group was not at a stage of practically experimenting with the military techniques of guerrilla warfare, their mode of study was initially very bookish even as they had aspirations far beyond the pages they were reading and debating. They were "reading for implementation" and had every intention of putting into practice what they learnt – reading the word with the intention of acting in the world.[389] For this reason it becomes very difficult to separate the theory from the practice, and the strategy and their actions – their actions were very much informed by their theoretical study, their strategies by their curriculum.

The curriculum

Elizabeth van der Heyden recalled that they studied "guerrilla warfare and communism." The revolutionary processes in Cuba, Algeria and China, were "big news" and "in the '60s, communism was also high up there in what you should study."[390] The international mood was infectious and it was through their study that the YCCC situated themselves within it. The "task-driver" gives additional insight into what they read:

> It was a question of getting a sound knowledge of the classical text[s] and as well as the South African military, political terrain and topography and all the rest of it. Now, the – we studied amongst other things, as I said, Mao Tse Tung, Ché Guevara, Denys Reitz's book "Commando", various books and articles by Tito, various works on Cuba, on Algeria. In English, Edward Behr, "The Algerian Problem" for example. I think Michael Grant, "The Algerian Turmoil", various books on the Russian Revolution, on Cuba, Sweezy and Huberman and a number of others, you know "Patriots and Rebels" and various other books… Lenin's "Partisan Warfare" which was very prominent.[391]

Alexander's above recollection of the guerrillas' curriculum corresponds closely to what was listed in "Pamphlet No. III" under "Literature" which presents a broad perspective on the place of reading in their praxis:

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[388] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[389] Freire, P. "The importance of the act of reading." *Journal of education,* 165:1, (1983): 5-11.
[390] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[391] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988. P.53. Note – I have corrected some errors with regards to the spelling of names in the original transcription.

The YCCC acquires, produces and disseminates literature relevant to all aspects of the revolution, especially the military aspects.

(3) BOOKS: At present available in all units are:

* Guerrilla Warfare – Mao Tse Tung
* Strategic Problems of the Anti-Japanese Guerilla War – Mao Tse Tung
* Guerrilla Warfare – Ernesto Che Guevarra
* The Paris Commune – Vladimir Illich Lenin
* Partisan Warfare – Vladimir Illich Lenin
* Pamphlet II – The Conquest of Power in South Africa – (YCCC)
* Pamphlet III – The Organisational Aspects of the YCCC.
* Pamphlet IV – Codes and Secret Communications – (YCCC)
* Lecture I – CUBA – (Fourth International)
* "Liberation" – Vol. I nos. 1,2,3.

(b) RECOMMENDED READING: Books on guerrilla warfare, Cuba, Algeria, Cyprus, China and Malaya. (A list of books available will be provided on request).

(c) TO BE PRODUCED: Programme of N.L.F. lectures available on request.

(d) All members should write regularly for the newspaper "Liberation."

(e) Guerrillas should acquaint themselves with the key works of the leading political organisations in South Africa. Pamphlets studying these organisations and relations of the YCCC to them will be issued. In the meanwhile local leaders will recommend the works to be studied and guide this activity.

(f) PROPAGANDA INSTRUMENTS: Each zone should initially provide itself with a duplicating machine. A printing-press is to be acquired and it is intended that every Region should eventually have a printing-press. At present the main instrument of propaganda is the "Liberation."

(g) Unlike other similar or dissimilar organisations the YCCC has made the principle of the regular and systematic production and reproduction of literature for the revolution. Guerillas should never lose sight of this principle.[392]

The two above excerpts highlight a number of key aspects to be discussed further. Their curriculum and their broader approach to study included both reading and writing: producing and reproducing knowledge was part of the learning process and their sense of study and production of materials was intimately linked to the YCCC's intention to establish the NLF. Their broad approach to "Literature" included the reproduction of core, or "classical" texts, on guerilla warfare – those by Mao, Ché, and Lenin

[392] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.6.

listed above – which would be made available to each cell, and the production and reproduction of their own materials. These intended to share their own learnings, analysis, curriculum, strategy and political programme with other comrades in the national liberation movement. Literature was thus a part key of their approach to organising – to recruitment, political education and as a newsletter to keep members updated with regards to developments in the revolutionary process.

The actual process of reproduction was collaborative, with different members of the ensemble performing different roles – typing, stencilling, reproducing, and stapling.[393] They acquired a roneo machine on Kenneth Abrahams's credit (he worked as a doctor) and reproduced documents at the Abrahams' home.[394] Through this process the YCCC produced three pamphlets out of a planned series of four. "Pamphlet II" was titled "The Conquest of Power in South Africa" which Alexander wrote. This pamphlet gave a brief analysis of the social and class structure of South Africa and leads into the analysis that armed struggle and particularly guerrilla warfare is the method of struggle that needs to be adopted by the national liberation movement in order to conquer the state. It also gave a description of guerrilla warfare and an explanation of how the YCCC saw it fitting into the struggle in terms of organisational structure, topographical and geographical regions, its social and political implications and some strategical and political considerations. "Pamphlet III" was prepared by Kenneth Abrahams and was titled "Technical and Organisational Aspects of the Yu Chi Chan Club." True to its title, the pamphlet details the (aspirational) structure of the national network of guerrilla cells they intended to build. It also deals with questions of espionage, recruitment, political and military work, finance, communications, training, strategy, and what is expected of guerrillas. [395] The fourth pamphlet, "Secret Communications," "the main source for which was the 1962 Encyclopaedia Britannica section on 'codes and ciphers'" was researched in the local library and prepared by van der Heyden.[396] Again, it contents were honest to its title. The document outlined the need to communicate secretly and described and demonstrated a number of different methods of encoding communications so their contents would not be immediately apparent to anyone intercepting them.

In an anti-linear fashion, "Pamphlet I" was never produced nor published.[397] Alexander explained:

[393] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.195.
[394] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[395] At this early stage of planning there is at times a conflation of the YCCC and the NLF. The NLF is in fact only mentioned once, in the "Literature" section where it says: "TO BE PRODUCED: Programme of N.L.F. lectures available on request." All the other organisational and technical aspects are relevant to a national network of 250 cells with 2500 members rather than the small reading group that YCCC was at the time. Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.6.
[396] Drew, A. "Biography of Elizabeth van der Heyden," unpublished paper, date unknown, p.5.
[397] The yet-to-be-produced document is listed as "Pamphlet no. I Political basis of Y.C.C.C." under the heading "Being produced" in National Liberation Front. *Liberation*, vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.2.

> Number 1 was to be written shortly before we were actually arrested. We then felt that Paper No 1 which was going to be an analysis of the South African situation, historical and theoretical analysis needed to be written after very, very wide consultation with many more people than which we had in the YCCC.[398]

The ensemble was aware that you couldn't learn everything in books, and that to understand some things you had to discuss and consult with people outside of your immediate circle. This is an acknowledgement of their limitations and their horizons and it leads them seek out others to think with. It's a commitment to thinking with people, learning from people and collective authorship.

"Revolution in Latin America" which is referred to in "Pamphlet III" as "Lecture I – CUBA – (Fourth International)," [399] is the only lecture listed in the YCCC canon. There is no information on the authorship on the document itself, only the bracketed "Fourth International" in "Pamphlet III." The paper basically reviews recent developments in Cuba within the historical perspective of revolutionary processes in Latin America and makes a Trotskyist analysis of the weaknesses and possibilities of the Revolution at that moment in the early 1960s.[400]

In addition to the reproductions of the texts on guerrilla warfare, the ensemble produced *Liberation* which was the "Official Organ of the National Liberation Front." Here the lines between the YCCC and the NLF blur again. Whereas the first issue of *Liberation* spoke about the YCCC in the past tense, the YCCC "Pamphlet No. III" suggests that each "unit" should have the first three issues of *Liberation* in its collection. In other words, those issues of *Liberation* were produced prior to "Pamphlet No.III" This suggests that they existed concurrently or that there was some degree of overlap as the YCCC continued to operate and produce literature for the NLF.

The 'curriculum' itself was constituted by texts written on guerrilla warfare by those involved in the historical experience of employing it – Ché and Mao fit this mold, as does Denys Reitz. *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War* seems somewhat of a wry historical irony – the military strategy of the defeated Boers becoming study material for overthrowing the apartheid state. The book was about the experience of the South African War from the perspective of an Afrikaner fighter[401] and was studied for the insight it

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[398] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.64.
[399] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.6.
[400] The document itself, typed and reproduced on the same typewriter with the same line breaks, fonts and titling as other YCCC documents, is titled differently: "Revolution in Latin America: Cuba the First Stage". This article, of which the actual authorship is obscure, bears a definite Trotskyist mark with a critique of the stalinist Cuban Communist Party and the effect of the Kremlin on contexts of unfolding revolutionary struggle. I quote from it briefly below to illustrate my point: "How can a conscious leadership emerge to deal with the dangers which threaten the revolution and, above all, the influence of the Communist Party?
The "Popular Socialist Party", the Cuban Stalinist party, has never in the past played any real role, certainly not that of leadership: long ago the Latin American Stalinist parties abandoned all revolutionary or even reformist ambitions, being content to play the part of agents of the Kremlin bureaucracy… The banning of the journal of the Cuban Trotskyist organisation, the Revolutionary Workers' Party, the silence which had fallen on the fate of the leaders, the destruction of the presses on which was printed Trotsky's PERMANENT REVOLUTION, show the influence the Stalinist apparatus wields in Cuba today, and its determination to use it against the revolutionaries," Yu Chi Chan Club. "Lecture I. Revolution in Latin America," c.1962, p.13.
[401] Reitz, D. *Adrift on the Open Veld: The Anglo-Boer War and its aftermath, 1899 -1943,* (Stormberg Publishers: Plumstead, 2006).

gave into waging guerrilla warfare in the South African terrain. Elizabeth van der Heyden recalled that while they did not identify politically with the Boers' cause in the war, their ability to take the war deep, resist and frustrate the British imperialists in that war, was impressive.[402] *Commando's* place in their ensemble of study materials hints at the open, voracious and fearless intellectual orientation the group had – they would study anything they could access regardless of its political position if they felt that it could assist them in their task.

Studying the unlikely victories of different assemblages of popular forces in Yugoslavia, Cuba, Algeria, China and the valiant efforts of the Boers in the South African War, could be considered a history of the unthinkable, of strategies of the impossible which seemed to affirm or justify their decision that guerrilla warfare was the way to go. For revolutionaries internationally, these unlikely experiences opened up the imagination of what was possible in terms of methods of struggle in asymmetrical warfare. Some of these are summarized by Ché:

> We consider that the Cuban revolution contributed three fundamental lessons to the revolutionary movements in America. They are:
>
> 1) Popular forces can win a war against the army.
>
> 2) It is not always necessary to wait until all the revolutionary conditions exist; the insurrectional *foco* **can develop subjective conditions based on existing objective conditions**.
>
> 3) In underdeveloped America the countryside is the fundamental arena for armed struggle.
>
> Of these three propositions, the first two challenge the defeatist attitude of revolutionaries or inactive pseudo-revolutionaries who take refuge in the argument that against a professional army nothing can be done, and who sit down to wait until all necessary objective and subjective conditions are attained somehow mechanically, without trying to accelerate them. Although now clear to everyone, these two undeniable truths were previously a matter for discussion in Cuba, and are probably still debated **today** in **America.**[403]

The ensemble was influenced deeply by the guerilla struggle in Cuba. One can see the mark of these lessons – that popular forces can defeat a technologically-superior enemy, that revolutionary conditions can be produced or accelerated by guerrillas and that rural areas can be the basis of an armed struggle that can lead to overthrowing a state – on their envisioned strategy. However, they did not import them wholesale, they took lessons from the various experiences that they studied, imagined how they would play out in their context and pieced them together in their own way.

Ché highlights *foco,* the guerilla nucleus, and its ability to develop subjective conditions conducive to waging revolution. The minoritarian position of Cuba's rebel guerrillas transposed in interesting ways onto the position of the YCCC who were likewise, in an outside position. The YCCC insisted "That this is the Revolution of the oppressed and exploited PEOPLE of South Africa (as opposed to a secret

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[402] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[403] Guevara, EC. *Guerrilla Warfare,* p.13-14. Emphasis in original.

conspiracy involving only a few persons.)."[404] They clearly felt it necessary to distinguish or defend themselves from an armed strategy based on a small group having no relationship to the broader population. That they did this is interesting, they seem to be responding to a critique that they have received or expect to receive – potentially that they are being adventurist and are disconnected from mass struggle. (Recall from earlier in the chapter that NEUM president Leo Sihlali "came out strongly against guerrilla warfare" and likened it to terrorism.)[405] This issue is taken up later in this chapter where we consider the YCCC's imagined strategy, and also further in the next chapter where we explore the ensemble's assessments of other organisations in the movement based on their orientation to armed struggle and their connection to "the masses".

One of the people who was both close to and critically supportive of the YCCC was Kenny Jordaan, a slightly older and more experienced comrade who was part of the Fourth International grouping in South Africa. Jordaan supported the group with some minor logistical assistance, which later included traveling with some members when they went on reconnaissance trips, as well as with political education materials.[406] He was critical of the strategy of guerrilla warfare and didn't think that it was appropriate to the South African context. Roseinnes Phahle recalled:

> He argued that, unlike the other countries in which guerrilla warfare had been successful, South Africa lacked a suitable terrain. Additionally, the neighbouring countries – still under colonial rule – were hostile to our struggle for national liberation. They would thus not provide us with bases from which to launch guerrilla warfare and to which fighters could retreat if they needed to.[407]

Despite his critique and analysis, Jordaan was supportive of the group and the group persisted with their interest in and plans for guerilla warfare.

With regards to guerilla warfare itself, the ensemble had both a level of fetishisation of it, as a method or a symbol, as well as a serious attempt to come to grips with its dynamics as it had played out in various conditions and a logical explanation as to why it was appropriate. By fetishisation here I mean that at the outset of their programme of study it was accepted that armed struggle was necessary and that guerilla warfare was the most appropriate method. In other words, for the ensemble at that time, armed struggle was essentially equal to guerilla struggle. It was the only form of armed struggle that they considered. Many aspects of their conclusions and strategies, which we will discuss later, stemmed from this. Leigh-Ann Naidoo, who has written on the Black Consciousness Movement's (BCM) education programmes, pointed out a similar tension in their approach and how it changed over time.

> The central tension, I argue, was between the critical educational project of transforming consciousness and the political education project of directing black people's energies against the white state…While the BCM began

[404] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.1.
[405] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa," p.468.
[406] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[407] Phahle, R. "Reminiscences of the Arrest of Fikile Bam & Marcus Solomon in 1963."

> with such a critical education project, it was later supplanted by a less rigorous political education project, one that sought quick community action to solve urgent social problems and ignite the masses to resist apartheid at the level of society.[408]

While the historical contexts are different between the BCM's and the YCCC's, there is a similarity. In moments of intense political repression and oppression, there can be the tendency for a process of inquiry to be foreclosed to an extent in order to speed up the process or get the group to a point of acceptance of a particular programme. Neville Alexander, who said his "126uerrilla'ist tendency" had been seeded and awoken by learning about Algeria and Cuba, and Sharpeville had "convinced" him that it was the way to go in South Africa, mentions that they were "trying to get to grips with how we could *apply* guerrilla warfare to the South African situation."[409] Elizabeth van der Heyden also said that they were reading *for the purposes of implementation*. This is obviously a different intellectual orientation to assessing whether or not they thought it was applicable. For example, a more open intellectual engagement might have consisted of studying the current landscape in the national movement to get a strong sense of the conditions, and from there, study various histories and strategies of struggle and waging revolution, including armed methods used under different conditions, and from there, seeing which synthesis – of their analysis of their context and which method/strategy of struggle – appeared most suitable to their situation. It may be too a harsh assessment but I would suggest that the YCCC was founded on the fetishisation of guerrilla warfare and were studying that method in order to apply it to their context, they intended make the context adaptable to the method.

While there was perhaps an element of guerrilla warfare being a foregone conclusion, there was also a logical justification for why they believed it was applicable as a method. It was their intention to conquer power, to overthrow the apartheid state. Elizabeth van der Heyden reveals some of the thinking that justified the adoption of guerrilla warfare as a method.

> [We] needed to move a step up the ladder, the next step was to confront the issue that the Nats [Afrikaner Nationalists] were not going to give in, that if we wanted to gain freedom, we would have to consider armed struggle. And of course it was a hard old thing but you had to it at some time… I didn't see the Nats giving in… and remember at that time, the early 60s, the Nats were at their strongest… But we would study different means of opposing, through violence, the state. And of course, not being able or not in a position to collect arms or manufacture arms or have arms, and to openly start an army, the alternative was to go underground and also that you would need to do some form of guerrilla warfare rather than armies. So we set to studying various means of, by which the oppressed could free themselves.

The Afrikaner Nationalists were in a position of power and weren't going to back down, they had shown that they had no problem using naked force on unarmed black people and peaceful protestors. The dominant methods that the young militants had been exposed to and employed up until that point,

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[408] Naidoo, LA. "The Role of radical pedagogy in the South African Students' Organisation and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, 1968–1973." *Education as Change,* 19:2, (2015), p.112-113.
[409] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

"meetings and APDUSA", seemed to have run their course and therefore they needed to oppose the government with force. That was the first aspect of their analysis. The second followed logically from the first – there was no prospect of apartheid South Africa's armed forces going over to the side of the oppressed black people.[410] This meant that the army was going to be an enemy in their efforts to conquer power. Open confrontation with a technologically-advanced repressive apparatus such as that of the apartheid state, while it was essentially impossible given the lack of resources for arms, training etc., would also be calamitous and paramount to collective suicide. In order to engage an enemy of that nature, alternative and unconventional traditions of waging war would have to be employed. In short, it was understood as a method for waging war in unfavourable conditions against a hostile and superior military force; this is how they arrived at guerrilla warfare as a method.

Organising and traveling terrains of study

YCCC's multifaceted practice of study undoubtedly included bookish tendencies but it also went beyond that into the dimensions of dialogue, debate and into other territories. As the study group had always been imagined as a precursor to an organisation with the capacity to carry out the plans and programmes that it developed, i.e. the NLF, much of the study prefigured and laid the groundwork for its establishment. The context of their action would be the environmental, social and infrastructural territory of South Africa and South West Africa, and, to a great extent, their efficacy of imagined future work would depend on their familiarity with these factors. To assist with this process of gaining familiarity through research, reconnaissance, and later recruitment, it was decided that a full-time organiser would be required who would be able to move around to strategic parts of the country and investigate the conditions. Neville Alexander said that "Don Davis , who was a preacher, a very unorthodox and eccentric sort of preacher" had already been traveling around to rural and semi-rural areas as a preacher; he was recruited to be the "paid organiser of YCCC."

> And by organiser at this stage we didn't mean more than finding out who was who and what was what in the countryside. We were clearly now beginning to go over to action. We were – but we were still very much in a research mould, trying to establish information, gather information, establish data, looking at strategic areas… At the same time just before we formed the NLF we gave Fikile Bam a commission… to investigate the Transkei along the same lines.[411]

There is an acknowledgement of the limitation of theoretical study and that to truly know the terrain, especially for the purpose of guerrilla struggle, one must know the land and its people intimately through movement across it, making contact and building relationships with them. Don Davis and Fikile Bam were charged with some of this work. Don Davis spent a lot of time in the Northern Cape area which

[410] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. II. The conquest of power in South Africa," c.1962.
[411] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.62

was understood as important partly because it contained the long land border that was the gateway between South West Africa and South Africa. Andreas Shipanga had the invaluable experience of traveling and working under false names in Angola, (what was then) Southern Rhodesia, and in South Africa. He had clandestinely crossed borders multiple times in Southern Africa.[412] The knowledge that he brought from his actual clandestine experiences was important in shaping the group's thinking around where to be based and how to move between territories.[413] Fikile Bam was commissioned to go and study the Transkei. In "Pamphlet No. II", the YCCC indicate that the Transkei was planned to initially be "the primary field of operations with a view to forming a strong base area." This was for the following reasons:

> It has all the geographical requirements: mountainous area, adjacent to Basutoland, even a coastline which might prove to be an invaluable asset later on. It is the most densely populated reserve in the country; a constant struggle has been waged there against Rehabilitation and Bantustan for the past 10 years. There is a very long political tradition and many people are already hiding in the mountains. Like all other reserves it has the advantage of being "foreign territory" as far as the state machine is concerned. As such then it will form a natural base area which could easily become a liberated area. [414]

Because of the major revolts and uprisings that had taken place, particularly in Pondoland, and in which, in some localised cases had used elements of armed struggle, the YCCC intended to connect with this militant energy, learn from its proponents and methods and draw them into their national network.[415] While they had evidently followed events and developments unfolding in the Transkei, they acknowledged the limitations of this and knew they needed to physically go and study the terrain themselves.

One might speculate that this orientation to go and study emerging forms of struggle and connect with the sites of militant energy was also partly shaped by the "prominence" of Lenin's "Partisan Warfare" in their studies, which says the following:

> [Marxism] recognises the most varied forms of struggle; and it does not "concoct" them, but only generalises, organises, gives conscious expression to those forms of struggle of the revolutionary classes which arise of themselves in the course of the movement. Absolutely hostile to all abstract formulas and to all doctrinaire recipes, Marxism demands an attentive attitude to the *mass* struggle in progress, which, as the movement develops, as the class-consciousness of the masses grows, as economic and political crises become acute, continually gives rise to new and more varied methods of defence and attack. Marxism, therefore, positively does not reject any form of struggle. Under no circumstances does Marxism confine itself to the forms of struggle

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[412] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.21-34.
[413] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]. Note that the plan of using Transkei as a base area was put forward in the YCCC before any operations had been launched, it was later revised based on Fikile's recommendations after a reconnaissance trip.
[414] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. II. The conquest of power in South Africa," c.1962, p.8.
[415] Kayser, R. "Land and liberty."

> possible and in existence at the given moment only, recognising as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to the participants of the given period, *inevitably* arise as the given social situation, changes.[416]

Potentially in part through Lenin, the necessary transposition from the Russian context notwithstanding, they were interested in the emerging methods of struggle at one of the major sites of resistance activity and movement in the national terrain and were drawn to the Transkei for these reasons. Of course, if it did, that influence could not have come only from reading Lenin. Aside from the fact that many in the YCCC had backgrounds in the eastern Cape, their political mentor, IB Tabata had been intimately involved in struggles in the Transkei for many years and his experience and approach greatly influenced the ensemble having been part of their learning under his tutelage.[417]

With regards to the dissemination and distribution of their literature, and with the intention of connecting the NLF cells that they planned to establish across the country to the YCCC in Cape Town, Elizabeth van der Heyden recalled recruiting Dulcie September at the tail end of the YCCC phase to play the particular role of "postbox":

> While we were in the YCCC we thought that… we needed a safe place for the postage. So I called on Dulcie September. Dulcie and I had been friends since primary school days so I asked her whether she would agree to our post being delivered to her place and I would collect it. 'Ya, okay, sure.' Alright. So, now, Dulcie's another person, Dulcie would never have stayed in the YCCC, she was not a person for that sort of intense study and so on, she's more an active person you know. Give her a task to do and she would do it and do it bloody well, if she agreed to it. Alright, so, she became our postbox, and in that time between the splitting of the YCCC and the formation of the Liberation Front.[418]

In addition to sending materials via the post, through September, the group was creative and resourceful with regards to distribution. *Liberation* encouraged members to develop a network of contacts amongst "regular travellers", "bedding boys", "chauffeurs" or "furniture removers" and to send materials with them. A truck, weekly transporting vegetables travelling between Cape Town and Windhoek, was also used to carry messages between members in the different cities.[419] The individual members' organising and recruitment trips, as well as the paid organiser's travels were also primary channels for disseminating literature. Knowing that the network would have to communicate frequently and that, under conditions of state repression, that presented a danger, the group commissioned Elizabeth van der Heyden to

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[416] Lenin, VI. "Guerrilla warfare", available online at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/gw/i.htm#v11pp65-213 [accessed on 24 February 2024]. Note that there is some confusion around the title of this particular text of Lenin's. It seems that two different translations translated it as "Guerrilla Warfare", and "Partisan Warfare." The two texts are the same with minor translation differences. For a version of the latter, see Lenin, VI. "Partisan Warfare." In Sarkesian, SC. (ed.) *Revolutionary guerrilla warfare: Theories, doctrines and contexts,* (Routledge: London, 2013), pp. 187-204.
[417] Kayser, R. "Land and liberty."; Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa."; Soudien, C. *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and political thought of The New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s,* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2019).
[418] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[419] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2 -2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.91.

research various methods of secret communication. The results of which were published as "Pamphlet No. IV":

> It is quite obvious to all of us that we have to discuss the various methods of secret communications seriously. We realise that, as our groups grow and spread, we will find it necessary to transmit messages, reports, instructions etc. from group to group. We have to beware that if these messages are intercepted and read, the whole organisation will be endangered. Later, in the event of active hostilities, it will become even more urgent to send messages safely, speedily and secretly. For this purpose we have made a study of the many methods of secret communications and have come to the conclusion that the following merit closer consideration. 1) Codes 2) Ciphers 3) secret ink and 4) secret methods of delivery.[420]

From reading to writing, to reproduction and distribution, the group developed an autonomous knowledge production system and infrastructure which was core to their organising practice. Their curriculum was multifaceted. It included an intensive study, reading and discussion, of a variety of texts about guerrilla warfare and revolution - the "classical texts" reflecting on the strategies, challenges and techniques of the method as utilised by Third World revolutionaries, secondary texts about struggles that employed it, as well as literature from the Marxist tradition on analysing its character and uses. Their process of curriculum and their practice of study also included their own independent research of the physical and social terrain – traveling and meeting people to gain a better understanding of the site in which their strategy would be implemented.

The political tradition of the YCCC: The conquest of power

Neville Alexander said that, while they made and maintained contact with members of ANC and the PAC in this period, they did not intend to recruit any of them into the YCCC. They wanted to establish a clear theoretical and strategic position before building organisational unity, in the NLF, more broadly.[421] They felt that both *Poqo* and MK were already on their way, "whereas we were still very much exploratory." [422] This partly explains why they chose to establish their own formation rather than join up with other groups who were already engaging with armed struggle in their own distinctive theoretical and practical ways. Because the YCCC wanted to take the time and space to formulate their own independent position and approach it is important here to analyse aspects of that approach in relation to those of other organisations in order to understand the distinctive character of the ensemble in this moment. In order to do this, this section discusses the thought and writings of YCCC and consider their relevance within broader turn to armed struggle of time. It argues that their distinctive character was in their conception of and orientation to guerrilla warfare which sought to intensify emerging struggles from within the mass

[420] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. IV. Secret Communications," c.1963, p.1.
[421] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.56.
[422] Ibid.

movement and flowed from their conception of the struggle as civil war tasking the form of a racialised class struggle.

The YCCC saw the revolution coming about, and their role within it, as follows:

> The oppressed of South Africa continue to rise against the enemy as they have done since Pondoland. Each uprising will display more emphasis on armed attacks against the State, and will provoke a nation-wide urge to move forward in the same way. Local struggles will duplicate themselves all over the country, merge, expand and progressively involve the whole nation…
>
> When and as the masses revolt our trained personnel will NATURALLY (because of their training and ability) take the lead in these uprisings, arm the masses and instruct them in guerrilla warfare. We will co-ordinate the multiple revolts into a national Revolution. We will see to it that localised uprisings have a national effect on local activity.
>
> The Y.C.C.C. sets out to establish an organisational network that will lead the struggle! We train guerrilla fighters for leadership of the national liberatory war. Our relations to the masses is, on the military level, that of officers to private soldiers. The masses will supply private soldiers in their thousands. Our work is to organise, unite and lead them into battle. We train leaders. We do not intend to recruit a vast army, which must numbers tens of thousands of men. We train officers who, under the correct circumstances recruit their own men (there will be no lack of volunteers).[423]

Kenneth Abrahams, the primary author of the above, expanded in an interview on some of these notions and clarified:

> Cardinal to NLF thinking was the fact that the NLF more or less wait until spontaneous uprisings occur – that is not the total range of our thinking, let me make that very clear immediately. But that we expected these uprisings to occur due to the nature of the system. And that is when we would be most active. But to know when the uprisings will occur, you will need to be where the people are; you have to be in the student organisations, in worker organisations, civic organisations, rate-payers organisations, you exist as an ordinary member, sensitised to what is happening. That puts you in a position to get the feel of what is happening in the mass movement and when things reach a certain level then you can accentuate or you can intensify the conflict.[424]

The YCCC thought of themselves in an aspirational sense which was, at the time, incommensurate to their position in reality. In the above quote the "organisational network" referred to the NLF which had not yet been established. They imagined themselves as playing a (or, even, the) leadership role in military aspects of the struggle; perhaps as a vanguard. Their strategy sought to harness the militant energy that they predicted would be unleashed in various uprisings, such as in the Pondoland revolts, and intervene in those. YCCC/NLF guerrillas, already known as leaders and dependable revolutionaries, would arm ordinary people, and, by using their influence and their knowledge from their studies, instruct them on

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[423] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.1. Emphasis added.

[424] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].

insurrectionary techniques, guide and coordinate their actions in order to heighten the conflict and take it to the next level.

It might seem anachronistic to make the comparison but the YCCC's strategy actually resonated closely with some of what the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC (hereafter, the MWT) later argued in 1979 regarding military strategy and its relation to the mass movement: "[It] was eventually a popular insurrection led by the working class which was the only means of seizing power. They therefore argued that military actions must be subordinated to political action, that military cadres must be absorbed into the mass movement."[425] While there were some differences, for example, the MWT argued for a strategy based on the urban working class and the YCCC planned for its base to be in the rural struggle in the first phase, there was a close resemblance between the relationship proposed between military cadres and operations and the mass movement. The YCCC suggested that armed militants should be embedded in the mass movement in order to get a feel for the mood of it and be in a position to influence it. Similarly, the MWT suggested that "military cadres" should be "absorbed",[426] they were responding to the predominant trend in which military cadres were entering the struggle from outside of mass movements.

YCCC Pamphlet II. "The conquest of power", situates the struggle in South Africa within the general historical process of world revolution and, in that, displays an internationalist analysis and commitment. The piece suggests that: "[From] the point of view of world revolution. Guerrilla warfare is the classical form of colonial and semi-colonial revolutions against Imperialism."[427] Guerrilla warfare was in this sense a symbol through which they associated themselves with revolutionary currents in the Third World, symbolising to others and for themselves that they were part of that current. Although they do not elaborate on what it meant to them at the time, the ensemble described themselves elsewhere as "fighting for socialist democracy."[428] They characterised the military process for which they are planning as a civil war rather than a war against a hostile foreign power. They quite clumsily characterise it as a "class struggle… which is blurred by the historical accident of race." [429] I say clumsy because the analysis suggests contradictory relationships between race and class – at some points that race is a constitutive element of class, and at others that race obscures the true or pure class character of society. This indicates a process of study and thinking that was still underway and in emergence.

While the explicit description of the struggle as a class struggle was a bold divergence from the UM's public declarations, which always veiled and mystified its socialist commitments, the constitution of their own position and ideas independent of the UM was also still underway and uneven. With regards to their

[425] Legassick, M. "Armed Struggle in South Africa: Consequences of a Strategy Debate," p.158.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Ibid.
[428] National Liberation Front. *Liberation*, vol.1, no.2, April 1963, p.5.
[429] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. II. The conquest of power in South Africa," c.1962, p.1.

own "correct" revolutionary programme, the ultimate aim of their planned activities, "Pamphlet No.III" summarises that as: "the destruction of the Herrenvolk state."[430] "The conquest of power" says that:

> Guerrilla warfare in South Africa is the logical extension of the national democratic movement in this country i.e. it is the continuation of the policy of Non-Collaboration in a specific form towards the achievement of the same democratic aims.[431]

Here they situate themselves firmly in the historical development of the national movement (interestingly, "democratic" here rather than "liberation") and within the alumni of the UM. The style and grammar of critique in "Conquest of Power", by making use of concepts like "non-collaboration" above and "rabid racialism" elsewhere, points to the UM influence or inheritance despite being outside of the UM organisational fold. [432]

The internal conceptual tensions and uneven process of independence notwithstanding, the significance of these arguments and positions need to be understood within the context of the time and, following the YCCC's attempt to clarify their own position, in relation to ideas of other movements. With regards to other methods of armed struggle that were circulating in South Africa at that time, "The Conquest of Power" makes a critique of the strategy of "isolated sabotage" suggesting that it depends on the "kindness, disunity and lack of decision of the state."[433] Andries du Toit has written that the ARM's strategy of sabotage flowed from its suspicion of ideology, which was actually an ignorance to their own ideological position. [434] Sabotage in that sense was the lowest common denominator as a method of armed struggle to which politically differentiated group in which political differences were suspended, could commit. As Legassick has pointed out, there was an ambiguity running throughout MK's existence between the armed struggle being a weapon to overthrow the state and being a mechanism to put pressure on the government to enter a "negotiated settlement to achieve democracy."[435] In the early 1960s, with its strategy of sabotage, its attempt to bring the government to the negotiating table so although MK is not named, the YCCC seems to be making a critique of its strategy and by extension is conception of the struggle. An important factor in this conception was "Colonialism of a Special Type" (CST) which was the ambivalent theoretical underpinning of the Congress Alliance's commitment to a Two-Stage revolution – initially the bourgeois, or national democratic, and thereafter the socialist.[436] MK's strategy of sabotage was formulated to achieve the first stage – the national democratic revolution – and for the ARM it was vaguely to bring whites to their senses and inspire blacks to militancy with no

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[430] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962.
[431] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. II. The conquest of power in South Africa," c.1962, p.5.
[432] See Bill Nasson's article for his engagement with some of the tropes of UM writing. Nasson, B. "The Unity Movement: Its Legacy in Historical Consciousness," *Radical History Review,* 46:7, (1990): 189 -211.
[433] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. II. The conquest of power in South Africa," c.1962, p.3.
[434] Du Toit, A. "Fragile defiance: The African Resistance Movement."
[435] Legassick, M. "Armed Struggle in South Africa: Consequences of a Strategy Debate," p.156.
[436] Everatt, D. "Alliance politics of a special type: the roots of the ANC/SACP alliance, 1950–1954." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 18:1, (1992): 19-39.

broader political vision. The YCCC's strategy of guerrilla warfare as a means to conquer power was formulated as a weapon of the racialised class struggle to achieve socialist democracy.

The YCCC's understanding of guerrilla warfare is interesting especially when considered in relation to Poqo's with which it shares some similarities and some inversions. *Poqo's* military actions were intended to inspire or provoke a mass insurrection. [437] Based on the proliferation of rural uprisings, the YCCC predicted that local uprisings would continue to occur and saw their role as intensifying them, and imparting on them a national character. "The conquest of power" suggests that "Spontaneity = suicide" which was likely a veiled critique of *Poqo's* strategy which they thought was too dependent on spontaneous action.[438] At the level of ideology, they add that "we are far removed from those chauvinistic groupings, which would insist in the teeth of all history that the white man in this country is a foreigner who has to be driven into the sea."[439] In this, they appear to be distancing themselves from sentiments harboured by some *Poqo* militants. During the early 1960s an ideological distance emerged between the PAC's Manifesto and the orientations and positions of many *Poqo* members who "reduced the organisation's ideological statements to a "set of slogans"" such as ""we shall drive [the whites] to the sea"; "they must go back to Europe."[440] At the level of strategy the YCCC thought that *Poqo's* was lacking solid planning and was slightly naive in their conception of how the insurrection would come about, and they differed with them regarding the nature of the struggle as being against a foreign/local population.

Conclusion: To the Front!

In the process of the turn to armed struggle in SA, revolutionaries from various political traditions, organisations and tendencies were engaging in the debates and practices. There was a lot of activity, interest and a lot of directions. One of those was the YCCC which was significant as a group of young militants from a background in the UM and in SWAPO who studied guerrilla warfare and were the only grouping in that period to, from the outset, commit to it as the preferred method of armed struggle. The ensemble's inter-nationalist approach also distinguished it from other formations in the armed struggle whose focus was exclusively on South Africa. The YCCC understood the struggles in South Africa and South West Africa to be intrinsically linked and they were committed to involvement in the liberation movements of both territories. Its membership reflected that understanding as it was constituted by people from the UM and from SWAPO.

The process of the ensemble's constitution took place within the following factors, outside an established political formation, within the repression of the early 1960s and the turn to armed struggle, within which

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[437] Kondlo, K. *In the Twilight of the Revolution;* Lodge, T. "Insurrectionism in South Africa."
[438] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962.
[439] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. II. The conquest of power in South Africa," c.1962.
[440] Kondlo, K. "In the twilight of the Azanian revolution," p.286.

they were behind the curve. Most of the ensemble were in their mid-twenties and had just come out of their first experiences organizing independently, in the CPSU, a process that was both cut short by many factors relating to the turn to armed struggle and involved an uneven pursuit of an independent political existence and path to the UM. Within this context there was both tremendous opportunity – they could define themselves and their politics however they chose to – but also tremendous pressure – to define themselves and get out of the blocks. In some of these senses they were similar to the PAC who had only formed in 1959 and were forced into improvising an approach to the new conditions having not established the infrastructures to support underground organizing and armed struggle. Yet they were also very different because the PAC already had mass appeal and base in various parts of the country. Within these conditions the ensemble read, discussed, debated and wrote, meeting frequently to collectively articulate their aspirations and transpose the learnings from various anti-colonial and socialist struggles to compose and write themselves into their context. Their decision to first consolidate and clarify their own plans and ideas about the struggle before recruiting people from other organisations that had already decided to go the way of the armed struggle and had their own ideas and strategies, represents the ensemble's desire to carve out an independent position.

While the ensemble was formed by the convergence of multiple strands and there is no single source or band leader, Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander were emerging as the two prominent figures in terms of developing theory and strategy, and writing the foundational documents. Neville Alexander in particular played a central role, this is undoubtable and an unavoidable conclusion. Having had the opportunity to live, study and struggle in Germany he had already had a far broader experience of the world and of organizing through relationships with Fourth International comrades and a close association with the Algerian revolution. Allison Drew has argued that there was a non-gendered distribution of labour across the group and that everyone participated equitably in the intellectual life of the ensemble.[441] While I agree with that to an extent, given the intensive reading regime, there were certainly imbalances with regards to educational experiences, the differential pressures that put on people and the limits it placed on who could write the key texts that would articulate the ensemble's politics.

The dynamics of the ensemble's history has also been shaped disproportionately by particular members. Those who were interviewed by others about the experience, and those who are still alive and were interviewed by me, are the ones whose voices represent the experience of ensemble. The ensemble was also an uneven formation in the sense that certain members, particularly those who had organized closely together in the CPSU – Marcus Solomon, Elizabeth van der Heyden, Fikile Bam, Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams, and Neville Alexander – formed the core and had a disproportionate effect on its character. This is seen in the prevalence of UM ideas in its writings for instance. The YCCC was constituted as an ensemble of people, practices and politics, ostensibly as a study group. Each of these aspects of the ensemble's identity and character was continually in motion and in the process of emerging through

[441] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front."

practice. The group was heterogenous – while most of the members shared a political background this was not true of everyone. Everyone had different educational backgrounds, interests and skills. The ensemble's pamphlets were individually written, collectively edited, but never listed as authored.

Their understanding of guerrilla warfare sought to intensify uprisings that they predicted would occur. In these moments they planned for the NLF to arm the masses and train them in techniques of guerrilla warfare, thereby intensifying the conflict and advancing popular uprisings into a phase of military struggle. This was different to MK's early strategy which was based on symbolic and propagandistic acts of sabotage, which bore much similarity to the approach of the ARM which never developed beyond sabotage. The YCCC approach also differed to *Poqo's* as the latter aimed through armed attacks on apartheid machinery and on white society to inspire the black population to revolt.

The YCCC's description of itself was aspirational and existentially linked to the NLF. The reading group could not conceive of themselves outside of the organising they planned and the political and military action they intended to carry out. Study was not only linked to struggle but was a component of the ensemble's culture and their method of doing politics. The distinction between the YCCC, the study, and NLF, the struggle, was blurred in countless ways. There were multiple overlaps and ambiguities with regards to where one ended and the other began. It was in the unfolding course of their formation that it was constituted, in-process. Their fluidity and emergent existence was contrasted with quite clearly and boldly articulated sense of themselves and their politics in their writings, belying the influence of their political training in the UM. The following chapter turns its attention to the process of the NLF's formation, the embryonic network they were building and the ensemble's understanding of the national liberation movement and their place within it.

Chapter Three. Proliferation. Overlapping ensembles, non/collaboration and the National Liberation Front

At that time, we were [more] concerned with getting our act together, getting the organisation out of the blocks. So that when we thought that, alright we've stuffed enough into our heads now, we knew what was on, we even worked out code names for all of us so that we could communicate in code names. And then we decided, alright, each of us would go and start another group… When we thought that we were ready to spread ourselves now into cells, the Yu Chi Chan Club became the United Front and we each were supposed to go out to start a cell.[442]

Introduction

Having constituted themselves as the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC), the ensemble felt that in late 1962 it was time to spread themselves out, to proliferate and form an underground network of guerrilla cells across South Africa (SA) and South West Africa (SWA). That network was to be known as the National Liberation Front (NLF). It was thought up and planned in theory by the ensemble in the YCCC and was based on their studies of guerrilla warfare as it was practised in struggles across the world, particularly as a current in emerging anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles. The present chapter explores, in the main, two things, the processes and practices of organizing and building the NLF in SA (the NLF and the ensemble's broader involvement in the Namibian liberation struggle is explored in more detail in the following chapter) and their thought on the national liberation movement. Both of these practices – making and maintaining contact, recruiting and organizing, and theorizing – were underway and there were multiple overlapping and continuing threads in the emergence of the NLF from the YCCC.

The literature and context sketched out at the beginning of the previous chapter, on the turn to armed struggle in the early 1960s, provides the backdrop for the present chapter too. The important addition to the conversation here is the organizational form of the front. In order to locate that, a brief engagement with it is necessary. The United Front emerged in post-revolution Russia as a tactic to defend working class interests against capital in the context of unfavourable political and economic conditions. Trotsky, its best known theorist, said it "unite[s] all the workers, at whatever cost, into the united front against the bourgeoisie, bridging all the splits and groupings in the working class."[443] The Popular Front was a tactic that emerged in Europe in the 1930s to unite working class organisations with those of the middle classes,

[442] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[443] Trotsky, L. "The question of the united front", February 1922. Available online at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1922/02/uf.htm [accessed on 15 February 2024].

including liberals, to defend against fascism. Amongst Marxists it is generally considered a catastrophic tactic that tied the interests of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie "to the chariot of imperialism" and diluted and neutralised working class interests.[444] The United Front became a common tactic for communist parties and got exported to multiple contexts and in the process, transformed and developed.[445]

In anti-colonial struggles and wars against hostile foreign imperialist forces, communists and nationalists transformed the tactic of the united front into a formation that brought the broad spectrum of anti-imperialist sections of society together into national united fronts, or national liberation fronts. While there is much variation between the multitude of national liberation fronts, a common approach is the attempt to coordinate and cohere the military offensive, generally a guerrilla war, against the occupying or invading force. The National Liberation Front in Vietnam[446] and the Front de Liberation National (FLN) in Algeria[447] are two different historical experiences that epitomise and elaborate this approach. A common characteristic of these kinds of formations is that they are initiated by a small clandestine group, often of communists who keep that aspect of their identity secret and who occupy a minoritarian position within the broader national movement. These minoritarians use the front as a means to ascend to a position of ascendancy and gradually attempt to exert more influence over the front's direction.[448]

In the Southern African liberation movement fronts of varying kinds have been employed in different moments and contexts of struggle. After the attack on the Soviet Union by the Nazis there was a Popular Front against fascism built by communists.[449] From 1960-1962 the short-lived South African United Front attempted to build a form of unity in exile between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and later added the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) and the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) "to work together, to campaign together, and to act together in making approaches to individuals, organisations and governments on the issues of apartheid

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[444] Mitchinson, P. "Trotsky on the Popular Front," 06 March 2007. available online at: https://www.marxist.com/trotsky-popular-front.htm [accessed on 15 February 2024]; Trotsky, L. "The decisive hour in France", December 1938. Available online at: https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/trotsky/1938/12/france.htm [accessed on 15 February 2024].
[445] Sapio, F. "The united front principle: expansion and adaptation." *European Journal of East Asian Studies,* 18:2, (2019): 133-164.
[446] Honey, PJ. "The National United Front in Vietnam: A Communist strategy for revolution." *Studies in Comparative Communism,* 2:1, (1969): 69-95; Selden, M. "The National Liberation Front and the transformation of Vietnamese society." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 2:1, (1969):34-43.
[447] Horne, A. *A savage war of peace: Algeria, 1954-1962,* (Macmillan: London, 1977); Sajed, A. "How we fight: Anticolonial imaginaries and the question of national liberation in the Algerian War." *Interventions,* 21:5, (2019): 640.
[448] "[The] FLN was anything but a mass movement. In fact, within the context of the entire population of Algeria it was in fact a minority of a minority." Mott, JW. "The Road to Algiers: The FLN Challenge and the French." MA thesis. University of New Brunswick, (2010), p.27.
[449] "The Comintern had revived the People's Front, and following its lead the CPSA developed a much more elastic conception of the social classes that were potentially anti-fascist and that now included some elements of the bourgeoisie." Drew, A. *Discordant comrades: Identities and loyalties on the South African left*. (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2000), p.233; Lodge, T. *Red road to freedom: A history of the South African Communist Party 1921-2021,* (Jacana: Auckland Park, 2021).

and South West Africa."[450] While the differences between the ANC and the PAC were always there, its dissolution was a product of a myriad of factors and Lissoni argues that the SAUF was formed out of convenience rather than necessarily and conviction of the need to unite, in other words it was a form of tactical unity.

The NLF expands the repertoire of the national/united front, this tactic of world revolution, and at the same time transposes it into the liberation struggle in South Africa, which is later picked up, revived and transformed in later periods. In the mid-1970s there was another attempt to build a front to unite the liberation movement in South Africa both internally and externally, the Azanian Liberation Front, which will be explored in Chapter Five "Reconfiguration" and in the 1980s, there was the formation of the National Forum and the United Democratic Front in an era that will be discussed further in the final chapter, "Articulation".[451]

The National Liberation Front (NLF), formed inside the country by the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC) was an attempt to build a front of armed movements within the moment of the turn to the armed struggle in South Africa and Namibia the experience of which is the topic of the present chapter. Different to the SAUF, as argued above by Lissoni, the NLF's approach to unity was not based on convenience. It was based on the assumption that the differences between organisations regarding conceptions of the struggle, with the exception of the principle of bourgeois democracy vs. socialism which would need to be clarified, were not fundamental and that they should work with anyone who has chosen to commit to the path of armed struggle to overthrow the apartheid regime. This was an embryonic form of principled unity, an extension of the attempt to build the Progressive National Students' Organisation (PNSO) on the principle that the oppressed should organise against apartheid independently of liberal and ruling class influence, in an entirely new context.

The process of establishing the NLF was one of overlapping ensembles by drawing on various contacts from school, CPSU, and APDUSA, and to lesser extent SWAPO and independent socialists. The NLF was the continuation of the process of constitution discussed in the previous chapter. While the period in the YCCC focused intensely on the ensemble, the process of "Proliferation" was the attempt to recruit people to the ensemble's position and project. Like the process of trying to form the PNSO, historical factors – their arrest in this instance - cut that short and they were never actually able to constitute themselves fully in the way they aspired to. Their arrest while they were just getting out of the blocks left a dynamism and idealism in the memory of the organisation, creating, for some a nostalgia for the experience of ensemble – close friends, thinking, planning and acting together. A combination of their

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[450] Oliver Tambo cited in Lissoni, A. "The South African liberation movements in exile, c. 1945-1970." PhD diss. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, (2008), p.98.

[451] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment: Background to the Azanian manifesto." In Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, NC. *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008), pp. 157-170; Lodge, T. and Nasson, B. *All, here, and now: Black politics in South Africa in the 1980s*. (New Africa Books: Cape Town, 1991); Seekings, J. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, (New Africa Books: Cape Town, 2000).

studies and their curriculum, particularly the influence of Algeria and Vietnam, their lateness (in turning to armed struggle compared to rest of movement), and their outside position also gave them a different perspective on the struggle. From that position their major contribution was the organisational form which they proposed which was a front rather than discreet and separate organisations. While the African Resistance Movement (ARM) also intended to also unite with the various strands of the liberation movement, as Andries du Toit has argued, this was imagined on the basis of ignoring or downplaying ideological differences[452] rather than having a deep engagement with them, something that was in process in the NLF. The NLF was unique in this period in both having a serious interest and engagement with ideological questions and, from that position, attempting to build a cooperative structure that could coordinate armed activities of the liberation movement. While the NLF was arrested early into its existence, it needs to be understood within the longer trajectory of the ensemble's politics, particularly in relation to later experiments in building fronts. In the 1970s and 1980s the YCCC/NLF repertoire experience was drawn on in the process of building new ensembles and strategising for new ways to bring about the unity of the oppressed.

"Actually quite marginal"[453]: Organising networks and non-antagonistic differences

In late 1962 the YCCC began the process of growing over into the NLF. From outside of any mass organisation this posed a major challenge. Within conditions of extreme repression where possibilities of meeting aboveground were almost nil, they had set themselves the task of establishing a network of comrades from across the country. With regards to who they planned to recruit, their ideal guerrilla was: already active in mass organisations, supported a program of armed struggle, almost always spoken about in the masculine, "an ardent, convinced person who is willing to sacrifice his life and to take up arms to win freedom," someone who "effectively unites political theory with military action," and "is always creative; he is creating a new society."[454] Potential recruits were identified according these characteristics, and supportive of the armed struggle and, once identified, the YCCC/NLF was to be proposed to them in theory, without revealing its actual existence and they were to be secretly vetted by at least one other NLF member before being invited to join.[455] Recruited 'guerrillas', with others in their proximity, would constitute cells in all cities, major towns and strategic rural areas.

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[452] Du Toit, A. "Fragile defiance: The African Resistance Movement." In Liebenberg, I., Nel., B., Lortan, F. and van der Westhuizen, G. (eds.) *The long march: The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa,* (HAUM: Pretoria, 1994), pp. 96-103.
[453] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.54-55.
[454] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.1.
[455] Ibid.

Elizabeth van der Heyden said that "there was the idea that this group would not be dependent on which organisation you belonged to, that it would be an open organisation."[456] The NLF had entered the turn to armed struggle later than the rest of the movement, once the rest of the ANC, the PAC and, to an extent the ARM, had established distinct approaches and undertaken some operations.[457] The YCCC thought that the liberation movement did not necessarily need another discreet army planning its own operations in isolation. What they thought was needed was a structure that could coordinate a level of cooperation amongst the various already-established groupings and recruit others into that. The ideal form – a network of underground cells across South African and SWA constituted by no more than ten members – was largely inspired by studying the experience and strategy of the FLN. Under the influence of the FLN, and in the spirit of principled unity, Neville Alexander explains the ensemble's approach to organisational form and ideological issues associated with it:

> We believed completely – first of all – in a United Front. We realized that these divisions were actions completely unjustified at a certain level. That once people had made the decision to go on to a revolutionary path, then a lot of the ideological differences became *actually quite marginal.* Although there are important class issues for example the question of socialism versus petty bourgeois democracy and so on which one couldn't obviously ignore. On the purely military level we thought at that stage, that it was very important that the movement should in a sense move together, move in tandem… This was part of our strategy – what we inferred from our studies – that we shouldn't allow a situation to arise, one that actually did arise eventually, but we shouldn't allow a situation to arise where the movement was divided into armed camps. So that from the word go it was very important to maintain contact with other groups that were also as it were dabbling in arms so to speak you know.[458]

One of the main issues of the front as an organisational form concerns ideological differences– what are antagonistic and what are non-antagonistic contradictions – and how to approach them? For Alexander above, in a 1988 interview with Matsemela, the contradiction between socialism and petty bourgeois democracy, a form of capitalism, was central, but beyond that, other ideological differences, between Africanists and democratic socialists, could be considered "actually quite marginal." This approach, described from the vantage point of almost twenty five years of reflection, was a key orientation to understanding the NLF's aspirations.

In the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter Elizabeth van der Heyden suggests that the process of transition from the YCCC to the NLF (she uses the term United Front in this instance) took place once they had "stuffed enough into [their] heads." This was in late 1962.[459] The ensemble felt that they had learnt enough from their studies to advance into the terrain of action. This seems to imply a fairly linear

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[456] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[457] Magubane, B., Bonner, P., Sithole, J., Delius, P., Cherry, J., Gibbs, P., and April, T. "The turn to armed struggle," in South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960-1970,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2004).
[458] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.54-55.
[459] Ibid.

progression from theory into practice, or study into struggle but in reality the relationship between the two was far more intertwined. Their synthesis could perhaps be described as an assemblage of study and struggle. Action at this stage, in the main, constituted building organizational infrastructures, making contacts across the movement, recruiting members and proliferating themselves through establishing cells. Marcus Solomon said that:

> [YCCC] was a study group, we wanted to do action. We started setting up cells to find out where things are. Ya when did the YCCC become the NLF? When we start… 'let's start doing things.' Okay what? Just take arms and shoot? No we must first suss out, set up cells.[460]

Even as they were eager to get involved in more 'action', research activities – sussing out the terrain – were still conceived as central to their process of organizing and they were patient in that regard. Having acknowledged and decided that there was no prospect for offensive military activities in the first year of their existence, their focus was on laying the groundwork for future operations.[461] Neville Alexander said that their "purpose was to… create infrastructures, to identify the right people, to start projects amongst them which would give us an opportunity to live with them and generally gain their confidence," to live amongst people like fish in water.[462] Influenced by Mao's idea of protracted war, he expanded, saying that their understanding was that the struggle was going to be a long one and any attempt to engage the enemy prematurely, without the prerequisite preparation and structures in place, would be disastrous.[463]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there was not a clear break between the two formations, there were overlaps in terms of personnel, processes and practices. Organisationally, while the YCCC was in many senses a preparation and a planning period for the establishing the NLF, many of the tasks associated with building the latter formation had already begun. The NLF intended to be connected as widely as possible to the main organisations in the national liberation movement. They understood these to be, in South Africa, Congress Alliance and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the (split) Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM/UM), and in South West Africa (SWA), the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), and the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) as well as some smaller and reformist groupings. The ensemble's analysis of all these groups will all be explored later in this chapter. While the NLF's primary recruiting base was young people in the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) fold, many of whom had been in the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU), who they were already close to,[464] contact with people in some of the other organisations had already been established in the YCCC period.

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[460] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[461] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962.
[462] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.66.
[463] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[464] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].

Members of the ensemble were close to a number of young people in Mkhonto WeSizwe (MK) and the Coloured People's Congress (CPC) which was part of the Congress Alliance. This included people like Barney Desai, Cardif Marnie and Agmat Osman who had initiated contact and conversation with the YCCC.[465] Additionally, there were younger people who were their friends, such as Basil February, and James April, part of the same generation of activists and shared many commonalities in political and educational backgrounds. About Basil February, Marcus Solomon recalled that he was very close to them in many ways, for example, Ursula February, Basil's sister, was married to Leslie Van Der Heyden (Elizabeth's brother and an NLF member) and Basil himself was a member of the CPSU.[466] He was a few years younger than Marcus Solomon but they had been in hostel together as students at Zonnebloem and later Trafalgar.[467] Nicky Van Driel wrote that James April had grown up in the NEUM, having had UM teachers during his schooling. In the 1950s he had become attracted to the ANC's mass campaigns and, at the same time, was becoming disillusioned with the NEUM's growing distance between itself and "the everyday struggles of ordinary people."[468] In vacating the NEUM, Van Driel further wrote that "April and Basil February… were among the first non-African [sic] people to join MK thereby recognising the common destiny of all black people."[469] Sharing some aspects of a background, these were people who the ensemble were connected intimately to, who took different political routes away from/independent of the NEUM in the early 1960s. Solomon's relationship with people like February and April made him aware that they were part of a broader moment; what was going on in the YCCC/NLF – the exploration of armed means within the process of liberation – was part of a general trend in the national movement. He characterised what they were doing in the NLF as "an overlapping, parallel process" to what was taking place in the CPC and MK.

On the nature of their relationship with the CPC/MK comrades, Neville Alexander said:

> We didn't do anything together. But there were lots of discussions and quite a lot of actual critical discussions – advanced strategy and tactics. And that's actually how we got to know about things like the sabotage campaign – or uMkhonto I should say and the rationale and the whole idea for example of trying to soften up the government on the one hand – force them to the negotiating table. On the other hand, the idea as they later on stressed, to make the people – accustom the people – black people to violence because people had grown up quite accustomed to non-violent tactics etc etc.[470]

An aspect of these relationships, then, that existed across organisational lines with shared histories of schooling, friendship and familiarity, was a practice of critique, discussion and thinking together that was the dialogic basis of the ensemble's knowledge about what was going on in corners of the movement

[465] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.58.
[466] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; van Driel, N. "The journey to Wankie: A biography of James April." Hons. thesis. University of the Western Cape, (1990), p.23.
[467] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022.
[468] van Driel, N. "The journey to Wankie," p.17.
[469] Ibid.
[470] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.58-59.

outside of their own. In particular here, in terms of what they came to learn, was MK's military strategy which was intended to bring the government to the table – something written about in veiled terms in "Pamphlet No. II" and dealt with in the previous chapter – an approach of which they were critical.

In Cape Town, in addition to the close CPC/MK group, the ensemble was linked to some sections of the PAC. Although he didn't mention names, Neville Alexander recalled that they were close to some of the young PAC comrades who he felt were serious and committed revolutionaries. Additionally:

> We worked with specific people in the PAC in Cape Town. Amongst others, there was at that stage the Cape Hawkers Association which had en bloc gone into the PAC, consisted of mainly Muslim hawkers and we knew some of those people very well and worked with them. I don't think they would like their names now to be revealed, we should maintain that privacy because none of them was actually ever put in front of a court for that kind of activity. But they were very serious people. Together with other PAC members in Langa and Crawford and so on with whom we also worked some of whom are in exile…I'm thinking specifically of… Ntantala who later on became the commanding chief of the PAC – army of Poqo... he was a particularly close associate of Kenneth Abrahams. [471]

The silent strategy of the underground prohibits Neville Alexander divulging too much above but his recollections, still, are telling. The PAC's main base in Cape Town was in the migrant labourer sections of the population, predominantly men from rural Eastern Cape who lived in the 'African' townships and hostels whilst in the city. The other main section of PAC membership in Cape Town consisted largely of teachers and other professionals, although numerically smaller than the migrant labourers, it was largely out of this section that the initial leadership of the organisation was drawn.[472] The section that Neville Alexander makes reference to – Muslim traders – was not the traditional base of the PAC but over the 1960s and 1970s more Muslim people became members and supportive.[473]

Other connections between elements of the UM, particularly SOYA, and the PAC, existed prior to and independent of the YCCC. Fikile Bam suggested that the formation of APDUSA in 1961 was, in part, a response to the successes that the PAC were having following its formation in 1959 and the mass campaigns in 1960. Having thought that that the PAC would be primarily based in Transvaal, the UM was "caught with our pants down" in Cape Town.[474] The PAC and their programme, of positive action on the ground and the message of freedom being around the corner, attracted many men – migrant workers, students and teachers – who had been familiar with the UM, some having been members of

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[471] Ibid, p.57-58.
[472] Kondlo, K. *In the twilight of the Azanian revolution: The exile history of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa), 1959-1994,* (Basler Afrika Bibliographen: Basel, 2009); Lodge, T. "Insurrectionism in South Africa: The Pan-Africanist Congress and the Poqo Movement, 1959-1965." PhD diss. University of York, (1984); Lodge, T. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945,* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1983).
[473] See for example *Imam and I.* (Directed by Khalid Shamis: Tubafilms, Cape Town, 2011).
[474] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].

organisations.[475] Prior to the massacres in Sharpeville and Langa, young members of SOYA, such as Bam, Archie Mafeje, Sotho Xaba and "a guy called Lobi" used to attend meetings with the PAC where they had: "Ideological fights…They didn't even take offence at the things we were saying. They kept on saying, look, okay that's all fine, all that you are saying is very good, but come and join us, don't be there, always at the top. Be among us here." Some SOYA activists did respond to this call to join the PAC, such as Francis Mbelu, Nana Mohomo and others because they felt like they were needed in that space. Philip Kgosana, while not a member of SOYA, through the CPSU connection at UCT, was also considered by Fikile Bam to be someone who was "within the sphere of UM influence" also joined the PAC.[476] While Fikile Bam never joined the PAC he kept up the connections and he had also been organising study groups with a number of comrades in Langa and Nyanga who were from across Congress Youth League, ANC and PAC backgrounds. It is unclear if these comrades ever became NLF members but some were certainly close contacts and attended at least one regional meeting.[477]

Contacts from the ensemble's existing connections around the time of transition from the YCCC into the NLF included their comrades in SWAPO, the young cohort from CPSU which was at the time largely in APDUSA, and some young members in MK and the PAC. The next section explores the various people and processes that formed part of the overlapping ensembles that were collectively constituting the NLF network.

Movement: Making contact/s, members and cells

The base of the NLF - having grown out of the YCCC – was Cape Town. Having national ambitions, the ensemble knew they needed to establish contact beyond their base in Cape Town. Travel became an essential methodology for building the infrastructure of the NLF – making contact with comrades and potential members, recruitment, building cells, research, and distribution of literature. Their strategy of proliferation was two-fold, to consolidate their homeground presence in Cape Town and to build contacts and recruit members into cells in other parts of SA and SWA. YCCC members, were expected to start another cell, some in Cape Town, and others in areas where they came from, areas considered strategic.

Elizabeth van der Heyden reflected on the early moments of what she referred to as "spreading [ourselves] into cells":

[475] Ibid.
[476] Ibid.
[477] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front during South Africa's Transition to Armed Struggle." *International Review of Social History,* 67:S30, (2022), p.204.

> Alright, Xenophon went to Queenstown to start a cell there. Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie went to Namibia with… Andreas Shipanga of SWAPO, they went to Namibia. I was supposed to stay in Athlone. Neville Alexander went to Lansdowne and Giose- Bellville, and then they were supposed to start another group in Cape Town, and then Kensington, and a group in Wellington, and we did actually. I think that was already about '62-'63, end of '62, beginning '63.[478]

Around the same time, November-December 1962 "[David] Haufiku left for South West Africa."[479] Don Davis did a lot of intensive organising work in what is now the Northern Cape mostly concentrated in Kimberley, Barkly-West and Gong-Gong. This region was strategic because it shared a long land border with both Botswana and Namibia. They considered it important to develop a presence there to facilitate the future clandestine movement of people and other necessary items for their struggle.[480]

The most established cells were the ones that grew directly out of the membership of the YCCC. Allison Drew writes about one of the two original cells:

> The Athlone– Lansdowne group met weekly at the Alexander home, with Neville Alexander, Ottilie Abrahams, Solomon, Shipanga, and Kenneth Abrahams, as chair. From February, Shipanga attended sporadically as he was often in Ovamboland preparing for his return as a SWAPO field organizer. [Dulcie] September, Dorothy Alexander, and Doris van der Heyden began attending in March, later joined by Leslie van der Heyden, Reginald Francke, and Cyril Jacobs. The group split; Elizabeth van der Heyden led the Athlone cell, and Neville Alexander the Lansdowne group.[481]

Elizabeth van der Heyden ended up in a situation, unenviable according to her, where she was responsible for a cell in which two of her younger siblings were also members. Regarding her sister Doris's recruitment, she said that "well I didn't actually have to ask my sister, she saw me printing things and wanted to be in on it, so she was in on it."[482] The proximity and closeness of siblings in their home meant that Elizabeth van der Heyden's political work could not be 'underground' in that space and the sisters became comrades in the NLF. With regards to her brother, Leslie, who was an old comrade of the group since CPSU days, he was also recruited into the NLF, by Neville Alexander, and since he lived in Athlone, he joined his sister's cell. Elizabeth van der Heyden was unhappy about it for a number of reasons. In the YCCC they had agreed to recruit 'unattached' people and Leslie van der Heyden had just gotten married to Ursula February (brother of Basil February who was also a CPSU member and in MK), Elizabeth van der Heyden felt it was unhealthy and "didn't like it at all" that her siblings, both younger than her, were in the underground guerrilla cell for which she was responsible.[483] The closeness in age, the common intellectual and political sensibility, and the shared friendship circles from past organising led to three of the van der Heyden siblings becoming NLF members. While this familiarity made this possible,

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[478] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[479] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.195.
[480] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.63.
[481] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.200.
[482] Ibid.
[483] Ibid.

the lines between family and comrades were blurred in the emerging ensemble in ways that, at least for Elizabeth van der Heyden, were uncomfortable.

Marcus Solomon recalls that he was basically in two cells – the central Cape Town one which was the other original cell, and the Elsies River-Belville cell. The Cape Town cell, was constituted by Marcus Solomon, Achmat Ajam, Brian Landers, Yusuf Lucas, Lionel Davis, and Cyril Jacobs.[484] Yusuf Lucas and Cyril Jacobs had been members of CPSU and Achmat and Lionel Davis had been in APDUSA. Lionel Davis had grown up in a poor family with a single mother in District Six. Different to all the YCCC members, he didn't get the opportunity to finish high school as he was working as a labourer doing a variety of menial jobs. Incidents of police brutality and racist experiences that he and other black co-workers had been subjected to led him to question what was going on in the country:

> So I started going to protest meetings, because I was jumping from one menial job to another, I decided that I needed to educate myself. I knew nothing of education, knew nothing of, I didn't have a role model that could give me guidance, I just decided on my own that okay let me go to night school… at night school I met fellow students who were members of APDUSA.[485]

It was in APDUSA that Lionel Davis met members of YCCC and was later recruited into the NLF, joining the Cape Town cell, by Marcus Solomon. Elsies River was a "Coloured" area about twenty kilometres east of central Cape Town, close to the urban centre of Belville. In addition to Marcus Solomon, the Elsies River-Belville cell consisted of community organisers GorDon Davis Hendricks and Gerald Giose and radical preacher and full-time NLF organiser Don Davis as well as the Belville contingent of the CPSU, who Neville Alexander had approached and recruited, including Frank Musson, August Matsemela, and Ambrose George.[486]

Outside of, but proximate to Cape Town, was Wellington – a small town in the winelands region, roughly 45min drive from Cape Town. Through APDUSA the ensemble had connection with some activists in Wellington. In the YCCC phase, when the ensemble was spreading their ideas around guerrilla warfare to small groups connected to the organisation, Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander had been invited to give a lecture on the revolutionary processes in Algeria and Cuba by activist Dorothy Adams. Adams had been church-going but was "sorely disappointed by the failure of churches to challenge the Group Areas Act" and looking for an organisation in which to get involved, she "became active in the TLSA and APDUSA."[487] As an APDUSA member, through contact with the ensemble, she was drawn to their ideas and plans. Adams became an NLF member and the contact person in Wellington where they didn't have a full cell but constituted a small ensemble made up of two or three other members.[488]

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[484] Ibid.; Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[485] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[486] Interview with Frank Musson, 16 August 2022. Cape Town.
[487] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.196.
[488] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

Further afield, as mentioned, some of the NLF comrades were sent to start cells in areas outside of Cape Town. As Elizabeth van der Heyden mentioned earlier, Xenophon Pitt was deployed to Queenstown where he got a teaching job and started a cell. Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga , as well as the Abrahams' two children at the time – Kenneth (Jr.) and Yvette, left for Namibia in early 1963 to help build SWAPO's presence in the country and carry forward the NLF programme there.[489] They followed Haufiku who had left in late 1962 with the same agenda. Shipanga was one of the first full-time organisers for SWAPO, he went to the north of the country with a commission from the NLF to base himself and investigate the Ovamboland region.[490] He planned to start a small shop, the proceeds of which were intended to fund his organising activities, a venture which the NLF supported financially.[491] This was a strategy originated in the region by Toivo Ya Toivo who started Ondangwa Cash Store in 1958 as an attempt to break the monopoly on businesses of the South West African Native Labour Association, which had the people in a chokehold.[492] Kenneth and Ottilie Abrahams moved to Rehoboth, which was a town roughly one hour south of the capital, Windhoek, where Kenneth worked as the people's doctor and Ottilie often essentially as a nurse in the context where medical infrastructure was extremely limited.[493]

In Johannesburg the NLF was linked closely to an ensemble of activists who, like many members in the YCCC and, like Basil February and James April, had formative political education in the UM but, for reasons related to its seeming incapacity to change gear and respond to the changing conditions in the country, had sought out new political homes. The Johannesburg ensemble included people like Roseinnes Phahle, Ismail Mohamed, Isaiah Lepolesa, Mthutuzeli Mpehle, Claude Noble, Derrick de Jager, Peter Matlhare, and Toughey Markham. They had left the UM largely due to its refusal to engage in and support popular social struggles, in particular, the Alexandra bus boycott of 1957.[494] The abovementioned group got involved in the Alexandra struggle along with a number of other civic and activist groups such as the Movement for Democracy of Content.[495] Roseinnes Phahle, a central figure in that Johannesburg grouping, reflecting on being on the out sides of the UM, writes:

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[489] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[490] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.64.
[491] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[492] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom: The Andreas Shipanga story as told to Sue Armstrong,* (Ashanti: Cape Town, 1989), p.36.
[493] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[494] Phahle, R. "Reminiscences of the Arrest of Fikile Bam & Marcus Solomon in 1963." August 2019. Available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/reminiscences-arrest-fikile-bam-Marcus Solomon-solomon-1963-roseinnes-phahle-august-2019 [accessed on 23 September 2023].
[495] The Movement for a Democracy of Content (MDC) was an organisation with international chapters in north America and West Europe, the cores being New York and London and one of the most active chapters being the Johannesburg one. Marcel van der Linden wrote: "MDC's beginnings were centred around the development of a critique of the limitations of the labour movement as it existed in the 1940s, a departure from a Trotskyist politics and a synthesis between some of Weber's analysis and Murray Bookchin's emerging ideas around anarchism. The tendency produced a journal that put its ideas across and sympathisers and supporters established reading groups to

> Altogether, for the members of the group, the period from 1957 onwards was one in which the group was in search of a political home or a guiding ideology. To that end, de Jager and I travelled to Cape Town during December 1958 to look for and talk to Kenny Jordaan. I followed this visit with another in December 1959 when I met others around Kenneth Abrahams, all of whom were once members of by then the defunct Forum Club. Notable among them were the Marney brothers, Enver Motala and Cardiff. Thereafter, we maintained a relationship with Kenneth Abrahams. He would make annual visits to us in Johannesburg. During the visits we would arrange meetings in which he addressed the contacts we had beyond our group. In 1962, he brought with him Neville Alexander, Cardiff Marney and someone whose name I cannot recall but who emigrated to Canada not long after. I accommodated all of them at my parents' home in Alexandra…
>
> Why were they in Johannesburg? This time the visit was not simply to maintain contact and exchange views about the political situation in the country. Neville Alexander and Fikile, in particular, had come up to Johannesburg [in 1963] to organise underground cells for the National Liberation Front (NLF). Both had contacts in Johannesburg. For the five days they were in Johannesburg, they spent each day and each evening pursuing their contacts and holding meetings with them… Due to my long-standing relationship with Kenneth Abrahams, I was their key contact in Johannesburg, so a stack of the documents was left in my custody when they returned to Cape Town.[496]

Phahle's account highlights a number of practices, groupings and relationships, that were already existing prior to and independent of the NLF, that the NLF became connected to in the process of building the network. He mentions personnel of the defunct Forum Club which was formed by members of FIOSA (Fourth International Organisation of South Africa) after that organisation dissolved in the wake of the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950. Barcuh Hirson wrote that the Forum Club "hosted lectures, and printed transcripts in the journal *Discussion"* and that, after it collapsed, "a succession of discussion groups were formed" but only a few of the grouping remained together after that and there were very few records of their activities following the state of emergency after Sharpeville.[497] From the previous chapter we might recall that Neville Alexander said this grouping, which he identified as belonging to the Fourth International (FI), was very supportive of the YCCC and that, despite having dissenting views on the applicability of guerrilla warfare in SA, they provided them with reading material and assisted with political education. [498] As Phahle's account also shows, this support continued into the NLF phase and was not restricted to the NLF. Jordaan, and the Marney brothers were working together as an ensemble

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engage the new issues and the emerging politics. The South African grouping and their involvement in the Alexandra bus boycotts were probably the whole tendency's greatest achievements in terms of organised struggle." That Johannesburg group included Arthur Magerman, a close associate of Dan Mokonyane, and Deborah and Martin Mabiletsa, the latter of whose allegiance was to the PAC, as well as "Raths" Rathminsamy who was a progressive teacher associated with the Transvaal Indian and Coloured teachers Association (TICTA). van der Linden, M. "The prehistory of post-scarcity anarchism: Josef Weber and the movement for a democracy of content (1947-1964)." *Anarchist Studies,* 9:2, (2001): 127-145.

[496] Phahle, R. "Reminiscences of the Arrest of Fikile Bam & Marcus Solomon in 1963." August 2019. Available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/reminiscences-arrest-fikile-bam-Marcus Solomon-solomon-1963-roseinnes-phahle-august-2019 [accessed on 23 September 2023].

[497] Hirson, B. "The question of class: The writings of Kenneth Abrahams Jordaan." *Searchlight South Africa,* 1:2, (1989): 21-35.

[498] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

of sorts, and they were establishing and maintaining relationships with independent groups of activists in different parts of the country, and building connections between them. This took place through traveling – visiting and hosting comrades in each other's homes and discussing ideas, exchanging views and sharing literature, and there were familial, intellectual and political textures to these relationships. They were facilitating the building of a network of ensembles, and they worked with a non-sectarian ethos, not only within the FI. As mentioned by Phahle, both Fikile Bam and Neville Alexander, had contacts in Johannesburg beyond Phahle's ensemble. But Kenny Jordaan was the connection between the NLF and the ensemble of which Phahle was a part. So it was because of Phahle's relationship with Kenneth Abrahams, that Phahle became trusted as a (or the) central contact for the NLF in Johannesburg. Whether or not he and his ensemble were 'members' or 'contacts' is ambivalent.

Moving away from the big urban centres, other parts of the country – including Bantustans and border regions – were key to the NLF's strategy and they thought it of utmost importance to build a presence within certain areas. Because of the level of development in the Bantustans, they thought that the apartheid government would find it difficult to continually survey and repress the area outside of "one time strikes against the peasant forces that could survive for months on end in those territories."[499] The experience of the Pondoland uprising had shown this to be possible and influenced the NLF to think about the Bantustans not necessarily as sites of offensive military operations themselves, but as sites of possible refuge, to safely hide away and blend into the local population in the wake of operations undertaken elsewhere and in preparation for subsequent ones.[500] The NLF's contacts in the Transkei were spread out and they had not established any cells there although they envisioned establishing one in the first quarter of 1963.[501] In Fikile Bam's report on his reconnaissance mission to the area which appeared in the second issue of *Liberation,* he said that organising there would take a lot of financial and logistical investment from urban cells and NLF activity would depend for the foreseeable future on the level of organisation in the surrounding towns before a presence could be built up: their contacts and members would need to be given the opportunity to travel to other centres to see the NLF's presence and infrastructure as they were working in isolation.[502] The area which is now the Northern Cape, which borders Namibia and Botswana, was the focus of Don Davis ' organising and his attempts to recruit people and build cells. The minutes from the "Executive Meeting" held from 16-18 January 1963 reported that, in the Kimberley-Barkly-West area, according to Davis, two cells had been started and he felt the prospects for expansion were good. As Davis had used his work as a traveling preacher both as a cover and a vehicle for his NLF work, many of the contacts he had in this area were made through

[499] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.65.
[500] Ibid.
[501] National Liberation Front. *Liberation*, vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.5.
[502] National Liberation Front. *Liberation*, vol.1, no.2, April 1963, p7.

church connections.[503] It was also recommended that, in order to consolidate the work to date, someone be sent to the area for at least one month.

UM connections and politics shaped the NLF's possibilities and prospects for contacts in many parts of the country. This was particularly true in parts of the country that none of the members came from. According to Neville Alexander, in Natal, or "Zululand", the NLF had two main contacts. These were Dr Ahmed Ismail Limbada and Gcabashe. Limbada was from the Dundee -Durban UM milieux and the ensemble had contact with him already through the national organisations of the UM such as the APDUSA of which he was a member. "Gcabashe [who] was a teacher – a retired teacher in Zululand and [who] had very, very close contact with the peasantry in Zululand." [504] Allson Drew wrote that Neville Alexander had tried to recruit Kader Hassim, part of the UM and an APDUSA member in Durban, "but his overtures were rejected."[505] One of the other regions in the country that had been a centre of rural struggles – over Bantu Authorities and Rehabilitation Schemes – around that time was Sekhukhuneland. This would have been a key strategic area in which to make contact, build membership and establish cells and a presence for the NLF given their imagined strategy. However, the conditions of their relationship with the UM made this difficult. APDUSA at that time had contact with people in the area and so because the link would have to come through that organisation, the NLF found it difficult and was unable to make direct contact.[506]

The NLF envisioned that having an international presence would be an important in the course of struggle for access to resources and solidarity. In the minutes of the NLF "Conference Committee on Literature, Finance etc." held on 16 January 1963, a recommendation reads as follows: "that a cell be formed in Tanganyika immediately. This cell to be composed of reliable S.W.A.P.O and other contacts."[507] While this cell was never actually formed, despite its de facto existence as a result of Ottilie, Kenneth Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga's arrival in Dar es Salaam after escaping the apartheid police in SWA in late 1963, this shows that they were thinking about building a presence in independent Africa and they understood regimes like Nyerere's as potentially key future allies. That would have given them access to the OAU's African Liberation Committee (ALC), the infrastructure of which was in the process of being established there in 1963.[508] The ALC might have offered the possibility of securing various forms of logistical, training, diplomatic and financial support. Many other African liberation movements were also establishing a presence in Dar es Salaam for exactly this reason so it would have been a context in which to exchange views and build solidarity on a much broader level.

[503] UCTMA BC1538 D5.1 – Trial records of "State versus Neville Alexander and 10 others".
[504] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.64.
[505] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.197.
[506] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.64-65.
[507] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.5.
[508] Yousuf, HS. "The OAU and the African liberation movement." *Pakistan Horizon*, 38:4, (1985): 55-67.

Beyond the continent, they established a cell in Alexander's old stomping ground, Tubingen in Germany. Franz Lee, a comrade and NLF member, had been accepted to study at Tubingen University and he had been instructed to set up a cell there, which he did. This cell was constituted by Lee, Irmgaard Bolle – a close contact of Alexander's from his time in Germany who "represented the section for Africa" in the Socialist German Student Association (SDS) – Aziz Hamad, a progressive student with whom Neville Alexander organised in the Afro-Asian student society during his time in Germany, and a number of other unspecified South Africans who were based there.[509] In addition to assisting with funds, one of this cell's functions was accessing and sending literature that was not possible to get in South Africa. Much of the reading material that the NLF had access to was brought back from Europe by Neville Alexander and it wasn't banned at the time in South Africa but was not available. Some of the literature that the NLF wanted that they didn't have were government publications from Cuba, Algeria, China and Yugoslavia and a subscription to the Quarterly Journal of the Fourth International.[510] After the arrest, this cell played an incredibly important role in initiating international solidarity action. Bolle and Lee were in regular contact with Dimbiti Bisho Alexander, Neville Alexander and Dorothy's mother, and they set up the Alexander Defence Committee (ADC) which raised awareness about the case of the NLF group that was arrested and raised funds for their trial and to support their family members. Beyond the NLF the ADC was significant as it initiated the first anti-apartheid action in Germany.[511]

Difficulties in the attempt to reconstruct the cellular structure and recount the membership of the NLF include its underground character and the passage of time since its period of existence. In a cell of 10 guerrillas, maximum, it was intended that only one member, the cell's founder, was connected to the broader network. In the instance that one cell got uncovered by the repressive state apparatus, this structure would, in theory, limit that to one cell because none of the members were supposed to know anyone else in the organisation. This did not play out entirely to plan, as many in the cells already knew each other, but later when some members of the NLF were arrested, there were many members who were not uncovered or exposed because the structure did in fact protect them. This has had three implications for the writing of this history. Firstly, members who were found out are reluctant to reveal the identities of those who weren't, secondly, members would not necessarily have known other members beyond their cells (even as this was not always the case, particularly in Cape Town), and thirdly, even if they knew them at the time, members don't necessarily remembers others. As every history is incomplete in particular ways, this is one of the present history's incompletions.

With regards to the extent of the NLF's membership, Kenneth Abrahams said that: "Eventually we established a network of 300 people. We had 30 cells of 10 people in each cell… Now this included three

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[509] Dick, AL. "Learning from the Alexander Defence Committee archives." In Choudry, A., and Vally, S. (eds.) *Reflections on knowledge, learning and social movements: History's schools,* (Routledge: London, 2018), p.44-45; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.77.
[510] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.5.
[511] Lee, F. "Correspondence." *International Socialist Review*, vol.25, no.4 (1964), p.98; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.77.

cells located in the SWAPO branch in Cape Town."[512] This is quite likely an overestimation of both the number of cells and the number of people within them and it is the only account that mentions other NLF cells of SWAPO members. Other members, including Neville Alexander and Elizabeth, stated that not all of the cells were fully constituted at ten members, many of them had less than that, some only three.[513] Interestingly however, Fikile Bam made the same estimation as Kenneth Abrahams, suggesting that there was over 300 NLF members at the time of arrest.[514] Neville Alexander recalled that there were never more than 150 members, that it was a widespread network with links and contacts in the mass movements, with most of the recruits coming from the UM, SWAPO and to a lesser extent the PAC. He described the proliferation strategy as follows:

> We were going to continue spreading out like that from one town to the other, making contact with one, two, three people – forming a little cell of 3 – 10 people at most. And in that way we would have a network – a cell structure that would have honey combed as it were throughout the whole country. We concentrated on very specific key strategic areas. And where we didn't establish cells, we made contact with individuals and tried to keep up that contact.[515]

What this highlights is another challenge in historicising the NLF's extent: the ambivalent lines between 'contacts' and 'members'. Perhaps the honey-comb network might more easily be thought about as an emerging network of overlapping ensembles rather than an "organisational structure" in any classical sense of political formation, in which the distinction between contact and member is potentially less important. At the core there is the YCCC an ensemble of comrades – from the CPSU/APDUSA and SWAPO – many of whom are also friends, siblings, spouses and were thinking together about the historical juncture and seeking to intervene in it. These YCCC guerrillas each established new groups by recruiting people they were mostly already linked to. Through the UM this ensemble was connected to other young APDUSA members, some of whom were also previously in the CPSU. They were also connected to ensembles of MK, CPC and PAC comrades, some of whom they shared long associations and political exchanges with and with whom were having critical discussions with about the armed struggle. There was also the church-related ensembles of people Don Davis recruited in Kimberley, Gong-Gong and Barkly-West, and the ensemble of activists in Johannesburg who were disillusioned with and had left the UM, and were looking for a political home. This group included Roseinnes Phahle – the NLF's "key contact in Johannesburg" and linked to both this group and their search, and also closely associated with the YCCC were the FI ensemble including Kenny Jordaan and the Marney brothers, who were never members but were supportive of the NLF, and were already in the familial practice of visiting

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[512] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990*,* p.12.
[513] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.
[514] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[515] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.76.

and hosting comrades, thinking together and sharing ideas and literature and, with a non-sectarian ethos, making connections between various independent activist groups.

The NLF, having been arrested just as it was getting out of the blocks, was very much still in process. Its organisational form and its membership were both emergent and loose. However, a membership of even 150, the lower estimate of its extent, was still a quite remarkable achievement given the conditions. It was constituted largely by a series of ensembles, members and contacts, many of whom were already were already connected through existing political links and structures, others through a history of association as part of a cohort of activists emerging in the late 1950s. This texture, and the concept of ensemble, provides an alternative way into thinking about organisational form. In this sense, the minoritarian history of the NLF is not merely recovering a history, or filling the gaps. It makes a double movement or contribution – the NLF itself enacted an idiosyncratic mode of organising and, within the historiography, the present dissertation makes an intervention in challenging and expanding the grammar and conception of political form.

Emergent practices and contentions in the social life of organising

Because the NLF was independently formed, in the sense of being out-side any broader political formation and without structural links to other parties or organisations, it had to fund raise autonomously for its own activities. They envisioned multiple sources of potential fund raising and this was a function of the cell. Each cell should have a treasurer and they would collect payments and organise activities to raise money for the cells' own costs, any surplus was to be sent to the central finance committee for the NLF's activities and expenses such as paying for the permanent organiser's travels and other commissions.[516] All literature was supposed to be paid for. This included the copies of the key texts by Mao, Che and others – of which the Literature Committee recommended there should be one hundred copies reproduced by June 1963 – and the YCCC pamphlets, of which they had already produced three hundred copies of No. II and No. III.[517] *Liberation* was supposed to be bought for 10c.

Another method of fundraising was through "Cover Organisations" which Neville Alexander referred to as "bogus clubs" and Lionel Davis spoke about fundraising under "pseudo names."[518] These included, for example:

[516] Ibid.
[517] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.2.
[518] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online; UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.76.

> 1. Educational Funds, 2. Youth Organisations, 3. Social Clubs, 4. Sports Clubs. It must be remembered that the form of organisation will vary from area to area, depending on local interests. These cover organisations must be perfectly legal and as far as possible "genuine."[519]

The idea of a "genuine" cover organisation is no doubt a fascinating, and quite amusing contradiction. Allison Drew provides more details:

> They formed the Rover Soccer and Excelsior Table Tennis Clubs and, drawing on their experience on the CPSU's bursary fund and APDUSA's finance committee, in April 1963, they set up the South African Students Bursary & Loan Fund…. Francke was the chair, Landers, the treasurer, and September, the secretary, who circulated funding appeals, organized events, collected monies, paid the expenses, checked the post office box, and signed the paperwork. Alexander was arranging bursaries for South Africans to study at West German universities; the fund was to pay for the students' airfare, as well as subsidize NLF activities.[520]

Other recommended methods for raising funds included various business ventures – laundries, tuck shops, dressmaking, and hairdressing. Another suggestion "raised by the S.W. Africans" was a barbershop. That approach was based on the historical experience of organising and raising funds through an everyday activity - the famous barbershop in Main Road in Sea Point, had been the centre of SWA liberation politics in Cape Town for many years. They also planned to circulate "Collection Lists" which could be "drawn up for a good cause in order to obtain funds from the rich," and, similarly, the overseas cell was expected to start organisations or funds to attract humanitarian and philanthropic capital.[521] Members also dipped deep into their own pockets to make organising work possible. Each "working (earning)" member was expected to pay 2% of their earnings to the NLF but some also went beyond that.[522] The Roneo machine that the YCCC acquired to reproduce literature for the NLF was bought on credit by the Abrahams[523] and Elizabeth van der Heyden actually paid for her own travel and expenses when she went to SWA on an NLF trip in June/July 1963.[524] Their commitment to the struggle, financially, blurred the distinction between organisational and the personal/private.

The organisational and the social were also very entwined in the NLF's fundraising which was a constitutive element of its members' social life. By January 1963, "All funds raised up to [then had] been raised by the Athlone cell, which [had] been in existence for 9 months. These have been raised mainly by means of subscriptions, shows, dances and parties."[525] Elizabeth van der Heyden recalled that they used to organise "bobops" to raise funds. These were parties where people would pay one bob (a shilling in those days) to enter the party and there would be drinks and food for sale and perhaps a raffle. This was a common fund raising strategy at the time and they used it in the CPSU too. Lionel Davis explained how

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[519] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.2.
[520] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.200.
[521] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.3.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[524] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[525] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.5.

the playlist at these "bobops" was a means of raising funds, similar to a jukebox, and how a particular practice was learnt from the Namibian comrades:

> Okay what happens is, it was something that happened in not only Namibia then, but also in Rhodesia then. Now you go to these functions, it was a fundraising and music would be playing okay, popular music, and you then had to bet, if you didn't like the music, you would have to pay a certain amount of money to say 'no I don't want that music, play something else.' Alright, so you then, the operator, the MC, had to switch because the person who requested this particular piece has now been rejected and because more money has come in. So the evening would progress that way, and that was from the Namibians that I learnt this okay, this was their way.[526]

NLF "bobops" served a fundraising purpose as well as being events where members would come and socialise and support the cause by drinking and requesting music, the proceeds from which went into the organisation's coffers. The interface between the logic of their secret structure – cell members only knowing those in their cell – and the sociality of their fundraising activities was somewhat discordant, as it exposed members to each other. Lionel Davis, who did not know many other members at the time that he joined, recalled:

> We then had a number of fundraisings, you know, dances under pseudo names, what do you call it, fundraising functions, inviting people, using pseudo names, this is how we used to raise funds, and occasionally there was a fundraising by the leadership within the YCCC and again, under some false pretence, pseudo name, we would have these functions. And in that way we started meeting others.[527]

Ottilie Abrahams also recalled this flaw in the fundraising tactic where at the events themselves NLF members were the ones selling tickets and organising the event and because they wanted to support their own organisation, other members were attending the "bobops." So a situation arose where "every second person" at the dance was part of the NLF and while this enabled guerrillas to dance, drink and party together, it also compromised the integrity of the cell structure.[528]

As Elizabeth van der Heyden mentioned, it wasn't all smooth going, and a number of contentions emerged in the course of things. One of these concerned a cell taking its own initiative. Neville Alexander recalled that in the first half of 1963 the Gong-Gong group began collecting and storing weapons and dynamite. This was, in their minds, in preparation for future military action. Gong-Gong at the time was a "diamond digging area" where explosives were fairly prevalent and were to get a hold of due to their widespread use in the mining industry.[529] Upon learning of this Kenny Jordaan and Neville Alexander paid them a visit in June 1963 to speak with them about it. The NLF at that point had not made any official preparations for accessing or storing arms, and definitely not using them. They had plans to acquire a farm on which they could do arms and explosives training for members but that had not been

[526] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[527] Ibid.
[528] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[529] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.83.

actualised at that time.[530] Kenny Jordaan and Neville Alexander were concerned that, without any procedures and the correct planning in place, the organisation wasn't prepared for that kind of illegal activity. If they were found out at that stage it would be catastrophic for the network. They informed the Gong-Gong cell that they should desist from collecting arms until such a time when the organisation had a proper plan in place and, presumably, the national committee gave them the go ahead.[531]

Questions of how one conducted themselves, how a guerrilla was expected to behave in the ideal, or aspirational, sense were also sites of friction. For Marcus Solomon this was a very important point especially given the fact that their strategy relied on the fact of becoming trusted by people in the areas in which they were working.

> How do you conduct yourself? A people's soldier, what does it mean, where do you get your support from? Communities? Oh, how do you do that? What is, you can't just go 'I'm gonna have a thing there neh, tonight, bringing people, decide how you're going to help me.' How do you conduct yourself? What's the person you must become? Sober. You can't become a public agitator [if you are not sober].

For him, clearly, alcohol was a key factor in this dynamic. I asked him if there were different positions on the question of alcohol, to which he responded: "No there wasn't different positions, what was different was how people were able to subject themselves to that discipline, because this is a part of the culture. 'Is ons klaar met die guerrilla studies? Okay, gooi it oop!'"[532] As members met in each other's homes and their relationships with each other often included comradeship, friendship, family and other relations, the intellectual and political life of the organisation was part of, not separate to, their shared social lives. So, as Marcus Solomon intimates, a study session could very easily blend into a drinking session. They were both part of the same culture. Some individuals had difficulty "subjecting" themselves and in one instance, alcohol compromised the discipline and reliability of one people's soldier. Neville Alexander, was known to drink heavily, and had gone through intense periods of doing so – such as in Germany once learning about Sharpeville. He went through a phase of drinking heavily whilst in the NLF and it got so bad that he began missing meetings and was failing to fulfil his responsibilities.[533] As a result he was suspended from some of his duties and replaced by Ottilie Abrahams both as the editor of *Liberation* and the representative of the Athlone-Lansdowne cell for a period. While Neville Alexander was undoubtedly a central figure to the NLF, he and his actions were not beyond reproach, and he was held accountable by the culture and actions of the collective. [534] On another occasion in the history of the NLF, alcohol was

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[530] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963; Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962.
[531] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.83.
[532] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town. The last two sentences translate into English roughly as: Are we finished with the guerrilla studies? Okay, throw it open/pour a drink!
[533] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town; van der Heyden, E. Comment at *Neville Alexander Commemorative Conference*, University of Cape Town, 25-26 November 2022.
[534] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front," p.201.

part of a social situation in which the stakes were high and so too was the price paid, this will be engaged later in the chapter.

Other issues emerged in the organising process that stemmed from or, at least, were related to the NLF's inexperience in underground organising. These opened up cracks in their formation that eventually led to the network getting infiltrated and, eventually, incarceration of most of the ensemble. Ottilie Abrahams recalled that she and other members had made a critique of Don's approach to recruitment while he had been traveling. They felt he had been careless and negligent of some of their organising principles such as carefully sussing people out before revealing the existence of the network or sharing any of their literature.[535] It was people that Don Davis recruited in the Kimberley – Gong-Gong area that eventually led to the group's infiltration. But also, there was a contradiction in the NLF's recruitment strategy. Don Davis was sent on his own to recruit in areas where the NLF had no presence whatsoever but the official strategy was that each potential recruit should be screened by at least two other NLF members, so clearly, in the conditions, this was impossible. Either he would have recruited no one or he had to improvise based on the realities.

While no one in the YCCC had any real experience in underground organising, this was not the case across the liberation movement. For example, parts of the ANC, particularly in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, had been developing the M-Plan since the late 1940s. The M-Plan aimed to reorganise the party into a clandestine structure that could sustain itself under conditions of state repression which they, correctly, predicted was on the horizon.[536] Similarly, Raymond Suttner has written about how the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) disbanded in the wake of the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and then reconstituted itself underground as the SACP in 1953. He considers the experience of the Party members more important than the M-Plan in the ANC's transition to underground organising:

> Unlike the SACP with its period of experience up till 1960, the ANC had not made serious preparations for underground. Illegality found it ill-equipped (Shubin 1999:11). The basis on which the ANC organised itself underground was the M-Plan, developed as preparation for underground in the 1950s, but not thoroughly implemented then (Suttner 2003). But successful transition of a mass organisation to an underground one was very complicated. Communists were very active in building the ANC as members of ANC and as an allied underground force (interview with Eric Mtshali 2003).[537]

Due to the close relationship between certain elements of the ANC and the SACP and the overlap of membership across the organisations, comrades from this tradition developed practices and techniques of underground organising prior to the moment that demanded and necessitated their employment. The

[535] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[536] Landau, PS. "The M-Plan: Mandela's Struggle to Reorient the African National Congress." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45:6, (2019): 1073-1091.
[537] Suttner, R. "The (Re-) Constitution of the South African Communist Party as an Underground Organisation." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* 22:1, (2004): 43-68.

PAC was in a difficult place after the majority of their leadership was detained in the wake of Sharpeville, many then went into exile and many others were arrested after Leballo's leak in early 1963.[538]

For the ensemble members who had come out of the UM tradition they basically had no experience in clandestine work or existence. An exception to this was Andreas Shipanga who had multiple experiences of flying under the radar. In a very sophisticated way, he had foiled the police's attempts to uncover and expose SWAPO in Cape Town by convincing the racists that he was 'in fact Coloured' rather than from Ovamboland in the north of SWA. Additionally, in his movements across southern Africa, clandestine border crossings, and assuming of fake identities, he had developed techniques for dealing with the police which the legal lives of the rest of the young ensemble, for the most part, hadn't. [539] Of the YCCC, only Don Davis was older than 26, the rest were younger and, while they were committed activists, and sharp intellectually, as an ensemble, their experience of organising was not particularly broad. While they did have the experience of individual FI members like Kenny Jordaan to draw on, this qualitatively different to SACP's in the sense of breadth of organisational structure and an experienced cadre of underground members.[540] The NLF's own views on organisations and developments within the national liberation movement as they unfolded, as well as their own plans, were published in their official newsletter/paper, *Liberation,* which is where our attention turns next.

Publishing liberation

The NLF was engaged in a practice of analysing unfolding developments that had bearing on the liberation struggle and were engaging ideas and techniques that they thought would assist them in the struggle. *Liberation* was intended to be the tool through which these ideas would be shared with their broader membership and even further afield. Far more than all of the other mentioned genres, what took up the most space in the pages of *Liberation* was the ensemble's engagement with and analysis of the other organisations that, in their estimation, constituted the national liberation movement. The present section considers various dynamics and politics of their practice of analysis and the parameters of their non-sectarianism commitment and orientation.

[538] Kondlo, K. "'In the twilight of the Azanian Revolution,'" p.288-291.
[539] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom.*
[540] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

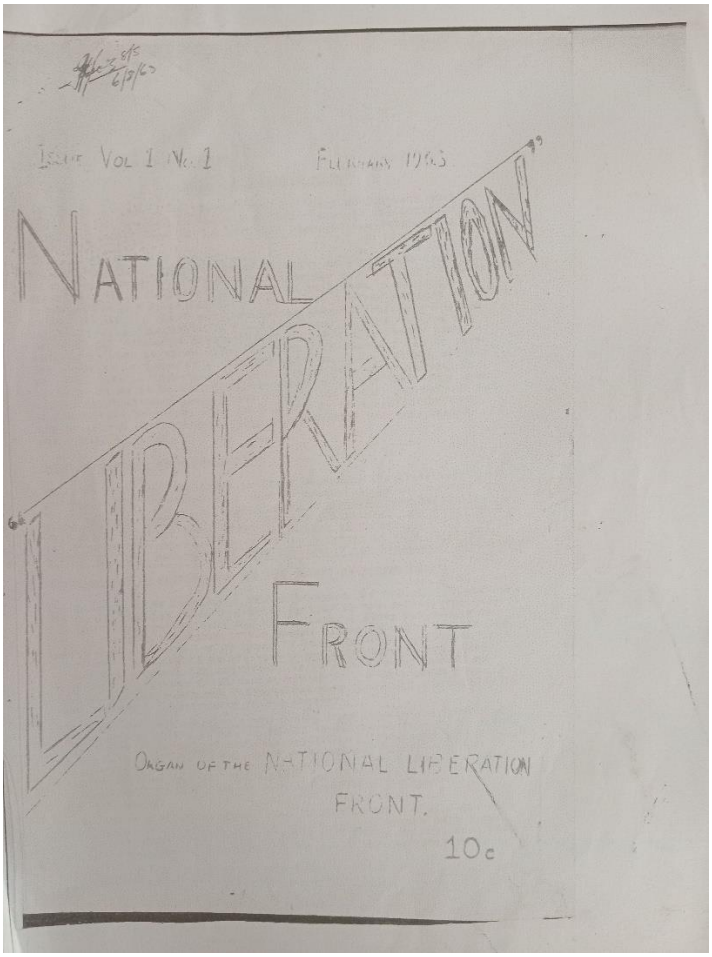


Figure 6. Hand-drawn cover of the first edition of "Liberation", February 1963.

The editorial introduction of the first volume of *Liberation* reads:

> It is with a sense of pride and revolutionary achievement that we introduce our members to this, the first issue of "Liberation", which will henceforth be the official organ of the National Liberation Front (N.L.F.)
>
> The need for an illegal newspaper to serve as a national organiser of the South African Revolution has made the appearance of "Liberation" essential. It is dedicated precisely to this task, i.e. to the organisation and co-ordination of the South African Revolution. While it is, therefore first and foremost an internal bulletin for the information and direction of N.L.F. members, we hope to open its pages to all dedicated revolutionaries inside and outside South Africa.[541]

From this excerpt, one can see that the form and character of *Liberation* is an important source in thinking about the YCCC and the NLF in history. The publication itself represents a key moment in the overlap, transitional and gradual growing over of the YCCC into the NLF, and the first volume, quoted above, was a YCCC production.[542] It was imagined as a central part of their organisational strategy, as they referred to it, itself, as a "national organiser" and implying themselves as "the" co-ordinators of the

[541] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.1.
[542] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.3. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

national Revolution. While the NLF at the time of its existence was in no position to play that role, not having the kind of relationships with the other prominent organisations that would allow it to hold that kind of influence over them, as an organising tool and to lure potential recruits, one can understand the tendency to describe the existence of an underground network in ways that over-emphasise its extent and over-inflate its sense of itself. Indeed they would not be the first to do this in the course of history. *Liberation* captures their aspiration of themselves and their organisation, articulates and projects visions and versions of themselves potentially incommensurate with their actual level of organisation and the influence of their position within the movement, and unapologetically places their revolutionary ambitions on the table. It serves as an archive of some of their conversations, visions, plans and decisions as well as some of their activities that we know about through reports on trips, minutes from meetings etc. Articles in the publication also report on national developments within, or of relevance to the struggle, and crucially, it contains their thought on the 'national liberation movement' and their analysis of the various organisations they understood to constitute it. NLF members' organising and recruitment trips, as well as the paid organiser's travels were primary channels for disseminating literature and the literature itself was conceived as having a key role in political education and introducing recruits to the positions of the network in relation to other the movement.[543]

Another aspect of their plans for political education, and an initiative for which they were fundraising, was the establishment of a school. The school was planned to streamline and, in a more focused way, approach the issue of cadre development. In the May 1963 volume of *Liberation,* the last volume to be published, under "Report on decisions taken by the Interim National Executive", it reads that "The Interim National Executive shall set up a school for organisers." The school would meet weekly and was to be run by NLF officials, representatives from each cell, and members who were going to do work in the "up-country" areas. Its first duty would be to "draw up a curriculum – and to plan its courses" and that "it shall be the function of the cell representative to ensure that his cell receives the benefits of the instructions."[544] There was also a plan to link up with the FI in Europe. It was hoped that they would still come good on the promise they gave to Neville Alexander, which was initially intended for the UM, that they would facilitate military training of members. The NLF imagined that these members would train outside the country and return to share the knowledge and experience gained through the process with the rest of the network .[545] The NLF planned for "an official tour of Europe and Africa [to] be undertaken in June" 1963, and while *Liberation* doesn't include the aims of the trip, one can quite safely speculate that this trip would be aimed at securing relations of support from groups like the FI and supportive governments in Europe and on the continent as this was a common strategy for African liberation movements at the time.

[543] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p16.
[544] National Liberation Front. *Liberation*, vol.1, no.3, May 1963, p.13.
[545] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988.

Regarding members' 'tours' of South Africa and SWA, many of these were not only reported in *Liberation* but these travels and what they learnt on them were used to reflect on their strategy and future organising plans. This indicated a feedback loop of research, publication, reflection and action. When Fikile Bam went to the Transkei to investigate the prospects for future organising in the region, his report was published in the second issue of *Liberation,* which read:

> Because the Transkei is going to be our "primary field of operation", and because of its suitability and potential, the work done thus far must be regarded as grossly inadequate, although it must be added that as much work was done as possible under present circumstances. Success in achieving better results must therefore be sought in the manner of approach we intend using in organising the Transkei. It is not enough for us to rely on individual workers if we mean to make it one of our strongest bases. Because of the conditions prevailing in the Transkei all groups must be prepared to share financially and politically in initiating a vigorous campaign. Because the repressive laws and comparative political and technical inadequacy the Transkei will for a long time be dependent on the cells in the towns. Only after a wide and effective network of contacts has been established will our people there be in a position to extend the work independently…
>
> From time to time our contacts in the Transkei must be made to see and feel our machinery at work along the lines we have put before them. They must themselves travel from time to time from one centre to another of our network. For some time, therefore, the degree of progress in the country will be directly related to and dependent on the degree of development in the towns as far as establishing our own machinery is concerned. [546]

The trip to the Transkei shifted aspects of the NLF's approach. It revealed that the region and the NLF's lack of organisation in it made it unconducive at that point to be its primary field of operations and that altered how they saw the spatial character of the coming struggle and thus their strategy.

Liberation's third issue featured a "Short Report on Activity in S.W. Africa (Ovamboland)." The piece opens with a jaunty passage about an NLF member's recent visit to the region:

> Our member arrived in S.W.A. 28th February. For the first three days of his stay, he was literally flooded with visitors who wanted clarity on certain political issues, viz. S.W. Africa's position in the world, the World Court, U.N.O. etc. These gave him the opportunity to explain the views on the struggle *as we see it in Cape Town.* The presentation of these progressive views was applauded by nearly everyone.[547]

(I highlight "as we see it in Cape Town" for engagement later in the chapter on the NLF's relationship with the SWA and SA.) The slightly sensationalist account of the NLF member's reception in Ovamboland leads into a description of said member's activities during his trip, engagements with elements of SWAPO, an assessment of where the political consciousness of the people was and what the prospects were for future work. Although the report is not attributed to any member, the member in Ovamboland is almost certainly Andreas Shipanga who had been deployed to the region around the same time that the report mentions.

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[546] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.2, April 1963, p.7.
[547] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.3, May 1963, p3. Emphasis added.

A noteworthy element of the report is the brief mention of their "Anti-U.N.O. stand." This was an anti-imperialist position which was informed by their analysis that the interests of the "Imperialist-colonialist controlled monopolies in S.W.A." would control a UNO facilitated independence process and divide the population.[548] This was a radical and minoritarian position in the Namibian liberation movement at the time as the majority of efforts had focused considerable energies on the UNO. On the question of armed insurrection and the population's receptivity to armed methods of struggle, the NLF write that the prominence of the UNO in the SWA national consciousness limits the political imagination of other modes of struggle. Some instances where people have considered using arms are dismissed as "a hangover from the wars of conquest [rather] than a modern solution to the problem of liberation."[549] Assessing the prospects for their own programme, they say:

> We are fortunate, in SWA, not to have to have opposition from other military groups. This advantage should be thoroughly exploited NOW, and the NLF so well consolidated that we will maintain our leadership. By the time (if ever) other groups (Poqo, Umkonto we Sizwe, APDUSA) start to recruit guerrillas in SWA, the NLF should be in a position to stifle any such activity.[550]

This is a highly revealing quote. They wanted to not only influence but control and lead future armed operations in SWA which presents a contradiction: Stifling other guerrilla operations is not the same as coordinating with them. This points again to how they imagined themselves as becoming a vanguard of the armed struggle and the front was a way to achieve a position of dominance and impose their will on it.

In an article titled "Bashee – River Incident," the NLF reported and commented on what Houston, ka Plaatjie and April describe as one of "Poqo's key actions in the early 1960s… the Poqo attack on a group of whites near the Mbashe River bridge in the Transkei on 4 February 1963."[551] The short article briefly discusses the emergence of "Makuluspan"[552], takes a generally pro-Poqo stand – suggesting that the killing was a result of the "ill-treatment of the people in the area by the same men who were killed" – critiques the police and the suggests that Poqo seem to be building up to something substantial in certain areas of the Transkei.[553] In an article titled "P.O.Q.O. (We stand alone), an NLF writer says: "The PAC's criticism of Congress was that the latter was not racialistic enough."[554] This language conceals a very simplistic and reductive portrayal of a complex process and an important critique. The writer seems unable to read the political process of the PAC's split because of a particular interpretation of "non-racialism." Another *Liberation* article says the following regarding the PAC's politics of race:

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[548] Ibid.
[549] Ibid., p9.
[550] Ibid.
[551] Houston, G., ka Plaatjie, T. and April, T. "Military Training and camps of the Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa, 1961-1981." *Historia*, 60:2 (2015), p.33.
[552] Lodge, T. "Poqo and rural resistance in the Transkei, 1960-1965." In *Collected Seminar Papers. Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, vol. 24, (1979): 137-147.
[553] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.2, April 1963, p.6.
[554] National Liberation Front. *Liberation*, vol.1, no.3, May 1963, p.4.

> PAC was anti-white, anti-NAT and pro-African. All that was black was good and its slogan "Africa for the Africans", was interpreted in the narrowest sense possible to exclude all coloureds and Indians and others. (Today a more sophisticated leadership gives a wider meaning to the term "African", namely, "a person of Africa regardless of colour. This is a poor veil which cannot serve to obscure the [rabid] racialism pulsating within PAC.)" [555]

The tone of the passage is harsh and the mode of critique seems to lack a sense of openness that one might imagine as a condition for, or a component of comradeship. The *Liberation* excerpt above seems to accept an overdetermination of the PAC's politics by a particular kind of racialism that can neither be fundamentally altered or re-interpreted in the light of the philosophy of its leadership, which was the official basis of the PAC's programme.[556]

The ensemble's anti-Stalinist roots, many of them having grown up in the UM under the veiled influence of Trotskyists, did not endear them to the Party.[557] They scoffed at the SACP's relationship with Moscow and their invariable support for Khrushchev's "interpretation of policy of Peaceful Co-existence in the Sino-Soviet quarrel about strategy and tactics."[558] In South Africa, their critique of the Alliance was that the Communist Party's Popular Front strategy – "alliance of workers and petty bourgeois radicals with the so-called liberal bourgeoisie of the country" – was opportunist and, while it gained them popularity through their association with the "openly chauvinistic Congress movement" had compromised the workers' struggle. The SACP advocated a class alliance with the liberals at a time when, in the NLF's analysis, it was possible to build independent organisations of the "rural and urban proletariat." 'Independent' in this instance meant free from ruling class influence.[559] They add: "Unlike the NLF, which is fighting for a socialist democracy"[560] the policy of the Congress/SACP bloc "does not go beyond bourgeois democratic demands of the liberals."[561] The NLF themselves conceived themselves building a United Front within the national liberation movement independent of ruling class and liberal influence. In the critique of the Congress Alliance they clarify their own position and the character of a front they are trying to build.

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[555] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.9.
[556] See Sobukwe, RM. "The Opening Address: Delivered by Mangaliso R. Sobukwe at the Africanist Inaugural Convention." In *The basic documents of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania,* (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania: Lusaka, 1965), pp.8-12.
[557] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.8. In the introduction to a their "Report on the Communistic Party and the Congress Alliance" they point readers to Tabata's "brief analysis of their [SACP's] objective political role in the revolutionary struggle" in Tabata, IB. *The awakening of a people*, (Spokesman Books: Nottingham, 1974).
[558] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.8.
[559] Ibid. It is unclear exactly what the NLF is referring to here regarding the SACP's Popular Front strategy, but it is likely a reference to the Colonialism of a Special Type theory which justified the two-stage revolution and the alliance with the ANC. Everatt, D. "Alliance politics of a special type."
[560] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.2, April 1963, p.5.
[561] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.1, February 1963, p.8.

The endings of the beginning

Their outside position in relation to a mass movement and their lack of an existing national character, meant that their existing connections formed the basis of the NLF and, in any areas where they didn't have existing contacts, they had to recruit from scratch and this exposed them to infiltration despite their theoretically very careful approach to recruitment. As it played out, it was in the area that their permanent organiser, Don Davis , was working in, where the NLF didn't have many contacts, that they got infiltrated. Fikile Bam recalled that Don Davis had, unbeknownst, recruited two undercover cops in late 1962, early 1963 into Gong-Gong cell.[562] The Special Branch then got hold of the information and bided their time, and then struck. Neville Alexander doubted that the cops intentionally infiltrated them, that rather it happened by chance. In his recollection, one of the people Don Davis recruited, Kotzee was an ex-cop and separate to that, Kotzee got arrested for diamond smuggling. In a search, the police found YCCC/NLF literature in Kotzee's home and he ended up giving away information and the whole Gong-Gong cell to negotiate his own release.[563] With that information, the Special Branch, over the next few months, infiltrated the NLF not just in Gong-Gong but in Cape Town as well.

Elizabeth van der Heyden reflected on the group's inattention to their own rules that they had developed:

> We had all these wonderful plans of how we are going to vet people when they were going to join. But no one bothered to check on him or this Jeremiah that he brought with us. Jeremiah was a police spy that he [Don] brought to us. And he brought him to the executive you know. So we had everything, all the good rules written down but execution was very very poor. I suppose this was because we were starting and you believe people, you know, even though that was a time when the special branch had spies everywhere, even in the schools, among the students. It was also a time when people were disappearing and you didn't know if they had joined Mkhonto or the special branch had nabbed them.[564]

Lionel Davis also recalled that the "impimpi" (spy) was present at meetings of cell representatives as well as at a fundraising "bobop."

> We had, I remember, Marcus Solomon and I were having what was known as a bob-op at a place in District Six. And the home that we were using, the guy who gave us the space to use was actually working for the cops, he was a police informer. And Marcus Solomon and I, and of course District Six could be rough at times, so after this function this guy, the house owner, was now prepared to escort us to Solomon's home in Walmer Estate but we didn't not trust this guy. He was just too eager to want to, its only later that I discovered that this guy was actually working for the cops, because one night, at the very function at this guy's home, there was another guy there that I knew was a police spy. And ya, I realised this guy was, and of course this guy, the house owner and

[562] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[563] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.22-23.
[564] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.

> this guy were friends. So when he decided to walk us home one of these guys we decided 'uh uh!' This is a bit dangerous so we have to dodge, but you see how inexperienced we were. So the cops got to know about us very early on.[565]

Being known about and infiltrated led to arrest. Don Davis was then the first to get arrested. He got picked up on the 10th or 11th of July 1963 on a fishing boat in Vredendal, a small town on the west coast. Special Branch traced him and tracked him down through Kotzee's information. Don Davis had with him, the addresses of Kenneth Abrahams, Kenny Jordaan, and Dulcie September. On the 12th of July 1963 Dulcie September 's house was raided.[566]

> When they knocked at Dulcie September's place that morning, she had the presence of mind to hide her stuff, she had quite a big bust you know, to hide the stuff here, you know, and tie it under her dressing gown. And so when they searched they found nothing. And then she warned Neville Alexander that they were on their way there. They didn't pay any attention to her. They were all sitting around there drinking coke and brandy. So, and the police came there, they found just about everything there was to be found. Now that sort of carelessness…[567]

Neville Alexander, who had just returned from an organising trip, was with Reginald Francke and Leslie van der Heyden, all teachers at Livingstone High School and NLF members. The three were hanging out at the Alexanders' house, discussing the Rivonia bust which happened a couple of days before and Don Davis' arrest, news of which was brought by Gerald Giose. While they were drinking and discussing, Dulcie September called and said that "Sabina" – a codeword for the Special Branch that had been agreed upon while Neville Alexander had been out of town – had just been to her place and would be coming over to theirs. Neville Alexander recalled: "So we then played the fool on the phone, both Francke and I, as we said oh, well let her come. We'll entertain her when she comes type of thing… For some reason it didn't click with Francke" who had been present in Cape Town and privy to the discussion about "Sabina."[568] In this instance the social life of their politics – organising and drinking together – opened them up. Alexander admitted that they were quite lackadaisical about security.[569] The police then raided the Alexanders' house and found plenty, Elizabeth van der Heyden elaborated:

> Now before we'd left we'd rolled off all sorts of pamphlets and so on to take to wherever we were going. But it was supposed to have been cleared before Neville Alexander left. You know. And it wasn't cleared. And when they came they found everything – the printing machine, the photocopier, everything that we had taken. Plus, and this was the telling thing, plus a list with our names and our code names. Now I ask you, Neville Alexander has a brain that can collect and remember pages of stuff that he has read, huh, why the devil did he need a list

[565] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[566] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.22.
[567] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[568] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.14-15.
[569] Ibid.

> with the code names?! And they just picked up the names you know, they just picked it up, and went round and rounded us up.[570]

Given the fact that they were in enemy territory, Ottilie Abrahams said she always felt like it was a mistake to write things down in the NLF and it was that which enabled the police to link them. Once they'd searched everyone's homes, it was the collection of literature that the individual members had in their possession that was used to connect and incriminate them in the conspiracy to commit sabotage. Neville Alexander said: "That was the badge. You see, that's how the police identified people and members. They found photocopies and other materials which clearly indicates that these people weren't just ordinary acquaintances but were actually members of the NLF, you follow?" [571]

After the Alexanders' house, the Special Branch searched and raided the houses of those Neville Alexander was with – Leslie van der Heyden and Reginald Francke. After a week of keeping Neville Alexander in custody and questioning him, most of the rest of the original YCCC group, and some NLF cadres, that were in Cape Town, got located through address books, their houses raided, and their persons arrested. That included Leslie, Doris and Elizabeth van der Heyden, Dorothy Alexander, Lionel Davis, Gordon Hendricks, and Dulcie September.

Frank Musson was never arrested but was picked up by the Special Branch and interrogated as a result of a security breach. At a regional meeting in Cape Town that he had attended before Don Davis' and Neville Alexander's arrests, someone mistakenly called him by his real name instead of his codename. On information from their rat and information they got out of someone else under interrogation, the Special Branch picked Musson up, who denied any knowledge of what he was being questioned about and eventually they let him go.[572] Fikile Bam managed to escape arrest in Cape Town and spirited himself up to Johannesburg where he linked up with Phahle's group.[573] Marcus Solomon read about Alexander's arrest in the newspaper as he was returning from an organising trip in the Eastern Cape and resultantly was able to return to Cape Town slyly before joining Fikile Bam in Johannesburg. The two of them stayed in hiding until their planned escape which was facilitated by Bam's sister, Brigalia Bam, Winnie Mandela and the questionable character of Brian Somana. On the day of the escape in mid-October 1963, they were arrested on their way out of the country.[574]

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[570] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[571] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.17-18.
[572] Interview with Frank Musson, 16 August 2022. Cape Town.
[573] Phahle, R. "Reminiscences of the Arrest of Fikile Bam & Marcus Solomon in 1963."
[574] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
Johnny Steinberg wrote: "On a Friday morning in mid-October, Winnie's car came to get the two men from their place of hiding. Somana was driving; Winnie was in the passenger seat, both her daughters on her lap. Bam and Solomon got into the back. They were off to meet the people who would smuggle them to Botswana. Minutes into the journey, the car was stopped by police. The officers were purposeful; they made directly for Bam and Solomon, cuffed them, and took them away. The police had clearly been lying in wait. They had taken no interest at all in Brian Somana or Winnie Mandela, not even acknowledging their presence in the car. Word soon swept through activist circles that Somana was working for the police." Steinberg, J. *Winnie and Nelson: Portrait of a marriage,* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2023), p.237.

Organisationally, that spate of arrests spelled the end of the operative phase of the NLF. Neville Alexander reflected: "Our inexperience in conspiracy in secret organisations actually came out during the first major confrontation with the state. And… the organisation was shattered. Because most of the leading lights as it were, were arrested or somehow neutralised."[575] The organisation's secret structure and the principle that members, with the exception of the cell's representative who would link to the regional and national structure, should only know people in their own cell (a principle that was haphazardly stuck to), was a double-edged sword. When it came to their uncovering and arrest at the hands of the state it meant that not all the NLF members were revealed or exposed, but it also meant that it was basically impossible for the remaining members to link up because they did not know each other.

Conclusion

What does the experience of the NLF have to say about this period? While it says something about the repressive might of the apartheid state at that time, more importantly it highlights that the desire to unite existed amongst some quarters in the liberation movement. There were glimpses of that desire in the SAUF in exile, but the texture and orientation of the NLF provides a something else to the tradition of fronts. From an outside position, a group of young radicals, eager to be in step with the march of the movement attempted to build a form that would connect, cohere and facilitate cooperation amongst armed groups. This was based not on convenience, as Lissoni argued the SAUF was,[576] it was an incredibly inconvenient aspiration but one informed by a crucial principle and belief, that most of the ideological differences that existed between tendencies were not antagonistic and that these differences should not prevent collaboration. No other group inside the country had this orientation at the time. MK and *Poqo* were going their own separate ways, with their different social bases and approaches to armed struggle – specialised sabotage and mass insurrection respectively.[577] And certainly none of the South African organisations had invested cadres and resources in building formations in SWA like the NLF did. It thus expanded the repertoire of the national front, stretching it into an inter-national formation. The NLF's mode of organising, the practice and form of overlapping ensembles presents and enacts an intervention into the history of this period, providing an alternative organisational form. The ensemble models an idiosyncratic articulation between the reading group and the front – small ensembles and broad formations of non-sectarianism. This movement, between the reading group and the front is a distinctive characteristic of the ensemble's repertoire.

The arrest and trial of the majority of the original ensemble did three related important things related to the historical memory of the ensemble. First, it solidified the arrested group 'as the YCCC/NLF', even as

[575] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.4. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.20.
[576] Lissoni, A. "The South African liberation movements in exile," p.131.
[577] Lodge, T. "Insurrectionism in South Africa," p.189-190.

not all of them – such as Dulcie September, Gordon, and Lionel Davis – were in actual fact part of the YCCC. Second, the secret cell structure, even as it was haphazardly applied, protected the identities of other NLF recruits. The result of this is that the history of the NLF is largely the history as told by the arrested group, recollected through the memories of the YCCC. Third, it froze the YCCC/NLF in this suspended moment between constitution and proliferation, in an aspirational state. An expansion on the latter point situates the chapter in the broader dissertation in important ways. The experience of the NLF informed and influenced many of the later experiments in which ensemble members were involved. They reflected on the process, built on its repertoire, and nostalgically remembered the experience. The non-sectarian ethos of the NLF and the attempt to build fronts was something that all the members took forward in various ways.

As much as this moment of arrest is the end of the chapter in which the ensemble operates collectively as an ensemble, it is also the beginning of the proliferation of new chapters and directions. In the period immediately following this one, the arrested face trial and are subsequently incarcerated after being found guilty of conspiracy to commit sabotage. Of the accused, the men and the women are imprisoned in separate facilities, and have extremely different experiences in prison. Some of these are explored in "Chapter Five. Interlude on incarceration." The focus of the following chapter, "Inter-nationalism", is on the Namibian contingent's trajectory and their contribution to the Namibian liberation struggle over the next two and a half decades – first inside SWAPO, agitating for democratic reforms within the organisation, and then on the outsides of SWAPO, building various projects and experiments to contribute to the changing movement.

Chapter Four. Inter-nationalism I. Critique inside, experimentation outside: Ensemble members in the Namibian liberation struggle

South Africa (always for our purposes including South West Africa).[578]

The "wisdom of silence"[579]: SWAPO and the Namibian[580] liberation struggle

A number of silences pervade the historiography on the liberation struggle in Namibia. The strategies of this silencing have included the focusing on a few 'key' individuals to the exclusion of others, the co-opting of all resistance into a SWAPO nationalist story, and the ignoring or erasure of both movements outside of SWAPO and those within SWAPO who adopted critical stances and fell foul of its leadership.[581] The memory of the movement is dominated by that of the ruling party, SWAPO. This situation has been produced by a number of factors including its hegemonic position in the liberation movement which was buffered by the OAU and the UN's recognition of SWAPO as the 'sole and authentic' representative of the Namibian people, SWAPO's dominant position in contemporary politics, and, as the ruling party, its orientation to postcolonial 'reconciliation' and history.

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[578] Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. III. Technical and organisational aspects of the Y.C.C.C." c.1962, p.1.
[579] Saul, JS. and Leys, C. "Lubango and After: 'Forgotten History' as Politics in Contemporary Namibia." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29:2, (2003), p.333.
[580] "Namibia/n" presents us with somewhat of an anachronism when speaking historically about the country and/or its people. It was only in 1968 that 'Namibia' became adopted (by the UN at the suggestion of Mburumba Kerina) as the name for occupied SWA and in 1990 that the country officially became the Republic of Namibia. In the liberation movement it became associated with the imagination of a free and independent SWA and thus, anachronism notwithstanding, I use it very intentionally, suggesting that the seeds and indeed the process of national consciousness was well underway. Unless otherwise stated, I use "Namibian" to refer to the movement and the people of South West Africa. See "The Man Who Named Namibia- Mburumba Kerina." *The Namibian* [online], 9 September 2014, Available online at: https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=127811&page=archive-read; [accessed on 12 December 2022].
[581] SWAPO's own version of history, a history intended to legitimize a position of power, is portrayed in these works: Department of Information and Publicity, SWAPO of Nambia. *To be born a nation: The liberation struggle for Namibia,* (Zed Press: London, 1981); Nujoma, S. *Where others wavered: the autobiography of Sam Nujoma*, (Panaf Books: London, 2001). Christopher Saunders suggested that the latter may have been written as a response to the critical history of SWAPO and the Nambian liberation struggle written by Leys and Saul. Saunders said that "Nujoma's book is more a work of propaganda than history. It confirms that the Namibian struggle was fought for national liberation, and that this meant, for Nujoma and others, the accession of SWAPO to power." Saunders, C. "Liberation and democracy. A critical reading of Sam Nujoma's 'Autobiography.'" In Melber, H. (ed.), *Re-examining Liberation in Namibia. Political Culture Since Independence,* (Nordic Africa Institute: Uppsala, 2003), p.88. The Leys and Saul book mentioned is Leys, C. and Saul, JS. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: the two-edged sword,* (Ohio University Press: Ohio, 1995).

One of the major silences that critical historians have amplified has been around the treatment of dissidents in SWAPO-in-exile. Often in collaboration with the repressive state apparatus of host countries, the organisation arrested, detained, tortured and abused its own members who were demanding democratic reforms in the party or protesting their conditions in the camps.[582] The willingness of SWAPO's leadership to use violent techniques on its own membership was particularly, but not exclusively, directed at its non-Owambo members but they were also part of a general approach of how SWAPO dealt with critique.[583]

SWAPO's postcolonial orientation to these skeletons has reproduced these silences and the party has never apologised nor taken any responsibility for any of these horrors. They have not always denied them flat out, but have tended to label the dissidents as spies in order to justify their own actions, which they downplay, as legitimate and common sense.[584] Their silencing of, and unwillingness to engage on these matters has often been couched within a politics of 'national reconciliation' which has been bent on a hollow notion of 'forgiving and forgetting' and a vilification of anyone who attempts to raise them as threatening the country's peace and stability.[585] Leys and Saul wrote that the SWAPO leadership has refused to make their records accessible to the public and that "he leadership's advocacy of the *wisdom of silence* on these matters has tended to be cast in terms of the presumed imperatives of 'reconciliation', but it is argued here that this policy may have at least as much to do with the leadership's seeking to hide the

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[582] Smuts, D. *Death, Detention and Disappearance: A Lawyer's Battle to Hold Power to Account in 1980s Namibia*. (Tafelberg: Cape Town, 2019), p.325; Trewhela, P. *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the exile history of the ANC and SWAPO.* (Jacana Media: Auckland Park, 2009), p.143-144; Williams, CA. "Exile history: an ethnography of the SWAPO camps and the Namibian nation." PhD diss. University of Michigan, (2009).

[583] Martha Akawa wrote: "The process of inclusion and exclusion is also found in the historiography of the SWAPO publications and various pro-SWAPO monographs. There was a general trend of excluding women (and men) who played an important role in SWAPO, but 'fell out of flavour' with SWAPO, after which their contribution was ignored. One example of this tendency is Ottilie Abrahams. She joined SWAPO in 1960 when the party was established. She was part of the team that established the SWAPO branch in Cape town. In January 1963 Ottilie and her husband opened the SWAPO branch in Rehoboth. They recruited members and started a network that sent recruits out of the country through Botswana. After arriving in Dar es Salaam in August 1963 (SWAPO had an office there at the time), they were sent to Kenya the same year to lobby for support. They were suspended from SWAPO in 1964 for raising questions about how funds were being spent." Akawa, M. *The gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle.* (Basler Afrika Bibliographien: Basel, 2014), p.76.

[584] Smuts, D. *Death, Detention and Disappearance,* p.325. Sam Nujoma wrote "I believe that it is in the nature of any war like ours for the enemy to infiltrate the national liberation movement… In the case of Shipanga and the others, we simply asked them to leave because they were interfering with the real struggle. They were going round to the Embassies saying that we were being denied this and that. So I told President Kaunda that we wanted to concentrate on the real enemy and that these people were making disturbances and hindering the struggle against the enemy. The Zambians knew this too, so they just flew them to Tanzania, where they were held in detention. Much was made of this by our enemies, but the numbers were very small. Fewer than a hundred were involved, and the stories spread by some of Shipanga's friends that hundreds and even thousands being detained were simply lies. There was really no uproar at all. The matter did not affect the front area, which was more important, and the armed liberation struggle continued with intensity." Nujoma, S. *Where others wavered*, p.246-247.

[585] See for example: Lister, G. *Comrade Editor. On Life, Journalism and the Birth of Namibia,* (Tafelberg: Cape Town, 2021); Melber, H. "SWAPO is the Nation, and the Nation Is SWAPO": Government and Opposition in a Dominant Party State. The Case of Namibia." In Hulterström, K., Kamete, AY. and Melber H. (eds.), *Political opposition in African countries: the cases of Kenya, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe*, (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet: Uppsala, 2007), pp.61-81; and Du Pisani, A. "Memory politics in" Where Others Wavered. The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma. My Life in SWAPO and my participation in the liberation struggle of Namibia."" *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture,* 1, (2007): 97-107.

blood of the past that it has on its own hands."[586] Jeremy Silvester expanded on these challenges by referring to the lack of a legal framework in Namibia through which citizens can "request access to archival records that concern them", mechanisms that would put the onus on the state to "'explain and thereby justify its retreat to secrecy"'.[587] Further, many documents, such as those related to the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF), remain in South Africa, and "SWAPO's own archives are currently housed in a private, party archive and have not yet been fully catalogued." He suggests that "if the many unwritten histories of the liberation struggle are to emerge, then ways will need to be found to make these major archival collections more accessible to new Namibian historians."[588]

One notable project that has made a crucial intervention in the terrain of archives, of which Ellen Namhila has been at the helm, has been the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS). The project has positioned its intention as "filling the gaps in the archival record" by collecting new oral histories and collating documents associated with the struggle in Namibia.[589] This has been a critically important exercise in producing new archives and has generated new possibilities for the writing of Namibian histories. As Silvester suggests, as one of the problems with much of the existing scholarship is its focus on a few individuals and organisations and its aversion to writing contradiction, the imperative for writing new histories must go beyond merely "filling the gaps". He described the contribution of the edited collection *Re-viewing resistance in Namibian history* and made a call to future historical work as follows:

> As a whole, the chapters present an alternative to a history that focuses on a few individuals at the expense of a wider understanding of the notion of resistance that is more inclusive, by providing regional perspectives in the tradition of 'history from below'. However, it is also hoped that the book will not only write 'forgotten' people into history, but also serve to provide a reading of the past that reflects the tensions and competing identities that pervaded 'the struggle' and created ambiguity regarding those who remained peripheral to it or opposed to it. If readings of the past provide the windows through which society addressed the present, then the ways in which we package the past will be indicative of the way in which we deal with the present.[590]

It is intended that my dissertation in general takes up this kind of orientation – to capture contradiction and contestation through alternative stories in the liberation struggle as part of sustaining a critical culture in the present – and that this chapter makes a particular contribution in that regard within the historiography on the Namibian movement. The chapter also makes a major internationalist contribution

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[586] Emphasis added, Saul, JS. and Leys, C. "Lubango and After," p.333.
[587] Silvester, J. "Introduction: Re-viewing resistance, liberating history." In Silvester, J. (ed.), *Re-viewing resistance in Namibian history*, (University of Namibia Press: Windhoek, 2015), p.3-4. The latter phrase is cited from Richard Callard.
[588] Ibid., 4
[589] Namhila, EN. "Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS): An integrated programme to fill the colonial gaps in the archival record of Namibia.", *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences,* 4:1 & 2, (2015); Namhila, EN. "Challenges of collecting memories of the liberation struggle in Namibia: A legacy of postcolonial archives." *World Library and Information Congress: 73rd IFLA General Conference and Council,* Durban, (2007).
[590] Silvester, J. "Introduction: Re-viewing resistance, liberating history," p.18-19.

in terms of broadening the scope of anti-apartheid activities by highlighting the inter-connections between the South African and Namibian struggles – one of the major contributions of the ensemble. It focuses on minoritarian figures within it – principally the evolving practices and ideas of Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga, members of the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC) and the National Liberation Front (NLF).

These members of the ensemble working in the Namibian liberation movement both in SWA and in exile where they had to navigate the complex dynamics of the African liberation movement infrastructure. Outside of the ensemble, (ex)members, the Abrahams in particular, struggled to constitute consistent ensembles with which to study, plan and act. They encountered organising contexts the dynamics of which were worlds away from the close-knit, critical, intimate and independent spaces of study and struggle that they had become accustomed to in Cape Town. The particularity of the development of Namibian liberation politics between Cape Town in relation to SWA, and ensemble members' place and involvement in that uneven process shaped the dynamics of their later involvement in SWAPO and the leadership's orientation toward them. As Zedekia Ngavirue has argued, SWAPO members in Cape Town had no base in SWA.[591] The ensemble's departure from SWA into exile after getting pursued by the apartheid police disrupted the possibility of shifting that dynamic and building a base in SWA. Once SWAPO established itself in exile, Cape Town became less important, even unimportant as it was disconnected from the organisation's base, and people from Cape Town became dispensable if they dissented. In the upper echelons of SWAPO, which was consolidating its position of dominance in the Namibian liberation movement, their ensemble orientation to critique and a democratic ethos led to Shipanga and the Abrahams all getting dealt with by the leadership through Shipanga's extra-judicial incarceration and the Abrahams' suspension.

After their periods working internal to SWAPO ended through the anti-democratic practices of its leadership, Shipanga and the Abrahams together and separately sought ways of participating in the Namibian liberation struggle from outside its mainstream. This was a struggle in itself and resulted in a range of outcomes and contradictions. Despite this, the Abrahams persisted and remained committed to rethinking, often in the context of the family, and intervening, as they built projects, published a radical journal and later reconnected with (ex)ensemble members in a series of experiments across the borders of SA and SWA. Shipanga entered the collaborationist transitional government on the ticket of SWAPO-Democrats, a project that the Abrahams had also been involved in but jumped ship at the beginning of the 1980s. Their continual experimentation produced a wide range of projects, publications and organisations that sought new ways to organise with people thereby expanding the repertoire of liberatory activities. This history draws on interviews and materials in the Abrahams Family archive to contribute to Ellen Namhila's and AACLRS's call to fill the gaps and the silences by drawing on alternative archives to write alternative histories of the liberation movement. It also responds to Silvester's call to write histories

[591] BAB PA 48 III 6.1. Tony Emmet interview with Zedekia Ngavirue, p.1.

of contestation in the liberation movement, showing the variegated nature of the movement from an outside perspective. Ensemble was a source of dissidence in SWAPO and of experimentation in the broader liberation movement which generated a wide range of projects, activities, approaches and contradictory possibilities.

Cape Town and Namibian liberation politics

From 1915 until 1990 South West Africa was a territory under the administration of South Africa effectively replacing Germany as the colonial power.[592] Under South African colonialism, two of the main routes through which black people from SWA came to SA was as students and as contract labourers: Black people were exploited as workers and, their schooling facilities inside SWA were underdeveloped. [593] In the late 1950s, as the liberation struggles on the continent heated up, many of these students and workers played significant roles in the formation of the two major organisations in the Namibian liberation struggle: SWAPO and the (South West African National Union (SWANU).

One of those people was Andreas Shipanga - born in 1931 and brought up Ovamboland in the north of SWA.[594] His mother taught him to write Oshiwambo in the sand before he went to school and his father passed on an anti-colonial orientation and interpretation of history from his own experience fighting the Germans in 1905. When it didn't compete with his herding duties, shared amongst him and his five siblings, he attended school and came from a Christian family. Major politicising experiences had been his brother's and other young men's return from fighting in WWII which "brought politics into our lives" and reading.[595] Shipanga subscribed to cultural and political South African publications such as *Drum, Advance* and *New Age,* which he said "seemed to be talking sense about racism" and offered an alternative to the gospel preached at church. [596] Shipanga trained to be a teacher and organised his first political action at his teacher training college in a strike for better wages in 1951-52. A few years later, when the Bantu Education Act was getting implemented in SWA in 1955, he along with 64 other teachers resigned in protest, refusing to teach black children to be or accept an inferior position in society. [597] He took the

[592] See Tsokodayi, CJ. *Namibia's independence struggle: The role of the United Nations,* (Xlibris Corporation: Bloomington, 2011).
[593] Cooper, AD. "The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25:1 (1999):121-138; Iijambo, TCK. "State, region, ethnicity and educational inequalities in postcolonial Namibia." PhD diss. Michigan State University, (2002); Amukugo, EM. *Education and politics in Namibia: Past trends and future prospects*, (Gamsburg MacMillan: Windhoek: 1993).
[594] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom: The Andreas Shipanga story as told to Sue Armstrong,* (Ashanti: Cape Town, 1989), p.1.
[595] Ibid., p.9. For the broader impact of the war on Namibia, see: Gordon, RJ. "The Impact of the Second World War on Namibia." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 19:1 (1993), p.147; SWAPO, *To be born a nation,* p.166.
[596] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.12
[597] Ibid. 17 "[T]he Bantu Education Act gave the total control of African education to the state by removing African education from mission schools. These policies were soon to be introduced in Namibia. The legislative measures leading to the extension of Bantu Education and separate development policies are evidenced by

opportunity with two close friends – Nicodemus Ntinda and Matheus – to travel and explore the region.[598] They travelled to Portuguese Angola, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa by skipping the border and assuming fake identities. In these places they were exposed to the varieties of southern African colonial racism and exploitation as well as forms of resistance such as the rallies organised by the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress[599] which impressed them. While working at a bar in a Bulawayo township, Shipanga heard from a colleague about two Namibians in Cape Town – Herman Toivo ya Toivo and Solomon Mifima – who were planning to start a political organisation inspired by the ANC. He started writing to them, discussing issues and eventually, in the interests of advancing the struggle of Namibian people, resolved to go and join them, which he did, arriving in August 1957.[600]

Many Namibians who were working as contract labourers, and many who had escaped their contracts and come clandestinely to Cape Town used to hang out regularly after work to "make the feeling of missing home less", drink and discuss current events in a barbershop run by another exile, Timothy Nangolo, at 35 Somerset Rd in Sea Point.[601] Over time these gatherings took on more and more of a political overtone and the critique of the exploitation of the despised contract labour system developed into an organisational expression. There were the beginnings of the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) which was formed in the same month of Shipanga's arrival. Part of the founding group, which, according to Peter Katjivivi was about two hundred, were Herman Toivo ya Toivo, David Haufiku, Solomon Mifima, Peter Mueshihange, Jackson Kahikuka, Jacob Kuhangua, Maxton Joseph Mutongolume, Shipanga, and many others.[602] Katjivivi further wrote that "Some Namibian students studying in Cape Town were also close to the OPC, in particular Emil Appolus, Jariretundu Kozonguizi and Ottilie Abrahams."[603] While the OPC was predominantly made up of contract workers from Ovamboland it was open to all Nambians and the students mentioned as well at Ottilie Abrahams's siblings – Norah and Charlotte –were some of the early 'non-Owambo' members.[604]

In April 1959, the OPC became the Ovamboland People's Organisation. One of its most prominent members, Sam Nujoma, who began organising contract workers in SWA, wrote that: "Our chief objectives were the end of the South African colonial administration, and the placing of SWA under the UN trusteeship system, but the end of the contract labour system was our first priority."[605] Regarding the

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the passage of the "1954 South West Africa Native Affairs Administration Act." Tjitendero, MP. "Examination of an alternative: a look at the primary and secondary education in Namibia." PhD diss. University of Massachusetts Amherst. (1977), p.38.

[598] Matheus' surname is unspecified in Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.21.

[599] See: Raftopoulos, B. "Nationalism and labour in Salisbury 1953–1965." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 21:1, (1995):79-93; and Day, J. "Southern Rhodesian African nationalists and the 1961 constitution." *The Journal of Modern African Studies,* 7:2, (1969): 221-247.

[600] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.33

[601] Ibid., p.35; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

[602] Katjavivi, PH. *A history of resistance in Namibia,* (James Currey: Oxford, 1988), p.20.

[603] Ibid.

[604] Du Pisani, A. *SWA/Namibia: The politics of continuity and change,* (Johnathan Ball: Johannesburg, 1985), p146.

[605] Nujoma, S. *Where others wavered,* p.54.

change of name, Shipanga recalled that it was in 1959, as the Treason Trial was grinding on, when there was a lot of focus on, and repression of the "Congress" organisations in SA. In this context Shipanga said: "[W]e decided, as a matter of pure survival, to change our name… [from the OPC] to the Ovamboland People's Organisation, or OPO."[606] The matter of the initiative of renaming and launching OPO is contested. Both Nujoma's and SWAPO's biography tend to downplay the origins of the organisation in Cape Town and the latter claims that the OPO was "launched" by Nujoma and Kuhangua in Windhoek.[607] This is basically supported by Zedekia "Zed" Ngavirue, who said on the matter:

> In relation to the wrangle over who started OPO, Ngavirue makes the point that people in Cape Town were isolated from the territory and therefore simply assigned themselves positions in what was essentially a nominal organisation. People like Nujoma and Kuhangua, on the other hand, headed a real organisation in Namibia, ie. they were representatives of someone, not self-appointed leaders.[608]

Ngavirue also wrote that "the founders of the OPO approached the labour question merely as an issue involving their kith and kin."[609] In other words it wasn't a labour organisation per se, even as its primary base was contract workers, the primary issue was the Owambo people, and contract labour happened to be part of their plight. This is a crucial factor pointed out by Ngavirue because it had ramifications for the following decades of struggle. While Cape Town had been the space of the OPC's initial formation and it had an active branch, the real work was being done in SWA and, by the time the OPO was established, the pendulum had swung to SWA. This meant that many of the Cape Town branch of what became SWAPO, particularly the non-Owambo members, didn't have a base or a constituency inside SWA because they had been away for so long and had not done any real organising there.

Students and the genealogy of SWANU

The other grouping mentioned in the beginning of this section was students from SWA. Namibian students first organised themselves into an formation in the early 1950s, the South West Africa Student Body (SWASB), which met mostly during vacations and held critical discussions about politics in Namibia and in South Africa and organised around students' issues, supporting others to further their studies through fundraising.[610] Feeling isolated from broader society as a students' organisation representing such a minute fraction of the Namibian people, SWASB remoulded itself as the South West Africa Progressive

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[606] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom*, p.37.
[607] SWAPO, *To be born a nation,* p.275.
[608] BAB PA 48 III 6.1. Tony Emmet interview with Zedekia Ngavirue, p.1.
[609] Ngavirue, Z. *Political parties and interest groups in South West Africa (Namibia): A study of a plural society (1972), Introduction by Christopher Saunders,*" (P. Schlettwein Publishing: Switzerland, 1997), p.220.
[610] There is not consensus in the literature on the exact date of either SWASB or SWAPA's formation. Katjvitivi suggests SWASB was formed in the early 1950s and SWAPA in 1955; Zed, participant in both formations, suggests SWASB was formed in 1952 and SWAPA in 1958; and Du Pisani suggests the latter was formed between December 1955 and February 1956. Du Pisani, A. *SWA/Namibia: The politics of continuity and change*; Katjavivi, PH. *A history of resistance in Namibia;* Ngavirue, Z. *Political parties and interest groups in South West Africa (Namibia).*

Association (SWAPA) in 1955 in order to influence Namibian society on a broader level. Ottilie Abrahams was the only woman in the leadership of these groups which included people like Uatja Kaukuetu, Werner Mamugwe, and Jariretundu Kozonguizi, who was active in the Fort Hare ANC Youth League.[611] On SWAPA, Katjivivi wrote:

> SWAPA projected itself as a cultural body with a political flavour. Its early projects included organizing cultural functions in Windhoek… [and] captured the imagination of the youth and incipient intelligentsia, particularly in Windhoek. It had support from many different Namibian communities. Some members set up the first black newspaper, a weekly titled *South West News.*[612]

SWAPA felt that the political landscape at that stage was largely dominated by what they considered to be 'tribal-based' affiliations such as the Herero Chiefs' Council (CC) and they debated and discussed the need to move beyond tribal-based politics toward a broader, national, form of political identification.[613] Hand-in-hand with shifting the mode of political identification Kozonguizi recalled that "it was in the many group discussions of SWAPA that the idea of a purely political organization to spearhead the national liberation movement was conceived."[614] Many of the SWAPA members would later go to play a key role in that process, the organising and launch of the (SWANU), the first Namibian political organisation which was national in aspiration, and was intended to be an organisation that would cohere the entire movement into a front-like structure.[615]

SWANU was launched in May 1959 as a front of sorts and its leadership was constituted by members from various organisations in the movement.[616] Katjivivi suggested that this was the first time that the three primary strands of opposition to SA colonialism – which he understood to be the "incipient intelligentsia" represented by SWAPA, the contract workers organized in the OPO, and the Herero Chief's Council under Hosea Kutako which had long been at the forefront of resistance – cohered into a nationalist movement.[617] This first phase of SWANU's existence – as a front of multiple organisations – did not last very long. There were already tensions in SWANU, particularly between the CC and the young nationalists from SWAPA in their respective approaches to political identity and what that implied

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[611] Boesak, H. "Ottilie Abrahams: An Honest and Upright Person." *Pambazuka News*, 14 July 2018. Available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/ottilie-abrahams-honest-and-upright-person-harry-boesak-pambazuka-news-14-july-2018 [accessed on 21 august 2022].
[612] Katjavivi, PH. *A history of resistance in Namibia*, p.30. Interestingly, members of the Unity Movement helped print *South West News,* as no white printer would agree to: "the biggest challenge that the APC [African Publishing Company] had to face at this stage was to find a firm prepared to print a black-run newspaper. We knocked at the doors of each and every printer in Windhoek, but in vain. It was only in the then Union of South Africa that we ultimately found a firm which agreed to print *South West News,* namely, the black-owned Prometheus Printers and Publishers (Pty) Ltd., of East London. The owners of Prometheus Printers were members of the intellectually sophisticated Unity Movement of South Africa." Ngavirue, Z. "Introduction." In Henrichsen, D. (compiled by) *A glance at our Africa: Facsimile reprint of South West News, 1960,* (Basler Afrika Bibliographien: Basel, 1997), p.9.
[613] Ngavirue, Z. *Political parties and interest groups in South West Africa (Namibia),* p.215-218.
[614] BAB PA 48 VI 1.3. Kozonguizi, JF. "A Brief History of the Liberatory Movement in South West Africa," 1961.
[615] Emmett, A. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915–66,* (Basler Afrika Bibliographien: Basel, 1999).
[616] SWAPO. *To be born a nation,* p.174.
[617] Katjavivi, PH. *A history of resistance in Namibia*, p.41.

about the direction, organisation and composition of the movement. These tensions in political outlook took a brief intermission when "co-operation was restored when a United Front was presented on the question of Removal to Katutura."[618]

The Old Location Uprising in 1959 was a major turning point in Namibian liberation politics. It was the first instance in that period where a broad social issue was resisted by a united group of people outside of 'tribal' or partisan affiliations, in a way that cut across both, and other categories and allegiances.[619] The Old Location action, whilst on the one hand offering a working model for a national politics to develop in the context of specific social struggles, on the other hand it re-opened the divisions that were present within the fragile SWANU coalition. The CC drew further away from SWANU, throwing some 'accusations' that they were communists and almost blaming them for the violence of the uprising and the OPO indicated that it was going its own way:

> [T]he OPO changed its name to SWAPO in order to broaden the organization "into a national united front"…[in] *To be Born a Nation,* The SWAPO publication does not, however, discuss the implications this had for national unity as SWANU had originally been constituted as a national organization which included the OPO.[620]

While some SWAPO stalwarts claim that the name change was their commitment to the national programme,[621] what Emmett highlights above however is important. SWANU had already built a national organisation which the OPO had been part of since the beginning so the formation of SWAPO within that context was a rupture of the alliance and signaled the end of the first significant attempt to build a cooperative structure in the Namibian liberation struggle. In this sense it was also an early sign that perhaps SWAPO's leadership had an aversion to the idea of a front and was not seriously interested or committed to any idea or practice of unity outside of its own organisation. This was a very different orientation to that of the ensemble that had constituted themselves in the YCCC/NLF.

Namibia in the ensemble – The ensemble in Namibia

The above section illustrated that it was students and workers from SWA, resident in Cape Town in the late 1950s, who developed their own political organisations. It was these connections, particularly in the case of Ottilie Abrahams and the other Schimming siblings, whose involvement across political spaces, that concretely situated the Namibian liberation struggle within the politics of the YCCC/NLF.As

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[618] Emmett, A. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia.*
[619] Melber, H. "'We will not move from the Old Location to Katutura: Forced Resettlement in Windhoek, South West Africa (1959-1968)." *Historia,* 68: 1, (2023): 54-85.
[620] Emmett, A. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia,* p.321-322.
[621] Ngavirue, Z. *Political parties and interest groups in South West Africa (Namibia)*, p.220; Ya-Otto, J. with Gjerstad, O. and Mercer, M. *Battlefront Namibia: an autobiography,* (Heinemann: London, 1982), p.57.

mentioned in "Proliferation", the ensemble found SWAPO to be the most fertile ground for their ideas and approach. There was also the added advantage (from the NLF's perspective) that no national organisations in Namibia had taken up the armed struggle so they thought that if they acted soon, they could establish a presence in SWA and be in a position of strength to influence the direction of the armed struggle if other elements also eventually went that route.[622] The armed struggle for the ensemble took on another significance as the alternative to an approach that looked to the UNO. The UNO orientation had been the focus of liberation efforts by organisations like the CC for many years and was also taken up by SWAPO and SWANU.[623] This can partly be explained by the role that the UNO and its predecessor in the League of Nations played an in South Africa becoming the coloniser after Germany – they were seen as having responsibility for the situation and the power to be able to do something about it. The ensemble's anti-imperialist critique and the way the situation played out in the Congo,[624] made them critical of the UNO approach and, as discussed in "Chapter Three. Proliferation," saw it as removing the initiative from the Namibian people. They felt that, in order to counter the UNO and move towards launching an armed struggle based on guerrilla warfare in SWA, SWAPO, a young organisation at this stage, needed to be built inside SWA – particularly in the south where it had very little presence at that time. They wanted to do a similar thing that NLF was planning to do in SA – study the landscape, make wide contact across the liberation movement and win people over to their position and approach, build political infrastructures, and recruit people who could join military structures in three to four years.[625] While Ottilie, Andreas Shipanga, David Haufiku and Peter Kaluna were all from SWA, none of them had been organizing there consistently since they'd been in Cape Town. It was a tall ask to move back there and build up SWAPO's base and presence and at the same time establish the NLF at the underground level. As central as SWA was to the NLF's plan it depended on them surmounting incredible challenges. In the best of times it would be hard, slow work and with the apartheid state pursuing them this became impossible.

Marcus Solomon remembered discussions in the ensemble about the relationship between the struggles in SA and in Namibia and how the Namibians in the group said that, while the struggles were interlinked, theirs was also autonomous: It had its own history and had developed its own dynamics. They emphasised that the people of SWA were fighting independently for *liberation from SA's colonial occupation*.[626] This appreciation of the particularity of the Namibian situation also meant that the Namibian struggle was not subsumed or led by, or an appendage to the South African struggle. So, the form of the internationalist commitment was that, while they understood the fate of the oppressed people in each country to be interlinked through their common oppressor in the apartheid state, there was also an

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[622] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.3, May 1963, p.9; SWAPO launched armed struggle in 1966 at Ongulumbashe. SWAPO, *To be born a nation.*
[623] Du Pisani, A. *SWA/Namibia: The politics of continuity and change;* Tsokodayi, CJ. *Namibia's independence struggle: The role of the United Nations.*
[624] Mohan, J. "Ghana, the Congo, and the United Nations." *The Journal of Modern African Studies,* 7:3, (1969): 369-406.
[625] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated, p.87-89.
[626] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

acknowledgement that the form of their oppression was different. The two struggles were relatively autonomous and that the Namibians', had to decide how to respond to their condition of colonialism on their own terms.[627]

Ottilie Abrahams was clear that the person she married would have to go with her to live in Namibia; she felt that she was born to participate in the liberation of Namibia and also had the feeling that she was studying on behalf of her community so whatever relationships she had would have to fit into, and find their place within the struggle.[628] Charlotte and Ottilie's love interests - Marcus Solomon and Kenneth Abrahams – were also members of SWAPO in the early 1960s. [629] While Marcus Solomon's membership fees weren't paid up for very long, for Kenneth Abrahams, the involvement in the Namibian struggle was lifelong. After a long night talking on the mountain in Cape Town, Ottilie Schimming and Kenneth Abrahams decided to get married, which they did and, thereafter, their entire individual and collective lives were tied up in Namibian liberation politics for the next sixty or so years.

Andreas Shipanga said that "In 1963 I was recalled to Namibia to become a fulltime organiser for SWAPO."[630] Prior to relocating, and still afterwards, he had been traveling frequently between Cape Town and SWA. He had been making trips like the one he reported on in the second issue of *Liberation,* discussed in the previous chapter, which came out in April 1963 and detailed meetings that he had had with people in Ovamboland.[631] He also went to Windhoek to discuss with SWAPO cadres there and broached the topic of armed struggle in a veiled way without disclosing the existence of the YCCC/NLF:

> We discussed the shootings of December 1959. I did not want to tell my colleagues about *Yu Chi Chen* [sic] directly, but only to test the ground. I said: "What do you think; can we still call out people out to protest peacefully?" There was a woman at the meeting who answered emphatically: "No. We cannot call people out when they have nothing to defend themselves with." There was an animated discussion, and I asked: "What is to be done?" The same woman answered: "Let us have guns. If you men are not up to it, we women will wage war while you look after the children."[632]

When he wasn't traveling to meet with women and men to discuss the prospects of armed struggle, Shipanga spent most of his time in the north. There he started a store with his brother, the start-up costs to which the NLF made a contribution. The plan was that the store should sustain him financially and

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[627] This vision, and the circumstances of course, were different to, for example, "Aimé Césaire's post – World War II commitment to colonial emancipation without national independence" which sought to decolonise the French empire not through the establishment of separate nation states but "to transform Antillean colonies into French departments and his subsequent attempt to reconstitute France as a federal republic," Wilder, G. "Untimely vision: Aimé Césaire, decolonization, utopia." *Public Culture,* 21:1, (2009), p.104.
[628] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[629] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[630] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.51.
[631] National Liberation Front. *Liberation,* vol.1, no.2, April 1963.
[632] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.51.

give him a cover for his political work.[633] However he also had to look after his mother and her livestock: "It was not easy. I was trying to read my *Yu Chi Chen* [sic] booklet at the same time as watching the herds, and I would clamber on to the top of anthills to get a better view." [634] In addition to running the store, looking after his mother and watching her cattle, Andreas Shipanga spent a lot of time planning and plotting with Toivo who was in Ondangwa and other SWAPO people in the area like Joseph Matthews. In those conditions, "We did not hold political rallies so much as meetings from house to house."[635]

At the beginning of 1963, Andreas Shipanga, after spending some time back in Cape Town with the rest of the ensemble, along with Kenneth and Ottilie Abrahams, and their children – Kenneth (jr.) and Yvette – drove to Rehoboth in SWA "in a little VW Beetle."[636] Rehoboth is a town about an hour's drive south of Windhoek, the capital. The town and its population, the Basters, occupy a fairly unique position within SWA, and in the 1960s they still maintained some forms of independence from the apartheid state and also tended to see themselves as separate from the rest of the black population.[637] When the town was classified as a "Reservation" by the apartheid government and, as a result, "the white Dr Laubscher was compelled to uproot his practice. To fill his place, Kenneth Abrahams was persuaded to establish a practice in Rehoboth."[638] These were the conditions under which the Abrahams came to Rehoboth.

While in Rehoboth the Abrahams busied themselves with work – medical, political and domestic. Kenneth Abrahams, through his work, endeared himself to the people of the region. In the absence of any other medical practitioners and very limited resources, Ottilie Abrahams, also got involved, essentially working as a nurse. They used to treat everyone who needed treatment, working long hours at the Rehoboth practice in the week, and visiting clinics in the outlying areas on weekends where they often stayed until long after dark.[639] Martha Akawa wrote that: "in January 1963 Ottilie and her husband opened the SWAPO branch in Rehoboth." [640] Ottilie Abrahams recalled that this was done at night "under that little bridge that you pass when you leave Rehoboth" with Andreas Shipanga as well as John Ya-Otto – a teacher at an Old Location school in Windhoek and SWAPO's Secretary-General in Windhoek until 1966.[641] Part of their work for SWAPO there was "recruit[ing] members and start[ing] a

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[633] Shipanga recalls that Toivo was the first to do that: "In fact it was Toivo who, in 1958, opened the first black-owned shop in Ovamboland, the Ondangwa Cash Store." Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom*, p.36.
[634] Ibid., p.53.
[635] Ibid.
[636] Ibid. Neville Alexander recalls this taking place in February 1962 but, by all other accounts, he is off by a year. UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.5. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, undated.
[637] Limpricht, C. (ed.). *Rehoboth, Namibia: Past & present,* (Cornelia Limprecht: Windhoek, 2012), p.50; Britz, RG., Lang, H., and Limpricht, C. *A concise history of the Rehoboth Basters until 1990,* (Klaus Hess Publishers: Windhoek, 1999).
[638] Beukes, H. *Long road to liberation: an exiled Namibian activist's perspective*, (Porcupine Press: Johannesburg, 2014), p.165.
[639] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[640] Akawa, M. *The gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle,* p.76.
[641] NAN A679, Dag Henrichsen interview with Ottilie Abrahams, 14 April 1996, p3; neither John Ya-Otto nor Andreas Shipanga mention the formation of the Rehoboth branch in their respective biographies.

network that sent recruits out of the country through Botswana."[642] Kenneth Abrahams recalled that they used the South West Africa Native Labour Association (SWANLA) infrastructure for these operations. Recruits would sign up to work on the mines in South Africa, they would then be flown to Francistown where the planes would stop overnight, at this point, the recruits would escape and join the growing community of SWAPO exiles in Francistown before going on in their journey into study or training.[643] The Abrahams did all this whilst raising their two young children. During their tenure in Rehoboth, their NLF comrade Elizabeth van der Heyden came to Namibia in the June/July school break in 1963 on an organising trip to see how they were getting along, bring messages and meet with other contacts. Although she had planned to, she didn't end up seeing Andreas Shipanga.[644] That would be the last they saw of Elizabeth van der Heyden and any of the South African ensemble members for many years.

The ones who got away

On the 18th of April 1963, the *Cape Argus* ran an article titled "South West Africa move to arrest a doctor" and in it they quoted a telegram sent by the Basters of Rehoboth to Hendrik Verwoerd: "Take notice only medical doctor being arrested. Community satisfied with his services. To prevent bloodshed withdraw his arrest."[645] At this stage the police's gripe was that he entered the country illegally. The people of Rehoboth, satisfied with their doctor, pronounced Kenneth Abrahams a citizen of the semi-autonomous Rehoboth then and there on the stoep of the house.[646] Later, on intelligence gathered by the informer and the arrests of Don Davis, Neville Alexander, Dulcie September and other members of the ensemble from the 10th of July 1963 onwards, the police made repeated attempts to arrest the doctor. Again with assistance from the Baster Raad, the decision-making assembly in the Rehoboth Gebied, Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams foiled these attempts and eventually narrowly escaped.

A meeting of the Baster Raad – the decision-making assembly – collectively resolved that, "if police attempted to enter the Doctor's house the bells of both Rehoboth's churches would be tolled, calling out the people to form a blockade around the house. Any attempt to enter the house would be resisted without regard for bloodshed."[647] The situation that they had planned for, happened. In the early hours of

[642] Akawa, M. *The gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle,* p.76.
[643] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]; although neither the Abrahams or Shipanga are mentioned, Johann Muller writes about this and the other main routes which SWAPO and SWANU recruits took to get out of the country, Muller, JA. *The Inevitable Pipeline into Exile: Botswana's Role in the Namibian Liberation Struggle*, (Basler Afrika Bibliographien: Basel, 2012), p.150-156.
[644] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[645] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "South West Africa move to arrest a doctor", *Cape Argus,* 18 April 1963.
[646] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "No trouble expected at Rehoboth during police talks", *Cape Argus,* 19 July 1963.
[647] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Mounting tension in Rehoboth: Bloodshed warning by 400 yelling Basters", *Cape Times,* 20 July 1963.

the morning, sure enough when the police came to arrest their doctor four hundred Basters surrounded the house and said to the police "if you touch the doctor, there will be blood!"[648] Knowing that the police's gendered imagination considered Kenneth Abrahams to be the revolutionary rather than Ottilie, she made a scene at the front of the house to distract them, and, under the cover of drama, Kenneth Abrahams wriggled away at the back of the house into Barend de Klerk's bakkie and got "'smuggled' out of town to a farm south of Rehoboth – to consider the situation."[649] Ottilie Abrahams then managed to take their two children with her and drove them to the safety of her parents' farm.

The news of the arrest of the ensemble also made it up north to Andreas Shipanga:

> One day in [June] 1963 I was walking into a bookshop when a big headline on a South African newspaper caught my eye: "RED CHINESE CELL DISCOVERED IN CAPE TOWN: Dr Neville Alexander and Elizabeth van der Heyden [den Heever] and others arrested. Search spreading to South West Africa." I bought a copy and hurried to a quiet corner to read it. The *Yu Chi [Chen]* Club had been discovered. In anticipation of just such an event, Levy Nganyone, the publicity secretary of SWAPO in Windhoek, and I worked out a code. I sent him a telegram: "Happy Birthday to you." It meant: "I'm coming."[650]

Andreas Shipanga travelled to Windhoek and, while in a shebeen with Nganyone discussing the situation of Kenneth Abrahams's escape arrest over a drink, the two overheard policemen. They were saying that Kenneth Abrahams was a communist and they were going to get him and that a dispatch had also already been sent to get Andreas Shipanga in Ovamboland.[651] Overhearing this and realising the increasing urgency, Nganyone left to fetch Kenneth Abrahams from the outskirts of Rehoboth and returned to get Andreas Shipanga later.

Ottilie Abrahams left the children – Yvette and Kenneth Abrahams – at her parents' farm and headed for Windhoek where SWAPO would also help organise her escape.[652] She dressed in disguise, as a young Herero woman who had become pregnant against the wishes of her family, and, through a series of precarious, and quite unsafe situations, made it into Bechuanaland. The journey was rough, particularly because she was a woman: Another escaping comrade, in Ottilie Abrahams's words, "tried to make love" to her while the man's wife was sleeping next to her and she recalled being stripped and searched by police at the border.[653] This highlights some of the particular ways in which the gendered terrain of the liberation struggle made for precarious, uncomfortable and dangerous situations for women. Once safely

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[648] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[649] Beukes, H. *Long road to liberation,* p.166; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[650] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.55.
[651] Ibid., p56
[652] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[653] Ibid.

into Bechuanaland, she made her way to Francistown[654] where it was planned that she would be joined by Kenneth Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga. However, to say the very least, they were delayed.

Together with Paul Smit who was a teacher from the Rehoboth area, and Hermanus Beukes, who was active in the Baster Raad and one of the early petitioners for Namibian independence to the UN, Kenneth Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga endured a dramatic and protracted trip to Bechuanaland.[655] After spending a few days in the mountains outside of Rehoboth, the four crossed into Bechuanaland and applied for asylum as political fugitives at the border post.[656] They were given temporary political asylum until the confirmation was granted by the Resident Commissioner of Mafikeng on 7 August.[657] On the 11th of August they managed to secure a ride with a truck driver, Mr Taljaard, who promised to take them from Ghanzi to Lobatsi. It was a promise arrested.[658] Along the way they were held up at gunpoint and waylaid by a mob of brigands – plain-clothed members of the apartheid police – who assaulted Shipanga and Beukes, threatened to shoot Kenneth Abrahams and handcuffed and arrested all four of them.[659] The following day they were transported by van back in to SWA, not crossing at the border but driving over the fence at a point where the it was flattened, to the town of Gobabis where "between 2 and 3 p.m. that day [Kenneth Abrahams] was formally arrested on a charge under the Suppression of Communism Act. The other three men were also arrested at the same time."[660] In Gobabis they were put in jail until they were flown to Cape Town ostensibly to stand trial for sabotage.[661]

Initially the SA state intended to charge Kenneth Abrahams with sabotage as a member of the Yu Chi Chan Club. As soon as Ottilie Abrahams heard that they had been arrested she called her old teacher, UM theoretician Ben Kies to assist in organising their defence, which he did.[662] The state was never actually

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[654] "At a very early stage of the liberation struggle in southern Africa Francistown had already become the main transit centre for refugees and prospective freedom fighters." All of these escapees and exiles together in the same place, with the fresh memory of the fascism of the apartheid state and the urgent quest for freedom on their minds, brought about a particular atmosphere. Many of them were living in the same, packed residence, at The White House – "a reception centre in Francistown for refugees from all neighbouring territories on their way into exile."" Muller, JA. *The Inevitable Pipeline into Exile,* p.81.

[655] Beukes, H. *Long road to liberation*; This incident has also been covered in other works including: Leys, C. and Saul, JS. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: the two-edged sword*; Leys, C. and Brown, S. *Histories of Namibia: Living through the liberation struggle,* Merlin Press: London, 2005); and Muller, JA. *The Inevitable Pipeline into Exile.*

[656] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "'Kidnap' trial may be held in Doctor case." *Cape Times,* 21 August 1963.

[657] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Dr. Abrahams claims he was kidnapped by police: Applies to Supreme Court." *Cape Times,* 20 August 1963.

[658] Ibid.

[659]"[K]idnapped on Sunday, August 11, on a road estimated to be about 100 miles inside the territory of Bechuanaland Protectorate by six White persons, two of whom were members of the South African Police." Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Dr. Abrahams claims he was kidnapped by police: Applies to Supreme Court." *Cape Times,* 20 August 1963.

[660] Ibid.

[661] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "S.A. request on Abrahams was refused." *Cape Argus,* 17 August 1963.

[662] "Abrahams's counsel is Mr. B.M. Kies, instructed by Messers. Buirski, Herbstein and Ipp." Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Abrahams case in court to-day: Full bench for his application." *The Cape Times,* 30 August 1963; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024]. Despite being on

able to bring that charge against him because of the fact that they had kidnapped the group from Bechuanaland which was, at that time, still a British Protectorate.[663] An international campaign for the release of the four was launched[664] with a big role being played by the NLF 's international cell in Germany.[665] Eventually enough pressure was put on the British government who demanded that the apartheid police drop the case and return the four to the place from where they were kidnapped in Bechuanaland.[666] Once Kenneth Abrahams was released at the end of August, the case against Shipanga, Beukes and Smit was also dropped.[667]

Both on the part of the media and the state, one of the many remarkable aspects of this whole situation was the total fixation on Kenneth Abrahams to the point of near invisbilisation of those around him, basically reducing them to his appendages. Kenneth Abrahams was a man, he was highly educated – he was a qualified medical doctor – and was classified as Coloured by the apartheid state. Kenneth Abrahams was seen as the 'big fish',[668] the dangerous communist doctor, and as such, attracted a great deal of attention. The group of four is described in the newspaper in the following way: "Dr. Kenneth Abrahams and his three companions – Paul Smith (31), a Baster teacher of Windhoek, Maans Beukes (51), chairman of the Baster Raad and Zack Andreas Shipanga , an Ovambo."[669] Andreas Shipanga here is referred to as an ethnic/tribal identity while the others, while also only the doctor's companions, have both jobs and apartheid identities. The impact of this is uneven and contradictory – individuals around him were marginalised because of a particular racist, sexist and classist lenses, and/but that marginalisation often brought a degree of protection that ultimately was used to benefit the collective. Andreas Shipanga escaped any and all attention as a potential person (of-interest) in the period from his arrest to their release. Kenneth Abrahams said that: "He was never interrogated about the NLF… I think they had difficulty in pinpointing him… They didn't know Shipanga as Shipanga as NLF organiser in the North, and SWAPO organiser in the North."[670]

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opposite sides of the 1957/58 split in the UM, Ottilie Abrahams and Kenneth Abrahams being Tabataites, there was still evidently a spirit of comradeship in the space between them all.

[663] Muller, JA. *The Inevitable Pipeline into Exile.*

[664] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "South Africa's request on Abrahams was refused," *Cape Argus,* 17 August 1963; Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Abrahams to seek release: Supreme court move today." *Cape Times,* 19 August 1963.

[665] Kenneth Abrahams claimed that the campaign even garnered support from the likes of Mao Tse Tung who mentioned the NLF's plight on Radio Peking. Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].

[666] Ibid.

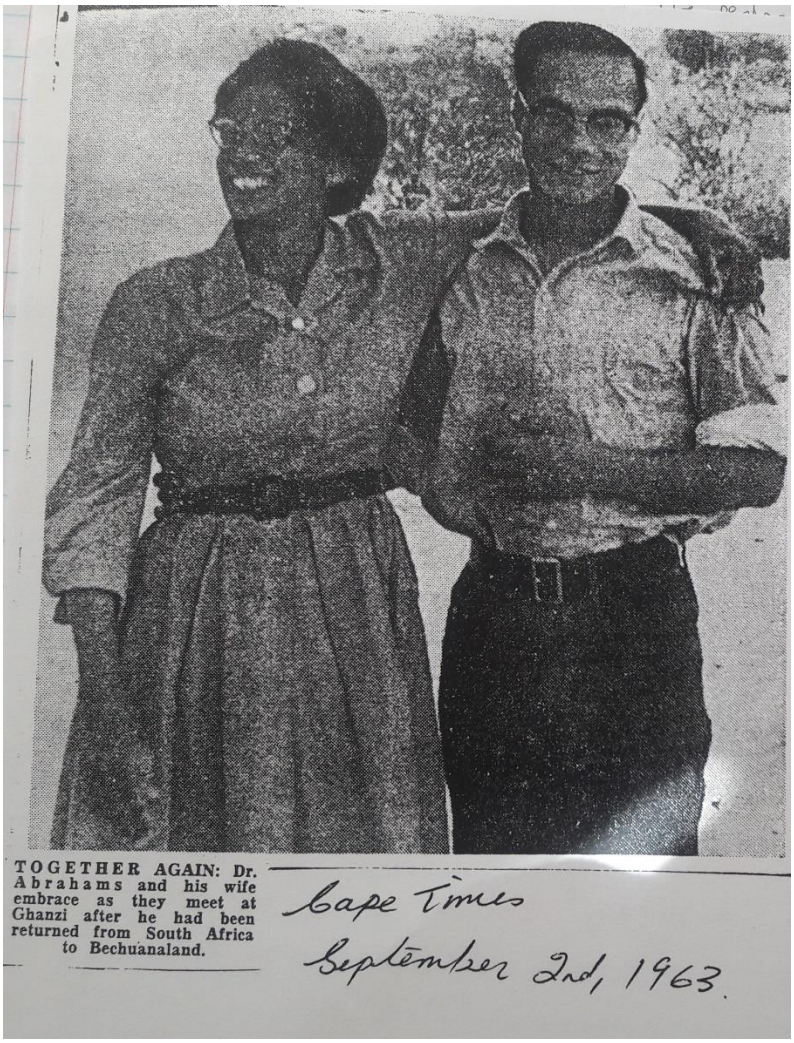
[667] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom*, p.63.

[668] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

[669] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Full story of alleged incidents leading to Abrahams' arrest at Gobabis: Hold-up on road described." *Unknown newspaper article.* circa August 1963.

[670] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].

When the four were released they were driven to Ghanzi in Bechuanaland, where Ottilie Abrahams met them, having been flown in from Francistown.[671] The joyful moment of Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams' reuniting at the airstrip in Ghanzi was photographed by journalist Allister Sparks.[672] Andreas Shipanga said that "Our story was hot news, and journalists and television crews from Britain, SA and elsewhere descended on the town."[673] From Ghanzi they made their way to Francistown and, eventually Ottilie, Andreas Shipanga and Kenneth Abrahams all went to Dar Es Salaam to join the SWAPO executive.


TOGETHER AGAIN: Dr. Abrahams and his wife embrace as they meet at Ghanzi after he had been returned from South Africa to Bechuanaland.

Cape Times
September 2nd, 1963.

Figure 7. Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams reunited in Ghanzi, Bechuanaland. Abrahams family archive - newspaper clippings.

This moment was essentially the end of the operative life of the NLF. While the members continued, both in SWAPO and later outside of it, to pursue a politics that was shaped by their experience in the ensemble, since the possibility of organising on the home front was completely out of the question, there was no prospect for building the NLF in the ways in which they had planned. This introduced a long

[671] Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Mrs. Abrahams Reunited With Her Husband", *Cape Times,* 2 September 1963.
[672] Ibid.; Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[673] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom*, p.65.

period of exile for all of them. For fifteen years they worked in different ways to be involved in and support the Namibian liberation struggle from exile until they could return safely in 1978. The exile context was drastically different to the close relationships of organising and the overlap between social life and politics that they had shared with the rest of the cohort and the ensemble.

Dar es Salaam, exile and the suspension of critique

After a long trip with multiple interesting episodes, detours and delays along the way including a sabotaged plane, a nauseous and light-headed trip with a ganja-smoking truckdriver, a brief sojourn in Congo where they assumed fake identities as UNO delegates, Ottilie Abrahams and her husband Kenneth Abrahams arrived in Dar Es Salaam in September 1963.[674] On their arrival, in the wake of his "fame" as a result of the international campaign for his release, Kenneth gave a press conference where he recalled that he tried to publicise the NLF line.[675] Andreas Shipanga arrived in October and all three became members of the SWAPO executive.[676] Ottilie held the portfolio of Education and Kenneth Abrahams, Health Officer and Andreas Shipanga, after a short stint in Dar, would go to set up the SWAPO office in Congo, in Leopoldville. [677] Others in the Executive included Sam Nujoma, Emil and Putuse Appolus, Ismael van Fortune, Louis Nelengani, and Peter Nanyemba.[678] This period working in an entirely different ensemble highlighted a number of underlying political divergences. Discussions within these leadership structures led to a number of conflicts and tensions in a short space of time.

When they arrived in Dar, the Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga were surprised at the ways in which members of the SWAPO executive were living and spending the organisation's money. They were taking groups of people out for meals at fancy restaurants, buying their girlfriends expensive clothing, and

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[674] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024]. Ottilie Abrahams is never mentioned at all in Sam Nujoma's autobiography and the only point where Kenneth Abrahams is mentioned is here: "A difficult problem occurred in 1963 when Andreas Shipanga, Dr. Kenneth Abrahams, my brother Noah Nujoma and others were stranded in British Bechuanaland. Nujoma goes on to explain how at great financial cost he chartered a plane to get the group to Dar es Salaam. Nujoma, S. *Where others wavered,* p.129.

[675] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]. While that particular intervention is not included in these clips, you can see footage of the Abrahams arriving in Dar es Salaam in the first and Kenneth getting interviewed by the press in the second: "Refugee Dr. Abrahams and wife arrive in Tanganyika (1963)" [online video]. Available at: https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/114721/ [accessed on 12 March 2024]; "South Africa: Dr. Abrahams S.O.F. on "Kidnap" story (1963)" [online video]. Available at: https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/117846/ [accessed on 12 March 2024].

[676] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom*, p.68.

[677] Ibid.; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

[678] BAB PA 48 VI 1.23. Kozonguizi, JF. "Document on the national liberation struggle in South West Africa", July 1964.

paying for their trips to the hair salon, etc.[679] Additionally, while the Abrahams, the Appoluses and Shipanga were living in a house together, most of the rest of the leadership was living in a hotel. Ottilie Abrahams proposed that everyone live together in the house as it would cut down on expenses, saving more money for other party costs. She was informed by Nujoma that, actually, they were staying in the hotels free of charge. The hotel owners had been assured that, after independence in Namibia, they would be repaid with favourable conditions in which to build hotels and/or other businesses.[680] Coming out of the YCCC and NLF and the experience of organising in SWAPO inside SA and SWA, where Kenneth, Ottilie Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga were accustomed to working in serious resource constraints and funding their own political work, these kinds of practices were seen as wasteful and corrupt. Ottilie Abrahams said: "The way I saw it, the money was given for the liberation of Namibia, meanwhile its being spent in the hotels of Dar Es Salaam." [681] They raised the issues of party expenditure frequently but they found that there was very little space to discuss and debate organisational matters in the SWAPO leadership forum. Eventually, from persistent pressure and perhaps as a concession, a committee was established to oversee the party finances. The committee was constituted by Emil and Putuse Appolus, the Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga. While it was agreed to by the executive, Kenneth Abrahams said that it was never properly constituted and the top level of the party never really allowed it to do the job it was supposed to.[682]

Financing liberation struggle activities was a much broader matter in Dar at that time where, under the Nyerere-led Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), the city was becoming the veritable hub of African liberation movements in exile.[683] The infrastructure of organised African nationalism and pan-African struggle, in their multiple tendencies, was forming there. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was formally founded in Addis in May 1963 and its African Liberation Committee (ALC) was being set up in Dar es Salaam.[684] Hilmi Yousuf wrote that: "The emergence of the OAU was a

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[679] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

[680] Ibid.

[681] Ibid.

[682] Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]. Kenneth Abrahams remembers Shipanga as being somewhat 'on the fence' about all of this. The records of the Abrahams' and Shipanga's recollections differ somewhat, not necessarily in a contradictory fashion but in the sense that both Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie, in interviews recall Andreas Shipanga in Dar es Salaam in a number of situations, and in his autobiography, the main source of information about Shipanga's life in this period, he doesn't mention many or any of the same incidents. Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom.*

[683] Burton, E. "Hubs of Decolonization. African Liberation Movements and "Eastern" Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar es Salaam." In Dallywater, L., Saunders, C. and Fonseca, HA. (eds.) *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East': Transnational Activism 1960–1990*, (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin/Boston, 2019), pp. 25-57.

[684] "The Addis Ababa summit conference of the African states in May 1963, resolved to speed up the liberation struggle of the African people who were then under foreign or white domination. To carry out the liberation goal, the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) agreed to establish the African Liberation Committee (ALC)." Yousuf, HS. "The OAU and the African liberation movement," p.55.

compromise between revolutionary and functional schools of thought on African liberation. The working of the ALC reflected this compromise."[685] One of the major 'compromises' in the formation of the OAU was on the form of 'African Unity.' The Monrovian moderates, whose position eventually won out in the debate, argued for maintaining the nation-state borders and polities established by colonialism. They stressed the principle of sovereignty, non-interference and suggested that African unity would best be pursued gradually through trade relations and other forms of bi-lateral and regional cooperation between sovereign states.[686] In the sense that the ALC reflected the compromise of the OAU, the vision and programme it inherited was based on nation-states therefore it supported groups struggling for *national* liberation and independence rather than any other alternative programme. Another tension existed in the ALC around how to support struggling national movements, one perspective was that national organisations should unite, and the other was that a single group or front should be solely recognised.[687] The encouragement for groups to form fronts existed in conflict with the logic of sole authenticity.

SWANLIF (South West African National Liberation Front)

Both internal to SWA and in exile, since the collapse of SWANU as an attempt to cohere the entire liberation movement, sporadic discussions had been taking place, between SWAPO and SWANU on building some form of united structure or front that would do that work.[688] The impetus to form SWANLIF however, came from the national executive committees in the country. On 1 October 1963, representatives from SWANU and SWAPO met in Windhoek and took a decision to move forward with a united front and SWANLIF was launched in the same month after a public meeting on 5 October had been held in Rehoboth which discussed the intention broaden the Front beyond SWANU and SWAPO.[689] Similar to the South African United Front[690], although without the South African organisations, SWANLIF was intended to co-ordinate international awareness work, the accessing and distribution of aid to the movement and collaborate on joint actions. It included: SWANU and SWAPO

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[685] Ibid.
[686] Mohammed, SA. "Organization of African Unity and the African Diplomacy," *Izmir Review of Social Sciences,* 3:1, (2015): 95-108.
[687] Yousuf, HS. "The OAU and the African liberation movement," p.58.
[688] With regards to the external front, in June 1962, Kozonguizi and Nujoma were touring various independent African states to secure support for their struggle. On this trip they had time to sit, discuss and reflect on the political situation at home and consider strategies for the coming years. When they were in Winneba, Ghana, they took an agreement to recommend a form of unity with SWANU and SWAPO. At this stage the form of unity had not been finalized, whether it would be a merger of the two organisations or a united front where they both maintained their own autonomy was left open. BAB PA 48 VI 1.8. Kozonguizi, JF. "Kerina-Getzen and myself", undated.
[689] Emmett, A. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia,* p.325.
[690] Lissoni, A. "The South African liberation movements in exile, c. 1945-1970." PhD diss. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, (2008). Nujoma also wrote that: "We were brought together in a United Front with SWANU and the [South African] ANC and PAC. But internal differences were too great and the ANC and PAC parted company very early on. SWAPO worked with SWANU at the UN and a 'Liberation Front' survived for a brief while." Nujoma, *Where others wavered,* p.123.

as well as the Rehoboth Council, Citizens' Association (Rehoboth), Volks Organisasie van Suid Wes Afrika (VOSWA), and South West Africa United National Independence Organisation (SWAUNIO).[691] Although they were invited, according to Kozonguizi, the CC rejected the idea of the front because they felt their influence would be sidelined or undermined by other constituents.[692]

After the comrades organizing inside SWA had established SWANLIF, they sent word out to the exile leadership in Dar Es Salaam regarding their decision and requesting their ratification of and support for the decision in order to make the necessary logistical arrangements that would enable the front rather than the individual parties to be funded. The SWAPO and SWANU external leadership groups met to discuss the proposal on 22 December 1963 "to formulate recommendations for the external arrangements of the FRONT. The participants were: SWAPO: Sam Nujoma; Dr & Mrs Abrahams; Mr & Mrs Appolus; Ismael van Fortune; SWANU: Jariretundu Kozonguizi; Ruben Ndjarajkana; Moses Katjiuongua." [693] That group collectively accepted the resolutions passed on the home front. Ottilie Abrahams recalled that "Then we met OAU, because we knew what their concept of 'sole authenticity' would do. We asked OAU specifically not to give money either to SWAPO or to SWANU, but to give it to an organization." They were wary of the looming logic of sole authenticity and wanted to assure a structure that would benefit the movement as a whole rather than a single organisation. [694]

A communique by SWAPO Vice-President Louis Nelengani, who missed the meeting where SWANLIF had been proposed and accepted, on 2 January 1964, threw a spanner into the works:

> In my personal capacity as Vice President of SWAPO [I] have rejected all the decisions adopted at that meeting and I have come to the point from where I see that the whole ideas of the front in unexceptable and in therefor nothing more than to undermine the progress we have already put up.
>
> Dear Brothers and Sisters,
>
> Let us be frank in all these talks, *what do we want in this so called front, which we cannot get in SWAPO?*
>
> Look friends,
>
> You people are talking about unity, through the front, a thing which all of you have doubts and fears, why should we keep on talking about unity, if we know that such unity is not genuine?
>
> *I reject this front in all and I am here for SWAPO and All.*
>
> Louis Nelengani[695]

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[691] BAB PA 48 VI 1.2. External Mission of SWANU, "The national liberation struggle in South West Africa; from: Tribal Councils to the South West Africa National Liberation Front", p.6.
[692] BAB PA 48 VI 1.23. Kozonguizi, JF. "Document on the national liberation struggle in South West Africa", July 1964, p.6.
[693] Ibid., p.6.
[694] Sellström, T. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 16 March 1995. Available online: https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/ottilie-abrahams.html [accessed 25 January 2024].
[695] Emphasis added, grammar and spelling kept from original. BAB PA 48 VI 1.23. Kozonguizi, JF. "Document on the national liberation struggle in South West Africa", July 1964, p.7-8.

Nelengani's letter represented an emerging tendency in the SWAPO leadership. In the collective forum in which the proposal had been discussed and debated, SWANLIF was approved. Without bringing the matter to a democratic forum, the initiative was squashed. SWANLIF had a short existence inside SWA for some months as comrades jointly organized a number of rallies under its banner including "the one held in February on the Odendaal Apartheid blueprint for SWA and the latest one in June on the Rivonia Trial."[696] But as Emmett wrote, "The launching of SWANLIF represented the last major attempt to coordinate the efforts of SWAPO and SWANU in the 1960s."[697] Shortly after the aspiration for the front was formed, both the OAU 1964, and the UN two years later, recognised SWAPO as the "sole and authentic representative" of the Namibian people.[698] The ramifications of this was that SWANU lost out on the prospect of receiving aid from OAU because they did not embark on armed struggle. SWANU never really achieved a position of any influence in the period after this as SWAPO's stature and infrastructure was consolidated and solidified in exile.[699] To some catastrophic effects as the SWAPO Crisis of the mid 1970s would reveal a decade later.

Another ending

The failure to launch SWANLIF also broadly coincided with the exile and suspension of critique from the SWAPO executive. Ottilie, Andreas Shipanga, and Kenneth Abrahams's few short months in Dar were filled with attempts to critique emerging practices and structures of power that they didn't agree with. What they found in Dar, in the SWAPO executive, and to an extent the bureaucratic organs of the OAU, was a kind of big man politics that was hostile to critique and being questioned, especially when it was coming from women – Ottilie Abrahams said that Nujoma "couldn't stand the idea of a woman in politics, he thought the place of a woman was in the kitchen… we were a danger to him."[700] Martha Akawa wrote that, while Ottilie Abrahams and Kenneth Abrahams were away in Kenya: "They were suspended from SWAPO in 1964 for raising questions about how funds were being spent," the reason given, without a trial or hearing, was for "disrespecting the leadership."[701] Zedekia Ngavirue wrote the following on an emerging pattern in SWAPO that situated this incident slightly more broadly:

> The Coloureds who, as stated by Nelengani, wanted to join the party were a few professional people opposed to the pro-government policy pursued by their community. They were also people who preferred a broader national identity to ethnic loyalty. At first they were welcomed into the party, and were even co-opted to

[696] Ibid., p.6.
[697] Emmett, A. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia,* p.326.
[698] Dobell, L. *SWAPO's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*, (Basler Afrika Bibliographien: Basel, 1998), p.35.
[699] Ibid.
[700] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[701] Akawa, M. *The gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle*, p.76 & p.49.

> important offices. For example, Ismael Fortune became secretary-general while Paul Smith, Dr and Mrs. K. Abrahams, and a couple of others, either participated in executive decisions or became diplomatic representatives at SWAPO's offices abroad. But, since these people had not been elected to leadership by the migrant labourers upon whom SWAPO was founded, they had no basis of power in the organisation. They were consequently expelled as easily as they were co-opted when they differed with the original leadership.[702]

The Abrahams' distance from the SWAPO base made it easier for the "original leadership" to deal with them. While their comrades back home were embroiled in a political trial, involvement for the ensemble in the Namibian liberation movement was proving to be a struggle. Escaping the apartheid police was dramatic and difficult for the Abrahams, getting expelled for by their own organisation, that they had been working for on a shoestring, for "disrespecting the leadership" without any kind of process was devastating.

The Abrahams family reunited and lived in Zambia until late in 1968. Whilst in Zambia they also spent time with old comrades as a number of UM people including IB Tabata and Jane Gool, John Samuel, Ursula and Alie Fataar, and Livingstone and Zim Mqotsis were also there at that time – some were working, like themselves, in public institutions, others were working for UMSA in exile.[703] In 1968 they were declared Prohibited Immigrants by Kenneth Abrahams Kaunda under the influence of John Vorster. Resultantly, after getting arrested separately, they had to flee again, this time finding asylum in Sweden after failing to secure it in Egypt.[704] It would be a long fourteen years until Shipanga linked up with Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams in Sweden.[705] In Kenneth Abrahams's words, he was "disposed of"[706] in the form of a series of secondments to set up SWAPO offices in sympathetic African countries.[707] About decade later however, Andreas Shipanga, despite his Ovambo roots and the fact that he was connected to a mass base in the organisation, was one of many who experienced the sharp edge of the leadership's methods of dealing with dissidents.

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[702] Ngavirue, Z. *Political parties and interest groups in South West Africa (Namibia)*, p.221.
[703] Interview with John Samuel. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024]; Omar, Y. ""In my stride": A life-history of Alie Fataar, teacher." PhD diss. University of Cape Town, (2015).
[704] "[In 1968] it transpired then that at that period Kaunda was engaging in secret correspondence with Vorster and it did seem that in order to improve his standing with Vorster, Kaunda adopted a rather hostile attitude to South Africans." Haarhoff, D. "The Southern African Setting of Chirundu," *English in Africa,* 13:2, (1986): 41-42; Abrahams family archive – newspaper cuttings. "Police hunt for missing PI-Doctor Abrahams intensifies," *Times of Zambia,* 9 December 1968; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[705] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[706] Ibid.
[707] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom.*

The "Shipanga Rebellion." The SWAPO Crisis

Andreas Shipanga had a very different few years to the Abrahams. He "was sent to Congo-Léopoldville as a representative of SWAPO" for just less than a year, and then played the same role in Cairo until the end of the decade.[708] In these roles Shipanga travelled a great deal, representing SWAPO in a variety of fora. Amongst other trips, he went to Cuba for the Tri-Continental Conference, to Britain to a conference on SWA in Oxford where he addressed the gathering and he travelled all over Scandinavia pushing the SWAPO cause and raising funds for the party.[709] In addition to the traveling, he got married in Egypt, a relationship that didn't last very long, and he also from time to time was responsible for groups of young exiles who were going to study or were on their way to be trained by sympathetic countries in their military camps. In this period, apart from when he had young cadres in his care, he had a lot of autonomy and operated mostly on his own, occasionally meeting other party officials at conferences or if they passed through his city. This period ended with his appointment as SWAPO's Secretary for Information and Publicity for which he initially moved back to Dar es Salaam in 1970 and then moved to Lusaka in 1972.[710]

A few years after Shipanga arrived in Lusaka, by the mid-1970s, SWAPO was in crisis. This crisis was brought about by convergence of international, regional and national political developments that combined to put a strain on the organisation's resources and the lack of democratic culture in its functioning. Regarding the latter point, as Martha Akawa suggested and as the lifelong suspension served on the Abrahams showed, SWAPO dealt with dissidents in undemocratic ways.[711] These tendencies and the methods of dealing with dissent were to worsen drastically in the pressure cooker of the coming decades as SWAPO leaders colluded with independent African host countries to punish its members. The "Kongwa Crisis", when "seven guerrillas ('the Seven Comrades' or 'Chinamen') based at Kongwa in 1968 openly criticized the SWAPO leadership and were detained by the Tanzanian authorities,"[712] was a sign of things to come. Power had become centralised in SWAPO's executive, in particular, in two members – Sam Nujoma and Peter Nanyemba – and their circle. They had begun operating with very little regard for the organisation's constitution and procedures.[713] The processes that were meant to ensure some kind of

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[708] Sellström, T. Interview with Andreas Shipanga . 20 March 1995. Available online: https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/Andreas Shipanga-shipanga.html [accessed on 27 January 2024].
[709] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom.* p.82.
[710] Ibid., p.95.
[711] Akawa, M. *The gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle.*
[712] Williams, CA. "Living in exile: Daily life and international relations at SWAPO's Kongwa Camp." *Kronos,* 37:1, (2011), p.61. In this article Williams goes far beyond the treatment of Kongwa as a crisis, to understand the conditions and processes at the camp much more broadly. For other accounts of the events at Kongwa, see Dobell, L. *SWAPO's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*, p.37-38; Leys, C. and Saul, JS. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: the two-edged sword,* p.43-44; and Trewhela, P. *Inside Quatro,* p.143 & p.189.
[713] "The 1960s also saw the consolidation of Nujoma and his closest associates in positions of virtually unassailable pre-eminence within SWAPO itself, the imprimatur of exclusivity bestowed by first the OAU, and later the UN,

democratic accountability internal to the party – the Central Committee, that was meant to hold the Executive Committee in check, and the Congress, the mass democratic and ostensibly highest decision-making forum of the party – had not been convened. The last congress, which was supposed to happen every five years, was at Tanga in 1968/1969. It would, in fact be, be 21 years until the next Congress was convened.[714]

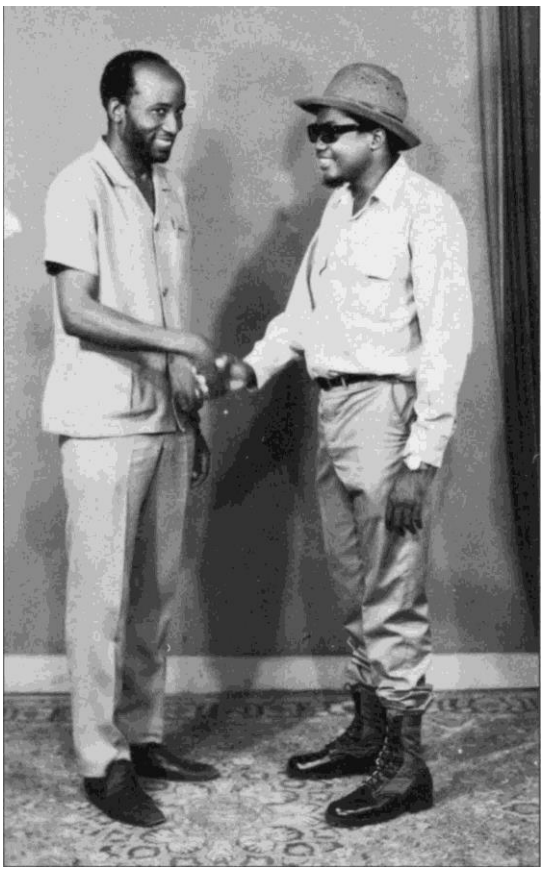


Figure 8. Andreas Shipanga meeting Momateni Kaluenja, SWAPO Youth League leader, Dar es Salaam, 1973. NAN Image 28864.

Since the Tanga Congress the conditions had shifted considerably. Political activity inside SWA had experienced a resurgence as mass popular uprisings led by workers, students and churches proliferated in response to the 1971 International Court of Justice's ruling declaring the South African occupation illegal. [715] On the heels of this upsurge in resistance waged by workers and students against the oppression and exploitation of South African colonialism, the occupying regime was determinedly attempting to implement its plans for grand apartheid. They held elections for Ovamboland to become a 'self-governing' Bantustan for which a hugely successful boycott was waged.[716] The South Africans launched a repressive crackdown on actual and suspected activists. This coincided with the coup in Portugal which

undoubtedly contributing to this development." Leys, C. and Saul, JS. "Liberation without democracy? The SWAPO crisis of 1976." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 20:1, (1994), p.125.

[714] Dobell, L. *SWAPO's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*, p.40.

[715] Ibid.

[716] Mashuna, T. "The 1978 Election in Namibia." In Silvester, J. (ed.) *Re-viewing resistance in Namibian history*, (University of Namibia Press: Windhoek, 2015), pp.178-191.

opened a window at the Angolan border for thousands of young Namibian radicals, many of whom had been involved in the recent struggles, to flee the internal repression and join SWAPO in exile. These youths had experience and energy for struggle and their numbers put pressure on the camps' resources and their militant orientation was a challenge to the established structures of power.[717] The convergence of these changes within the broader regional context of shifty and shifting geopolitical allegiances[718] created a situation in which "all the elements were in place for rebellion."[719]

And that rebellion would come. Contributing to the discontent were the living conditions in the camps which were, both materially and in terms of the general atmosphere, terrible and deteriorating. Conflicts were breaking out between the established leadership structures of the camp infrastructure and the young militants. There were instances of food being withheld as a control mechanism, women combatants were sexually abused by high-ranking officers, and dissidents were detained in holes in the ground – known as dungeons. Others were tortured and some executed.[720] There were reports of medicine and other supplies being sold in Lusaka by SWAPO leaders for their own benefit and that some supplies meant for the camps were actually being sold to UNITA.[721] This collectively contributed to a mass groundswell of discontent amongst SWAPO members; mostly rank-and-file soldiers of the mid-70s cohort who were experiencing the worst of the conditions in the camps. Dobell wrote:

> Matters came to a head in March 1976 – a full year after a heated meeting with SWAPO leaders in Lusaka at which representatives of the SWAPO Youth League formally presented their demand for a congress – when PLAN fighters based in Zambia's Western Province rebelled… The response was swift and furious. In the early hours of 21 April 1976, the Zambian army and the police arrested twenty-seven SWAPO members in Lusaka, of whom eleven – five Executive Members including Shipanga, Mifima and Engombe, and six Youth League activists – considered to be leading the rebellion, were singled out and taken to Nampundwe Camp, where they were detained for two months before being transferred to prisons in Tanzania.[722]

All the "leaders" of the rebellion were denied any proper legal proceeding and were never sentenced in either Zambia and Tanzania. Shipanga described the horror and the violent irony of the situation and the sense of disillusionment and disappointment with not only the party but also of being extra-judicially detained in the land of one of African liberation's brightest lights. Not Yet Uhuru.

> When I set foot in Tanzania for the first time in 1963 my heart sang: "This is the land of *Uhuru.* Here black men are free." Little did I imagine on that happy day that thirteen years later I would be abducted to the same country in shackles.

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[717] Williams, CA. "Exile history."
[718] Anglin, DG. "Zambia and southern African 'Détente.'" *International Journal,* 30:3, (1975): 471-503; Trewhela, P. "The Kissinger/Vorster/Kaunda Détente: Genesis of the SWAPO 'spy drama' – Part I." *Searchlight South Africa,* 2:1, (1990), p.78
[719] Trewhela, "The Kissinger/Vorster/Kaunda Détente," p.81.
[720] Williams, CA. "Exile history."; See also Angula, O. *SWAPO captive: A comrade's experience of betrayal and torture,* (Penguin Random House: Johannesburg, 2018).
[721] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom.*
[722] Dobell, L. *SWAPO's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*, p.48-49.

> This marked the beginning of the most humiliating and bewildering period of my life. I was 45, and for twenty years I had been fighting an unmistakable enemy – white domination of my country, Namibia. Now I was being imprisoned by my brothers in the liberation struggle and the sense of injustice was almost intolerable.
>
> I could not have imagined then that Julius Nyerere, the President of Tanzania, the most outspoken black African critic of Pretoria, would be my gaoler for the next two years. I was never charged with any offence nor brought to trial. But the supreme irony was that one of the reasons for my arrest was that I had called for an intensification of the war by SWAPO against the South Africans, while others in the leadership, for reasons of self-interest, preferred to let the struggle run into the sand.
>
> While our young soldiers died of hunger and sickness in the remote bush camps near the Zambian border with Namibia, some of their leaders in Lusaka were selling food, medicines, arms, and ammunition donated by sympathetic countries to other liberation movements based in Lusaka. Blankets meant for our guerilla forces were sold in the Lusaka townships. While our boys, inadequately armed, were being killed, certain leaders were enjoying the profits from nightclubs they owned in Lusaka.[723]

Largely due to the tireless efforts of Shipanga's wife Esme Matshikiza and an international campaign of awareness-raising by groups like the Abrahams, and others, the group of SWAPO detainees was eventually released. With a sense of relief as well as fierce and tragic irony that took place on African Liberation Day, the 25th of May 1978 – the anniversary of the founding of the OAU.[724]

On the "Shipanga Crisis" Nujoma wrote: "It was a tragedy that some of the Youth Leaguers, when they joined us in exile in Zambia, were led astray by one group of dissidents led by Andreas Shipanga."[725] Shipanga was branded as a spy who had been bought off by western capital and the whole rebellion was supposedly his engineering. Leys and Saul have written that in individualising the naming of the crisis, as the "Shipanga Rebellion," the leadership sought mystify the fact that it was in fact a phenomenon of widespread discontent and instead suggest that there was just one or two bad eggs.[726] As with the Abrahams more than a decade earlier, it was just another episode in the purge of people who refused to toe Nujoma's line, of the difficult ones who asked too many questions. It illuminates the contradictions of the worst excesses of the consolidation of influence and power – sole authenticity – in a single organisation. The gulf growing between SWAPO's leadership and its membership was getting worse. Having monopolised the space for the struggle in exile – being the only movement committed to armed struggle and through that securing the sole authentic status – it posed a dilemma for those dissidents purged from its ranks and others outside of SWAPO. Possibilities in the organisation were almost non-existent for democratic debate and there was no other force in the liberation movement with a significant base in the country or an exile infrastructure comparable to SWAPO's able to seriously contest its policies or strategies. The critical current that had been forged in the experience of ensemble, which initially

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723 Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom*, p.vi.
724 Ibid.
725 Nujoma, S. *Where others wavered,* p.242.
726 Leys, C. and Saul, JS. "Liberation without democracy?"

planned to work in and through SWAPO, now had to experiment with building new spaces within the struggle. This was a difficult process beset with contradictions and while there were moments of collective and collaborative study and struggle, there was never a consistent ensemble.

What can then be said about the ensemble in SWAPO? How does one make sense of the fact that three individuals in positions of high-ranking office who got sidelined and silenced, with varying levels of violence, shared an experience of study and struggle in the ensemble? The YCCC/NLF was a space in which debate and critique of ideas and each others' actions, even the powerful (remember Alexander's suspension due to irresponsible behaviour?), was part of the political culture. They brought that orientation, which was considered to be a constituent part of the ensemble, to a space configured very differently in which that was not welcome.

These people were by no means exceptional for their pursuit of a more progressive and democratic organisation, they were not the only dissidents. Many others were disappeared, many others' stories have been silenced. They were part of a dissident sensibility in SWAPO that was produced by the context in which they were organising and the centralisation of power bestowed by the 'sole authentic' status and the ways in which its leadership reproduced itself as a result, as well as, of course, the fearlessness of the dissidents themselves. The importance of the Abrahams' and Shipanga's experience and reflections is to, like others have done, contribute to the expanding historicization of contestation within the national liberation movement. Their experiences and actions add to the historicising and situating a tradition of dissent and the agitation for democratic reform that took place within SWAPO. Like Leys and Saul, and Christian Williams have shown in their work on contentions within SWAPO, the centralised power in its leadership was contested in various ways by various groups over time.[727] The contribution by Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga to building a critical tradition within SWAPO, however precarious, must also be understood within the trajectory of the ensemble, one of its afterlives of the YCCC/NLF, so to speak. While their contributions within the fold of SWAPO came to an end, their commitment to the struggle did not. From outside of SWAPO they continued experimenting and produced spaces to think and act from to make a contribution to the liberation struggle.

The Namibian Review Group

The UN Security Council's Resolution 435 (hereafter Resolution 435), which declared South Africa's occupation illegal, was announced in 1976 and adopted by the UN 29 September 1978. It called for the withdrawal of South African occupying forces and a transfer of power to the Namibian people. and generated the expectation among many that elections and independence could be as soon as the end of

[727] Ibid.; Williams, CA. "Exile history."

1978.[728] It was in actuality another twelve years of South African swindling, negotiation, transition, struggle, compromise and concession until Namibia achieved flag independence, as Resolution wasn't actually fully implemented by SA. Despite this incomplete implementation, there were some important ramifications at the time it was announced and later adopted by the UN. With the expectation of impending elections and independence, Resolution 435 prompted a rapid reorganisation of Namibian politics.[729]

In 1976, within the feeling of historical time's acceleration and the expectation that independence could come in the next two years, the debate about the future of the SWA felt burning. A group of Namibians in Sweden got together and constituted themselves as The Namibian Review Group (The Group), a non-partisan grouping, to produce a publication called *The Namibian Review: A Journal of South West African Affairs* (*The Namibian Review*).[730] The editorial board, elected by and from The Group included people who held either current and past positions in SWANU - Godfrey Goaseb and Moses Katjiuongua - and SWAPO, Paul Helmuth and Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams the Abrahams, as well as Virimuje Mbuende who worked as a musician and had the role of P-R Officer. Other members of the Group included Tjeripo Ngaringombe, Rebecca Murangi, Bartholomew Tjivukua, Charles Kauraisa, Uatja Kaukuetu, Ulla Helmuth and Ambrose Kandjii.[731] Apart from work-in-progress by myself, and Drs. Koni Benson and Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, this publication has not been written about in the literature on the Namibian liberation struggle.[732] Like the NLF's *Liberation, The Namibian Review* is important as an archive of thought, analysis, and planning and assuch is a valuable source for independent activity in the Namibian liberation struggle. I argue that *The Namibian Review* is significant as it constituted a politicised yet non-partisan intellectual space with a commitment to critique and discussion that enacted and elaborated the kind of comradely contestation that had proven difficult to build and sustain in the exile context of the liberation struggle.

The Group understood their intellectual work – the collective thinking, the editorial approach, writing, undertaking interviews, analysing events, all the work involved in producing and publishing the journal –

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[728] Abrahams, KG. "Editorial: Introducing the "Namibian Review." *The Namibian Review,* Number 1, (1976), p.1; "Document Retrieval: Security Council Resolution 435 (1978): Namibia." United Nations Peacemaker. Available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/namibia-resolution435 [accessed on 30 January 2023].

[729] Conditions inside Namibia gave the illusion of becoming less repressive but the South African Defence Force (SADF) continued and intensified its military campaigns against SWAPO's camps and Namibian exiles in them. Under the pretence of preparing for elections, the Administrator General (AG), appointed by the South African regime, repealed some apartheid legislation – such as the prevention of gathering and the prohibition of certain individuals attending gatherings – that was seen to hinder the process of a free and fair election campaign only to pass new anti-democratic legislation that was justified as it would ensure "public safety" in the campaigning and election process. Heywood, A. *The CASSINGA event: An investigation of the records,* (Archeia 18: Windhoek, 1996); Mashuna, T. "The 1978 Election in Namibia."; SWAPO. *To be born a nation,* p.246-248.

[730] Abrahams, KG. "Editorial: Introducing the "Namibian Review." *The Namibian Review,* Number 1, (1976), p.1.

[731] The Namibian Review Group, *The Namibian Review,* Number 1, 1976.

[732] Benson, K., Gamedze, A. and Mushaandja, N. "The Namibian Review: a journal of contemporary South West Africa/Namibia, 1976-85." *8th Namibia Research day colloquium,* 2 October 2021; and Benson, K., Gamedze, A. and Mushaandja, N. "Mapping the social lives of The Namibian Review." *Radical History Review,* (forthcoming, 2024).

as a stake and a weapon in the national liberation struggle. Their commitment was to "provide a forum for debate and an arena where conflicting opinions may clash" and "to the establishment of the broadest possible united front against foreign domination." From its outset it claimed to be "an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, anti-racist publication, constituting a platform for the distribution of revolutionary ideas… [and] dedicate[d]… to the concept of a single united nation and economic as well as political independence."[733] The ethos and orientation of *The Namibian Review* was thus the transposition of the politics of a front – collaboration across different political tendencies – into the form of an independently produced and funded publication. With the limitations for democratic organising in exile, for the Abrahams, *The Namibian Review* took on a significance as a replacement of that space as the space of or approximation of ensemble.

Reviewing the pages: Analysis, reporting and contestation

On the pages of *The Namibian Review* all aspects of Namibian society – economy, gender, race, politics, nationalism, community initiatives, poverty, education, history, colonialism, The UN, etc. – were opened up in the form of interviews, criticism, editorials, poems, position papers, analysis, letters to the editor, reports, etc., while the struggle was heating up. Its articles were produced by people in the Group as well as people who posted letters and submissions.

The second issue ran an article written by Kenneth Abrahams titled "Shipanga in the African Gulag," which exposed the horrors that SWAPO detainees were experiencing.[734] Numbers 3 and 4 also featured articles on the SWAPO crisis: "Letter to Sam Nujoma of SWAPO" by a group of SWAPO members resident in Kenya at the time, the spokesman of which was Peter Shitongeni Shakumu who was at the time the SWAPO Chief Representative in East Africa, and "Namibian Detainees: The Tan-Zam Thousand" by Nikodemus Muundjua.[735] These and other pieces exposed the atrocities and the crisis in real time. [736] Many other groups were reluctant to as many thought that the stories were right-wing

[733] "The Constitution of the Namibian Review Group." *The Namibian Review,* Number 1, (1976), p.5-6.
[734] The Namibian Review Group, *The Namibian Review,* Number 2, 1977.
[735] The Namibian Review Group, *The Namibian Review,* Number 3 and Number 4, 1977.
[736] "[I]n December 1973 SWAPO scored a long-awaited diplomatic coup when it was recognised as the "authentic representative of the Namibian people" with all its attendant privileges – by the General Assembly of the United Nations." Dobell, L. *SWAPO's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means*, p.42. For the effects of the 'sole and authentic' designation on SWAPO itself, see also Leys, C. and Saul, JS. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: the two-edged sword*; and Ottilie Abrahams' critique of the concept as it manifest in the Namibian liberation struggle: Sellström, T. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 16 March 1995. Available online: https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/ottilie-abrahams.html [accessed 25 January 2024].
Both Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams asserted that *The Namibian Review's* coverage of the atrocities in the camps was the first public exposure. I have not been able to independently verify this.
Matsemela, A. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. 6 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104408 [accessed 25 January 2024]; Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

propaganda and felt that taking a critical stance in relation to SWAPO as the internationally recognised sole and authentic representative of the Namibian was to take a stand against the national liberation movement as a whole.[737] It was only from the mid-1980s and post-independence that the critique gathered momentum and became more widely publicised and spoken about.[738] This critique of SWAPO was an expression of *The Namibian Review's* commitment to debate in the pursuit of building capacities for democratic participation in an independent society. The Abrahams had experienced repression at the hands of Kaunda, and Shipanga was experiencing it at the hands of Nyerere, they understood that abuses of power were part of the repertoire of post-colonial regimes.

Developments in the country often either featured in issues or guided the framing of issues in the editorials or introductory articles as writers considered the importance of certain events within the situation of the broader struggle and adjusted the publishing schedule according to what felt urgent.[739] When Clemens Kapuuo was assassinated on 27 March 1978, The Group published 'Number 10' as a 'Special Issue' about Kapuuo's history in/and Herero politics in the liberation struggle, his assassination and how it all fit into the present juncture. 'Number 10' closed with editorial notes explaining the delay in publishing schedule due to Kapuuo's assassination and explained the next issue would come out the following month and describes some of the contents.[740] Their publishing schedule was thus flexible, attentive and sensitive to what was unfolding in the present moment – they were open to developments shifting their timelines.

The Namibian Review made space for and unapologetically published differences, disagreements and contending positions on various matters. An example is a series of articles that got published in the early issues on SWAPO's policy. "Number 4" published an article titled ""SWAPO of Namibia" Has No Policy" by Godfrey Goaseb and Moses Katjiuongua, a critical analysis of a recent SWAPO Political Programme. The authors critique SWAPO and the sole and authentic title conferred by the UN and the OAU, its adherence to a politics of tribalism, plagiarism of SWANU's ideas and an inconsistency between the programme and their constitution, and an incoherence in some of their positions with regards to espousing a phony socialism: "Will not Marx and Engels – the founders of scientific socialism – rise from their graves to come and learn from SWAPO's 'pioneering' discovery in being the first in human history to build a "classless society" and "socialism" on the basis of private property?"[741] To this biting and quite

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[737] Harry Boesak told me that his Marxist grouping in Namibia was connected to WILSA – Workers' International League of South Africa – a South African Trotskyist formation in the 1980s who they broke with partly over this issue: WILSA wanted to stop the Namibians expressing solidarity with the detained or a public critique of SWAPO as they were concerned that the apartheid regime and its allies would use that against the liberation movement as a whole. Interview with Shaun Whittaker and Harry Boesak. 29 July 2021. Windhoek.

[738] Angula, O. *SWAPO captive: A comrade's experience of betrayal and torture;* Leys, C. and Saul, JS. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: the two-edged sword;* Smuts, D. *Death, Detention and Disappearance*; Trewhela, P. *Inside Quatro*; Williams, CA. "Exile history."

[739] See for example: Abrahams, KG. "Editorial: Unite or Perish." *The Namibian Review,* Number 4, (1977), p.1-2; and Shilongo, T. ""Namibia Day" violence." *The Namibian Review,* Number 6, (1977), p.1-2.

[740] The Swedish-Namibian Association, *The Namibian Review,* Number 10, (1978).

[741] Goaseb, G. and Katjiuongua, M. ""SWAPO of Namibia" Has No Policy." *The Namibian Review,* Number 4, (1977), p.7.

amusing critique, a certain Tiy M. Kanyamukulua responded said "that they should check their spears before they throw them to the enemy," told them that they had been away from Namibia too long and were out of touch with the reading capabilities of the people, and that their article was both "difficult to follow, and does not make sense at all."[742] To this, the initial authors responded in the following issue, still in a snarky register but also stating that they appreciate constructive feedback and will consider their writing style to reach more people in future.[743] This, just one of many engagements that went back and forth between people who disagreed on various matters, was the political content of *The Namibian Review* – its commitment to provide a space for people united against colonialism, to exchange conflicting views. As Jeremy Silvester argued, the objective in writing these histories is not merely to fill gaps, but that what was happening in those gaps can provide an alternative perspective to the liberation movement and highlight various tensions that existed.[744] The history of *The Namibian Review* does this in its own idiosyncratic way, it highlights a tendency in the liberation movement that itself was committed to exactly this goal that Silvester refers to and in that sense it was a prefiguration of that critical ethos.

Reviewing the labour: The Group and the Abrahams family

From September 1977, The Group "expanded its range of activities and has formally been converted into the SWEDISH-NAMIBIAN ASSOCIATION," (The Association).[745] The Association's activities included producing and publishing the journal, and they branched into political work in Sweden disseminating knowledge to build consciousness and awareness of the struggle, and building networks of solidarity to support it supporting the struggle. One public event that they organised was held on the 12th of March 1978, the introductory speech, given by Ottilie was eventually printed under the title "Namibia on the Eve of the Elections." After the introduction, a discussion about the topic was opened up, and the journal printed "Highlights from the Discussion" along with the speech. Included in the highlights package were a very eclectic group of comments some of which go very much against the politics of the Group as stated in "Number 1," such as a few commenters taking positions in favour of the OAU's 'sole authentic' model and suggesting that the acknowledgement of SWAPO as such was reasonable.[746] These comments displays the commitment to contradiction within the movement and that contestation is generative rather than inhibitive to it.

The Namibian Review was very much a collective product, conceptualised by The Group and the Association, but it was the Abrahams' family home and dynamics that were central to its actual production and distribution. In this sense, unofficial members of The Group/Association included Rudi,

[742] Kanyamukulua, TM. "Letters to the Editor." *The Namibian Review,* Number 5, (1977), p.14.
[743] Goaseb, G. and Katjiuongua, M. "Reply to Kanyamukulua." *The Namibian Review,* Number 6, (1977), p.6.
[744] Silvester, J. "Introduction: Re-viewing resistance, liberating history."
[745] Abrahams, KG. "Notes by the Editor." *The Namibian Review,* Number 6, 1977, p.8.
[746] Abrahams, O. "Namibia on the Eve of the Elections." *The Namibian Review,* Number 9, (1978): 7-10.

Yvette and Kenneth Abrahams (Jr). On Sunday mornings Ottilie would blast her Sunday morning soundtrack – opera singer Maria Callas to start their routine: Everyone would clean and Ottilie would cook meals for the week. When the household tasks were finished, they would gather in the games room. They would place piles of the individual pages of the next issue of *The Namibian Review* on the pool table and everyone would walk around the table compiling full copies, staple them along the long edge and fold them into an envelope. The envelopes would then get addresses stuck to them and readied for delivery. [747]

Reflecting on his parents' dynamic, Kenneth Abrahams (Jr.) said they had a working relationship, or a political relationship. This relationship it was at the centre of *The Review*.[748] When the journal was launched in late 1976, Ottilie was the Secretary and Kenneth Abrahams the Editor. While the journal underwent many changes over its eleven-year lifespan as people came and went from the editorial board and the journal shifted its HQ to Windhoek (in 1979), Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams were the cornerstone of the journal's production. Theirs was a relationship that displayed quite normative gender roles with Kenneth the theoretician and Ottilie the practitioner. Notwithstanding the reality and unequal nature of this, the distinction between the theory and practice belies the way in which they co-constituted each other in multiple ways. Yvette Abrahams recalled how the whole family would participate in discussions about politics and analyse a particular social issue or phenomenon to which they wanted to respond.[749] Kenneth Abrahams would then develop a strategy of how best to deal with the given issue based on the conversation which he would present to the family for critiques and suggestions. He would then revise and refine the plan before subjecting it to the family again for feedback, when the plan was refined, it would be given to Ottilie Abrahams who would then go and practically implement the plan in the respective project or organisation. After experimenting with the implementation, Ottilie Abrahams would come back to Kenneth and the family and give feedback on the plan based on how it fared in its real context. The family would then collectively discuss and the plan would get refined before it was implemented again etc. This ongoing cycle of praxis – action and reflection on action – was part of their home and family life and while there was a clear gendered division of labour, they each felt suited to different kinds of work they were doing and Kenneth Abrahams (Jr.) said that they found a relationship shape that worked for them.[750]

The SWAPO-D venture

[747] Kenneth Abrahams Jr and Yvette have both told me this story a number of times in conversation and I have also verified this with them both. All the details from the following two paragraphs comes from these conversations and an interview with Yvette Abrahams. Interview with Yvette Abrahams. 1 & 7 February 2022. Gordon's Bay; Notes from conversation with Kenneth Abrahams (Jr.) Abrahams. August 2021. Windhoek.
[748] Notes from conversation with Kenneth Abrahams (Jr.) Abrahams. August 2021.
[749] Interview with Yvette Abrahams. 1 & 7 February 2022. Gordon's Bay.
[750] Notes from conversation with Kenneth Abrahams (Jr.) Abrahams. August 2021.

The work of publishing the journal and organising the public engagements of the Association were spaces of intensive engagement with the state of the Namibian struggle from the vantage point of distance. Just as The Review was getting into its stride, in 1978 there were two important developments: Andreas Shipanga and the other detainees were released and the UN adopted Resolution 435 one of the effects of which was opening the possibility of moving back to Namibia.[751] With impending elections, the old ensemble members wanted to contest the growing hegemony of SWAPO. They did that by establishing a new formation.

The SWAPO Democrats (SWAPO-D) were formed in mid-1978, and "claim[ed] to speak for approximately 20% of the External Wing of SWAPO now classified as "dissident."[752] SWAPO-D was initially envisioned as a critical bloc that was committed to SWAPO's "original principles and programme" and was pushing for democratic restructuring within it.[753] They considered themselves to be a "valid faction within SWAPO" that was frustrated with the way in which the leadership had concentrated decision-making power and the decisions it was making and the directions it was taking as a result. They demanded that all "illegally and unconstitutionally" expelled members be reinstated and all detained members be released and reinstated. Like the militant youth in the mid-1970s had, they also renewed the demand to hold a Congress, open to all members, where major policy decisions in light of recent developments, could be reviewed and decided upon.[754]

One of the major catalysts to SWAPO-D's formation was the position that SWAPO, which they referred to as SWAPO-N for Nujoma, would not participate in the proposed General Elections which, at that stage were scheduled for 31 December 1978. SWAPO refused to participate in these General Elections for a number of related reasons. Their conditions of engagement were as follows:

> SWAPO, having learnt from bitter experience that Vorster was not to be trusted, laid down certain conditions for any settlement under discussion… They entail South African acceptance of the right to independence, absolute territorial integrity, the release of all political prisoners, the free return of all exiles, a commitment to withdraw its occupation army and police and UN supervision and control of elections.[755]

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[751] Shipanga, A. "Namibia and the Western Initiative." *The Namibian Review,* Number 13, (1978): 1-5; and Sellström, T. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 16 March 1995. Available online: https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/ottilie-abrahams.html [accessed 25 January 2024].
[752]Shipanga, A. "Namibia and the Western Initiative."; "Ever since 1963 all attempts to question the policies of the SWAPO leadership have resulted in arbitrary expulsions from the organisation. None of these expulsions have ever been confirmed by a subsequent Congress which is the supreme organ in SWAPO. Thus the expulsions cannot be regarded as legal and valid according to accepted democratic principles. Over the past few years, in concordance with the increasing dissatisfaction with the Nujoma leadership, the number of expelled members ("dissidents") has increased by leaps and bounds. Today no less than 20% of SWAPO membership outside of Namibia belong to this category. Up to now dissidents have been scattered far and wide… Although members have been expelled for a number of differing reasons all the dissidents have this much in common – loyalty to SWAPO as an organisation of the people and a desire that SWAPO be re-organised along democratic lines," "The SWAPO(D) Manifesto." *The Namibian Review,* Number 11, (1978), p1.
[753] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990, p19.
[754] "The SWAPO(D) Manifesto." *The Namibian Review,* Number 11, (1978), p.2.
[755] SWAPO. *To be born a nation,* p.240.

In SWAPO-D's estimation, this position and SWAPO's persistence with the strategy of armed struggle was both holding up the independence process and was contrary to the majority of Namibians and indeed SWAPO members' wishes.[756] Interestingly, SWAPO-D was unconvinced of SWAPO-N's capacity and will to change and restructure.[757] In the instance that it didn't change, SWAPO-D announced in its manifesto its intention to establish itself as a force on the ground in Namibia and eventually form a coalition with the Namibian National Front (NNF), "an alliance of anti-Turnhalle parties, which had been formed in April 1977",[758] to participate in the General Elections.[759]

Resolution 435 enabled exiled Namibians to return home provided they didn't support the armed struggle publicly. On his and Ottilie's decisions in that period, Kenneth Abrahams, SWAPO-D's Secretary for Finance and Publicity, said:

> I returned in July 1978. It was easy to come back then because South Africa had accepted Resolution 435, and part of that was an agreement that any Namibian could be part of what they called the `new dispensation', i.e. you could return without fear of being persecuted or prosecuted provided that you did not publicly support the armed struggle. We also made it clear that our main point of disagreement with official SWAPO policy at that point was the question of the armed struggle. As we depicted it at that stage, the armed struggle had been part of the three-prong strategy which consisted firstly, of the armed struggle; secondly, of internal political mobilization; and thirdly of diplomacy – international pressure aimed at getting South Africa to accept the principle of Namibian independence. With South Africa's acceptance of Resolution 435, South Africa's acceptance of the independence principle had been made clear, and therefore whatever the justification for the armed struggle preceding 1978, that had fallen away. As we described it, we were in a situation where we were negotiating the transfer of power, and South Africa was, to all intents and purposes, now at the negotiating table. [760]

This position on the armed struggle and their orientation to that and SWAPO's policy at that particular moment is both complex and important and requires some reflection. A generous reading of their position against SWAPO's armed struggle is that it illustrated that they understood that methods of struggle are suited to specific historical conditions and that their analysis of the particular juncture in the late 1970s suggested to them that armed struggle was not the most productive route, indeed Dobell referred to it as the most "inept" in the Third World.[761] In the early 1960s, with the optimism and confidence of revolutionary movements in various parts of the world, in the YCCC and the NLF, they were committed to a programme of armed struggle on the basis of guerrilla warfare to overthrow the

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[756] Ibid.
[757] "The SWAPO(D) Manifesto," p.2.
[758] Mashuna, T. "The 1978 Election in Namibia," p.183. The Turnhalle conference was a process initiated by the South African government to draft a new constitution for SWA and establish an interim government. It was largely considered a sham and intended to entrench South African interests under a new dispensation. One of the outcomes of the conference was the formation of the political party Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). See for example, Innes, D. "Imperialism and the national struggle in Namibia." *Review of African Political Economy*, 4:9, (1977): 44-59; and SWAPO. *To be born a nation,* p.228-300.
[759] "The SWAPO(D) Manifesto," p.2.
[760] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990, p19.
[761] Dobell, L. *SWAPO's struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by other means,* p.20.

apartheid state in both SA and SWA. In the late 1970s, conditions had shifted: the armed struggle was a seeming cul-de-sac and since the opportunity for mobilising on the home front had re-emerged, persisting with it was inhibiting new organising possibilities in the movement.[762] A more critical reading might understand the denouncement of the armed struggle as a sectarian position in relation to SWAPO and one that was produced by years of exile and the desire to get home. The armed struggle had played a major role in getting SWAPO recognised as the 'sole and authentic' representative of the Namibian people, a politics of which they were very critical,[763] and the image of the guerrilla struggle played somewhat of a propagandistic role at home and abroad and the denouncement of the armed struggle was essentially a denouncement of SWAPO. Their ill-treatment by its leadership had potentially prohibited their recognition that, in spite of the organisation's problems, SWAPO's "conviction that political, military and diplomatic efforts are not contradictory but supplementary; and as such, they can be pursued concurrently,"[764] their refusal to disarm or call off the armed struggle as long as the military occupation continued, was a legitimate position. Strike Mkandla wrote that the armed struggle "was the most potent instrument in the hands of Namibians for forcing the South African occupiers of the country to the negotiating table by making the continued occupation expensive and exposing its inherent brutality" even as there was ambivalence and heterogeneity with regards to attitudes toward it from various elements in the liberation movement.[765]

The tension in SWAPO-D's manifesto and their conception of themselves – between agitating as a bloc or faction for democracy within SWAPO and being a political party of its own – was fairly quickly resolved by the pressure and perceived urgency of the time: They became a party. The expectation that elections and independence were right around the corner seems to have forced SWAPO-D to hastily make decisions about which way they would go and they effectively just became a party doing election campaigning caught up in the protracted transitional politics of that period. In one press conference, Ottilie, the Secretary-General, said they wanted to "call Nujoma's bluff" and hold elections because they – SWAPO-D – were quite, naively at that point, confident that they might do well.[766] But as it went, eventually neither SWAPO-D nor SWAPO or the NNF participated in the 1978 elections as there were multiple irregularities around assessing public support as well as the intimidation of people in various parts of the country to both register to vote and to vote.[767]

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[762] Ibid.
[763] Sellström, T. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 16 March 1995. Available online: https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/ottilie-abrahams.html [accessed 25 January 2024].
[764] SWAPO. *To be born a nation,* p.318.
[765] Mkandla, S. "Namibia: The Dynamics of The Struggle for Independence." *Journal of Third World Studies,* 9:2 (1992), p.278 & 262.
[766] NAN AACRLS 084 B.960. "SWAPO-D: Shipanga & Dr & Mrs Abrahams" [Audio Cassette]. Undated.
[767] Mashuna has argued that: "Taking these factors into account, the high turnout of the eligible voters who registered and voted in the 1978 election, should be seen as a result of positive publicity and negative violent coercion and political intimidation." Mashuna, T. "The 1978 Election in Namibia," p.185; Venter, D. "SWA/Namibia: settlement impasse." *South African Journal of African Affairs,* 9:3, (1979), p.157.

SWAPO-D got funded by Anglo-American. The multinational corporation hoped they could take votes away from SWAPO who were considered by the capitalists at that stage to be hostile to ongoing accumulation.[768] Strange bedfellows indeed. While Andreas Shipanga, SWAPO-D's President, was always somewhat ambivalent about socialism, this was a very strange contradiction and compromise for Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams who were avowed socialists and people whose political background was in the principle of non-collaboration with ruling class and capitalist influences. In a press conference, Kenneth Abrahams described the economic policy envisioned by SWAPO-D as a free enterprise economy with certain redistributive agendas: They had no plans to nationalise companies but hoped to install at least one government representative on the boards of each multinational operating in Namibia, and intended to build a land bank and give land held by absentee landlords to black farmers for production.[769]

SWAPO-D splits

The above-described, and other contradictions at the heart of the SWAPO-D had to be resolved. Kenneth Abrahams reflected that the party was getting "precisely nowhere" for a variety of reasons.[770] SWAPO-D did not have a base of its own and their strategy was essentially to win over people from SWAPO's constituency, mainly in the north, and gain some traction through an alliance with the NNF. Kenneth Abrahams explained that it was hard to gain any ground as SWAPO-D as SWAPO supporters in the country were not quick to shift allegiance even if they learnt about the atrocious things that were going on in the camps. As an attempt to capture a different constituency and coordinate efforts, they planned to coalesce with the Namibian National Front (NNF), Kenneth Abrahams explains:

> We tried then to merge SWAPO-D with the NNF to form a single party. This process took a long while, and reached finality in April 1980 with the formation of the Namibia Independence Party (NIP). But then everything fell apart because Shipanga in SWAPO-D wasn't interested in the formation of a single party; and at that stage too the NNF was divided because elections to the 'second tier' were on the cards.
>
> These were ethnic elections which were held in 1980… In any case the NNF broke up on the issue of ethnic elections, and SWAPO-D just disintegrated, with some of us leaving SWAPO-D (Tilly left, I did, and so did several others), while Shipanga carried on with SWAPO-D. But *SWAPO-D itself never amounted to more than just a few people who had funds.*[771]

The last sentence is a fairly damning assessment of an experiment to which Kenneth Abrahams himself belonged. Ottilie Abrahams thought SWAPO-D was a mistake on at least two accounts:

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[768] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990, p.20.
[769] NAN AACRLS 084 B.960. "SWAPO-D: Shipanga & Dr & Mrs Abrahams" [Audio Cassette]. Undated.
[770] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990, p.20.
[771] Ibid., p.21. Emphasis added.

> [The] problem was that by that time we had been in exile for thirteen years and we were totally out of touch with the sentiments of the people in Namibia. The formation of SWAPO-D was a mistake. But the feeling behind it was not a mistake… The [other] mistake we made was that we thought that the people who formed SWAPO-D with us were the same people whom we knew in 1963… Now, when we formed SWAPO-D we had not seen each other for thirteen years. But what we obviously forgot was that these people—who had also been in the leadership of SWAPO—were exposed to the same influences and were affected by this. They were thinking very similarly to SWAPO.[772]

Ottilie Abrahams told an anecdote to relate how she felt Andreas Shipanga had changed. At some point in the SWAPO-D era she was washing the floor of the office and Shipanga was horrified, saying that the Secretary-General of a party cannot be washing floors. [773] Shipanga himself, after refusing the merger with the NNF, stayed the SWAPO-D course and eventually went into the collaborationist transitional government in 1985.

> The decision to take SWAPO-D into the transitional government was not made lightly. We were aware that, as non-elected representatives working alongside the SA administration, anyone who joined such a government could be called a puppet. But it seemed a more hopeful path than simply accepting deadlock.
>
> In fact the path has been extremely stony. SA did not honour its agreement. When we began to put in motion policies that the white minority did not like, PW Botha came to Windhoek and simply changed Proclamation R101, giving the administrator general illegal powers of veto.
>
> This was a moment of crisis for me as for my black associates. If we resigned in protest, as we were sorely tempted to do, so much would be sacrificed. We decided that, on balance, it was better that Namibians should rule themselves, even within the constraints imposed by SA, than that they should succumb to direct rule from Pretoria.[774]

Andreas Shipanga's decision to enter the institution of the transitional government was a definite far cry from politics he had been involved in in previous decades. Although the responsibility for the decision is completely his, it's easy to see how at a certain level it was produced by his disillusion with SWAPO and the erosion of the possibility of contributing to the organisation he had been part of founding. The disintegration of SWAPO-D and Shipanga's decision marked the end of any sustained collaboration between him and the others ex-ensemble members in the Namibian liberation struggle.

Reviewing the changes

[772] Sellström, T. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 16 March 1995. Available online: https://nai.uu.se/library/resources/liberation-africa/interviews/ottilie-abrahams.html [accessed 25 January 2024].
[773] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[774] Shipanga, A. *In search of freedom,* p.154.

The SWAPO-D experiment meant that there was a period of inactivity and subsequent restructuring on the front of *The Review*. Since the Abrahams had moved back to Namibia they had been kept busy with SWAPO-D activities, and for the whole of 1979, no issues of *The Review* were published. In 1980, 'Number 16' was published solely by Kenneth Abrahams. Under an editorial titled "A New Series", he explained changes in the structure of the journal:

> For the record, the old Namibia Review Group parted amicably. A brief glance at the old Editorial Board is of some interest as this, in itself, provides a comment on the turbulence of current Namibian politics. Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilié Abrahams returned to Namibia in 1978 to work as Secretary for Finance and Publicity and Secretary-General, respectively, for the SWAPO-Democrats. Moses Katjiuongua left for Canada to do a Master's Degree in Public Administration. Godfrey Goaseb remained in Sweden to complete his training as a Tax Inspector. Paul Helmuth returned in 1979 to work for the DTA. Virimuje Mbuende is still in Sweden making a name for himself as a guitarist with a new band. Maud Lindgren has recently visited Namibia and may possibly return again.
>
> Tjeripo Ngaringombe is a member of the old Namibian Review Group who has returned to work as National Organising Secretary for SWANU, Rebecca Murangi is back and Bartholomew Tjivukua has returned to work as an engioneer with the Department of Water Affairs. Charles Kauraisa, Uatja Kaukuetu, Ulla Helmuth and Ambrise Kandjii are other members of the old Group who came home but did not stay. So, all in all, the Group has been active, engaged in various ways with Namibian politics although we never got as far as producing a journal.[775]

The shift in *The Review's* HQ – from Stockholm to Windhoek – was also a shift in personnel as the ensemble that had produced it – the Namibia Review Group and the Swedish-Namibia Association – was no longer together. After 'Number 16', cited above, *The Review* reorganised itself with Kenneth Abrahams as Editor, Ottilie Abrahams as Secretary and Jean Sutherland as Research Assistant and this group produced 'Numbers 18 – 32' over the coming seven years. *The Review* continued independently publishing analysis and news on developments relevant to the movement, articles on Namibian history and contemporary socio-economic conditions, interviews with activists and much more. As most of the articles, probably about half, were written by Kenneth Abrahams, Jean or Ottilie, one can read their evolving analysis as well as reports on projects and organisations in which they were involved in *The Review's* pages.

The Third Option: Nationhood and new directions

[775] Abrahams, KG. "Editorial: A new series." *The Namibian Review,* Number 16, (1980), p.1.

A major development in the liberation movement with which the Abrahams were associated, was the founding of the Namibian Women's Association (NAWA) in November 1979.[776] Ottilie Abrahams was a stalwart of the organisation, the driving force in its foundation and was its first Chair, Kenneth Abrahams was involved, with Ottilie Abrahams in some of NAWA's strategic planning, conceptualisation and projects. SWAPO had founded its Women's Council (SWC) in 1977 to mobilise women for the struggle according to the main party's conception of it. Its limited political scope and the state repression between the late 1970s and the mid 1980s meant it was largely inactive.[777] NAWA was established as an independent women's organisation, open to all women, unattached to "any political party" and was founded with the intention of "attain[ing] equal rights for women in Namibia":

> NAWA aims, inter alia, to bring together all Namibian women irrespective of colour, religion, language or ethnic group and to foster a genuine spirit of loyalty to a single, united Namibian Nation.
>
> NAWA's members felt that our society should be changed in such a way that women will be able to play a major role in future development. NAWA also decided to have a closer look at the educational system and to do what it could to bring about improvements.[778]

The first NAWA project was the "Remedial classes for children with special/learning difficulties."[779] It was established as a response to what parents in Khomasdal and Katutura were reporting – that many of their children were struggling at school, in particular with reading. NAWA recognised the issue as structural and a result of racist education policy. They aimed to mobilise the whole community – teachers, parents and children – to help those with learning difficulties and they mobilised individuals and institutions to give their skills and resources to support the initiative.[780] NAWA initiated and sustained many alternative and grassroots educational projects, particularly with children throughout the 1980s. In the post-independence period they founded the Girl Child Movement, provided legal support and counselling services to women getting divorced, and have made important and progressive contributions to governmental policy and research processes dealing with questions of gendered oppression and gender based violence.[781] For the Abrahams, in the wake of SWAPO-D and the disillusion of political organisations, the experience and projects of NAWA were part of a significant shift in their conception of the urgent tasks of national liberation at that moment and the form of their contributions to the movement away from purely party political processes to more grassroots community projects as a means of mass mobilisation.

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[776] Abrahams family archive – documents. "NAWA Memorandum, December 1980;" See also Abrahams, O. "The NAWA Project." *The Namibian Review,* Number 25/Double Issue, (1982), p.32.
[777] Giesler, G. *Women and the remaking of politics in southern Africa,* (Nordic Africa Institute: Uppsala, 2004), p.146.
[778] Abrahams family archive – documents. "NAWA Memorandum, December 1980."
[779] Ibid.
[780] Ibid.
[781] Benson, K., Gamedze, A. and Mushaandja, N. "Radical histories ii: Ottilie Abrahams Speaks."; and Legal Assistance Centre. *Namibia Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service Directory,* (Gender Research & Advisory Project: Windhoek, 2005).

While SWAPO-D, at least for the Abrahams, was a failure in many ways, the end of that experiment became an opportunity to reflect on their involvement up until that point, take stock of the condition of the country, the state of the liberation struggle and how they were going to make a contribution in the coming phase. They felt that they had been "been concentrating exclusively, first, on the struggle for independence; and second… on the formation of political parties, and on parties pushing ahead with the struggle for independence." [782] These realisations didn't lead to them abandoning party political work altogether – they organised and campaigned with the Namibian Independence Party (NIP) and the NNF throughout the 1980s and in the 1990 – but they did prompt them to quite fundamentally rethink their approach.



Figure 9. Portrait of Ottilie Abrahams, Secretary of the Namibian Independence Party, 1980s. Botha, G, NAN Images 26491.

Kenneth Abrahams described the dominant two ways of viewing the national situation and went on to define what he called "The Third Option" which encapsulated their emerging praxis:

[782] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990, p.21-22.

> The first option expresses itself in the emphasis given to the armed struggle against South Africa as the main (or only) form which the movement for national independence should take. The second option assumes (or implies) that no struggle against SA colonialism can ever be successful and that we should therefore seek a suitable compromise e.g. an internal settlement. The third option is not an intermediary position between total warfare and total surrender; it is based on the premise that the most appropriate (or optimum) form which the struggle for independence and liberation should take at this time is that of community-based organisation and mass-mobilisation.[783]

The Third Option was a strategy to work and mobilise both rural and urban poor around projects that intended to have an immediate impact on their lives in the context of harsh social and environmental conditions and broadened the base of the national liberation movement beyond the exclusive focus on the armed struggle, the compromised politics of South African administrated independence processes, appealing to the UN to intervene, and initiating autonomous projects to prevent the dependence cycle on NGOs.

They sought to situate the various localised issues that communities were facing within a national context and they called this work "nation-building."[784] Their concept of nation – the political community living in the occupied territory of South West Africa – was a critique and an alternative to the right wing apartheid colonial administration. The colonial administration was emphasising "ethnic" and "tribal" identity in the political forums they controlled as a way of restricting the emergence of a national movement and preserving white supremacy and South African occupation.[785] The notion of "a single, unitary, undivided Namibian nation" became for the liberation movement an aspiration, and a project to unite various groups of people living in the territory against the occupying South African regime, their common enemy. It was their understanding that the process of struggle against colonialism both necessitated and would produce a nation in the sense of a political community.[786]

Thus, an expanded concept of national liberation beyond the party was at the heart of this new approach. Kenneth Abrahams wrote:

> The struggle for national liberation is far more than just a political struggle; it is a broad movement which encompasses virtually all aspects of our lives. And therefore when the political parties go into hibernation other organisations of the people become relatively and temporarily more important, and fill the vacuum created by the political parties which have disappeared. [787]

In the prevailing situation where the people's political autonomy was usurped by, or delegated to the negotiations between the South African administration and the UN, the proliferating NGOs and SWAPO's armed struggle, underlying this new approach was the orientation that the people are their own

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[783] Abrahams, KG. "The Third Option." *The Namibian Review,* Number 30, (1983), p.1-2.
[784] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990, p.21-22.
[785] Abrahams, O. "The need for Self-Determination." Number 23, (1981), p.16.
[786] Abrahams, KG. "Second-Tier Authorities", Number 23, (1981): 3-5.
[787] Abrahams, KG. "The role of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in building the nation," Number 32, (1987), p9.

liberators. In other words, no one was coming to sort out their community issues and they couldn't be resolved in the current framework, so it was up to people to organise themselves: The Abrahams "nation-building" work was situated here.

The Namibian Nationhood Project Coordinating Committee

By 1983 they had already expanded their activities that "attempt[ed] to broaden the base of the national movement," this involved projects as diverse as starting community advice centres, remedial education projects, agricultural projects, community campaigns, civic organisations, and holding seminars on history.[788] In order to extend this work they managed to get support from an unlikely source.

> We knew the United Nations Nation-Building Programme had launched a Nationhood Fund, and it was that Fund which had provided the money for the Institute in Lusaka. We adopted the idea of a 'nationhood programme' for use inside Namibia… It was at that time that we launched all these 'nation-building' initiatives in education, in rural development, in the form of legal-aid clinics, legal-aid centres, community advice centres, civic associations, and so on.[789]

The majority of the work of the Nationhood Programme for Namibia, established by the UN Institute for Namibia, took place in Lusaka at a training centre which was developing a layer of Namibians to be sympathetic to the UN and western capital and hold various positions in public office and private sector in a future independent state.[790] Ottilie Abrahams added that: "we decided to adopt this Nationhood Programme and make one important alteration. We would launch it and carry it through inside Namibia itself and not try to build a nation-in-exile, as the UN had been doing for the past ten or twenty years."[791]

The Abrahams then established the Namibian Nationhood Project Coordinating Committee (NNPCC) in October of 1983 which linked "autonomous community-based projects together" and encouraged the establishment of new projects. [792] The NNPCC was constituted by two representatives from each project, one full time staff member – Ottilie, the Director, and a Management Committee. "All other full-time and voluntary personnel [are] directly attached to projects." The NNPCC met two to three times per year. It channelled funds from the UN and other donor agencies including sympathetic foreign governments to

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[788] Abrahams, O. "A report on the Nationhood Programme in practice: The NNPCC 1983-1986." Number 32, (1987), p.16.
[789] Leys, C. Interview with Kenneth Abrahams. August 1990, p.21-22.
[790] See for example: Committee on the United Nations Fund for Namibia. *Nationhood Programme for Namibia: project for training in public enterprise management. Report of the Committee on the United Nations Fund for Namibia*, (United Nations: New York, 1981); and Committee on the United Nations Fund for Namibia. *Nationhood Programme for Namibia: project for training in the development, planning and administration of human settlements: report of the Committee on the United Nations Fund for Namibia,* (United Nations: New York, 1981).
[791] Abrahams, O. "A report on the Nationhood Programme in practice: The NNPCC 1983-1986." Number 32, (1987), p.16.
[792] Ibid., p.17. This is the source for the information in the rest of the paragraph.

the projects. The NNPCC included the Khomasdal Burger Vereeniging (KBV) Community Centre, the KBV Legal Aid and Community Advice Bureau, the KBV Housing Project, the Seminar on Poverty in Namibia, the Vaalgras Education Project and the People's Seminar on Alternative Education and other projects. In between NNPCC meetings Ottilie Abrahams and Kenneth Abrahams would periodically visit the individual projects to see how they were progressing and assist with particular challenges – these could be specific to difficult dynamics between people, or technical challenges with the community project, both of which were understood as core to the work. Developing people's capacity for self-reliance, underlain by the principle that people should own and control the means of their lives' reproduction, were fundamental to the Nationhood work.

In 1980-81 the country was experiencing a terrible drought the intensity of which is only expected once in a hundred years. Particularly in the arid south, the situation was dire: "The centennial drought of 1980/81, locally called Otjite, "The Dying", is still remembered by people as the drought that "finished the livestock."" Effects of the drought's severity were not only environmental as many "social institutions temporarily collapsed in the early 1980s leading to displacement and depastoralization."[793] One of the factors that exacerbated the social impacts of *Otjite* was the history of colonial dispossession and white commercial farming in the area which used agricultural techniques for market production that were both unsuited to the arid clime due to their water usage, and undermined indigenous people's capacity to sustain themselves. Within this context, NNPCC projects also became a space to develop a critique of existing commercial farming approaches and propose alternatives:

> We have hitherto, especially in our agricultural projects, taken over farming methods lock, stock and barrel from White commercial farmers. We have not had time to consider the uses of Appropriate Technology. Much emphasis has been placed on obtaining and storing water, through digging wells, drilling boreholes, the construction of dams etc. Too little thought has been given to the way water is actually used. Obviously if we can reduce actual water consumption, we can reduce expenditure on dams, windmills, diesel pumps etc, items which usually require a relatively heavy capital investment. We thus intend to investigate such water-saving methods as drip-irrigation, more intensely in the future.[794]

NNPCC projects were not only oriented toward drought[795] but, as Kenneth Abrahams mentioned above, as the struggle for national liberation encompasses the full spectrum of life, the range of projects was equally broad.

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[793] Schnegg, M. and Bollig, M. "Institutions put to the test: Community-based water management in Namibia during a drought." *Journal of Arid Environments,* 124 (2016), p.67.
[794] Abrahams, O. "A report on the Nationhood Programme in practice: The NNPCC 1983-1986." Number 32, (1987), p.21-22.
[795] For a longer engagement with the NNPCC projects in the desert, see Gamedze, A. "Nationhood, Kgalagadi and the Namibian liberation struggle." *The Funambulist,* No.44, (2022): 68 -73.

An autonomous knowledge infrastructure: Publications, seminars and student struggles

Another area in which they made significant contribution under the auspices of Nationhood was in building and cohering a community and an infrastructure for the development of a critical and politically progressive intellectual tradition. Through *The Review* they had already made serious strides since its beginning in 1976. With the *Namibian Review Publications* they expanded that work to publish more in-depth fashion than was possible in the shorter articles in *The Review.*[796] And, like with the Swedish-Namibia Association, they broadened their activities into popular education and various public seminars. The first issue of *Namibian Review Publications* was an occasion to work with an old comrade and member of their original ensemble.

> It is highly appropriate that the first edition of this new series should be devoted to some recent essays from our old friend and colleague, Dr Neville Alexander Edward Alexander. We have known him and worked together for nearly 30 years and we form part of that "new generation, born in the battle for truth" which sprang up in the course of the struggle against the Bantu Education Act and the Separate Universities Act.[797]

The reference to the CPSU (new generation born in the battle for truth) was their way of situating themselves not only in relation to their comrade, Neville Alexander, who had been released from prison in 1974 and his banning order five years later, but also situating themselves historically as a cohort who came of age politically at a particular moment in time. The essays themselves are concerned with the one of the questions pertinent to that particular juncture in the liberation struggle at that time, that of the emergence of national consciousness in historical context.

The first of the three essays, "Jakob Marengo and Namibian history" makes the argument that the uprisings led by Marengo from 1904-1907, which united various groups of people in Southern SWA and the Northern Cape, represent a link between the "primary resistance" against German colonial rule, genocide and dispossession, and "the modern liberation movement."[798] Neville Alexander charts a critical path away from nationalist historians and what he calls "the romanticised historiography of African resistance" the main characteristics of which he suggests is an anachronistic folding in of various instances of resistance, regardless of historical context, into a grand narrative of nationalism.[799] Neville Alexander suggests that in the process and development of Marengo's struggle, one can detect "a kind of growing over of one form of struggle into the other with a gradual, often only vaguely perceived shift in the target of resistance" from "peoples fighting for the restoration of land and sovereignty" to "people fighting essentially for political independence, higher wages or democratic rights, all within the capitalist framework or, even for the abolition of capitalist exploitation."[800] This work was a stake in the terms of

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[796] Abrahams, KG. "Preface." *Namibian Review Publications*, Number 1, (1983): 1-3.
[797] Ibid, p.2
[798] Alexander, N. "Three essays on Namibian History by Dr. Neville Alexander." *Namibian Review Publications*, Number 1, (1983), p.5.
[799] Ibid.
[800] Ibid., p.10 & 5.

the struggle in that moment - a response to the question of whether or not Namibia constitutes a nation, resistance to apartheid's ethnic politics, and a suggestion that the object of resistance for the liberation movement, as well as the very form of the movement must develop and change over time. This was significant in this moment because at a certain level it could be read as a theoretical justification of the shift in strategy that they had initiated under the "Nationhood" project.

Two of the *Namibian Review Publications,* of which there were five in total, were the published proceedings of popular seminars that the Abrahams organised under the twin umbrellas of *The Review* and the Nationhood programme. These were "Number 2", *The Seminar on Namibian History, December 1982*[801] and "Number 5", *Seminar on Poverty in Namibia, March 1985.*[802] In addition to these seminars they regularly organised other seminars on these and other topics relevant to their Nationhood agenda. At "A seminar on the subject, "Growing Food in Times of Drought", held in Keetmanshoop on the 5th and 6th November 1983, a number of people gave presentations on various aspects of cultivation in desert conditions and Ottilie gave the keynote address and a workshop as part of the gathering.[803] "Number 3" of the series was written by Na-iem Dollie, Neville Alexander and Jean Pease. It was titled "Let's fight the organ-grinder: Background to the Nkomati Accords," an address given at the "National Internal Summit under the auspices of the National Forum Committee on Sunday 22 April 1984."[804] (I will write more about the National Forum in "Reconfiguration", the following chapter, but for now it will suffice to say that it was an attempt at building an anti-racist and anti-capitalist united front around a document called the "Azanian Manifesto" in the South African national liberation movement in the early 1980s.) The republishing of this article, which situates the Nkomati Accords within a broad Southern African and international context, in terms of geopolitics and political economy, is evidence of a commitment to an internationalist consciousness as well as of ongoing relationships of study and struggle. These relationships were very much reciprocal, work done in Namibia fed back into South Africa in some of the same forms. *Free Azania,* another publication that will receive more attention in the following chapter, was a publication produced by a group that some of its members called the "Azanian Marxist Tendency", which included Neville Alexander and a number of others who will be introduced in "Re-Configuration", in Cape Town in the mid-1980s. It was a regular occurrence to see in the pages of *Free Azania,* an article, often but not exclusively an abridged version of Kenneth Abrahams's editorial, republished from *The Namibian Review*'s archive.[805]

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[801] "The Seminar on Namibian History." *The Namibian Review Publications,* Number 2, (1984).
[802] "Seminar on Poverty in Namibia." *The Namibian Review Publications,* Number 5, (1985).
[803] Abrahams, O. "Growing food and the Nationhood Progamme." Number 30, (1983), p.3.
[804] Dollie, N., Alexander, N. and Pease, J. "Let's fight the organ-grinder: Background to the Nkomati Accords." *The Namibian Review Publications,* Number 3, (1984).
[805] To cite a few, Alexander, N. "The role of the student in society." *The Namibian Review,* Number 29, (1983): 12-18, this article also appeared in *Free Azania,* 1:5, (c.1983). Abrahams, KG. "Namibia: Independence negotiations or a transition to 'Neocolonialism?'" *The Namibian Review,* Number 23, (1981), this article also appeared in *Free Azania,* 1:2, (1983); and Abrahams, KG. "The state of the nation in Namibia" *The Namibian Review,* Number 32, (1987), also appeared in *Free Azania,* October 1987.

The expansion of the stable of *The Namibian Review* also became a site for supporting the emerging Namibian student movement as it assisted with publishing *The Namibian Student.* One of the early unofficial members of The Namibian Review Group, Yvette Abrahams was a university student in South Africa at the time and was drawn to and involved the Black Consciousness Movement. Yvette Abrahams was one of the founders of *The Namibian Student* and the longest-serving member of its Editorial group. *The Namibian Student* was produced with a support from Kenneth Abrahams, in the form of a "no conditions" donation, and *The Namibian Review* in the form of the using of their infrastructure.[806] Traces of the relationship between *The Nambian Review,* and more broadly Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams's political lives, are scattered all over *The Namibian Student:* a SWAPO-D donation,[807] the same postal address, the same formatting style, an evaluation of 'The People's Seminar on Education,'[808] slogans echoing the UM like "Unity is the first weapon of the oppressed!"[809], epigraphs quoting Neville Alexander[810] and the general political orientation.[811] *The Namibian Student* also agitated and organised for the establishment of a non-partisan national "strong united front" of high school and tertiary level students which was eventually founded in June 1984 as Namibian National Students' Organisation (NANSO).[812] At a was a conference for students that was organised by the Council of Churches the previous year, in July 1983, both Neville Alexander and Kenneth Abrahams addressed the students. Neville Alexander shared thoughts on the students role in society partly by building on the experience, strategies and ideas of the CPSU, the Kenneth Abrahams gave an analysis of education in Namibia historically, in the present and proposed some directions for the future.[813] Here the history and

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[806] "Editorial." *The Namibian Student,* Number 2, (1983), p.1.
[807] *The Namibian Student,* Number 3, (1984), p.1.
[808] Ibid., p.3.
[809] *The Namibian Student,* Number 6, (1985), p.1.
[810] Ibid., p.7.
[811] Many of the strategies of *The Namibian Student* resonate very strongly with the CPSU's approach. Some of these are their non-partisan affiliation in the interests of creating an open space for students and students' issues to be the basis of the organising strategy but for student politics to also act as a funnel into the national liberation movement, and for students to organise themselves at their schools and other institutions into SRCs.
[812] The publication shared the announcement of the conference to "form a national student union" which would take place at Döbra Training College during the mid-year break in 1984. They encouraged students to organise themselves at the school, inter-school and regional level and to choose representatives to attend the national conference and also explained how to prepare a contribution so as to make the most of the time together. *The Namibian Student,* Number 6, (1985), p.1; *The Namibian Student,* Number 4, (1984), p.1.
[813] Alexander, N. "The role of the student in society." *The Namibian Review,* Number 29, (1983): 12-18; and Abrahams, KG. "Whither education in Namibia?" *The Namibian Review,* Number 29, (1983): 13-25.
It's important to note that involvement and perspectives from the CPSU cohort was also received and treated critically from some quarters. Joseph Diescho, organiser of a student conference in Jan 1983 was "perturbed by the tone of [Kenneth Abrahams's] article on the Döbra Conference." His critical feedback was published in *The Namibian Review.* Apart from taking Kenneth Abrahams to task on some minor fact rectification and a difference of opinion as to whether the "private sector was manipulating students" or not, Disecho wrote: "Furthermore, we are not convinced why our efforts and initiatives as Namibian students should be judged against the yardsticks of the Cape Peninsula Students of 1957. This implies that we should have consulted you when we organised the get-together, while we deliberately decided to exclude you and political party leaders for the time being. We know your roles in the struggle for liberation, but this time, at least for a start, it was a students' exercise. We do know the true and unselfish leaders and educationists in our country, and their works do not pass unnoticed."
Kenneth Abrahams's response to the criticism showed most of the points of Diescho's critique to be unfounded based on what he actually wrote and the substantive issues raised such as why no Black educationists were invited to address the conference and why the private sector had such a strong presence in the conference. This engagement is

experience of the CPSU cohort was used as a way to connect with, and try to influence emerging student struggles in the Namibian struggle. Importantly, this took place through the independent intellectual infrastructure and community they were building through the Nationhood project and *The Namibian Review*.

The Namibian Review, its publications and the conferences they organised constituted a distinct critical autonomous intellectual environment and tradition of study and debate in Namibian society in the time of their existence. While progressive journalists played a key role in building and expanding a related space, increasingly so from the mid-1980s when *The Namibian* was founded, initiating and sustaining a spaces of this critical inquiry nature was a major challenge.[814] Within that context in which there were also no universities in Namibia, *The Nambian Review* assemblage of publications and activities, even as a minor current, it was undoubtedly significant. The imperative and orientation to working with youth and the renewed internationalist connections and collaborations with South African comrades, was sharpened and concretised in a different way in the next phase with the establishment of Jakob Marengo in 1985.

Jakob Marengo Tutorial College: Education for Liberation!

After a period of planning by Ottilie, Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander, Jakob Marengo Tutorial College was founded in Katutura with the motto was "Education for Liberation." This was probably the most concrete and sustained expression of the reciprocal relationship of solidarity between old ensemble members. While they had been publishing each others' writings in *The Review* and in *Free Azania*, the school was an everyday living and material manifestation of their collective study and struggle that required continuous labour. As a long term plan, it emerged from the "nation-building" approach. The concept and expression of "nation-building" in the school was inspired by histories of anticolonialism, it aspired to and was produced by pan-Africanist relationships of solidarity and a commitment to the urban poor and precarious. It was an intervention to counter the influence of Bantu education on black youth and the ethnic consciousness it sought to instil as well as a base and a space to cohere many of their other projects.[815] As mentioned in the previous section Marengo represented an important figure in southern African anticolonialism as an expression of a progressive form of national identification in struggle that transcended so called tribal affiliations.[816] The school aspired to extend Marengo's orientation to the present conditions. At the time there were many people from other nearby African countries in Windhoek, in particular, those who had left during the civil war in Angola, and others from Congo and Zimbabwe. Youth from these countries generally found it difficult to get into schools in South West

published as 3 pieces in conversation" Diescho, J., Conradie, D, and Abrahams, KG. "The (January Dobra Students' Conference." *The Namibian Review,* Number 28, (1983): 24-27.

[814] Lister, G. *Comrade Editor.*

[815] Interview with Ottilie Abrahams by author and Koni Benson. November 2016. Windhoek.

[816] See Neville Alexander's discussion of Jacob Marengo in Alexander, N. "Three essays on Namibian History."

Africa due to a lack of resources, the politics of immigration – many having come clandestinely, and age restrictions in the apartheid education system. As a result of its principle to accept any students who wanted to study – regardless of nationality, immigration status, age and whether or not they could pay – the student body at Jakob Marengo Tutorial College was constituted by many of these inter-national students who were in precarious conditions and discriminated against, and excluded by the system, as well as many local working-class black Namibian students who lived in Katutura.[817]

The school stated its commitment to the principles and practices of participatory democracy, non-sexism, reciprocal respect and critical thinking. The principal, from the time of its opening in 1985 until a few weeks before she passed in 2017, was Ottilie Abrahams.[818] The teaching corps of the school was recruited from various networks of activists, immigrant teachers as well as from Khanya College, an independent tertiary education institution with campuses in Johannesburg and in Cape Town. Khanya College was established by an alternative education organisation called SACHED (South African Committee for Higher Education) the national director of which was John Samuel (of Durban Student Union background) and the Western Cape director was Neville Alexander.[819] Khanya College would send study materials to Jakob Marengo, graduates from it would be recruited to teach at Jakob Marengo and contribute to vacation programmes and it would recruit matriculants from the school to go and study in South Africa.[820] These institutions were imagined as part of an independent education pipeline, outside of the control of the apartheid education department, which also included The People's Primary School, founded on the motto of "Education for Progress",[821] and a pre-primary school,[822] all based on the same philosophy, intended to offer poor students a progressive alternative to apartheid schooling. This was a very practical form of inter-national solidarity which was rooted in the relationships and ongoing commitment of members of the cohort and the ensemble.

It was staffed by young activists such as Harry Boesak, who was from Windhoek and came from a liberation struggle family, and was involved in left political groupings like the Workers Revolutionary Party, taught at Jakob Marengo from a few months after it started all the way until 2007.[823] Na-iem Dollie was a young activist from Cape Town who had been involved with independent left politics as a student at UCT in the Students of Young Azania and was also part of the group that produced *Free Azania* (and

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[817] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[818] Interview with Ottilie Abrahams by author and Koni Benson. November 2016. Windhoek; Interview with Shaun Whittaker and Harry Boesak. 29 July 2021. Windhoek.
[819] "Khanya College was founded in 1986 as a project of the South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached) Trust. The original purpose of the College was to provide university access courses for people who had been active in community and mass organisations. In addition to providing access for students, Khanya was set up as an alternative form of tertiary education. The College, therefore, attempted to run democratically and encouraged students to return to serve their communities after completing their studies." "Khanya College: Who we are." Available online at: https://khanyacollege.org.za/who-we-are/#page-content [accessed on 1 February 2023].
[820] Interview with Ottilie Abrahams by author and Koni Benson. November 2016. Windhoek.
[821] "People's Primary School." Available online at: https://peoplesps.wordpress.com/ [accessed 28 February 2024].
[822] Interview with Lucy Edwards and Herbert Jauch. 6 August 2021. Windhoek.
[823] Interview with Shaun Whittaker and Harry Boesak. 29 July 2021. Windhoek.

one of the authors of the piece on the Nkomati Accords mentioned above). Dollie was asked by Neville Alexander, who he practically idolised, to go and help Ottilie Abrahams with the new school, which he did and became part of the first group of teachers at Jakob Marengo from 1985. Another of these young activist-teachers was Ayesha Rajah who came to teach at Jakob Marengo from South Africa and worked closely with Ottilie Abrahams in other Nationhood projects.[824] As an academic institution it excelled, and to this day a few students regularly rank amongst the top in the country when matric exam results came out.[825] Providing access for poor black students, many of which were in very precarious circumstances, to quality and progressive education is an indication of the slow hard work of building and sustaining independent projects.

"Her projects [were] her fiefdom"

External funding, for initiatives like Jakob Marengo and the Nationhood projects, shaped asymmetrical power relations in the dynamics of working groups. They often had, or felt, more responsibility, and wielded more power. Ottilie Abrahams reflected on some of the challenges of her own position in the Nationhood projects:

> Even though we discourage this, our people still look upon those who physically bring in funds as a kind of erstatz colonial administrators. The corollary to this attitude manifests itself in this way… once projects are adopted by donor agencies, expenses which previously have been met by the participants themselves, become part of the project. As project holder one is often out in the unenviable situation of having to adopt an attitude of vigilant protector of foreign funds rather than that of a comrade jointly involved in the common and difficult task of building a nation.[826]

As Kenneth and Ottilie Abrahams had initiated many of the projects, had done the high-level planning and managed the administrative tasks and relationships with funders, they were positioned differently to other workers in the projects and some tensions emerged around these dynamics.

Jakob Marengo school was based on the principles of participatory democracy, yet a number of the young activist teachers, attracted to the expressed political project of these schools, struggled with Ottilie Abrahams over financial transparency, or the lack of space to discuss issues and make changes, and many ended up leaving. Na-iem Dollie, after two or three years working at the school, enjoying the work of teaching but becoming frustrated with the way certain things, which he didn't specify, were being done, he fell out with Ottilie Abrahams over a series of disagreements that she wouldn't shift on. Resultantly he left the school.[827] Lucy Edwards, an activist from Cape Town who grew up in Neville Alexander's

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[824] Notes from conversation with Ayesha Rajah [Whatsapp]. May 2022.
[825] Ngutjinazo, O. "Jakob Marengo SS joins top 10." Available online at: https://www.namibian.com.na/jakob-marengo-ss-joins-top-10/ [accessed 17 February 2024]; Notes from conversation with Kenneth Abrahams (Jr.) Abrahams. August 2021. Windhoek.
[826] Abrahams, O. "A report on the Nationhood Programme in practice: The NNPCC 1983-1986." Number 32, (1987), p.20.
[827] Interview with Na-iem Dollie. 6 April 2022. Cape Town.

neighbourhood (we will hear more of her story in Chapter Seven "Articulation") worked in the pre-primary school and had a similar experience to Dollie. Edwards admired Ottilie Abrahams greatly but, she realised she couldn't work with her as there was no space to collectively discuss issues and decide on how things were done. About Ottilie Abrahams' orientation, she said: "She had that gumption to continue and to still stand up for what is right… [but] her organizations was her fiefdom, that was her fiefdom and there was no space for other players."[828]

Lucy Edwards' husband, Herbert Jauch, taught at Jakob Marengo from 1987 when their family moved to Namibia after being denied entry to South Africa due to his anti-apartheid activities. He recalled conflicts over money and a lack of transparency around finances more generally. According to him, the teachers at Jakob Marengo were paid about half of what those in government schools were being paid.[829] Young teachers had been attracted to the school out of a political commitment to its vision and, in the case of Jauch and Edwards with their children, they were spending their savings to make ends meet because the salary was too little to live on. The reason given by Ottilie Abrahams was that the funders didn't want to give any more money. However, on the occasion that some of the funders visited the school they were "concerned that the teachers earned so little and that the school would lose the good teachers all the time because there was such a big gap between Jakob Marengo salary and state schools."[830] After the funders' visit, Jauch and some of his co-teachers raised the matter with Ottilie Abrahams, the principal which "led then to a complete refusal to, to let us even know how much money is there for the school or what's, what's the budget, etc." This lack of transparency and problematic orientation to money and decision-making certainly muddies the ideal waters of the lofty goals and principles of participatory democracy.

The Third Option and the Abrahams' relative retreat from the party-political independence process led to Ottilie diving fully into implementing the project-based work and Kenneth Abrahams into the planning and strategy.[831] The frustration with their experiences in SWAPO and SWAPO-D and their attempts to influence the political culture of those organisations and the broader politics of the transition through them potentially put an increased amount of pressure and expectation on these projects. The projects thus became *the* spaces that they were responsible for, that they could influence and, control the political decisions and directions and in some instances, became positioned as alternatives to participation in the mainstream mass movement.

In 1988 on Cassinga Day, NANSO, in collaboration with teachers, parents and workers, staged popular protests. nationwide which were predominantly aligned to SWAPO but not directly organised by it.[832]

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[828] Ibid.
[829] Interview with Lucy Edwards and Herbert Jauch. 6 August 2021. Windhoek.
[830] Ibid.
[831] Ibid.
[832] Heike Becker wrote about the same process of student action: "In the late 1980s the revolutionary activism of youth and students became ever more pronounced. Thousands of Namibian high school students throughout the country, joined later in the year by those attending the 'Academy of tertiary education' (the predecessor of the University of Namibia, UNAM) in Windhoek, came out for a massive school boycott in May 1988 to demand the withdrawal of army bases near schools. The *Namibia National Students' Organisation* (NANSO), which had been formed in June 1984, became a leading force. NANSO spearheaded many rallies and marches in the last few years of South African rule over Namibia… Other student activism was even more overtly connected to broader politics,

Herbert Jauch recalled that Ottilie Abrahams "special program on that day at school, like sports activities, *to keep the students away from the march*," which he found odd given the action's popular character and its anti-colonial in orientation. He also found Kenneth Abrahams orientation odd, who Jauch recalled saying: "the students must understand they don't have the leverage of economic power and the student boycotts can achieve nothing."[833] In an awkward way this line of reasoning seems to resonate with those of the Jaffeites in the 1950s who argued against the formation of the CPSU.[834] In this incident, the Abrahams seemed to have returned to a negative form of UM non-collaboration which cut them off from the popular or mass feeling in the liberation struggle. The pressures of managing the relationship between the responsibility for running projects that required day-to-day work, and figuring out how to contribute to unfolding events in the liberation struggle was undoubtedly difficult.

In including these contradictions, my intention is not to vilify or bash Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams or to imply a teleology that concludes with the Abrahams becoming more and more conservative. Absolutely not. In fact, they remained involved at many different levels and remained committed to the project and vision of liberation for their whole lives. Ottilie Abrahams worked as the principal at Jakob Marengo until a few weeks before she passed away and she regularly ran workshops with the Girl Child Movement, The Children's Movement and continued to work with a whole range of other grassroots organisations for the rest of her life. The attempt has been to consider these contradictions and try to understand them as products of choices and decisions made within particular collective contexts with uneven possibilities for ensemble, and within a longer process of the development of a tradition of struggle. What seems clear is that the spaces between people in the projects, and the asymmetrical power relations were certainly not the same as those in their formative experience in the YCCC/NLF – small, intimate groups of friends and comrades, thinking and debating together and holding each other to account. These conditions, and the Abrahams' sensibilities, forged through a long and often quite difficult journey in the liberation struggle, limited the possibilities for ensemble and perhaps it was the ongoing relationships with their old comrades from the CPSU and the YCCC/NLF where they continued to identify themselves.

Conclusion

Yvette Abrahams illustrates how relationships established in the 1950s, solidified in organisations like the CPSU, and the YCCC, endured into the 1980s. These relationships were familial, intellectual, and

including massive public rallies in Katutura on Cassinga Day and May Day 1988, which were led by NANSO activists." Becker, H. "A country on fire." *Review of African Political Economy,* 3 November 2020. Available online at: https://roape.net/2020/11/03/a-country-on-fire-protests-in-namibia/ [accessed on 16 October 2023].

[833] Interview with Lucy Edwards and Herbert Jauch. 6 August 2021. Windhoek.

[834] This is discussed in "Chapter One. Emergence." See also UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.2. August Matsemela interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.57-60.

political. Years after their experience as guerrillas, Ottilie, Neville Alexander, Kenneth Abrahams and Marcus Solomon, were still thinking and planning together:

> Well, you know, they came down to Cape Town once a year, especially after I came to live here, after I started going to UCT [early 1980s]. And, and that was, you know, my father saved the whole year for that kinda one month's vacation. You know, check in with his family, see all his brothers and sisters. But it was also the annual, the annual Yu Chi Chan Convention in a lot of ways. Because they'd hang out with, with all the toppies and they would sit and discuss the struggle during the year preceding and then quite literally plan, the struggle for the year to come. You know, how did this fit into their long term, their medium term, their short term... ya, and there would be many, many of these conferences... You know, at least once every holiday, we go to see Uncle Neville Alexander, and then Uncle Neville Alexander will come round a couple of times, you got to go see Uncle Marcus Solomon and Marcus Solomon will come round and then there will be some kind of reunion, you know, you drop them off, and you come pick them up a couple of days later. At that point, then the agenda for the year to come, has been set.[835]

These kinds of "Yu Chi Chan Conventions/Conferences" and the broader relationships of which they were a part, were the bedrock of many projects, much planning and a tradition of pan-African solidarity. They were also central to how ensemble members produced their social life and they connected them to the living memory of their most formative and exciting political experiences.

Reflecting on the work of the schools and the NNPCC projects they were still involved in in the late 1980s, and the legacy of the YCCC/NLF, Ottilie Abrahams said that:

> We are getting people to understand that they are their own liberators… And the YCCC lives on, it is not dead! I mean there's Neville Alexander doing the same work, just a different guise, there's Kenneth Abrahams, I mean the NNPCC sees itself running about thirty community-based projects, so the NLF is not dead, it goes marching on!... What I'm saying is that the NLF is not a phase of the struggle that you can put in a compartment. No, I'm saying in the same way that the NEUM and the SOYA and the CPSU is part of our lives, in the same way, what we have learnt in the NLF still informs our practice at the moment. And we are passing on what we have to the children in the high school, the pre-primary school and the primary schools. [836]

While the NLF hadn't existed as an organisation for about 25 years, Ottilie Abrahams saw all the zigzags, various experiments, organisations, projects and the multiple groupings as part of the same trajectory, the same tradition, trying to do the same thing they'd always been trying to do just in different ways and forms depending on the conditions they found themselves in. She understood the 'ensemble' to still exist as a dispersed and scattered grouping as well as a continuous, changing thread of contributions in the liberation struggles in South African and Namibia. Even as they were in different countries, some of them continued to think and work together and supported each others' projects and their relationships became a site of inter-national collaboration. *The Review* and Jakob Marengo, in particular, were sites of these kinds

[835] Interview with Yvette Abrahams. 1 & 7 February 2022. Gordon's Bay.
[836] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].

of reciprocal relationships of solidarity – spaces to continue to study together and support struggles both in South Africa and in Namibia in a way that insisted on their entailed, and intrinsically connected nature. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, the YCCC must be understood within the longer trajectory of its politics. Ottilie's reflections highlight the importance of that experience to her thinking and organising in later periods.

At the outset of the chapter I cited Jeremy Silvester's call to write histories of the Namibian liberation struggle that show the complexities and the contentions by which it was constituted.[837] The chapter has illustrated through the experiments, thoughts and activities of (ex) members of the ensemble, that the Namibian liberation movement was a contested process with contradictory positions, approaches and possibilities at various moments. On the out sides of the mainstream movement for political independence, the history of (ex) YCCC/NLF members and their contribution to the Namibian liberation struggle is complicated, at times contradictory and was characterised by the ongoing attempt to rethink and reassess the given conditions and make respond to them. It was that dynamic approach that generated new concepts and approaches to liberation and independence.
There is no single line or story that could encapsulate the various initiatives, critiques, projects, parties, publications, escapes, exiles, asylums, arrests, detentions, suspensions, disappointments, reactions and alternatives that constituted almost thirty years of study and struggle in the movement. The attempts at reforming SWAPO by Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams and Andreas Shipanga, form part of an important history and tradition of critique against the party's excesses. Their ill-treatment at the hands of SWAPO's leadership, and their unfavourable status in the leadership's eyes forced them into an outside position in the liberation movement which, particularly after the OAU and UN's designation of SWAPO as the sole and authentic representative of the people of Namibia, necessitated experimentation to create alternative perspectives, methods and conceptions of liberation. Their non-linear trajectory of independent experimentation from the outskirts of the movement particularly in the 1980s introduced new contradictions and sited of possibility into the movement and it adds the "Third Option" to the historiography of the liberation movement which has been focused on SWAPO, the armed struggle and dynamics related to the political process of independence to a great extent.

Some moments in that trajectory, such as SWAPO-D accepting funding from Anglo-American and Andreas Shipanga joining the transitional government, were compromising. Particularly in the case of SWAPO-D, it was in no small part a product of their long period of exile, their negative experiences with SWAPO and the fact that they were out of touch with the popular feeling in the country. The Nationhood project, while it was accomplished with money from the UN – of whose role in the Namibian struggle they had a critique of since the early 1960s – they used it for ends that supported their vision of the struggle at that time. While the emphasis on the UN had generally operated to remove the

[837] Silvester, J. "Introduction: Re-viewing resistance, liberating history."

initiative from Namibian people and produce a pliant comprador class in exile, they bent the UN mandate toward their own using its funds to build capacities for survival in harsh social and environmental conditions in communities inside Namibia. These projects were sites of struggle in various ways, over money and decision-making, and in some instances became approached as alternatives to the broader movement for independence. In the case of the Abrahams, it was the continuous rethinking, often with other comrades and in their family, of the situation and the possibilities that particular moments opened and closed, and the ongoing attempt to produce spaces of struggle on the outside of partisan politics that is distinctive. The enduring legacy of some of these experiments are in broadening the conception and the work of national liberation, to include not just the movement for flag independence and the political aspects of that but also the conditions of poor people's daily lives and the creation, through internationalist relationships, of independent spaces for the development of critical intellectual practices and broadening both the conception of liberation and its practice.

Chapter Five. Interlude on incarceration. Uneven possibilities of ensemble inside the repressive state apparatus

THOUGH INDIVIDUAL PRISONERS HAVE always differed in accordance with temperament, principles, strategy and tactics, and although the various tendencies represented there have always had slightly different approaches on major issues, the pressure of events and common experiences have given rise to a uniformity of approach to 'purely' prison issues so that – except in special circumstances – most prisoners now respond in accordance with a tradition established over the years.[838]

The transfers had profound consequences. First, the distance made it difficult and costly, not just for visits from family, but from lawyers, journalists, and human rights representatives. Marginalized in the public domain, women prisoners became invisible. Secondly, the repeated moves impeded the women's capacity to build political solidarities and friendships across political and sectional divides and thus to organize and manoeuvre against the prison authorities. Subjected to the state's regendering project, the political space available to the NLF's women prisoners shrank far more than it did for their male comrades, whose prison experiences became the measure of antiapartheid politics.[839]

Introduction

This interlude cannot do justice to the ensemble's long periods of intense repression that was incarceration, nor comprehensively delineate the particular individuals' specific and differentiated experiences. It takes inspiration from something Marcus Solomon said: "Today you would find that a lot of people talk about the suffering on Robben Island. Yes, there was a lot of suffering but I think there's too much focus on that, and that sort of thing worries me."[840] Solomon is gesturing towards the fact that there were other aspects of life going on in prison, such as friendship, learning, organising and sport. Barbara Caine has written about friendship amongst men and women political prisoners under apartheid, suggesting that friendship was transformative for prisoners and it was key to struggle and survival.[841] For ensemble members, the experience of prison was the first time that they interacted in a sustained, intense and intimate way with a broad cross section of people from different traditions in the liberation movement, different geographic regions and linguistic and cultural contexts. The results of this process were uneven across gender, length of sentence, and section of the prison but nonetheless the experience was transformative and I argue that this shaped their future possibilities and proclivities in life and in

[838] Alexander, N. *Robben Island Prison Dossier, 1964-1974.* (University of Cape Town Press : Cape Town, 1994), p.11.
[839] Drew, Allison. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front during South Africa's Transition to Armed Struggle." *International Review of Social History,* 67:S30 (2022), p.207.
[840] *More than just a game.* (Directed by Junaid Ahmed, United International Pictures, South Africa, 2007).
[841] Caine, B. "Prisons as spaces of friendships in apartheid South Africa." *History Australia,* 3:2 (2006): 42.1-42.13.

struggle. Following Solomon and Caine, this interlude looks at what else was going on in prison, the self-activity, reflections and experiences of ensemble members.

The memory of prison experiencen the liberation struggle experiences dominated by the figures and experiencees of men political prisoners on Robben Island, in particular the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC).[842] However, increasingly scholars have both critiqued the gendered nature of this narrative and written in different ways about the experiences and representations of women political prisoners under apartheid.[843] Marcus Solomon, Fikile Bam and Neville Alexander have featured in documentaries and literature about study and sport Robben Island.[844] Neville Alexander achieved a level of status and became known in the liberation movement as a fierce, independent and fearless intellectual through debates with the leadership of the ANC, particularly with Nelson Mandela. [845] These exceptions notwithstanding, the experience of the ensemble in prison is very thin in popular memory and the literature. While some of the men play minoritarian roles in the mainstream narrative, as Allison Drew has written, the women's experience is practically invisible.[846]

Within the prison differences between people were highlighted. With the exception of Fikile Bam who was classified "African", all of the incarcerated YCCC/NLF members were classified "Coloured." A bookish bunch, they all had education up to high school at least, and many with university degrees and teaching qualifications. Their politics predominantly developed out of the Unity Movement tradition and they came of age as a cohort in Cape Town. The majority of prisoners were classified as 'African' and came from either Congress, including ANC, Mkhonto WeSizwe (MK) and the South African Communist

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[842] See for example: Buntman, FL. "Categorical and Strategic Resistance and the Making of Political Prisoner Identity in Apartheid's Robben Island Prison." *Social Identities,* 4:3 (1998): 417-441; Mandela, N. *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, (Hachette: London, 2008); Roux, D. "Writing from Robben Island: National Identity and the Apartheid Prison in South Africa." In Kelly, M. and Westall, C. (eds.) *Prison writing and the literary world: Imprisonment, institutionality and questions of literary practice*, (Routledge: London, 2020), pp. 93-109; Schalkwyk, D. *Hamlet's Dreams: The Robben Island Shakespeare*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2013); Soudien, C. "Nelson Mandela, Robben Island and the imagination of a new South Africa." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 41:2, (2015): 353-366; Suze, A. "The untold story of Robben Island: Sports and the anti-apartheid movement." *Sport in society,* 13:1, (2010): 36-42; Unterhalter, E. "The work of the nation: Heroic masculinity in South African autobiographical writing of the anti-apartheid struggle." *The European Journal of Development Research,* 12, (2000): 157-178.

[843] Bonnes, S., and Jacobs, J. "Gendered representations of apartheid: The women's jail museum at constitution hill." *Museum and Society,* 15:2 (2017): 153-170; Kruger, M. "Witnessing the Ruins of Apartheid: The Women's Jail (Johannesburg) as a Site of Encounter." *Matatu,* 50:1, (2018): 60-80; Hazan, E. "Gendering the Carceral Experience: The Women's Jail, Johannesburg, 1960s–1983." Hons. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, (2018); Musiiwa, E. "Frances Baard's and Helen Joseph's struggle against apartheid, 1950-1963: A comparative analysis." *Historia,* 57:1, (2012): 66-81; Naidoo, S. *Women in Solitary: Inside South Africa's Female Resistance to Apartheid,* (Routledge: London, 2021).

[844] *More than just a game.* (Dir. Junaid Ahmed); *Robben Island: Our University.* (Directed by Lindy Wilson, Tele-Cine Ltd., London, 1988).

[845] "Neville Alexander: Interview excerpt." Available online at: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/prison/alexander.html [accessed on 21 February 2024].

[846] Drew, A. "A Gendered Approach to the Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front." Helen Scanlon also briefly writes about Elizabeth van der Heyden's experience in prison in *Representation and reality: Portraits of women's lives in the Western Cape, 1948-1976,* (HSRC Press: Cape Town), p.210-211.

Party (SACP), or the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).[847] The men were all imprisoned on Robben Island whereas the women were frequently transferred and spent time in five different prisons: Roeland Street, Worcester, Kroonstad, Nylstroom, and Barberton. The second epigraph at the beginning of the chapter refers to the difficulties associated with this precarious experience. As an attempt to insert the ensemble's stories and experiences into discussions about incarceration under apartheid, the interlude is based exclusively on the members' own accounts.

Conspiracy, collaboration and nativity in the women's jails

The prison system was based on the apartheid ideas of race and the project of racism. Its measures were replicated and intensified in the intensely controlled and repressive environment.[848] Between these differences, a variety of responses emerged. In Worcester the prison population included both "common law" and "political" prisoners. Elizabeth van der Heyden recalled that there, the ensemble members got along well with the other prisoners and they had even begun teaching them to read and write English as well as assisting them to read and write letters to and from family members. In this context, van der Heyden's Afrikaans improved a great deal, learning from her inmates.[849] Unfortunately this mutual learning process was cut short as the ensemble members were moved by the prison authorities due to the influence they were having on the common law prisoners.[850] There were similar experiences of language learning such as in Kroonstad where prisoners lived four in a cell – two from YCCC/NLF and two from the ANC, Elizabeth van der Heyden was with Dulcie September, and Dorothy Alexander was with Doris van der Heyden. In sharing space with isiXhosa speakers, Elizabeth van der Heyden learnt to understand much of the language even as she still struggled to speak it.[851]

Other dynamics between ANC members and the ensemble were strained. Elizabeth van der Heyden recalled that in Kroonstad these differences became often insurmountable and the sources of antagonism and conspiracies:

> In fact, when we were in prison, those women accused us of being spies first of all, because we weren't ANC members. And of being the pets of the white man, having slave mentality and dishing up this old thing about we

[847] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town; Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[848] *Robben Island: Our University.* (Dir. Lindy Wilson)
[849] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town
[850] Groenink, E. *Incorruptible: The Story of the Murders of Dulcie September, Anton Lubowski and Chris Hani,* (Evelyn Groenink: Cape Town, 2018), p.9.
[851] Drew, A. "Biography of Elizabeth van der Heyden," unpublished paper, date unknown.

> being armchair politics, politicians. And advising the younger ones to have nothing to do with us because they only follow their leaders, and impressing on us that the ANC was their religion. [852]

She said that this was largely the result of the attitude of some senior ANC women – Francis Baard and Dorothy Nyembe – towards them. They got along well with the younger prisoners but they were reluctant to contradict the elders.

Within these differences there was also instances of collaboration. One Christmas, the political prisoners at Kroonstad put on a nativity play, the initial suggestion for which, surprisingly, came from long-time atheist Elizabeth van der Heyden:

> I had just thrown it in there you know as sort of what are we going to do this Christmas. So I said what about a nativity play? So they picked it – can we have a play, can we have a play. Alright eventually I heard we're going to have a nativity play. And [laughs] this is Dulcie, "you said you're going to have a nativity play, they're waiting for you. I said, I just threw it in there. You've got to make it happen. So I wrote a nativity play – I wrote it. The birth and so on. Lots of hymns, lots of singing, angels and shepherds and wise men. So I say to the matron, we want to have a play we going to need certain things and we going to need time to practice. Okay, you're going to have a play? Ooooh. Ooooh. So helpful, so helpful. So I wrote the play and they practice. We had a Mary and we had a joseph and we had a Herod and we had the shepherds and we had the three wise men. Alright, and the angel Gabriel, don't forget, the angel Gabriel.[853]

The wardens helped Elizabeth van der Heyden and Dulcie September , the stage manager, get the things they needed for the play – sheets to make costumes out of, materials for curtains, a space to perform – they used the area where they would sew the prisoners' shirts, time to practice and a slot to perform, and at Elizabeth's request they got to invite the prisoners from the common law section to the performance. The performance itself was a hit.

Elizabeth van der Heyden was the only ensemble member of the women to get a ten-year sentence, the others got five years. For Elizabeth, when Dulcie September, Dorothy Alexander and Doris van der Heyden were released from Barberton it was both a relief – she had been the one to recruit them into the NLF so felt some responsibility for them – and it introduced a period marked by a lot of solitude. "Once they were released she had only her own self to worry about, and she contented herself with her own company, reading and thinking. 'You can survive by living in your mind,' she explained."[854] The five more years she spent at Barberton without any company from the ensemble were largely solitary. She built a close relationship with Amina Desai[855] whose sentence overlapped with hers and busied herself with organizing the library and participated in her section's efforts to construct and maintain a rock garden. [856]

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[852] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[853] Ibid.
[854] Drew, A. "Biography of Elizabeth van der Heyden," unpublished paper, date unknown, p.9.
[855] Ibid.
[856] Ibid.; Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.

By the time Elizabeth van der Heyden was released, the other women ensemble members had all left South Africa on exit permits. She had spent five years relatively solitary years in prison, largely surviving by living in her mind. After getting released, the additional five years under a banning order was isolating in new ways. The totality of this experience had the effect of sequestering Elizabeth van der Heyden to herself.

No man is an Island

On Robben Island prisoners were divided into two main sections. Single cells or the Isolation Section, also known to the prisoners as *Makhuluspan*, and the General Section/ "communal section", which was constituted by "racially mixed" cells for multiple people and was where the majority of prisoners were held.[857] The Isolation Section contained much of the "leadership" and people who were considered to be troublemakers and instigators as well as the majority of the ensemble men – Lionel Davis, Leslie van der Heyden, Neville Alexander and Fikile Bam.[858] Marcus Solomon said that the dominant memory of Robben Island is based on the experience of these prisoners, including the omnipotent protagonist in that story Nelson Mandela, to the exclusion of the mass of prisoners who were in the General Section.[859] Lionel Davis recalled that the separation of prisoners into these sections was a mechanism of control and part of the broader strategy to "divide-and-rule" prisoners. The prisoners themselves resisted this. In 1966 when prisoners in the general section refused to eat reduced rations of food – a punishment by wardens for not working hard enough in the stone quarry – those in *Makhuluspan* joined in and went on hunger strike. "Things didn't start from the leadership or from one political persuasion, it started in the general section of our prison… But in solidarity we all stood together and went on a hunger strike and this was the approach to prison life."[860]

Marcus Solomon and Gordon Hendricks served their sentences in the General Section. For Marcus Solomon, "that was the best thing that could have happened to me." Rather than being alone like in *Makhuluspan,* he was in a cell with up to forty other people, "with a few old men who were toppies and you know, hardened political activists, here you stayed with the masses. I can tell you it was a very, very positive thing for me because we had a very interesting time."[861] He was sent, as punishment to the Isolation Section on two occasions. The first time was when Sedick Isaacs and Ahmed Cassiem, from the African Resistance Movement, first came to prison around 1965. They had conjured a plan to escape –

[857] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[858] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[859] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; Morris, L. Interview with Fikile Bam. 2 August 1999. Available online: Accessed on 25 January 2024 https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/carnegie/cul:sbcc2fr0sx [accessed on 25 January 2024].
[860] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[861] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

what Marcus Solomon called a "wild, funny business" – that never actually came off.[862] Solomon and Isaacs were close as they had been at school together. When the prison authorities caught wind of the plan, they thought that Solomon was the leader of the escape plot and, as a result, he was isolated for a period. The second time he got sent to isolation was when prisoners struck as refusal to work in the quarry in the rain and the cold: Marcus Solomon was the first to give his ticket in and, so, again he got detained. [863]

Fikile Bam suggested that a major contribution of the ensemble – with teachers, students and university graduates amongst them – was setting up education structures and teaching in prison. They played a key role in setting up "Robben Island University" which "was a school on the Island which Neville became… the sort of principal, but we were all involved in that. Most of our guys were involved in that… [and] we subsequently brought in people from other organisations so the school itself, although started by us as a core, but became everybody's thing. [864]

For Marcus Solomon, the most transformative work was the literacy programmes. He clearly distinguished the literacy work in *Makhuluspan*, with which Alexander and others were associated, from what happened in the General Section. In the Isolation Section there was a much smaller number of people and a much smaller number of people who couldn't read and write.[865] In the General Section, the mass section, a lot of the work was teaching people to read and write from scratch, a process in which Marcus Solomon played a significant role. Some of the prisoners were old seasoned, veteran activists, who had organised strikes, or led marches; they had incredibly broad and vast life and political experiences. Solomon was struck and disturbed by how small they would become in the presence of English – "like children."[866] In response, they decided to begin the literacy process with people's own mother tongue languages, mainly isiZulu and isiXhosa, and the shift was incredible. People became animated and confident – worlds away from how English demoralised them. Marcus Solomon said: "We discovered Paulo Freire before Paulo Freire became known to us."[867]

Intellectually and politically for Neville Alexander, the experience prison was central for a fundamental shift in how he saw the world. He reflected that his educational experiences – in South Africa and in Europe – had made him "very Europeanised," and this "became quite a problem later on because I had to rediscover Africa."[868] On Robben Island Neville Alexander had a long series of debates and

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[862] Ibid.
[863] Ibid.
[864] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[865] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[866] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[867] Ibid. Paulo Freire is well known for his pioneering work in literacy education in which the first language of the oppressed is used to teach a new language. See for example, Freire, P. *Education for critical consciousness*, (Bloomsbury: London, 1973).
[868] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.1. Interviewer unknown, Interview with Neville Alexander, 1988, p.42.

transformative conversations with Nelson Mandela, who had an immense knowledge of African history. These engagements convinced him of the importance of seriously studying and understanding the longer-term movements in African society in order to more deeply grasp the contemporary movement for national liberation.[869] He disagreed with Madiba on many matters, but learnt another crucial lesson from him and some of the other older ANC people – respect for people as a principle. You could disagree outright with a person and still have respect for them in how you regarded and treated them.[870] This was an alternative orientation for someone schooled in the white-hot debate and polemics of the UM intellectual tradition.

Lionel Davis too said that ultimately he did not regret his time in jail. He remembered the connections that were built across political persuasions under the harsh conditions of incarceration as some of the most meaningful experiences to witness and be part of:

> People are surprised to learn that these people who saw themselves as enemies of each other in the beginning, learnt to become friends. It did not mean that you surrendered your political feelings, your political affiliation, you can differ political but friendships started on Robben Island across colour and political lines and this for me was one of the most healing things that we could have experienced.[871]

Here Lionel Davis articulates a crucial link amongst friendship and politics. On the Island he saw friendships develop between people who came from different ideological persuasions and that those friendships did not necessarily mean that they agreed or abandoned their positions. But, similar to Alexander's reflection, that political and other differences need not be a barrier to respectful and even affectionate relations.

This learning of a way to be with people, a way to listen to people and learn to people was common to many members of the ensemble. Fikile Bam recalled that when he entered the Island, at the tender age of twenty-three, his "politics were very academic and ideological",

> It was really just when we started mingling with people from other organisations, with older people, that you get to learn more about the struggle. And of course the fact that you met people from all over the country and various groupings of people, peasant people, people who had been teachers, people who had come from other walks of life, and that kind of experience was very rewarding. And I still do not regret imprisonment for that reason alone. [872]

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[869] Carlin, J. Interview with Neville Alexander. Available online at: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/interviews/alexander.html [accessed on 22 March 2023].
[870] *Robben Island: Our University.* (Dir. Lindy Wilson).
[871] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[872] Legal Resource Centre, Oral History Project. Interview with Fikile Bam. 29 November 2007. Available online: http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/judge-fikile-bam-interview [accessed on 25 January 2024], p.5-6.

In this sense, for Bam, prison was a process of widening and broadening his experience and developing his political sensibility. Through interaction with people – conversation, study – his "academic" or bookish sense of politics were opened up to a more grounded and living politics.

Marcus Solomon had always been drawn to Mao and his philosophy, in particular the idiom that "your people are your teachers" and the directive to, therefore, "go to the people". [873] Part of this experience was becoming part of a socialist discussion group whose membership came from across the organisational spectrum of the liberation movement – UM, ANC, PAC, and the SACP. It was a process of unlearning certain prejudices and perspectives, and a reorientation and a re-education in the concrete conditions of the context and it was a solidaristic process that encompassed aspects of human interaction, politics, language, education and fundamental questions of values and perspective.

> I think the prison experience strengthened that understanding because I, use a simple example, we were brought up in this unity movement tradition -the ANC's petty bourgeois, etc. etc… But they didn't realize these people are really good activists, so much they can teach you but they may not be articulate, they can't debate Marx, the Communist Manifesto, but they committed, they may not have my understanding about the history of the Comintern whatever or the history of the Communist parties of Stalinism. But these are fantastic people, you know, peasant, there were workers in the Port Elizabeth, small towns of the country from Limpopo, Limpopo to the Eastern Cape, KZN and, and even those who were extremely theoretically sound. [874]

In a corresponding way to Fikile Bam, he felt it was through the processes of living with and learning from people on the Island that he actually began to understand Mao's lesson in a lived way as his experience opened him up to a wide range of knowledge forms.

For these men on the Island, these experiences point to a fundamental shift in the evolution of themselves as people and of their politics in the context of the national liberation movement. Through the range of collaborative initiatives in collectively responding to their conditions of racist and carceral oppression, they had a much broader experience of ensemble study and struggle with people from a variety of different political, class, linguistic and regional backgrounds. In this sense, the aspirations of the YCCC/NLF became more real than in the period of its operative existence. In a lived and intimate way they experienced and became part of their theoretical proposition that the majority of ideological differences between the various tendencies in the movement were non-antagonistic. This process produced learning, and a wider capacity to learn, listen and work with different people.

Conclusion

[873] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[874] Ibid.

The intention of this collection of experiences and reflections has been to show some of what transpired in prison with a focus on the autonomous activities of the imprisoned themselves. This has revealed some of the experiences and sensibilities of the ensemble in a very particular context, the manifestation of their individual characters and their shared pollical tendencies in the concentrated conditions of the prison with other elements of the liberation movement and, in some instances, common law prisoners. Their activities were sometimes oriented toward resisting the oppressive conditions in which they were living, sometimes at doing what they could to "keep the anguish at bay,"[875] mobilising for recreation, study and generally making the best of a bad situation. In some instances, the oppressive circumstances prevailed, in others there were progressive gains won. While the experiences, for men and women, in different sections, and different institutions, were differentiated, the experience of prison was significant in each member's life, and it played a role in shaping their evolving conception of the struggle and what they dedicated themselves to in subsequent chapters.

[875] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.

Chapter Six. Reconfiguration. New ensembles, old repertoires and the non-sectarian spirit of the underground

Much of the literature on the anti-apartheid struggle is dominated by what João Coelho has dubbed the "liberation script," a narrative arc that assumes the ascendency of the African National Congress as an inevitability. To write histories that confront, oppose, or offer alternatives to this nationalist teleology, it is necessary to make an intervention at the level of narrative.[876]

Reconfiguration in context

Most of the previous chapters have had quite distinct and almost discreet focuses with regards to time and cast. "Emergence" was concerned with how a group of student activists sought to chart their own path in resisting apartheid and liberalism in the late 1950s by forming the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) and attempting to build a "progressive national students' organisation". One of the outcomes of the uneven CPSU experience was the creation of a cohort of activists "born in the battle for truth" out of which "the ensemble", the subject of this dissertation, was then formed. "Constitution" focused on the formation, in the early sixties, of the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC), the ensemble, from the ranks of the cohort, the out sides of the Unity Movement (UM) and comrades from the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). The process of constitution involved collective study of histories and strategies of guerilla warfare with the view to embark upon an armed struggle to overthrow the apartheid state. "Proliferation", in the same period, explored the process of building the National Liberation Front (NLF) which was intended to be a non-partisan national network of guerilla cells that would play a leading role in the armed struggle. This process of proliferation was arrested by the arrest and incarceration of most of the ensemble members whose experiences in prison, amongst other political prisoners and their various self-organising endeavours, were discussed in the "Dossier on incarceration." Prior to the "Dossier" was "Inter-nationalism" which explored the role of ensemble members in the Namibian liberation struggle, both in exile and inside the country, through a variety of attempts to make contributions from largely outside of the mainstream of the movement. Unlike all of these chapters, with the potential exception of "Inter-nationalism" – the scope of which was also expansive and broad, the present one's focus is multi-

[876] Keniston, W. "Cover Stories & Undercover Stories: Apartheid South Africa, 1969 -1984." *Stokes Seminar*, 19 November 2021, Dalhousie University, p1.

directional, necessarily so. This is the period when, after serving sentences in prison for conspiracy to commit sabotage ranging from five, to seven or ten years, and five years of house arrest under banning orders, ensemble members extended their experimentation in a reconfigured and reconfiguring national liberation movement.

The combination of various forms of black resistance, the successes of anticolonial movements in southern Africa, and transitions in the economy in the 1970s started to rupture the ideological and material hegemony of apartheid as the state entered a state of crisis.[877] It signalled an end to "high apartheid", a period of intense political repression characterised recently by Saul Dubow as a successful counter-revolution.[878] Indeed Ross has suggested that the period between Sharpeville in 1960 and the Soweto Uprisings in 1976 "was a period when the repression of the African population was sharpest."[879] The massive expansion and development of security and intelligence forces from the 1960s was largely responsible for the near-decimation of the organised liberation movement through death squads, mass arrests, bannings, house arrests, trials, detentions, incarceration, surveillance and torture.[880] It also made it incredibly difficult for the banned elements of the movement to re-emerge. While they had been making attempts to re-connect with each other and build underground structures internal to the country, this was slow and difficult work.[881] However, other sites of struggle were being contested. Since the ensemble members got arrested and had been incarcerated, major developments in the struggle against racism and capitalism in South Africa included the formulation of the philosophy of Black Consciousness (BC), the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the revival of black trade unions also in the early 1970s.[882] The trade union movement – which cohered after a series of strikes by workers and students in Ovamboland in 1971-72 and the latter "Durban moment"

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[877] Murray, M. *South Africa: Time of agony, time of destiny, The upsurge of popular protest,* (Verso: London, 1987); O'Meara, D. *Forty Lost Years: the apartheid state and the politics of the National Party 1948-1994,* (Ravan Press: Randburg, 1996); Wolpe, H. "Apartheid's deepening crisis," *Marxism Today,* 27:1, (1983): 7-12.

[878] "It no longer suffices to treat the decade from Rivonia, 1964, to the Durban 'moment' of the early 1970s, as a mere hiatus or a period of rebuilding in exile. For one thing, this has the unintended consequence of implicitly naturalising white power and black resistance as two nationalisms in perpetual conflict. It fails to take full account of the emergence of Black Consciousness. And it pays inadequate attention to how stability, order, and compliance were re-established after Sharpeville. One way to rethink the 1960s might be to treat the post-Sharpeville crackdown as not just a brutal era of suppression during which racial capitalism flourished for more than a decade, but as a rare instance of successful counter-revolution." Dubow, S. "New approaches to high apartheid and anti-apartheid." *South African Historical Journal,* 69:2, (2017), p.307.

[879] Ross, R. *Change: Black Material Culture and the Development of a Consumer Society in South Africa, 1800-2020*, (Brill: Leiden, 2023), p.127.

[880] Gottschalk, K. "The rise and fall of apartheid's death squads, 1969–93." In Campbell, BB., and Brenner, AD. (eds.) *Death squads in global perspective: Murder with deniability*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2000), pp. 229-259; O'Brien, KA. *The South African Intelligence Services: From apartheid to democracy, 1948-2005,* (Routledge: London, 2011).

[881] ka Plaatjie, T. "The PAC's internal underground activities." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), pp.669-701; Houston, G., and Magubane, B. "The ANC political underground in the 1970s."In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), pp. 371-451.

[882] Magubane, B. "Introduction to the 1970s: The social and political context," In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), pp.1-36; Mazamane, MV., Maaba, B. and Biko, N. "The Black Consciousness Movement" In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), pp.99-160.

which was a wave of industrial actions by workers in Durban in 1973 – signalled the strength of the industrial working class in South Africa, reignited above-ground activity, built new solidarities, and gave renewed fire to socialist politics within the liberation movement.[883] In the student uprisings started in Soweto in 1976, which was the most decisive blow to white supremacy in the period, BC became the "unifying ideology" as high school learners' "peaceful march ignited a general revolt across the country."[884] Especially in the newly-constructed townships, and in the reserves, the material conditions of black life were incredibly harsh and in the latter part of the decade, a number of civic movements of various kinds mobilised around local issues.[885] These processes were all the more significant given that they took place within intense state repression.

Old schisms in the Afrikaner nationalist camp were put under pressure by worsening economic conditions as well as political action by workers and students.[886] This induced a multi-pronged crisis – of accumulation, of national and regional hegemony, and of international legitimacy – that apartheid was increasingly engulfed by in the 1970s. Economic growth rates in the 1960s had been close to 6%, they hit a downswing after 1973, reached recession by 1976 and "by 1978 the apartheid economy was mired in a deep structural crisis of accumulation."[887] O'Meara suggested that this crisis induced "intense politicking" "by the capitalist class" and a struggle within the Nationalist Party over its future direction. Eventually in 1978 PW Botha succeeded John Vorster in the National Party and the *verligtes*, advocating a programme of reform, won out in this struggle against the *verkramptes* who wanted to maintain grand and petty apartheid.[888]

Magubane and Houston point out that "the predominant form of political involvement in the underground in the early 1970s" was "young political activists," mostly from the BCM, "[becoming] involved in underground networks without any links to the externally based political organisations."[889] Later in the decade, particularly after the Soweto uprising, many BCM adherents were seeking new methods of struggle and ways of confronting the apartheid regime and, to this end, they sought out older

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[883] Friedman, S. *Building tomorrow today: African workers in trade unions, 1970-1984,* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1987); Sithole, J., and Sifiso N. "The revival of the labour movement, 1970–1980." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006); Macqueen, I. "Black Consciousness in Dialogue in South Africa: Steve Biko, Richard Turner and the 'Durban moment', 1970–1974." *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* 49:5, (2014): 511-525.

[884] Nieftagodien, N. "The Soweto Uprising." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), p.351. See also Mukonde, KT. "'If you belong to my generation and you never read James Hadley Chase, then you are not educated': Everyday Reading of High School Students in Soweto, 1968–1976," *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 49:2, (2023): 205-224.

[885] Mayekiso, M. *Township politics: Civic struggles for a new South Africa*, (UJ Press: Johannesburg, 2023); Seekings, J. "The development of strategic thought in South Africa's civic movements, 1977–1990." In Adler, G. and Steinberg, J. (eds.) *From comrades to citizens: The South African civics movement and the transition to democracy* (MacMillan: London, 2000), pp.52-85.

[886] O'Meara, D. *Forty Lost Years,* p.171; Posel, D. "The meaning of apartheid before 1948: Conflicting interests and forces within the Afrikaner Nationalist alliance." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 14:1, (1987): 123-139.

[887] O'Meara, D. *Forty Lost Years,* p.171; Saul, J. and Gelb, S. "The Crisis in South Africa: Class Defense, Class Revolution." *Monthly Review,* 33:3, (1981), p.23.

[888] O'Meara, D. *Forty Lost Years,* p.258.

[889] Houston, G. and Magubane, B. "The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s," p.376.

activists, many of who were returning from periods of incarceration. Neville Alexander and Marcus Solomon were two amongst many of those returning from the Island who were sought out and became deeply involved in inter-generational processes of study. Neville Alexander suggested that in the period from the mid-1970s into the early 1980s, various formations worked together "on a strictly non-sectarian basis in accordance with the *united front ethos* that characterized this phase of struggle."[890] While there are some writings on this period of underground struggle in this period, the majority of them are written from the perspective of a single organisation and tend to situate various non-sectarian relationships and collaborations across organisational lines in relation to the trajectory of said, single organisation.[891] A contribution of the present chapter is its exploration of various collaborative relationships that existed in the movement outside of any political home in the period from the ensemble members' release through to roughly the end of the 1970s. These were relationships and collaborations which were conducted on non-partisan and non-sectarian lines. Following this, a guiding interest is in this the stories and narratives of this "united front ethos" that existed in the underground in the 1970s – what it was and how it was expressed. In order to explore this the chapter looks at ensemble members' trajectories in the wake of incarceration and their attempts and decisions to reconfigure their lives and their work. It proceeds to consider a set of interconnected stories of collaboration in study and in struggle starting with some of the individual ensemble members' trajectories, the re-organisation of study groups and autonomous community projects, the reckoning of BC and the attempt to build a front of the major organisations in the liberation struggle. The chapter ultimately argues that a significant dynamic within the reconfiguration of the movement in the 1970s was the spirit of non-sectarianism and that a number of collaborative projects at various levels had their basis in this orientation.

Within the severe conditions of oppression under high-apartheid/counter-revolution, political work inside South Africa was intensely difficult and dangerous. Non-sectarianism was key to the survival and elaboration of the liberation movement. This is a period of the ensemble being scattered. Under conditions of surveillance and house arrest, it's a difficult time to re-connect and re-constitute, and many of them don't. It is also a period in which new ensembles are constituted that are reminiscent of the YCCC and are connected to other ensembles, like in the NLF, but it's also a different moment. These groups were not constituted around the project of armed struggle as the original ensemble was in the early 1960s. They were constituted as nodes of networks of independent socialists which were being built

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[890] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment: Background to the Azanian manifesto." In Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, NC. *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008), p.164. Emphasis added.

[891] Houston, G. and Magubane, B. "The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s."; ka Plaatjie, T. "The PAC's Internal Underground Activities, 1960–1980."; Mazamane, MV., Maaba, B. and Biko, N. "The Black Consciousness Movement."; Suttner, R. *The ANC Underground in South Africa, 1950-1976*. (First Forum Press: Boulder, 2009). Notable exceptions to this trend include some works on the Soweto Uprisings which, even as they generally assign a key role to BCM and acknowledge the role of other organisations, they tend to situate the initiative in organised student groupings. See for example: Mukonde, KT. "'If you belong to my generation and you never read James Hadley Chase, then you are not educated.'"; Ndlovu, SM. and Nieftagodien, N. "The Soweto Uprising." Another notable exception which focuses explicitly on non-sectarian relationships in this period and an important source for this chapter is Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment."

by members of the ensemble and others. It was a time in which the politics that the ensemble had been theoretically committed to, a politics of connection and collaboration across partisan and ideological lines was the dominant mode of underground organising as Magubane and Alexander suggested. Neville Alexander, particularly after his series of Robben Island debates with the leadership in the ANC, and the publication of *One Azania, One Nation,* was becoming recognised as a figure of much stature in the liberation movement. Similarly to how Ciraj Rassool described Alexander's mentor Tabata,[892] Neville Alexander was increasingly able to draw on his powerful status for organisational goals. He played a key role in the establishment of an independent socialist network and in the Azanian Liberation Front, the major attempt in that period to build principled unity in the liberation movement. While there were some points of divergence, they found common ground with the BCM and resonated with their desire and attempt to unite the liberation movement.

A note on the organisation of this chapter, Ih takes a number of routes, might be necessary. It has three sections which are organised thematically rather than strictly chronologically. The first looks at the individual processes of ensemble members' reconfiguration of life after being released from prison. The conditions of oppression, particularly under house arrest, were extreme and it was incredibly isolating and difficult. The second section looks at the process of re-constituting study groups with a new cohort of activists, most of whom came out of the BCM. These non-sectarian study groups' political identity were in emergence as they initiated community projects and intervened in civic struggles. The third section looks at the role of independent socialists within the process of the formation of the BCM-initiated Azanian Liberation Front, starting with Alexander's changing orientation to BC. These three sections run parallel rather than successively. The processes in the chapter unfold primarily in the Western Cape, and in Cape Town specifically. These processes were neither exceptional to the Cape as they were connected to national processes, but there were also particularities about them which emerge in the narrative.

Routes and reconfigurations of life and work

For ensemble members who had been incarcerated, upon their release, they entered a new phase of restriction under the banning orders imposed on them by the apartheid government. These oppressive conditions generally included frequent police surveillance and harassment, repressive measures that limited their movement, prohibited them from speaking and writing in public forums, and limited the number of people they could socialize with. Within these dynamics they had to reconfigure and rebuild their lives and figure out how to contribute to the movement for liberation. Given the relative isolation imposed by the banning orders and the fact that their prison sentences elapsed at different times – those

[892] Rassool, C. "The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa." PhD diss. University of the Western Cape, (2004).

with ten-year sentences getting released in April 1974, the others being released three and five years earlier – it was basically impossible to reconvene *as an ensemble* and the various members took different routes to reconfigure their lives.

For Elizabeth van der Heyden, the period immediately after prison was intensely difficult. As the only woman of the group who served a ten-year sentence, and as explored in the "Dossier on Incarceration", prison was a grindingly isolating experience, particularly in the last five years as her closest comrades and inmates – Dulcie September, Dorothy Alexander and Doris van der Heyden – were released after five years. By the time Elizabeth van der Heyden was released, her brother Leslie and his wife Ursula, as well as her siter Doris and her long-time friend Dulcie September had all left the country on exit permits, meaning no return, for England (Leslie and Ursula would later go to Zimbabwe).[893] Her siblings left because the conditions for building and sustaining life were so hard – getting work was a struggle, and the banning order configured their social lives in oppressive ways. Elizabeth van der Heyden experienced similar difficulties but decided to stay in the country as she wanted to remain connected to, and involved in the struggle inside the country. After struggling to do so, she eventually found work at the South African Prisoner Education Trust (SAPET) which provided prisoners and detainees with administrative, financial and other support to continue with and further their studies.[894] SAPET was part of a group of Trusts which included also the South African Healthcare Trust and the South African Students' Trust which worked from the same building.[895] Here she was able to make a contribution to the lives of those, like her, who had been incarcerated by the racist state. Elizabeth van der Heyden worked here from 1979 until the early 1980s when she returned to her first love, and became an English teacher at Heathfield High School.[896]

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[893] Groenink, E. *Incorruptible: The Story of the Murders of Dulcie September , Anton Lubowski and Chris Hani,* (Evelyn Groenink: Cape Town, 2018); Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town; *Murder in Paris: The assassination of Dulcie September* . (Directed by Enver Samuel, South Africa, 2021).

[894] Billy Keniston wrote: "The South African Prisoner Education Trust (SAPET) was a project created by Nusas. In its inception, SAPET was designed by student radicals who were attempting to find ways to connect with and offer solidarity to older generations of the movement." Keniston further wrote about some of the clandestine apartheid police involvement in funding the work largely through the work of the infamous spy Craig Williamson: "The security police created a separate organization, the Prisoners Support Trust (PST) that was then responsible for dispersing all the funding from IUEF on to activists inside South Africa." Keniston, W. "Cover Stories & Undercover Stories." See also Vale, L. *Education is Ours.* (New Africa Books: Cape Town, 1990), there is some discussion of the work that SAPET was doing in this book with a focus on the eastern Cape and in the late 1980s.

[895] Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town; van Ginneken, N., Lewin, S. and Berridge, V. "The emergence of community health worker programmes in the late apartheid era in South Africa: An historical analysis." *Social science & medicine,* 71:6, (2010): 1110-1118.

[896] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.



Figure 10. Elizabeth van der Heyden, c.2010s. "Get to know Betty van der Heyden." Available online at: https://murderinparis.com/news/betty-van-der-heyden [accessed on 17 March 2024].

Dulcie September found house arrest too much to endure and thought she would be of more use to the struggle in exile. Evelyn Groenink wrote that: "A year or two after her release in 1969, Dulcie September left South Africa on an exit permit."[897] She went to London where she became deeply involved in anti-apartheid activities and became a member of the SACP and the ANC.[898] She worked in the ANC Women's League in London for a few years before getting a full-time post with the ANC in Lusaka in 1980 and, in 1983 moved to Paris where she was the organisation's Chief Representative for France, Luxembourg and Switzerland, a post she held until her tragic, still unsolved, assassination on 29 March 1988.[899] Dulcie September was remembered in the ANC as fearless in debate and always willing to defend her position and opinion, she stood out as an inspiration in that way for many of her women comrades because she had no qualms taking on big men in the leadership when she felt it necessary. Her death was more than likely a result of this fearless, committed and politicised intellectual orientation – at the time of her assassination she had been doing politically-sensitive research into French companies'

[897] Groenink, E. *Incorruptible,* p.9.
[898] *Murder in Paris: The assassination of Dulcie September.* (Directed by Enver Samuel, South Africa, 2021).
[899] Groenink, E. *Incorruptible.*

arms deals with the apartheid state, research that a number of powerful groups would rather not have had exposed.[900]



Figure 11. Dulcie September, 1980s. Samuel, E. "The Portfolio." Mail & Guardian, 11-17 June 2021.

Fikile Bam's parents, after retiring, had returned to their hometown of Tsolo in the Transkei, and he was banned there after he was released from prison.[901] He managed to clandestinely and infrequently travel back and forward between there and Cape Town where he would connect with ensemble members like Elizabeth van der Heyden and Neville Alexander until the late 1970s.[902] In this precarious period Elizabeth van der Heyden and Fikile Bam had a brief romantic relationship and had a child, Tina in 1978. According to Elizabeth, Fikile Bam had customary or chieftainship responsibilities in his family and was expected to have multiple wives. Being asked if she would be okay with this situation Elizabeth van der Heyden said "absolutely not." [903] She decided to raise Tina, who she saw as her "masterpiece," on her own in Cape Town.[904] Helen Scanlon wrote that "for her family, the stigma of having a child out of

[900] Ibid.; *They killed Dulcie September* [Podcast Series]. (Open Secrets and Sound Africa, 2019).
[901] Legal Resource Centre, Oral History Project. Interview with Fikile Bam. 29 November 2007. Available online: http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/judge-fikile-bam-interview [accessed on 25 January 2024].
[902] ZA HPRA A2675 -2. Part I. Gail Gerhart and Thomas Karis interview with Fikile Bam. March 1988.
[903] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town. Note this is the only account of the situation I was able to access.
[904] Scanlon, H. *Representation and reality: Portraits of women's lives in the Western Cape, 1948-1976,* (HSRC Press: Cape Town), p.211.

wedlock proved almost more problematic than her political involvement."[905] Like the last five years of prison, under house arrest, with her women comrades out of the country, a complicated relationship with the father of her child and her family, van der Heyden was very isolated and she recalled these years as extremely tough socially.

On the eve of Transkei's sham independence in mid-1976, at the order of Matanzima, a large number of people who were known to be activists were detained, this included Fikile Bam.[906] Interestingly, amongst the ranks of the arrested were members of PUFLSA – the People's United Front for the Liberation of South Africa. PUFLSA was a group that shared many characteristics, sensibilities and approaches as the YCCC/NLF, as well as a tutelage in the pedagogical and political tendencies of the UM and an organizational existence outside of it. The UM influence on PUFLSA came through mentorship from Sobantu Mlonzi who had since broken with the UM due to frustration with its inaction but had been part of the Progressive Forum and other Johannesburg-based formations during his time at Wits University in the 1950s and 1960s.[907] The incarcerated PUFLSA group included the Ntsebeza brothers – Lungisile and Dumisa, Matthew Goniwe, Lulama Xingwana, Zingiza Loza and Meluxolo Silinga.[908] In detention, according to Lungisile Ntsebeza, Bam was very generous and encouraging of the younger comrades and he openly shared his critical reflections on the YCCC/NLF experience.[909] Given the climate in "independent" Transkei, Bam found it too difficult and dangerous to remain involved in politics inside it and he changed tack and decided to pursue legal work for which he had been studying. In his own words, he "[slipped] back into main South Africa and ultimately was able to come back to Johannesburg here to do my pupillage as an advocate" after which he returned to Transkei to work at the newly established High Court.[910] While this work was professionally rewarding, he felt that it had distanced him from "the sort of public interest law which I was hoping to be able to have as part of my career… [and it] somehow left me unfulfilled in terms of being able to make a contribution."[911] Bam was approached by Francis Wilson to participate in the Second Carnegie study on poverty in South Africa[912], which he joined, and, after his banning order ended, that led him into working in the Port Elizabeth offices of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) which he described as legal work which targeted laws that affected poor people

[905] Ibid.
[906] Ntsebeza, L., Wotshela, L., Kepe, T., Matoti, S. and Ainslie, A. "Resistance and Repression in the Bantustans, Part 1 Transkei and Ciskei." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), p.775.
[907] Interview with Lungisile Ntsebeza. 28 September & 5 October 2021. Cape Town.
[908] Ntsebeza, L. et al. "Resistance and Repression in the Bantustans, Part 1 Transkei and Ciskei," p.775.
[909] Interview with Lungisile Ntsebeza. 28 September & 5 October 2021. Cape Town.
[910] Legal Resource Centre, Oral History Project. Interview with Fikile Bam. 29 November 2007. Available online: http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/judge-fikile-bam-interview [accessed on 25 January 2024], p.6-7.
[911] Morris, L. Interview with Fikile Bam. 2 August 1999. Available online: Accessed on 25 January 2024 https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/carnegie/cul:sbcc2fr0sx [accessed on 25 January 2024], p.32.
[912] The results of this study were eventually published as: Wilson, F and Ramphele, M. *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge*, (David Phillip: Cape Town, 1989).

and exploited them as labourers and consumers and as black people facing prosecution under the pass laws.[913]

For both Fikile Bam and Elizabeth van der Heyden– in the LRC and SAPET respectively –the growing NGO sector and the efforts by activists to orient them towards progressive ends, provided spaces to do politicised work. Lionel Davis, also, found work in this sector in the space of cultural work that the BCM had injected with a new sense of dynamism through their philosophy of liberation. After his period of incarceration and the intense period of banning, Lionel Davis became interested in and committed to the production of art. The practice of creating art became a space for him to process traumatic experiences of prison and house arrest as well as becoming a practice of freedom and a way to connect with other activists, build new ensembles and contribute to unfolding struggles.[914] He became involved with the Community Arts Project (CAP) in the late 1970s where he trained to become an artist, an ongoing learning journey that also took him to both Rorke's Drift[915] and, later, in the early 1990s to UCT to study art.[916] At CAP Lionel Davis taught many black students art and through his influence as a teacher, "through drawing and painting, many of Davis's students were able to freely think and create for the first time in years. Often, this opportunity set [his] students on the road to attaining a much stronger and more profound sense of self. "Through the medium of art," Davis explains, "you can begin to dignify a person.""[917] Beyond his work at CAP, Lionel Davis was part of independent art collectives such as the BC-identified Vakalisa which, as Thulile Gamedze wrote, "aligned their commitment to BC within the broader struggle of working class South Africans".[918] The *Athlone News* wrote: "Vakalisa, [means] to spread, to propagate, publish or inform… Vakalisa sees its work as being politically motivated by the struggles of the working class and rejects the idea of the artist as being individualistic, eccentric and politically divorced from his or her social reality."[919] Lionel Davis was thus part of new ensembles that were both charting new radical paths for artists as cultural workers and also, through that, were part of a broader movement taking place in that period of groups identified with a BC politics making an explicit usage of the concept of the "working class" and orientating themselves through and toward it.

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[913] Morris, L. Interview with Fikile Bam. 2 August 1999. Available online: Accessed on 25 January 2024 https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/carnegie/cul:sbcc2fr0sx [accessed on 25 January 2024], p.40.
[914] Lochner, E. "The Community Arts Project (CAP): the role of the arts in building community and artistic development." In Anderson, T., Gussak, D., Hallmark, KK. and Paul, A. (eds.) *International Art and Social Justice Conference*, (National Art Education Association: Alexandria, 2010), pp. 136-146.
[915] Rorke's Drift housed "The ELC Art and Craft Centre was started in 1962 by Peder and Ulla Gowenius. This arouse out of a committee formed in 1961 in Stockholm, Sweden, for the advancement of African Art and Craft in an oppressive, racist country." It started a two year Fine Art programme in 1967 which was one of the few places in the country at the time where black people could study art. Rorke's Drift Art. "Historical Background." Available online at: https://www.rorkesdriftart.com/history-27227945 [accessed on 17 November 2023] .
[916] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[917] Lochner, E. "The Community Arts Project (CAP)," p.143.
[918] Gamedze, T. "Ordinary People, Ordinary Issues, Ordinary Emotions": Practising with Garth Erasmus and black consciousness," 15 Feburary 2021. Available online at: https://asai.co.za/practising-with-garth-erasmus-and-black-consciousness/ [accessed on 17 November 2023].
[919] "Artists form Vakalisa." *Athlone News,* October 1984.



Figure 12. Lionel Davis. Africa South Art Initiative. "Vakalisa Documentary." Available online at: https://asai.co.za/wp-content/gallery/vakalisa-documentary/Lionel_Davis.jpg [accessed on 17 March 2024].

This synthesis, which, crudely put, was that between a BC politics and a socialist one, was a major feature of the period and others in the group besides Lionel Davis, Neville Alexander in particular, played key roles in developing and deepening not only the theory but also the organising relationships between different groupings and networks. When Neville Alexander came out he moved in with his mother at her house in Lotus River, a working-class and lower middle-class neighbourhood of Cape Town classified for 'Coloureds.' This is where he lived, in a room at the back of the house, until he passed in 2012.[920] Neville Alexander met Dr Mahate who became an important source of support for both him and Marcus Solomon after they were released. Mahate was a general practitioner who ran a popular practice in Grassy Park and was known as a "struggle doctor" – he used to treat activists and their families for discounted rates or even for free, and supported a variety of movement activities financially. Dr Mahate gave Neville Alexander a job doing the bookkeeping which supported him financially and he was able to study and write from his mother's house afterhours.[921] After returning from the Island, he was working on his first majorly influential work – *One Azania, One Nation: The national question in South Africa* which was published

[920] Interview with Karen Press. 16 September 2021. Cape Town.
[921] Ibid.

under the pseudonym NoSizwe and the manuscript of which Hamied Mahate, the doctor's son, smuggled into exile to get published by Zed Press.[922] The book was emblematic of Alexander's work in the liberation struggle in the decades to come both of which will be discussed in more detail in this and the following chapter.

Marcus Solomon initially stayed with his brother Patrick in Hanover Park in Cape Town, a working-class community that was designated 'Coloured' under the Group Areas Act. Patrick had taken over the responsibility of looking after their other siblings while Marcus Solomon was on the Island and had also been the one to visit Marcus Solomon most frequently. Marcus Solomon worked for Dr Mahate before finding another job at the City Council as a clerk. While he was staying in Hanover Park, in 1974, Marcus Solomon reconnected with Theresa Botha (previously Jasson) who had been an acquaintance in the early 1960s. She had been a close friend of Charlotte Schimming who was romantically involved with Marcus Solomon at the time. By the mid-1970s, Theresa Botha was an activist who had come up through the Young Catholic Workers and, at the time was becoming a member of the Black Women's Federation. The two got together, and shortly thereafter got married, had a child together, Lee-Anne, and moved to Woodlands in Mitchell's Plain.[923] They became involved in various community projects and political processes together and Marcus Solomon describes the period he spent with Theresa as "the most creative part of my political life. It laid the basis for almost everything."[924] In Hanover Park and in Mitchell's Plain, "the big thing that struck me most is the housing issue, in fact I started right making notes of the housing issue, congestion and the children. What was really striking the number of single par-mothers."[925] These issues and others related to the daily struggles of working black people became central to the organising activities of the emerging civic movement that both Marcus and Theresa Solomon became deeply involved in.

These trajectories were indicative of the decisions that each individual made within their parameters of possibility and the harsh conditions of release from prison and further banning. In different spheres and different directions, all the members of the ensemble, although not acting in concert, remained involved and committed to liberatory politics and made contributions in their own ways in various spaces. The following section explores processes of connecting with other activists and recruiting them into study groups as way of, what Neville Alexander described as "establishing" an "independent socialist network" which they began "almost as soon as the prison gates were shut behind us."[926] While people in these groups would not necessarily know other people who were part of other groups, they were aware of being part of a network across the country. Sound familiar? The resonance with the approach of the YCCC and

[922] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Lucy Edwards and Herbert Jauch. 6 August 2021. Windhoek.
[923] Interview with Theresa Solomon. 3 March 2022. Cape Town.
[924] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[925] Ibid.
[926] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment," p.161.

the NLF is obvious and undeniable, however this was a new moment and it was an opportunity to recruit, work with and help facilitate the emergence and development of a new layer of cadres.

Study and project groups, struggle and new ensembles

As ensemble is a practice – a method of doing life, study and struggle – after and beyond the operative life of the original ensemble, members built new ones with others. This section, which looks at reading groups, support networks and autonomous community projects, is intended to give a sense of the texture and fluid expressions of the non-sectarian spirit of the underground in this period. At the level of the ensemble, it was a process of broadening and bringing new people in to build new relationships as the basis of struggle. Marcus Solomon explains the approach to the study groups as he understood it:

> Not [necessarily] under National Liberation Front, new situation. And that's what study groups are for. Where do you, where are you now? Where you want to be? Where do you find yourselves in the situation? What do you want to change? What do you want to link up with? So, to inform yourself, help create the new way forward…and then, of course, study groups are also to then help clarify the work you are doing in your different structures…. So, Neville Alexander and I we started just, sort of, just cutting the, the corners, restarted the study grouping. We mos had the slogan we not going to be our own banners, I mean, what's the word, we not going to ban ourselves… [be our] own warders, yeah… Yeah, but after a few months, but what was, people started after a few months started, activist coming to us now. Find out how you, coz young people also were interested [in] these Islanders. And some of the questions, what do you guys, is there anything you can how the way forward? And they say what do you think must be done? And I said well and we had discussed this quite intensive on the island; people are going to come to us, what we then say? We would've, what we said then look we've been locked up for 10, 15, 7 years. We must actually ask you that, but the main decis- you, we must all go back to the people. Things are already happening so, we must link up with that and learn from that, that was very useful, learn from, because seasoned activists always had the understanding our main teachers are our people.[927]

For Solomon it was imperative that, as the "seasoned activists", they don't impose a programme but that close contact and engagement with "the people" and the study groups became the spaces where they collectively asked questions, analysed the contemporary juncture and formulated plans. In these groups they collectively read texts from various revolutionary struggles around the world including but not limited to the Russian Revolution, the Palestinian struggle, as well as materials on South Africa, such as Legassick and Hemson's 1976 pamphlet "Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism

[927] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

in South Africa."[928] In addition to reading, in these groups they would strategise about how to intervene in emerging struggles.

Many of the younger cohort of activists that they worked with came out of the BCM, with whom they entered a mutual process of learning and exchange. Neville Alexander writes:

> Because of our reputation as members of the "National Liberation Front" and a certain measure of publicity locally and abroad, many BCM members gravitated toward us and soon we were involved with them in (illegal) study groups, in which mainly political and historical themes or developments were the subject. By way of example, I can vouch for the fact that, among other things, in our Cape Peninsula study groups we addressed the staple issues of the movement such as the land question, the national question, the language question, African culture, the economic system. Needless to say, similar patterns involving political activists and ex-Robben Islanders from different political organizations occurred throughout the country with more or less regularity and for similar reasons.[929]

As Neville Alexander points out, this process of collective learning and intergenerational study was a wider phenomenon in the movement at the time which was characterised by two forces pulling in a similar direction.[930] For comrades in the BCM, having developed for the most part without the experience of older comrades, many were keen to seek out ex-political prisoners as an opportunity to learn and develop their own politics. As these ex-political prisoners re-entered society, with the major liberation organisations largely inactive aboveground inside the country, they wanted to link up with the most widely organised, most energetic section: the BCM. In addition to learning together, older comrades also wanted to influence young BCM cadres in order to recruit them into their structures to revive their internal presence and/or build new structures.[931] The dynamics and multi-faceted nature of this dual process was one of the main themes running through this period and one of the dynamics animating the movement's reconfiguration.

Study, social reproduction, and networks of non-sectarianism

One of the developments in the liberation movement in the wake of the mass arrests and incarceration of comrades in the 1960s was the emergence of support initiatives for prisoners. Although differently organised, Elizabeth van der Heyden's work at SAPET was part of this as was the work of the Alexander

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[928] Interview with Eugene Cairncross. 1 March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town; Legassick, M. and Hemson, D. *Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in South Africa.* (Anti-Apartheid Movement: London, 1976).
[929] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment," p.160.
[930] On this phenomenon, see Houston, G. and Magubane, B. "The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s."; ka Plaatjie, T. "The PAC's internal underground activities," p.669-670.
[931] ka Plaatjie, T. "The PAC's internal underground activities," pp.669-70.

Defence Committee (ADC) about which Archie Dick has written.[932] Another expression of this in Cape Town was an informal and non-sectarian support network for people whose loved ones were imprisoned, mostly on the Island.[933] A lot of people had to travel extremely far – from other parts of South Africa, and some from as far as northern Namibia[934] to visit – so this network would host people and arrange other support as they came to visit their family in prison. They organised support for and hosted people whose imprisoned relatives, comrades, lovers and friends came from across the political spectrum – Unity Movement (UM), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP), South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), African Resistance Movement (ARM), etc.

Eugene Cairncross, who grew up in Woodstock and was doing his PhD in physics at UCT, was a member of the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) and was part of this prisoner support network. Eugene had been brought into this network by fellow APDUSAn Frank van der Horst, an old comrade of the original ensemble from CPSU days.[935] In a roundabout way, through the connection of the non-sectarian support network for prisoners' families, Eugene met both Marcus Solomon and then Neville Alexander who he then began to work very closely with. The story goes like this: Indres Naidoo was a member of Mkhonto WeSizwe (MK), and the SACP and was imprisoned on Robben Island for involvement in an MK operation.[936] When his mother came to visit him, Eugene Cairncross' family hosted her and thereafter they remained in touch and familial.[937] So when Sophie Kisting (who had come from Namibia to study medicine at UCT in 1968 and considered BC her "philosophical and spiritual" home) finished her degree in 1975, she and Eugene Cairncross, her partner, took a trip around the country visiting comrades, discussing the situation and catching up with old friends.[938] In Johannesburg they stayed with Indres Naidoo, who had just been released, and he impressed upon them that they must meet some of his ex-inmates who had also just been released and were living in Cape Town: Marcus Solomon and Neville Alexander.[939]

Sophie Kisting and Eugene Cairncross, along with Neville Alexander and Marcus Solomon, and Joe Adam, another comrade, came together to constitute a study group. Their meetings took place regularly, at least once a week and, in moments of intense struggle, perhaps more often. They usually met at

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[932] Dick, AL. "Learning from the Alexander Defence Committee archives." In Choudry, A., and Vally, S. (eds.) *Reflections on knowledge, learning and social movements: History's schools,* (Routledge: London, 2018), pp.42-53.
[933] Interview with Eugene Cairncross. 1 March 2022. Cape Town.
[934] A large group of SWAPO cadres had been arrested in 1967, sentenced in 1968 and were imprisoned on Robben Island. See Shityuwete, H. *Never Follow the Wolf: The autobiography of a Namibian freedom fighter,* (University of Namibia Press: Windhoek, 2023); and *Paths to Freedom*, (Directed by Richard Pakleppa: On Land Productions, Namibia, 2014).
[935] Interview with Eugene Cairncross. 1 March 2022. Cape Town.
[936] The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, "Indres Elatchininathan Naidoo", Available online at: https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/national-orders/recipient/indres-elatchininathan-naidoo ; Accessed on 18 November 2023.
[937] Interview with Eugene Cairncross. 1 March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town.
[938] Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town.
[939] Ibid.

someone's house, sometimes down by the Liesbeek River, sometimes in people's cars, and almost always over food and often over Lenin.[940] Remember how all YCCC/NLF members had the task of identifying and recruiting people who they thought they could work with into cells? The members of this group were also expected to be building connections with potential people to work with in various areas and spaces of struggle and where they could establish other reading groups in attempt to build a layer of cadres.[941]

Marcus Solomon started another two reading groups. The first was constituted by people who were mainly involved in civic structures and community projects, the specific orientation of this group was to study and debate developments in order to "make interventions in the emerging civic community struggles"[942] and to influence them in a progressive direction. (The following chapter deals more closely with these groups' involvement in civic organisations.) It included Virginia and Desmond Engel, Theresa, Shahida and Johnny Issel, and Peter and Norma Gabriel. The second group was an initiative that emerged out of an interest in the first group – a focus on local youth. This youth study group was constituted by a number of youth mostly from the Mitchell's Plain area – Zelda Holtzman, Vernie Peterson, Trevor Oosterwyk, Theresa Solomon, Michael Weeder, and Bonita Bennett.

Interestingly, years later Marcus Solomon learnt that apparently the initiative to start the study group with the Engels and the Issels was not solely his:

> I was under the impression it was part of replicating, duplicating, our study group. In the meantime, coming out many years later, it seemed that they have their own [agenda] and this is a cross-pollinat[ion], whatever they called, but they said they set up the study group… I'm not saying they're not speaking the truth, but it seems that the two study group programmes were over lapping, they came with an idea, I came with an idea, etc… It was a BC thing, but I think increasingly it was also, although both Virginia and Johnny and the tradition they came with was very interesting. Community work, that was the BC movement's big strength, you get into communities, work with people set up projects. So, their big thing was go back to the community and later on you see, when we did the Mitchell's Plain survey it was part of that tradition go into the community, find out what people are thinking.[943]

This "overlapping" and the independent initiation of the group from two different sources, suggests that there was a wider process of study underway in the movement that was not restricted to partisan allegiances. As Marcus Solomon said: "I was linked to other study groups via Neville Alexander and Joe and Eugene… these were two just two groups of a range of networks being established around Cape Town."[944] Through the connections of Johnny Issel and Virginia Engel, they were also linked to other groupings such as one of slightly older activists from the Congress movement, including people like Fihla Christmas Tinto, Zolile Malindi, Wilson Sadena and Mildred Lesiea.[945] Given the fairly loose political

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[940] Ibid.
[941] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[942] Ibid.
[943] Ibid.
[944] Ibid.
[945] Ibid.; and Interview with Theresa Solomon. 3 March 2022. Cape Town.

form of some of these reading groups, the emerging conditions in the wake of non-partisan student and worker struggles and the growing civic movement, and the intention to study and understand these changing conditions in order to intervene in the reconfiguring liberation movement, different partisan affiliations were largely non-antagonistic.

What Marcus Solomon also highlighted above was another trend in the liberation movement - the focus on community work and self-reliance – which came very much from the BC activists and tradition.[946] Biko expounded on the BC thinking on the matter, saying: "Our projects are not so much oriented towards getting or achieving something for the people. We would rather have people getting it for themselves, and therefore being able to utilize that critical awareness for ever so many things, including a possible retaliation or measure against the system."[947] This approach - and the related impulse to systematically speak with people in the community about their ideas, desires and struggles, the practice of *huis besoek*[948] – had a marked impact on Solomon's own life and the direction of his own politics. Out of these groups that Marcus Solomon started, the first one in particular, to which he makes reference above, came a new interest: on social reproductive issues and a specific interest in youth and children. The study group was very close and they also all had young children, Marcus Solomon said: "We met every Friday or Saturday mainly, and we did everything together and when the children came along, that's where the issue of children - How do we bring up these children under this struggle for the new world?"[949] This question, that emerged from the conditions of their lives, led to inquiries into the process of socialisation. The idea of "the new person" or "the socialist person" and how to facilitate its emergence under the oppressive conditions of the present became a preoccupation.[950] As an aside, this particular focus resonated with a lot of the work that Ottilie and Kenneth Abrahams started doing in Namibia in the 1980s – attempting to build community projects on the basis of participatory democracy. More broadly represents a broadening of a liberatory project toward incorporating more prefigurative elements in addition to a more confrontationist or oppositional agenda.[951] Out of the process of collective inquiry emerged practical expressions of their ideas: they formed a creche, the first members of which were the children of Johhny and Shahieda Issel, Peter and Norma Gabriel, Desmond and Virginia Engel, and Theresa and Marcus Solomon. Theresa Solomon coordinated the creche in the daytime and did

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[946] Tricontinental. *Dossier No. 44: Black Community Programmes: The Practical Manifestation of Black Consciousness Philosophy,* (Tricontinental Institute for Social Research: Johannesburg, 2021).
[947] Biko quoted in Asheeke, TTPW. *Arming Black Consciousness: The Azanian Black Nationalist Tradition and South Africa's Armed Struggle*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2023), p.84.
[948] Visiting people in their homes as part of black social life and used as an organizing methodology.
[949] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[950] Guevara, C. "Socialism and man in Cuba." In Deutschmann, D. (ed.) *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on politics and revolution*, (Ocean Press: London, 2003); Chen, TH. "The new socialist man." *Comparative Education Review,* 13:1, (1969): 88-95; Tian, L. and Yan, Y. "Self-cultivation of the socialist new person in Maoist China: evidence from a family's private letters, 1961–1986." *The China Journal,* 82:1, (2019): 88-110.
[951] Prefigurative politics can be briefly described as, "within the ongoing political practice of a movement" building and practicing "those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal." Boggs, C. "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control." *Radical America,* 11:6, (1977): 99-122.

organising work with the Mitchell's Plain Coordinating Committee (MPCC) and other civic structures in the evenings.[952]

Some of the seeds of this thinking for Marcus Solomon came from reading Lev Vygotsky – a Soviet educational psychologist – whilst on the Island. A particular phrase stuck with him: "children are co-creators of the world from the time they are born."[953] Flowing from this, the approach of the creche centred that co-creative capacity and the agency and autonomy of the children. The idea was not that children should be 'educated' by adults but rather that they should be acknowledged as co-creators of their world and given a safe space that facilitates their independent interaction. The thinking was that, through this experience of freely interacting, the children would socialise each and develop radical values and new ways of being together potentially beyond the imagination of adults who have been socialised in oppressive and individualistic conditions. This orientation became, and remains, one of the main focuses of Marcus Solomon' life in terms of thinking and organising. The Children's Movement (TCM) was launched in 1979 and the Children's Resource Centre (CRC) was launched in 1983. These both grew out of the creche and the need for a different kind of socialisation of children as a central part of the struggle. [954] They were organisational forms that built a network of community groups, across Cape Town initially, who were working with children in a way that aligned with the approach of the reading group's creche.

"Those little gatherings… are to discuss the practical issues"[955]

When I asked her about the study groups, Sophie Kisting said "I want to talk about the projects rather." For her, these were the foundation. Her orientation was that you have to study "because you have to intervene on issues that's alive to your people"; and as a black person who has had the opportunity to

[952] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Theresa Solomon. 3 March 2022. Cape Town.
[953] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town. While I haven't found the exact quote from Vygotsky, and Marcus Solomon admits that he might have remembered it incorrectly, for some of the broad arguments, see Vygotsky, L. "The socialist alteration of man." In Van der Veer, R., and Valsiner, J. (eds.) *The Vygotsky reader* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1994), pp.175-184.
[954] "The Children's Movement was initiated in 1979. It emerged out of community struggles and from mothers asking questions about the future of their children in the context of anti-apartheid struggle. Questions we raised such as, how does learning take place? How does one inculcate values different to those of the apartheid system? How do we develop new types of relationships? If we reject Bantu Education, what should our children's learning and education look like, what would an emancipatory education look like? A number of Children's Groups were established in different communities. Eventually these groups, as a collective, called themselves the Children's Movement." Popular Education Programme. "Children's Resource Centre and Children's Movement." Available online at: https://www.popularеducation.org.za/content/childrens-resource-centre-and-childrens-movement [accessed on 17 February 2023]. See also Peters, M. "Children as Change Agents? The Children's Movement in Action, South Africa 1983-2021." Hons. thesis. University of the Western Cape, (2021).
[955] Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town.

attend university you have to "use your skills to help uplift the downtrodden and dispossessed people."[956] About the term 'study group', she said the following:

> [D]efinitely, it's a misnomer. Yes, we studied, but everything we studied, Asher, was in order to implement something, not for the idea of just gaining knowledge… [I]t would have been [more accurate for me] if we call it project meetings. Even though we had to study those books, everything from Gramsci we would read the trilogy of Trotsky, we would read Lenin, Lenin, Lenin, Lenin. And, but you know, that sort of, it's your homework kind of thing, but those little gatherings… are to discuss the practical issues.[957]

Kisting's intervention, that these were "project meetings" rather than strictly "study groups", is an essential one as the inseverable relationship between these two things is at the core of these ensembles' character and texture. Like the creche and TCM, started by Solomon's other reading and friendship group, many members were involved in independent community projects across the city which they generally funded from their own earnings. Kisting herself, a doctor, was involved in a range of autonomous health projects such as a clinic that she started with some other doctors in an informal housing settlement in Modderfontein.[958] An initiative to teach people first aid, led by nurses and doctors in collaboration with the Domestic Workers' Union, was started in the context of severe state violence in 1976. They started this because masses of protesting black students were being shot and beaten up by police. So many were dying "because people didn't know how to stop the blood." First aid was thus approached as a way for communities to develop skills both to prevent people dying but also keep them from having to go to state institutions where they would often get charged by the police for involvement in the protest in addition to the racist medical treatment.

These study groups were oriented toward, as Sophie Kisting put it, "issues that's alive to your people" or "bread and butter issues" of the "urban and rural poor" – campaigns around electricity or other services, land protests, workplace strikes, or other kinds of political action.[959] They attempted to continually make themselves aware of what was unfolding in the country and internationally, and attempted to support and intervene where they could. One method of doing so was collectively producing and distributing pamphlets about particular struggles and the context that produced them. Another way of supporting was helping to raising awareness, for example, when the Fattis and Monis strike erupted in March/April 1979 the group raised money to send Marcus Solomon to Durban where he went to discuss the strike with comrades there as part of an effort to get the strike endorsed nationally.[960] As Thozamile Botha has written, this period of the late 1970s was one in which there was increasing overlap between civic and labour struggles and these ensembles were very much part of that as they were involved in and supporting

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[956] Ibid.
[957] Ibid.
[958] Ibid.
[959] Ibid.
[960] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town. See also Pillay, D. "Speaking truth to power: a personal journey through the politics of boycott and engagement at Rhodes University during the 1980s." *African Sociological Review,* 9:1, (2005): 184-190.

struggles across various terrains.[961] Kisting spoke about how they got involved in various struggles and what the spirit of those collaborations were:

> [It was] sort of try to engage in a cooperative fashion. In those years, you know of the late '70s In order to engage with people very, very directly, somebody would introduce you to someone that can be trusted in a particular township and you start working… it was that kind of time Asher where you it didn't mean that they belong to movement, which I belong or Neville Alexander belong or a tendency but because we were inspired by the theory that informed our actions, *to work with as many people as possible in a non-sectarian manner, for the sake of helping us towards a liberation from the yoke that is carrying us*. And within that we strove for unity, for unity. And there was not a very definitive divide at the time.[962]

What Kisting described here is really the spirit of these kind of collaborations and gives some sense of what Neville Alexander pointed to as the "united front ethos" that existed in this period. In these new ensembles, there was continual and fluid movement between the social space of study groups, project meetings, meals, family responsibilities, building connections, unfolding struggles, and jobs. Personal relationships which had their beginnings and their centres in the political initiative transcended that in multiple ways as ensemble members' lives – political, social and familial – became bound up together. These relationships were kind of the social fabric of the non-sectarian politics of the period.

This section explored some of the nodes of the "independent socialist network"/study groups/project meetings that some members of the YCCC/NLF began organising once they were out of prison and still under banning orders. The exact character of these groups is difficult to define and this is why the long descriptions and excerpts of thoughts of those who were involved are so important to get a sense of the texture and the form of these relationships and the various levels at which they were involved and intervened. The political identity and organisational form of this spirit was loose, "emerging" and it was in "process," and as Sophie Kisting said, it was more about an involvement in and support of actual struggles than it was about which organisation one belonged to. All this took place within a deep study of and dialogue with revolutionary history, thought and practice and it was within this that they understood all of their work – involvement in civic struggles, autonomous health projects, support for strikes. With a non-sectarian politics they worked across multiple struggles with as many people as they could, regardless of the political tradition or tendency they came from. The emphasis on community projects for self-reliance was a trend in the liberation movement at the time that had been given new impetus by the BCM and its approach to Black Community Programmes as an essential part of the process of liberation. Marcus Solomon expressed how that approach influenced him and his orientation to struggle a great deal. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the themes of this chapter is the non-sectarian ethos that existed in the movement in this mid-late 1970s, and another is how the movement as a whole was in a process of reconfiguration. One of the major factors in this dynamic was the strength of the BCM and

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[961] Botha, T. "Civic associations as autonomous organs of grassroots' participation." *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory,* 79, (1992): 57-74.
[962] Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town.

significant changes and challenges at the level of both organisation and philosophy within it. The following section looks at some of the changes within BCM and some challenges the movement and the philosophy was confronted with in the heat of the late 1970s.

The changes: BC, challenges and the orientation of the question mark

By the mid-1970s there were a number of critiques of BC and the BCM from both inside and outside of it. A number of adherents and members of structures had the feeling that the framework of BC was limited in grasping the complex nature of South African society and the organising strategy that grew out that framework was potentially not sufficient to achieve the liberation they envisioned and desired.[963] Diliza Mji, part of the leadership at the time, recalled that, internally, "around '74/'75 BC was under heavy – under heavy questioning."[964] (Mji is famous, or infamous, depending who you speak to, for his speech at SASO's General Student Council in 1976 where he was introducing Marxist concepts into BC discourse.)[965] Some of the major issues were, for some, with its economic policy, framed by the concept of "African Communalism", a lax approach to security, and the movement's perceived capacity to confront and overthrow the apartheid regime.[966] Toivo Asheeke has written on about how, from 1972, a group of revolutionaries internal to the BCM were meeting clandestinely to discuss the movement adopting armed struggle as a more direct challenge to the state.[967] Many went into exile and some, like the Bokwe Group, attempted to form specifically BC armed structures. On the internal front, Johnny Issel articulated the orientation of one section of the BCM: "We were looking for an alternative, rather we were looking for a political hold that could help us fight this struggle to the end."[968] Issel's search would eventually take him into the ANC and the UDF in the 1980s but, in the wake of the Soweto uprisings, in which activists from the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) across the country were arrested, he was still searching:

> The BCM's approach was found in 1976 to fall short of what was required to lead our people into an effective struggle challenging the SA government. We are sitting at Victor Verster prison in 1976. We are all Black

[963] "I met Neville Alexander shortly after he came from Robben Island… now that was 1974. That is a time, 74-76, when we had very serious problems with the BCM. We were looking for a political hold that could help us fight this struggle to the end… Our problems were the kind of economic policy which the BCM was in the process of formulating for a future SA. We had very serious problems with that… Then the fraternisation of the top echelon in the movement with Americans, American government officials," ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989.
[964] Fredrickse, J. Interview with Diliza Mji. 1985. Available online: https://www.saha.org.za/nonracialism/transcript_of_interview_with_diliza_mji.htm [accessed 2 March 2024], p.1.
[965] Mazamane, MV., Maaba, B. and Biko, N. "The Black Consciousness Movement," p.139.
[966] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989; see also Gibson, Nigel. "Black Consciousness 1977-1987; the dialectics of liberation in South Africa." *Africa Today,* 35:1, (1988): 5-26.
[967] See Chapter 3 particularly in Asheeke, TTPW. "Uncovering hidden fronts of Africa's liberation struggle: Black power, Black consciousness and South Africa's armed struggle, 1967-1985." PhD diss. Binghamton University (2018), pp. 85-127.
[968] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989, p.6.

> Consciousness adherents. It was the only movement that was dominant and active during the entire Seventies. There was only one Unity Movement guy there but he was arrested for staring or looking or something like that. And maybe one or two odd persons who were also arrested for some strange reason. We are all there. We are in the Western Cape so we've been having problems with the BCM. And those problems have not been strongly articulated but we're sitting in Victor Verster. And here we are witnessing in the entire country, as a result of our work, our propaganda etc, these things are taking place. And are these things enough to bring this government to a downfall?
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> … And we had to admit that it was not enough to bring the government down. So there must be something seriously wrong with our movement. So we left Victor Verster not knowing where to go, what to do. That's when many of us for the first time, for the first time, discovered Lenin. For the first time when we read Marxist literature, things like that…[969]

Issel articulates a certain kind of openness to new methods and the orientation to be searching. It was this that made possible many of the intergenerational and non-sectarian collaborations and learning exchanges in the underground in that period. While the BCM internally was experiencing changes, it was equally also both a challenge to, and was being challenged from quarters outside of it.

To say the least, Neville Alexander was initially not completely convinced by BC, (that changed in some ways later but we'll get there). One of the first pieces he wrote after his release was titled "Black Consciousness: A reactionary tendency?"[970] It was published in the Teachers' League of South Africa's (TLSA) *The Education Journal* and, due to his banning order, it was under the pseudonym Mildred Poswa. There is some controversy around the piece's title which originally was published without the question mark but in later reprints this was corrected.[971] The piece itself is harshly critical of BC. Neville Alexander refers to it as "essentially" a "cult affected and popularised by SASO." He refers also to black music and black theology as "cults, gimmicks and commodities" which were "transported" from the United States (US) "by a divergent collection of reactionary interests.[972]" I argue that he very fundamentally misunderstood and misrepresented the movement, the historical conditions of its development and indeed the liberatory potential of its philosophy. I think there are two main, intrinsically related problems with the piece which are both methodological and, which is also to say, political. The first is related to how Alexander reads BC as a transplantation of a US phenomenon of black struggle and the second is the problem with that transplantation itself in relation to the actual context of BC's development in South Africa. His interpretation of black struggles in the US I find problematic. According to him, and without

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[969] Ibid. p.8.
[970] Powsa, M. "Black Consciousness: A reactionary tendency." *The Education Journal,* (January 1982). [This is a republication of the original piece.]
[971] Alexander, N. "Black consciousness: A reactionary tendency?" In Pityana, NB., Ramphele, M., Mpumlwana, M. and Wilson, L. (eds.) *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness,* (David Philip: Cape Town, 1991).
[972] Powsa, M. "Black Consciousness," p.1 & 4.

citing any actual works supposedly representing the position, the general failure of black movements in the US was:

> [T]he fruit of the lack of a scientifically-based social analysis — the result of illusions about caste. They failed to recognise the indispensable precondition for the emancipation of the racially oppressed in the USA, which is that the struggle of the oppressed, to be successful, must merge with the general struggle against the oligarchic order in that country.[973]

What is implied here is an encouragement for black people to join the "mainstream of the struggle against exploitation and oppression" which, in the US, can only mean joining the white working class. This is an incredibly strange and awkward position for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Alexander's own sensibility was never to join the "mainstream" of the movement against exploitation and oppression in his own context, he had a relationship to it but always maintained a position of independence based on the convictions of his own analysis. He also had a critique of the historically reactionary role that the white working class had played.[974] Secondly, the specific position of black people within the racist US social formation and the limitations of mainstream/white unions and organisations to seriously address and resist these conditions, ie. the inadequacies of the "mainstream of the movement against exploitation and oppression", are the exact reasons for the emergence and necessity of black movements both historically and in the contemporary.[975]

Another set of issues enter when Alexander attempts to transplant this problematic reading of US black movements to the BCM in South Africa. His argument is basically that "BC" is reactionary in the US, and as, according to him, it was directly transplanted, it is even more so in South Africa given that black people constitute the majority of the population. Contrary to transplantation, Leigh-Ann Naidoo has written on the pedagogical process of debate, dialogue and translation through which SASO formulated

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[973] Ibid., p.4.

[974] See for instance: "A very important social class in South African society is the white working class… today they form the main pillar of the colour caste, capitalist system… at the moment and for the foreseeable future their immediate interests [lie] with that of emergent fascism in this country in every respect." Yu Chi Chan Club. "Pamphlet No. II. The conquest of power in South Africa," c.1962, p.2; and: "The growth of capitalist agriculture and the agricultural export industry produced pressures and contradictions that led to the formation of the Afrikaner Bond and the early Afrikaner sectionalist movement. Mining created a privileged white working class which challenged the ruling classes by combining together in order to retain privileges and rights for skilled (white) workers as opposed to unskilled or semi-skilled (black) workers." NoSizwe. *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa,* (Zed Press: London, 1979), p.112.

[975] There is a plethora of work on this topic from a wide variety of angles and different historical moments. See for example, Du Bois, WEB. *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a history of the part which black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880*, (Routledge: London, 2017) and a critical engagement with that seminal book: Robinson, C. "A Critique of WEB Du Bois' Black Reconstruction." *The Black Scholar,* 8:7, (1977): 44-50. See also: Carson, C., Foner, PS. and Ransby, B. (eds.) *The black panthers speak*, (Haymarket: Chicago, 2014); Kelley, R. *Freedom Dreams: The black radical imagination,* (Beacon Press: Boston, 2002); Padmore, G. *Pan-Africanism or communism: The coming struggle for Africa,* (D. Dobson: London, 1956); Robinson, C. *Black Marxism: The making of the black radical tradition,* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2020); Trotsky, L. *On black nationalism and self-determination,* (Pathfinder Press: New York, 1978); X, M. *The end of white world supremacy: four speeches*, (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2020).

the philosophy of BC which took place through an engagement with a wide variety of texts. Based on actual research and with a very different orientation to 1976 Neville Alexander, Naidoo writes:

> The 1970s was a time in South African history when black intellectuals were critically selecting, analysing, critiquing and developing a home grown version of BC, which resulted in an outpouring of political writing by black people. SASO founders were also able to draw on the writings of other African intellectual activists and leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, and were witnessing African states to the north gain independence from colonial rulers. SASO and the BCM were selecting and reading a pan-African canon, including literature coming out of the Black Power movement in the United States. A systematic engagement with this canon allowed for the BCM to develop concepts from South Africa, relevant to the particular context from which they were writing, building the basis for a critique of apartheid education and developing further ideas and understandings of the role that education could play in the fight for liberation.[976]

Another part of this elaborate process of study was a practice that firmly situated the BCM in the South African context and this was the undertaking of fieldwork in black communities, discussing issues and ideas with everyday thinking black people. There was evidently an influence from black movements in the US, this is undoubtable. However, in situating that dynamic in a broader continental context, Toivo Asheeke suggests that:

> [T]he message of Black Power was enthusiastically received by not only college students, but key liberation movements and citizens of Dar es Salaam who felt its message resonated deeply within their own experiences as colonised and recently liberated Africans. Black Power was not a foreign import to Africans, or a cut and paste job by Africans enthralled by the energy and righteousness of the Afro-American struggle. Black Power addressed issues of the abuse of hierarchical power structures, the global and racist nature of capitalism/imperialism, and the dogged determination to overthrow white settler colonial rule politically, socially, culturally and economically.[977]

BC was in step with other African liberation movements in their engagement with black thought from the struggle in the US. There was no simple importation of US ideas or practices, the process incorporated many influences, of which Black Power, itself a heterogenous phenomenon, was just one and the influence of black movements internationally was multi-directional.[978] Without seeing or understanding this locally-situated dialectical process of the development of BC, Alexander makes it difficult for himself to see or understand its contextual emergence.

Alexander further made the argument that BC was basically a continuation of the ruling party's tribalisation project and was in favour of the reactionary division of the country into bantustans. This is quite plainly historically inaccurate as evidenced by any of the BCM's official policy with regards to

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[976] Naidoo, LA. "The Role of radical pedagogy in the South African Students' Organisation and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, 1968–1973." *Education as Change,* 19:2, (2015), p.122.
[977] Asheeke, TTPW. *Arming Black Consciousness*, p.64.
[978] Ibid., and, in the production of culture, and some discussion of the dynamics of this ongoing dialogue, see Kelley, RDG. *Africa speaks, America answers: Modern jazz in revolutionary times,* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2012).

bantustans, their formulation of black as a political identity which resists apartheid categorisations, and the ruling party's crushing of the movement because of the radical challenge it posed to apartheid designs. For Alexander and the kind of UM non-racialism in which he was trained, BC and their decision to organise without white people,[979] clearly presented a challenge and perhaps even a certain kind of limit for him. In spite of the way in which it clearly unsettled him and clouded his analysis, the ontology of the question mark in the original piece's title is crucial: The question mark is a potential opening, it indicates that the process of study and investigation is still underway, and holds the possibility for he, himself to move, which he did. By the time he had published *One Azania, One Nation,* some of his views on BC had turned basically 180 degrees as he came to understand the movement as representing and enacting the "surest blow to Bantustanisation."[980] What a transformation!

Neville Alexander was open to moving and indeed was moved by the challenge of BC. The refusal of closure of the question mark was key to holding the space for this possibility and was essential to future intellectual and political work much of which was done in principled collaboration with elements of the BCM. This was some of the ground on which collaborations with young BCM comrades took place and the orientation of the question mark highlights the importance of an open orientation to questioning as a key part of building solidarity and non-sectarianism. While Alexander never identified as a BC adherent and continued to disagree with some elements and positions of the movement, this never stopped him from working with them in numerous comradely collaborations. The following section explores an attempt initiated by the BCM to build a concrete manifestation of the spirit of non-sectarian and a structure that would unite the liberation movement as a whole, at home and in exile.

"A statement of common ground"[981]: The Azanian Liberation Front

In addition to the previously-discussed loose, diffuse and autonomous expressions of the non-sectarian ethos that was characteristic of the liberation movement underground in the 1970s – the reading groups, the support networks, the community projects – there was an attempt to build a more formal organisational form that would embody the explicit desire to collaborate and coordinate efforts and

[979] He claims that BC is a retrogression from the "new road" of 1943 because "the nation-to-be-born in this country cannot exclude any section of the people." This itself a contradiction because the "new road" was established on the basis on non-collaboration and the refusal to organise with certain sections of the population. Powsa, M. "Black Consciousness," p.11.

[980] "[I]t is a great step forward, spurred on by Black Consciousness and the growing criticism from other wings of the national liberation movement, to state roundly that 'In our opinion, the South African nation is the totality of all its people, black and white, who pay allegiance to South Africa as their homeland' and even that the consciousness of the African 'should be broadened so that in it the African should understand not only his being African but more his being South African. This is the surest blow to Bantustanisation.'" NoSizwe. *One Azania, One Nation,* p.167-168.

[981] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Gail Gerhart interview with Peter Jones. July 1989.

energy across the movement. Apart from a seminar paper of my own,[982] some details in Alexander's chapter on the Azanian Manifesto and the description of the process of building the "New Front" in Mazamane et al.'s paper on "The Black Consciousness Movement"[983], the history of the Azanian Liberation Front[984] (ALF), the process of formation of which is the subject of this section, has not been written about.

Neville Alexander writes about some of the context of the ALF's formation, the BCM's initiative and his involvement in it:

> The BCM leadership, whatever the contradictions and disagreements in its ranks, together with other organizations, including underground socialist groups such as the one to which I belonged, was actively exploring ways and means of establishing a united political front not merely as a tactical alliance but as a long-term strategic alliance for the attainment of the overthrow of the apartheid state.[985]

As Neville Alexander points out, the specific impetus for building the ALF came from the BCM. This as general orientation – to unite the liberation movement – and the specific attempt of the ALF are generally downplayed, or ignored in the history of the BCM. It had long been an intention of the BCM to build some form of unity within the liberation movement internal and external to the country in an attempt to advance the struggle further through cooperation and collaboration on various issues.

The BCM's desire to unite the national liberation movement in some form goes back, at least to the General Student Council in 1972 when the intention was put forward and debated.[986] The movement had officially maintained that it was positively neutral with regard to the other liberation organisations. However, the dynamics of the actual conditions were not as straightforward as the policy suggested. As the most organised force inside the country, BCM comrades were clandestinely being approached, courted and convinced by other organisations, particularly by the ANC and the PAC, to join them. From

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[982] Gamedze, A. "The Azanian Liberation Front: Notes on an ongoing investigation." *Wits History Workshop Seminar,* 19 October 2022.

[983] From the process describe and the people involved, I have ascertained that the "New Front" described by Mazamane et al., is the same as the ALF: "BCM leaders entertained, clandestinely for the most part, a desire to link with the exile-based liberation movements. They proposed a united front, similar to the short-lived South Africa United Front… This New Front would encompass the ANC, PAC, NEUM, BCM and other anti-apartheid formations. The idea of the BCM opening lines of communication with other liberation movements had been on the cards since its inception but gathered momentum after Soweto and the banning of BCM organisations." Mazamane, MV. Et al. "The Black Consciousness Movement," p.152.

[984] The name "Azanian Liberation Front" was mentioned independently in a number of interviews including: Interview with Brian Hotz-Ashley. 4 March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town and Interview with Na-iem Dollie. 6 April 2022. Cape Town.
Toivo Asheeke, a comrade and historian, who has been very encouraging, generous and helpful generally with regards to the present research, is the only scholar who I have seen mention the South African/Azanian Liberation Front. In his use he refers not to the formation under investigation here, but to a short-lived attempt to build a front of the armed wings of the liberation movement that was organised primarily from Botswana by the 'Bokwe Group' between the Septembers of 1973 and 1976. The failure to build that front resulted in the formation of the Azanian People's Liberation Front. See Chapter 3, Asheeke, TTPW. "Uncovering hidden fronts of Africa's liberation struggle," pp. 85-127.

[985] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment," p. 163.

[986] Chapter 1, Asheeke, TTPW. "Uncovering hidden fronts of Africa's liberation struggle," pp. 1-37.

the side of the BCM, too, various attempts to link up organisationally were underway, underground. Following the establishment of the Black Peoples Convention (BPC) in Hammanskraal on 16 December 1972[987], John Ganya, of the PAC said:

> We told the BPC that we wanted to use their organisation as a base from which to recruit members for the PAC and this request was supported. They even alerted us to those members of the BPC who were too close to the ANC in their ideological thinking. For example, Steve Biko's brother was a PAC member. Some of the BPC leaders had their relatives who were ANC members. So the BPC leaders and its members were divided between us and the ANC.[988]

On a similar note, but a different approach, Houston and Magubane wrote about processes of linking up between the ANC and SASO:

> Joyce Sikhakhane, who had been active in an ANC underground initiated by Winnie Mandela in Soweto during the 1960s, continued working underground on her release from detention in September 1970. One of her immediate tasks was to link up with the leaders of the newly formed South African Students Organisation (SASO). In early 1971 Sikhakhane was called to a meeting in Durban with Steve Biko, Rick Turner and Griffiths Mxenge to discuss 'how to take things forward.' 'Steve Biko really sought out the ANC activists, plus the leadership,' she says. She was one of the people working in the ANC underground inside the country who 'didn't find it problematic to talk to Steve Biko, Barney Pityana, Harry Nengwekhulu and the others'. These contacts were to prove useful later.[989]

As Joyce Sikhakhane implies, the majority of the ANC underground considered it problematic to engage the BCM. This was quite different to the close relationship with the PAC.[990] Some PAC underground operatives such as Zephania Mothopeng and Saki Mafatshe worked closely with and sometimes inside BPC structures.[991]

While all these attempts to link up, to woo and to recruit were underway, it remained the BCM's official intention to bring the movement together in some way. Partly as a response to energies pushing and pulling in different directions, and difficulties emerging due to botched attempts of exile-based movements to influence developments on the home front,[992] a Black People's Convention "position paper" from late 1976 laid out the following:

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[987] Asheeke, TTPW. *Arming Black Consciousness,* p.87.
[988] ka Plaatjie, T. "The PAC's Internal Underground Activities, 1960–1980," p.686.
[989] Houston, G. and Magubane, B. "The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s," p.373.
[990] Johnny Issel recalled that some elements within the PAC often considered the BCM to belong to them. ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989.
[991] From around 1974, the PAC underground in Johannesburg was working with and recruiting youths active in the South African Students' Movement (SASM) and sending them for ideological training, conducted by PAC members, over weekends in Swaziland. Zephania was working with the theological centre at Wilgespruit and was running extra politics and history classes from there for this cohort of youths to attend. In Kagiso, youths organised through a body they established, the Young African Christian Movement (which later changed the Christian to Religious), to draw people into the PAC. ka Plaatjie, T. "The PAC's Internal Underground Activities, 1960–1980," p.687-690.
[992] Peter Jones: "Inside the country, we were at the receiving end. And we knew that we were going through a very very dangerous process. We were going through a process where because of the accidental manifestations of the '60s

> There is a need for the resolution of conflicting interests and in pursuit of this the following options are open:
>
> – we can form a new front operating both internally and externally;
>
> – we can form a basis for future unity encompassing all liberation movements;
>
> – we can form an exclusive frontline alliance with one group at the expense of others;
>
> – we need to be ready to form alliances with non-frontline groups of particular importance to us.[993]

Attempts to build something along these lines were already well underway by the time this paper was published in 1976. The BCM leadership, in particular Steve Biko and Peter Jones, initiated a series of discussions that took place over the period of, roughly, 1974-77 between themselves and certain elements of the ANC, the PAC, the Unity Movement and "Alexander's Group" (a name which will be discussed later).

Affronts and building a front

There were two sets of processes planned in the of building the ALF. These were the attempt to reach consensus on a common position internal to the country, and the interface and negotiations with the externally-located movements, the latter process unfortunately never happened in this period. The exact form of the front was to be worked out in dialogue with all of the representatives who would discuss it with their own constituencies. The proposed form was to be along the following lines: On the internal front, the proposition was that the BPC be used as the body to coordinate and cohere the movement and could speak with a united voice to those in the external front.[994] There was also the proposition, reminiscent of the NLF's ambitions, coming from the internal movement, that all the armed forces unite in a front that would coordinate military activities. The present section explores the various dynamics, aspirations and the process of organising the front.

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we had a political leadership outside the country that actually believed that they have the obligation to decide the direction of the struggle back home.…You would find that any person coming in from outside, with any instruction or initiative or anything, when he gets caught police don't even bother to do fancy espionage work or do fancy detective work. They grab every single known member of that organisation, ANC or PAC, in a particular area and beat the hell out of them. And eventually, from admissions and stuff, people would just get into a trial, and people would go back to jail for years. And this resulted in a lot of negativity. And we knew that the conditions were emerging in the country where we could actually quite convincingly put an argument on the table to force, to compel a return of the political initiative inside the country." ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Gail Gerhart interview with Peter Jones. July 1989, p.11.

[993] Cited in Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment," p.162. Alexander adds in the endnote: "Readers will have to accept my word for it that this is an unaltered quote from an authentic minute of the executive meeting of the BPC, referred to in the text. I have taken it from a letter I wrote from Germany to comrades in South Africa in 1979, which is in my personal archives," p.170.

[994] Ibid.

One of the major political events in the 1976 calendar was the granting of sham independence to Transkei – it would be the first Bantustan to "achieve" that status. This was a preoccupation intellectually and politically for many, Neville Alexander included. He was particularly concerned with how the division of the country into "independent" states would possibly fragment the national liberation movement and resistance to apartheid.[995] Alexander wrote about an action that was planned and organised to take place in protest of the Transkei independence on the 26th of October 1976. Organising committees for this action existed across the country and they contained mainly BCM cadres but also included people from the ANC, PAC and "independent socialist groups" such as those that Neville Alexander and Marcus Solomon belonged to.[996] That protest was planned to be the launch of a front constituted by the organising parties. The protest didn't eventually take place as it and most other developments were eclipsed by uprisings starting in June 1976 but the attempt to build the front continued. The slow process of planning and organising for the front, took place undercover under conditions of state surveillance and repression. Comrades who were involved in the process were situated in different parts of the country. The Eastern Cape and parts of Natal, being proximate and playing host to the centre of BC activities in Ginsberg, were the places where the talks were most developed. In those regions and parts of Cape Town there was the strongest consciousness and consensus around the front amongst the movements.[997] In order to meet, the protagonists often had to either spirit themselves away under the cover of darkness and pretence to fool the Security Branch, or fabricate an alternative story to justify their movements.[998]

Mazamane, *et al*, write that after the BPC conference in 1975 "contacts began in earnest with the ANC's Griffiths Mxenge and Harry Gwala; NEUM's Neville Alexander; and the PAC's Zephania Mothopeng, who initially opposed the idea although Sobukwe was in favour of holding exploratory talks."[999] Here is a good point to discuss a certain ambivalence and that emerged around the UM, the underground socialist network and "Neville's Group." In a number of accounts, such as the quote from Mazamane, *et al*, Neville Alexander is referred to as the representative of the NEUM and in others, "Neville's Group" is mentioned. This ambiguity is interesting given the fact that Neville Alexander was never a member of the UM after his expulsion by Tabata in 1961. With regards to the ALF, Derrick Naidoo was the only person who mentioned specific elements of the UM who were involved in the ALF, suggesting that African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA) and South African Council On Sport (SACOS) were involved - both organisations emerged out of the Tabata faction and contained old friends and comrades of the ensemble.[1000] There are no other accounts – from interviews or otherwise - that

[995] Interview with Eugene Cairncross. 1 March 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Karen Press. 16 September 2021. Cape Town.
[996] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment," p.162.
[997] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989.
[998] For example, on the one occasion that Biko and Sobukwe got to meet in person, the latter actually took on a case (he was working as a lawyer) in a close by district so that he could travel through Ginsberg to meet Biko. ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Gail Gerhart interview with Peter Jones. July 1989.
[999] Mazamane, MV. Et al. "The Black Consciousness Movement," p.153.
[1000] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town.

pinpoint the exact relationship between these formations. This is potentially as much a sign of the reluctance to disclose details from the underground as the fluid and emergent form of organisation prevalent in the underground at the time. The most plausible explanation was that Neville Alexander was representing a bloc of sympathetic UM organisations and/or individuals, and the independent socialist network. There was likely some overlap between these groups (recall that Eugene Cairncross was both an APDUSA member and in a reading group with Alexander and Solomon). The important reflections on these dynamics are the fact that Neville Alexander's name and stature had achieved a level of recognition in the liberation movement,[1001] and that there was some level of collaboration with UM people or organisations, itself another expression of the non-sectarian, fluid and emergent character of underground politics of the period.

Back to the ALF process… The plan was that, after reaching consensus inside the country, Biko and potentially also Alexander would go outside the country to meet with the external structures to discuss this proposal.[1002] The BCM had been trying to set up a meeting with the ANC in exile since at least 1974 to discuss some kind of front. Due to a lack of intent on the part of the ANC, as well as some circumstantial factors, that meeting only happened five years later, in 1979. Under those renewed conditions of repression, no one from inside the country was able to attend the meeting which was in Lusaka. Eventually Barney Pityana and Ben Khoapa attended who were in exile in UK and US respectively.[1003]

In 1977, still in the process of building consensus in the country, through their extensive meetings, Biko and Jones had synthesised the conversations they had had with the various comrades and had drawn up a paper with minimum demands that had been endorsed by all the movements internal to the country up to the highest level; with the exception of "the funding issue".[1004] The BPC had received funds for projects from a range of corporate donors including Anglo-American and there was murmurings both inside and outside the BCM about what the political ramifications of that relationship were or might be. This was a sticking point between the BCM and the independent socialists in the attempt to reach a common position for establishing the ALF.[1005] On a whim, Biko and Jones made an undercover trip to Cape Town

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[1001] When I asked Sophie Kisting if she saw or understood herself as part of "Neville's Group", she responded: "I certainly never looked at it like that. But because Neville Alexander was a known political person who went to Robben Island and so on. And, of course, he is also a strong political writer. And sort of fearless defender of his theories and so on. People may have identified others with him as such, but I think within the group, even in WOSA Neville Alexander was very, very much part of a broader group." Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town.

[1002] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment," p.161-162; Peter Jones said that there was a plan to smuggle Biko into Swaziland for a night to have the meeting and according to Johnny Issel, it was Barney Pityana who was going to organise the meeting from exile. ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Gail Gerhart interview with Peter Jones. July 1989.

[1003] Mazamane, MV. Et al. "The Black Consciousness Movement."

[1004] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town.

[1005] Ibid. and see Jaffe, H. *European colonial despotism: A history of oppression and resistance in South Africa,* (Kamak House: London, 1996), p.187; Mandela, N. "Whiter the Black Consciousness Movement? An Assessment." Available online at: https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv02009/05lv02010/06lv02013/07lv02015.htm [accessed on 22 November 2023].

in August 1977, one of the main purposes of which was to meet with Neville Alexander. They hoped it would be the final consultation before the internal liberation movement reached a consensus on the form and programme of the united front. The meeting tragically never happened and the dynamics around the non-meeting were complex on a number of levels.

Against his banning order in the Transkei, Fikile Bam was visiting Cape Town and had been staying with Biko and Jones at a comrade's house in Crawford, a suburb in Cape Town, and he had been assisting them with various things during their visit.[1006] Biko asked Fikile Bam to take him to Alexander's house because he had always wanted to meet him. Fikile Bam was familiar with transporting people to and from Alexander's house, as he said that: "Neville Alexander had a girlfriend who came to his house illegally, and I would be driving her over and back at night."[1007] He agreed to take Biko and Jones over:

> Neville Alexander was under house arrest, and wasn't allowed any visitors at night after a certain hour. I had phoned him to say that I would be bringing someone by, but I couldn't say who it was on the phone. When Neville Alexander opened the door and saw that it was Steve, he was angry with me. He refused to let Steve come in. He was nervous because he wasn't allowed to have visitors, and he thought Steve was probably being tailed by the police. He also just didn't want to talk to Steve "man to man." Neville Alexander was busy trying to woo the BC people to make them follow him and not Steve. The whole incident really made me lose confidence in Neville Alexander. I have always been troubled about it.[1008]

For Fikile Bam, Alexander's refusal to meet Biko was a significant moment in a relationship of study and struggle over twenty odd years and something shifted in him through that experience. Derrick Naidoo's narrative and analysis of the incident went as follows:

> Neville Alexander said I can't meet you, although they were banned but it wasn't because they were both banned, not allowed to be together and could be arrested. It was because he got a mandate that unless you clarify the question of the American involvement, we can't meet. That was his mandate. So, even when Steve came there to Lotus River to Grassy Park, Neville Alexander couldn't discuss. So, Steve's trip was a dangerous trip, wasted trip and so on and so forth. My own view is that I thought that the purist nature of the way in which the, the Unity Movement saw things, that they didn't say that when you in these things, some of these things, you can't be pure, you have to make some decisions which have elements of compromise in it. Once you've got a big, huge movement and you got an armed movement, then you can tell people to fuck off and keep their money. But the point is, you got to get to that point and you can't get to that point without certain resources. So,

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There was also murmurings about some meetings between US state officials and the BCM. Johnny Issel also mentioned that this issue became a serious one within the BCM for certain cadres who were not happy about some of the leadership who were "fraternising with American government officials," ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989.
There was some communication and attempts from a US State Department to court the BCM, and they even invited Biko to tour the States, a request that Biko refused because "the US had not yet demonstrated its claimed change of attitude to South Africa." Mazamane, MV. Et al. "The Black Consciousness Movement," p.154.
[1006] ZA HPRA A2675 -2. Part I. Gail Gerhart and Thomas Karis interview with Fikile Bam. March 1988.
[1007] Ibid.
[1008] Ibid.

> it's a very difficult question, there's no right and wrong. So, you can see both groupings had their views on it, I think Neville Alexander shifted from that position much later in the 80s.[1009]

Derrick identified an element of UM purity in Alexander's position but also that he was sticking with the mandate he had as the representative of the loose independent socialist network and UM bloc.



Figure 13. Fikile Bam. "Interview: Fikile Bam, interviewed by John Carlin." Available online at: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/interviews/bam.html [accessed on 17 March 2024].

For Biko and Jones, the non-meeting was perplexing and the failure to meet under those circumstances affected them emotionally. Jones recalled:

> The meeting didn't come off. We aborted the meeting the very next day for some reasons that maybe later will come out. We got back into our car and the drove back home. We were very tight and Steve was feeling very very sad because he had had an experience that he had never had as a person…. He had an experience in Cape Town that turned him off so completely that he told me that, you know, don't even worry about anything that is happening that is worrying us; lets get into the car, lets go back home and think about it from the safety of our house. There is something that I think we don't understand here. [1010]

On the following day, Jones and Biko were arrested on their way back to Ginsberg.[1011] Under arrest, they realised that they had on them the ALF's basis – the document that represented discussions, plans, travels, meetings and principles that were developed over three to four years of underground organising. In realising this – and knowing that, if the Security Branch found it, the results would be catastrophic for

[1009] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town; Interview with Karen Press. 16 September 2021. Cape Town.
[1010] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Gail Gerhart interview with Peter Jones. July 1989.
[1011] Ibid.

the entire movement – they ate the paper. Peter Jones explained what was in that document and the foundational politics of the front:

> The basic point of departure in the document had been that the kind of differences amongst the liberation movements in this country are not fundamental differences. If it is a difference in the first instance, it's a postponable difference in terms of the priorities of where we are today and where we need to get. On basic issues like the land question, our understanding and the understanding even in people's minds of the land question… Issues like that, issues of race, stuff like that… a statement of common ground. [1012]

With the eating of the principles and minimum programme for the formation of the ALF went the only documentary material and evidence of the emerging front. The detention and subsequent execution of Biko and the arrest of most of the BCM leadership in the wake, not only had obvious and adverse effects on the BCM itself – forcing younger, less trained cadres into leadership positions prematurely – and the liberation movement as a whole, it basically arrested the ALF before it had got off the ground.

Let's take a pause here. What did the ALF experiment mean? What did it represent? At the most basic and potentially profound level, it was a statement of common ground that represented the desire across multiple elements in the liberation movement to move together. The quest for a united position and a united front. Neville Alexander and the constituency he represented showed that the form of unity that was being sought by them was on the basis of certain principles that would be reached through extended debate, discussion and dialogue. While Derrick Naidoo pointed out that there was potentially a certain kind of quest for purity in Alexander's hard lines, this quest is still important in itself. While the inflexibility of the position on funding and the conditions under which a meeting could or couldn't take place, the important point is that there was not only a conversation underway, but a united project under construction. This takes on a lot of individual meaning for Neville Alexander who initially had serious reservations about BC and the BCM. It was the question mark that kept him in the conversation. The ALF was the culmination of the aspiration of the non-sectarian spirit of the 1970s underground and its arrest was a significant blow to all those who had been trying for years to bring the liberation movement together.

Peter Jones recollected that when he got out after 18 months in jail, even though the desire to unite was still there amongst some people, the conditions had shifted and it was harder to advance the cause. Even by 1977 there had been a grouping within the of BCM who had gone into exile and, based their own experiences, efforts and assessments of the terrain outside, thought that the attempt to build unity was slightly romantic. Peter Jones recollected that they sent messages back home trying to "convince us that it was so difficult and so manifestly [hostile] between the organisations that it was going to take a miracle to bring them together."[1013] The difficulty of meeting with the ANC in Lusaka mentioned previously was

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[1012] Ibid.

[1013] Ibid. See also the experiences and attempts of the Bokwe Group in Botswana in Chapter 3 of Asheeke, TTPW. "Uncovering hidden fronts of Africa's liberation struggle," pp. 85-127.

testament to this. In the wake of the BCM's crushing, around 1979, the same year that Barney Pityana and Ben Khoapa of the BCM finally got to meet with the ANC in exile,[1014] Peter Jones further said that:

> [The] ANC was circulating an instruction from outside to that, and I saw the document, "the ANC supports unity of the struggling people." Its definition of unity, however, now became unity under the auspices or the wide influence of the ANC… In other words people were encouraged to start structures, it was very finely laid out there, start structures for unity within the confines of the Freedom Charter. This was long before the UDF became a structure, or an issue as such… [W]ith the falling away of the compulsion that the BCM represented, the excuse also fell away for why we have to submit ourselves to broad unity. Because then, from '79 onwards, you find a manifestation of political competitiveness in this country.[1015]

As Jones hints at, the end of the ALF, which coincided with the crushing of the BCM and the murder of Biko, was a part of the growing over of one era into a new one. The next major attempts to build fronts in the liberation struggle, in the early 1980s, would not succeed to bring all the major organisations into one front based on a principled unity: A manifestation of the "political competitiveness" that Jones mentions?

Concluding reflections

This chapter, in particular, presented a whole slew of challenges related to scope and decisions about its focus. It is a period where the original ensemble is scattered – spatially and socially. While some members continued to work together, in general, the original ensemble does not operate as an ensemble-acting-together-in-concert which raises a question about the concept itself and whether or not it makes sense to use it for this reason. If we think back to Coltrane's Classic Quartet – Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner and Jimmy Garrison – we will recall that after playing in that landmark band, the latter three all went on make major contributions to the further development of the music. In those later periods and in their work with other bands, one could always hear the trace of the Classic Quartet and the modes of playing together that they developed in that context. The question remains: Were they still an ensemble after the dissolution of the Classic Quartet? However, I think this is limited and limiting question, and perhaps a more interesting one can be asked: What does it open up in how we hear and think about those musicians and their collaborations if we continue to hear them as members of the Classic Quartet as a living, still evolving thing? Or, to put it in the negative, what is potentially foreclosed if we don't? Without the Classic Quartet experience we wouldn't have so much of what comes after it – such as New York is Now! Ornette Coleman's 1968 album which features Jones and Garrison on the drums and bass respectively.[1016] We simply wouldn't have it. Jones and Garrison made a name for themselves as individual players and as

[1014] Mazamane, MV. Et al. "The Black Consciousness Movement," p.154.
[1015] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Gail Gerhart interview with Peter Jones. July 1989.
[1016] Coleman, O. *New York is Now!* (Blue Note: New York, 1968).

a drums-bass duo in the Classic Quartet and developed a method of doing improvisation together in that context. It's a question of what someone, or what two or more people, with a shared intense history and experience in an ensemble, bring to another ensemble. To transpose this question to the present topic of investigation: What might listening for the reverberations of the ensemble in lieu of an actually existing ensemble open up? In the negative: what might we miss and misunderstand about the political lives and work of these people if we do not situate it in relation to their experience in and of ensemble? Crucially also, ensemble, as a set of collective practices, is about relationships and, whereas specific organisations or parties might end, relationships can too but they tend to change and evolve and withstand the pressure of the time/s. Ensemble perseveres as a way of doing things together.

I have attempted to weave a range of stories about the activities, ideas and lives of members of the ensemble in the period after their incarceration and I asked above *if ensemble can withstand the pressure of multiple directions*. Ensemble – as constituted by people who are changing as they respond to their particular experience and position within the context of the changing world – inevitably changes but as a mode of doing things together, it carries on. "The ensemble" was never re-constituted in this period but new ones were in which the repertoire was revisited and expanded. The extreme surveillance, oppression and isolation under house arrest forced the reconfiguration of life to take place in nuclear and individual ways. Different members took different directions depending on the realm of possibilities at their disposal and what their experience in prison had opened or closed. These conditions make it all the more impressive that some members did manage to re-constitute new groups to study, plan and act with. In this sense, the ensemble's repertoire was central to process of remaking politics in this period. The revisiting of the repertoire within new conditions opened opportunities to work with people from different political backgrounds, particularly younger activists in the BCM and this experience created the possibility for growth, challenge and development as well as building solidarity.

The individual members staggered release and the reconfiguration of their lives and ensembles took place in tandem with a broader process of reconfiguration in the movement. The experiments in this period collectively underline the significance of the collaborative spirit in the underground in the 1970s *to the very survival of the liberation movement* in a period of counter-revolution in which apartheid occupied a position of ideological and material hegemony. The organisational expressions of this spirit emerged in often loose and fluid groupings. These had as their foundation small groups that studied, planned, acted and ate together, many of these came out of new relationships formed by searching BCM activists and older activists who were coming out of periods of incarceration. This spirit was manifested in not only the study groups but also the independent community projects that their members initiated and got involved in. Its organisational high-point was the attempts to build the ALF – a front of major organisations in the liberation movement that sought to establish common ground and unite both the internal wings into the BPC and the armed wings into a single liberation army. For members in the ensemble, the level of connection and collaboration with other elements of the liberation movement was unprecedented in their trajectory up until that point and they had not before taken part in a process of building unity on another

organisation or tendency's initiative. Their prior experiments to build the NLF – uneven as its successes were in terms of achieving a broad-based membership constituted by elements from various organisations – were echoed in the orientation of the ALF which attempted to crystallise the "united front ethos" that was characteristic of the moment.

As the crisis of racial capitalism deepened, the state embarked on its programme of reform. From 1978 onwards, in the wake of the crushing of the BCM and the resultant end of the ALF attempt, there was a flurry of multi-directional activity and creativity in the liberation movement as many new organisations were formed but nothing was quite settled or cohered. The ALF was situated at the threshold of this process and what it suggests in relation to this, is that there was a growing sense in the liberation movement that fronts, or some kind of organisational form capable of cohering and harnessing energies and constituencies beyond a single organisation or party, were going to be important in attempting to overthrow apartheid. While the organisational forms did not, relationships forged in this chapter persist and form the bedrock of future collaborations in an era full of fronts. Fronts in the 1980s moved beyond the character of the ALF in this period as the new terrains of struggle that had been opened – the civics, the unions, community projects and, increasingly, women's groups – begin to impart some of their character on the practice of building fronts.

Chapter Seven. Articulation. Principles, tendencies and textures of unity: Ensemble in an era of fronts

So, the, when Hennie dies I'm one of the people that say we going to give Hennie a funeral that is commensive with his activism and his position [in the] struggle, and then of course, then you know, it ends up that this guy can't, he can't be one of the people that buries Hennie. But I think that would be an immediate reaction but a more important reaction I think people realised that this is an opportunity. I don't want to deny that. This – we can actually put the ANC [African National Congress] on the public domain, and with that they said no you can't be involved, you're a third force. When we get there, there's a tension but they decide they can do, unfold the ANC banner on Hennie's funeral and then of course the whole thing comes to the fore.[1017]

I think the situation with which he found himself was that his involvement in the Labour Party allowed him some space to move, being, because being in Worcester, Hennie was under very strict surveillance, and I knew that, but he was a fine person. A very likable person but he got killed in a car accident and then Neville Alexander tried to bury him. We had been attacking him all these years. [Hennie?] Yes. So, that was the first fight which this budding Congress, Motley group of people was taking on another ideological position. So, they took on Neville Alexander around Hennie Ferus's funeral, because political funerals is also political contest here, perhaps maybe not so much so today, but a few years ago, you could really contest for, you really contest for political space, ground and all. So, Neville Alexander and Marcus Solomon tried to bury Hennie and of course we wouldn't allow it.[1018]

Introduction

John Ferus, known as Hennie, was a member of the moderate Labour Party in Worcester, a town just over 100km from Cape Town. He was locally very well-known as an anti-apartheid and community activist and had been detained multiple times and served a sentence on Robben Island for defying his banning order. He was killed in a car crash in April 1981 and buried on the 26th of that month.[1019] As the two epigraphs above suggest, Hennie's funeral, within the politics of that historical moment, became a site of opportunity. As a site of opportunity, it was a site of political contestation – one won by the

[1017] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[1018] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989.
[1019] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town; "South Africa: Funeral Of John 'Hennie' Ferus, Community Leader And Campaigner" [video]. Available online at: https://www.pond5.com/stock-footage/item/110343863-south-africa-funeral-john-hennie-ferus-community-leader-and [accessed on 29 November 2023]; South African History Online. "ANC flag raised at the funeral of John 'Hennie' Ferus." Available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/anc-flag-raised-funeral-john-hennie-ferus [accessed on 29 November 2023]; ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989.

"budding Congress" who, somewhat opportunistically, buried Hennie in their colours. This was someone they had been critical of in life – "attacking him all these years." But they were shrewd enough to know that a more honest adherence to those kind of antagonisms at the event of his death, was outweighed by the possible political gains of raising their flag. This incident in the Western Cape, marked a moment in, and was part of an actual process of the growing presence, consciousness and influence of the Congress within the country, out of relative obscurity. It can also be seen as a symbol of the growing over of one chapter, in which non-sectarian collaboration was the dominant orientation in the liberation movement, into another that was characterised by what Peter Jones called "a manifestation of competitiveness" and a hardening of partisan and political lines in the liberation movement.

All of these processes took place within the deepening crisis of racial capitalism that the apartheid state was in. The *verligtes,* having won the struggle in the Afrikaner Nationalist camp sought to reform apartheid and buttress its repressive apparatus.[1020] It passed a cocktail of political reforms which offered concessions to various sections of the black population that it intended to co-opt. It allowed for the registration of black trade unions, passed measures to support the growth of a black middle class, continued pursuing its bantustan strategy and sought to fragment black resistance by offering differential crumbs to the various "racial" groups, best epitomised in the tricameral parliament.[1021] As an antithesis to these kinds of measures, there was a growing consciousness of the necessity to organise in formations that could bring people together across "racial groups", political persuasions and across different kinds of organisations in order to defeat apartheid. In a sense, with regards to the front as an organisational form, it was *an idea whose time had come.*

Accompanying this timely idea were a number of questions about what kind of front was appropriate, how to organise it, and on what basis would it be formed. There was not one answer to these questions and the character and basis of the front was a contested site. For one grouping, loosely referred to as the independent socialist network, a strand of which referred to themselves as the Azanian Marxist Tendency (AMT), the big debate was between conceptions of the united front vs a popular front. The popular front was understood to have an anti-apartheid programme and could be constituted by the broadest possible front of organisations who shared the minimum demand to end apartheid. This could include members of the liberal bourgeoisie and pro-capitalists, for the AMT, found expression in the United Democratic Front (UDF). Based on studying writings and experiences in the Marxist tradition and in anti-colonial revolutions, the united front was understood to be anti-apartheid and anti-capitalist, based on the understanding that the social formation was constituted by racial capitalism. In other words, you couldn't

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[1020] Cock, J. and Nathan, L. *War and society: The militarisation of South Africa,* (David Phillip: Cape Town, 1989); Murray, M. *South Africa: Time of agony, time of destiny, The upsurge of popular protest,* (Verso: London, 1987); O'Meara, D. *Forty Lost Years: the apartheid state and the politics of the National Party 1948-1994,* (Ravan Press: Randburg, 1996); Saul, J. and Gelb, S. "The Crisis in South Africa: Class Defense, Class Revolution." *Monthly Review,* 33:3, (1981): 1-156; Wolpe, H. "Apartheid's deepening crisis," *Marxism Today,* 27:1, 1983: 7-12.

[1021] O'Meara, D. *Forty Lost Years;* Posel, D. "Language, legitimation and control: the South African state after 1978." *Social Dynamics,* 10:1, (1984): 1-16.

destroy apartheid without destroying capitalism and resultantly it excluded ruling class elements from membership in the front because they would orient the politics toward preserving capitalism. For the AMT, the National Forum (NF), the formation of which they played a key role in along with elements of the BCM, was intended to be that united front.

For ensemble members, of course, the strategy of building and organising fronts was essentially nothing new (although the conditions were). From the late 1950s, when they tried to organise a progressive national students' organisation through the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU), to the early 1960s when they formed the National Liberation Front (NLF), and the BCM-led initiative to unite the major organisations in the movement into the (ALF) in the mid-1970s. In various ways, members of the ensemble had initiated and been involved in the processes of building a number of fronts. The ensemble's foundational politics was in the attempt to build national fronts – as students, as guerrillas, etc. With the possible exception of ALF which failed for different reasons explored in the previous chapter, in earlier periods they never really managed to achieve a 'national' front because they were not very well connected across the movement, they were arrested before they could get off the ground and their orientation of non-collaboration potentially restricted their potential to collaborate. In the early 1980s, partly due to their involvement in the previous decade and their time spent in prison, they were much more connected and involved in ways that went far beyond their UM beginnings. For Neville Alexander, Elizabeth van der Heyden and Marcus Solomon, the principal ensemble members whose actions are explored in the chapter, the expression of that in their own independent trajectories was different. As the front became a predominant organisational form and strategy in the struggle, ensemble members got involved, and made decisions and contributions in various ways that cumulatively expanded the repertoire of the ensemble's and the movement's politics as a whole.

In the wake of the brutal smashing of the BCM in 1977, in a similar way to the post-Sharpeville crackdown, with the exception of the trade union movement, the most organised elements of the liberation struggle were neutralised. As a response, the movement had to reassess and reconfigure itself. An atmosphere of creativity and experimentation pervaded the liberation movement as a range of new organisations were formed. This included organisations like the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) which was launched in 1978 and re-launched in 1979,[1022] the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) which was formed in 1979,[1023] the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) Congress of South African Students (COSAS) formed in 1979,[1024] Azanian Students' Organisation (AZASO) formed

[1022] Mazamane, MV., Maaba, B. and Biko, N. "The Black Consciousness Movement." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), pp. 257-297.
[1023] Gwande, VM. "'To build a just and fair society": Fosatu and the vision of a new South Africa, ca. 1970s-1980s." *New Contree,* 88, (2022): 54-72.
[1024] Work currently underway on the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) by Noor Nieftagodien, will be a significant contribution to this story. COSAS, aligned to the ANC, was one of the most organised forces inside South Africa in the 1980s and played a substantial role in Congress's ascendance in this period.

in 1978 initially as the student wing of AZAPO,[1025] and grassroots women's organisations United Women's Organisation (UWO) formed in 1978 and launched in 1981, the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) launched in 1981,[1026] and many other civic organisations.[1027] A key dynamic within this process was the ascendancy of Congress to a position of dominance, one of the effects of which was that by the middle of the decade, excepting AZAPO and CUSA, mentioned above, all of these organisations were aligned with Congress. Reasons which go some way to explaining this ascendance include the relative weakness of other movements, the illusion of Congress's ideological vagueness and its popular front orientation, the vastly superior exile infrastructure and resources it had access to, its place in the popular imagination of resistance, and the fragile but nonetheless present network it had built in the underground. These factors cohered in its ability and capacity to attract many of the most organised elements of the mass movement -particularly in the UDF and the trade union movement – and convince them of the superiority of the Freedom Charter as a programme and of the ANC as the leadership of the struggle.

Anne Heffernan makes the argument that Congress's hegemony was achieved through, the cannibalising or co-option of various, often contending, ideological positions.[1028] This is related to Eric Louw's assertion that the politics of the ANC and the UDF were "vague" and it was this "vagueness" that enabled them to build broad alliances across class, party, ethnicity, etc. These perspectives gesture towards the ANC as a broad church. One of the broad church's political expressions was the popular front. Reflecting on Bob Fine's commentary on Joe Foster's 1982 speech, John Saul wrote:

> [Fine] drew a clear distinction between 'popular front' politics (where 'the working class is merely wheeled in and out like the crowd in a Shakespearean drama') and a much more assertive and effective working class political presence, suggesting (already in 1982) that, in contrast, 'there are good reasons to believe that [the popular front] was the basic conception behind the Congress Alliance; namely that SACTU subordinated the specific interests and organization of workers first to mass protest campaigns and then to the armed struggle'.[1029]

With its ideological ambiguity, Congress was able to attract various organisations and constituencies to it but underlying this, was a developing alliance with capital which arguably undermined many of Congress's other relationships.[1030] This ideological ambiguity, connected to what Saul wrote above, was a cover for a

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[1025] Cele, G., and Koen, C. "Student politics in South Africa. An overview of key developments." *Cahiers de la recherche sur l éducation et les savoirs*, 2:2, (2003): 201-223.
[1026] Hassim, S. *Women's organisations and democracy in South Africa: Contesting authority,* (UKZN Press: Pietermaritzburg, 2006).
[1027] For example, this includes the Soweto Civic Association (SCA) formed in 1979, the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO), formed in 1980, in Durban, a coalition of civics coalesced into the Release Mandela Committee (RMC) in the same year, and also in the same year, the community newspaper *Grassroots* was formed in Cape Town. See Chapter 2 in Seekings, J. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, (New Africa Books: Cape Town, 2000), pp.29-48.
[1028] Heffernan, A. "Blurred lines and ideological divisions in South African youth politics." *African Affairs,* 115:461 (2016): 664-687.
[1029] Saul, JS. "On taming a revolution: The South African case." *Socialist Register,* 49, (2013), p.216.
[1030] A number of scholars have written about the negotiations that the ANC's leadership was having with big business and capital in Lusaka from the mid-1980s. For example, Wielanga and Rynart wrote that "By the time international sanctions were imposed in the mid-1980s, business was engaging regularly with the ANC." Wielenga, C. and Rynhart, G. "Expert Opinion: Business deserves thanks for role in averting SA civil war, say experts ahead of

pro-capitalist position. Thabo Mbeki famously said as early as 1984 that the ANC was not a socialist organisation and it wasn't going to become one.[1031] Yet it had the ability to attract unions, student groups, civic groups, communists etc. to its social democratic anti-apartheid programme.

Tom Lodge wrote that the ANC, compared to many other organisations, successfully built up an infrastructure in exile.[1032] This was a significant factor particularly in the wake of Soweto 1976 when masses of young militants left the country because, as Suttner suggests, "many may have intended to join the PAC, the ANC was better equipped to absorb the young people."[1033] Additionally they had the resources to invite activists from inside the country from COSATU and UDF, to meet them in Lusaka where they convinced these groups that their constituencies' struggled would be best resolved within their anti-apartheid programme. In addition to activists, they met with representatives of capital to assure them that project of accumulation would well continue into the post-apartheid period if they took the reins.[1034] Internally too, while it may be overstated, Magubane stresses that the ANC's underground was far more extensive than many scholars have stated, particularly in Soweto.[1035] The work of underground networks and infrastructures like Radio Freedom, broadcast from Lusaka, played a role in keeping alive the symbol and memory of the ANC even in periods when politically it was dormant.[1036] One of the by-products of this broad process which coalesced in the early 1980s and continued throughout the decade to manufacture Congress's ascent, had the effect of settling the period of flux that preceded it into camps. By the late 1980s the liberation movement was largely divided into the Charterist/Congress camp and the AZAPO/Black Consciousness camp between which there was often violent hostilities. This chapter demonstrates that there were alternative, and indeed more radical visions of liberation than those which were articulated by Congress's popular front orientation.

The chapter is in three parts. The first part looks at struggles at the local level, with ensemble members involved in civic organisations and women's organisations. Here a few things are explored including the contestation of political space and the decisions that individuals made as part of the process of constituting and affiliating to area-based and national fronts. The second section looks at the constitution

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discussion co-hosted by UP." 11 March 2021. Available online at: https://www.up.ac.za/centre-for-mediation-in-africa/news/post_2957958-expert-opinion-business-deserves-thanks-for-role-in-averting-sa-civil-war-say-experts-ahead-of-discussion-co-hosted-by-up [accessed on 31 October 2023].
See also: Michie, J. and Padayachee, V. "South African business in the transition to democracy." *International Review of Applied Economics*, 33:1, (2019): 1-10; Ndlovu, SM. "The African National Congress and negotiations." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Vol.4 Pt.1 1980-1990*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2010).

[1031] Ibid., p.26.

[1032] Lodge, T. "State of exile: The African national congress of South Africa, 1976–86." *Third World Quarterly*, 9:1, (1987): 1-27.

[1033] Suttner, R. "The African National Congress centenary: a long and difficult journey." *International Affairs,* 88:4, (2012), p.731.

[1034] Ndlovu, SM. "The African National Congress and negotiations", South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Vol.4 Pt.1 1980-1990*, (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2010); Saul, JS. "On taming a revolution."; Michie, J. and Padayachee, V. "South African business in the transition to democracy."

[1035] Houston, G. and Magubane, B. "The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s." In South African Democracy Education Trust (eds.), *The road to democracy in South Africa, 1960-1970,* (UNISA Press: Pretoria, 2006), pp. 371-451.

[1036] Saul, JS. "On taming a revolution."

of the AMT through recruitment of young activists and continued collaboration with old comrades who emerged as a cohort in the CPSU. The section explores the articulation of the AMT's politics through its publication *Free Azania* and the ideas it was drawing on with a particular interest in the united front. In the third section the focus shifts to the process of building the NF. It considers what some of its foundational politics were and what the process of building unity generated in terms of the relationships on which it was built and the transformation of politics that took place in those relationships. The chapter ultimately argues that the dynamics of building fronts in this period in which Congress was achieving a position of hegemony, partly by cannibalising various ideological tendencies and through resource and organisational superiority, was part of a contested process of hardening organisational lines in a way that undermined non-sectarian aspirations and possibilities that had existed in the prevailing ethos and conditions of the previous decade.

Struggles at the local level: Conditions, contradictions and contestations

As gestured towards in the previous chapter, a major factor in the reconfiguration of politics from the late 1970s onwards was the prevalence and the importance of the civics movement. These movements became key sites of struggle in the era of fronts in the 1980s.[1037] The conditions of life in black communities, particularly in many of the newly established townships to which many black people, dispossessed by apartheid forced removals, were moved, were harsh, poor and deteriorating. Black communities were the ground zero where the harsh contradictions produced by the articulation between racism and capitalism in the South African social formation were playing out in an extreme fashion. There was a lack of basic services and facilities, unsafe living conditions, and extortionate costs of living – transport, rent and electricity. The locally-situated and internally differentiated civics movement was struggling against these conditions as they manifested in various racially-designated and segregated Group Areas. A major contradiction in civics was that, as neighbourhood-based organisations, their composition tended to reproduce rather than challenge apartheid's definitions of race, this was a challenge for anti-racist organising. As the ANC, PAC, and BCM were banned, the civic movement also became a strategic aboveground space of contestation and manoeuvring in the national context as members of various organisations attempted to influence the direction of civics to advance partisan mandates. Resultantly there was a struggle for political space by the abovementioned organisations and other tendencies. In the Western Cape, ensemble members, principally Marcus Solomon – with Theresa Solomon, Elizabeth van der Heyden and Neville Alexander, were involved in different ways in civics in this period where these

[1037] There is a slew of literature on this topic. For example, see: Maseko, SS. "Civic movement and non-violent action: the case of the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee." *African Affairs,* 96:384, (1997): 353-369; Mayekiso, M. *Township politics: Civic struggles for a new South Africa*. (University of Johannesburg Press: Johannesburg, 2023); Seekings, J. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, (New Africa Books: Cape Town, 2000).

struggles against the material conditions, and struggles for political space were heating up. This section explores some of the stories of life and contestation, and the dynamics of their involvement within unfolding local and national level politics.

The disciplinary tendency in an intergenerational dispute characteristic of the time

Another emerging terrain of mass struggle in Cape Town in the early 1980s was in high schools. Two important developments of these struggles were that they merged with unfolding struggles in other terrains – expressing solidarity with civic and union struggles for example – and they generated another cohort of activists who were independently finding their own way. In 1980, school students with representatives from black schools, independent of any partisan or organisational affiliation, formed the Committee of 81. Nicky Van Driel, a leader of the Committee, wrote:

> The year 1980 saw the biggest, most organised and decisive student protest in the history of the Western Cape. At its zenith the boycott of classes involved every educational institution in the province, in both rural and urban areas, and included students from African, Coloured, and Indian schools. Parents and entire communities were soon drawn into the debate around the students' demands.
>
> What had initially commenced as a small protest against, among other things, drunken teachers, a lack of stationery, a shortage of textbooks and poor conditions in schools, became a struggle by students for control of their schools, and their rejection of an educational system that prepared them to become cheap black labour.[1038]

These students organised across 'race' by rejecting the apartheid philosophy in favour of principles derived from BCM. This politicising process - described by Van Driel as a "baptism of fire" from which "there was no going back" – was a significant experience for the whole generation of school students and was key in their development from into activists on, but also beyond, the schoolgrounds.[1039] These struggles developed new solidarities. Students from the Committee of 81 got involved in and supported other emerging struggles.[1040]

[1038] van Driel, N. "Our Souls dwelt in the House of Tomorrow: The student Committee of 81." Available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/our-souls-dwelt-house-tomorrow-student-committee-81-nicky-van-driel [accessed 4 March 2024].

[1039] Ibid.

[1040] "In the meetings of the Committee of 81, held in Athlone over weekends, the new layer of young radical activists began to emerge. As student leaders were detained, new ones took their place in the leadership of the boycott. Students were galvanised into political action amid growing protests and political solidarity through the bus boycott led by the bus action committee and a red meat boycott involving workers who were members of the General Workers' Union. As the Committee of 81 released its manifesto, "From the Schools to the People", its leaders became members of the bus action committee and liaised with unions about solidarity boycotts and other action." Rassool,C. "'Bush college' produced many far-sighted leaders." Available online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2012-05-04-bush-college-produced-many-farsighted-leaders/ [accessed on 4 March 2024].

Neville Alexander was both supportive of and in touch with some of the students involved in the Committee of 81.[1041] He was also involved at the civic level in structures in his neighbourhood – the Lotus River – Grassy Park Civic (LOGRA) and Grassy Park Ratepayers and Tenants Association. These neighbourhoods were stratified along an axis of class between people living in homes, owning or renting, or people living in what were known as *skriwwe* flats.[1042] One grouping in the civic was a radicalised group of young activists who emerged in the wake of the Committee of 81 student struggles. This group included Lucy Edwards, who later taught at Jakob Marengo in Windhoek. It also included Greg Ruiters. Ruiters came from a poor family, attended a UM school and was put off by what he felt were elitist sensibilities, resultantly he had been more drawn to the BCM and also developed a strong interest in Trotsky and Lenin. Also part of that cohort was Greg and Lucy's comrade, Leon Pretorius, another activist in the neighbourhood.[1043] This group and their broader tendency were later known as the 'Partyites' – Trotskyists for whom "Only the Party could lead the struggle," and therefore all organising work was oriented toward that.[1044] In the early 1980s the underground structure which would later express itself as WILSA (Workers' International League of South Africa) was still taking shape and most of the comrades were very young and quite inexperienced. The young Partyites, feeling that the tenants were largely being ignored and excluded from the civic's activities and focus, were organising with other tenant youth in the *skriwwe flats* and were highlighting the class differentiations within the community in the civic structures. They were attempting to put forward the position that the civic needed class purity and that the presence of the petty bourgeois home-owners and renters was diluting and compromising the political project.[1045]

[1041] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town.
[1042] "Skriwwe" directly translates to scruffy. Interview with Greg Ruiters. 23 September 2021 & 15 February 2022. Cape Town.
[1043] Ibid.; Interview with Lucy Edwards and Herbert Jauch. 6 August 2021. Windhoek.
[1044] Greg Ruiters Personal Collection – documents. "The Balance Sheet of the Tendency." 1988. For more on this tendency see also Mahomed, S. *Organise Or Starve: A History of the Unemployed Workers Movement (Western Cape, South Africa),* (Shaheed Mahomed: Cape Town, 2022).
[1045] Interview with Greg Ruiters. 23 September 2021 & 15 February 2022. Cape Town.

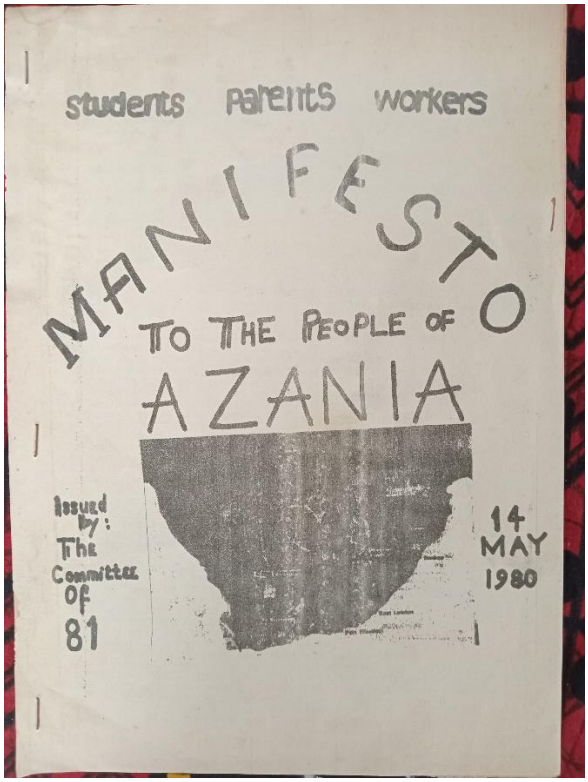


Figure 14. Committee of 81 Manifesto. X personal collection - documents.

As a result of their agitation and underground work with the youth, this group was expelled from the civic by Neville Alexander. They labelled him a "centrist", and called the civic's leadership structure, which included Lucy Edwards' elder sister, Rita, and Norma and Peter Gabriel, "Nevillites." Ruiters recalled that the reasons given were absurd. Their charge-sheet, which they were given at their disciplinary hearing, included teaching the youth the wrong songs, distributing banned literature, and other "trumped up charges."[1046] A lengthy quote from "The Balance Sheet of the Tendency" produced by WILSA to reflect on the status of their work, provides more context from their perspective:

> In 1980, on the basis of personal initiative and residential coincidence a few comrades (not formed into any tight cell at all) entered the centrist initiated Grassy Park Ratepayers and Tenants Association. A combination of characterising Neville Alexander as a Left alternative to Stalinism and an attempt to 'be involved' in the 1980-generated upsurge, saw us initially view the Grassy Park/Lotus River initiative as the prototype of struggles for the period. Having had no experience of trade union involvement or organisational links with the African proletariat, the politics of Grassy Park/Lotus River set the tone for our political involvement for some time.
>
> Here we found out that Centrism spoke about the working class, claimed in private to be interested in Socialism but systematically set about blocking every attempt to do revolutionary work amongst the GP [Grassy Park] tenants. Somewhere in the misty realms of Alexander's centrism, residents' associations were seen less as organs of worker's power and more as liberated zones where (non-existent) guerrillas could find shelter and sustenance. The focus became more to prove one's existence rather than use one's existence to promote a solid self perpetuating structure amongst workers. Our calls for more tenant involvement, for consistent defence work in

[1046] Ibid.; and "Greg Ruiters Personal Collection – documents. "The Balance Sheet of the Tendency." 1988.

> the area, for more political content to the programmes therefore threatened the Centrist conception of the civic and they systematically proceeded to slander us and keep the civic from the Party-ites. When we shifted our emphasis to the youth, the emphasis became one of the isolating the youth and/or attacking the Partyite control over the youth. The point is that this defined the political terrain for us and we ended up fighting for control of the civic and later the youth on Centrist terms. Matters came to a head when five of our comrades in community Youth were suspended by the Centrist-controlled Ratepayers on trumped-up charges. With this action it appeared as it we had no further choice but to secede from the ratepayers civic.[1047]

Lucy Edwards recalled the incident and, with hindsight, how she felt about it:

> They decided we are cancerous growths inside the civic, that was the word… Neville Alexander didn't want to be contradicted. For as much as he had a revolutionary theory, he is, sometimes he didn't want to be contradicted, he could be very nice, very charming, but he didn't want to be contradicted. Yes, he told us that he didn't want to be contradicted. I know a lot of people were in awe with him
> Yeah, they all in awe with him and he's extremely charismatic and his an extremely nice guy, and I really respected him…. [But] somehow that very workerist stance offended him, because look I understand what he was trying to do. He was trying to build a civic movement of a very apathetic coloured working class and here, we were coming and carrying out debates about the petty bourgeois, petty bourgeoisie inside those organizations where people were bothered about bread and butter issues. And I think it was infantile, and so he expelled us and we formed our own youth movement and so on. So, I understand fully what he did and why he did it and I probably would have done the same if I was older and if I, if I had the bigger, better picture.[1048]

With regards to the bigger picture that Lucy refers to, at the foundation of this conflict was a contestation over space and for political influence. Within the longer arc of the ensemble's trajectory, it is hard not to think back to when IB Tabata suspended and later expelled Kenneth Abrahams and Neville Alexander from SOYA and then APDUSA in 1961 when learning about Alexander's expulsion of the young firebrands from the civic. In both situations, there was a conflict between two groups convinced of their own correctness. On the one side, a younger group of people who are pursuing and pushing their own independent political program based on their analysis of the situation. On the other side, an older comrade who has their own organisational and political plan as well as a well-entrenched social status and a position of power within the structure. In both situations, the conflict was never engaged in the clear terms or in a democratic manner. The older comrade mobilised their powerful position to expel the critique and squash the dissent as they interpreted the conflict as one over political space and influence in a moment where the liberation movement was changing tack. Civics were emerging as key sites of mass mobilisation in this period preceding the era of national fronts when there was a level of motion and fluidity that had not yet settled or cohered into a broader-based political form. Solomon's involvement in civic processes in Mitchell's Plain in the same period illustrates the process of building fronts at the local level and a different orientation to democratic process.

[1047] Greg Ruiters Personal Collection – documents. "The Balance Sheet of the Tendency." 1988, p.2.
[1048] Interview with Lucy Edwards and Herbert Jauch. 6 August 2021. Windhoek.

The Solomons, civic struggles in Mitchell's Plain and moving toward the front

The contestation around Hennie Ferus's funeral, and the different sides of the tussle that Marcus Solomon and Johnny Issel were on, was a significant moment in their political relationship and the reading group and a window into the eroding possibilities for non-sectarian organising in the context of Congress's ascendancy. Marcus Solomon cited the conflicts around Hennie's funeral as when they stopped working together after which their study group disintegrated.[1049] As Marcus Solomon said in the epigraph, part of the contestation over space involved the branding of himself and Neville Alexander and others associated with them, as "Third Force."[1050] While Marcus Solomon experienced some difficulties from the "Third Force" label, that was not as much of an issue at the civic level because he was well known and liked in the community, partly through the organising practice of building relationships *huisbesoek* and sustained work. He recalled that at one civic meeting in Mitchell's Plain a Congress-aligned group had tried to discredit Marcus Solomon as "Third Force" but a number of women defended him saying that they knew him because he used to visit them and he was "one of us" and a "nice guy".[1051]

If you remember from the previous chapter, Marcus Solomon and the Issels – Shahieda and Johnny - had both been under the impression that they established the study group, or at least they claimed that in later years. In the late 1970s this hadn't been a problem as they studied together, strategized together and collectively started the creche that Theresa Solomon ran, which led to the founding of The Children's Movement. In the early 1980s, these collaborative non-sectarian possibilities due to the intensity of the struggles over political space, like the reading group, were disintegrating. Members of that reading group emerged as a cohort in a context of reconfiguration where the ascendancy of Congress led to a gravitational attraction of multiple elements of the movement towards it. Theresa Solomon who had come up in the Young Catholic Workers, and then the BCM, became a member of the ANC in the early 1980s. At the time she worked at the Western Province Council of Churches and one of their projects was supporting people who were in hiding underground by providing them with money and assisting them to leave the country. Through her involvement in that project she became connected to two members of Mkhonto weSizwe (MK) who, in her words, lived in "the black townships." It was with these women, and through listening to Radio Freedom, that she first learned about the ANC. She then joined their cell and later contributed to organising their escape.[1052] Johnny Issel had a similar experience with

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[1049] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[1050] The term "Third Force" is best known for its use by ANC leaders in the early 1990s to refer to the covert death squads operating in South Africa to destabilise the process of transition and undermine the ANC. In a disturbing way, "Third Force" has been used after the transition to brand and excoriate working class movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo as enemies of the ANC government by implying that they are doing the same work as those death squads. Ellis, S. "The historical significance of South Africa's third force." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 24:2, (1998): 261-299; and Zikode, S. "The third force." *Journal of Asian and African studies* 41:1-2, (2006): 185-189.
[1051] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[1052] Interview with Theresa Solomon. 3 March 2022. Cape Town.

Radio Freedom from 1975 onwards. Due to their almost total invisibility in the late 1960s and 1970s, he said "we knew nothing about the ANC… we got to know about the ANC over the radio." Interestingly, he said that there was no talk of the Freedom Charter on Radio Freedom at that time and it was "many years later we will discover the Freedom Charter." He further recalled that "I would discuss with other people… like Virginia Engel."[1053] Virginia Engel, also part of Marcus Solomon' reading group, with Issel and others, organised Hennie Ferus' funeral. She had also come up through the BCM, having been the Western Cape Treasurer of SASO. In the wake of the BCM's crushing she became deeply involved in union work, was part of establishing the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), a founding affiliate of FOSATU.[1054] In their independent formation, this cohort of activists and many of the organisations they were involved with, over time, became part of the Congress orbit.

Theresa and Marcus Solomon were part of the first residents of Woodlands in Mitchell's Plain since they moved there in 1975 and were involved in civic organising that responded to the daily struggles of people. As a result of this involvement Theresa Solomon, was detained frequently from the late 1970s.[1055] She recollected aspects of a process in 1980 where struggles cohered in a new way:

> We started CAHAC - Cape Areas Housing Action Committee of which at one stage I was secretary to that organization. But I also got involved in establishing creches in Mitchell's Plain. So it was civic organizations. And I became the secretary to the Mitchell's Plain Coordinating Committee, which was a structure that housed all the civic associations in Mitchell's Plain irrespective of political alliances. So that was MPCC and that was the years that we got, I got detained very often. We managed to take up issues that were you know, as people would say bread and butter issues - kos en kombuis issues - to this use that terminology. But in actual fact, whatever we did was a threat to the to the state.[1056]

Sipho Maseko provides more context to CAHAC's formation:

> In May 1980 tenants of houses in the Greater Cape Flats and neighbouring areas leased by the Cape Town City and Divisional Council were informed that their monthly rents would increase from the beginning of June of the same year. The announcement shocked a community that was already disadvantaged by severe unemployment, low wages, and at the same time distressed by an economic recession… At the meeting to discuss rent increases a body called an Umbrella Rentals Committee (URC) was established and charged with responsibility to resolve the problem of rents. However, immediately after the formation of the URC the government) ostensibly in an

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[1053] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Thomas Karis interview with Johnny Issel. December 1989, p.11-12.
[1054] Johns, L. "Tributes for exemplary unionist, activist Engel," 20 May 2015. Available online at: https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/tributes-for-exemplary-unionist-activist-engel-1860684 [accessed on 2 December 2023]; and South African History Online. "Virginia Engel." Available online at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/virginia-engel [accessed on 2 December 2023].
[1055] Theresa reflected on the impact of her and Solomon's detention in this period: "Sometimes we were detained at the same time. The effect on our daughter was devastating. We made sure that she understood that we were fighting a system and not people. It was important that we did not radicalise instances and incidents for her. It was a huge contradiction for a child to understand. My first detention was difficult. I told my daughter not to cry. I now see the effects on her and I have a lot of guilt as a parent. I became an emotionless person. There was no trauma counselling. Activists didn't need that […] or so we thought." Ommudsen Pessoa, L. *Welcome to Mitchell's Plain: Filming a 'Model Township' during Apartheid,* (Africae: Nairobi, 2023), p.156.
[1056] Interview with Theresa Solomon. 3 March 2022. Cape Town.

> attempt to avoid politicising the matter, decided to drop the proposed rent increases at least temporarily. It also went further to outlaw all subsequent meetings of the URC from June 1980. Despite the attempts to circumvent a challenge from the disaffected residents the seedbed for community awareness had already been planted. In September 1980 members of the URC regrouped and changed its name to the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee (Cahac). The latter then expanded its scope to deal with general civic concerns encountered by the community on whose behalf it sought to act.[1057]

The victory over the Divisional Council to freeze rent increases impacted multiple areas designated for "coloureds" whose rent was governed by that body, paving the way to establish CAHAC as a front of civics across areas and partisan affiliations. This displayed the awareness that uniting along a broader basis was necessary to respond to the harsh material conditions that pervaded in communities – a result of the crisis of racial capitalism at the local level.

A challenge within these struggles was that the organising in civic struggles in this period tended to follow apartheid's segregation of areas, and governing structures by race.[1058] Jeremy Seekings wrote that the Western Cape Civic Association (WCCA), a similar structure to CAHAC in "African" townships, was initially part of CAHAC but "soon went it's separate way."[1059] Amongst the many difficulties of organising across "coloured" and "African" groups, particularly in the Western Cape, was the anti-African racist sentiment that had been cultivated in coloured communities which had been intensified under apartheid.[1060] Connected to this, was administrative segregation. In the CAHAC case, when the government announced its intention to reinstate the rental increases from the beginning of 1982, CAHAC resisted, organising protests, a community petition and demanded to meet the government. They were directed to the local Management Committees (ManComs) which governed the "coloured" townships. CAHAC refused to go to the ManComs and reiterated the demand to meet with representatives of the central government because it viewed the ManComs and the Community Councils, the equivalent in 'African' townships, as "dummy representation", instruments to further entrench the logic of segregation and segregate resistance. The government, not wanting to compromise "coloured" communities' confidence in the proposed tricameral parliament but also not wanting to give in to their demands, agreed to meet a CAHAC delegation in a meeting which initiated a bureaucratic process that went precisely nowhere. Maseko wrote about the results of this process: "The lack of confidence that the

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[1057] Maseko, SS. "Civic movement and non-violent action: the case of the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee." *African Affairs,* 96:384, (1997): 353-369.

[1058] This phenomenon has been described by Mahmood Mamdani who illustrated that in colonial contexts in which tribal/ethnic/racial identity has been constructed by the state, those categories often become the terrain of political mobilization. Mamdani, M. *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism,* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1996).

[1059] Seekings, J. *The UDF,* p.79-80.

[1060] One major material mechanisms through which this has been achieved is the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP) which codified the region in the south west of the country as the natural homeland of "coloured" people and protected certain jobs for them at the expense of "Africans" who were said to not originate in that region. Goldin, I. "The coloured labour preference policy, co-option and contradiction." *Collected Seminar Papers: Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, vol. 33, (1984): 108-120; for some of the specifically gendered dimensions of the CLPP see Scanlon, H. *Representation and reality: Portraits of women's lives in the Western Cape, 1948-1976,* (HSRC Press: Cape Town).

community grievances could be addressed by the existing government paved the way for Cahac to change its approach to focus on competing for national political power."[1061] CAHAC realised that the apartheid dynamics which shaped the terrain of resistance and reform made their demands irresolvable within the system. Organising would have to be along a broader front and directed against apartheid. And so when the UDF was launched in August 1983, in Mitchell's Plain, CAHAC was one of the main constituents of the Western Cape region, providing 21 affiliates.[1062] Their involvement in the UDF "altered its character as a social movement whose niche was to struggle to win concessions on a variety of civic issues" as it joined the national movement to resist the Koornhof Bills and the government's tricameral parliament. [1063] One of the things the civic movement brought to the UDF was a focus on the housing issue. Tied into the politics of local government, these were considered as important in their relation to apartheid's strategy of reform. However, housing fell further down the agenda as a planned national conference on the issue in mid-1984 never materialised due to multiple competing organisational priorities between the local and national levels.[1064]

Marcus Solomon's perspective on his own position within this process is interesting. As a member of CAHAC, one of the biggest constituencies in the Western Cape UDF, he says that he helped to form the UDF but was never a member of it.[1065] But de facto by his involvement, he was at the very least associated with it. He was involved in multiple civic formations at different levels in the area where he lived – the Woodlands Civic, the MPCC and CAHAC – and through that was deeply embedded in the community and lived in what he called "an ANC house" as Theresa was a member of the ANC underground, although she never revealed that to him.[1066] Within these social, political and familial contexts there was a strong pull toward Congress. Even though he never joined either the ANC or the UDF, as a member of organisations that democratically decided to go into the UDF, he subordinated himself to the majority decision and went the way of the civics even as he maintained his own autonomous position within that. This marked somewhat of a political break with Neville Alexander whose energies were going into the National Forum. Solomon saw the break as one over a principle – of being member of a democratic mass organisation – and one expression of it was in the CAHAC story. When CAHAC decided to negotiate with the Divisional Council, Marcus Solomon had gone along with the decision of the organisation. He said that Neville Alexander had a principle to not negotiate with government structures and their difference of position on this matter was what took them in the different directions and into different fronts. It was his entailment with and in ensembles – familial, social and communal – and his allegiance to a particular kind of democracy that determined his direction. Elizabeth

[1061] Maseko, SS. "Civic movement and non-violent action," p.362.
[1062] Seekings, J. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, (New Africa Books: Cape Town, 2000), p.59.
[1063] Maseko, SS. "Civic movement and non-violent action," p.363.
[1064] Seekings, J. *The UDF,* p.122.
[1065] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.
[1066] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town. [This is the source for the rest of the paragraph.]

van der Heyden, who was involved in the formation of the United Women's Organisation, took a very different position when that organisation affiliated to the UDF. Her decision and the broader politics of what Shireen Hassim called "associational autonomy" will be explored in the next section.

The integration/autonomy dilemma: The United Women's Organisation, Elizabeth van der Heyden and the UDF

Women's organising, both in the Western Cape and nationally, experienced a revival from the mid-1970s onwards and in the early 1980s it coalesced and grew independently into a range of new formations and negotiated a complicated relationship with the national liberation movement. One of the first signs of this was in the establishment of the Black Women's Federation in 1973.[1067] Other signs of it were in the independent efforts of localized responses to the harsh crisis of social reproduction engendered by racial capitalism. From 1975, "African" women in Crossroads informal settlement in Cape Town mobilized and fought against the odds – racist government, apartheid group areas, bureaucratic administration, patriarchal power, and racist and classist exploitation – for their right to live where they liked. [1068] Struggles like these, with localized particularities, initiated by women responding to the violent realities of reproducing life under apartheid in crisis, proliferated in the late 1970s. Shireen Hassim wrote:

> On the new terrain of battle within the townships, women's gendered responsibilities for household and community reproduction acquired a broader political significance. Women emerged as a powerful force in community-level politics, organising around bread-and-butter issues such as high rents, lack of services, and corrupt local councils.[1069]

This force was often in flux and its organizational form was emerging in the process of struggle. Many women's organisations grew out of, or alongside the growing civics movement as women played key roles as organisers. In the early 1980s a number of grassroots women's organisations coalesced into regional formations in different parts of the country. Notably, these were the United Women's Organisation (UWO) in the Western Cape, the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW), and the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW).[1070] Their establishment took place within the era of intensification of mass struggle nationally, and a broad shift towards fronts as preferred organizational forms. This led to complicated negotiations as women activists and organisations had to figure out how to either synthesise and reconcile women's specific demands and feminist principles with those dominant in the national

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[1067] Ram, P. "The mobilisation of women: the Black Women's Federation, 1975-1977: with particular reference to Natal." MA thesis. University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, (1992).
[1068] Benson, K. *Crossroads: I Live where I Like: A graphic history*, (PM Press: Binghamton, 2021); Benson, K. "Crossroads continues: Histories of women mobilizing against forced removals and for housing in Cape Town South Africa, 1975–2005." PhD diss. University of Minnesota, (2009); Cole, J. *Crossroads: The politics of reform and repression, 1976-1986*, (Ravan Press: Johannesburg, 1987).
[1069] Hassim, S. *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa,* p.48.
[1070] Ibid.

liberation movement, and/or create the political space to articulate feminist positions autonomously. The rest of this section will consider these complex dynamics, how some of them played out in the Western Cape's UWO in its relationship to the UDF and how Elizabeth van der Heyden positioned herself in relation to them.

The UWO existed from late 1978 "as a loose structure comprised of women who had been involved in a range of activities: civic formations, trade unions, and detainee's support committees," but was only publicly launched in 1981. Its founding commitments were for full democratic rights in South Africa, equal pay for equal work, a "fundamental transformation of power relations in society" and it endeavoured to orient itself to the everyday problems of women in oppressed communities.[1071] Early into its existence there were requests from activists in the women's movement in other parts of the country for the UWO to expand and establish itself as a national women's organisation. The UWO declined to do so. It decided that it wanted to keep an emphasis on its practice of participatory democracy and focus on grassroots issues. It was thought that attempting to build a national formation too early would take away from that task. It resolved to assist women's movements in other parts of the country to organise themselves into similar regional structures if they desired.[1072]

When, in 1983, affiliation to the UDF was proposed, "There was no debate about the necessity of joining the new front; rather, it was considered a logical development of both organisations' stance that women's struggles should be integrally connected to struggles for democracy." [1073] The results of the affiliation were and are contested. Gertrude Fester, an activist and a historian of the UWO wrote that:

> Theoretically, women's liberation and national liberation are complementary. However there were tensions around which issues were to be prioritised, and a demand for women to work in all of these structures. In many areas it was women who initiated civics but the men who were the leaders. Women were the ones who carried the burden of domestic labour. Some UWO branches ceased to function as their members became leaders in the civics while others prioritised UDF activities. Other members took up leadership positions in the trade unions. In council it was stated that we had not lost members, rather we had broadened 'the struggle'. The reality was that the UWO was weakened as an organisation. As a result of its existing infrastructure UWO members were central to the formation of UDF area committees.[1074]

Despite these challenges, Fester maintained that affiliation to the UDF was essentially positive. However, the change of pace organisationally tended to result in a situation where the priorities of the UDF, rather than those of the branches, began to shape the UWO. Through this it became more like the women's

[1071] Ibid., p.55-59.
[1072] Ibid.
[1073] Ibid., p.69.
[1074] Fester, G. "Women's organisations in the Western Cape: vehicles for gender struggle or instruments of subordination?" *Agenda,* 13:34, (1997), p.49.

section, or the women's league, of the UDF rather than the front of powerful independent grassroots organsiations it had been.[1075]

After Elizabeth van der Heyden's banning order expired in 1979 she was working with the South African Prisoners' Education Trust (SAPET). As mentioned in the previous chapter, all the other women from the YCCC/NLF trial with whom she had previously been imprisoned, had left the country before she was released. Under house arrest, although she had kept up contact with Marcus Solomon and Neville Alexander, often through Theresa Solomon, she did not join their initiative to re-establish study groups. As a single mother, she faced much stigmatism within her family and community for having a child outside of marriage. Within all of these complex dynamics, her first above-ground political activity after her arrest, trial, sentencing, prison and banning was involvement in the UWO. Sophie Kisting, who got to know Elizabeth van der Heyden well as they worked together in the same building, and was involved in the process of establishing the UWO, recalled that Elizabeth van der Heyden played a key role in the UWO and brought all of her political experience to bear on the process.[1076] She emphasised the broad base of the movement – constituted by civic organisations, activists from the ANC and the BCM, and unions, like the Domestic Workers' Union which with which she had a "solid connection" – and the spirit of unity and non-sectarianism with which it was founded. About van her Heyden's involvement, which was short-lived, Helen Scanlon wrote:

> Once active political opposition revived in the Western Cape, she also became a member of the UWO, but withdrew from active politics after UWO became affiliated with the UDF in 1983. Citing 'external' influence as her reason, she claims: 'I'm sorry but I cannot function in an organisation that takes its instructions from outside, from Europe.'[1077]

Allison Drew emphasised that it was the fact that affiliating to the UDF put the UWO into the camp of Congress and aligned it with the ANC that led Elizabeth van der Heyden to leave.[1078] Her formation in the UM and her experience in prison with ANC members, particularly the seasoned activists, had not warmly entailed Elizabeth van der Heyden to the ANC and the sense that the organisation was being controlled by outside forces – whether the ANC, and/or the ambiguously directed "from Europe" – was antithetical to her political sensibility.

As an attempt to draw this particular section to a close I draw on what Shireen Hassim speaks about as the autonomy/integration dilemma. For some women, the emergence of grassroots women's organising in this period was important as an autonomous and feminist space for the debate, articulation and resistance to issues and conditions specific to women. For others it was a means to mobilise, or integrate,

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[1075] Hassim, S. "Voices, hierarchies and spaces: reconfiguring the women's movement in democratic South Africa." *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies,* 32:2, (2005): 175-193.
[1076] Sophie Kisting recalled that "I think she was the first vice president." I have not been able to verify this elsewhere. Interview with Sophie Kisting. 11 July 2023. Cape Town.
[1077] Scanlon, H. *Representation and reality,* p.211.
[1078] Drew, A. "Biography of Elizabeth van der Heyden," unpublished paper, date unknown.

women into the broader anti-apartheid movement. She suggests that this tension shaped various decisions and directions taken by women's movements.[1079] Hassim's argument can be opened up to speak to the dilemmas of various political tendencies, identities and positions in the liberation movement. For organisations whose fundamental analysis and politics was formed around race, around class, and around gender, this period produced a similar kind of dilemma for them: Remain relatively autonomous or integrate the specific demands and politics into the mainstream of the resistance movement against apartheid? This engendered the conditions for different kinds of coalitions and fronts that attempted to cohere the demands and analyses of various tendencies within the framework of national liberation. The results of these kinds of collaborations were uneven – it could broaden the base and the politics of a particular group and/or it could marginalise their specific demands. In the case of the UWO and the UDF, while the latter facilitated the former's participation in the mainstream of national politics, the relationship also undermined its capacities to determine its own agenda based on the will of its own members. In this period of fronting, there was contestation at multiple levels for influence over civic and other grassroots movements. There was also contestation over the content of liberation itself, and accompanying all this, there was the related search for an organisational form that would respond to the desires of the oppressed and the exploited in the struggle to defeat apartheid. The next section looks at a set of processes within these dynamics, including the debate over the articulation of apartheid and capitalism, the attempt to build a home for Marxist intellectuals, the conception of the united front and the attempt to build one.

The Azanian Marxist Tendency: Study, clarification and articulation

Connected to what was happening on the local level through involvement in civics, and with an eye and an aspiration toward national level politics, was the building of ensembles to study, plan and act with. Part of this process was connecting with young activists who had emerged largely in student struggles in the mid-1970s and early 1980s and who had encountered and been attracted to Neville Alexander through his writings and his growing stature in the movement. Another part of it was clarifying and articulating the politics of the independent socialist network spoken about in the previous chapter. Within the increasing dominance and hegemony of the Congress movement, this network defined itself and its politics in clearer terms. It began to articulate itself in relation to other elements in the movement, as an explicitly socialist tendency – referred to internally by some as the Azanian Marxist Tendency (AMT) – whose analysis of the South African social formation was that it was a manifestation of racial capitalism.[1080] This

[1079] Hassim, S. *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa.*
[1080] See for example: Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment: Background to the Azanian manifesto." In Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, NC. *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008), pp. 157-170; "SACOS president speaks." *Free Azania,* 1:6, (1983): 23-26; and "The Azanian Manifesto (June '83)." *Free Azania,* 1:4, (1983), p.21.

process of clarification and articulation it did largely through its publication, *Free Azania.* There has been a growing interest in the concept of racial capitalism internationally,[1081] and in what Levenson and Paret have referred to as the "South African tradition of racial capitalism," a growing body of work on the development and contribution of the concept from within the South African liberation struggle.[1082] The present work contributes to this conversation by exploring the process through which a central strand of this tradition developed and how it expressed itself politically.

Politically, this tendency was critical of the National Democratic Revolution and two-stage-ism of the Congress and South African Communist Party.[1083] One of its contributions was the insistence that a radical class project was necessarily part of, not augmentative, or external to, the national liberation struggle.[1084] The debate about what kind of organisational form was capable of doing this political work – was one of its preoccupations. They were searching for a form that could both unite people across apartheid's racial and ethnic categorisations under the leadership of the black working class and defeat the apartheid system – which they understood to be constituted by the articulation of racism and capitalism. This preoccupation with organisational form was expressed in the debate about the Popular Front vs. the United Front and what those looked like in South Africa in the early 1980s. Practically it took form in the attempt to build fronts such as the Disorderly Bills Action Committee, which became the Cape Action League, and, of course, the National Forum. With regards to the practices and ideas of the ensemble, the thread that is explored in this section is considered to be a development within the same trajectory of the YCCC/NLF – its commitment to collective study to clarify political positions and strategy, the aspiration to be involved and connected to various elements of the liberation movement, and the fixation on the front as an organisational form. It is a process in which Neville Alexander played a key role with

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[1081] Part of this trend has been spurred by a renewed interest in Cedric Robinson's work and the continued importance of his ideas. One expression of this has been the republication and reintroduction of the third edition of his seminal works, Robinson, C. *Black Marxism: The making of the black radical tradition,* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2020). Other expressions include but are not limited to the following: Alagraa, B. "Cedric Robinson's Black Marxism: Thirty-Five Years Later." *The CLR James Journal*, 24:1-2, (2018): 301-312; Kelley, RDG. "What did Cedric Robinson mean by racial capitalism?" 12 January 2017. Available online at: https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/robin-d-g-kelley-introduction-race-capitalism-justice/ [accessed on 4 March 2024]; Leroy, J. and Jenkins, D. (eds.), *Histories of racial capitalism.* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2021); Rakei, S. and Madzivhandila, P. "Black Marxism and Liberatory Praxis." In Ndlovu-Gatsheni, SJ. and Ndlovu, M. (eds.), *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21st Century: Living Theories and True Ideas,* (Routledge: London, 2021), pp. 151-170; Thomas, D.C. "Cedric J. Robinson and racial capitalism: Africana liberation resistance structures and black internationalism in the twenty-first century." *African Identities*, 11:2, (2013): 133-147.

[1082] Levenson and Paret recently edited "Special Issue: The South African Tradition of Racial Capitalism" for *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. This is the introduction to that special issue in which there are numerous other contributions: Levenson, Z. and Paret, M. "The South African tradition of racial capitalism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 46:16, (2023): 3403-3424. Other work in this trend include: Cloete, M. "Neville Alexander: Towards overcoming the legacy of racial capitalism in post-apartheid South Africa." *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa,* 86:1 (2014): 30-47; Vally, S. and Motala, E. (eds.) *Against racial capitalism: Selected writings, Neville Alexander,* (Pluto: London, 2023).

[1083] See for example Hudson, P. "The freedom charter and the national democratic revolution." *Free Azania,* (October 1987): 30-42. *Free Azania* introduces this article with the following: "The importance of this article is that rather than concentrating on the demands of the Charter it examines the theoretical formulation underpinning it," p.30. In other words, they disagreed fundamentally with the very basis of the Freedom Charter and the conception of the National Democratic Revolution.

[1084] Interview with Brian Hotz-Ashley. 4 March 2022. Cape Town.

ensembles he assembled that were constituted by new, younger activists as well as older comrades, some who emerged with him as part of a cohort on the out sides of the UM in independent black student politics in the late 1950s.

New and old ensembles

John Samuel, an old comrade from the Durban Students' Union (DSU) and APDUSA, had been working in the sphere of education in UK, Ghana and Zambia. Prompted by Soweto 1976, he returned to South Africa to take up the position of national director at SACHED (South African Committee for Higher Education).[1085] Under the Samuel regime, the SACHED gravitational pull attracted other members of the cohort – "the generation born in the battle for truth." (How historically ironic or, perhaps better, poetic, that two streams of the struggle against University Apartheid in the late 1950s – the liberal SACHED and the alumni of the CPSU and the DSU – would converge somehow in the 1980s in the intensifying movement for national liberation and that their sites of operation would be the expansive terrain of alternative education?). Neville Alexander became the Western Cape director of SACHED in 1981.[1086] Enver Motala, also from the DSU and APDUSA but had broken with the UM in the late 1960s, became the national director of the Labour – Community Subcommittee of SACHED (LACOM).[1087] Marcus Solomon had always wanted to return to teaching, something he was kept from under his banning order, in 1979 when it finally expired he taught briefly but felt constrained and within the changed school environment it felt difficult to make any sustained progressive contribution. He was also pulled into the SACHED orbit, initially as a distributor for UPBEAT, a radical magazine for teenagers, and then as a facilitator and coordinator for LACOM. Through these recruitments and many others, SACHED became a base with an infrastructure that supported grassroots struggles, employed activists, and used the terrain of alternative education to build connections across different sections of the movement. With most of the liberation organisations banned, activists used SACHED's resources to support the movement: they used

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[1085] Interview with John Samuel. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg. And: "The South African Committee for Higher Education was founded in 1959 by a group of academics, church people and educationists. It was established as a response to the 1959 Extension of Universities Act which segregated universities by 'ethic' identity and 'race'. Some of SACHED's foundational impulses were to mitigate against "ethnic education" and the associated stigma of inferiority, and to plug the gap of lack of Black tertiary educational opportunity since Black students could no longer enter the white universities." Benson, K. and Gamedze, A. "Radical Histories i: SACHED and some others." *Pathways to Free Education*, 3, (2016), p.49

[1086] Vally, S. and Motala, E. (eds.) *Against racial capitalism,* p.xviii.

[1087] "LACOM educators adopted popular education methods to build on participants experiential knowledge in learning about working class politics for a socialist society. Educational activities were organised and planned together with mass-based organisations. For example, LACOM supported the establishment of cultural 'locals' in unions. This period, the 1980s, was characterised by labour and community education programmes which included music, theatre, art, and the production of creative materials." Benson, K. and Gamedze, A. "Radical Histories I," p.61.

its printers to print flyers and posters, drove its cars to transport comrades to meeting, and used project meetings to recruit, plan and organise.[1088]

Along with the SACHED's infrastructure, NoSizwe's *One Azania, One Nation*, published in 1979, created new opportunities to connect with old and new comrades. The book and its arguments opened sites of possibility within an ongoing process of connecting, studying and building with comrades across the country. Dog-eared photocopies of the book circulated amongst young radicals both in exile and at home. It became a means of influencing the political consciousness of an emerging cohort of activists, many of whom who had grown up under the radicalising influence of BC and were looking for new ideas and new methods that would help them advance the struggle to the next level.

One day in 1981, as Neville Alexander was on his way to SACHED, he gave a hitch-hiker a lift. The hitch-hiker was Na-iem Dollie, at the time an undergraduate student at UCT who was involved in AZASO (Azanian Students' Organisation). Along the way, the two started chatting and Neville Alexander was unassumingly asking about what the students at UCT were up to, what was going on politically etc.[1089] Then at some point Dollie, having read *One Azania, One Nation* "cover to cover," turned to Alexander and said, "but aren't you NoSizwe?" Neville Alexander, slightly taken aback, shook the question off and changed the subject. When they arrived SACHED – an old house in Mowbray in Cape Town's southern suburbs – Alexander invited Dollie to come and meet him the following day. At that meeting Alexander offered him a job – to work with Marcus Solomon to distribute UPBEAT. This was the first of many tasks Alexander gave him over the next few years as Dollie continued to work closely with Alexander as a loyal "lieutenant."[1090] In addition to Dollie, Alexander was developing closer contact with others of his cohort, many of whom had emerged in the Committee of 81 struggles and were studying at UCT. This group included Nicky and Maria Van Driel, Ashley du Plooy and Brian Ashley and they were drafted into study groups and became key to some of the political and intellectual work of the early 1980s.[1091] Brian Ashley opined:

> [What] is significant about the study group is it becomes a place where we can strategize, so that's we in the study group and Neville Alexander, about building a student group and linking up with other young activists that are emerging out of the 1980, 81 student activist, etc.[1092]

Starting in 1983, these students were also involved in the second iteration of SOYA – Students of Young Azania – a student group who, like the CPSU and SASO before them, took up the mantle of the critique of NUSAS's liberalism, and mobilised around issues affecting black students. Importantly, as Brian put it, "all of them were conscious that they, they not just part of SOYA, they not just part of a student thing,

[1088] Interview with Karen Press. 16 September 2021. Cape Town.
[1089] Interview with Na-iem Dollie. 6 April 2022. Cape Town.
[1090] Ibid.
[1091] Ibid.
[1092] Interview with Brian Hotz-Ashley. 4 March 2022. Cape Town.

they part of a political current… That is linked to Neville Alexander. Let's put it as crudely as that."[1093] The SOYANs were attempting to build a united student federation in the long term, were part of the DBAC, and later CAL and the National Forum. [1094]

Relationships established in the non-sectarian seventies persisted and created the possibilities for building new ones. In 1982 Neville Alexander was invited to address an AZAPO gathering at Wilgespruit Centre for Contextual Theology in Johannesburg.[1095] A young revolutionary by the name of Salim Vally was in the crowd. Vally had cut his teeth in the mid-1970s in BC high school organisation SASM (South African Students Movement) and, in 1982 he had just returned from a few years in exile in the United Kingdom and in Canada where, whilst studying and struggling with other immigrants, he had read *One Azania, One Nation.* [1096] Since returning to South Africa, he was part of a group called Action Youth/Aksie Jeug – a Johannesburg-based organisation of "working, unemployed and student youth residing in Soweto, Lenasia, Eldorado Park, Riverlea, Bosmont and Fordsburg" – whose principles were "anti-racism, anti-imperialism, anti-ethnicity, anti-collaboration, anti-sexism, paramountcy of working-class interest and ideas, and democratic criticism – self-criticism."[1097] After Alexander's address at the AZAPO gathering, Vally told him that he enjoyed his talk, agreed with his analysis, said that it sounded like NoSizwe's and asked if that was him. Alexander chuckled and told him that he was.[1098] Like with Na-iem Dollie, that encounter began a close personal and political relationship. For Vally and Alexander, it lasted until Alexander's death in 2012. These new and old relationships, with people who were involved at different levels – in student organisations, in civic groups, socialist youth formations etc. – formed an ensemble that began to articulate itself, its politics and its aspirations in sharper and clearer terms.

Free Azania and articulating the tendency

In an atmosphere increasingly filled with the spirit of the struggle over Hennie Ferus' funeral and the ANC's deployment of cadres into the country to build up its presence and exert influence over struggles, organisational lines were being drawn that cut through earlier, non-sectarian attempts to unite the liberation movement. By around 1982 an ensemble had cohered in Cape Town that included but was not limited to Neville Alexander, Peter Meyer and Frank Van der Horst (all old comrades from CPSU days), and Derrick Naidoo, from Durban from a political background forged in the non-sectarian spirit of the 1970s underground and a strong Maoist influence, Pumezo Lupuwana, from the Eastern Cape, studied Science and had a strong interest in Marxism, Doreen Musson, a progressive academic, as well as

[1093] Ibid.
[1094] Abrahams family archive – documents. "Compilation of SOYA documents," undated, p.3.
[1095] Interview with Salim Vally. 17 February 2022. Johannesburg.
[1096] Ibid.
[1097] *Arise! Vukani!* 2:1, (1987), p.20.
[1098] Interview with Na-iem Dollie. 6 April 2022. Cape Town.

members of the younger generation mentioned above and others.[1099] Within the breaking down of more fluid, loose organisational structures of the 1970s underground, Na-iem Dollie said that they felt the need to articulate and clarify their politics in order to differentiate themselves from groupings who they were theoretically and politically close to but differed on certain issues; "We weren't AZAPO, we were a Marxist Tendency, and our kind of home was the home that Neville Alexander was building for Marxist intellectuals." Internally, some members of the group referred to themselves as the Azanian Marxist Tendency (AMT). [1100]

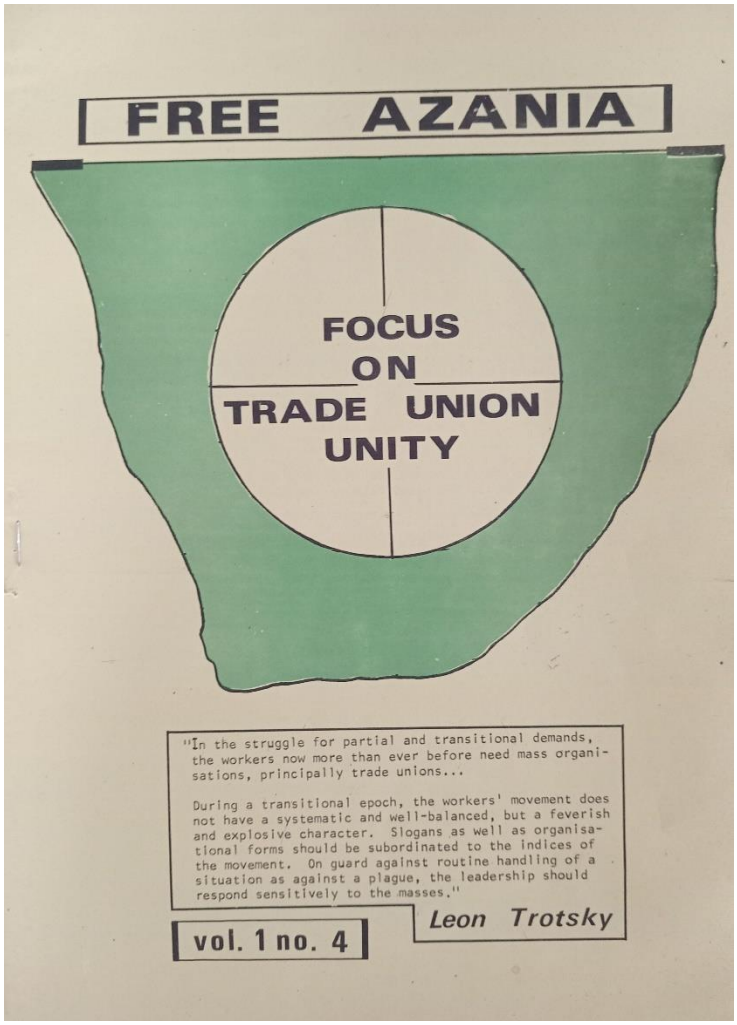


Figure 15. Free Azania, vol.1, no.4. Cover.

Two important factors in the naming and the articulation of the tendency were its identification as Marxist and as Azanian. Together these identified it with movements for national liberation and for socialism on the African continent and more broadly internationally, situating itself in solidarity with other Third World and European struggles. Its Marxism was inspired by a wide range of thinkers and revolutionaries including: Ernest Mandel, Leon Trotsky, Mao Tse-Tung, Rosa Luxembourg, Samora

[1099] Ibid.
[1100] Ibid.

Machel, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Neil Burton, Amilcar Cabral and many others. They maintained a non-dogmatic orientation to Marxism, never affiliating or identifying with any particular faction. In fact, as Derrick Naidoo pointed out, they were critical of the process through which "division[s] in the world between camps of the Soviet Union, the communists and the Trotskyists was so deep that it was deposited in the peripheries of the South, from the North."[1101] In other words, while they were influenced by the thought of people like Trotsky,[1102] they drew widely on struggles across the world and always remained politically independent as a matter of principle.

Their independent orientation to Marxism was mirrored and replicated in relation to the concept of "Azania":

> Azania, like Namibia… has come to stand for a political programme that is accepted by all the oppressed people of this country. It embraces no less than the aspirations of the people for a free, democratic, non-racial, undivided nation in which the workers who produce the wealth of the country are the decisive class. To accept the word Azania does not mean that one necessarily accepts a particular organisation's political line or tactics. It means that one identifies with the aspirations of the oppressed people for liberty and equality. [1103]

This open orientation and identification animated the double, or dialectical movement of articulation. On the one hand it is the close identification with a popular sensibility, on the other it is the clarification of an independent position that is never fully subsumed within it. As "Azania" was a term associated (its existence in the liberation movement at least) with a trajectory of struggle that came out of the PAC and subsequently the BCM (of Azania). In choosing to identify with this, the AMT was pulling closer towards these traditions and slightly away from Congress which never officially identified with the concept.

In this period, there were a number of publications produced by the Congress Alliance or sympathetic to it, some of these were the journal *Work In Progress,* the SACP's *The African Communist,* and the ANC's *Mayibuye*. In order to both articulate themselves, their analyses and positions, and counter the ideological force of Congress, members of the AMT felt that they needed a theoretical mouthpiece. According to Dollie, Alexander approached him with the task of editing a journal which would do this job and would

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[1101] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town.

[1102] "There is a misconception about Neville Alexander. He has been labelled a Trotskyist, or even less complimentarily, an "ultra-leftist". In the researcher's initial five years of close encounters and then 25 years of occasional and chance meetings with the man, I have never heard him once describe himself as a Trotskyist. Indeed, on one occasion *en route* to the South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached) in Mowbray in 1983, I said to him that I was becoming fascinated with Leon Trotsky's writings. I was especially influenced by Isaac Deutscher's trilogy on the Russian revolutionary. Fired up and inspired by some of the works of established practitioners in socialist thought, I was keen to get to know the Alexander of theory… I wanted Alexander to put a label on his philosophical inclinations and ideological choices. He did not oblige and, I suspect, he decided to humour me instead. He said: "I can't describe myself as a Trotskyist, but there's a lot of good in what Leon Trotsky had to say." And that was the end of that, at least for the time being, and I was left in no doubt that my political mentor was a person who embraced a Marxism that was not of the Stalinist variety." Dollie, N. "The dance of an intellectual mandarin: a study of Neville Alexander's thoughts on the language question in South Africa." MA thesis. University of South Africa, (2011), p.24.

[1103] "Controversies: Azania." *Free Azania,* 1:1, p.5.

be titled *Free Azania*.[1104] Brian Ashley, who was "becoming more politically conscious" and was a committed part of the emerging ensemble also became involved, he recalled:

> I'm introduced to this fellow Na-iem, we're introduced to him and Na-iem says, look we are going to produce this revolutionary magazine called *Free Azania*. So, Na-iem, Maria, and myself… we are the ones who are producing *Free Azania*. We are the ones going to the printers, etc. but we are told through Na-iem that behind this is a secret group, you know, there's this group. It's the Neville Alexanders and people who are producing the [material], you know, writing some of the, you know, I don't think we wrote, maybe I did write one or two things but most of it was, we were given articles by Neville Alexander and others that would make up *Free Azania*. But when it gets banned, you know, it's, it's, it's me, it's Na-iem who are relating to the lawyers and you know like, we the hands-on people.[1105]

So it was the young radicals who did the work of producing the journal and responding to crisis when it emerged but it was Alexander, and perhaps others in the underground background, who was providing instruction and direction. By this stage, Alexander's stature enabled him to attract the allegiance of these emerging activists and recruit them to his vision. The editorial in the inaugural issue, whose theme was "Focus on Azania", stated the vision and orientation and highly ambitious publication schedule as follows:

> Free Azania will appear at least nine times annually. It will reprint articles from local, national and international journals, pamphlets, books and interviews which
>
> - Contain valuable information regarding the liberation struggle in South Africa and in other countries of the colonial and ex-colonial world;
> - Raise controversial questions about the struggle for liberation and emancipation;
> - Analyse our situation in the national, African and international context.
>
> From time to time articles may be commissioned on topical and fundamental issues of the South African struggle.
>
> The source of any article is a matter of indifference to the editors. Free Azania should made to be a forum of self-criticism, criticism and debate in which people should feel completely free to send in articles, letters and comments for publication… It is hoped that in this way Free Azania will be a contribution to the development of an informed and critical movement where democratic discussion among people holding different views within a liberatory framework will become a matter of course.[1106]

Apart from the frequency of its publication, the journal operated basically within this vision for the remainder of the 1980s.[1107]

[1104] Interview with Na-iem Dollie. 6 April 2022. Cape Town.
[1105] Interview with Brian Hotz-Ashley. 4 March 2022. Cape Town.
[1106] "Editorial." *Free Azania,* 1:1, (1983), p.2.
[1107] Due to the historical conditions of its publishing, and the ongoing States of Emergency and frequent raids and arrests, it is unclear exactly how many issues were ultimately published but at least fourteen issues were produced from 1983 up until 1989.

The similarity of approach, political orientation and commitment to open debate in the liberation movement resonated closely with that of the *Namibian Review* (an anonymous member of the grouping said it was a major inspiration for *Free Azania* in the first place!).[1108] Beyond inspiration, as shown in "Inter-nationalism", there was a reciprocal relation of solidarity-publishing whereby articles on developments in the Namibian movement from the *Namibian Review* would often get republished in *Free Azania* and vice versa. One example was their reprinting of Alexander's paper given at the Ecumenical Conference for Students at Döbra, SWA in July 1983 – "The role of the student in society," a gathering that Kenneth Abrahams also addressed.[1109] Members of the original ensemble were still thinking and acting together more than twenty years after their initial constitution.

Free Azania also frequently re-published articles from *Azania Worker* and *Azania Frontline* and included details for subscription to these publications.[1110] The group who produced the latter two mentioned publications was the London-based Azanian Liberation Support Committee (ALSC). Central to that group was Rose-Innes Phahle, a comrade of the original ensemble since the 1960s when he was the key NLF contact in Johannesburg. "In addition to Phahle, the London committee comprised Don Noels, Vukile Mdingi, Margaret Shakespeare and Charlie van Gelderen," who were mostly South African exiles with a background of involvement the liberation movement and a common commitment to socialism.[1111]

With regards to the national context, *Free Azania* took editorial decisions that reflected a broad conception of the liberatory movement that took for granted its internally differentiated character. Their issues had focused themes on Azania, unions, alternative education, sports, students, women, and various developments relevant to the movement such as the Koornhof Bills, the Nkomati Accords, and local government, resistance and control. Speeches from recent events such as Joe Foster's speech at FOSATU's third anniversary were published,[1112] as were manifestos and programmes from the various organisations and fronts in the liberation movement. In vol.1 no.7 "Focus on Programmes/Focus on Nkomati," *Free Azania* published an article titled "Rival visions which underpin the left" which attempts an analysis of different programmes within the liberation movement. It is written by a journalist who has since become (in)famous politically as the leader of the liberal DA (Democratic Alliance), Helen Zille.[1113]

[1108] Interview with X. March 2022. Anonymous location.
[1109] This piece is republished from *The Namibian Review,* Number 29, (1983). In *Free Azania,* 1:5, (1983), it is listed without an author but in *The Namibian Review,* Neville Alexander is credited as delivering the paper.
[1110] "Azania Worker was meant to be a forum in which socialists from all political currents within the trade unions, student and national liberation organisations could contribute towards the development of a relevant theory and practice of social change, and in which they could exchange experiences and lessons drawn from past and present struggles. It was non-sectarian and open to publishing contributions that differed from the views of the editorial group. Azania Frontline: Newsletter of the Azania (South Africa) Liberation Support Committee published articles written by the committee based on news reports from South Africa and also reprinted news articles from South African newspapers written by black journalists." Drew, A. "The Azania Liberation Support Committee and its publications." Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/azania-liberation-support-committee-and-its-publications-allison-drew [accessed on 13 March 2023].
[1111] Ibid.
[1112] Foster, J. "The workers' struggle: Where does FOSATU stand?" *Free Azania,* 1:4, (1983).
[1113] Zille, H. "Rival visions which underpin the left." *Free Azania,* 1:7, (1983): 43-46.

Accompanying the article, in the spirit of provoking a debate in "the form of a scientific dialogue based on the careful examination of the existing programmes of the organisations that constitute the national liberation movement," are three programmes: the Unity Movement's *Ten Point Programme,* Congress's *Freedom Charter,* and the National Forum's *The Azanian Manifesto* (more on the National Forum soon).[1114] Their understanding, which underpinned these decisions, was that the movement was constituted by the whole gamut of oppressed people's organisations provided they were not collaborationist – this included students' groups, sports societies and clubs, women's groups, trade unions, liberation organisations, community organisations, and civic associations. *Free Azania* sought to engage and report on the movement as a whole and it presented the positions of various tendencies in addition to its own.

While the publication was committed to presenting various positions within the movement through the practice of democratic and critical debate, and that was part of the Azanian Marxist Tendency's political sensibility, the group also had their own political and theoretical positions on various matters and it was an intention of the *Free Azania* to put those across. This took place in interesting ways. In vol.1 no.6, "Focus on Sport", a piece titled "SACOS[1115] president speaks" is based on an interview with Frank van der Horst. *Free Azania* asked the old CPSU comrade, at the time the president of SACOS, about his conception of the struggle in South Africa. They asked him about his conception of the nature of the struggle in South Africa by asking his position on the following: the black working class being the central and pivotal class in the struggle, the question of a single nation, and whether he believed that the system they are "struggling against is one of racial capitalism[?]."[1117] These questions essentially ask the interviewee to situate themselves and their organisation in relation to the *Free Azania's* and the Azanian Marxist Tendency's analysis of the South African social formation and their conception of the struggle through these particular units of analysis – the black working class, the nation and racial capitalism – all of which were core tenets of their politics. These concepts were frequently debated, deployed and discussed on the pages of *Free Azania* as different perspectives on the debate on the articulation of race and class were hashed out.[1118] A key debate that unfolded in *Free Azania* was around the question of what form of organisation was capable of uniting the liberation movement to defeat apartheid under the leadership of the black working class. The AMT's answer was the United Front.

[1114] Ibid.

[1115] SACOS was the South African Council for Sport. A non-racial and non-collaborationist sports body that had the slogan "No normal sport in an abnormal society." Cleophas, F. "The South African Council on Sport at 50: the fight for sports development is still relevant today." Available online at: https://theconversation.com/the-south-african-council-on-sport-at-50-the-fight-for-sports-development-is-still-relevant-today-202402 [accessed on 4 March 2024].

[1117] "SACOS president speaks." *Free Azania,* 1:6, (1983): 23-26.

[1118] The piece where they first lay out the terrain of this debate: "Is the South African struggle a class struggle or a racial struggle? [Reprinted from *Mosebetsi Isisebenzi*]." *Free Azania,* 1:1, (1983).

Crisis's opportunity: "The problem of unity rests on the definition of the enemy"[1119]

On the unfolding and deepening crisis that the apartheid system was in by the early 1980s, a *Free Azania* editorial read:

> We are entering a period in our history in which the mettle of our movement will be tested to the full. The realignment which is taking place in the ruling class is a direct response to the growth of popular resistance and the exigencies of world capitalism. The conflicts emerging within the ruling class reflect the social, political and economic contradictions which the present regime is unable to resolve. Thus, the regime of the ruling class is "a regime of crisis."[1120]

The apartheid government was rolling the dice. The "realignment" referred to above was a reform package that the government proposed which came to be known as Prime Minister PW Botha's "New Deal", and the Koornhof Bills. Roger Southall explains their basic character:

> In brief, the main features relate to (i) an intent to eliminate what is widely referred to as "petty apartheid"… (ii) the granting of formal trade union rights (whose substantive nature is subject to wide ranging debate) to African workers ; (iii) the refurbishing of influx control and the pass laws in a manner designed to impress international opinion, overhaul their administration, and increase their effectiveness at a reduced financial cost ; (iv) a complex of moves designed to improve living conditions and socio-economic opportunities for some urban blacks… and (v) the promotion of a "new political dispensation"… The result would be a new constitutional structure whose essence is promoted as moving from white domination to "sharing power" while simultaneously maintaining the "national" (i.e. ethnic) integrity of the diverse "peoples" involved.[1121]

These Bills provoked mass response. The political reforms, particularly the Tricameral parliament and the Black Local Authorities Act, which attempted to bribe off a collaborative section of the black population with the illusion of participation in decision-making processes, were fiercely resisted and firmly rejected across various pockets of the national liberation movement. In the face of the racist attempt to fragment black resistance, the search for a political form to counter this and put the movement on the offensive was on.

As this dissertation has shown, building fronts to unite various elements of the national liberation movement was a central preoccupation of the ensemble. Perhaps what distinguished the AMT in this period was its fixation on the United Front and its articulation in relation to and as an alternative to the Popular Front. Eugene Cairncross, who left South Africa for Zimbabwe in 1981, recalled that in their study group they read, intensively, and debated what he referred to as all the "classical works on the United Front":

[1119] "The United Front vs The Popular Front." *Free Azania,* 1:2, (1983), p.4.
[1120] "Editorial", *Free Azania,* 1:2, (1983), p.1.
[1121] Southall, R. "Botha Reformism, the Bantustan Strategy and the Marginalization of the South African Periphery." *Labour, Capital and Society,* 15:2, (1982), p.14-15.

> Our ideas of a United Front were drawn from the ideas of the United Front in the early period, particularly by Lenin and a few other examples to distinguish it from a popular front where you have, you know, just basically a tactical agreement on certain issues rather than a broader basis saying this is what we, you know within the society these are the things that we are struggling for as a common platform and we will band together without disbanding organisations. So it was definitely not the idea that for example you could have people who might disagree with National Party, like the Progressive Party, but were firmly in favour of maintaining a capitalist system. So you know it's not that kind of broad church which the ANC tried to do, which it did but actually it's the right wing that dominated.[1122]

Eugene Cairncross has here highlighted some of the major influences and features of the debate. The fundamental sense in which it was distinguished from the Popular Front was in its definition of the enemy. A popular front, "or bloc of classes, includes one or other section of the capitalist class, usually the liberal bourgeoisie" and its composition sets a definite limit on how and who it can determine as its enemy. With capitalists in its ranks, capitalism cannot be the enemy of the popular front. In the South African context, the popular front, which became expressed in the UDF, was limited to a more restricted anti-apartheid programme while the united front's platform was anti-apartheid and anti-capitalism.

Beyond the constitution and programme, about the process of exchange in the forum of the united front, *Free Azania* wrote:

> United fronts are usually fertile soil for creative and constructive debate about ideological and theoretical questions. The members of the different parties or organisations, as they learn to act together and through struggle to trust one another, in spite of party differences, gradually begin to discuss these differences and influence one another. The prevailing spirit in a united front is one of tolerance for other parties' point of view within the framework of the common strategic goal… In this sense the united front is a school of democratic attitudes. [1123]

In other words, there was a pedagogical aspect to the organisational form, a sense of study associated with a certain kind of political openness. This echoes the "united front ethos" that Neville Alexander suggested characterised the phase of non-sectarian struggle of the previous decade, which manifested in study groups and mutual learning exchanges. It was relationships forged within this dynamic that became the basis of forming the united front in practice.

The united front and the change of relationships

While the previous section of this chapter explored some of the debates about the united and popular fronts in theory, the present section considers the process of formation of National Forum (NF) as an

[1122] Interview with Eugene Cairncross. 1 March 2022. Cape Town.
[1123] "The United Front vs The Popular Front." *Free Azania,* 1:2, (1983), p.4.

attempt to build a united front in the South African liberation movement. It is interested in the texture and the process of its formation. Interestingly, in both the UDF and the NF, the composition and conception of the front developed and broadened in this period from being primarily constituted by the major liberation organisations (in the case of the ALF), to incorporating civic organisations, independent activist groups, women's organisations, sports societies etc. The relationships at the centre of the NF were between the re-constituted BCM, and the independent socialist network, relationships which began in the underground, in the previous decade. The previous chapter already illustrated how it was in and through this relationship that Neville Alexander moved significantly from his Mildred Poswa piece on the reactionary tendency of BC. This section looks at how, in part through these ongoing relationships, elements of the BCM also shifted, expanded and developed their conception of BC through a dialogue with socialist influences. While the NF was eventually out-organised and out-resourced by the UDF, which increasingly came under the hegemony of the ANC, some of its significance lies in the kind of principled and generative relationships it was based on which constructed unity across political persuasions and created space within them for learning, exchange and movement. The study and struggle, of which the NF was an expression and a product, produced an important moment in the development of both the theory and practice of the liberation movement in South Africa synthesising a radical critique of racism and capitalism which had, and is still having, an impact on traditions of struggle committed to anti-racism and socialism nationally and internationally. The NF can be understood as the culmination of the vision and attempt of the NLF, expressed in different conditions with different possibilities. The thread from the attempt to build the Progressive National Students' Organisation, through the NLF and the ALF, is central to situating the NF – these formations are in that sense its ancestors.

Neville Alexander wrote that the National Forum was the direct response of a segment of mostly urban black people to Botha's New Deal and the National Party's broader programme of reform. It had one of its antecedents in the Disorderly Bills Action Committee (DBAC)[1124]:

> The first successful attempt to mobilise the oppressed people against this twin assault occurred in the Western Cape. On the initiative of the Western Cape Civic Association, which was then a nonsectarian, nonaligned federation of civic associations embracing the greater part of Cape Town and Boland towns such as Paarl, Mbekweni and Stellenbosch, the DBAC was formed in August 1982. Three strands of political activists in the Western Cape converged in this *ad hoc* committee. These were the Black Consciousness Movement, the nonracial socialist groupings, and the (mainly pro-Charter) trade union movement. They came together in a diversity of anti-apartheid and anti-capitalist organisations: trade unions, civic and tenant associations, and youth, women's, students', sports, cultural, religious and other community organisations.[1125]

[1124] One of the Koornhof Bills was known as the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill. The DBAC's name was a play on this. Savage, M. "The imposition of pass laws on the African population in South Africa 1916-1984." *African Affairs,* 85:339, (1986): 181-205.

[1125] Alexander, N. "The national forum." In Liebenberg, I., Nel., B., Lortan, F. and van der Westhuizen, G. (eds.) *The long march: The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa,* (HAUM: Pretoria, 1994), pp.199-200.

The significance of the DBAC was in its pioneering role in resisting the reforms, but also in its composition of mostly grassroots organisations – a result of the site of motion resting with organisations at the local level. Brian Ashley recalled his experience of the DBAC's formation and his perception of its composition:

> I remember going to a mass meeting where, you know, you had all the different groups in Cape Town, you know, across the political spectrum. ANC, PAC, Black Consciousness, but they weren't there in their political formations, they were there through the civic organization, or the youth organization or the women's organization. So, they, they would be aligned politically but, you know, basic, if you living in Langa you part of LAGUNYACRO[1126] let's say, for example, but it's got a particular politics. So, when you send in representatives there, you making sure that you send in those that represent the dominant politics, or the United woman's organization. It was an ANC thing so you would know that the women who would go there would be ANC people, but they're not going wearing their, couldn't because organizations were banned, etc. But the Disorderly Bill Action Committee was across you know with all of these formations, and it was built on the tremendous growth of people's organizations from 1980.[1127]

The DBAC brought not only different organisations, but also different political persuasions together and as a front at the provincial level. In that sense, it was an antecedent of the National Forum and it "[spread] the idea and the reality of a united front of people's organisations across the country."[1128]

At the national level, the ALF was in some sense an antecedent of the National Forum too. Major changes from the context of the ALF were the possibility of organising aboveground, Congress's growing presence in the country, and the broadening of the front's membership to include a much wider variety of organisations. Continuities between the ALF and the NF were the relationships and the initiative of the BCM, this time in the form of AZAPO. An AZAPO delegation of its national executive committee toured the country in late 1982 to assess the national situation and meet and discuss it in formal and informal forums. Interestingly, Neville Alexander wrote that:

> The AZAPO general council had in fact deliberately decided not to launch a political campaign of resistance against the tricameral/black local authorities dispensation under the umbrella of AZAPO in order to effect maximum unity of the oppressed people. For, already at this time, the struggle for the Charter Movement and the BC (or, more generally, the Azanian) Movement had begun to bedevil the liberation struggle of the people of South Africa.[1129]

The delegation resolved to propose the establishment of a national campaign to the AZAPO's general council.[1130] Just a few months later, on 6 February 1983, Alexander gave an address at AZAPO's third national congress in Pietermaritzburg titled "The National Situation." The address made an analysis of the

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[1126] LAGUNYACRO was an acronym for the civic structures in the following areas: LAnga, GUgulethu, NYAnga, and CROssroads.
[1127] Interview with Brian Hotz-Ashley. 4 March 2022. Cape Town.
[1128] Alexander, N. "The national forum," p.200.
[1129] Ibid.
[1130] Ibid; and Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment," p.165.

moment, suggesting that a number of political, economic, regional and ideological were cohering in "the crisis of white supremacy" and that this crisis presented "the historic opportunity for the oppressed and exploited people of our country."[1131] He closed with the following:

> We have to build up a national united front of all people's organisations in order to fight for full democratic rights for all and an end to the system of racial capitalism. Such a front must not be an alliance of ethnically defined organisations but an alliance of workers', community, students', youth, sports and other organisations of the people. Ambivalent and opportunist elements such as white and black organisations of liberals who are not committed to the total liberation of the people of Azania, those who are merely concerned with the elimination of superficial aspects of apartheid, must be excluded from such an alliance of organisations.
>
> A national conference should be convened for the purpose of formulating a national agreement on immediate political demands.[1132]

As AZAPO's plans and Alexander's closing indicate, consciousness was growing across the liberation movement of the necessity of building fronts to take on the government at different levels.[1133] Also underway were organising efforts to make the plan a reality. For instance, in the AMT camp, Brian Ashley recalled that in the garage of Doreen Musson, they collectively compiled and produced a pamphlet called "Let Us Unite in the Year of the United Front" authored under the pseudonym of David Stuurman and distributed all over the country.[1134]

The National Forum

The culmination of all the organising was a gathering on 11 and 12 June 1983 in Hammanskraal,[1135] a region north of Pretoria that, since 1977 with the 'independence' of Bophuthatswana, was cut across by

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[1131] "The national situation." *Free Azania,* 1:1, (1983), p.16.

[1132] Ibid., p.24

[1133] For example, another antecedent was a call made at a gathering of the Transvaal Anti-SAIC (South African Indian Council) that had been called to protest the government's constitutional proposals in Johannesburg on 22 and 23 January 1983. At that meeting, the progressive Reverend Alan Boesak made a call for establishing a united front in the liberation movement to counter the tri-cameral parliament. This was then taken up by members of the meeting who constituted a subcommittee which later resulted in the establishment of a popular front, UDF. Boesak played a peculiar role in the development of fronts in this period. Having made this public call early in 1983, later that year he was part of the launch of the NF before jumping ship and becoming one of the iconic figures of the UDF. "A front to oppose 'new deal.'" X personal collection – documents. "Cape Action League documents and newspaper cuttings," undated.

[1134] Interview with Brian Hotz-Ashley. 4 March 2022. Cape Town.
David Stuurman (1773-1830) was an anticolonial militant from the Eastern Cape who united Khoi, San and Xhosa groups in battle to resist the British conquest in the 18th and 19th centuries. Like Jakob Marengo who became an important figure in the Namibian liberation struggle, Stuurman's actions were interpreted as early instances of nationalist organising. For more on Stuurman, see: Malherbe, VC. "David Stuurman:"last chief of the Hottentots."" *African Studies,* 39:1, (1980): 47-64.

[1135] "Hammanskraal was very instrumental in the struggle against the apartheid regime and in the advancement of Black Consciousness. Between 1972 and 1983, Hammanskraal hosted some of the most significant meetings in the history of the struggle against apartheid. Between 2-9 June 1972, this township hosted a South African Student`s Organisation (SASO), General Students Council meetings which declared leaders of homelands "puppets" of the

the borders between the bantustan and SA. In attendance were about 800 people representing over 200 black organisations. The largest groupings in the NF were AZAPO, which was at the time the most organised political force in the country, the Cape Action League which was previously the DBAC, more on that briefly, Action Youth and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA).[1136] Here at Hammanskraal the NF was launched with the Azanian Manifesto as its political programme.[1137] The Azanian Manifesto was the first document of its kind in the South African struggle around which a national mass political formation was based that made explicit the system of racial capitalism as its object of resistance. The document positioned "the struggle against apartheid [as] no more than the point of departure for our liberation efforts."[1138] In other words, the target of resistance was not just apartheid but racial capitalism. It situated the black working class as the primary driving force of the struggle. It made explicit socialist demands such as state provision of housing, healthcare and education, the right to work and form trade unions, worker control of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and that the land should be owned by the Azanian people and its use should be oriented toward abolishing forms of exploitation.[1139]

government of the Republic of South Africa. After the conference, some SASO members left the country to join the liberation movement in Botswana.
The first annual congress of the Black People`s Convention (BPC) was held on 16 December 1972. In December 1974, a 4 day convention called the Black Renaissance Convention, organised by Smangaliso Mkhatshwa and Maurice Ngakane, called for sanctions on the Republic of South Africa and declared a militant approach to the struggle against apartheid. In June 1983, the National Forum was held in Hammanskraal. The forum called for the establishment of a Socialist state. It represented 170 Black organisations from different sectors."
Küsel, US. *Phase I cultural heritage resource impact assessment: Cultural heritage resources impact assessment for portion* R/*17 of the farm Hamanskraal 112 JR in Hammanskraal, Gauteng Province*. (African Heritage Consultants CC: Pretoria, 2014).

[1136] Alexander, N. "The national forum, " p.201; Laurence, P. "The National Forum brings black organisations nearer to unity," *Rand Daily Mail,* 14 June 1983.

[1137] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment."

[1138] "The Azanian Manifesto (June '83)." *Free Azania,* 1:4, (1983), p.21.

[1139] Ibid.

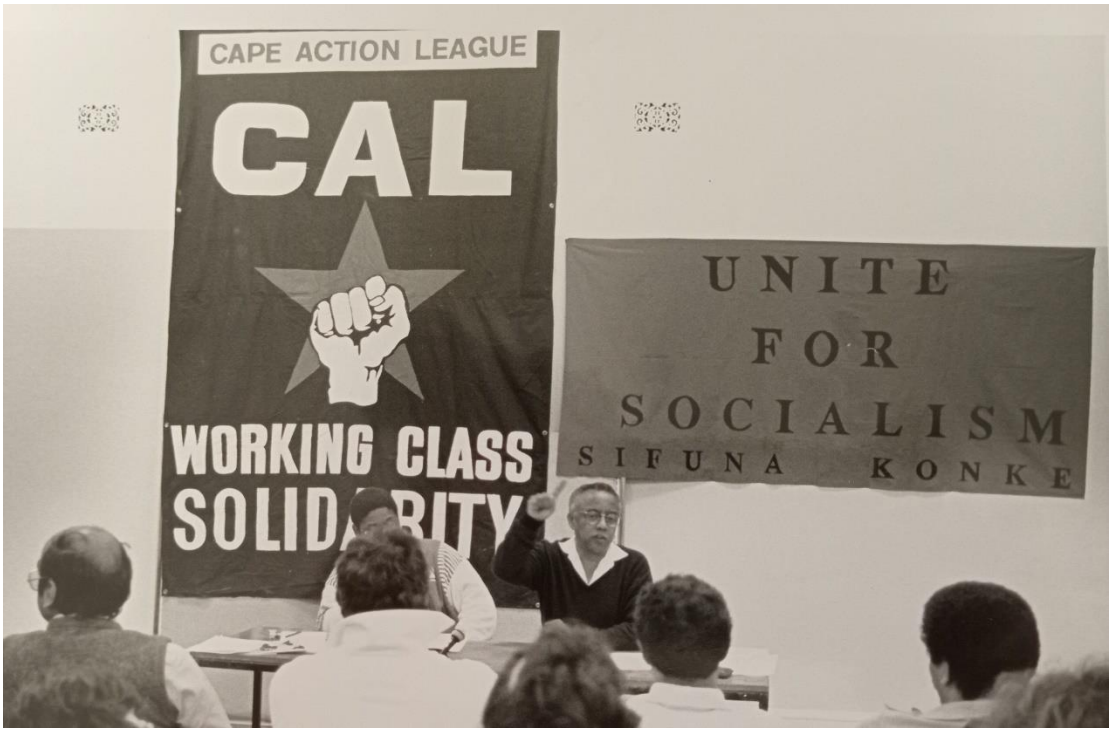


Figure 16. Neville Alexander at a Cape Action Leage gathering. Photo by Albert Hess. X personal collection - images.

Merely a few months after the NF's launch, in August 1983, in Mitchell's Plain, Marcus and Theresa Solomon's home ground, the UDF was launched. Right from its founding it received more positive publicity from the white liberal media, support from religious groups and had more access to funding. Alexander wrote:

> Within weeks of its formation in August 1983, the UDF started gaining the upper hand in what had, in reality, become a battle for hegemony and dominance between vanguard black consciousness and Charter groups. In this battle between two different conceptions of the struggle for national liberation in South Africa, the political positions and the agenda of the UDF were "simpler", more populist and backed by excellent media and other propaganda and organisational skills and resources.[1140]

While the two fronts were formed through different processes, within vastly different material possibilities, and with very different politics, at one very basic level, they were attempting to achieve one of the same things. On the impact of the National Forum and the UDF in the period immediately after their founding, Sylvia Vollenhoven wrote the following:

> The first display of the effectiveness of the growing black opposition to government's attempts to press ahead with unacceptable and cosmetic reforms, was the dismal failure of the Coloured and Indian elections for the tricameral parliament. In the run-up to the elections in August 1983, both NF and UDF groups held mass rallies country-wide. On the weekend before the elections about 20,000 people attended rallies in protest-in all the country's main centres. [1141]

[1140] Alexander, N. "The national forum," p.201.
[1141] Vollenhoven, S. "South Africa at a Crossroads." *Third World Quarterly,* 8:2, (1986), p.492.

This was a massive achievement. The NF and the UDF were both products and producers of the surge in movement in the 1980s and they attempted to harness, influence and shape the mass discontent emerging in black communities, workplaces and organisations based on their respective analyses. And at the level of resisting and contesting these particular reforms, they won a major victory over the apartheid government.

The National Forum convened again over the Easter weekend in 1984 in Pietermaritzburg, and in 1986 in Durban, at the latter there were 1600 delegates representing 457 organisations.[1142] Despite the growth in numbers, the NF struggled to sustain itself or run many major campaigns or actions and after the elections in 1984, it was not sustaining any ongoing activity. The UDF – with its broad church/popular front/'anti-apartheid' orientation, its backing from the ANC, and the involvement and support from churches, white liberal groups such as NUSAS and the Black Sash – out-resourced and essentially out-organised the NF. While this is a fairly bleak assessment it is also a limited one and, as hinted at previously, perhaps some of the significance of the national forum was what the process of its formation generated.

Between blurred and hardening lines: Casualties and the creative capacities of unity

> *The CAL believes that the interests of bosses and workers can never be the same. Therefore, an alliance between workers and bosses (Popular Front) can only serve the interests of the bosses. The UDF is such a popular front. It includes workers' organisations such as CAHAC and organisations of the bosses, such as the Western Cape Traders' Association and the children and wives of factory and mine bosses (NUSAS and Black Sash).*[1143]

Derrick Naidoo reflected that "The popular front - united front debate caused a lot of division."[1144] At the time of the NF's formation, there was a belief amongst some that it "helped to narrow differences between consciousness movements and the Charterists."[1145] At the first National Forum Committee meeting there was a wide section of organisations present, including many Charterists such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU), Azanian Students' Organisation (AZASO) and the General and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU), and prominent individuals, such as Alan Boesak, were initially part of the NF.[1146] There was some controversy

[1142] "Briefs: National Forum." *Arise! Vukani,* 2:1, (1987), p.7; X personal collection – documents. "Cape Action League documents and newspaper cuttings," undated.
[1143] "What we stand for." *Cape Action League: Formerly known as the Disorderly Bills Action Committee,* 1:2, August 1983.
[1144] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town.
[1145] Laurence, P. "The National Forum brings black organisations nearer to unity," 14 June 1983, *Rand Daily Mail.*
[1146] Ibid., "Those who voted for the manifesto [in Hammanskraal] included members of the South African Allied Workers' Union, the General Allied Workers' Union, the Congress of South African Students – all strongly Charterist in outlook – as well as leading personalities of the United Democratic Front."

around the four mentioned organisations as NF leaders such as Lybon Mbasa and Saths Cooper recalled their active participation in the process and that they voted for the Azanian Manifesto at the first meeting.[1147] In the emerging spirit of drawing hard lines, and displaying the almost mystical hold that the Freedom Charter had, those four organisations later claimed that they only attended the NF as "observers" and published a statement which:

> Disassociated themselves from the manifesto as they [said] it was in opposition to the Freedom Charter…. [They] reiterated their support for the Freedom Charter "as the only democratic document drafted in the history of the liberation struggle. The Charter stands out from all other alternatives for change in South Africa, not only because of the manner in which it came into being, but also because of the demands reflected in it. It can never be substituted without the will of the majority. Any attempt by an individual or a group to discredit or undermine it can only be seen as an act of betrayal to the aspirations of all South Africa's people."[1148]

A sign of the times, this dissociation is fascinating for its fixation on the Freedom Charter as a sacred document, to which there could be no conceivably democratic alternative. It is not the contents of the Azanian Manifesto that are taken issue with, but that its very existence is an affront, almost an insult to the Charter and by extension a "betrayal to the aspirations of all South Africa's people." This underlines Heffernan's argument that ideological lines were blurred and substantive political differences were more marginal in this period as the association with the Freedom Charter and the Congress Alliance took a more prominent place in determining organisational allegiances as they possibilities for non-sectarian collaboration dwindled.[1149]

In addition to organisations and individuals shifting their allegiance, the contrasting positions and the broader context of struggle of which they were a part, generated tensions and created splits in organisations themselves. The united front principle of working-class independence precipitated a split in DBAC in early 1983. The split took place over the question of the involvement and membership of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) – the same white-dominated liberal student organisation that the CPSU had debated and critiqued the nature of their resistance to university apartheid in the late 1950s. The organisations who left the DBAC, which included the UWO and CAHAC, joined the UDF and the DBAC reformulated itself as the Cape Action League (CAL).[1150]

This context of hardening lines produced a tendency for often unnuanced, polemical positions. The nature of the debate of the United Front vs. the Popular Front concealed some of the complexities of the moment. The UDF harboured militants of many hues and became a mass movement of serious

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[1147] Ibid.; and South African Students Press Union (SASPU). "Groups oppose alternative to Charter." *Focus,* 2:2 (July 1983), p.8.
[1148] South African Students Press Union (SASPU). "Groups oppose alternative to Charter." *Focus,* 2:2 (July 1983), p.8. Derrick Naidoo recalled that COSAS "were brought in line" by the Congress leadership: Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town.
[1149] Heffernan, A. "Blurred lines and ideological divisions."
[1150] Interview with Brian Hotz-Ashley. 4 March 2022. Cape Town; Abrahams family archive – documents. "Compilation of SOYA documents," undated, p.6.

reckoning with its own momentum. It was a dynamic movement constituted multiple contending positions. Jeremy Seekings wrote:

> The strategic logic of contesting what was termed the political 'middle ground', with organisation building and alliance building in more cautious and conservative constituencies, sometimes brought the UDF's structures into conflict with its more militant and confrontational affiliates, which, favoured the intensification of resistance and denounced the wooing of the 'middle ground' as a reformist compromise.[1151]

The UDF, in the Congress tradition of ideological "vagueness" identified by Eric Louw, was a broad-church popular front against apartheid, diffuse and multiple and containing a variety of contending positions. In terms of the resolution of those contradictions, Rusty Bernstein reflected: "Mass popular resistance revived again inside the country led by the UDF, [but] it led the ANC to see the UDF as an undesirable factor in the struggle for power and to undermine it as a rival focus for mass mobilization."[1152] While the UDF constituted a serious grassroots force, containing a wide range of political persuasions held under its anti-apartheid programme, the "strategic logic" of "wooing the middle ground", as Seekings put it above, was characteristic of the pitfalls of the Popular Front.

While the NF – UDF poles drove some particular splits, they fit into a broader set of dynamics unfolding in this period and the increasing dominance of Congress and Charterists within the anti-apartheid movement. In black student politics, the BCM lost a lot of ground to Congress in the wake of SASO's crushing. Saleem Badat has written about how AZASO, founded in 1979, shifted from its BC starting point and reoriented itself toward Charterism already by mid-1981.[1153] Anne Heffernan has written about a major conflict in AZAPO which involved the suspension of its president Curtis Nkondo over his Charterist sympathies in 1980. In the wake of the Nkondo incident, AZAPO's student organisation, AZASO, in which Nkondo was generally held in high regard, re-evaluated their own political line at their December 1980 summit. With some dissension, the strongest contingent in that process considered BC to be "too narrow a framework for AZASO and 'that for the organization to play a meaningful role in the liberation struggle, a more broader [sic] but clearer approach to defining issues at stake should be adopted.'"[1154] AZASO severed organisational and ideological ties with AZAPO and drew closer to the Charterists. AZAPO established AZASM (Azanian Students Movement) in 1983 but by that time had already lost much ground in the contesting of space between the two camps.

One stake within these struggles concerned the critique of liberalism and the initiative and form of involvement of white people in the movement. Neville Alexander suggested the following about the differences. Starting with those between the Charterists, the BCM:

[1151] Seekings, J. *The UDF,* p.16.
[1152] Rusty Bernstein cited in Saul, JS. "On taming a revolution," p.222-223.
[1153] Badat, S. *Black student politics: Higher education and apartheid from SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990*, (Routledge: London, 2016), pp.209-240.
[1154] Heffernan, A. "Blurred lines and ideological divisions," p.672.

> At a superficial level, the differences between the two groups seemed to be about the participation of people classified as "white" in the struggle for liberation. There were probably thousands of BC adherents for whom this was what the debate and the conflict was all about. In reality, however the conflict was about the very nature of the struggle itself: for the BC leadership and militant activists, the participation of "ladies" from the Black Sash Movement or "spoilt" young white students from NUSAS reduced the struggle to a civil-rights campaign, as opposed to the struggle for national liberation.
>
> It was, in fact, on this terrain that the Azanian tendency and the radical socialist activists (such as those from CAL and from Action Youth in the Transvaal) found themselves on common ground. However, for the latter the issue was not one of colour at all, but specifically one of class leadership in the struggle… They had no objection to individuals who had transcended their racial or class horizons joining their organisations and taking their rightful place in the struggle… [t]here was a principled difference between the BCM and the nonracial socialist activists – one which was never resolved.[1155]

Leaving aside the mystical ambiguity and what exactly the process of "transcendence" of a "class horizon" or a racial one might be or entail, a few important points emerge from this paragraph. The first regards the nature of the struggle, the second, the common ground between, albeit different grammars of, the BCM and the independent socialists, the third is the fact that there was never a resolution of their differences.

Peter Jones said that there were two major effects of the crushing of the organisations of the BCM in 1977. The first was the compulsion amongst black people to commit to a broad unity based on the analysis and position that black people are and must be on their own. This leads into the second effect, the increasing alienation of black people from their supposed process of liberation. Foundational to the BC initiative and compulsion had been that people must participate in the process of their liberation, that the participation is the very process of liberation. Jones:

> And then we found a re-emergence of a process which we thought we had forever killed in this country. And that was the desire of elements in the white left, basically, which we call the white circles, that want to have anything to do with the liberation movement, to once again position themselves, and I mean, effectively positioning themselves. We used to jocularly call it the "London connection", where you would find from '80 onward, those few years, all kinds of strange things happening. The intent was to influence people's perceptions and attitudes towards things… you would have at meetings colours coming up, the flag of the ANC, you would have documents floating around. You would find that UCT once again became the centre for mobilisation campaigns, in which you could go and fetch five hundred thousand pamphlets there, you can arrange for buses… in fact massive resources became available, much much more became available in later years.[1156]

Jones argues here that the resources that white activists could provide became a justification for their involvement and that kind of dynamic was formalised in formations like the UDF, and it removed black

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[1155] Alexander, N. "The national forum," p.201-202.
[1156] ZA HPRA A2675 -2 Part I. Gail Gerhart interview with Peter Jones. July 1989, p.20-21.

people from their own initiative.[1157] This relates to what Neville Alexander said above that the difference between the NF and the UDF was about the *nature of the struggle*. While the grammar of "working class independence" and "Black [people] you are on your own] are different, as Neville Alexander mentioned, it was a point of common ground in that they both identify essentially the same problem within South African liberation politics and open similar potentialities.

The effect of the black trade union movement since 1973, with which the BCM had been involved and associated,[1158] made it possible to realistically build and conceptualise an anti-capitalist politics within the liberation struggle in a new way as it put the interests of the industrial working class firmly on the agenda. As the reverberations of this development were felt a politics within the liberation struggle without an explicit position on capitalism became untenable. As the character of BC's changes took place in a pressure cooker of repression and reconfiguration, and the growing influence and antagonism of Congress, it grasped towards an easily grabbable and fairly generic grammar as an expression of those changes. Following from Jones above, when the BCM emerged in AZAPO in the early 1980s, it was in a different organsiational expression. As Nigel Gibson has written, AZAPO adopted a fairly doctrinaire expression and understanding of "scientific socialism" and claimed itself to be the vanguard of the black working class. Gibson argues that this made AZAPO, as the primary organised expression of BC at the time, just another Marxist-Leninist tendency which represented a shift from the compulsion Jones identified above about the initiative of BC being situated in black people and communities, not a party above and outside themselves.[1159] Interestingly, Neville Alexander is credited by some for the shift towards "some BC activists [were] adopting a Marxist-Leninist class-based analysis of the situation in South Africa."[1160] I say that this is interesting because the form and expression of Marxism in the AMT and expounded by Neville Alexander was so decidedly anti-dogmatic, and as suggested in the chapter previously, they refused to identify themselves as or with a particular strand of Marxism but drew influences from multiple sources. While I don't think any adherents of the AMT should be credited with the particular shifts in BC's politics, they were undoubtedly part of the mileu in which many who had grown up in the BCM had their first experience of studying socialism. And the relationships forged in study groups and loose, non-sectarian organising initiatives of the 1970s, paved the way for those on which the NF was based. This long collaborative process held space for multi-directional learning, movement and importantly, the ongoing reconfiguration and re-articulation of one's politics. It was a process of building and dreaming alternatives, and a process of multiple contradictions.

[1157] Ibid.
[1158] Macqueen, I. "Black Consciousness in Dialogue in South Africa: Steve Biko, Richard Turner and the 'Durban moment', 1970–1974." *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* 49:5, (2014): 511-525.
[1159] Gibson, N. "Black Consciousness 1977-1987; the dialectics of liberation in South Africa." *Africa Today,* 35:1, (1988): 5-26.
[1160] Mazamane and Maaba, cited in Heffernan, A. "Blurred lines and ideological divisions," p.673.

Conclusion: The political tradition of the Yu Chi Chan Club?

Of the original ensemble, this chapter has considered the choices and directions of Marcus Solomon, Elizabeth van der Heyden and Neville Alexander within an era of fronts in the liberation struggle. As ensemble is about people transforming themselves together and creating themselves in a collective context, it has presented an interesting perspective on the concept. Iin the period after Coltrane's passing, all of the surviving members of the Classic Quartet forged their own paths, sometimes together, sometimes with others. In this period all of these people constitute themselves autonomously in relation to and as part of broader processes. While they all took quite different directions, they all developed their own independent principles for how to act which was based on their prior political involvement in the YCCC/NLF, their uneven gendered experience of ensemble in prison and under house arrest and the intervening years and the conditions of work and family. The experience of collective study and debate and independent political experimentation is fundamental to the tradition of the ensemble and it produced independent-minded activists.

While all of these members experiences constitute the ensemble's story in this period, as it has largely been marginalised in the broader liberation movement historiography, it is, however, important to reflect on the NF in particular. The NF represented the most advanced form of the ensemble's original aspirations. It was the organisational expression of principled unity amongst radical elements in the liberation movement. While one can draw a thread through the National Liberation Front, and the Azanian Liberation Front to the NF, all of these were different, and built in different moments. Nonetheless I argue that there were two crucial distinguishing factors in the National Forum from previous ensemble attempts to build fronts. Firstly, the orientation to ideological differences and what constituted antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions in that regard. Secondly, the ensemble's level of connection to other elements in the liberation movement.

In the AMT and the NF the explicit commitment to socialism distinguishes it from previous attempts. While the NLF described themselves as fighting for socialist democracy, that aspect of their politics was not front and centre and they would work with anyone who wanted to overthrow the apartheid state and accepted armed struggle as a method. In the Azanian Liberation Front, initiated and pioneered by the BCM, while the independent socialist network took issue with the BCM's acceptance of funds from American capital, in the adverse conditions of repression in the 1970s, they were committed to the programme of unity across the liberation movement, not only with anti-capitalist forces. In this period, the early 1980s, ideological differences, in particular over the question of anti-capitalism, were understood to be antagonistic. This position was generated within the conditions of apartheid's crisis and in the wake of the black trade union movement which had put the question of socialism on the table in an entirely new way. The state's response to crisis aimed to reform apartheid by coopting sections of the black middle class into junior positions in capitalism. This juncture therefore required the articulation of a

critique of the social formation (racial capitalism) and the articulation of an organisational form capable of organising unity in the struggle on those grounds. In their estimation, merely an anti-apartheid programme, would reproduce and prolong the conditions of racial capitalism. (We can't say they were wrong!). This was part of the process of the hardening of ideological lines in the liberation movement and took place in some way in relation to Congress's popular front sensibility.

What also distinguishes the NF from previous ensemble attempts at fronts was the fact that there were existing relationships with other elements in the movement on which to build the forum, notably the BCM who shared the compulsion to build unity in the movement. Relationships of study and struggle that had been built in the previous decade since the ensemble had been released from prison were the basis for building the NF. That includes the non-sectarian and inter-generational exchanges and mutual learnings, the plan to protest Transkei's independence, and of course the attempt to build the ALF. In the early 1960s, when the NLF had tried to recruit people across the liberation movement, they were confined by the repression and surveillance of the moment, and their fairly limited horizons with regards to contacts across the movement broadly and ended up mainly recruiting ex-CPSU and APDUSA members even as they had contacts in MK and in the PAC. The NLF had been an aspiration to build unity without the primary resource that it required – contacts and comrades from across the movement. The NF was something else in that regard – a collaborative effort based on relationships built over years struggling in adverse conditions in which the BCM and the independent socialists and some elements of the independent trade union movement came together. While they were both sites of struggle, constituted by various tendencies, what distinguished the NF from the UDF was its conception of racial capitalism and the synthesis of an anti-racist and an anti-capitalist politics. The history of the NF reveals that in the era of fronts, there was an alternative. An alternative conception of the struggle, an alternative dream of liberation, and an alternative mode of organising for it.

Conclusion. Retrospective significance. Ensemble in the study and struggle of history

You could say it was a question of being, but not in the sense of something unique to you as an individual, of something personal. For whereas in the feminist movement now they'd say the personal is the political for my generation the personal was never taken, in this sense, very seriously. You knew that you had this battle, but I think there was always the recognition that what was happening to you was totally linked to what was happening to others. People ask me, "Why don' t you write an autobiography?" But I have never been able to think that way. I don't know quite how to explain it. My generation, I think, would find it impossible to emphasize the personal at the expense of the political - even speaking to Richard Hart you would find the same thing, that his autobiography would be linked up with those political movements. The idea of what happens to you would always remain a secondary subject, because that's how you lived and experienced it. The circumstances have changed, and one would experience it quite differently now.[1161]

The chorus held the genius. Far from the image of the lone genius as the figure of the intellectual, what became apparent in RMF was that the rich and fertile grounds for intellectual work was the plenary space the students created for themselves: collective, multiple-questioning and plural. This collective space was crucial to the production of self-definition, self-theorisation, self-critique, and a shared project of anti-oppressive praxis towards solidarity.[1162]

Minoritarian ensembles: Repertoire's reverberation

Above, Sylvia Wynter says that thinking autobiographically for her was very non-intuitive, not just for herself but for many in her generation. At Jakob Marengo High School in 2016, Koni Benson and I discussed the idea of a biography with Ottilie Abrahams; we asked if she was thinking about writing one or why no one else had. She was ambivalent to the whole thing. The individualising impulse of biography felt very alien to the orientation of her life which had been in collective.[1163] The alternative she proposed was a history of all the organisations, projects and movements in which she had been involved. In other words a trajectory of her activities told through the collective experiences of organising over time. She thought this would be interesting because it wouldn't be centred on her specifically, and it would be an

[1161] Wynter, S. and Scott, D. "The re-enchantment of humanism: An interview with Sylvia Wynter." *Small Axe,* 8, (2000), p.137.
[1162] Naidoo, LA. "Black student intellectuals and the complexity of entailment in the# RhodesMustFall movement." PhD diss. University of the Witwatersrand, (2020), p.302.
[1163] Interview with Ottilie Abrahams by author and Koni Benson. November 2016. Windhoek.

opportunity to tell the stories of the many many many unarchived and unwritten-about experiments over more than sixty years. While I had no intentions at that stage of doing a PhD, or necessarily taking up Ottilie Abrahams's suggestion, in reflection I realise how important that experience was for me. It was part of my growing fascination with the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC). Critically, the way it was presented or articulated was not as a moment, an event, or a discreet organisation. It was part of a longer process of people becoming militants and remaking themselves in and through relationships of study and struggle with other people in changing conditions of the struggle against apartheid and capitalism. This orientation stuck with me and has imparted a strong character on this dissertation.

It was through experiences of inter-generational learning like that with Ottilie Abrahams, that my initial curiosity in the YCCC expanded into an interest in this longer trajectory of organizing. In this trajectory the YCCC was one experiment in an ongoing and uneven process of many that were built and existed for various amounts of time in the South African and Namibian liberation struggles between the late 1950s and the 1980s. So what is it that connects the YCCC and the National Liberation Front (NLF) to the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU)? Or to a critical current inside the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), or to the SWAPO-Democrats, or *The Namibian Review*? To the Azanian Liberation Front (ALF), the National Forum (NF) and the study groups of the 1970s non-sectarian underground? To The Children's Movement (TCM), autonomous community health projects, *Free Azania* and the projects of the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED)? This trajectory of experiments – which encompassed study groups, educational organisations, autonomous community projects, radical publications, civic associations, student movements – took place outside of any stable organizational home that spanned roughly thirty years from the late 1950s to the late 1980s.

At the most rudimentary level these organisations, projects, publications, collectives, coalitions and fronts – these experiments – were created, joined and sustained by people who were at one stage in their lives members of the YCCC and the NLF, sometimes with other (ex)members, sometimes not. While this is a rudimentary observation it has more profound, or perhaps interesting, implications. People are constituted by ways of thinking and doing, particular sensibilities and tendencies, sets of principles, ideas and values. And perhaps most fundamentally, people, and their practices, ideas, and ways of doing things etc., are constituted in relationship with other people within the changing conditions of the world. So, the fact that these experiments were connected by the common experience of their personnel also means that the experiments were connected by an evolving set of relationships, thought and practice. Relationships offered the possibility of carrying on, returning to ongoing conversations within different moments and changing conditions and building a cadre of comrades with whom to ask the questions as they walked and worked together. These relationships produced new ensembles, experiments, ideas, syntheses and new positions around which to build solidarities. In the absence of an enduring form such as a Party or a card-carrying organisation, we can think about relationships as part of the infrastructure of political life. Particularly in times of low ebbs of political activity, the sustaining of various kinds of relationships committed to a life of study and struggle provided the possibility not only of sustaining the current, but

also of evolving, deepening and developing it further. Ensemble was the foundation and the thread of a distinctive, yet differentiated and multi-directional current of independent, black and socialist politics in the South African and Namibian liberation struggles.

The concept of ensemble operates at, at least two, inter-articulating levels – as a method of study and struggle, and a method of historical research and writing. This conclusion is organized according to these two fluid distinctions. The first section considers aspects of the ensemble's distinctive repertoire as a radical tradition. Important here was their continual search for an outside position, an independent and autonomous organisational and political sensibility, their evolving commitment to socialism and internationalism, their assemblage of study and struggle and their proclivity for the front. The second section considers the contributions of ensemble as a method of research and writing to histories, presents and futures of emancipatory struggles. It reflects on how ensemble presents an alternative relationship between individual and collective, the significance of narrative as an intervention in historiography, and suggests that ensemble constitutes an alternative experiment in historical writing.

As the dissertation has both enacted and argued, the history and significance of the YCCC/NLF must be understood within the longer trajectory of its predecessors and its afterlives. If it is not, one runs into cul-de-sacs like Martin Legassick did in dismissing the CPSU's importance because "their goals were too wide."[1164] Certainly the visions of liberation developed by these activists was broad, wide, ambitious, aspirational, and radical. Where I disagree with Legassick is that the unachieved nature, or even the unachievability, of an oppressed people's ambitions within a given historical moment renders them "ineffective."[1165] Indeed the visions of the CPSU in the longer trajectory of the ensemble's evolving politics had a multitude of effects as this dissertation's narrative has displayed. Like Robin Kelley, I have been interested in the dreams of freedom of black people, whether they were materially realised or not is, at a certain level, immaterial.[1166] The approach of this dissertation has been to take those goals, visions and freedom seriously not primarily in terms of whether they were achieved or not, but as the sites around which a radical tradition was evolved, transformed and extended by people. These people both made and were made in and by these experiments through relationships of study and struggle and the dynamics of that changing, often contradictory process, are important. They are important not merely as a recovery of a minoritarian tradition to insert into the historiographical cannon. They are important because they provide alternative perspectives and ways of thinking not just about the history under investigation, but the conviction and the search also offer alternative ways of acting in the present and the future. This is why the history of a minoritarian tendency.

[1164] Legassick, M. "The National Union of South African Students: ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities," *Occasional paper no. 4,* (African Studies Center: University of California Los Angeles*,* 1967), p.26.
[1165] Ibid.
[1166] Kelley, RDG. *Freedom Dreams,* (Beacon Press: Boston, 2002).

Ensemble I. Repertoire

Like Coltrane's bands, the ensemble continually revisited and returned to a core repertoire as a way of remaking and reinventing their tradition of struggle in changing conditions.

Two of the characteristic commitments of the ensemble were to study and to unity of the oppressed. The corresponding organizational forms of these were the reading group – and other projects and infrastructures for political education – and the front, respectively. These – the commitments and their organizational expressions – were core tenets of the UM political culture which most of the ensemble were socialised in. As Ottilie Abrahams emphasised, her experience in the CPSU, as well as in the Society of Young Africa, and the YCCC/NLF could not be relegated to a moment in the struggle. These experiences were formative and foundational, informing her political sensibility and decisions throughout her life.[1167] Infrastructures of study were central to the UM and the predominant organizational form of the UM was the federal structure. The ensemble took the federal structure and, combined with their study of the organizational forms in other communist and anti-colonial struggles, they experimented with the front as a political form. Expanding on this inheritance, the paradigmatic form of organisation of ensemble was the idiosyncratic articulation between the reading group and the front. The loose non-sectarian study groupings of the 1970s underground were the micro-unit of what Alexander described as "united front ethos" [1168] whose political character Solomon described as "emerging."[1169] They realised their broader political expression in wider forms of solidarity such as the ALF, and later the NF, the rehearsal for which, was the YCCC/NLF in which the overlapping ensembles of independent left groupings in the liberation struggle were embryonically cohered.

The pursuit of independence was a thread that changed over time and was a central dynamic of the ensemble's politics. Their independent and out side position both allowed for and produced the necessity for the creative experimentation with a wide range of practices and ideas.

This quest imparted a distinctive character on the fronts that members of the ensemble built. Independence was not only sought from UM such as in the CPSU and the YCCC/NLF which were built outside of it albeit with myriad ideological and organizational connections. It was also pursued in relation to ruling class and liberal influence, underlain by the principle articulated by Kenneth Abrahams that the

[1167] Matsemela, A. Interview with Ottilie Abrahams. 31 October, 3 November 1988. Available online: https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104407 [accessed 25 January 2024].
[1168] Alexander, N. "An illuminating moment: Background to the Azanian manifesto." In Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, NC. *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008), p.164.
[1169] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

debate about the future of the oppressed should take place in the organisations of the oppressed.[1170] The principle of independence was what led Elizabeth van der Heyden to vacate the United Women's Organisation when it affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) as she felt that the autonomy of the grassroots women's organising was compromised by outside forces.[1171] Her experience in prison had not endeared her to the African National Congress (ANC) and her last five years as the only ensemble member was an isolating experience. Dulcie September took a different route, joining the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in exile and making a major contribution to the liberation struggle in that way through her fearless orientation. For the ensemble then, their approach to unity of the oppressed, and their resultant sensibility and choices, took place on the basis of these principles and was expressed differently by each of them in different moments.

It was a perpetual desire of the ensemble was to make contact, be connected and collaborate with elements across the liberation movement.

Since their time in the CPSU, the internally-differentiated movement, rather than its organisations, was perceived as paramount. The deep realisation that flows from this – that the process of liberation is broader than, and can never be restricted to a single organisation, (read sole authenticity) – informed their approach. Under different conditions it was enacted in a variety of ways but in various periods the openness to learning from and with comrades from other political and cultural backgrounds created the possibility for continual growth and transformation. In prison ensemble members were amongst a wide cross-section of the liberation movement for the first time. Here it was largely through engaging and discussing with other prisoners that many of the men had a lived experience of the theoretical principle that they held in the NLF – that the ideological differences between various elements of the liberation movement were largely non-antagonistic – as they were all forced to live and survive with other prisoners under the shared conditions of racist incarceration. For Lionel Davis, the process of witnessing and being participant in friendships that developed across political persuasions thought to be antagonistic was a transformative and healing experience.[1172] Fikile Bam suggested that the ensemble's contribution in prison was in establishing learning infrastructures through the Robben Island University – a structure that was non-partisan.[1173] For Neville Alexander, it was the orientation of the question mark and the desire to connect and organise with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the wake of prison that enabled him to move beyond some of his foreclosures, potentially inherited from a version of UM non-racialism,

[1170] UCTMA BC1538 A2 2.6. August Matsemela interview with Kenneth Abrahams and Ottilie Abrahams, undated.
[1171] Scanlon, H. *Representation and reality: Portraits of women's lives in the Western Cape, 1948-1976,* (HSRC Press: Cape Town), p.211.
[1172] Interview with Lionel Davis. 11 June 2011. Online.
[1173] Matsemela, A. Interview with Fikile Bam. 24 March 1989. Available online : https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104311 and https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/center-for-popular-memory/item/104261 [accessed 25 January 2024].

that were expressed his initial critiques of it.[1174] Study, broadly conceived in the undercommons sense, offered both the possibility of learning new things, revising old sensibilities, connecting with new comrades and building new formations. In this sense it was a constituent element of the ensemble's political culture rather than something augmentative or supplementary.[1175]

The ensemble's practices of study and struggle were always inspired by and committed to an internationalist politics.

Most particularly, this commitment and their friendships produced ongoing relationships of solidarity between experiments in the liberation movements in South Africa and Namibia. These inspirations go back to the YCCC/NLF whose understanding was that South West Africa, for their purposes, was always part of South Africa. As black people in both countries were suffering under and struggling against the apartheid government, their struggles were intrinsically linked. From the NLF when cadres were deployed to organise in SWAPO to build the organisation inside the country, to the reciprocal re-publishing of articles on the pages of *Free Azania* and *The Namibian Review,* and the relationships between Jakob Marengo Tutorial College and Khanya College, this was not just a theoretical formulation but a living and evolving tradition of pan-African solidarity. Further considering the contribution of the ensemble in the Namibian struggle, it was its critical tendencies, formed in small, intimate, often home-based study groups, that evolved into a dissident current within SWAPO and an independent set of experiments outside of it that expanded the scope and repertoire of the liberation movement. These interconnections and the texture of the ongoing relationships, projects and solidarities, are unique. They not only provide an example of various ways to support struggles across borders, they provide an alternative perspective on the national in national liberation struggle, suggesting that the struggle cannot be waged within the confines of a single state. Given the history of the relationship between South Africa and SWA/Namibia, this tradition is significant as it troubles the conception of the apartheid, and the struggle against it as a specifically and uniquely South African phenomenon.

From the YCCC period, the ensemble articulated itself as struggling for socialist democracy, the only grouping in that moment to do so. This outside tradition of socialist politics maintained organisational independence from Moscow, from international Marxist factions and from liberal and ruling class influence.

[1174] See Powsa, M. "Black Consciousness: A reactionary tendency." *The Education Journal,* (January 1982). See also "Chapter Six. Reconfiguration."
[1175] Moten, F. and Harney, S. *The undercommons: Fugitive planning and Black study,* (Minor Compositions: Brooklyn, 2013).

This enabled it to create solidarities with various other black organisations within the liberation movement. This experience and these relationships expanded the theoretical articulation of the social formation of South Africa and the articulation of forms of resistance capable of challenging it. The anti-dogmatic approach to Marxism and the insistence on the primacy of the local conditions led to one thread of this trajectory articulating itself as the Azanian Marxist Tendency (AMT) and in collaboration with the BCM and some elements of the independent union movement, notably the Council of Unions of South Africa, constituted the NF on the basis of a critique of racial capitalism. The National Forum, formed in the context of the debate between the United Front vs, the Popular Front, was significant for the solidarities it produced, between sections of the black trade union movement, the BCM and the independent socialist network. It was these experiments, of building ensembles of ensembles, and the process and experience of the attempt to build unity on a principled basis that produced some of the most significant analyses and critiques of the social formation of South Africa. These were developed through the process of various tendencies, with different conceptions of the struggle, influencing and learning from each other's ideas in the democratic school of the united front.

Ensemble II. Resonance and reverberation

The ensemble's distinctive tradition of study and struggle reverberates through my approach to it and reconfigures and opens new possibilities for hearing, reading and writing histories of emancipatory movements. Keniston proposed that is at the level of narrative that interventions into the liberation struggle historiography need to be made in order to contest the teleology of "liberation script."[1176] The nature of these interventions therefore require the enactment of a critique of the mode of teleology itself. That necessitates not just alternative stories, but new and alternative experiments and approaches to researching and writing history. The process of this experiment has produced a range of effects which open up a multitude of different possibilities.

In arguing that ensemble as a grounded method of history needs to be informed by and grounded in the requirements of the present historical moment, the dissertation has attempted to remain attentive to contradictions and multi-directional trajectories.

What to make of the otherwise forgettable incidents in this trajectory – the Anglo-American funded SWAPO-Democrats, disputes over wages and the budget at Jakob Marengo, the expulsion of young Partyites from the LOGRA civic, and the ensemble's often ungenerous readings of other movements?

[1176] Keniston, W. "Cover Stories & Undercover Stories: Apartheid South Africa, 1969 -1984," *Stokes Seminar*, 19 November 2021, Dalhousie University, p1.

Following and building on experiments like *Publica[c]tion,* my approach is rooted in the orientation that contradiction is potentially generative and the messiness of process is more important than the political line, the specific outcome or the argument.[1177] The need exists in ongoing liberatory struggles, pressingly in the present, for organising widely, across non-antagonistic differences. Intimate groups of friends, comrades, partners and siblings with whom to carefully and closely study and plan, to think through things, strategise and make interventions, are critical. Also critical is the articulation between these ensembles and building solidarities more expansively. At both of these levels, disputes, contradictions and conflicts will inevitably and necessarily emerge so as people with revolutionary commitments in this world, we absolutely need relationships, organisational forms and practices capable of holding us and our disagreements as we, following the Zapatistas, ask the questions while we walk together.[1178] The articulation between the history of this ensemble's activities and the way in which it has been approached in this dissertation has produced narratives that both propose ways of studying and struggling across differences of various sorts and consider the contradictions and challenges of building principled unity within changing historical conditions.

The history of the ensemble reconfigures the possibilities for critical writings about the UM in relation to the broader liberation movement.

As mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation, the problem of isolation has shaped a lot of writing on the UM. I said that I was trying to have a different kind of engagement with the UM than those which base their approach on reacting or responding to its position of marginality within the broader historiography and find it necessary to prove its brilliance or correctness. I also said that an example of the kind of engagement I was interested in having was enacted in the evolving trajectory of ideas and practices of the ensemble in relation to the UM. Through considering and narrating the ensemble's evolution and its members' political lives, this dissertation's engagement has critically situated the ideas and sensibilities of the UM within some of the major shifts in the liberation movement. In so doing it has moved against and beyond the isolationist impulse and the exceptionalism paradigm by highlighting connections and relationships that the ensemble had with other elements in the movement as well as tensions in those processes. Ironically, (as the ensemble's political trajectory was formed mostly outside the UM orbit), it potentially opens the way for writing histories of the UM that, instead of assuming and decrying its position of marginality in the literature, both critically examines UM politics and ideas within a broader context of the liberation movement. This kind of approach might seek histories of connection

[1177] See Gamedze, A., Magano, T. and Naidoo, LA. "This here collection is incoherent." In (eds.) Gamedze, A., Magano, T. and Naidoo, LA. (eds.) *Publica[c]tion.* (Publica[c]tion Collective: Johannesburg, 2017), p.2.
[1178] See for example: Stirin, MA. "Walking We Ask Questions": An Interview with John Holloway," 1 February 2005. Available online at: http://leftturn.org/%E2%80%9Cwalking-we-ask-questions%E2%80%9D-interview-john-holloway/ [accessed on 14 March 2024].

and involvement. It might seek to critically understand the ideas and sensibilites, and the openings and limitations thereof, through histories of connection, ie. practice. Maybe, just maybe, in refusing to confine the debate about its legacy to the insular and aging forums in which it now exists, that orientation will have reverberations in the present. Perhaps that kind of engagement will prompt a new interest in its ideas and its histories. The process of revisiting of some of the best aspects of the UM's politics in conversation and synthesis with the best of other traditions in the liberation movement might contribute to building new traditions of struggle which we desperately need.

Ensemble, as the thread connecting these otherwise seemingly disparate experiments, provides an alternative way into thinking about the organizational form of emancipatory politics and how they are reproduced.

In a musical ensemble there are multiple sources of sound produced by the individual improvisors. Acting in concert, those elements constitute a collective piece of music which is neither reducible to the individual elements nor does it negate them. The ensemble effect is composed by the combination of harmonic and disharmonic relations between and amongst those elements and the various sonic explorations of the members. In this sense, a solo is never really a solo, it always exists within the context of other musicians' choices – what to play, even if nothing. In transposing the implications of this to the topic investigation, we have an alternative way of hearing, reading and writing history. Ensemble as a way of listening to history is interested in the solos as products of ensemble. In situating the solo in the context of the ensemble it provides a means of defetishising the individual and making explicit the relations of ensemble.

The idea of ensemble in black creative music, or jazz, and the groupings of study and struggle intends to open up the grammar and lexicon of organizational form in histories of black struggle.

While it was not initially intended in this way, there is an analogy that it would be remiss not to point out – the relationship between the figures of John Coltrane and Neville Alexander. There are many historical reasons why they are not equivalent or directly comparative figures. The members of the Classic Quartet and other members of Coltrane's bands had long careers after his early death. Alexander's role in ensembles and his orientation to them changed over time – while he was central to them, he was not indispensable. When he was in Germany doing his PhD, the CPSU functioned as an organisation for three years without him. When he got drunk and missed meetings in the YCCC/NLF, he was suspended by other members who picked up the slack. It was only really in the post-incarceration period, in the conditions of the underground and his stature having grown as an intellectual in the liberation movement,

that his name became more strongly associated with groups of which he was a part. However, as Eizabeth van der Heyden's recollection of the disparaging nickname given to the CPSU – Alexander's Rag Time Band – by the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) president Adrian Leftwich,[1179] there were seeds of this kind of dynamic much earlier and there might be some generative comparisons to be made. Both Coltrane and Alexander were visionaries, deep thinkers who had a great conviction of the importance of their ideas, plans, and projects. They were both incredibly creative and their approaches kept evolving, producing experiments on the out sides of the main streams. They had the social abilities to impress upon others the significance of their ideas and recruit them into their projects and the experience playing leading roles in ensembles. They also had the individual capacities for extremely disciplined practice and work. Additionally, they are now often celebrated as individuals. But Coltrane and Alexander could never have produced or achieved any of the things they are celebrated and remembered for without the ensembles in which they were participant and further, most of the analogies could be applied to their contemporaries and their ensemble members because their sensibilities and abilities were produced, honed and sharpened in collective. Ensemble was the very context of their development, that which produced them and the collective possibility of pursuing minoritarian dreams and visions.

People – as musicians, revolutionaries, friends, thinkers, etc. – are transformed through processes of becoming in and through the space of relationships with others.

Marcus Solomon always impresses upon me that people don't become activists or become "conscious" only when they join organisations – they enter them as fully-formed people shaped by the values of their communities, families, the experience of playing sport etc.[1180] There might be catalytic moments and leaps in consciousness and organisations might ignite new thoughts or introduce new ways of being into their experience but it is a continuous process of becoming and development with others. Ensemble as a mode of historical research has attempted to made visible this process throughout the dissertation. In so doing it has focused on the underlying and evolving dynamic and practice of study and struggle which has been the soil out of which the multitude of projects, networks, coalitions, organisations, reading groups, schools, and fronts grew. This process clearly transcends the bounds and lifespans of specific organisations and is why the history of the YCCC/NLF cannot be understood merely within the historical moment of its existence, why the tradition resists the confines of discreet organisations and why the narrative of its evolution is relatively more important than any single conclusion about it.

[1179] Interview with Elizabeth van der Heyden. 10 & 22 June 2021. Cape Town.
[1180] Interview with Marcus Solomon. May & June 2021 and February & March 2022. Cape Town.

Forward ever!

The multitudinous and multi-directional nature of this history and the ongoing nature of these movements' successors resists a simple conclusion. Its continual evolution posed a major challenge for the scope of this dissertation. The dispersed ensemble's activities and choices at the inception of the 1980s era of fronts provided a book-end for thinking about the articulation and expression of that core repertoire of the tradition – the united front in the national liberation front. However, it is of central importance to note that the trajectory didn't in any way end in the mid-late 1980s. It kept evolving into new forms under the changing conditions of late apartheid, through the transition and into the post/neo-apartheid period. For example, in the 1990s, many associated with the current joined or formed Workers for Socialist Action (WOSA) an organisation committed to putting a radical socialist agenda on the table within the contested terrain of the transition. The Children's Movement has continued organising with children across South Africa and Namibia and is celebrating its 40th anniversary. Jakob Marengo, also is still running, albeit with some changes in the post-independence period, and it will celebrate its 40th year of operation in 2025.



Figure 17. Marcus Solomon at The Interim Book Giveaway, Cape Town, 2023. Photo by author.

Many individuals who were involved and associated with the ensemble continue doing progressive work in their respective fields and push the project forward in various spaces of work and organising. Elements

of the cohort of militants that emerged in the black student and worker movements in 2015-2017 were searching for alternative histories and methods of struggle. It is no coincidence that we got connected to people like Marcus Solomon, Derrick Naidoo, Ottilie Abrahams and others from the ensemble. These were people who understood the struggle to be ongoing. They were still engaged, still organising, and were eager to connect with younger activists to discuss issues in unfolding struggles in the here and now. The dynamic of study was the method of connection and the constitution of new ensembles and inter-generational relationships of struggle. Always oriented to analysing the present conditions with a view towards transforming them, study was a practice of recruitment and constitution, clarification and renewal, and reproducing social life.

Derrick Naidoo said the following to me in an interview:

> My angle of interacting with you is to put on the table that even today the struggle to bring the formations together is still a struggle and some of us still adopt that position today - we've continued. It's not been a one-off thing at a certain moment in time, it's [a] continuous and it's a belief that look, that if the liberation movement or what, what came out of the liberation movement or now the more radical movement now needs to unite… If you take the Fees Must Fall movement, there was a large group of people trying it and they got a taste of sectarianism… That [it] still exists but the, the alternative still exists as well… Towards the end being anti-capitalist and the tradition of forming unity on a principled basis. You have strategic unity and tactical unity, but principled unity is obviously the cherry on the top. [1181]

For him, the purpose of the interview was to transmit and communicate a message – that the struggle continues, that the "tradition" in the liberation movement, committed to an anti-capitalist agenda and principled unity, could not be compartmentalised into a single period. He also emphasised this tradition, or this principle, as being something that has been pursued by revolutionaries from various organisations, not something exclusive in any way to "the ensemble" or this trajectory of politics. Indeed the history of the ALF – with involvement and buy-in from the internal structures of the ANC, the PAC and being of course, at the initiative of BCM for whom it had long been a preoccupation to unite the liberation movement – is one process that displayed this. Unity was a dynamic and transformative principle the need for which still exists today. We continue to need relationships and ensembles that assume the inevitability and necessity of struggle and as many multi-directional experiments in freedom's dreams as are infinitely possible.

[1181] Interview with Derrick Naidoo, 24 February 2022. Cape Town.

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