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Youth Politics: The Political Role of AZANYU in the Struggle for Liberation: The Case of AZANYU Thembisa branch, 1980s to 1996.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This research report addresses the role of youth in the struggle for liberation in South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s. It will particularly focus on the "Africanist" aligned youth organization: the Azanian National Youth Unity (AZANYU). For the purpose of manageability, the report will confine itself primarily to the AZANYU Tembisa[1] branch.

The main aim of this research report is to explore and analyze the political role (and significance) of this branch in the struggle for liberation. To achieve this, the branch's political ideology, identity, strategy and tactics, and strengths and weaknesses will be analyzed.

This research report will argue that this branch did not emerge as a result of the local struggles. By extension it will show that its politics were not local but national in character. This was because this branch mainly engaged in the politics of militarism. Its primary objective was to recruit youth in the township to send outside the country to receive military training with the Pan Africanist Congress' (PAC) military wing, Azanian Peoples Liberation Army (APLA).

In addition the report will focus on how AZANYU responded to the political transition that took place in the country from 1990 to 1994. It will show that AZANYU, because of the opposing views which arose as a result of the question of negotiations, split into two factions. These factions were made up of activists who were against the negotiations and those in favour of them. It will also show that this split had devastating consequences for the organization's unity and, in particular, for the PAC in the 1994 elections.

Finally, the report will examine the conditions and challenges facing members of AZANYU in the post-apartheid era. Of significance it will show how the

[1] For the sake of convenience I have used the word 'Tembisa' rather than 'Thembisa' which is the correct spelling in Isizulu.

organization's activists have adapted to the new polity, and how they view the new government.

This research report is divided into two sections. The first section is based on the written documentation of the political role of AZANYU Tembisa branch in the struggle for liberation. The second section deals with the visual documentation of this branch in a form of a proposal for a documentary film.[2]

1.1 Rationale

Various scholars have over the years extensively and painstakingly researched the South African youth politics.[3] However, a survey of the available literature on youth politics in South Africa reveals that AZANYU has been largely ignored. What consideration has been given by Lodge, Johnson, Seekings, Rantete and Swilling is only as an allusion,[4] and little attention has been paid to AZANYU as a youth organization.

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[2] See the section titled Documentary Film Treatment

[3] See Seekings, J. 'Political mobilization in the black townships of the Transvaal' in Frankel, P. et al. (eds.), S*tate, Resistance and Change in South Africa*, (London, Croom Helm, 1988); Seekings, J. *Heroes or Villains? Youth Politics in the 1980s,* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1993); Carter, C. 'Comrades and Community: Politics and the Construction of Hegemony in Alexandra Township, 1984-1987', Ph.D. Thesis, (Mansfield College, University of Oxford, 1991); Marks, M. *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 2001); Johnson, S. 'The Soldiers of Luthuli: Youth in the Politics of Resistance in South Africa' in Shaun Johnson (ed.) *No Turning Back*, (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1989); Naidoo, K. 'The Politics of youth resistance in the 1980s: The dilemmas of a differentiated Durban', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* Vol.18. No.1, March 1991; Sitas, A. 'The making of the 'comrades' movement in Natal, 1985-91', *Journal of Southern African Studies* , Vol.18, No.3, September 1992

[4] See Lodge, T. 'The Pan Africanist Congress, 1959-1990' in Ian Liebenberg et al. (eds.), *The Long March: The story of the struggle for liberation in South Africa*, (HAUM, Pretoria,1994); Johnson, 'Soldiers of Luthuli' in S. Johnson, *No Turning Back;* Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?;* Swilling, M. and Rantete, J. 'Organization and Strategies of major resistance movements in the negotiation era' in Robin Lee and Lawrence Schlemmer (eds.), *Transition to democracy: Policy perspective*, (Oxford University Press, 1991)

This study examines the political ideology, identity, strategy and tactics, and strengths and weaknesses of AZANYU in the struggle for liberation, and the concept of "war" as perceived by this youth organization. The report will show that AZANYU – the Tembisa branch in particular – believed strongly that freedom could only be achieved through "war".[5] This political strategy was linked to that espoused by the PAC (following its proscription in 1960) and its military wing, POQO[6], which later came to be known as APLA.

Proceeding from this the report will try to show how and why the Africanist aligned youth engaged in the politics of resistance. To explore this it will examine the following questions: Why were youth in the 1980s and early 1990s in the forefront of the liberation struggle? What type of youth participated in these politics? Through what processes were these youth inducted into the politics of resistance? What factors sustained their participation in that struggle? How did these youth perceive political violence? What was their view of the youth that were not involved in the struggle? And what were these youths – as a result of their involvement in the struggle – expectations for the future? Finally and most importantly why did some youth join an Africanist youth organization?

This research report specifically focuses on AZANYU Tembisa branch, not only because it operated differently, but because Tembisa as a townhsip has not been adequately researched particularly in relation to its youth politics. Therefore a special focus will also be given to Tembisa in this research. The scholarly work available about Tembisa's politics in the 1980s is confined to that undertaken by Siyotula.[7] Although her study provides an illuminating account of the role played by the township's residents in the struggle against rent and services charge increases from the early 1980s to the mid-1980s, it does not explore in-depth and analyze the

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[5] For a more detailed account on the concept of war in the 1980s, see Cock , J. *Colonels and Gender: War and Gender in South Africa,* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.1-24

[6] See Pheko, M. *Apartheid: The story of the dispossessed people,* (London, Marram Books, 1984); Lodge, T. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945,* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press. 1983), pp.231-255

[7] Siyotula, N.G. 'The Tembisa Rent Boycott', Honours Dissertation, (University of the Witwatersrand, 1989)

township's youth politics. Siyotula alludes to the township's youth involvement in the struggle during this period.

To achieve its intention this research report will retrace the development of youth politics in Tembisa from the early 1970s to the 1980s. This will enable it to illustrate from where the AZANYU Tembisa branch's members drew their Africanist politics.

1.2 Literature Review

It has already been observed that none of the scholars who have studied youth politics in South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s have undertaken in-depth research about the role of AZANYU in the struggle for liberation. In this regard, Ali Hlongwane is an exception, even though his work is focused on the life history (biography) of Zephania Mothopeng.[8] He, nevertheless, deals briefly with the politics of AZANYU. His work is helpful in documenting debates which arose within this organization that caused the emergence of opposing views within it in the early 1990s. His work is further enhanced by the fact that he was a member of AZANYU during this period. In this regard he provides an insightful "insiders view" to the organization's activities.

Shaun Johnson's work provides an interesting review of the emergence of the "youth component of resistance".[9] He traces the development of youth politics from the late 1960s with the formation of the South African Student Organization (SASO) to the eruption of youth revolts in the 1980s. Johnson, at one point in his work, alludes to AZANYU's ideology and its critique by the charterist-aligned organizations.[10] In similar vein, he provides AZANYU's response to the critique.[11] This work, although, does not deal with the politics of AZANYU, it is valuable in providing the historical background to the emergence of youth organizations and their role in the politics of resistance.

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[8] Hlongwane, A. 'To Independence Now! Tomorrow the United States of Africa: The Story of Zephania Lekoame Mothopeng, 1913-1990', MA Dissertation, (University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Education, 2002)

[9] Johnson, 'Soldiers of Luthuli'in S. Johnson (ed.) *No Turning Back,* pp.94-143

[10] The Charterist-aligned organizations were political organizations that adhered to the Freedom Charter. Their politics were based on non-racialism

[11] Johnson, 'Soldiers of Luthuli'in S. Johnson (ed) *No Turning Back,* p.112

Similarly, Seekings in his study of youth politics in *Heroes or Villains* provides an illuminating account of the emergence of youth organizations in the country from the mid-1970s. He discusses their activities in detail. His work is helpful in differentiating between the youth who were involved in the struggle in the 1970s and those involved in the struggle in the 1980s. In his work he illustrates that in the 1970s it was young people or students (and not the youth) who were in the forefront of the struggle because of their specific focus on school politics. And in the 1980s youth took the lead because of their involvement in the broader politics. Even though Seekings does not discuss AZANYU's political activities in detail he acknowledges its existence. For instance, he notes that in 1982 already there was an AZANYU branch in Kagiso in the West Rand although it does not appear to have attracted a large following.[12]

Kumi Naidoo and Ari Sitas' work focus on the politics of youth resistance in Durban.[13] Sitas' work looks at the 'making of the comrades movement' and Naidoo deals with 'major difficulties encountered by youth organizations and activists' [in trying to organize themselves into a united youth organization]. The two scholars provide similar views about the factors which drew the youth (in Durban) to the struggle for liberation. Both refute the argument that youth movements (or comrades) emerged because of the social indicators such as "black unemployment and anomic behaviour". They, instead, contend that youth induction into the politics of resistance was influenced by various factors.

Naidoo, in his study, further provides an illuminating account about the socio-cultural and political differences between the Indian and Coloured and African youth. He asserts that these differences were the main reasons why the youth in Durban could not organize themselves into a united youth movement.

However, in both scholars' work there are silences about the life histories of the youth, which would have enabled the studies to throw light on the socio-economic factors that caused the youth to join the struggle. Even though these scholars do not deal with an Africanist youth organization (they both focus on the charterist youth)

[12] Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?,* p. 39

[13] Naidoo, 'The politics of youth'; Sitas, 'The making of the comrades'

they provide a valuable account of the emergence of youth organizations; of the different characteristics of youth organizations; and of internal functioning of youth organizations.

Monique Marks' work has made a valuable contribution towards the illumination of the socio-economic and political factors which prompted youth to become involved in the politics of resistance. In her studies of youth politics she focuses on a particular youth organization in a specific area – Diepkloof in Soweto in the 1980s and early 1990s. In her paper titled 'Youth and Political Violence' she provides a valuable analysis of the factors that contributed to the youths' involvement in immoral activities. She attributes this to moral degeneration because of lack of moral authority. For her, this could only be curbed with the "formation of youth organizations led by mature and respected leadership".[14] This work throws light on the important role played by youth organizations and mature and disciplined leadership in the struggle for liberation. Marks notes that the latter were instrumental in leading and guiding youths' involvement in the struggle in a constructive manner and to instill discipline in them.

In her paper titled 'We are fighting for the liberation of our people…', she illustrates how the youth involved in the struggle justified their use of political violence. She notes they did this by stating that they were "responding to the ANC's call to take up the armed struggle as a strategy for change"; and that "bloodshed [was] necessary for liberation". She concludes that the "key to understanding the willingness of the (Diepkloof) youths' participation in political violence is their identity as 'comrades' whose role was to protect the community from physical and moral threat".[15]

Although Marks' work focuses on the charterist youth organization in Diepkloof, it sheds light in the understanding of why youth engaged in political violence, and how

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[14] Marks, M. 'Youth and Political Violence: The problem of anomie and the role of youth organizations', *Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation* (CSRV), University of the Witwatersrand , Seminar 5, 30 July 1992. http://www.csvr.org.za/pubslist/pubspolt.htm

[15] Marks, M. 'We are fighting for the liberation of our people: Justifications of violence by activist youth in Diepkloof, Soweto', Seminar 3, 1995, http://www.csvr.org.za/pubslist/pubspolt.htm; See also Sitas, 'The making of the comrades'

they interpreted their involvement in it. This work will be particularly important in this research report's analysis of the AZANYU Tembisa branch members' interpretation of their belief that war was inevitable in the struggle for liberation.

In another paper titled 'Onward Marching Comrades', Marks provides an invaluable account of the youths' response to the changing nature of politics in the 1990s precipitated by the unbanning of the liberation movements. She argues that the 1990s saw the role of the youth organizations in the struggle becoming unclear. This was because, she contends, this period ushered in the politics of negotiations, which resulted in the ANC, and later the PAC, assuming a leading role in the transition period. This left the youth confused and uncertain about their role. Reflecting on this view, Ashwell Zwane, a member of the Alexandra Youth Congress (AYCO), cited by Marks asked "What is the role of the youth now? Even the ANC has not defined a role for us …"[16]

Marks in this study begins by interrogating the role played by organized youth in the 1980s. She then compares and contrasts it to the role the youth played in the 1990s. This work is helpful in trying to understand how youth in organized political organizations responded to the transition period. It is, therefore, relevant in this research report's analysis of AZANYU's response to the political transition in the early 1990s.

Charles Carter's Ph.D. thesis on the political role of the Alexandra Youth Congress (AYCO) in the struggle for liberation is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the character of a youth organization determined to "construct its uniform identity".[17] He argues that AYCO in trying to achieve this became dominant and coercive. He also explores the socio-economic factors that caused most of the youth in Alexandra Township to become involved in the struggle.

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[16] Marks, M. "Onward Marching Comrades: The Career of the Charterist Movement in Diepkloof, Soweto", Paper presented at the History Workshop Conference at the University of the Witwatersrand, July 1995. http://www.csvr.org.za/pubslist/pubspolt.htm; also see Marks, *Young Warriors,* pp.73-74

[17] Carter, 'Comrades', pp. 87-138

At one point in his work Carter reveals the link between members of AYCO and the ANC's underground operatives, particularly the Mkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), or MK, operatives, in the 1980s. However, there is a disturbing silence about these MK operatives, even though one acknowledges that during the period in which Carter undertook this research it could have been difficult to locate such operatives – for security reasons, a shortcoming which Carter acknowledges.[18] Nevertheless, Carter's work sheds light on underground political work, and links between the exiled ANC and the youth organizations operating inside the country. Although, Carters' work, like those mentioned already does not focus on the Africanist youth organization, it nevertheless throws light on the character and internal operations of youth organizations in the 1980s. This work will be relevant when analyzing the link between AZANYU and the exiled PAC and APLA.

Siyotula's dissertation provides an illuminating account of the emergence of rent boycotts in Tembisa.[19] She painstakingly shows the socio-economic factors that caused the boycotts. This work examines the important role played by the township's civic organizations in the struggle for better social services delivery in the township in the 1980s. She illustrates how, initially, the Tembisa Civic Association (TCA) took up the struggle against the Tembisa Town Council's (TTC) decision to increase rent charges, and how this role was later spearheaded by the Tembisa Residents Association (TRA). She further alludes to the role played by the charterist youth organizations during the rent and school boycotts in the township in the 1980s. Siyotula's also provides an interesting account about the origins of Tembisa. In the first chapter she deals with the historical component of the establishment of the township. She then explores the issue of lack of social delivery in the township, which was to become the source of discontent among the township's residents.

Overall her work down plays the role of the township's youth in the struggle. Notwithstanding this it is helpful in illustrating that there was organized resistance in the township from the late 1970s.

[18] ibid, pp.128-130

[19] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', pp. 23-57

1.3 Theoretical framework

Various scholars have used different theories to analyze youth politics in South Africa. Carter, for instance, uses Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to analyze AYCO's role in the struggle for democracy. Marks, has in one of her studies of youth politics, employed Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie. In some occasions she uses the theory of social movements to analyze youth politics. Like her I will also employ this theory to analyze the AZANYU Tembisa branch's involvement in the struggle for liberation.

According to Scott (1990), cited by Marks, social movements involve:

> … A collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interest, and for at some significant part of the social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collective actors in that they have mass mobilization, or a threat of mobilization as their prime source of … power. They are further disassociated from other collectivities such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society or the relative position of one group.[20]

In her analysis of youth politics in Diepkloof, Soweto, Marks employs four approaches: those of resource mobilization, identity, political process and 'new social movement'. For the purpose of this study we will look at the first three.

Zald and McCarthy (1987) cited by Marks, point out that the resource mobilization approach "examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of social movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements". Marks believes that this approach can be criticized on two levels. (1) It does not adequately explain why individuals act irrationally in pursuit of interests as groups, since it does not delve into questions of consciousness. (2) It assumes that "the poor can only bring about change with the assistance of the elite".[21]

For these reasons it is of limited use in the analysis of an organization such as AZANYU Tembisa branch. To understand this branch's politics adequately one would have to engage critically with questions such as 'why did certain youth join

[20] See Marks, *Young Warriors,* p.140
[21] ibid, p.143

AZANYU? What kind of youth joined AZANYU? What type of a "youth" organization was AZANYU? These are the questions that deal with the consciousness of the youth activists and the character of the organization.

The identity approach's proponents assert that "identity is key to understanding collective action..." However, Marks notes that this approach can be criticized for "not examining the interaction of the individual participant with the broader group that makes up the social movement..."[22] Nonetheless identity played an important part in the politics of the AZANYU Tembisa branch, because it provided the organization and its members with a sense of direction and of compatibility with the PAC's politics which were based on the tenet that "Africa belongs to Africans". It further clearly defined the oppressor and the oppressed.

The political process approach theorists, according to Marks, are concerned with the political context in which social movements emerge, and the impact which social movements have on the political environment. She notes that "their importance lies in their insistence that the political environment provides the opportunity and space for social movements to emerge and collective action to occur or for these social movements' demise". This approach, while essential in understanding the dynamic nature of society, can be criticized for "failing to examine the existence of reactionary forces outside of government, and ignores the importance of both resources and identity to social movements".[23]

This approach is important when analyzing youth organizations like the AZANYU Tembisa branch because it provides an understanding of why youth organizations emerged and why they adopted certain strategies and tactics in their resistance against oppression. This branch, for instance, emerged in 1987 – during the national state of emergency. The repressive situation which prevailed during this period forced its members to adopt a clandestine *modus operandi.* This was evident in the branch's underground and militaristic politics.

[22] ibid, pp.144-145
[23] ibid, pp.145-146

1.4 Documentary Sources

In my preliminary research I visited a number of sites with the intention of uncovering documentary sources about AZANYU in general, and the AZANYU Tembisa branch in particular. I visited the PAC's national office in Johannesburg and managed to access some of AZANYU's records from the former members of AZANYU.[24] These records are valuable in examining AZANYU's response to the transition period. They include correspondence letters, pamphlets, AZANYU (Revolutionary Watchdogs) conference resolutions, AZANYU media statements and newspaper clips covering interviews of the organization's leadership with various newspapers.

I also made contact with former members of AZANYU and the Pan Africanist Student Organization (PASO) residing in Tembisa who generously provided me their private collections which included transcribed AZANYU and APLA revolutionary songs, recorded APLA songs in a cassette and the PAC's publications such as *Azania News,* pamphlets and a funeral programme of one the founding members of AZANYU, who was killed in an APLA operation.[25]

At the University of the Witwatersrand Historical and Literary Papers section I accessed volumes of the AZANYU, PAC and APLA publications. These shed light on the activities of AZANYU and APLA, and the link between the exiled PAC and APLA and AZANYU. In addition I obtained other publications which reported on the South African youth politics in general. These proved to be invaluable when comparing AZANYU's activities to those of the other youth organizations during this period.

Some of the documentary sources that I use in the research report are political trial records. These provided invaluable information about "hidden" political activities in Tembisa at this stage.

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[24] I am indebted to Ntsie Mohloai (Former national president of AZANYU) for giving me some of his documents covering AZANYU activities in the 1980s and early 1990s. I have these documents in my possession

[25] I am indebted to Bheki Nyandeni (Former chairman of the PASO Tembisa branch) for giving me some of his collections covering AZANYU and PASO activities in the early 1990s. I have these collections in my possession

At the Johannesburg Central Library I accessed volumes of newspapers reporting on the history of Tembisa from its establishment to the early 1990s. Others provided information relating to the role played by students and youth organizations in the struggle in the early 1980s in the township.

While working at the Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives at the University of the Western Cape I uncovered a large volume of PAC and APLA publications at the Mayibuye Archives Historical Papers section. These provided invaluable information on the link between the PAC and APLA and AZANYU.

The main difficulty that I encountered during my research was to gain access to documents that dealt specifically with the activities of the AZANYU Tembisa branch. In an attempt to resolve this difficulty I visited the PAC Tembisa branch office with the hope of gaining access to material documenting the branch's activities, but could not uncover any. This has made it very difficult for me to verify and substantiate some of the information I gathered from some of my informants in the township about the role and activities of the branch.

1.5 Methodology and Oral history

This research report takes an approach grounded in *social history.* Social history has as its main focus the response by the ordinary people to their daily experiences. By addressing them social historians aim to democratize history by recovering what they see as "hidden history" – thus making history a subject of popular access and people's involvement. This accords with Tosh's argument that "social history aspires to treat the history of society as a whole, not just the rich and the articulate".[26]

Its most distinct methodological orientation has been the emphasis on oral history (or oral sources). According to Portelli "oral sources give us information about illiterate people or social groups whose written history is either missing or distorted".[27] In similar vein, Thompson notes that [oral history] "is a history built around people. It

[26] Tosh, J. *The pursuit of history: Aims, Methods and New directions in the study of modern history,* (United Kingdom, Longman Group, 1991), p. 210

[27] Portelli, A. 'What makes oral history different?' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1998), p.64

allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people".[28] In short this is history from below.

In emphasizing oral history's significance, Tosh cautions that it should be "heard alongside the careful marshalling of social facts in the written record".[29] He points out that there are two main reasons why oral history is practised. First, it is because personal reminiscence is viewed as an effective instrument for re-creating the past. Second, many historians see oral history rather as a democratic alternative.[30] However this does not intend to imply that oral history is not without its share of limitations.

Even though oral sources (or testimonies) provide invaluable information as far as "hidden or distorted" history is concerned, it is also necessary to caution that they have their limitations as historical sources. One of their limitations is flawed (or selective) memory. Tosh acknowledges this and warns that "the testimony which can be gleaned from surviving members … of groups, like the memories of most old people about their youth, is often confused as regards specific events and the sequence in which they occurred".[31] There are two reasons for this. First, it could be because of loss of memory. Second, it could be because oral sources have deliberately "blocked" their memory as a result of brutal past experiences.

Passerini, in an introductory chapter of the book titled *Memory and Totalitarianism,* cautions that certain interviewees tended to confuse either names of mass organizations or significant events because of the brutal past they experienced under the Nazi period or Stallinist era. In this regard she observes "that people's memories of their own past lives, what they remember and what they forget, are shaped by their own expectations for the future, and also by whether they have children or young people for whom they care and who may outlive them…"[32] In this regard oral

[28] Thompson, P. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), p.28

[29] Tosh, *The pursuit of history,* p. 210

[30] See Marks, *Young Warriors,*pp.16-17

[31] Tosh, *The pursuit of history,* 210

[32] Passerini, L. 'Introduction' in Luisa Passerini (ed.), *Memory and Totalitarianism,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), p.12

sources (or interviewees) tend to provide an unsuspecting interviewer either with distorted and selective information or information that glorifies the interviewee. This is because such information would guarantee them an indefinite respect from their offspring.

Allessandro Portelli notes that "it is impossible to exhaust the entire memory of a single informant; the data extracted with each interview are always the result of a selection produced by mutual relationship [between the interviewee and interviewer]".[33] Proceeding from this view it can be argued that oral sources cannot provide complete data and are also firmly fixed on power relations between the interviewer and interviewee. An interviewee might decide – for various reasons – to withhold sensitive information from an interviewer and this might hamper the interviewers' research.

In addition the interviewee may relate to the interviewer what he/she thinks the latter has to hear – based on the questions that the interviewer asks. This happens mostly on occasions when an interviewee wants to impress an interviewer about his/her positive role, for instance, in the struggle (interviewees rarely talk about their negative roles in the struggle). This could mislead an unwary interviewer. This problem can however be countered by conducting a wide range of interviews with different people to verify the information.

Rousseau cited in Minkley and Rassool argues that "South African social historians (or interviewers) impose themselves and their radical methods on ordinary people… thus create correct political [and historical] practice".[34] What Rousseau implies by this is that oral testimonies are not the voices of the ordinary people, as claimed by many oral historians, but of the historians themselves.

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[33] Portelli, 'What makes oral history different*?'* in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History,* p.212

[34] Minkley, G. and Rassool, C. 'Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa' in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetze (eds.) *Negotiating the Past: The making of memory in South Africa*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), p.94

Qualifying this argument Portelli remarks that "far from disappearing in the objectivity of the sources, the historian remains important at least as a partner in dialogue, often as 'stage director' of the interview, or as an 'organiser of the interview'.[35] What this means is that an interview is a historical exercise between two people: the interviewer and the interviewee. What Rousseau does not take into account is that, even though oral history interviewers may have preconceived expectations from an interview, interviewees are in a position to direct the interview in a way that would make their voices heard. This is evident when the interviewees begin to relate untold (or undocumented) stories which the interviewer did not know. Thus Tosh remarks "ordinary people are offered not only a place in history, but a role in the production of historical knowledge with important political implications".[36]

Another limitation in oral testimony is that of age (or generational differentiation), especially if the interviewer is young and is interviewing old people. In this regard an interviewer may encounter two problems. First, old people may refuse to be interviewed – however this scarcely happens. Second, old interviewees may try to relate to the interviewer what they think the latter ought to "know and hear". In some occasions old interviewees tend to withhold information, which they think is not meant for the "ears" of the young interviewer.[37]

This causes problems for the interviewer because the information that he/she gathers from such interviews tends to be one sided, and in most occasions self glorifying. However this does not mean that young people cannot interview old people. Belinda Bozzoli's study on *Women of Phokeng* confirms this. Bozzoli, with the assistance of Mmantho Nkotsoe, managed to draw valuable data on the life histories and life strategies of the old women of Phokeng. This was partly because of Nkotsoe's familiarity with the area, and its language and the fact that she was a woman. The old women of Phokeng agreed to be interviewed by Nkotsoe because they saw this as an opportunity for them to "teach" her about her history.

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[35] Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History,* p.72

[36] Tosh, *The pursuit of history,* p.212

[37] See Bozzoli, B. 'Interviewing the women of Phokeng' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History*, (London, and New York, Routledge, 1998), pp.145-154

Portelli observes that "[there is an] insistence that oral sources are distant from events, and therefore undergo the distortion of faulty memory".[38] To counter this view she remarks "indeed, this problem exists for many written documents, which are usually written some time after the event to which they refer, and often by non-participants". In conclusion, she argues that "oral sources might compensate chronological distance with a much closer personal involvement". What this implies is that verified information gathered from oral sources can be accepted as authentic because it is either narrated by active participants or by someone who witnessed the events. It is first-hand information.

Even though oral history has its limitations, it is, to borrow Marks' description, however a 'satisfactory source'[39] in discovering "hidden histories". Tosh notes that "problems in [oral history] should not be grounds for having nothing to do with oral history. What they suggest is rather that oral history, like all verbal materials, require critical evaluation, and that it must be deployed in conjunction with all the other available sources …"[40] This view is further enhanced by the keen interest shown by various scholars in oral history despite its limitations. Some of the scholars who have used oral history in the South African context include Charles van Onselen in his book *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine*… Bozzoli in 'Women of Phokeng', Phil Bonner in 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness in the East Rand', Marks *Young Warriors'* and Carter 'Comrades and Community'.[41]

1.6 Research process

To achieve the primary objective of this research report I felt it was imperative for me to gain an understanding of the AZANYU Tembisa branch members' life histories.

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[38] Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History*, p.68

[39] Marks, *Young Warriors,* p.15

[40] Tosh, *The pursuit of history*, p. 215

[41] Van Onselen, C. *The Seed is Mine: the life of Kas Maine: A South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985,* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996); Bozzoli B. *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983,* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1991); Bonner, P. 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand, 1939-1955', *Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14, No. 3, April1988;* Marks, *Young Warriors;* Carter, 'Comrades'

According to Neuman, researchers who employ the life history type of interviewing "ask open-ended questions to capture how the person understands his or her own past". [42] This I believed would enable me to examine the factors that caused them to be part of this organization; and in addition to explore the role played by the organization in the struggle. By gaining an understanding of their life histories I believed I would, through the report, be in a position to reveal their political consciousness and identity, which made them susceptible to the politics of the Africanist.

For this research report I used both formal and informal processes of interviewing. I intensively interviewed 12 interviewees ranging from local AZANYU activists (i.e. members of the Tembisa branch), members of the AZANYU National Executive Committee (NEC), a local PASO member, members of the PAC's underground structures, APLA cadres, PAC underground activists from the 1960s and 1970s. The duration of the interviews differed – depending on an interviewee's availability. With some interviewees an interview averaged about six hours; others between an hour or two hours; whereas, one of my informants granted me a 45 minute interview. All, but one, of the formal interviews were tape-recorded. And none of my informants objected to me using a tape recorder.

I found this method very helpful (compared to taking notes by hand) because I could conduct the interview without obstructing the flow of the interview by requesting an interviewee to repeat what he had said because I missed it. After an interview I would transcribe the interview and return the transcript to my informant to read and comment on it. This proved to be helpful in two ways. First, my interviewees felt a sense of involvement in the project and this resulted in them opening up to me and beginning to reveal information, which I do not think, they would have otherwise given me.

Second, my informants, after they had read the interview transcript, assisted me in pointing out and correcting the mistakes in the transcript, particularly spelling

[42] See Neuman W. Lawrence, *Social research methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches,* (Boston, Allyn & Bacan, 1997), p.373

mistakes. This method further enabled me, after reading the interview transcript, to develop detailed and specific set of questions for follow-up interviews. When conducting the first interview I asked unstructured questions because I intended to gather as much information about my interviewees' life histories as possible. In the follow-up interview I asked structured questions, which dealt with specific issues and events.

In addition I held informal interviews particularly with some of the local AZANYU activists. This usually took the form of a general discussion about youth politics in the country and influential personalities within the organization both locally and nationally. For these interviews I did not use a tape recorder. I would listen and when I got home I would write in my notebook some of the points which I thought were important.

Interviews took place in various places. In most cases, I conducted my interviews in the activists' homes; some at the activists' workplaces and in shebeens. And our informal interviews took place in the street when some of the local activists walked me to the taxi rank to catch a taxi back home. They would show me some of the streets in the township named after their fellow activists and begin to discuss the role that the latter played in the struggle. I found our informal interviews helpful because my informants felt more relaxed and thus could recall events, names of fellow activists, and some of the clandestine meetings which they, as a branch, used to hold. I would then ask my interviewees about some of these issues during our formal interview. It was during our informal interviewing process that I came into contact with some of the former branch's members in Tembisa. The latter would meet us in the street discussing the activities of AZANYU in the township and join the discussion. After the discussion I would request a formal interview with them.

I have quoted extensively my interviewees' responses in the report. This is because, as in the case of Carter's work, I felt that an "activist's own words provide significant insights into the nature of youth consciousness …"[43] Taking into account that my chosen case study has not been adequately researched I believed that the presentation

[43] Carter, 'Comrades', p.31

of the voices of the individual activists would throw light into their political thought, organization's internal functioning and their personal involvement in the organization. This I felt would enable this research report to provide an authentic view of the politics of AZANYU Tembisa branch. My interests in oral history interviews is based on Portelli's view that "interviews often reveal events or unknown aspects of events; they also cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the non-hegemonic classes".[44]

My interests in youth politics in South Africa began when I did my research on youth activism in Alexandra Township for my 10-minute documentary film, as part of the History and Documentary Film course. Through my interaction and interviews with youth activists in Alexandra I came across information relating to youth activism in Tembisa. And when the time came for me to choose a case study for my research report I opted for youth politics in Tembisa. This was untapped terrain.

Drawing from my preliminary archival research on youth politics it became evident to me that research about youth politics in Tembisa has not been conducted, and most importantly Tembisa as a model township has been under-researched. Therefore I felt that a case study of youth politics in the township would contribute to the existing literature on youth politics in South Africa, and provide a new and exciting view of youth activism in the Tembisa.

In the initial stages I intended to research the charterist youth organization in Tembisa. However after months of trying, without success, to gain access to some of the organization's former activists, I decided to refocus my research to another township in Gauteng. It was while I was trying to identify another township in which youth activism was at its peak in the 1980s to research, that I first heard about AZANYU from a friend, who coincidentally was also from Tembisa. His view of this organization was that "it was weak and did not play a significant role to advance the

[44] Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History* p.67

course of the struggle".[45] My interest in researching the township's youth politics was immediately aroused. I wanted to find out who were members of this organization? Why was it weak, as my friend claimed? I wanted to find out about its role in the struggle?

I returned to Tembisa. However, on this occasion I was looking for the Africanists, or Ama-Afrika, as members of AZANYU refer to themselves. My starting point was the PAC's branch office in Tembi Mall, in Rabasotho section. There I met Dumpie, who later introduced me to Tinyiko Manyisa and other members of the organization. At the time of our meeting Manyisa was the chairperson of the PAC's students' wing, PASO Tembisa branch. As expected they questioned me about my proposed research and my intentions. I explained to them that I was a student interested in studying the political role of AZANYU in the struggle. I had a feeling that some mistook me for a journalist. This is because they kept on reminding me of how the South African press had over the years reported negatively about the PAC and its structures. And they were worried that I would do the same. I explained to them that I was not a journalist but a student.

After meeting with Manyisa and others at Tembi Mall for several times, I was invited to attend a PAC meeting which was held at the Council's chambers in Tembisa. The main issue that was discussed in that meeting was about mounting a campaign to resist evictions from the township of informal dwellers. The meeting was well attended mostly by people who were threatened with evictions. It was opened with the PAC salutation of *iAfrika –Izwelethu* (Africa is our land), with members raising their right hands in an open palm salute.

It was in the course of that meeting that Manyisa introduced me to Bheki Nyandeni. Nyadeni had been the chairman of PASO from 1991 to 1994. More than anyone else he showed interest in my research to an extent that he even suggested that he would like me to interview him. In addition he promised to give me some of his private materials on the activities of PAC, AZANYU and PASO. And he did. He even tried

[45] Informal chat with David Mbolekwa. Mbolekwa was a fellow student at the University of the Witwatersrand

to contact me with the former PAC Tembisa branch chairperson, Mandla Cebekhulu. Unfortunately, during my field work in Tembisa I could not meet with him.

Following our brief discussion with Manyisa, Nyandeni and the other members of the PAC in the township it was suggested that I should contact Mpuka Radinku. Radinku is a former member of the AZANYU N.E.C. I called Radinku and explained to him about my research. He sounded enthusiastic and even mentioned that he was happy that I had undertaken to do this project because the role of AZANYU in the struggle has not been studied. But because my case study was the AZANYU Tembisa branch, he referred me to Jorro Segabotle who was a member of this branch in the early 1990s.

I met with Segabotle in Kempton Park at the Councils' offices where he works. After explaining to him about my intended study he referred me to Julian Mohlala. Mohlala was one the core members of the AZANYU Tembisa branch in the mid-1980s. I met Mohlala in Kempton Park where I told him about my proposed research and requested an interview with him. He agreed but I had to call him to arrange a suitable day for us to meet.

I learned later when I called him to make an arrangement for our interview that after our first meeting he contacted Segabotle to find out if indeed he had referred me to him. I decided that in order for me to achieve my goal I had to create a rapport with the local AZANYU activists. Nevertheless he showed interest in my study and suggested a few people that he thought I should interview. One of these was Simon Mashishi. Mashishi is one of the few surviving founding members of the AZANYU Tembisa branch.

When I met with Mashishi, unlike the other activists that I had already met, he did not show any skepticism. He listened attentively when I explained to him why I wanted to do this research. And he promised to help me in whatever way he could. My meeting with Mashishi gave me a chance to visit Tembisa more often. He invited me to visit him at his home, and in the process he introduced me to his family members, neighbours and friends and, most importantly, to other former members of AZANYU particularly those who at a later stage had joined APLA. Whenever he introduced me

to his fellow activists he always referred to them as his recruits. This made it easy for me to gain access to some of the APLA cadres in the township.

The ongoing concern of "insider and outsider" approach among researchers did not have much affect on my research in Tembisa. The fact that I was not a resident of Tembisa did not seem to concern my interviewees. In fact, they were happy that, I, as an "outsider" was doing this research, as one of my interviewees commented that "at least you will be objective". Some people did have reservations about to talking to a stranger about their activism, but these were in a minority. The fact that I grew up in Alexandra Township, and that I knew quite a number of youth activists in the township whom they also knew helped to allay others' concerns.

My brief stay on Robben Island brought me into contact with Dini Sobukwe. Sobukwe showed interests in my field of study and drew my attention to a number of people that I could interview. It was during our long discussions about my research that he gave me Ali Hlongwane's contact details. Hlongwane is a former member of AZANYU. I met Hlongwane in Johannesburg during the December holidays of 2003. He showed interest in my study to the extent that he gave me some of his private collections on AZANYU and the PAC activities. In addition he provided me with invaluable input regarding AZANYU's role in the 1990s.

Gaby Cheminais, the exhibition designer at Robben Island Museum, provided me with Simon Ramogale's contacted details. I met Ramogale in Johannesburg and explained to him the nature of my study, and requested an interview with him. He was most helpful in providing me with a rich historical background of the origins of Tembisa and his involvement in the PAC in the township from the 1960s to the early 1990s. In addition he introduced me to Jaki Seroke. Seroke in the late 1970s and 1980s was a PAC underground operative based in Tembisa. My interview with him shed light on the pervasive influence that the PAC had in the township; and the PAC underground structure's role in recruiting youth in the township.

My research was not without its fair share of problems. One problem that I encountered when conducting my research is that I could not access female members of the AZANYU Tembisa branch. I spoke on numerous occasions on the telephone

with Granny Kgosi, who was one of the former female members of this branch in the early 1990s, requesting an interview with her. Despite my numerous attempts I could not interview her. This has unfortunately created a void in the report. There is a disturbing silence as far as the women's voice is concerned about their role in this branch's politics. In similar vein, I could not interview some of the key male members of this branch because some did not want to participate in the research; others felt that they did not want talk about their past experiences in the struggle. While, others who participated in this research did not want to reveal some of the information regarding their activities because they claimed it might incriminate them because some of them did not apply for indemnity through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

1.7 Ethical Considerations

According to Neuman "the researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, even when research subjects are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics".[46] Drawing from this, and taking into account that my research is focused on human subjects I have ensured that my research subjects clearly understood the nature of my research and its intention. I explained to my subjects about my research before I could ask them to participate in the research. When they agreed to participate it was based on that clear understanding.

In accordance with this I have guaranteed my subjects anonymity, if they requested that should be the case, as was the case with one of my potential interviewees. This is because some of my subjects have engaged in political activities that could be perceived by others as politically harmful – or subversive, as one of my interviewee's pointed out to me. Thus some of my subjects felt that if they agreed to participate in this research they would want to remain anonymous. Neuman says, "anonymity is the protection of the identity of a specific individual from being known".[47] I agreed that I would protect their identity from being known by using pseudonyms, if they so wished. Subjects who participated in this research did so voluntarily and with the full understanding about the intention of this research report.

[46] Neuman, W. Lawrence, *Social research,* p.443

[47] ibid*,* p.452

Chapter Outline

Chapter One examines the existing literature on South African youth politics. It shows that an in-depth study on AZANYU has not been conducted. The chapter goes on to discuss the research process: why I chose this study, and how I conducted my research. It also gives a detail account of the obstacles that I, as a researcher, encountered during my field work.

Chapter Two discusses the origins of Tembisa from the mid-1950s to the early 1990s. It shows that the township prior to 1976 was a quiescent area – politically. At this stage there were no political protests or mobilization in the township, except for the brief existence of the Pan Africanist Congress's cells. It further looks at the socio-economic factors that propelled the emergence of political resistance in the township.

Chapter Three looks at the different routes by which young people in Tembisa were introduced to politics. It goes on to show that, despite their early political conscientization, young people in Tembisa began to form an organization towards the end of 1975 because of their opposition to the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. The chapter also focuses on the establishment of youth organizations in the township in the 1980s. It shows that they played a minimal role in the struggle because of the revival of student politics and the severe repression exerted by the state.

Chapter Four examines the political role of the AZANYU Tembisa branch in the struggle for liberation. The chapter argues that this branch did not emerge because of local politics; instead it was formed to perform a specific task of recruiting youth in the township to send outside of the country to receive military training thereby becoming APLA cadres. It contends that because of this this branch's politics were national in character. In addition, it discusses the internal operations of this branch, its political ideology, identity, strengths and weaknesses. It further shows that the question of land was central in the politics of this branch.

Chapter Five discusses how AZANYU responded to the transition period. It shows that AZANYU split into two factions between those in favour of negotiations and those against them. It argues that this split was caused by the PAC's gradual shift from revolutionary politics to the politics of negotiations. It also contends that this split caused confusion within the Africanist organization, and this had devastating consequences for the PAC in the 1994 elections.

Chapter Six focuses on the post apartheid era. It shows that not all the youth who were involved in the struggle have benefited from the new dispensation. Some are still living under abject poverty. In addition, the chapter focuses on how the former youth activists view the African National Congress led-government. Members of AZANYU believe that the new government has contributed immensely in the development of the continent and the global politics, but still needs to do more to uplift the peoples' lives in the country. Finally, the chapter shows how members of AZANYU resolved their political differences.