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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 4

The way of the open-palm[1]: The emergence of an Africanist Youth Organization in Tembisa, 1986 – 1990

> The political situation [in the 1980s] was to make people understand that there was a struggle in the country; and the struggle was between Blacks and Whites. The Whites being the usurpers – having usurped the land; and by extension everything. I mean the resources and the like. So blacks must fight to repossess the land.[2]

> "What I was interested in the most was to see our country back to us and the Boers taught a lesson".[3]

The chapter examines the formation of a branch of AZANYU in Tembisa in the mid-1980s. To understand the character of this organization it will explore the following questions: Who formed this organization? Why was it formed? What was its role (or political significance) in the struggle for liberation? The chapter will further examine this organization's strategy and tactics; and strengths and weaknesses. In addition, it will look at how it interacted with the community – if it interacted with the community at all. In short the chapter will explore the political history of this branch.

The chapter will argue that the operational strategy and tactics of this branch from its formation until 1989 were not focused on local political issues (or grievances) such as rent increases, consumer boycotts and housing shortages – the bread and butter issues. Instead they centred on national politics. This contention is in contrast with Mark Swilling's argument that "…What is significant is that … local organizations were rooted in struggles over urban problems that affected the daily lives of most members of the communities …" [4] This is evident in the branch's clandestine *modus operandi*.

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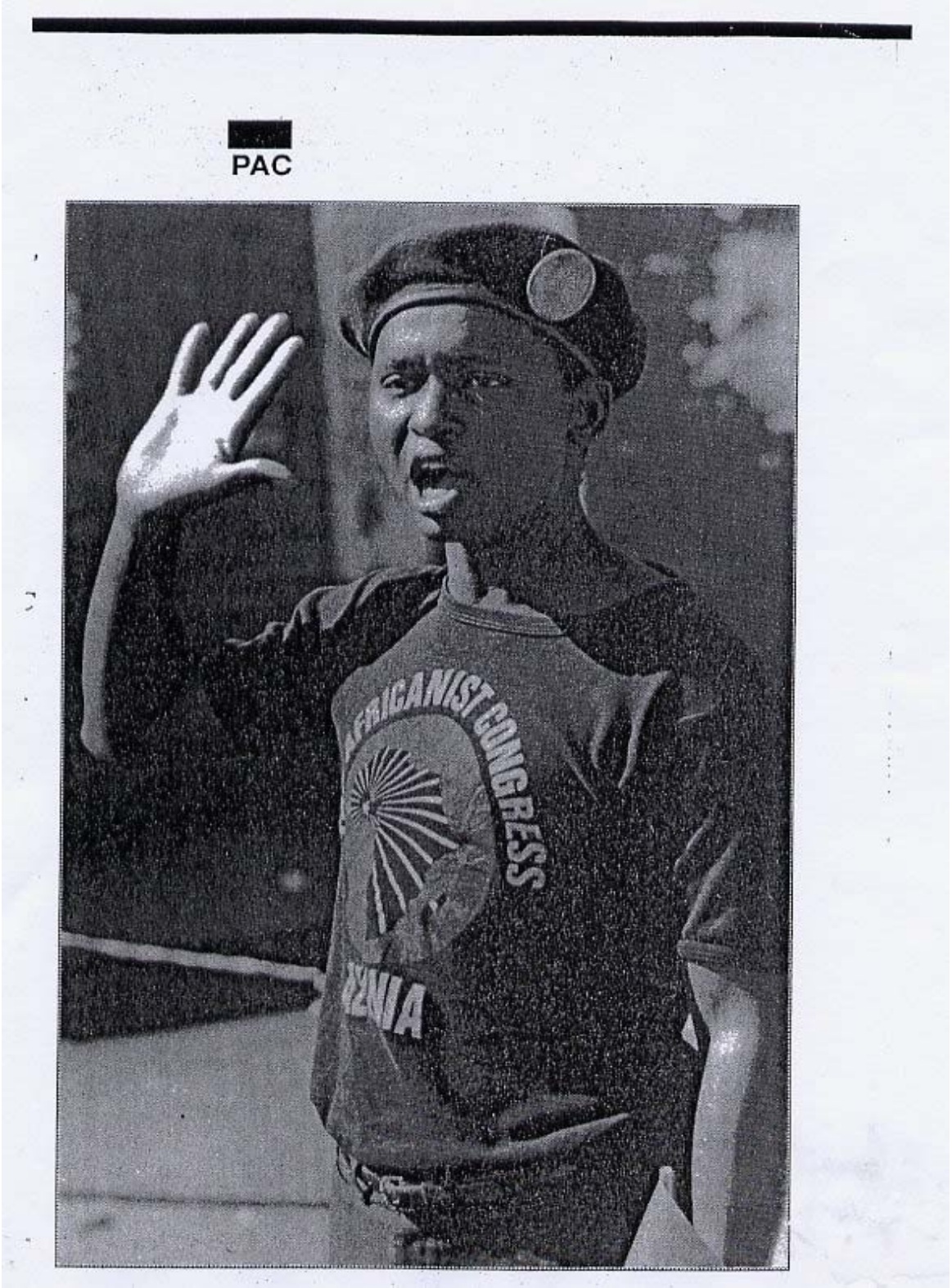
[1] The PAC members use the open-palm salute when they greet each other

[2] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[3] Interview with Johannes "Joe" Mahluza, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Tembisa, 11 September 2004. *Boer* is an Afrikaans word for Farmer. Youth (or black people in general) in the 1980s used it to connote the government, or the white police, or whites in general

[4] See Swilling, M. 'The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt' in William Cobbet and Robin Cohen (eds.), *Popular Struggles in South Africa*, (Africa World Press, Inc. 1988), p.93



* *Work in Progress* 68, August 1990

During this period this branch operated mainly as "an effective transmission belt for APLA recruits", to use Lodges' description of AZANYU.[5] The chapter will show that in this regard this branch operated differently compared to the "charterists" youth organizations. In addition, it also differed with the other AZANYU branches' elsewhere in the country. It avoided mass mobilization. Instead it operated through the unit (or cell) system.[6]

4.1 "Don't worry guys Azania[7] will be free": Character, Ideology and Identity

According to Marks "the period 1985 to 1988 was marked by state attempts to crush organizations that were seen by the state to be core to the national uprising". "The youth in particular", she continues, "were ruthlessly dealt with".[8] It was during this period that a branch of AZANYU was formed in Tembisa.

Before turning our attention to this branch, a brief history of AZANYU (national) is necessary. AZANYU was formed in February1981. In the same year John Nyathi Pokela was elected to the chairmanship of the PAC, after he was released from Robben Island. One of his main missions was to "… establish a permanent link between the exile wing and the home front".[9] It appears that it was for this reason that AZANYU was formed. Following its launch, AZANYU set itself modest objectives: (1) to organize the youth and acquaint them with [Africanists'] past history; (2) to give them a correct and proper orientation in life; and (3) to help them become assets

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[5] Lodge, 'The Pan Africanist Congress' in Ian Liebenberg et al. (eds.), *Long March,* p. 121

[6] The cell system was first adopted by the PAC's military wing POQO in the early 1960s. See Lodge, 'The Pan Africanist Congress' in Ian Liebenberg et al. (eds.), *Long March,* pp. 113 -116; Mafole, M. 'The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, 1959-1990' in Sipho Buthelezi (ed.), *South Africa: The Dynamics and Prospects of Transformation, 1900-1994*, (Harare, SAPES Books, 1995), pp.42-60; Lodge*, Black Politics,* pp. 241 – 255

[7] Azania is an Arabic word meaning the land of the black people. The PAC adopted the name Azania in the mid-1960s after Potlako Leballo decided upon it as a new name for South Africa. See Lodge, 'The Pan Africanist Congress' in Ian Liebenberg et al. (eds.), *Long March,* pp.117-118*;* Pheko, *Apartheid,* p.107

[8] The period between 1985 and 1988 was characterized by the rapid increase in states repression because of the two state of emergencies declared during that period. See Marks, *Young Warriors,* p.41

[9] See Mphahlele, *Child of This Soil,* pp. 78-79

to the community by identifying themselves with their daily problems, relating and interpreting them according to the concrete conditions.[10]

During its formative years AZANYU actively embarked on commemoration campaigns. For instance, on 21 March 1981, the 20th anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, it participated in a campaign to clean up cemeteries. In accordance with this, it published a statement that read:

> On the above date to mark the 21st anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, AZANYU made a request to the people to attend a clean up operation of the graves of the massacre victims at Sharpeville cemetery.[11]

In 1984 it organized to commemorate the June 16 by "…holding an all-night vigil" at the Hector Pieterson's home in Zone 10 Meadowlands, Soweto.[12]

AZANYU also participated in community projects which included "fund raising for and renovating the Orlando Orphanage Home; donating books, stationery, toys, a black board, and other materials to the Mzimhlophe Transit Camp."[13] In addition, it engaged in community literacy projects. Nhlanhla Lebea recalls:

> We got involved in a lot of projects. We came up with the *Masifundisane* (Let's teach each other) project to recruit people from the hostels. [These were] particularly hostels in Johannesburg and the Western Cape".[14]

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[10] *Azania News: Official Organ of the PAC*, July 1983, Vol. 19, Number 7, see an article titled *Azanian National Youth Unity* by Dan Mthimunye. I am indebted to Ntsie Mohloai for giving me this document. I have a copy of this document in my possession; University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and -Literary Papers, Abdul, S. Bemath Papers, File A2248 BEMATH (PAC), *Azania News: Official Organ of the PAC*, April 1984, Vol. 20, Number 4, see an article titled *The Role of the Youth in the Azanian Revolution* by Arthur Moleko)

[11] *Azania News: Official Organ of the PAC*, July 1983, Vol. 19, Number 7.

[12] *Ran Daily Mail,* 14 June 1984. Hector Peterson was the first victim of the student uprisings in June 16, 1976 to be shot and killed

[13] ibid.

[14] Interview with Nhlanhla Lebea, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Braamfontein, 4 July 2003

This was probably a tactical approach, first, to attract less attention from the state and, second, to win itself maximum support from the various sectors of the community.

Notwithstanding this, in 1982 a mass detention of the organization's leadership by the police took place. Amongst those detained was Sipho Ngcobo (National General Secretary). Ngcobo was held under the Section 22 of the General Laws Amendment Act of 1966. This law allowed for the detained to be held incommunicado for 14 days. More damagingly, Carter Seleke (National President) and Alex Selani (National Organizer), together with Thami Mazwai (*Sowetan* Journalist), were sentenced to 18 months for refusing to testify in the trial against the Soweto Youth Revolutionary Council's (SOYRCO) leader Khotso Seathlolo and Masabata Loate (AZANYU Soweto branch organizer).[15]

This immediately prompted AZANYU to abandon public work and to begin to operate underground, mainly creating links with the exiled PAC and recruiting volunteers for APLA. Lebea remarks:

> Carter [and others] because they were from prison then they were much orientated towards underground work. [They would] get documents of the PAC; recruit for APLA. They were [receiving] comrades who were coming in … to [carry out] operations; distribute them; get accommodation for them. They were operating underground and that restricted their mass activity. They [opposed anybody who would] come up and say 'let us be overt and operate like a normal political [organization].[16]

However, it was not long before its operational method changed. This was informed by the resolutions which were adopted at AZANYU's first national congress where it was decided that AZANYU should, first, operate aboveground as a political organization and, second, form other structures that would adhere to the PAC's politics. In 1986 AZANYU held its national congress at the Lutheran Centre in Soweto. According to the minutes recorded at this congress the congress "… was a milestone in the history of AZANYU because it was through that congress that

[15] *Sowetan,* 25 May 1982; *South African Student Press Union* (National), Vol. 3, Number 1, February/March 1982

[16] Interview with Nhlanhla Lebea

AZANYU re-established and [solidified] its structures".[17] Lebea, who was then the chairman of AZANYU, recalls:

> Well in 1986 we had our most successful congress in terms of which various decisions were taken. I think that was the turning point in terms of our political strategy, because it was through that congress that we basically took a decision to [turn AZANYU into a] political [organization], which was going to support the PAC …[18]

Up to that point, AZANYU, apart from participating in commemoration campaigns and community projects, operated as a cultural movement. Lee Modiga remembers:

> AZANYU that particular time, as you know, that political organizations were banned like the PAC, was operating like a cultural movement, but pushing the politics of the PAC. Now the issue was 'is it necessary to remain a cultural movement or a political movement in public?' since it was very clear that we needed to politicize our members in order to grow the organization.[19]

However, the decision to turn AZANYU into a political organization (which was to support the PAC) was not taken lightly. It was contested within the organization. Some members felt that it was premature to take such a decision since the PAC was banned. They felt that coming out publicly to support the PAC would attract severe repression from the state. Modiga observes:

> The main issue was [whether] the 'banning was it concentrated on Pan Africanist ideology or the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania'. So on our side it was that 'look, the banning was not on the Pan Africanist ideology but was on the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. What this means was that what had been banned was the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania and not the

[17] *Minutes of the first national congress of AZANYU.* I am indebted to Ntsie Mohloai for giving me this document. Mohloai is a former member of AZANYU; and at the time of my field work he was the national organizer of the PAC under the presidency of Dr. Motsoko Pheko. I have a copy of this document in my possession

[18] Interview with Nhlanhla Lebea

[19] Interview with Lee Modiga, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Braamfontein, 6 April 2003. Members of AZANYU participated actively in the Mafube Arts Commune together with renowned artists such as Ingoapele Matingoane and Maishe Maponya. Interview with Nhlanhla Lebea

> Pan Africanist ideology. So it was not going to be illegal for us to continue to [propagate] the Pan Africanist ideology in the country – because that was not banned.[20]

To qualify this position some members of AZANYU consulted PAC's stalwarts who were inside the country. Modiga recounts:

> So we consulted with many people – a wide spectrum – [amongst] the Pan Africanist intellectuals. One of these intellectuals was Joe Thloloe … who is a Pan Africanist. It was myself and Nhlanhla Lebea at that time. And we verified [with him]; and our understanding was correct. He confirmed that our position was correct. Then we began to [ask] 'what is to be done?' The first area was that we needed to develop an ideological position, with our tenets of Pan Africanist ideology. Then … myself, Cunningham Ngcukana and Nhlanhla Lebea [drafted] the first constitution of AZANYU. After that we took all the drafts – untyped drafts – to Joe Thloloe to study them. And he agreed that [our constitution was correct]. He typed the document and it was circulated to other Africanists. [21]

The decision in favour of AZANYU operating as an aboveground youth organization prevailed. Flowing from this AZANYU played an instrumental role in the formation of an Africanist-orientated student wing, the All African Students Action Committee (AASAC) – later renamed PASO. AASAC was formed on 17 October 1986 "as a result of the educational crisis that confronted the students nationally".[22] In the same year the African Womens Organization (AWO) was formed.

In 1987 AZANYU held another national congress at the Ipelegeng Community Center in Soweto where emphasis was placed on broadening and strengthening the organization. Ali Hlongwane, who was a member of the organization, remembers that:

> … The leadership that emerged from this congress put emphasis on organization, mobilization and cadre development. A process was set in motion where AZANYU branches were formed

[20] Interview with Lee Modiga

[21] ibid

[22] University of the Witwatersrand Library and Literary Papers, Abdul, S. Bemath Papers, File A2248 BEMATH (PAC), see, *The Records of the launching congress of PASO held at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in Roodeport on the 14 and 15 October 1989*

> in various townships of Soweto, the East Rand, Pretoria and Uitenhage. This further spread out to places like Witbank, Nelspruit and Natal.[23]

In similar vein, Modiga recalls that:

> The resolutions, which were adopted [at that congress] included the formation of…the mother body; [to have an] in influence on the labour movement; [to have an] influence in the cultural aspects.[24]

At this stage AZANYU was clearly operating aboveground. However, most significantly it had developed close links with APLA. It appears that following the PAC's declaration of 1987 as the 'year of arming the people' a substantial number of AZANYU members left the country to join APLA.[25] This explains the increase in the number of military attacks by APLA inside the country during this period. The most notable of these were the attacks on police in Bramley, a suburb outside Alexandra Township, and in Tladi, Soweto.[26] The PAC leadership "[noted] with satisfaction the mobilization of the Azanian youth, particularly the active role of AZANYU". It further "resolved to increase the youth's fighting capacity and groom it for future leadership".[27]

In its 1988 national congress, AZANYU took a resolution to intervene in the political violence taking place in Pietermaritzburg between the UDF supporters and the Inkatha followers.[28] A year later it played a significant role in the formation of the Pan

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[23] Hlongwane, A. 'To Independence Now' p. 63

[24] Interview with Lee Modiga

[25] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers., Abdul, S. Bemath Papers, A2248 BEMATH (PAC), *AZANIA: The official organ of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania,* Vol. 26, No. 2

[26] ibid; *The PAC and the armed struggle,* South Africa Foundation Review, August 1991; Hlongwane, A. Unfinished Autobiography. I am indebted to Ali Hlongwane for allowing me to use his unfinished autobiography tentatively titled *Holding on to the Call of freedom: Chronicles of an Azanian Childhood.* I have a copy of this unfinished autobiography in my possession, p. 50

[27] Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives Historical Papers, Political Organizations, Box 1-29, 'APLA presence is indisputable' in *AZANIA Combat: Official organ of the Azanian People's Liberation Army,* Issue No. 5, Quarterly 1987

[28] *Sowetan,* 21 January 1988

Africanist Movement (PAM). It further developed links with labour movements. This enabled it to have an influence on labour movements. For instance, it deployed some of its members in the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). Cunningham Ngcukana became the secretary general of NACTU. Other Africanists who were in the same trade union federation included James Mndaweni (president), Patricia de Lille (vice president).[29]

In addition, some of its members were deployed in the Congress of South African Trade Unions' (COSATU) affiliated unions. For example, Lee Modiga was deployed in the South African Commercial and Catering Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU), formerly known as the Commercial and Catering Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA).[30] In the cultural field it operated within the Mafube Arts Commune, Azanian Choir and the Pokela Poetry Group.[31]

In 1990 after the PAC was unbanned, together with other political movements, AZANYU's role shifted to that of an affiliate within the movement, rather than a leading structure within the Africanists' tradition as has been the case since 1981. It was during this period that differences developed within AZANYU as a result of the question of negotiations, which caused it to split into two factions. This issue will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Having sketched the brief history of AZANYU (nationally), the chapter will now turn to the AZANYU Tembisa branch.

4. 2 Africanist youth organize

It is well known that youth in the 1980s played a leading role in the liberation struggle. But the question to ask now is, as Seekings does in his book *Heroes or Villains*, who were these youth or what distinguished them from the young people in general? Many social commentators on youth politics have provided varying definitions of youth. Seekings points out that "youth in the '80s were stereotyped into two views: the apocalyptic and liberatory. "The apocalyptic view of the youth", Seekings writes "is hostile, identifying the youth with violence and destruction". This

[29] University of the Witwatersrand Library and Literary Papers, Abdul, S. Bemath Papers. File A2248 BEMATH (PAC), see *Front File,* February 1990.

[30] Interview with Lee Modiga

[31] Hlongwane, Unfinished Autobiography, p. 46

view, he continues, "… portrays [the youth] as rebels against political and social order … [whose] militancy was primarily directed into the struggle against the apartheid state, although even the township residents were among the victims".[32]

The liberatory view, on the other hand, he notes "is broadly sympathetic, seeing the youth as the 'comrades' or 'young lions' who selflessly struggled for liberation and democracy".[33]

Shaun Johnson argues that "youth refers to an attitude of mind as much as it does to age".[34] For him "[youth] connotes the most energetic, volatile and impatient elements of the black communities'.[35] Likewise, in the period between 1984 and 1988, Seekings observes that "the category of youth was reconstructed as the scope of political activity itself broadened, with protest, confrontation and violence becoming more and more widespread, and liberation imminent".[36]

In examining the AZANYU youth in Tembisa the chapter will follow Johnson in viewing them as energetic, volatile, but most importantly as impatient against the system which they perceived to be unjust and oppressive.[37] This propelled the AZANYU youth to focus their energies in the struggle for the total overthrow of this system. Defining 'youth', a leading member of AZANYU Tembisa branch, remarks:

> …Youth at the time was anybody who was politically active … That is, a person would be 60 or 70 years old we still looked at him/her as a youth as long as he/she was politically active. Be engaged in the politics of liberation. But any person who was not politically active could not be regarded as a youth. [That person] would be regarded as old even if that person were 16 years [old].[38]

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[32] Seekings, *Heroes or Villians,* pp. 3-10
[33] ibid

[34] Johnson, 'The Soldiers of Luthuli' p.95

[35] ibid

[36] Seekings, *Heroes or Villians,* p. 50

[37] In this chapter 'System' is used to connote the state under the National Party government

[38] Interview with Simon Mashishi

According to Marks "most township youth who joined political organizations in the '80s were at school, and many of the leaders of these organizations were still at school".[39] Supporting her, Makgane Thobejane remembers that:

> In the '80s, it was mostly students being involved in youth politics and also some unemployed because they had nothing to do but hang around. Working youth were a problem because the trade unions were very weak. Workers saw the youth as *siyayinyovas* – trouble makers.[40]

The branch of AZANYU in Tembisa was no different in this regard. Its founding members were all school-going youth in the township.[41] For instance, Simon Mashishi, Mduduzi Zungu and Thabo Mabelane were students at Boitumelong Senior Secondary School; George Nyanga attended at Thuto Ke Matlala High; and Malakia Lenono, Jacob Mathala and Doctor Makwela all attended at Tembisa High. However, some of its members were unemployed youth.

The branch of AZANYU was formed in 1987 in Tembisa by a group of seven youth. Mashishi recalls:

> … Here in Tembisa, I remember … there were seven of us who formed AZANYU. It was myself, George Nyanga, Mduduzi Zungu, Thabo Mabelane, Malakia Lenono, Jacob Mathala and Doctor Makwela.[42]

Preceeding the formation of this branch were secret discussions held on the possibility of forming an Africanist youth organization in the township. Mashishi continues:

> [We had our meeting] at Tembisa High [School]. *Ja,* in a classroom at Tembisa high. Well, George introduced the idea and [asked] 'why don't we form a branch?' In that meeting it was myself, George Nyanga, Mduduzi Zungu, Thabo Mabelane, Doctor Makwela, Jacob Mathala

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[39] Marks, *Young Warriors*, p.49

[40] ibid, pp. 49-50

[41] Interview with Simon Mashishi, Tembisa; George Nyanga's funeral programme. I am indebted to Bheki Nyandeni for giving me this programme. I have a copy of this programme in my possession

[42] Interview with Simon Mashishi; Interview with Julian Mohlala, Kempton Park, 4 March 2003. Doctor Makwela should not be confused for a medical or academic doctor. Doctor is his name.

> and the Mayaba brothers, Sipho and Jabu. That's how the idea of forming a branch in Tembisa came about.[43]

This group made up the core leadership of the branch. It was characterized by a strong sense of friendship. Some members within the group were childhood friends; others developed their friendship at school; while, others knew each other from the township. This in future became important when recruiting other youth into the organization – familiarity became the criteria to recruit.

Reflecting on how he came into contact with the Africanist youth in the township, Mashishi remarks:

> In 1984 we were still in the charterist camp – all of us. Around '85 or '86 somewhere there Mduduzi Mdunge, who was [being] recruited to the [Africanist camp], would talk to me but because [then] we were both members of COSAS he [asked] George [Nyanga], who was already recruited to the [Africanist camp], to come and talk to me. He introduced me to George. Fortunately I knew George's sister. Then we started to talk. I can't remember exactly what he said but the discussion was political. Then I put my views about Azania being free … I think that really interested him because they were the people who were pushing the idea that this country is not South Africa but it's Azania. Then he brought me Frederick Engels and the Communist Manifesto ... [and] How Europe underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney. I was swayed by each and every book I read. I moved from being a communist to an Africanist.[44]

However, for Mashishi it was not until a heated argument between himself and one of his comrades in COSAS over the name of the country that he finally aligned himself with the Africanists youth in the township. He remembers:

> Incidentally it was [Philemon] Letshele who was to [push me towards] the politics of the PAC by arguing against the name Azania. I was so enthusiastic when I mentioned that everything must change. We were at school it was during break. So I mentioned Azania. I said, 'Don't worry guys Azania will be free'. And Letshele [asked], 'what Azania? There's nothing like that called Azania, and there would never be such'. Then … I accused him of being anti-

[43] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[44] ibid

> liberation. And he accused me of being a confused person. … Then I realized that I was with different people.[45]

In similarly vein, recalling his experience about how he was recruited to the Africanist camp, Mandla Matlala remarks:

> I was a chess player, playing with a certain guy called David until I met Abbey Pheko. Pheko was challenging guys from Alexandra, Soweto, to play chess. It was in 1986 when we also met George [Nyanga], Mduduzi Zungu, Malakia Lenono and Jabu Mdunge through our chess games. George was a chess player. We met them and then we organized to start a team – Tembisa team – to play against other townships, like Alexandra. That's when politics started. We were playing around Jo'burg. Yes, at the Market Theatre. We saw the attitude of the white boys – because they didn't like us. … When they lost a game always they got angry. So … [George and others] were saying 'you see white people always have this tendency to hating the blacks, they forget that this is our country'. I asked them 'why you guys say this is our country except for them?' Then those guys started with the politics of the PAC that says 'the land belongs to the Africans. … I wanted to know more. They gave me reading materials. I read Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, the *Azanian Combat* and the *Azanian Manifesto*. Then I got influenced and found out that I have a role to play in this country for the people.[46]

Two key points can be gleaned from these experiences. First, the Africanist youth recruited or introduced Africanists' politics not to everyone but only to the youth that they knew, and perhaps, trusted as well. This augured well for the branch's operational method which was based on secrecy. Second, the question of land was emphasized in all their political discussions. The PAC's position on the question of land is that:

> The land is the substance and symbol of indivisible nationhood, national independence, self-determination, national development and national culture. In Azania the land is the heritage of the African people. The resolution of the land question thus represents the fundamental element in the struggle of the oppressed African people for national liberation, self-determination and socio-economic development.[47]

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[45] ibid

[46] Interview with Mandla Matlala, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Tembisa, 12 June 2003

[47] Discussion document prepared by The Department of Land and Environmental Affairs, see, *The Land Policy of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania*, 1992

For this branch the question of land became the most effective way to recruit members. The youth, once recruited to the organization, prided themselves about being in the struggle to fight for the repossession of the "peoples'" land from the usurpers.

Mashishi's experience of growing up on a farm highlights the impact the question of land had on the Africanist youth. This is worth studying in detail.

Simon Mashishi was born in 1965 in Tembisa. At the age of four or five he was taken to a farm called Heuningfontein in Nylstroom to stay with his aunt, who was working there. He recalls:

> We were living in a four-roomed house [here in Tembisa] and all my three aunts with their children and husbands were living here. And my cousin, Bethuel Ngobe, was staying and attending school here. So you can imagine the crowd that was staying and sleeping in that house.

To create space in the house and, probably, to enable him to study in a less crowded and conducive area, he was sent to a farm school. He remarks:

> I started my Sub A at a school named Nolsebos Bantu School. And I did my Sub B at Daagbreek Lower Primary there in Nylstroom. In 1975 I returned to Tembisa where I did my Standard One at Tlamatlama Lower Primary. At the end of that year my father bought a place in Maboloka, in Brits. And we had to go and stay there. In Maboloka I attended at Phuthanang. When I completed there I went to study at Edward Higher Primary. At the end of my primary schooling I went back to Nylstroom. I attended my Standard Six at Modimolle High School. And that's where my political consciousness started.

He claims that the Boer at their farm wanted everyone to pay for his or her stay by working on the farm. This, he notes, included children. He remembers:

> You see, anyone who could pick up a stone had to go to the farm to work. Our job was to chase the birds away. You see, that was a strawberry farm. A strawberry is a small thing. So its fruits only grow small. So the birds would come and eat those strawberries, and the strawberries would be damaged. So if the birds ate them they destroy the quality [then] you'll have to pluck them out and throw them away because they were grown for commercial purposes – to be sold in town. But it was mentally and physically frustrating. You see, a bird

> doesn't think the way a human being thinks. You'll chase them away and they would come back, and so on. And for that job he was paying us 20 cents a day. So I started faking illness. I expressed my dissatisfaction to that Boer to say I won't be able to work in the farm anymore. He said, 'Well, if you can't work in my farm anymore then you must move from my farm'. But I could not move because I was still attending school. So I would come back at night just to sleep and in the morning go to school.[48]

He further claims that his understanding of the importance of land was also enhanced by his cousin.

> My cousin was attending school here in Tembisa High. He was a classmate of Ngoako Ramathlodi. And that was the BC era - the Black Consciousness. So when he came [*to* [visit us] he would oppose everything white. He used to emphasis the question of the land. You see, there every black man was a labourer. [And] we could see that these people, [Whites], are getting rich and rich and we are starved. And he emphasized to me that Azania will prevail and one day we'll own these farms. And these Whites have to find where they were going to stay …

This, he believes, consolidated something that was beginning to form in his soul to say, "No, there's something wrong with Whites".[49]

Not all the youth that became members of this branch were recruited (or even introduced to the Africanist politics) by other Africanist youth. Some were introduced to the Africanists' politics by members of the PAC's military wing, APLA, who were operating secretly inside the country. Johannes "Joe" Mahluza, explains:

> I got to understand the PAC's politics around 1985. I used to attend meetings – school meetings - and asked a lot of questions about what happened in 1976; why our houses are not the same as those of the Whites; why are Africans suffering like that but got no answers. [APLA] political commissars identified me and they used to come to me and inform me. But every time they came to me they'll use different names. So I decided not to concentrate on their names and concentrated on the information that they were giving me. I talked to many Africans like Mopholosi Morokong], Jojo, [others] used different names. The talks started

[48] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[49] ibid

> with us discussing general things, but we'll end up discussing specific things about politics, like military.[50]

Mahluza's interaction with APLA cadres saw him actively participating in some of the APLA operations. He recalls:

> In 1987 these Africans that used to come to me and give me information told me that since we've been knowing you for a while this is the truth: 'we are involved in APLA'. They said they were telling me this because they realized that I'm interested in these things and I can be trusted – I questioned the situation. That's when the operations started. I got my basic military training inside the country. The guerrillas trained me on how to use grenades. And at some points we would meet and carry out operations.[51]

Mahluza claims that even though he became a member of the branch of AZANYU in the township "he was not interested in names but he just wanted to see the work done [militarily]".[52]

His experience illustrates that in Tembisa prior to the formation of the Africanist youth branch there was a strong Africanist influence. Following the police crack down on the PAC's cells in the township in the early 1960s, the Africanist influence was revived in the 1970s when an underground network was established inside the country operating from Tembisa. Seroke remarks:

> Around 1979, personally, I joined the PAC [and] started to work for the PAC underground. We used to go to the neighbouring countries and come back with PAC propaganda, information, journals, and so on. This was really meant to mobilize people; make people aware of what was going on. In Tembisa we did exactly like that, because in the end most of the people, the youngsters, had a good understanding of what we used to do. I had guys [like] Morokong Mopholosi and [others] who used to be part of this network.[53]

Flowing from this, a substantial number of people in the township were recruited to the PAC through this underground network. Malebo observes:

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[50] Interview with Johannes "Joe" Mahluza

[51] ibid

[52] ibid

[53] Interview with Jaki Seroke

> [Around] '79 or '80 Jaki Seroke came with a book called Naledi or something. But it was a PAC book. [Then he was operating] underground for the PAC. It really lambasted Oliver Tambo and we were drawn to it – and we discussed it. [It said] 'Oliver is globetrotting and he's not doing anything. Why is he not in Zambia? Because we had influence in Tembisa we were now recruiting people for the PAC. We would have a supply from Jaki. We would take our discussions to a shebeen called Steve's Place where we would lambaste the Freedom Charter like you won't believe. We were young and we thought it was a waste of time. The question of international mobilization to us [didn't make sense] and we didn't care about it.[54]

Subsequently some of this group changed positions and were persuaded of the relevance of the Freedom Charter. Malebo continues:

> Steve, [the owner of Steve's Place], came and gradually sat with us and told us about the importance of the Freedom Charter. He gave us the history of the ANC. He talked about leaders [such] *as* John Nkadimeng; he talked about the role played by some white comrades; he talked about the formation of the SACP. We were attracted to that. Then James Moleya brought us *Umsebenzi* (The Worker). And we discussed it. That was the turning point, because *Umsebenzi talked* about the four pillars of the revolution. And the reason why Oliver Tambo globetrots made sense. He had to talk to the world about the plight of the South Africans. I must be honest those discussions shaped my political thinking until today in terms of the organization that I had to follow. And the whole thing took a different direction. Thlaki Lekganyane and Fura Mathobela remained in the PAC.[55]

The PAC's underground network did not only revive the PAC's influence, but was also instrumental in recruiting youth to leave the country in order to receive military training in exile as APLA cadres. Seroke recounts:

> From 1984 we started recruiting [youth]. Every year we would 'pave' routes out of the country to [countries] like Lesotho… For instance, [we] would take a Kombi load of 15 guys four times a year to Lesotho. I was in charge of the Transvaal PAC and I was living in Tembisa. We used Tembisa as a platform. We recruited most of the youth from Khalambazo [section].[56]

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[54] Interview with Greg Malebo

[55] ibid

[56] Interview with Jaki Seroke

It is not clear why the PAC's underground structure in Tembisa recruited mostly youth from Khalambazo section, but it is possible that at this stage this structure had had considerable influence among the youth in that section.

Against this background it is evident that the Africanist youth in Tembisa were introduced to the PAC's militaristic politics very early in their political life. To illustrate this point Mashishi recalls that in Tembisa there were many APLA political commissars who instilled in them the politics of war. He remarks dramatically:

> Eh, in Tembisa there were lot of political commissars – people who were underground. Those [people] who were underground their politics were gun-inclined. So the politics that were imparted from those guys, the commissars, were more like the military politics to us, you see. It was like a military academy in Tembisa. So we produced … a militant group that wanted to fight. That's why we produced a lot of cadres, because when we talked to other people we would put emphasis on the military aspect of our politics. So as a result most of the people who were produced here were people who undoubtedly knew that the end process of this political training was war".[57]

This explains why this branch centred its politics on military activism. This point will be dealt with in detail below.

4.3 Ideology

> Ideology justifies the actions men and women take to support or to oppose the prevailing political and social order.[58]

Lebea declared in 1986 in an interview with the *Weekly Mail* that AZANYU was an Africanist organization. He stressed that "the present phase of the struggle [was] anti-colonial". And on that basis, he concluded that "[the struggle was] therefore a 'nationalist struggle' for rule by Africans".[59]

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[57] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[58] See Stadler, A. 'Ideologies' in Albert Venter and Alexander Johnston (eds.), *Politics: An introduction for Southern African Students*, (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1991), p.260

[59] *Weekly Mail*, September, 19 to 25, 1986

AZANYU drew its Africanist ideology from the PAC. "The Pan Africansts [insisted] that only Africans could join the struggle for freedom. Only Africans could support the PAC's aim of a 'government of the Africans, by the Africans, for the Africans' wholeheartedly".[60] This was premised on the argument that Africans, as the colonized and oppressed, have an innate and genuine interest in liberating themselves from oppression. This position contrasted with that contained in the ANC's Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter declared that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white'.

Ramogale remembers that there used to be fierce debates between the 'Charterists' and the 'Africanists' regarding the Freedom Charter. He remarks:

> The word 'Charterist' was from the PAC group using it as derogatory term for those people who were agreeing to the principles of the Freedom Charter. We used to say the land cannot belong to all who live in it; the land must belong to somebody. And then we had some other leaders within the PAC who said 'South Africa is not a prostitute that belongs to everybody who live in it. I mean a prostitute belongs to everybody who's got money. And that influence … went down to the youth …[61]

This ideological position filtered down to the Africanists' youth in the 1980s. They also held the view that Africans should lead the struggle because the liberation of the country rested in their hands. Mashishi recalls:

> We followed Pan Africanism as a political ideology. We believed that the African people are their own liberators. We did not believe that the members of the oppressing nation could be part of the oppressed nation, and at the same time be a part of the liberation movement. It did not make sense to us. And even the members of the oppressing nation did not show any willingness to join [us]. But anyway we were non-racial. We did not recognize the race of the person. We recognized the roles the people played. That is why we spoke about the members of the oppressing nation, as opposed to Green people or Yellow or White people or Black people.[62]

[60] ibid. p.105

[61] Interview with Simon Ramogale

[62] Interview with Simon Mashishi

The Africanist youth perceived the struggle in Azania as being between the oppressor and the oppressed; the colonizer and the colonized, as opposed to being between different classes – capitalists and the workers. Molefe Mafole writes

> The problem in South Africa was in essence a colonial problem … It was land dispossession of the indigenous African people by a foreign settler community of European extraction; it was subjugation or imposition of settler minority rule on the indigenous African population … it was social degradation of the African people, that is, the relegation of the African people to inferior position in society; all justified on a white supremacist ideology which postulated the innate superiority of the white race and the inferiority of the black race or indigenous Africans.[63]

Flowing from this view, the Africanists clearly defined the enemy as the white oppressor. Sobukwe asserted that "the masses do not hate an abstraction like 'oppression' or 'capitalism' … They make these things concrete and hate the oppressor – in South Africa, the white man".[64] Hence the Africanist youth saw the acts of violence directed against the 'system' by APLA guerrillas as moral and justified. This was based on the belief that whites had usurped the land from the indigenous people, and this land could only be attained through the barrel of the gun directed against the usurpers.

In this regard the AZANYU Tembisa branch's role was to advance the course of the struggle that would in the end see the return of the land to its rightful owners – the Africans. To achieve this this branch recruited youth in the township to join the PAC's military wing, APLA.

Identity

Sobukwe in 1959 was asked 'Who were the Africanist?' In his response he said:

> A simple answer would be that they are the members of the African Movement. But, if one wishes to go deeper into the question, one would say that they are those Africans who believe that African Nationalism is the only liberatory outlook that can bind together the African

[63] See Mafole, 'The Pan Africanist' p. 42

[64] See Lodge, 'The Pan Africanist Congress' in I. Liebenberg et al. (eds.) *The Long March,* p.105

> masses by providing them with a loyalty higher than that of tribe and thus mould them into a militant disciplined force.[65]

In similar vein, AZANYU perceived "African Nationalism as a progressive force to be promoted, to rally and unite the African people into a strong national force that shall ruthlessly destroy the reactionary forces of oppression".[66] To this they welded on the notion of the national democratic revolution whose aim was "the repossession of the usurped land and the elimination of material imbalances".[67]

In the 1980s the word 'comrade', according to Carter, "… had widespread currency…"[68] This was largely due to the charterists' ubiquitous campaigns ranging from bus, rent, consumer and school boycotts, and the establishment of youth organizations. These were spearheaded through the UDF. Johnson, cited by Marks, argues that "[the term 'comrade]' was a generic, ill-defined term; it came to be used to refer to practically any black youngster engaged in resistance …"[69]

Marks notes, "being a 'comrade' meant distinguishing oneself from other members of the community".[70] 'Comrades' had to behave in a "correct" way. That is, not drink or take drugs. They were disciplined. In short they acted in a constructive and moral manner. And this granted them the right to discipline those whose mannerisms were destructive. As a result they perceived themselves as the "eyes and ears" of the community; the protectors of the community. In Ari Sitas' work 'comrades' defined themselves ', *inter alia,* as "those who cannot escape their social geography, the streets of their township; as the soldiers of the liberation movement …as the fear-less, the death defiers (*amadelakufa)* …"[71]

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[65] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers. Abdul, S. Bemath Papers BEMATH (PAC), File A2248

[66] Hlongwane, Unfinished Autobiography, p. 41

[67] ibid

[68] Carter, 'Comrades', p.231

[69] ibid

[70] ibid

[71] For a more detailed account of the 'comrades' identity see Sitas, A. The Making of the Comrades, pp. 634-637

Africanist youth saw themselves in a similar manner. They also identified themselves as the protectors of the community; as soldiers of the movement. However, they differed from the 'comrades', as defined above, in that their political action was exclusively directed against the "system" and not against the community or its "destructive" members. Mashishi explains this in the following way: "we identified ourself as the protectors of the community. That's why we adopted the slogan that says 'Peace among the Africans, war against the enemy'".[72]

The Africanist youths' identity was firmly linked with the oppressed and dispossessed African masses. They saw themselves as the children of the oppressed and dispossessed Africans. Therefore, as foot soldiers of the movement it was their duty to fight to end oppression and to repossess the "stolen" land. This is captured in a standard refrain in their revolutionary song[73]:

Se kuncono ngi thathe ilizwe	It's better for me to repossess the land now
Se kuncono ngi thathe ilizwe	It's better for me to repossess the land now
Se kuncono ngi thathe ilizwe	It's better for me to repossess the land now
Shaya nge Scorpion	Shoot with a Scorpion
Shaya nge Scorpion	Shoot with a Scorpion
Shaya nge Scorpion	Shoot with a Scorpion
Se kuncono ngi bulale ibhunu	It's better for me to kill a Boer
Ku nokuba ngi thengise isizwe	Than to sell my land away
Se kuncono ngi bulale ibhunu	It's better for me to kill a Boer
Ku nokuba ngi thengise isizwe	Than to sell my land away
Se kuncono ngi bulale ibhunu	It's better for me to kill a Boer
Shaya nge AK	Shoot with an AK
Se kuncono ngi bulale ibhunu	It's better to kill a Boer
Shaya nge AK	Shoot with an AK

This suggests that inasmuch as this branch projected itself as the protectors of the community, its focus was mainly on directing the struggle against the 'system'. It never participated, for instance, in local campaigns such as crime-free campaigns. In contrast, to achieve this the Charterist youth dealt severely with anyone involved in criminal activities through the peoples' courts, for instance. They also embarked on campaigns against *impimpis* (sell-outs), which in certain occasions resulted in the

[72] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[73] I am indebted to Bheki Nyandeni for giving me a musical cassette of the Africanists' revolutionary songs. I have a copy of this cassette in my possession

killings of *impimpis* through a horrific form of a 'neck-lace'.[74] Conversely the Africanist youth in Tembisa dealt with such people by trying to "rehabilitate" them. To achieve this they would recruit these people into the organization. This point will be dealt with below. However, this does not imply that the 'charterist' or the ANC, in particular, condoned this act, they condemned it.[75]

4.4 Strategy and Tactics

> AZANYU's strategic approach was based on military activism. We were pioneering the liberation of the country through cells.[76]
>
> Our programme was centred around military … War".[77]

From the time AZANYU Tembisa branch was formed its mission was to recruit youth in the township to be sent outside the country to receive military training thereby to become APLA cadres.[78] The logic was that after they had received military training they should return to Azania (South Africa) to fight the 'system' with the aim of overthrowing it and be in a position to repossess the usurped land. This mission corresponded with the branch's adopted Para-militaristic tactic. It operated clandestinely by using a unit system to achieve its strategic objective. This needs to be accounted for.

The AZANYU Tembisa branch, as already observed, was formed during the government's heightened repression. During this period the most affected youth organizations were those that actively participated in mass (or public) resistance. Mthimkhulu notes that these organizations "[are] born as a result of struggles which

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[74] For a detailed account about the Chaterist youth involvement in campaigns directed against the criminals and *impimpis*, see Cater, 'Comrades', pp. 237-266. 'Neck-lacing' a person involves placing a tyre around his/her neck and pouring petrol all over his/her body and burning that person

[75] See an interview with Chris Hani, Chief of Staff of MK and member of the ANC National Executive Committee in a documentary film titled *Ulibambe Linga Shone: Hold Up the Sun,* 'Not the Kings, Not the Generals', Episode Five

[76] Interview with Lee Modiga

[77] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[78] This point was also made by Julian Mohlala during our interview

took place in schools, communities and workplaces". He continues "they [draw] hundreds of people who use campaigns and rallies as an outlet for their anger".[79] However, this tactic attracted the authorities' attention, which in turn inflicted serious blows on these organizations. This explains the ineffectiveness of the "charterists" youth organizations' following the declaration of the state of emergency.

Against this background the AZANYU Tembisa branch opted to use a more clandestine tactic of resistance – the unit system. This made it impossible for the police to identify the members of the branch ad its operations. Because of this none of the branch members were detained during the state of emergency. Reflecting on how the branch came up with the idea of forming units, Mashishi remarks:

> The resolution taken at a [our] meeting [with Goerge Nyanga and others] was that since we have decided to form ourselves into a branch of AZANYU now we had to come up with our programme of action. That's when they commissioned me and Thabo [Mabelane] to come up with a strategy of how we were going to organize the society… and bring more recruits into the organization. Then we came up with the system of the units.[80]

Explaining how the unit system functioned, Mashishi continues:

> The unit simply was that you go out [on your own to recruit]. You recruit three people and you form them into a unit – they are your unit. And they too, as individuals, go and recruit three more people and they become a unit. The one who recruits those people is a unit commander. I was a commander, Thabo was a commander, Mduduzi was a commander, George was a commander, Pheko, came through the formations of other units, was a commander. So there's a line of protocol. The commanders will meet as a branch and will discuss certain things and then will take resolutions. And after that the resolutions will be passed to the units, and the units will propagate those things. I was a commander, Thabo [Mabelane] was a commander, Mduduzi [Zungu] was a commander, George [Nyanga] was a commander, Pheko [Abbey] was a commander.[81]

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[79] Mthimkhulu, P. 'Mass Movement of the '70s and '80s and the liberation struggle' in Sipho Buthelezi (ed.), *South Africa: The Dynamics and Prospects of Transformation, 1900-1994*, (Harare, SAPES Books, 1995), pp. 105-106

[80] Interview with Mashishi.

[81] Ibid; Interview with Julian Mohlala

This way of recruiting, Mohlala told me that it was based on the philosophy of Mao Tse Tung that says "Eat one fish a day". Practically translated, he explained "it meant that each member had to [recruit] one member a day".[82] And adhering to this philosophy, members of the units made it their mission to recruit as many members as possible. It appears that through this tactic this branch managed to wrestle equally for membership with the 'charterists' in the township. Mashishi recalls:

> It worked to such an extent that I would say in 1990 there were some sections in Tembisa, which were known as PAC sections. But we did that without attracting the attention of the enemy. The enemy did not know how we worked; and the enemy did not understand how we grew. But it was apparent that the [organization] was growing and it was getting a lot of followers in Tembisa. I would say Moriting section, Moedi section, Khalambazo section, Makholong section were predominantly [AZANYU aligned]. I remember Moriting section we even renamed it Ghana – the first liberated section, as Ghana was the first liberated country in Africa. So when you went to Moriting you'll raise your hand in an open-palm salute and everyone would salute you during those days. But with the other [sections] it was 50/50 or 50/45 in favour of the charterist.[83]

Notwithstanding this claim about the branch's growth it has, however, proved difficult to ascertain this branch's membership. This is primarily because there are no documents, for instance, a register, to which I could refer, to examine the validity of this claim. This shortcoming has been experienced by many researchers who have undertaken to document youth organizations in the 1980s.[84] For security reasons youth organizations in the '80s neither documented their activities nor their members. They feared that if the police, through their constant and random raids, could confiscate such documents their members' identity would be revealed and they would be targeted by the security personnel. One of the then youth activists in Tembisa told me that they would not even allow people to take notes in their meetings.

A noticeable absence of female members particularly in the branch's formative years must have greatly affected the branch's size. The branch's reluctance to recruit female

[82] Interview with Julina Mohlala; Interview with Simon Mashishi

[83] ibid

[84] For a more detailed account about the difficulties in writing about [youth] resistance in the 1980s, see Marks, *Young Warriors,* p.36

members was mainly premised on the belief that female activists were likely (when under pressure) to betray the branch's activities and their members; and that they could not play an effective role especially in militaristic politics. Mashishi unconvincingly recounts:

> We were a militaristic organization … We saw how … MK operatives died – [they were] sold by [their] girlfriends or women close to [them]. At that formative stage we could not afford the betrayals … People like George [Nyanga] would tell you that once there's a woman in our meeting then we would never attend that meeting.[85]

The branch's position on the role of women in the politics of resistance was reminiscent of the PAC's stance. According to Glaser, "the PAC did not see a role for women in political resistance". "[PAC's] membership", he notes, "was exclusively male; [and that the PAC] considered a woman's league unnecessary".[86]

Reflecting on the role played by women in the branch, Mashishi observes that in the formative stages of the branch women activists played a "minimal and supportive role". He explains this in a patriarchal way that this was because "they had to understand what their men [were] doing".[87] According to him it was late in the 1980s and early 1990s that women activists began to play a significant role in the branch's activities. But even then women were not involved in the military operations undertaken by male activists. He recalls:

> …In the late '80s and early '90s when the armed struggle intensified we started engaging them in the role of moving arms because when the [Boers] occupied the township they used to carry arms from one place to another, and hide them. The [Boers] did not suspect them very much. They would search *men* but not women. Like I said the wife to Willie [Modupo] would go with him and their children and it would look like a normal family [but] they would be carrying arms. Hey, there were a lot of women activists [in our branch] people like Albertina Gcinaphi (Willi Modupo's wife), Granny Kgosi.[88]

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[85] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[86] Glaser, 'When are they going to fight?' in Bonner, Delius and Posel (eds.), *Apartheid's Genesis,* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1993), p.306

[87] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[88] ibid

However, as time went by, female activists' role changed when some were elected to leadership positions in the branch. In my interview with Bheki Nyandeni he told me that in 1991 Narais Moloto was elected to the branch's executive.[89]

Extrapolating from the number of youth that left the country via the AZANYU Tembisa branch, it is possible to conclude that this branch had recruited quite a substantial number of members in the township. For instance, of the seven founding members of the branch, three, George Nyanga, Malakia Lenono and Mduduzi Zungu fled the country to exile to undergo military training with APLA in Guinea Bissau.[90]

George Nyanga's leading role in recruiting other youth to the Africanist tradition, and ultimately in the formation of the branch of AZANYU in Tembisa distinguishes him from other Africanists' youth in the township. It is worth studying his career in detail.

> George Nyanga was born on 20 August 1967 in Olifantsfontein. He was the fourth child of the eighth children. He started his primary schooling at Tlamatlama Lower Primary in 1977 and went to Tshepisa Higher Primary in 1981 where he passed his Standard six. Thereafter he went to Malebo High School in Pietersburg where he did Form Two and Three. In 1987 he returned to Tembisa to do his Form Four at Thuto Ke Matla High School. And in 1988 he went to do his Form Five at Bokamoso High School.
>
> It was at Bokamoso that he became a leading member of the SRC and an organizer. During this period he was already involved in AZANYU Tembisa branch as an organizer. In September 1988 he left the country to join the PAC External Mission. He underwent military training in West Africa and became one of the leading members of APLA Political Comissariat. Nyanga was killed in action on 18 June 1990 in Mafikeng. According to reports he died in a battle between the Bophuthatswana Defence Force Patrol and the APLA cadres at Ramatlabama, 35 kilometres from Mafikeng.[91]

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[89] Interview with Bheki Nyandeni, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Tembisa, 23 December 2003

[90] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[91] University of the Witwatersrand Library and Literary Papers. Abdul, S. Bemath Papers, File A2248 BEMATH (PAC), *Azania Combat: Official Organ of APLA*; George Nyanga's funeral obituary. I am indebted to Bheki Nyandeni for giving me George Nyanga's funeral programme. I have a copy of this programme in my possession.

Other Africanist youth who left the country from the township to receive military training in exile were Prince Phineas Manganyi, Mandla Matlala, Johannes Mahluza, and Patrick Maluleke.[92] This illustrates the determination of the Africanist youth in the township to fight the government militarily.

[92] Interviews with Simon Mashishi; Johannes Mahluza; Mandla Matlala



Thousands pay their last respects to the late Cde George Nyanga, the APLA guerilla killed in a skirmish with Bop (and SADF) forces.

'SADF played role in Bop-APLA gun battle'

THE Azanian People's Liberation Army believes SADF was involved in a skirmish between Bophuthatswana puppet forces and an APLA unit near Mafikeng on June 25, the APLA Chief Information Officer, Cde Jonny Majozi, has said.

Cde George Khosologane Nyanga (22), a leading APLA political commissar, was killed in the battle, whose details are subject of contention between Bophuthatswana puppet authorities and the PAC army headquarters.

What is common cause is that the battle began when a Bophuthatswana Defence Force patrol came into contact with an APLA unit at Ramatlabama, some 35 km from Mafikeng.

There has been no independent confirmation of a Bophuthatswana claim that its forces suffered no casualties in the battle that ensued.

At a Press conference in Johannesburg, PAC General Secretary Cde Benny Alexander echoed a statement in which Cde Majozi said

By Muriel Dimpho
Ops Bureau Chief

Cde Nyanga had actively been involved in local PAC youth structures before joining APLA.

The PAC and APLA remained fully committed to armed struggle said Cde Alexander, quoting Cde Majozi.

Meanwhile, the PAC army headquarters has released details about the late Cde Nyanga, whom it said had died bravely in action.

In a statement released in Dar Es Salaam, the seat of the PAC external headquarters, the Secretary for Defence, Cde Sabelo Phama, confirmed that Cde Nyanga had been a leading political commissar in APLA.

He had formerly been a member of the militant Azanian National Youth Unity (AZANYU) in the East Rand township of Tembisa.

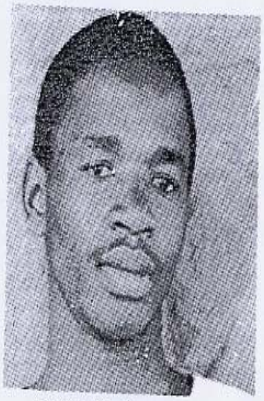
Cde Nyanga had joined APLA on September 23 1988 and received military training from January to August 1989, said Cde Phama, who is also a member of the PAC Central Committee and of its Military Commission.

Meanwhile, Cde Majozi has said that APLA did not normally release for publication details about personal military backgrounds of its fighters involved in armed activities inside South Africa.

"In this particular case, as in the cases of APLA's Bramley and Lichtenberg heroes, there were sinister attempts by some other organisation to claim the body of our fallen fighter," said Cde Majozi.

"Even our Defence Secretary, who rarely makes public pronouncements on such sensitive matters, had to depart from his usual way to make a detailed comment on this one.

For, to him and all of us at army headquarters, Cde Nyanga was not just a guerilla, but was a deeply committed and brave political fighter."



The late Cde George Nyanga

Bop soldier is paralysed in APLA attack

A BOPHUTHATSWANA puppet army Lance Corporal, Alfred Moeng, was paralysed after being shot in the neck in a close gun battle between the bantustan's forces and 10 Azanian People's Liberation Army fighters on June 18, Bophuthatswana authorities have confirmed.

A spokesman said Bophuthatswana Defence Force soldiers had opened fire on about 10 APLA guerillas whom he alleged had taken a computer from an irrigation scheme in Tsholofelo and were suspected of involvement in several acts of insurgency around the area.

The APLA men, he said, were on their way to the bantustan in alleged two stolen motor vehicles when BDF soldiers, deployed near Lehurutse "border" area, picked up their movement.

"The guerillas shot Lance Corporal Alfred Moeng in the neck when he tried to stop the cars," said the Bophuthatswana spokesman.

"BDF soldiers, who had set up an ambush, later opened fire, but no one was injured or captured," he said.

Lance Corporal Moeng was now paralysed as a result of the gunshot wound in the neck.

'... Not just a guerilla, but a deeply committed and brave political fighter'

* Azania News, Vol.22,No.4,1986

Reflecting on his experience of how he skipped the country, Mahluza recounts:

> When I left in the morning of 1989 it was like I was going to work. We slept at a certain house here in Tembisa. I was never briefed about leaving. I decided on my own. It was something that was on my mind. I never liked this thing of throwing stones. I wanted to fight. There were many of us, because there were also some guys from Soweto. So [the following] day we went to Johannesburg. [Whilst] in Johannesburg others decided that they were not leaving anymore. In the end there were only six of us. We stayed in Johannesburg for two or three days at different places. There was an office there in town I've just forgotten the name of that street. We used to hang out there. Then we left for Botswana. We used taxis. The other guy that we were travelling [with] spoke to the taxi driver and then told us to get into the taxi and we shouldn't worry about paying he would pay. We arrived there at night [because] we crossed the Ramatlabama border at 10 o'clock. [To cross into] Botswana we used passports. When we arrived in Botswana they were expecting us they had been briefed about us. A car came to fetch us to town. The guy [that spoke to the taxi driver] disappeared. We stayed for sometime there in a flat. From Tembisa it was myself and the late Solly - I met him in Johannesburg. We met Mandla Matlala in Dukwe. From Botswana we went to Tanzania and then Uganda to get military training.[93]

Matlala, describing his experience in exile, remarks:

> … I decided to cross the country and [go] for military training. I stayed in Botswana for two months. Botswana was in transit. We had a refugee camp in Botswana. We had to stay there until our documents had been fixed so that we could cross to Tanzania. In Tanzania we did military training for nine months in Bagamoyo. Then after that we went to Uganda in 1991. We started training again in Uganda in Kabamba. That was a basic training … for eight months. Then we came back [to Tanzania]. I became involved in the organization's activities like raising funds; and studying through correspondence until 1994 when we returned to South Africa.[94]

The branch's units recruited individuals whom they had thoroughly 'checked out' for behaviour and bravery. This, Mashishi explains, is because 'we understood that we were mobilizing for war. We did not mobilize to make a political statement'.[95] He continues:

[93] Interview with Johannes Mahluza

[94] Interview with Mandla Matlala

[95] Interview with Simon Mashishi

> Basically we did not see the marches as the way of liberating the country. When it came to that we differed a lot with other organizations. We thought it was a child's play. We believed that people should be trained to confront the enemy in the battlefield than to go about shouting slogans and then go home. We didn't believe in that. We might have been wrong. Ours was to swell the ranks of APLA and to create the strategy by which we could get people to go and train in exile – that was our mission. And we concentrated solely on that.[96]

In the late 1950s this view appealed to many people who wanted to join the PAC. According to Gerhart "… activists who came forward to join the PAC from the time of its founding were almost attracted by the prospect of militant action; the notion of merely spreading propaganda among the unawakened masses did not hold much appeal for them".[97]

The branch's *modus operandi* determined that people with particular personalities should be recruited; people that would help advance the course of the struggle in the manner envisaged by the branch. Mashishi explains why certain members of the branch were recruited:

> Let me give an example. Malakia Lenono. We knew that the guy was intelligent and he could argue. So we needed somebody who was intelligent and who could argue to help us convince other people. The late George Nyanga [people who recruited him] knew that the guy was brave, and the guy was dedicated; and that the guy could take any mission that he was given as long as he believed in [it]. [They knew that] he could go anywhere. And indeed, he went everywhere to locate the routes for the guerrillas from outside, where they could be settled and to do a general reconnaissance at the borders.[98]

Mashishi claims that they were not just recruiting people who were going to add numbers and never add value to the organization.

However, this branch did not only recruit intelligent and brave people, but also recruited *tsotsis*. Mashishi observes:

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[96] ibid.; Interview with Julian Mohlala

[97] Gerhart, M. Gail, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology,* (London, University of California Press, 1978), p. 227

[98] Interview with Simon Mashishi

> Like I indicated before that we did not [recruit] everybody. We had a criterion that we used to judge people. [We recruited] intelligent people, argumentative people, brave people, and even thugs sometimes. We would know that this guy is a thug – he steals and hijacks. We would go to a particular thug and recruit him. We would say to him 'look, we want a car and this car is wanted at such a time. And that car would be available. [Some of the *tsotsis* that] we recruited [were] people like Shadrack Mapalakanye and Tom Baloyi. We recruited them for specific purposes.[99]

Recruitment of *tsotsis* by political organizations was not new. PAC in the late 1950s and early 1960s recruited *tsotsis.* Gerhart, cited by Glaser, notes that "if any single group could be described as distinctively PAC in orientation, it would be the broad category of Africans known in some contexts as 'location boys' and on others as *tsotsis…".*[100] For Glaser this was because "the PAC immediately struck the right chord with the *tsotsi* youth. *Tsotsis* were particularly attracted to the PAC's emphasis on 'action' and confrontation. … And there was also an appealing simplicity about PAC ideology. [It] painted the struggle in very clear terms: black vs white, African vs Settler". He concludes "the PAC shared the same sense of urgency and frustration, the same explosive anger as the younger generation".[101]

In much the same way as *tsotsis* were attracted to the PAC in the 1950s, they also found the politics of AZANYU Tembisa branch appealing because they were based on military action. It is apparent that the *tsotsis* were recruited into the branch, because of their unconventional methods of getting things, to serve a specific purpose: provide the branch with certain resources that the branch lacked. Despite this there is no evidence to suggest that the *tsotsis,* which were recruited into the branch converted and focused their energies solely on politics.

Asked what they told people when they recruited them, Mashishi remarks:

> Basically it was a question of oppression. I mean everyone knew that we were oppressed and why we were oppressed. And that was because of the land. [We told them] that [we] are oppressed not because we are black; and [we are] not oppressed because we are Africans.

[99] ibid

[100] Glaser, 'When are they going to fight?' p.304

[101] ibid, p.305

> They've oppressed us because they have economic interests. So this thing of saying if there can be harmony between blacks and whites that's nonsense. Only if the land can return to the African people its when oppression will end …[102].

The branch's disregard for marches and rallies as a tactic was informed by past experiences that members of the branch had either witnessed, heard of or even read about. Mashishi recalls:

> The political programme which involved the masses we felt that it was going to put people's lives in danger. You see, when the enemy gets angry and find people marching the enemy would kill people like fleas. I think what influenced our thinking was the experience of 1960. Mangaliso Sobukwe went out with the people and the people were killed in Sharpeville.[103]

Tactically this branch did not only differ with the 'charterist' youth organizations, but also differed with some of the AZANYU branches. For instance, the AZANYU Orlando branch, unlike the Tembisa branch, engaged in local politics in its area. Lebea, who was a member of the Orlando branch, observes:

> [After completing] in Turfloop, together with Themba Godi, we then came up with a new tradition in AZANYU, which was mass political activity. AZANYU was [then] operating from the offices of the African and Allied Workers Union (AAWU). We started to recruit students in Orlando. AZANYU was now getting involved in mass politics on students' issues. In June 1985 [John] Pokela dies then we organized days of mourning; commemoration rallies … For the first time in the history of the PAC since 1959 the flag of the PAC was hoisted very high in Orlando by students thousands and thousands of students.[104]

This branch's operational method created uneasiness within the organization's national leadership. Lebea remembers that they would groan, "Look guys, you'd cause us to be arrested. The way you are approaching things you are going to compromise us". They did indeed make the police aware of the branch's existence (and its activities), and even its leaders. This was evident when the police detained some of the branch's members during the 1985 state of emergency.

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[102] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[103] ibid

[104] Interview with Nhlanhla Lebea

Lebea recalls:

> The state of emergency – the first state of emergency in 1985 started in June up to March 1986 I was one of the people who were first nabbed. We were nabbed by the police and released the following year. Well, we came back and we continued where we had left off.[105]

The AZANYU Tembisa branch's use of the unit system showed a tactical awareness of the members that since they were operating under a severe repressive period they needed to operate clandestinely mainly because of its militaristic politics.

It is worth noting that the AZANYU Tembisa branch was not the first youth organization formed with the primary aim of recruiting youth for military activities. At the beginning of the 1980s there were other youth organizations which were formed to perform this mission, albeit, they existed for a brief period as a result of police harassment. According to Seekings "the KwaMashu-based African Youth Congress in Durban around 1980 [was] one example".[106] However, the AZANYU Tembisa branch was one of its kind in the mid-1980s.

4. 5 Interaction with the community

The AZANYU Tembisa branch's interaction – or lack of interaction – with the community can only be adequately understood in relation to the political situation in the township in the mid-80s. In 1986 Tembisa residents, through the local civic organization, "… made the non-payment of rent an official stand in the township".[107] This was after a strike was called by the municipal police force. Siyotula notes that the municipal police refused to heed a call to supervise a funeral of an activist in the township. In addition, they expressed their demand for a wage increase. The municipality responded by dismissing three policemen.[108]

The municipality's decision drew the workers and the community closer. In the process they formed a working committee which comprised of the civic leaders, union

[105] ibid.

[106] Seekings, *Heroes or Villains,* p. 41

[107] For a more detailed account on rent boycott in Tembisa, see Siyotula, 'Tembisa' , pp.28-57

[108] ibid, p.42

organizers and students. The main task of this working committee was to "coordinate support for the striking council workers".[109] It was not long before the working committee called for a rent boycott in Tembisa. This, as Siyotula observes, "made Tembisa the second township after the Vaal to embark on a rent boycott".[110] The rent boycott continued unabated, and in 1989 the chairman of the Board of Tembisa Administrators, Mr. Gert Muller, announced that the township was at a loss of R7.1 million.[111]

Notwithstanding the local struggles taking place in the township the AZANYU Tembisa branch did not participate. However, this needs to be qualified. By not participating it does not mean they were opposed to the rent boycott. Mashishi explains:

> Like I indicated before that ours was not a mass programme. I would describe it as an individualist programme. I don't think we were in a position to influence the masses. But we did not oppose the rent boycott. Actually we supported all the positions that were adopted at the time.[112]

He continues:

> And the question of rent boycott we used to enforce it. The question of clean up campaign, because the local administration had collapsed, we used to enforce together. Everybody – those who had vans would contribute them, and those who did not have vans would contribute R2 so that petrol for the vans could be bought.[113]

However, it were the individual members of the branch that participated in the local politics – not the branch. These individuals did not only support local campaigns, but also opposed some of the gruesome actions perpetrated by the 'charterist' youth in the township. Mashishi recollects:

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[109] ibid, p.44

[110] ibid

[111] *The Star,* 5 January, 1989

[112] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[113] ibid

> The position of burning people in a form of a necklace we did not support. Actually Thabo [Mabalane] and myself went out to condemn that. And we met with various structures and we voiced our dissatisfaction about the burning of people. We opposed them. They would say 'well, we are going to burn *impimpis'*. Fine we did not have any problem with the *impimpis* being dealt with somehow. But the question of the burning we did not agree with it. We opposed it. And in turn they labeled us Unita. We have to be killed.[114]

At this stage the burning of *impimpis* or police residing in the townships in the form of a 'neck-lace' was prevalent. Charles Carter in his PhD Thesis cites examples of this gruesome act which took place in Alexandra Township in the mid-1980s.[115] In Tembisa, for instance, on 28 June 1986 Tlou Jan Ramphela, a policeman accused of shooting and killing Jacob Lelempe was 'neck-laced'. Two of the six accused, Standford Lelempe and Rodney Moloi, were found guilty and sentenced to death.[116] The individual members of the AZANYU Tembisa branch also opposed what they perceived as the imposition of the ANC-orientated organizations' hegemony in the township. Matlala remarks:

> "Actually there were two civic organizations, the TCA and TRA. [The TRA was] trying to destroy the TCA because most members of the ANC were in the TRA. That's one of the most activities, which I was involved in. You see, when I got [to the meeting] I challenged it. I asked how can this TRA be one sided, whereas in this area we have different members from different organizations. You have members from the PAC, AZAPO, you have members from the ANC. How can all members of the ANC be the members of the TRA. That means they wanted all the people of Tembisa to belong to the ANC. … But we needed an organization that would cover everyone, every member of different political organizations. At the time we were together with Julian Mohlala and Simon Mashishi".[117]

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[114] ibid

[115] See Carter, Comrades, pp. 228-273

[116] University of the Witwatersrand Library and Literary Papers, AK 2449 Political Trials., State vs Robert Sieti Komane

[117] Interview with Mandla Matlala. For a more detailed account of the ideological differences that developed within the TCA, which led to the formation of the TRA, see an interview with Greg Malebo.

It was during this period that open clashes between the 'charterists' youth and the Africanists youth broke out in the township.[118] Recalling an incident where the two organizations came close to a fatal confrontation, Mashishi recounts:

> Look, here in the township the people who [were] burning people [were] our friends. We used to engage them individually, because as organizations we used to meet but you'll find that the situation became so explosive to an extent that [if we were armed we would have shot each other]. Fortunately, none of us were armed … This happened many times, for many years. So we developed that thing to say no, well, as organizations we are not supposed to meet. But as individuals, [we could meet].[119]

But this experience was an exception and not the rule. The most dramatic encounter between the two organizations took place in the late 1980s when the 'charterist' youth were alleged to have harassed members of the Africanist youth. The latter retaliated. In the words of Matlala:

> I mean COSAS wanted to be the bosses of PASO. At times you'd find that they are fighting or they had fought somewhere, then we would be holding a meeting around six in the evening and we'd hear that students from Boitumelong, which belonged to the ANC, had robbed some students from Khalambazo [section]. So we would have to go there and when we get there you'd find them running away and hiding. Then we would go after them when they were least expecting. We would 'dust' (beat) them a bit and leave them.[120]

Matlala claims that this resulted in some of the members of the charterist youth joining AZANYU because they realized that it was not a violent organization. He recalls:

> And most of their members even realized that these guys (AZANYU members) are the people because they [don't] kill; they just discipline you. And many of them even decided to come to our side. I can still remember people like Carlos from khalambazo [section]. He's now a member of South African National Defence Force (SANDF). We once 'dusted' him a bit and smeared ash on his body. He went home and when he returned he then decided to join us until

[118] For a detailed account about the conflict between the charterist youth in Alexandra Township and/or the Azanian Peoples Organization or the 'Zim-Zim's, see, Carter, 'Comrades', pp. 245 – 248

[119] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[120] Interview with Mandla Matlala

> he went outside to exile. He became a member of APLA, [and] not only the PAC [or AZANYU].[121]

The AZANYU Tembisa branch, on certain occassions, interacted with the community when it needed places where it could hide APLA cadres who had infiltrated the country. Members of this branch would hide APLA cadres in houses belonging to members or supporters of the movement in the township. Mashishi recalls:

> We placed them with African families. Usually we placed them with families that we knew were members of the party or supporters of the PAC [like] the Maduna family. I mean Mopholosi [Morokong] hosted others, Valtuin used to host others. There were quite a number of them.[122]

4. 6 Strengths and Weaknesses

The state's heightened repression in the mid-80s weakened youth organizations all over the country. However, the AZANYU Tembisa branch, through its operational tactic: the unit system, was not affected by the government's repressive measures. Instead, it managed to recruit youth in the township and send them out of the country to join APLA. This partly explains an increase in the number of military operations that were carried out by APLA cadres inside the country from the beginning of 1987 onwards.

This should not be construed to mean that all military operations which took place at this stage were carried out by APLA cadres from Tembisa. But it is important to note that a substantial number of them involved youth from the township. For instance, some of the reported military operations which involved APLA cadres from Tembisa included the gun battle between Jabu Mdunge and Mongezi Calata and the South African Police in Port Elizabeth. Mdunge was a founding member of the branch.[123] Another military operation which took place in Mafikeng involved Nyanga.[124] It

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[121] ibid

[122] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[123] Hlongwane, Unfinished Autobiography, pp. 51-52

[124] For a chronological account of the APLA military operations inside South Africa in the 1980s, see Lodge, T. 'Is the spirit of Robert Sobukwe rising' in *Weekly Mail*, August 5 to August 11, 1988; Mphahlele, *Child of This Soil,* pp*.116 -117;* Lodge, T and Nasson, B. *All Here and Now: Black Politics*

appears that there were other military operations which were not reported in the media as evident in Mahluza's account earlier in the chapter.

At this stage APLA was not the only military wing of a liberation movement carrying out operations inside the country. The ANC's MK was also involved in military activities.[125] However, their operations differed. MK's operations were mainly focused on sabotage.[126] MK adopted this method of warfare to avoid loss of life. Nelson Mandela explaining why MK opted for sabotage said "Sabotage did not involve loss of life, and it offered the best for future race relations. Bitterness would be kept to a minimum and, if the policy bore fruit, democratic government could be a reality".[127]

Notwithstanding this position, MK cadres in the late 1980s were involved in military missions which resulted in loss of life. Peter Stiff notes that the ANC, in submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), estimated that MK units were responsible for thirty landmine explosions in the rural areas of northern and eastern Transvaal between late 1985 and mid-1987. This resulted, it reported, in thirty explosions which claimed twenty three lives, including two MK cadres who were killed while laying a mine.[128]

APLA military activities, in contrast, commonly involved loss of life. In January 1982, John Pokela, addressing the 38th Ordinary Session of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee held in Kinshasa observed at length:

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in South Africa in the 1980s, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), p.195; *Azania Combat: Official Organ of the Azanian Peoples Liberation Army*, Issue Number 7, Quarterly 1988

[125] For a detailed account of MK military activities inside the country, see Stiff, P. 'MK infiltrations into South Africa, 1985-1989', *The Silent War: South African Recce Operation,* (Galago Books. 1999), chapter 29

[126] The most notable MK missions, include, the Koeberg nuclear power station, the SASOL oil-from-coal plants and military headquarters in Pretoria. See Cawthra G. *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine*, (International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa. 1986), p.217

[127] See, "I am Prepared to Die" Nelson Mandela's statement from the dock at the opening of the defence case in the Rivonia Trial, Pretoria Supreme Court, 20 April 1964, http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/rivonia.html

[128] Stiff, The Silent War,p.504

> Another factor that puzzles me … is the superficial approach and tendency to make belief that with bombs of certain installations inside the country the Azanian revolution has suddenly begun and is about to be completed in the near future. This is an exercise in self-deception … The South African regime cannot be brought down by merely attacking – no matter how frequent – installations and other inanimate objects. The regime is maintained in power by the army and the police. It is these two pillars of apartheid state that have to be vigorously and systematically attacked if the regime is to be brought down. To radically change the minds of the settler racists and their supporters the armed struggle must be primarily at the level of mortals.[129]

In the mid-1980s APLA's Commander-in-Chief, Johnson Mlambo, reiterated Pokela's words when he ordered his army to "kill soldiers and police". Mlambo in his message to the Azanians said: "Soldiers and police are the mainstay and pillars of white domination in South Africa. … Collaborators are only leaves of the tree of white domination and their elimination cannot be an end, but means for opening the way to the tap-root of white apartheid settler domination".[130] PAC strongly believed that by ordering its military wing, APLA, to kill soldiers and police, whom it saw as the main protectors of apartheid, the government would be weakened and therefore overthrown. AZANYU Tembisa branch, in its operations, took cue from this position.

It would be misleading to portray this branch as a well-organized and problem-free youth organization. It was faced with three problems in particular. First, it lacked funds. Mashishi recalls:

> One handicap of AZANYU was lack of funding. AZANYU did not have funds. It survived by fundraising most of the time. And the money from fundraising was not the kind of money which could be used to run an organization.[131]

To fund-raise the branch requested money from business and professional people in the township. Mashishi remembers:

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[129] Pheko, *Apartheid,* p. 178

[130] *Azania Combat: Official Organ of the Azanian peoples Liberation Army*, Issue Number 2, Quarterly 1986. I am indebted to Bheki Nyandeni for giving me the copy of Azania Combat. I have this copy in my possession

[131] Interview with Simon Mashishi

> To fundraise we went to professional people like doctors, lawyers and business people in the township. Some of them were lukewarm according to the organization, which they belonged to. For an example, Steve Mabona would give us money but he wouldn't give us much. We had to use force and threats to get money [from] people like Steve Mabona. But Steve Mabona was some kind of a treasurer or money keeper for the ANC underground – we did not know about that. We knew Steve as a businessman. Others, well, they were hidden members of the PAC. And those were much willing to contribute [to the organization].[132]

It appears that the problem of lack of funds did not only affect this branch, but the whole organization. Lebea, recalling how AZANYU (national) raised funds, remarks:

> For funding we forced ourself at the South African Council of Churches (SACC). We would instruct Bishop Tutu to give us money. Every time we will fight him. In Wilgespruit they were giving us money. There was a reverend in Wilgespruit … he used to give us money, and other committed Africanist like journalists such as Joe Thloloe, Thami Mazwai and Jon Qwelani, they used to give us money.[133]

However, occasionally AZANYU would receive money from the PAC in exile. Seroke recalls how he used to get into trouble with the law for undertaking the mission of distributing money to the youth organization:

> I interacted with the youth at a different level. I mean the chairman of the PAC, [John] Pokela used to give me money for activities of the underground work but also to give to the PAC. I used to give AZANYU. I did that on two occasions. And, of course, that used to give me problems because I would be harassed by the police. You know youth talk too much and don't have discipline… I would tell them 'guys, I'd give you money about R20 000 for your activities'. But before the money even arrives they're already talking about it 'this guy is bringing us money'. I mean I was once detained for two weeks during the state of emergency. Among the issues was 'where's the money that you're supposed to give to the youth?'[134]

The other weakness of the AZANYU Tembisa branch was the lack of adequate political literature. Mashishi observes:

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[132] ibid; Interview with Nhlanhla Lebea

[133] ibid

[134] Interview with Jaki Seroke

> AZANYU did not have political literature because the government of the time had banned all organizations and the literature associated with those organizations. So there was some kind of a void. You'd suffer to get a document. So the literature that was there was smuggled literature [such as] *Azania Combat* by APLA. [They] would smuggle [those] inside the country one or two copies. And mind you those copies must serve the quest of the whole country. [Those] copies would be taken to the trade unions and [they] would reproduce about 10 to 15 copies. And we would say two copies go to Gauteng, two copies go to the Free State, two copies go to the Cape.[135]

This seems to have been a common problem among AZANYU branches. Other branches faced with this problem included those from Bekkersdaal, Nelspruit, Bushbuckridge and Durban. They reported at the AZANYU National Council that their "growth was frustrated by their lack of material and proper understanding of the Africanist position".[136]

The importance of reading and understanding politics was emphasized in the PAC. Mphahlele remembers how Enoch Zulu, a member of the APLA High Command, "stressed that they (APLA cadres) should ground themselves in sound political theory because politics is supreme over the gun. … A soldier without a clear political orientation, asserted Zulu, was dangerous even to his commander".[137] And the PAC's Disciplinary Code clause 9(b) states that "members must read books, and newspapers, for it were an offence to the PAC to be ignorant of current events".[138]

To overcome this problem some members of the AZANYU Tembisa branch used unconventional methods to acquire reading materials. Mashishi remarks:

> Indeed some of us used to go out of the township to look for the literature. We would go to schools, university libraries to look for the literature. And whatever book that hinted a bit

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[135] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[136] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers. Abdul, S. Bemath Papers, File A2248 BEMATH (PAC), *Minutes of the National Council of AZANYU held at Ipelegeng Community Centre in Cross Roads, Soweto, on the 28-29 October, 1989*

[137] Mphahlele, *Child of this soil,* p.101

[138] Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives, Political Organizations, Box 1-35, PAC, *The basic documents of the Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa, March 1965*

> about Pan Africanism we would steal it. And we stole quite a number of books. That was in order to arm ourselves and to make our political work.[139]

Others stole books from their homes. He continues:

> So Thabo [Mabelane], whose father was a journalist, to augment a lot of things used to steal books from [his] home that he had read. And he would bring them to me to read. They were political books. Even poetry like Don Mattera's. I remember the first book that he stole from the house was *Azanian Love Songs* by Don Mattera. I can still remember some of the poems from that book.[140]

Ali Hlongwane in his 'Unfinished Autobiography' writes about how he acquired PAC reading material during his overseas trip:

> During the Woza Afrika Festival held in New York in 1986 in which I participated as an actor I was connected by the late playwright Matsemela Manaka with the PAC representative in the United Nations (UN), Leshoane Makhanda. … He passed on to me PAC literature: The Speeches of Mangaliso Sobukwe and the Basic documents of the PAC; the speeches of John Nyati Pokela; The National Mandate and Time for Azania. He also passed on to me pamphlets on PAC prisoners like Zeph Mothopeng, Jeff Masemola, Philemon Tefu, Ike Mthimunye and John Nkosi. I was able to smuggle back the latter with the help of my co-actor, Job Kubatsi.[141]

These unconventional methods of acquiring reading materials illustrate that there was a dire need which AZANYU and its various branches experienced because of lack of resources. This explains why, in some occasions, the AZANYU Tembisa branch resorted to recruiting *tsotsis.* The latter, through their "expertise", provided the branch with resources that enabled it to carry out its mission effectively.

Toward the end of the 1980s the AZANYU Tembisa branch gradually shifted from solely advancing the struggling through militaristic politics and became involved in local politics. For instance, it began to hold mass meetings. Mashishi recalls:

> The 'Charterist' were entrenched. They had mass support in Tembisa there was no question about that. We held a meeting and said, 'now here it is a situation the 'Charterist' have taken

[139] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[140] ibid

[141] Hlongwane, Unfinished Autobiography*,* p. 42

> over; our guys have left, what's to be done?' All that we've been doing had to be carried on – recruitment. But [now it] was building the organization in terms of numbers, because it was a game of umbers. We developed a programme around the [recruitment of] the working class and students. We had a programme of forming a student organization … We were holding our meetings at Thembi Mall … and the agenda was about the day to day activities of the organization. And we would comment on the national issues, international issues how they were going to impact on the party, and how we should respond to such issues.[142]

When the branch of PASO was launched in Tembisa in 1991 the local branch of AZANYU was already operating aboveground.

It was at this stage that this branch witnessed the problem of infiltration by spies. This was evident when some of the branch's members or people associated with the branch were "visited" by the security personnel enquiring about the organization's activities. Mashishi remembers that Thlaki Lekganyane was "visited" by the Special Branch (SB) to inform him about the organization's activities. He remarks:

> [We realized that there was a problem of infiltration] when the SB got some of our people. [And they would have] information that was accurate. They went to Thlaki's home. When Thlaki returned home from work he found them there. They ordered him to sit down in his house and [said] 'you think you are clever, but we know this and that; your people come to us and give us information, so there's no point in hiding [it].

To overcome this problem leading members of the branch supplied the units with incorrect information. Mashishi recalls:

> I remember that we had to give wrong information to the units because infiltration was becoming a problem for us. We would give them wrong information to see how they react. Say, for example, there's a person who is not a member of the unit, perhaps he's just an ordinary member of the community. We'll tell a unit that this guy has guns and is good. Then when the police "visit" that person we would know there's a problem in that particular unit because we've given them this information and now the police have "visited" an innocent person who doesn't know anything. Then we would identify the unit and try to find out actually who amongst the four people is responsible. Those were some of the things that we used to do.[143]

[142] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[143] ibid

Asked what action did the branch take against members suspected to be informers. Mashishi responded: "Fortunately we did not deal with those people harshly. We would disband the unit and isolate the suspect, and then regroup the others to form unit – and exclude the suspect. [But] we would monitor him. And he would remain an ordinary member of the organization; and not a member of the unit".[144]

Amidst the problems faced by the AZANYU Tembu branch, South Africa was witnessing changes in its political landscape. In 1989 F.W. De Klerk, on September 20, ascended to power replacing P.W. Botha as President of the country. Soon he released some of the PAC's long-term serving Robben Island prisoners, such as Jeff Masemola; limited powers of the security establishment; and allowed mass demonstrations and rallies.[145]

It was at this stage that PAM was launched. Following its launch, it assumed a leadership role, and AZANYU became its affiliate. PAM's role was to mobilize internally in order to build a strong Africanist organization. The Harare Consultative Conference from November 24-26 (1989) between the PAC and Africanists from South Africa noted that "… PAM would be launched to co-ordinate and promote the Africanist cause [within the law in South Africa]".[146]

According to Dikgang Moseneke, PAC second deputy president, cited by Kaiser Nyatsumba, "PAM was a front for the then banned PAC …" It… was intended then, Nyatsumba notes, "to be for the PAC what the UDF and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) were for the ANC".[147] Three months later after its formation, PAM dissolved to form part of the PAC. On the 10 March 1990 it changed its name to PAC (internal)

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[144] ibid

[145] Swilling and Rantete, 'Organizations and Strategies' in Robin L. and Schlemmer L (eds.), *Transition to democracy*, p.208

[146] Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives Historical Papers section, Political Organization Box 1-35, *The Formation of PAC; ,Front File*, February 1990

[147] Nyatsumba, K. 'The PAC and AZAPO: Revolutionary Watchdogs' in Glenn Moss and Ingrid Obery (eds.), *South African Review 6*, *From Red Friday to CODESA,* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1992), p. 96

Joe Thloloe, a veteran journalist, noted that the formation of PAM created an "uneasy relationship between PAM and the PAC" and this affected AZANYU. According to him this was because at this stage "…PAC was still a banned organization committed to conducting an armed struggle against the rulers of this country, while PAM was an overt political organization [which from the onset declared that it was not opposed to negotiations]".[148]

When President de Klerk introduced his fast-paced changes leading to a negotiated settlement AZANYU rejected the negotiations outright. In 1989 it released a press statement which categorically rejected negotiations stating that "negotiations can only take place when the land had been transferred to its rightful owners".[149] At this stage the youth wing spoke with one voice. In the mid-1990s the situation changed following the PAC's gradual shift to negotiations. This split AZANYU into two factions between those in favour of the negotiations and those against them. This issue is dealt with in detail in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Like the PAC, prior to the 1990s, the AZANYU Tembisa branch earnestly believed that it could topple the government militarily. To achieve this it made it its mission to recruit youth in Tembisa to send outside the country to receive military training thereby becoming APLA cadres. Through its operational method based on the unit system it managed to achieve this. Despite this it did not attain its objective because the government was not ousted from power militarily. Instead it relinquished power after a protracted process of negotiations, which culminated in the first democratic elections.

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[148] Thloloe, J. 'No Negotiators and Many Bullets Either' in *Work in Progress 72,* January/February 1991,
p. 14; see interview with Benney Alexander, General Secretary of PAM, in *Work in Progress,* January 1990

[149] *Press Statement: AZANYU's perspective on negotiations and sanctions, 5 June 1989.* I am indebted to Ali Hlongwane for giving me this document to use as a reference. I have a copy of this document in my possession

Notwithstanding this the AZANYU Tembisa branch showed a tactical awareness n dealing with the government's repressive measures. The repressive measures unleashed by the government in the mid-1980s in its attempt to crush extra-parliamentary opposition in the townships necessitated a change in tactical approach. Unlike the 'Charterists', the AZANYU Tembisa branch after it was established adopted a different operational method which was based on a clandestine unit system. For a while this branch did not centre its politics on mass mobilization. For a two year period, after it was established, this branch did not participate in the township's local politics. Instead, it focused its politics on national politics directed against the state. This was informed by the militaristic politics imparted on the branch members from an early stage in their political life by the PAC's political commissars, which had formed a base in Tembisa. Because of the branch's *modus operandi* a substantial number of youth in the township left the country via this branch to join APLA in exile.

The chapter has illustrated that the repossession of the land was central in the politics of the Africanist youth. In line with the PAC's politics, which were premised on the question of the land, the Africanist youth in Tembisa believed that the country's political crisis could only be resolved when the land had been returned to the indigenous people, and this could only be achieved through revolutionary means. Hence they perceived the struggle to be between the oppressed Africans and the white oppressors.