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Neville Alexander and South Africa's New Left, c. 1957–1964

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About the paper

This paper focuses on a particular moment in the intellectual and political life of Neville Alexander. It does so by situating Alexander and the organisations he was instrumental in setting up, the YCCC/NLF, in the broader context of the New Left, which the author refers to as a "transnational generational movement", arguing that Alexander and the YCCC/NLF represented a South African version of this movement. The paper also raises a further point about how a transnational perspective can "illuminate" small groups such as the YCCC/NLF, in a context where a national perspective can, as in South Africa, lead to these groups being marginalised and overshadowed by larger and formal political parties. This is a substantially reworked version of an earlier paper that was presented to three audiences in October 2022 – see footnote 1.

By Lungisile Ntsebeza

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Neville Alexander and South Africa's New Left, c. 1957–1964[1]

Allison Drew

The Atlantic world is well known for its circuits between Africa and its diaspora and across the syndicalist and socialist world. These left their marks on Cape Town, a port city at the intersection of the Atlantic and Indian oceans that hosted diverse discussion clubs, facilitating the development of autodidact intellectuals who followed world events and produced a critical anti-Stalinist left-wing intellectual culture. The speeches and writings of Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) intellectuals in the 1940s–1950s and articles in the Forum Club's 1950s journal *Discussion* provide a few examples of their significant socialist and left-radical theorising (Hogan 2021; Johnson 2020: 104–134; Sandwith 2014: 48–172; Vinson 2006).

A rival of the African National Congress (ANC), the NEUM played a crucial role in this 'global thinking', as Chris Lee calls it – thinking that is transnational in scope and reflects the interrelationship of global and local dynamics (Lee 2005: 33, 43–44, 49). Launched in 1943 and led by the charismatic socialist intellectual Isaac Bangani Tabata, the NEUM was a federal body whose two biggest pillars were the eastern Cape-based All-African Convention (AAC) and the western Cape-based Anti-CAD (Coloured Affairs Department) movement. All NEUM affiliates subscribed to its 'Ten Point Programme' of democratic rights. NEUM intellectuals argued for the multiple origins of human civilisation worldwide and compared South Africa's developing authoritarianism and racism with European fascism. In short, the NEUM used world history to make sense of South African developments and to overcome the isolation felt by black

[1] This paper was written at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) during the second semester of 2022, and I am extremely grateful to the Institute for its support. A version of this paper was presented at a STIAS seminar on 6 October 2022, at the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, on 11 October 2022 and at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Stellenbosch, on 13 October 2022.

intellectuals in a white supremacist society.

Most black intellectuals were schoolteachers, generally excluded from the University of Cape Town (UCT), which loomed above the city on the slopes of Devil's Peak Mountain. Underlining the exclusion, in 1934 the university erected a bronze statue of arch-British imperialist and mining magnate Cecil Rhodes, seated chin on hand, pensively gazing out at the city. Most studies of South African socialist theorising, ironically, focus on university-based scholarship, especially that of the 1970s. This focus on academic scholarship overlooks intellectual work produced by blacks – and by white communists like British-born Sidney Bunting, excluded because of his politics (Drew 2007: 215–216). Indeed, the country's structured racism meant that despite the left's commitment to non-racialism it was nonetheless fractured across racial and regional lines.

Academics examining 1970s socialist theorising generally stress the impact of European Marxist currents on white South African academics. Andrew Nash, and Kirk Helliker and Peter Vale discuss Western Marxism in South Africa (Nash 1999, but see also Nash 2021; Helliker & Vale 2013). Tom Lodge's *Red Road to Freedom* presents South African communism as a fairly continuous century-old national organisation, stressing white male communist intellectuals such as Harold Wolpe (Alexander 2007; Lodge 2021). If we take the 1970s as our point of departure in studying South African socialist theorising, then it appears to be the product of white academics.

Yet looking back just a decade, the tiny and ephemeral Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC) and National Liberation Front (NLF) of 1962–63 appear as the germ of a South African New Left – heretofore virtually unseen and unsearched for – the roots of which go back to the late 1950s, especially to critical youth in the NEUM and the western Cape student movement. YCCC/NLF member Neville Alexander played a crucial role in this New Left. Born in 1936 in Cradock, Alexander was the eldest of six children of schoolteacher Dimbiti Bisho Alexander and carpenter David James Alexander. His Ethiopian-born maternal grandmother, Bisho Jara, one of a group of enslaved Oromo children, was freed by a British warship near Yemen while en route to a Jeddah slave market, and settled at South Africa's Lovedale Mission in August 1890. After training as a teacher, she obtained a post in Cradock and married a local minister. As a child Alexander was mesmerised by his grandmother's dancing and chanting in Oromo.[2]

[2] Discussion with Alexander, c. 1987–88; see also Shell (n.d.).

Exceptionally intelligent, Alexander had an extraordinary ability to block out distractions and focus precisely on an intellectual task. Educated by German nuns at the Holy Rosary Convent in Cradock, he entered UCT in 1953 and finished his university work in record time with honours. By the early 1960s he was already a transnational intellectual-activist, having received an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation fellowship for doctoral studies in the Federal Republic of Germany – West Germany – and completed his thesis *magna cum laude* at the University of Tübingen in 1961.[3] Indeed, writes Quinn Slobodian, 'Alexander's biography reads like a précis of the trajectories leading to the emergence of an international New Left in the 1960s ... show[ing] how individual education migrations knit together transnational networks of opposition' (Slobodian 2012: 23–24).[4]

Neville Alexander in West Germany
Courtesy Freie Universität Berlin, Universitätsarchiv, Sig. Lieck. Sig. 1.

[3] Alexander graduated in 1956 with a first-class BA Honours in German, concurrently completing the first year of a BEd. That year he received a two-year DeVilliers-Smuts scholarship. In 1957, he obtained an MA in German language and literature with distinction. In 1958 he began the second year of his BEd course before leaving for West Germany. Neville Alexander, Unsworn statement, UCT Manuscripts & Archives (UCTMA), Neville Alexander Papers BC1538 D5.1.1.14, p. 1651.

[4] Slobodian mistakenly claims Alexander was an ANC member.

The YCCC/NLF was crushed by the apartheid regime, but before their arrests, its members produced a small body of writing and a practice reflecting the group's position in a transnational New Left movement. Yet the group has scarcely appeared in the 1960s South African liberation movement historiography, which gives primacy to groups engaged in armed struggle (for example, SADET 2004). It has been dismissed because of its position to the left of the South African Communist Party (SACP).[5] It has been overshadowed by the disproportionate focus on radical whites, namely those in the SACP and the short-lived National Committee for Liberation/African Resistance Movement (NCL/ARM).[6] It has been stigmatised by the label of 'coloured' – as most of its South African-born members were classified – and hence as non-African (Bam 2022: 169–190).

'Just as the ANC is at the center of things, so the center of things is increasingly within the ANC,' wrote John Saul and Stephen Gelb in 1981 (Saul & Gelb 1981: 146). Although that centre embraced the SACP, which cultivated an extremely close relationship with the ANC, the ANC's dominance was not then assured: throughout the 1980s the liberation movement engaged in a fierce internal power struggle. The theoretical problem implicit in Saul and Gelb's claim concerns the relationship of the centre and the margins: can the shifting political centre really be understood in isolation from the margins, which are also in a state of flux as individuals and groups move to and from the centre?

By looking at the YCCC/NLF not only as part of the longer-term South African socialist movement but as part of a transnational generational movement, one can avoid both the overwhelmingly national focus that overshadows studies of South African communism and the inherent white bias of studies of university Marxists (Drew 1991: 519–546; Drew 2000: 275–281). Paradoxically, a transnational perspective illuminates small groups by seeing them as part of a diffused global movement, whereas a national perspective leads to their being overshadowed by larger and formal political parties. Focusing on Neville Alexander's role, this paper explores the relationship between this transnational movement and the distinctive conditions producing and then smashing South Africa's New Left.

[5] On the SACP see, *inter alia*, Ellis (2012); Filatova & Davidson (2013); Kirkaldy (2022); Lodge (2021); Maloka (2001).

[6] See, *inter alia*, Du Toit (1991); Gunther (2004); Gordimer (2013). Many communists and NCL/ARM members have published memoirs or autobiographies.

What was the New Left?

Generally seen as having had a presence in Europe and the Americas, the long 1960s New Left was concerned with finding new and non-hierarchical organisational forms to avoid the bureaucratisation of both Soviet communism and social democracy. In Europe, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's February 1956 revelations of Stalin's terror, followed by the November 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, were crucial, leading to disillusionment with the Soviet Union and resignations from communist parties. As Ellen Meiksins Wood suggests, 'what made the New Left "new" was above all its dissociation from the traditional forms of "old" left politics, both Stalinist Communism and social democracy' (Meiksins Wood 1995: 24; Renaud 2021).[7] Indeed, the 1960s New Left was very much concerned with the organisational ossification predicted 50 years earlier by the German-born Italian sociologist and theorist Robert Michels (Michels 1915).

While not forgetting class struggle, the New Left gave greater recognition to struggles against oppression, especially anticolonial, national liberation and civil rights movements. It was very much a movement of youth – students, young socialists and anti-war activists – and self-consciously intellectual.

Anticolonialism was fundamental to the European New Left, which 'framed the anticolonial struggle as a new antifascism', argues Andrea Brazzoduro (2020: 960–961). In March 1956, when the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) voted to give the government 'Special Powers' to do everything possible to maintain order in Algeria, young French leftists linked their anger with the PCF to a critique of the Soviet system and supported Algeria's *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) (Drew 2014: 195–196, 242; Jenson & Ross 1987). Henri Alleg's *La Question*, published in February 1958, showed that France's use of torture during the war was routine; it made 'quite an impact' on Alexander when he read it in Tübingen.[8] In autumn 1959 Frantz Fanon published his analysis of the Algerian revolution, *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* [*Year V of the Algerian Revolution*], which intensified antagonism to France's occupation of Algeria (Drew 2014: 237, 241). The Algerian liberation struggle profoundly affected Alexander and indeed

[7] Africa, too, had New Left influences; see Zewde (2017). Perhaps the Algerian students killed by the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) during its war constituted a New Left (Drew 2014: 226–227).

[8] August Matsemela, interview with Neville Alexander, UCTMA BC1538 Neville Alexander Papers A2.1, 27.

individuals across the South African left (Brazzoduro 2020: 960–961; Drew 2015).

The West German New Left that Alexander encountered consisted of dissident socialists in and around the well-established *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) [Social Democratic Party]; in the West the tiny Communist Party of Germany had been banned on 17 August 1956 but functioned underground. In November 1959 the historically socialist SPD eliminated class struggle from its programme, agreeing to reform rather than overthrow capitalism (Renaud 2021: 210). The *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS) [Socialist German Students' Union] had been founded in 1946 as the SPD's student wing, but in the course of the 1950s tensions between them mounted. In November 1961 the SPD leadership declared that membership in both the SDS and the SPD was irreconcilable. Those remaining in the SDS were expelled from the SPD, becoming the German New Left (Renaud 2021: 226–228; Zewde 2017: 22–24).

Germany had lost its colonies after the First World War, and the West German New Left supported ongoing anticolonial struggles. The 1950s and 1960s saw a rapid influx of African and Asian students into West German universities – their numbers rising from 200 in 1951 to 12 000 in 1962. African and Asian students formed the Afro-Asian Students Union and introduced their West German counterparts to new ways of thinking about colonialism, pushing them to support their national liberation struggles. Indeed, argues Slobodian, they – including Alexander – were essential to the development of a West German New Left. The relationship was reciprocal, as these foreign students in turn applied and reinterpreted ideas encountered in Europe to their own countries (Slobodian 2012: 8, 17, 28).

The European New Left had an intellectual and cultural impact precisely because of the political space afforded by democracy. By contrast, New Leftists in regions that had been colonised were concerned with the conquest of power. The key example is the Cuban Revolution, where Latin American New Leftists had a momentous albeit brief success before the revolution was subsumed under the influence of Soviet communism.

On 1 January 1959 Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara proclaimed the victory of the Cuban revolution over Fulgencio Batista's military dictatorship – under the nose of US imperialism. Guevara became Latin America's New Left spokesperson. He argued that Cuba's revolution showed that popular forces could defeat a regular military force, that insurrection could create revolutionary conditions and that, by promising agrarian reform to win over the peasants, the countryside could be made the locale for revolution (Guevara 1964; Martz 1970: 176–177). Indeed, echoed Cuban commentator Luis E. Aguilar, 'Castro's victory shows that extremism is no

longer an infantile disease ... that a small band of fighters is capable of creating the subjective conditions for revolutionary victory' (Martz 1970: 196).

The Soviet Union was then pursuing 'Peaceful Coexistence' – negotiation rather than war to settle international disputes along with the refusal to export revolution or counter-revolution (Karpov 1964: 863). The Latin American New Left insisted on ideological independence from international communism and stressed broad movements rather than political parties.

European New Leftists saw the guerrilla unit as a new organisational form applicable to the 'asymmetrical power that they experienced under heavily policed capitalist democracies' (Renaud 2021: 245). Studying in West Germany, Alexander recalled that Jean-Paul Sartre and other French intellectuals went to Cuba and returned 'speaking in the loftiest tones about this Cuban revolution ... that really captured the imagination of the intelligentsia ... and in some ways helped to popularize the Cuban revolution in Germany as well'. Imagining Castro and Guevara as 'epic heroes', he recalled, the revolution 'reinforced the whole guerillarist [sic] tendency inside me ... All it needed ... was Sharpville [sic] to make me realise that this was the road we had to go ... out of these different strands there was almost some inevitability about where I eventually landed'.[9] In turn, the Cuban experience influenced the YCCC/NLF's thinking and writing about guerrilla struggle. But this incipient South African New Left was smashed by the apartheid regime almost as soon as it emerged, underlining the New Left's dramatic regional diversity.

The roots of a South African New Left

Coming to power in 1948, the apartheid regime rejected the anticolonial wave sweeping Africa, repressing dissent throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The Suppression of Communism Act (No. 44 of 1950) was passed on 26 June 1950. In anticipation the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) had dissolved itself on 20 June, the earlier Trotskyist groups having already collapsed. The new underground SACP was formed in 1953, representing a demographic break with its predecessor: only an estimated fifth of CPSA members were recruited into the new party numbering some several hundred (Johns 2007: 10; Lodge 2021: 291).

[9] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538 A 2.1, 36–38.

Although a number of Witwatersrand (Wits) University students spearheaded the new party's formation, like its predecessor the SACP was very much old left, retaining its extremely pro-Soviet stance and hierarchical organisational structure. It experienced some internal disquiet over Khrushchev's Stalin revelations and the Soviet Union's Hungarian invasion, but most members acquiesced. As one communist recalled, many SACP members were 'very, very rigid' when it came to Soviet communism (Hirson 1995: 255, 279–280, 302; Kirkaldy 2022: 61–63; Lodge 2021: 314–377). Despite the Hungarian invasion, very few communists left the party – a marked contrast with the exodus from European communist parties, notably the British Communist Party. Even in the 1960s exile period, Lodge notes, 'the party's senior leadership in London remained well insulated from any wider intellectual currents generated by the emergence of the New Left' (Lodge 2021: 376).

SACP members worked clandestinely in the still legal ANC and its allied Congress organisations. However, the presence of white communists in Congress Alliance structures caused discord within the ANC that culminated in a split, broadly over internal democracy and the national question, and the launch of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in April 1959 (Johnson 2020: 133–157; Lodge 2021: 302, 314).

The NEUM's hesitancy about mass action was apparent in the Train Apartheid Resistance Campaign (TARC). The TARC was formed in late 1948 as a united front of organisations to fight the government's extension of segregation to trains in the Cape Peninsula – an apartheid test case. Many Capetonians wanted to board the newly segregated trains in protest at the racist policy, but the TARC leadership, most of whom were NEUM members, claimed that the masses were not ready. As a result the campaign fizzled out within six months. Several months later, after the communists had dropped out, the TARC leadership affiliated to the NEUM. Essentially, the NEUM consistently maintained that mass action was not possible until the revolutionary moment arrived – but it never did (Carneson 1948: 1–2; Jordaan [1950?]: 8-15).

The 1950s marked the last major wave of youth to join NEUM affiliates. As the writer Ezekiel Mphahlele recalled, the ANC 'never really interested itself in educational and cultural matters as an important front of our activities' (Lodge 1990: 168). This left the intellectual arena open to the NEUM, whose youth found its theoretical discussions to be far more compelling than those of the Congress movement. 'What attracted me to the NEUM,' recalled Roseinnes Phahle,

> was that unlike the ANC … it had developed a political literature of its own in the writings of IB Tabata, Benny Kies,

> Hosea Jaffe, Dora Taylor (alias Nosipho Majeke) and by other members; and the organisation also had a programme of demands – the Freedom Charter was yet to come. (Phahle 2019a)

Young people entering the NEUM in the 1950s thought the ANC outflanked the NEUM in townships because it responded to popular pressure over working class issues. They hoped to give the NEUM a more activist profile.

Africans flocked to the cities despite the legal impediments. Tabata sought to address their political education. In Cape Town the New Era Fellowship (NEF) and other fellowships fell under the Anti-CAD umbrella and were led by Ben Kies and Hosea Jaffe. Generally they attracted a predominantly coloured and often middle class audience, with formally educated men being the prominent speakers. For this reason and to counter the ANC Youth League, in 1951 Tabata launched the Society of Young Africa (SOYA), whose formation as an AAC affiliate increased his organisational base within the NEUM.

SOYA soon acquired a national momentum, with branches in the Cape Province, Transvaal, Natal and Orange Free State and contacts in Basutoland [Lesotho] and Bechuanaland [Botswana]. In Cape Town, where by 1954 active membership had risen to 50 and included migrant workers, clerks, teachers and a few students, 'being a Soyan carrie[d] prestige'. The Western Province SOYA made 'desperate efforts' to attract women members, and under pressure from coloured and Indian youth SOYA became non-racial, although some members wished it to remain African only (AAC 1954: 34–35; Drew 1991: 484–485).

Soon after Alexander's arrival in Cape Town he joined the NEUM. He was deeply impressed by Tabata:

> I stopped short of hero worshipping Tabbie, the way in which most other people did … [but] there's no doubt, as far as my own style, even my writing, and … politics in general is concerned, that … politically Tabbie was the greatest influence on my life. Politically we all grew up at his feet.[10]

SOYA became the most important political organisation in Alexander's life before he went to West Germany. Under Tabata's guidance, he recalled,

[10] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.2, 50.

> [the] Chinese road out of colonial oppression was put as the alternative to the Indian road. And it was an absolute alternative in the sense of methodology, method of liberation as well as the goals of liberation and the process of liberation.

They read Joseph Needham, Edward Snow and Mao Zedong, especially his philosophical works, but also some of his writings on guerrilla struggle.

> Nobody at the time even thought of guerrilla warfare as a revolutionary method. What we were interested in was how China was restructuring their society, how the land question was solved, industry.

Later, though, when he seriously studied guerrilla warfare, the background on China would be extremely important.[11]

Notwithstanding Alexander's glowing recollections of the Cape Town SOYA, the experience of Witwatersrand Soyans foreshadowed the NEUM's growing generational conflict, one that resulted in splits and expulsions in the late 1950s and 1960s. Pressure on the NEUM was greatest on the Witwatersrand because of the social protest movements and strong ANC presence there. Led by Sefton Vutela, Wits Soyans became convinced that the AAC president, W.M. Tsotsi, and general secretary, Leo Sihlali, were leading the organisation down a bourgeois democratic path. These leaders, they maintained, were interpreting the 'Ten Point Programme', conceived as a minimum, transitional programme, as a set of maximum demands. That meant that working class needs were sidelined in favour of those of an aspirant African bourgeoisie that followed nationalist leaders across the continent who compromised with imperialism. The Wits Soyans insisted that the 'Ten Point Programme' be openly recognised as a transitional programme to socialism – even though the Suppression of Communism Act raised serious safety concerns (NEC SOYA 1959: 22). Ideologically, the Wits Soyans were closest to the NEUM's Western Cape Kies-Jaffe faction.

In mid-1953, when student Roseinnes Phahle looked up SOYA in Alexandra township, he found that all but one member – Andrew Lukele – had left and joined the local branch of the Movement for a Democracy of Content (MDC). The antifascist MDC bore the hallmarks of an incipient New Left. A transnational group launched in London in 1947 with the German-language journal *Dinge der Zeit* [*Contemporary Issues*], the MDC distinguished itself from Soviet communism and European social democracy, opposed Leninist party structure and was seen by many as anarchist. It was

[11] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.2, 54–57.

introduced to South Africa by the heavy-drinking dissident Afrikaner poet-activist Vincent Swart and his wife, Lilian Swart, who had arrived back in South Africa in 1951 after several years overseas. In contrast to the NEUM, the South African MDC was extremely active and very successful during the 1957 Alexandra bus boycott. However, its members were harassed by the police, and it later disintegrated, both in South Africa and overseas (Meiring 2022; Phahle 2019a; Van der Linden 2001: 137).

The history of the Progressive Forum (PF), another Johannesburg-based NEUM study forum, also illustrates the pressure of township youth on the NEUM. The PF began as a circle of intellectuals based mostly at Witwatersrand University who examined international events. Its members, Lukele, Phahle, Baruch Hirson and Seymour Papert, amongst others, espoused a range of views. As a whole it was more overtly socialist than the NEUM, with probably a third of members identifying as Marxist or Trotskyist. Nonetheless, Hirson felt a certain pressure to conform, recalling how difficult it was to critique Tabata's 1950 book, *The All African Convention* (Tabata 1950).[12] Indeed, recalled Phahle,

> we issued a statement arguing that Tabata's The Awakening of a People began by noting that South Africa's problem was both political and social, but that it failed to analyse the social question. Tabata was seen as a leading NEUM theoretician, and his faction treated the book as a bible. As a result, the social question was never discussed at Progressive Forum meetings. (Phahle 2019a)

Yet there was debate. Certain members stressed the primacy of the national struggle, arguing that organising for socialism was premature. They claimed that since white workers would not support the small black proletariat, black workers needed to align with black peasants and intellectuals. Such an alliance raised the problem of how to keep the movement from being coopted by an aspirant bourgeoisie.

Other members, similarly to the Wits Soyans and western Cape Trotskyists, believed that the NEUM should organise for socialism, although few dared to espouse this position openly.[13] Vincent Swart's arrival livened

[12] Interviews with Baruch Hirson, London, April 1987, Ismail Mohamed, Johannesburg, May 1988, Seymour Papert, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 1988. See also AAC (1954: 30–33); Tabata (1950).

[13] Interviews with Hirson, Papert and Alexander; see also Drew (1991: 498–490); Hirson (1995: 258).

up the discussions, but the NEUM leadership dragged its feet on activism. As a result of its refusal to join the 1957 Alexandra Bus Boycott committee, several PF regulars from Alexandra pulled out. By the end of the decade the PF was in fragments.[14]

As Phahle (2019a) observes, 'the period from 1957 onwards was one in which the group was in search of a political home or a guiding ideology'. Some formed the short-lived Transvaal Indian and Coloured Teachers Association, hoping to link it with the NEUM-affiliated Teachers' League of South Africa and Cape African Teachers Association. Vutela's group and others campaigned to boycott Soweto Advisory Boards.[15] Phahle and a comrade looked for links in Cape Town. They found these in former Forum Club members, notably the historian Kenneth Jordaan (Phahle 2019b).

Alongside these youth politics, the government's attack on black education infuriated students. The Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953) imposed separate and unequal education on Africans, and in 1956 the Extension of University Education Bill (University Apartheid Bill) was introduced in parliament with the aim of extending this inequality to the university level. The overwhelmingly white university students were organised into the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), which campaigned against academic segregation, although many members accepted social apartheid. The ANC overshadowed the AAC at the University College of Fort Hare, but the universities of Cape Town and Natal were NEUM strongholds amongst the tiny numbers of black students.

Alexander, UCT medical student Kenneth Abrahams and other students decided to form 'a progressive national students union as a proper countervailing force against Nusas'. They wanted 'a mass type of organization where they could resist and protest ... without in a sense becoming revolutionaries because of the one single issue'. As Alexander explained, it was to be a 'mass organization that was not sectarian, that was not tied to the Unity Movement or to the Congress movement ... [and] which would concentrate on educational questions and not on politics'.[16]

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[14] Interview with Hirson; see also Phahle (2019a); Lodge 1983: 155–171. Swart's influence in SOYA and his criticism of the 'Ten Point Programme' is discussed in AAC (1954: 32).

[15] Advisory Boards offered limited consultative local representation in African townships. Their members were often seen as sell-outs to the white minority regime.

[16] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.2, 62, 67.

The NEUM's Kies-Jaffe faction opposed the idea of a student organisation as a potential rival to the fellowships.[17] Nonetheless, Alexander, Abrahams and others organised at coloured high schools, at Langa High School and at Hewat Training College, writing articles and forming study groups on South African history and education. Although Alexander had organised for SOYA, this was his first experience building an autonomous organisation from scratch. In March 1957 the Cape Peninsula Students Union (CPSU) was launched at Woodstock Town Hall. In contrast to NUSAS, the CPSU countered that academic non-segregation would still allow social apartheid rather than full democracy. Precisely to prevent the CPSU from being drawn into the NEUM's internal disputes, Alexander pushed for it to remain politically non-aligned. Most members were 'just students. But a few people became activists and eventually joined Soya and so on and became ... much more political'.[18] The next year Alexander left for Tübingen.

Neville Alexander in Germany

If the MDC was an early New Left influence near Johannesburg, then West Germany, where Alexander studied from October 1958 to February 1961, provided a key point of departure for later New Left influence in South Africa. But before arriving in Tübingen, Alexander spent a week or so with Jesse Eichman and Bernard Berman, two Johannesburg SOYA members studying in London. They introduced him to the fragmented Trotskyist left, and he learned about the Fourth International as a broader movement. He met Irish-born Gerry Healey's 'Newsletter group,' South African-born Ted Grant, leader of the Labour Party's militant tendency, and people who had broken with the British Communist Party after the Hungarian invasion (Grant n.d.; McIlroy 2005). Alexander 'knew very little of those things at the time. But of course very quickly learned a lot about it'. What was most important to him, though, 'was the fact that for the first time I was introduced to basically socialist groups – socialist parties ... It was very different from what we had been used to in the Unity movement where everything was codified'.[19]

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[17] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.2, 77, 62, 67.

[18] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.2, 64, 68, 78–79; Neville Alexander, Unsworn statement, UCTMA BC1538, D5.1.1.14, p. 1657.

[19] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A.2.1, 6–8, 13.

Because of Alexander's NEUM background, he was well aware of Stalin: 'we knew the books and we knew that Stalin was a monster who had caused the deaths of millions of people'. Otherwise, his knowledge of Stalinism was 'abstract and theoretical ... The concreteness of Stalinism in South Africa for us was always linked to the ANC'.[20]

Alexander quickly realised that British-based Trotskyists like Healey saw Britain and Europe as the centre of gravity of the world revolution – indeed Healey was seen as 'very British orientated'.[21] Generally British Trotskyists believed that socialism would have to come to power in Europe before the colonies. Alexander was sceptical of this view:

> I had come to believe, not because of Mao, but because of what we in the Unity Movement had grown up to believe, that the centre of gravity of world revolution had shifted to the colonies ... the metropolitan areas were in a sense caught up in the cold war.[22]

From London, Alexander proceeded to medieval Tübingen, a small but cosmopolitan university town built along the Neckar River. After the Second World War the Allies had divided Germany into four zones under American, British, French and Soviet control; Tübingen was in the French zone. The Soviet-aligned German Democratic Republic was proclaimed in the east in October 1949, and the Allied administration of what became West Germany ended on 5 May 1955. Tübingen still showed signs of the war, and people were hungry for contact with foreigners, which Alexander enjoyed. The rapid influx of African and Asian students into the university kept the spirit of the April 1955 Bandung Conference of African and Asian states very much alive. Alexander joined the Afro-Asian Student Union, and in autumn 1960, formed the first SDS working group on Africa; influenced by foreign students, the SDS formed a number of working groups concerned with colonised areas (Slobodian 2012: 23–25).

For the first time in his life, Alexander was free to do whatever and go wherever he wanted. He threw himself into academic studies and student politics, recalling 'a real genuine warmth and cameraderie [sic] such as I never had experienced before ... I was really secure in a social and emotional

[20] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 7–8.

[21] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 7; see also McIlroy (2005).

[22] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 10.

sense'.[23] His involvement with the SDS began with the Algerian solidarity movement, which was strong in Tübingen because of its past location in the French zone. The SDS embraced a mix of socialists, and Alexander met Trotskyists who strengthened his links with the movement in Europe. But in contrast to Healey's Trotskyism, he found 'as far as the SDS was concerned, that participation in Algerian solidarity movement marks the opening of solidarity action with revolutionary ... movements ... Its [sic] from this period onwards, '59 and 60 onwards that the SDS starts radicalizing'.[24]

At some point Alexander and other SDS students made a two-day trip to Tunis to meet Algerian student leaders of the *Union générale des étudiants musulmans algériens* (UGEMA) to explore possibilities for solidarity. They learned about refugee camps in Morocco and Tunisia, and as a result of this trip the SDS began to mobilise medical students to collect medical supplies and to work as doctors for the FLN during their university breaks.[25] This youthful support for the Algerian struggle illustrates the stark contrast between New Leftists and Soviet Communists. For example, in September 1958 the FLN established its provisional government, the *Gouvernement provisoire de la république algérienne*. Although the clandestine Algerian Communist Party recognised it two months later, the USSR only did so in late 1960 (Alleg 1981: 468).

The March 1960 Sharpeville-Langa massacres provoked a major psychological shift in Alexander. He realised that non-violence and non-collaboration would be ineffectual without preparing for armed struggle. He travelled around West Germany lecturing on apartheid.[26] He participated in SDS debates in Tübingen and Frankfurt concerning party democracy and factions; he believed that factionalism should be tolerated even in a one-party system. He also helped to organise foreign seasonal workers in the metal workers union, producing special issues of the metal workers' newsletter and a report on trade unions in Africa.[27] He had a number of girlfriends but fell in love with Irmgard Bolle, a German doctoral student and SDS comrade who later worked in the SDS Office for International Affairs with responsibility

[23] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 18.

[24] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 28, 30–31; see also Busch et al. (2014: 57–60).

[25] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 24–25; see also Kellner & Pfeiffer (2018).

[26] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 44–45.

[27] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.1, 31–33.

for Africa.[28]

Return to Cape Town

Alexander could have remained in West Germany, teaching and organising a European anti-apartheid movement. Instead, he returned to Cape Town, having obtained his DPhil in February 1961. On his way home he visited Trotsky's widow, Natalia Sedova, in Paris and met with Fourth International representatives. He pushed the idea of armed struggle; they advised him that if the NEUM sent two representatives to Paris, the Fourth International would assist with preparations for armed struggle. He arrived home in July 1961 convinced of the need to build international solidarity networks to enable black South Africans to study abroad.[29]

Political conditions had deteriorated significantly during Alexander's absence. University apartheid had become law in 1959, making it a criminal offence for blacks to register at formerly open universities without ministerial permission. The University College of the Western Cape (UCWC), founded for students classified as coloured, enrolled its first class in 1960. It provided training in an empty primary school near Bellville South for low-and mid-level school and civil service jobs – light years from UCT (Thomas 2005: 73; Thomas n.d). Alexander had received teaching offers in Europe, but he could not obtain a post at UCT – even though very few South African academics then had a doctorate. He blotted out the pain with alcohol. After a weekend drinking spree he applied for a job at Livingstone High School, where he began teaching in September 1961.[30] He had lost the freedom and equality he had found in West Germany.

The Unlawful Organizations Act (No. 34 of 1960) allowed the government to declare illegal any organisations deemed to threaten public order or safety. The ANC and PAC were banned. The NEUM had split, largely along Anti-CAD and AAC lines, following the AAC's December 1958 conference and expulsion of Wits SOYA and the Cape Peninsula

[28] Svenja Kunze, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, to author, 3 February 2020; see also Klimke (2010: 31, 255 n. 77).

[29] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.3, 36.

[30] Discussion with Alexander, c. 1987–88; see also Busch et al. (2014: 67); Levinson (1966: 139–140).

fellowships.[31] The CPSU had withered and affiliated to the AAC, a move Alexander saw as part of the NEUM's continued faction fighting and one that prevented the CPSU from attracting students from different political tendencies. In December 1960 Tabata, Jane Gool and Alie Fataar had launched the African People's Democratic Union – from January 1961 the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (APDUSA). Affiliated to the AAC, APDUSA was a unitary organisation that individuals joined directly. It prioritised the demands of black workers and peasants, attracting a younger and more militant membership that was not occupationally restricted mainly to teaching.[32]

Anti-apartheid politics receded underground as public meetings were banned. Activists met secretly in their homes. In September and October 1961, the recently formed National Committee of Liberation and the SACP each engaged in sabotage. The PAC's underground *Poqo* [alone, pure] had been launched in May 1961 with cells drawing on migrant labour networks; in December *Poqo* circulated incendiary leaflets in Cape Town's African townships. The SACP military units were incorporated into *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) [Spear of the Nation], led by the ANC's Nelson Mandela; MK announced itself on 16 December 1961 with a rolling sabotage campaign.

The now divided NEUM was squeezed by the Congress movement's expansion and marginalised by its own political reticence. Convinced that it would be further diminished if it did not plan for armed struggle, Alexander conveyed the Fourth International message to the NEUM executive. They forbade him to speak about it, worried that the NEUM would be banned if it came out for armed struggle. Alexander was invited to a secret leadership caucus, but at the meeting he 'crossed swords with Jane [Gool]' and decided not to attend any further caucus meetings. Instead, he began addressing different groups about the Algerian war. His CPSU friends, the Namibian Ottilie Schimming and Kenneth Abrahams, now married, were members of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). SWAPO had come out for armed struggle, and Kenneth Abrahams pushed the SWAPO line. In January 1962 he was suspended from SOYA, as was Alexander for defending him (Drew 2022: 191).

The preconditions for a New Left amongst NEUM and former NEUM

[31] For different perspectives see AAC (1958), Lady Frere: SOYA, which criticises the left-wing tendencies, and the Witwatersrand SOYA's description of the 1958 conferences, in NEC SOYA (1959).

[32] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.3, 33–34; see also Kayser and Adhikari (2004: 322–324).

youth were present in the rejection of both Stalinism and the NEUM's bureaucratisation. While an incipient New Left emerged first in African townships near Johannesburg, especially Alexandra, Alexander's return from Germany accelerated its development around Cape Town.

The formation of the YCCC/NLF

Alexander and Abrahams had APDUSA supporters, who invited them to lecture to their small gatherings on Algeria, Cuba and South West Africa. Study groups were constantly forming. Alexander joined Ursula Wolhuter's Marxist study group, but later switched to that of the Abrahamses. This included SWAPO leader Andreas Shipanga and UCWC student and CPSU member Xenophon Pitt. Shipanga and the Abrahamses organised SWAPO study groups and published *South-West Commentator* and *SWAPO (Cape Town Branch)* from the Abrahamses' garage. They were joined by teachers Marcus Solomon and Elizabeth van der Heyden, UCT law student Fikile Bam and two other SWAPO members, David Haufiku and, briefly, Peter Kaluma. They called the group the Yu Chi Chan Club, after Mao Zedong's book *Yu Chi Chan* [On guerrilla warfare] (Drew 2022: 192–195).

They discussed strategies of armed struggle, an ongoing topic in political circles since the 1961 sabotage attacks, and the need to build a united front across the liberation movement. They read Lenin, Mao, Guevara, Joan Gillespie's *Algeria: Rebellion and Revolution* (1960) and Deneys Reitz's *Commando* (1948), on the 1899–1902 Afrikaner guerrilla war against the British, amongst other works. Their aim was to assess whether those ideas could work in 1960s South Africa. The YCCC disbanded in mid-December 1962, deciding to set up a network of cells called the National Liberation Front – named after the Algerian FLN. The NLF was to operate as a united front and study works on guerrilla warfare (Drew 2022: 195).

The YCCC/NLF showed the common features found in other New Left movements: the rejection by youth and students of both Soviet-style communism and bureaucratised political parties – in their case the NEUM; the search for new organisational forms and methods of struggle; and the stress on theoretical work. Its members were mostly teachers, students and librarians – intellectuals.

According to the anonymous typescript 'When, Where, Why was the N.L.F. Formed?', they aimed to 'organize in breadth not depth', building a network of non-hierarchical cells with ten regions, five zones, five areas, and

one cell per area, i.e., *dorp* [rural town or village], location or part of a town.[33] The cells were to have a maximum of ten members – most were much smaller – enabling the full participation of all members. Regional committees with two members from each cell were to coordinate work by passing information to and from the cells.

Membership was open to anyone, regardless of background. The desired attributes were revolutionary ardour, honesty, integrity, intelligence, initiative and fearlessness. Each member was 'to devote 24 hours per day for revolution' – tricky given that they all worked or studied full-time, and Alexander was by then also teaching German part-time at UCT – and 'to work and play only when very necessary'. The document stipulated: 'No sex discrimination ... No age discrimination. No discrimination on grounds of political history'. Notwithstanding the prohibition on age discrimination, the document stated a preference for people between 20 and 35 years of age, as students were 'usually too immature' and older people 'too fixed in way of thinking'. Recruitment developed through the members' personal networks, broadly following gender lines, with some exceptions.

In marked contrast to the hierarchical SACP, the NLF's cell structure was flat, its cells were not divided by task and its division of labour was not gendered.[34] Kenneth Abrahams chaired the first cell, in Athlone–Lansdowne. The group split; Neville Alexander led the Lansdowne cell, and Elizabeth van der Heyden the Athlone cell. Marcus Solomon formed a Cape Town central cell. Kenneth Abrahams formed Maitland and Elsie's River cells. UCWC students Frank Musson, August Matsemela, Ambrose George and Desmond Moodley (the latter three from Port Elizabeth) formed a Bellville South cell; Matsemela was trying to set up a Port Elizabeth cell. Dorothy Adams formed a Wellington cell. Bam organised in Langa and Nyanga townships, forming a study group with links to the CPSU, Congress Youth League, ANC and PAC.[35]

While the lack of hierarchy was facilitated by the NLF's very small size, it was reinforced by the internal organisation of the cells, which used standardised agendas covering four points: developments in the camp of the oppressed, developments in the camp of the *Herrenvolk* [master race],

[33] Anonymous, 'When, Where, Why was the N.L.F. Formed?' (April 1962 [sic]), 2–3, 9, UCTMA BC1253, A.H. Murray Papers.

[34] Jean Middleton describes the SACP's gendered hierarchy (Middleton 1998: 12–29).

[35] Fikile Bam, UCTMA BC1538, D 5.1.12, 1417–1425. See also Drew (2022: 195–197); Thomas (2005: 74).

finances and general. Each topic was introduced by a different person, broadening speaking opportunities. Alexander lectured on Mao Zedong; Ottilie Abrahams kept the group's library and lectured on South West African politics; Elizabeth van der Heyden spoke on secret communications and APDUSA; Solomon on the PAC; Landers on partisan warfare; and Doris van der Heyden on the November 1962 uprising in Paarl, north-west of Cape Town. They produced articles for the NLF organ, *Liberation*, and fundraised by holding dances. The NLF's first regional committee meeting was held in February 1963. Alexander was to be the NLF's editor and represent Athlone–Lansdowne, along with Ottilie Abrahams. But he was suspended for drinking heavily and missing meetings – a symptom of the trauma of returning from a democratic society to one that was highly racialised and repressive. Ottilie Abrahams became the editor and Athlone–Lansdowne delegate (Drew 2022: 200–203).

The NLF hired an itinerant Pentecostal preacher, a Second World War veteran named Don Davis, to identify people across the north-western Cape and west coast who might be amenable to their ideas. Franz J.T. Lee, from the north-eastern Cape, received a bursary to study at Tübingen University and left for West Germany in October 1962. He and Irmgard Bolle sent literature to Cape Town.[36] Leiden-born Edmond Trosée was a go-between between Cape Town and Johannesburg socialists. Trosée and his family had immigrated to South Africa soon after the Second World War, settling in Cape Town. Profoundly affected by the treatment of the Jews during the war, Trosée made contact with the South African left.[37]

The YCCC/NLF on guerrilla struggle

The YCCC/NLF tried to develop a theoretical rationale for guerrilla warfare in South Africa, as seen in Alexander's pamphlet, *The Conquest of Power in South Africa* ([Alexander] n.d. [1962]). Difficult reading, it shows the strong influence of Guevara and Mao; the title, according to Alexander, indicated the influence of the libertarian-socialist Daniel Guerin concerning the

[36] Matsemela, interview with Alexander, UCTMA BC1538, A 2.3, 62–63; A 2.4, 77–78; Don Davis, UCTMA BC 1538, D 5.1.1.13, 1499–1500.

[37] Trosée died in Johannesburg in unresolved circumstances on 3 October 1965 (*Report on a Medico-Legal Post-Mortem Examination, Post-Mortem Serial No. 3016/65*, 26 October 1965, Dr Herrman Lazarus; email from Dr Edward Adelstein, 9 October 2022). The police would not release the body to the family. Discussions with Eefka Trosée Young, Lorette Trosée Espi, Cape Town, August 2022.

conquest of power.[38]

The need for guerrilla warfare was shaped by South Africa's racially divided society, argued Alexander in the pamphlet. Class struggle had been 'blurred by the historical accident of race ... the utilization of ... colour groupings by the ruling class'. This was 'the colour-caste, capitalist system'. The white working class had been bought off; thus, he contended, 'the most revolutionary sections of South African society are to be found among those ... called the Non-Whites. The most exploited classes of South African society are at the same time racially or nationally oppressed' ([Alexander] n.d.: 1).

In Europe the key factor in seizing power had historically been the relationship of the army to the contending classes, Alexander continued. But in South Africa, where non-violence had proved ineffectual in achieving change, the white army would never support the black masses. The cases of Algeria, Cuba and to an extent Angola showed 'that guerrilla bands of vanishing magnitude were turned into regular armies in the course of the struggle through desertions, political propaganda and state repression of the civilian population' ([Alexander] n.d.: 3). This should also be possible in South Africa, he posited. 'Guerrilla warfare in South Africa ... is the continuation of the policy of Non-Collaboration in a specific form towards the achievement of ... democratic aims' ([Alexander] n.d.: 4).

Here Alexander drew on the NEUM's concept of non-collaboration with racial structures, as elaborated by Tabata. Non-collaboration signified a rejection of the state's efforts to coopt black leadership into government-created racial institutions. In refusing to work within racial structures, non-collaboration raised the possibility that black South Africans could establish their own institutions and challenge the state through dual power. Because of the coincidence of class and colour in South Africa, non-collaboration with racial institutions was seen as a means to fight class collaboration and promote working class independence (Alexander 1986; Tabata 1950).

Alexander stressed the importance of the rural masses, who would provide the base of the guerrilla army for some time, while guerrilla teachers would be crucial in teaching literacy and raising the cultural level. In cities, by contrast, guerrillas would be involved in political and trade union organisations ([Alexander] n.d.: 4).

Mountainous, bushy, forested and swampy areas were most suited to guerrilla warfare, he noted. The areas of the Bantustan rehabilitation schemes

[38] Drew, interview with Alexander, 14 March 1988. The pamphlet is also extracted in Drew (1997: 377–386).

would provide the best guerrilla bases. Pondoland and Ovamboland, with their quasi-guerrilla traditions, and the Transkei, with its mountainous areas, coastline and proximity to Basutoland, would be primary fields of operations ([Alexander] n.d.: 6–7). Generally the liberation movement compared South Africa and Algeria as two settler societies, but Alexander, unusually, drew a parallel between South Africa's colonial relationship with South West Africa and France's colonial relationship with Algeria. In South West Africa, he argued,

> most probably guerilla action on an extensive scale will bring about some kind of 'Algerian' Independence. This will certainly not be satisfactory in the long run, but from the point of view of providing a strong liberated area ... it will be an invaluable gain for the struggle as a whole. It is South Africa's Achilles Heel and we have to concentrate as much activity on it as possible. ([Alexander] n.d.: 7)

Finally, Alexander concluded, cells were the nuclei of guerrilla units, from which the guerrilla army would develop. Thus, their immediate task was to form cells in all strategically important areas. The YCCC/NLF must synchronise their own guerrilla units with those of other organisations ([Alexander] n.d.: 7–8).

Was there a difference between Alexander's New Left conception of armed struggle and that of the pro-Soviet SACP, South Africa's old left? The SACP's 1962 New Year statement endorsed the Soviet Communist Party's October 1961 programme as 'a blue-print for the building of communism', a guide to 'the most advanced communist party in the world' with rules that 'should be a model for all Communists'. It saluted MK as 'the basis for the rapid establishment of a peoples [sic] liberation army, should such a step become necessary' – like the YCCC/NLF it underestimated the difficulties of developing such an army.[39]

Its December 1962 programme elaborated its Soviet-derived 'colonialism of a special type' thesis that national democracy was a precondition for socialism and thus that the SACP should continue its alliance with the ANC. It maintained that 'the peoples' movement must find mass methods of struggle, both violent and non-violent', yet its discussion of methods stated only that 'patriots and democrats will take up arms to defend themselves, organise guerrilla armies and undertake various acts of armed resistance,

[39] ([SACP] n.d. [c. January 1962]: 1, 3) *The New Year – Some Tasks & Perspectives*, UCTMA BC1081, Jack Simons Papers 0.7.1.

culminating in a mass insurrection against White domination' (SACP 1981: 314).

According to Simon Stevens, MK most likely turned to sabotage as a place-holder against other political organisations, especially the PAC and *Poqo*, rather than as a prelude to guerrilla struggle (Stevens 2019). But in March 1962 Nelson Mandela and his ANC comrade Robert Resha discussed guerrilla strategy with Algerian FLN leaders in Morocco. Mandela drew several points from the meetings: 1) the need for unity of all forces; 2) the need for political education of the masses; 3) the need for coordination of urban and rural areas; and 4) the need for external bases where guerrilla troops could be stationed and a provisional government be set up.[40] Mandela returned home in July 1962 and briefed his MK comrades. Although some felt that sabotage was still useful, they agreed to move towards guerrilla struggle, given the lengthy training period required. Govan Mbeki and Joe Slovo were designated to draft a strategy for guerrilla warfare, known as *Operation Mayibuye* (Magubane et al. 2004: 138).

In March 1963 the PAC's Potlako Leballo announced a national insurrection – leading to mass arrests of PAC and *Poqo* members. Not to be outdone, in April the ANC endorsed sabotage as a first stage of armed struggle, which would develop into guerrilla struggle aimed at seizing power (ANC 1977 [1963]). Around that time Slovo and Mbeki completed *Operation Mayibuye*, which dealt with technical and organisational matters rather than theoretical ones (Benneyworth 2017: 24; see also Lodge 2021: 327). It conceded that Leballo's announcement had struck an emotional chord and that the people showed the preconditions for a 'revolutionary situation' – disillusionment with legal methods, belief that change necessitated force and readiness to follow a lead. However, guerrillas were needed to spark the uprising and arm the people. With international support – including military intervention in South West Africa – the liberation movement could establish an external political authority on friendly soil. Foreign-trained guerrillas could then infiltrate the country to 'attack … pre-selected targets with a view to taking the enemy by surprise, creating the maximum impact on the populace, creating as much chaos and confusion for the enemy as possible'. Rural areas would initially be 'the main theatre of guerrilla operations', complemented by urban sabotage (Anonymous 1977 [1963]; Magubane et al. 2004: 138–141).

[40] Nelson Mandela, Notebook on ALN, 385/33/16, Nelson Mandela Foundation Centre of Memory and Dialogue, Johannesburg, 41–42, 50.

Both *Operation Mayibuye* and Alexander's *Conquest* pamphlet stressed the predominantly rural nature of guerrilla struggle, but nonetheless there were important differences. While the YCCC/NLF envisioned guerrilla struggle as an educational process, *Operation Mayibuye* saw it as a 'spark'. Moreover, while the YCCC/NLF stressed the internal struggle and Namibian agency and potential for guerrilla warfare, *Operation Mayibuye* stressed external military intervention in South West Africa, suggesting Namibian passivity. *Operation Mayibuye* was the subject of critical debate amongst SACP and MK leadership, and on the bulk of the evidence was not adopted. Thus it seems that South Africa's ephemeral New Left went further in attempting to develop a theoretical rationale for guerrilla struggle than did the SACP and MK, especially as *Conquest* was followed by Kenneth Abrahams' pamphlet, *Technical and Organisational Aspects of the Yu Chi Chan Club* ([Abrahams], n.d. [c. 1962]). However, neither the old nor the New Left considered the impact of South Africa's greater industrial development compared to that of Cuba and Algeria. Both underestimated the power of the state, which soon swooped them up and into prison.

Conclusion

The New Left was both a movement of ideas and a political rejection of Soviet communism and bureaucratic social democracy. Given South Africa's decades-long history as part of an international socialist movement, it should be no surprise that the country had its own New Left during the global 1960s. Although the NEUM excelled in thinking, it fell far short in terms of activism, and a small, fragmented New Left emerged in the late 1950s in response to this gap. An underground New Left group was formed in the early 1960s, aspiring to bridge the thinking–activism gap by considering guerrilla warfare as a type of practice then seen as effective in ousting colonial and imperial domination.

Neville Alexander played a pivotal transnational role in transmitting ideas and experiences and connecting people around this New Left, taking steps to enable black South Africans to gain education overseas and acquiring reading material from West German socialists. He and his comrades set up cells encouraging political education so that members could discuss and evaluate guerrilla struggle. In encouraging people to think both critically and comparatively, Alexander provided a crucial alternative to the SACP's dogmatism. However, both the old and New Left fell victim to romanticised notions of armed struggle, overlooking its inherent violence and underestimating state power.

Unlike 1960s Europe, where open debates and mass protest were possible,

South African state repression prevented this New Left from developing into a movement. This made it particularly vulnerable to exclusion from the historical record. Moreover, in South African historiography the focus on organisations close to power has meant that the SACP's history overshadowed the history of the various socialist strands that emerged over the decades. But proximity to power is not the only criterion by which historians should evaluate history. In order to understand the history of socialism in South Africa it is necessary to uncover these currents and incorporate them into the historiography, moving beyond a purely organisational approach.

From a broader perspective the 1960s New Left should be understood as an interconnected global movement, rather than simply as a collection of national movements. Also including Africa, this New Left wave swept unevenly across the globe's diverse countries and regions, looked different and had different impacts within those areas. While European New Lefts challenged power without considering its overthrow, the New Lefts in historically colonised areas saw power in zero-sum terms, as something to be conquered. Nonetheless, these different New Lefts were connected by a complex network of individual transnational journeys and the common reading and discussion of radical texts. The diverse experiences of the global New Left reflected not only the varied developments producing the late 1950s and 1960s political contexts, but in turn the response of states to their own national New Lefts. European states showed some tolerance towards their New Leftists; the South African state showed none.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AAC	All-African Convention
ANC	African National Congress
APDUSA	African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa
CAD	Coloured Affairs Department
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CPSU	Cape Peninsula Students Union
FLN	*Front de libération nationale*
MDC	Movement for a Democracy of Content
MK	*Umkhonto we Sizwe*
NCL/ARM	National Committee for Liberation/African Resistance Movement
NEF	New Era Fellowship
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NLF	National Liberation Front
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PCF	*Parti communiste français*
PF	Progressive Forum
SACP	South African Communist Party
SDS	*Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund*
SOYA	Society of Young Africa
SPD	*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TARC	Train Apartheid Resistance Campaign
UCT	University of Cape Town
UCTMA	University of Cape Town Manuscripts & Archives
UCWC	University College of the Western Cape
UGEMA	*Union générale des étudiants musulmans algériens*
YCCC	Yu Chi Chan Club