The Dance of an Intellectual Mandarin:
A Study of Neville Alexander's Thoughts on the Language Question in South Africa

by

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Declaration

I declare that "The Dance of an Intellectual Mandarin: A Study of Neville Alexander's Thoughts on the Language Question in South Africa" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Na-iem Dollie   August 2011
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SIGNATURE   DATE

Acknowledgments

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Ottilié Abrahams, who remains a pillar of strength and integrity, and who has shown me that it is possible to wonder and be rooted in the struggles of ordinary people.

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Acronyms and Initialisms

ANC   African National Congress

AAC   All African Convention

Apdusa African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa

BCM   Black Consciousness Movement

Cosatu Congress of South African Trade Unions

CPSA   Communist Party of South Africa

CPSU   Cape Peninsula Students' Union

Cusa   Council of Unions of South Africa

Fosatu Federation of South African Trade Unions

Langtag Language Plan Task Group

NEUM Non-European Unity Movement

NLP   National Language Project

Nusas   National Union of South African Students

PAC   Pan Africanist Congress (of Azania)

Pansalb Pan South African Language Board

Praesa Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa

SACP   South African Communist Party

Saso   South African Students' Organisation

Sayrco South African Youth Revolutionary Council

UDF   United Democratic Front

Wosa   Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action

Biographical Sketch: Neville Alexander

Neville Edward Alexander is now 74 years old. He has written seven books and numerous political and scholarly articles that have been published in refereed journals and by organisations with which he has been associated. In *One Azania, One Nation* (1979), Alexander sets out his philosophical and political template for much of his subsequent writings. *Sow the Wind* (1985) is a collection of his speeches between the years 1980 and 1984. The short but powerful essay titled *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* (1989) is a theoretical-strategic intervention by Alexander to critically look at the language question, and is arguably the first written codification of his multilingual policy proposals. In *Education and the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa* (1990), his speeches and essays address the relationship between education and national liberation. A year before South Africa's democratic elections, Alexander's *Some Are More Equal Than Others* (1993) is an analytical and a polemical assessment of the events and political circumstances that coalesced to produce the negotiated compromise and eventual ANC electoral victory in 1994. His *Robben Island Dossier* was published in 1994 but was written after his release from Robben Island in 1974. The dossier is a "report to the international community" on relationships and conditions prisoners experienced on the island. In *An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa* (2002), Alexander explores and critiques the "rainbow nation" that was politically constructed by the ruling ANC incumbents.

Alexander was born in October 1936 in Cradock in the Eastern Cape to Dimbiti Bisho, a school teacher, and to David James Alexander, a carpenter. His formal schooling years were spent at the Holy Rosary Convent in Cradock and he matriculated in 1952. The University of Cape Town was his next stop, where he spent six years, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts, an Honours and a Master's in German. At university, he joined the Non-European Unity Movement's students' affiliate, the Cape Peninsula Students' Union, and then accepted a scholarship to attend the University of Tübingen in Germany and complete his doctorate "on style change in the dramatic work of Gerhart Hauptmann". Alexander then joined the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa and was expelled from this political organisation in 1961. He formed a study group of nine people, which was called the Yu Chin

Chan Club, and which in Chinese means guerrilla warfare. This club was disbanded in 1962 and was replaced by the National Liberation Front. He was arrested by the apartheid authorities in 1963, and was put on trial and convicted of "conspiracy to commit sabotage". He spent the next ten years (1964–1974) on Robben Island.

After his release from Robben Island, Alexander was banned from political activity and ordinary human association for five years, which he spent in the working class and lower middle class suburb of Grassy Park in Cape Town. He became the regional director of Sached Trust, an educational non-governmental organisation, in 1981, and was instrumental in gathering left-wing people at the National Forum's launch in 1983. This gathering produced the socialist-inspired "Azanian Manifesto", which is a set of demands and injunctions calling for a socialist state in South Africa, and Alexander is widely acknowledged as the author of this document. As a politically inspired educationist and linguist, Alexander formed the National Language Project and was a prime mover in the establishment of Khanya College, an institution that was created to act as a bridging organisation for black students en route to university study. In the early 1990s he initiated another political organisation, the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action, and used this as a platform for an election campaign in 1994. In 1995 he was appointed by the new South African minister of arts, culture, science and technology to chair a Language Plan Task Group (Langtag), and was also appointed as vice-chairman of the Pan South African Language Board (Pansalb) and functioned in this capacity until 1998. For the period between 2000 and 2002, Alexander was appointed by the minister of education as the convenor of a panel to explore and make recommendations on language for higher education in the country. He then served as a member of the Western Cape Language Committee up until 2005.

He has pioneered proposals for a multilingual society for the better part of 25 years, and has been based at the University of Cape Town-housed Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa since the 1990s, where he has been the director. In 2008 he was awarded the prestigious Linguapax Prize for his work on multilingualism.

Alexander lives in Cape Town. He remains a political and social activist, writer, commentator and theoretician.

Abstract

This study distils some of the principal political and sociological lines of enquiry that Neville Alexander embarked upon in his published writings. It initially sets out to sketch the political, economic and intellectual milieu that he encountered after his release from Robben Island in 1974, and then it addresses the language question, as a part of the national question, in South Africa. The researcher argues that Alexander's "dance" in the world of political and educational interventions has at times been solitary but that his discourse is substantively girded by the writings and experiences of established practitioners in the fields of sociolinguistics, political economy and cultural activities. The study concludes that his policy proposals on language in particular, in spite of the fact that the constitutional and institutional infrastructure exists for their implementation, have been put on the back burner because the dominant linguistic interests of the post-apartheid government correspond with the communication interests of market-driven institutions in the country, and not with the interests of the linguistic majorities who populate the nation.

Keywords:

Class, colour-caste, communication, hegemony, dominance, Marxism, multilingualism, "race", racial capitalism, nation, organic intellectuals, social democracy, socialism.

Introduction

Background

Neville Alexander is a 74-year-old South African socialist intellectual whose continuing life's work is more than simply the sum of his writings. Like most other socially committed intellectuals, his self-declared mission includes writing about and engaging in the universe of ideas to change society (No Sizwe[1] 1979). It may well be a point of wasteful speculation in the corridors of intrigue occupied by idle chatterers, but there is little flippant indulgence to suggest that he is no more and no less a human being who has daily rhythms that are not dissimilar to other human beings. The spaces between his writing outputs are filled by the day-to-day activities of an individual. The philosophical and ideological content of these spaces, and of those spaces that are filled during his writing time, is the interest of this dissertation. This content can range from the ordinary to the spectacular, from deep contemplation to less than solemn thoughts, and from states of discomfort to those of elation.

Alexander's engagement with people is presumably similar to other university-based academics and is marked by the conventionally mundane to the esoterically sublime. These activities seamlessly flow into acts of sitting down and reading, percolating ideas and then writing, and together they produce a dense roadmap to an intellectual gathering. While a biographical and sociological approach along the lines described by Berger and Berger (1976) would be useful to describe the formation of thoughts and their daily gestation, it would imply an interrogation of the roles and thoughts of the main and living actors in the dramatic sketch of Alexander. This is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, a biography of Alexander is already under way.[2]

On the other hand, this dissertation is a qualitative study of Alexander's written work. His writings provide some of the main signposts on a map of the man's complex and evolving identity, and they point to some of the main sociological and political matrices that underpin his own definition of the world and those of his peers, critics and supporters. In studying his writings, it is hoped that some of the spaces that make up the content of his life are afforded some explanation. Alexander is not a politician in the conventional sense of the word, but he is politically motivated and, throughout his adult life, he rarely shied away from

analysing and criticising the consequences of centralised state power, or for that matter, of decentralised state power. In fleshing out some of the details of his historical political and educational choices and proposals, the researcher hopes to draw broader insights about the interests and motivations that drive politically inspired academics and socialist activists whose notions of power are not constrained and dictated to by the need to wield power but to reclaim its meaning so that ordinary people can benefit from its use. This would seem to be the original and well-intentioned implication of Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah's "political kingdom" in his and his liberation movement's quest for national liberation and social emancipation.

What separates Alexander from many other academics is that his pursuit of knowledge, be it in the areas of his educational expertise or in political theory, is anchored in the existential imperative to act in the "here and now". For Alexander, as a thought leader, "knowledge for knowledge sake" is the antithesis of a "pedagogy of the oppressed" (Freire 1970) and is not a sufficiently compelling motivation to pursue social enquiry. Instead he locates his literary and productive activity firmly in the realm of "praxis" as Gramsci (1971; 1996) explains, in which reflection and action are coterminous determinants and symbiotic participants in the creation of socially conscious knowledge. Alexander places his writings at the "service" of humanity, and through his writings, he advocates the primacy of working class interests over those of other classes and other sectional interests that drive the dominant and dominated or subordinate groups in society (No Sizwe op cit).

To begin with then, it might be appropriate to list the known facts about Alexander's life. He has been a political prisoner of the apartheid state, a banned individual, a revolutionary activist, a leader of political movements and of political parties, a scholar of German drama, a language specialist committed to alternative education, a radical chronicler and critic of apartheid education, and an academic and policy participant in post-apartheid education in South Africa.[3] He has fulfilled these different roles and functions at different moments and at various times in his life, and some if not all of these roles and characterisations of Alexander have found their several and combined expressions in his writings.

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Literature review

The notion of "transdisciplinarity" is at the core of the researcher's approach to reading, which feeds the main intellectual activity for this dissertation. The seemingly eclectic approach to constructing the baseline arguments for an eventual analysis of Alexander's policy propositions may be construed as a weakness, but the researcher will argue that it captures the "immersion process" of methodology adequately. Through "immersion", the writer works and experientially lives interactive research and supervision in the tertiary faculty through which the dissertation is done. The day-to-day engagement with broader social concerns and political issues is a necessary component of this. Testimony to this "social action research" and transdisciplinarity is the work of Lessem and Schieffer (2010). According to these academics, there is a distinction between the concept of methodology and that of method. Methodology is ideologically laden and needs to take into account the disposition of the researcher and the enabling environment in which the researcher works. This proposition is not dissimilar to experiential-based training in other creative or productive activities.

Philosophy, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2006), is "the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence". Ideology, according to the same dictionary, is "a system of ideas and principles forming the basis of an economic or political theory". Ideology is also "the set of beliefs held by a particular group".

For academic and the "organic" intellectuals described by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1971), it is a matter of dispute whether enquiries into the "nature of being" (Lukacs 1978) precede ideological commitments, or whether ideological convictions shape the philosophical underpinnings of the intellectual. This introduces a further problematic, which perches uneasily on the summit of a historical clash between notions of socialisation through social upbringing and the systematic acquisition of ideas through active and self-conscious training, self-inspired reading and learning. It points to the millennia-old philosophical extremes captured in the assertions about deeds and ideas, and how these two concepts vie for dominance in the creation of individuals. For dialectical materialists and their celebrated nineteenth century proponents, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "in the beginning was the deed". What seems to be their essential message is that written representations of ideas flow

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from actions. It is this maxim, formulated by these acknowledged philosophers and political economists, which led them to assert the primacy of the deed over the idea. Struik (1971:47)[4] quotes the well-known sentence from the Communist Manifesto: "The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it."

While this study accepts that there is an unsolved dilemma posited in the aphorism, "in the beginning was the deed", and in the equally infamous conceptual opposite and religious pillar, "in the beginning was the Word", it further accepts that ideology is an acquired set of beliefs whose philosophical underpinnings and implied moral choices are also acquired through a combination of socialisation, individual and collective struggles, reading and sometimes through that completely non-materialistic phenomenon called "faith". But then again, "moral choice" can be an unscientific attachment and can fly in the face of accomplished facts and established practices. For example, if a dominant group continues to suppress a subjugated group of people, the repetitive act of suppression does not make it right even if, for proponents of social Darwinism, it may well confirm that the "fittest survive". Faith can turn out just to be a belief in the value of ordinary human beings and their mores, rather than a scientific breakdown of people's places in the economy and their location in the proverbial food chain. Early Marxists have often been criticised for drawing a linear relationship between the act of production and the embrace of beliefs. They have been lampooned as "deterministic" and "structuralist", and reams of paper have been filled to dismiss their assertions about the stubborn links between economics, politics and ideology. This research aims to discuss these and other concerns in order to establish their continued relevance in what Therborn (1980) alludes to in his cryptic sociological juxtaposition and title of his book, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*.

It is disputable that if a person has been privy or subject to certain influences in his or her life, then necessarily those influences will determine the person's character or interests. A linear relationship between one's economic position in society and what one becomes is a point of view that tends to replace "agency" with "compliance", or with "acquiescence". While it may well be true that economic position could affect a person's demeanour and provide a template to understand his or her responses to life's challenges, it is a leap of faith to conclude that one's place in the economy and one's evolving surroundings can wholly explain an individual's identity.

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As a working point of departure, this study assumes that a person's evolving identity is made up of its constituent parts, but for these parts to be understood, history and context are significant sociological sites to consider.

The readings for the study span the disciplines of philosophy, history, politics and ideology, economics, linguistics and education. While artificial boundaries have been constructed to separate these disciplines, and does lead to "silo-type" thinking in academic writing, this accepted practice at tertiary institutions does have its advantages, most important of which is that it provides a useful schematic to characterise the principal influences that have informed the writer's theoretical template.

In the field of philosophy, the researcher elaborates on the clash and synergy between selected variations of Marxism and Sartre's and De Beauvoir's existentialism. Both approaches can be germane in understanding humanity's essential nature. Both schools of thought are based on notions of radically changing existing power arrangements that regulate society. The synergy between these schools of thought is the vision of a new reality primarily promoted by a radical intelligentsia, an engaged mandarin class of intellectuals or a "thinking elite". While Marxism employs techniques of social enquiry that deal with the interests and motivations of large groups of people, or social classes, the existential method and framework focus in large part on the imperatives of the individual. In studying the written texts of Alexander, the researcher maintains that public and private interests are at work in the development of his propositions.

In the discipline of history, the researcher focuses exclusively on secondary material that details the historical evolution of, and changes in the South African state, especially but not limited to the period of the 1970s to the present. The researcher also provides an account of the influence of Western Marxism, Soviet Marxism, Stalinism and Trotskyism on the thinking of the generation (the 1970s to the present) of political and social activists who came to be associated with socialist discourse in South Africa. These are woven into the narrative on Alexander's evolving views and provide the "structural" and intellectual backdrop to his political and educational analyses.

In the conceptual terrain of politics and ideology, the researcher leans principally on the writings of Marxist and social-democratic philosophers and theorists. Politics, the

researcher argues, needs to be understood not only as institutions of state power, or as "state apparatuses" (Althusser 1971), but also as the civic agency encapsulated in civil society and citizenship (Gramsci 1971; Habermas 1984).

In the field of socio-economics and/or political economy, the works of Mandel (1973), Saul and Gelb (1981), O'Meara (1975; 1997), Turok (1986; 1991), Nattrass (1990), Nolutshungu (1982), Mbeki (2009) and the diverse range of articles in the *South African Labour Bulletin* and in the contemporary pro-government journal, *New Agenda,* and relevant government and non-governmental websites have been used as a theoretical backdrop to develop a picture of the South African political economy, and of Alexander's cryptic, if not detailed assessment of capitalist development in the country.

In the field signposted by linguistics, education and politics, the researcher sketches the main themes of sociolinguistics and political critique propounded by Groys (2009), Chomsky (1988; 2006), Foucault (1979) and Eco (2003, 2008), and compares these with Alexander's theses.

While a transdisciplinary approach implies the embrace of different ideas and techniques used across and between the disciplines that make up social and natural sciences, the researcher has tilted this study in favour of writings that capture conversations about political economy, language and nation building.

Rationale

The "actually existing"[5] reality of globalisation and the consolidation of the market economy have resulted in the reluctant acceptance and, at times, willing embrace by academic leaderships of the fact that capitalism has been victorious as the second decade of the 21st century unfolds. Research about philosophical issues, especially those that underpin the "softer" disciplines of languages and culture, has been sidelined and is being replaced by intellectual enquiry that is "market driven" and in tune with technological advances that are "relevant". In the opinion of the researcher, the language of the Left is being systematically replaced by a particular English diction that reflects the power of money and the competitive order of the market. Individualism and the pursuit of private interests have been elevated into

the top echelons of virtuous activity. This leap to the Right and neoliberalism is criticised by Nash (1999) as capitulation.[6]

This was not always the case. The period of the 1970s and 1980s was marked by an upsurge in popular protest and challenge, not only in South Africa but on the rest of the African continent. The victories over colonialism and neo-colonialism were accompanied by a concomitant growth in the literature and a new crop of post-liberation theorists, academics and historians. John Saul, Michael Löwy (1981), Issa Shivji and Walter Rodney (1971; 2003) combined sympathetic critiques of liberation movements and radical nationalism with sound historical analyses that helped change the language of the Left, and locally grown historians and analysts such as Charles van Onselen, Belinda Bozzoli, and a crop of black activist intellectuals such as Alexander, Steven Bantu Biko, Pallo Jordan and many others provided different incubators for radical intellectuals to germinate and grow. The common thread that linked these different theorists and activists was their commitment to some variation of socialism. This, of course, was a wide open ideological space to fill, especially so in the context of pre-1994 South Africa.

Alexander is one of the unique unsung casualties in the literary war of attrition that both Left-inspired and market-driven intellectual warriors have fought. His powerful voice for change has been straitjacketed into sizable bite-size chunks to be discarded by practitioners of power, and regrettably, by peers who have for unknown reasons decided not to engage his thoughts. His passionate and detailed arguments about the irrelevance of "race" in sociology have been met with reticence and silent rejection in neoconservative and radical scholarship. His views on the indelible links between the practice of language and exercise of state power have been ignored, and his policy proposals to retool education strategies have fallen on deaf and unresponsive ears. Moreover, his use of the Indian-inspired concept of "colour-caste" in his analysis of the South African social formation has failed to resonate, even among his radical contemporaries in sociology.

This study is an effort to revisit these and many other unique contributions to social theory and enquiry that Alexander has made, and develop these into working assumptions and premises for an "existential Marxism". The exclusion of Alexander from mainstream intellectual conversations has been at times deliberate. The researcher argues that

Alexander's exclusion has been as a result of political arrangements and historical affiliations that may have to do with the exercise and the allure of power, or with the lack of influence in the portals of political power of equally adept and insightful individuals in his peer group. And yet, it is no coincidence that South African Communist Party stalwart Harold Wolpe was arguably the closest intellectual ally of Alexander in his expositions of what constitutes the South African nation. But even this affinity has not seen the proverbial light of day, and Alexander's views have somehow remained hidden in the interstices of the marginalised and fractured Left in the country. The researcher will argue that Alexander's radical theses need to be reiterated, re-examined and analysed for their practical implications to build a new and socialist society.

Aims of the study

The principal aim of this study is to identify, track and contextualise the elements of philosophy and ideology that arrested the imagination of Alexander and that came to resonate in his writings. To achieve this aim, the dissertation will attempt to outline Alexander's interpretation of key philosophical premises and persistent ideological constructs that appealed to him in his writings on politics, language and power, and how particular philosophies and ideologies came to be "refracted"[7] through him. This study is an attempt to understand the "refraction" of ideologies and philosophies through the works of this linguistic and political activist. It necessarily has to interrogate the philosophical influences on Alexander to be able to analyse the writings themselves, and to present a defensible argument about Alexander's changing identity over the past 30 years. In the researcher's opinion, Leon Trotsky's notion of refraction is a useful grid through which to view the writings of Alexander.

This outline can be partly understood if successive intellectual and political "conjunctures" in his literary life are described and laid bare. This is not to say that his life can be defined by a chronological series of Rubicon crossings or of Damascene "moments", nor does it mean that his writings can be packaged in neatly defined and discernible stages, but it does mean that particular snapshots of an evolving intellectual life can be used to understand the hardening or softening of certain ideas in his writings. In particular, this study

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has set out to develop a picture of the political milieu in which Alexander had entered and had operated in at different stages in his activist and academic career.

Subsidiary aims of the study have sought to problematise and analyse the notion of Alexander as a political and educational icon in the local and global context. The study attempts to develop a political and an educational organisational map of the principal influences on his unfolding and changing identity. In this construction of his identity and its evolution, an attempt has been made to elaborate on the meaning and substance of the concept of "identity", which can be self-defined or imposed, or it could be a combination of self-perception and the perception of other people. In this part of the study, particular attention is given to Benedict Anderson's notions of "imagination and association"[8], which political scientist Dirk Kotze has used in his analysis of evolving "national" and "state" identities, which he locates firmly in Anderson's notion of nations as "imagined communities"[9].

In sketching the backdrop to Alexander's critiques about the direction the post-apartheid state has taken on politics, language and education, the study provides a historical and cartographic sketch of educational and language policies, and attempts to ascertain the dominant economic imperatives driving these policies. It records the continuing struggles for transformation and Alexander's role in them. To this end, a chronological map of his language policy proposals is outlined, and unavoidably, the study captures critical reflections on the limitations of the South African social-democratic state.

The problem statement

In seeking to answer the question, "Who is Neville Alexander?", the researcher records views and analyses of the changing intellectual and political-economic environment in which Alexander has operated. Alongside this, the researcher interrogates selected sources of inspiration that have influenced the man. By so doing, the researcher intends to place in relief the key arguments that point to possible answers to the subsidiary questions, "What does he represent?" and "Who does he represent?".

To answer the principal and subsidiary questions posited in this problem statement, the researcher provides a typology of the political-economic and educational contours of

three lines of sociological enquiry. These three lines are: the dialectics of class and "race"; the dialectics of nation-building; and the dialectics of individual human agency, class position and/or determination (in other words, what in sociological parlance has been reduced to a contestation between "culturalism" and "structuralism"[10]).

Firstly, Alexander has asserted that the strategic alliance between the "black working class and radicalised sections of the middle classes" (No Sizwe 1979) is the axis around which fundamental change will hinge in South Africa. The promotion of these class interests has been a political signature of his writings over 30 years, ever since the publication of his *One Azania, One Nation*. For Alexander, the black working class is both the historical agency through which political change can be effected and the class "for itself" that has the potential to humanise society and its institutional forms. This position he has shared with other Marxist thinkers, not only locally but internationally. But a key consideration in this assertion, and an avenue for critical examination, is that Alexander has not been overtly active in black working class organisations, such as trade unions, and for the most part of his adult life, he was intensely involved in radically inspired middle class organisations. While this may be used as a criticism by his political opponents, the historical focus of his political activity is no different to legions of other socialist-inspired intellectuals across the world, whose self-defined missions may well have been to promote working class interests but whose practices are prescribed by and concentrated in petty bourgeois organisations, and the values and norms that are assumed to be associated with this class of people. Alexander's assumption is that the radicalised middle class will eventually "commit class suicide" and have its class interests subsumed and subordinated to those of black workers whose "historical mission" is to replace capitalist property relations with a more equitable distribution of ownership.

But Alexander was not alone in his advocacy of working class interests. The variations of "Western Marxism" – started mainly in Western Europe and encapsulated in the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, Georg Lukács, the so-called Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas – have had a significant influence on the generation of white and black university students in South Africa in the 1970s. These radical and liberal students generated new insights and lines of political investigation into the country's growing body of anti-establishment social theory. These students and intellectuals also produced harsh critiques of African nationalism. The theoretical contributions by the Western Marxists and the South African cohort, led by academic Richard Turner, had little impact on the dominant and overt political organisations

of the oppressed people and their leaderships, which at the time included the black consciousness movement. Their influence was predominantly registered in the black trade union movement, as Karis and Gerhart (1972) and Nash (1999) explain. But a key concept emerged from this group of trade union-based intellectuals. They coined the term "racial capitalism" [11] to describe the economic and political order that obtained in South Africa, and Alexander adopted this notion in his analysis of the national question. While incidental to this study, the concept was a deliberate effort on the part of a small but vibrant group of thinkers who were also opposed to the Communist Party of South Africa's description of the economic and social order as a "colonialism of a special type" [12].

Not dissimilar to the radical critiques produced by the scholarship of Western Marxists, Alexander developed his theses on the symbiotic relationship between capitalist development and the political order embedded in the notion of "race" and racial classification. But while the concept of racial capitalism was accepted by Alexander in his expositions, he parted with the so-called white Left in South Africa, and indeed with the broad liberation movement [13], on the question of "race" itself. Alexander premised his theory on the rejection of "race" as a valid sociological or biological entity, whereas the white Left and theoreticians of the ANC, the PAC of Azania, and to a lesser extent the black consciousness movement, still accepted the notion that different "races" exist.

Secondly, this study of Alexander's writings is a preliminary step to understand and posit a historical-political context for his continued and persistent belief in a "socialist Azania". There are two separate conceptual issues that need to be addressed in this assertion. The first is the advocacy of socialism. South Africa has embraced and continues to embrace a capitalist way of life in which property relations have not been fundamentally altered since the advent of democracy in 1994. The African National Congress (ANC) remains the governing party since its electoral victory in 1994 and has historically been steered by people who have been described by analysts and commentators as "middle class" with "bourgeois aspirations". [14] Alexander's writings on language and education imply the dismantling of existing property relations and their replacement by a more equitable distribution of ownership.

The second conceptual issue is Alexander's usage of the concept "Azania". "Azania" is his preferred name for a liberated and socialist South Africa, and is a distinctly African-centred concept.[15] While historians and political ideologues may well differ over the origins of the concept, Azania is a derivative of "Zanj", a Swahili concept that can be roughly translated as a "mythical kingdom of the black people". In a considered textbook for "students of history" in southern Africa, Neil Parsons (1982:25) gives the following historical description of the concept:

> 'Azania' was the name given to the east coast of Africa in a shipping guide to the Indian Ocean, titled *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, first published in Greek in the 2nd century AD. The Greek word Azania was taken from the Persian name 'Zanji-bar', meaning the coast of the *zanj* (black) people. The Persian word still survives in the name of Zanzibar island. Persians and Arabians traded along the Azania coast, from Mogadishu south to Inhambane Bay in southern Mozambique, from the first few centuries AD.

Alexander's use of the concept of Azania is both provocative and, it would seem, historically deliberate. The concept was first used politically by Nkrumah in 1958 at the All-African People's Convention and then by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of Azania in 1961. It was inherited by the founders of the Black Consciousness Movement after the launch of the South African Students' Organisation in 1969 to describe a future liberated South Africa. In adopting this idea as the title of his political testament, Alexander's provocation is an intellectual challenge and an invocation of political memory. To the researcher's knowledge, he has opposed nationalism since his political baptism through his membership and participation in former political organisations. The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (Apdusa) and the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) were his training ground. His book, *One Azania, One Nation*, presents a materialist analysis of the South African "nation". In the book, he challenges the notion of "race" and he analyses the political realm in which it functions as an organising tool for social manipulation and engineering. According to Alexander, the idea of "race" is politically motivated and has no biological or scientific basis for its use. Alexander's concept of nation and nationhood follows the broad contours of argument and description that Anderson (1991) posits.

Yet, despite the acknowledged and arguably sound theoretical underbelly of his thoughts, Alexander's voice has remained muted in the local corridors of policy making and academic discussions.

This is not a dilemma exclusive to a study of Alexander and his ideas. While this may well be a generalisation, it would be prudent to say that Alexander remains a living part of the Aristotelian hope and view that "all men by nature desire to know" in Plato's kingdom of philosophy [16], where argument and reasoning occupy preciously guarded seats in the courts of discourse. Moreover, how does one "explain" the almost dogged attachment to beliefs in systems of social and economic organisation that have not, as yet, been practised in South Africa, but have had their own peculiar manifestations in countries such as the former Soviet Union, Cuba, China, former East Germany and Hungary? Groys (2009) argues forcefully in his powerful book on the "linguistification" of society for the need to revisit the critiques of the former Soviet Union and the understanding of language as the medium through which power is exercised. While the proverbial battle between socialist and capitalist discourses will continue to occupy pride of place in the globalised village of academic affiliations and economic imperatives driving research areas, post-colonial theorisations about South Africa still hold the danger of taking their cue from Eurocentric points of departure in which indigenous African knowledge systems are given scant attention.

Alexander develops, and it could be argued that he breaks with the classical Marxist tradition of analysing South Africa's historical development solely in terms of class formation and class struggles. He interrogates the "constitutive rules" [17] that lie at the root of the changing political authority before and after the country's first democratic elections in 1994.

As the new South Africa increasingly slips into what can be called a language of mediocrity that underpins postmodernism and market-driven discourses, and as the Gini coefficient spirals increasingly upwards, despite the self-conscious efforts by the ruling party and the current government to describe their efforts as being in tune with the demands of a "developmental state", an embrace of alternative policies on language, education and social justice may have to be injected into the central portals of power and the perception of power. This is what Alexander has attempted to do without too much success. The dominant alignment of black, and increasingly parasitic, petty bourgeois interests and international capital has successfully outmanoeuvred alternative world views. This is not to say that

conflicts and contradictions within the emerging black middle class, or between this social class and the different fractions of capital, are non-existent. What it does mean is that the central government has successfully managed the transition to a fully fledged capitalist state through a carefully constructed socially appealing economic policy, and a sophisticated media and public relations campaign. The South African government has been adept at securing popular support through making its middle class interests and values the "general interests" of the nation. The language that accompanies the policies of "black economic empowerment", or formerly "affirmative action", is testimony to the government's refusal to accept radically alternative terms of communication. Socialist discourse has very simply been replaced by the language of the historical misnomer called the "free market".

Thirdly, and in an effort to recapture and develop the radical conversations of the 1970s and 1980s, and in fact to reintroduce an existential Marxist lexicon into the contemporary body politic of literature, the researcher argues that the Sartrian existentialist movement's insistence that the "personal is political" has direct relevance for a study that proclaims to be an investigation into the shaping of an identity, as this dissertation does. In this context, and at some level of abstraction, Therborn's "ideology of power" is indeed the dominant set of beliefs that make up the power arrangements regulating society, and his "power of ideology" points to the human agency, the individual, and the institutions exercising that power.

On philosophy, Marxism and existentialism have been uncomfortable bedfellows, and the efforts at separating or at merging the schools of thought are legendary in the celebrated annals of philosophical reconstruction and revision. While the various shifts, debates and personalities are relevant for a historical perspective on these different schools, this study will narrow its focus to considerations that Ernest Mandel and George Novack (1970), Carr (1961) and Deutscher (1963) raise in relation to the role of the individual in history. The historical mission of Marxism has been to underplay the role of the individual. Its theorists have argued that courses of history are determined by the "objective" interplay of classes, and individuals play an incidental role in the unfolding of history. The philosophers of existence, the existentialists, have placed human agency at the forefront of changing social realities, and individuals as the main actors. In studying Alexander's writings, the researcher will seek to combine relevant characteristics of Marxism, especially those that relate to identifying the organisational forces in shaping the man's identity, and those of existentialism. The

researcher acknowledges that the nuances, divergences and synchronicities between the two schools of thought require further and detailed elaboration, but will be briefly discussed later in this dissertation.

On history, politics and ideology, South African archives and libraries are well-fitted with conservative, liberal, neoliberal and Marxist writings on the development of the social formation from pre-colonial through colonial, post-colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid times. Within each paradigm, the facts presented tend to serve the writer or the intended audience. The researcher will concentrate on the historical writings that are ideologically closest to Alexander's interpretation of the country's history, and the focus will be on the past 30 years. Alongside this, the researcher looks critically at Gramsci's, Carr's, Novack's and Deutscher's thoughts about what constitutes an intellectual, especially the sociological and political elements that coalesce to form an "organic intellectual".

On political economy, the researcher's interest dovetails with Alexander's source materials. The body of literature covering manufacturing, mining, and to a lesser extent, agriculture, has been adequately filled by Marxist, social-democratic and liberal scholarship in South Africa. The new wave of free enterprise warriors, led locally by people such as Bernstein (2010), among others, presents a world view that is firmly locked into the presumed virtues of the market economy, and is of incidental interest to the researcher, despite its dominant resonance in the current South African government and its embrace of a benevolent capitalism. While the study outlines the various stages of South Africa's capitalist development, the period 1970 to 2010 is covered more intensively and extensively. This has been done to correspond with the periodisation of this study on Alexander.

On language, literature and power, the short but seminal work by Groys on the "linguistification" of the Soviet Union has been used as one of paradigmatic frameworks in which Alexander's expositions on these issues are studied and analysed. The intention is to argue that language choice and its promotion are at the centre of any state's interest to make the world and its subjects in its own image. In the South African case, while the democratic state has passed legislation that allows for 11 languages to have "official" status in spoken and written communication, English remains the dominant means and medium. Alexander suggests that English has acquired its high status in the hierarchy of language choice because its promotional driver is the market and the government. The researcher locates these

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concerns about language use and adoption in a global and African context, and invokes the authority of some of the leading thinkers on writing, language and power.

Research methodology

This is a qualitative and transdisciplinary study of Alexander's written work, which can be seen as a product of and an inspiration for the civil society and political organisations that he has participated in. It relies almost exclusively on secondary material, transcripts of papers and speeches, and books written by Alexander, and critiques or commentaries on Alexander's written work. Limited primary source material will also be used, adding new voices to and elaborating on historical and political contexts, and thereby presenting a range of contextual considerations about the man and his work.

To study the "role of the individual in history"[18], a survey of perceptions may be necessary, but this would involve a discursive detour into subsidiary interviews with Alexander's peers and his protégés. While this would undoubtedly add weight to a discussion of his iconic role and status, and indeed contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of his biography, it would also detract from the main intent of this research, which is to study his written work.

But a self-reflective and cautious note may be pertinent. Paraphrasing Alexander's arguments may well be a useful exercise in convincing the reader that the researcher has indeed understood the texts, but as with most interpretations of original texts, this holds the potential consequence of possible misinterpretation or of crude representations of his often nuanced and richly textured arguments. In the world of print and broadcasting media, for example, interviewees often claim that their statements have been misquoted or quoted "out of context". When this happens, the reader or listener is left with the question of verifying veracity. While the philosophical underpinnings of what constitutes "truth" are necessary to interrogate, what is of immediate relevance for this study is to state that interviewees are perfectly justified in questioning the contextual framework that interviewers use to quote, or indeed and often unintentionally to misquote, their subjects. But whether one is constructing a journalistic article or an academic dissertation, there is the ever-present criticism that one is

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presenting a distillation of another person's words and deeds. The accusation that the writer or the researcher is "selecting" facts and presenting a biased interpretation of the interviewee's or research subject's views is correct, because the writer does indeed select those facts and opinions that appeal to him or her, and then proceeds to write about them, often at the expense of other opinions or salient facts the interviewee may have. This selection of what is appealing is the lot of all writers, whether it is Alexander or the researcher and writer of this study.

Paraphrasing has its place in dissertations, but this is not a problem statement. Far more relevant for this study is that Alexander, to this day, continues to propose language and educational policies that go "beyond" mainstream and government-initiated proposals. The principal research assumption of this dissertation is that he is acutely aware of the limitations of a social-democratic state, but he persists in proposing language and educational alternatives that may or may not be taken up by the governing authorities. A problematic suggested by this persistence can be found in two interrelated questions: is there a need to analyse concepts that are destined to be ignored or rejected by officialdom; and how does one measure the efficacy of concepts because official resistance to their adoption means that they have not been translated into government policy? The researcher takes the unambiguous view that it is in the interest of scholarship and humanity to investigate Alexander's theses.

The researcher's intention is to understand and where appropriate criticise Alexander, and to question whether a "symptomatic reading" – these words are used by Stuart Hall in his chapter titled "The 'Political' and the 'Economic' in Marx's Theory of Classes" that appears in Hunt's book (1977:18) to describe and criticise the works of French philosopher and academic Althusser on Karl Marx – has been done. As Hall explains:

> It is one thing to read a text with one eye always on the matrix of conceptual premises, and propositions which generate it, gives it what theoretical coherence it possesses – and also helps us to identify its 'silences', its absences. 'Reading for absence' is certainly one of the principal foundations of critical theoretical practice. But it is quite another to operate a 'symptomatic reading' like a theoretical guillotine, beheading any concept which has the temerity to stray from the appointed path.

This study on Alexander's literary output is qualitative in the sense that it is interpretive and not necessarily normative. By focusing on the individual's writings, the methodology adopted in the study follows the broad contours of argument proposed by Lessem and Schieffer (2010) and by Badenhorst (2003). It is underpinned by "small-scale" research. Large empirical data samples have not been examined. The study is non-statistical; it is subjective because it encompasses the personal involvement of the researcher; and it investigates what is ordinarily taken for granted. These microconcepts and individual perspectives lend themselves to a field of research that involves "negotiated meanings and personal constructs". By its very nature, the methodology applied in this dissertation cannot be quantitative. This is further borne out by the fact that the relationship between the researcher and the subject is "close" as opposed to the quantitative "distant", and the researcher writes as an "insider" on the subject matter. The interactive nature of the research implies that the researcher is continually processing the "images of social reality", and these images are indeed socially constructed and not static. Not unlike the perception that nations are constructed realities, this research relies on the ability of the researcher to produce images of Alexander that are in the first instance his own projection of what constitutes the subject's reality.

The interpretive method implied in qualitative research could require in-depth interviews with both Alexander and the people who have worked with him. The researcher has decided not to use questionnaires as the principal interviewing tools to gather information from Alexander, his peers and his protégés. In a bigger study that interrogates the symbiosis between organisations and Alexander, and between other people and Alexander, questionnaires may well be necessary.

Document analysis is the cornerstone of the research method. The major part of the research is focused on studying and analysing books, articles, interviews, journals and magazines, papers delivered at conferences and speeches that were either written by Alexander, or written by other theorists and academics about the language question and the structural milieu and "sociological sites" in which identities are formed and transformed. The researcher intends exploring the dialectic that persists between writing output and historical context that shapes, and is shaped by, socially committed literary production.

Outline of the study

The study comprises four chapters, and this "Introduction". All chapter subtitles are variations on the theme of this thesis, "The Dance of an Intellectual Mandarin".

In Chapter One, the researcher provides a sociopolitical and conceptual time line of Alexander's work and life up to 2010. It is subtitled "An Exclusive Dance?", and the researcher discusses the conceptual elements that support the researcher's descriptive assertion of Alexander as a mandarin. It also sets out to outline the key theoretical constructs that the researcher intends exploring in later chapters.

Chapter Two is subtitled "The Ballroom and the Dance Floor". In this chapter, the researcher explores the sociopolitical, economic and cultural context in which Alexander has operated, and in which he has entered as an interventionist to change mainstream and popular thinking on education and language. The research sketches the political and economic contours of Afrikaner and white capitalist hegemony, and the responses to that hegemony by the different and often competing sections of the liberation movement. It especially highlights the theoretical contributions to liberation theory that Alexander has made. Included in this chapter will be an assessment of liberal and Marxist traditions in South Africa's body politic of opposition and resistance to apartheid.

Chapter Three is subtitled "Imagining the Tunes". In this chapter, the researcher seeks to problematise and analyse the language question in South Africa. The chapter selectively tracks the post-apartheid state's educational and language policies, and Alexander's responses to these. It records his resistance to "dominant" developments in the country around education, politics and power.

Chapter Four is subtitled "Towards a New Orchestra and Dance Routines". In this concluding chapter, the researcher critically analyses Alexander's contributions to the evolving and changing sociopolitical, educational and language debates, locally and internationally.

This thesis takes as its cue the idea that Marxism remains relevant as an analytical tool of social praxis. The researcher argues that existential Marxism and its postmodernist

interpretations, while their origins may well lie in the Europe, enhance the growing body of knowledge in the social sciences in Africa.

Limitations and delimitations

The study attempts to cover Alexander's writing output since 1979. In that year, Zed Press published his major work, *One Azania, One Nation*. The researcher has decided to use this year as the point of departure for his survey and analysis of Alexander's writings because few of his (Alexander's) published works preceded this year. This periodisation of Alexander's work narrows the study to 30 years.

While biographical details are covered selectively in the dissertation, the study is not a biography of Alexander. It does not explore his private life as background or as an accompaniment to his development as an intellectual activist. However, where pertinent, specific people and their unique contributions to his formation as a socialist intellectual are mentioned.

The study does not interrogate Alexander's writings before 1979, which is the year that his book, *One Azania, One Nation*, was published under the pseudonym, No Sizwe. Where necessary and if available, the researcher refers to writings prior to 1979 if these are relevant to constructing or capturing an argument in his later writings.

As with most dissertations, the literature review is selective and deliberately narrow to allow for a systematic reading of the conceptual issues that need to be addressed. The pool of data is a conceptual pool, as opposed to an empirical pool, that draws on a very wide range of publications covering various fields in the social sciences. While the literature review spans several disciplines, the researcher narrows its focus to written works that answer questions related to politics (nations and nation-building projects, power, individuals in history), economics (on South Africa's development as a capitalist state) and ideology.

The body of literature that has been used for the thesis is a selection of books, journals, articles, commentaries and interviews that the researcher has read, accumulated and borrowed over 30 years. By far the bulk of this literature has been written by socialist or Marxist-inspired thinkers and practitioners. For the researcher, this bias in choosing the literature has been both intentional and fortuitous. The researcher opines that the volumes of

literature generated by conservative, neoconservative or neoliberal intellectuals do not address, nor do they develop the social concerns that the Marxist and social-democratic writers are guided by. This may be seen as a limitation to this study, but it is a self-imposed delimitation that the researcher is prepared to defend.

In conclusion, an investigation into the norms of organisations and how they function could provide a theoretical matrix for an interpretation of the possible effects that these organisations may have had on Alexander and his identity, but equally significant would be how his ideas shaped the organisations in which he has participated. The researcher acknowledges that the limits and boundaries of symbiotic influence – organisation on individual and *vice versa* – are not easily defined, and can lead to only rough approximations of a prism through which an understanding of the dissonance and synchronicity between his activist life and his *weltanschauung* is possible. This symbiosis between organisation and philosophy or ideology will be addressed in another study that the researcher will be undertaking on Alexander's work and life.

Notes

[1] No Sizwe is the pseudonym that Alexander used.

[2] Crain Soudien, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, has informed the researcher that he is writing Alexander's biography.

[3] This can be gleaned from a range of sources, including internet references, and private reconstructions from friends and colleagues.

[4] See an enlightening conversation in Struik's book, *Birth of the Communist Manifesto*, about the origins and debates underpinning one of the most powerful action-oriented and action-based documents/pamphlets of 19th century revolutionary movements.

[5] This concept is borrowed from former East German intellectual Rudolf Bahro.

[6] In a hard-hitting response to the abandonment, if not destruction of Marxism in South Africa, Nash writes in 1999: "And yet, after keeping alive for two decades a critique of the capacity for class compromise within the liberation struggle, the leading figures of this generation capitulated almost without exception to the imperatives of the market and the crudest forms of bourgeois ideology. The most conspicuous emblem of this capitulation, Alec Erwin, once a strategist of revolutionary socialism in the trade union movement, is now a leading proponent of neo-liberalism as a minister in Mandela's and Mbeki's governments. If a Marxism which developed in such propitious circumstances could be so rapidly and decisively undone, the prospects of rebuilding a Marxist culture today must seem bleak indeed."

[7] In June 1933, Leon Trotsky wrote a pamphlet titled "What is National Socialism?". He presented an analysis of the rise of fascism and of Hitler, and started off his propaganda piece with the following: "Naive minds think that the office of kingship lodges in the king himself, in his ermine cloak and his crown, in his flesh and bones.

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As a matter of fact, the office of kingship is an interrelation between people. The king is king only because the interests and prejudices of millions of people are *refracted* [my italics] through his person." The original pamphlet was published in *The Modern Thinker*, October 1933. The researcher's use of the concept of refraction is premised on the idea that individuals are constituted in relation to other people, and that "stations" or occupations in life are in fact relations between people and their cumulative histories and knowledge.

[8] Dirk Kotze is a political scientist at Unisa.

[9] Anderson's work on nations as "imagined communities", which was first published in 1983, has had a significant impact on Alexander's thinking.

[10] See Cross, M. (1992) *Resistance and Transformation*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers. Cross provides a short and useful, even though inaccurate, account of Alexander's presumed "radical structuralism" (167–194). He likens Alexander's advocacy of South Africa's black working class as the "historical" agency to effect fundamental change in relations of production, and therefore in the emergence of a national culture, to French structural Marxist Louis Althusser's insistence on the "role of structures" in causing change, as opposed to what he (Cross) sees as Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's focus on the role of human agency (i.e. the individual) in social processes.

[11] The original formulator of the concept "racial capitalism" is difficult to establish, but it was extensively used by socialists aligned to the trade union movement, in particular to the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu), and then it appeared in the political journal of the ANC-aligned Marxist Workers' Tendency, *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*. It was used interchangeably with "apartheid capitalism", the equally challenging characterisation of the socio-economic and political order that obtained in South African for much of the 20th century.

[12] "Colonialism of a special type" is a notion that was advanced by the Communist Party of South Africa to describe apartheid society. It gained currency in the 1970s and the 1980s but was lambasted by most political tendencies that were organising popular struggles outside the presumed mandates of the ANC. The notion was vital because it determined the strategic option favoured by the CPSA not to challenge the pillars of capitalism, but to struggle, alongside the ANC, for full democratic rights (a special type of colonialism, the party's theorists argued, still had to be dismantled and replaced by a state in which universal franchise was operational). The non-ANC Left opposed this quest because the political strategy produced by this perception of the society meant the implementation of a "two-stage revolution": first, the attainment of a political kingdom of political human rights; and second, at some future point the attainment of a socialist state. While this was the dominant view of the CPSA during this period, it must be noted that party stalwarts Harold Wolpe and Ruth First, according to Andrew Nash, had "called into question" the "coherence" of the two-stage theory as early as 1975 and 1978, respectively. In 2010, the Communist Party remains somewhat stuck in the first "stage" of its two-stage revolutionary theory, with all the benefits of high office and a solid ANC capitalist government in place. Blade Nzimande, the general secretary of the party, serves as higher education minister in the democratic state. Jeremy Cronin, the deputy general secretary of the party, is the deputy transport minister.

[13] The proscription of the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania and the Communist Party of South Africa, and the imprisonment of leading figures of the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa, the Yu Chin Chan Club, and later the detention and imprisonment of SA Students' Organisation's activists had left a vacuum in organisational protest and challenge to the apartheid state in the 1960s and early 1970s. The liberation movement was more than one organisation or "movement" at the time. The use of the term "liberation movement" refers to a broad political opposition to apartheid and capitalism, and comprised all the major and minor political tendencies that were intent on overthrowing the apartheid state.

[14] The evolution and trajectory of the ANC are recorded elsewhere and will be referenced later in the dissertation.

[15] Alexander's book, *One Azania, One Nation*, is in the opinion of the researcher his political testament and his major theoretical contribution to liberation theory in South Africa. For a more detailed discussion on the origins of the concept of Azania, the historian, Basil Davidson, is a useful resource. While the researcher asserts the African-centred version of the origin of the concept "Zanj" (a Swahili term) as the root of Azania, there is alternative literature suggesting that it has Arabic origins in "Adzan", which is a generic term for East Africa.

[16] Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle are credited with being the founders of Western philosophy and debating forums.

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[17] Contemporary socialist philosopher, legal scholar and advocate for "rethinking thinking" Howard Richards, who is also a "distinguished fellow" at the Unisa-hosted Research Chair in Development Education, uses this concept to describe the norms underpinning the changing and governing threads that knit the different interests and imperatives binding societies. In the South African case, Roman law and its juridical structures and procedures remain in force.

[18] British historian EH Carr and philosopher Isaiah Berlin differ about the role of the individual in history. For Carr, individual agency needs to be understood in the context of particular historical conjunctures, and the possibilities opened up through the divergence and confluence of interests resulting from the clash of classes, whereas Berlin argues forcefully for the acceptance of individual choice and individual will, and chance, in the making of history.

Chapter 1

An Exclusive Waltz?

Meeting Alexander

There is a misconception about Neville Alexander. He has been labelled a Trotskyist, or even less complimentarily, an "ultra-leftist". [1] In the researcher's initial five years of close encounters and then 25 years of occasional and chance meetings with the man, I [2] have never heard him once describe himself as a Trotskyist. Indeed, on one occasion *en route* to the South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached) in Mowbray [3] in 1983, I said to him that I was becoming fascinated with Leon Trotsky's writings. I was especially influenced by Isaac Deutscher's trilogy [4] on the Russian revolutionary. Fired up and inspired by some of the works of established practitioners in socialist thought, I was keen to get to know the Alexander of theory.

At the time, I had read a bit about Antonio Gramsci [5], and I became a follower of his thoughts. I had browsed through Amilcar Cabral's theories on nationalism. I had read as much as I could on the "architect" of Russia's 1917 revolution, Vladimir Lenin, who I thought was an excellent, but an arguably ruthless strategist of political organisation. I wanted Alexander to put a label on his philosophical inclinations and ideological choices. He did not oblige and, I suspect, he decided to humour me instead. He said: "I can't describe myself as a Trotskyist, but there's a lot of good in what Leon Trotsky had to say." And that was the end of that, at least for the time being, and I was left in no doubt that my political mentor was a person who embraced a Marxism that was not of the Stalinist variety.

Alexander was critical of existentialism [6], and I was particularly interested in reading about this school of thought. I was in awe of his status as a socialist ideologue, and as a revolutionary who translated ideas into action, or so it seemed at the time. For me, Alexander was an educated and erudite political animal whose interests jostled and yet coincided with those of my mother and other working class women, and with those of enlightened intellectuals. In these formative years of my political training, he was a person whose

contributions to liberation theory and educational best practices carried the approval of history, and they were maturing.

For a brief while, I basked in the glow of his achievements, his former commitment to the armed overthrow of the apartheid state, his lucid arguments and his agile mind. His outstanding theoretical accomplishment[7], indeed his political testament, was a gripping presence in my thoughts. Alexander, the "old man"[8], represented a body of history that I wanted to get to know. He had an urbane and ascetic lifestyle that I wanted to emulate, and moreover, he had a layered brain that I desired to have access to. While I sensed then that he was able to distil the complex thoughts of Hegel, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Antonio Gramsci, former deputy commissar for culture in Bela Kun's Hungary Georg Lukács, scores of German philosophers, the volumes of theory produced by the likes of Jürgen Habermas, Theodor W Adorno, Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Samora Machel, Ernest Mandel, Alex Callinicos, Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon and Mao Zedong, and convincingly argue against the many distortions of history concocted by Joseph Stalin and the post-1924 Soviet academies of social sciences, it took me a long time afterwards to appreciate his statement that "the most complex thoughts ought to be said simply and understandably"[9], which is an affirmation of Lenin's insistence on simple language.

Left-wing individuals in Cape Town and the mass democratic movement

From about 1972 to 1983, South African liberation history "belonged"[10] to the mass democratic movement inside the country.[11] The black consciousness (BC) movement and the radicalised trade unions had eclipsed the exiled liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of Azania and the Communist Party of South Africa. Alternative literature flooded the internal corridors of communication and exchange linking an expanding left-wing intelligentsia, and there was a growing consciousness and confidence in the Left inside the country about its independence from the "traditional" movements that historically captured the popular imagination through their propaganda of armed struggle, their promotion of non-racism and their opposition to the apartheid government. There was also a growing uneasiness in the Left and its multi-movement affiliations. Whether one was a "Charterist", a "BC type" or an "ultra leftist" became one's passport to secret gatherings and meetings.[12]

In Cape Town and its environs, the Left coalesced around certain individuals and "programmes". For the ANC and the rest of the "Charterists" or the "Congress Movement", Oscar Mpetha was an icon, Johnny Issel and later Trevor Manuel were key organisers, and Theresa Solomon held her own counsel in Mitchells Plain. For the trade union Left, David Lewis was central. For the BC movement, Peter Jones was a black knight in Paarl, and Mandla Seleoane, who was a "young lion", was emerging as a thoughtful political theorist and philosopher. For a civic-based socialist alternative to the Charterists in the Cape, Alexander had gravitational pull. For the Trotskyists within the ANC, who called themselves the Marxist Workers' Tendency, political activists Zackie Achmat and Jack Lewis were instrumental. For the New Unity Movement and its crop of teachers, Richard Dudley had taken over the mantle of Ben Kies, and later transport minister in Nelson Mandela's cabinet Dullah Omar was dismantling his Unity Movement history to link up with the ANC and the United Democratic Front (UDF). On the fringes of the New Unity Movement, Dawood Parker drew intellectuals and students to his South Peninsula Educational Fellowship, which held occasional meetings in Newlands to discuss burning political issues of the day. The white Left was as fractured as the black Left, with individuals from the University of Cape Town occupying centre stage, and Willie Hofmeyer was raising eyebrows with his acts of individual streetwise bravery and political guts. [13]

There was a richness to the ebb and flow of information among the diverse political tendencies and groupings that made up liberation politics at the time, and all known activists represented some or other political programme.

It was a time when everything and anything of left-wing persuasion had to be consumed and spoken about in conspiratorial voices. And among the range of political choices on offer to young activists and budding socialist-inspired intellectuals, Alexander's intellectual magnetism and erudition were compelling. The power of the idea was seductive and ordinary people's interests in creating a better life were his *raison d'être*. Despite not having a substantial mass base or a large constituency and following, it was his insistence on cogent reasoning and lyrical argument that captured the imagination of some politically frustrated and often "hungry" [14] young people. And yet, with all the force of reason and self-effacement, he was and still is able to say: "People all over the world are basically the same." [15] To this day, his acuteness in conversation and his empathy for people still move me.

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What Alexander might have lacked in the cut and thrust of political skill and manipulation, he made up in sheer presence and intellectual authority.

Alexander was, and I would say still is, an exceptional individual with a presence that is difficult to ignore. What might be seen as a narcissistic indulgence and addiction to rigorous intellectual pursuits for the public good, he is at the same time admired for his delivery of language [16], in English or in German, which is persuasively democratic in its delivery, and normative in its gravitas. He is one of the first writers whose works I have read and who, in conversations, convincingly comes across as a "committed writer".

Writers, radical intelligentsias, commitments and paradigms

Alexander's generation of revolutionary activists and writers coincides with a resurgence and outpouring of French existentialist thought in the 1960s and 1970s, and the emergence of and disillusionment with the "Frankfurt" and "post-structuralist schools" [17]. At the same time, the notion of alienation in capitalist society, the role of intellectuals, the function of writing and the proliferation of anti-colonial struggles and protests were gripping the imagination of radical thinkers.

In Europe, French philosopher and existential theorist Jean-Paul Sartre was a key figure in the gathering momentum of intellectual activism and social responsibility. His public pronouncements and political activism, his books and his articles were either lambasted for their extreme individualism, attacked for their assaults on French capitalist society and the free market global economic order, criticised for their affinities with Marxism and embrace of dialectical materialism, or loudly ignored by the conservative, right-wing press. [18]

In conversations with Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre captures the ongoing tensions that he has experienced with his writing and politics, and his evolving views about the centrality of political motivation in the unfolding drama of his philosophical musings in the following revealing remarks (*Adieux to Sartre* 1984:376):

> Yes, I knew that politics could be a matter of writing too. It wasn't effected merely by elections and
> war, it was also written. There were pieces that were satires or discussions of a specific political fact;

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for me, politics was like a side issue of literature [in his more convincing and committed existential years in the 1930s and early parts of the 1940s]. And I thought I should undertake it toward the end of my days [the conversations that appear in the 1984 book with De Beauvoir took place when Sartre was already in his "old age" in the 1970s], when I was less capable of producing literature. In any case, I saw my life – it was above all my life that I saw, not so much my works; I didn't think about my works a great deal – I saw my life like that, ending in politics.

For the most part of his university life and up till about the end of the second World War, Sartre was consumed by finding cogent and arguable reasons for an individual to exist in a bourgeois world and in which life itself seemed to have no purpose or meaning. His understanding of politics suggested an interpretation that was confined to the people who, and institutions that, wielded state power. While busying himself in philosophical undertakings and developing a reasoned, if dubious, account of what it means to be an individual in a world of "contingency" and therefore chance, Sartre maintained a distant if not unsympathetic relationship with Marxists, and particularly the French Communist Party, which in the 1940s and the 1950s hardly criticised the Soviet Union and rarely wavered in its support for the Stalinist policies executed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. With the rare exception of the Soviet decision to crush the Hungarian revolution in November 1956, Sartre was circumspect about his criticisms of the Soviet state. While he was not a socialist until much later in his life, the French philosopher embraced socialist practices in his working and private life. Nevertheless, for the critics of left-wing persuasion, Sartre was an anomaly who had not shed his semi-proletarian and middle class origins.

His status as a left-wing radical and militant philosopher of action was repeatedly questioned by people from across the Left political spectrum, and especially by people who were active in some or other variation of Marxism.[19] A notable exception was a small but vocal Maoist grouping in France, with which he eventually worked very closely before he died.

Ernest Mandel, the Belgian Trotskyist and author of many seminal works on Marxist theory, and George Novack, the US-born communist and Marxist theoretician, are positively ambiguous about the value of existentialism in their *The Marxist Theory of Alienation* (1970).[20] Novack (1970:6) asserts that Marxism does not adhere to the notion that

"alienation" is an eternal condition, "any more than it believes in eternal damnation". Instead, he says that existentialism

> teaches that alienation is built into the very nature of man [sic] as an enigmatic castaway on this planet. Whatever he may do to overcome that state, born of an awareness of the meaningless of existence, he can find no exit from his fate ... Alienation is the outgrowth of specific historical conditions which have been brought into existence by man's unwitting activity and which can be changed at a higher stage of economic and social development by man's conscious collective action.

One of Sartre's central intellectual preoccupations was indeed the sense of political and cultural alienation experienced by intellectuals in a world dominated by money and punctured by the charms of the bourgeoisie. Novack writes that Albert Camus, one of Sartre's contemporaries, has a central figure in his novel, *The Stranger*, who is "estranged from other people and even from his own deepest self and emotions" (Novack & Mandel 1970:5). This alienation, this "disintegrated personality", is a theme that courses through the works of not only the existentialists, but the films of people such as the Swedish Ingmar Bergman and the Italian Federico Fellini.

Karl Marx has turned this quintessentially Hegelian concept of alienation on its head. For Hegel, there are two types of alienation. These can be broadly described as political alienation and the alienation of labour. The forfeiture of individual rights to the "collective interest" represented by the state means that people have to give up freedoms ordinarily associated with individual choice. This alienation from one's desires is one of the characteristic features of societies that are modelled along the lines of a nation state. Moreover, for Hegel, all labour is "alienated labour" because "in any society and under any conditions men [sic] will always be condemned to become separate from the products of their labour". Mandel (1970:16) argues that Marx, on the other hand, develops Hegel's "anthropological" theory of alienation and instead posits a definition of alienation that not only is bounded by its place in time but also by the social interactions and social relations that arise out of particular forms of society. For Mandel and Novack, existentialism is no more and no less a 20th century revision of Hegel's "idealist definitions" of alienation. In socialist society, they argue, workers will own their product and alienated labour will be a thing of the past.

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For his part, Sartre had already evolved beyond the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* of the 1940s, and was already in the grip of increasingly more complex dilemmas about dialectical reasoning. The criticisms that were levelled at his late conversion to Marxism were met by Sartre (*Critique of Dialectical Reason* 1976:96–97) in typically elliptical prose:

> Marx clearly indicated that he distinguished *human relations* from their reification, or in general, from their alienation within a particular social system ... This is why the habit of skipping the abstract discussion of the human relation and immediately locating ourselves in the world of productive, of the mode and relations of production, so dear to Marxism, is in danger of giving unwitting support to the atomism of liberalism and of academic rationality. This error has been made by several Marxists: individuals, according to them, are a priori neither isolated particles nor directly related activities; it is always up to society to determine which they are through the totality of the movement and the particularity of the conjuncture.

Just under ten years prior to this elaboration on human relations, and also in Sartre's defence, De Beauvoir, in an interview conducted by Madeleine Gobeil in 1965, describes Ernest Hemingway as an uncommitted writer, whereas Jean-Paul Sartre "staked everything on his literary work and on the hope that his work would survive". For his part, Hemingway is reported to have said: "All you can be sure about, in a politically minded writer is that if his work should last you will have to skip the politics when you read it." While Hemingway's "simplicity of dialogue" appeals to De Beauvoir, his apparent separation from his writing reality and from the power dynamics at play in what he sees or captures is not his most endearing quality for her. [21]

But, while Marxists were attempting to discard any association with existentialism and delink the two schools of thoughts, or indeed philosophies, a similar contest was emerging between the traditional Marxists and another way of socialist thinking embedded in so-called Western Marxism, whose origins are to be found in the combined distillations of writings produced by Italian communist Antonio Gramsci and Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács, and which found its articulate expressions in the writings of French-born Marxist Louis Althusser and German-born Marxist sociologist Theodor Adorno, who together with Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas, Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse, was a member of the "Frankfurt School" of social theory. Not unlike Sartre, Adorno has focused on the

notion of the "personality", particularly the "authoritarian personality" in capitalist society. Not surprisingly, the different personalities promoting the school became preoccupied with ideology and with the Althusserian concept of the "ideological state apparatuses". British-based Marxist theoretician Alex Callinicos's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1983) traces the evolution of the different philosophical strands in Marxism, and provides a useful and panoramic view of the evolution of Marx's ideas in the 20th century. Callinicos (1983:127–153) recalls that a characteristic of Western Marxism is its focus on ideology:

> One of the characteristic features of Western Marxism is the attention given to ideology. By 'ideology' I mean what Marx called 'the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict [i.e. that between the forces and relations of production] and fight it out' ... The enormous attention paid to ideology by Marxist theoreticians over the past 50 years must be set alongside the fact that there is no satisfactory account of ideology in Marx.

In Alexander's *One Azania, One Nation*, his "Select Bibliography" excludes references to Sartre's, De Beauvoir's, Adorno's and Althusser's writings. This suggests an ambivalence, if not a rejection, about their value in his political message. There can be little doubt that he knew about these people because in conversations with people in Cape Town in the early 1980s, he has referred to the structuralist and Frankfurt schools of thought. It may well be that he regarded these theorists' work as no more than an intellectual interest, but their notions of commitment and struggle may well have differed strongly from his. Whereas the French existentialists hailed from the *petit bourgeoisie*, even though they rebelled against the indulgent "excesses" of their class, Alexander was made of different stuff. The existentialists regarded writing and words as their vocation whereas Alexander, through his words, sought to mobilise and inspire people to change society. In part, this could be explained by his origins. His father was a carpenter and his mother was a teacher. It could also be partly understood through his evolving view that words find their meaning in people's embrace and decision to act on them. Alexander's writings carried the convincing edge of a determined ideologue to transcend the claustrophobia of his class origins (not unlike Sartre and De Beauvoir), and his writings became the means through which he expressed his dissent and opposition to the status quo in South Africa. His writings are the outlines of an "abiding

passion" for "the unity of the oppressed people. When I contemplate the recent history of Southern Africa, I consider it the duty of every revolutionary to give continuous attention to the question of national unity under the leadership of the black workers and their class allies."[22]

This unambiguous statement points to a common thread in Alexander's thoughts, and challenges the musings of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, who both argue that the history, feelings and identity of the writer are not a necessary condition in order to understand the written text.[23] For Barthes, the author exists only at the "instant of writing", and even though Foucault did rein in his conclusion about the "irrelevance" of an author, he also argues that a text has meaning because of itself, not because of the writer. These post-structuralists argue that all written texts can be understood on their own, and the writers are incidental. While Foucault recognises the writer as an historical institution, he maintains that "it is language which speaks, not the author"[24]. The relative autonomy that Barthes and Foucault award to language is an echo of, and reflects a finessing of a theoretical continuum started by Althusser in his work on ideology and ideological state apparatuses[25].

Alexander's writings cannot be separated from the person, and the class interests that he advocates, and it is questionably and historically unsound to separate his many writings from the "refraction"[26] of ideologies and philosophies permeating his treatises. Without a detailed knowledge of the author, writings tend to stand in dysfunctional limbo to their historical relevance and political impact. Perceptions of the writer, while they may not carry the weight of scientific investigations, are equally important in understanding potential or actual impact, as is the history of the writer. Political writing throws into sharp relief human experiences in the fight for power and condenses experiences into words, and not only comes alive in well constructed sentences, but can be contextualised when the biography or the author's station in life is known.

It is conceivable that a text can be understood and can have meaning without the knowledge of the author's history or station in life. This is borne out by the tomes of crime novels (where the author does not matter significantly, and the story line and the plot are far more significant in the reader's mind), and also in non-fiction works such as Marx's and

Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* in which words, slogans and injunctions have direct sociopolitical meaning and can carry the force of truth regardless of the authors' identities.

It is now a matter of history that Foucault has been probably misunderstood by theoreticians across the globe. The American anarchist intellectual and philosopher of language[27], Noam Chomsky, describes Foucault after a 1971 interview in Holland as "amoral", and German intellectual Jürgen Habermas says he had "probably misunderstood" Foucault's writings. What could be considered compelling and what captured budding intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s is that Foucault placed the notion of power at the centre of his writings. "Foucault argues that all forms of knowledge are historically relative and contingent and cannot be dissociated from the workings of power."[28]

While it may be difficult to understand Foucault and his changing views, it is equally difficult to misunderstand Alexander, who rarely if ever strayed from his own focus on power relations in society. But while Alexander may well have been reluctant to embrace any or all of Foucault's theoretical odysseys[29], it would have been equally difficult for him to challenge the central theme of power in the French philosopher's and semiotician's writings. An understanding of power, its exercise and manifestations in institutions of coercion, repression, consent and even acquiescence, is present in all of Alexander's work on language and nation building in South Africa. Like Foucault, Alexander's sense of opposing the injustices and repression meted out by capitalist institutions of power courses through his writings. The pain that humans inflict upon others can only be removed through the overthrow of existing power relations, and here both Alexander and Foucault are agreed that oppressive terms of domination need to be overthrown. Alexander has not departed from his central thesis that the language question, as a central part of the national question[30], has to be "resolved" through a wide-ranging consultative process with the working class, or its legitimate representatives, at the helm of the negotiating team to effect change. Under apartheid, Alexander was determined to promote change through a fundamental social revolution[31]. In post-apartheid South Africa, while he is not publicly advocating the overthrow of the democratically elected government, it would be surprising if thoughts of proletarian insurrection are not a part of his political thinking.

Both Foucault and Alexander are individuals who were locked in titanic battles with their own set of political and social circumstances. Both were radical participants in and products of their environment, and both were slaves to the pen. Their political missions may

have differed, but these determined and inspired individuals shared a common platform: they were both a part of a global radical intelligentsia, an enlightened *petit bourgeoisie*, and wrote about their visions of a new order, and were fed by the lived experiences of the existing order.

Alexander, unlike Foucault, had few if any difficulties with "truth". The French philosopher had throughout his life sought to "reinvent himself" and was "a man of supreme discretion, deliberate reserve, of tensile silences"[32] (characteristics that Alexander has displayed throughout his life as well). But Alexander would have no truck with the self-indulgent narcissism of Foucault, despite being equally reserved and discreet in his personal life. In the last few years of his life, Foucault prised the dense history of his personal life through his lectures recounting the life of Socrates and his struggles with truth. Apart from the very different starting blocks in the two men's histories and their divergent political missions, Alexander has played no "games" with life and politics, whereas Foucault had no intention to limit[33] his experiences in life to a straightforward "kiss and tell all" scenario, and as it turns out in his death as well[34]. For Alexander, this type of navel gazing is a waste of time.

Alexander, the role of individuals and historical materialism

Alexander has had a long association with the philosophical method of historical materialism, and has assimilated its cornerstones into his own evolving outlook since he came into contact with Marxism before his incarceration[35] in 1963. In all his subsequent writings, and especially through his study on the national question in South Africa in the years leading up to the publication of *One Azania, One Nation* in 1979, Alexander has approached sociopolitical theory through this lens. But, like so many left-wing intellectuals and Marxist revolutionaries, he has remained cautious in applying the method to interrogate existential issues in his own life. The angst of the self and the questions around the search for meaning in life appear not to have featured in Alexander's universe of thought and practice, and where he did seek answers to these questions, they, in all likelihood, would be found in the political work he was engaged in or the struggles that he was participating in. This is the colossal divide between Alexander and Foucault. Whereas Foucault has focused on the individual in

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relations of power, Alexander has sought to concentrate on larger groups or classes of people and their concerns in power arrangements.

Edward H Carr, whose *The History of Soviet Russia*[36] is a monumental testimony to historical scholarship, is said to have written his equally compelling and influential essay, *What Is History?*[37], as a response to his debate with Oxford-based academic and liberal individualist Isaiah Berlin about the role of the individual in history, the role that "chance" plays in determining historical events, and "historical inevitability".[38] Berlin had accused Carr of being a "determinist" who dismisses the "accidental" in history and who relies on the "vast impersonal forces" that shape historical moments. Carr responded in kind to Berlin and dismissed the former Russian's philosophy of history as a "parlour game", a "counterfactual" account and a "might-have-been" school. While Berlin's interpretation of history is interesting, and challenging, it is not of immediate consequence to an understanding of Alexander and his formation. Carr, on the other hand, locates the individual in the context of a socio-economic and political milieu, whereas Berlin argues that this view of individuals as agents of history inevitably leads to a determinism and a worldview without choice. Carr liberally invoked the authority of Trotsky in his own study of the Soviet revolution and the revolutionary actors who played a central part, but he disagreed with Trotsky on the issue of chance.

In Trotsky's view, Stalin is an accident of Russia who was in the right position at the right time to seize the historical initiative and bureaucratise the Soviet state for his own ends, but he (Stalin) was also carrying out an ill-defined "historical law" of inevitable Sovietisation and democratic centralism.[39] On the other hand, for Trotsky, it took the determined subjectivism, political brilliance and stubbornness of Vladimir Lenin to steer the Russian intelligentsia and urban workers to overthrow the Tsarist regime and the bourgeois provisional government in 1917. The "historical law" of unravelling class struggle, led by the radical intelligentsia that promoted the class interests of the urban proletariat, was Lenin's baton that he took with ease. The intensity of contradictions had led to an explosion of class interests that Lenin fomented, and in whose person was embodied the "refraction of historical law".

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For Berlin, Lenin was simply a dictator who subsumed the real interests of the proletariat, and acted out the role that he himself had designed or was chanced upon to perform.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Alexander was a part of a historical moment that was punctured and formed by the fact that Nelson Mandela and most of the other Rivonia trialists[40] and ANC leaders were still in prison or abroad, the exiled movements were making slight inroads into popular consciousness, the armed struggle was picking up momentum in its propaganda, the military might of the apartheid regime was seemingly overwhelming, and the internal forces of liberation were as divided as ever as they were pitted against state apartheid-capitalism[41] without a united front. In theory, this type of historical moment lent itself to a leadership vacuum that needed to be filled. Alexander had the intellectual tools and integrity to fill the hiatus, but a complex personal political history and affiliations combined with a considered contempt for "tail-ending mass struggles"[42] produced at least some of the limitations that prevented his natural accession to a mass leadership position. Alexander could not become a "Charterist" as his former and distant ally, Dullah Omar, did. The historical moment of chance was lost on the man because unlike Lenin, Alexander was not ruthless about political ambition. His commitment was to ensure the start of a mass secular education campaign in which working class interests would dominate and eventually settle as the hegemonic order. The intermediate steps of social interaction and class compromises were not his concern. His disdain for pragmatism led him to a position that called for the implementation of transitional socialist demands, knowing full well that they would not be met. And so he engaged the radical nationalists of the black consciousness (BC) movement in the National Forum[43].

This decision to link up with radical nationalists and self-proclaimed socialists in the BC movement has been the subject of many discussions and queries about Alexander and his choices. The researcher's own view is that his decision was a strategic one that combined his political analysis with his ethical choices of what is "right" and "wrong". But this ethical choice needs to be problematised.

EH Carr writes the following in his discussion of politics and ethics:

> Those who assert the primacy of ethics over politics will hold that it is the duty of the individual to submit for the sake of the community as a whole, sacrificing his own interest to the interest of others who are more numerous, or in some other way more deserving. The

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"good" which consists in self-interest should be subordinated to the "good" which consists in loyalty and self-sacrifice for an end higher than self-interest. The obligation rests on some kind of intuition of what is right and cannot be demonstrated by rational argument. Those, on the other hand, who assert the primacy of politics over ethics, will argue that the ruler rules because he is the stronger, and the ruled submit because they are the weaker. [44]

Carr was not a self-proclaimed Marxist, even though Berlin's biographer Ignatieff treats him as such, but Carr's understanding of history, his analysis of the class struggles that bring about change in societies and his detailed knowledge of the rise of Soviet power have enriched the tomes of Marxist historiography and the theory of knowledge. While he employed a discursive writing style that was nuanced and not prejudiced by academic distance from the subjects he interrogated, Carr was nevertheless inspirational.

Alexander was never a politician in the dictionary meaning of the term, but politics and ethics have been at the core of his writings. His intuition of what is right for society is what infuses his elaborate knowledge on the national question [45] and the crucial role that language plays in building an expansive, rather than an implosive nationhood. While Alexander's Marxism has made him suspicious of nationalism and its debilitating consequences, he embraced the radical nationalists in the BC movement who insisted on the injunction, "black man, you are on your own". Apart from the obvious sexist critique it was likely to generate, the injunction fitted in with Alexander's belief that the black working class, as a subset of black and oppressed people, alone held the key to unravelling the class and colour contradictions embedded in South African society. The conservative nationalists of the ANC, the Africanists, held no such key, if one were to develop Alexander's logic. He used his store of knowledge and his class analysis to advocate for the unity of the oppressed and exploited people in South Africa. He has employed the political slogan of "One Azania, One Nation" [46] as a stepping stone for a greater and more inclusive unity of the oppressed across the world.

But this has been his political paradox for many years: nations, in classical Marxism, should be built in order that they are transcended or destroyed. When the print industry made it possible for communication to be more widespread in vernacular languages, nations become what Benedict Anderson called "imagined communities" [47] and are often bounded by geography, and their use value lies in their perceived need to build local identity. But as units

of cohesion or global solidarity, they do not possess much potential in generating the requisite class interests that democratic socialists, such as Alexander, embrace. This is the dilemma that socialists, Marxists and other left-wing thinkers have contemplated for over 150 years, and has been the cause of many shifts, splits and realignments within the global socialist movement.

The "good" in radical nationalism is that it opposes any form of colonial control. The "bad" in this form of nationalism, as in any other form of nationalism, is that it plants the seed for a xenophobia under the veneer of presumed common interests for a liberated people, and buries a sense of self-importance "to serve one's own" that will surface eventually.

Alexander is not so much driven by the "general interest"[48] or rights of nations in construction or nations that are established, and he has not asserted the primacy of politics over ethics, or vice-versa. Alexander has tried to combine ethics and politics in his writings by taking sides. He remains unapologetic about his advocacy of working class interests over those of the owners of capital. And since 1994, he has persistently criticised the post-apartheid government for managing the legislative and political framework for capitalist interests to dominate the society.

Gramsci, organic intellectuals and civic space

Alexander, the organic intellectual and revolutionary Marxist, has always stood apart from the mainstream of academia and has criticised those who embrace the politics of convenience. Politics was never a career choice for Alexander. His understanding of politics was, and is rooted in the notion of "people's power", or to put it differently, in those institutions and organisations that are rooted in the struggles of ordinary working people. This is not uncommon for an individual who is a writer and a political animal, and who has no interest in pursuing politics as a vocation.

Alexander is not a lone voice in his understanding of politics and in his rejection of bourgeois politics that centres on the promotion of middle class interests and the subordination of working class interests.

Gramsci, the Italian Marxist who is credited with adding new concepts and insights to the Marxian universe of social praxis, writes extensively about "hegemony" and "organic

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intellectuals". Writing from prison in Italy under the fascist dictatorship of Mussolini in the late 1920s and 1930s, he grappled with some of the most pressing issues of education, power and the place and function of intellectuals in society. In a summary explaining Gramsci's key concepts, Benedetto Fontana writes: "The knowledge of intellectuals, in short, becomes life and politics only when linked to the feeling/passion of the people."[49] This is a key sentence in unlocking what, in the researcher's opinion, can only be described as a treasure trove of Gramsci's contributions to Marxist theory, knowledge and revolutionary practice.

The feeling or passion of "the people" may well admit of some controversy and debate because the assumption built into the positive assertion about the link between intellectual knowledge and feeling is that this "passion" is something good. This tenuous link between passion or feeling and consciousness is explained in mostly deterministic terms by Marxists, who insist that the most advanced consciousness emanates from the working classes, particularly the industrial proletariat, which, because of its economic location, is the only class able to overturn production relations that are the matrix of power arrangements in capitalist society.

Gramsci (1996:199), in his famous *Prison Notebooks*, answers his own question, "[A]re intellectuals an autonomous social group, or does every social group have its own intellectuals?", in the following way:

> Every social group coming into existence on the primal basis of an essential
> function in the world of economic production creates together with itself, organically,
> a rank or several ranks of intellectuals who give it homogeneity and a consciousness
> of its own function in the economic sphere: the capitalist entrepreneur creates along
> with himself the economist, the scientist of political economy ...
>> But every social group emerging into history out of the economic structure
> finds or has found – at least in all of past history – pre-existing categories of
> intellectuals [for example, the ecclesiastics] that moreover seemed to represent a
> historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated changes in
> social and political forms.[50]

Derek Boothman (1995:xiv), another editor and translator of Gramsci's "theses"[51], remarks in his "Introduction" that Italian idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce "was for Gramsci what Hegel was for Marx". In both Marx's and Gramsci's writings, the written words are the

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"signifiers" that suggest a dense arrangement of concepts their predecessors may or may not have interrogated. But, in both cases, their respective intellectual "greatness" does not consist "in their being close to or distant from another author, but solely in the adherence of their thought to contemporary reality, in the precision and breadth that they give to an image of this reality" (Boothman, ibid.).

Not unlike Marx and Gramsci, Alexander has been neither "close" nor "distant" from his own iconic thinkers, but he has been ideologically close to the social classes he feels he is supposed to represent and to whom he is aligning himself so as to provide an eclectic homogeneity to their interests.

In the beginning was the deed – so goes the famous Marxian dictum that turns on its head the equally famous assertion by Descartes in the 17th century: "I think, therefore I am."[52] Gramsci and Alexander have been doers and thinkers, and the complex relationship and interplay between philosophy and action is an important consideration in this dissertation. Alexander has a changing identity that does not mean that he is inconsistent, but it does mean that the circumstances of life have been changing and his theoretical expositions have been developed to changing circumstances. Alexander, as an organic intellectual, has served the classes (the working class and the radicalised *petit bourgeoisie*) of his choice and continues to do so because of their location in the lines of production, distribution and exchange, and their potential for embracing and advocating a revolutionary consciousness. And, not unlike the Italian Marxist who grappled with ideology and its functioning in the political field of tension produced by the antagonistic line-up between workers and capitalists, Alexander's critiques of education are not limited to schools, universities and colleges – the formal representations of ideology.

Fontana reiterates Gramsci's views on education:

For Gramsci education is not limited to the merely narrow confines of formal schools and university. Rather it encompasses the entire sociocultural and sociopolitical structure as it is manifested in the complex relations 'per ogni individuo rispetto ad altri individui, tra ceti intellettuali e non intellettuali, tra governanti e governati, tra élites e seguaci, tra dirigenti e diretti, tra avanguardie e corpi di esercito' [for each individual compared to others, including the intellectual classes and intellectuals, between rulers and ruled, between elites and followers, between managers and directors, between avant-guard and army

corps – this is a rough translation of Gramsci's original] (Gramsci 1975 1331). The pedagogic relation is simultaneously cultural/philosophical and political, and each element of the relation reciprocally acts on the other. It is for this reason that Gramsci specifically identifies the emergence (or perhaps the reemergence) of a space wherein public opinion is formed and proliferated, and wherein consequently the battle for and over this opinion is fundamental. Such a battle takes place within what is called civil society.[53]

In his own way, Alexander has insisted on capturing and recapturing the "civic space", a concept ably explained and used by German intellectual Jurgen Habermas[54] and Gramsci. This is where public opinion is formed and this is where the challenges for state power could be contested. It is not a coincidence that, in the year 2011, Alexander's university-based educational unit still retains the word "alternative" in its name.[55] Alexander is proposing an alternative type of education to the hegemonic pretence at developmental education that the state embraces – it is a pretence because it serves the interests of a ruling class made up of an alliance between capital and the expanding conservative layers of the black middle class[56] whose employment opportunities have opened up as a result of the post-1994 deracialisation of the state. Deracialisation could only happen alongside the white business friendly implementation of black economic empowerment. The class "compromise" between owners of capital and political managers has produced an educational social welfarism that does little to change the lives of ordinary working class people. One of the limits to welfarism is that its principals and its political authorities have no interest in collapsing skewed class structures, but they are at least officially intent on distributing the economic surplus more widely to the "have-nots".

It is for this reason that Alexander has consistently opposed the educational policies of the post-apartheid government since 1994, and it is for this reason that his policy proposals have been stonewalled or put on an indeterminate back burner. In this sense, the intellectual mandarin has danced an exclusive waltz, with very few partners, and has faced down phalanxes of bureaucratic and institutional resistance to his alternative body of work. For the state, relations of production should be more carefully managed and they should not reach a point where they are overturned or fundamentally transformed. For Alexander, a sea change in production relations is a prerequisite if working class interests are to be realised and served by political managers.

This places him in an unassailable position, and it makes his politics seem even more radical than is mentioned in the public domain. On the one hand, Alexander knows the limitations of a social-democratic state and operates in it as a functional intellectual at a prestigious South African university where, presumably, intellectual pursuits of social consequence can and must be its lifeblood. There can be no limits to exploring alternatives to the status quo if those alternatives have a resonance in the "passion of the people". Within the structures of the University of Cape Town there is a sufficient residue of social conscience to allow this recognised and achieving revolutionary Marxist the space to work independently of university rhythms. On the other hand, the relationship that he has developed with the state is not straightforward, and for him it does not depend on the personalities or private inclinations and choices of the individuals who are in positions of power. Over the many years of insightful commentary and studied insights, the equivalent of a war of attrition has been played out between Alexander and the state. His knowledge of education is wide ranging and his policy proposals have been based either on his own research or from what he has drawn out of the findings of acknowledged authorities in education, but he has steadfastly engineered a path of critical thinking and reasoning that has made it difficult for state bureaucrats and policy gurus to embrace his visions. Through their engagement with Alexander, the state and its functionaries (at least the sociologically alert ones) have been forced to question the class character of their own positions in society, and the positions of the political organisation that put them in authority. In this sense, Alexander is also unassailable because he does not pander to the allure of money and personal power, but to the far more noble *diktat* to "serve the people". He cannot be and has not been bought[57].

Alexander and civil society

These preliminary perceptions that the researcher has of Alexander are a work in progress, but they are also co-ordinates in plotting a path through the kaleidoscope of personality formation and identity, historical and philosophical influences on his written work, the maze of contradictions that need to be unravelled in South Africa, and his contributions to designing a new world. An existential dilemma is not that the researcher does not understand his textured educational proposals and evolving political-ideological positions, but my own political orientation and the ambiguity of truth that has always attracted me. My belief that truth cannot be universal has pockmarked my own journey, and writing about Alexander has

made me realise that faith in something or in someone or in an idea can be non-material, or it resides "under the left nipple"[58], as Martin Luther is reported to have said. It can be a "feeling", but it is there and it drives people who believe in it.

Edwin Cameron (2005:212), the talented and inspiring South African judge who has acquired immune deficiency syndrome (Aids) and lives with his antiretroviral drugs, writes: "The rank immorality of the notion that tens of millions of poor people should be denied access to available medications because of the limitations on the use of human knowledge had to be pronounced: and the opposition to the immorality had to prevail."[59] While Cameron was reflecting on his experiences as an Aids-infected person with access to the antiretroviral drugs, his thoughts could equally sum up the critical analyses of civil society organisations and pro-poor groups that are working in the fields of housing, social welfare, electricity or water where people continue to be denied, or have limited access to, a decent life. The government has most of the relevant statistics and profiles about the living conditions of ordinary people, and yet continues to pursue a path of blissful ignorance in implementing pro-business projects and programmes, and succumbing instead to "limitations on the use of human knowledge". Cameron's argument could suggest that in other spheres of human activity, it is "rank immorality" that needs to be "pronounced" when a government wilfully ignores, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the plight of its citizens and the squalor in which they live.

Alexander has been less generous about, and yet equally critical of, government policies and the political authority's apparent lack of will to do something about people's suffering and the state of education in the country. He has brought home uncomfortable truths about government intent and ideological dispositions. For Alexander, the state is not delivering to the poor, not because it is in denial about the wide-scale poverty and the "chronic crisis"[60] in education but because it is following a deliberate strategy to open up the political and economic space for middle class interests to settle and dominate South African society, and thereby satisfy the overarching and hidden hand of its sponsors in international capitalism and its Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The state's strategy of black economic empowerment sails very closely to a blunt refutation of the lived reality of millions of South Africans.

Cameron, on the other hand, weaves an alternative view that is complex, passionate and studied. Through the denialism on Aids of the state's principals, he argues, and the active

role of pharmaceutical companies in limiting access to medicines for the poor through their exorbitant price tags and patents, the state is wittingly complicit in people's suffering. His carefully constructed and very readable book is his personal journey and is informed by a detailed knowledge of South African law, political society and civil protest. The fine distinction he draws between "denialism", as defined in the discipline of psychology, and "dogmatic denialism"[61], as in the constructed counters to the scientific knowledge that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) causes Aids, attests to a legal mind that is laden with and inspired by a "passion for life" and therefore a "passion for people", and an intellect that has dealt with words and their contextual meaning for many years. He is at one and the same time a public official occupying high office and an advocate for civil society organisations that are contesting and recapturing the civic space where manifestations of state power are at their most rarefied and pernicious in the secluded and hidden world of human sexuality. Unlike Foucault, Cameron does not play "games" with life, and his "limit-experiences" in refusing to succumb to certain death in 1997 when he became very ill have been self-willed and determined.

And neither does Alexander play games with life. For many years, and the researcher suspects currently as well, his refrain has been that revolutionaries are engaged in a "life-and-death" struggle against racial capitalism or its contemporary manifestations. In this struggle, Alexander has danced a lonely and sometimes a considered movement or waltz[62] against apartheid-capitalism or racial capitalism, against post-apartheid capitalism and the life-and-death economic and ideological consequences of decisions made by the state to pursue an overarching and benevolent, but rough and arguably sophisticated capitalism[63] in which self-interest and the pursuit of profit are the financial compasses of decent living in South Africa.

Alexander's *One Azania, One Nation* is based on a "historical materialist" approach to society and shares Trotsky's view that the author "stands as a historian upon the same viewpoint upon which he stood as a participant in the events". There is little to suggest in Alexander's subsequent writings that he has changed his philosophical and ideological approach to writing and authorship. Trotsky has written: "The reader, of course, is not obliged to share the political views of the author, which the latter on his side has no reason to conceal. But the reader does have the right to demand that an historical work should not be a

defence of a political position, but an internally well-founded portrayal of the actual process of the revolution ...” [64]

Alexander's use of Trotsky's ideas does not make him a "Trotskyist", which has become somewhat of a swear word in political circles because the groupings that formed after his death became messianic in their exclusivist approaches to politics, and developed a culture of mistrust towards other left-wing or socialist-inspired organisations. [65] The influence and confluence of his readings and of his lived experience as an activist provided Alexander with the raw material to develop what can be described as his major contribution to liberation theory, socialist theory, political theory and educational theory: his analysis of "race" and his treatment of the "reality of racism". In the pages of *One Azania, One Nation*, the reader is treated to a feast of new discoveries in social theory and the political implications of the stubborn reality of racist practices that had been premised on the assumption that South Africa's population registration groups are in fact "races", and that the liberation movement and its theoreticians had done little to challenge this basic assumption. In the chapter titled "Elements of the Theory of the Nation" [66], for the first time in South African history, an analysis and a reasoned tally are made of the biological, sociological, political and ideological arguments that had been constructed to favour or to dispel the notion that different "races" make up humanity. The carefully constructed but passionate argument that Alexander's provides in collapsing the notion of "race" as a valid biological entity and a political dead-end, has set him apart from most other writers on the subject of the national question, and has generated a constrained silence from other theoreticians in the liberation movement in 1979 when he wrote the book.

Alexander's findings and political message are unambiguous: there is no such social category as "race", except as an unscientific invention, that could even begin to explain human difference. It is a constructed entity that has been used to explain and politically justify the enforced separation of people, and has had genocidal consequences in Hitler's Germany in the 20th century. Three decades ago, his intention was to provide activists and revolutionaries with the historical and intellectual armoury to challenge the basic precepts of theses that varied from an embrace of different "population groups" as different races, different "national groups" as different races to viewing different "ethnic groups" as different races. This assertion in 1979 was the proverbial "worm in the bud" [67] for much of social theory subsequently, and provided intellectuals with the knowledge and scientific grounding

to either reject Alexander's thesis, and explain it away as a political statement of intent to undermine the ANC's dogged insistence on "national groups", or accept his thesis and rethink the whole body of work on the national question, from the Left and from the conservative ideologues of race theory, in which the notion of different races is a given. This rethink is what Alexander has done with far-reaching implications for educational theory and practice.

Even a cursory reading of his original writings on race and the ideology of racism suggests that his views on nation building, schooling and the "pedagogy of the oppressed"[68] are different from mainstream analyses and proposals.

In his work, Alexander has the indelible tracings of Samora Machel's socialist enthusiasm, the elegant yet polemical prose and revolutionary zeal of Leon Trotsky, the considered historical depth of Edward H Carr, the "madness" to oppose the status quo of Michel Foucault, the studied and existential embrace of a lived reality reminiscent of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, the "faith" and passion of Martin Luther, the intellectual honesty of Amilcar Cabral, the nuanced reflections of philosophy and action of Antonio Gramsci, the detailed knowledge of language of Noam Chomsky, and the courage and inventiveness of Karl Marx. As a South African mandarin who does not occupy a political position of power in the state, Alexander has brought his own set of challenges to an increasingly deracialised capitalism that continues to dominate a potentially vibrant nation in the making, and his theoretical contributions are perilously ignored by the political authorities in power.

In contemporary South African society, Alexander's dance continues to be lonesome, but truth can hardly be said to be the prerogative of majorities, especially when the state is organised around some cross section of popular will – the experience of Hitler's Nazi Germany and that country's working and middle class acquiescence are a blunt reminder of the seductive traps in nationalist ideologies that are built on and abuse the "limitations on the use of human knowledge"[69]. If nothing else, the inevitable nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche found its supreme expression in the absurd notion of a "master race", and all the political and ideological consequences that followed Hitler's accession to the throne. Alexander has made it his life's project to lay bare the debilitating racial constructs that continue to underpin much

of social science, and to construct a different, indeed an "alternative" discourse about education, language and nation building. History may well be on his side, but political authority has evolved into a sophisticated instrument of control in Mammon's South African universe, and the likes of Alexander are at best tolerated, or his name is used in diplomatic circles to suggest just how open the society is and how immensely advanced the society has become because it is able to entertain the radicalism of Alexander.

NOTES

[1] ANC theoretician and socialist Pallo Jordan, who has served as the culture minister in the post-apartheid government, provides the following description of Neville Alexander and the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action: "Since the mid 1980's the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (Wosa), led by Neville Alexander, has provided a political home for those Trotskyists operating outside the Charterist camp, while the so-called 'Marxist Workers' Tendency' has been the rallying point for those within it." The article appeared in the *Southern Africa Report* in 1991 and was titled "A Survey of the South African Debate on the Decline of Socialism in Eastern Europe". While the opinions of political ideologues and former revolutionary activists such as Jordan carry the imprint of presumed collective decision making, the opinions of newspaper columnists, news editors, political editors and chief editors have to be treated with circumspection – they are often the mediated words transporting the worldviews, descriptions and opinions of their owners, their journalists, their perceived audience (their readers), and their spouses and partners, into the public domain. In newspaper articles, published writings and sometimes mischievous articles on Alexander, inferences have often been made on the man's "ultra-leftism" or his "Trotskyism". I have read these writings on Alexander with dismay, but little has been said to correct this perception. I do not intend to correct this perception in this dissertation, but I do intend to analyse and comment on their use value and accuracy.

[2] Throughout this introduction, I have used "I" and the "researcher" interchangeably. While it is accepted and common practice in academia to depersonalise the text, my repeated use of the personal pronoun is a choice that I have made to affirm my appreciation of the body of work produced by the founders of existentialism, my philosophical grounding in Marxism and my commitment to honouring the unassailable truth that the "personal is political", which is a standing principle of the women's movement.

[3] The researcher was working for Sached Trust, an educational non-governmental organisation. Alexander was the director of its Cape Town chapter. Its head office was in Johannesburg and John Samuel, who later became a post-apartheid deputy director-general of education, an adviser to former South African president Nelson Mandela and the chief executive of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, was its national director. I recall the conversation with Alexander from memory as I was not allowed to take notes or to have the tools (pen and paper) of my later trade, journalism, anywhere near or in a conversation with Alexander.

[4] See Isaac Deutscher's *The Prophet Armed* (London: Oxford University Press 1954)*, The Prophet Unarmed* (London: Oxford University Press 1959), and *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press 1963). These three books acquired almost biblical status for budding intellectuals who had some or other catchy phrase or word from Trotsky in their proverbial back pockets, and reading circles of young activists in Cape Town in the early 1980s, and it was through these books that I developed an interest in biographical writing. In fact, in a later conversation with Alexander, I said that I would like to start writing his biography, and he said: "You'll have to do that without my authorisation [or help]." He was 48 years old at the time, and I was 25. The exact wording I do not remember. I never got round to writing his life's history, and 25 years after these intensely

charged political circumstances and conversations, my one regret is that I did not take detailed notes of the many meetings and gatherings where I was present and where Alexander spoke or participated in. Generally the "minutes" of the meeting were taken, but the atmosphere was rarely captured.

[5] In the years 1983 and 1984, I had read parts of Antonio Gramsci's translated work, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1973) and I found his analysis of ideology convincing.

[6] Unlike Alexander, I was an avid and far less critical (and indeed gullible) reader of Simone de Beauvoir's and Jean-Paul Sartre's works. De Beauvoir in particular was central in my readings, especially her novel, *The Mandarins* (Norton and Company 1956), and her autobiographical works. Alongside the "compulsory" readings for our reading and study groups, I voraciously consumed her writings.

[7] See No Sizwe's *One Azania, One Nation* (London: Zed Press 1979). Alexander used the *nom de plume* after an effective 11-year incarceration (10 years on Robben Island from 1964 to 1974) and a subsequent five-year banning order that confined him to the environs of Cape Town.

[8] The younger people around Alexander at the time included Derek Naidoo, Mercia Andrews, Rita Edwards, Ashley du Plooy, Fasiega Arendse, Pumeso Lupuwana, Brian Hotz, Maria van Driel, Cecil Prinsloo, Crain Soudien and the researcher. Marcus Solomon, who was jailed with Alexander for his involvement in the Yu Chin Chan Club established by Alexander in the early 1960s, was also connected to this group through Sached Trust, and Mandla Seleoane was on the fringes. I had developed a deep affection for Solomon and Seleoane, and the latter was never really convinced of Alexander's politics. We affectionately called Alexander the "old man", and this was in part a security precaution because we were living in a military state, and because we all enjoyed the trappings and makings of political intrigue and secrecy. We were also, in some way or another, attached to a "reading group", which in the repression of the 1980s was a political cell, and the actual names of political comrades were only mentioned in private conversations. I recall that Derek Naidoo was especially circumspect about people's names, and there were times that I would be lost in telephone conversations with him because his vocabulary was peppered with false names, metaphors and suggestions.

[9] The researcher's recollection of a conversation with Alexander in 1982.

[10] The scholarly and historical jury may well be out on this issue, and different factions in the liberation movement may well have different perspectives on which political tendency held the upper hand in capturing mass consciousness. While this may be so, what cannot be disputed is that the banning of political parties, the detentions of thousands of activists, the silencing of legitimate protests and the student revolt of 1976 combined to produce a historical conjuncture that made the oppressed people inside the country rely on themselves and make their own voices heard. In this sense, the "internal" mass movement against apartheid claimed the civic space to challenge the state for power.

[11] Steve Biko had split from the National Union of South African Students (Nusas) in 1968 and formed the black South African Student Organisation (Saso). Alongside Nusas, the white student Left at universities had organised labour commissions and channelled their expertise into what came to be embryonic structures of trade unionism. While the armed propaganda of Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (Apla) of the PAC made for the "feel-good" factor in the local population, political groupings had emerged inside the country with no direct or obvious links to the traditional and exiled movements and organisations. Together with the proliferation of civic-based organisations, and other non-governmental organisations, they were the nodes of power of the mass democratic movement.

[12] Terms such as "Charterists" or "Congressites, "ultra-leftists" and "BC types" were liberally bandied about by the different factions of the Left at the time. They were loose terms used by political principals and their minions, and this researcher was very much a minion, to pigeon-hole individuals and groupings, and were intended to identify potential allies or enemies. "Charterists" or "Congressites" were those people broadly in agreement with the leading role of the ANC in the national liberation struggle and who viewed the ANC's Freedom Charter, drawn up in 1955, as their guiding political declaration of intent. "BC types" were those who broadly followed the politics of Steven Bantu Biko and who insisted on black exclusivism in political formations. The "ultra-leftists" were two groups of people: those who opposed nationalism in any form and insisted on the "leading" role of the working class (these people were mostly based in the trade union movement); and those who were unapologetic and committed Trotskyists.

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[13] The biographies of these individuals can be found elsewhere, either on the government websites or in Wikipedia. In brief, Oscar Mpetha died in the early 1990s and was a celebrated hero of the liberation struggle. Johnny Issel became a high-profile and powerful local ANC MP in the Western Cape government after 1994. Trevor Manuel has emerged as an astute ANC cabinet minister in charge of finance and, at the time writing this dissertation in 2010 and 2011, as a minister in the Presidency in charge of planning. Theresa Solomon became Cape Town's first black mayor and then served as South Africa's high commissioner to Tanzania and Canada. Peter Jones was a Paarl-based black consciousness activist who was centrally involved with Steven Biko. Mandla Seleoane was a student activist at University of Cape Town and eventually became an academic attached to the Human Sciences Research Council. Richard Dudley was the principal of a school, Livingstone High School, in Cape Town. Ben Kies was a lawyer who had a practice in Salt River and who specialised in political trials. Dullah Omar was a partner at Kies's law firm and who became South Africa's transport minister after 1994. Zackie Achmat was a radical activist and Trotskyist who later became the chairman of the Treatment Action Campaign (Achmat and his comrades used the publication, *Inqaba ya Basebenzi*, which was founded by then exiled Marxist Martin Legassick, as their political guide and "organising tool"). Jack Lewis was a student in economic history at the University of Cape Town and became a film maker. Dawood Parker was an intellectual who maintained an impressive library at his home, and whose exhortations about reading had a decisive influence on me. Willie Hofmeyer was a law graduate from University of Cape Town who later served as an ANC MP and then as the head of the country's Asset Forfeiture Unit linked to the National Prosecuting Authority.

[14] The "hungry" I refer to was a loose description of the generation of 1976 and post-1976 young revolutionaries whose "mission" was to violently overthrow the apartheid state.

[15] My recollection of another conversation I had with Alexander around 1983/4.

[16] People from across the political spectrum have acknowledged his command of English, Afrikaans and German. My interpretation and summary of the varied comments are a distillation over many years. German academic and historian Gesine Krüger said to me in the early 1990s: "You do know that Neville [Alexander] speaks high German."

[17] Theodor Adorno, the philosopher-refugee from Nazi Germany, had by the 1960s entered the raging debates between Marxism and analytical philosophy, and UK-based "Western Marxist" Perry Anderson had in 1968 described the "Oxford ordinary-language philosophy" of Adorno (who studied at Oxford between 1934 and 1938) and Karl Popper, who disagreed with Adorno over the "method" of social science, as "parish-pump positivism". Louis Althusser, the French philosopher and Marxist, had by then taken over the mantle of influence and his work became the template for many British Marxists. The Frankfurt School, and Adorno was a full member, is said to have had more influence on US left-wing thinking, while Althusser became iconic as a "structuralist" in the UK. A new breed of "Western Marxists" was in the making and Anderson was instrumental in promoting the shift towards the European or continental-inspired focus on ideology. Almost expectedly, "disillusioned Althusserians" (to use Alex Callinicos's description in his book, *Marxism and Philosophy* 1983:4) shifted towards another French philosopher, Michel Foucault.

[18] Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre's intellectual confidante and constant friend whom he met at the École Normale Supérieure, has provided ample anecdotes and narratives on his and their journeys, literary engagements, publishing battles, and intellectual foes and friends in her autobiographical accounts that appear in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958), *The Prime of Life* (1960), *Force of Circumstance* (1963), *All Said and Done* (1972), and *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (1981).

[19] A notable exception was a small but vocal Maoist grouping in France, with which Sartre eventually worked very closely before he died. He never joined the French Communist Party, but in the build-up to and publication of his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, he not only embraced Marxism as a tool of social analysis and politics, but he also became increasingly involved in civil society groupings not only to oppose continued French colonialism and its bourgeois state, but also to challenge the hegemonic order of global capitalism. The philosopher-activist, in the decade before he died, had become convinced of the applicability of Marxist theory to understand and to replace the status quo in France and globally.

[20] Mandel was a leading figure in the Trotskyist movement – especially in the Fourth International that was inspired by Trotsky's "An Open Letter for a Fourth International" published in *New Militant* in 1935 – which

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was once described by Edward Roux, a South African communist and author of *Time Longer Than Rope* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1964), as a "tendency to split". Despite being created out of the endemic bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union after Joseph Stalin, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, usurped power and effectively crushed all Left opposition forces within and outside the governing political party, the Trotskyist groupings often split over the minutest of differences and became even more hostile towards one another than towards the presumed class "enemies" of the industrial and rural proletariats they were presumably representing in their fight against "international capital". South Africa was no exception to the unfortunate, indeed destructive, splitting practices of the Trotskyists internationally. Even though the fractious groupings have had debilitating effects on young people, and the researcher includes himself as a marginal yet willing fellow traveller in the Trotskyist odyssey, Mandel has written extensively on capital accumulation and has been an iconic figure in left-wing circles and study "cells" in Cape Town. His books include *Marxist Economic Theory* (1968), *Late Capitalism* (1975), *From Class Society to Communism: An Introduction to Marxism* (1977), *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism* (1978) and *The Place of Marxism in History* (1994). In the researcher's view, while the Trotskyist movement as a whole has enriched and refined aspects of radical Marxist theory, and has often unwittingly pointed to the potentially disastrous consequences of centralising state and bureaucratic power in actually existing socialist states, its different factions have further divided the international socialist movement and has contributed to an ongoing disillusionment among leftists, especially among Marxists.

[21] See Madeleine Gobeil's interview with De Beauvoir in *The Art of Fiction No. 35* (1965).

[22] See the back cover of *One Azania, One Nation* (1979).

[23] The website, www:suite101.com, in 2008 carried a pithy summation by Chris Woolfrey titled "Author Theory – The Work of Barthes and Foucault" of post-structuralists Roland Barthes's essay, "The Death of an Author", and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?".

[24] Ibid.

[25] Louis Althusser is the celebrated "prophet" of French structuralism and whose theoretical works, *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane and Penguin 1970), *Reading Capital* (London: NLB 1970), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB 1971) and *Essays in Self Criticism* (London 1976) were lambasted by British historian and philosopher Edward P Thompson as deterministic and ahistorical. See Thompson's polemical *The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press 1978).

[26] In June 1933, Leon Trotsky wrote a pamphlet titled "What Is National Socialism?". He presents an analysis of the rise of fascism and of Hitler, and starts off his propaganda piece with the following: "Naive minds think that the office of kingship lodges in the king himself, in his ermine cloak and his crown, in his flesh and bones. As a matter of fact, the office of kingship is an interrelation between people. The king is king only because the interests and prejudices of millions of people are *refracted* [my italics] through his person." The original pamphlet was published in *The Modern Thinker*, October 1933. My use of the concept of refraction is premised on the idea that individuals are constituted in relation to other people and that stations or occupations in life are in fact relations between people and their cumulative histories and knowledge. This study on Neville Alexander is indeed an attempt to understand the "refraction" of ideologies and philosophies through the works of this linguistic and political activist. This is where I part company with Barthes and Foucault. This dissertation necessarily has to interrogate the philosophical influences on the subject/writer (Alexander) to be able to analyse the writings themselves, and to present a defensible argument about Alexander's changing identity over the past 30 years. In my opinion, Trotsky's notion of refraction is a useful grid through which to view the writings of Alexander.

[27] Chomsky's ideas on "generative grammar" are complex and adequately covered in analyses and biographical accounts elsewhere. The interview referred to took place in 1971 and had Chomsky and Foucault as participants. The discussion was hosted by an anarchist who was intent on pitting the two intellectuals against each other.

[28] See Lisa Downing, *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008:vii).

[29] In the latter part of his life, Michel Foucault focused increasingly on sexuality and the power relations in which human subjects enter when they explore this changing phenomenon. Foucault's volumes 1 and 2 of his

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History of Sexuality (New York: Pantheon Books 1985) provide incisive historical accounts of changing human sexuality, identity and power.

[30] Alexander has been consistent in his opposition to the "four-nation" thesis advocated by the ANC and its allies in the Communist Party. For the ANC, and this is a crude summary, the nation comprises Africans, Coloureds, Indian and Whites. The "main content" of the national liberation struggle was to rid the country of apartheid and to replace the authority of power in the hands of Africans, the argument goes. For Alexander, this has always been his problem with the ANC and the former Stalinist Communist Party of South Africa. In his view, this perception is flawed, and at worst could lead to genocidal wars being fought out between these various "population registration groups". The misconception that this thesis is based on is that "race" underpins the ANC's preoccupation with these groups of people, not unlike the policies advocated by the former apartheid regime or those of Adolf Hitler. Instead, and this will be discussed in far greater detail later in the dissertation, Alexander introduced the refined edge of class, ideology and power to his conception of the "elements that constitute the theory of the nation" (No Sizwe, 1979:132–164). In what is arguably one of the first South African-inspired critiques of the "reality of racism" and the "myth of race as a sound biological entity", Alexander outlined a fundamentally opposing and new view of the national question in 1979.

[31] This Marxist view on revolution can be summed up as follows: whereas a "political revolution" implies a change in government without transforming production relations (much like what has happened in 1994 in South Africa), a "social revolution" implies a radical change in relations of production and a change in ideology of the government that emerges from this overhaul. The South African Communist Party and ANC stalwart, Rivonia trialist Walter Sisulu, who toured the country after his release from prison in an effort to persuade Umkhonto we Sizwe and other ANC cadres and their commanders to embrace the political option of negotiations between the years 1991 and 1993 (and not to continue the armed struggle against apartheid), described the change in 1994 as a "political revolution" in a conversation that this researcher had with him and former banker, anti-militarist campaigner and colleague Terry Crawford-Brown in Cape Town after the ANC victory at the polls.

[32] See James Miller's narrative account of Foucault, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (London: Flamingo 1994:357).

[33] "Limit-experiences" are a peculiarly Foucauldian construct. They refer to those experiences in life where pain and pleasure are at their limit, and the intensity of the lived experience approximates Friedrich Nietzsche's gnomic decree, "to become what one is".

[34] Foucault died of Aids in June 1984, and on his death bed, he, for the first time, spoke about his personal life and childhood to his friend, Herve Guibert. Miller's sympathetic account of Foucault's last days suggests that the French philosopher, although he confessed to Guibert, still struggled with his shadows and his subterfuge, wanting and not wanting to talk about his life.

[35] Alexander was taken into custody by the security police of the apartheid state in 1963. He was held in detention for a year and then convicted of plotting to overthrow the government through "reading" about guerrilla warfare. Literature on armed struggles was found by the police that implicated Alexander and his comrades in the Yu Chin Chan Club, and he was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on Robben Island. Effectively, Alexander was imprisoned for 11 years.

[36] See E.H. Carr, *The History of Soviet Russia* (New York: Macmillan Company 1959).

[37] E.H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Random House 1961).

[38] Michael Ignatieff's biography, *Isaiah Berlin* (London: Random House 1998), provides insightful glances into Berlin's life and his intellectual preoccupations. His duel with Carr was one of many that he used to elaborate on his liberal political principles. Ignatieff wrote: "Replying to Carr was a challenge Berlin could not duck. In a series of letters to *The Listener*, as well as in private exchanges with Carr himself, Berlin insisted that Marxist theory put an almost exclusive emphasis on abstract socio-economic causation and neglected the importance of the ideas, beliefs and intentions of individuals." (1998:236)

[39] Isaac Deutscher's trilogy on Trotsky is helpful and insightful. In particular, *The Prophet Armed* (1954) deals with the period up to 1921, after which Trotsky was increasingly marginalised by Stalin and ostracised by like-minded apparatchiks of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. According to Deutscher, Trotsky started to read French novels in Communist Party central committee and politbureau meetings to show his contempt for

Stalin's increasingly pernicious and brutal role in establishing the "cult of personality" around Lenin (who died in 1924), and through this, around himself. In what came to be a criticism of communist parties across the world in later years, the "democratic centralism" that Lenin advocated as an organisational principle for the Bolshevik Party was elevated by Stalin and his followers to an organisational decree that allows a single leader the power to determine policy, deaths, and an allocation of resources to suit his or her interests. The ethical and class issues of decision-making do not feature in this interpretation of democratic centralism. Critics of communism have argued that the "democratic centralism" of Lenin inevitably leads to a "bureaucratic centralism" because loyalties are developed and sustained with particular individuals, and not necessarily to concepts. In this, they are probably right, and new forms of organisations have mushroomed. The women's movement has been particularly vocal and marginally successful in its campaign for transparency and accountability in political work for mass-based and civic movements.

[40] Rivonia trialists included Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada and Walter Sisulu. These people were sent to life imprisonment for their involvement in planned armed opposition to the apartheid state.

[41] Apartheid-capitalism was a concept used by South African Marxists to describe the political economy of the country before 1994, and was used to explain the "symbiotic" relationship between the government apartheid policies and the economic framework within which these policies were operationalised as tools of production management and as tools of social engineering. The concept was used interchangeably with "racial capitalism".

[42] In the circles and political cells around Alexander, this notion of "tail-ending" was used to criticise the acquiescence of activists who threw their support behind all struggles of the masses, regardless of the presumed intent. Because it involved ordinary people on the ground, it was argued, it therefore had to be supported. But for the non-Charterists in Cape Town, spontaneous revolts of the masses were treated with suspicion. "Issue-based" politics, whether it was the rent boycotts, bus boycotts, the student protests led by the Committee of 81 – a senior secondary school initiative – or throwing boulders and stones at the police and the military that patrolled the working class suburbs of Cape Town, were often dismissed as senseless acts by these intellectuals.

[43] A political and civic-based initiative called the National Forum was established in June 1983. While the founders would have liked to believe that this was a "mass-based" formation, or at the very least able to procure a mass following, the fact of the matter is that it remained a loose coalition of Marxist study groups, some civics, BC political formations and intellectuals disillusioned with the impending slide towards the Charterists in the liberation movement. BC luminaries such as Lybon Mabasa, Phiroshaw Camay and Saths Cooper, then the vice-president of the Azanian People's Organisation, independent socialist Neville Alexander, who was then the leading theoretician of the Cape Action League, a coalition of civic organisations in the Western Cape, Desmond Tutu and Emma Mashinini were the movers and shakers behind this forum, which came to be seen as an alternative to the Charterists, who created the United Democratic Front later on that year (the national launch of the UDF was in August 1983).

[44] See E.H. Carr, 2001. *The Twenty Year Crisis*. New York: Perennial.

[45] Alexander had and still does have a different view about the national question than most ANC theoreticians and strategists. In his view, the question has to answer the issue of which class interests should dominate. For Alexander, the question is only partly answerable unless language, ideology and ownership of the means of production are addressed. For the ANC, the national question is resolved when a harmonious and tolerable co-existence is established between Africans, Coloureds, Indians and whites. The majority of people are Africans, so the interests of Africans are to dominate the polity, the ANC's policy documents reiterate. This falls short of addressing issues of class.

[46] Azania is a derivative of the Zanj city states of the east African coast, which British historian Basil Davidson loosely described as the "land of the black people". In a political journal and publication called *Free Azania*, which was published between the years 1982 to 1985 and of which I was the nominal editor with Alexander in the background, Alexander wrote that "Azania" may well be a myth, and that myths are not necessarily lies but can often be "outlines of reality".

[47] A good reference work and discussion on Benedict Anderson is Chris Barker's *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities* (Buckingham: Open University Press 1999:65–67). A detailed discussion on Anderson's "imagined communities" is taken up later in this dissertation where I will not only compare and synthesise his writings with those of Alexander's, but I will attempt a critique.

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[48] I have used "general interest" (including the constitutionally enshrined "right to life", "right to education" – which are not necessarily "bad") as opposed to the sectional interests of different classes making up the society.

[49] See Benedetto Fontana's article titled "The Democratic Philosopher: Rhetoric as Hegemony in Gramsci", which appeared in *Italian Culture 23* (Michigan: Michigan University Press 2006:97–123).

[50] Gramsci, A. 1996. *Prison Notebooks Volume II* (Edited by Joseph A. Buttigieg). New York: Columbia University Press.

[51] In 1971, Quinton Hoare's and Geoffrey Nowell's translation of Gramsci's *Selections from Prison Notebooks* was first published. For English-speaking scholars of Marxism and for revolutionary activists, this was an important chapter in understanding the Italian Marxist's thought. Gramsci, in the opinion of the researcher, wrote elliptically. His notebooks were written in prison and they are not ordered in a book-type format. The non-linear approach to writing was his signature and he had to rely on memory, recall and some reference books in constructing his arguments and "theses, which appeared in paragraph style, and were often non-sequential in that the one did not necessarily follow on from the previous".

[52] Rene Descartes was a French philosopher and mathematician whose canonical pronouncement gave philosophy a timely injection, and a century or so later Marxists declared that philosophers had been interpreting the world, "the point is to change it".

[53] See Fontana, *op. cit.*

[54] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol.1* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). Habermas's more general works attempt to "reconstruct a moral point of view from which normative claims can be based".

[55] At the time of writing this dissertation in 2010 and 2011, Alexander was the director of the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (Praesa).

[56] "Capital" and the "black middle class" will be discussed in greater detail later in the dissertation, but a useful starting reference is the insightful book and journalistic account by Moeletsi Mbeki, *Architects of Poverty* (Johannesburg: Picador 2009), on why capitalism needs changing in Africa. Mbeki looks at Africa's malaise, South Africa's elite, the makings and failures of African states and regional integration.

[57] In assisting me prepare the research proposal for this dissertation, my supervisor and the incumbent South African Chair in Development Education at the University of South Africa, Catherine Odora Hoppers, made this telling albeit unsurprising remark about Alexander in one of the many discussions that the researcher has had with her.

[58] See John Gross's *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987:11).

[59] Edwin Cameron, *Witness to AIDS* (Cape Town: Tafelberg 2005:212).

[60] In the introductory paragraph of one of his more recent articles, "Schooling in and for the New South Africa", Alexander states: "We write about schooling in South Africa at a time when most knowledgeable educationalists and practitioners are agreed that the educational system is in a state of chronic crisis." The article appeared in *Focus Issue 56* (Houghton: Helen Suzman Foundation, February 2010:7).

[61] See Cameron's discussion on denialism (*Witness to AIDS* 2005:131–135).

[62] *The Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006:863) states that a waltz is "a ballroom dance in triple time performed by a couple, who turn round and round as they progress around the dance floor". But, this fount of English diction also says, to "waltz in" is to behave in a casual or inconsiderate way – not the kind of movement one associates with Alexander.

[63] This idea of a "sophisticated capitalism" may admit of some dispute. The country is regarded as the economic powerhouse of Africa and has a gross domestic product that suggests year-on-year growth. The ideological positioning of the government, despite its employment of key SA Communist Party figures such as Jeremy Cronin and Blade Nzimande in deputy ministerial and ministerial (Cabinet) positions, respectively, is one that approximates a crude nationalism that dispels hope for a socialist consciousness to develop. Julius Malema, the leader of the ANC Youth League, represents a particular Africanist approach that has regained currency in the critical decision-making organs of the ANC.

[64] See No Sizwe (1979:7).

[65] Trotskyist groupings, which included the Non-European Unity Movement and later the New Unity Movement, fomented a unique brand of politics that seems to have been constructed in relation to their definition of the "character of the Soviet Union" (what mattered was not so much the struggles of people in the

Soviet Union but rather the machinations of the bureaucracy), and the Trotskyists were obsessively divided over whether the Soviet Union was "state capitalist", "a degenerate/deformed workers' state", or whether it was more generously, a socialist state whose leaders had "lost their way". The South Africa historian and communist, Edward Roux, in his *Time Longer Than Rope* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1966), describes the Trotskyists as a political grouping that has a "tendency to split".

[66] See No Sizwe (1979:132–164).

[67] Nobel Prize winner VS Naipaul describes the Trinidadian chapter of his life as "The Worm in the Bud" in his book, *A Writer's People* (London: Picador 2007).

[68] Paulo Freire's work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press 1968), remains a beacon for activists across the world.

[69] Cameron, op cit.

Chapter 2

The Ballroom and the Dance Floor

The 1970s

Liberal and Marxist scholarship on South Africa's economic, political and educational history shared a common home. Their philosophical lines of enquiry emanated from formerly white English-language universities, or they were huddled and boxed into some corner offices at the black institutions that were designed by the dons of apartheid to serve the natives.[1] The premises on which these politically antagonistic, yet at times overlapping, worldviews were based remain intact and contested, but there can be little doubt that the volumes of papers, theses, articles, books and sheer academic hard and incisive work produced by liberal and Marxist scholars have enriched the body of social theory and knowledge.

Many radical black academics were studying abroad in the 1970s and 1980s, working anonymously in exile, working discreetly at white liberal universities, employed by "bush colleges", or were working in non-governmental organisations supported by a panoply of funders. These funders included the Swedish government's development agency, Sida, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Germany's political party-linked funders[2], British-based Oxfam, the government-funded development agencies of the Netherlands, left-wing groups such as the relatively small Umverteilen Stiftung in Germany, and political and material support from the Soviet Union, China, and other foreign agencies.[3]

Convergence between the radical and socialist-inspired Left's overriding political mission and the parliamentary destiny of liberalism was unlikely because the former sought the overthrow of apartheid-capitalism outside the legal framework, while the latter not only worked within the existing system of racial domination but also advocated a benevolent capitalism without its racial underpinnings. Liberal philosophy in South Africa had its roots in the English commercialism that preceded, and made it an unwilling participant in legitimising, the overtly racist state of the National Party. Co-operation between the various ideologues and practitioners of left-wing politics and those of liberal schools came about

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because both parties embraced an essential humanism in their outlooks and because of personal friendships cultivated in their places of work, in the academy or in struggles against apartheid. Marxists and liberals suspiciously worked alongside one another to topple apartheid and the discriminatory tyranny, which was based on the constructed mythology of "race" by South Africa's ruling classes, of which the liberal commercial interests dominated until about 1948 when the National Party captured the political and economic reins of power. The National Party politically demoted the mainly UK-orientated mining and finance houses to oppositional roles in parliamentary protest through the former United Party, and after this the Progressive Federal Party. [4]

Internationally, the political scenario in the early 1970s was marked by popular challenges to United States imperialist aggression in Vietnam and the interventions of the Soviet Union and China in support of liberation movements globally.

The ANC was a direct recipient of Soviet support and its cadres were sent to the "actually existing" [5] socialist state for military and ideological training. The PAC was forging fraternal relations with the Chinese Communist Party, and the black consciousness movement was in its infancy. Working class protests and challenges to apartheid were episodic with 1973 marking a milestone in industrial strikes in South Africa. The decade of the 1970s was, in many important respects, a defining moment in the country's political economy, and despite the very many and varied treatises on the development of capitalism that were circulating in academic and left-wing circles at the time, the decades, it was generally agreed by commentators and analysts alike, preceding this decisive stage in South African history were not seamless.

A look backwards: 1910 to 1984

Before presenting a series of historical snapshots of the political economy in South Africa since 1910, it might be well worth noting that while detours outlining the principal features of capital accumulation in South Africa, the state and its evolving social base have been an intellectual preserve of radical Marxist and liberal sociologists and political economists, any periodisation is always a rough approximation of the main "content" of a historical moment,

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and the researcher is aware of the dangers inherent in a view of history as a series of "turning points". Depending on the class position adopted or assimilated by the person constructing these "moments" – which, in sociological parlance, tend to imply a confluence of political, social and economic events – they are either presented as a continuum in a series of changes, or presented as a yardstick to retain a status quo.

In this sense, the researcher agrees with the insightful remarks of David Yudelman (1984:22–26), who argues for a complete revision of twentieth-century South African history as a whole, and asserts that "modern South Africa" has to be conceptualised differently. But, as a point of departure, the work done by liberal, or neo-conservative, and Marxist, or neo-Marxist, theorists has been fundamental in opening up new avenues of investigation and indeed in collapsing some of the mythologies in official and repetitive apartheid propaganda. While the theoretical grid outlined below is divided into two – a view from "above" and a view from "below" – this dichotomy is intellectually artificial, but useful. Resistance to the apartheid state and its various incarnations over 80 years is well recorded, and the articulation between what the state did or did not do, and the liberation movement's response to that state, has been documented and analysed. The original documents compiled by the different organisations making up the liberation movement edited by Karis and Carter[6] (1972; 1977), and later Karis and Gerhart, is an impressive written testimony of the "view from below", even though this view is one that is "mediated" through the writings of the acknowledged, elected or self-appointed leaderships of the organisations claiming authorship of the documents. On the other hand, the work of neo-conservatives such as DW Krüger (1969), a former director of the Institute of Historical Research, now the Human Sciences Research Council, on the "making of a nation", is equally important in that it provides a "view from above" and an insider (a pro-National Party) perspective on the history of the Union of South Africa between 1910 and 1961.[7]

For the purposes of this dissertation, the evolution of the state and that of the radical black opposition is conceptualised separately initially, and then as the manufacturing sector consolidates from the 1940s to the 1980s, the functional relationship between "race" and class recedes, setting the stage for the "clash of the titans"[8] in the 1990s and early 21st century. While this dualistic sketch of South African history is a necessary addition to developing a more comprehensive picture of the ballroom in, and the dance floor on which Neville Alexander came to "dance", the researcher acknowledges that this intellectual

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dichotomy can be criticised because, among other considerations, it does not deftly capture the in-depth detail of the "articulation" between the oppressed people and the state, and because it does not address the sites of contestation that had led to changes in government policy that were the result of mass action, or changes in mass action that were the direct or indirect consequences of state policy. But having said that, there is also the compelling argument that the separateness of different experiences was precisely the ideological and political construct that drove the architects of South Africa's unique path of "separate development".

According to liberal economists Sampie Terreblanche and Nicoli Nattrass (1990:6–23), the political economy of the developing racially exclusive state had six discernible and identifiable preceding "periods" before the late 1980s.

The first period, 1910 to 1922, was kick-started by the decision of the British parliament to grant the different colonies a generic Union of South Africa status in 1910, when black people were almost "completely excluded from [South African] parliament", the alliance between Afrikaner farmers and capitalist mine owners formed the "backbone" of the pro-British South African Party. While ideologically ultra conservative, but politically radical, nationalist Afrikaners under the command of General James Barry Munnik Herzog opposed the continuation of this alliance, the period highlighted the legislative and formal union between "gold and maize" (that is, a union between British-controlled mining and mainly Afrikaner-controlled farming), and the respective governments of General Jan Christiaan Smuts and General Louis Botha introduced legislation that prefigured the fully developed apartheid state of the 1970s. The statutory "colour bar" at the point of production was promulgated in 1911 through the Mines and Works Act. This was accompanied by the Black Regulations Act, which made it an offence "for a black miner to break his employment contract". In 1913, the Land Act stipulated restrictions for black people to acquire land, and thereby secured the increase in the cheap labour supply. The policy of the government of the Union of South Africa was straightforward: on the one hand, it was intent on making black people insecure sojourners in their land of birth and create a migratory urban and rural proletariat; and on the other, the dominant political establishment needed to forge, as far as it was possible, a workable white unity between the Brit and the Afrikaner.

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In this first period, there was a divide in educational practice: there was an education for whites, "the civilised", and then there was education for the natives, the "uncivilised black masses". Just prior to the Act of Union in 1910, historian of South African education Michael Cross[9] writes, the Cape School Board Act of 1905, the Smuts' Education Act of 1907 in the Transvaal and the Herzog's School Act of 1908 in the Orange River Colony "made compulsory provision for white children and institutionalized racial separation in education" (Cross 1999:18). According to Cross, who cites the authoritative work of historians Stanley Trapido and Shula Marks (1979), the Milner[10] and Smuts regimes were the progenitors of many "guidelines of twentieth-century segregationist policies" in South Africa. Under Milner and his predecessors, the colonies promoted a British identity for white people. Cross paraphrases Malherbe[11] and asserts that these policies "precipitated the development of Christian National Education (CNE) Movement, an important aspect of the struggle for Afrikaner linguistic and cultural affirmation".

But to understand the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the repeated and often failed attempts to forge the sought-after unity between the Boers and the British, it is worth mentioning that the Calvinist tradition played an instrumental part. Cross (1999:16) points out that "Calvinism, as its main form of theology, associated the idea of predestination – a sense of group mission and the notion that the Afrikaner is a God-chosen people – with Afrikaner nationalism. As Afrikaners gained prominence in South African politics, this notion provided the theological justification for Afrikaner hegemony and dominance in politics."

The second period, 1922 to 1933, was ushered in by a "minor civil war" on the Witwatersrand by white mine workers. Employment conditions had changed because the gold price had declined and rising costs had compelled the Chamber of Mines, which was then the financial and organisational node of British interests controlling the economy, to award black people more job opportunities at lesser cost. Overtly anti-capitalist and essentially racist, the strike of white workers led to a pact between the English-speaking Labour Party and Herzog's National Party, and resulted in the successful mobilisation of Afrikaner anti-imperialist sentiment and the start of a Pact government from 1924. A hallmark of this period was increased state intervention and protectionist policies, a form of what Terreblanche and Nattrass call "economic nationalism". During this period, mining and farming were still the main contributors to the gross domestic product, but these economic sectors were about to be

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challenged by manufacturing, whose organisational appearance was marked by the creation of Iscor, the Iron and Steel Corporation, in 1928. Alongside these economic initiatives that were a signature of the Pact government, the state also adopted welfare policies to compensate "poorer whites (of which over 80 per cent were Afrikaans) for the impoverishment and disruption that they were suffering as a consequence of modernization and urbanization". The political intention was to allay white fears of black competition in the market place. Key to this was the 1925 Wage Act that codified the government's intention to pay white workers a rate "commensurate with a 'civilised' standard of living". The implication was again obvious: the wages paid to black workers were uncivilised. A stratified labour aristocracy was in the making for the anti-imperialists of Herzog and the self-professed anti-capitalists of Colonel FHP Creswell in the South African Labour Party. For both Herzog's National Party and Creswell's Labour Party, white workers' unity was a necessary bulwark against the regulated and potentially explosive upward mobility of black workers whose stations in life and in the economy were not to be stroked with the brush of "civilisation". To this end, white labour had to be protected at all costs. Under the Pact regime, a workers' government was operationalised. Of course, the difference was that it was a white workers' government whose very existence depended on the continued hegemonic presence of white capital in mining, farming and, towards the late 1920s, manufacturing.

The third period, 1933 to 1948, was heralded by the political capitulation of Herzog to General Smuts. The South African economy had not escaped the consequences of the great Depression between 1928 and 1932, and with a gross domestic product that had shrunk by 6 per cent, the task of the political authority appeared to be to "rehabilitate" the economy. The gold standard was dropped with Britain leading the charge to delink its pound currency from the metal, and South Africa was selling gold at twice its previous price. This led to the marginal rescue of gold miners and encouraged the expansion of the manufacturing industry. The political leadership of Smuts and Herzog needed to "fuse" again in a mutually beneficial arrangement to prevent the economy sliding back into a depression, and save the then lucrative gold mining industry, and to "get the blacks off the voters' roll". Both men eventually achieved their aims. But then Hitler interceded and Herzog favoured "neutrality" in the Second World War, whereas Smuts was emphatic about supporting the "Allied cause". Working class white men left their jobs to fight in the war and a gradual erosion of the colour bar took place in the 1940s. More black people were given skilled jobs under the Fusion government, and this unsettled the comfort zones of Herzog and his Afrikaner nationalists.

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The now famous Fagan Commission of 1948 argued that "permanent black urbanization should be unrestricted in order to meet the needs of industrial expansion and to provide a settled, stable, skilled workforce with improved education and wages so as to provide an expanding market for consumer goods" (Nattrass & Ardington, 1990). But this liberal slide was not to be entertained by Daniel François Malan of the National Party, which was by then (late 1930s and in the build-up to 1948) eclipsing Herzog and was beginning to address more of the national symbolism and sentiments of the Afrikaner proletariat. Malan, who is regarded as the architect of what eventually coalesced as apartheid among the dominant and subordinated social classes in South Africa, started mobilising Afrikaners and other white workers on a programme that has been variously and richly described by South African Marxist academic Dan O'Meara (1997) as "volkskapitalisme", or roughly translated as "people's capitalism". Herzog did throw his lot in with Malan and secured the political victory of 1948 when Afrikaner workers, Afrikaner capitalists and the emerging Afrikaner *petit bourgeoisie* voted Afrikaner nationalists into power. For the new political class of Afrikaners, now firmly in control of the reins of power, the political victory of 1948 against Smuts and British interests, it meant that capital accumulation no longer required unholy alliances with self-professed socialists such as Creswell's Labour Party, nor did it mean an uncomfortable second-cousin status to previously hegemonic British capital, but the dawn of a new chapter in South Africa. Afrikaner nationalism transformed itself from an economic nationalism of the 1920s to safeguard white working class interests to creating platforms for unfettered capital growth for its own: a coalition of class strata that spanned workers, industrialists, entrepreneurs and a growing middle class of state bureaucrats, nurses, teachers, lawyers. The template for unrestricted apartheid rule and tyranny was made in 1948.

The fourth period, 1948 to 1960, with the National Party precariously perched on a fragile branch and facing two directions, apartheid was adopted as the government's strategy to disorganise potential and actual black popular protest, to secure cheap black labour for the mines and the farms, and to create a multiclass phalanx of white people committed to unquestioning white capitalist political rule and economic domination. The state was now in the hands of the National Party under the leadership of DF Malan, and there was an urgent imperative to "man" the key posts and place the quartermasters in strategic positions to exercise the political authority over the country. The white parliament was to be used to pass legislation [12] that enabled the social and economic planners of the new apartheid state to dismember whatever black resistance might have posed a challenge to its political authority,

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to forcibly secure black people's labour power in the key industries; and to provide an enabling environment for white capital in the mines, in manufacturing and on the farms to grow. This essential economic nationalism of the 1920s was transmogrified into a form of white Afrikaner rule that required the "buy-in" of its main and evolving social base: white workers and a developing middle class that extended beyond the beneficiaries of Sanlam. The state bureaucracy and parastatals were enlarged in this critical period of institutionalising apartheid and effectively "solved the 'poor white' problem". For the apartheid state, white workers posed little threat if visible material benefits accrued to them – their political allegiance had already been secured through the 1948 electoral victory of the National Party, and, in any event, round after round of legislation merely confirmed their superior status as labour aristocrats. For the planners of apartheid, white workers were a necessary component of its strategy to build white rule in South Africa. They were after all going to be the foot soldiers of the apartheid army and police services to control an unpredictable and "restless" black population and fend off any external or internal threat to racial capitalist rule. White workers and a growing Afrikaner middle class bureaucracy were seen to be, and indeed were, instrumental in establishing the initial racial contours of Afrikaner rule.

The fifth period, 1960 to 1973, started as a baptism of fire with the anti-pass campaign of the Pan Africanist Congress. The events of March 1960 "resulted in an economic as well as a political crisis. Capital poured out of the country and the value of the rand plummeted," write Nattrass and Terreblanche (1990). The dons of the apartheid state, now spearheaded by Hendrik Verwoed and after it was excluded from the Commonwealth following its unilateral declaration as a "republic" in 1961, vigorously pursued a policy of "separate development" and attempted to balkanise the country into different ethnicities. The strategy was intended to achieve two aims: one, to declare "independence" for the "homelands" – areas in South Africa perceived by the architects of apartheid to be occupied by a particular language or cultural group; and two, to stem urbanisation. The black urban proletariat had increased twofold since the 1930s, and this was seen to be a threat to cities and their lily white populous. Repression, detention and incarceration of black people were the order of the day for the racist state, and once Mandela, Sisulu, Sobukwe and other resistance icons were imprisoned on Robben Island, the state resumed its historical focus to function as a political manager of capital, and not merely as an instrument of repression. The economy expanded at a healthy 5.6 per cent per annum between 1960 and 1970, and, in the words of Terreblanche and Nattrass (1990:14) again: "At the same time, a stronger Afrikaner business

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class emerged. In witnessing the way in which this class prospered under bureaucratic favours, the English-speaking business class softened its attitude towards the National Party government."

The sixth period, 1973 to 1984, was marked by many momentous events, two of which seem to stand out: firstly, the urban strikes that occurred in 1973; and secondly, the students' revolt in 1976. Triggered by the 40 per cent rise in commodities, black workers took to the streets in Durban in the early 1973 and for four years afterwards, intermittent strikes followed. The state responded to this militancy by initiating the reformist Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions to propose reforms in industrial relations and labour needs, respectively. Wiehahn recommended that black trade unions be legalised and that the job colour bar be scrapped.

Labour correspondent and liberal journalist Steven Friedman[13], who was then writing for the newspaper, *Rand Daily Mail*, writes the following of this period in the 1970s:

> The initial wave of organisation was to prove as ephemeral as its predecessors. The banning of union leaders – all white intellectuals – began a decline which was to see paid-up membership in the Durban area slump to something in the region of 2,000 by the mid-1970s. In retrospect, it seemed that the brief wave of unionism in the early Seventies was to be yet another chapter in the catalogue of the African union movement's failures. (Macshane, Plaut & Ward 1984:48).

Macshane et al (1984), in whose book *Power!* Friedman is quoted, argue that Friedman's prognosis "proved mistaken". On the contrary, the authors assert, unions had grown and they had become a powerful force "on the South African political scene". Alongside these events that directly affected working class people, black students also took to the streets and protested in 1976. Nattrass and Terreblanche (1990:17) describe the student protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in the following way:

> The 1976 Soweto uprising, which left at least 575 dead and 2 389 wounded (Lodge, 1983, p. 330), is an important watershed in South Africa's political economic history. As in 1922 and 1961, South Africa

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reeled under both political and economic crises as widespread capital flight was induced. This, coupled with the world economic downswing following the OPEC oil price hikes, had a negative impact on South Africa's growth performance. Since 1974 the annual growth rate has averaged less than 2 per cent per annum and real per capita income has declined by 15 per cent (Van der Berg, 1989 – reference in the original).

Alexander in the 1970s

Neville Alexander was released from Robben Island in 1974 after spending an effective 11 years as a prisoner of the apartheid state. This was a year after the Durban strikes that left a significant mark on the country's trade union movement [14]. The black consciousness movement was piecing together a fragmented political community of black student activists, and was in its infancy and already under the unwarranted and vicious scrutiny by the security police of the apartheid state.

At 38 years old, Alexander, armed with a detailed knowledge of the political orientations of fellow Robben Islanders and a doctorate in German classical drama [15], had just emerged from enforced exile from his community, his political comrades, his friends and his loves. But the state was not going to allow him to live a normal life. It immediately banned him for five years after his release. This meant that Alexander was not allowed to leave the judicial area of Cape Town, and was not allowed to be in the company of more than one person at a time. This had direct implications for his political and academic work. The authorities literally cut him off from the rest of society, and he was not allowed to work in an environment where his productive activity was shared with other people, and he was not permitted to be in the same company of more than one other person. Moreover, he was prevented from going into exile to join the ANC, PAC or any other political organisation, and become an activist from afar. He certainly had no intention of joining these political organisations as they were not advocating the interests and aspirations that he stood for. Apart from the intention to overthrow the apartheid state through armed struggle, Alexander saw no common ideological and political ground with these organisations. His training had begun in the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (Apdusa) and the students' union of the Non-European Unity Movement in the 1950s. The various Congress groupings and the ideological insistence on racial categories within the ANC and the PAC made synergies between a post-1973 Alexander and these political groupings very difficult

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and practically impossible. Instead, Alexander stayed on in South Africa, and prepared the theoretical groundwork for his 1979 publication of *One Azania, One Nation*.

Then 1976 happened and the students of Soweto threw down the gauntlet to the apartheid state. Mass popular protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in black schools quickly gathered momentum into a wider social movement against apartheid and capitalism. The state had to quell this growing threat of insurrectionary politics that came about as a consequence of relatively peaceful civil protest. It moved quickly and by 1977, all the major political organisations of black people were banned again, and the apartheid state embarked upon a strategy to cut off the new and emerging leadership of black consciousness activists, independent socialists and trade union radicals. [16]

Alexander's tools of analysis were being shaped by the intensification of mass protests, popular anger and the proliferation of internal political organisation. But towards the end of the decade he had two ideological issues that he had to settle: the first was the obfuscation of "race" and the national question in South Africa as expounded by the theoreticians of apartheid and their predecessors in the shape of British colonialism; and the second was the obfuscation or the lack of science and investigation in the liberation movement's interpretation of the national question in South Africa on the one hand, and the obscurantism of the traditional Stalinist and indeed Marxist views that infused the thinking of even the brightest in the Communist Party of South Africa, the ANC, the PAC, the radical nationalists of the black consciousness movement, and the growing number of "workerists" in the trade union movement on the other. A novel assessment of the national question was an imperative if new strategic political alliances were to be forged, and Alexander concentrated on drawing up an ideological matrix upon which, he presumably thought or calculated, a new internal non-Congress united front of political movements would coalesce to challenge for state power and install a socialist regime.

For the purposes of this dissertation, and in anticipation of the discussion on Alexander's subsequent political strategy, a detour on the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and its counterpart, African nationalism, is germane.

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Afrikaner nationalism

Afrikaner nationalism has its political origins in the Afrikaner Bond, which was formed in 1882. According to No Sizwe, the Bond was a "political association of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois white (predominantly Afrikaans-speaking) farmers" [17]. The struggle of this intellectual elite of mainly Cape-based farmers was to achieve equal status of Dutch with English, and their economic mission was to lessen the grip that British banks had on South Africa in the latter quarter of the 19th century. The Boers launched their first war against British imperialism seven years later between 1879 and 1881. Afrikaner nationalism or as No Sizwe describes it, "Afrikaner sectionalism" was born and suffered a further setback when the British successfully scuppered attempts by the Boers between 1899 and 1902 to gain a foothold in the economy and have the essentially bourgeois Afrikaner nationalism the principal focus of the white polity. The defeat of the Boer republics and the continued stranglehold of British commercialism over the country resulted in the 1910 Union of South Africa that collapsed the four colonies into one political entity. But 1910 also heralded the start of an "all-white aristocracy" [18] against the anticipated charges of the native black hordes. But rebellion was in the air and in 1914 the scattered urban working classes and *petit bourgeoisie* coalesced around the systematic dispossession suffered after the defeats in the Boer War of 1899 to 1902. By 1918 the Afrikaner Broederbond was formed and spearheaded the cultural and economic "class vanguard of Afrikaner nationalism" [19].

The white miners' strike of 1922, which was also called the Rand Strike/Revolt, was directed at the "hostile coalition of mine magnates and the South African Party government" [20]. The revolt opened up a passage for the adoption of the Union of South Africa's first Industrial Conciliation Act in 1924, and exposed the vulnerability of the crisis-ridden Union government, which was desperately trying to politically demobilise a nascent but growing Afrikaner nationalism and confidently face Britain with the keys to unlock the treasure trove of the country's mineral riches.

The Afrikaners had, however, a decided advantage over the disparate groups that the South African Party government held as its constituency. From its outset, the nationalist movement had organised people from all classes of Afrikaans-speaking white society around the relevance of language and economic interests. Dan O'Meara (1975) asserts that the class nature of this powerful Afrikaner entity is a key to an "understanding of its role and of 'Afrikaner Nationalism'". [21] Intense class conflict preceded the 1922 revolt of white miners,

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but it took a number of years to form the Broederbond, which was, in O'Meara's view, a "petty bourgeois organisation pure and simple". It was an urban movement comprising clerks in its formative years in the 1920s, and after 1933, it was dominated by professional groups of academics, teachers and lawyers. While the class character of its members differed from the Cape to the Northern Cape and the Transvaal, it became the conduit through which Afrikaner capital started to mobilise against and challenge, in the decades leading up to 1948, the domination of politics under General Jan Smuts and his pro-British commercial interests in the economy.

The years of white tolerance and compromise between Boer and Brit in the 1930s, which were marked by a coalition government between the Afrikaner Albert Hertzog and essentially colonial interests represented by Smuts, came to an end when the Smuts *kraal* succeeded in pushing through the decision to enter World War 2 on the side of the British and the other anti-Nazi governments.

For the radical nationalists in the Afrikaner movement, the 1930s produced the conditions that brought into being the Ossewa Brandwag (OB), which not only contemplated a guerrilla war against Smuts and his government, but was actively promoting a pro-Nazi ideology and a racial exclusivity that later on, under the post-1948 National Party government, percolated into the brutal policies that came to be euphemistically called "separate development": the nightmare of Bantustans and the official embrace of the notion that South Africa's polity was a pot of different "races" that needed to be physically separated from one another and allowed to pursue their own development and social order alongside but not intertwined with the dominant white society. It was the extreme nationalism of the Ossewa Brandwag that provided the political stimulus for and node of attraction for poor whites to fill the political trenches of Afrikaner nationalism, which triumphed in 1948. Political authority, however, still remained vested in the middle class of Afrikanerdom, which, while ambivalent about the Brits and English-speaking whites in general, still tried to accommodate British commercial interests in opposition forms in the whites-only parliament. But political accommodation of a potentially violent and militant Afrikaner nationalism in the shape of the Ossewa Brandwag was preceded by a deliberate strategy of the Afrikaner elite to empower the poor Afrikaners and poor whites through the establishment of Santam, Sanlam, Nasionale Pers (National Media), *Uniewinkels* (Union Shops), *Volskas* (People's Bank) and *Die Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut* (The Afrikaans Trade Institute) in the 1930s. The cultural

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life of Afrikaners was dominated by the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings* (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations). It was this recognition of the synergy and overlap between economics and culture that provided the jump-start to the Afrikaner overthrow of pro-British rule in 1948, and provided the sediment for an exclusive nationalism to emerge. O'Meara puts in succinctly: "For Afrikaners who owned no land, who possessed a modicum of training which rendered them unsuitable for manual labour, and who were not prepared to assimilate to the dominant British culture, integration into the economy was difficult." For Afrikaners, entry into the system of capitalist exploitation was "limited not only by class position, but also by language".[22] With politics dominating the thrust of Afrikaner nationalism, the convergence between economic and cultural or language interests became the movement's cornerstone, and just under 30 years after the Afrikaner victory, the articulation between economic and language instances came to a head when the apartheid government took the politically suicidal decision to force Afrikaans as a medium of instruction into black schools in 1976. Afrikaner nationalism was unable to sustain itself through the limited confines and numbers of white Afrikaner speakers, but needed the acquiescence through language imposition of black Bantu speakers as well. For three decades, white Afrikaners – who had successfully formed a white state with the collusion of mainly white mining capital, who had disenfranchised black people, who had incarcerated most of the acknowledged leadership of black people, who had carved up the country into Bantustans, who had passed into law policies that brutalised workers and peasants, and who had had relatively tempestuous encounters with black protest – now needed to enter the domain of thought and control over black people. And because white Afrikaners understood the indelible link between politics and language, and indeed because they understood the age-old wisdom that politics is language[23], the apartheid state self-consciously attempted to infiltrate the minds of black people who did not speak Afrikaans through introducing its language of power and control into black schools. What the white state underestimated was that the children of Soweto, where the revolt started, were children of South Africa's working classes and unemployed who carried all the imprints and signatures of protest, and whose experiences were encoded in their mother tongues of Nguni and Sotho dialects.

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1976 and the tracings of radical nationalism

Spurred on by the rise of black consciousness and intermittent strikes, the students of 1976 almost instinctively knew the threat that Afrikaans posed if introduced as their new *lingua franca*. They understood that the acceptance of Afrikaans meant the destruction of a linguistic heritage and the further subjugation of their and their parents' political interests in favour of white Afrikaners. Paradoxically, they opted for English, which, despite being the language of the colonial oppressor before white Afrikaners held the political reins of power, was the language of resistance to white rule. But the choice of English did not just come about automatically. Its use has deep roots in the history and unfolding of African nationalism and nationalist protest against colonial and Afrikaner rule in South Africa. The development of African nationalism, whose most vocal contemporary advocate is the ANC Youth League, is the stuff of imagined legends, figures and movements, but its impact on the youth of 1976 cannot be underestimated. While only some of its contours are discussed below, it is important to note that much of this history has already been written about at length. [24]

The alleged African nationalism that dominates the ANC Youth League and some of its principals in the ANC in 2011 has a denser history than its presumed origins 99 years ago with the launch of the ANC. Ben Turok (1986:63), who is an ANC member in South Africa's parliament, in a paragraph explaining the co-operation between the Marxists of the SACP and the nationalists of the ANC, writes the following: "The African National Congress, founded in 1912, was controlled by petty bourgeois nationalists in the first decades of its existence." [25] The ANC changed from a moderate nationalist organisation to a radical nationalist movement in the 1940s with the ANC Youth League's adoption of its programme of action in 1949, and the "petty bourgeois" nationalists were still dominating the group's ideology. Very little can be said to dispute Turok's assertion because even the turn to the armed struggle in the 1960s was an outcome of the path followed by the radical nationalist Nelson Mandela and was not necessarily the choice of the communists or the Marxists in the SACP. While the ANC, the PAC and the black consciousness movement adopted and pursued some variation of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid radical nationalism, the roots of this movement are to be found in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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Conservative historian Elie Kedourie (1960), in his short and cryptic book titled *Nationalism*, describes nationalism as a doctrine that was "invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century".[26] It is a view that borrows from the tomes of theory produced in the Enlightenment at the turn of the eighteenth century.

> The state, on this philosophical view, is a collection of individuals who live together the better to secure their own welfare, and it is the duty of rulers so to rule as to bring about – by means which can be ascertained by reason – the greatest welfare for the inhabitants of their territory.[27]

Add to this working description the elements of class composition, language, ideology, geographical space, memory, political order and common law, and one can develop a more nuanced sense of Afrikaner and African nationalist identities. The Afrikaners were at one in their pursuit for statehood from the British colonial yoke with the black nationalists in their quest to assert their own identity and separateness from what they rightly considered to be imposed rule first by the Dutch, then the British and in the latter part of the 20th century, the Afrikaners. The cleavage separating Afrikaner and African nationalisms has always been ideology and the respective principals' different and antagonistic understandings of what constitutes humanity. In both these nationalisms, the lead voices have been the educated elite, and their class positions combined with their heritage and belief systems shaped, if not determined, their ideological dispositions.

For the African nationalists and their spokespeople, the notion of race and the practice of demographic and social separation were direct consequences of European "civilisation" in which presumed white superiority was taken as a given over the subjugated African people, and their acceptance of these ideas was a founding pillar in the political strategies formulated and executed by the political organisations that claimed their authorship from the indigenes. The ANC itself was at first called the South African Native National Congress before it changed its name in 1923.[28] This was also a time when a "native" was officially used in state literature and was a derogatory term used interchangeably (and unofficially) with "kaffir". The ANC understood "African" to mean a direct descendant from one of the African polities and whose language was a dialectal derivative of one of the Bantu languages. An African, in its view, was a black person without roots from Malaysia or India. His or her physical appearance included kinky hair, broadish nose and dark brown to black skin colour. This

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racist stereotype was the exact replica of the colonial mind and its characterisation of black people in Africa. The ANC, despite its different political agenda from those of the colonisers and the usurpers (the Boers later), adopted their fundamentally flawed perception of human beings as an organising principle in its quest for freedom. The dire consequences of this box-like and scientifically bankrupt interpretation of black people and the exclusivist nationalism persist in contemporary South Africa, where the "main content" of the democratic state still remains the "liberation of the African people", whose definition has not changed much over its 98 years. The absurdity of the description is given scant attention in ANC circles today, and yet it is still regarded as a criterion for access to a universe of benefits that the "freedom" of 1994 had brought. Here, it must be noted that the All-African Convention [29], which was formed in 1935 in Bloemfontein, had a broader definition of what is meant to be African, and its proclaimed intent was to act as an umbrella political association of which the ANC was invited to be a member.

But there was a coincidence in the ANC's practical organisational policy, which arose out of the organisation's firm belief in the notion of different "races", and apartheid government's legislation that prevented different "population registration groups" (Whites, Coloureds, Africans and Indians) to belong to the same political party. For this reason, and while there may well be a dispute about the long-term consequences of these deliberate and self-imposed divisions set up by the ANC, the movement became a holding vault for progressive whites organised in the Congress of Democrats, Coloureds in the Coloured People's Organisation, Indians in the South African Indian Congress and black Africans in the ANC. At the same time, the ANC had moved into fraternal relations with the Communist Party of South Africa, and especially after 1949, worked closely with the CPSA.

It was this deliberate decision of the radicalised ANC to forge closer ties with the CPSA and with progressive whites that provided the grist for equally inspired radical nationalists to break away and form the Pan-Africanist Congress whose vision of South Africa and whose organisational methods differed markedly from those of the ANC. The PAC rejected the "multiracialism" of the ANC and regarded the Freedom Charter, which was drawn up in 1955, as reformist. Its goal had Africa in perspective and its central focus had land topping its agenda. The PAC's arguably more militant radicalism has its philosophical grounding in an African socialism, and its operational and organisational methods excluded

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white people from central decision making in its policy formulations and composition of its structures.

These historical echoes were taken up by the black consciousness movement, which cannot be analysed or understood without a glance at its principal and most articulate proponent, Steve Bantu Biko. University based, the founders of the black consciousness movement sought to organise black students at tertiary institutions independently from the white liberal-orientated National Union of South African Students. Biko and his comrades formed the South African Students Organisation in 1969. Its theological empathies and critiques were made known and explicitly stated at the initial stirrings of what became a gravitational node for many people even outside the students' constituencies that the movement sought to organise. As Biko outlines (Malan 1997:24–25).: "The first people to come and relate to blacks in a human way in South Africa were the missionaries. They were in the vanguard of the colonisation movement to 'civilise and educate' the savages ... The religion they brought was quite foreign to the black indigenous people." But, he adds: "African religion in its essence was not radically different from Christianity. We also believed in one God, we had our own community of saints through whom we related to our God, and we did not find it compatible with our way of life to worship God in isolation from the various aspects of our lives." [30] On the particular brand of nationalism that he subscribed to, Biko captured the spirit and intent of the enlightened radical nationalists of the PAC combined with a confrontational existentialism of Frantz Fanon: "SASO is a Black Student Organisation working for the liberation of the Black man, first from psychological oppression by themselves through inferiority complex and secondly from the physical one accruing out of living in a white racist society ... [The black man is] first of all oppressed by an external world through institutionalised machinery ... and secondly, and this we regard as the most important, the Black man in himself has developed a certain state of alienation. He rejects himself, precisely because he attaches the meaning of White to all that is good ... This arises out of his living and it arises out of his childhood." [31]

Biko was not a Marxist. He advocated a brand of nationalism that spoke loudly to disenfranchised black men whose dignity was trampled on by white society and whose human rights were systematically ignored and violated. This essential humanitarian approach resonated not only with black people (and here Biko referred to black people as those who were not white by law: Coloureds, Indians and Africans), but also with white liberals. Donald

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Woods was positively enthralled by and lyrical about Biko: "Steve Biko was the greatest man I ever had the privilege to know." [32]

The ANC had been at pains to show its convergence on the national question with the black consciousness movement in the 1970s, and the PAC was in organisational disarray and had been eclipsed by the sheer momentum of black consciousness thinking and organisation in the 1970s. Alexander discusses the implications of these different nationalisms in *One Azania, One Nation* [33], and remarks: "It is indeed astounding that, where the Bantustan strategy raises so immediately and provocatively the whole national question, there has not been forthcoming from the liberation movement itself any systematic consideration of the question. At most the validity of the National Party's theory of nationality involved the Bantustan strategy has merely been *denied* and other concepts of what constitutes nationality simply *asserted* without further elucidation." [34]

The ideological space in the early 1970s was fraught with tension and competing nationalisms. The governing National Party was emerging from a relatively good decade of growth [35] but was on the back foot and rapidly losing even more ground to the internal mass movement against apartheid. English-speaking whites had, for all practical political purposes, thrown their lot in with the Afrikaner-led and Afrikaner-dominated government. Fractious and tenuous though it was, white unity found its expression in parliamentary charades of consent and opposition. The "enemy within" – South Africa's disenfranchised majority – was restless and conditions for a revolutionary overthrow were ripening. Acoustics within the nation-state were shattering and were unable to contain the intensity of the sounds of protest and challenge. For the National Party, wholesale devastation of popular opposition was necessary and new enemies needed to be found. Balthazar John Vorster's government, fired up and released by the acquiescence of white voters to do what it pleased, shifted all emphasis of social control to the political dictates of the military, and decimated the successive leadership corps of the national liberation movement.

A realignment of left-wing organisations became a distinct possibility, but the basis of such an alliance needed rethinking and reworking. Previous efforts at such unification had failed, and the memories of revolutionary activists who participated in such efforts were not going to be erased. The ANC's Freedom Charter, a social-democratic assertion of demands

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and declarations with the allusion to rudimentary state control over the major means of production, contained the somewhat rough exclamation that "all national groups" shall have equal rights. As a rallying document for restless students and a volatile trade union movement, the charter held little appeal. The PAC's statements of political intent were smothered by its own internal wrangling and disunity, and the Unity Movement, with its overemphasis on its Ten Point Programme [36], never gripped the popular movement.

The overt and unapologetic racism of the National Party, buoyed along by the sometimes subliminal and often undeclared racism of British commercial interests that dominated the pre-1948 apartheid state, was somewhat easier to handle. Both "racisms" could even be dismissed because their theoretical underpinnings were ideologically driven by an embrace of superiority, and therefore questionable and unscientific. Far more challenging, for Alexander, was to interrogate the "unsystematic" efforts on the part of the liberation movement to develop a new sense and definition of nationhood and nationality, and to develop a "systematic" thesis on the national question from the point of view of the oppressed and exploited, or at least from the point of view of the radical intellectuals who advocated the primacy of black working class interests over other sections or classes of South African society.

To this end, Alexander wrote his chapter, "Elements of the Theory of the Nation", and to which he has consistently returned, reformulated and developed over three decades since the publication of *One Azania, One Nation* in 1979. Up till then, only the Marxist-inspired Communist Party of South Africa and the Fourth International of South Africa had analysed the political, economic and ideological implications of the national question.

For Alexander, a comprehensive treatment of the national question in the South African context must answer questions related to "race", class, the "content" of national liberation, the class alliances that were necessary in the 1970s and 1980s in the fight for national liberation, the limitations of ethnic group theory and the paradoxical dilemmas posed by the quest for self-determination. The complex interplay between these different concepts formed the matrix of his understanding of the nation and of his insistence on nation building. It provided the codes to unlock the political strategy and political programme that he had subsequently developed and implemented in the 1980s.

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On "race", Alexander takes the sound position that it is a biological nonentity. However, there is the "reality of racism". Racists have tended to force the link between the notion of "race" and the "practice of racism", while natural and political scientists have pondered long and hard about the disjuncture between race and racism. If there is no such thing as race, the argument goes, how is it possible for racism to exist? To this paradoxical query, the germ of an answer may be found in ideological reasoning. Resting on the belief that a human being is superior in culture and intelligence, or more advanced than another on the evolutionary scale, racism arises out of the untested and unscientific cluster of feelings that find their origins in prejudice. But the genealogy of prejudice is different to the concept of "race", Open University academics Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter argue (Wetherell & Potter, 1992:202–203):

> Unlike the concept of 'race', the intellectual history of the concept of prejudice has not ... been traced to the same extent. But ... its roots seem to be in the classic traditions of the Enlightenment. Billig (1988) points out ... that it was as a result of the shifts in thought associated with the Enlightenment that the term 'prejudice' began to acquire a negative connotation. Prejudice became firmly associated with the *mischief of irrationality* [my italics] which all decent post-Enlightenment citizens would wish to avoid.

This is not only applicable to the state-sanctioned racism of apartheid but also to the racism of the colonial invaders who preceded the advent of the *volk* in the South African case. This is a key to understanding the racial constructs of the apartheid edifice. Its scientific invalidity is borne out through countless studies that have all but put paid to the existence of "races". At most, they are "breeding populations" in genetic studies, and no more. Chris Barker's summary of the absurdity of race classification is pertinent (Barker, 1999:60–61):

> The concept of race continues to bear the traces of its origins in biological discourses and a form of social Darwinism which stresses 'lines of descent' and 'types of people' based on alleged biological and physical characteristics. The most obvious of these distinctions is skin pigmentation, an attribute that is frequently linked with 'intelligence' and 'capabilities' so that 'racial' groups are marked by a hierarchy of superiority and subordination. Such a conception is at the root of racism ... The historical formation of 'race' has been one of power and subordination so that in Britain and the USA, for

example, people of colour have occupied structurally subordinate positions in relation to almost every dimension of 'life-chances'. [37]

In a more elaborate and detailed argument about the "falsity" of race, Wetherell (1996:183–184) cites American geneticist Richard Lewontin – who has stated that any use of racial classification has to take its cue from sources outside the scientific discipline of biology – in her work on social psychology and the "sociology of racism":

> Of all human genetic variation ... 85 per cent turns out to be between individuals within the same local population, tribe, or nation. A further 8 per cent is between tribes and nations within a major 'race' ... That means the genetic variation between one Spaniard and another, and between one Masai and another, is 85 per cent of all human genetic variation, while only 15 per cent is accounted for by breaking people up into different groups ... The result of the study of genetic variation is in sharp contrast with the everyday impression that major 'races' are well-differentiated. Clearly, these superficial differences in hair, form, skin colour, and facial features that are used to distinguish 'races' from each other are not typical of human genes in general. Any use of racial categories must take its justification from some source other than biology.

Wetherell says that strong similarities exist between humans across the globe. For biologists, she asserts that "the most genetic variation occurs between individuals in the same population rather than between populations".

In *One Azania, One Nation*, on the question of class and ideology, Alexander takes the classical historical materialist approach, and links the different types of nationalism to the class and ideological positions of their principal proponents. He maps the historical genesis and evolution of Afrikaner nationalism, which he formulates as a subset of nationalism and calls it an Afrikaner sectionalism, and the contradictory yet almost inevitable nationalist projects or outcomes that the political missions of the liberation movement imply. Alexander though, unlike some Marxist theorists and ideologues, develops a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between class position and ideology that presumably drove the nationalism propounded by ANC's Nelson Mandela, the PAC's Robert Sobukwe and the

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BCM's Steve Biko. The political conclusion that he reaches is that all the variations of nationalism infusing the liberation movement could be accommodated within a deracialised capitalist state, and that the solution to tackling the consequences of capitalism in South Africa lay not so much in reforming its local distortions and its potential for accommodating the different nationalisms, but in its overthrow. Simply dismantling the colour bar that prevents access to historically denied and oppressed people would not provide the civic and political space to explore a different type of society simply because the development of capitalism is intimately tied to the development of the "colour-caste"[38] system of "separate development" and apartheid, he argues. On the one hand, within the white population registration group, class divisions were marked by language distinctions: the majority of whites were Afrikaans speaking, and constituted the labour aristocracy, while the majority of English-speaking whites were middle class or owners of capital. A "caste" system was consolidated after 1948 in which access to power and privilege became the preserve of white Afrikaners.

On the other hand, within the black group (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) class divisions were also marked by linguistic differences: working class Coloureds and Indians spoke English and Afrikaans, while aspirant middle class people generally conversed in English or went to English-medium schools. English also was the main medium of communication for black middle class or educated Africans, whereas variants of Sotho and Nguni were the dialects spoken by working class and peasant African communities. In almost silo fashion, the white and black groups developed their own class distinctions and internal structures of codes and rituals, and language use became a mark of distinction. Within these vaults of society's composition, closed systems of discourse and communication often separated the different layers. A "colour-caste" system had developed out of the political decision making and economic imperatives of South Africa's ruling elites. The government and its business cohorts needed class and colour in parasitic dialogue to realise a grand plan of white supremacy over the black natives. It was therefore not surprising that the students of 1976 equated apartheid and Afrikaans with capitalism, but paradoxically insisted on English as the medium of instruction and learning rather than one of the indigenous languages.

In his detailed synthesis of the works of Cox, Cope, Ernstzen, Tobias, Hiernaux, Montagu, Berreman, Johnstone, Macrone and Wolpe, Alexander draws the conclusion that the colour-caste characterisation is "*only* tenable on the assumption that castes articulate with

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the fundamental class structure of the social formation".[39] Theoretical precedents established

by writers on the caste system in Brahmanic India are developed by Alexander in his analysis

of the different sections of South African society, and he radically parts ways with the

"pluralist" theories of the composition of the society, and dispenses with the straightforward

Marxist notions on class and class formation: "It is my central thesis that the officially

classified population registration groups in South Africa are colour-castes and it is of pivotal

political importance to characterise them as such."[40]

Faced with a retrogressive and reactionary nationalism in the shape of Afrikanerdom

and potentially implosive radical nationalisms of the liberation movement, Alexander has

grappled with the question of change and the constitutive rules of transformation. To this end,

it could be said that radical individuals may well have played important roles in adding

content to the nature of change, but it is the task of larger groups of people in society to effect

and sustain change. South Africa's social formation had been well established in the 1970s

and the political consciousness of different colour-castes and fractions of classes manifested

in their separate and sometimes overlapping demands. For Alexander, progressive classes

meant those groups that not only opposed apartheid, but had the potential to turn this

opposition into a stepping stone to overthrow the constitutive capitalist relations that

underpinned the white regime. So, on the question of class alliances to be forged and

considered necessary to overthrow the apartheid-capitalist state, Alexander asserted that the

central role of the black working class could not be overemphasised. This was not only

because of its relationship to the means of production, but because of its evolving

consciousness as a class-for-itself.[41] In recognising that this section of the working class

formed the "bedrock of South African capitalism" and was in the majority with an urban-

centred yet migratory lifestyle, Alexander then developed a case for a political movement to

base itself on an alliance between South Africa's black proletariat and radicalised sections of

the middle class. This was nothing new in Marxist terms, but it was explicit and

unambiguous. Alexander has, ever since the publication of *One Azania One Nation*,

maintained that this alliance remains the axis on which radical social change can be ushered

in South Africa.

By the end of the 1970s, South Africa's political economy had developed into a fully fledged

state of "racial capitalism"[42]. The Afrikaner middle classes and landed gentry dominated the

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state apparatuses and the white English-speaking bourgeoisie had been successfully outmanoeuvred and relegated to tokens of opposition in the whites-only parliament. Pieter Willem Botha replaced John Vorster as prime minister in 1978, and then served as president between 1984 and 1989. The Afrikaners had all the plum jobs in the government and the state became a welfare protectorate of white nepotistic employment. Being white meant being privileged, and this self-awarded status of superiority cut across all classes of white society. But debt was piling up, and the once almost monolithic bloc of Afrikaner unity was fraying at the edges, and the ostensibly reformist policies of Botha and his cabinet created the space for Afrikaner unity to founder. Right-wing generals in the South African Defence Force took this opportunity to flex their muscles internally and in the neighbouring states of Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia, and unofficially declared war against countries "harbouring terrorists". This was the real meaning of Botha's "Total Onslaught" policies that not only forced the hands of international community to condemn South Africa's actions in other countries, but generated sufficient media attention to begin an economic sanctions campaign. The government's war against the oppressed majority had also taken a new turn. After the whirlwind of 1976, the army was given *carte blanche* to raise black townships to the ground if there was even a hint of an uprising. Economic fundamentals were far from satisfactory. Unwittingly, the Afrikaners created the conditions for their worst nightmare. The sheer scale of repression meant a closing of ranks for the oppressed people, and prising the doors of protest and challenge. The government was forced to rethink its lack of legitimacy and introduced in 1983 the "tricameral parliament", which was doomed from the beginning. [43] Botha, despite his militaristic posturing and emphasis on the security of the apartheid state, wanted to reform the system by allowing Coloureds and Indians their own parliament. Together with the real power vested in the all-white House of Assembly and the domination of the State Security Council in the affairs of the rulers, the government was hell-bent on pursuing its politically suicidal notion of separate development and "own affairs", and at the same time sharpen the presumed differences between Africans and other black people (Coloureds and Indians). The response of the oppressed to Botha's shenanigans was unambiguous. Popular rejection of these "puppet parliaments" resulted in the formation of the National Forum Committee and the United Democratic Front, which were not only set up to oppose the state's new experiment in political engineering, but also to bring together different tendencies in the liberation movement that were vying for control over the course, the direction and the objectives of the struggle for national liberation.

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By the mid 1980s, Alexander shifted his energies to investigating and developing notions of alternative education. Not only were the avenues for radical protest opening despite the "states of emergency" declared by the apartheid regime, but Alexander's proposed terms of non-engagement with the state had been established. His terms involved bringing about socialist change in the polity, and this could not be achieved through sitting down with the perceived enemy. At the same time, boycotts of consumer goods sold at supermarket chains that were seen by the general buying populace as exploiters of workers' labour were the order of the day. Strikes at mines and at factories were not only directed at conditions of work or at low wages but at capital's collusion with the apartheid state. Economic sanctions came into play and were directed at international banking institutions and other multinational corporations that operated in the country, and black high school and tertiary students were perennially on the march. The United Democratic Front had eclipsed the black consciousness movement and its socialist allies of the National Forum Committee, and covert steps [44] were being taken by the dominant tendency in the national liberation movement to lay the groundwork for a negotiated settlement to resolve the South African crisis. From the point of view of statecraft and social engineering, the white ruling bloc had bungled its chances of prolonging its hold on power for much longer, and the internal and external pressure was sufficiently intense to remind the rulers that what was at stake was simply not the preservation of apartheid, but the underpinnings of the system. From the point of view of the liberation movement, the stage was being carefully and purposefully set for the African National Congress to lead the negotiations on behalf of the black majority and the cohorts of social democracies spearheaded by Germany's Social Democratic Party, Britain's Labour Party, Sweden's Social Democratic Party and the US's Democratic Party, which, along with the governing parties in Africa that provided refuge for the ANC and the PAC, were acutely aware that a conflagration in the southern tip of Africa could well mean the overthrow of capitalist relations of production. For the planners of capitalist reproduction, this had to be averted at all costs.

Universal franchise and democracy were knocking at the gates of the racially exclusive white citadel, and before these gates were raised to the ground by the sheer weight of protest and confrontation, they had to be opened to allow the black hordes an orderly and a "civilised" entry. The leaders of the march into the portals of compromise needed to carry the signatures

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of Western civilisation and Eastern compromise into Africa's economic powerhouse. They were "wired" [45] to enter the hospice of apartheid on terms that the Afrikaners, and therefore "white civilisation" and "the West" could continue to live with. The decision to compromise, phase out the armed struggle and become bedfellows with other nationalists was taken in exile and with the blessing of the ANC leadership on Robben Island.

The Egyptian-born Marxist scholar, Samir Amin, aptly describes the different "worlds" in the country:

> South Africa has been hard to classify, in part because it represents a microcosm of the world capitalist system. There exists on its territory zones that correspond to all constituent 'worlds' that make up the world system. There is the overwhelming white population whose popular culture and standard of living seem to belong to the 'first' (advanced capitalist) world. A humorist would note, however, that the 'statist' policies of the former white rulers put the country in a category that used to include the so-called socialist countries of the 'second' world. Much of the urban black population belongs to the modern, industrializing 'third' world, while rural Africans do not differ much from their counterparts in 'fourth' world Africa. [46]

These words were written in 1997 and after the democratic elections of 1994, but they could equally describe the different sets of interests and composition of the country in the 1980s, or indeed before.

Alexander's main academic and revolutionary interests, and all his discourses on language and education that have had recurrent references to his conceptual map on the national question, nation building and his elaborate discussions on the elements that constitute a nation and nationhood, shifted from political analysis to an educational focus. Buoyed by the momentum of "alternative education" set in motion by the generation of students of 1976, Alexander and the groups that coalesced around his line of thinking were preparing for a "war of position" [47] to respond to both the state and the increasing grip of radical nationalism that became the dominant, if not hegemonic, tendency in the ANC in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Liberal and nationalist writings and policies in the 1970s and early 1980s were constructed to combine in an unusual tryst to force the exclusivist white capitalist state onto a path of reform, while revolutionary Marxists such as Alexander urged the overthrow of the social relations of production, and spurred on by the waves of protest and popular anger, the revolutionary activists were keen to get the apartheid regime to capitulate. The Marxist aspiration, however, was being encircled and hemmed in by a downturn in international relations that tended to favour an acquiescence to the money market and the commodification of ideas. Internationally, the socialist and communist movements were on the retreat and social democracy was gaining ground as a viable option in countries where parliamentary democracy was compromised by dictatorships, by aristocratic dictates or by the perceived authoritarianism of governments in "actually existing socialist states" [48].

NOTES

[1] The "white universities" included the University of Cape Town where the economic and political academic space was shared by Marxists such as David Kaplan, Ian Phimister, Martin Nichol, and the free enterprise warriors such as Brian Kantor who was ably assisted by the conservative liberal political soldier Robert Schrire; the University of Natal where liberal economist Jill Nattrass rubbed academic shoulders with radical left-wing sociologist Fatima Meer, Marxist Mike Morris and Communist Party member Yunus Carrim; and the University of Witwatersrand where Marxist historians Belinda Bozzoli and Charles van Onselen, radical politics lecturer Sheila Meintjies, left-wing educationist Linda Chisholm, left-wing historian Tom lodge, among many others, railed against one another and the liberals. The black universities, which were derisively called bush colleges because they were set up to neutralise and distort academic protest to apartheid and capitalism and which were designed to house the natives from the "bush" with their native intelligence, included University of Fort Hare and University of Western Cape where liberal educationist Richard van der Ross held the fort. Afrikaans-language universities had their own pockets of left-wing and liberal dissent, but they largely produced an academic corps to continue and reconstruct the theoretical justification needed to roll out the grand plan and promise of apartheid (but not all white Afrikaans speakers succumbed to the allure of white power: liberal economist Sampie Terreblanche, who became an economic adviser to the then Democratic Party, was educated at Stellenbosch University).

[2] Funding for civil society in the 1970s and 1980s was considered the "lifeblood" of the organisations and movements that challenged the apartheid state. The source countries of these international funders varied considerably: the Nordic states, Germany, Britain, the United States of America, Holland, China, Libya, France, Switzerland, the USSR, Australia and Canada. Most social-democratic funders "invested" in the ANC-aligned, ANC-orientated or liberally orientated organisations such as the Black Sash and the independent newspaper *Weekly Mail*. German funding presence was particularly significant from the Neumann Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and later on the Heinrich Boll Foundation and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. The Left in South Africa was overtly critical of funding from USAID, while Swedish agency Sida enjoyed support and acceptance from the ANC, PAC and internal organisations such as Sached Trust of which Alexander was a regional director in Cape Town. Overt left-wing funding from German-based

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Umverteilen Group was directed at Alexander's initiatives, and he also enjoyed the support from the universities that hosted him, especially those in Germany.

[3] In the corridors of power that weaved through the leadership echelons of protest in South Africa and in the exiled movements, concern was expressed about the "agendas" of these different funders and the "terms" of the funding grants. For the most part, and this is indeed a subject for further analysis and investigation, the "humanitarian" support provided by the social-democratic funders (such as Sida and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation) was considered legitimate and in the broader interests of the mass movement, whereas anything that even vaguely suggested CIA or British MI5 linkage was rejected. Direct government funding from the Soviet Union and China had the exiled political movements as primary recipients. Cuban support for liberation movements in Africa cannot be measured in monetary terms: the sacrifices of the Cuban state, both in terms of armed personnel and in medical aid, have secured its place in the hearts and minds of oppressed people on the continent.

[4] Up till then, the political alliance between Boer and Brit under Albert Hertzog and Jan Smuts held together the tenuous white unity against the black majority.

[5] Rudolf Bahro coined the phrase "really existing socialism" in 1977 to describe the socialist state of the former East Germany and other self-proclaimed socialist states at the time. As a member of the Communist Party, he was writing primarily for party members and sympathisers, but he was trenchant in his critique of the party's policies.

[6] A study of the history of South Africa's liberation movement would be incomplete without a study of the voluminous archival and original documentation compiled by Karis, Carter and Gerhart.

[7] Krüger's book, *The Making of a Nation* (Johannesburg and London: Macmillan), was first published in 1969, and had a print "run" of eight impressions. For Krüger, "Throughout the period there was a steadily increasing awareness amongst white South Africans of belonging together, the growth of national consciousness and the readiness to accept a common future based on cultural diversity. It was this reality which triumphed in 1961." Not unlike other race-based theorists of his generation, Krüger was reconstructing the argument that South Africa is made up of a "white nation" (Afrikaans-, English-, Italian-, Portuguese-, French-, German- and Dutch-speaking white people) and many "black nations", which became the justification for the political principals of the apartheid state to balkanise the country, and which was the basis of its "homelands policy".

[8] This is a reference to the Marxist notion of class struggles between the working class and the bourgeoisie or owners of capital. The liberal-pluralist notion has been to view race and class separately, and develop an understanding of South Africa's development as if capitalism could have evolved without the symbiosis between colour and class. The revisionists, namely the Marxists and neo-Marxists, especially the generation led by Martin Legassick, Stanley Trapido, Belinda Bozzoli, Rick Turner, Harold Wolpe and Neville Alexander, asserted that the very nature of deep-level mining required a political organisation of society that facilitated easy access to a large and growing workforce. In the South African case, this meant a black working class, and this required that the political managers, the successive capitalist states that emerged since 1910, had to develop the institutional framework for white supremacy and the economic subjugation of black workers simultaneously. As the need for an acquiescent proletariat grew with the development of manufacturing, more skilled workers were required and the job colour bar gave way to the exigencies of market capitalism. The "functionality" of the race-class axis in the running of South African society became less and less an imperative for growth.

[9] Michael Cross's two books, *Resistance and Transformation* (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1992) and *Imagery of Identity in South African Education* (Durham (North Carolina): Carolina Academic Press 1999), are important insights into and analyses of the South African education system as it evolved since 1880. His 1999 book is a more comprehensive survey of this evolution. Cross is critical of the "structuralism" that he asserts is inherent in Marxist and neo-Marxist writings on the topic of education, and instead proposes that history must be used as a "method of inquiry". Cross draws his inspiration from the works on ideology of Argentinian-born theorist Ernesto Laclau, who is known for his radical critiques of "Marxist economic determinism", and from those of Aletta Norval, a South African-born scholar who is based at the University of Essex in Britain.

[10] Sir Alfred Milner, a central figure in the Anglo-Boer war and colonial representative of the British Empire in southern Africa, served in three capacities in his stay in southern African: he was governor of the Cape Colony from 1987 to 1901; administrator of the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony from 1901 to 1902; and

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governor of the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony from 1902 to 1905. Jan Christiaan Smuts, on the other hand, was born in Malmesbury in the Western Cape. He trained at Christ's College, Cambridge, and practised as a lawyer on his return to South Africa. As a Boer commander, he joined the ultra nationalist Het Volk (People's Party) in 1905. After the act of Union in 1910, Smuts led the South African Party, and became prime minister of the Union in 1919.

[11] The footnote reference in Cross's 1999 book cites E.G Malherbe (Education in South Africa, Volume 1 (1652-1922), Cape Town and Johannesburg: Juta & Co.:1925).

[12] Terreblanche and Nattrass cite a few of the pertinent segregationist and repressive laws that were enacted in the 1950s: "The pass laws were tightened, particularly the 1952 Black (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act which introduced the Reference Book ... A plethora of segregationist legislation was passed, such as the 1950 Population Registration Act, the 1950 Group Areas Act, the 1953 Reservation of Separate Amenities Act and the Black Resettlement Act. The 1953 Bantu Education Act pegged expenditure on black education back to the level of black taxes, and the 1957 Extension of University Education Act made provision for the creation of separate ethnic universities ... Much of the overtly political legislation was, however, directed towards controlling black labour. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act declared the Communist Party an unlawful organization and was used to smash the trade union movement. The 1953 Natives Settlement of Disputes Act banned blacks from registered trade unions and provided them with a separate system of emasculated plant level 'works committees. The 1956 Riotous Assembly Act inter alia effectively banned picketing. With the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act, provision was made for the extension of the colour bar to industry."

[13] Friedman is a leading social-democratic commentator on South African politics, and is a sought-after columnist in the country's newspapers. Denis MacShane, Martin Plaut and David Ward wrote their book, *Power!* (Nottingham: Spokesman 1984), to "explain to people outside South Africa the immense growth in trade unions organising black workers in that country".

[14] While organised trade unionism has a long tradition in South Africa's labour history, the post-1948 apartheid regime enacted legislation that made it virtually impossible for black workers to organise into trade unions. When unions were able to organise, they were allowed to do so along government-defined racial lines, very much like the way the broader society was being arranged by the National Party. For an insightful overview of pre-1973 trade unionism, see the book edited by Eddie Webster, *Essays in Southern African Labour History* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1983). The strikes in Durban provided a further impetus for black workers to develop and build trade union organisations after a long period of relative calm that was occasioned by incarceration of political activists in the 1960s and the banning of political organisations of black people including the ANC, the Communist Party of SA, the PAC, while interestingly the ANC-aligned SA Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) was never actually banned.

[15] Before his imprisonment in 1964 (he was arrested in 1963), Alexander completed his doctorate in 1961 on the "style change in the dramatic work of Gerhart Hauptmann" at the University of Tübingen in Germany, according to Wikipedia.

[16] Much has been written about the political economy of this period. I can do no better than simply citing the texts and journals that appealed to me. See, for example, publications such as *Work in Progress*, the *South African Labour Bulletin*, and other more academic and university-bound studies that are mentioned as reference works at the end of this dissertation. While politics and economics were at the forefront of the mass struggles of the 1970s, the theoretical weapons for subsequent ideological battles and the class character of the shape of things to come were beginning to take their overt forms.

[17] See No Sizwe's *One Azania, One Nation* (1979:15).

[18] Ibid. (1979:18).

[19] No Sizwe draws the distinction between cultural and economic or class interests, and quotes Dan O'Meara's study, "White Trade Unionism, Political Power and Afrikaner Nationalism", which appeared in *South African Labour Bulletin* (Vol.1, No.10, 1975), and "The Afrikaner Broederbond 1927-1948: Class Vanguard of Afrikaner Nationalism", which appeared in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* (Vol.3 1977). While the distinction between the overriding cultural or class interests is relevant in the shifting allegiances of Afrikaner

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nationalists, I have used the formation of the Broederbond more loosely as a node of *petit bourgeois* Afrikaner cultural and class interests.

[20] See Eddie Webster (ed., op. cit., 82)

[21] See O'Meara, *ibid.*

[22] See O'Meara in Webster, ibid., 173.

[23] Greek philosopher Plato was the "first to elevate languages to the medium of total power and the total transformation of society", according to Boris Groys whose book, *The Communist Postscript* (London: Verso, 2009), is essential reading for scholars of linguistics and power in the former Soviet Union. In this pro-communist book, Groys outlines his thesis that "politics" is the driving force behind Russia's relatively recent embrace of capitalism, and that there is little inevitability to the country's adoption of the market economy. Important for this discussion though are his views on the "linguistification of society" and the fact that political ambition and goals are realised through language and the state's control over the means of communication open to its subjects.

[24] Of course there have been continental variations of African nationalism, but it is the particular type of African nationalism that manifested itself in the policies and programmes of the ANC, the PAC and the black consciousness movement of South Africa that is of relevance to this study.

[25] See Ben Turok's article, "The Left in Africa", which appears in the book edited by Barry Munslow, *Africa: Problems in the Transition to Socialism* (London: Zed Books 1986:63). Turok was then a lecturer and a leading theoretician in the ANC, and was based in the UK at the time.

[26] See Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (First published in 1960 and Revised Edition in 1961, London: Hutchinson & Co. 1961:9).

[27] Ibid. (10).

[28] See, for example, Mokgethi Motlhabi's *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers 1986:38). The book, which was first published in 1984 and just after the launch of both the United Democratic Front and the National Forum Committee in 1983, is a helpful survey of the three major organisational nationalist trends in liberation history: the ANC, the PAC of Azania and the black consciousness movement.

[29] For many years, the All-African Convention (AAC) tried to settle differences with the ANC after its launch but never succeeded. In brackets, it might be added that the AAC together with other organisations in the Cape formed the Non-European Unity Movement in 1943. See, for example, EJ Verwey's *New Dictionary of South African Biography* (Pretoria: HSRC Publishers 1995:183).

[30] See *The Essential Steve Biko* (Compiled by Robin Malan, Cape Town: David Philip 1997:24-25).

[31] Ibid. (37).

[32] Ibid. (28).

[33] In the chapter titled "The Movement for National Liberation" in *One Azania, One Nation* (op. cit.), Alexander outlines his thoughts on the failure by the three main organisational components of the national liberation movement (the ANC, the PAC and the black consciousness movement) to systematically address the national question; he criticised the "internal colonialism theory" advocated by the Communist Party; and he also laid bare the essential threads of the Unity movement's understanding of the national question.

[34] No Sizwe, op cit (126).

[35] See, for example, Sampie Terreblanche's liberal treatment of the economy in *Vernuwing & Herskikking* (Cape Town: Tafelberg 1973). A far more sympathetic account of the history of Afrikaners and white rule is D.W. Krüger's *The Making of a Nation* (Johannesburg: Macmillan 1969). I cite these works because they provide insights into the kingdom of Afrikaner rule from the point of view of Afrikaner intellectuals. Terreblanche subsequently became an economic adviser to the liberal Democratic Alliance, while Krüger stayed stuck in the Afrikaner wonderland of ideological myth and fantasy.

[36] The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) was formed in 1943. It developed a Ten Point Programme, which was a set of demands and a programme of intent that were practically identical to those laid out in the ANC's Freedom Charter, with the exception that it was premised on "non-racialism" as opposed to the "multiracial" approach of the ANC. In programmatic terms, it was a bourgeois-democratic movement directed at achieving universal franchise, but contained the kernels of socialist and Marxist thought in its founding

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principles. It was based mostly in the Western Cape and its leading intellectuals included Benny Kies and Isaac Bangani Tabata. Tabata later formed the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (Apdusa) of which Alexander became a member. The Unity Movement, as it was known, comprised mostly teachers, lawyers and other intellectuals, and was critical of the other trends in the liberation movement, especially those that adopted armed struggle as a strategy to challenge the apartheid state. Alexander broke with this and formed the Yu Chin Club, which encouraged its members to, at the very least, read about armed struggles. While the Unity Movement's contributions to liberation theory are unquestionable, the movement never really gripped the popular imagination. In many different ways, the movement's rise and stagnancy are a rather blunt reminder that the purity of ideas does not necessarily translate into popular action that can threaten a status quo, and that however neat and ostensibly sound the theory may well be, ideas really only have effective meaning when they are accompanied by action. This is not to say that the Unity Movement or its membership was inactive. Its inability to garner mass support for its policies and programmes does not, in my opinion, negate the "truths" or the soundness of its programmes, but it does confirm the distance that separated its leadership from the intended mass base it proclaimed to have as the source and object of its policies.

[37] See Chris Barker, *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities* (Buckingham: Open University Press 1999:60–61).

[38] Alexander introduced the notion of "colour-caste" in No Sizwe (1979:141). The peculiar path of South African capitalism meant that "class" and "colour" were symbiotically related to each other. Black people generally provided the labour in the country's primary industries of mining and agriculture, and later manufacturing, and whites generally provided the capital to set up the farms, mines and factories. But within these different groups, classes had also come into being. Drawing on analyses of the caste system in India, Alexander adapted these to the South African case.

[39] See his discussion on the colour-caste system in No Sizwe (141–159).

[40] Ibid. (141).

[41] To this day, the notion of proletarian consciousness as the most "advanced" consciousness is still under the political microscope. If it is indeed true that there is such a thing as "truth" that emerges out of the clash of the class titans – the bourgeoisie and the working class – then for radical theoreticians and intellectuals, such truth must be found in the bowels of the social relations that are the consequence in the class "war" between capital and labour, that is in the workers. In the South African case, however, black workers and the small black middle class in the 1970s and the 1980s were disenfranchised, and the democratic imperative for the right to vote provided the political space for a coincidence of interests between these two groups of the society. For the black middle class, a social democracy may well have been a goal and an end in itself, but for black workers, the argument went, the right to vote was part of a broader package to wrest control and ownership of the means of production. For revolutionary Marxists like Alexander, the assumed advanced consciousness of black workers in their quest for freedom remained the guarantor of a "socialist Azania". Years before Alexander wrote his No Sizwe, Hungarian Marxist philosopher and former culture minister Georg Lukács was unequivocal in his admiration for working class consciousness: "With labour, human consciousness ceases to be an epiphenomenon, in the ontological sense ... Only in labour, in the positing of a goal and its means, consciousness rises with a self-governed act, the teleological positing, above mere adaptation to the environment – a stage retained by those animal activities that alter nature objectively but not deliberately – and begins to effect changes in nature itself that are impossible coming from nature alone, indeed even inconceivable." (See Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Labour*, London: Merlin Press 1978:21–22).

[42] The origins of the concept of "racial capitalism" are difficult to establish, but many theoreticians have written extensively about the co-determination between race and class, especially in anti-colonial struggles and the development of capitalism in these. Alexander is part of this pantheon of Marxist theorists, and he, probably more than any other South African revolutionary writer, drew the stubborn link between the trajectory of racist rule and that of capitalism. He argued, in my opinion quite correctly, that the two concepts could not be separated in the South African context. The ideological motive for apartheid was coterminous with the ideological imperative of capitalist development. In his view, there was a confluence between the need to centralise economic centres of power and the need to construct racially exclusive silos of white privilege. This perspective he shared with other writers such as South African Marxist Martin Legassick, who belonged to the

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Marxist Workers Tendency of the ANC, and Cedric Robinson, whose *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* made a compelling, passionate but unconvincing case for a Marxism that is black and that departs from the Eurocentric grip of its origins. As with Alexander, Robinson asserted that there was and is a structural link between racism and capitalist development.

[43] The "Tricameral parliament" was an unintended yet net outcome of the "years of fire, years of ash", as journalist-academic Baruch Hirson describes the whirlwind of 1976-1977 in South Africa. The government needed to break black solidarity, and devised strategems to win the hearts and minds of non-African sections of the black population through extending the system of racial representation. The three "Houses of Parliament" (the Coloured House of Representatives, the Indian House of Delegates and the white House of Assembly) were an enormous waste of money and those who collaborated with the white state were isolated and rejected by the communities. PW Botha wanted some form of constitutional reform to create further buffers between the white ruling electorate and the black African majority, and in recognising the dismal failure of the then existing President's Council, which preceded the Tricameral farce, he sought some legitimacy among Coloured and Indian people. According to Wikipedia, which can be an unreliable source of information, but which is a useful point of departure for a more comprehensive research: "The Tricameral Parliament was the name given to the South African Parliament and its structure from 1984 to 1994. While still entrenching the political power of the White section of the South African population (or, more specifically, that of the National Party (NP)), it did give a limited political voice to the country's Coloured and Indian population groups. The majority Black population group was still excluded, however. The Tricameral Parliament can trace its origin back to 1981, when the Senate was replaced with the President's Council ... which was an advisory body consisting of sixty nominated members from the White, Coloured, Indian and Chinese population groups. Following a request by P.W. Botha, the President's Council presented a set of proposals in 1982 for constitutional and political reform. This proposal called for the implementation of 'power sharing' between the White, Coloured and Indian communities. The right wing of the NP was very unhappy about this proposal and a group of its MPs, led by Dr. Andries Treurnicht, a cabinet minister and the leader of the NP in the Transvaal province, broke away to form the Conservative Party (CP) in order to fight for a return to apartheid in its original form."

[44] It is now a matter of history that plans for a negotiated settlement were discussed with Nelson Mandela, who was then still on Robben Island, and that he gave his blessing to the decision to take the first steps towards working out a framework for such negotiations. The luminaries spearheading the "talks about talks" included ANC president Oliver Tambo and Thabo Mbeki, who became the country's first deputy president in 1994.

[45] In going beyond post-colonial theory, Catherine Odora Hoppers, the Chair in Development Education at the University of South Africa, has often used this concept to refer to the programmatic inclination of formerly colonised people and their progeny to respond positively to the interests of the former colonisers or to the "West" and its economics and culture.

[46] See Samir Amin, who wrote the "Foreword" to Hein Marais' book, *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transition* (London: Zed Press 2001:vii). Amin is not only an acknowledged theoretician of development, but was a member of the French Communist Party, which he left because of his opposition to the party's embrace of Soviet Marxism. Amin is a militant intellectual who has headed up the influential Dakar-based Third World Forum. His prolific work – including over 50 books and many articles on the theories of underdevelopment, imperialism, "obsolescent capitalism", liberalism and Africa – has been used extensively as research and methodological templates for Marxist scholars and academics.

[47] Gramsci has been credited for using the concepts of "war of manoeuvre" and "war of position" to describe two equally adversarial processes in the war against capitalism: the former implies a head-on and insurrectionary clash between the masses and the bourgeoisie while the latter suggests a more strategic and intellectual approach that employs the mass media and is directed at popular consciousness (this is the infamous "cultural hegemony" that is so often referred to by scholars in their use of Gramsci's ideas). With the development of the communications industry, the internet and live news coverage, concepts such as trench warfare, fallback positions, retreats, timeous attacks and tactical manoeuvres, juggling perceptions and employing "embedded journalists", collateral damage and backward/forward positions have become part of the imperialist abuse of a lexicon grounded in Gramscian notions of "manoeuvre" and "position" – in other words, all the tools of warfare that generals and admirals employ to justify their own reproduction in the euphemism called "the theatre of battle/war". A more comprehensive and detailed assessment of Gramsci's notions on "hegemony" is dealt with later in this dissertation.

[48] See Rudolf Bahro, op. cit.

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Chapter Three

Imagining the Tunes: The Politics of Language and the Language of Politics

Introduction

Language is the currency through which ruling classes communicate the standards and norms that they wish to impose on the rest of society in every polity.[1] This structuralist[2] or conventional Marxist wisdom, and understanding of language, has been radically transformed and refined by twentieth-century thinkers. Alexander, this researcher argues, is one such thinker. His notions about the language question and his analysis of language use in society stand alongside the writings of Benedict Anderson (1983; 1991), Jürgen Habermas (1984) and the seminal contributions of Boris Groys (2009).[3] Central to all these writers' analyses and theories are the concepts of class, power and nation. The question that has been posed, directly or indirectly, by these theorists is deceptively simple, and one which has been codified by Pablo Mukherjee in 2007: "How exactly do communities convert themselves into nations by using language?"

In Anderson's seminal treatise (1983; 1991) on nationalism, the changing understanding of its origins and of its spread is given a substantial stimulus in his intellectual travels as he traverses the globe to distil the essential features and processes that accompany, earmark and identify the construction of nations in the imaginations of people. In Habermas's work, the German use of the word *versprachlichen*, which means to verbalise or to put into words, is catapulted into the grander notion of the "verbalisation of society", and the concomitant order and structure of power that accompany such verbalisation. Habermas steers his readers towards a "horizon of ultimate consensus" (Groys 2009:xi). In Groys's work, his "linguistification of society" substantially develops Habermas's notion of *versprachlichen*. Groys proposes that such linguistification "exacerbates social divisions and contradictions". For Alexander, the overarching purpose of language is to communicate with others.

The language question can be seen to be a critical part of the elusive imagination or re-imagination of the "national question", and in the South African case, it is inextricably bound to the practices of power and hegemony. It is with this in mind that a brief historical survey of the cultural-political institutions that came to be nodes of growth and expansion of English and Afrikaans as the languages of power in South Africa might be appropriate.

Language and nation: the Afrikaners mobilise

Over a period of about 110 years, which is from 1880 to about 1990, the Afrikaners in South African history[4] recognised the critical importance of language in their quest for power and control over the diverse South African polity. The leaderships of successive Afrikaner movements focused on their own language with three central goals in mind. Firstly, they wanted to forge a unity in their interpretation of their "nation" as separate from the British colonists. Secondly, they needed to construct some uniformity in communication among themselves to build a solidarity that excluded the British and the black majority. Thirdly, as a common sense tool the Afrikaners aimed to exclude other groups that may contend for power and dislodge them from their privileged positions and occupations within the state that they were trying to create or, after 1948, the state in which they have had political power. The story of Afrikanerdom is as complex as its language is unambiguous. To understand at least some of the contours of this evolution of power and control, it is necessary to lay bare at least some of this history.

South African educationist Michael Cross, who has written two books on resistance and the "imagery of identity" in South African education and whose inspiration has been University of Essex-based Argentinian-born political theorist Ernesto Laclau and South African-born academic on ideology Aletta Norval, has provided a useful account of the development of Afrikaans and Afrikanerdom. The researcher can do no better than to summarise and paraphrase aspects of Cross's historical account of this development, and to complement this sketch with Alexander's interpretation of the gathering of the Afrikaner *volk*[5].

The concept of the *volk* is a cultural concept, and Cross refers to it as a group of people with a common life-style, an experience of continuity based on shared history and

tradition, common land, descent, custom, language, religion, social organisation and political ideals.

The Afrikaners were descendants from mainly Dutch-speaking colonists who "defected from Cape Colony in approximately 1834–1840 (in the notorious Great Trek)", and in what Parsons (1982:91) generously calls the Afrikaner *Difaqane*[6]. But even before this trek, a few Afrikaners had already clashed with the British administration of the Cape Colony at Slagtersnek. The rebellion was put down and a trial[7] ensued.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, British interests in the Cape Colony were centred on its strategic value on the Atlantic seaboard en route to India. The Afrikaners were a settler community of pastoralists who wanted to expand into the interior and were driven by land hunger, which caused the "defection" of the white farmers eastwards and northwards.

Cross (1999) writes that there are four main forces that have determined the development of Afrikaner nationalist, or what Alexander calls "sectionalist", discourses prior to 1948. These are a Calvinist Protestantism, the clash of Afrikaners with the British, the perceived threat of the black majority, and the struggle for political power by the different groups making up South African society over the past two centuries. In the 68 years prior to 1948 when the Afrikaners eventually took control of the state, Cross says Afrikaners were guided by four "themes". Put differently, Cross asserts that, firstly, creating the Afrikaner *volk* was paramount in the thinking of its leaders during the period 1881 to 1901. Secondly, the survival of Afrikanerdom through the Christian National Education Movement characterised the period 1902 to 1924. Thirdly, between the years 1910 to 1948, Afrikaners sought to co-exist with the British and other whites. And fourthly, coincident with this attempt at co-existence, Afrikaners then tried to push for political hegemony between the years 1924 and 1948.

What was becoming increasingly clear in this build-up to the accession to power was that Afrikaners were embracing a sense of the importance of power. Their leaders and thinkers started to construct and promote a consciousness that was becoming increasingly national in character and outlook. Cross (1999:16) cites Van Jaarsveld[8]: "The national consciousness, which, on the one hand, led to the discovery of their own language, led, on the other, to the discovery of their own history – to the language because it had to with their

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nationality in the present and in the future, and to their history because it had to answer questions on their origins, background and identity."

Alongside this growing awareness of Afrikaners' increasingly countrywide vision, the Dutch Reformed Church "got into gear" and the compilation of Afrikaner history, and the promotion of Afrikaans as the language of Afrikaners took off. Cross writes (1999:21)

> Dutch/Afrikaner literary activity of the 19th century reflects earlier concerns with national self-assertion and the historical foundations of an Afrikaner nation. This was an attempt to articulate Afrikaner nationalist feelings by displaying and interpreting the images, words and symbols of the past. Historical consciousness was to bring about national consciousness, necessary for the struggle against British cultural and political imperialism.

In 1877 the first history book in Afrikaans, titled *Die Geskiedenis van ons Land in die Taal van ons Volk* (The History of our Land in the Language of our People/Nation) was written by SJ du Toit, and the Afrikaans newspaper, *Patriot*, ran a column for "Afrikaans history" in 1876. In part the struggle for linguistic and cultural affirmation was partly led by the Christian National Education (CNE) movement, which had been "imported" from Holland in the nineteenth century. It became increasingly popular in the concentration camps set up by the British to imprison Afrikaners during the Anglo-Boer war at the turn of the century. Incidentally, the CNE movement had grown as a Protestant alternative to education offered by the Roman Catholic Church in Holland. In South Africa, it also emerged as an alternative. Cross (1999:23) confirms this: "Similarly, in South Africa, Christian National Education appeared in opposition to state-controlled secular education, systematically enforced after the Anglo-Boer war."

The CNE movement was the impetus for Afrikaans-only schools, the Institute for Christian National Education, the Broederbond and the economic co-operatives that eventually came into existence and that came to dominate the broader socioeconomic life of the Afrikaners' "nation" in the making. To give direction and to crystallise the movement of Afrikaners into a more cohesive unit and indeed to attempt a standardisation of Afrikaners' response to British rule and the indigenous people, the Afrikaners formed the Voortrekkers to prevent a potentially large flow of children into the Boy Scout movement, and after the Union

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in 1910. These people also created the Ossewa Brandwag, which was aimed at fostering an "Afrikaner national consciousness and pride" in the Afrikaans language. Largely middle class Afrikaners [9] bandied together to form insurance group Sanlam in 1918, banking co-operative Volkskas in 1934 and the Rembrandt Group in the 1940s to steer the economic mobilisation of Afrikaners. Cross argues that the emphasis on Afrikaner linguistic and cultural self-determination underpinned the activities of these organisations, the most notorious of which was the secretive Broederbond. In a footnote, Cross reveals the intention of the Broederbond:

> The most notorious organization was the Broederbond, a secret brotherhood organization founded in May, 1918, with the aim of secretly furthering the interests of the Afrikaner people, striving for the Afrikanerization of South Africa in all aspects of life, for the dominance of Afrikanerdom in the political sphere and for a "truly Afrikaans government of South Africa" (C.F.J. Muller, *100 Years: A History of South Africa*, third revised edition, Pretoria: Academica 1981:141).

In the first decade of the twentieth century the concession of free and compulsory education was given to white children in the Orange River Colony [10] for children aged between ten and sixteen years. Herzog's School Act of 1908 extended the range from seven to sixteen years, and for the most part, this Act established the principle that all white children should be taught in a "dual cultural environment". Cross (1999:29) writes, "In 1906, the Transvaal received self-governing status from the British Liberal government. In 1908, the first meetings of the National Convention, which led to Union [in 1910], were held in Durban. By May 1909, the contending parties had struck an agreement in Bloemfontein. Both Dutch and English were recognized." In fact, the Act of Union in its Article 137 is unambiguous: "Both English and Dutch [later Afrikaans] languages shall be official languages of the Union ..."

While the British and the Afrikaners had accepted bilingualism after the country became a Union of South Africa, Cross argues that the status quo did not address the "technicalities" of how this agreement should be translated into educational policy. For the Afrikaner sectionalists (or nationalists), who wanted to "separate linguistic and cultural identities", commitment to their "own" meant struggling for political hegemony in the three decades that immediately followed the Act of Union in 1910.

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In this "struggle for political hegemony" between 1910 and 1948, policy and legislative developments in education went a significant distance in responding to the growing dissension between mainly white Afrikaner labour and white capitalists. The variations in the governing party made little difference to the self-perceived and overarching need to forge a white unity. During this period, the state passed legislation to allow for the extension of technical education to white children. It also set up industrial and agricultural training colleges or schools for white children from working class homes. Legislation ensuring compulsory education for white children was passed, and the principle of bilingualism (English and Afrikaans) to lessen antipathies between Afrikaners and English-speaking white people was accepted. The approach by the state was one of rapprochement and its strategy was to build a workable unity between the different white groups. It was a strategy that had implications not only for the educational sector, but was a response to economic imperatives as well. Cross inserts an insightful analysis by established South African educationist and radical scholar Linda Chisholm in his assessment of the educational implications:

> The significance of these initiatives goes beyond the instrumental function that education was expected to play in the economy. Indeed, state intervention in the reconstruction of white schooling responded to the "heightened conflict between white labour and capital on the Rand and the need to reproduce white labour in such a way that it saw its interests as non-antagonistic to those of capital." [11]

But the state was not exclusively focused on white education. The Apprenticeship Act of 1922 was "supported by discriminatory industrial legislation" that denied Africans access to semi-skilled or skilled jobs. With minor changes in policy and rapid growth of an Afrikaner urban proletariat and middle class, the links to the countryside were receding. For the ideologues, bonds of solidarity needed to be maintained and reproduced. Recourse to ideology and divinity was the course taken. Cross (1999:41) quotes promoter of Calvinism and apartheid ideologue DJ van Rooy:

> In every People in the world is embodied a Divine Idea and the task of each People is to build upon that idea and perfect it. God created the Afrikaner people with a unique language, a unique philosophy of life, and their own history and tradition in order that they might fulfil a particular calling and destiny

here in the southern corner of Africa. We must stand guard on all that is peculiar to us and build upon it. We must believe that God has called us to be servants of his righteousness in this place.

Equally emphatic is HG Stoker, another Afrikaner nationalist: "God willed the diversity of peoples. Thus He has preserved the identity of our Volk. Such preservation was not for naught, for God allows nothing for naught ..." By invoking the authority of some or other divinity, successive clerical, social and political leaderships of the multi-class Afrikaner movement were able to lay the ground for a submission to a self-created "higher authority", and partly secure the consent and acquiescence of the Afrikaner social base, which was increasingly becoming urbanised, and bent on the "separation of black and white 'races'". Martin Legassick [12] has argued forcefully that the post-1948 National Party's policy of segregation was in fact conceived before the party's electoral victory. The South African-born scholar writes: "[The] crucial formative period for the policy of segregation was between the South African War of 1900–02 and the First World War." This is confirmed by Cross (1999:289), who argues that the "Reconstruction Administration" from 1910 to 1948 aimed at consolidating previous policies:

> On the question of "race relations," the Afrikaners relied on segregationist policies developed during the reconstruction regime and the discourses of culture developed by social anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s, which replaced the Victorian discourse of "civilizing mission" and colonial traditions of racism as the basis for social segregation.

In his concluding chapter, Cross (1999:287) argues that the "constitutive elements" of the nationalist Afrikaner discourse had their origins in Calvinist precepts propagated by the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church. The particular literary and "commemorative initiatives" focused on Afrikaner history and the place of the Afrikaans language as the means of communication among Afrikaners. The cultural organisations came to "ultimately harmonize" Afrikaners and mitigate "potential conflicting interests of a class, gender, religious or political nature".

Colonial roots of the official languages

With the National Party victory in 1948, the process leading to the eventual demotion of indigenised British capital to parliamentary and successive small oppositional roles in the democracy for white people started. English, as a spoken and written language, did not suffer the same fate, and the political leadership of the new and unapologetically white state had two main concerns: firstly, it needed to Afrikanerise the state bureaucracy; and secondly, it needed to secure the physical and cultural separation and isolation of black people so that whites, particularly Afrikaners, did not become "dominated by them".

The underlying racist assumptions of the apartheid planners of the post-1948 state are given adequate and blunt expression in the following quotation from DJ du Toit, one of the Afrikaners who was charged with developing education for black people in the formative years of the apartheid state. Cross (1999:73–74) translates Du Toit's words and cites him at length, and it is well worth repeating the absurdity of one of the leading writers of the Herrenvolk's ideas:

> Ostensibly the natives will be absorbed by our culture, but in fact they will, by obtaining participation in our lives, *kaffirize* our whole social and political life ... The past shows us that ... the whites who have sunk to the level of the *kaffirs* also *interbreed* with them. Differentiation, as it has been applied up to the present, results in assimilation, and assimilation leads to domination by the natives. In principle and in practice we cannot accept assimilation. The only alternative is total segregation.

This fear of integration permeated the thinking of Afrikaners and their apartheid strategists before and after their 1948 victory. While it was omnipresent in their way of thinking and underwent slight variations in intensity over the 46 years of National Party domination of the polity, it was a fear that led to the ruling party's Bantustan strategy, its so-called homelands' policy, its genocidal efforts at forcibly removing black people from urban areas to remote rural compounds, and its eventual adoption of a "Total War" strategy to prevent a "communist takeover". The state adopted English and Afrikaans as the official languages to communicate and assert its rule, and where indigenous languages were spoken, it was to be confined to the expanding townships and informal settlements (so-called squatter

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camps) that began mushrooming alongside and in the metropoles of Cape Town, Johannesburg, East London, Bloemfontein and Durban, or in the rural settings where black people's "own culture" could be developed. But Dutch-Afrikaans does not have the illustrious history that so many Afrikaner ideologues of apartheid would have liked people to believe. Instead, the process of language acquisition and use was somewhat straightforward and rather simple, as Neville Alexander explains in his *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* (1989).

Alexander writes that before the colonisers – first the Dutch through the Dutch East India Company and then the British – arrived on the shores of southern Africa, the languages spoken in the region were a variety with Bantu roots. During the first years of the landing, the Dutch used local linguists Autshomoa, Krotoa and Doman as interpreters. But this was costly and in any event the colonists had very little intention to learn the local languages. Alexander (1989:12–13) quotes the telling point that the Dutch company, "ever mindful" of the need to reduce costs, decreed that "natives should learn our language, rather than we theirs". Company policy shifted from limited trade to one of "erratic colonisation", and the "demand for labour led to a dramatic change in the nature and quality of communication between the Dutch colonists and the indigenous groups". The Khoisan languages were on the back foot as the colonists invented themselves as "free burghers [free citizens]". Very soon afterwards, Afrikaans-Hollands became the language of trade, politics, religion, education and social intercourse between "white and non-white" in the Western Cape. Alongside this, East Indian slaves at the Cape developed their own variety of Afrikaans-Hollands, which later became known as Bokaapse Afrikaans. By the end of the seventeenth century, Cape colony inhabitants were well versed in Afrikaans-Hollands.

As for English at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Anglicisation policies of the British governors did not percolate into more indigenised variations but, as Alexander (1989:15–16) points out, "British imperialism wanted to ensure that the ruling elite as well as the new generations of colonists were indoctrinated by means of English literature and manners into a uniform loyalty to the British Crown." The British were in charge of the Cape Colony, and the outcome of its jingoist language policy meant that English became "the language of public discourse among Whites while Afrikaans/Dutch was pushed back into the private and religious spheres".

But while the scars of the ongoing tensions between Afrikaans-Hollands and English were more or less inevitable outcomes of conflicting interests represented by the now settled Dutch colonists and the English newcomers, for Alexander, and far more relevant in the construction of a historical context to appreciate the impact of imposed languages on an indigenous people, the role of the missionaries in the nineteenth century in subjugating the Nguni and Sotho speakers was far more "decisive". The linking theme for all the missionary societies that were operating in southern Africa during this period was to "scatter the seeds of civilization and extending British interests, British influence and the British Empire". This Christianisation of the African people was the "strategic thrust" to provide the "savage tribes" a new confidence in the colonial government. Alexander remarks that in the schools, which they established, the missionaries nurtured a tiny English-knowing black middle class and a working class that was trained to be "a docile and efficient labour force which should accept European religious and political authority and social superiority".

As an aside, in a remarkable "history lesson" [13] accessed on the internet, the lesson's compiler asserts that the author of the booklet titled *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*, Nosepho Majeke, was in fact a white woman, whose name was Dora Taylor. The author of the "lesson" says the book was written after World War 2 "from a Marxist perspective". This lesson wishes to recast the image of the missionary and claims that the essay by Majeke is false: "[T]he book made a number of charges alleging missionary complicity and participation in the conquest."

There is not very much that is redeemable in this lesson, except perhaps that Majeke certainly was influenced by Marxist writings on the subject of the missionaries and their complicity in securing and promoting colonial rule. The majority of the missionaries were British, but some came from France, Switzerland and Germany. According to Alexander (1989:18–19), they "spread the knowledge of English among African people" and produced a crop of black preachers and teachers – the mission elite – and were called "black Englishmen" by many Afrikaners later. In addition, they were intent on spreading the gospel, and this meant that they needed to "reduce the indigenous languages to writing and to teach these written as widely as possible". Alexander elaborates on his proposition that the missionaries were acting unambiguously in the interests of the colonial powers:

Although literacy in the Nguni and Sotho languages became the possession of only a handful of African people, it has to be stressed that the missionaries became invaluable agents of colonial rule in that they helped to train a core of people who could spread the knowledge of the Bible among the colonised people and when necessary could act as interpreters in courts and in other government institutions. Again it must be stressed that in most cases the missionaries were only or primarily concerned with evangelisation. But because of their position on the side of the ruling class, it was impossible to expect that they would do anything to undermine the system. Indeed, they inevitably facilitated the conquest, dispossession and subjugation of the indigenous people.

This is not to say that the relationship between the missionaries and the colonial authorities was without conflict. Moreover, some missionaries learnt the local languages and were adept at writing down indigenous languages, and had passages from the Bible translated in these languages. But their overarching purpose was to provide ancillary support to the colonial regimes. Even the author of the "history lesson" acknowledges their economic function:

[W]ithout question, missionaries were an important factor in promoting economic change. They introduced and encouraged the use of foreign products (clothing, tea, etc.) which undermined the former self-sufficiency of the subsistence economy. This brought Africans more and more into a market economy. To pay for these goods, Africans would have to produce surpluses of agricultural products to sell or find other ways to get money; for many this meant going to work for wages—what some call 'proletarianization'.

In this formative period of English promotion in southern Africa, the essentially British colonial language policy "tolerated" primary schooling in indigenous languages and insisted on English-medium instruction in the Anglocentric curriculum for the "tiny mission elite". Alexander (1989a:20) argues that, for the colonised people, "this meant that English language and English cultural traits acquired an economic and social value that was treasured above all else while their own languages and many of their cultural traits were devalued and often despised".

With slight variations and amendments in policy, and in response to changing circumstances in the designated white groups whose unity was marred by growing Afrikaner

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dissent over English-speaking white rule over about 150 years, this persisted well into the 20th century in all British colonies of southern Africa, including the Union of South Africa after 1910 and until the Afrikaner National Party took power in 1948 and introduced a new language policy.

Language, power and the liberation movement

In 1949 the Afrikaner National Party government appointed the Eiselen Commission to inquire into and make a report on all aspects of "native education" or, as the rulers would have preferred to call it, "Bantu education". The commission's recommendation laid the groundwork for the Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953. The philosophical bankruptcy and "justification" for the policy have been criticised by many analysts and commentators [14], and include the mythologies and reinventions associated with what Alexander calls German Romanticism and its Fichtean and neo-Fichtean [15] idealism about the "dignity of each and every human being and their right to promote their own language and culture", and Alexander concurs with Wilson and Thompson (1971) in their assessment of the Afrikaners' educational policy designed for black people: "The anti-assimilationist and anti-urban aim of the policy was quite explicit. The emphasis on vernacular instruction was to be the main instrument to promote separateness." This was to be a separateness not only between white and black people, but a separateness that was brutally enforced among black people themselves. The emphasis on "ethnicities" and the presumed racial differences between the black groups in South Africa was to become the Afrikaners' ideological anchor in their efforts to divide the indigenous people even further. Hendrik Verwoerd, who was appointed minister of Native Affairs and who became apartheid South Africa's third prime minister in 1958, is reported to have said that "Africans who speak different languages must live in separate quarters ..." (Alexander 1989a:21).

The apartheid rulers were intent on breaking up the country into separate "self-governing" units, characterised by supposed and actual language differences, and presumed cultural differences, so that unified black resistance to their white state could be contained. As for the language policy, the apartheid language policy continued along the well tested lines of British colonial policy but "with the substitution of Afrikaans for English as the language of domination and social accommodation" (Alexander 1989a:21). Where Afrikaans

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could not be imposed as the language of domination, it had to be promoted "on a basis of equality with English in all spheres and facets of life".

Within the ranks of the liberation movement, the language question featured less systematically in policy forums, and more as part of a broader struggle for the universal franchise, some form of nationhood and a quest for unity among the oppressed people. Abdullah Abdurahman, arguably one of the more articulate voices of the urban "Coloured" elite in Cape Town, and a leader of the African People's Organisation, is quoted by Alexander (1989a:29):

> The question naturally arises which is to be the national language. Shall it be the degraded forms of a literary language, a vulgar patois; or shall it be that language which Macaulay says is "In force, in richness, in aptitude for all the highest purposes of the poet, the philosopher, and the orator inferior to the tongue of Greece alone?" Shall it be the language of the "Kombuis" [kitchen] or the language of Tennyson? That is, shall it be the Taal [Afrikaans] or English? ... Now this problem of language concerns our people and I think it should be the aim of all our members to seek to cultivate the English tongue wherever and whenever practicable or possible.

Abdurahman's preference for English was unambiguous, and not surprisingly, it resonated well with the other elite black groups as well. The mission-educated elite of black resistance simply followed through on one of the linguistic conditions for eventual assimilation into the British Empire and foreign domination. Wittingly or unwittingly, this preference for English is, in large part, a runoff of the "fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English" [16] in the political struggles of the colonised elite.

For the African National Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa, systematic efforts to cultivate English were small and erratic. Only the Communist Party through its night-school classes actively promoted the learning of English among African workers on the Witwatersrand and in the Western Cape in the 1930s and the 1940s. Alexander records that it was in the Communist Party that "the first serious attention" was given to the position of indigenous African languages in South Africa. Basing himself on Stalin's interpretation of the national question and finessing it to the realities of South African

spoken languages, Moses Kotane, before he became the general secretary of the Communist Party, is reported to have said in 1932 (Alexander 1989a:31–32):

> The language question would form one of the main difficulties. There is no one language which is sufficiently known and spoken by a majority of the people in Africa. Zulu is spoken mainly in Natal, Xhosa in the Eastern Cape; Sotho in Basutoland and in some parts of the Free State, Tswana in Bechuanaland, western and north-western Transvaal, as are Sepedi, Tshivenda and Shangaan in the eastern and northern Transvaal. Neither English nor Afrikaans is widely spoken among Africans. So, while in each republic or national area everything would be conducted in the language of its people, there still remains the problem of the official national language to be solved. Nevertheless, this could be settled by the common consent of all.

These words, more or less, sum up the language position of the ANC and of the Communist Party for decades after they were first uttered. What was being asserted was a respectful embrace of indigenous languages, but an equally respectful acceptance of Chinua Achebe's "fatalistic logic" of the hegemonic status of English language in the national discourse, even though Kotane couches it in the democratic language of the "common consent of all". At the time, the inequality between local languages and English was palpable, and there seemed to have been a momentum that favoured acceptance of English as the eventual lingua franca.

But it was the teacher, Jacob Nhlapo, who was also a member of the ANC, and who, according to Alexander (1989a:32), was the "voice of the future". In 1944 Nhlapo prefigured Alexander's own policy proposals on the language question. In a pamphlet titled "Bantu Babel: Will the Bantu languages live?", Nhlapo sets out his proposal that the spoken varieties of Nguni and Sotho be standardised in a written form to assist in overcoming tribal and ethnic divisions, and to build "at least two mother tongues". While this process of standardisation is happening, Nhlapo proposes that

> English ought to be made the African "Esperanto" [17] while the question of the African Babel of tongues is being cleared up. Even when we have been able to make Nguni and Sotho the two mother tongues – if we ever manage to do this – English will still be the African "Esperanto". Even if we do not manage to build one joint Bantu language or two, English will still be the answer to the question of the many

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> Bantu tongues as it has been in America, where nations from all parts of Europe and from Africa found themselves living together.

But for Nhlapo's "wish list" to be operationalised would have required considerable financial, indeed state, resources and a political will to achieve. This was simply not possible in the 1940s when he first made his suggestions because, in the first place, the state was controlled by white and capitalist interests, and, in the second place, the concerns of the ANC then included only a marginal interest in the language question.

For the Non-European Unity Movement [18] (NEUM), the relationship of English to other spoken languages was also addressed. Alexander (1989a:36) describes the debate, which appeared in the pages of the learned *Educational Journal* of the Teachers' League of South Africa, as "flowery, verbose and incurably Eurocentric". On the one side was a Stalinist position where few major languages would become the "main means of communication". On the other side was the "essentially Leninist" position that "all languages are equal as means of communication and as bearers of culture". Despite the often vitriolic and sometimes highly personalised polemics of the contending parties in the debate, two key issues are of consequence to the understanding of the language question. Firstly – not unlike other theorists, leaders and language practitioners in the broader liberation movement at the time – there was an acceptance of the "unchallenged position" of English as the language of communication globally. And secondly, there was also an acceptance of the indigenous languages as the actually existing means of communication and media, and carriers of culture, but their singular and collective force was not in a position to challenge the hegemonic status of English. Alexander (1989a:37) cites one of the antagonists in the NEUM debate, AC Jordan:

> And if English should at any time be superseded by some other language, not as an "official" language but as an undisputed medium of universal culture, we shall accord that language its rightful place and get the maximum cultural benefit out of it. Be it remembered always that the issue is not any particular language for its own sake, but *language as a medium of culture*.

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The black consciousness movement (BCM) was not overtly concerned with the language question, but the momentum it set up and the events of Soweto 1976 were instrumental in defining the liberation movement's approach to the two main contenders for acceptance among the educated elites of the oppressed majority. What can be described as a paradox of South African history is that the black students in 1976 – what writer Baruch Hirson has described as the "Year of Fire, Year of Ash" – rejected Afrikaans. The students were adamant that the "language of the oppressor" was not going to be frog-marched down their throats, and at the same time, they accepted and demanded that English be the language of instruction at black schools. They rejected the language of their current oppressor, only to demand the continuation of use of the language of a former coloniser.

The origins of organised black trade unionism can be traced to missionary-educated Clements Kadalie, who formed the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) in 1919. As a union leader, he was opposed to militant trade unionism and sought to achieve workers' rights through negotiations. Since its inception, the union movement in South Africa elected to conduct its business through English, and its main communiqués and organs of communication were written in English, from the exiled voices of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) to the militant incarnations of trade union activism of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu), the National Council of Trade Unions (Nactu) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). While the development of militant trade unionism has been recorded elsewhere [19] and synergies between it and the national liberation movement have been widely commented on, the strategic alliance between Cosatu and the ANC is now a matter of history. The political positions advocated by successive leaders of the various trade union federations have generally followed those taken by the leadership of the political party that respective trade unions aligned with on the national question. This included political positions taken on the language question.

But while repression in South Africa in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was intense, elsewhere on the African continent, anti-colonial struggles were gathering momentum, and the drive towards national liberation rarely was without considerations of language. In 1970 Amilcar Cabral, one of Africa's foremost liberation theorists and practitioners, had very little doubt

about the dangers of "progressive assimilation" of native populations. The colonial powers either physically annihilate indigenous populations or they seek to "harmonise economic and political domination of these with their cultural personality"[20]. This "harmonisation" is hedged about with a military shield, and the colonial state acts both as enforcer and as policeman in the cultural life of a subjugated people. In defining a national culture for liberation, Cabral insists that the movements for change must be "able to conserve the positive cultural values of every social group", or for that class or colour caste, to strive for a "confluence" of these values in the "stream of struggle", which is a metaphor that Alexander has also used in his description of national unification. While Cabral was writing about Guinea Bissau, the implication is equally applicable for South Africa. By allowing the indigenous languages to be used in daily discussion and in the formative years of formal instruction in schools, this does not negate the overarching languages of power and their function in developing hierarchies of domination and subjugation, but also in controlling the dominant discourses in the polity, especially those discourses that are fundamental to the reproduction of the capitalist system. Maintaining English and Afrikaans as the "official languages" has meant that the apartheid rulers could determine, to a large extent, the type of information and communication to the citizens, and thereby ensure either an acquiescence or an uninformed consent to their rule, or so the planners of segregation thought. But this strategy of assimilation has not gone unchecked. Even though Cabral does not explicitly present a detailed analysis of the language question in his writings, it would be difficult to argue that he had not pondered the implications of the different language groups in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. After all, he spoke and wrote in Portuguese, and sometimes delivered his many speeches in English to international audiences. In his literary works, his focus on culture and reclaiming history suggests an interpretation of culture that includes the language question, if not explicitly, then through his references to the castes and different ethnicities that made up the pool of people from which he drew his inspiration. In this regard, he not only confirms the view of NEUM's Jordan about language as a carrier of culture, but asserts its centrality in resistance to colonialism and the assimilation of indigenous cultures and languages into Western variations of democracy. Cabral was assassinated in January 1973 by Portuguese-inspired assassins, just months before "his dream of independence" (Vambe & Zegeye 2007:x) in Guinea Bissau was fulfilled.

Further south, the liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia, despite the seeming invincibility of the South African juggernaut in the 1970s, were

inexorably moving towards a preparation to govern their respective countries. As in Guinea Bissau, the Portuguese were to be given their marching orders in Angola and Mozambique. And while the language question was an inextricable part of the national question and the movement for national liberation in both these countries, the language questions in Zimbabwe and Namibia have a direct bearing on the South African variation because of the hegemonic status of English in these countries.

Alexander (1989a:41) paraphrases Emmanuel Ngara [21], who posits two policy options in then Southern Rhodesia and whose analysis of the Zimbabwean language question inspired Alexander's booklet on language policy:

(a) That there be three languages in Zimbabwe: Shona, Ndebele and English. That Shona and Ndebele be called national languages and that both be accorded official status. That English be the language of international communication and the prime medium of higher education.

(b) That there be one national language in Zimbabwe, Shona, the majority language of the nation, the language of Zimbabwe culture of the past, the language of the Mutapa emperors. That the national language be the main vehicle for the development of national culture. That English be an official language of international communication and the prime medium of higher education for as long as the people of Zimbabwe find it necessary to use it.

Alexander writes that independent Zimbabwe "in fact adopted a modified version of the first option". He refers to Kathleen Heugh's study (1987) on the "underlying ideologies of language medium policies in multilingual societies" to support his view that English was thought to be the "linking language, the language of national unity in spite of its colonialist origins". In fact, Alexander writes, after 1984 parents in Zimbabwe could choose "to have their children taught in English, Shona or Ndebele for the first three years of schooling, after which English became the only medium of instruction". Heugh concludes (Alexander 1989a:42) that Zimbabwe followed the same "familiar route" that other ex-colonial countries had travelled in the first decade of independence:

What we have witnessed thus far in the early years after independence is a familiar pattern where English is selected as a language of wider communication and also one which acts as a unifying bond

where intense rivalries exist between major groups within that newly independent state. ... [A]fter the initial language policy has been made, adjustments are gradually made to give greater emphasis to indigenous languages.

Heugh says the trend in Zimbabwe was then towards bilingualism because of a "growing sense of pride" in the local languages. Independence not only brought about a pride in local languages, but a commitment, at least theoretically, to develop the written standards of Shona and Ndebele and have either of these two occupy a status alongside English in national communications.

The language question in Namibia was different. English and Afrikaans – the two official languages of its colonial occupier, South Africa – occupied pride of place in the hierarchy of instructional media. There were ten spoken languages. In a 1970 census, over 53 per cent of the population spoke Ovambo (there are eight Ovambo dialects of which Ndonga and Kwanyama have a written standard), 0.8 per cent spoke English, and 29.2 per cent spoke Afrikaans ("Coloureds", "Basters" and "Afrikaners"). Herero speakers accounted for 7.6 per cent; German was spoken by about 2 per cent. [22]

Alexander argues that Swapo had already decided before independence that English should be the official language of Namibia. He quotes Hage Geingob, who was the director of the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka in the 1980s and who later became the prime minister of an independent Namibia under a Swapo government, to support his view (Alexander 1989:44):

... In spite of the difficulties inherent in the task of implementing English as the official language for Namibia, the Namibian people will rise to the occasion. This decision, however, does not imply that the indigenous languages are being dismissed. Local languages have a vital role to play in society and there will be a need for an overall multilingual language planning policy, both long-term and short-term, in which various languages are institutionalized to their greatest advantage.

In these African countries, English has, over time, and certainly after independence gained a predominance that has been unexpected. In Namibia and Zimbabwe, and despite the "growing sense of pride" in indigenous languages that Heugh mentions in the afterglow of

political freedoms that accompany the inauguration of a new democratic dispensation, English as the dominant and hegemonic language of communication has come to be accepted by political principals, leading academics and increasingly the black middle classes that form the backbone of the new political order. The reasons for this are complex and could be linked to the fact that the market economies at the base of the sociopolitical structures in these states are the promoters and unstated guardians of English.

The language question in South Africa

It might be worth saying that the language question has not changed dramatically after the country's first democratic election in 1994. What was a central part of educational policy, and therefore housed in the educational institutions of the state, for the apartheid rulers before 1994 shifted to a new institutional home in the newly created South African national Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology after 1994. This shift is significant as it locates the language question, at least as far as the democratic government is concerned, in the realm of culture.

The language problematic[23] can be approximately summarised in the following questions: Why was English used and indeed chosen, and not Zulu or Xhosa, as a national means of communication in the government? What are the historical and political reasons for continuing with the use of English as a lingua franca? What are the advantages and disadvantages of developing written standards for the Nguni and Sotho clusters of languages? Alexander (1989:7) asserts that the overriding question that needs to be posed is: "How do we abolish social inequality based on colour, class, religious beliefs, sex, language group or any other basis?" It is this latter question in this "problematic" that directly links the language question to the broader concern of Alexander's works and literary output – that is, the sociology of nation building and the struggle for socialism.

There have been, and are, at least 25 languages spoken in South Africa. Out of a population of 25 million people (in 1980), the most widely used languages were Zulu and Xhosa, which, according to the census data of 1980, had 6.05 million and 2.87 million speakers, respectively. English and Afrikaans had 2.58 million and 1.76 million speakers. North and South Sotho had a combined total of 4.29 million speakers.[24] While the main historical co-ordinates of educational, language and cultural policy have been outlined earlier

in this chapter, it might be useful to sketch a brief summary of apartheid language policy. Christian National Education, which was the official policy of the National Party government, dictated that African languages were separated through "lexical and other corpus-planning manoeuvres" (Alexander, 1997). These languages were kept at a level, or were relegated to what Alexander calls "*Ausbau*-languages" [25], which means that even though the different strands or varieties of a particular language cluster, such as Nguni or Sotho, could well have been developed into a standard written form, they were kept apart to systematically underdevelop them, despite the apartheid rulers' public pronouncements that they were in fact modernising the indigenous languages.

Before 1994, South Africa's rulers were intent on balkanising even further the presumed ethnicities or "nations" that they were busy constructing, and in the light of international pressures on African independence movements and the reality of the independence of Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, and later Namibia, the apartheid state sought to indemnify itself through many strategies to save itself from its own inevitable implosion, but which nevertheless exacted a terrible human and financial toll on the country's resources. Its "homelands/Bantustan policy" was an economic failure, and its efforts to herd black people into different geographical units defined by their "ethnicity" or language was politically unmanageable.

For the oppressed people, their political leaders were "anglo-centric" and not only opposed Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools since the whirlwind of 1976, but insisted instead that English be used because it represented the "language of liberation" as in other African countries in which liberation movements successfully defeated colonialism. In Alexander's assessment of the hegemonic role of English, this subordination to English by the middle class leadership of the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress, the Black Consciousness Movement, the NEUM and its later incarnations, and independent Marxists including those who were involved in the black trade union movement, was because it was "the only language that could compete with Afrikaans as a means to power". Moreover, it was the "only means to international communication and world at the disposal of South Africa's elites". What was absent from the thinking of the political leadership of the majority of people was the historical precedent set by Afrikaners in their cultural movement [26] to oppose English at the turn of the 20th century, and thereby create a social cohesion in which African languages could incubate and develop in written form.

The political leadership of the oppressed had no intention to "denigrate" African languages, but they also had no intention to "develop, modernise and spread the knowledge of the indigenous languages both for the intrinsic empowering value of such an exercise and as an explicit strategy of cultural-political resistance". In a rare and self-effacing way, Alexander admits that the language question has turned into "yet another crisis for our people ... of our own making". He sketches the complex interplay between economic imperatives and the "high status languages" (1997):

> How should this crisis be defined? In a nutshell, the crisis is characterised by the fact that the vast majority of our people do not at present have a sufficient command of the high status languages (English and Afrikaans) so that they can compete for well paid jobs and prestigious career options on a basis of equality with the 20% of the population who do have the requisite language skills. On the other hand, the language resources that the majority do have (most of the metropolitan and urban population can speak with high proficiency at least two – often radically different – African languages), are not validated in the market place. In other words, the indigenous languages are not accorded a status such that knowing them is of material or social benefit to the speaker outside the relevant speech community itself.

Alexander agrees with Cameroonian scholar Beban Sammy Chumbow, who has argued forcefully for the development and modernisation of the indigenous languages in Africa. Chumbow asserts that "greater access to education, optimal utilisation of human resources, diffusion of innovations in appropriate technology" require a re-examination of national language policies so that the "foreign language of wider communication is used along with the indigenous languages of wider communication so as to optimize the use of the linguistic resources of the nation and maximize the use of Science and Technology and Research and Development in the service of national development" (Alexander 1997). Chumbow recognises that indigenous language is not an easy task. It is "fraught" with problems whose roots are to be found in multilingualism and "multi-ethnicities" in Africa. As a step to surmount these problems, Chumbow says, language planning, which is a discipline that "seeks to provide solutions to identified language-related and language-dependent problems", can be done. Especially for the future of science and technology, it is imperative that the empowerment of people through the democratisation of access to knowledge takes place, he concludes.

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For his part, Alexander is unambiguous about the need to teach people in their home languages. In a case such as South Africa, in which a minimum of at least two languages are spoken by its population and is a de facto bilingual if not a multilingual country, the former colonial language (English) [27] should be one of the "package of languages to be learned". He cites Kwesi Prah who maintains that the educational policies of post-colonial African governments that neglected the modernisation and development of home languages are one of the main reasons for the "abysmal failure of all economic programmes on the continent".

A systematic focus on language development is considered critical to a liberated society. Alexander contends that a democratic language policy is critical for such a society to come into being and takes as his point of departure the events of 1976 to kick-start a process of what he calls "language planning from below". He also says somewhat ambitiously that the formation of the National Language Project (NLP) in 1986, which he initiated, heralded a beginning of a more co-ordinated advocacy process for a new language dispensation.

Whereas before 1994, language policy and language practice had served colonial and sectional interests in South Africa, the "new South Africa" adopted a raft of principles that was spelt out in its new constitution from which a language policy was to emerge. The high status languages of English and Afrikaans were relegated to the same official status as the indigenous African languages. In May 1996, the country's Constitutional Assembly, which was charged with the responsibility of drawing up the new constitution, adopted what can be described as one of the most progressive frameworks of language dispensation the continent has ever seen. Alexander (1997) writes that the assembly adopted a constitution that provides for:

–   the promotion of multilingualism;
–   the provision of interpreting and translation services;
–   the equal treatment of all languages spoken in South Africa;
–   the development and modernisation of the African languages;
–   the officialisation of 11 of the languages spoken in South Africa, namely: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu;

–   a Pan-South African Language Board (PANSALB) to act as a kind of language ombudsperson regarding not only the 11 official languages but also Khoi, Nama, sign language, and a number of other languages used either for religious or communal purposes;

–   the prohibition of the use of any language for the purpose of discrimination, exploitation and oppression.

Linguist and academic Nkonko Kamwangamalu (2004:198–199) writes:

> The population of South Africa is not only multiracial but it is also multilingual. It is estimated that about 25 languages are spoken within South Africa's borders. Of these languages, 11 have been accorded official status ... All official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably (The Constitution, 1996, Chapter 1, Section 6 (2)).

In an otherwise informative and clearly argued article, Kamwangamalu appears stuck in a pluralist-liberal mode in describing the composition of South Africa's polity in notions of "multiracialism" [28] and their consequences in the realm of perception. Despite this, his purview of language not only encompasses the simple and profound problematic founded on questions that not only hinge about the decisions by the post-1994 democratic government to opt for 11 official languages and not just English, but also it includes questions about the de facto domination of English as the leader in national and market communication. He (2004:253) writes:

> As far as the market forces are concerned, there is no sustained demand for multilingual skills in the African languages for academic, economic, administrative and employment purposes. The lack of this demand has ensured that English and to some extent Afrikaans remain central to virtually all the higher domains of language use. As Verhoef (1998:192) remarks, the demand for multilingual skills in the African languages would contribute towards raising the status of these languages and change the way in which the languages are perceived by the different language communities ... [B]lack South Africans have ambivalent attitudes towards their own languages: they value the languages highly only as symbols of ethnolinguistic identity and as vehicles for intergenerational transmission of indigenous cultures and traditions; but they prefer English for all the higher-level functions and for personal upward social mobility (see Slabbert, 19994; Verhoef, 1998; Virasamy, 1997).

Kamwangamalu (2004:253) argues there are additional factors that "inhibit policy implementation" of African languages. The legacy of apartheid has left an indelible mark on the status of these languages is one such factor. Added to the weight of history imposed by this legacy, are what he calls "elite closure" and "linguicism". Elite closure is a reference to "linguistic divergence" that has been "created as a result of using a language which is only known to or preferred by the elite, in this case English". For Kamwangamalu, linguicism is an ideology of the dominant or ruling class in which, in the South African case, English and Afrikaans, are given a "higher social status than the indigenous languages".

Alexander approaches the issue of English language domination, and indeed the hegemonic status of the English language, differently. His view is that it can be seen through a range of lenses, but the "kaleidoscope" of class and power seems the most compelling. In a far more strident tone, and in a far more explicitly critical voice, Alexander (1997) states:

> The seduction of an English-only or an English-mainly policy comes from both economic and ideological sources. On the surface, it appears to people who already have proficiency in English (the world language) that the most economical language policy consists of encouraging or even compelling everybody to learn English even at the expense of their first languages. Such a policy, it is believed, will cost much less than a policy of multilingualism which involves, among other things, thousands of translators and interpreters. Ideologically, those who are proficient in English are in possession of invaluable cultural capital; the sky is the limit for them as far high-paying jobs and career options are concerned in a context of poverty and inequality. Such unspoken, perhaps even unconscious, pressures are decisive in the emergence of a *middle-class language policy* [italics not in the original].

This position, which Alexander has been developing, refining and advocating since the publication of his *One Azania, One Nation* (1979), is not dissimilar to Sam Nolutshungu's critique [29] (1982) over twenty-eight years ago of the black consciousness movement and what the latter has described as "elite accommodation" of the leadership of this nationalist initiative. Put differently, Nolutshungu's analysis is that the class interests and class values that drive the nationalist leaderships in South Africa could be and, as it turns out in 2011, have been accommodated within an officially "deracialised" post-apartheid capitalist state. For Alexander, the middle class language policy of the current South African state is both an expression of the will of the politically dominant elite and a chosen communication tool that

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is driven by the market. English is the chosen language because there is a coincidence of interests between the dominating class of middle class black people and the owners of capital. While the financially well endowed Chinese and other east Asian polyglot empires have not only expressed an interest in settling and developing their considerable dollar reserves [30] on the African continent, with the necessary consequence of an infusion of different languages with which to "play in the market", for the foreseeable future English as the international and the national lexicon of power will continue to dominate in the corridors of economic and political power.

In South Africa, the language of power and the power of language, especially English and Afrikaans, will remain a contested dilemma for language activists. In both the 1996 Census and the 2001 Census [31] compiled by Statistics South Africa, the languages most spoken by South Africans at home are Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans. In a comparative study published on its website, Statistics SA narrates the order of language preferences:

> The most frequently spoken first home language in both census years was isiZulu. It was spoken by 9,2 million people in 1996, increasing to 10,7 million in 2001. This was followed by isiXhosa, spoken by 7,2 million in 1996 and 7,9 million in 2001. The third most frequently spoken first home language was Afrikaans, spoken by 5,8 million in 1996, increasing to 6,0 million in 2001. The least frequently spoken first home language, of the eleven official languages of South Africa, was isiNdebele, spoken by 587 000 in 1996, increasing to 712 000 in 2001. The nine official indigenous African languages were spoken as first home languages by 76,5% of the population at the time of Census '96, increasing to 77,9% at the time of Census 2001. Afrikaans and English together were spoken as first home languages by 23,1% of the population in 1996, decreasing to 21,5% in 2001.

The authors of this study say that the ranking order of the different home languages spoken remained the same in 1996 and 2001.

In his study, Kamwangamalu (2004:259) states that Afrikaans is the only language that "could present a challenge to the hegemony of English in all the higher domains, except diplomacy". As the third most spoken home language, Afrikaans has just over 6 million speakers, but in a population of just under 45 million [32] in 2001, these people account for 13.3 per cent of the country's population. Also in 2001, the census data indicate that 23 per cent of South Africans spoke English and Afrikaans as home languages, which means that under 10 per cent of the population actually conversed in English in their homes. Despite these staggering statistics, English remains the de facto means of official communication in all state

departments, and the lingua franca of most if not all principals in the country's business affairs. In other words, the maintenance and destiny of the country's political economy have become the preserve of the established white corporate elites and the black accommodated elites and their middle class imaginations to reproduce power and status.

Kamwangamalu (2004:257) says the spoken languages in South Africa co-exist in a "hierarchical, three-tier, trilingual system, one in which English is at the top, Afrikaans in the middle, and the African languages at the bottom". He describes this as "asymmetrical multilingualism" because English has more prestige than the others, and he concludes that there is a "mismatch" between the state's multilingual policy and language practices.

Alexander would have little difficulty in agreeing that this dissonance between policy and practice has been a feature of the ANC's proclaimed allegiance to "empower the nation" through an equitable language dispensation, and at the same time that it is a signature of ANC principals uncomfortably straddling the divide between market-inspired and market-dominated economic realities on the one hand and the imperatives of a developmental, if not a socialist state, on the other. Comprehensive language planning, for him, requires plans "on the board" and soon after that, plans "off the board" so that plans and actual educational practices resonate. But, it would seem, this is easier said than done. This is the tricky area where noble ideals and reality tend to clash. In his own words, it may take "generations, decades and in some cases, perhaps, centuries of committed attention to the development of the languages of low status in order for actual equality of usage to be realised" (Alexander 1997). Paul Walters, a critic of Alexander's radical proposals about language planning, makes the following comment in the same *African Sociological Review* in which Alexander's article was published:

> I regret that I cannot share the author's [Alexander's] faith in the power of language planning as such. I think he is closer to the truth when he admits that 'we cannot sjambok [browbeat] the people to paradise'... I fully agree that, under apartheid education, the indigenous languages (excluding Afrikaans) were cynically and deliberately underdeveloped, and I would like to believe that, had the same quantity of material and ideological resources been devoted to the development of those indigenous languages *and* had there been the same career and material rewards for the learning of those languages as were so lavishly dished out to speakers of Afrikaans in the years of Afrikaner dominance, then the relative statuses of those indigenous languages today might

be very different ... [M]y point of difference is that I do not believe that any amount of language planning is going to change this.

Walters is evidently less than enthused about Alexander's proposals, and explicitly refers to Alexander's "sense of outrage and injury" that "has the power to obscure the urgency of the need to establish widespread numeracy skills (if for nothing else, to chart the financial depredations of our new wave of politicians!)". Before dealing with the substantive aspects of Walters' critique, it may well be worthwhile to dispel his allusion to Alexander's supposed "sense of outrage and injury". These emotions are legitimate outcomes of oppression and exploitation, and of living under a state of tyranny for the time that Alexander has had to endure, and to use this inference as a block on which to reduce Alexander's proposals is not only disingenuous, but disrespectful. Be that as it may, Walters' objection to language planning is not unique, and has potentially disastrous consequences. His almost "evolutionary" approach to educational development has the appearance of soundness and longevity, and when he does invoke the authority of mathematics literacy in his critique of Alexander's proposals, his comment is very little more than a restatement of an established fact: "One of the greatest imbalances at the moment is the very different capacity of the indigenous languages over against [sic] English when it comes to expressing mathematical concepts – even, indeed, in respect of economy and precision of expression when it comes to counting." Walters' proposal is to recognise the "need to establish widespread numeracy". This position is unassailable and, in the opinion of this researcher, one that does not need to be the preserve of English speakers or does not need to be taught in English or Afrikaans. Numeracy can and should be taught in home languages.

What Walters might lack in comprehending Alexander's "outrage and injury", and the transformation of these emotional states into a practical plan to empower ordinary people whose multilingualism has been an untapped resource, Gary Barkhuizen makes up for in his critique of the "practical side, the implementation, of Alexander's proposals" [33]. Acknowledging Alexander's view that "schools are the main instruments of socialisation in modern societies", Barkhuizen identifies three "principles" that Alexander expounds to guide language planning: multilingualism, development and modernisation of African languages, and equal treatment of all spoken languages. But then he casts aspersions about the practical implications of these "ideological concerns":

All too often planners are guided by ideological concerns rather than by the practical possibilities of their plans. One major hurdle, as Alexander himself points out, is that planners have to take into account the language attitudes of the people of South Africa. Unfortunately, what they think is not what Alexander wants them to think. He therefore feels that 'they have got to understand' both the history of the country's language situation and its plans for the future. Besides being patronising and potentially undemocratic, this task will be a very difficult one indeed.

These comments and criticisms of Alexander's work on language are spurious for a number of reasons, most important of which is that Alexander would be the first to admit that he is ideologically inspired and driven. Having a set of beliefs and politically pursuing this set is not unfamiliar nor unwelcome in Alexander's arsenal of action politics, and what Barkhuizen does is to artificially separate ideology from practical educational realities. An overhaul in existing relations of productions is at the root of Alexander's proposals, even though the reality of the market economy in South Africa is a short-term and medium-term guarantee against such a rupture. At best, what can be changed must be changed within the paradigm created and determined by the political overlords whose main preoccupation is the reproduction of the status quo. Alexander's view is that the middle class dominates and is in charge of, even though it is not necessarily hegemonic in, the political structures that dictate language policies. This thematic permeates Alexander's writings and it might be useful to characterise, at the very least, some of the main features of this middle class to understand his opposition to its political domination of the polity.

The black middle class and the language of power

In what can be described as one of the most incisive journalistic accounts of the stranglehold of African elites on political power, Moeletsi Mbeki [34] (2009) asserts that South Africa had three elites after the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of last century: the English commercial elite, the Afrikaner elite, and the African elite. Mbeki (2009:45) argues that the old aristocratic elite that "had ruled African societies and led the resistance to colonisation was physically annihilated by the British in the nineteenth century". The African elite at the turn of the

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previous century was "new". It consisted of "acculturated and Christianised elites that had arisen in the Cape and the colonies, promoted first by the missionaries and later by the British government as valuable allies" to suppress the "tribes". Already then there were the "accommodationist faction" and the "nationalist faction".

But the origins of the black middle class can be traced back to the 1830s, says Mbeki (2009:55), when the British realised "they could not crush the Xhosa without forming alliances with other African tribes". To this end, the British turned the indigenous leaders into military allies. Mbeki reports (2009:55–56):

> The British introduced their black allies to the ways of the modern capitalist world at the time. They transformed them into peasant farmers and acquainted them with Western religion, writing, modern medicine, Western clothing, modern citizenship and electoral politics ... Out of this peasantry emerged South Africa's African middle class – Christian, missionary educated, Anglophile, liberal, pro-capitalist and attuned to parliamentary democracy, which was introduced by the British in the Cape Colony in the 1950s. The African middle class was soon joined, in particular, by the freed Malay and other slaves, many of whom became independent entrepreneurs after the abolition of slavery in 1834–38. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the former peasant and former slave middle class was joined by free Indians who had paid their way to South Africa and worked as independent merchants, teachers and doctors. The most famous of these was Cambridge-educated Mohandas Gandhi.

Through the churches, the semi-skilled and skilled professions, and through non-governmental organisations, a black middle class began to evolve, and "remained the torchbearer of democracy in South Africa for 100 years while its nineteenth-century partners, the British imperialists, had swapped democracy for super profits from diamonds and gold" (Mbeki 2009:57). It was this layer of people that provided the pool from which the democratic leadership of the country emerged. Mbeki concludes:

> In 1994, it emerged as a powerful black elite that controlled significant institutions, such as the South African Council of Churches and the Catholics Bishops Conference. It provided political leadership to the formidable trade union movements of Cosatu and the National Congress of Trade Unions (Nactu). It was thus seen at home and abroad – by South African big business, by foreign investors and by the

British and Americans – as the natural replacement for the floundering Afrikaner elite that had ruled the country since 1907, although, unlike that elite, it still had very little economic power.

In describing the three "characteristics of the black elite", Mbeki (2009:58–61) explains that its "first ideology" developed in the mid-nineteenth century as British liberalism, "which promoted the sanctity of private property, freedom of speech and association and elected representative government". In the second place and grafted on to this liberalism, there was an African nationalism, which, according to Mbeki, "arose initially in response to attempts by mining companies to dispossess African peasants in order to drive them to the diamond and gold mines as cheap, unskilled manual labour ... African nationalism in South Africa dovetailed with liberalism in that it also promoted individual entrepreneurship." In the third place, "social democracy" entered the mind-set of the black elite in the second half of the twentieth century through the "influence of the South African Communist Party", the Soviet and Chinese communist parties and the social democratic parties in Western Europe" (Mbeki 2009:60). These variations of social democracy were based on what Mbeki calls "statist economic models", and not on socialism. Mbeki diplomatically refers to its creators' vision as one which wanted to break the power of white-owned corporations so that the black elite could enter the world of business. He cites Nelson Mandela's explanation of the Freedom Charter, which was adopted in 1955: "The charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold mining monopolies that have for centuries plundered the country and condemned its people to servitude. The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class."

Mbeki (2009:61) then sums up his interpretation of the black elite in a remarkably poised but politically trenchant, if not devastating, paragraph on the post-1994 democratically elected government's policy of black economic empowerment:

Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has not, however, proved to be the fatal blow to South Africa's oligarchs that Nelson Mandela and black nationalists of his era once envisioned. In fact, it strikes a fatal blow against the emergence of black entrepreneurship by creating a small class of unproductive but wealthy black crony capitalists made up of ANC politicians, some retired others not, who have

become strong allies of the economic oligarchy that is, ironically, the caretaker of South Africa's de-industrialisation.

In 2007, it was estimated [35] that South Africa's black middle class had grown by 30 per cent in just over a year, from 2 million to 2.6 million people, and that its spending power rose from R130 billion to R180 billion. In 2010 terms, this means that the middle class, which would presumably be over 3 million people in an estimated population of just under 50 million, would constitute about 6 per cent. This growing black stratum of people represents a wage earning class that includes lawyers, doctors, technicians, judges, teachers, sportsmen and sportswomen, academics, and the largest component, the state bureaucracy and manual employees whose count exceed one million people. It is this group of skilled and semi-skilled people who have become the willing and unwitting foot soldiers to disseminate and reproduce the cultural and ideological values of the ANC and other nationalist political groupings such as the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) and the PAC, which have thrown their lot in with the post-1994 political regime, but it is also this group, or social class or fraction of the middle class, that has remained second in charge in determining economic priorities, despite its characterisation on the website, www.southafrica.info, as being the "most important economic grouping".

With very few exceptions, this layer of people has had access to public and private English-language schools or English-medium schools, and has become the much-maligned "black Englishmen [sic]" of the twenty-first century, which Alexander (1989:18) cites and which has been so pejoratively referred to by "radical black activists". The children of this group of people attend either private schools or "good" government schools in middle class areas and suburbs. In the private schools over 70 per cent [36] are black children. The Department of Education's Country Report [37] (2011:1) provides a more detailed breakdown of learner figures:

> The current scope of school education is indicated by the following summary data. Overall, in 2009, the schooling system in South Africa has over 12 million learners enrolled in more than 25 000 schools with over 400 000 educators teaching in South African schools. Like in other countries, the schooling system comprises of public and independent sector. More than 11 million learners were enrolled in

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24 699 public ordinary schools and were taught by 387 2837 educators in 2009. While 393 447 learners attended 1 207 independent ordinary schools, and were taught by 25 230 educators.

While small in comparison with the rest of the population, and while there is presumably a ceiling beyond which the parents and children of this black middle class may not expand, the political power that this group of people wields on the cultural health of the country is evidently decisive. And it is this group of people who insist on the continued embrace of English-language primary, secondary and tertiary schooling. This would seem to be one of the most fundamental dilemmas that South African language planners face.

The language English is not only the historical language of big capital in South Africa, it is also the language of access for middle class black people to expand and to reproduce their recently acquired status of political power and their strategic station in the international diplomatic circuits. It has indeed become the language of power, both locally and in global affairs, and enhances the perception of South Africa's reputation as a "miracle nation".

NOTES

[1] American linguist and anarchist intellectual Noam Chomsky argues that language serves not only as a means of communication between people, between representatives of ruling and dominated classes, between members of the same class or sections thereof, or for that matter between what Alexander refers to as colour-castes, but also serves as a tool for internal reasoning. Chomsky's "transformational-generative" grammar is a set of "rules that express the relation of deep and surface structure in sentences". "Surface structure" is the phonetic form of sentences whereas "deep structure" determines semantic interpretation. See, for example, *Chomsky: Selected Readings* (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press 1971).

[2] The structuralist school in Marxist theory argues that specific fields of culture and politics may be reduced to structures. According to Wikipedia (accessed on 3 June 2011), it originated in the "structural linguistics" of Ferdinand de Saussure and eventually came to resonate in the works of French Marxist Louis Althusser, and the so-called post-structuralists Michel Foucault, psycholanalyst Jacques Lacan and literary critic Roland Barthes. Put differently, structuralism is an intellectual movement that generally views human culture as a "system of signs", that is semiotically, and can be explained and understood through investigating the formal and informal organisations that people create.

[3] It is very difficult to comment on any study on nationalism without either anchoring it in, or referencing it to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; 1991), Etienne Balibar's "The Nation Form: History and Ideology" (1991), Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World – A Derivative Discourse* (1986), and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell 1983). It would also be remiss not to mention the works of Vladimir Lenin and

Joseph Stalin on the national question and the "rights of nations to self-determination", and the short but significant essay by conservative historian Elie Kedourie titled *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson & Co., first published in 1960, and the third revised edition published in 1966).

[4] Much of this history is captured in popular and academic books, dissertations, newspapers and journals. By far the most exciting and penetrating is Dan O' Meara's book, *Volkskapitalisme*, which was written in the 1970s. *Volkskapitalisme* is a textured interrogation of the class basis of Afrikaner nationalism and its rise as the hegemonic force it came to be after 1948. Other studies that are worth mentioning include WA de Klerk's *The Puritans in Africa – A Story of Afrikanerdom* (London: Rex Collins 1975); Carl David Dalcanton, "The Afrikaners of South Africa: A case study of identity formation and change" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh 1973).

[5] In Afrikaans dictionaries, a *volk* is described as "a nation", or "a people". Among the more messianic Afrikaans-speaking leaders who spoke out on behalf of their "people" in the early and mid 19th century, a *volk* was a divinely inspired creation or, at the very least, it was presumably a people who spoke Dutch or Afrikaans, whose skin colour was not black or brown, but some shade of white intended to invoke a feeling of solidarity among those to whom it was addressed, and who were descendants of mainly Dutch-speaking colonists who landed on Cape Town's shores in the mid 17th century. In an intriguing blog posted on 11 December 2009, frostygirl.bundublog.com/2009/12/11/die-afrikaner.volk-verbreek-hulle-gelofte-van-16-december-1838-aan-god/ (accessed on 12 June 2011 by the researcher), an oath taken in 1838 by Afrikaners was reprinted in old Dutch. This was the infamous oath to honour the day of the Sabbath and just before the roving colonists faced an army of Zulu speakers in battle, but this is not the intriguing part. What is is in the commentary by the writer: "God is baie lief vir die Afrikaner Volk omdat ons nog een van die min nasies is wat nog so 'n klein bietjie wys dat ons vir God vrees en omgee wat Hy dink en voel [God loves the Afrikaner people very much because we are one of the few nations that still shows that we care for God and that we care what He thinks and feels]." This is said 180 or so years after this oath was taken, and the comment by "frostygirl" adequately sums up the self-awarded closeness to a divine covenant that has been a hallmark of the ideological imagination of many of Afrikanerdom's theorists and leaders.

[6] The Difaqane is a Sesotho name for the Mfecane, which in Zulu means the "scattering" or the "crushing" of indigenous tribes in southern Africa. Parsons' use of the concept is interesting in that he implies that the Afrikaners were, and are an "indigenous tribe" in search of new land in South Africa.

[7] See the online records of the proceedings. The collection is called *The Rebellion of 1815. Generally Known as Slachtersnek* (H.C.V. Leibrandt (ed.) 1902) and can be found at http://ia600303.us.archive.org/BookReader/BookReaderImages.php? (accessed on 3 June 2011).

[8] See F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa* (London: Macmillan Press 1990).

[9] Dan O'Meara's *Volkskapitalisme* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1983) remains one of the most impressive and insightful accounts of the class character of the dominant economic movements in the lives of the Afrikaner people.

[10] This concession was promulgated through the *Education Ordinance of July 1905*.

[11] Linda Chisholm's work on education in South Africa spans four decades. She was part of the "revisionist school" in South African historiography, and was a part of the new generation of educationists and historians of education that included Frank Molteno, Richard Levin, Tony Fluxman, Pam Christie, Peter Kallaway and Jonathan Hyslop. Chisholm has been associated with the small but significant Educational Policy Unit at Wits University between the years 1981 to 1990. During her tenure at Wits University, Chisholm has not been averse to Marxism and, in her writings, was guided by a historical materialist approach. She is a director at the Human Sciences Research Council and has been seconded from her position to be the special adviser to the current South African Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga. Michael Cross (1999) quotes an insight from her which appears in "Class practice, racial control: Education of the white working class on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1913", a mimeo that was published by the Department of Education at Wits University in 1985.

[12] Martin Legassick has written some of the most critical commentaries on the South African social formation. Basing himself on Marxist categories of political and economic analysis, he has been one of the first South African scholars to assert the symbiosis between the notions of "colour" and "class" in the development of

South African capitalism. Legassick was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1940, and he and his parents emigrated to South Africa in 1947. He joined the ANC in exile and was subsequently expelled in 1985 from the organisation for allegedly "forming a faction". He, together with other militant activists including Paula Ensor, who is a former student of Richard Turner (the political activist who was assassinated in 1978 by agents of the apartheid state), Rob Petersen and David Hemson, had formed the Marxist Workers' Tendency within the ANC as a platform to advocate for a "mass workers' party" to be built through the structures of the ANC. Legassick now lives in Cape Town and is still active in social and anti-capitalist struggles.

[13] The online site is http://stmarys.ca/~wmills/course322/9Missionaries_conquest.html (accessed on 10 June 2011).

[14] See, for example, the book edited by Peter Kallaway, *Apartheid and Education* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1988). In particular, see the articles written by Frank Molteno, Pam Christie and Colin Collins.

[15] Johann Gottlieb Fichte was an 18th century German philosopher who became a leading figure in the movement of German idealism. Developing the propositions of self-awareness and self-consciousness of another German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, Fichte's ideas were later taken up by both left- and right-wing ideologues. For the apartheid strategists, the recourse to Fichte was opportunistic and a ruse to disguise essentially racist beliefs and policies.

[16] Alexander attributes this "classic" remark to Nigerian author Chinua Achebe whose signature novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is one of the widest read works of fiction in Africa.

[17] "Esperanto" is a constructed language that originated in Belarus in the 1870s. It has been traced to Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof whose goal was to create a "politically neutral language" to assist international understanding. The billionaire philanthropist George Soros is a user of Esperanto, which has been described as "not genealogically related to any ethnic language and is a language lexically predominantly Romantic, morphologically intensively agglutinative, and to a certain degree isolating in character" in Wikipedia.

[18] The NEUM was formed in 1943 and split in 1957. Isaac Bangani Tabata, a founding member of the NEUM, formed another political organisation called the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (Apdusa). Neville Alexander became a member of Apdusa but was later expelled from the organisation. Political activist Baruch Hirson's pithy account of the origins of and tensions within the NEUM appears in South African History Online at www.sahistory.org.za/article/non-european-unity-movement-south-african-online (accessed 15 June 2011).

[19] See, for example, Karis, T & Carter, GM (1972). *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882 – 1964*, Vol. 2, Hope and challenge, Hoover Institution Press: Stanford University, California. Lewis, J. (1984). *Industrialisation and trade union organisation in South Africa*, 1924-55: "The rise and fall of the South African trades and labour council". *South African Labour Bulletin*. September-October, 1974, Vol.1, No.6. *The African Communist*, No 116 First Quarter 1989: November 1988.

[20] See, for example, the compilation of Cabral's speeches in *Amilcar Cabral: Unity and Struggle* (Vambe, MT and Zegeye, A. (eds.) Second edition. Pretoria: Unisa Press 2007:171–176).

[21] Ngara is a Zimbabwean academic and a Marxist writer. He has served as Pro-Vice-Chancellor at South African universities. Among other writings, his books include *Ideology and Form in African Poetry: Implications for Communication* (Portsmouth: Heinemann 1990). Ngara shares Alexander's view of committed writers. In a review of his book, Chelva Kanaganayakam quotes Ngara: "Committed poets must constantly and ceaselessly reflect upon their own social vision and modes of representation with a view to speaking more genuinely for humanity and in a manner which strikes a chord in their reader. This continuous search and exploration is necessary if their poetry is to have a positive and lasting impact in their own time and for posterity." Kanaganayakam concludes that Ngara's work is a "Marxist and dialectical analysis" and is advanced in favour of the liberal humanist or nationalist approach, or the "interpretive preoccupation of deconstructionists". See www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713735330 (accessed 19 June 2011).

[22] These figures are taken from Swapo's *To be Born a Nation: The Liberation Struggle for Namibia* (Department of Information and Publicity, Swapo of Namibia, London: Zed Press 1981:3). The book was written under the auspices of Swapo's department of information and publicity with a "Foreword" by Peter Katjavivi, who was Swapo's secretary for information and publicity in 1979. Katjavivi's first paragraph is an optimistic declaration about and dedication to Swapo's "complete overthrow of South African rule in our

country". The negotiated settlement that ushered in Namibia's independence in 1990 was a far cry from the legitimate rhetoric of the liberation movement's principals a decade earlier.

[23] The noun "problematic" is here used in the sense that Ernesto Laclau employs it: a "coherent system of questions" that make up the ground upon which a discussion between radically different perspectives may take place. See *Imagery of Identity* (Cross 1999:xxv).

[24] See a reprint of this Census data in Alexander's "The Language Question" in *Critical Choices for South African Society* (No.12, Cape Town: Institute for the Study of Public Policy 1989).

[25] See, for example, Alexander's article, "Language Policy and Planning in the New South Africa" (*African Sociological Review Vol.1* 1997).

[26] The now infamous *taalbeweging* (language movement), which has been exhaustively narrated and commented on by Afrikaner nationalist historians and cultural commissars, was part of and provided an impetus to an organised resistance to English domination in the cultural life of Afrikaners, and which resulted in the eventual equality of status of Afrikaans as an official language with English in later decades of the 20th century.

[27] Afrikaans is regarded as an indigenous language even though its colonial origins lie in the lexical and morphological structures of Dutch diction. It has been creolised by Afrikaners, the Khoisan and the Malay populations of the Western Cape.

[28] The term "multiracialism" is premised on the notion that many "races" exist in South Africa. Academics and some leading social scientists seem not to have been able to shake off the habit of referring to the country's different population registration groups, colour castes, or simply different colour configurations, as "races". This has had unfortunate consequences for social science and sociology because it has provided political strategists with useful tools, and seemingly unchallenged or unchallengeable tools, to continue to mobilise people along these, in the researcher's opinion, shaky grounds, and for which there is not any biological basis.

[29] Sam Nolutshungu wrote the book, *Changing South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip), in 1982. Already then, he predicted that the bourgeois character of the nationalist leaderships would be the key to understanding their eventual "co-option" into bourgeois society if conditions allow for such co-option to take place, and if the self-conscious decisions and political decisions of the leaderships are not anti-capitalist. As much as his critique applied to the black consciousness movement and its leadership corps then, his analytical tool of "co-option" could equally describe the station that the leadership of the current ANC government finds itself. The "elites" of the nationalist movements have indeed found their place in the sun whose brightest star is the "market forces". There is a "preview" of Nolutshungu's book available at http://books.google.com/books/about/Changing_South_Africa.html?id=zfHoAAAAIAAJ (accessed 8 July 2011).

[30] China's reserves were estimated at US$3.04 trillion in March 2011. This figure appears on the website www.chinability.com/Reserves.htm (accessed 8 July 2011). The website of the *Economist*, www.economist.com/node/18560525 (accessed 8 July 2011), has reported that by the end of 2010 the reserves were estimated at $2.85 trillion.

[31] See, for example, the website http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/RSAPrimary.pdf1 (accessed 8 July 2011).

[32] According to the website www.South.Africa.info (accessed 8 July 2011), Statistics South Africa estimates the population to be at just under 50 million people. It says: "According to the mid-2010 estimates from Statistics South Africa, the country's population stands at 49.9-million, up from the census 2001 count of 44.8-million."

[33] When he wrote his "Comment" on Alexander's 1997 proposals, Barkhuizen was employed in the Department of English at Rhodes University. The comment appears on the website of the *African Sociological Review Vol.1* (1997).

[34] Moeletsi Mbeki is a former journalist, a former head of communications for the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), a brother of former South African president Thabo Mbeki, and a private business entrepreneur. He has also been a director of Endemol South Africa and the African Resources & Logistics Corporation. His book, *Architects of Poverty: Why African Capitalism Needs Changing* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2009), is a lucid account of the emergence and political role of the black middle class in shaping or in mis-shaping the destinies of South Africa and Zimbabwe, the latter being his former place of exile. Mbeki has also served on the board of trustees of the South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached), which was

the organisation that employed Alexander in the early 1980s and where Alexander served as a regional director in Cape Town.

[35] University of Cape Town/Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing and TNS Research Surveys published a study in 2007 on South Africa's "most important economic grouping", the black middle class. The study, which was reported on the website www.southafrica.info/about/people/blackdiamonds-230507.htm (accessed 11 July 2011), found that there was unprecedented growth in black middle class numbers.

[36] This figure may well be higher. In an undated fact sheet published on the website, www.expatCapeTown.com, it states that there are 12 million learners in South Africa, 26 000 state schools of which 20 000 are primary and 6 000 are secondary schools. Over 400 000 learners attend the 2 000 private schools and 70 per cent of these learners are black. Some of these figures do not tally with those released on the government's education website, and they tend to be exaggerated for social and political effect.

[37] See the government website, www.education.gov.za (accessed on 12 July 2011).

Chapter Four

Towards a New Orchestra and Dance Routines

Background to a review of strategic concepts

It is 32 years since the publication of *One Azania, One Nation*. Neville Alexander has changed and transformations undergone in the society and in the individual have been surrounded and accompanied by the growth and spread of globalisation, so much so that Fukuyama[1] has proclaimed the "end of history". Alexander's written works have been published widely. Regardless of the place or ownership of the publishing houses that have carried his written output, his unapologetic partisanship, his ideological convictions and his numerous flights of literary expertise and critique, the passion with which he has written and approached his writings has been unquestionably evident.

Referring to a different setting and set of sociopolitical circumstances, Isaac Deutscher (1963:219) describes the life and work of Leon Trotsky in his majestic trilogy on the former Russian revolutionary:

> All banished men brood over their past; but only a few, very few, conquer the future ... it would not be quite right to say that as historian he [Trotsky] combined extreme partisanship with rigorous objectivity. He had no need to combine them: they were the heat and light of his work, and as heat and light belonged to each other. He scorned the 'impartiality' and 'conciliatory justice' of the scholar who pretends 'to stand on the wall of a threatened city and behold at the same time the besiegers and the besieged'. His place was ... within the revolution's threatened city.

Alexander was, and is not a communist phenomenon such as Leon Trotsky was, nor was he a Trotskyist in the sense that former South African culture minister Pallo Jordan[2] has described him, but his passion for people, for history and for being "within the revolution's threatened city" matches that of Trotsky's. Alexander has approached his political writings and work unambiguously and on the side of the oppressed people, and while the revolutionary theorist

and Marxist intellectual continues to direct his university-housed Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (Praesa) from the hills of Cape Town's Rondebosch suburb, his contributions to a different and a radically evolving conceptual universe of empowerment are well worth reiterating and necessary to review if one is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of his policy proposals on the language question. The concepts that he has employed and developed since his release from Robben Island in 1974 are a significant part of a broader template of change that may well tip the proverbial scales in favour of a multilingualism that is both necessary and may prove to be instrumental in charting a course away from the continued commodification[3] and reification of the English language, and into an appreciation of the political gravitas of the acceptance, standardisation and promotion of indigenous languages in the courts of discourse and power.

"Race", colour-caste and class

South Africa's racial-capitalist political and economic system was in large part planned and engineered by subjugating black people across the southern African region to the dictates of mining capital and a white rural bourgeoisie. But the colonial, post-colonial and then white indigenous bourgeoisie settled with notions of their own superiority and of their own place in the world as civilisers, and they viewed black people as inferior, and therefore almost but not really human. It was not only convenient for them to invent notions of different "races" making up the South African polity, but also necessary for their economic imperatives to elaborate and develop the idea that the human species comprises these so-called races. This notion has unfortunately stuck not only in popular consciousness and has been re-imagined by ordinary people as something of an established fact, but it has also been accepted as a sociological and supposedly unchallengeable scientific fact by theorists in liberation movements across the world, and by leading Marxist and liberal theorists of political economy, anthropology, sociology and other branches of the social sciences.

Alexander has repeatedly challenged this notion. He writes (No Sizwe 1979:133–134):

> It is a measure of the inadequacy of the theoretical frameworks of the South African liberation movement that many organisations and individuals speak, write and act as though they accept the

validity of 'race' as a biological entity. In the only country in the world where this belief constitutes the basis of state policy, it is amazing that so few have bothered to examine the concept of 'race' as a political priority. Indeed, except for the Unity Movement and less consistently the P.A.C., few political publicists seem to be able to write on their country without using the concept of 'race' ... *Yet, there is something fundamentally wrong in the assertion, based on impeccable scholarship, that all 'races' are equal!* There is something fundamentally wrong in accepting that 'population groups' in South Africa are 'races' at all and that our difference with the ideologues of the 'Herrenvolk' is that we believe – on the basis of scientific investigation – that they are equal whereas they believe in the inferiority of the oppressed groups, an inferiority allegedly determined by their racial descent. For just as the supposed inferiority or superiority of 'races' necessarily assumes the existence of groups of human being called 'races', so does the assertion that 'races' are equal in their potential for the development and the acquisition of skills [Italics in original].

While the above quotation is a small section in an elaborate chapter on the "Elements of the Theory of the Nation", it adequately sums up Alexander's approach to the question of "race". He concludes that there are no such things as "races" (1979:136): "It follows that I reject ... any characterisation of the so-called 'population groups' [black Africans, Coloureds, Indians and whites] inhabiting South Africa as 'races' of any kind, for such a view is devoid of any scientific basis and is a purely ideological description which exposes a clear political tendency."

Alexander is not a lone voice in the world of sociology and social psychology. His views are underlined and confirmed not only by advances in genetic science and biology, but by social scientists as well. Margaret Wetherell (1992:16), who has done pioneering work on the indigenous populations of New Zealand and anti-racism, and who has critically looked at social and political categorisation through the theoretical lens of the "imagined community" that Anderson (1983; 1991) writes about, restates the conclusions drawn by Robert Miles:

Miles (1982) suggests that popular and everyday notions of race, which give meaning and significance to certain superficial physical characteristics, such as skin colour and physiognomy, are erroneous and obscurantist in two senses. Racial descriptions are contradicted by developments in modern biology and genetics and they perpetrate a conceptual terminology which is not adequate to describing the real nature of group relations.

This dovetails with Alexander's analysis of the racial juggernaut that has gripped South Africa's political leaderships and population for over two centuries.

Within Alexander's conceptual universe of 1974 to 1979, and alongside his rejection of race-based sociopolitical theories, the liberal-pluralist [4] school of thought had already introduced a new term to scupper potential criticism. "Ethnic group" theory had, by the end of the decade of the 1970s, already gained some currency within the circles of the dominant ruling class and within some circles of the liberation movement.

Alexander (1979:137) explains: "In the 1940s Montagu and others suggested the term 'ethnic group' to describe human breeding populations ... They did this because the idea of 'race' had become so repugnant to them that they wanted to find some euphemism 'as a means of avoiding the word, yet retaining its meaning!'"

Race-based theories and those that have their origins in "ethnic group" theories are, for Alexander, "useless, at worst dangerously misleading". With the same amount of passion, he has criticised the academic and political industry that has promoted the concept "ethnic groups". Instead, Alexander has proposed that the officially designated population registration groups in South Africa be called "colour-castes".

On the notion of colour-caste, Alexander (1979:141) is unambiguous: "It is my central thesis that the officially classified population registration groups in South Africa are colour-castes and that it is of pivotal political importance to characterise them as such." But Alexander was neither unique nor alone in his exposition of the concept. As a prelude to his interpretation of colour-caste, he cites PL van den Berghe, who writes from a liberal-pluralist perspective and who dismisses the Marxist notion of classes as "not meaningful social realities" (No Sizwe 1979:149):

> In addition to the overlapping but discreet cleavages of race and ethnicity, the South African population is stratified into social classes. More precisely, each racial caste is subdivided according to status criteria which range from traditional ones (such as the Hindu caste system among South Africans of Indian origin) to modern socio-economic strata based on income, education, occupation and life-style ... Because of the all-encompassing and overwhelming importance of race, however, class distinctions tend to take a distinctly secondary place, or indeed a tertiary one, after both race and ethnicity.

Similarity of class position across racial lines has never been a successful basis for political action in South Africa and even the labour movement has been infected by racism. Not only is there an almost total lack of solidarity between white and non-white manual workers, but the prevailing feelings have been ones of bitterness and competition.

Alexander opposes this "pluralist" interpretation of the colour-caste system as applied to South Africa's society, and provides a historical materialist account of its evolution, linking political action critically to the development of a "consciousness" of caste on the one hand, and the development of capitalism on the other. He states that at the very start of the colonisation process, the slaves employed by the Dutch East India Company were both a "class" and a "caste". Because of the difference in colour between the imported slaves and the local population of Khoi pastoralists, this "historical accident of colour differences" was destined to become a "colour-caste system". The Dutch initially maintained their difference from the local population through an insistence on their Christian religious beliefs as opposed to the "heathens" of Khoi or San people. As the colony grew, the Dutch needed more labour and more people were dispossessed and employed as labour tenants on Dutch farms in the Cape. Alexander (1979:154) writes that by the time capitalist agriculture had been established by the 1840s, "a clear cut colour-caste system had come into being, one in which caste and class coincided virtually in all respects". While the process was different, a similar evolution of colour-caste occurred on the mines after the discovery of diamonds and gold in the 1860 to 1880 period of capitalist development. Skilled white labour had to be imported because neither whites nor blacks in South Africa had the technical know-how to mine low grade ore on the Witwatersrand. The owners of mining capital also had to keep production costs low, so they employed black miners as unskilled manual labour. "Hence the skilled jobs were monopolised – in the South African context – by whites," Alexander says. But it is the same colour-caste system that plants the seed of its own destruction. Alexander (1979:157) touches on the evolving consciousness of the fragmented and divided black proletariat:

By means of the colour-caste system, and its sub-systems such as the reserve system and the Bantustan system, the proletariat are disorganised by the dominant classes, and therefore unable to constitute a class-for-itself, a group of people who have become conscious of the objective coincidence of their interests as a class. To the extent that white wage earners have graduated into the ranks of the new

petty bourgeoisie they increasingly see their destiny as tied to that of the capitalist system. It is inevitable that the working class in South Africa will become increasingly 'black'.

The effects of the colour-caste system were not confined to the farms or down the mine shafts. The colour-caste system also "engendered a thin layer of ancillary, complementary and satellite petty-bourgeois and aspirant bourgeois classes among all black groups" (No Sizwe 1979:158). But this layer of arguably opportunistic petty bourgeois elements to be found in the black communities was also stratified, and the "radicalised" sections that had and have limited access to capital because of the restrictions of apartheid and the delimitations of a post-apartheid state, for Alexander, could become potential allies of a black working class, which will eventually become a "class-for-itself" and realise its aspirations outside of the framework of capitalist relations of production[5]. Alexander has come to the conclusion that an alliance between the radical fractions of the black middle class and the urban and rural black working class is the axis around which fundamental social change in South Africa could take place. Put crudely, this alliance between the radical black middle class and the black working class has come to be Alexander's signature insistence for a re-imagination, if not overthrow, of capitalist South Africa before 1994 and after 1994. It is premised on the assumption that these middle class layers are indeed anti-capitalist and that when the time comes for a "revolutionary assault" on capitalist power, the working class will lead the dismantling of market-inspired and market-bound capitalist production relations. At present, of course, the political reins of power are firmly in the hands of the pro-capitalist black middle class whose grip on the popular imagination has grown, and has been strengthened by policies of affirmative action and black economic empowerment.

But this could well be the death knell of Alexander's class alliance between working and middle class black people that, in his opinion, will usher in a new democratic and socialist order. The bigger the black middle class grows, this researcher argues, the more likely it will distance itself from working class politics and challenge to capitalist power.

But the end of history, as Fukuyama would have it, is nowhere near Alexander's thoughts and planning. Alexander shares a conviction with John Saul whose book, *Decolonization and Empire* (2008), is a refreshing re-examination of the "recolonisation of southern Africa". While global capitalism, the West, the black and white southern African

elites have won, Saul[6] asserts, "it ain't over 'til it's over" (2008:178–179). The Canadian-based Marxist scholar, writer and political activist writes:

> The struggle continues, continues against the recolonization of southern Africa by the "new empire" that is being driven by global capitalism and its local minion. But in what ways, to what extent, how effectively and anchored by whom does that struggle continue? Who, how, and for what? – the familiar litany of agency, site, imaginary? So, yes, "the struggle continues," but so too do the challenges to our creativity, our intelligence, our commitment.

For Saul, as for Alexander, the "spirit of resistance" is not dead in the global South.

Language, politics and power

Alexander's leitmotif is the political sphere of human thought, communication and action, and particularly the clash of politics that captures the ongoing conflicts between government or "the state" and the "people". In this regard, he stands in a long line of Marxist theoreticians who, although emphasising the centrality of economics in their analyses of social formations, have also emphasised the defining role of politics in their deliberations. Boris Groys (2009:xv), a linguist and Marxist theoretician, provides a deceptively straightforward description of language, politics and economics in his assessment of the former Soviet Union:

> The economy functions in the medium of money. It operates with numbers. Politics functions in the medium of language. It operates with words – with arguments, programmes and petitions, but also with commands, prohibitions, resolutions and decrees. The communist revolution is the transcription of society from the medium of money to the medium of language. It is a linguistic turn at the level of social praxis.

For Groys, the capture of state power by Marxists in the 1917 Russian revolution was decisive in securing the political control considered necessary to move the economy in non-market directions, and therefore away from the commodity-based and profit-oriented production. It also meant that a new philosophical culture could be set in motion in which the

subordination of the economy to politics became real. But this cultural and attitudinal shift was achieved not without contradiction and conflict and, at least for Groys, confirms the power of dialectical materialism.

The paradox of power in the former Soviet Union was an approximation of Marxism's "ambivalence" in its understanding of language. It is an accepted fact in the Marxist pantheon that the dominant language in any society is always the language of the dominant class or combination of classes. It is also true to say that when an idea "grips the masses", it becomes a material force. Language, as the major transmitter of ideology, at least in the communist order that was installed in the Soviet Union, was used both as a propaganda tool and was given the space to develop as a social tool to carry the messages or "signs", as the linguists would prefer to call them, without it (language) being commodified. It is, of course, an entirely different matter altogether how the dominant ideas led to the mass persecutions and intellectual tyranny that characterised the Stalinist distortions of Marxism and its humanitarian constructs. Language, under Stalin, became a tool of communication and repression to further legitimate the state bureaucracy's hold on power and stifle political dissent. Despite this, the researcher concurs with Groys (2009:1–2) when he says that philosophy uses language to address "the whole of language. But to think and address the whole of language necessarily implies laying claim to the government of the society that speaks this language."

Whatever differences one might have with Groys's defence of the philosophical premises upon which the Soviet Union was born and the political conditions that the founders of the first socialist state created, what is difficult to counter is that this view is held, arguably from different political perspectives, by many different theorists of political economy, philosophy and language.

British-based Alex Callinicos (1985:135) dispenses with the notion of ideology as imaginary representations, false beliefs or illusions. In this he agrees with the critique of ideology as outlined in Göran Therborn's book, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (1980). According to Callinicos (1983:136–153), Therborn insists that ideology is "discursive practices through which human beings live their relation to reality". Callinicos asserts that thought and language are interdependent, so the study of ideology "must involve an analysis of the systems of signs through which they are expressed".

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Alongside these notions of ideology, Italian Marxist and revolutionary Antonio Gramsci (1996), in his *Prison Notebooks*, has argued that the class in power must initiate and build a layer of intellectuals and employ a number of institutions, ranging from churches, political parties, schools, civic organisations, to impose its official ideology on the masses. But this "dominant ideology" carries the messages and signs of previous ruling classes, and is not a *tabula rasa*. "Organic intellectuals" and the radical intelligentsia will have to ensure that there is "organisation" to their acquired beliefs and values, and that this organisation necessarily takes on a political form. Gramsci's understanding is that class domination, and this would apply to capitalist and socialist societies alike, is not an automatic consequence that arises from control and ownership of the means of production, but a deliberate and self-conscious effort on the part of people in their challenge for power.

Organisation, policy and language

The "strategic concepts" above – "race", colour-caste, class, language, politics and power – are the key background co-ordinates that this researcher has used to draw an organisational-theoretical map of Alexander's political activism since the publication of his book, *One Azania, One Nation*, in 1979. The researcher maintains that the refraction of ideologies through the person of Alexander is captured in these "strategic concepts", and that the organisations to which he has belonged or has been affiliated with politically are organisations that provided him intellectual sustenance and the necessary human contact and social interaction to develop his proposals on the national and language questions.

Alexander had by 1979 just had his banning order lifted and Zed Press had published his *One Azania, One Nation* under the nom de guerre No Sizwe. The apartheid state was preparing for a counter offensive to what its military and political principals and strategists believed was a "total onslaught" by communist and socialist groups, unsympathetic governments and black popular movements in southern Africa against Western civilisation, the God-chosen Afrikaner *volk*, and capitalism. The military and political leadership of the governing National Party had successfully doused the fires of popular resistance in the 1970s, which were kick-started by the Durban working class strikes of 1973 and the Soweto conflagration against the imposition of Afrikaans-medium instruction in black schools in 1976. Thirty-year-old black consciousness leader and former student activist Steven Bantu

Biko was murdered in detention in September 1977, and 36-year-old philosopher Rick Turner was assassinated at his home in January 1978. The ANC, the PAC, the Communist Party of South Africa, the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (Apdusa), the South African Youth Revolutionary Council (Sayrco) and many other organisations that had sought to organise resistance to apartheid and capitalism were either banned or their leaders were in exile, in detention in South African jails or had been convicted for some or other "terrorist activities". Legal recourse to oppose apartheid was limited and the repressive state apparatus of apartheid was armed and ready to fight to the death and at whatever cost to the social fabric.

The three most vocal political "tendencies" that made up the liberation movement – the ANC, the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) – were divided both in terms of their respective strategies and also in their philosophies. The acknowledged leaders of the ANC and PAC were in either in exile or jailed on Robben Island and in other prisons across the country, and the BCM leadership was straining under the sheer force and intensity of repression. But the single most significant difference between the BCM and the exiled movements was that the BCM sought to develop a "self-reliance" among black people (and "black", for the leadership of the BCM, comprised African, Coloured and Indian people and not just African people who were black skinned) and to build community development projects. The organisation that arose out of the BCM was called the Black People's Convention (BPC) and was focused around the social needs of black people. It had an ambivalent relationship to liberal white organisations but it did not reject outright, as the PAC did in the late 1950s, all contact with white people.

Alexander's interest in the BC movement was political. He had presumably identified that the whirlwind stoking the fires of popular dissent in the 1970s, especially the student uprisings, had the markings of actions of a potentially revolutionary and radical intelligentsia, a potentially anti-capitalist middle class that would "throw its lot in with the black working class" when or if a challenge for state power arose. It is the opinion of the researcher that Alexander had these political-strategic calculations in mind when he mobilised his Marxist groups and the Cape Action League[7] in Cape Town to support the launch of the National Forum in 1983. Alexander and the leadership of the Azanian People's Organisation, especially Saths Cooper and Lybon Mabasa[8], decided that the new constitutional dispensation of the National Party government to include "Coloureds" and "Indians" in a

tricameral arrangement to continue governing the country, and without the participation of the "African majority", was a hopeless venture and a good rallying point to mobilise the oppressed people. They formed the National Forum Committee with patrons Desmond Tutu, Albertina Sisulu and Allan Boesak. These people also became associated with the United Democratic Front that was launched after the National Forum.

For the political principals in the National Forum, especially for Alexander, non-racialism and the struggle for socialism were combined. He rejected the four-nation propositions in the Freedom Charter because he did not accept "race" as a valid biological or sociological entity. The fact that racism existed was, for him, not a scientific reason to conclude that "races" exist. Politically, this meant that Alexander was not going to embrace ANC-aligned or ANC-inspired movements that persisted in categorising people as though they belonged to different races. His positions were shared by other leading figures in the National Forum. The forum also drew up its own manifesto, which it called the Azanian Manifesto [9], and which for many activists outside of the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front, came to be a different "charter" and rallying document. It certainly had all the signature concepts that Alexander believes in:

> Our struggle for national liberation is directed against the system of racial capitalism which holds the people of Azania in bondage for the benefit of a small minority of white capitalists and their allies, the white workers and the reactionary sections of the middle classes. The struggle against apartheid, therefore, is no more than the point of departure for our liberatory efforts. Only the eradication of the system of racial capitalism can put an end to apartheid ... It is the historic task of the black working class and its organisations to mobilise the urban and rural poor together with the radical sections of the middle classes in order to put an end to the system of oppression and exploitation by the white ruling class.

The Azanian Manifesto, despite its obvious and self-evident ideological bias, never came to "grip the masses" as Groys explains in his interpretation of dialectical materialism, and the National Forum's alliances outside the country did not enjoy the international clout and infrastructure that the ANC had. While this may well be a moot point, the National Forum, despite its clarity of vision and articulation of purpose, never grew beyond the

gripping rhetoric of its founding activists and ideologues. On the one hand, the philosophy of liberation came to be poignantly expressed in its founding manifesto, but its discourse was locked in interminable warps with itself over the increasing popularity that the UDF enjoyed and the mass base that this ANC-aligned formation was able to muster. On the other hand, the political leadership that Alexander injected into the National Forum was, for the most part, unchallenged and lasted not more than three years. The staggered demise of the National Forum was as much about the increasing power of the ANC in exile and its local cohorts, as it was a signal to non-ANC-aligned radicals to rethink their own political affiliations. The international community of big powers (the US, Britain, West Germany, the Soviet Union) had by then already concurred that apartheid needed to be replaced by a democratically elected government, and the ANC, despite its own internal contradictions and tensions about socialism, was the party of choice.

The political spectrum at the National Forum was wide ranging and the gathering was an important milestone in the evolution of non-ANC and even anti-ANC-aligned groupings that had emerged from the workers' movement and the civic and educational structures that came about as a result of the community-based and community-oriented work of non-governmental organisations such as the South African Committee for Higher Education (Sached) where in 1983 Alexander was still employed as a regional director in Cape Town, the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the independent Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu [10], which later transformed into Cosatu) and the BC-aligned Council of Unions of South Africa (Cusa).

Within the essentially middle class configuration of the National Forum, the theorists of the BC movement had their own understanding of what needed to be done in South Africa, and their economic analyses have rarely been covered by scholars. It was the only other major tendency within the leadership of the National Forum, even though the sheer force of political and philosophical logic of Alexander was difficult to challenge. The BCM had a thirty-point economic programme. Mokgethi Motlhabi [11] (1984:124) explains:

> Its main thrust was on the ownership by the state of all land and land-related industry such as mining and forestry. The state ... was to own all industries the products of which were of strategic importance to the nation and its economy. In agriculture, emphasis would be placed on cooperatives. Such

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cooperatives and villages would receive state assistance in marketing their products for both internal and external consumption. Foreign investment in industry would be kept to a minimum.

The BCM did not have as its guide the Freedom Charter that the ANC and its allies drew up in 1955 in Kliptown, but neither was its leadership cadre inspired by communism or Marxism. In the 1970s, the Freedom Charter, the political programmes of the ANC and the PAC were not documents or points of convergence around which black people mobilised, but the mythology, signs and propaganda associated with armed struggle carried a weight that was difficult to measure and, in the opinion of this researcher, had a gravitas that far exceeded the guerrilla armies' actual performance "on the ground". Buti Tlhagale, in the "Foreword" to Motlhabi's book (1984:xiii), gives his version of the political nodes for black people at the time:

> Thus the role of that historic document, the Freedom Charter, as an embodiment of the political aspirations of the people still remains controversial. The non-racial nature of the United Democratic Front and the exclusively Black Azanian People's Organisation or the National Forum are not far removed from the organizations that have preceded them.

The BC movement shared Alexander's focus on black working class people, at least in theory, and its leadership met Alexander's criteria of radical middle class "allies" in the struggle against racial capitalism.

In 1984 the "Nkomati Accord" [12] was signed between the governments of Mozambique and South Africa. This signalled the first overt and public signs that the armed struggle of the ANC and the PAC was to be scaled down, if not removed from the political equation in southern Africa. The accord was signed by Mozambican president Samora Machel and South African president PW Botha. Mozambican territory was not to be used by the ANC or the PAC as a base from which to launch guerrilla attacks against the South African state. The quid pro quo was that South Africa would cease to supply arms and other resources to Renamo, which, at the time, was conducting its own war against the Frelimo government of Machel. Alexander's response to the "peace accord" was that it was one signed "at gunpoint".

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In an article published in the journal *Race & Class* (1985) and titled "Let's Fight the Organ Grinder: An Azanian Perspective on the Nkomati Accords", the National Forum Committee analyses the international context that led to the accord:

> According to the American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Dr Chester Crocker, 'a wide range of vital western interests, and US interests in particular, are engaged in the Southern African region'. In order to understand this admission, it is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves in Orwell's year of 1984 that, for the strategists in the White House, every country in the world is viewed in terms of the epochal contest between the capitalist and socialist systems. The USA is the undisputed leader of the capitalist segment. The USSR represents the main strength of what Rudolf Bahro called, with a mixture of resignation and criticism, the actually existing socialist countries of the world. To complete the picture, we should mention the People's Republic of China, which to the Soviet leadership represents the leader of the 'revisionist' forces in the world.

The US was attempting to "constructively engage" the apartheid state and prepare the ground for a "negotiated settlement", not only in South Africa but also in Namibia, which at the time was still under South African occupation. The National Forum Committee (Alexander) (*Race & Class* 1985) quotes Herman Nickel, who was then the US ambassador to South Africa:

> Constructive engagement is a regional policy, directed not only at South Africa alone, but at all of Southern Africa. Progress towards a more representative government in South Africa and economic progress throughout the rest of Southern Africa are inseparably linked to region-wide stability. This is why we have been working towards a set of interrelated goals. These include:
>
> (1) An internally recognised independence for Namibia;
>
> (2) A negotiated withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola;
>
> (3) Some form of detente between South Africa and other states in the region, and, since internal conditions in South Africa also contribute to regional conflicts;
>
> (4) The peaceful evolutionary change in South Africa towards a constitutional order to be defined by South Africans themselves but one firmly rooted in the principle of government by consent of the governed;
>
> (5) Recognition of the need for internationally supported programmes for economic development of the region.

For Alexander, these words from Nickel capture "in a nutshell" all the indicators that were needed to understand the "imperialist conspiracy" in southern Africa. Alexander describes South Africa as a major power and a "sub-imperialist metropole", and because of its military might, it was the "regional gendarme", the last standing soldier to protect Western interests, but its internal policies needed an overhaul and a reformation. The US was emphatic that change would not be an uprooting, nor a casting aside of capitalist production relations.

Alongside the overtly political activity that Alexander was involved in during this period, he had also set in motion the ideas that were to lay the foundation of a bridging college for aspirant university students. Through the infrastructure provided by Sached, Alexander laid the groundwork for pre-university colleges to be built in Cape Town and Johannesburg [13].

Few theorists or analysts in the ANC or its aligned structures could match Alexander's insights, but what they may have lacked in political depth and breadth, they made up in organisational expertise and in their ability to secure a popular acquiescence if not a comprehensive consent of the masses of the South African population. Through a sophisticated public relations campaign and real participation in mass-based struggles, the UDF and the ANC re-invented themselves as the legitimate heir to the popular struggles that had gone before. Alexander and his leadership cadre in the National Forum Committee lacked the strategic and ruthless organisational know-how to break out of a middle class logjam of not being able to translate sound theoretical principles into actions that "gripped the masses". Alexander and his close-knit group of aides, advisers and political comrades rarely managed to strategically "deploy" their own people in organisations and structures that eventually mattered when state power was to be contested. If a criticism is to be made of Alexander's political career, it could be that he lacked the conviction to invest in individuals and power so that his ideas and strategies could be reproduced or developed. In this sense, Alexander has not been a politician in the conventional sense of the word, and because he always had an ambivalent relationship with the practice of power, he could not build "empires". And yet, as an ideologue and as a person who has been politically inspired since his early twenties when he joined the Cape Peninsula Students' Union, Alexander can equally not be accused of not knowing what power means.

Mass mobilisation, as understood by the leading figures in the UDF and the National Forum, meant participation in workers' strikes for higher wages, participation in boycotts of consumer goods at retail stores that were considered sympathetic to the apartheid state and that were perceived to be against working class demands for better conditions of work, participation in rent boycotts in working class areas, participation in political funerals that increasingly carried the flags of the UDF, the ANC, Cosatu and its affiliates (notably the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa), the Communist Party of South Africa, and on some occasions, the flags of BC-aligned or PAC-aligned trade unions and political organisations. The UDF, as the unofficial "internal wing" of the ANC, not only captured the popular imagination as the ANC's torch bearer, its leadership was treated as the custodians of the morality, political ethics and strategic vision of both the Robben Island and the exiled contingents of ANC and Communist Party leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Oliver Tambo and Chris Hani. The ANC and its allies, inside and outside South Africa, rode the waves of popular protest and anger that flowed, and the "four pillars" of its organisational strategy were beginning to pay political dividends.[14] The mass struggles internally, the underground struggles, the armed struggles and the diplomatic offensive to isolate the apartheid regime, combined to create a climate that pointed to the inevitability of an ANC inheriting, if not capturing, the political kingdom. The international momentum for a political compromise was reaching a fever pitch, especially after Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power and the gradual dismantling of the Soviet Union. The main source of political support for the continuation of the armed struggle in southern Africa was about to dry up, and the ANC was being increasingly embraced and feted by the West as the legitimate and "valid interlocutor" (Alexander 2002:48) and "ready to take over the reins of government".

For the National Forum Committee and its allies in the mid 1980s, lack of funds to mobilise people countrywide, to pay staff, to run community-based programmes, to organise the symbols and popular insignia of resistance such as political funerals, large-scale pamphleteering and sustained strikes against capital, made it difficult for the theorists and leaders to gain a significant foothold in popular consciousness. Moreover, the apartheid state was intent on crushing any opposition to its rule, and National Forum leaders, by force of circumstance and choice, remained politically silent after the states of emergency were declared in 1985 and 1986.

Alexander, even though he remained active in civic organisations, made a strategic retreat and concentrated on gathering his thoughts. Through Johannesburg-based Skotaville Publishers, a collection of his speeches [15] delivered at political and educational conferences was published on the language question. The latter half of the decade of the 1980s was characterised by state repression, conspiracy theories about a possible "negotiated settlement" that the ANC was orchestrating with the National Party government (which later proved to be true), and a change in the political guard of the National Party.

Namibia was edging towards independence and Alexander was closely involved with organisations that, and people who had been at the coalface of that country's struggle for nationhood and political independence from South Africa. His views on the national question in Namibia and on the complex language question have been published in the *Namibian Review*, a political journal that was edited by Ottilié Abrahams [16] and Kenneth Abrahams who, together with Alexander and Andreas Shipanga (who later became a leader of the Swapo-Democrats, which was an offshoot of Swapo of Namibia), were expelled from the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa in the early 1960s.

In 1989, ten years after the publication of *One Azania, One Nation*, and with the decimation and political retreat of left-wing organisations that added to the increasing momentum of political compromise initiated by the US, Britain, Germany, Sweden and the former Soviet Union, and accepted as the only alternative to a prolonged and presumed protracted war of attrition by the exiled ANC and the National Party government, Alexander set out to outline his main theses on the South African language question. The considered essay, which was published as a booklet and titled *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* (Alexander 1989a), is a summary of the "colonial and neocolonial language policies" from 1652 to 1988, and of the language question as perceived and developed by different organisations that made up the South African liberation movement. The essay provides a sketch of his theoretical framework and a set of proposals "towards a democratic language policy for a post-apartheid South Africa/Azania", and lays the basis for his promotion of multilingual practices as a decisive stepping stone towards nation building and national unity. Invoking the work of Benedict Anderson (1983) on the evolution of nations, Alexander (1989a:47) states that the slogan "One Language, One Nation" is out of date, and that each language bearing a unique "culture" is "equally out of date". Alexander accepts that developments in communications and media have effectively "undermined all

ideas of separate and separable cultures which are produced by relatively isolated communities". The National Language Project (NLP), an organisation in which he was the prime intellectual inspiration and driver of policy, and which had its offices in Cape Town, advocated English as a "lingua franca/linking language" and also supported the notion that all the languages in South Africa needed to be promoted. Its proclaimed focus was to engage in "research into language projects which are being conducted or implemented by community and other non-government organisations" and to "facilitate co-operation among these groups in order to rationalise resources and the training of personnel". In his booklet, Alexander (1989a:69–70) quotes the policy of the NLP:

> People need to communicate with one another through the languages spoken in the region in which they live. So, for example, if one lives in Natal, one needs to communicate through English and Zulu. If one lives in the Western Cape, one needs to converse through the media of Afrikaans, English and Xhosa. Consequently, we believe that the groundwork for providing useful language courses and tutor-training programmes which are specifically geared toward a directly communicative approach should be undertaken without delay.

This non-governmental organisation arose out of Alexander's concern that the fundamental question of communication across language groups in a nation-building exercise should reach into the homes of the urban and rural poor, and the black working class. Again, at the level of policy formulation, there is little that one can criticise. However, in practice, the NLP never grew, and indeed was never intended to grow, into a mass-based organisation. In the minds of its formulators, it may well have been the "spark that lit the prairie fire", which Mao Zedong is reported to have used to describe the multiple and small struggles in the Chinese countryside.

Alexander, in an article titled "The Language Question" that was published by the University of Cape Town's Institute for Public Policy (1989b), has a different and more complimentary view of the NLP. He writes that post-1976 in South African history is one of its most creative periods:

In every sphere of life, people (men, women and children) were compelled to wrestle with alternatives to the superannuated practices of a racist society. In the sphere of language, countless smaller and larger projects were initiated by community and religious groups, service organisations, trade unions and private businesses independent of state support. Yet it was not until 1985 approximately, when the National Language Project was launched, that systematic, all-embracing strategising and action on the language question began to be undertaken.

Small as it was, the NLP and Alexander did highlight the need for a political campaign, which was an imperative in light of the international and national campaigns to force the apartheid government to, at the very least, accept black majority rule. In part, it also contributed to the organisational framework for Alexander to focus almost exclusively on the language and national questions as he perceived them to be. But as the decade of the eighties drew to a close, the terms of apartheid domination were set to change in a political overhaul intended to usher in a new democratic dispensation that effected a transfer of power to a triumphant black elite in the ANC. Language issues were being increasingly pushed on to the back burner as the print and electronic media focused on possible democratic elections, and the concomitant media hype combined with a sophisticated political machinery of the ANC made the outcome of the elections in 1994 more or less predictable. The non-ANC Left had, for the most part, thrown in its lot with the cacophony of inevitable victory for the ANC. The National Forum had folded as a cohesive political voice in the mid eighties, and Alexander, for his part, and his close associates decided to form another political organisation, the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (Wosa), to take part in the build-up to and in the elections of 1994. It wanted to present a socialist alternative to the expansion of bourgeois democracy offered by the ANC. But this organisation did not have the resources or the electoral machinery and popular support that the ANC had built up since the early 1980s through the mass campaigns of the UDF. This is not to say that the ANC was without its internal contradictions and tensions [17], or was a monolithic organisation during this period. Sympathetic academics, analysts and ANC members [18] have argued that it was precisely its ability to absorb tension that has made the ANC the successful political organisation it has become.

Wosa was not able to attract a large following, and after the elections in 1994 it did not feature as a persuasive player in politics. Alexander, by then, continued his work in education and language politics. His base had shifted to the University of Cape Town, where

he had created the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (Praesa) and where he has been doing his writing and studies into the national and language questions.

In 1995 Ben Ngubane, the minister of arts, culture, science and technology, appointed Alexander as deputy chairman of the Pan South African Language Board (Pansalb), which was established under the Pan South African Language Board Act of 1995. Its brief was two-fold: one, it was set up to provide for the "recognition of multilingualism in the country"; and two, it was created to "promote and develop the previously marginalised languages". In addition, in December 1995, the Language Plan Task Group (Langtag) was created as a policy advisory group to Ngubane and fell under the broad mandate of Pansalb. Alexander was the chairman of Langtag. The brief of the seven subcommittees in Langtag was to develop a comprehensive language plan for a democratic South Africa. In his guidelines to each subcommittee, Alexander stresses that all members of the committees should "identify the needs and priorities with regard to the realisation of the constitutional principles pertaining to the language question in South Africa and the implementation of the policies that derive from those principles" [19]. The subcommittees were set up to cover the following sectors of language policy: the development of the (South) African languages; the issue of language equity; language in education; equitability and wide-spread language services; special language needs of minority groups; language as an economic resource; literacy. In a remarkably short space of time, Langtag presented its report on a comprehensive overhaul of the language question to the minister in August 1996, specifically "unveiling a plan for equal status for South Africa's 11 official languages". The report recommends that the nine African languages be used in high-status functions "such as parliamentary debates ... and for domestic business transactions". It suggests the formulation of guidelines that could be used for "public servants to use languages other than English (and to some extent Afrikaans) in national, provincial and local government forums on a regular basis". For its part, the government simply could not match this speed of delivery with which this report was produced. Beukes (2004) [20] reports:

> A small Language Policy Advisory Panel consisting of experts and a representative of the Pan South African Language Board was appointed by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology to draft a language policy and plan, drawing on the framework provided by the LANGTAG Report. In a

remarkably short period of time, this body of experts, in collaboration with the Government's language planning agency, the National Language Service, produced the first draft of the Language Policy and Plan for South Africa and the South African Languages Draft Bill. *In 2003, nine years into democracy, the Cabinet finally approved the National Language Policy Framework (NLPF)*. The NLPF is designed as a package that will eventually consist of a Policy Statement, an Implementation Plan, the South African Languages Act and the South African Practitioners' Council Act (DAC [Department of Arts and Culture] 2003b:5) [Italics added].

Alexander's endeavours to have "plans on the board" and soon afterwards "off the board" took nine years to be drafted eventually into a Bill. By 2003, Alexander had left Pansalb, and returned to his writing. In an upbeat "reference study" titled *Language Education Policy, National and Sub-National Identities in South Africa* (Council of Europe 2003:15), Alexander alludes to and indeed distils some of his experiences as a language policy adviser to the government after 1994:

> After an extremely problematic start during the first seven years of the new Republic of South Africa, language education policy appears to be on the road towards finding a definite direction. Although the gap between the constitutional and legislative position on the one hand, and the actual practices in the classrooms and lecture halls of the country on the other hand, remains very wide and often appears to be widening, the fact that these instruments exist is of the greatest significance. They represent democratic space for the legal and peaceful promotion of multilingualism and for mother tongue based bilingual education in South Africa ... Moreover, recent developments indicate that on the part of the state, there is a definite albeit problematic commitment to the constitutional provisions on language and language education.

Among the statutory organisations that had been formed, Pansalb was by far the more powerful and significant in directing language policy. It ensured that each of the official eleven languages had a lexicographic unit, which was based at one or more of the country's universities. Alexander (Council of Europe 2003:17) comments that on paper "the language infrastructure appears to be in place. However, as I have indicated, there are many practical problems as well as lack of political will and strategic clarity in respect of the evolving language dispensation." As in all his other writings, Alexander returns to the political domain

of power, "race" and class. He anchors his conclusion to his reference study (2003:18) in the following way:

> For the foreseeable future, the question of ethnic identities remains an issue just below the political horizon. Except for the conservative white Afrikaans-speaking people – and for some Zulu-speaking people –, the language question is not yet one around which major political mobilisations can be undertaken. Class issues are much more salient because the depredations of the macro-economic policy which the government appears to be totally committed to, and which has led to large-scale job losses, homelessness and general social diseases. Moreover, the relapse into racial identities that has taken place because of the implementation of affirmative action and black economic empowerment measures in both the public and private sectors, has caused the main debates on individual and collective identities to centre on "race" rather than on language.

Alexander (2003) concludes that a "multilingual habitus" has to be created to avoid the danger of ethnic fragmentation and widespread conflict based on linguistic affiliations. This has been a consistent theme in his writings. In his book, *An Ordinary Country* (2002:141, 161), he writes:

> No sense of national unity or of national consciousness will ever come about in South Africa until all South Africans treat the issue of 'race' as what it is, that is, a contingent biological factor over which the individual has no control or influence. The crippling effects of being born with a dark skin in a country where the hegemonic consciousness favours people of lighter hue have to be eliminated within the next generation or two if South Africa is ever to become a country in which significant advances of a civilising kind are to be made ... It is, therefore, a matter of some concern that the compromise in the Constitution of South Africa which led to the establishment of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities of South Africa may inadvertently open the Pandora's box of ethnic, that is, tribal politics that has been one of the causes of the underdevelopment of many of the countries of post-colonial Africa.

This book collapses the mythology that has come to be associated with South Africa's transition from the apartheid era to democratic rule. Citing the studies that have been done on the class character of the ANC and the political conundrums that confronted the leadership and membership of the South African Communist Party by Hein Marais (1998; 2005), the

contradictions, limits and possibilities of the government's macroeconomic and neoliberal growth strategy (Gear) by Patrick Bond (2000; 2001), and a critique of the ANC's role in the liberation struggle by Dale McKinley (1997), Alexander constructs a map of political compromise that the ANC and the National Party engineered and entered into, and that is not very different to other transitions in other parts of Africa. [21] While the title of the book rests very comfortably on the shoulders of its content, there is a ring of inevitability in his analysis. While this may be so, Alexander does also point to the creation of new social platforms of protest that the South African Left can and should mobilise around. These include anti-debt lobbies, ecological issues, anti-nuclear campaigns, landless people's movements, youth and women's concerns.

Memory, communication and imagination

Since his political baptism in the years leading up to and including 1957 when he joined the Cape Peninsula Students' Union, and through the direct and indirect influences of the iconic figure, Isaac Tabata [22], Alexander's political and theoretical preoccupation and focus have been on the country's national question. In other words, he has tried to answer the question "What or who is the nation?". His "political testament", which he aptly named *One Nation, One Nation* in 1979, is a profound and detailed study that provides the gist of his answer. He has rejected the "four-nation" thesis of the African National Congress; he has rejected the crudely described "two-nation" thesis of the black consciousness movement; and he has forcefully argued against the idea of nationhood that is premised on the assumption that the human species is divided into different "races". It was in the 1980s that he elaborates on his thesis of nationality and of people as an "imagined community" in the sense that Benedict Anderson (1983) describes them – as people who do not necessarily share one language. Just before and after the launch of the National Language Project in 1985, Alexander started to combine his studies on the national question with those on the language question. In particular, he drew on the works of Anderson, who only later in 1991 added a seminal chapter on memory and forgetting to his signature work, *Imagined Communities* (1983). In a revised version of his book, Anderson (2006:204) writes:

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. After experiencing the physiological and emotional changes produced by puberty, it is impossible to 'remember' the consciousness of childhood ... Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated. Against biology's demonstration that every single cell in a human body is replaced over seven years, the narratives of autobiography and biography flood print-capitalism's markets year by year ... As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of 'forgetting' the experience of this continuity – product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century – engenders the need for a narrative of 'identity.'

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) [23] was set up in 1995 to explore this notion of memory and forgetting in order to achieve a level of political appeasement that was considered by the ruling ANC as a necessary condition to achieve stability in the country, especially after the memory of Chris Hani's assassination just two years previously. Its express purpose was to be an initial step and vehicle to pursue "national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace". All individuals who committed acts, omissions and offences associated with "political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past" were to be granted amnesty if they made a "full disclosure". The unpublished political function of the TRC was to suggest an idea of nationhood, or indeed in the words of its chairman "a rainbow nation" that is prepared to "forgive and forget". This intentional political objective is an unreconstructed pluralist paradigm in which the "sins of the past" become sublimated in the reality of the present and hopefully forgotten in the hope of the future. Whatever the noble intentions of the commission members and staff, and the courage of the participants who submitted their narratives to the commission, there is evidence to suggest that the cathartic moments of anger, anguish, pain and sorrow did not translate into material benefits for those who suffered as a result of deeds committed in the name of politics. What is of utmost significance though for this dissertation is that people were asked to reconstruct what actually happened to them or their children, wives, husbands, and other family members. This, in and of itself, required that they enter into a cognitive journey to reconstruct and re-imagine memories, and deliver these memories in words. This was not only done with enormous sensitivity by the committee chairmen and women who steered the conversations and submissions, but the monologues and the dialogues were conducted, and this is the remarkable feature of the hearings, in the

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languages that participants chose. In most cases, the reconstructions or testimonies were done in mother tongue languages and were ably and comprehensively translated into English, Afrikaans or in any one of the African languages in which victims and perpetrators alike felt comfortable. What the TRC unwittingly demonstrated was the capacity of the state and its institutions to practise a multilingualism and a discourse in languages other than English or Afrikaans. Despite the leaps of progress made by the TRC in establishing the differences and commonality of human experiences through its embrace of multiple language deliveries and translations, the same cannot be said of the very government that created the commission.

For Alexander, the process of nation building is an active process of communication and struggle. In part, this view is both shared and challenged by Chomsky (Otero 1988:401), who writes:

> I think that a very important aspect of language has to do with the establishment of social relations and interactions. Often, this is described as communication. But that is very misleading, I think. There is a narrow class of uses of language where you intend to communicate. Communication is an effort to get people to understand what one means. And that, certainly, is one use of language and a social use of it. But I don't think it is the only social use of language. Nor are social uses the only uses of language. For example language can be used to express one's thoughts with little regard for the social context, if any.

For Chomsky, language is not only and primarily an instrument of communication, and does not only have social uses. Clarification of thoughts, constructions of sentences and words, what one may call "internal reasoning", can also be a function of language.

In a country where 25 or more languages are spoken, the linking language of English should not be elevated any more than it already is. Because people tend to think and construct sentences in their mother tongues, Alexander argues, it is imperative for people to be taught in their formative years at school in their home languages but should learn at least one other language to be able to effectively communicate with others. This simply has not happened and the "political will" to make this transition is lacking. Language has never been a neutral medium. It is at the "heart of culture" in the sense that it is a "privileged medium in which cultural meanings are formed and communicated ... [and] it is the means and medium through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world" (Barker 1999:11). This view

is not dissimilar to Michel Foucault's understanding of knowledge. Downing (2008:vii) draws the link between knowledge and power: "Foucault argues that all forms of knowledge are historically relative and contingent, and cannot be dissociated from the workings of power."

This view of language feeds directly into Alexander's and Anderson's notions of nations as "imagined communities". Anderson (2006:6–7) writes that the nation is imagined because

> the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the images of their communion ... The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations ... It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained ... Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

This imagination is expressed in the public domain as words, sentences, symbols, signs and images. The control of these signs and symbols rests with the dominant political authority, and in South Africa's case, a political class of black people who have become sufficiently empowered to govern the country. According to Barker (1999:67), communication is central to Anderson's understanding of the ascendancy of national identities and nation states. However, it is Barker's contention that Anderson's work does not specify how print capitalism actually gave rise to national sentiments.

In theory and indeed on paper, South Africa arguably has one of the most assertively embracing human rights constitutions in Africa, if not globally. Alexander has acknowledged that the country's constitution is one of the most progressive on the language question (Alexander 2003). He says: "We have one of the most progressive constitutional arrangements ever in regard to the language question. Yet indications are that we are about to go the way of all neo-colonial flesh also in this regard."[24] This neo-colonialism is expressed in the following way: while the country has eleven official languages, only Afrikaans and English enjoy high status and esteem. Kamwendo (2006) cites Satyo's cynical remark that the

country has a "menu of 11 languages", of which two can be chosen, English and Afrikaans. (Satyo's lateral arithmetic sums up the hierarchy of language choices in South Africa. He states that 11 means 1+1=2, namely that the menu of eleven can be broken down into two single units that add up to two: English and Afrikaans.)

Sound policies do not necessarily translate into sound practices and to the dismay of the language practitioners who crafted the initial Langtag report, multilingualism still remains a distant ideal.

Change and revolution

Alexander has asserted that a new democratic space has been opened with the advent of a broad-based constitutional democracy in South Africa. But this change from apartheid domination to elite accommodation has come about as a result of political power agreements, arrangements and configurations of the mainly English- and Afrikaans-speaking and educated elites. The social, national and language questions that he has raised through his work and through his activism have been partially met in theory by the custodians of power and history. This exercise of this power and the control over the historical construction of this power is the function of English as the dominant and hegemonic medium of communication. Chomsky (Otero 1998:624) poignantly remarks that history is owned by people who have been educated:

> History is owned by the educated classes. They are the people who are the custodians of history. They are the ones who are in universities and throughout the whole system of constructing, shaping and presenting to us the past as they want it to be seen. These are groups that are closely associated with power. They themselves have a high degree of privilege and access to power. They share class interests with those who control and in fact own the economic system. They are the cultural commissars of the system of domination and control that's very pervasive.

While Alexander may not agree with Chomsky's anarcho-syndicalism, it would be difficult to dispute the veracity of Chomsky's views on history and power. The South African state is controlled by a sizable black elite and is expanding through the systematic removal

and replacement of the largely white and Afrikaner bureaucracy that dominated the middle and upper layers of power. This educated elite holds the reins of power, and through this power it controls the production and distribution of knowledge. But this political power can only be exercised through the acquiescence if not consent of the economic managers and of the governed. To be able to generate the "political will" that Alexander refers to will require a change in the skewed relations of production favouring the classes that own the means of production. It is on this issue that Alexander parts company with South Africa's current crop of political managers and controllers. Whereas the government has no intention of altering the property clauses that underpin the social order in which it is governing, and thereby uprooting the social relations underpinning the civic space in which society functions, Alexander is not wedded to a democracy that favours the reproduction of existing owners of capital.

In his book of essays on the transition in South Africa, *Some Are More Equal Than Others* (1993), which is also a series of advocacy statements from Wosa and Praesa and penned by Alexander, he asserts his position. On the change envisaged by the negotiating elites in the build-up to the 1994 elections, Alexander predicted that the "immediate future will be shaped by the market-driven imperatives of the system manifest in the profit motive, the principle of achievement and the technical-vocational needs of commodification". Very little has changed in the polity since then and Alexander is not alone in these views. John Saul (2008:167), a liberation theorist and scholar of anti-colonial struggles in Africa, writes:

> A tragedy is being enacted in South Africa ... [I]n the teeth of high expectations arising from the successful struggle against a malignant apartheid state, a very large percentage of the population – amongst them many of the most desperately poor people in the world – are being sacrificed on the altar of a neo-liberal logic of global capitalism.

Saul, not unlike Alexander, has been an anti-capitalist warrior. His involvement in solidarity work for southern African liberation movements is legendary, and he has "pulled no punches" in his critiques of the very movements that he was intimately involved with. In the "social-democratic delusion" that is a persistent refrain in the upper echelons of power in South Africa, he points out (2008:174) that this attachment to the market is premised on the belief that

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you can have your capitalist cake and eat your humane and social outcomes too, by means of reforms (read: various social programmes) that enrich people's lives. Of course, this may have been possible – admittedly within very severe limits – in certain advanced capitalist centres (and to a greater degree before the coming of full-blooded "capitalist globalization" than it is presently) – but it is much less plausible now, especially on the periphery of the global capitalist system. But perhaps South Africa, as continental sub-imperial power, might hope to reap sufficient spoils from that exercise to embark, as Trevor Manuel sometimes claims his government to be doing, on a mildly reformist exercise too?

Alexander has worked "within the system" as a policy specialist and adviser to the first post-1994 democratic arts and culture minister, and he has done so self-consciously and with the intimate knowledge that educational reform is a protracted process. The alliance of classes that he believes is necessary to effect radical sociopolitical change has, since the publication of *One Azania, One Nation*, been a beacon for his political activism and his commitment to a workers' party. For Alexander, black workers remain the only viable constituency through which such change can occur. The radical sections of the middle classes are very few and far between, and it is moot whether these people would have much interest in "throwing their lot in with workers", even though historically they did join working class struggles for democratic rights and social justice. The thin layer of radical intellectuals based at universities and in non-governmental organisations is not a significant political base from which to challenge the state for fundamental changes, and while people from this layer could contribute to a general liberation ethos, as a group their role is hardly likely to be substantial in the theatre of radical change.

The language question revisited: Alexander's "war of position"

Alexander's proposals on the language question in South Africa cannot be delinked or viewed separately from his interpretation of the broader national question, from his participation in political structures, and from his understanding of political power. In this sense, Alexander is an active participant in the making of history, and a radical intellectual who is committed to an anti-capitalist agenda. For the most part, the practical implications of his proposals have not been taken up by the government, and it is not likely that they will be implemented in the short term.

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For the long term, Alexander's orientation is not dissimilar to the strategic vision of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci whose concept of a "war of position" [25] is a useful pointer to Alexander's vision on the language question in South Africa. A confrontational approach clearly has not worked with the language planners and policy makers in the current government, and a reformulation of strategy may well be necessary. But this "war of position" can only be understood if one unpacks his understanding of the notions of "dominance" and "hegemony", and the overlap and difference between the two. Towards this end, a useful point of departure is to restate Alexander's understanding of the distinction between English "dominance" and English "hegemony". For Alexander and Bloch (Praesa 2004:2):

> [I]t is of the utmost importance that we distinguish clearly between the *dominance* of English, on the one hand, and the *hegemony* of English, on the other hand even though the two are necessarily connected. In our view, the dominance of English, which is driven by market forces – aided and abetted by British, U.S. and other pro-English agencies – is a phenomenon, the continuation of which is tied up with global political and economic developments that go beyond the specificities of cultural and linguistic dynamics. One of the most debilitating effects of hegemony is to make speakers of languages other than English – in this case – begin losing faith in the value of their home languages ... If English stands at the top of the global linguistic pyramid, the indigenous languages of the African continent are to be found as close to the base as possible. In Africa, the disempowering effect of the hegemony of English has gone so far that we can be forgiven for seeing it as a kind of social pathology.

English is indeed driven by market forces, not only in South Africa but globally. Globalisation has ensured that the language of the market is the dominant language of the world. Alexander and Bloch cite Tove Skutnabb-Kangas's telling indictment that the fate suffered by indigenous languages has been as a result of "linguistic genocide".

But, in South Africa, the democratic space opened by the 1994 elections has ensured that this fate of indigenous languages has not yet been sealed by the local representatives of neoliberalism, the "free market" and capitalist expansion. It remains "contested terrain" upon which many players with vested interests still have to secure the turf of their linguistic preferences. What is indisputable is that English has been accepted as a lingua franca, if not the lingua franca in South Africa. What is disputed is whether there is sufficient space left for home language clusters such as Sotho and Nguni to have the resources and political backing

that will ensure their standardisation, and whether there is sufficient short- and long-term political will to sustain the lexicographic units at universities to allow for the expansion and eventual adoption of home languages as a complementary addition to, and with the same status as English. Indicators are that this will not happen. The black middle class is firmly entrenched as the leading political class. It sends its children to English-medium schools, and it has been actively promoting the wide-scale use of English in parliamentary, judicial and civil communication. The country's leading newspapers are English medium gatherers and distributors of information. Already English hegemony is becoming a fait accompli.

Where does this leave Alexander and his team of multilingual activists?

The short answer is that Alexander's "war of position" on the language question is necessarily a very long-term commitment. Writing in 1995, and citing Partha Chatterjee's metaphor of nation building as a quest in a "moment of manoeuvre", Alexander dramatically reiterates his understanding of the "new nation" that was supposedly ushered in after the democratic elections of 1994:

> The nation is being imagined, invented, created before our very eyes. Indeed, we are extremely fortunate to have been afforded ringside seats by Clio enabling us to observe in the most concrete manner possible the contest between the nation conceived as a community of culture and the nation conceived as a political community. As organic intellectuals, however, we resemble Brechtian rather than Aristotelian theater-goers. Like every other would-be mother or sire of the new nation, we want to be involved in its conception even if only as midwives to the wondrous fruit of the womb of our struggle. At worst, we are willing to be mere critics, those (usually tired old) men and women who stand around in the labor ward admiring or bewailing the features of the new-born infant.

Alexander did not stay in the labour ward admiring or criticising the features of the infant nation. He became an active participant in the ministry of arts, culture and technology as an adviser and as chairman of Langtag and then as a member of Pansalb, the language board. Together with his colleagues at Praesa and at the government-sponsored institutions, he developed the framework for a multilingual future, and actively promoted indigenous languages in the institutions of state and civil society. Seventeen years after the first democratic elections and volumes of literature that have been produced by Alexander and his

team later, the country still maintains a stubborn silence on the use of African languages. English is the undisputed dominant and hegemonic language of this government.

This does not mean that his policy proposals are incorrect or not achievable. They are both correct and they are achievable. But they lack the political infrastructure and support to make them the dominant reality in the linguistic paradise that was spelt out in the country's Constitution. The acceptance of a neoliberal framework for growth and stability has ensured that questions of language and linguistics are placed on the strategic back burner, as they have been for seventeen years since 1994. Even when Acts of parliament have been enacted and published and that give clear and unambiguous direction to language planners and implementers to accord the indigenous languages the same status as English and Afrikaans in their structures of political authority, these promulgations have stayed, to use Alexander's words, "on the drawing board" and rarely got "off the board".

Carole Bloch (2006:27), another member of the Praesa team, sums up the frustration that has set in after committed language practitioners had spent so much time proposing and planning a new language dispensation in the new South Africa's formative years:

> Much energy and time has been wasted, with educators at all levels becoming despondent and disempowered in the face of "mere change without conservation". At the same time frustrations of one kind or another are inevitable aspects of change. It is also in some respects difficult to write with real analytic insight about the nature of 'influence' within such a relatively short time period. But our struggles to intellectualise African languages (Alexander 2003) and the larger goal to systematise and normalise societal multilingualism in South African must be seen against the often farcical backdrop of post-colonial language policy development in other parts of Africa, with the many glaring examples of implementation failure due to lack of political will by governments (Mazrui & Mazrui 1998, Alexander 2000:6–11). It is thus understandable that we have felt extreme impatience, as it has often proved to be the case that our ideas, insights and suggested strategies were 'ahead of our time' – certainly in terms of policy implementation. Nevertheless, the enabling policy frameworks were in place and the influence of the projects that we have undertaken has slowly but surely gained influence.

In conclusion, the dance of an intellectual mandarin in the shape and form of Alexander has been solitary and collegial. The literary and philosophical journeys that he has undertaken are exclusive to the extent that they involved his analytical and conceptual tools he has developed

and refined over many years of contemplation. His "intellectualism", his dogged commitment to scientific investigations, and his unshaken belief in a socialist future have not endeared him to the apartheid and post-apartheid governments. But he has attempted to test and experiment with his ideas in government-inspired forums and, more significantly, in non-government-inspired forums that he has created and worked in with like-minded activists and multilingualists, his colleagues, his followers, his comrades and the intellectual groups with which he has become associated. In this sense, his dance has been a private solitary affair as well as a public collegial act of engagement. The conditions for the implementation of his policy proposals on language have militated against their adoption and their implementation. His weakness has not been in theory or in the exposition of his thoughts, but in the rudimentary political infrastructure that has carried and that has given material substance to his thoughts. He has danced on a floor that is not even and he has made his moves in an environment in which the orchestra was not playing the tunes that he has become accustomed to. Bloch may well be right in suggesting that Praesa's strategies and implementation plans for a multilingual society are "ahead of our time". This researcher is not convinced that this is so. I think she is closer to the truth when she asserts that there is a lack of political will on the part of the governing authorities to implement Alexander's proposals. Instead the proposals have been put on the back burner.

NOTES

[1] Yoshihiro Francis Fukuyama is a former neoconservative who has written that liberal democracies may well be the ultimate form of government. Globalisation, according to Fukuyama's pessimistic or optimistic predictions (and this does depend on one's ideological political convictions), is unstoppable and the market-driven economies are here to stay. His flagship book, *The End of History and the Last Man* [sic] (1992), is a messianic effort to justify the further spread and consolidation of a capitalist way of life.

[2] See the endnote in Chapter 1.

[3] The concept of "commodification" is used here in the sense that Boris Groys (2009:xvi, xx) uses it: "In capitalism, the ultimate confirmation or refutation of human action is not linguistic but economic: it is expressed not with words but with numbers." For Groys, every statement becomes a commodity in capitalism.

[4] The liberal-pluralist school in South Africa stretches back to the jingoism of British commercial interests about the "Queen's English" and about "being British", even though its theoretical incarnations have had their own "moments" of exposure through individuals such as the American-based anthropologist Ashley Montagu, who has published widely on the subjects of "race" and the fallacy of race.

[5] The concept "capitalist relations of production" is used here in the classical Marxist sense as spelt out in Marx's voluminous works on the capitalist mode of production in *Capital Volume 1* (London: Penguin Books 1976). It refers to those relations that, on the one hand, signify and encapsulate the ownership and control by the dominant class of the means of production, and they signify the drive of capitalist industries to make a profit on

the other hand. This control and this ownership have been in the hands of the state in post-capitalist and actually existing socialist states, and where there were the profits to be made, these were channelled into state coffers.

[6] John S Saul is an emeritus professor at York University in Toronto. He has written on eastern and southern Africa, on development theory, and on the practice of international solidarity. Among the many books that he has authored, the one that stands out for the researcher is *The Crisis in South Africa* (1986), which he has written with Stephen Gelb (Gelb became a member of the task team that was set up by the post-1994 South African government and which proposed a neoliberal framework for economic development, alternatively called the Gear plan – the Growth, Employment and Redistribution plan). Saul, on the other hand, remains committed to a new social order, one that will challenge the "empire of capital", but he does point to the fact that intellectuals and social activists may have to rethink alliances that will be necessary to effect a shift away from the dominant capitalist paradigm (his "agency" in the cited quote), and that sites of struggle may well have to be rethought.

[7] The Cape Action League was formed as an umbrella civic organisation in Cape Town in the early 1980s. It had a newsletter called *Solidarity*, which was edited and managed by Amien Abrahams, a political ally and friend of Alexander.

[8] Saths Cooper and Lybon Mabasa were active members of the black consciousness movement and its affiliate organisations, the South African Students' Organisation (Saso), the Black People's Convention (BPC), the Azanian People's Organisation. Cooper became Azapo vice-president in 1983 and was a leading figure in the formation of the National Forum later that year. Mabasa remained active in the BC movement until 1998 when he started the Socialist Party of Azania (Sopa).

[9] The document can be viewed on the website www.disa.ukzn.ac.za (accessed 16 July 2011).

[10] Fosatu was a federation of trade unions in South Africa. Its leadership was not averse to the ANC, but neither was it aligned to the exiled movement. Alec Erwin, who later became minister of trade and industry in the Mbeki government, was Fosatu's first general secretary. In the 1970s, Erwin and his comrades and allies in the Wages Commissions set up by the National Union of South African Students, were described as "workerists" and not nationalists. Their primary focus was on working class struggles, and Erwin eschewed embracing the nationalist rhetoric of liberation movements, while at the same time he did not oppose the popular movements.

[11] At the time of writing his book, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers 1984), Mokgethi Motlhabi was the director of the Equal Opportunities Council in Johannesburg. Of particular significance for this study is the period 1970 to 1983, which Motlhabi captures adequately. Based on a theological, particularly Christian outlook, the book and its coverage of the black consciousness movement in South Africa are an important contribution to a reconstruction of this frenetic and often violent time in the lives of black intellectuals. Other activists and theologians who wrote about Christian-inspired resistance to apartheid in the decade preceding the publication of Motlhabi's book include John de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1979) and radical cleric and activist Allan Boesak, *A Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbix Books 1977), who later emerged as a leader of the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front in the mid-1980s, and who still later (in the 1990s) was charged and found guilty of fraudulently misappropriating funds from a Danish church aid organisation, Coca Cola and singer Paul Simon through the non-governmental organisation, Foundation for Peace and Justice. Boesak was not granted a pardon by South African president Thabo Mbeki when he first applied, but in 2005, he received a pardon and his criminal record was expunged. Boesak is now a member of the Congress of the People (Cope), which is a breakaway grouping from the ANC, and which was conceived after Mbeki was ousted as president of the ANC in Polokwane in December 2007, and was then obliged to step down as president of the country.

[12] The "Accord of Nkomati", as it was called and titled, states: "The High Contracting Parties shall not allow their respective territories ... to be used as a base, thoroughfare, or in any other way by another state, government, foreign military forces, organisations or individuals which plan or prepare to commit acts of violence, terrorism or aggression against the territorial integrity or political independence of the other or may threaten the security of its inhabitants." This was a key clause in the memorandum of understanding that was signed by Pieter Willem Botha and Samora Machel on 16 March 1984. The mimeo, which has no place of publishing or a publishing house, can be found at Unisa's main campus library in Pretoria under the reference number 341.026679068 MOZA.

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[13] Khanya College was established in 1986, but its genesis can be traced to Alexander in the years 1983–1984 when he first initiated discussions with academics to create an institution to address the academic needs of particularly black students who wished to go to university, but because their schooling had either been disrupted through anti-government protests, or because their schooling had been hopelessly inferior and therefore lacked the quality needed for university study, a seamless passage into university study was more difficult. Khanya College was set up to facilitate the entry into the world of university study.

[14] Much of this history has been captured elsewhere. Organisational documents, position papers, articles and analyses can be found in Karis and Carter's impressive collection of original documents, on websites such as www.sahistory.org.za, www.anc.org.za, and in a range of books and journals.

[15] The title of this book of speeches, *Sow the Wind* (Johannesburg: Skotaville 1985), draws its inspiration from the Bible and is the half of the warning, "Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind". While there are different interpretations of the text, its original meaning seems to be that which appears in *Galatians*: "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

[16] Ottilié Abrahams is a Windhoek-born Namibian woman who studied in Cape Town in the 1950s. She was intimately involved in the leadership of Swapo, in the Non-European Unity Movement, in Apdusa, in the Yu Chin Chan Club, and left southern Africa to live a short but frenetic life in exile in Zambia and then in Sweden. After her return to Namibia, she started the Khomasdal Burgersvereeniging (the Khomasdal Civic Association) in the early 1980s. A close ally and political comrade of Alexander, she set up the Jakob Marengo Tutorial College in 1985 and was its director. A life-long political and social activist, Abrahams immersed herself in Namibian civil society, and was instrumental in setting up the Namibian Nationhood Co-ordinating Committee. She became an active member of the Namibian Educational Forum. The researcher is deeply indebted to Abrahams for employing him for two years and hosting him in Namibia. She has exuded and has lived a dedicated lifestyle of commitment to the poor, and has a political integrity that is difficult to find in the contemporary world. Her love for people and especially for children is a shining example of human solidarity. Abrahams contributed immensely to shaping this researcher's life and political interests.

[17] By 1994, the ANC's electoral machinery was an alliance between the nationalist movement, the South African Communist Party and trade union federation Cosatu, the triad of power. Its multiclass nature was never hidden nor was it focused on. The leading partner in the alliance was the political leadership of the ANC under Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. The SACP had suffered a major blow in 1993 when the general secretary Chris Hani was assassinated in Boksburg, but its leadership remained on course to support the ANC in the elections that were to take place the following year. A key concern for international capital and the local press was the issue of "nationalisation" of the major means of production. It was on this particular point that the ANC's political leadership finally broke its silence over its economic and social intentions.

[18] The researcher has had interviews and discussions with pro-ANC academics and ANC members over the many years of his own ambivalent relationship with the ANC. Most notably for this dissertation have been his discussions with ANC stalwart Walter Sisulu, Jonathan de Vries and Allan Hirsch. De Vries was the publicity secretary of the UDF in the 1980s in the Western Cape and is now the special adviser to the minister of energy, Dipuo Peters, and Hirsch served as deputy chief economist in the department of trade and industry and then as principal economist, analyst and strategist in Thabo Mbeki's presidency, and who wrote a book titled *Season of Hope: Economic Reform Under Mandela and Mbeki*, which is a well argued praise song for the economic stability achieved by Mbeki and former minister of finance Trevor Manuel during the years in which the post-apartheid government's Gear policy was implemented. While Sisulu had been a member of the ANC since 1940 and a member of the Communist Party of South Africa before and after it renamed itself the SACP, De Vries and Hirsch have been and remain "committed social democrats" (Hirsch was creator and editor of the political journal, *Social Review*, while he was teaching and researching at the University of Cape Town in the late 1970s and early 1980s). These people assert that the ANC was and is a "sophisticated political organisation" with a developed "internal culture" that has generated an ability to "understand people" and "deploy its cadres successfully". Dissent within the organisation has been a feature of its politics, and its capacity to "deal with opposition" has been a signature of its maturity, they have said. This view of the ANC is not shared by people such as political activist and academic Martin Legassick, who has had the misfortune of being expelled from the

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ANC for his opposition to the increasing bureaucratisation and embrace of capitalist values by its leadership in the 1970s, and who has had exactly the opposite experience of having his dissent "crushed" by the exiled leadership of the ANC.

[19] See the website, www.info.gov.za/speeches/1996/f060r.htm (accessed 16 July 2011). This was a media release issued by the then South African Communication Service, which is the forerunner of the current Government Communication and Information Service (GCIS).

[20] Anne-Marie Beukes delivered a paper titled "The First Ten Years of Democracy: Language Policy in South Africa" at the 10th Linguapax Congress on Linguistic Diversity, Sustainability and Peace in May 2004. Beukes is a linguist and, at the time of writing, was based at the Department of Linguistics and Literary Science from the Rand Afrikaans University, which subsequently changed its name to the University of Johannesburg.

[21] Patrick Bond is a Marxist theorist, political commentator and social activist. He has written extensively on globalisation, apartheid debt, access to free or affordable water, and has served as an adviser in developing the democratic government's reconstruction and development programme (RDP). Hein Marais is a radical scholar and a socialist who has written widely on the ANC, alliance politics and the evolution and role of the South African Communist Party. Dale McKinley is a former member and critic of the South African Communist Party who has been intimately involved in South African social movements spearheading anti-privatisation campaigns.

[22] Isaac Tabata was a South African Marxist thinker and political strategist whose "abiding passion" was the unity of the oppressed people. He was at the launch of the All-African Convention (AAC) in 1935 and at the launch of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) in 1943. He joined the NEUM but broke away in the late 1950s and then formed, with Jane Gool, the African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa (Apdusa) in 1961, which Alexander joined and from which he was subsequently expelled. For Tabata, the NEUM was "inactive" and needed to become involved in and integrated into mass politics, just like the ANC and the PAC at the time.

[23] The TRC was formed by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995 and was chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The deputy chairman was former liberal politician Alex Boraine. The literature on and produced by the TRC is extensive. Apart from its own seven-volume report titled *TRC Final Report*, public interest in its findings was equally extensive and wide ranging. The TRC has its own dedicated government-sponsored website, www.justice.gov.za/trac/legal/index.htm, on which a substantial amount of relevant legal and other documentation can be found (accessed 24 July 2011).

[24] This citation appears in Gregory Hankoni Kamwendo's "No Easy Walk to Linguistic Freedom: A Critique of Language Planning During South Africa's First Decade of Democracy" (in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15(1) 2006:63).

[25] See page 87 (Note 47) for an explanation of this concept.

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