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**THE ASSOCIATION YOUNG AFRICA
AND ITS CONTEXT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO TRAFALGAR HIGH SCHOOL**

Albert Hess

**Submitted in fulfilment
of the Degree Master of Arts (History)
November 2006**

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part for the award of any degree. It is my work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 23.11.2006

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The Association Young Africa at Trafalgar



Dr James Marsh, Dr Sedick Isaacs and Imam Achmad Cassiem

To the memory of my mother Elizabeth and aunt Olive Jane for their courage and unwavering support.

University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the social orientations of the members of the Association Young Africa (AYA), and the circumstances that surrounded the founding of the organization at Trafalgar High School. It endeavours to place these elements in their historical perspective in order to determine what prompted these young students to establish this political organization. It also examines how the surge of events affected their personal lives as students, their arrests and imprisonment on Robben Island, and the very limited developments that followed on the mainland after their release. The research is important because its central focus, the history of the AYA, is unrecorded. Its significance stems from the fact that the AYA was the first militant student group from the Cape to plan action of a violent nature against state oppression.

The thesis represents the ebb and flow in the history of Trafalgar High School from the 1950s to 1964 and the influence of the Non European Unity Movement (NEUM) as well as that of the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA) in shaping the political atmosphere before the arrival of Achmad Cassiem, Sedick Isaacs and James Marsh as students at the school. It tries to ascertain to what extent these organizations prompted the actions of those Trafalgar High School teachers at the school who were sympathetic to their aims before and after the formation of the AYA. The source material was obtained by recording interactive discussions and through qualitative interviews with members of the focus group, the past teachers and students from Trafalgar. Open-ended questions were presented to establish their political awareness of the AYA, which had its roots in the politics of the Unity Movement and the TLSA.

The policies of the Coloured Affairs Department (CAD) for separate Coloured education in the old Cape Province, were designed to protect the interest of Coloured educationists, and were subscribed to by the NEUM and TLSA at Trafalgar High School because these policies were crucial to the continued survival and development of the Coloured intelligentsia. The political development at different tertiary institutions and high schools was rooted in the programme of the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD) established to challenge the threat of institutionalised segregated education. These developments contributed to the formation of radical student groups such as the AYA at Trafalgar.

The particular response by the AYA to the policies of the Anti-CAD movement and to apartheid oppression may be found in the rejection of the accommodationist strategies of the TLSA/NEUM alliance, the AYA's impatience with the abstentionist politics of the group, and their resolution to offer the maximum sacrifice with a view to achieving the maximum gains. More significantly this thesis observes the futility of action, lacking a clear political strategy, and reflects on the question of the legitimacy of AYA's activities. It further examines the forces at play in an apolitical climate dominated by a particular social class, the Coloured intelligentsia – captive to its identity and status – as articulated among members of the teaching staff at Trafalgar at the time when the apartheid state was at the height of its power.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	All African Convention
ANC	African National Congress
Anti-CAD	Anti Coloured Affairs Department
APLA	African People's Liberation Army
APO	African People's Organization
ARM	African Resistance Movement
AYA	Association Young Africa
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CAC	Coloured Advisory Council
CAD	Coloured Affairs Department
CATA	Cape African Teachers Association
CBD	Central Business District
CPSU	Cape Peninsula Students Union
EJ	Educational Journal
FI	Fourth International
NLF	National Liberation Front
JC	Junior Certificate
MYM	Muslim Youth Movement
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NEF	New Era Fellowship
NUM	New Unity Movement
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
SOYA	Society of Young Africa
SAP	South African Police
SATA	South African Teachers' Association
SB	Special Branch
TLSA	Teachers League of South Africa
UCT	University of Cape Town
UWC	University of the Western Cape

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University of Cape Town

INTRODUCTION

“If we can see the present clearly enough, we shall ask the right questions of the past.”¹

This study is about the formation of the Association young africa (AYA) at Trafalgar High School, in particular the roles of Achmad Cassiem, Sedick Isaacs and James Marsh, and the context in which the AYA operated. An investigation is made into the socio-political background of the members of the AYA and the teachers, who served at the school at the time, as well as the context of Trafalgar, their Alma Mater, in District Six. It was considered important that the history of the school be included in this study, since it was the precise location where in 1963 this particular cell of the AYA was formed. The school is also situated in close proximity to an electrical sub-station on De Waal Drive where this AYA unit suffered its premature demise in 1964.²

The significance and need for presenting this study emanates from the historical importance of Trafalgar as the first Coloured high school in Cape Town and the contribution made by its teachers and students to freedom and democracy in the 1950s and 1960s.³ The thesis also serves to highlight the role played by the school in the inculcation and development of an ethos of critical analysis, freedom of thought, and freedom of political expression and affiliation.

¹ John Berger, *Ways of seeing*, (1974) p.16.

² *Cape Argus*, 5 November 1964.

³ The term “Coloured” was used to denote racial classification by the apartheid state, of those neither classified African, nor White, nor Indian at the time. (Gavin Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, Cape Town, David Philip, 1987 p.4.) Coloured identity is a white-imposed categorization. But for a variety

The thesis undertakes to demonstrate the popularity of Trafalgar among members of its local community, District Six, and the traumas which Coloured people experienced with the passing of the Group Areas Act of 1950 that affected all Non-Whites, and the forced removals of black communities countrywide.⁴ These and other factors of social deprivation and the denial of human rights compounded the level of the Trafalgar student hostilities towards the government and led to the effective formation and actions of a particular radical student group at the school, namely the AYA, which is the essence of this thesis. This investigation of the AYA as a radical student group will focus on their reactions to the forces of oppression and question to what extent influences of a socio-and-political nature determined their actions. It will also strive to identify these influences to determine their outcomes.

The period 1962-1976 was a critical period of intense political turmoil and upheaval for progressive forces across the land. These voices of dissent organised nationally against the apartheid government in an attempt to remove it from power. In Cape Town there was a sharp increase in the number of Coloured youth, especially high school students, who expressed an active interest in, and participation, in national politics and in the political discourse of South Africa.⁵

As early as 1937, a group of Coloured University of Cape Town students, who were opposed to the government's political stratification of Non-Europeans through racial

of reasons it came to be adopted by sections of those people so described. Ethnic allegiances can develop an emotional dimension that take on a life of their own independently of purely material concerns.

⁴ The Group Areas Act No 41 of 1950 legislated the physical separation of communities through the creation of separate residential areas for different racial groups.

inequalities, founded the New Era Fellowship (NEF). Having grown out of a Trotskyist debating society, the NEF focused its initiative on the founding of the Anti-CAD on 28 February 1943. This was the same year that the Non European Unity Movement (NEUM) was formed. The Anti-CAD (Anti-Coloured Affairs Department) opposed and rejected the Bill to amend the Separate Representation of Voters Act that was to complete the disenfranchisement of the Coloured voters, the Separate Representation of Voters Act, and the proposed Coloured Affairs Department (CAD). The Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD) was determined to eradicate all discriminatory laws from the statute book. The Separate Representation of Voters Act, Act No 46 of 1951, together with the 1956 amendment, led to the removal of Coloureds from the common voters roll and the placing of education of Coloureds under the control of the CAD. The leading members of the Anti-CAD were Coloured intellectuals including Victor Wessels, Van Schoor and Ben Kies, who was principal of Trafalgar High School at the time. Kies as principal openly identified Trafalgar as an institution in the political campaign against the CAD.⁶

Cracks appeared in the NEUM in 1951 as a result of political tension. I. B. Tabata, who was a founder member of the organization, announced at a general meeting of the NEF that the Society of Young Africa (SOYA) had been formed. Meanwhile the steadily worsening rift between Tabata and Kies came in 1957 over the agrarian policy inscribed in point 7 of the 10 – point programme of the NEUM.⁷

⁵ *Cape Argus*, 4 November 1964.

⁶ *The Torch*, National Edition Vol. XI No. 6, Cape Town, Tuesday, 17 April 1956. p. 1

⁷ Baruch Hirson, *A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement: An Insider's View* [Online] Available: <http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/History/Neum.html> p.12.

Kies' open defiance of the CAD led to a banning order being served on him by the government in 1956, which had far reaching implications at Trafalgar. It devastated the morale of his teaching staff and the spirit of intellectual fervour. His banning brought about a major transformation of a socio-political nature that undermined the maintenance of cultural values and militancy. It is against this background of decline that an attempt to uphold the culture that the militancy against the apartheid system in the 1960's took place at Trafalgar. Trafalgar was one of three senior educational institutions in the Cape that became embroiled in "struggle politics", a phenomenon in the educational site of struggle. This circumstance reflected both student-teacher polemics, and their reaction to the introduction of the CAD system of education that was devised by the government to departmentalize all aspects of South African life.⁸

In the 1960s the contestation between these two ideologically polarized forces—state and citizen—induced a keen sense of political consciousness that precipitated and transformed itself into political action. The fruit of this contestation shattered the power relations between the students at Trafalgar and the organs of the state and the CAD. Although previous student groups had embarked upon other forms of protest, such as, painting slogans on the school walls, the decision to opt for violent protest action, as illustrated by the AYA at Trafalgar, was an extreme act against state oppression. It demonstrated the students' fearlessness of possible state retaliation that could under the circumstances have taken any form. This action by the AYA could therefore be considered as a position that

⁸ Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, p. 5. Coloured political mobilisation is therefore closely linked to the rise of a Coloured identity.

reflected their class-consciousness.⁹ By focusing on the protest action of the AYA at Trafalgar this thesis will show how their class orientation determined their political action. It will show how the NEUM in the face of “struggle” became more conservative and in adopting a stand of non-protest action and abstention from direct action, the NEUM failed to provide a deterrent.

The AYA is an example of a student political “pressure group” that operated from schools such as Trafalgar. Although this particular student group was the first at Trafalgar to demonstrate their opposition to the CAD’s stratification of Coloured education by means of violent protest action, they were not the first to decide on such action. In 1964 Basil February, who was a student at Trafalgar in 1960, crossed the borders of South Africa to Zimbabwe where he joined Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in Zimbabwe.¹⁰ Other events and incidents of political significance that may have influenced the strategy and actions of the AYA have to be explored. Achmad Cassiem mentions the incident of the 24 July 1964 when Frederick John Harris, a white schoolteacher had planted a bomb in the concourse of the main Johannesburg railway station as having providing some stimulus to their own course of action.¹¹

Notwithstanding the personal initiative, commitment, and common purpose demonstrated by the AYA group at Trafalgar, the hypothesis is posed that they may have been

⁹ Interview James Marsh, 18 June 2005, Lansdowne.

¹⁰ Van Driel, Nicole (Nicky) Martina, *The Wankie Campaign: the ANC’s first armed military operation July-September 1967*, [Online], Available: www.sahistory.org.za/pages/sources/vandriel-thesis/chapter-five.htm [2005/08/17].

encouraged by one or more individuals outside of the group to consider embarking on this violent protest action. The investigation also attempts to ascertain whether any other elements influenced the political nature of the group and to establish their identity. This person may have been concealed among the discussion groups that were organized by some teachers at Trafalgar and were composed of selected politically committed students as well as members of the AYA.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the formation of a radical student group and to ascertain whether an externally derived objective distinct from that of the AYA and prevalent in the discussion group undermined their agenda. It explores the intentions of a group of students who participated in the politics of planned attacks to overthrow the state during the late 1960s. It attempts to record and analyze 25 years later by relying extensively on memories of the focus group and past Trafalgar teachers and students. By examining and recording the development and orientation of the AYA it is my intention to place the orally recorded and video interviews in their historical context, to interpret their actions, and to submit an analysis of its outcome for scrutiny and debate.

In the absence of other recordings of the historical events of the AYA other than what appeared in the local and national press during their trial in 1964 and the court records accessed through the National Archives, this investigation seeks to place on record an important aspect of the history of Trafalgar. It draws attention to the realization of the

¹¹ Frederick John Harris <http://www.suntimes.co.za/2004/02/15/news/gauteng/njhb09.asp>
Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

broader aims of the AYA in the Western Cape and their contribution to the struggle for freedom and democracy.

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CHAPTER 1

TRAFALGAR HIGH SCHOOL – *PER ANGUSTA AD AUGUSTA*

(FROM TRIALS TO TRIUMPHS)

c1954 -1970

The events that led to the loss of all the political rights of the Non-Whites in Parliament can be traced back to the passing of the Act of Union in 1910. The Act of Union proclaimed by the Westminster Government was used by Britain to remove the rights of Non-Whites and Coloured representatives from the South African legal system. A number of political manoeuvres followed including the Separate Representation of Voters Act No 46 of 1951 which together with the 1956 amendment, led to the removal of Coloureds from the Common Voters Roll and their prohibition in 1968 from belonging to “white” political parties. That finally in 1971 culminated in the total elimination of Coloureds in the Cape and elsewhere from active participation and involvement in municipal politics.¹ As R. van der Ross lamented about the removal of the Coloureds from the voters roll and at the negative outcome of their spurious campaign that, “It is a pathetic tale of the political castration of a population group whose loyalty to the country was undoubtedly unsullied and which had never rebelled against the government of the day”.²

¹ G. Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, p. 5. “Coloured organisations in the history of twentieth century South African politics reveal a far more complex interplay of both collaboration and resistance, co-option and exclusion.”

² Abdurahman, Abdullah, *Say it out loud: the A.P.O. presidential addresses and other major political speeches 1906-1940, of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman: collected, edited and with a bibliographical introduction by R.E. van der Ross*, (Bellville, Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, UWC, 1990), p. 76.

In response to the Act of Union in 1910, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, who had sought to represent the Coloured voters in parliament, threatened the withdrawal of the support of the Coloured ballot.³ In protest against the erosion of rights, he used Coloured education as a measure for political leverage. He set about establishing primary schools, which he called “institutions” in his endeavour to emphasize that these schools would offer more than secular education. The first of its kind, Rahmaniya Institute, was founded in Aspeling Street District Six in 1913, expressly so that he could define the Non-White community in a larger political setting. “In addition to the part Abdurahman played in promoting the education of Coloured pupils, he also played the leading role in establishing Muslim missionary schools in the Western Cape. The mission school system, which the state subsidized in various degrees, was the backbone of the education of Blacks” (should read Coloured education because Blacks were not part of Abdurahman’s programme, or of the state).⁴ However, the refusal of the government to allow for political power sharing weakened the influence that Abdurahman exerted on certain educational institutions in the Cape.

Abdurahman established Trafalgar High School (Trafalgar) in 1912 for Coloured students meaning those who were classified as such under the government’s racial system of identity.⁵ By 1963 all Coloured state-supported schools were placed under

³ Dr Abdurahman had acclaimed himself the spokesperson and bona fide representative of the Coloureds and at least expected to share in the political spoils envisaged in the outcome of the political developments in South Africa. At the height of his success Dr Abdurahman “owned almost one hundred properties, some even in Adderley Street, Wale Street and Long Street as well as many in the Malay Quarter and District Six, and vacant plots as far as Blaauwberg Strand” including Trafalgar which was until 1954 the institution par excellence that exemplified middle class ideals.

⁴ Interview Hassan Bavasah, 21 March 2005, Zeekoevlei.

⁵ Lewis, Gavin, *Between the wire and the wall*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p. 27. In September 1904 Abdurahman became the first black man to win election to the Cape Town City Council, as the representative of District Six, one of the city’s poorest constituencies. His main goal shortly after elections was the improvement of Coloured education.

the control of the Department of Coloured Affairs with the passing of the Coloured Persons Education Act No 47 of 1963 expressly to further and promote racial oppression. The Department sought as a measure of political control through education to serve its long-term plan of subjugation of Non-Whites. Trafalgar was the first of three state subsidized schools to be built in the Cape. The emphasis of teaching at Trafalgar was not based on religion like the missionary schools; in this respect Trafalgar was secular. Its secularity encouraged social and political interaction and granted students an opportunity to develop to their full potential. It was established as part of a dual strategy that understood education as a developmental tool for the unity and uplifting of Non-Whites through the medium of education and as a means to serve the political ambitions and personal beliefs of “Colouredism” of its founder, Abdurahman.⁶

Abdurahmanism/Colouredism, was an opportunist position of the Coloured intelligentsia who held the same view as white liberals of the time who believed in a separate solution for the group of people who had been given the political label “Coloured”. These members of the Coloured intelligentsia through political manoeuvring appealed for change from above to embellish their selfish egos. This played itself out among liberals, both Black and White, in a separate racist solution for educational institutions.⁷

⁶ Abdurahman, Abdullah, *Say it out loud: the A.P.O. presidential addresses and other major political speeches 1906-1940, of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman: collected, edited and with a bibliographical introduction by R.E. van der Ross*, (Bellville, Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, UWC, 1990), p. 7.

TRAFALGAR AND ABDURAHMANISM / COLOUREDISM

In trying to address the question as to whether Trafalgar was a Coloured institution or not, the social composition and nature of this group needs to be considered. The Coloured people at Trafalgar had moved from the rural to the urban areas to become the urban proletariat of whom many became skilled workers and artisans. Together with the Muslim craftsmen they became a very important feature in the cultural and economic development of the Western Cape.

The word Coloured took on a greater meaning as a tag used by the apartheid government to denote racial classification. Trafalgar was by legal definition a Coloured institution because the laws that governed education in South Africa precluded the racial mixing of Coloureds, Africans and Whites in schools. Trafalgar turned a blind eye to the enrolment of Africans at the school and in principle encouraged the admission of African students although it fitted the legal classification of being a Coloured school in the apartheid prescriptive context.

Trafalgar's history reflects that it was controlled by Colouredist elements in the staff component in terms of the organisations, which they represented. This influence was especially prevalent from 1912-1950 after which there were political changes taking place in the country as a whole and in education that affected the social nature of the school.⁸ Trafalgar was a Coloured school in as much as it was situated in a Coloured area and had mostly Coloured teachers on its staff. The teachers worked under the CAD and taught Coloured children but the question of Colouredism must be separated and explained in terms of the principles of the Unity Movement and not as

⁷ Interview A. Slingers, video recording, 24 June 2005, Athlone. Slingers joined the teaching staff at Trafalgar in 1934.

Colouredism of Trafalgar.⁹ Trafalgar was Coloured by the philosophy of those who had a hold over it but not in the sense that it could be labelled as a Coloured organisation.

The image of the school should not be confused with the founder and with Abdurahmanism. There were too many other forces at Trafalgar and not just Colouredism, for example, the Muslim students lobbied for the inclusion of their religious practices into the school timetable. There was a specific request for permission to attend Jumah, the prayers at Mosques on a Friday, and to receive religious instructions in their language. There were therefore too many forces to conclude that Trafalgar was influenced by just one set of ideas.

The status of Trafalgar as the first government high school for persons of colour in the country created an immediate challenge in expectations by Non-Whites for intellectual leadership and it placed an onus on the school for political solutions and meaningful results. These expectations were evident in the wave of requests for admission from prospective students across the cultural spectrum within the country and as far a field as Namibia (South West Africa), Zambia and Zimbabwe (Northern and Southern Rhodesia respectively). This overwhelming response for higher education resulted in a concerted migration of students from all over the country that gave rise to a high degree of cross-cultural interaction, and a confluence of diverging ideas. Those students who traveled from across the borders chose Trafalgar because of its legacy, its quality teaching staff, and its high standard of education. Their influx

⁸ Interview Hassan Bavasah, 9 April 2005, Woodstock.

⁹ Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, p.4. To study Coloured history one has to know what Coloured is. Yet to accept existing definitions of Coloured was to accept implicitly, and thereby re-

in turn boosted the development and increasing political awareness among students. Many students, such as the Schimmings came from politically active families.¹⁰ Their arrival, and that of others, had a significant influence on locally emerging political opinion.

TRAFALGAR'S TEACHERS AND TEACHING ETHOS

Trafalgar was an institution where students were encouraged to come to grips with socio-political events that dominated the news locally and in neighbouring countries, and to interact with students from other institutions, so that they could together share their knowledge and understanding of these cultural and political events and appreciate the interest of others. Collectively, the staff attained an exceptional standard of academic achievement and they nurtured this ethos that pre-dated the 1950s and the days of the CAD. The teacher's approach to education was to use Trafalgar as a platform for development and empowerment for all who passed through its gates. It is one of the reasons why so many students from Trafalgar achieved something in his/her small way through what was taught at the school whether a love for history, literature, or art. They inculcated a collective sense of ownership within Trafalgar's communities by trying to make the community share in its values to nurture this ethos.

The system of CAD education put a premium on the culture of unquestioning respect for teachers, an obstacle that was overcome by the high level of excellence of the teaching at Trafalgar. Trafalgar was an institution that above everything else strove to

enforce, the obviously unjust and arbitrarily imposed definition of a state in the interest of white supremacy.

¹⁰ The Schimmings were from Namibia (formerly South West Africa) and the sisters who attended Trafalgar were Scharlotte and Matilda "Tilly" Abrahams.

help every single student to understand that there were basic values that were not negotiable. Teachers understood their responsibility to the parents and the interests of the community to be ahead of the CAD. Teachers elected to be teachers at the time because it was a calling. They elected to be at Trafalgar because they were politically conscious as affiliates of political organizations, and therefore not politically (innocent or) naïve. Trafalgar was a vibrant school because it had the community of District Six's strength that embraced its actions. These were elements that featured foremost in the social consciousness of the AYA because of their class position and as community-oriented individuals in terms of their cultural upbringing and life experiences.

Whether it was through secularism, a representative school committee, or through bodies such as the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) the parents were prepared to get involved in order to understand the workings of the CAD and what it was that they were pitted against. The teachers at Trafalgar shared a social camaraderie that stemmed from a political awareness that was grounded in a deep social commitment, but were not necessarily united politically.¹¹

The staff complement at Trafalgar (at any given time) did not believe in the superiority of whites and in terms of their political outlook could not fit into the racist political propaganda of difference through skin pigmentation that was being expounded at the Afrikaner and English schools. Teachers at Trafalgar were determined to rise above their political status by demonstrating to the Coloured wing of the oppressed that they were equals in intellect with the same superior abilities

ascribed to whites. This position nurtured an ethos of academic excellence at Trafalgar that became the hallmark of education in the Cape. They were thinkers who were there by choice and felt very much at home in Coloured schools and at Trafalgar in particular. They were of a high calibre teachers like Jack Meltzer who held three Masters Degrees in Greek, Latin and English literature, Solly Edross B.Sc. and Kies M.A. B.Ed.¹² History lessons conducted by Slingers included African history and its Diasporas. Discussions on the influence of African socialist thinkers such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Fanon, Cabral and others who inspired a revolutionary consciousness were encouraged. These lessons fell well outside the perimeters of the prescriptive syllabus of the CAD.¹³

A firm belief arose among the bourgeois layers of the Coloured intelligentsia who (were predominantly teachers) that above all else they had to take advantage of their educational opportunities in order to try and improve their economic status. Although this action appeared to be progressive in nature, it contained elements that were accompanied by subtle undertones of middle-class self-aggrandizement.

It also became quite clear as the Herrenvolk tightened its stranglehold on the aspirations of the Coloured intelligentsia and teaching under the CAD became more difficult and distressing, that those teachers who would not cope emigrated. to Canada and Australia to escape persecution. Steenveldt had as a consequence of his

¹¹ Interview A. Slingers, video recording, 23 May 2005, Athlone. The admission policy of the school committee at Trafalgar was contrary to the regulations set out by the CAD because it allowed for the admission of all students.

¹² Interview A. Slingers, video recording, 23 May 2005, Athlone. The admission policy of the school committee at Trafalgar was contrary to the regulations set out by the CAD because it allowed for the admission of all students.

¹³ Interview Goosain Emeran, video recording 23 June 2005, Schotsche Kloof. Emeran was the principal at Trafalgar from 1966-1995.

TLSA/NEUM affiliation suffered the preclusion of becoming head when Ravens was installed as principal. It was the actions and arrest of the AYA that shifted the focus of the CAD from teacher to student politics.

The legacy set by Abdurahman and his historical connection to Trafalgar was at variance with the political profiles of Kies and Cressy who were educationists first and foremost and sought the fight for the political rights of Non-Whites through education. Their differences with the liberal bargaining strategy of Abdurahmanism, that traded the political rights of the Coloureds, created an opposition platform that would witness the participation of teachers from Trafalgar in the development, and support of, protest marches on the Grand Parade in Cape Town. These marches were in opposition to the policies of the CAD, and would contribute to the process of a degree of rashness found in the actions of the AYA student group, who were reasonably autonomous in terms of their *modus operandi* and choice of targets.¹⁴

The TLSA and its parent body the NEUM dominated the politics of the Coloured intelligentsia in Cape Town.¹⁵ Most of the TLSA/NEUM members were teachers at Coloured schools, including Kies, a principal at Trafalgar. Harold Cressy, who was the first principal of Trafalgar before Kies, was the first person of colour to achieve a B.A. degree from the University of Cape Town (UCT), while P. Heneke, also a

¹⁴ Scott (1990), p. 131. Solidarity among sub-ordinates, if it is achieved at all, is thus achieved paradoxically and only by means of a degree of conflict. Certain forms of social strife, far from constituting evidence of disunity and weakness, may well be the sign of an active, aggressive social surveillance that preserves unity.

¹⁵ Nasson, Bill "The Unity Movement Tradition", in *History from South Africa* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press), p. 146. The formation of the NEUM in 1943 was largely a product of resistance against segregationists, and the consultative and administrative bodies put together by the state in the late 1930s and early 1940s. NEUM's protests were especially directed at the Coloured Advisory Council and the Coloured Affairs Department. A preceding anti-CAD mobilization against the imposition of the latter was what secured widespread support, mainly from among directly affected

Trafalgar principal, became the chairperson of the first Coloured Advisory Council in 1944. As a result of the political constraints placed on education for all Non-Whites by the government the quality of teaching at Trafalgar became the pursuit of excellence to make political headway.¹⁶ This arose out of the opportunity seized upon by the Non-White intelligentsia to occupy a space that arose from the political differences between Abdurahman who supported the government's policy of separate education and the emerging forces of the NEUM. Despite the later demise of Trafalgar, the AYA and other students were determined to rebuild and return to this perceived past glory of Trafalgar.¹⁷

While Kies was principal of Trafalgar it was run under the authority of the NEUM and not under the regulations of the CAD. This was unlike the previous principals of Trafalgar, Cressy and Heneke, who opted to serve on the maligned Coloured Advisory Council despite the members of staff supporting the NEUM. Kies became principal after the retirement of Heneke and inculcated his brand of discipline after 1944 when the activities and influence of the NEUM reached a low ebb. It was Kies who instilled the criterion for academic excellence founded in the ethos of the school. He tried to invigorate the staff by encouraging them to become more politically active during this period of disillusionment. The younger NEUM members were already expressing their dissatisfaction with the kind of protest against the government that consisted of mass meetings and rallies. The old guard preferred legal protest only whereas the "Young Turks" were keen on more direct action. The same urgency

Coloured teachers. This accentuated the leadership role in the NEUM as a radical-middle class intelligentsia that came to be known as the "educational orators".

¹⁶ Abdurahman, Abdullah, *Say it out loud: the A.P.O. presidential addresses and other major political speeches 1906-1940, of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman: collected, edited and with a bibliographical introduction by R.E. van der Ross*, (Bellville, Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, UWC, 1990), p. 8.

experienced by the “Young Turks” would press the AYA into radical action almost a decade later in 1964.

Kies, whom the state considered an agitator, was subsequently banned from teaching and on 13 February 1956 was summarily dismissed from his post at Trafalgar. His banning and departure caused the organization at Trafalgar to suffer a moral setback and the era of academic excellence at Trafalgar High School immediately declined leading to despair among teachers as the level of oppression rose. This paved the way in turn for a process that would lead to radical action by the AYA.¹⁷ After several attempts to find alternative employment Kies found employment with Juta Books. This created an opportunity for him to embark on his career as an attorney and in 1970 Kies became the first advocate of colour in apartheid South Africa during the period when the repression of the state was at its worst. Kies was not the only teacher to suffer and later Appolis Slingsers and Cosmo Pieterse were banned in 1963.

Trafalgar remained a beacon of light even against the background of decline and decay that set in after the banning and departure of Kies and the attempt to continue to uphold the democratic values and a cultural atmosphere during this period from 1954 to 1960. The question as to why the NEUM was demoralized in the late 1950s is therefore important, because it was during this period that a new militancy developed amongst students. This revealed a component and aspect of a more radical nature that was being stored to be unleashed against the apartheid system. This element of illegality was contrary to the increasingly conservative nature of the struggle waged by the NEUM and took some teachers by surprise and raised the feeling of alarm.

¹⁷ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, April 2005, Zeekoevlei.

¹⁸ *The Torch*, National Edition, Vol. XI, No. 6, Cape Town, Tuesday, 17 April 1956.

Participating students who formed part of this new contingent were considered reckless individuals. Basil February and James April students at Trafalgar and Livingstone respectively became Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) guerrillas and forerunners of the AYA group.¹⁹

Although the social composition at Trafalgar could be characterized as petty bourgeois during the 1950s, this would change by 1960. Equally significant to the political developments at the school were the influences of race and class on the teachers, and the students. Although these elements of race and class were always present among staff they were somewhat obscured by the identification of a common enemy in the CAD and a common commitment to the pursuit of education. Political differences were vented through their collective criticisms of the policies of the NEUM. Amongst the staff, disagreements of an ideological nature caused many rifts (of which students were aware) and created divisions that were evident in the existence of the various political tendencies and factions.²⁰ These variances contributed towards the cultivation of a spirit of ideological independence and tolerance among students. This would later favour the operational requirements of the AYA since the AYA were to engage, at different social and political levels, in search of contacts or information without drawing attention to itself.²¹

Because of its influence on the teachers and students, the NEUM could be considered a political organization. It aimed to challenge the existing government through its

¹⁹ James April and Basil February were part of the Luthuli Detachment. February died in action in Zimbabwe during the Wankie Campaign in 1967.

²⁰ Scott, J. *Dominance the art of resistance*, (New Haven, Yale University, 1990), p.20. Forms of resistance or insurrection cannot be understood without reference to the sequestered social sites, at which such resistance can be nurtured and given meaning.

programme of resistance to the CAD that sought to perpetuate second-rate education in Coloured schools. In essence the NEUM challenged the politics of education and via the rhetoric of Kies this became the voice of Trafalgar. The AYA at Trafalgar drew its courage and support from this.²² Furthermore, through its policy of non-racialism inscribed in its Ten Point Programme, the NEUM outlined its organization's commitment to fostering political unity amongst the Non-Whites in their fight against parliamentary exclusion and racial oppression. The essence of the NEUM's programme was embedded in the slogan by Kies, "Let us live for our children". This summarized their philosophy and became the standard of the NEUM and was adopted at the TLSA annual conference in 1918.²³

By the early 1950s the remaining semblance of the old guard at Trafalgar including Cressy, Heneke, Kies, Greef and Edross, were gradually being replaced by the "Young Turks". These were mostly students who had matriculated from Trafalgar and who had completed their tertiary education at UCT.

Teachers in their capacity as educationists became members of the TLSA and NEUM and conducted themselves as conscious instruments of change and played a major role in the direction and development of Non-White education. Through the TLSA and NEUM the teachers influenced the thinking and resulting actions of many of their students often with far reaching consequences. Trafalgar in particular provided an

²¹ Interview Hassan Bavasah, February 2006, Woodstock.

²² Nasson, "The Unity Movement tradition: its legacy in historical context", p.156. "The close association in the Unity Movement between historical production and national liberation struggle, the relationship between scholar and active political participation, is quite different from that implied in mainstream academic Marxist economic and social histories and even more so, from that in nationalist-inscribed people's, or popular history".

²³ Adhikari, Mohamed, "*Let us live for our children*": the Teachers' League of South Africa 1913-1940, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, UCT Press, 1993), p. 83.

arena for critical thinking in the search for methods of emancipation while fostering a secular philosophy. The AYA found the climate at Trafalgar conducive to their objectives. But as a radical student group founded to oppose the policies of the government, AYA was directly concerned with the struggle to overthrow the government and they chose radical politics as an alternative to legal protests.²⁴

It also resulted in an underlying drive among different tendencies of Colouredists towards the unquestioning acceptance of the policies and principles of the NEUM. The basic tenet was expressed in the view that by hard work and sacrifice one might rise above circumstance in order to grasp the opportunity that was conceded. Teachers at Trafalgar went beyond this parochial view to confront the bigger challenge of poverty, impoverishment, and oppression in their immediate communities in South Africa and in other parts of the subcontinent. This willingness to challenge Abdurahmanism was what transformed Trafalgar into the beacon of light and an instrument of change by finding an alternative to the liberal approach and of the kind of racism that was inherent in Abdurahmanism. The entrenchment of inequalities in education for Non-Whites provoked the emergence of numerous groups representing both students and teachers, with the Anti-CAD being one example. The AYA, contrary to the influences of the TLSA/NEUM policies of abstention from illegal protest at all cost, disputed its appropriateness and opted for extensive radicalism in the face of growing oppression.²⁵ By giving credence to the acceptance of the concept of Colouredism, and in his acceptance of racism, Abdurahman propagated separate

²⁴ Interview Sedick Isaacs, 15 June 2005, Athlone.

²⁵ Nasson, "The Unity Movement tradition: its legacy in historical context", p.145. The role of teachers has always been crucial over the past four decades. The influence of the Unity Movement has waxed and waned but their persistence has continuously drawn numbers of high-school pupils into

solution to achieve the political ideals of the Non-Whites. His endeavour to establish a political career in the white parliament and as the bona fide representative of the Coloured group resulted in the drastic decline in his popularity. It galvanized the forces and gave way to a new force of young middle class aspirants in the NEF whose main aim was to lead all the Non-Whites in their struggle for unity. Trafalgar, because of its secularity, which had its origins in the diverse composition of its teachers, therefore did not fit into the category of an "institution" as prescribed by Abdurahman. Suffice to say that it did not mean therefore that teachers who taught at Trafalgar were outright materialists. What it meant was that the ethos of free and independent critical thought encouraged open debate amongst students and staff that diverged from the Abdurahman prescript.²⁶ The student component at Trafalgar included all cultural groupings and religious denominations and cultural background and composition of the AYA exemplified this.

TRAFALGAR AND SECULARISM

The teaching methodology at Trafalgar was different to other schools in the Western Cape. It was different to Zonnebloem College, which was founded after 1912, in that it was not a missionary institution. A characteristic of missionary institutions in South Africa at the time, besides acting as appendages and instruments of colonial rule, was that it included religious instruction as an important feature of its daily curriculum.

The idea of Trafalgar being a secular school had to be seen in the context of the history of secularity at the Cape. It is a history that includes the influence that

their ambit. Whatever the Unity Movement's collective form they constituted a collective forum, which moulded awareness among pupils.

²⁶ February, V.A., *From the arsenal*, 1983 p. 65.

cosmopolitanism had on the social fabric of its inhabitants. The proximity of the school in District Six with the diverse nature of its inhabitants and the political activities had a considerable impact on the student populace. This collectively contributed to the atmosphere at the school being one of relative secularism in terms of its social composition.

Although teachers at Trafalgar were united in their fight for Non-White unity through education and were steadfast against racial oppression, there were differences. This was despite a high degree of tolerance of cultural, religious and political ethic. These differences were manifest in class, culture and religion and between those Muslims or Christian teachers who from a perspective of secularism were at variance with the approach of the "out and out materialists".²⁷

The influence of the NEUM was internalized by a group of teachers at Trafalgar to mean that the body served to support co-operation between Christian, Muslim, Indian and Coloured teachers. Muslim teachers at Trafalgar were nevertheless wary of the TLSA and NEUM because they considered the propagation of Marxist theories amongst some teachers at the school to be favouring atheism, which could have been misconstrued by Muslim teachers to mean that they were anti-Muslim. It was on the basis of this misconception and on the perception of Trafalgar being a secular institution that many Muslim teachers supported the schools programme of action and the TLSA/NEUM alliance but never ventured to become members of these organizations especially the latter. Support for the NEUM by the Muslim teachers was never seen as a problem in anyway threatening because the programme of action of

²⁷ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, 21 March 2005, Zeekoevlei.

the NEUM was considered predominantly theoretical and concentrated around the education of the Coloured people and the creation of a Coloured intelligentsia.²⁸

TRAFALGAR HIGH SCHOOL AND THE BEGINNING OF PROTEST

The New Era Fellowship (NEF) was founded in Cape Town in 1937 by a group of University of Cape Town (UCT) students as an open forum for discussion and debate. The NEF was “a political vanguard drawn from all sections of the oppressed Non-Europeans and was largely but not exclusively, young”.²⁹ It initially was comprised of UCT students but later included disgruntled members of the TLSA who were critical of the Van der Ross and F. Hendricks practice of going along with dummy representation and promoting Coloured identity. It included amongst others, APO members, Abdurahman sceptics, and members of the ANC who were disgruntled with their leadership. By 1942 the NEF included a broad representation of the Black oppressed.³⁰

The NEF was critical of the collaborationists within the African National Congress (ANC), the Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) and the All African Convention (AAC), which sought to unite all sections of the oppressed and was “striving to build a national organization, which will be the mouthpiece of all of us Africans”. The NEF was established as the youth were demonstrating against the reneging ANC leadership and the move by the Wilcocks Commission’s decision in favour of the

²⁸ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, 21 March 2005, Zeekoeflei.

²⁹ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, 21 March 2005, Zeekoeflei.

³⁰ Mokone, Sarah, *Majority rule: some notes*, (Cape Town, Teachers’ League of South Africa, 1982), pp. 22-24.

development of the Coloured Affairs Department.³¹ The formation of the NEF as a movement by 1942 was “a political vanguard drawn from all sections of the oppressed largely but not exclusively young”.³²

The NEF would have a fundamental influence on the future political direction and impact of Trafalgar and its influence on the political history of the Cape from 1950 onwards. Hassan Bavaiah was the NEF's organizing secretary during the period 1955-1956 and he made a considerable impact on promoting secularism at Trafalgar. The impact modified the psychology and outlook of the student populace at Trafalgar and certainly to some degree secularized an increasing number of students from both the Christian and Muslim communities. The secularism at the school helped to influence the social and philosophical development amongst the emerging petty bourgeois at the school.

At a meeting called by the NEF to discuss the CAC and CAD it was decided to form from among the Coloured people in the Western Cape an alternative organization. A follow-up consultative meeting was arranged in conjunction with other representatives countrywide. A body was formed to oppose the measures set up by the CAC and CAD to control Coloured education. This joint effort initiated by the NEF would radicalize future black protests against collaborationists within the CAC and CAD alliance, bringing into existence on 28 February 1943 the movement of the Anti-

³¹ Jaffe, Hosea, *European colonial despotism, a history of oppression and resistance in South Africa*, (London, Karnak House, 1994), pp.162-164.

³² Mokone, *Majority rule: some notes*, p.21.

Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD).³³ This was the same year that the NEUM was formed although its history could be traced earlier.

When the Anti-CAD was founded as an initiative of the NEF its mission was to obstruct the proposed Coloured Affairs Department and to gather all Black economic, social and political sentiment in one mighty force against the government. This initiative brought about a resurgence of political awareness amongst Coloured teachers and students. Their participation in mass rallies and meetings established a common political discourse as well as solidarity with teachers and participants from the broader South African communities who attended these gatherings. People like Enver Marney, Arthur Davids and Kenny Jordaan were in the forefront of action. There were questions and discussions by students around the formation of the Coloured Affairs Council, which encouraged a cultural awareness and successfully staged several plays with political themes, all managed and controlled by students at Trafalgar with the blessing of the NEUM.³⁴

Although the NEUM purported to unite the Non-White petty bourgeoisie by doing so it ironically risked doing the exact opposite. This was evident in the founding of the Anti-CAD, which sought to use other sectors of the Non-White community in its fight

³³ Jaffe, Hosea, *European colonial despotism, a history of oppression and resistance in South Africa*, (London, Karnak House, 1994), pp.162-164.

³⁴ Interview Hassan Bavasah, June 2005, Cape Town. In 1943 the Minister of Interior Harry Lawrence enlisted the services of Bishop Lavis and Dr Gow in setting up the Coloured Action Committee, a special Coloured section of the Department of Interior. The Anti-CAD was established in opposition to the CAC and CAD. Among those elected on the Anti-CAD committee were B. M. Kies and S. Edross who were teachers at Trafalgar. The Trafalgar Cultural Society was formed in the 1950s to stimulate growth through education and to heighten the political awareness of students. It was revived in 1963 with Achmad Cassiem acting as chairperson. Its official newsletter *Voice of Trafalgar*, edited by Cassiem, was denied publication by the principal Jack Meltzer on the basis of the radical nature of its content. This was symptomatic of the political change, and in the shift of balance and power of control from the teachers, who were supporters of TLSA/NEUM, to the students. This shift of

against the destruction of Coloured political rights. The secret of the NEUM was Colouredism because it sought to secure political rights for the petty bourgeoisie and the middle class sector within its ranks through a programme that incorporated the principle of legal action and form a Coloured identity.

The new incumbents at Trafalgar were divided along two political lines. There were those who supported the NEUM/Anti-CAD strategy and their programme of action and those who were NEF affiliates. They were critical of the absence of a strategic plan of mass action directed against the destruction and loss of Non-White political rights throughout the Western Cape and beyond. Between 1945 and 1960 every social and political right of the Coloureds was removed. Coloureds were dispossessed of their land in District Six, Constantia, Claremont and elsewhere in the Western Cape with impunity. The history of forced removals was the life history of the members of the AYA who were affected by the suffering that accompanied the Group Areas Act of 1950. All of them experienced forced removals of some kind and their families were harassed by the government's policies towards people of colour.³⁵

At a meeting of the Anti-CAD held in the Drill Hall Cape Town, which was attended by many teachers from Trafalgar it was decided by a large audience of supporters to pass resolutions rejecting the Separate Representation of Voters Act. Coloured people were called upon to express their opposition to dummy representation.³⁶ It was the Anti-CAD programme in the 1960 at Trafalgar that would create an opportunity for

power to the students was accompanied by a noticeable shift in the class nature of the student population at Trafalgar.

³⁵ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, December 2004, Zeekoevlei.

³⁶ *The Torch*. National Edition, 17 April 1956.

student demonstrations, which for the first time would veer from legal protests to illegal protests and direct confrontation with the law. The prospect of the formation of a group such as the AYA was a consequence of the changing political climate and drop in the level of tolerance by students against the CAD.³⁷

SOCIAL CHANGE IN STUDENT COMPOSITION

The fundamental changes that took place at Trafalgar during the period 1958-1968 were mainly due to the change of the school's social composition from 1958 onwards. It was then that the social composition at Trafalgar fundamentally changed from being a predominantly petty bourgeois school rooted in conservative Christian petty bourgeois values supported by a small educated Christian base and Coloured skilled workers in the 1950s.³⁸ Two groups of teacher factions at Trafalgar in the late 1950s were divided along political lines with one rooted in secular materialism and the other in the subjective liberal prescripts of the NEUM. These two groups included among others Hassan Bavasah and Jack Meltzer in the one group and Ernest Steenveldt and "Pollie" Slingers in the other. There was also another group of teachers, many of whom were white, who did not openly side with, or show the desire to be associated with, any of the previously cited groupings. And finally there was one additional group that was considered apolitical and who preferred to avoid the atmosphere of progressive political interaction and dialogue generated by conditions in the staff room. These teachers during their teaching breaks or lunch hours, preferred to spend all their time in the seclusion of their classrooms.³⁹

³⁷ Interview Achmad Cassiem, October 2005, Lansdowne.

³⁸ Rassool, Yousuf S., *District Six lest we forget: recapturing subjugated cultural histories of Cape Town (1987-1956)*, (Bellville, faculty of Education, UWC), p.31.

³⁹ Interview Goosain Emeran video recording, 18 May 2005, Schotsche Kloof.

In the 1950s Trafalgar changed from being a predominantly petty bourgeois school to a semi-proletarian and proletarian institution. Whereas the previous student record reflected a mainly middle class base, a larger number of students with working class beginnings from District Six and other economically disadvantaged black areas began to enroll. This adjustment in the social composition of the student body was partly responsible for the militancy of the AYA.

The spirit and culture of Trafalgar changed with the entrenchment of inequality in education and relative success of apartheid in the 1960s, which was a period of renewed repression and the legislation of Coloured education through the Department of Coloured Affairs in 1960's. The period of secularism that flourished at Trafalgar up to 1960 died. The third generation of teachers, those who had been students during and just prior to the departure of Kies were returning to their Alma Mater as university graduates. A new era with new challenges awaited their arrival. The CAD had destroyed the ethos of independence in education and a new social class of students had begun to enrol at the school.⁴⁰ These students were predominantly from working class backgrounds whose socio-political experiences were at variance with the students of the past and they would change Trafalgar's course of history. This changing social composition would permit unreserved political interaction between both students and teachers that crystallized in commitment between members of the AYA who were bonded by their commonality and the school's history.⁴¹ Although most of the teaching staff came from a religious background both Christian and

⁴⁰ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, April 2005, Zeekoevlei.

⁴¹ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, April 2005, Zeekoevlei.

Muslim, they inculcated a secular approach to education believing that, “The chief weapon against apartheid, colonialism and capitalist exploitation was the mind. Shared understanding of the nature of oppression and an analytical grasp of how the social friction it engendered could be creatively employed (as) a liberating instrument to be honed afresh at every stage of the struggle”.⁴²

In the 1960s this process changed Trafalgar’s nature from political elitism to a position of mass concern. The choice of protest action changed from a NEUM stance of legality of protest action that would not endanger or expose anyone to action by the state, to illegal protest actions. Instead of the political conformity from the suffocation and demoralization of CAD and apartheid a new vigorous psychology emerged to contest these issues. The tendency of all these new phenomena was to benefit the creation of a social intelligentsia at Trafalgar in the spirit of Russian socialism and of the cultural and political development of the nineteenth century. This tendency unfortunately never crystallized because of the arrests of the AYA by the police and the repressive actions of the apartheid state.⁴³

Trafalgar after 1960 became chiefly a proletarian and semi-proletarian institution. The social composition of the school was partly of the reason for the militancy that prevailed there from 1960 onwards. The NEUM’s legal protests against oppression were rejected with the realization by students of the intransigence of the South African police and the need for radical confrontation. The working class character of the AYA created a synergy that directed the lessons they derived from their social

⁴² Anthony Holiday, *Cape Times*, 14 June 2005.

⁴³ Anthony Holiday, *Cape Times*, 14 June 2005.

practices and political experiences towards finding a solution to end the social and political oppression of Non-Whites.⁴⁴ Members of the AYA at Trafalgar had already been politicised before arriving at the school. Their familiarity with, and understanding of, the socio-economic problems was what was spoken of in every Non-White proletarian household where their political consciousness originated. The AYA had at first been strongly influenced by the militancy and African Nationalism championed by the PAC.

The historical contribution and value of Trafalgar even more than in the 1950s was in the 1960s, where against the background of political inertia and worsening political oppression, an attempt was made by students and teachers to maintain the culture of militancy that was to be found nowhere else in the Cape. The majority of teachers at Trafalgar taught there, at a time when they had a calling above all else to be politically involved.

From the 1970s onwards with the arrival of a new social group of students all this disappeared. As from 1975 onwards this nature of revolutionary fervour at the school was all but gone. The majority of the Coloured petty bourgeois who established themselves as professional businessmen in the Cape had their origins at Trafalgar. The development of the Coloured petty bourgeois at Trafalgar from 1940 –1950, and from 1970 onwards could be distinguished by their social lifestyles.⁴⁵ Their lifestyles, as exemplified by the lifestyles of the Gools and the Abdurahmans, gave an insight into the values of the Coloured petty bourgeois since 1940.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Interview Hassan Bavasah, tape recording, December 2004, Cape Town.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, p.15. It was only when it became clear that no new deals for Blacks would ensue from the state, did Coloured political organisations begin to contemplate seriously how to defend and advance their interests as a group.

⁴⁶ Rassool, (2000), pp. 3-37.

MEMORY OF BASIL FEBRUARY 1964 (THE LUTHULI DETACHMENT)

Basil February was the first student at Trafalgar to be arrested and it is possible his actions influenced the AYA.⁴⁷ He was a loner and avid reader who thought deeply about socio-political developments inside the country. February was very energetic, physically and intellectually, and he was independent as he was original in his way of thinking. During his short stay at Trafalgar to do his Department of Education Joint Matriculation Examination he involved himself with NEUM politics and acquainted himself with James April who was a senior student at Alexander Sinton. In 1963 February and April were arrested and charged for the public painting of political slogans. February was given a penalty of a fine and a suspended sentence and released. April was kept until January 1964 when he was released on bail and the state subsequently withdrew the charges brought against him.

In February of 1964, February and April together, secretly left the country to arrive in Tanzania in May of that year where they joined Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in exile. Politically orientated student action groups of the 1960s like the AYA remain unidentified and acclaimed because of their covert character, which stemmed from the dangerous nature of their function. They remain obscured by the slanted exposure recording and presentation of our recent history. The starkness of is evident in the failure to date to locate the grave of February in Zimbabwe and to appropriately honour those adolescents from the local townships who contributed with their lives to affect a transformed society

⁴⁷ Interview James April, audio, April 1993, at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) after his release from Robben Island where he spent 15 years.

February was a young man who became impatient with the modus operandi of the strategies of the NEUM and Anti-CAD. He disappeared sometime between 1965 and 1967 having left the country to reappear as one of 80 guerrilla fighters who crossed the Zambezi River from Zambia into Rhodesia from where they entered the Wankie Game Reserve. Their mission was a long march home to South Africa. There was a degree of recklessness among students in the 1960's. The NEUM was very quiet on the action of February whereas the ANC and PAC tried to draw political gain from the skirmish between the Luthuli Detachment and the Rhodesian forces at Wankie in which February was killed. The detachment comprised both ANC and APLA cadres. The life story of February as a courageous, intelligent and committed person was later to be used as an example and as a role model for students at Trafalgar. An appeal was made by Emeran to Dullah Omar Minister of Justice to launch an investigation into his death and to have the grave of February located.⁴⁸ There was a certain element of impatience that came to the fore and because of Basil February's passion, commitment and fervour it was felt that he would have excelled in any field. Like February the AYA believed that illegal violent activities would achieve their objectives.

⁴⁸ Van Driel, Nicole (Nicky) Martina, *The Wankie Campaign: the ANC's first armed military operation July-September 1967*, [Online], Available: www.sahistory.org.za/pages/sources/vandriel-thesis/chapter-five.htm [2005/08/17].

CHAPTER 2

DISTRICT SIX:

SITE OF STUDY AND SITE OF STRUGGLE

Our political practices are expressed and constituted by the language in which it is lodged. The language, which we use to portray our environment gets its meaning from the form of political practices within which it develops and grows.¹

The history of District Six is significant because not only was Trafalgar situated in District Six but members of the AYA were well acquainted with the historical conditions of the area through the experiences of their parents and having themselves spent a greater part of their youth and adolescence there. District Six's history is one that runs along lines of division of class, ethnicity, gender and religion. Contrary to popular belief the city was never a homogenous community. The question of sources for the history of District Six is important because the oral and recorded history of dominant groups thrust its language and imagery in a certain direction that construed the people as victims and objects. These comprehensive stereotypical images that were constructed of District Six and its inhabitants included the popular images of coons, gangs, flower sellers and alcohol.² These conjured images were rooted in the lore of oral tradition and the narrated experiences of popular memories that dominated the cultural traditions. In the absence of the culture of writing the image of District Six risked the likelihood of distortion. There was a gross oversimplification of the existing realities, especially by those who preferred the comfort of a conjured

¹ Gibbon, M, *Interpreting politics* (1987), p. 2.

² Nason, Bill., *Oral history and the reconstruction of District Six*, (1986) pp. 4 -5.

narrative, to an inspection *in situ*. This cultural tradition that created stereotypes of the former District Six inhabitants forced them to live through their history as either victims or objects. The face of the community was based on the theory of a contrived situation and the co-modification of its residents for the joy of tourists and the comfort of the dominant elite.

The oral traditions that formed the basis for the transmission of the experiences of their past life unlike the written word vacillated between nostalgia and romanticism.

In as much as the trauma of forced removals exacerbated the effects of the denial of freedom it also romanticized, obscured, and contradicted the life in District Six. The significance of this is found in the crucial preservation of its aesthetic, historic or social value for the generations of former residents of District Six who now domicile on the Cape Flats. For the true history of the area to survive, we have to free ourselves from the myth of District Six and to acknowledge all manner of distinctions that would allow historical enquiry and simple realities to emerge.³

District Six was originally the section of the old centre of Cape Town near Van Riebeeck's Castle. The people of District Six saw themselves as apart from the rest of the city, an impression perpetuated by the apartheid dominance of whites who also lived there. This concept was not applied in the sense of a discreet culture which justified apartheid but rather as an alternative to open rebelliousness or public protest. The relationships amongst its inhabitants were strained because the physical dwellings occupied by members of the various communities were divided.

³ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, *Origins of early District Six*. (1987). pp. 19 – 21.

Before 1750 Cape Town had very little in terms of housing accommodation or residential developments although houses built on the Heerengracht were of higher value and prestige. This physical expansion would later become a salient feature in the strategy of social division by the apartheid government in terms of the forced removals of the inhabitants of District Six and would become one of many political rallying points of the AYA at Trafalgar. It was towards the end of the 1700s and early 1800s that the disparity between the poorer and wealthier sections of the town was becoming more obvious and distinct. Cape Town and especially the area that would later become District Six was a growing community of free inhabitants that provided the arts and crafts required for the transient population and ships crews. The larger number of inhabitants comprised Company employees who were primarily of Dutch descent. Poverty was becoming more visible by 1829 and was heightened by the influx of impoverished families from Britain who had immigrated to the rural Cape hinterland.⁴ It was the residence of among others craftsmen, blacksmiths, and free slaves. By 1840 there was an intermingling of classes that were locked in structural poverty and connected by their employment in the docks, railway or fishing industry. It was an area where in 1820 three out of four inhabitants were tenants. The colonialists at the Cape, as was the practice of colonialist's world wide, applied the phenomenology of racism and developed ethnic stereotypes of slaves. This resulted in terms of the structures of dominance and power relations that most blacks were too poor to buy property and they were forced to live in hired rooms. Cape Town rapidly became a town with an economic divide and had been transformed into a community of two towns. The two-town perception included those people who lived "behind" and

⁴ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, *The history of Cape Town: the making of a city.*(1987), pp. 120-121.

those who lived “between” the rows of geometrically constructed houses and the streets as informal dwellers or squatters.⁵

The community of District Six formed part of a lower class of a residential group that comprised a broad cross section of people of local and foreign origins and of settler and Khoi combined. The political status of the community in District Six was determined by pigmentation and since the inhabitants were predominantly Non-White working class tenants the area suffered accordingly.⁶ The physical infrastructure of the area degenerated rapidly into slum conditions as a result of the absentee landlord, poverty and tenant syndrome that developed. Most landlords who were foreign and white were wary of the economic decline of the area and moved to exclusive up-market residences situated outside the immediacy of the city bowl leaving the economic decline for which they were accountable. There were very few whites living in the area at the time and the council preferred to maintain services in the exclusive white enclaves.⁷

In District Six lived quality craftsmen including tailors, cobblers, blacksmiths, builders, painter, mechanics and hawkers and many other sought after trades. There were also many family businesses in existence many of whom operated from within their homes and from makeshift outbuildings or from their “stoeps” (verandahs). Entire families often participated in the business venture to try and make a success of the practice and many did. But the majority of this tenant community owed their frail

⁵ Field, Sean, (ed.) *Lost Communities, living memories: remembering forced removals in Cape Town*, (2001), pp. 15-17.

⁶ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, *Origins of early District Six*. (1987), pp. 62- 63

⁷ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, and Van Heyningen, Elizabeth, (eds.), *Cape Town: the making of a city*, (1998), pp. 170-172.

existence and their economic dependence to the disguised stranglehold of a predominantly white business class in the Central Business District (CBD).⁸ Here were the biggest contractors of the cheap labour that the area had to offer in abundance.⁹ Most of the tenants who sold their labour worked as stevedores in the docks, in the railway goods yards, as cleaners in the city's office blocks, and as labourers for the city council. They found the proximity of District Six that was within walking distance to their place of work convenient and the rentals charged by the absentee landlords for the tiny rooms just affordable.

The District Six small traders, hawkers and household entrepreneurs admittedly provided a service that contributed to the stability and marginal interdependence of the majority of their clients in the community. But these small businesses posed no threat to white capital or the ruling power established by the dominant culture. The fierce competition for scarce resources was the cause of District Six becoming a place of poverty and over crowdedness.¹⁰ Alongside this existed an ethos of neighbourliness and a community spirit that strove for solidarity and cultivated a degree of political awareness that would stimulate the consciousness of the AYA and serve as a reminder of the deprivation and suffering of the community from which they came.¹¹

The bulk of the wages that were earned in the clothing, furniture and shoe factories was returned to the coffers of the bosses as the money was duly spent on purchasing

⁸ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, *Origins of early District Six* (1987), pp. 65-67.

⁹ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, and Van Heyningen, Elizabeth, (eds.), *Cape Town: the making of a city*, (1998), pp. 250-253.

¹⁰ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, "Origins and history of early District Six to 1910", in *Cabo* 4(2), (1987), p. 19.

¹¹ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, *Origins of early District Six* (1987), pp. 67- 68.

those very items needed for household consumption. The community of District Six was an ever-growing neighbourhood that guaranteed a high turnover and demand for consumables. The location of District Six being in close proximity to the CBD became a rallying point between capitalism and white dominance that was both desirable and contradictory. Having recognized the difference in power relations the District Six community opted for economic prosperity and spatial growth within the confines of their communities. But mindful of the relations of dominance that existed in the policies and practices of the government the inhabitants covertly continued to build a relationship of resistance. Many inhabitants preferred to place tolerance and broad-mindedness above their demands for political rights. This was an important point of frequent discussions in the households of members of the AYA.¹²

The perception of stereotypes and foreign prescripts when recalling the community of District Six immediately comes to mind. However when delving below the surface veneer one encounters the memory of a place of sanctuary for its inhabitants of a quality that harbours a distinct social code. This theoretical social code of conduct was structured around the family, religion, the neighbourhood and the workplace.¹³ It also included a historical narrative that tells of a lifestyle led by the residents of District Six that was shaped by socio-political prescripts, the origins of which can be traced back to the history of colonialism and the subsequent history of apartheid at the Cape. These negative prescripts helped to reinforce the concept later developed and partially accepted by the residents in their attempt to deal with the problem namely the coons. By distancing themselves into become a community apart from the rest of the city they sought to remedy the problem of being stereotyped. This action was a

¹² Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

counter measure to the shift in the equilibrium of political power by the government. It was manifest in the development of a dialect and culture that was distinct to the community of District Six. Aspects of this were later used as a channel for communication by the AYA during solitary confinement at Caledon Square Police Station and during imprisonment on Robben Island.¹⁴

The neighbourhood of District Six was a place of sanctuary in that it provided a safe haven to the community against overt acts of subjugation and oppression. The residents found solace in the collective spirit that was shared in the elements of culture and heritage. These were explicit in the dialect, a degree of religious tolerance, the realization of their economic interdependence and a developing political understanding that set an example for the AYA to pursue.

The office of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) that opened in Hanover Street used culture for the inculcation of political consciousness amongst the youth of all religious denominations. Notwithstanding the fact that the Muslim and Christian faiths were an integral part of the cultural awareness and spiritual growth that was central to the spiritual upliftment of the communities of District Six. Cassiem's father was a founder member of the MYM branch that operated from Hanover Street. The branch was situated in the lane approximately thirty metres or so from the entrance to the Star Bioscope in Hanover Street or diagonally across from the only fish market in the area. Hanover Street was the economic hub of District Six.

¹³ Bickford-Smith, Vivian, "Origins and history of early District Six to 1910", in *Cabo* 4(2), (1987), p. 20.

¹⁴ Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance*, p. 157. Subordinate groups as in District Six often sought to find ways of expressing a dissonant view through their cultural life simply as response to an official culture that was invariably demeaning.

The heritage of District Six was to be found in the names of streets – Hanover Street, Caledon Street, William Street, Constitution Street – the significance of which lay in the area surrounding these thoroughways and the people who lived there.¹⁵ The struggle to resuscitate the social organizations of the communities who had been relocated to the Cape Flats has failed and presently remains undeveloped because the elements of social regeneration could never be recreated to what existed in District Six. The narrative of Hettie Adams and William Street captures the spirit of the cultures of District Six in terms of its gender consciousness and use of the dialect.¹⁶ One needs to have had a good understanding of the nuances to fully grasp the value of Smith's testimony. The place that was once real, its ensuing events and the people of William Street, are transformed by memory into myth. The history of the absentee landlords, good neighbourliness and warm community spirit is set in the all too familiar tone of a people's will to survive. The colloquium that includes the antics of "moffies" (men who are of homosexual, bisexual or transvestite orientation), priests, gangsters, horses, vagrants, artisans, business entrepreneurs and politicians are terms that in their current context may have a different interpretation and meaning.

District Six was at times a violent place although the perception of the overwhelming majority is that it was a place of tolerance, love and kindness. The community had developed the willingness to take what life had to offer and give it meaning. It was a place that embodied togetherness of a kind that gave residents a sense of place and belonging. It is a memory of sensitivity that hovers between nostalgia and the longing

¹⁵ Rassool, Ciraj, and Prosalendis, Sandra, (eds.) *Recalling community in Cape Town: creating and curating the District Six Museum*, (Cape Town, District Six Museum, 2001), pp. 51-54.

¹⁶ Adams, Hettie and Suttner, Hermione, *William Street, District Six*, (Diep River, Chameleon Press, 1988) pp. 41-43

by ex-residents for the return of a lost period which is perceived to have offered relative freedom from conflict and hardship.¹⁷

The ethnic divisions under apartheid formed the basis for separate development in District Six. Segregation was inherited from white colonialist rule and was later refined to engineer the destruction of the area. The Coloured, white and black people who constituted the community of District Six exemplified the meaning of cosmopolitan identity of the place. The cross flow of ideas transformed the focus of the community on education and made room for a society that was able to connect on various levels. The various political influences ranged from NEUM /TLSA influence from a bourgeois perspective to the influence of the NLF and the Communist Party (CP) and later the ANC and Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU) members had a strong sense of socio-political identity with the community of District Six as did the AYA. The ideological relationships and cross flow of ideas was useful in the development and encouragement of critical thinking and the transformation of people's attitudes to their situation of entrapment under the existing rule of law.¹⁸

Most of the teachers at Trafalgar, Harold Cressy and other state subsidized schools situated in District Six were members of the TLSA. Many of their colleagues at missionary and other educational institutions in the area were also members. The dominant language Afrikaans was the medium of instruction at many primary and pre-primary schools, like the Central Methodist Mission at 25A Buitenkant Street,

¹⁷ Swanson, Felicity, and Harrison, Jane, *Ja so was District Six*. pp. 62 – 63.

¹⁸ Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, p.13. Lewis argues the fact that those people broadly described as Coloured were not a homogenous political, class or social group, and that their diverse origin impeded their political mobilisation even up to today.

(now District Six Museum) and Wesleyan School in Albertus Street, which was a Christian Missionary Institution. Rahmanyiya was also one of Dr. Abdurahman's establishments that operated strictly from a Muslim cultural and religious ethical premise. These institutions were out of the immediate influence and control of the NEUM and its language preference of English as a medium of instruction. This situation invariably exposed young Coloured students to the dilemma of racial identity because English was perceived as the language of the elite. It was one of the anecdotal complaints James Marsh related when he enrolled at Trafalgar that he felt uncomfortable having to communicate in English. He felt disadvantaged because English was the medium of instruction and his mother tongue was Afrikaans.¹⁹

The schools of District Six made an important contribution to the maintenance and development of various cultural customs and traditions practiced by the communities living there. The social conditions also exposed those most vulnerable to the negative influences of the dominant culture. The dominant language of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools was a means by which the CAD entrenched segregation policy of the state. The NEUM in fighting segregation in education chose English as the medium of instruction. Many students from Afrikaans speaking backgrounds found this well-meaning policy of the NEUM destabilizing, because they were through this policy inadvertently being doubly disadvantaged. In as much as they were firstly disadvantaged by the state and secondly by an environment that was perceived to be hostile by virtue of English being its language preference.

¹⁹ Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, p.13. Lewis argues the fact that those people broadly described as Coloured were not a homogenous political, class or social group, and that their diverse origin impeded their political mobilisation even up to today.

In South Africa, as in other colonial countries, political action was initially legal action such as by the NEUM/TLSA. When the official and peaceful channels are exhausted the militants, the AYA and others hardened their positions.²⁰ The AYA chose radical action because they believed that there was an internal connection between language and action had to extend beyond theory. The students' immediate and enthusiastic response to the call by the Anti-CAD for full democratic rights had spread amongst the students at Trafalgar. Such was the response to the Anti-CAD that they could militantly reply to the government minister's threat to use his power to confine them to concentration camps; the Coloured community was not going to be frightened by the threat.²¹

During the 1960s and 1970s in District Six serious pockets of political resistance had emerged from within the community and out of the "Manichean conflict" between the secularist and dualists who commanded some form of political leverage in the area. They jointly collaborated through plans of action that were devised in opposition to and against the debilitating forces of colonial/apartheid oppression. Many individual attacks on the apparatus that symbolized oppression were launched by persons like Sedick Levy. Levy was caught by the police, found guilty and imprisoned on Robben Island in 1960, for placing an explosive device (Molotov cocktail) against the side door of Roeland Street Prison. But in as much as Levy's action was an attempt to highlight the plight of the oppressed in his pointed attack on one of the prime symbols of apartheid, it was not an isolated incident nor was he a maverick as many antagonists from the Non-White community suggested. There were other audacious

²⁰ Fanon, *Studies in a dying colonialism*, (1959) p.101.

²¹ Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, p. 227. The Vietnamese, who died before the firing squads, were not hoping that their sacrifice would bring about the re-appearance of a past but like the AYA their pledge was for the sake of the present and the future.

albeit futile attempts to oppose and subvert the growing power and brutality of the government. The evidence of this opposition progressively began to fill every page of the daily editions of the liberal press and issues of the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* that appeared on the city streets. What did emerge was an element of political consciousness the nature of which was of a developing covert class collaboration and class confrontation that was directed against the power of the state.

STUDY AND STRUGGLE

The ideological relationship and cross flow of ideas that permeated the communities of District Six and the students from Trafalgar increased after 1960 because of the increase of more locally resident students who enrolled there. It was the influence of their social interaction and the proletarian and semi-proletarian backgrounds that changed the social composition of the school and the direction of the dominant political consciousness of individuals who schooled there. Many students who travelled from outlying areas on the Cape Flats had to commute daily through District Six on their way to and from school. This daily routine was an eye opening experience to those from petty bourgeois families forcing them to internalize and come to understand the political context of society.²² Many other students would leave homes that were in a similar material condition to those found in District Six. The experience was invaluable since it exposed the squalid reality and the gross level of disparity between the socially advantaged and disadvantaged sectors of society who were living cheek by jowl. These conditions were fundamental elements in the realization of the concept of study and struggle of the AYA and others in terms of their programme of transformation and change.

²² Interview James Marsh, video recording 7 August 2005, Lansdowne.

The social interaction between the students and the community of District Six, whether formal or informal, was fundamental to the building of capacity for future political engagement and in the process transformed their vision of that society. The experience was ongoing and affected students on a daily basis and in their daily life. It was a situation that students and others could not easily avoid and one that inevitably raised the question of the qualitative aspects of change from an oppressive to an egalitarian society which were in terms of study and struggle what the AYA aspired to assist the broader democratic movement to realize.²³

²³ Interview James Marsh, video recording 7 August 2005, Lansdowne.

CHAPTER 3

THE ORIGINS OF THE GROUP ASSOCIATION YOUNG AFRICA

c1963-1964

The period 1959-1963 was a period of great political instability. In education there was increased political tension as a result of the stranglehold of CAD as well as the consolidation of structural apartheid. During this time a number of important events occurred that were to have a fundamental influence on the outcome of the history of Trafalgar.

The Sharpeville Massacre on 21 March 1960 made an indelible impression on members of the AYA. At the trial of the AYA the intransigence of the army and their brutality towards the unarmed Sharpeville marchers were cited among the reasons for the radical choice of retaliatory action. They had concluded along with others that the only alternative was a protracted armed struggle. Sharpeville finally rested the notion that the state could be overthrown by general strikes and legal action. The agenda of the members of the AYA unit was rooted in the Sharpeville Massacre and in the subsequent bombing at Park Station, Johannesburg, on the 24 July 1964 by John Harris a political activist and member of the African Resistance Movement (ARM). The formation of the ARM and their acts of sabotage that included the blowing up of rural electricity pylons and railway signal points on the suburban line from Rondebosch to Cape Town got headline coverage

in the newspapers.¹ Then there was the dramatic incident that followed when John Harris who was a member of the ARM planted the suitcase bomb on a platform reserved for Whites at Johannesburg station. Harris was a white liberal in terms of the terminology used at the time. A woman died in the explosion but Cassiem reports that the police were made aware of the presence of the bomb and its location but that they used the incident to justify the wave of oppression that followed in their efforts to crush the liberation movements. Harris was the only white South African to be found guilty and was executed by the apartheid government for a political crime. Other acts of sabotage were by the Yu Chi Chan group and ARM came to an abrupt end with the arrests of Neville Alexander, Marcus Solomons, Bettie and Les van der Heyden, Eddie Daniels and John Scott for acts of sabotage.²

In 1964 the level of political agitation and acts of defiance had shifted from a phase of resistance by the NEUM and Anti-CAD of organizing of mass meetings and marches as a response to the laws of subjugation and oppression, to one of radical action.³ The NEUM aimed to unite members of the Coloured, Black and Indian communities. It was a federal

¹ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne. Little did Cassiem realize that whilst in prison as an awaiting trial prisoner he would meet up with these people whom he had read about and who had committed these acts of sabotage. Eddie Daniels was a founder member of the ARM. He was sentenced to 15 years for committing acts of sabotage. Daniels was assisted by the AYA in an attempted escape from Pollsmoor Prison in 1964.

² Fran Buntman, *Robben Island the prisoner resistance to Apartheid*, 2003 p. 18. By 1963 and 1964, hundreds of men from around the country had been banished to the Island. They were imprisoned for furthering the aims of the banned PAC and ANC and for engaging in organised acts of violence and sabotage against apartheid. In some cases, like the Yu Chi Chan Club and the NFL four men were each sentenced to ten years imprisonment for reading

³ Sarah Mokone, *Majority rule*, p. 79. "The aim of the NEUM, was to unite in a national political organisation all those who had no vested interest in a colour bar".

body of a number of independent organizations each with its own presuppositions, constitution, and conceptions of the political road that lay ahead. Included in the movement were the Cape African Teachers Association (CATA), the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA), and the African Voters Association (CAVA). The unifying factor for these organizations within the NEUM was a programme of democratic demands and a method of struggle based on the principle of non-collaboration and boycotts. The NEUM had always been a movement that was rooted in the intellectual layers of the Non-Whites and amongst the petty bourgeoisie and consequently it never captured the South African political platform on a mass scale like the Congress Movement did. However, the latter failed to progress beyond the politics of mass action only which resulted in the exclusion of a revolution in the cultural sense that underlines fundamental changes.⁴

The Cape Peninsula Students Union (CPSU), which was established as a rallying point outside of the NEUM was radicalizing students. Originally as young academics from UCT they set out to establish representative contact groups for Non-White students to challenge racial education and to galvanize radical student action against Bantu education. The AYA did not operate in isolation. They took example from historical events that occurred in China, Algeria and in the actions of the Cape Peninsula Students Union (CPSU).⁵ The CPSU was a student body whose origins and concerns were similar to that of the AYA. The CPSU was founded in opposition to Bantu education and its existence that became a topic for debate within the NEF and the Society of Young Africans (SOYA) for more than a year. The Unity Movement was never interested in

⁴ Baruch Hirson, *A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement: An Insider's View* [Online] Available: <http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/History/Neum.html> p.1.

student movements, which they considered reckless and which they regarded with suspicion from their studies of nationalism and student movements in Europe. The CPSU in its endeavour to form a progressive nationalist students' organization networked all high schools that became fertile grounds for recruitment to the NEUM, ANC, PAC, BCM and other political entities in the 1960s. The CPSU's objective of becoming a progressive national student organization was partly obscured by the elitism of the NEUM and the founding of the ANC youth league through the formation of the African Students' Association that cut across the structure of the CPSU. Their programme of action that bordered on illegality and acceptance of the position of the All African Convention (AAC) as opposed to the position of the Anti-CAD brought them into disrepute.⁶

Violent action of any kind was never considered an option by the CPSU although protest action was an option. Their main thrust was directed at the political development and education of students and through its organ *The Student*, the CPSU could communicate their ideas to students countrywide. The CPSU progressed as far as to organize a junior CPSU for students who were in standards or grades below Junior Certificate (Grade 10) in realizing their vision of a Progressive National Students Organization (PNSO). The organizers of the CPSU included Neville Alexander, Kenny Abrahams, Dulcie September, Carl Brecker, and others who were always discouraged by the NEUM from tacking any action that was deemed illegal. This confirmed the impression that the NEUM was simply not prepared after 1948 to go on to the streets in protest regardless of what the issues were. The CPSU objected to and defied the leadership of the Anti-CAD

⁵ Interview James Marsh, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

⁶ Interview Neville Alexander, video recording 30 May 2005, Claremont.

and NEUM who preferred the prescribed legal and abstentionist manner and approach of protesting as opposed to one of illegality.⁷

Meanwhile the breakaway party of the CPSU comprising Neville Alexander, Kenny Abrahams, Dulcie September, Kenny Jordaan, and others formed the National Liberation Front (NLF) that propagated an armed response to the system of apartheid. Although they had approximately 150 cadres who were combat ready at the time of their arrests they eventually failed because they lacked mass based support and the resources that were available to other revolutionary groups. The NLF used its newspaper *The Student* even after the arrests in 1963.⁸

Importantly the fear of retaliation of a brutal nature by the apartheid state curbed and deterred the NEUM from taking any action, which was a class position to which both the NLF and the AYA had scant regard. Contrary to the dictums of the TLSA/NEUM the NLF and as demonstrated by the AYA at Trafalgar who took it upon themselves to decide that armed struggle was to be the main thrust to achieve liberation as exemplified in China, Algeria, and Cuba. The AYA in their interaction on a personal level or through the integrated student programmes involving students from Trafalgar were influenced by the politics of the CPSU and its progressive influences. This development was terminated with the period of state repression from 1963 and the arrests of Neville Alexander,

⁷ Interview Neville Alexander, video recording 30 May 2005, Claremont.

⁸ Interview Neville Alexander, video recording 30 May 2005, Claremont.

Marcus Solomon, Kenny Jordaan, Fikile Bam, Les van der Heyden and others and ironically later with the AYA arrests and termination of the political actions of the AYA.

EVENTS AT TRAFALGAR LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE AYA

The events leading to the formation of the AYA included the official transfer of Coloured education from Cape Provincial Administration to the Coloured Affairs Department that took place under the authority of the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs I. D. Du Plessis (1962); the arrival at the school of Ravens, who was to be labelled a CAD stooge by radicalised students; the change in the social nature of the school with the influx of students from all over the Cape Peninsula who were from proletariat and semi-proletariat backgrounds; and that Trafalgar began to feel the effects of the “chicken run” as teachers who feared retrenchments as a result of the “Colourdisation” of education under CAD in the 1960s, began to emigrate for Canada and Australia. Those teachers who stayed were served with banning orders or transferred to posts in remote areas as an alternative to resigning from their posts. Founder members of the NEUM at Trafalgar who constituted the “old guard”, Edross, Greeff and Meissenheimer emigrated. It was destroyed by the scuttling away of its leadership by emigrating because of the increase of political pressure on education from the CAD state apparatus and the severity of the banning orders and restrictions served.⁹

The Department of Coloured Affairs had declared Trafalgar a breeding ground for radicals and had identified certain teachers as abettors and instigators to the radical cause.

⁹ Interview Ernest Lennert, audiotape, 21 January 2005, Goedverwacht

Ravens was the choice of the CAD sent expressly to quell the revolutionary spirit amongst students and teachers alike. It was during this period, in March 1962 that Ravens appeared unannounced to replace Steenveldt, who was the choice of students, as head of the school. My interview with Emeran who followed Steenveldt as the “legitimate” successor and served as principal from 1966-1995 revealed that staff members knew who Ravens was and that he was not “a faceless person but that he could have been an acquaintance.”¹⁰ According to Ernie Lennert, Steenveldt, with support from the school committee, staff and students was nominated to fill the position of principal.¹¹ The vacancy had come about with the retirement of P. R. Heneke who was acting-principal. The CAD refused to implement the recommendation of Joyce Meissenheimer, Slingers and others who were serving on the school committee that Kies should be principal. The school committee then nominated Steenveldt as acting principal, a position he held until the arrival of Cliffy Ravens. During the second term of schooling in 1963 Ravens replaced Steenveldt as acting principal. Ravens tried to take control of the school against the wishes of staff and students at Trafalgar. In 1963 Cliffy Ravens took over as the principal.

This incident caused a major rupture in the equilibrium of power politics and unleashed a tirade of violent student action against Ravens and the CAD at Trafalgar that was unprecedented at any school in the Cape. A spontaneous and totally unsuspected backlash by students against Ravens erupted from the morning of Monday 5 May 1963 that he set

¹⁰ Interview Goosain Emeran, video recording, June 2005, Schotsche Kloof.

¹¹ Ernie Lennert joined Trafalgar in 1962 from Genadendal where he taught at Emil Weder.

foot in the office of the principal until his departure a broken man. The campaign lasted three weeks during which time students launched a flurry of creative albeit brutal attacks against his character. There was Anti-CAD protest action by students at Trafalgar including painting slogans on the walls of the school building. These slogans denounced Ravens as a government “stooge” and the CAD as a government “puppet”.¹² Commercial companies delivered wreaths purportedly mourning his death to the principal’s office from anonymous sympathizers. Another incident was when sugar was poured into the petrol tank of Ravens’ car and the registration number changed from CA to CAD. This major uprising amongst students at the school was in protest against CAD’s attempts to undermine the morale of the school and to entrench CAD control. It also brought about the formation of the AYA in 1963 as a radical student group.

In retaliation there was action by the police Special Branch (SB) who regularly visited the school premises and entered the classrooms unannounced and without authorization of the principal. The SB also planted and used spies at schools including Trafalgar.¹³ One day in November 1963 I was escorted from our home in Canterbury flats District Six by “Spyker” Van Wyk and his brother to Caledon Square Police Station for questioning. Unknown to me Kolia, a Trafalgar student, had been arrested the day before in connection with the disturbances at Trafalgar that stemmed from the anti-Ravens’ campaign and the revolutionary slogans that appeared on the exterior and interior walls of

¹² Mokone, *Majority rule: some notes*, p. 20. The terms “puppets” and “collaborator” (although very rarely used today) still retain the air of sharp condemnation they acquired when used against those who sold out to the apartheid state.

¹³ Interview Goosain Emeran, video recording, 1 June 2005, Schotsche Kloof. Oppression had delivered a degree of socio-economic insecurity that made some individuals easy prey to corruption and to work as informers for the government.

the school building. A few days after my return to school I was called aside by Lennert for a debriefing session. At first I could not grasp the line of questions and the motive for his conduct. I later realised that teachers feared being implicated by the students during interrogation by the SB. Our hatred for the police was deep seated and we were "tough" but one could never be too confident of their methods to undermine that determination. Many questions remain unanswered. Kolia, who went abroad after matriculating, died in a boat accident in Canada in 1980. It was never revealed how the SB came to visit me in 1963 when Kolia and I were lone operatives.

At Trafalgar Steenveldt was returned to office after Ravens was forced to resign as principal from the school having suffered a nervous breakdown in 1963. During the first assembly Steenveldt called for the return of the "Spirit of Trafalgar!" Student study groups were being arranged and attended by members of the AYA These reading groups would gather at a pre-arranged venue that would normally be the home of one of the students. The home of Achmad Cassiem in Pontac Street or that of another colleague Gajjar in Goldsmith Road Salt River became regular venues for discussions that were TLSA controlled around the sweeping changes of independence that was taking place in Equatorial Africa with Guinea Bissau in 1962 and the turmoil that developed in the Congo with the voices of Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba as did Julius Nyerere of Tanzania in his clamour for "Uhuru".

Prior to the arrival of Ravens there was a peaceful co-existence between George Meissenheimer who represented the Fourth International (FI) at the school and Steenveldt

who had aligned himself with the NEUM. Despite ideological differences between members of the FI and the NEUM they acted collectively to support the agenda of the Anti-CAD.¹⁴ The programme of the Anti-CAD was an important instrument of change devised by the NEF to fight Non-White education.¹⁵ Members and affiliates of the TLSA included the majority of teachers at Trafalgar who supported Anti-CAD. The understanding of a working alliance between the F.I. and NEUM supporters was therefore an option that was taken in the interest of a common political cause and of the fight against oppression. They shared an ethos to use education as a tool for the development of the broader Non-White community.

There were additional undercurrents other than political and ideological differences between the FI and NEUM. These elements of political difference created an opportunity for factionalism to impinge on the freedom of choice about the candidate who would succeed Hencke. One such underlining cause of tension between the FI (Meissenheimer, Meltzer and later Bavasah) and the NEUM (Steenveldt, Slingers, and Lennert) was the submission of Jack Meltzer's application for the post. Meltzer was an affiliate of the FI and a brilliant scholar but was unsuccessful in his application. The result was attributed to the dual nature and influence of Christian ethics of the NEUM affiliates and the opposing secular Marxist political position of the FI.¹⁶ The decision of the majority of the school

¹⁴ The Fourth International or FI was a group of Trotskyists who believed that the workers were the vanguard of the struggle. The NEUM considered teachers to be the vanguard of the struggle. The main achievement of the Anti-CAD was that it mobilized a generation of Coloured intellectuals immunizing them against Marxist theory.

¹⁵ Mokone, *Majority rule: some notes*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Interview Hassan Bavasah, November 2004, Zeekoevlei.

committee was subjectively swayed away from Meltzer in favour of Steenveldt.¹⁷ There were murmurings amongst the staff reflecting their middle class positions, that Meltzer, a UCT graduate was academically more qualified for the post than Steenveldt with a Teacher's Training Diploma, but their disapproval at the outcome never reached more than a murmur.¹⁸ In fairness to the NEUM, Meltzer who was a member of FI and ideologically opposed to the NEUM was an acquaintance of Ravens and ambiguous on the question of Ravens' imposition on Trafalgar by CAD and was therefore objectively part of the state's manipulation. To be ambiguous like Meltzer was to support the state. Meltzer's position was formed within a political ideology and indicative of the FI's political standpoint.

There was no open animosity between teachers although tensions that emanated from political differences did exist. These ideological impasses manifested themselves in the heated debates that intermittently flared between the two rival political camps. These interactions influenced the students and may have influenced members of the AYA who were grappling and trying to come to terms with the various political ideologies and the colonial apartheid scheme.¹⁹ And although there was the perception from teachers that students were ignorant of the disputes, the antagonists and supporters from the student

¹⁷ Interview Hassan Bavasah, November 2004, Zeekoevlei.

¹⁸ Interview Goosain Emeran, video recording, June 2005, Schotsche Kloof. He was principal at Trafalgar from 1965-1985.

¹⁹ Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*, p. 77 One of the problems of the concept of hegemony is the implicit assumption that the ideological incorporation of subordinate groups will necessarily diminish social conflict.

ranks held fiercely and openly contested ongoing debates led by amongst others Reginald Africa and Peter Masondo.

As intimated, Trafalgar was not the only institution in the forefront of struggle against the CAD. Early in his career as a teacher trainer at Livingstone, Neville Alexander realized the importance of language and the absence of the study of African history at Non-White schools. He understood language as a tool for the successful inclusion of culture and politics in realizing revolutionary goals. Alexander and his close associates Allie Fataar, Kenny Jordaan and Les van der Heyden joined forces with Francois Abrahamse, Prinston Abrahamse and others who were totally committed to education. High Schools like Livingstone, Harold Cressy, South Peninsula and Trafalgar were hotbeds of Unity Movement politics. They debated the idea of teachers being the “vanguard of the struggle” which was a TLSA / NEUM position at a time when the teachers were not prepared to give up their livelihood for the struggle for liberation.²⁰

Interactive meetings of student groups were arranged for the purpose of political discussions. These meetings were at times held at school venues and on other occasions at private venues and were attended by Cassiem, Marsh, Azad Kolia, Esme Adriaanse, Cynthia Jacobs, Gregory Steenveldt, Lucy Smith and other students from Trafalgar. These forums were expressly initiated by teachers from the TLSA and breakaway National Liberation Front (NLF) to galvanize support for the programme of the Anti-CAD and to encourage students into the forefront of struggle politics. Furthermore these

meetings served to encourage students to interact and to study of the newly found freedom and independence of countries on the African continent north of the equator. A phenomenon that was later to be characterized by Harold Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech, which he delivered on 3 February 1960 in the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town and the achievement of political independence by the Ivory Coast and other African countries (from which members of the AYA drew great inspiration). The "Wind of Change" speech was important because it was the first public statement of Britain's acknowledgement of Black Nationalist movements in Africa. Macmillan acknowledged that black people in Africa were quite rightly claiming the right to rule themselves. He went on to say that the wind of change, whether we liked it or not, was the growth of national consciousness and that was a political fact.²¹

It must be emphasized that although teachers were politicised through the TLSA and other progressive organs countrywide the AYA were committed to move beyond the realms of the radicalism of rhetoric, which they identified as a flaw in the TLSA/NEUM alliance. The AYA had individually identified armed revolutionary strategy, as a means to achieving political goals even before the idea of coming together to form a political group had been considered.

²⁰ Neville Alexander was co-founder member of the National Liberation Front. In 1964 he was convicted of conspiracy to commit sabotage and imprisoned on Robben Island until 1974. [Online] Available: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/alexander.n.htm> [2005/08/12]

²¹ Boddy-Evans, Alistair "Wind of change" speech made by Harold Macmillan to the South African Parliament in 1960, [Online] Available: http://africanhistory.about.com/od/eraofindependence/a/wind_of_change1.htm

MEMBERS OF THE AYA AT TRAFALGAR

Intense discussions took place amongst the AYA members Achmad Cassiem, Sedick Isaacs and James Marsh to determine the political nature of the group and the type of action they envisaged. The school was an ideal place to meet since it was seen as neutral in the sense that they had permission as bona fide students to be on the premises which dispelled unwarranted attention that any gatherings would have aroused.

The theoretical aspects of the formation and historical association of the group were left to Cassiem who was a friend of Yusuf Da Costa. Cassiem and Da Costa had a penchant for historical data.²² Da Costa was a past student of Isaacs who schooled at Trafalgar prior to Isaacs' arrest. In 1962 Cassiem had met Marsh at Trafalgar before the formation of the AYA and discussed the increase in state oppression and declining political climate in the broader context of decolonisation. They discovered a shared social consciousness between themselves and a common political ideal, which led to Marsh joining the AYA. The rest of the group had met before they formed the cell. Abdurahman Abrahams for example, knew Isaacs and worked clandestinely with Isaacs and Cassiem but Abrahams was unaware of the existence of Marsh and the cell at Trafalgar.²³

The AYA on one level was a student body from which students were chosen for the underground level. This was done without the knowledge of people on the outside or teachers. The core group quickly developed into a fairly big group because a number of

²² Interview Sedick Isaacs on September 2005, Athlone. The AYA planned to place an explosive device at the UWC Chemistry Department. They had planned to clear the department of all the chemicals, which they were going to use in other attacks.

²³ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

Isaacs' friends, who lived in the neighbourhood, like Abrahams and Sulaiman Keraan, got involved. Achmad had recruited the secretary of *The Voice of Trafalgar* as a driver although she did not know what her mission was, and Marsh. Cassiem had designed a badge that he wanted his mother, who was working at Ensign Clothing Factory in District Six, to have embroidered but this was aborted because of their arrests.

SEDICK ISAACS

As an activist and graduate in science Isaacs remembers the energy involved in the founding of the group. The political discussions in the meetings at the time, as he recalled, included the subject of apartheid oppression and the dichotomy of white and black disparity that formed the basis and nucleus of all the tension and the suffering that was being experienced by the Non-White communities countrywide.²⁴

During my interviews with Sedick Isaacs I endeavoured to find out what had transpired one day at Trafalgar. I had inadvertently come across the three Cassiem, Isaacs and Marsh having a meeting in the classroom. It was interval and the fact that they were sitting inside Isaacs' classroom, the physical science laboratory and the expression on their faces upon seeing me was a clear indication that there was something amiss. Isaacs in trying to skirt the incident of my recollection, and I had wondered why, had remarked that he was never good at history and believed that it was a futile subject about which one has to write examinations. Isaacs considered Cassiem to fit the role of historian and he

²⁴ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording September 2005, Athlone.

felt that “it is better to explore history than to repress or deny it”.²⁵ The liaison between Isaacs and Cassiem grew out of a cultural-socio and political bond.

I detected that the incident bothered him then although I allowed it to pass with the hope of recapping at a later stage in our discussion. He nevertheless admitted that he did not at the time know who the person was peeping at the window since the wall was concealing that person’s identity. Had I been aware of their plans I could have been suspiciously implicated as a “squealer”. Subsequent to my investigation and according to Marsh another senior student by the name of Dawood Gaibie had also seen this group and had enquired from Marsh as to what it was that demanded that level of pre-occupation. Marsh admitted in a subsequent interview that he was concerned at Dawood’s remarks because they had been members of a reading group and political student exchange programme at the school and I knew Dawood was well read and street wise. I felt that my observation of them acting suspiciously at the time had to be raised since there was the suspicion or perception by members of the group that someone from outside could have leaked sensitive information, which may have led to their arrest.²⁶

ACHMAD CASSIEM

Cassiem was born in Cape Town and stayed for a number of years next to the Mosque in Queen Street Mowbray. With the introduction of the Group Areas Act the family was forced to move to District Six and they found a place first in Stone Street then Pontac

²⁵ Edward W. Said *Culture and Imperialism*. p. xxviii.

²⁶ Interview James Marsh, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

Street right opposite the Hyman Liberman Institute which was a hive of community activity. His father and mother were followers of the Muslim faith and his father was a founder member of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) and Cassiem was influenced by the ideological education of MYM. This was a Muslim organization that allowed for the expression of Marxist socialist tendencies and was on occasions attended by Bavasah who was a teacher at Trafalgar, and by John Gomas, who was a member of the CPSA or South Africa Communist Party (SACP) as it became known after 1953.²⁷ His parents therefore understood the dangers involved in opposing the powers of the dominant culture and risks when engaging against the policies of the apartheid government.²⁸

Cassiem attended St Peter's Primary School in Mowbray and subsequently went to Wesley Senior Secondary School (then known as Wesley Training College) up to 1962 when he left to attend Trafalgar for Standard 9 and 10 (Grade 11 and 12). There were no open political debates taking place among the teachers or the student bodies at Wesley. Davidse was the principal at the Primary School and a martinet and strict disciplinarian in the English tradition as was Cravit the principal at the Senior Secondary School who had an English style of disciplining students right down to dress codes and behaviour. When the clampdown came in 1962 Cassiem together with Steenveldt had arranged for reading groups over weekends and were held in Salt River with topics among others that discussed "Boycott as a weapon", "Concept of non collaboration" and the "State of the country under the state of emergency". But, as youth they were eager to do something

²⁷ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.
Non-white students had to apply for permission to study at UCT and disillusioned Muslims who were studying at UCT had established MYM.

more practical. Cassiem also stressed that the idea for armed struggle did not emanate from those discussions or from the Unity Movement. The Teachers at Trafalgar, when confronted by the facts of the AYA, were shocked at how deeply the group had become involved at that level.

Cassiem left to attend Trafalgar for standard 9 and 10 (Grade 11 and 12) in 1963. He arrived when the Cultural Society was being revived. He was elected as its chairperson and Reginald Africa as deputy chair. He became the editor of *The Voice of Trafalgar* the school magazine which had overtly political content. The first issue of *The Voice of Trafalgar* was published without incident but the second issue caused an uproar. Meltzer who was principal had objected to the tone of the magazine stating that it was too political and that it had to be withdrawn. It was also reported that Cassiem had included an article or drawings on how to manufacture an explosive device.²⁹

Cassiem like Isaacs witnessed the Langa marchers of the PAC along the Main Road in Salt River to Caledon Square in 1960, which heralded his political awakening. The march was in retaliation to police violence in Langa against burning of the pass books in support of the call by Robert Sobukwe. 30,000 workers led by Philip Kgosana marched. What impressed Cassiem most was the extraordinary discipline of the marchers who were predominantly migrant workers from the surrounding townships of Langa and Guguletu. It was that kind of political action that had introduced him to the influence of mass

²⁸ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

²⁹ Interview Abdurahman Abrahams, video recording and audio tapes, February – June 2005.

politics, demonstrations and marches and fuelled the spirit of radicalism within the young Cassiem.

Cassiem's response to Sharpeville was that the immediate task was to embark on a campaign of sabotage resulting in August 1964. Cassiem recalled that "when the Sabotage Act was passed in June 1962, I was in J.C. (Junior Certificate, the equivalent of Grade Ten) at Wesley Training College in Salt River Cape Town. I had no idea that I was going to be detained under that same act. The Sabotage Act included 90-day Detention that later on evolves into the 180-day Detention Act and subsequently indefinite detention."³⁰ The Sabotage Act was a response to the formation of MK and of Poqo by the PAC. Cassiem when he was fifteen and at Wesley scribbled some comment about the Sabotage Act not realizing that two years later this note was going to be produced as evidence against him in the trial. Cassiem was 17 years old when he was detained under the 90-day Detention Act, and his name should be included in the list of those courageous men and women who braved one of the most vicious regimes in the world.³¹

JAMES MARSH

Assimilation even at a school like Trafalgar was not easy for students who were Afrikaans speaking and from economically neglected communities. Marsh and many others from the 1959 brigade did not find assimilation at the school to be straight forward. Marsh's environment was where bread was seen to be of more importance than

³⁰ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

³¹ Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin White Masks*, (New York, Grove Press, 1967), p.228. Cassiem found himself in a world in which it was always a question of annihilation or triumph.

books, which were considered elements of petty bourgeoisie status and luxury. There was a perception among those affected of a class-conscious preference for students from petty bourgeois backgrounds and this made life uncomfortable for them.

Marsh lived with his family his mother, father and seven brothers and sisters in a place called Oakdale, which was situated on the slopes of Tygerberg hill in the Cape, before the family was forcibly removed by the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950 to Bellville and finally to Elsie's River on the Cape Flats. Marsh did his secondary schooling at Zonnebloem College from where in 1962 he enrolled at Trafalgar as a senior student and matriculant.

During the school recess in 1961, on his return journey by train from Ebenezer where he visited his sister who was teaching there, he met George Meissenheimer a teacher from Trafalgar. Meissenheimer (a FI member) was attracted by the uniform of Zonnebloem College worn by Marsh and he enquired about James' future plans. On hearing that he was about to complete his senior secondary education (Junior Certificate or JC) Meissenheimer invited Marsh to enrol at Trafalgar. Marsh proceeded in 1963 to enrol at Trafalgar as a candidate for the matriculation examination. For Marsh to survive the city and to overcome the stigma of being Afrikaans speaking in a predominantly English and petty bourgeois environment at Zonnebloem College solace was found in the daily experience of the laissez-faire of District Six and the over-arching culture of Trafalgar.

Marsh arrived at Trafalgar with a high level of political and social awareness. His political consciousness stemmed from his working class background and social life with the rest of the family members in the community of Elsie's River. His arrival at Trafalgar coincided with the period of decolonisation in Africa and the impact of the Anti-CAD programme against the Colourisation of education played an important role in the development of his political overview. Other contributory factors were the progressive reading material that became accessible, the influence of Slingers and the consciousness of Lennert who taught there. Slingers, who mentored students in history by unpacking and making the subject accessible, placed South African history in its relevant African and global context. The African liberation movements were set to radicalise Coloured education.

ABDURAHMAN "MARNIE" ABRAHAMS

Abrahams was another member of the AYA who clandestinely formed part of the cell although he did not go to school at Trafalgar. Abrahams' involvement stemmed from his admiration for Isaacs as a science teacher and the politicisation as a child in the house of his parents in Pepper Street BoKaap.³² Abrahams was raised by his aunt Gadiejah Sadan who lived in Leeuwen Street in the BoKaap in close proximity to where Isaacs lived. Abrahams was born Abdurahman Jabaar as confirmed in his birth certificate but as was the customary idiom in District Six and the BoKaap his name was shortened to Marnie Abrahams or Mahnie to all his comrades colleagues and friends. Abrahams attributes the initial confusion around the official registration of his name and surname as just another

³² Interview Abdurahman Abrahams, video recording and audio tapes, 19 February – 25 June 2005.

strategy by the officials under the political dispensation of apartheid at the time, who through their erroneous registration of birth dates and the misspelling of names and surnames of persons of colour, served to confuse, undermine and nullify the very existence of registered individuals.³³

Abrahams was introduced to Cassiem because of his keen interest in the political unfolding in the country and his ability to negotiate. His inclusion into the group was unknown to Marsh. Abrahams was given the task by the unit to fundraise. Although George Allen Clarken had also volunteered himself for this position, Abrahams had soon managed to lay his hands on unwrought gold, which had to be tested for its purity and then resold to accrue funds. Isaacs tested the metal for its purity and gold content which he thoroughly “enjoyed” and found easy to accomplish with his scientific knowledge and access to chemicals.

The AYA resolved to take violent action as a true revolutionary movement to overthrow the state. Even in the event of failure, the AYA believed they would at least contribute substantially to a violent demise of the apartheid state. The AYA’s agenda for armed struggle was agreed upon in a very short space of time and they had a very short life span considering that the core group was established at Trafalgar late in 1963 and the AYA accused were convicted and sentenced to gaol terms in December 1964.

³³ Interview Abdurahman Abrahams, video recording, 12 March 2005, Newfields.

CHAPTER 4

ASSOCIATION YOUNG AFRICA: THE BOMB AND THE ARRESTS

The political climate in which the AYA's activism, arrests and subsequent trial took place was one in which the mass reaction by the people was to the fore. It was a time of general expectations on the political front that generated and precipitated a spirit amongst students at Trafalgar to agitate for change. This climate for change was evident in the newspaper headlines in the *Cape Argus* in November 1964: "Reports of car with dynamite a mistake, police chief says", "Documents in sabotage case are contested", "3 more are held under 90 days" and "Women questioned about germ war plans".¹ They also exposed a mild state of paranoia by the state at the time.

The mood of Non-Whites could be measured by the pamphlet issued by the Anti-CAD wherein it unequivocally states, "Unfortunately there exists no militant national organization of the non-European people taking up and fighting bravely any and every issue concerning the rights of all non-Europeans, Africans, Coloured or Indians. If such a national organization did exist there would be no need for an Anti-CAD Committee".² Collectively the group of AYA at Trafalgar had consciously decided on their formation as a militant students group. The AYA were rooted in critical discourse and academic intellect, and they had manufacturing skills in explosives. Unwittingly the AYA had answered to the call of the Anti-CAD.

¹ *Cape Argus*, 5 November 1964.

THE BOMB

Isaacs had a B.Sc. in chemistry from UCT and was able to set up a bomb factory. But this was not the first time that he manufactured bombs. He had been introduced to explosives whilst at the MYM where he had been working during the school holidays. At the MYM Adam Gool had a joinery factory and Cassiem befriended Clarcken, a British citizen who was allegedly a military instructor based in Aden. Isaacs was introduced to explosives whilst at the MYM where he had been working during school holidays. Clarcken had embraced Islam and was manufacturing various sorts of military weapons in the workshop. Explosives in the form of dynamite were seen on the premises and other contraptions one of which he recalled was a hollowed truncheon that was filled with lead. Isaacs had acquired two premises to manufacture bombs where Cassiem had worked in Long Street and Chapel Street.

In Bokaap where both Abrahams and Isaacs lived there was a company called Scientific Suppliers that supplied and dealt in chemicals. Abrahams had a politically sympathetic contact working at the company who was prepared to provide the group with laboratory equipment and chemicals. The fact that the group had easy access to what could be considered highly dangerous chemical substances in the increasingly repressive political climate that prevailed is significant given that under normal circumstances it would have been extremely difficult or near impossible to obtain them.³

² February, Vernon, *From the Arsenal*. Articles from the TLSA (1913-1980).

³ Interview Sedick Isaacs, June 2005, Athlone. The easy access to chemicals was indicative of the antagonism towards the state and the willingness of ordinary people to assist clandestine groups to pursue such activities.

Sulphuric and nitric acid with which they could manufacture dynamite or nitro glycerine were supplied. Isaacs explained these were highly unstable explosive substances hence they opted for picric acid which was more manageable in terms of its chemical stability and because it could be safely stored. Picric acid had one disadvantage in that it stained the hands and clothes of the user a bright yellow which remained etched in the skin and clothing and was visible for days. It was therefore easy to spot the perpetrators when the substance had been handled without gloves and protective clothing. The other obstacle in the use of picric acid was its corrosive quality that prevented it being stored in metal containers. As the AYA was intent on making explosives to be used in bombs they had to be wary of the corrosive quality that caused the chemical to become a very unstable substance.⁴

Although Isaacs had all the scientific knowledge and expertise to make explosive devices he was specifically interested in non-lethal offensive gasses, the tear-gasses and acid of phenols, which could immobilize groups of people. They also experimented with gasses that could be made from a derivative of castor oil that in small quantities could kill large numbers of people.⁵ Isaacs explained that they had the capability of manufacturing nerve gasses that could cause the lungs to disintegrate, they had decided against using these gases. He admitted he manufactured and experimented with various drugs including extremely toxic substances, of which LSD was mild. They were tested by paid volunteers but had such a negative psychological effect on them that they refused to participate a

⁴ Interview Sedick Isaacs, June 2005, Athlone.

⁵ In our interview Isaacs revealed that he had later discovered that the derivative of castor oil mentioned earlier, which in small quantities could kill large numbers of people, was on an international British and American list of strategic gases in terms of its high toxin level.

second time no matter how much money was offered to them. Cyanide was another option but was identified as extremely dangerous to both the user and the opposition.

The strategy was that they could deploy the gasses and retrieve to safety those sympathizers who were caught up amongst the immobilised crowd. The experiments included a method to perfect the optimum distribution of these gasses using explosives. This was the main focus of their action, which is contrary to the erroneous belief that they were bent on mindless sabotage.

The second phase was to use explosives in attacks on government facilities and buildings that were either occupied or used by government officials or representative of the State. This decision put police stations high on their target list. The intention of the AYA in their projected plan was to use explosive gas detonators in government facilities that would stun or incapacitate the police either in police stations or at anti-apartheid demonstrations where police violence was routine in terms of the brutal shambokking, tear-gassing and firing of rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators.⁶

The bombs that were manufactured by Isaacs at the bomb factories were to be collected from Achmad's home in Pontac Street, which only the first tier knew about was to be collected from Cassiem's home once completed. The first bomb was to be collected and used by Marsh. The device had design weaknesses to facilitate the spread of material on explosion and the detonating device incorporated ignition by means of a light bulb.⁷ That

⁶ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording and audio tape, 11 June 2005, Athlone.

⁷ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording, 15 January 2006, Athlone.

bomb was used in an attempt to blow up the Matroosfontein Post Office but was unsuccessful and the newspapers reported this failure. Marsh in his attempt to place the bomb had accidentally dropped it through the hole in the window of the Post Office. This was unfortunate because it meant that the police had a sample of the device and that it was used in evidence.

The purposes for the citing of these examples are twofold. Firstly, to demonstrate the seriousness of the AYA as a radical student group in terms of the form of action to remedy the cause of oppression amongst the Non-White communities. Secondly, to show the intellectual capacity and skills that existed within the group. A point that is underscored by Isaacs' remark on the question of their premature arrest at the sub-station and his reply that he wondered what the future would have held further had they not been arrested.⁸ However the AYA had a naivety and were under the illusion of invisibility although that was not the case in the light of the discovery of the failed explosive device by the Special Branch. They could not identify who was watching them and observing their movements and who their enemies were.⁹

The AYA had opted for violent action and were unmistakably equipped for this as the interviews reveal. This has been a fundamental oversight and a point that up to today, has not been seriously considered or debated, other than what was revealed in the trial in view of the lack of information about the AYA. Their decision was to take the struggle to

⁸ Van der Merwe, Hendrik, and Groenewald, C.J. (eds.) *Occupational and social change among Coloured people in South Africa*, p.25. The author's argument is that occupational positions relate to social prestige, honour, esteem and to class. However where labour achieves sufficient coherence and solidarity their powers can be exercised.

another level of action where they were not only going to use force of arms but had advanced to what they considered their second revolutionary phase.¹⁰

THE ARRESTS

There were several occasions when members of the AYA tested their explosives. On one of many occasions, a spot was chosen at Oudekraal on the Atlantic coastline near Llandadno where a bomb was tested and the debris brought back to the laboratories for analysis to establish the efficiency of the device. They also reconnoitered the area at the University of the Western Cape (Western Cape College of Education) where they were going to break into the premises to steal the chemicals that were kept in the laboratory and then blow up the building.¹¹

It was during such an excursion that the group was arrested. The day of the arrests was the Sunday before Cassiem was to write his Senior Certificate examination. In the afternoon Cassiem celebrated the birthday of co-student Patricia Bandster with her parents at their home. Bandster, whose father was an employee at a printing company had acquired printing skills from him, and assisted with the layout and printing of *The Voice of Trafalgar*. Bandster left the country shortly after the arrest of the AYA.

In the evening on returning home to Pontac Street, Cassiem put his brother's baby to bed when he heard a car hoot. On investigating he found Isaacs parked in his red Renault sedan and Isaacs said to Cassiem that he had "equipment" that had to be tested.

⁹ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording, 15 January 2006, Athlone.

¹⁰ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording and audio tape, 11 June 2005, Athlone.

Understanding the reference made by Isaacs, Cassiem immediately got into the vehicle only to discover Abrahams seated at the back of the Renault. They had jointly selected to use the bomb on another target which for historical reasons Cassiem decided against revealing. The bomb was under the front passenger seat, where Cassiem sat. Electrical wiring which they did not have was required to set the bomb off so they went to house in Wynberg where they got the wire and then drove to a destination which was in the direction of Sea Point to detonate the bomb.¹²

As they approached the city there was a change of plan. They stopped to reconnoitre the sub-station on De Waal Drive instead of going out to Sea Point and they decided to test the bomb at the sub-station instead of going all the way to their pre-arranged destination which Cassiem admitted was “a grave error”.¹³³ They had parked their car right next to the sub-station which is a medium sized single storey building situated on the upward carriageway that runs out of city centre. It is approximately five metres from the sidewalk edge with sufficient space for a vehicle to safely park off the road.

When they got to within a short distance of the sub-station Isaacs got out and walked to the target pretending to be urinating. He was in possession of an unlicensed Brownie automatic pistol which he carried in his trouser pocket. They had only been there for a moment when the police van stopped behind their car. Apparently police driving on the other carriageway into town purely by accident parked on the side of the road which also

¹¹ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

¹² Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

¹³ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

overlooks the city. However, there is a high retaining embankment that does not allow for visibility of the sub-station when traveling on the carriageway. One has to actually go right to the edge of the road on the side of the embankment to be able to see the substation below.¹⁴ The importance of this observation is to show that it was not as easy as it may seem to have seen them contradicting the evidence of the state that the activity by these individuals, which was seemingly of a suspicious nature, could so easily be seen from that vantage point.

Whether the police were just out on patrol or looking out for couples who were contravening the Immorality Act of 1950 when they spotted the red Renault parked near the sub-station on De Waal Drive is speculation.¹⁵ Further Isaacs in his interview emphatically doubts the simplicity of their arrest and does not accept the details as they stand, although I must hasten to add that he admits negligence on their part as a main contributory factor to the group's demise.¹⁶ Another speculation by Cassiem was that the police followed them from Isaacs' home in Leeuwen Street in the BoKaap, to Abrahams and then from Cassiem to Wynberg. Cassiem pointedly stated that the incident of their arrest could not be put down to co-incidence. After having searched and found the pistol on Isaacs the police arrested them and then in their car were taken to Woodstock Police Station where they were placed in the holding cells and interrogated.¹⁷

¹⁴ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

¹⁵ Moreover during the period prior to the incident leading to the arrests, Isaacs had been meeting Clarken who had a girlfriend named Aslin who was white and worked as a librarian. Clarken was white but looked Coloured and Isaacs speculated that there was the perception by the police of the likely contravention of the Immorality Act of 1956 by the couple that drew their attention to the AYA.

¹⁶ Interview Sedick Isaacs, September 2005, Athlone.

¹⁷ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

Whilst being detained at Woodstock the police searched the car where contrary to the evidence placed before the court and registered in the transcripts of the prosecution the police then only found the bomb and electric wire that was left in the vehicle. When they found the bomb Cassiem recalls that “then we knew that the game was up”.¹⁸ The police did not immediately notice the stain of picric acid on their hands but were elated and astounded at having so easily uncovered and defused a major plot. The police focus on MK, POQO and the ARM had allowed a major oversight of other groups. The explosives of the AYA differed from the commercial type in that it was homemade unlike those of the aforementioned groups who relied on commercial explosives. This discovery placed the police on a special alert because it revealed an oversight of their assessment of the level of insurgence.¹⁹ Placed in separate cells they had difficulty communicating with each other but when an opportune moment arose Isaacs’ words to Cassiem and Isaacs were that the operation was politically motivated. Guided by this, they individually responded to their interrogators. Early the following morning they were taken to Caledon Square Police Station.²⁰

When the police searched their homes, because their arrests were unexpected the police found material that was incriminating. The police visited the room that Isaacs had rented and used as a laboratory situated in Mount Street District Six. Drawings, lecture notes and newspaper cuttings on the attempted bombing of the Matroosfontein Post office in Elsies River were among the items found.²¹ It did not take the police long with the discovery of

¹⁸ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

¹⁹ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording, June 2005, Athlone.

²⁰ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording, June 2005, Athlone.

²¹ Interview James Marsh, August 2005, Lansdowne.

the evidence of picric acid to connect this to similar explosives using picric acid. Soon the explosive experts produced forensic evidence from the bomb found at Matroosfontein Post Office that concluded that it came from the same source and that the unit was responsible. On further investigation and questioning of Cassiem, the police were able to trace the perpetrator of the alleged deed to Marsh and Marsh was arrested. It was under these circumstances that a charge relating to the attempt to explode a bomb in the Matroosfontein Post Office arose.²² The question that was uppermost in the minds of the investigators was the location of the premises where these explosives were being manufactured.

Subsequently, Karolus Marsh and Alexander (Alec) Williams two lower ranked operatives of the unit were located at their homes and arrested. At Trafalgar, James Marsh was summonsed from the classroom to the principal's office where Sergeant "Spyker" van Wyk was waiting. He was escorted to a police vehicle in the parking lot on the school premises and taken to Caledon Square Police Station for questioning about possible linkages to the attempted bombing of the Matroosfontein Post Office.²³

Marsh was not aware of the existence or connection of Abrahams to the AYA. It appears that Marsh only came to know about Abrahams during their encounter in prison shortly after their arrest. He was also unaware of the attempt by Isaacs, Cassiem and Abrahams to blow up the electrical sub-station on De Waal Drive and their subsequent arrests that day. Although the general perception existed and persists that they were arrested as a

²² Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court.

²³ Interview Achmad Cassiem, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

group including Marsh at the electrical sub-station, Marsh was not with the group at the electrical sub-station.

Cassiern did not know Williams but had met him on one occasion when he visited Cassiern at his home in District Six. On their arrival at Caledon Square Police Station each member of the group including the new arrivals was placed into individual cells next to one another. When Williams' parents visited their son, they could be heard shouting at and abusing him for becoming involved. They demanded that he become a witness for the state against his co-accused. In the interim word about their arrests had to be communicated to the rest of their accomplices, whose identities only they knew, and to try and conceal the location of the bomb factories.²⁴

In the cells at Caledon there was verbal communication between the members and a system was devised whereby written notes for fetching and delivery were left in the toilet bowl. Williams was expected to be one of the accused in the trial but was listening to the rest of the group on behalf of the police. Strategically placed between the cells of Isaacs and Cassiern he could overhear all the conversations and planning that was being discussed. This only emerged during the trial when to their shock and amazement Williams turned state witness and the police could reveal all the facts passed on by Williams.²⁵ Karolus Marsh and Williams acquired immunity from the state for their contribution in bringing the trial to a speedy and successful ending.²⁶

²⁴ Interview Achmad Cassiern, 5 November 2005, Lansdowne.

²⁵ Interview Achmad Cassiern, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

²⁶ Court records in judgment delivered by Justice J.W. van Zyl on 4 November 1964 in the Supreme Court of South Africa (Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division). In the matter of: The State

Three damaging elements that affectively concluded the arrest and premature destruction of the AYA were firstly that the police had samples of the explosives and detonators, secondly that they found the press clippings of the unsuccessful bombing attempt in Matroosfontein at the homes and in the cupboards of suspects, and thirdly the almost immediate breakdown of some of the people who had been involved in the failed attempt namely Karolus Marsh and Williams. The AYA core group was therefore denied the time to consolidate or send out a communiqué for others to cover their trails.²⁷

The worst shock for Cassiem and Isaacs were revelations of the messages found in the toilet and details of their discussions between the walls of their single cells and the elaborate plans to escape from Caledon Square which were not reflected in the transcripts of the trial. On their arrival at Pollsmoor Prison they had met up with Eddie Daniels who was awaiting transfer to Robben Island. Their plot to escape at Caledon Square had been aborted and at Pollsmoor they decided to include Eddie Daniels. The bars of the cells in which they were kept had been sawn through and were kept in place by chewing gum. Firearms and black clothing had been supplied to camouflage their escape and an external support team in charge of the operation was in place. A common law prisoner had seen members of the group liaising with a sympathetic warder Mac Dillon who was followed and in that way the prison authorities were alerted to the plot that resulted in their cover to escape being blown once more. Apparently no charges were pressed by the state for

versus 1. Sedick, Isaacs 2. Achmad, Cassiem 3. Abdurahman, Abrahams and 4. James Marsh. Case Number 350. Box No. CSC 1/1/1/620, Cape Town.

²⁷ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

their attempted escape and the AYA was re-located back to Caledon Square Police Station from where they were dispatched to Robben Island on being sentenced.²⁸

POLICE INTERVENTION

The AYA like February were contemplating illegal and violent protest. This was during an era at Trafalgar in which there were “stooges” and spies and at a time when the SB (Special Branch) spied on teachers. Cassiem’s (AYA) group were as individuals viewed with apprehension and were being considered by teachers as reckless. The AYA wanted to change the situation by violent action that brought the spotlight of the intelligence service to the school the result was the principal’s office had a listening device attached to his telephone and a gadget that monitored his comings and goings from his office. Teachers at Trafalgar experienced the threat of being followed by the security police during and after school.²⁹

Organizations were not the only areas of concentrated espionage by the Security Branch (SB). Schools had become the fertile breeding ground for illegal protests against oppression and an obvious home for political development and planning. This new development at schools like Trafalgar was initially introduced by the NEF and its parent body the NEUM in the programme of the Anti-CAD against the maligned system of Coloured education. The phenomenon of the planting and use of spies was an old political ploy and therefore also occurred at schools including Trafalgar.³⁰

²⁸ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

²⁹ Interview Goosain Emeran, video recording, 1 June 2005, Schotsche Kloof.

³⁰ Interview Goosain Emeran, video recording, 1 June 2005, Schotsche Kloof. Oppression had delivered a degree of socio-economic insecurity that made some individuals easy prey to corruption and to work as informers for the state.

There was a case at Trafalgar when the science teacher Biggs discovered a student in possession of a listening device. Although the device was confiscated the recorded information could not be retrieved because the teacher who was involved in this particular incident had in his enthusiasm (or so it was reported – my insertion), attempt to unravel the recorded information had destroyed what was on the tape. It was later discovered when other teachers intervened who were suspicious of the student's background that the student had been granted permission to enrol at a very late stage during the second half of the school term. However there was a policy at the school regarding entry for prospective and socially disadvantaged pupils allowing for the student's late enrolment. However, subsequent to that event the police arrived to escort a student from the school hall. Ernie Steenveldt the acting principal realizing the seriousness of the matter had called for an urgent assembly of all students and teachers in the school hall. Suffice to say that was the last time that this student was seen on the school grounds although neither his innocence nor that of other students who were suspected of having had contact with the police was ever proven.

CLARKEN

The members of AYA had also befriended Clarken shortly before their arrests. Clarken had the desire to "blend in" with the rest of the community of District Six meaning that he physically desired to "look local". Clarken had enquired from Isaacs about the availability of a skin darkener and Isaacs was aware of a chemical silver nitrate that when administered would darken skin. A side effect unless administered in small quantities because it affected the stomach was diarrhoea. Clarken's skin did become darker but

accompanied by a tinge of blue.³¹ The treatment was stopped because it was feared that the unnatural blueness would attract unnecessary attention. It was facetiously argued that if a big enough quantity of the chemical were to be added to the drinking water of especially white communities, the skin darkening effect would naturally eradicate the racially biased position based on skin colour of the apartheid government.

Clarcken was prepared to teach the group the art of handling rifles and guns of which both the knowledge and tools were in short supply. They nevertheless engaged Clarcken's knowledge and expertise to hone their skills in order that they may put their plans into operation. Arms were found and a number of rifles were located and stolen to ensure the success of the programme. Clarcken had embraced Islam and became known as Abdul Karriem. At the MYM he manufactured various sorts of military weapons in the workshop. Explosives in the form of dynamite were seen on the premises and other contraptions one of which he recalled was a hollowed truncheon that was filled with lead.³²

It was this level of involvement and the charges of illegal gold and diamond smuggling brought against Clarcken that subsequently brought the attention of the MYM under the scrutiny of the Security Police. Whether Clarcken was brought in to infiltrate the MYM was speculated but never proven. After his arrest, bail was secured and arrangement made by the AYA for Karriem to be secretly transported to safety from Francistown and across the Zimbabwe border.

³¹ Interview Sedick Isaacs, September 2005, Athlone.

³² Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

There was unfounded speculation that Clarcken was a state agent that purportedly led to the arrests of members of the AYA. However I was unable to identify the source of this information that was supposedly leaked to the police by members of another cell of the AYA that was operating outside of the cell at Trafalgar. It was speculated that it was this information that got the police to follow the car in which Cassiem, Isaacs and Abrahams were travelling, and led to their arrest at the sub-station on De Waal Drive. Isaacs mentioned names of persons whom he suspected might have influenced the outcome of the trial but it is not in the interests of this thesis to speculate.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 5

THE TRIAL OF MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION YOUNG AFRICA

The trial of the AYA took place in the Supreme Court Cape Town, and lasted for a period of three months. The connection of the accused to the AYA cell at Trafalgar was never mentioned in the records of the trial because it emerged subsequent to interrogation and the finding of newspaper clippings of the attempted bombing of the Matroosfontein Post Office. The presiding officer was Justice J. van Zyl, who delivered his judgment in the matter of the State versus the four accused on 26 November 1964. The four accused were Isaacs who appeared as Accused Number One, Cassiem Accused Number Two, Abrahams Accused Number Three, and Marsh Accused Number Four.

Isaacs was singled out as the leader of the group and described by the state prosecutor as one of two senior science masters at Trafalgar. The other was Steeneveldt who had been teaching there since the early 1950s. The significance is that both Steeneveldt and Biggs, were primarily educationists and too conservative to have even considered, let alone supported, political options. Cassiem and Marsh were described as scholars in the Senior Certificate class at Trafalgar. Abrahams was employed by a firm in Cape Town. It was

noted by the Prosecution that Cassiem was a science student in Isaacs' class whereas Marsh was studying Biology and was therefore not taught by Isaacs.¹

The Prosecution for the State noted that all four of the accused were Coloured and that the main charges brought against them by the State was for having committed the crime of sabotage by contravening Section 2 (1) of the Sabotage Act 76 of 1962. Furthermore it was alleged that the accused during or about the period 8-10 August 1964, on De Waal Drive and at Elsie's River possessed explosives, which they planned to use and that they willfully attempted to cause an explosion whereby life or property was endangered. The evidence led by the State aimed to substantiate the charges against the four accused that concerned three alleged incidents: firstly an attempt on the 10 August 1964 to detonate a bomb in the Matroosfontein Post Office in Elsie's River, secondly an attempt on the 30 August 1964 to damage or destroy by means of an explosion an electrical sub station on De Waal Drive in Woodstock, and thirdly conspiring to damage a building or buildings at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).²

Members of the defence who represented Isaacs, Cassiem and Marsh were Omar and Newman who in turn instructed Advocate Kies. The strategy by the group even during the trial was to mislead the Prosecution and on the instructions by Kies to refuse to testify in the witness stand. The defence council in grasping fully the psychological impact of the case on the Prosecution even grappled with the suggestion of whether the Accused for

¹ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division.

² Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division.

example should wear short or long pants in mitigation of being found guilty of sabotage and to lessen the impact in anticipation of a harsh sentence.

Abrahams contracted his own defense personnel having made a sworn statement to the police following their arrest on De Waal Drive. Abrahams' sworn statement certainly contradicted the refusal by the rest of the accused to submit written statements to the police. This led to the separation of his trial from that of the other members of the group.

According to the Prosecution it was on the 30 August 1964 at approximately 11.45p.m. that Constables Goosen and Van Heerden, whilst patrolling along the upper lane on De Waal drive near the electrical sub-station, noticed a red Renault with its headlights off parked on the pavement close to the sub-station that was situated on the opposite carriageway. On investigation the policeman found Cassiem seated in the front passenger seat and Abrahams on the back seat but slightly towards the centre of the parked vehicle. On enquiring about the whereabouts of the driver both Cassiem and Abrahams replied that the driver had got out to relieve himself.

On inspection, Constable Van Heerden found Isaacs in the immediate vicinity of the sub-station and having executed a body search found Isaacs to be in possession of a loaded automatic pistol and a single rubber glove. Isaacs' hands and the glove were said to have been stained by a fine yellow dust that was later identified as picric acid, an explosive substance. On finding the pistol Constable Van Heerden had shouted to his colleague Constable Goossen, who had stayed at the vehicle to monitor its occupants, to warn him

of his discovery. It was reported that Constable Goossen thereupon performed a body search on Cassiem and Abrahams. On arriving back at the parked vehicle Constable Van Heerden conducted a further body search of Isaacs whereupon he found two building plans that were to be identified as that of the University of the Western Cape, in his shirt pocket.³

The two Constables then turned their attention to the parked car in which the group had been traveling. They found on the floor under the front left seat where Cassiem had been sitting partially concealed under some rags a homemade bomb and detonator. Furthermore, at the back of the car on the floor immediately behind the driver's seat next to where Abrahams had been seated was found a gallon tin (5 litres) that contained petrol and a twelve-volt battery. Rolled up on the seat was thirty-three feet (10 metres) of electrical flex as well as the other glove, partner to the one found on Isaacs. The constables arrested the group who were taken to the Woodstock Police Station for further investigation and interrogation and kept until the next day. The three detainees, not having had charges laid against them, were transferred to Caledon Square Police Station the following day. Marsh joined the group at Caledon Square Police Station that morning, where questioning in connection with their alleged offences and subsequent arrests continued. A visit to the domicile and the room that Isaacs had rented and used as a laboratory, situated in Mount Street District Six, was arranged.

³Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division.

There were other incriminating objects and an identical powder substance as that found in their vehicle was identified. During their search of Cassiem's room, the police under a carpet found cuttings of the report on the attempted bombing of the Matroosfontein Post office in Elsie's River. On further investigation and questioning of Cassiem, the police were able to trace the perpetrator of the alleged deed to Marsh. It was under these circumstances that the charge related to the attempt to explode a bomb in the Matroosfontein Post Office arose.⁴

The police and army personnel laid formal charges following a "thorough investigation". Explosive experts and employees of the state later used the battery found in the vehicle, which belonged to Isaacs, to detonate the explosive device and contents of the bomb to demonstrate its power and destructiveness. The outcome of this test was used to prove the intention and capabilities of the group and according to the evidence that they intended to use the explosives for the purpose of injuring any person found in the proximity of the force of the device and to damage any property.⁵ The picric acid was connected to the Matroosfontein Post Office bomb. Allegedly the Post Master of the Matroosfontein Post Office had upon opening and entering the premises on the morning of the 11 August 1964, found that a glass pane that had been broken in one of the windows in the back room, which had a porcelain washbasin in it. In the basin was found what appeared to be a homemade incendiary bomb. The State in its evidence submitted that the plastic bomb, having tested a similar device by this time in process of their investigation, on exploding

⁴ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme

would have set the building alight and that the telephone installations and telegraph services would have been damaged.

In their investigation the State had relied on the evidence of Karolus Marsh and the evidence of Williams. They were prepared to turn state witness and testify against James Marsh in the charge of the alleged attempt to explode a bomb at the Matroosfontein Post office at Elsie's River. Inspections in loco were conducted with the two accomplices turned state witnesses who pointed out the spots where each had kept watch on the night of the 10 August, when the offence allegedly took place.⁶ It was raining that night and Karolus Marsh had kept watch whilst Williams and James Marsh placed the explosive device through the window of the Post Office. After keeping watch for approximately ten minutes Karolus Marsh went home. James Marsh had later returned home and reported to his brother Karolus that the device had not worked.

Williams, who was known to Cassiem, gave evidence to the effect that he was on a friendly footing with Marsh, and that the two had at some stage visited Cassiem in District Six, a point which Marsh denied in my discussion with him on the issue. Williams also stated that during their conversations Marsh had intimated to him that Marsh was to join an organization that was to destroy the government. Furthermore, he stated that the two of them had often visited Cassiem and on one occasion they accessed architectural ground plans of the Matroosfontein Post Office.

⁵ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

In the evidence led during the trial it was said that Williams was the one who accompanied Marsh to the Post Office. He assisted him in accessing the premises by crawling through the fence at the back of the building where there was a broken window through which to place the explosive device. Karolus Marsh held watch at a tree trunk some distance from the window as a lookout to give warning in case of anyone approaching. According to the State the description by Williams of what took place was consistent with the locality and the State's version of what had transpired on that night. Alexander admitted that he never managed to get a close look at the bomb that James Marsh was alleged to have placed through the broken window because the device had fallen out of reach on being planted through the window. When James Marsh realized that he could not retrieve the device they decided to abort the mission and returned home. Williams was acquitted on all charges by the State as was Karolus Marsh. This was done on the basis that their submissions and testimonies were honest and true even though there were contradictions in certain aspects of their accounts of the unfolding events on the said night and admitted to by the State prosecution.⁷

The State contended that James Marsh Accused Number Four was guilty of Sabotage on three charges. He attempted to set fire to the Matroosfontein Post Office; he was on the premises of the Post Office in possession of explosives in contravention of Section 6 of Act 26 of 1956; and that he conspired with the other three accused to damage the Matroosfontein Post Office by exploding an incendiary bomb in it.

⁶ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

Newman, instructed by Omar with Kies appearing for James Marsh contended that the Court could not convict Marsh Accused Number Four of the attempt to set fire to the Matroosfontein Post Office because the bomb had not exploded. Newman contended that the acts proven by the Prosecution merely amounted to acts of preparation and he relied on the case of Rex v. van 1942 T.P.D. 291 where the accused attempted to blow up a steam wagon by means of a bomb. On the facts of that case the court found the accused had not committed the crime of attempting to blow up the steam wagon because he was interrupted before he could place the bomb in its intended position before lighting the fuse.⁸

Section 6 of Act 26 of 1956 made it sufficient an offence for anyone found in possession of any authorized explosives and under sub section 315(2) (b) of Act 56 of 1955 sufficient for the state to have alleged that the Accused was in unlawful possession of the explosives on the said premises. There was the question of being in unlawful possession of explosives meaning the picric acid, one of the main ingredients of the bomb, which was listed as an authorized explosive. The point that the State remained to clarify and decide upon was whether any one of the accused possessed the explosives and/or whether two or more of them had possessed it jointly. This would have adversely influenced the outcome of the trial in terms of the imposed sentence.

⁷ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

⁸ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

The Judge by his own admission had no doubt as to whom the guilty party was. By his own admission, Isaacs had admitted to having the skills and had identified the explosive substance as picric acid. His hands were dusted and stained with picric acid the major ingredient of the bomb that was found in the car of which he was the owner. The State found Isaacs failure to enter the witness box to deny the allegations as strong evidence of him having possessed the device. It did not however exclude the possibility that Accused Number Two, Cassiem, and Accused Number Three, Abrahams, were not joint possessors considering that Isaacs was nowhere near the vehicle when the Constables van Heerden approached him at the sub-station.

During further cross examination by the Prosecution, Williams testified that he had met James Marsh after the aborted attempt at bombing the Matroosfontein Post Office, whereupon James had mentioned that the group had explored the University of the Western Cape. It was mentioned that in due consideration for Williams' fear of explosives the group had decided on allocating to him the task of keeping watch over the movements of the caretaker who was living on the premises of the University of the Western Cape and that a gun would be provided to protect him from the caretaker's guard dogs. The State pointed out that this passage had a ring of truth that demonstrated the courage or lack of it in the witness.

When Accused Number One Isaacs was searched at the car on De Waal Drive during the night of their arrest a plan of the premises of the University of the Western Cape was found in the shirt pocket of his shirt as well as an automatic pistol that has been

previously mentioned. From comparison of aerial photographs of the University of the Western Cape with the plans and comparing what was seen *in situ* the Prosecution was satisfied that the plan related to the University of the Western Cape and that it gave a reasonably accurate presentation of the premises and especially the night watchman's hut. It was the opinion of the state that the knowledge and accuracy of the drawings could not have been casually come by.

To substantiate the handwriting purported to be that of Isaacs', his brother was called by the state for its verification. Isaacs' brother had reluctantly identified the handwriting on the document as his, as did the Meltzer, principal of Trafalgar, who said that the handwriting of the examination question paper handed to him by Isaacs matched the handwriting of the list on the back of the plan. A handwriting expert employed by the state compared the documents identified by the brother and the principal as being the handwriting of Isaacs. On the back of a portion of the plan allegedly drawn by him was written in capital letters and underlined the word "caretaker" and immediately below "goes to bed at 9.30 or thereabout".⁹

In respect of the planting of an explosive device on De Waal Drive the Prosecution requested that the four accused be found guilty of sabotage on the basis that they had conspired to damage a UWC building or buildings, that they conspired to damage the Matroosfontein Post Office by exploding a bomb in it, and that they conspired to damage or destroy by means of an explosion the sub-station on De Waal Drive. They sought to

⁹ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

link the evidence of Marsh to Isaacs. The evidence taken by Sergeant van Wyk during a search of Isaac's home included a number of glass tubes that were identified as containing potassium chlorate. The plastic bomb found at the Matroosfontein Post Office contained a mixture of potassium chlorate, sawdust and petrol.¹⁰

The last set of facts dealt with Cassiem, who after his arrest had accompanied the police to his home at Pontac Street District Six where he stayed with his parents, brothers and sister and where his bedroom was searched. Among papers found were what the police at best could describe as crude drawings and formulae for the construction of an incendiary bomb. Newspaper cuttings, two in English and one in Afrikaans reported the attempt at bombing the Matroosfontein Post Office, pieces of tangible evidence that indicated that Cassiem in all probability must have been one of the conspirators. The Prosecution assumed these points to be *prima facie* proof of his involvement especially since Cassiem as with Isaacs and Marsh did not enter the witness box in an attempt to rebut the accusations of the state.

As proof around the attempted bombing of the Matroosfontein Post Office and the conspiracy to damage the buildings at UWC the State relied chiefly on the evidence of accomplices. Section 257 of the Criminal Procedures Act at the time entitled the Court to

¹⁰ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

convict an accused upon the uncorroborated confession of an accomplice provided there was irrevocable proof that the offence had been committed.¹¹

Karolus Marsh and Williams as state witnesses were commended by Detective Sergeant "Spyker" Van Wyk as having been delivered in a straightforward manner and that they had corroborated each other. Williams had made an impression on Van Wyk that he was at pains to give accurate evidence and Van Wyk had no doubt that Williams was telling the truth to questions put to him by the State as well as for the Counsel for the Defence. His description of the plastic bomb and detonator that was used and found at the Matroosfontein Post office after the sabotage attempt also corroborated the material evidence. It was noted that the evidence by Williams had an unmistakable ring of truth about it quite apart from the fact that Isaacs, Cassiem and Marsh had not gone into the witness box to deny the evidence.

The allegations by the State of conspiracy were that before a conspiracy to commit a crime could be forwarded, there must have been a tacit agreement i.e. by implication, or expressly, to commit the crime. That if the State had alleged who the conspirators were it could not go beyond the indictment and was limited in its proof of the conspiracy to proving the agreement was reached between the persons named. That it was the unlawful agreement that becomes the criminal act and not the negotiations between the parties that become unlawful acts punishable by law. What must be borne in mind was that their acts

¹¹ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

were mere plans and no more than acts of preparation since none of the plans were successfully implemented.

The Prosecution had argued that the State was entitled to lead any evidence that was admissible to prove that a conspiracy existed. Williams in his evidence had stated that Marsh had told him that it had been decided to bomb the Matroosfontein Post Office on Sunday and therefore only one conclusion could be drawn that other people besides Williams and Marsh had been in on the scheme to bomb the Post Office. Williams had then been instructed by Marsh to collect the bomb from Cassiem in District Six.¹²

On the night of the attempted explosion Williams had apparently suggested to Marsh not to proceed with the plan. Marsh had responded that his colleagues would expect him to proceed which according to the state could only mean that Marsh was part of a set of conspirators who were party to the agreement to set fire to the Matroosfontein Post Office. Under cross-examination Cassiem was implicated in that the bomb was collected by Williams from his house in District Six and that the bomb was one of two. The second bomb found in the red Renault owned by Isaacs was similarly constructed and could only have been manufactured by Isaacs. The state had also submitted in its evidence newspaper cuttings, drawings and formulae found in the bedroom of Cassiem that proved Cassiem was one of the conspirators.¹³

¹² Interview Goosain Emeran, video recording 23 June 2005, Schotsche Kloof. Emeran was the principal at Trafalgar from 1966-1995.

¹³ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

The evidence led by the state connecting Isaacs with the attempt to bomb the Matroosfontein Post Office was linked to a conversation between Isaacs, Cassiem and Marsh in Caledon Square that was overheard by Williams. The conversation concerned the tube of potassium chlorate found in Isaacs' bedroom and the potassium chlorate in the unexploded plastic bomb that was found at Matroosfontein Post Office. This was used to show that Isaacs had the ability to commit sabotage and not just the inclination.¹⁴

The State attempted to demonstrate that all four of the accused had conspired to bomb a building or buildings at UWC but that they had abandoned the project because there was too much light making visibility and their movements could have been easily spotted. It was further argued that if the accused had not agreed to use the bomb at UWC because it was too well lit the evidence was not conclusive of the existence of a conspiracy. It therefore followed that under those circumstances the accused could not be found guilty. The State however argued that Isaacs irrespective of which of the above contentions were true had the intention to commit sabotage.¹⁵

In submission against the State's allegation that all four of the Accused had conspired to damage or destroy the sub-station on De Waal Drive by means of an explosion, it was argued that the State had failed to prove that the Accused had expressly agreed to commit the unlawful act, nor that such an agreement existed, and as such the State had failed to prove that there was a conspiracy. The State's final allegation was to prove that Isaacs,

¹⁴ Interview Cassiem, 5 December 2005, Lansdowne

¹⁵ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

Cassiem and Abrahams jointly possessed the bomb and all the apparatus needed to detonate the device when they were arrested on De Waal Drive. The State argued that it could not be conceived that Isaacs would have been driving around at 11.45pm unless he was quite certain of his companions and their knowledge of the presence of the device. Isaacs and his companions already knew what was in the car and were of one mind of what they were likely to, or would try to, put the bomb and its apparatus to use.¹⁶

Justice J.W. van Zyl found all the Accused guilty in the Supreme Court in Cape Town on 24 November 1964 on charges of sabotage. In passing sentence Judge van Zyl granted leave for appeal to Cassiem and Abrahams whereas Isaacs was refused leave to appeal, having been considered by the Prosecution to have been chiefly responsible for the manufacture of the explosive devices and liable for having misled the others. Sentence was passed in December and Cassiem and Marsh received sentences of five years imprisonment, served on Robben Island. Marsh did not apply for clemency. Cassiem, during one of many interviews, admitted to me that contrary to the projection of juvenile innocence by the Prosecution, he had developed a penchant at an early stage, even before the formation of the AYA, for the manufacture of explosives and explosive devices. Isaacs was found guilty and sentenced by Judge J van Zyl to 12 years imprisonment without leave for appeal.¹⁷

¹⁶ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

¹⁷ Archival records in the matter of The State versus Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams and Marsh. Case No. 350/64 conducted in the Supreme Court of South Africa Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division

CHAPTER 6

ROBBEN ISLAND:

DEMONS AND DRAGONS¹

Esiqithini or “The Island” was the name given to Robben Island by political prisoners. The history of Robben Island can discursively be summarized in the few words: incarceration, brutality, mental anguish and social isolation. It was graded a maximum security prison and the main reason why political prisoners were incarcerated on Robben Island was for the very same reason that “undesirables” had been abandoned there by the European colonists – to make sure that they did not escape because they were considered dangerous.²

The political prisoners who were incarcerated on Robben Island during the apartheid years (1960-1993) came from a broad cross section of the South African social strata and were members of the many progressive political organizations in the country. The Unlawful Organization Act of 1960 prevented any person: to become or continue to perform any act as member of an unlawful organization; to display any sign or token of past or present membership of such an organization; to take part in any activity of any

¹ *Demons and Dragons* represents the power relations between the prison guards and political prisoners on Robben Island in their quest for total control over their subordinates, the “relations of dominance” and “relations of resistance”. There “are no relations of power without resistance” Norman Long, and Ann Long (eds), *Battlefields of Knowledge: theoretical windows on development intervention*, p. 258.

² Buntman, *Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid*, p. 3. Robben Island has a long history as a site where outcast and rebels opponents of various settler and colonial governments were

unlawful organization. Sedick Isaacs, Neville Alexander and Marcus Solomons among others were all professional teachers and political detainees who served prison sentences on Robben Island.³ Jafta Masemola also a teacher, served the longest period. John Nkosi was the youngest political prisoner in the history of apartheid South Africa to serve a prison sentence there.⁴

The political prisoners were incarcerated in cells with common law criminals who had been placed there with specific hidden agendas. The AYA were categorized as “common law” prisoners, as were all other political prisoners, except Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, on Robben Island.⁵ This was contrary to international law regarding the rights of political prisoners.⁶ This blatant disregard exposed political prisoners on Robben Island to extreme acts of violence. The practice of racial dominance under apartheid thrived in the prison environment and was evident in the psychosis of the white wardens. The warders acted

abandoned and imprisoned. Under apartheid however Robben Island was the prison in which most Black male political prisoners who opposed the apartheid regime were incarcerated.

³ Alexander, Neville, *Robben Island prison dossier, 1964-1974*, (Cape Town, UCT Press, 1994), pp. 36-37.

⁴ Buntman, *Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid*, p. 18. By 1963 and 1964, hundreds of men from around the country had been sent to the Island. They were imprisoned for furthering the aims of the banned PAC and ANC. Engaging in organised acts of violence and sabotage against apartheid. In some cases, like the Yu Chi Chan Club and the NFL four men were each sentenced to ten years imprisonment for reading about armed struggle. Buntman, *Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid*, p. 3.

⁵ Sobukwe was considered the only political prisoner by the government. The other political prisoners although they were convicted of crimes of a political nature failed to achieve that status. Sobukwe was shifted from the main prison into a single complex away from the main building where other prisoners were held.

⁶ Initially it's colonial imperialist past overshadowed reports in the liberal press of the true conditions that prisoners were experiencing. But information that was leaked to the international Red Cross about the brutality of the wardens, harsh weather conditions and inhumane treatment of prisoner, which had gone unheeded, had brought some relief.

brutally and with sadistic violence consistently against prisoners to undermine their morale.⁷

The labeling of prisoners as “communist “ and “terrorist” fitted in well with the prison system’s intentions of undermining the integrity of their captors and as a pretext for their persistent dehumanization by the dreaded warders. The government perceived the threat by the “communists” and “terrorists”, who in their view were the most hated and reviled political constructs of evil, to have been safely locked away on Robben Island. “The prison authorities worked hand in glove with the SB. They, (the SB) selected hardened criminals who were serving time [to] serve as provocateurs and informants, and to abuse and intimidate us. They pawed over our incoming and outgoing letters, recorded our visits and planted listening devices in or cells”.⁸

THE AYA ARRIVALS

The two student members of the AYA, Cassiem and Marsh, who were 18 years old, had both been sentenced to five years. Isaacs who was 24 years of age was to serve a sentence of 12 years on Robben Island. Cassiem recalls, “I was sentenced to 5 years hard labour. Isaacs was seen as the mastermind – he received 12 years... When we arrived on Robben Island we discovered there were already 1800 prisoners on the island.”⁹ On the journey to Robben Island they had been put in the hold in handcuffs and leg irons

⁷ Naidoo, Indres, *Island in chains*, (Hamondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982), p. 60. They were absolutely new in the quarry and did not know what to do but instead of explaining things to us the warders simply started lashing out with rubber batons, sticks and pieces of rubber piping, calling us names, telling us how stupid we were.

⁸ Maharaj, Mac (ed.), *Reflections in Prison*, (Cape Town, Zebra and the Robben Island Museum, 2001), p.ix.

wearing short pants and kaki shirts. On their arrival and admission Isaacs recalled a large letter "D" was stamped on his card, which signified that he was to occupy the lowest rank in the prison hierarchy and during his prison sentence he would be identified only as prisoner 883/64. In the high security section the AYA as young adolescence received an unceremonial reception by the Rivonia Trialists and leaders of Poqo in block "D" who were symbols for young cadres on the mainland in the struggle for freedom and democracy.

They were stripped and searched and taken to the "B" section, which was part of the isolation section commonly known as the "kulukoets", the punishment section, which had single cells and was where they were kept in solitary confinement for the period of a year. There they were kept in solitary confinement for a year. Here they were placed individually into single cells 2.5m by 2.1m with no toilet or washbasin and a door with a grille and a window facing the passage for continuous observation. The only possession was a card with their details. This is where they wrote their Senior Certificate examination. On arrival they noticed an enormous metal container filled with mealy meal which was supper at night. In contrast there was the open section of the prison which consisted of the zinc section or "Zinc Tronk" for criminals that were kept on the Island to serve as free labour. They did the basic cleaning of the homes of the warders, basic maintenance, and worked on the ferries because no political prisoner could be trusted to do this work.

⁹ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

The enslavement of Non-Whites by apartheid/colonialism was one of the worst forms of dehumanization of people of colour in South Africa. A secondary form of slavery and equally dehumanizing was the experience of isolation for the AYA and other political prisoners on Robben Island.¹⁰ The isolation of prisoners firstly from all contact with life on the mainland and then from each other was a tested method for insanity. The AYA's initial trauma of having to suffer long periods of isolation in prison was softened by the realization that there were other young adolescents like Dimake "Pro" Malipe who was serving a life sentence.¹¹

The warders on Robben Island were found to be generally of low morale, low self-esteem and according to the political prisoners, ignorance and fear of the "terrorist" was manipulated in the minds of the prison guards. Their job paid them a meagre salary and the entry level into the post was at the lowest rung of acceptance into the civil service. "These shortcomings made them ideal candidates to be fed the master race psychology of the dominant culture".¹² The threat of the 'terrorist' whether real or perceived, fed into the negative constructs of Non-Whites including the prisoners. The outcome was that warders caused mayhem to be sown amongst the prisoners and prisoners were treated brutally without the slightest provocation. The prisoners responded to this dehumanizing

¹⁰ Alexander, *An ordinary country*, p. 117. The strategic political and ultimately moral historical question is how to move towards understanding without ever forgetting, but to remember without constantly re-kindling the divisive passion of the past.

¹¹ Buntman, *Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid*, p.34. Resisting the basic conditions of life in prison in most of the 1960s as well as the 1970s was a necessary precursor for any far reaching resistance, such as using ones imprisonment to acquire academic qualifications or developing structures that created, organised and gave meaning to the prisoner community.

¹² Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

behaviour with civility and a refusal to let the warders and prison officials undermine their discipline and political integrity.

The use of psychological torture was numerous as was the daily naked stripping and general searching of prisoners including the AYA to force them into a physical and mental state of surrender. These violations affected each AYA prisoner differently and it hardened their determination to survive the ordeal. "We may not become adjusted to maladjustment – this is what psychologists and psychiatrists are trying to do, instead of changing the social order they want to change the individuals adjustment to the unjust order – there is no mass psychotherapy – we must deal with the question of oppression, exploitation and injustice at the level where it must be dealt with."¹³ The members of the AYA therefore as adolescents did not only have to learn to adjust to the company of elders and of the policies of the different political persuasions on their arrival at Robben Island but also how to cope with the brutality and baseness of their captors.¹⁴

DEBATES IN PRISON

There were groups of young students from the PAC and ANC who although they were conscientised on the mainland, through their interaction with Nelson Mandela, Wilton Mkwayi, Neville Alexander, Stanley Magoba, Dennis Brutus and other political prisoners who were leaders on the mainland, really understood the differences between the organizations and could interact politically openly. The political prisoners used their

¹³ Interview Open to question Imam Achmad Cassiem, [Online]. Available: <http://www.inminds.co.uk/qa-imam-achmad-cassiem.html> [2005/09/06].

¹⁴ Interview James Marsh, video recording, 18 July 2005, Lansdowne.

incarceration to improve their academic status. Andrew Mlangeni a Rivonia Trialist, who was sentenced to life imprisonment successfully completed his BA in Political Science by studying through UNISA while in prison.¹⁵

Robben Island was also called “Robben Island University” where there were fundamental debates from an African Nationalist and opposing Black Nationalist perspective. The question of engaging the revolution from a local, as in African Nationalist, or from a Marxist international viewpoint was always a burning question to be debated or the question whether a revolutionary movement engages in armed struggle with the intention to overthrow the apartheid state. Another question was of the strategic importance of the land question in terms of its ownership, utilization and distribution for an egalitarian society. In these debates the AYA supported different tendencies. In general it was accepted that the struggle was for the end of apartheid and for a non-racial society. Cassiem did comment that during a discussion with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, Mandela had remarked about the possibility of an end to the struggle for freedom, but not one based along the lines that Cassiem projected.¹⁶

These verbal debates were very successful in articulating the political perspectives by all represented political groups and broadened the minds and impressed on the younger prisoners what the struggle was all about. This receptiveness to ideas and openness of

¹⁵ Buntman, Fran, 2003. *Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 19-22 and pp. 33-36. Mlangeni became a Member of Parliament in the post-apartheid elections in 1994.

¹⁶ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

mind helped the prisoners in “D” maximum to create a camaraderie and respect for each other that was fundamental to serious discussion and debate. It was this element of trust that contributed to the understanding of one another in the way that they eventually had. It is ironic that the worst case scenario namely imprisonment on Robben Island created the opportunity that allowed leaders of all political persuasions to meet and debate issues that were impossible on the mainland.¹⁷

The sudden increase in the number of student prisoners and the concern for the low literacy level amongst cadres from rural areas called for the introduction of a programme of action among political prisoners. This programme, which took time and effort for it to be allowed because of the antagonism and apprehension of prison authorities, would eventually assist students to continue their education whilst serving their prison sentences. The political discourse thus served to improve the literacy level as well as the realization of scholastic aspirations and goals of prisoners.

Marsh and Cassiem were preparing for their Senior Certificate examination at the time of their arrest. At the time students wishing to write the Senior Certificate examination were required to pay a registration fee to allow him/her to be admitted to the examination room. Cassiem’s father reported at the trial that he had paid his son’s examination fee on the Friday, two days before his son’s arrest on the Sunday. Prior to their arrival the group had set themselves on pressing their demands to further their studies whilst serving their prison sentences on Robben Island. Although the members of the AYA were successful

¹⁷ Buntman, *Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid*, p.34. Resisting the basic conditions of life in prison in most of the 1960s as well as the 1970s was a necessary precursor for any far

and were able to pursue their studies many prisoners either failed permission or were allowed and then disallowed as the government wielded its power over its captive prey. Other prisoners like Johnson Mlambo had already been granted permission to study and was doing his "A" levels through the University of London. By December 1964 the members of the AYA were also granted this privilege. Warders were envious of the success of the study programme and academic progress and achievements amongst political prisoners. They were also fearful of the theoretical transfer and eventual loss of power. To prevent prisoners from using their allocated time for study purposes the warders often switched off the lights early. The AYA's study programme was disrupted by the warders switching off the lights in the "C" section of the prison, which was the study room for student prisoners, at eight o'clock in the evening.¹⁸ Political prisoners cherished the time allocated for study purposes which they considered a major achievement in their continued commitment to the ethos of "study and struggle" for development and for attaining democracy.¹⁹

In 1965 Marsh, Isaacs, Cassiem, Abrahams, Stanley Magoba, Solomons and others were re-arrested on Robben Island by the authorities for allegedly plotting to unlawfully communicate information to an unknown source on the mainland on the poor conditions of prison service and the treatment of prisoners on Robben Island. As a result Cassiem, Isaacs, Magoba among others were subjected to the humiliating experience of corporal punishment. Punitive action could vary from a starvation diet of rice water to physical

¹⁸ Interview Achmad Cassiem, video recording, November 2005, Lansdowne.

¹⁹ Interview James Marsh video recording, July 2005, Cape Town.

caning and was meted out to all who transgressed prison rules. Cassiem and Isaacs were brutally caned when their plans to escape from the Robben Island were uncovered.

In 1966 Dimitrio Tsafendas assassinated Hendrik Verwoerd who was Prime Minister of South Africa at the time. The demeanor of the warders on hearing the news of Verwoerd's death changed noticeably towards the prisoners, who were ignorant of the fact. It was also the year that Marsh was able to successfully complete his Senior Certificate. Conditions on Robben Island as on the mainland continued to deteriorate. Prisoners were determined to have their voices heard and resorted to hunger strikes resulting in some prisoners having further charges and sentences added to sentences they were already serving. Conditions were tough and were exacerbated by the resolve of political prisoners to adhere to the principle of being able to study and to struggle for better conditions of work, food, and for a better future.

The abuse of power manifested itself in the Stone Quarry that was situated north west of the main prison on Robben Island. All political prisoners were sentenced to hard labour. The stone and lime quarries epitomized the forms of mental stagnation and physical destruction endured by them. Their guards delighted in the methodical breaking down of the will of their captives. They were denied the utilization of any skills and for years they were forced to 'knap' by quarrying the hard stone with menial tools and then crushing them into smaller stones using a 10kg hammer from 7.30 am until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Their task at the quarry was to retrieve the stone that was used for the building

of the main prison as well as to “kap groot klippe klein en klein klippe fyn”. Work was menial, hard, and useless with no practical goal, and the harshness of the elements intensified the situation. Then there was the tedious walk to and from prison with half empty stomachs in the heat or cold with little or barely any clothes on their backs.²⁰ The ‘stone quarry’ which is situated on the northwest side of the island was where the AYA spent most of its time. They marched there in the morning after breakfast and returned to their cells in the early afternoon.

²⁰ Alexander, Neville, 2003. *An ordinary country: issues in the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa*, (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002), p.144. The struggle of a man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

CHAPTER 7

MAYIBUYE:

ROBBEN ISLAND TO THE MAINLAND

c.1969-1981

'The imagination is today a staging ground for action and not only for escape'.¹

This chapter explores Cassiem and Marsh's return from Robben Island to the mainland after their imprisonment as students for acts of sabotage in 1964. Isaacs remained on Robben Island where he was to serve the remaining 7 years of his 12 year sentence.²

Five years of isolation had taken its toll on the members of the AYA. In as much as they had psychologically prepared themselves for the sacrifices and adjustments to their solitary cells and surroundings on Robben Island, they had to prepare themselves for the challenge of their release and return to society on the mainland. Even though members of the AYA easily admit to having had to adapt and prepare themselves for their ordeal in Robben Island's "hell hole", the adjustment for leaving and the return to the mainland was faced with apprehension.³ Leaving Robben Island created a mixed feeling of fear and disorientation. They were returning to the mainland where the nationalist government

¹ Apparudai, Arjun, *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Dilip Gaonkar and Benjamin Lee series eds, Volume 1. University of Minnesota Press, 1999). p. 7.

² Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Writers in politics*, p. 135. The conscious determination to struggle demands the conscious creation of systems of struggle.

³ Moses Dlamini, *Robben Island hell hole*, (1984) pp. 160 - 161.

since the early 1960s had become aware of the serious political groundswell that threatened to destroy its power base and reacted by introducing harsh laws in an effort to arrest “terrorism” and to stop their detractors. Students at Trafalgar were being harassed by the agents of apartheid among them the notorious “Spyker” van Wyk from the Special Branch.

Cassiem and Marsh were discharged from Robben Island prison four months before their term of sentence expired in 1969. They had been separated from Isaacs before their departure. Isaacs was shifted from “C” section to another section of the prison complex after he hatched a plan to escape. As Marsh intimated he had an immense scepticism and trepidation about his re-orientation and preparation for his return to the mainland. The thought of leaving their comrades and friends on Robben Island created its own dilemmas. They were leaving a position of reasonable security with those whom they could trust for what was considered to be the unknown. Marsh and Cassiem were clear about the fact that new developments of a broad nature had obviously taken place and that these unavoidable changes would require a reasonable amount of accommodation. They accepted that the nature of their assimilation into the community and acceptance by society would be a traumatic undertaking.⁴ The reception of members of the AYA on their return to the mainland as free individuals was similar to their departure to Robben Island prison as convicted political prisoners. Their arrival was unannounced and their family members were either ignorant of their arrival or unaware of their pending destination.

⁴ Interview James Marsh, video recording, 21 August 2005, Lansdowne.

Cassiem and Marsh together with some of short term prisoners were shifted from Robben Island to Victor Verster prison, which is a farm prison situated near Worcester. Here they were to serve out the remaining months of their five year prison sentence. Cassiem had sardonically remarked that they had been sent by prison authorities to Victor Verster to “fatten up” and to hide the physical harm inflicted upon prisoners that was easily noticeable.⁵ After having served the last four months of their sentence of five years of incarceration to the day, Marsh and Cassiem were taken from Victor Verster to Caledon Square police station where they were each served with five year banning orders. Caledon Square police station was ironically the starting point of their journey five years before to Robben Island. The banning orders restricted their daily movements and contact with members of their families and members of the public. Cassiem and Marsh having been served their banning orders and returned to their families both experienced a loneliness that was as a consequence of the fear from friends of being contaminated by the stigma of being associated with a felon. That they felt shunned by their communities and treated like misfits and could not find employment increased their loneliness. They felt rejected in their efforts to be re-integrated into their communities and society.

By the time of his release in December 1969 for Cassiem a lot had changed with his two brothers who were his junior both having married as well as his sister. He was exacerbated by the five year banning order that restricted him from moving about freely. He could not enter factories or educational institutions nor leave the magisterial district of Cape Town. Cassiem recalled that when he was released and placed under banning orders, many Muslims did not even want to greet him for fear of being contaminated,

⁵ Interview James Marsh, video recording, 21 August 2005, Lansdowne.

whereas others made it their point to send messages of support and support him financially.⁶ The Muslim community was completely traumatised by the killing of Imam Abdullah Haroon, who died on the 27 September 1969 as a result of a fall whilst in police detention and they became more fearful because if they could kill the leader in your community what chance did the ordinary persons have.⁷ This had exactly the opposite effect on Cassiem who believe that the tree of freedom is nourished by the blood of martyrs and Haroon's death, became his inspiration.⁸

Isaacs after taking leave of his comrades had in the interim hatched a plot to escape, as had always been his intention since his arrival on Robben Island in 1964. A portable radio that had been stolen by one of the common law prisoners and was not in working order had found its way into the Isaacs' cell. Isaacs, a technical buff, had located and fixed the faulty device when the wardens got word of the missing radio and launched a search of the prison cells. The plot to escape from Robben Island with a number of accomplices had reached an advanced phase. Isaacs had also managed to design and produce a replica key that fitted and could unlock the metal gates of the prisoners' cells. When the warders came to inspect his cell in search of the radio which was now in working order they found it among his meagre belongings and on further investigation also found the replica key. When one of the warders tried to unlock the cell gate using the fake key it worked.

⁶ Open to question Imam Achmad Cassiem, [Online]. Available: <http://www.inminds.co.uk/qa-imam-achmad-cassiem.html> [2005/09/06].

⁷ Interview James Marsh, video recording, 21 August 2005, Lansdowne.

⁸ Open to question Imam Achmad Cassiem, [Online]. Available: <http://www.inminds.co.uk/qa-imam-achmad-cassiem.html> [2005/09/06].

Isaacs was brutally assaulted by the wardens who had taken him to solitary confinement where the beatings continued and his jaw was broken in the ensuing attacks. A section of the prison regulations states that anyone who is found with an implement that facilitated an escape must be put in chains. So chains were brought to the cell and since the chains could not be fitted over ones clothing, the prison officials just ripped off his clothes and in a state of semi-consciousness Isaacs remembered being manacled. Padlocks were fitted to the hand and leg irons as an extra security measure.

All political prisoners prior to their release from Robben Island went through a period of uncertainty. Although Isaacs mentioned that there was not much expectation of his release he was the first prisoner from Robben Island to have been released directly into the community without having to be transferred to another penal institution, as with Cassiem and Marsh, or into the custody of an employee of the state. On his arrival at Cape Town harbour from Robben Island on the day of his release, Isaacs was met by "Spyker" van Wyk and this immediately shattered his hopes of going directly to his home as a free man. "Spyker" took custody of Isaacs and escorted him to Caledon Square where he was served with a banning order. He was then taken home to BoKaap where his mother was waiting to welcome him home. His mother was apprehensive about the return of her son mindful of the fact that he was a year late having had to serve nine extra months for the attempted escape.⁹

For Isaacs the multiple effects of the new environment were similar to that which he had experienced every time he was released from solitary confinement during his

incarceration on Robben Island. All the houses looked smaller and the roads narrower like a game of optical illusion that applied to the interior of the holding prison cells and their door entrances that acquired a bizarre spatial dimension from solitary confinement. During his gaol term and in keeping with the ethos of study and struggle, Isaacs had done research and experimentation on the subject of the connectivity of visual sensory compensation and that when there is conflict there is a feeling of seasickness.

Isaacs found that the community preferred to maintain a distance from him and at one stage had found him a source of amusement. Almost 13 years of isolation made even having to cross a busy road with oncoming traffic quite frightening for him. The other problem that accompanied the stigma of imprisonment was the difficulty in locating a job. Having qualified in chemistry Isaacs applied to the various local companies and international corporate bodies for employment. He applied to Pick 'n Pay supermarket because he was quite familiar with statistics however the owner replied that he could not accommodate Isaacs in the business but that he could assist his son in selling Rag tickets.

The banning order that was served on Isaacs on his release precluded him from living a normal life. He was not only refused a passport but also refused permission to travel outside of the magisterial district that his banning order prescribed him to. Zack de Beer of the Democratic Party telephoned Isaacs with a promise of looking into the matter but was unsuccessful. In 1978 a friend of Isaacs who worked for the Department of Home Affairs approached him with the offer of getting a legal travel document if he filled in a form and paid a deposit of two rand, which Isaacs did. Some time later he received a

⁹ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording, September 2005, Athlone.

notice from the department informing him that such a transaction was not possible and refunded his deposit of two rand. In 1978 Isaacs decided to get married but the conditions of the banning order prevented his wife to be in his company as well as the guests whom he hoped to invite to the ceremony and the service of Kies was called in to advise in the matter.

Isaacs eventually found work at the hospital which was organised by Moira Henderson. She assured the security police who were in constant surveillance of Isaacs that he was going to do statistics, which did not involve anything but numbers. Of course this was not true but on that recommendation he managed to find a job and was able to move on despite continuing security problems that would prevent Isaac expressing his full potential.¹⁰

¹⁰ Interview Sedick Isaacs, video recording, September 2005, Athlone.

CONCLUSION

“Mystification is the process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident.”¹¹

The history of Trafalgar High School dates back to 1912 the year in which it was founded. As the first Coloured high school in South Africa it was established expressly for the education of students from the Coloured community as classified under the government’s racial system of identity. Trafalgar was under the control of the Coloured Affairs Department to further promote racial oppression and political control through education in racially segregated schools, but it failed to realize this. Although Trafalgar was under the Coloured Affairs Departmental administration it never ascribed to the political notion of Colouredism that was incited, aided, abetted and nurtured by the ruling class and through Dr Abdurahman.

The thesis raises the importance of Trafalgar’s secularity that helped to secularise the society at the Cape and gave students and teachers the opportunity to live their lives as scholars and educationists to the utmost. It has endeavoured to explain how secularity helped in establishing a new intelligentsia that was part of the history of Trafalgar.

The 1960s were an era in the history of the school and the country when morale was at a low ebb. The programme of the Anti-CAD was taking its toll on the functioning of teachers with the threat of escalating repression, banning orders and an ever-increasing trail of exiles. Despite the battle for control by CAD of Trafalgar during

¹ Berger J. *Ways of Seeing*. p. 20.

the 1960s, it remained under the influence of TLSA/NEUM activists. Their desire was to preserve what was left of the ethos and to revive its heritage through education. This revival they had hoped to achieve by re-establishing the era of political development and academic excellence that was encapsulated in the Kies epoch. The call for the return to the spirit of Trafalgar implied the return to the time when Kies guided education and the comforts of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. Teachers were calling for the redirection of the energy of the AYA and other similar forces whose programme of action was perceived to threaten their bourgeois ideals.

The AYA at Trafalgar by its nature challenged the petty bourgeois mores that dominated at the school and in this process contributed to the change in the social nature of the institution. This threatened the sway of power relations which had been the prerogative of the TLSA since it was founded in 1913. The TLSA, conscious of the threat contained in the spirit of the AYA, tried to restrain what they considered to be reckless political behaviour. At the time students were frustrated at the slow pace and method of the engagement by the Anti-CAD in their opposition to the government's handling of education for Non-Whites. Cassiem as editor of the school magazine *The Voice of Trafalgar* had openly declared his cause for violence. Basil February as a precursor to the events of 1964 had in 1960 also indicated a similar tendency of impatience that alarmed and caused anxiety amongst the teachers.

The teachers hoped that by redirecting the focus of the AYA's attention away from the planning of revenge attacks and into organised debates it would diffuse and minimise the chances of illegal exposure and the risk of imprisonment of the AYA. This was an active policy by the TLSA at Trafalgar to encourage students to enter into

a debating society but it also became quite clear to the politically conscious leading student elements that two opposing groups of teachers were vying for the support of students against each other. The conflict was therefore not between a group of progressives against a group of reactionaries but of one fought along ideological lines. Teachers who were promoting various pupils as aspirant young intellectuals were endorsing individuals and groups on a political basis. The teachers ideological differences could also be understood in the Ravens' incident. Ravens was labelled a CAD stooge and was driven out during a violent campaign launched by students not the teachers. The perception at the time of Ravens was that he was someone who had appeared from nowhere – a faceless person with clear instructions from the CAD to defuse the political climate and neutralise the influential forces.

In the absence of factual evidence I can only speculate on the basis of my research that despite their support for, and active participation in, the protest against the oppressive nature of the colonial apartheid system that acted with impunity against Non-Whites, the teachers at Trafalgar, with exception, were not prepared to join the vanguard of the struggle. The TLSA/NEUM dictum of legality held sway and the ethos of democratic and political principles came second to the comfort and security of a petty bourgeois lifestyle, or the risk of losing their jobs, lives or limbs for the cause. It was therefore not surprising to note the fear of the anticipated action by those students from predominantly proletarian backgrounds who had from 1960 onwards registered in greater numbers at the school. Needless to say, there were members of staff who were placed under banning order – firstly Kies in 1956 and later Slingers and Pieterse in 1963. Steenveldt had as a consequence of his TLSA/NEUM affiliation suffered the preclusion of becoming principal when Ravens was installed as principal.

The question of whether there was a connection between the AYA and the NEUM teachers remains unanswered. This raises the question how the teachers at Trafalgar who were steeped in legality, unless there was a hidden agenda, could have attached themselves to the AYA's illegal actions. To the extent that NEUM teachers succeeded at Trafalgar and the other schools under their control, they shaped a major part of suppressing the rise of a new intelligentsia who questioned the past and formulated a new ideology and illegal strategy. In so doing they objectively helped to reinforce the apartheid system and created a sense of helplessness among youth. This encouraged reactionary forms of struggle and brought about a demoralisation of workers and youth in the Western Cape, which still largely persists today. The NEUM wanted to control ideological structures of the past and contribute to a strategy for the future but they failed to formulate an alternative political position.

The possibility of illegal action being used by students at Trafalgar against the government increased the chances of students being spied upon and the information handed to the authorities for retribution. Again there is no concrete evidence besides the listening device that was confiscated by one of the teachers, who discovered the device in the possession of a student in class and an electronic device attached to the principal's office door.

The AYA wanted to impact on the history of that era. Members of the group pursued or supported different political tendencies during their period of imprisonment on Robben Island. Although this emphasises their individual political independence it also draws attention to underlying differences the nature of which could not be clearly ascertained. It must also be noted that the group never met as a unit to seriously raise

and discuss issues that led to their premature demise. It is possible that shortcomings or oversights that resulted the perception of a degree of alienation between them. There are points of contention that remain unresolved and contribute to a perception of mild apprehension about full disclosure. I have uncovered several grey areas regarding the discovery and arrest of the AYA that point to possible security breaches that need more time and meticulous research. One example is the arrest of Cassiem, Isaacs and Abrahams at the electrical sub-station on De Waal Drive about which Marsh was unable to be precise although a factor could be that he was not there at the time of the arrests and was ignorant of Abrahams' involvement. Another example is the intimation by Cassiem in one of the interviews that he was unaware of the failure of the bomb at Matroosfontein Post Office to detonate and he only discovered they were unsuccessful from a newspaper report.

The conclusion drawn by members of the AYA is that their resolve was to make maximum sacrifice and demand maximum gains for a just social order. It is not clear whether they achieved their goal in the light of their premature arrests and imprisonment. Although they embarked on violent action it was without the formulation of a clear strategic political position. However, whatever the shortcomings of this study, it does raise the questions of the ideological structure of the TLSA/NEUM at Trafalgar, and the ambiguous challenge of the AYA to their ideology, the CAD, and to the apartheid state. Even though all the questions regarding the AYA may not have been adequately answered, the thesis begins to highlight their determination and their contribution to a just social order and democracy from apartheid.

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Interview with James April, audio recorded interview on 3/6/1993 at Garsfontein, Pretoria.

Interview with Hassan Bavasah, audio recorded interview on 8/11/2004 at Zeekoevlei.

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Interview with Carl Brecker, video recording of interview on 12/ 3/2005 at Sandvlei.

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Interview with Sedick Levy, video recorded interview on 12/6/2004 on Robben Island ferry "Autshumato".

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Interview with A. Slingers, video recorded interview on 5/5 /2005 in Athlone.

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Photographs

All photographs by Albert Hess. Cover photograph of Dr James Marsh, Dr Sedick Isaacs and Imam Achmad Cassiem was taken at the Trafalgar High School reunion in June 2002.

CASE NO: 350/64

/LUBHE.

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF SOUTH AFRICA
(CAPE OF GOOD HOPE PROVINCIAL DIVISION)

Cape Town, 2nd December, 1964.

T H E S T A T E .

-VERSUS-

- 1) SEDIQ ISAACS. 2) ACHMAT CASSIEA.
3) ABDURAHMAN ABRAHAMS. 3) JAMES MARSH.

YAN ZYL, J: The four of you have been found guilty of the crime of sabotage. This is a very serious crime. A very serious view is taken of the crime of sabotage. So much so, that the legislature imposes a minimum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment upon any one found guilty of the crime of sabotage. In addition, the legislature has not only imposed a minimum sentence upon anybody convicted of the crime of sabotage but also states that the death penalty may be passed on anyone who has been found guilty of the crime of sabotage.

10

In the case of the four of you, there is no evidence that you directed your unlawful acts against the lives of any of the citizens of the State. The Court will take that into account when passing sentence. Nevertheless, you unlawfully possessed explosives - i.e. Accused Nos. 1, 2 and 3. Explosives are very dangerous things. The law has passed special legislation to ensure that people will not be possessed of explosives in circumstances in which it will be dangerous for other citizens in the State. The

20

/three.....

The accomplices Korolus Paulus Smith.
and Alexander Williams who in this
matter gave evidence for the State
are in terms of section 254 of the
Criminal Procedure Act. discharged
from all liability to prosecution
for all such offences in respect of
which they were accomplices and in
respect of which they gave evidence.
in this matter.

2 Dec 1964



STATEMENT IN TERMS OF SECTION 25(1) OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY ACT, 1982 (ACT 74 OF 1982)

- (a) Reasons for the notice issued in terms of section 20(a) of the Internal Security Act, 1982, to ACHMAD CASSIEM:

I am satisfied that the said ACHMAD CASSIEM engages in activities which endanger or are calculated to endanger the security of the State or the maintenance of law and order.

- (b) Information which induced me to issue the said notice:

The information which induced me to issue the said notice cannot, in my opinion, be disclosed without detriment to the public interest.

Given under my hand at *Pretoria* this *1st* day
of *July* 1983.

L LE GRANGE
MINISTER OF LAW AND ORDER

Trafalgar High School

1



The main entrance to Trafalgar High School.

2



The main building with toilets and classrooms on the ground floor and principal's office and staff room on the first.