




The role of CASSAS in the liberation struggle of the southern African region, 1976 to the early 1980s



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Historically, the period 1976 to the early 1980s in Lesotho shows that at the students of the National University of Lesotho (NUL) played an important role in the struggle for liberation. This article acknowledges that scholarly work has been performed in addressing student activism during the period under discussion, with specific focus on those at NUL. While conceding that in most cases student activism was not well-coordinated, the article indicates that with the formation of Committee for Action and Solidarity for Southern African Students (CASSAS) at NUL, a partially unified approach was adopted. This partial unity resulted from the fact that students belonged to ideologically different formations which at some point became antagonistic to one another. Despite the relentless efforts by NUL management, state agencies and to a lesser extent the South African apartheid regime to stifle such activism, the influence of CASSAS was noteworthy. Through CASSAS, students became critics of the university's management, as well as the ruling Basutoland National Party (BNP) under the leadership of Chief Leabua Jonathan. As in many African countries, for example in Uganda (Makerere) and Zimbabwe (University of Zimbabwe), universities were designed as either state-controlled or state-directed. In this article, we use the publication called *The Vanguard* to highlight students' activism under CASSAS at NUL.

Contribution: This article delves into the impactful role of National University of Lesotho students in the 1976-1980s liberation struggle. Focusing on CASSAS, it unveils a partially unified approach amid ideological differences. Despite suppression, CASSAS emerged as a significant influence through *The Vanguard*, critiquing both university management and political leadership.

Keywords: National University of Lesotho; Basutoland National Party; Marxism; *The Vanguard*; student activism.

Introduction

As the pace of decolonisation picked up across Africa through the 1960s, the 1970s also experienced the revival of student politics in the broader segment of society in Lesotho, as their activism became central to the political process. In this article, we observe that under the Committee for Action and Solidarity for Southern African Students (CASSAS), the ideological unity of students at the National University of Lesotho (NUL)¹ was the result of a process that started in 1976 when a group of Student Representative Council (SRC) members in collaboration with other individual students, came together in solidarity with the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles of fellow southern African countries. Operating under CASSAS, these students were socialised into emancipatory politics, which engulfed the whole region at the time. Using CASSAS and *The Vanguard*, as CASSAS's mouthpiece, this article focusses on the historical roots and impact of the specific practice of an ideology of unity and solidarity and highlights how this became an ideologically activist choice rooted in the students' leadership structures. These student leaders under the banner of CASSAS, had multiple encounters of joint politically entrenched activism. As will be shown in this article, *The Vanguard*, created a platform for a strong ideological and political bond that later became instrumental in mobilising students for liberation gains.

The article further explores the long-term outcomes of this political mobilisation in Lesotho's post-colonial era, comparing it with other similar student activities in South Africa (SA) during the apartheid era and the post-1976 student uprisings in the country. Encounters with students from SA gave CASSAS leaders the basis for initial steps towards a strong political bond necessary for building

1. The establishment of the Pius XII Catholic University College (PXIICUC) by the Roman Catholic Church Hierarchy of Southern Africa on 08 April 1945, marked the beginning of NUL as a Catholic institution, hence its location in Roma was not by chance. The escalating racism in South African official circles was a crucial factor in the decision to build a university college in Lesotho. This is because, before 1945, the University College of Fort Hare in South Africa accepted all qualifying Lesotho students for enrolment in university programmes. On 01 January 1964, PXIICUC became the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland (UBBS), having been taken over by the governments of the three territories and thus appropriately renamed so. However, while PXIICUC was physically replaced by the independent and non-denominational UBBS, its ideological influence persisted as Christianity remained the main foundation of the new university.

up a common liberation agenda in the upcoming years. Although *The Vanguard* played a significant role in publicising students' activism at NUL, this article also highlights the shortcomings of CASSAS, namely, the failure to have phases of 'mass mobilisation'. This, we argue, was because of the repression CASSAS members experienced by the ruling Basutoland National Party (BNP), as well as NUL management.

Through CASSAS, NUL students soon organised themselves on the premise that united action offered the best prospect of success. This article will show in an opportunistic way, how these students took advantage of the newly formed CASSAS to carry out political activities and how, despite tight surveillance by the security agencies and NUL management, they managed to weave both underground and aboveground networks aimed at student mobilisation. This section acknowledges that such political activism under CASSAS would not have been successful without some complicity with locally and regionally organised student movements, such as the Lumumba Society.

This article is divided into various sections. The first section deals with student politics at NUL during the 1970s and 1980s. The second section sets the regional and socio-political context that in one way or another saw the growth of student politics. Furthermore, we show how, despite the diverse territorial origins, these students managed to build some cohesiveness and a common agenda of student emancipation from both embedded ideological colonial and apartheid yokes. The third section concentrates on the influences on the formation of CASSAS. It further focusses on its objectives and activities in promoting the ideals of emancipatory politics. Moreover, the section shows how the students began gathering information and paying attention to the study of political activism outside Lesotho, something that had a direct influence on their activism. The fourth section investigates and interprets the contents of *The Vanguard*, and how this had a political influence on the student community at NUL. With this content, we evaluate the extent to which NUL became a springboard for students' political activism in the advancement of the liberation goals, inclusive of apartheid SA.

In general, this article looks at and shows how, from a historical viewpoint, university settings are contested and turn into political battlegrounds in a variety of unique and complex ways. Here, we argue that the conflicts and struggles that exist in African colleges now, are a result of their past. A crucial topic for greater critical thinking and further research is the intersection of power, politics, and education as a setting for the exercise of authoritative decisions by global, regional, and national actors, aiming to dominate African educational systems.

Student politics in a regional context

Before fully interrogating the role of students under CASSAS at NUL, it is important to investigate this theme from a regional perspective and context. In the region where NUL is situated, African university students have long engaged in

political activism, responding to changing political, social, and economic circumstances through protest that has, at times, exerted considerable influence on the national stage. Student activism employs highly politicised strategies, yet has received minimal attention from regional historians. Between 1970 and 1979, major student protests occurred in some 29 countries and in three-quarters of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. In the period between 1980 and 1989, similar incidents were reported in more than 25 countries.

While the shared experiences primarily stem from Cameroon, the aforesaid was also confirmed by Fomunyan and Rahming who stated: 'In Africa, since the 1960s, there have been waves of student protest in almost all African nations in response to social, economic, cultural, political, and personal injustice'.² Konings adds that the wave of political liberation in Africa began to intensify in the 1980s, leading to an unprecedented wave of student protest in universities across West and Central Africa. Students were at the forefront of the struggles for political liberalisation, and sometimes received support from secondary school students, their teachers, and other professional groups.³

The universities in the region have always been sites of turmoil, conflict, and insurrection, but the sources of the conflict and how they were enacted varied and were often dependent on complex specific political climates and the ongoing flow of ideas between the region and the continent at large. In the region, university students of the 1970s and 1990s played a key role in movements for national liberation. Exiled student groups encountered a left wing, and converging communist ideologies, which fed into both African students' anti-imperialism and the rise of radical political student bodies. In *University Crisis and Reform: A Reflection on the African Experience*, Mahmood Mamdani reflects on the dilemmas of his experiences as a university lecturer, as well as visiting professor at the University of Durban Westville (UDW). He contends that a university should train human resources for development. He explores the nature of African universities not only the few established by colonial powers but also the many set up after independence.⁴

We identify the stages of activism in which students have mobilised, using case studies from Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Zambia, Namibia, and Botswana. With regard to Botswana, Munthe pointed out that any politicisation there was, was overshadowed by the fact that it was bordered by South African, Namibian, and Zimbabwean minority regimes. In the interest of preserving national security, Ian Khama refrained from denouncing the racist governments in the

2.K.G. Fomunyan and M. Rahming, "Knowledge as Power for Social Transformation." *Zoe International Journal of Social Transformation* 1, no. 1 (2017) 1–6.

3.P. Konings, "University Students' Revolt, Ethnic Militia, and Violence during Political Liberalization in Cameroon." *African Studies Review* 45, no. 2 (2002) 179–204. See also D.P. Chimanikire, *Youth and Higher Education in Africa: The cases of Cameroon, South Africa, Eritrea, and Zimbabwe* (Nairobi: African Books Collective, 2009); S. Federici and G. Caffentis, "Chronology of African University Students' Struggles: 1985–1998." in *A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African Universities*, eds. S. Thabane and O. Alidou (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2000).

4.M. Mamdani. "University Crisis and Reform: A Reflection on the African Experience." *Review of African Political Economy* 58 (1993) 7–19. For the SA context, see also C. Thomas, "Finding Voice, Vocabulary and Community: The UWC Student Movement, 1972–1976." *Journal for Contemporary History* 39, no. 1 (2016) 19–37.

area. Munthe examines the connection between student politics and broader national politics in Botswana in his dissertation. It also clarifies the reasons for the party politicisation of student politics, its characteristics, and the significance of student politics in national politics. Munthe describes the University of Botswana (UB) as a 'state within a state', with the UB students' ideologies occasionally at odds with those of the ruling party.⁵

Drawing on case studies from Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Zambia, Namibia, and Botswana, we identify phases of activism in which students have mobilised. On Botswana, Munthe observed that any politicisation that happened in the country was clouded by the fact that it was surrounded by racist minority regimes in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Ian Khama avoided criticising the surrounding racist regimes for the sake of national security. In his dissertation, Munthe explores the relationship between student and national politics in Botswana. It further sheds light on the causes and nature of party politicisation of student politics and their importance in national politics. Munthe defines UB as a 'state within a state' and how the politics of students at UB sometimes contradicted that of the state. The relative evenness of the political playing field within UB was embraced by the opposition parties as a springboard to challenge the ruling party. According to Fomunyan, students at African universities inherited the culture of violence generated by the previous generation during the colonial era.⁶ Here the author addresses what happened in South and East Africa with the focus on the period post-1990.⁷

Student politics at National University of Lesotho from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s

In 1976, the Lesotho government under Leabua Jonathan passed the *National University Act (No. 10) of 1976*, which preserved and constituted NUL as a body corporate, capable of suing and being sued. The Act gave students considerable power by establishing an autonomous Students' Union (SU), which was neither a servant nor an agent of the university. There were criticisms of the Act from the opposition, stating that it wanted to democratise students' issues in an undemocratic country, and that it subordinated institutional interests to individual or group interests. Between 1970 and 1986, the BNP's oppressive governance and political unrest had a direct impact on NUL. The institution entered a turbulent political phase in the 1980s. Therefore, whatever cordial relations that existed between Jonathan's government and NUL were over in just about 6 years after its creation. This was because students and staff were divided between those who supported the BNP and those supporting the Basotho Congress Party (BCP). For instance, between 1981

5.J. Munthe, "Harbingers for Change or Activists in Isolation? Student Politics and the Opposition Movement in Botswana" (MSc, University of Edinburgh, 2015), 12–13, 32–43.

6.K.G. Fomunyan, "Student Protest and the Culture of Violence at African Universities: An Inherited Ideological Trait." *Yesterday & Today* 17 (2017) 50.

7.Fomunyan, "Student Protest ...", 53–56.

and 1985, NUL was transformed into a political battleground that witnessed unprecedented levels of state repression and state-sponsored violence, which prompted students to engage in rhetorical resistance that alternated between overt and covert actions.

According to Mushonga, the Student Democratic Front (SDF) and the Student Liberation Front (SLF) were two opposing student movements that operated during that time.⁸ Thus, the SDF had 'parasitic' relations with the state, while the SLF had close ties with the opposition BCP.⁹ We contend that these two student movements reflect the partisan differences in the nation. On campus, the BNP Youth League also engaged in political activities that created conflict and instability. The BNP Youth League called on the government to modify the University Act and to show 'militant support and sympathy with SDF' at a conference held on campus on 12 December 1981.¹⁰ This happened despite the criticisms levelled against the government and the university's management; the 1976 *University Act* was dispersing power and subordinated institutional interests to individual and group interests.

The above-mentioned situation led to critical questions asked by Mushonga on the developments of the 1980s, as to whether NUL was a university; a national university; a party university; or a state university? In one of his chapters on the political history of NUL, Mushonga concedes that there are no easy answers to these questions. In this chapter, he alludes:

It is my thesis in this paper that repressive state power on one hand, and tendencies towards 'power over' by University authorities on the other hand, both generated overt and covert resistance as well as discursive and non-discursive struggles which tended to destabilize the institution during this period.¹¹

In October 1981, issues of the militarisation of the campus by security forces and detention of other students led to protests. The 1984/85 NUL Vice Chancellor's Report indicated that the division in the Student Union led to instability in student governance and contributed to the deteriorating inter-relationships between students themselves, and between students and the university's management.¹² The latter faced the difficult task of handling a highly restive and politicised student body on one hand and a government bent on imposing its will on the institution on the other. To keep a watchful eye on NUL, the government deployed police and security agents on campus. Relations also deteriorated when the government imposed its own candidates as vice

8.M. Mushonga, "Government, Community and the University in Africa Today: The Case of the National University of Lesotho" (PhD, University of the Free State, 2017), 103.

9.M.R. Likate, "Personal Reflections of the Breakup of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, October 2016." *Proceedings of the 70th Anniversary Conference*. Roma: NUL.

10.M. Mushonga, "Overt and Discursive Struggles and Instabilities at the National University of Lesotho during BNP and Military Dictatorships, 1980–1992." in *Towards an Anatomy of Persistent Political Instability in Lesotho, 1966–2016*, ed. M. Thabane (Roma: Morija Printing Works, 2017), 183, 187.

11.Mushonga, "Overt and Discursive Struggles ...," 186–187.

12.Mushonga, "Overt and Discursive Struggles ...," 187.

chancellors. The appointments of A.M. Setsabi in 1980 and B.A. Tlelase in 1984 were cases in point.¹³ To further deepen the rift and control NUL firmly, the government amended the University law in 1984, 1985 and 1989. The amendments gave the government powers to control what was happening at NUL. Protesting the above, students boycotted lectures and denounced the BNP government.¹⁴ We notice here that what was happening at NUL was merely a reflection of the bigger national politics of Lesotho.

Background to the formation and objectives of Committee for Action and Solidarity for Southern African Students

Students' struggle and activism in Lesotho could not be dissociated from what was happening in the neighbouring countries. The three British protectorates of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland (now eSwatini) regarding higher education, had one university across the three countries, which in October 1966 was recognised as the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS). The three governments jointly ran it until 1975 when Lesotho pulled out, forming NUL on the Roma campus.¹⁵

The 1970s and 1980s saw an increasing outflow of refugees fleeing the apartheid regime that was under a great deal of pressure both internally and from the international community. Jonathan's government in Lesotho estimated the total refugee population to be around 20 000 during this period.¹⁶ These refugees which included students from SA who had fled after the 1976 Soweto uprising, were warmly welcomed in Lesotho and accommodated in the suburbs of Maseru, such as Lithoteng, Borokhoaneng, Upper Thame, Hoohlo, and Maseru East. This arrangement shows that the refugees were made part of the Basotho community, thus making it difficult to tell who a refugee was and who was not. Such a gesture from the Basotho explains the level of sympathy they had in pursuit of the liberation cause in SA. In the 1970s and 1980s for instance,

13. Mushonga, "Overt and Discursive Struggles ...," 187.

14. Mushonga, "Overt and Discursive Struggles ...," 187–189.

15. It is important to observe that the earlier image of NUL, as epitomised through Institute of Extra Mural Studies (IEMS) as 'the Light in the Night', was more positive compared with later images. When NUL was formed, it was seen as a 'university of Lesotho' in contradistinction to UBLS, which was seen as a 'university in Lesotho'. Thus, the new NUL was seen as the 'University of the People', with promising solutions to the problems of the nation and the region. However, as disillusionment began to set in, especially over the perceived failure of the university to find solutions to the multiplying problems of society, the image of the university quickly turned negative, with the Lesotho government even beginning to see NUL as the seat of opposition politics. M.T. Mashologu, *A Broken Reed: The Traumatic Experience of the Last Day of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, and its aftermath* (Morija: Phafa Publishers, 2006); B.T. Mokopakgosi, "The University of Botswana and the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa." *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008),; B.T. Mokopakgosi, "Why the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland Failed: Lessons from the Brief History of a Regional University in Southern Africa." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013) 465–480; P.T. Mgadla and B.T. Mokopakgosi, "Botswana and the Liberation of South Africa: An Evolving Story of Sacrifice." in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET). African Solidarity*, vol. 5, ed. S.M. Ndlovu (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2013), 393–440.

16. Lesotho Government Archive, Maseru, *Cabinet Refugees*, File CA/UN/2/Vol. 1.

NUL set aside 25% of scholarships for South African refugees, with further scholarships for Namibian and Rhodesian students.¹⁷

The year 1976 was when high school students in SA embarked on protests, which started in Soweto and later spread countrywide. The SRC at NUL in collaboration with individual students and other movements, formed a committee for action in solidarity with the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles of fellow southern African countries and students.¹⁸ What started as an SRC project later became an autonomous, fulltime committee focussing on broad, united solidarity in the liberation struggle of southern Africa.

Those who formed CASSAS (sometimes referred to as a forum), were regarded as the left-wing Basotho NUL students because of their anti-apartheid solidarity tendencies and their support for the liberation struggle in southern Africa. On the formation of CASSAS, Mothibe and Mushonga observe:

It was formed following the flight of many black students from South African schools and universities in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprising. It was a broad anti-imperialist front of people who were passionate about the struggle against oppression in general, and apartheid in particular... It was also a 'school' for 'comrades', especially those who had come from South Africa, through which they were recruited into left-leaning politics.¹⁹

In the chapter published by Mothibe and Mushonga under the auspices of the Hashim Mbita project, a few pages were dedicated to the issues pertaining to higher education and CASSAS in Lesotho. Striking in this chapter is how the authors managed to successfully link the formation of CASSAS with SA's liberation struggle. They claim that NUL's adoption of the idea of a non-racial community was one of its key features. As a result, it was welcoming to individuals from many cultural, racial, and ethnic origins. Furthermore, they asserted that NUL greatly broke down any boundaries that South Africans and other nations had previously faced. South African students discovered that white lecturers at NUL were just like everyone else and fought apartheid because the institution was a non-racial one and some white academics preferred to work there.²⁰ We affirm in this article that it is within this context that NUL was seen as a regional university with Pan-Africanist links.

17. T.H. Mothibe and M. Mushonga, "Lesotho and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa." in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET). African Solidarity*, vol. 5, ed. S.M. Ndlovu. (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2013), 488–490.

18. Two of the more popular youth groups among educated Basotho were the University Christian Movement (UCM) and the Student Christian Movement (SCM), which had chapters in schools in Lesotho and South Africa. In South Africa, the UCM allowed young South Africans to envision a new future through a Christian framework, despite bleak times under the apartheid regime's repression. In Lesotho, Basotho youth utilised the UCM and SCM as forums to discuss contentious issues and use faith to try and bridge political and religious divides. It should be observed that these organisations were never fully introduced into the CASSAS agenda. For more information see, D.R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977* (Athens, GA: Ohio University Press, 2010), 73–74, 161–163.

19. Mothibe and Mushonga, "Lesotho and the Struggle for Liberation," 489.

20. T.H. Mothibe and M. Mushonga, "Fighting from 'The Belly of the Beast' Lesotho's Contribution to the Liberation Struggle of South Africa." in *Southern African Liberation Struggles: Contemporaneous Documents, 1960–1994, vol.7, SADC Hashim Mbita Project*, eds. A.J. Temu and J.N. Tembe (Dar-es-Salaam: Mkuki na Nyoka Publishers, 2014) 362–366.

The late 1970s to early 1980s was a time when the political climate in Lesotho saw a distinct polarisation between the nationalists and the communists. It was during this period that the BNP leadership classified Ntsu Mokhehle of the BCP as a communist, because of his earlier ties with the African National Congress (ANC).²¹ While to some degree, Mokhehle was regarded as radical, he was highly respected by many, especially the youth and the more leftist citizens. In essence, CASSAS advocated the issue of politicisation. Pherudi and Dalindybebo maintain that the student movements/forums such as CASSAS, the Lumumba Society and even individual student activists carried and perpetuated ideologies, such as Marxist-Leninism, Pan Africanism, and anti-imperialism. Chris Hani and Mokhafisi Kena were credited with the formation of CASSAS.²²

Marxism, in all its manifestations, from Marxism–Leninism to, later, African nationalism, served as the main ideological framework of the students' intellectual conversations. It also provided a crucial framework for social and political analysis for African intellectual life, following the defeat of Nazism and the role played in that defeat by communists in resistance activities. This would have an impact on students and provide them with a different foundation on which to build an anti-colonial rhetoric in the context of Lesotho politics. Sehoai Santho, who worked as a Political Science lecturer and doubled as a political activist in his own right, refers to CASSAS as 'the organic mainstay of activism at NUL for both students and staff consciousness and solidarity'.²³

In this section of the article, although acknowledging the many objectives of CASSAS, we decided to sample a few, which resonated with the leadership of the forum. One objective was to deal with a definition of imperialism. For the forum, to find a common one that was acceptable to members became a challenge, given the numerous ways imperialism has manifested itself across the globe. Defining imperialism was crucial to articulating the very fabric of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements that CASSAS was representing. In defining imperialism or seeking to do so, the forum would resultantly create awareness about the implicit imperial ills directly affecting its members, students, and other target groups. This was done by interrogating the homogenous cases of oppression seen in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Despite this, CASSAS members agreed that imperialism wore many faces, as oppression was experienced differently under British rule. To these members, the exploited and oppressed needed a radical way of dealing

21. For more information on Mokhehle and his role within the BCP and in exile, see M. Ntsukunyane, *A Brief History of the Basutoland Congress Party: Lekhotla la Mahatammoho, 1952–2002* (Morija: Morija Printing Works, 2004); M. Ntsukunyane, *Exiled Ntsu Mokhehle: The Great Mass-Leader and the Victim of Politics of Convenience in Retrospect* (Morija: Morija Printing Works, 2010); M.G. Lekunutu, *Factors that Account for the Failure of the Basutoland Congress Party in the 1965 General Elections* (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 1985).

22. M. Pherudi and N. Dalindybebo, "The role of National University of Lesotho in developing leadership for free South Africa", Paper Virtually Delivered at the AFDeL 2022 Conference, Lesotho, 20 March 2022, 5.

23. M. Pherudi (Personal Collection) telephonic interview, S Santho (former lecturer, National University of Lesotho), 23 October 2021.

with oppression. This objective of defining imperialism corroborated the assertion that it could be helpful in creating awareness and action to remedy the situation through some political means.

Besides the issues of defining imperialism, another objective of CASSAS while reading through its constitution was that of searching for the truth in the socio-economic and political challenges faced by the African continent. However, the forum was conscious of the fact that exposing this truth about the conditions in countries, such as Lesotho and SA, could also be dangerous. Therefore, members of CASSAS were cautious about when to make such revelations. The forum observed the 'reactionary politics' of the apartheid regime and BNP government as potential risks to students and staff members at NUL to freely express themselves without concerns of arrest, assassination or injury.

Another objective titled *Umoja ni nguvu, utengano ni adhaifu* translated 'Unity is strength, division is weakness' is a well-known Swahili proverb that has been echoed in the political rhetoric of numerous African leaders. For example, in his address to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah stated: 'Our objective is African union now, there is no time to waste. We must unite now or perish'.²⁴ The aforesaid shows that unity was a central principle of liberation.

Available evidence indicates that CASSAS was successful in achieving some of the above-mentioned objectives. The forum's assistance to the victims of apartheid and other oppressive systems in the southern African region could not only be seen through commentary and congregation around the NUL campus but also through the diversity of its members, including apartheid victims from SA.²⁵ The forum managed to integrate broader student political activities on the campus, thus creating an environment where students could freely express themselves. Through the establishment of CASSAS, a platform was created for South African students at NUL, a taste of 'freedom of speech' that would have resulted in arrests, assaults and even murder in their home country. The purpose of CASSAS, among other things, was to ideologically strengthen the activities of all exiled students. The forum backed liberation movements in southern Africa, including those in SA, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, and South West Africa (Namibia). Along with other organisations, it also supported Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization and the Polisario Front of Western Sahara.²⁶

24. K. Nkrumah, "Speech at OAU Summit, 24 May 1963." <https://www.ghanaculture.gov.ord.gh/mod_pdf. See also M. Pherudi, *Storm in the Mountain* (Bethlehem: Hoogland Printers, 2004), 2.

25. L. Rakuoane and H. Sekonyela observed that CASSAS had in its membership those of the South African diaspora. Although not many names were mentioned regarding this, suffice to indicate that there were leaders such as Mzimkhulu Gwetshe, Pat January and Nkgoako Ramathlodi who came up. Some of the Basotho students Kananelo Mosito, Nqosa Mahao and Sehoai Santho and the likes of Kenyan, Rock Ajulu were members. Rakuoane was able to be a member of the SRC on a CASSAS ticket and once in, he became instrumental in persuading some of his colleagues to use some SRC resources to support and participate in the liberation struggle.

26. Mothibe and Mushonga, "Fighting from ..." 363.

Among other activities that formed part of CASSAS's solidarity work, every year at the intervarsity games, they hosted what became known as Solidarity Evenings. While there were various political parties fighting for the overall liberation of Africa, movements that shared common political principles would naturally show support for one another. At these evenings, student activists from Botswana and Swaziland attended, representing various parties.²⁷

Rakuoane observed that the SRC from the UB, for example, was in support of the PAC, while NUL's CASSAS stood with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC. Committee for Action and Solidarity for Southern African Students tasked itself with the responsibility of providing a platform for leftist discussions that would equip the youth for liberation activism. Non-racialism, as an ideological standpoint was a significant part of CASSAS ideology and highly influential, according to its proponent, the ANC.²⁸ Committee for Action and Solidarity for Southern African Students' ideological standpoint, however, was unclear in the first year or two of its existence. Its establishment initially intended to offer support to every committee, party or movement fighting against imperialism and the systematic and physical oppression of the African people.

The CASSAS believed that education and acquiring skills was important for the liberation of the African masses. Thus, the issue of literacy and education for African students was one of supreme importance to the anti-apartheid struggle. Education, as discussed, was one of the core principles in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), the ANC, and PAC. The leaders of these organisations with university qualifications who were undoubtedly viewed as credible to lead the struggle, also aimed to help find sponsors for students to enable them to follow their academic pursuits, and later promote literacy in Africa. This was evident in 1978 when the World University Service (WUS) offered scholarships to NUL for the South African refugees, so that they could attain their much-needed tertiary education. International donors, such as the United Nations (UN) offered many scholarships, which were long-term investments in the future of African countries.

Committee for Action and Solidarity for Southern African Students activities as reflected through *The Vanguard*²⁹

Another objective by CASSAS that deserves extensive interrogation in this article is the forum's quest to attain

27.M. Motsokane (Personal Collection) interview, L. Rakuoane (former student, National University of Lesotho), Maseru, 20 July 2017.

28.Motsokane (Personal Collection) interview, L. Rakuoane.

29.*The Vanguard* was established as a quarterly publication of CASSAS in 1978. It published articles and opinion pieces on the state of liberation in Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe written under pseudonyms to avoid exposure to the apartheid laws and other oppressive legislation. This publication, like the ANC's *Sechaba* and other printed media, became a significant platform for the advancement of liberation politics. It had a wide spectrum and scope in terms of covering political issues, as well as sensitising NUL students to the political developments, not only in Lesotho, but also in the neighbouring countries. It did not only publish articles by students but also by some of the NUL lecturers who were viewed as progressive. An example was Bill McClain who went by the pseudonym of Joe Hill.

solidarity for those students on the African continent who faced challenges created by colonialism and apartheid. It focussed on the inhumane, socio-economic and political conditions in SA under apartheid. This stance was revealed in CASSAS's constitution which reads: 'To make it clear at all times to the students and peoples of Africa that one is either a part of the problem or a part of the solution'.³⁰ This objective on its own could be considered an implicit statement of politicisation, thus, suggesting that if people remained silent on apartheid and imperialist undertones, they risked being part of the problem.

The aim of fostering solidarity was not only to expose the imperialist West and apartheid in SA, but also to inform Africans about the affairs of their countries. From the NUL side, CASSAS advocated for the sharing of knowledge and information, and for eliminating the elitist status of being a university student. Members argued that the above was critical in eradicating what they referred to as the possibility of 'class suicide'.³¹ This meant that NUL students had to consider to a certain degree, forfeiting their privileges and empower others with information and awareness about the liberation struggle. Thus, CASSAS's commitment to interrogating the truths about apartheid and BNP atrocities was considered as true solidarity. The CASSAS leadership was adamant that to be part of the solution, one had to explicitly tell the truth about apartheid and imperialism. This objective and many others by CASSAS strongly encouraged vocal protests and activism against those perpetuating apartheid and imperialism.

As articulated in *The Vanguard*, solidarity and unity became the cornerstones of students' activism at NUL. Upon attaining national independence in 1966, Members of Parliament (MPs) in Lesotho declared NUL was still to maintain a sense of compassion and solidarity with students from other countries, further reiterating that the institution should maintain its accessibility to students from elsewhere on the continent.³² If students at NUL saw the need for solidarity and commitment to the global course against imperialism and apartheid as being important, surely individuals and groups from other countries did so. For example, Mozambican and South African liberation groups from the early 1960s worked very closely with one another towards the eventual conquest of their respective oppressors. The ANC formed close ties with Frente de Libertao de Mocambique (FRELIMO) in 1968. Based on the above-mentioned information, we conclude, therefore, that NUL was indeed a Pan-African university in an age of unrelenting imperialist oppression.

Students in Lesotho were able to show, through CASSAS, that they were an integral part of the struggle for southern

30.CASSAS Constitution, 52.

31.The concept was used frequently in the rhetoric of student movements that invested in the total liberation of South Africa and Lesotho. It assumed that privileges enjoyed by the elite groups, including the educated could not fully contribute to liberation without becoming one with unprivileged and oppressed masses.

32.*Hansard Official Report*, "Parliamentary Debate of the Interim National Assembly," October 1975.

Africa. The forum was very open about its opposition to the apartheid regime, and the government and the UN supported some of its initiatives. In addition, CASSAS worked in many ways to influence university policies and convince the institution to back the liberation cause. National University of Lesotho and CASSAS have both, at various times, welcomed foreign speakers to the institution to conduct public lectures. This proved that CASSAS's operations extended beyond Lesotho and NUL. The CASSAS members travelled abroad with financial assistance from the UN to connect with other progressive forces.³³

As previously mentioned, CASSAS's solidarity could be seen through the diverse commentary supporting the liberation forces, such as the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in Angola, South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in the then South West Africa (now Namibia), the ANC in SA, the Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in Guinea, and many more. As shown hereunder, the editors of *The Vanguard* did not fail to congratulate these parties on their successes and encouraged them, even during their challenging times. For example, in 1978 *The Vanguard* wrote:

We have the pleasure of announcing the release of Ngugi wa Thiongo ... Ngugi wa Thiongo has been released after international campaigns for his release have brought pressures to bear on Kenyan government.³⁴

Some of the important lessons learnt through CASSAS are as follows: firstly, it promoted solidarity among students. In October 1986 when the President of Mozambique, Samora Machel's aircraft crashed and he died with 34 others at Mbuzini on the South African side, NUL students walked from Roma campus to Maseru in protest.³⁵ Secondly, students performed community service (*letsema*) during heavy storms in the nearby villages. They easily interacted with communities and enjoyed their staple food such as *lipabi*. Most students, including South Africans, were treated as brothers and sisters. Thirdly, the integration of foreign students into local communities was promoted. Those who did not know or understand the language, particularly Sesotho, were afforded an opportunity to learn through interaction with local communities.

Fourthly, as Pae stated, 'Lesotho students were black like black South African students' and that there was no discrimination, no racism, and no xenophobia. They shared a common purpose of studying and completing their degrees, so that they could contribute to developments in their respective countries.³⁶ Through its teachings, CASSAS provided a platform for the Basotho and other students in general, to understand the liberation struggles in Africa and to be able to sympathise with those from oppressed countries.

33. Mothibe and Mushonga, "Fighting from ...," 364.

34. Anon, "Ngugi Released", *The Vanguard* June/December (1981) 40.

35. D. Nase, "Personal Archives on Student Activities at NUL"; See also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa Report, 1989, 25.

36. M.E. Pae, "Experiences of Lesotho Students Studying at the University of Natal: Their Perceptions in Relation to Oppression in the form of Racism, Xenophobia and Sexism" (MEd University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2004), 36.

Through such teachings, students saw themselves as of one origin, namely, that they were all Africans.³⁷

Fifthly, CASSAS encouraged good leadership and academic excellence. Most South African students who studied at NUL became part of the new ANC's government in various spheres after the 1994 democratic transition.³⁸ Most students were funded by World Vision Services-International Scholarship and WUSs-Canada. Like many other scholarships, failure was not an option for the sponsored students as this could lead to the termination of their studies. Therefore, CASSAS reminded such students of their responsibilities back home and their commitments to the welfare of their countries.

In articles such as 'Namibia, SA's UDI' and 'Imperialism', CASSAS strongly condemned the imperialist systems all around the world. Regarding this, once again, CASSAS achieved its goal. It contended that encouraging and promoting global strategies by all forces waging the struggle against imperialism, was key to freedom. This global strategy, which was arguably ambitious was hardest to achieve because of the contradictions arising in ideologies and strategies. The South African liberation movements were good examples of justifying the above. For example, the ANC, PAC and later BCM had divergent approaches to the country's liberation. The ANC strongly believed in the concept of non-racialism, while the PAC and BCM believed that the black people needed to be at the centre of the struggle, with little interaction, if any, of white people.³⁹

The section that follows here provides an analysis of some of the publications by *The Vanguard* with respect to CASSAS activities.

The Vanguard: December 1978

As noticed, some of the ways in which CASSAS contributed to the overall liberation struggle in southern Africa was through commentary in *The Vanguard*. Apartheid, being a system closest to and affecting Lesotho the most, it seemed natural that much of the editorial pieces in this publication would address the multiple issues and challenges arising from the system.

The publication pieces relating to and mentioning SA's liberation struggle the most are examined below to understand the nature of CASSAS's solidarity with the struggle and, perhaps, establish its ideological standpoint. One cannot speak of apartheid and the anti-apartheid

37. M. Pherudi (Personal Collection) telephonic interview, D. Ambrose (former lecturer, National University of Lesotho), Maseru, October 25, 2021.

38. These included P. Mlambo-Ngcuka (former Deputy President of South Africa); T. Mboweni (former Minister of Finance); V. Pikoli (former National Director of Public Prosecutions); Brigadier-General S. Nombewu (South African Defense Force); Adv. B. Motloung (Free State Bar); N. Ramatlhodi (first Premier of Limpopo Province and former Minister of Mineral Resources); T. Nhlapo (Chairperson of the Commission of Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims); and N. Ndebele (former Pro Vice Chancellor at NUL and Vice Chancellor and Principal at UCT).

39. J. Kimble, "A Political Murder: Donald Woods." *The Vanguard* December (1978), 41-43.

struggle without mentioning South West Africa (Namibia), which suffered similar injustices under the leadership of the National Party (NP) of SA. Racialism, economic exploitation, and cultural degradation which the African people in SA experienced were similar to those experienced in South West Africa. As early as 1978, SA held internal elections in which it claimed that 8% of the population had gone to the polls.

Responding to the above, Olindi Ragira, Rok Ajulu's pseudonym lambasted the South African regime and stated: 'African puppets to be installed as supposedly elected representatives of the people of Namibia'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, he opined:

In reality, South Africa will retain formal control of Walvis Bay, while its full contingent of defense forces will remain in the territory, at the 'special request' of the new government.⁴¹

Ajulu, thus demonstrated the depth of SA's political manoeuvrings to maintain and spread the tentacles of apartheid. The system was essentially intended to spread across the southern Africa region, having a direct and strong influence in the affairs of each country and pillaging anything that stood in its way. This happened in SA and, according to the editorial in *The Vanguard*, also in South West Africa. The motives behind these elections were exposed and publicly condemned by *The Vanguard*. Articulating SA's standpoint on SWAPO and its influence on the Namibian people, P.W. Botha indicated, 'I would not allow SA's army and police to be pushed into the background while SWAPO creates a Marxist government'.⁴²

Ajulu is commended for the sharp and frank delivery of this commentary, which we believe was an act of resistance contributing to the advancement of anti-apartheid activism. He scorned the South African leadership by bluntly stating, '... South Africa demonstrated to the world that it can blithely carry out its own declaration of independence, and ruthlessly impose its will on the people of Namibia ...'⁴³ Here, Ajulu clearly condemned the South African leadership and its actions which, despite numerous counts of international interventions, unashamedly perpetuated the unjust and inhumane practices of apartheid.

On the issue of SA's unresponsiveness to international interventions, Ajulu asked, Why did the Nationalist government spend 18 months in negotiations with the UN, the 'Big Five, and even SWAPO itself? What was the purpose and significance of these negotiations?⁴⁴ In this commentary, SWAPO was identified by Ajulu as CASSAS's ally and all other solidarity organisations advocating for the liberation

40.O. Ragira, "Namibia: South Africa's UDI", *The Vanguard* December (1978), 14.

41.Ragira, "Namibia: South Africa's UDI ...," 14.

42.Ragira, "Namibia: South Africa's UDI ...," 19.

43.Ragira, "Namibia: South Africa's UDI ...," 19.

44.The 'Big Five' consisted of France, China, United States of America, United Kingdom, and Russia. For more information see D.U. Zaire, "Namibia and United Nations until 1990", A. Bosl, A. Du Pisani and D.U. Zaire (eds.). *Namibia's Foreign Relations: Historic Contexts, Current Dimensions, and Perceptions for the 21st Century* (Windhoek, Macmillan Education, 2014), 46.

struggle. Like the ANC, SWAPO was recognised at NUL as a true representative of the Namibian people. Typical of SA's reactionary politics, SWAPO suffered a similar fate as the ANC and any other group supporting the struggle for liberation. Once again, the ideology of Marxism emerged as apartheid's biggest ideological rival. Bearing in mind that Marxism was the ideological core of most, if not all, liberation movements in SA, it was not surprising that the apartheid regime was also threatened by its spread into the neighbouring countries. Based on the Marxism sympathy, that could be seen in both the student formations and the scholarship of lectures at NUL, the above claim can be argued to be true. The ideological basis of CASSAS and the SLF as explained in this edition of *The Vanguard* was predominantly influenced by the principles of Marxism or sometimes Marxism-Leninism.

The Vanguard: June and September 1979

The June/September 1979 *The Vanguard* publication publicly highlighted its solidarity with the worldwide struggle for freedom and through its publications, such struggle was intensified. The commentary highlighted the issues of mobilisation and heightened political activism by NUL students for the advancement and victory of the South African liberation struggle.⁴⁵ Interestingly, the cover page of the issue referred to here, showed a picture of Nelson Mandela with the title, *Nelson Mandela is honoured by NUL*.⁴⁶ Inside was an editorial on the prospects of a total war in SA, a tribute to Mandela and Agostinho Neto, and of the liberation struggle in Namibia. Contributors addressed the 'Revolution in Grenada', the 'Imperialist Logic', and a perspective of the South African condition as it was in 1979.⁴⁷ All articles carried messages of solidarity with the liberation struggles of different countries, thus achieving the objectives of the CASSAS constitution.

On 29 September 1979, the NUL honoured Nelson Mandela with a degree of Doctor of Laws in a graduation ceremony attended by ANC Secretary General, Alfred Nzo and other dignitaries. This occasion was declared by *The Vanguard* as a 'day that will go down in the history of liberatory circles in southern Africa'.⁴⁸ The day was referred to as such because this event to honour Mandela was one way of showcasing and acknowledging NUL's role in the anti-apartheid struggle, not as peripheral but as truly central to the eventual victory of the struggle. During this historic event, the liberation community was assured of NUL's commitment to the struggle, by stating that the university had made numerous appeals to the South African regime for Mandela's release.⁴⁹

45.Anon, "Victory of the South African Liberation Struggle." *The Vanguard*, June/September (1979) 2-3.

46.Anon, "Victory of the South African ..." 2-3.

47.Anon, "Victory of the South African ..." 17-48.

48.Anon, "Victory of the South African ..." 7.

49.Anon, "Victory of the South African ..." 7.

The author who reported on this ceremony stated, 'The award of honorary doctorate must, therefore, be seen as solidarity with what Nelson Mandela, the ANC and the people of SA have taken up arms for'.⁵⁰ As the struggle intensified, so did NUL's support for the anti-apartheid struggle. For example, the regime blocked Winnie Mandela's attendance at the ceremony. This issue of *The Vanguard* praised the ANC for tormenting the apartheid regime in SA. Furthermore, the publication reaffirmed its stance and belief in the ANC's principles, ideology, and liberation activities. It declared the ANC 'a national movement, which has carved itself the reputation of African revolutionary pioneer and vanguard of national liberation in South Africa'.⁵¹ This article covering NUL's honour to Mandela revealed once again the unwavering support CASSAS had for the liberation struggle, and its loyalty to the ANC.

The Vanguard: June/September 1980

In May 1979 the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) was established in Tanzania. True to its mandate of solidarity, CASSAS hosted a dinner at NUL to raise funds for the college. According to *The Vanguard*, the fundraising event was a success, raising M1418 (R1418) to be donated to the college.⁵² The event symbolised two important issues; firstly, it was another example of CASSAS's commitment to ending the imperialist and apartheid perils in SA and empowering, and uplifting those affected by the apartheid regime's racial policies. In addition to the funds raised for the dinner, M813 (R813) of sports equipment was also sent to SOMAFCO. Secondly, it showed solidarity between the ANC and the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) Revolutionary Party of Tanzania.⁵³

The aforesaid showed the lengths to which CASSAS and its members went in support of the anti-apartheid movements. The students at NUL were not only vocal about their solidarity but they also exhibited what could be termed a 'hands-on approach'. This was not a minor feat, considering that they had limited financial sponsors as opposed to other non-student committees.

The Vanguard: June/December 1981

The cover of this edition boasted a map of southern Africa with a military tank driving through it. Its headline was 'Stop the war against Angola and Mozambique'.⁵⁴ This headline and the images accompanying it served as a politicisation tool for the students at NUL and other readers of the publication. We contend that such commentary served as a reminder to the students at NUL of the ongoing struggles against imperialism in other countries. In 1980 and 1981, the

50. Anon, "Victory of the South African ...," 7.

51. Anon, "Victory of the South African ...," 7.

52. Anon, "CASSAS raises M1418.00 for ANC school – SOMAFCO." *The Vanguard* June/September (1980) 44.

53. Anon, "CASSAS raises ...," 44.

54. Anon, "Cover Page." *The Vanguard* June/December (1981).

South African Defence Force (SADF) intensified 'terrorist' military attacks on Mozambique and Angola in a nervous attempt to maintain power in the region. True to its spirit of solidarity, *The Vanguard* once again reinforced the importance of supporting these countries during the battle against apartheid. In this publication, the author observes that the SADF attacked the homes of ANC members at Matola in Mozambique, killing 13 people.⁵⁵

On 27 March, the SADF, once more, made incursions across the Mozambique border at Porta do Ouro but they were driven back by the Mozambique army. On 07 June, a 3000 SADF contingent, supported by 49 tanks, 20 helicopters and 3 squadrons of Mirage jets invaded the southern part of Angola and seized the provincial capital of Kunene. On 27 July, another invasion of Angola ensued. After this, it was reported that more than 60 soldiers and civilians were killed. In late August 1981, SA launched another attack on southern Angola.⁵⁶ It was only a year after the Matola raid in Mozambique when the SADF launched a similar attack in Maseru (Lesotho). All these attacks, as published in *The Vanguard*, likely heightened the political conscientisation of both students and staff at NUL. The actions of the SADF were exposed. In his article, Sehoai Santho using the pseudonym of Joe Moriri wrote an article titled 'Angola: The Facts of Aggression' gave a deeper analysis of the unfolding events in Angola, deciphering what these events meant for the apartheid regime.

Not forsaking CASSAS's confidence in the victory against apartheid, the editorial in this publication went on to state that Pretoria's aggressive attempts to silence those who were against apartheid were met with resistance. The liberation movements remained steadfast in their struggle for freedom. Based on the aforesaid, it became clear that CASSAS was committed to supporting the liberation struggle not only in Lesotho but also in the whole region. This was consistent with the ideals of promoting solidarity within the African countries. Even clear was the public's politics in the face of the struggle; the political loyalties of *The Vanguard* could be seen in the topics of choice and the general tone used during these discussions.

Conclusion

The NUL campus was made up of a network of dedicated, active students and staff who often represented the struggle as if it were their own. A constant feature in the narrative carried by these collectives was the link drawn between Lesotho's own political situation and that of neighbouring apartheid SA. From the aforementioned, CASSAS played a significant role uniting and conscientising the NUL students and those outside the institution politically. As shown in the article, CASSAS had some challenges regarding its operations; however, it managed to overcome them. This is evident in the articles published in *The Vanguard* that upheld

55. Anon, "Editorial." *The Vanguard* June/December (1981), 1.

56. Anon, "Editorial ...," 1.

a common voice of solidarity with the liberation struggle in SA. The politicisation of students through this publication was seen not only through the material that dominated the pages but also in the way the contributors interacted with information on the published articles. The authors did not only disseminate information but also provided detailed critical analyses of such information.

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The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

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Disclaimer

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