



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Africans and the Soviet Rights Archipelago*

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Abstract

The history of Soviet “rights defenders” is seemingly well known. Emerging in the 1960s in response to fears of a creeping re-Stalinization, the rights movement was part of the broader dissident milieu that coalesced in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. Drawing on new documents from the Ukrainian KGB, this article broadens the canon of what we consider “Soviet rights talk” by focusing on a group completely ignored in the existing history of Soviet rights defenders: African students. As the article demonstrates, Soviet citizens were not the only people to draw on a discursive repertoire of civil and universal rights to articulate their demands against the Soviet state. By closely examining the letters and petitions activists produced, it becomes clear that African students’ language of rights grew alongside and, in many respects, pre-empted the Soviet rights movement. The article concludes by considering why, despite sharing the same discursive and physical spaces, neither African nor Soviet rights defenders succeeded in building bridges between their respective islands of protest. Examining this failure to build meaningful solidarities demonstrates the value of pursuing the social history of internationalism; it is only in the banality of the everyday that the capacity for Soviet internationalism to create unanticipated frictions and conflicts reveals itself.

“5 December 1965 may be considered the birthday of the human rights movement [*pravozashchitnoe dvizhenie*]”, wrote Soviet dissident Liudmila Alekseeva in the 1980s. On that day, according to Alekseeva, the first demonstration in the Soviet Union to carry human rights slogans took place on Pushkin Square in Moscow, following the arrest in September of authors Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel’.¹ Both authors were charged with anti-Soviet activity for having published abroad work critical of the Soviet government, under the pseudonyms Abram Terts and

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¹Liudmila Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomyслиia v SSSR. Noveishii period* (Benson, VT, 1984), p. 240. Somewhat ironically, Aleksandr Daniel’, Iulii Daniel’'s son, dates the birth of the Soviet human rights movement to 1968. See Iulii Daniel’, “Geburt der Menschenrechtsbewegung. Das Jahr 1968 in der UdSSR”, *Osteuropa*, 58:7 (2008), pp. 47–55.

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Nikolai Arzhak. Their arrest was widely interpreted among the intelligentsia as evidence of the creeping re-Stalinization that followed the ouster of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev the previous year.² Alekseeva's account is illustrative of the fact that the history of the Soviet human rights movements, like that of many movements of the 1960s, was initially written by activists themselves.³ And, just as the scholarship on the "Global Sixties" has worked to "emancipate itself from narratives dominated by former activists and their opponents", so historians of the Soviet rights movement have sought to historicize and problematize the role of dissidents and rights activists in the post-Stalin Soviet Union.⁴

While this more recent historiography has done much to remove the glow of hagiography that surrounded early accounts of the Soviet rights movement, the basic sketch of its outline remains largely intact. The arrest and trial of Siniavskii and Daniel' is presented, rightly, as a key inflection point in the development of the "rights defenders" (*pravozashchitniki*). As historians such as Benjamin Nathans and Robert Horvath have described, these rights defenders sought to defend both inalienable rights and the more limited rights enumerated in the Soviet Constitution in ways that blurred the lines between the universal and the particular.⁵

This article seeks to broaden the contours of our understanding of Soviet rights defenders in the 1960s by considering a group that, like their Soviet counterparts, took to the streets and penned letters of protest to authorities in Moscow. However, unlike Liudmila Alekseeva, these rights defenders were not Soviet. They were African. By the end of the 1960s, thousands of students were arriving from across the African continent to study in Soviet universities.⁶ And while the Soviet authorities imagined that the gift of an education would ensure their quiescence, African students quickly and frequently disabused them of this misconception.

²Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY, 2008), pp. 5–6.

³Besides Alekseeva's, a number of dissident autobiographies published in the West during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as works published by their Western interlocutors, framed the early history of Soviet dissents. See Vyacheslav Chornovil, *The Chornovil Papers* (London, 1968); Anatoly Marchenko, *My Testimony*, transl. Michael Scammell (London, 1969); Valentyn Moroz, *Report from the Beria Reserve: The Protest Writings of Valentyn Moroz, a Ukrainian Political Prisoner in the USSR* (London, 1974); Peter Reddaway, "The Development of Dissent and Opposition", in Archie Brown and Michael Kaser (eds), *The Soviet Union since the Fall of Khrushchev* (London, [1969] 1978), pp. 121–156; *idem*, "Police towards Dissent since Khrushchev", in T.H. Rigby, Archie Brown, and Peter Reddaway (eds), *Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR: Essays Dedicated to Leonard Schapiro* (London, 1980), pp. 158–192.

⁴Martin Klimke and Mary Nolan, "Introduction: The Globalization of the Sixties", in Chen Jian *et al.* (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (Abingdon, 2018), pp. 1–9, 1. For examples of the more recent historiography of the Soviet rights movement, see Barbara Walker, "Pollution and Purification in the Moscow Human Rights Networks of the 1960s and 1970s", *Slavic Review*, 68:2 (2009), pp. 376–395; Benjamin Nathans, "Talking Fish: On Soviet Dissident Memoirs", *Journal of Modern History*, 87:3 (2015), pp. 579–614.

⁵Robert Horvath describes Soviet rights defenders as "a defender both of inalienable rights and the letter of the law" in *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratisation and Radical Nationalism in Russia* (Abingdon, 2005), p. 47. See also Benjamin Nathans, "The Disenchantment of Socialism: Soviet Dissidents, Human Rights, and the New Global Morality", in *idem*, *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), pp. 33–48.

⁶Constantin Katsakioris, "Burden or Allies? Third World Students and Internationalist Duty through Soviet Eyes", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 18:3 (2017), pp. 539–567.

From shortly after their arrival in the late 1950s, African students drew on a language and practices of activism remarkably similar to those of Soviet rights defenders. Despite this, they have remained completely ignored in histories of Soviet rights, both by activists at the time, who eschewed any mention of African students' parallel appeal to Soviet legality, and by historians in the years since.

I refer to the existence of these parallel, but apparently unconnected, movements as part of the Soviet rights archipelago. In his magnum opus *The Gulag Archipelago*, Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn described for the first time the sprawling network of prison camps that were first erected in the Solovki islands in the White Sea and then spread across the vast expanse of the Soviet Union.⁷ The Soviet "dissident movement" was, like the prison system that sought to constrain it, an archipelago of its own, comprised of islands of various sizes and types that represented a range of unorthodox thought and practice.⁸ Despite the seas that separated them, Soviet rights defenders on their various islands saw some success in building bridges with one another. That was not true of African rights defenders, who remained stranded on an island of their own.⁹ Considering African and Soviet rights defenders as representing islands in this archipelago allows us to acknowledge their similarities without assuming a relationship between the two.

By turning its attention to this outlying and unchartered island of the Soviet rights archipelago, the article addresses broader questions of Soviet internationalism in the post-Stalin period. Internationalism often implies conjuncture – the movement of people, ideas, and objects across borders. Certainly, the invitation to thousands of African students to study in the Soviet Union was imagined by Soviet politicians and policymakers as a moment of connection between the twin experiments of Soviet socialism and postcolonial African nationalism. But by moving beyond the level of international politics to the level of the everyday, we see that within these moments of conjuncture appear critical moments of disjuncture. These moments of disjuncture occurred not just between African rights defenders and the Soviet state, but, as we will see, also between African rights defenders and Soviet rights defenders. This failure to build bridges between the islands of African rights talk and Soviet rights talk reveals something about the nature of the movements themselves: their blind spots and, ultimately, their failures. In addressing these disjunctures, the article, like others in this Special Issue, contributes to a deeper understanding of the social history of the "home front" of socialist internationalism

⁷Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag GULAG 1918–1956. Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia* (Paris, 1973).

⁸Though she does not use the metaphor, Liudmila Alekseeva talks about both the diversity of Soviet dissent and attempts to forge solidarities between different groups. See Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomyслиia*. For a broader discussion of East European "dissidents", see Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless", in *idem et al.*, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (Armonk, NY, 1985), pp. 23–96.

⁹Jan Eckel has advanced a similar metaphor for human rights activism globally: "What we might call islands of activism emerged [...] which, although politically distinct, were also related in some respects to explicit engagement with human rights." See Eckel, *The Ambivalence of Good: Human Rights in International Politics since the 1940s*, transl. Rachel Ward (New York, 2019), p. 128.

or, to put it another way, of how socialist internationalism was reflected back on to Soviet society itself.¹⁰ Though neither African rights defenders nor their Soviet analogues could be described as part of “mass” movements, approaching them comparatively throws the paradox of Soviet internationalism – its liberatory potential and its authoritarian reality – into sharp relief.

In elaborating the connections and disjunctures between African and Soviet rights talk, the article first examines the language of rights employed by the better-known Soviet rights defenders. Though these events are well established in the literature, revisiting Soviet citizens’ letters and petitions provides important context for understanding African rights defenders. The article then turns to African rights defenders, as well as the streams of postcolonial dissent from which they emerged. For Soviet rights defenders, their protests against overreaches of Soviet power were recorded at the time in *samizdat* (self-published) documents, many of which made their way to the West and were published both in Russian and in translation. This was partially true of African rights defenders, too; those who were among the first to protest the Soviet government did so in publications published in the West. However, for the most part the petitions and protests of African rights defenders have remained obscured. Using newly declassified records in the British National Archives and the records of the KGB in Kyiv, we arrive at a closer appreciation of the language and practice of African rights defenders. The article concludes with a reflection on why these islands of activists failed to build bridges with one another.

Soviet Rights Defenders

The demonstration against the trial of Siniavskii and Daniel’ took place in December 1965. News of the demonstration had spread in Moscow through a *samizdat* leaflet written by the poet and mathematician Aleksandr Esenin-Vol’pin. In his “Civic Appeal”, Vol’pin called attention to the lawlessness of the Soviet state, which was breaking its own laws by denying Siniavskii and Daniel’ an open trial. It was this kind of lawlessness, Vol’pin argued, that had cost the lives and freedom of millions of Soviet citizens during the Stalin era: “The bloody past calls us to be vigilant in the present”, Vol’pin warned his readers. To combat such lawlessness, Vol’pin called for a “glasnost’ meeting” (*miting glasnosti*) at which participants would chant a single slogan: “We demand an open trial” (*my trebuem glasnosti suda*). The meeting was to be carried out in the strictest accordance with Soviet law; any behaviour that transgressed Soviet law would be “harmful and possibly provocative” and participants should suppress any illegal activity. The rally was to take place beneath the statue of Aleksandr Pushkin on 5 December, Soviet Constitution Day.¹¹ This “legalist” argument – that laws should be understood in exactly the way they were written and not as they were interpreted by the Soviet government – became a

¹⁰On the internationalist “home front”, see Péter Apor and James Mark, “Home Front”, in James Mark and Paul Betts (eds), *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization* (Oxford, 2022), pp. 318–357.

¹¹“Grazhdanskoe obrashchenie”, in E.S. Shvarts (ed.), *Antologiiia samizdata. Nepodtsenzurnaia literatura v SSSR, 1950-e–1980-e gg.*, Vol. 1, Book 2 (Moscow, 2005), p. 345.

hallmark of Vol'pin's critique of Soviet power.¹² Chief among these laws was article 125 of the Soviet Constitution, introduced by Stalin in 1936, which guaranteed all Soviet citizens freedom of speech, the press, and assembly.¹³ Vol'pin had deployed this tactic before; in an event that dissident Vladimir Bukovskii described as the beginning of the Soviet human rights movement, in early 1962, Vol'pin managed to enter a trial by presenting the guard with a copy of the Soviet Criminal Code.¹⁴

These early stirrings of a Soviet dissident movement in many respects set the tone for what was to come. In particular, the emphasis on *glasnost'*, a term difficult to translate into English but usually rendered as "openness" or, less commonly, as "publicity", became a hallmark for many Soviet rights defenders. In his research on dissident uses of *glasnost'*, Robert Horvath delineates three ways in which Soviet rights defenders employed the language of openness in their interactions with the Soviet state: the demand for *glasnost'*; the weapon of *glasnost'*; and the practice of *glasnost'*. Vol'pin's call for open trials best exemplifies the demand for *glasnost'*, while the publicity that dissidents provided for those incarcerated in prisons and psychiatric institutions offers an example of the weapon of *glasnost'*. Related to *glasnost'*-as-weapon was its practice, which included dissidents emerging from the underground to air their views in public, often at great risk to themselves and their associates.¹⁵

The Pushkin Square demonstration attracted around 200 participants. However, it was almost immediately stopped by police and twenty demonstrators were arrested. Several were subsequently expelled from the Young Communist League (the Komsomol) and the various institutes at which they studied. In response, another leaflet, signed by the "Resistance" group, was distributed around Moscow University, decrying "the violation of the most basic democratic norms" and the "vile campaign of reprisals" against participants in the demonstration. In doing so, the Resistance group protested both the violation of individual autonomy and the specific freedoms protected by the Soviet Constitution:

Who is responsible for these violations of constitutional freedoms? Obviously – no one! Obviously, the authorities do not consider it necessary to ensure the freedoms proclaimed by the Constitution. On the contrary, they support acts of abuse against democracy and encourage manifestations of violence against the individual [*nasilie nad lichnost'iu*], direct and indirect.¹⁶

Both inside and outside the courtroom, Soviet citizens continued to appeal to Soviet legality and the defence of individual dignity. In a letter to Soviet leader Leonid

¹²For more on Vol'pin, see Nathans, "The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol'pin and the Idea of Rights under "Developed Socialism", *Slavic Review*, 66:4 (2007), pp. 630–663.

¹³*Konstitutsiia (osnovnoi zakon) Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik* (Moscow, 1937), pp. 30–31.

¹⁴Vladimir Bukovskii, *I vozvrashchaetsia veter ...* (New York, 1978), p. 144.

¹⁵Horvath, *Legacy of Soviet Dissent*, pp. 46–59. See also *idem*, "The Dissident Roots of *Glasnost'*", in Stephen G. Wheatcroft (ed.), *Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 176–189.

¹⁶"Prizyv grupy "Soprotivleniia", in Aleksandr Ginzburg (ed.), *Belaia knigi po delu A. Siniavskogo i Iu. Danielia* (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), pp. 62–63, 62.

Brezhnev, Andrei Siniavskii's wife Mariia Rozanova, herself a member of dissident circles, wrote: "It may very well be that the result of this letter will be my arrest [...] but even the natural fear of such reprisals cannot stop me, because all legal norms are being trampled; elementary human dignity is being trampled."¹⁷ The wife of Iulii Daniel', Larisa Bogoraz, more explicitly connected her husband's prosecution to a violation of universal norms, pointing to the right to disseminate ideas enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a subsequent letter, she invoked "all these violations of the norms of legality and humanity".¹⁸ The defendants themselves similarly drew on a language of Soviet legality; in his closing remarks, Siniavskii asked the judge: "[A]re not Soviet citizens equal before the law?"¹⁹ Somewhat ironically, given it was, in essence, a show trial, the Soviet press mirrored this language of rights. "While protecting society, life, and the honour and dignity of its citizens, Soviet justice at the same time provides a broad right of protection for those over whom the sword of justice is raised", wrote Iurii Feofanov in his coverage of the trial for *Izvestiia*, the official newspaper of the Soviet government.²⁰ The appeals were to no avail. In February 1966, both Siniavskii and Daniel' were found guilty and sentenced to seven and five years respectively in strict-regime labour camps. The same fate awaited many other Soviet dissidents in the coming years.²¹

That we have these details at all is thanks to Aleksandr Ginzburg, who had been expelled from Moscow State University in 1960 and sentenced to two years in a labour camp for circulating one of the first *samizdat* literary magazines, *Sintaksis*.²² Ginzburg compiled various documents related to the trial and distributed copies of his *White Book*, as it was known. By his own account, his purpose was not to inform the public so much as to inform the relevant authorities about the injustice of the trial. To this end, he produced five copies, one of which he sent directly to the KGB.²³ For their troubles in compiling and distributing information about the trial, Aleksandr Ginzburg and three others were put on trial – the "Trial of the Four" – in January 1968.

Again, a variety of activists rallied in defence of the accused. Among them were Larisa Bogoraz and Pavel Litvinov who, on 11 January 1968, issued an "Appeal to World Opinion". In their appeal, Bogoraz and Litvinov accused the trial of

¹⁷Maia Vasil'evna Rozanova, "Pis'mo zheny A. Siniavskogo L. Brezhnev, General'nomu prokuroru SSSR i Predsedateliu KGB", 24 December 1965, in *Belaia kniga*, pp. 64–67, 65.

¹⁸Larisa Iosifovna Bogoraz, "Pis'mo zheny Iu. Daniela Pervomu sekretariu TsK KPSS" and Bogoraz, "Pis'mo zheny Iu. Daniela General'nomu prokuroru SSSR i Predsedateliu KGB", December 1965, in *Belaia kniga*, pp. 78–82, 79, 82. Bogoraz was not the only one. Aleksandr Ginzburg, in a letter to Aleksei Kosygin, similarly invoked the UDHR. See Ginzburg, "Pis'mo redaktora zhurnala 'Sintaksis' A. Ginzburga A. N. Kosyginu", December 1965, in *Belaia kniga*, pp. 84–88, 87.

¹⁹"Poslednee slovo Andreia Siniavskogo", in *Belaia kniga*, pp. 301–306, 306.

²⁰Iu. Feofanov, "Iz zala suda. Tut tsarit zakon", *Izvestiia*, 10 February 1966. Reproduced (and dated 11 February) in *Belaia kniga*, pp. 207–211.

²¹Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), pp. 172–202.

²²Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (Abingdon, 2005), p. 59.

²³Pavel Litvinov, *Protsess chetyrekh. Sbornik materialov po delu Galanskova, Ginzburga, Dobrovol'skogo i Lashkovo* (Amsterdam, 1971), pp. 7–11.

Ginzburg of being “in violation of the most important Soviet legal norms” and appealed to “everyone who has a conscience and enough courage to demand a public condemnation of this shameful trial”. It was, they wrote, “a stain on the honour of our country and on the conscience of each of us”. The same day, the appeal was broadcast in both English and Russian by the BBC, ensuring the broadest possible audience for the two activists’ call “to the world community and, above all, to the Soviet community”.²⁴

Bogoraz and Litvinov found themselves in the dock later the same year. In August 1968, they and six others gathered at Lobnoe mesto, a site used in previous times to announce tsarist proclamations and located on Red Square not far from St Basil’s Cathedral, sat down, and unfurled banners protesting the recent Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Their banners carried slogans including “For your freedom and ours!” (*Za vashu i nashu svobodu!*), “Hands off Czechoslovakia!” (*Ruki proch’ ot ChSSR!*), and, in Czech, “Long live free and independent Czechoslovakia!” (*Ať žije svobodné a nezávislé Československo!*). Their protest lasted no more than ten minutes. As at the Pushkin Square protest three years earlier, the protestors on Red Square were quickly accosted by plain-clothes police officers, who transported them to a local police station; five were charged with breaching articles 109–1 and 109–3 of the Russian Criminal Code: knowingly disseminating fabrications that defamed the Soviet political and social system, and group activities that disturbed public order.²⁵

Following their detention, Volodia Dremluiga, one of the other protestors, carefully timed their stay in the police station. After three hours, he stood up and headed for the door, explaining that they could not legally be held for longer without a detention order. Natal’ia Gorbanevskaia, another of the protestors, who was saved from detention by the presence of her young child, later noted the irony that one of the items confiscated from Dremluiga’s apartment was a copy of the Criminal Code.²⁶ Gorbanevskaia, with the help of Andrei Amal’rik, sent a letter to various news outlets around the world, including *Le Monde*, *The Times* in London, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*. “I am prepared to testify about this before world opinion”, she wrote.²⁷ Meanwhile, inside the courtroom, the defendants linked their trial to the earlier trials of Siniavskii, Daniel’, and Ginzburg and argued that the “conscience of the people” was on trial, appealing to “all citizens of the USSR, all progressive humanity”.²⁸

Defending their decision to stage their protest on Red Square, which was at the centre of the charge of disturbing public order, Bogoraz told the court: “This protest was addressed to the government and, by tradition, that which is addressed to the government is voiced on Red Square.” Litvinov agreed: “Red Square is an

²⁴Larisa Bogoraz-Daniel’ and Pavel Litvinov, “K mirovoi obshchestvennosti”, in E.S. Shvarts (ed.), *Antologiiia samizdata. Nepodtsenzurnaia literature v SSSR, 1950-e–1980-e, Vol. II: 1966–1973 gody* (Moscow, 2005), pp. 43–44. See also Litvinov, *Protsess chetyrekh*, pp. 260–262.

²⁵Natal’ia Gorbanevskaia, *Polden’. Delo o demonstratsii na Krasnoi ploshchadi 25 avgusta 1968 goda* (Moscow, [1970] 2007).

²⁶Gorbanevskaia, *Polden’*, pp. 52, 56.

²⁷*Idem*, “Glavnym redaktorom gazet”, 28 August 1968, in *idem*, *Polden’*, p. 63.

²⁸*Idem*, *Polden’*, p. 80.

appropriate place to make public an appeal to the government.”²⁹ The judge disagreed. Bogoraz, Litvinov, Dremluiga, and their two co-defendants were convicted on both counts. Bogoraz and Litvinov were sentenced to four and five years in internal exile, respectively; their co-defendants were sentenced to exile or time in a penal colony.

As the 1960s drew to a close, these early experiments in *glasnost'* coalesced around such publications as the *Chronicle of Current Events* and organizations such as the Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights, the Moscow Human Rights Committee, and, after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, the Helsinki Watch Groups. All combined to various degrees acts of publicizing the plight of political prisoners, appealing to public and world opinion, and exposing the hypocrisy of Soviet legality.³⁰

Other groups were similarly engaged in such activities, albeit in ways that spoke less clearly to a language of universal rights. Since the late 1950s, the Crimean Tatars had been petitioning the Soviet authorities for the right to return to Crimea following their mass deportation to Central Asia by Stalin in 1944.³¹ By the late 1960s, the Crimean national movement had adopted some of the same tactics as other rights defenders, including staging a public protest in Maiakovskii Square in Moscow.³² Meanwhile, they had been writing petitions and open letters since the 1950s, some of the earliest instances of *samizdat* being used to organize an independent citizens' movement.³³ These connections were not just one way; the Initiative on Human Rights, for example, took its name from initiative groups established earlier by Tatar activists.³⁴ Meanwhile, the format of the *Chronicle of Current Events* was taken from earlier information bulletins distributed by Crimean Tatars engaged in their own acts of *glasnost'*.³⁵

Like their counterparts in the Moscow rights movement, one strategy the Crimean Tatars increasingly adopted was looking beyond Soviet borders to publicize their fight abroad. In a 1968 appeal, 118 representatives of the Crimean Tatars addressed themselves, like Bogoraz, Litvinov, Gorbanevskaia, and Amal'rik had before them,

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 97, 101.

³⁰Nathans, “Disenchantment of Socialism”.

³¹For more on the movement for return, see Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: From Soviet Genocide to Putin's Conquest* (New York, 2016), pp. 117–160.

³²The various actions by and against Tatar activists were covered extensively by the *Chronicle of Current Events* (CCE). See “Kratkie soobshcheniia”, CCE, 5 (December 1968); “Raz'iasnenie natsional'noi politiki”, CCE, 6 (February 1969); “Sud nad Gomerom Baevym”, CCE, 7 (April 1969); “Pereselenie krymskikh tatar v Krym”, CCE, 7 (April 1969); “Demonstratsiia krymskikh tatar 6 iunია 1969 g. na ploshchadi Maiakovskogo”, CCE, 8 (June 1969); “Sud nad desiat'iu krymskimi tatarami”, CCE, 9 (August 1969); “Delo 109”, CCE, 10 (October 1969); “Novosti samizdata”, CCE, 11 (December 1969). Available at: <https://chronicle-of-current-events.com/>; last accessed 27 January 2023. For English translations, see Peter Reddaway (ed.), *Uncensored Russia: The Human Rights Movement in the Soviet Union. The Annotated Text of the Unofficial Moscow Journal A Chronicle of Current Events (Nos. 1–11)* (London, 1972), pp. 249–269.

³³Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*, transl. Carol Pearce and John Glad (Middletown, CT, 1985), p. 12.

³⁴Robert Horvath, “Breaking the Totalitarian Ice: The Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in the USSR”, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 36:1 (2014), pp. 147–175, 156.

³⁵Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Poetka. Kniga o pamiati: Natal'ia Gorbanevskaia* (Moscow, 2014), pp. 277–278. See also Peter Reddaway, *The Dissidents: A Memoir of Working with the Resistance in Russia, 1960–1990* (Washington, DC, 2020), p. 122.

to the “world public”: “We appeal to all the peoples of the world, and above all to those who have experienced for themselves what national inequality and repression mean. We appeal to all people of good will in the hope that you will help us.”³⁶ One of the ironies of the Tatar appeal is that they did not need to look far to find those who knew what national inequality and repression meant. African students, in their own fight for *glasnost*, had been fighting against inequality and repression on the streets of Moscow and Kyiv for years.

African *Glasnost*

African students began arriving in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s, one of the more visible manifestations of the changes to sweep the USSR following the death of Stalin. After 1960, many of these students enrolled at Peoples’ Friendship University, established by Nikita Khrushchev to train a new generation of technical specialists from countries across the Global South.³⁷ Others enrolled in existing universities and institutes across the Soviet Union, in places such as Kyiv, Baku, and Tashkent. However, almost as soon as they arrived, stories emerged of the difficult conditions faced by international students, including accusations of racism and complaints about the ideological rigidity of Soviet education and the constant presence of surveillance. Students alleged racially aggravated harassment in the streets, repeated use of slurs including “monkey”, and differential treatment on account of their skin colour.³⁸

These early complainants drew on much of the same language and employed similar strategies as their Soviet counterparts. In a letter to Khrushchev written in March 1960 – just a month after the Soviet leader had announced the new Peoples’ Friendship University and six months before the flagship university would open – a group of students complained about the discrimination they faced at the hands of Soviet citizens and petitioned him for help. They urged him to intervene, arguing that the Soviet government should “take action to prevent the recurrence of such incidents”. In doing so, they appealed to both a universal and a distinctly Soviet right: “Like many African students in different parts of the world, we came to this country to study, not as refugees. Therefore we have the right to expect to be treated in a human way, like every citizen of this country.”³⁹ The following year,

³⁶“Obrashchenie predstavitelei krymsko-tatarskogo naroda k mirovoi obshchestvennosti”, *CCE*, 2 (June 1968). Available at: <http://old.memo.ru/history/diss/chr/chr2.htm#p4>; last accessed 14 January 2023. See also Reddaway, *Uncensored Russia*, pp. 249–252.

³⁷For more on Peoples’ Friendship University, see Constantin Katsakioris, “The Lumumba University in Moscow: Higher Education for a Soviet–Third World Alliance, 1960–91”, *Journal of Global History*, 14:2 (2019), pp. 281–300; Riikkamari Johanna Muhonen, “‘Good Friends’ for the Soviet Union: The Peoples’ Friendship University in Soviet Educational Cooperation with the Developing World, 1960–1980” (Ph.D., Central European University, 2022); Nikolaus Graf Vitzthum, “Cooperation and Control at the Micro Level of Soviet Internationalism: Moscow’s Lumumba University, 1960–1970”, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 30:2 (2022), pp. 357–393.

³⁸See especially Michel Ayih, *Ein Afrikaner in Moskau* (Cologne, 1961).

³⁹Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), fo. 5, op. 35, d. 149, ll. 44–45, Ispolkom Soiuz studentov iz Chernoi Afriki v SSSR. Predsedateliu Soveta Ministrov SSSR N.S. Khrushchevu: Pis’mo ob insidentakh s obuchaiushchimisya v SSSR afrikanskimi studentami, 17 March 1960, in A.B.

students from Africa and Asia studying in Kyiv established a “League of Nations”. The leaders regularly raised the issue of the unequal treatment of black people (*negry*) in the Soviet Union and envisioned the League conducting outreach among Soviet citizens and, if necessary, organizing strikes and demonstrations. One of its council members, the Ghanaian John Afful, much like Vol’pin and the Resistance group, attempted to distribute an “appeal to Soviet students”. In it, Afful explained that African students had arrived with “friendly feelings” towards Soviet citizens and called on the latter to reject “false rumours” about international students.⁴⁰ Like their counterparts in Moscow, the participants of the League drew on an international language of rights to advocate for their protection in the Soviet Union while drawing on the same corporative and pan-African identities as students on African campuses.

Both the letter to Khrushchev and the League happened in private; the letter was never published, and the League appears to have existed more as an aspiration than as a reality. Nonetheless, even in private, bringing injustice to the attention of authorities was an important aspect of Soviet rights defenders’ approach to *glasnost’*. Moreover, the students’ letter did not remain private. Again mirroring their Soviet counterparts, the same group of students who had written in private to Khrushchev published an “Open Letter to All African Governments” shortly after their defection to the West. In language that had clear resonances with Bogoraz and Litvinov’s later “Appeal to World Opinion”, the students wrote of their decision to “present the case against Communism to African and world opinion”. The students outlined a litany of grievances against the Soviet Union, among them the lack of press freedom that would have allowed them to publicize their complaints in the Soviet Union itself. They made statements, not because they “had joined the imperialist camp”, but because “free opinion is muzzled in the Soviet Union, because the servile Soviet press cannot publish any dissenting point of view, and because the mockery of democracy that operates in this totalitarian dictatorship does not recognize the individual”. Complaints included instances of racist violence and discrimination and the overbearing “Soviet propaganda machinery”. Students could not act on their own initiative and were subject to “undue or humiliating pressure from Soviet authorities”.⁴¹

Davidson and S.V. Mazov (eds), *Rossia i Afrika. Dokumenty i materialy. XVIII v.–1960 g.* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 310–311.

⁴⁰Branch State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (HDA SBU), fo. 1, op. 1, spr. 1496, ark. 102–104, P.P. Tikhonov to L.H. Kallash, 26 October 1961. Afful remained silent on what rumours were being spread. For more on rumours about African students, see Aleksandra Arkhipova and Anna Kirziuk, *Opasnye sovetskie veshchi. Gorodskie legendy i strakhi v SSSR* (Moscow, 2020), pp. 476–479.

⁴¹Theophilus Okonkwo, Andrew R. Amar, and Michel Ayih, *An Open Letter to All African Governments* (London, 1960). The Open Letter was republished in various African newspapers and typescript copies were distributed in English and French. See National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, MD (NARA), Record Group 306, Series: Policy Files, 1959–1967, File: Policy – African Students in Bloc [Folder 2/2], *Lettre ouverte à tous les gouvernements africains*, 20 September 1960; A.R. Amar and T.U.C. Okonkwo, “Warning against a New Form of Colonialism in Africa”, *African Daily News* (Salisbury), 4 October 1960; *idem*, “Soviet Police Molested Girl in African’s Company”, *African Daily News* (Salisbury), 5 October 1960; *idem*, “African Students Give Lie to Russian Claim of Friendship”, *The Times*, 14 December 1960. File: 24.3.4 Press Reports on Students in Bloc and Friendship University; The National

Individual accounts by students also appeared in the Western and African press. While attention, both at the time and subsequently, has focused on the allegations of racism these accounts contain, their broader language of individual dignity has been largely overlooked. However, these denouncements touch not only on Soviet racism in a narrow sense, but also on broader attacks on human dignity. In the first of these defector narratives to be published in the West, Stanley Okullo repeated a line from the letter he had sent to Khrushchev: “we should be accorded normal human respect”.⁴² On the system of passes (*propuski*) required for entry into most public buildings, and with which all Soviet citizens were familiar, Andrew Amar, one of the authors of the Open Letter, wrote that “we Africans certainly felt it as yet another petty indignity that we had to suffer and a further insult to our intelligence and maturity”. In the same article, Amar claimed that, of all the discomforts of Soviet life, “it is the restrictions on personal freedom that are irksome”.⁴³ He returned to this theme in another article, in which he referred to “this atmosphere of petty restriction in our personal life and official opposition to Africans having a political opinion of their own [...] which makes life for African students in Moscow very trying, if not impossible”. “I was not going to allow the Soviet authorities”, the young Ugandan explained, “to treat me as a kind of puppet, whose mind and personality were to be moulded to their will”.⁴⁴

If Amar stuck to the language of personal dignity, Theophilus Okonkwo, another of the authors of the Open Letter, was more forthright in connecting these “petty indignities” to the broader question of rights: “No student, anywhere in the world likes to give in readily to such sternness and what he considers an encroachment on his personal liberty and rights”, he wrote in the Lagos *Sunday Times* in response to a Soviet directive that students in Moscow could not hold a protest rally without the prior knowledge and consent of the authorities.⁴⁵

As with the memoirs of Soviet rights defenders who published their accounts in the West, there is evidence to suggest that African students’ accounts were the victims of similar “egregious editorial interventions” by Western interlocutors.⁴⁶ Irrespective of the level of editorial intervention, these early African apostates from communism were engaged in similar kinds of publicity as Soviet rights defenders. That both Soviet and African accounts were subject to intervention to make them more palatable to a Western audience further suggests parallels between the two.

Western defectors were not the only group of Africans to engage in their own form of *glasnost*. In late 1962, the first domestic public protest against Soviet discrimination

Archives, Kew, (TNA) FCO 141/18440, Open Letter to All African Governments, 20 September 1960; Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.1825, Box LXXX, File 123A, Papers of Alan Howard Ward and Elizabeth Ward, fos 32–36, “Open Letter to All African Governments”, typescript.

⁴²John Redfern, “I Got the Sack in Moscow: Young Reds Insulted and Bullied Us at University, African ‘Guest’ Student Says”, *Daily Express*, 14 July 1960.

⁴³Andrew Richard Amar, “East African Student Tells of Red ‘Spies’”, *East African Standard*, 17 February 1961.

⁴⁴*Idem*, “Visitors Can Go Only 12 Miles Outside Red Capital”, *Sunday Guardian*, 12 March 1961.

⁴⁵Theophilus Okonkwo, “Life in Moscow University”, *Sunday Times*, 6 November 1960.

⁴⁶Nathans, “Talking Fish”, p. 582. On African defector narratives and Western editorial intervention, see Hilary Lynd and Thom Loyd, “Histories of Color: Blackness and Africanness in the Soviet Union”, *Slavic Review*, 81:2 (2022), pp. 394–417, 415.

erupted in Moscow. In April, a multinational group of African students submitted a petition to the editors of *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, the official newspaper of the Soviet youth organization, demanding clarification about an article that had been published the previous October. The article recounted the story of Larisa, a beautiful and popular young woman who had become romantically involved with Ahmed, a foreign student. Ahmed was an archetypal villain, an example to Soviet citizens of the dangers of acquisitiveness and vanity. But what the students took issue with was a detail at the end of the piece: after marrying Ahmed and moving with him to his (unidentified) home country, Larisa was promptly sold into slavery by her new husband.⁴⁷

Four hundred African students from thirty-two countries at various universities and institutes in Moscow established an investigatory committee, which met with the editors of *Komsomol'skaia pravda*.⁴⁸ They demanded the editors “clarify the situation to us and to the world at large”. As a result of inaction, the Larisa Commission, as it styled itself, planned to convene a meeting of all African students and further petition the editors to retract the story. If this were not done, they threatened to bring the issue to the attention of African governments to ensure that the matter be aired in “all newspapers of the world”.⁴⁹ Drawing on a language of universal rights and obligations, the Commission reminded the editors of the “responsibility which they bear before their fellow human beings, living on one and the same planet with them – namely, their good name, honest[y], respect and dignity”. Students reiterated this theme in a letter to African governments, when they wrote that the article had given “an impression which lowers the prestige, dignity, honour and good name of Africa”.⁵⁰

That African students so readily and repeatedly addressed themselves to an international audience demonstrates the extent to which they were aware of their peculiar advantage within the geopolitical landscape of the Cold War. Since the 1930s, the Soviets had invested considerable effort in emphasizing both Western racism and the Soviet commitment to anti-racism.⁵¹ This continued into the 1960s, when Soviet authorities actively involved African students in the production of accounts about the evils of imperialism and the emancipatory promise of Soviet socialism.⁵² At the same time, Soviet artists, poets, and journalists ensured the public sphere was suffused with images of Soviet beneficence towards the Global South.⁵³ It is ironic that it was, in part, the very publicity that the Soviet

⁴⁷ Arkadii Sakhnin, “Raskaianie opozdalo”, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 27 October 1962.

⁴⁸ The committee was made up of students from Cameroon, Dahomey (Benin), Ghana, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and Tanganyika.

⁴⁹ TNA CO 1035/241, Robert Brash to J.C. Edmonds, 13 May 1963.

⁵⁰ TNA CO 1035/241, “Report to All African Students”. Emphasis in original; TNA, CO 1035/241, “To African Governments for Publication in Their National Papers”.

⁵¹ Meredith L. Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of US Racism, 1928–1937* (Lincoln, NE, 2012).

⁵² Examples of such publications include N.M. Frolkin (ed.), *Sredi nastoiashchikh družei. Sbornik statei studentov podgotovitel'nogo fakul'teta dlia inostrannykh grazhdan Kievskogo ordena Lenina gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. T.G. Shevchenko* (Kyiv, 1963); and G.N. Tsvetkov (ed.), *My vseгда budem družiami. Sbornik statei inostrannykh studentov, obuchaiushchikhsia v Kievskom ordena Lenina gosudarstvennom universitete im. T.G. Shevchenko* (Kyiv, 1964).

⁵³ Yevgeny Fiks (ed.), *The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture* (New York, 2021).

government gave to African liberation that assured African students of a global audience. That various African governments similarly emphasized their close relations with the Soviet Union further enhanced the political power of African protest actions.⁵⁴ Their global audience – both at home in Africa and across the West – also helps explain the different response of the Soviet government to African and Soviet rights protests. At no time was this clearer than in 1963, when African students adopted tactics unprecedented in post-Stalinist Moscow.⁵⁵

In December 1963, African students staged the largest unsanctioned protest on Red Square since the 1920s (Figures 1 and 2).⁵⁶ The circumstances around the protest remain unclear. What is clear is that the immediate trigger was the death, in Moscow, of a Ghanaian student, Edmund Asare-Addo, under mysterious circumstances. The Soviet authorities claimed it was accidental; African students suspected murder. On 18 December, five days after Asare-Addo's body was found, several hundred African students marched through the streets of central Moscow for approximately a mile and a half, surrounded by bystanders, on to Red Square. On their way, protestors allegedly tackled a police officer to the ground and rocked police vehicles that attempted to prevent access to the square. Mounted guards looked on as hundreds of protestors held aloft banners and set a car alight.⁵⁷ Their banners carried slogans such as "Don't kill like cannibals", "Moscow is a second Alabama", and "Communism is racism". Other protestors carried a funeral wreath.⁵⁸ Whereas Bogoraz and Litvinov's protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia five years later lasted a matter of minutes before onlookers tore away their protest banners and plain-clothes officers bundled them into vehicles, the African students' protest lasted hours before the crowds disbursed.⁵⁹

⁵⁴The relations of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali with the Soviet Union are instructive. See Alessandro Iandolo, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968* (Ithaca, NY, 2022).

⁵⁵Besides those activities discussed previously, see also Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Suplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s", *Slavic Review*, 55:1 (1996), pp. 78–105; *idem*, "Petitions and Denunciations in Russian and Soviet History", *Russian History*, 24:1–2 (1997), pp. 1–9.

⁵⁶Julie Hessler, "Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War", *Cahiers du monde russe*, 47:1–2 (2006), pp. 33–63, 33. Outside Moscow, other large-scale protests had taken place in the post-Stalin period, notably in Novochoerkassk in 1962. For more, see Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novochoerkassk* (Stanford, CA, 2001); "Novochoerkasskaia tragediia, 1962", *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1 (1993), pp. 110–136; and *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 4 (1993), pp. 143–177.

⁵⁷"USSR Student Demonstration", *AP Television*, 18 December 1963. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YsMpS-HzJs>; last accessed 14 January 2023. Estimates of the number of demonstration participants vary widely; the *New York Times* reported at the time that 500 students participated; the *Lagos Daily Times* put that figure at 700. See *New York Times*, 19 December 1963; *Daily Times* (Lagos), 19 December 1963. However, Edward Na, in 1963 a student at the L'viv Medical Institute and a participant in the Moscow protest, suggested that the number was no more than 150. See Lina Rozovskaia, "They Studied in the USSR", *BBC News Russian Service*, 4 February 2010. Available at: http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2010/02/100204_peoples_friendship_lumumba; last accessed 28 January 2023.

⁵⁸NARA, Record Group 59, Series: Subject Files, 1952–1964, File: African Students in USSR, UPI Bulletin A34, December 1963; The National Archives, Kew (TNA), CO 1035/241, Humphrey Trevelyan to the Foreign Office, London, No. 2581, 19 December 1963.

⁵⁹NARA, RG 59, Series: Subject Files, 1952–1964, File: African Students in USSR, Moscow Embassy to Secretary of State, Washington, DC, 19 December 1963. Section 1 of 2.

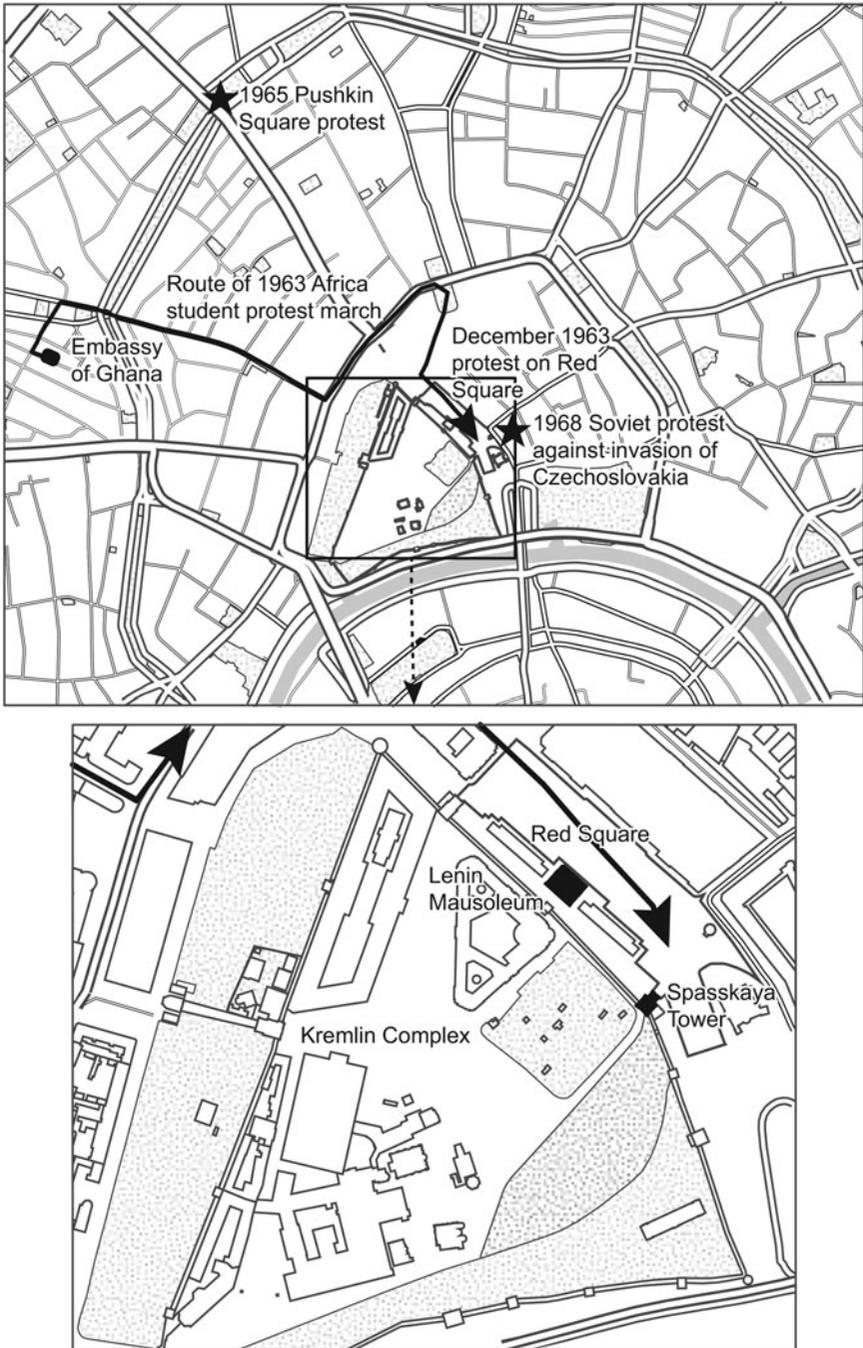


Figure 1. Locations of the Moscow protests discussed in this article.



Figure 2. African students protest the death of Edmund Asare-Addo on Red Square, December 1963. The poster in the background reads: “A friend today. The devil tomorrow.” In the foreground, a wreath features a photograph of the deceased.

Source: ASSOCIATED PRESS.

Rather than being arrested and tried, several hundred of the protestors were invited to an audience with two members of the Soviet Central Committee, Minister of Education Viacheslav Eliutin and Minister of Health Sergei Kurashov. There, the students presented the Soviet delegation with a memorandum. In it, they demanded that details of the investigation into Asare-Addo’s death be publicized widely and that the perpetrators be punished. More broadly, the students drew attention to the problem of “terrorist” and “barbaric” acts against African and other foreign students, in much the same way that Aleksandr Ginzburg later sought to bring the injustice of the Siniavskii–Daniel’ trial to the attention of the Soviet authorities.⁶⁰ This act of *glasnost’* was further underlined by the statement of one of the student delegates at the meeting: “Before talking about the facts of [Asare-Addo’s] death itself, I want to say that we are not convinced of our security in this country. When we are beaten, it is ignored. Maybe the minister doesn’t know that.”⁶¹

Early the next month, forty students gathered at Kyiv University to protest the non-fatal stabbing of a student from Guinea-Bissau and to demand a guarantee of their safety against attacks from the “unfriendly portion of the population”. Following the university’s failure to act, on 2 January, more than one hundred

⁶⁰State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), fo. 9606, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 353–354, Memorandum. English quotations from Hessler, “Death of an African”, p. 56.

⁶¹GARF, fo. 9606, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 341–348, “Zapis’ besedy Ministra vysshego i srednego spetsial’nogo obrazovaniia SSSR tov. Eliutina V. P. s gruppoy afrikanskikh studentov”, 18 December 1963, in (ed.) T. Iu. Krasovitskaia, “Vozvratit’ domoi druž’iami SSSR ...”. *Obuchenie inostrantsev v Sovetskom Soiuzе, 1956–1965* (Moscow, 2013), p. 478. Other students at the meeting also brought instances of violence to the attention of the ministers.

African students boycotted their classes.⁶² Almost a month after the protest on Red Square, a group of around twenty-five African students met at the Kyiv University dormitory. The topic of discussion was the creation of a Kyiv Union of African Students.⁶³ Following the election of the executive committee, the assembled students adopted a charter whose main aim was the protection of African students.⁶⁴ In language that closely resembled that used to describe members of the nascent Soviet dissident movement, H.M. Tsvietkov, Kyiv University's prorector for international students, strongly condemned the students involved in the Union and branded them "agents of imperialism".⁶⁵

African rights defenders continued to advocate for themselves throughout the decade. In 1969, most of the foreign students at Kyiv Medical School boycotted their classes following attacks by Soviet citizens. In a meeting with representatives of the Ukrainian government, students demanded a guarantee of their safety and the development of "a normal attitude towards them".⁶⁶ Later the same year, the KGB complained that students "are using the death [of a Nigerian student] to make collective demands to the Ministry of Higher Education to ensure their personal safety".⁶⁷

It was in this context of heightened tension that the discovery of the body of a Kenyan student, James Gakio, led to widespread protest in Kyiv the following month. Twenty-eight-year-old Gakio had been a student at the Ukrainian Agricultural Academy when, on 14 October, he left his dormitory and disappeared. Over three weeks later, on 6 November, his body was found in a small lake in front of the popular Prague restaurant at the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy. The timing of the discovery – on the eve of the fifty-second anniversary of the October Revolution – served as a sinister message to Kyiv's African population.

The following day, more than one hundred students accompanied Gakio's coffin to Kyiv's Boryspil' airport in scenes reminiscent of the funeral procession held for Asare-Addo in 1963.⁶⁸ In a petition to the rector of the Academy, students called for a boycott of classes until their demand for a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and African ambassadors had been met.⁶⁹ The protest quickly spread beyond the Academy and soon most African students in Kyiv were boycotting classes.⁷⁰ Another gathering of students passed a resolution

⁶²Central State Archive of Social Organizations of Ukraine (TsDAHOU), fo. 1, op. 24, spr. 5906, ark. 2–3, Memorandum to TsK KPU, 2 January 1964.

⁶³TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 24, spr. 5661, ark. 68–69, I.T. Shvets' to A.D. Skaba, 14 January 1964; TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 24, spr. 6005, ark. 11, L. H. Kallash to TsK KPU, 13 September 1965.

⁶⁴TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 24, spr. 5661, ark. 68–69, I.T. Shvets' to A.D. Skaba, 14 January 1964.

⁶⁵TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 24, spr. 5906, ark. 11–12, I.T. Shvets' to A.D. Skaba, 10 February 1964. On the treatment of Soviet dissidents, see Meredith Roman, "Soviet 'Renegades', Black Panthers, and Angela Davis: The Politics of Dissent in the Soviet Press, 1968–73", *Cold War History*, 18:4 (2018), pp. 507–511.

⁶⁶HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 985, ark. 68–72, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 14 May 1969.

⁶⁷HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 988, ark. 285–288, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 7 October 1969. See also spr. 985, ark. 68–72, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 14 May 1969.

⁶⁸TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 435, ark. 3–4, Iu.M. Dadenkov to TsK KPU, 12 March 1970.

⁶⁹HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 287, "Petitsiia rektoru USKha ot afrikanskikh studentov, obuchaiushchikhsia v akademii". Russian translation from English.

⁷⁰HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 272–275, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 14 November 1969; TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 264, ark. 11–15, H.M. Tsvietkov to TsK KPU, 20 November 1969.

that reiterated the demand of the previous day's petition. The resolution added that, should Soviet authorities seek to intimidate any African student in relation to their "struggle for security", "all of us Africans will stand behind our people and, where appropriate, are prepared to return to our home country".⁷¹ The strategy of leaving the Soviet Union en masse was one that had been used by African students in the Soviet Union before. In 1965, following the death of a Ghanaian student, George Daaku, in Baku, all the Kenyan students studying in the city left and returned to Nairobi.⁷² Particularly for those outside of easy reach of the Western press corps in Moscow, the threat of leaving the Soviet Union provided an important point of leverage that risked tarnishing the image of the Soviet Union internationally.

On 15 November, over a week after Gakio's body had been discovered, a more than four-hour meeting of the interim committee of the Union of African Students resolved to hold a demonstration (*shestvie*) the following week to seek fulfilment of their petition. For this, they planned to make placards in Russian, French, and English, just as the protestors on Red Square had done in 1963. Furthermore, a member of the interim committee planned to send a student to Moscow to inform British and Chinese correspondents about African students' demands and their planned demonstration.⁷³ Other students contacted embassies, or friends and acquaintances in cities around the Soviet Union, to inform them about the unrest in Kyiv. In a long-distance call to a Kenyan in Leningrad, the caller requested that students in the city "immediately put out a resolution and call for the same from Leningrad and Moscow".⁷⁴ Others contacted friends in Simferopol', Tiraspol', and Rostov, spreading news of events in Kyiv and calling for further actions.⁷⁵

Having made their demands known to local Soviet representatives in Kyiv, as well as compatriots and representatives of their home governments elsewhere in the Soviet Union, as many as 300 students assembled on 17 November at the Kyiv Institute of Civil Engineering.⁷⁶ The KGB recorded a rough account of the appeal to Soviet representatives read out at the meeting:

We experience how difficult it is to establish friendly contacts, especially with those with whom we live and study. We saw how these people did not want to

⁷¹HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 288, "Rezoliutsiia priniataia na obshchem sobranii vsekh afrikanskikh studentov v Kieve v 4 obshchezhitii Sel'khozakademii". Russian translation from English.

⁷²For more on the Daaku case, see Constantin Katsakioris, "Leçons soviétiques. La formation des étudiants africains et arabes en URSS pendant la guerre froide" (Ph.D., L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales de Paris, 2015), pp. 260–261; *idem*, "Engagements politiques et mobilisations des étudiants africains en URSS (1960–1964)", in Françoise Blum, Pierre Guidi, and Ophélie Rillon (eds), *Étudiants africains en mouvements. Contribution à une histoire des années 1968* (Paris, 2016), p. 307.

⁷³HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 289–292, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 17 November 1969.

⁷⁴HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 278–281, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 15 November 1969. See also HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 313–315, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 18 November 1969.

⁷⁵TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 264, ark. 11–15, H.M. Tsvietkov to TsK KPU, 20 November 1969; HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 992, ark. 58–59, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 28 November 1969.

⁷⁶HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 326–329, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 18 November 1969. Estimates of the number vary quite widely; the figure provided by the Ministry of Higher Education put the number of students at 170. See TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 264, ark. 16–18, Iu. M. Dadenkov to TsK KPU, 19 November 1969.

be associated with an untouchable [*neprikasaemye*] [...] If, in the early days, we were told that only fools treat us this way, we now see that it is done by intelligent people who also popularize [*propagandirovat'*] such behaviour [...] It is not in the interests of our friendship if we talk only about our own issues.

The students concluded, in terms evocative of dissidents' "legalist" arguments, with a demand for security, but "not security on paper, because you have good laws, but security in practice".⁷⁷ The students threatened to write an "open letter about all these events" to the Soviet and foreign press if this security was denied.⁷⁸

Similar protests continued into the 1970s. In 1975, the Czechoslovak consulate in Kyiv informed the KGB about a planned protest by Nigerian students the following day. The BBC Russian Service also broadcast news of the planned strike.⁷⁹ The cause of the protest was the recall of a Czechoslovak student at Kyiv University, Alena Grulichová, who had recently married her Nigerian fiancé, Sandy Udo Ubam. Students met at the Universytet metro station before making the short walk to the consulate with placards reading "Down with racism", "The black man is also a person [*chernyi tozhe chelovek*]", "Discrimination is an international crime!", "A world for everyone – black, yellow, white!", and "Long live Marxism–Leninism!".⁸⁰ The Czechoslovak consul, Bohumil Pospíšil, met with a five-person delegation, which delivered a letter demanding that Grulichová be allowed to remain in Kyiv to "prevent the destruction of the family on the basis of racial discrimination".⁸¹

The following month, the ambassadors of Senegal, Tanzania, Liberia, the Central African Republic, and Tunisia handed the Soviet deputy foreign minister, L.F. Il'ichev, a memorandum, drafted by the "Union of African Students", concerning problems faced by African students in L'viv. The memorandum claimed that the students had been subjected to "torture and discrimination" and accused the Soviet Union of disrespect towards both African governments and people.⁸² Ten days later, in Kyiv, a "Commission of African Students" requested a meeting with representatives of the Soviet and Ukrainian governments. At the meeting, the Rwandan representative, Célestin Nzabandora, decried "the existence in the Soviet

⁷⁷HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 319–320, "Primernyi tekst 'Obrashcheniia', zachitannogo studentom Kievskogo politekhnicheskogo instituta Bekkulz Bendzhaminom (S'erra-Leone), na sobranii afrikanskikh studentov 17 noiabria 1969 g. v aktovom zale Kievskogo inzhenerno-stroitel'nogo instituta". Russian translation of original English.

⁷⁸HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 989, ark. 317–318, "Obrashchenie ministeru vysshego i srednego spetsial'nogo obrazovaniia USSR ot afrikanskikh studentov obuchaiushchikhsia v g. Kieve", 17 November 1969. Russian translation of English original.

⁷⁹HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 1109, ark. 371–373, V.V. Fedorchuk to V.V. Shcherbyts'kyi, 29 October 1975. Various outlets in the Western media also picked up the story. See *Washington Post*, 28 October 1975; *Chicago Defender*, 29 October 1975; *The Times* (London), 30 October 1975; *The Times* (London), 5 November 1975; *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 November 1975; *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1975; *Washington Post*, 27 November 1975; *New York Post*, 27 November 1975; *Jet*, 25 December 1975.

⁸⁰HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 1109, ark. 374, "Lozungy".

⁸¹TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 1285, ark. 57–59, I.A. Peresadenko and F.M. Rudych to TsK KPU, 29 October 1975; TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 1285, ark. 60–61, H.H. Iefymenko to TsK KPU, 29 October 1975.

⁸²TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 1285, ark. 49–54, "Memorandum o problemakh afrikanskikh studentov vo L'vove", 14 November 1975. For more on Kibibi, see Katsakioris, "Leçons soviétiques", p. 263.

Union and Kyiv of social repression against African students, racial discrimination, segregation, a lack of conditions for the safety of their lives, [and] the hostile attitude of the population". Other complaints included the "psychosocial repression" that had driven many to mental illness and "encroachment on the honour and dignity of the black race," which had "entered everyday life as a normal phenomenon". Finally, students explicitly protested the imprisonment of a Rwandan student, Alphonse Kibibi, who had previously studied at the Volgograd Medical Institute.⁸³

Clearly, by the 1970s, things had changed. While students continued to employ a language of rights that appealed to universalist ideas of human dignity – as in the slogans carried in the protests against Czechoslovakia – unlike their predecessors, students in the 1970s seemingly saw little use in appealing to the letter of Soviet law:

We would be very grateful if African students travelling to the Soviet Union were told beforehand that they would be subjected to harassment, torture and discrimination and that they would not have the right to complain. We think that no African would agree to come to the Soviet Union on such terms.⁸⁴

The answer to the problem no longer lay with the Soviet government. Ironically, African students had abandoned a legalist approach to attacking racial discrimination at exactly the time that the Helsinki Final Act had brought renewed attention to the Soviet Union's international rights obligations towards its own citizens.

All this evidence demonstrates the strength of African rights talk in the Soviet Union. From the earliest days of African students' arrival in Soviet universities, some among their number articulated claims to the right to dignity, to freedom from harassment and discrimination, and for the Soviet Union to better live up to its loftiest promises. In this, African rights defenders shared much with their Soviet counterparts: both movements coalesced around moments of injustice (on the one hand, political trials and, on the other, acts of physical violence); both sought to employ *glasnost'* in its various manifestations, by enlightening state officials, by working through Western interlocutors, and by blurring the boundaries between private discontent and public dissent; and both occupied an ambivalent position in relation to Soviet power, not rejecting many of its basic premises while repudiating what were, in the eyes of African and Soviet rights defenders, its most egregious abuses.

They were both also minority movements. Though both claimed to speak for broader constituencies, the number of activists remained a small, unrepresentative group. For some African students, complaints about assaults on their dignity and accusations of racism rang hollow. This was particularly true of South African students, whose experience of apartheid and exile made the deprivations of Soviet life seem insignificant by comparison. Kenneth Swakamisa, who witnessed the protests in Kyiv in late 1963, remarked that "the actions of African students who

⁸³Katsakioris, "Burden or Allies?", pp. 555–556.

⁸⁴TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 25, spr. 1285, ark. 49–54, "Memorandum o problemakh afrikanskikh studentov vo L'vove", 14 November 1975.

[...] talked about alleged racism in the USSR are not reasonable. These students do not know what racism is at all".⁸⁵ Similarly, for some Soviets, even those who moved in dissident circles, the complaints of the dissident intelligentsia seemed out of touch with the reality of the majority; Anatolii Marchenko reflected in his autobiography that Solzhenitsyn's fight for creative freedom would find little sympathy in Marchenko's home of Barabinsk, where more quotidian concerns occupied people's minds.⁸⁶

In his history of the Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights, Robert Horvath argues that perhaps the group's greatest achievement was that "it violated the longstanding taboo on organized public activity by non-state structures".⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Andrei Amal'rik, speaking of the power of petition-writing among Soviet dissidents, wrote of the "inner liberation" experienced by participants. "The dissidents did an ingeniously simple thing", he wrote; "in an unfree country they began to behave like free people".⁸⁸ For Africans travelling from the postcolonial and, in some cases, colonial world, the importance of behaving like free people seems to have been self-evident. The myriad organizations they established in both Moscow and Kyiv (and doubtless elsewhere) were similarly breaking the taboo on organized public activity. On a purely empirical basis, it seems clear that African advocacy fell well within the bounds of the Soviet rights archipelago. Certainly, Soviet citizens were aware of African rights defenders; as Naomi Caffee has observed, the 1963 protest on Red Square provided the context for Kazakh poet Olzhas Suleimenov's 1964 poem "On Pushkin Square".⁸⁹ Given the public nature of African protests, it seems inconceivable that Soviet rights defenders were unaware of their messages. Why, then, given these similarities of thought and action, did African rights defenders remain on an island of their own?

Unbridgeable Islands

One apparent reason for the failure of African and Soviet rights activists to make common cause is the very different contexts in which rights activism emerged for African students and Soviet citizens. For the latter, it was the threat of a creeping re-Stalinization that stimulated many of the early appeals to Soviet legality, a plea to avoid the "arbitrariness" of Stalin-era violence.⁹⁰ For the former, the rights talk they spoke in Soviet streets had analogues in the struggle against imperialism in their home countries. The language of human dignity was one employed by anti-imperial activists across the continent. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela cites the 1941 Atlantic Charter as having "reaffirm[ed] faith in the dignity of each human being"

⁸⁵TsDAHOU, fo. 1, op. 24, spr. 5661, ark. 63–67, I.T. Shvets' to A.D. Skaba, 21 January 1964.

⁸⁶Anatolii Marchenko, *Zhivi kak vse* (New York, 1987), pp. 66–67.

⁸⁷Horvath, "Breaking the Totalitarian Ice", p. 150.

⁸⁸A.A. Amal'rik, *Zapiski dissidenta* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1982), p. 39.

⁸⁹Naomi Caffee, "Between First, Second, and Third Worlds: Olzhas Suleimenov and Soviet Postcolonialism, 1961–1973", *Russian Literature*, 111–112 (2020), pp. 91–118, 101.

⁹⁰Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70* (New Haven, CT, 2013).

and inspiring the African National Congress's own charter.⁹¹ In his writing, Kwame Nkrumah similarly appealed to human dignity as at the heart of the post-imperial project: “[M]an is regarded in Africa as primarily a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain inward dignity, integrity and value.”⁹² Meanwhile, Julius Nyerere “pray[ed] for the safety and success of our brethren [...] wherever they may be engaged in this struggle to add to the world’s sum total of freedom and human dignity by restoring that freedom and dignity to this great Continent of our – AFRICA”.⁹³

It was not only postcolonial African leaders who spoke this language of dignity and rights. “We feel it is a great transgression on individual human rights, trying to whittle off the integrity, individuality, and personality of the students in this College, and reducing him to the status of a schoolboy under the firm hand of a stern headmaster and spying prefects”, wrote one group of students in Tanganyika in a protest letter to the authorities of the University College, Dar es Salaam, in 1961.⁹⁴ While this was a relatively minor case – the College authorities dismissed it as “overbrooding on petty grievances”⁹⁵ – more sustained invocations of rights were happening elsewhere on the continent. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, individual petitioners appealed to the United Nations regarding breaches of rights in the UN Trust Territories.⁹⁶ While it lies outside the scope of this article, acknowledging the activism of African rights defenders in Eastern Europe opens new avenues for comprehending grassroots challenges to the creeping authoritarianism that spread across much of the continent after the initial wave of postcolonial promise subsided. From this perspective, Moscow and Kyiv join Kinshasa, Kampala, and Salisbury (now Harare) in a global network of sites of resistance by young Africans against states intent on constraining the self-determination of their citizens.⁹⁷ As Nana Osei-Opare has written, and as the African rights defenders detailed above further demonstrate, students did not leave

⁹¹Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London, 1995), p. 110.

⁹²Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution* (New York, 1964), p. 68.

⁹³Julius K. Nyerere, “A Widening Brotherhood”, in *Freedom and Unity | Uhuru na Umoja: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952–65* (Dar es Salaam, 1966), p. 62.

⁹⁴Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.1825, Box LV, Papers of P. Cranford Pratt, Box 91E, University Students’ Union to P.C. Pratt, 7 December 1961.

⁹⁵Bodleian Libraries, MSS.Afr.s.1825, Box LV, Papers of P. Cranford Pratt, Box 91E, fo. 12, S.N. Eliufoo to R.C. Pratt, 15 March 1962.

⁹⁶Ullrich Lohrmann, *Voices from Tanganyika: Great Britain, the United Nations and the Decolonization of a Trust Territory, 1946–1961* (Berlin, 2007); Meredith Terretta, “‘We Had Been Fooled into Thinking that the UN Watches Over the Entire World’: Human Rights, UN Trust Territories, and Africa’s Decolonization”, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 34 (2012), pp. 329–360. For more on rights talk in Africa, see Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA, 2010).

⁹⁷Dan Hodgkinson, “Subversive Communities and the ‘Rhodesian Sixties’: An Exploration of Transnational Protests, 1965–1973”, in Chen Jian *et al.* (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (Abingdon, 2018), pp. 39–52; David Mills, “Life on the Hill: Students and the Social History of Makerere”, *Africa*, 76:2 (2006), pp. 247–266; Pedro Monaville, *Students of the World: Global 1968 and Decolonization in the Congo* (Durham, NC, 2022). On the debate between an individual versus a collective right to self-determination, see Burke, *Decolonization*, pp. 35–58.

behind these networks of activism when they moved from their homes in Africa to Soviet towns and cities.⁹⁸

However, the different historical contexts from which the defence of rights emerged is hardly enough to explain the disjuncture between African and Soviet rights defenders. Within the Soviet Union, various groups of rights defenders were also approaching this issue from different contexts, whether it be Tatars petitioning for the right to return to Crimea, the Moscow intelligentsia exposing the abuse of Soviet psychiatry, or Ukrainians critiquing the shortcomings of Soviet nationalities policy.

Another possible reason is the failure of African students to build sustained rights networks. While they employed the language of rights throughout the 1960s and 1970s, there is little to suggest that these periodic moments of activism were linked in any meaningful way. Unlike Soviet rights defenders, who, notwithstanding deaths and emigration, maintained their networks, African students' protest networks appear to have been circumscribed by the natural turnover of students returning to their home countries. Whereas the same names appear repeatedly in the literature on Soviet rights defenders, there were no analogous figures within the African rights movement. The fragmentation of this network may have been worsened by the lack of involvement by African students in the "*samizdat* system" that had emerged in the Soviet Union in the late 1950s and that continued to grow in the decades thereafter.⁹⁹ While the KGB archives in Kyiv are replete with examples of Ukrainian *samizdat*, I have come across no examples written by African students. Given the importance of *samizdat* as the "systematic 'site' of dissidence", this absence is particularly significant.¹⁰⁰ That is not to say that African students did not find ways of communicating outside official channels; Peter Reddaway remembers students in Moscow using their indigenous languages to evade the KGB.¹⁰¹ But the spoken word precluded the development of the kind of system that evolved around the printed word.

For Soviet citizens unable to retreat into Swahili or Yoruba to confound whoever may have been listening, the kitchen became the primary site for subversive conversations. Looking back on the Soviet period in the 1990s, Moscow urban planner Aleksandr Vysokovskii wrote that "small kitchens became something like family clubs, where large *kompanii* crowded in, sang, drank, talked, worked, wrote, and, unfortunately, suffered [...]".¹⁰² The *kompaniia* was, to put it simply, a group of friends. Liudmila Alekseeva explained the existence of these groups as a necessary corrective to the alienation of Soviet life. They emerged "because they

⁹⁸Nana Osei-Opare, "Uneasy Comrades: Postcolonial Statecraft, Race, and Citizenship, Ghana-Soviet Relations, 1957–1966", *Journal of West African History*, 5:2 (2019), pp. 85–111, 100–102.

⁹⁹Ann Komaromi, *Soviet Samizdat: Imagining a New Society* (Ithaca, NY, 2022).

¹⁰⁰Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs, "Introduction", in Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (eds), *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. ix–xviii, xi.

¹⁰¹Reddaway, *Dissidents*, p. 94.

¹⁰²Aleksandr Vysokovskii, "Arkhitektura razrukhi: nestavshie sredi shestidesiatykh", *Vek XX i mir*, 9–10 (1994), pp. 79–96, 87.

were needed”, Alekseeva wrote, elaborating further that “[o]ur generation had a psychological, spiritual, perhaps even a physiological need to discover our country, our history, and ourselves”.¹⁰³ Such was the emotive weight of these informal meetings that Boris Belenken, who in the 1970s was thrown out of the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute, referred to himself as a “man of the kitchen [*chelovekom kukhni*]” in his conversations with historian Philip Boobbyer.¹⁰⁴ Others have described this “intellectual kitchen” (*intelligentskaia kukhnia*) as one of the symbols of the sixties generation.¹⁰⁵

These intellectual kitchens, and the *kompanii* that inhabited them, were not simply private spaces. It was in Larisa Bogoraz’s kitchen that participants strategized ahead of the 1965 Pushkin Square protest.¹⁰⁶ As Gorbanevskaia later wrote of that meeting, “it wasn’t enough for us to ‘disapprove’ while sitting in our kitchen”.¹⁰⁷ However, the relationship between public and private was always ambivalent. As Juliane Fürst has written of the *kompaniia*, “[i]ts members were bound by a shared secrecy concerning the content and details of their discussions, yet its relatively fluid membership and openness to guest members made it a quasi-public forum”.¹⁰⁸ This shared secrecy, while arguably strengthening the affective bonds between *kompaniia* members themselves, simultaneously undermined opportunities for building bridges with others, including international students. “Everyone had to know everyone”, Aleksandr Vysokovskii reflected, “and in truth the circle of ‘friends’ [*svoikh*] was strictly monitored”.¹⁰⁹ The very nature of Soviet repression – its intrusion into the everyday lives of its citizens and their subsequent withdrawal into the life of the *kompaniia* – helped ensure that the islands of African and Soviet dissidence remained mutually uncharted.

Perhaps the more compelling explanation for the mutual ignorance of these groups, however, is the difference in the relationship with the Soviet state implicit in the claims made by African and Soviet rights defenders. For Soviet rights defenders, the fundamental issue was the perceived arbitrariness of the Soviet state; rights were a tool to defend both individuals and groups against the excesses of Soviet power. Soviet rights defenders were therefore pursuing a negative right to freedoms of conscience, movement, and expression. At first glance, African rights defenders were pursuing a similarly negative right to freedom from racial discrimination. However, implicit in this right to freedom from racial discrimination was the

¹⁰³Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston, MA, 1990), p. 83.

¹⁰⁴Philip Boobbyer, “Truth-Telling, Conscience and Dissent in Late Soviet Russia: Evidence from Oral Histories”, *European History Quarterly*, 30:4 (2000), pp. 553–585, 569.

¹⁰⁵V.M. Voronkov, “Proekt ‘shestidesiatnikov’. Dvizhenie protesta v SSSR”, in Iu. Levada and T. Shanin (eds), *Ottsy i deti. Pokolencheskii analiz sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow, 2005), pp. 168–200, 185, 194.

¹⁰⁶Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *Thaw Generation*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁷Gorbanevskaia, *Polden’*, p. 7. See also Anke Stephan, *Von der Küche auf den Roten Platz. Lebenswege sowjetischer Dissidentinnen* (Zürich, 2005).

¹⁰⁸Juliane Fürst, “Friends in Private, Friends in Public: The Phenomenon of the *Kompaniia* among Soviet Youth in the 1950s and 1960s”, in Lewis H. Siegelbaum (ed.), *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 229–49, 230.

¹⁰⁹Vysokovskii, “Arkhitektura razrukhi”, p. 87.

necessity for Soviet authorities to police the behaviours of their own citizens. As one African petition wrote, “[p]eople committing [abusive] acts must be re-educated by Soviet organizations and institutions in such a way that they alter their rude actions”.¹¹⁰

For their part, Soviet citizens appear to have reacted poorly to African advocacy. The British Commonwealth Relations Office reported to embassies across East and West Africa that Soviet citizens had reacted to African rights defenders with “indignant bewilderment (why behave like this when we treat you so well?)”.¹¹¹ A similar sentiment was recorded following protests in Kyiv.¹¹² Unlike members of the sixties generation elsewhere in Europe and North America, Soviet citizens were as likely to view representatives of the Global South as living embodiments of their own subjection than as an inspiration towards greater liberation.¹¹³ Nowhere was this contradiction between African liberty and Soviet liberty clearer than in the conflicting demands of their rights defenders. The continuing calls from Africans in particular for further policing of Soviet citizens underlines the contradiction between the democratic promise of socialist internationalism and the autocratic reality of the Soviet state and society.

Finally, that Soviet and African rights defenders remained stranded on their respective islands tells us something about the nature of both the Soviet and the international rights movement themselves. Though it appealed to the universal, the Soviet rights movement was bound up in the idiosyncrasies of late Soviet socialism. It was, in this sense, only imperfectly a universalist movement. This was equally true of African rights defenders, who bristled under the heavy hand of the Soviet state but saw no contradiction in demanding that same state exercise control over Soviet citizens. In his discussion of the development of human rights activism, Aryeh Neier writes that “[t]hough they may have little in common linguistically, culturally, or politically, a great many of the millions of persons worldwide who consider themselves human rights activists feel a kinship and seek ties to others within the movement”.¹¹⁴ The experience of Soviet and African rights defenders suggests that this global rights imaginary worked best as just that: an imaginary. When brought together in the same town or city, neither Soviet nor African rights defenders saw merit in seeking to build the kinds of solidarities on which the Soviet state based its international legitimacy. The failure to build broader solidarities exposes the utopianism that Samuel Moyn has argued lies at the heart of the global rights movement.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰GARF, fo. 9606, op. 2, d. 83, ll. 353–354, Memorandum.

¹¹¹TNA, CO 1035/241, Commonwealth Relations Office to Accra, Lagos, Freetown, Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Nairobi, and Zanzibar, 19 December 1963.

¹¹²HDA SBU, fo. 16, op. 1, spr. 987, ark. 133–136, V.F. Nikitchenko to TsK KPU, 3 December 1969.

¹¹³I explore this further in Thom Loyd, “Congo on the Dnipro: Third Worldism and the Nationalization of Soviet Internationalism in Ukraine”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 22:4 (2021), pp. 787–811.

¹¹⁴Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton, NJ, 2012), p. 9.

¹¹⁵On rights as a utopian movement, see Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

In this sense, rights talk embodied the fundamental paradox that lay at the heart of Soviet internationalism, as laid out in the introduction to this collection. This grammar of solidarity was central to African students' claims against the Soviet state, but it also lay at the core of a growing cynicism among Soviet citizens about the validity of internationalism. Rights talk carried the seeds of both resistance and legitimation.