Benjamin Magson Kies

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Benjamin Magson Kies, Drum , March 1960

**Synopsis:**

Teacher, political activist, advocate and founder of the NEUM and member of the TLSA.

**First Name:**

Benjamin

**Middle Name:**

Magson

**Last Name:**

Kies

**Date of Birth:**

12-December-1917

**Location of Birth:**

Cape Town,South Africa

**Date of Death:**

19-December-1979

**Location of Death:**

Cape Town,South Africa

**Gender:**

Male

**Benjamin Magson Kies**

**Introduction**

Benjamin Magson Kies was an important South African political activist and theorist from about the middle of the 1930s until his death in 1979. His major contribution as an activist was to the development of the political strategy of non-collaboration with the structures and instruments of oppression and exploitation. This contribution was elaborated through the principles and work of the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department (Anti-CAD) Committee and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) both of which he had an instrumental role in founding between 1943 and 1944. As a theorist he was responsible, with life-long comrades, for the development and articulation of the theory and practice of non-racialism. The essential point of Non-racialism was that ‘race’ was an invention of the forces of hegemony and domination to secure the subjugation of people who were classified as ‘non-white’.

Kies was born on the 12th December, 1917 to parents of modest means in the working-class community of Woodstock, Cape Town. His father, a factory worker, was active in the African Political Organisation (APO) where Mohammed Adhikari (1993:181) reports that he ‘had served for many years on the APO Executive’. Kies was a student at Trafalgar High School, the foremost school for students classified Coloured in Cape Town. After matriculating in 1934, he went to the University of Cape Town where he completed, with the assistance of a scholarship, the BA (1937), MA (1938) and BEd (1939) degrees. After qualifying as a teacher Kies returned to Trafalgar High School where he taught until he was dismissed in 1956 because of his political activities. With a British Council scholarship in 1946 he proceeded on a study tour of Europe and a period of study at the University of London.

**Early Political Formation: The New Era Fellowship**

In 1937, Kies, then barely 20 years old, helped to establish the New Era Fellowship (NEF), an anti-colonial and leftist debating society. The NEF was the training-ground and incubator for the radical non-Stalinist socialist tradition that has come to be associated, principally, with the NEUM, later to become the New Unity Movement (NUM).  The NEF was responsible for the establishment of a wide range of progressive and socialist and specifically anti-Stalinist social, cultural and political organisations to come out of Cape Town from 1937 onwards. Many of these organisations continue to exist today. Many individuals, some no longer explicitly politically affiliated have their political education in this broad tradition (Soudien, 2019).

The home base of the NEF was the Stakesby Lewis Hostel in District Six, Cape Town where it lay on a regular schedule of cultural activities, principally lectures and debates. To these events came a wide cross-section of Cape Town’s people. The lectures were given by the most progressive intellectuals and political figures in the city. The debates covered issues that were topical at the time, such as the role of intellectuals, the impending Second World War and, most critically, the question of ‘race’ in South Africa. Kies was involved in determining the agenda of the NEF from the beginning in 1937 when he would still have been a student at UCT at the time.

**Kies and the Political Climate of the Early 1940s**

The leaders of the NEF, called the ‘Cape Radicals’ by Soudien (2019), inevitably, came to the awareness that the fellowship was not sufficient, by itself, for the prosecution of the political struggle. This awareness arose out of a series of stock-taking exercises undertaken of the political situation in South Africa in the NEF during 1940.  At the time the leading organisations among the so-called Coloured people were the African People’s Organisation, the APO and the Teachers’ League of South Africa (TLSA). These were essentially conservative organisations.

Giving an indication of the break which the young radicals would make with the political establishment in the ‘coloured’ community, Kies gave notice in his talks of the direction that the NEF would provide for Cape radical politics. The first was political and the second was conceptual. Both were seminal.

The political direction Kies lay out appeared in a lecture he gave to the NEF in 1938 entitled “The Revolt of Youth”. In this lecture Kies took issue with the preoccupation of the older generation with ‘civility’. This civility, he suggested, masked a desire to be white and an acceptance of inferiority. The conceptual move Kies was making emerged out of a series of gatherings organized by the NEF in the middle of 1939 to take stock of the political situation in the country. These propelled the NEF towards a more theoretical consideration of the question of the sociology of the country and of ‘race’ in particular.

**The Political Programme: Non-Collaboration**

A great deal of thinking took place amongst the radicals of the NEF between 1940 and 1943. They found themselves in the midst of a global struggle at the core of which was the question of ‘race’ and imperialism. They had to make sense of what was happening politically. Locally, in South Africa, the left was coming under increasing attack from the establishment. In these important developments, it was clear that the young Kies, still not yet 30 years old, played a leading role. He gave a lecture in the NEF on the 29th May, 1943 entitled *The Background of Segregation* (Kies, 1943).

Out of *The Background of Segregation* came the basic theoretical and strategic positions that would inform the anti-Stalinist socialist movement for the next sixty years. Kies explained in the address that his purpose was to give a “sober picture of the factors we are up against and also to show clearly how we will have to face up to these realities” (Kies, 1943: 2). His focus was the social first and foremost. He explained that “the basic principle upon which the British Empire is founded is that of ‘divide and rule’. The plainer name is Segregation. And this principle works right through the Empire, from the Statute of Westminster to the Constitution of the NRC or the CAC; from the creation of a white working-class aristocracy in South Africa to the stoking up of Hindu-Moslem feuds in India” (ibid).

An important conceptual stage was being signalled in Kies’ thinking in this lecture. Changing the situation in the country, Kies argued, would not be easy. Two moves, he argued, needed to be undertaken. The first was building the united front of oppressed people. The second was to throw off the idea of ‘race’.

With respect to the first move, Kies was, obviously, working with the same imperatives that propelled the oppressed political community since 1935 with the establishment of the All-African Convention. Those efforts had failed to unite the political organisations which were then active, the African National Congress, in the main, with the other organisations such as the multiple groupings which existed all over the country. A REAL United Front, Kies said, and here he had in mind the failure of the AAC, the National Liberation League and the Non-European United Front, all of them attempts at constructing a united front of oppressed organisations, “cannot suddenly be called up or created, but it has to be BUILT. And it can only be BUILT UP from below…. This is the first condition for a REAL United Front: it must have a mass base” (Kies, 1943: 13). Its purpose he said was not to stir up race hatred, “it is for the purpose of uniting ALL non-European oppressed, so that they may bring the white working-class to its senses…. It may seem …that all the whites are living on milk and honey. That is not so…. They are exploited all the same” (Kies, 1943: 14). As part of this first move, he argued that the liberation movement had to come to terms with the fact that practical leadership always came from the intelligentsia: “The workers and peasants have always been so exhausted and bowed down by arduous toil that they have never had time to study and look deeply into the why and wherefore of their miserable condition” (ibid). The ‘non-European’ people, he argued, did not have a leisured class, but it was certainly lucky to have an intelligentsia, “and we are luckier than that, because our intelligentsia has sprung straight from the loins of the working class. They do not have to go to the people. They belong to the people and the people are all around them” (Kies, 1943: 14-15). He urged “WE MUST TURN OUR FACES TO OUR PEOPLE AND WE MUST BE AMONG THEM AND WITH THEM AND OF THEM, TEACHING AND LEADING THEM” (his emphasis) (Kies, 1943: 16).

The second move Kies made was with respect to the racial question. In *The Background to Segregation*he began to lay out a theory of ‘race’, to locate it within a larger class analysis and to emphasize how significantly ‘race’ was an instrument of imperialism. “They intend to reduce us all to the same low level of slavery”, he argued, “but to keep us segregated even in subjection….but each group is always to think that its chains are different. Already the names – African, Coloured and Indian – are practically out of date; they no longer correspond to reality” (Kies, 1943: 3). What was the reality? “The reality”, he said was “that in South Africa there are only white and non-white” (ibid).

George Hull (2018: 4), reading the lecture critically, argued that Kies had begun in this talk to ‘deplore the vicious racial myths’, ‘the myths of racial hierarchy’. To criticism made of his address that “said that the Coloured People would ‘lose their identity’, if taught alongside pupils from other racial groups” he replied “the sooner the Coloured man loses his identity the better off he will be” (ibid).

The central issue of ‘race’ which had stimulated the thinking of Kies’ and his comrades was intensified by the proposed disenfranchisement of people classified coloured by the Jan Smuts led United Party government. This United Party proposal came to a head with the establishment in 1943 of the Coloured Advisory Council. Kies gave a lecture on the subject entitled, “The C.A.D. – the New Fraud”, at a meeting of the NEF. In the wake of this, a body called the Anti-CAD Committee was established consisting of Kies, Goolam Gool, Jane Gool, Isaac Tabata, Saul Jayiya, Richard Dudley, Rev Eric Viljoen, Rev D. Wessels, Alie Fataar, Edgar Maurice, Cissie Gool, Johnny Gomas and Sonny Abdurahman (Jaffe, 1994: 162-163). It issued a statement headed ‘The C.A.D. The New Fraud’. This was followed by public meetings throughout the Cape province and a national conference on the 28th May in the Cape Town Banqueting Hall. The gathering attracted 200 delegates representing organisations such as the APO, NEUF, NLL, Fourth International of South Africa (FIOSA), trade unions, churches and civic organisations. Mokone (1991: 25) described the coming together of the organisations as “the biggest conference in the history of the Coloured sector of the oppressed.”

The major item on the agenda for the united front was the form it should take. A debate took place at the Anti-CAD conference around how such an organisation should be established. Many options were considered. In the end a federal structured was decided upon. The support of the All African Convention was quickly obtained and a call to the nation was issued - ‘The Clarion Call – A Call to Unity’ (Mokone, 1991: 3). This led in December 1943 to what was called the Preliminary Unity Conference “where a 10 Point Programme was adopted as the basis for unity” (Jaffe, 1994: 164).

The 10 Point Programme consisted of minimum demands:

1. The franchise, ie the right of every man and woman over the age of 21 to elect and be elected to Parliament, Provincial Councils and all other Divisional and Municipal Councils.
2. Compulsory, free and uniform education for all children up to the age of 16, with free meals, free books and school equipment for the needy.
3. Inviolability of person, of one’s house and privacy.
4. Freedom of speech, press, meetings and association.
5. Freedom of movement and occupation.
6. Full equality of rights for all citizens without distinction of race, colour or sex.
7. Revision of the land question in accordance with the above.
8. Revision of the civil and criminal code in accordance with the above.
9. Revision of the system of taxation in accordance with the above.
10. Revision of the labour legislation and its application to the mines and agriculture. (Lewis, 1987: 222)

A central plank of the Anti-CAD Committee’s political strategy was the boycott. The idea of the boycott, of course, was not new. It had arisen strongly as an issue with the establishment of the Native Representative Council (NRC) in 1935 (Drew, 1996: 31). The ANC and the leading figures in the All African Convention (AAC) differed strongly over the approach that should be taken to the NRC. Trotskyist-leaning elements in the AAC argued against participation in the processes and structures of the NRC. This tactic was deployed as the major form of resistance to the ruling class.  The essential message of the Anti-CAD was, as Kies argued, that the CAD was a fraud. It was intended that black people would give up their demands for the full franchise and would come to accept political subordination. The boycott strategy gave the community of radicals not just an approach for managing the struggle against the ruling class but also an entirely new vocabulary. Terms such as collaborator and non-collaborator and quisling, borrowed from the experience of Norway and the collaboration there of Widkun Quisling who collaborated with the Nazis, became important short-hand terms to indicate political positions.

On the basis of the 10-Point Programme, the NEUM was launched in the City Hall of Cape Town on 26 January 1944. This was followed by many meetings all over the country and the establishment of many structures affiliated to the NEUM. Included amongst these were older and established structures such as the AAC and the TLSA, but also many newer organisations. The NEUM also established a newspaper, *The Torch,*which Kies came to edit for a period of time. It was in the course of these developments that Kies gave his second key address, *The Basis of Unity.*Itwas delivered at the Third Unity Conference of the NEUM at the banqueting Hall in Cape Town on 4th of January 1945. This address was critical in advancing the argument that Kies had begun in *The Background to Segregation.*

Kies insisted in *The Basis of Unity*on being clear theoretically. “Theory”, he said, “is important. Your political theory means the way you sum up things, where you consider the interests of the oppressed to lie. This determines your direction; it determines the type of demand you make and the type of organization you admire or follow or join; it determines your political activity” (Kies, 1945: 6).

What was this theory? It was premised on the “… recognition that Segregation is an artificial device of the rulers, and an instrument for the domination of the Non-European, is at the same time a recognition that the division, strife and suspicion amongst the Non-European groups themselves is artificially fostered by the ruling class” (Kies, 1945: 8). His distinctive contribution was that the idea of ‘race’ was an ideological construction of the ruling class.

Kies concluded his paper by claiming that “all these points… together comprise a whole outlook, a **new outlook”**(his emphasis)(Kies, 1945: 10). In this he was working out a bigger argument about the artifice of ‘race’. He explained the necessity for challenging this. Challenging it, he explained, required a whole new outlook on life. Without using the words he was making the argument that dominant discourse infiltrated the mind and the body: What was needed “was a complete change of orientation in the present and not at some future and unknowable date” (Kies, 1945: 10).

**Theory: The Making of the Non-Racialism Idea.**

In the company of his colleagues, many of them formidable intellectuals, people such as Tabata, AC Jordan, Dora Taylor, Kies led the development of the idea of non-racialism. Elements of this thinking were evident in the writing and work of Taylor and Jordan. Taylor challenged patrimonial and essentialist ideas about ‘race’ and culture. Jordan, for his part, was arguing by 1950 that what was called ‘Western culture’ was actually the inheritance of all people: “(It is as if) this civilization sprang out of the brain of the white man in the same way as the Goddess, Pallas Athene, sprang out of the brains of Zeus” (ibid).

The argument for non-racialism came to a climax with Kies’s third major paper, *The Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to Civilisation*in 1953. The contemporary analyst, Christopher Joon-Hai Lee (2014: 45) argues that what Kies was able to achieve with this publication stood in comparison with the work of the great Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci:

Much like his ideas, this body of thought was antifascist and spoke to a specific historical moment, though also attempting a deeper and wider-ranging social analysis. If Gramsci’s *Notes on Italian History*sought to describe a ‘passive revolution’ of bourgeois hegemonic development in Italy, Anti-CAD and later NEUM literature sought to expose the passive revolution of segregation and white *Herrenvolk*hegemony being constituted in South Africa. … The *Bulletins*sought to promote, conceptually, and universalize a common, subjected condition of ‘Non-Europeans’, similar to Gramsci’s ‘subaltern’ classes. (Lee, 2005: 45)

*The Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to World Civilisation* was delivered as the 2nd AJ Abrahamse Memorial Lecture of the TLSA in Cape Town on the 29th September, 1953. In this work Kies focused his entire attention on the question of the ‘myth’ of ‘race’ (Kies, 1953: 7). Almost unheard of anywhere in the world at the time, he sought, systematically to demolish the idea of ‘Western Civilisation’ and the idea of a “‘Western man’ with a ‘Western soul’, a ‘Western philosophy’, a ‘Western science’ and a ‘Western way of life’” (Kies, 1953: 8).

Problematic for Kies was the taken-for-granted couplet of ‘race’ and civilisation. With the horrors of the holocaust looming large at the back of his thinking, he showed how the idea of ‘empire’ and of civilisation was premised upon the discredited science of racial-biology. Kies said:

The creed of the new myth requires the changing of only one word in the Nordic gospel, and it reads: “In Westernkind the world once more its weal will find.” [ He is referring here to the writing of Rudolf Rocker (no date) *Nationalism and Culture. Ed]*The peoples of Asia and Africa are regarded as belonging to ‘backward’ or ‘child’ ‘races’, whose ‘inherent inferiority’ is patent from their numbers, skin colour, queer customs, heathen gods, laziness, treachery, primitive methods of farming, irresponsibility, fatalism and disregard for the sacredness of human life. In so far as it is admitted that the peoples of Asia have made any contribution to civilisation, it is conceded that they stumbled upon certain discoveries without appreciating their worth or developing them in a way from which society could benefit…. As far as Africa is concerned… (it is) the home of permanently child ‘races’…. (Kies, 1953: 8)

Kies went on to make the point that “one of the more important tasks of our time is to dissect this myth… and to give our reply to it, on the level of ideas and in the field of practice” (Kies, 1953: 9). He took the term ‘Non-European’, and explained that it was only a geographical term and that it could refer to people of ‘any skin-colour, height, hair texture, skull or nose shape who live outside of the Continent of Europe’ (ibid).

Demonstrating a sophisticated commend of anthropology, palaeontology and ultimately of psychology he explained what science was able to say about the idea of ‘race’:

[w]e are in no position at the present time to pronounce upon the weight of the evidence thus far produced by the newer line of research. It is *sufficient*for our purpose to say that we, the so-called ‘children of Ham’, together with Messrs D.F. Malan and Eric Louw [ Key politicians in the National Party who, at the time, were propagating the basic racial principles of separate development] derive from the same stock, *homo sapiens*, as Dr. L.S.B. Leakey and the Mau Mau whom he is now so bitterly fighting…. The human race is now, as it was when *homo sapiens*evolved, one biological species, with the same number and formation of bones, the same brain and nerve structure, the same internal organs, the same four types of blood groups… and the same capacity, in fact propensity, for interbreeding…. Geographical dispersal, isolation and diet, have not made the slightest difference to the biological unity of man as a single species, and provide no scientific basis for a division into what are popularly mis-called ‘races’. (Kies, 1953: 12)

Kies brought this argument to a conclusion by saying that ‘it is from his culture … that man derives his humanity’, and begins his social history (ibid). Critically, in emphasizing the significance of the slow process of ‘trial and error’ in history – the first cultural stage through which every society goes – he made clear how important to the discussion of the idea of a common humanity was the reality that the first processes of domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants took place outside of what is understood as Europe today. Europe, in this sense, was the inheritor of many important cultural and technological discoveries. In this argument, he anticipated Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000) landmark postcolonial text, *Provincialising Europe,* by more than fifty years.

The impact of this lecture was profound. It significantly advanced the theoretical discussion of what ‘race’ was and how it could be understood historically and sociologically. For the first time, since Olive Schreiner and Lancelot Hogben who provided Kies with his earliest days of about the meaning of ‘race’, was an explanation provided of how to locate the concept in relation to the politics of difference. “With few exceptions”, observed Jaffe (1980: 27) “colonial-liberation movements … fell into the trap of ‘races’, ‘ethnic groups’, and used these to classify the oppressed themselves.” This politics, Kies made clear, had been constructed around an ideology of superiority and inferiority “as a weapon in a global war fought mainly for the re-distribution of spheres of economic interest inhabited by the lesser breeds without the myth” (Kies, 1953: 8). Where the politics of the early anti-Stalinists socialists were constructed around a theory of racial equality, which placed them in the same conceptual orbit as their Stalinist opponents, these grown-up socialists had come to the startling awareness that the idea of ‘race’ could no longer be sustained at all. It was, said Jaffe (1980: 29) “the dominant ideology of capitalism…. Not only did it enter the everyday ‘unconscious’ mind of Europeans who eventually accepted the invention of race as something self-evident; but it went into almost every sphere of ‘science’ and literature.”

The closing lines of Kies’s *Contribution*embodied a *cri de coeur*which would ring for decades in the ears of the socialist movement in South Africa. He said: “In the eyes of the South African *Herrenvolk,*segregation or *apartheid,*curfews, locations and the South African laws may represent civilisation, and the liberation from them a relapse into barbarism. But we, together with the majority of mankind who have seen the hateful, degenerate cannibalism to which these defenders of ‘Western’, ‘European’, ‘Christian’ civilisation have in fact brought civilisation in the West, we think otherwise” (Kies, 1953: 40).

**Kies in the Apartheid Era**

The period after the ascent to power of the National Party in 1948 was difficult for Kies and his comrades. They were not only confronted with the ruling party institutionalising racism but also, critically, with the beginning of the long night of political repression into which the country was thrust by the National Party. The central piece of legislation brought by the National Party was the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. This achieved not only the banning of the Communist Party of South Africa but proscribed any form of political activity which remotely had socialist or communist overtones.

In this climate of rising political suppression Kies and his colleagues worked hard to maintain their political programme. Central to this programme was the boycott. This boycott strategy focused on the Anti-CAD which continued to mobilise communities all over the country against the multiplying initiatives of the new government to put in place segregationist-style structures to serve the different communities of the country. A key issue, in this context, arose with the segregation of trains in 1948. The Anti-CAD and the NEUM began a campaign of resistance. Kies and other colleagues were arrested and charged with incitement of public violence. They were hauled before a court of law but not found guilty. This finding notwithstanding, the state effected drastic changes to the legislation and began from about 1950 began to put in place the grand architecture of apartheid.

As the apartheid agenda was unfolding Kies and his colleagues continued to organise at the community level. Publications such as the TLSA’s *Education Journal*and *The Torch*were maintained. In these Kies continued to play a leading role, writing voluminously. As a result of this work he was turned down for the position of principal at Trafalgar High School in 1953. In 1956 he was dismissed from his post because of his role as the editor of the *Educational Journal.*He was charged by the Secretary of the Cape Education Department with misconduct. His misconduct was that he had published the Presidential Address of Mr WP van Schoor at the annual conference of the TLSA in 1955. This address, claimed the Cape Education Department, promoted antagonism amongst the ‘non-white’ population against white people. He was then, subsequently in 1959, issued with a banning order. This banning order, says Dennis Cavernelis (n.d: 95) ‘brought to an end his overt political activities. He was obliged to give up attendance at meetings of movements and associations with which he had been connected for the previous decade and more.” This banning order was renewed in 1960. Upon his banning Kies was employed by Juta, a publishing house and bookseller in Cape Town. He also began studying again and enrolled as a law student at the University of Cape Town. He graduated with a Bachelor of Law degree in 1961 and completed his pupillage as an advocate in 1961 at the age of 43.

Becoming an advocate was not an easy path for Kies to walk. He first of all had to deal with the restrictions that were placed on him by his banning order and then, a matter of immense irritation which he managed with equanimity, the apartheid restrictions which prevented him from accessing and being afforded the facilities that his peer advocates expected for the delivery of their briefs. The first brief he was given came through the intercession of Judge Joseph Herbstein who asked Kies to serve as the *pro deo*defence in a murder trial at the Worcester Circuit. Herbstein (*Cape Times,*16 January 1980) said:

In offering him this brief I pointed out the difficulties which he would have to face – non-membership of the Circuit Mess, the inability to stay at any hotel, and the necessity of finding lodging in the location – and many others. Stating his knowledge of all this, and his readiness to face the difficulties and the unpleasantness, he unhesitatingly accepted the assignment.

On the opening morning of the session, the customary ‘coffee gathering’ took place. My guests were the local magistrate, the assessors, the prosecutor, members of the Bar, the sheriff and district surgeon – all Afrikaans-speaking. By chance, discussion started on a recently published book by Adam Small and naturally spread to one on Afrikaans literature generally. The details do not matter, suffice it for me to say that ben’s contribution was listened to by a spellbound audience. When he left my Afrikaans guests in the most complimentary terms graciously admitted that this coloured man knew infinitely more about their culture than they did. A new respect was born.

But further restrictions followed. In November 196, just over half a year having passed in his new career, the then Minister of Justice, BJ Vorster, served him with another banning order, his third, which prohibited him from being an office-bearer or member of 36 named organisations included in which were the NEUM, the Anti-CAD and the TLSA.

Kies’ legal career, these restrictions notwithstanding, grew significantly. He was elected as a member of the Cape Bar Council and quickly built a reputation for managing political cases. One of the most significant of these was a *habeus corpus*case he successfully took on in defence of Dr Kenneth Abrahams of the Yu Chi Chan Club. Abrahams had been abducted by the South African Police from Bechuanaland (Botswana). The case would provide the legal struggle for the rights of prisoners with a powerful precedent. Almost fittingly, he died on the 19 December 1979 in a Hermanus court where he was defending four people who had been accused under the Terrorism Act of 1967.

**Conclusion**

The significance of Kies’ contribution to the political struggle in South Africa and to its theory of change is relatively unknown. He was, however, one of the country’s most important political theorists. The contribution which he made with the theory of non-racialism emerged almost thirty years before a similarly constructed theory of social analysis arose with neo-Marxism in the early days of European post-structuralism and the subsequent developments that came with the rise of the Indian Subaltern movement. These contributions he made arose, significantly, in the fertile space of South African intellectualism, reflecting the extraordinary and still-to-be-told-story of the evolution of a distinct school of political thought which emerged out of the Western Cape. An extremely significant element of this story was that these intellectual developments took place outside of the university. The spaces inhabited by Kies, such as the NEF had become, during this period, the most progressive intellectual and even scholarly site of critical thinking in the country. The NEF’s lectures, such as those of Kenny Jordaan, Cosmo Pieterse and a whole group of young minds in the late 1950s, for example, were significantly in advance of much of what was being taught at the major universities in the country at the time. They effected an epistemological break which disrupted the dominant approaches to ‘race’ and class to the core. Kies himself, writing in *The Sun,*under the pseudonym I.N. Fandum, made the observation of his elders that “(they were in) the twilight of their ideas” (Sandwith, 2011: 12). Driving Kies  and his comrades on were the political dynamics of South Africa’s ‘race’ and class struggles. They began their intellectual journey with the important insight that the social space in which they found themselves had to be understood properly. They embraced theory without apology. Out of this came, for the period, some of the world’s most innovative sociological, political and psychological thinking. In all of this, recognising the contributions of his peers, Kies was without question a leader.

Kies was acknowledged by the post-apartheid with provincial honours in the Western Cape when the Order of the Disa – Officer, 2004 was bestowed on him posthumously. Given his commitment to the idea of working as a collective, it is not clear that Kies would have accepted this honour had he been alive.

We also include links, in 5 parts, to a Masters Thesis by Dennis Cavernelis on the life and contribution of Benjamin Magson Kies :

Part 1

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_mL-1qxbLNrOWUzVXlrTDBrUHhnOG1CT1ZvbnNFc0lvXzlR>

Part 2

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_mL-1qxbLNrTjJyRHdyU3hjcldIQm1fU1JWektzUFVKVF9N>

Part 3

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_mL-1qxbLNrNXFLUUFxZTFxVzNfaVA3UWVfX3dZOC1fUVg4>

Part 4

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_mL-1qxbLNrTC1fT0gybmd4a3hObzJ0X1lwSUlGZG1BbTdF>

Part 5

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_mL-1qxbLNrUkZmWFVJNWNfb3NYV3FjZC01RjFkdzhxU29n>

Biography drafted by Crain Soudien

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