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**Hope, fear, shame, frustration: Continuity and change in the
expression of Coloured identity in white supremacist
South Africa, 1910-1994**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which Coloured identity manifested itself in South African society from the time the South African state was formed in 1910 till the institution of democratic rule in 1994. The central argument of the dissertation is that Coloured identity is better understood, not as having evolved through a series of transformations during this period, as conventional historical thinking would have it, but to have remained remarkably stable throughout the era of white rule. This is not to contend that Coloured identity was static or that it lacked fluidity but that the continuities during this period were more fundamental to the way in which it operated as a social identity than the changes it experienced. It is argued that this stability was derived from a central core of enduring characteristics that regulated the way in which Colouredness functioned as an identity during this period. Each of the four emotions in the title of the thesis corresponds to a key characteristic at the heart of the identity. The principal constituents of this stable core are the assimilationism of the Coloured people (hope), their intermediate status in the racial hierarchy (fear), the negative connotations, especially that of racial hybridity, with which it was imbued (shame), and finally, the marginality of the Coloured community (frustration).

In addition to a series of thematic analyses that broadly encompass the expression of Coloured identity throughout the era of white supremacist rule, the dissertation uses a range of case studies of key texts to demonstrate its thesis. Collectively, the case studies have been chosen to cover the entire period under review as well as to represent the full spectrum of opinion within the Coloured community about the nature of their identity.

After an opening chapter that sets the social and historical context and that maps out its conceptual framework, the thesis outlines a historiography of Coloured writing on the history of their community. This analysis provides an overview of changing perceptions within the Coloured community of their history and nature as a social group. The first two case studies, the *APO* (1909-1923) and the *Educational Journal* (1915-1940), investigate the expression of Coloured identity in the earlier decades of South Africa's existence. The second set of case histories, *Torch* (1946-1963) and *A Walk in the Night* (1962), explore new perspectives introduced by the emergence of a radical movement in Coloured politics during the middle decades of white rule. In the next chapter the Black Consciousness poetry of James Matthews (1970s) and *South* (1987-1994) serve as examples of opinion within the anti-apartheid movement during the latter phases of the apartheid era. Finally, an examination of Hein Willemse's 1993 study of the *Straatpraatjes* column, published in the *APO* from 1909 onwards, is used in the conclusion to illustrate a particular view common at the close of the apartheid period and to reinforce the general conclusions of the thesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	All African Convention
ANB	Afrikaanse Nasionale Bond
ANC	African National Congress
APO	African Political Organization
BLAC	Black Literature, Art and Culture
CAC	Coloured Advisory Council
CAD	Coloured Affairs Department
CATA	Cape African Teachers' Association
CPC	Coloured People's Congress
CPNU	Coloured People's National Union
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CRC	Coloured Representative Council
FIOSA	Fourth International Organization of South Africa
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
NEUF	Non-European United Front
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NLL	National Liberation League
SACPO	South African Coloured People's Organization
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
TARC	Train Apartheid Resistance Committee
TLSA	Teachers' League of South Africa
UCCA	Union Council of Coloured Affairs
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMSA	Unity Movement of South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The nature of Coloured identity, its history and the implications it holds for South African society have evoked considerable interest in recent times. Debate around these issues have generated much controversy yet there has been no systematic study of Coloured identity. The current literature offers only the most superficial of attempts at analyzing the essential character of Coloured identity or the social and political dynamic that informed Coloured exclusivism. Recent studies on the history of the Coloured community, most notably the books by Maurice Hommel, Richard van der Ross, Gavin Lewis, Ian Goldin and Roy du Pre¹ focus narrowly on the racial oppression Coloured people suffered and on Coloured protest politics. They largely ignore crucial questions relating to the nature of Coloured identity and the way in which it operated as a social identity. By either taking Coloured identity for granted - as something inherent that needs no explanation because it is the automatic product of miscegenation - or by portraying it as a false identity imposed upon weak and vulnerable people by the ruling white minority, the existing literature minimizes the role that Coloured people played in the making of their own identity and presents an oversimplified image of the phenomenon.

The most recent scholarly volume on the subject, a collection of essays edited by Zimitri Erasmus, a sociologist at the University of Cape Town, breaks with this

¹ M. Hommel, *Capricorn Blues: The struggle for human rights in South Africa*, (Toronto, Culturama, 198.); R. van der Ross, *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid: A study of political movements among the Coloured people of South Africa, 1880-1985*, (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1986); G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A history of South African 'Coloured' politics*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987); I. Goldin, *Making Race: The politics and economics of Coloured identity in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1987); R. H. du Pre, *Separate but Unequal: The 'Coloured' people of South Africa - a political history*, (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1994).

pattern in that it focuses directly on Coloured identity and does not suffer the usual coyness about broaching sensitive issues such as racial hostility towards Africans within the Coloured community or the sense of shame that suffuses the identity.² It does, however, lack coherence, as is so often the case with books drawn from papers presented at a conference,³ in that it consists of narrowly focused contributions from a variety of disciplines and which collectively fail to provide a sustained narrative or consistent interpretation of the history or nature of Coloured identity.⁴

This thesis aims to redress these imbalances in part and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the manner in which Colouredness functioned as a social identity. It will attempt to identify the fundamental social and political impulses behind the assertion of a separate Coloured identity and to explain processes of continuity and change in its expression during the period of white rule in South Africa. This will be achieved through close analysis of a range of key texts written by Coloured people in which they give expression to their identity as Coloured and reflect on the nature of their community, its past and its place in the broader society. Attention will, amongst other things, be focused on the manner in which the marginality of the Coloured community, their intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, class differences, ideological and political conflict, cultural affinities and popular stereotyping have influenced processes of Coloured self-definition. By concentrating on the role that Coloured people themselves played in the making of

2 Z. Erasmus, *Coloured by History. Shaped by place: New perspectives on Coloured identities in Cape Town*, (Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2001).

3 The chapters are drawn mainly from a conference held at the University of Cape Town in June 1998.

4 A critical and coherent study of Coloured identity in Zimbabwe has recently been completed. See J. Muzondidya, 'Sitting on the fence or walking a tightrope? A political history of the Coloured community of Zimbabwe, 1945-1980', (Ph. D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 2001).

their identity and by exploring the ways in which ambiguities and contradictions within their group identity shaped their consciousness, this study seeks to elucidate complexities in Coloured social experience hitherto neglected by historians and social scientists. The thesis also sets out to provide brief histories of the texts themselves, and where relevant, biographical sketches of the authors. This is necessary not only to establish the significance of these texts and to place them in their social and historical contexts, but also to help flesh out the socio-political environment in which expressions of Coloured identity occurred. This approach is further justified by these case histories, with the exception of La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*,⁵ representing the only studies of these texts.

The main argument of this thesis is that Coloured identity is better understood not as having undergone a process of continuous transformation during the era of white rule, but to have remained stable throughout this period. This is not to hold that Coloured identity was static or that it lacked fluidity but that the continuities during this period were more fundamental to its nature and a more consistent part of its functioning than the changes it experienced. It will be argued that this stability arose from a central core of enduring characteristics that regulated the way in which Colouredness operated as a social identity under white domination. Each of the four emotions in the title of the thesis corresponds to a key characteristic at the heart of the identity. The principal constituents of this stable core are the assimilationism of the Coloured people which spurred hopes of future acceptance into the dominant society; their intermediate status in the racial hierarchy that generated fears of losing their status of relative privilege and being relegated to the status of Africans; the negative

5 A. La Guma, *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*, (London, Heinemann, 1967).

connotations, especially the shame attached to racial hybridity, with which it was imbued; and finally, the marginality of the Coloured community that caused them a great deal of frustration. Their marginality is seen as the most important of these attributes as it placed severe limitations on the possibilities for social and political action and put the Coloured community at the mercy of a ruling establishment that was generally unsympathetic to their needs and aspirations and that usually acted in prejudicial, and sometimes even malicious, ways toward them.

Of the five chapters that constitute the body of the thesis the first two deal with general themes covering the entire period under scrutiny while the rest will be devoted to a series of strategically selected case studies that give voice to the full range of ideological positions on the nature of Coloured identity within the community. Because of a general lack of familiarity with the history of the Coloured people, both at a popular level and in the academy, the thesis opens with a contextualizing chapter that provides an overview of Coloured history from the late nineteenth century inception of a distinct Coloured identity through to its adaptation to the post-apartheid environment. More importantly, this chapter also discusses the dynamic behind the expression of a separate Coloured identity during the era of white domination in South Africa and the ways in which the racial stereotyping of Coloured people has reinforced aspects of their collective self-image. The second of the thematic chapters consists of a historiography of Coloured writing on the history of their community. It charts changing interpretations of Coloured history and identity within the Coloured community itself by analysing popular perceptions of this past as well as the writing of Coloured intellectuals - confused, conservative, moderate and radical - on the subject.

Chapter three comprises two case studies exploring the functioning of Coloured identity during the first half of the period of white domination. They are also meant to supplement the thematic chapters by serving as illustrations of the way the inner core operated in concrete social situations as well as of the conventional expression of Coloured identity. The *APO* newspaper (1909-1923), the mouthpiece of the African Political Organization, by far the most dominant Coloured political body during the first four decades of the twentieth century is analysed as the first example. The second consists of the *Educational Journal* (1915-1940), the organ of the Teachers' League of South Africa, the largest and most influential professional body within the Coloured community during this period. This will be followed by a chapter on perceptions of race and Coloured identity within the radical movement in Coloured politics during the middle decades of the twentieth century before the apartheid state cracked down on the extra-parliamentary opposition in the wake of the Sharpeville shooting. The focus here will again be on two case studies. The *Torch* (1946-1963), voice of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the main organization within the Trotskyist tradition of Coloured radical politics is used as one example. Alex La Guma's, *A Walk in the Night*, written in the early 1960s, serves as an illustration of the outlook within the Communist Party faction within Coloured radicalism. Chapter five examines the growth from the early 1960s onwards, of the movement toward the rejection of Coloured identity as well as the initial stages in the retreat of Coloured rejectionism in the early 1990s. The Black Consciousness poetry of James Matthews and *South* newspaper (1987-1994) are presented as case studies for this period. They are supplemented by analyses of the *Educational Journal* of the 1960s and the *Grassroots* community newsletter (1980-1990) to fill thematic and chronological gaps

in the narrative.

In the concluding chapter the enquiry will be consummated by analysing Hein Willemse's 1993 study of *Straatpraatjies*, a newspaper column published in the *APO* from its inception in 1909.⁶ A critique of this scholarly article, which was written towards the close of the period under scrutiny about a text produced at its inception, will form the basis of a discursive and conclusionary discussion of continuity and change in the expression of Coloured identity throughout the period of white supremacist rule.

The period chosen for this study is beacons off at each end by momentous political settlements, each of which had a profound impact on the Coloured community and the way in which Coloured identity found expression. The first settlement, the unification of the four settler colonies into the South African state, radically changed the social and political context in which Coloured identity operated. Gone was the relatively tolerant racial order of the Cape Colony in which nearly ninety percent of Coloured people lived. Union inaugurated a much harsher social and political dispensation that became progressively more segregationist through much of the twentieth century. The second political settlement, which led to the inauguration of democratic rule in 1994, brought with it not only constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties but also a whole new range of opportunities for the expression of group identities and for ethnic mobilization, the full impact and implications of which are still to be played out. In the period between these two political settlements, characterized as it was by an oppressive and prescriptive white supremacy, Coloured people suffered severe

6 H. Willemse, 'Die beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder in die *APO*, (1909-1922)', *Stilet*, Vol. 5,

restrictions to their personal and communal freedom and therefore to the ways in which they were able to give expression to their identity as Coloured people. Though far from able to regulate all aspects of the expression of Coloured identity, the white supremacist state and the dominant society as a whole were nevertheless able to set fairly rigid limitations within which Colouredness was able to operate, thereby contributing materially to the relative stability in the expression of the identity.

Since this thesis' main criticism of nearly all of the extant literature is its effective denial, or underplaying, of the role of Coloured people in the making of their identity the emphasis in this thesis is on the part played by Coloured people in creating their own identity. Prominence is thus given to the utterances, actions and writings of Coloured people in which they evince their primary social identity. The thesis is sheet-anchored in analyses of key texts produced by some of the most prominent organic intellectuals in the community in which they give expression to their identity as Coloured people and reflect on its essence, qualities and history. The marginality of the Coloured people and their consignment to the periphery of the dominant society during the period of white domination is the main reason for that mainstay of academic history theses, state archives, being of limited value to this enquiry. The emphasis is instead on serial publications, especially newspapers, written mainly by Coloured people for a largely Coloured readership. The great advantage of this type of source material is that it addresses a targeted constituency and needs to communicate in language that is broadly accessible and through ideas that resonate with its intended readership.

Having lived in or close to Coloured neighbourhoods nearly all my life, having attended a working class Coloured primary school and a middle class Coloured secondary school, having taught at various Coloured township schools in the mid-1970s, having since childhood made numerous friends and innumerable acquaintances with people who regard themselves as Coloured, I can legitimately claim to have had extensive experience of life within the Coloured community. With personal memories stretching back to the late 1950s I have also been part of the social milieu and witness to trends described in this thesis during the last three and a half decades of the apartheid era. And since I have had an academic interest in Coloured identity since the late 1970s and used my day-to-day interaction with people to probe issues broadly relevant to the subject, there is a very real sense in which I can claim to have been a participant-observer to these processes for two and a half decades. It is for these reasons that I have taken the liberty of drawing on my personal experience as source material for this study, though I recognize that this is unorthodox for an academic dissertation. It needs to be stated, though, that such usage is limited and at no point in this thesis does any contentious issue or major point of interpretation hinge on such testimony. Where deployed as evidence, my personal experience is either clearly indicated or referenced and is used only to add colour and texture to the argument.⁷

A word about the terminology used in this study. For want of better alternatives and for the sake of adding some variety to the text I use 'petty bourgeoisie' and 'elite' interchangeably when referring to the upper strata of the Coloured community. Though neither a petty bourgeoisie nor an elite in the accepted senses of the words, this social group can nevertheless be distinguished from the Coloured proletariat by

7 If the use of oral testimony is generally acceptable and participant observation is a recognized

their relative affluence, literacy and adherence to the norms and values of white middle class respectability. A general consciousness of their superior status within the Coloured community also set them apart from the Coloured labouring poor. Forming an elite only within the Coloured community, this group in reality consisted of a combination of petty bourgeois and 'respectable' working class people and is perhaps more accurately referred to as an emergent petty bourgeoisie for much of the twentieth century. It is only towards the close the period under discussion that a substantive petty bourgeoisie in the usual meaning of the term can be observed within the Coloured community.⁸

The advent of the new South Africa has complicated the use of racial terminology as both the racist and politically correct conventions of the apartheid era break down. Old terms have taken on new meanings and are invested with new values as people have greater freedom to formulate their own social identities.⁹ In this study the term 'black' is used in its inclusive sense to refer to Coloured, Indian and African people collectively and 'African'¹⁰ is used to refer to indigenous Bantu-speaking peoples.¹¹

The use of the term 'Coloured' is still complicated by a residual politically correct

method of research then it cannot be entirely inappropriate for a few judiciously chosen personal observations and experiences to be included in the analysis.

8 For a discussion of the concept of petty bourgeoisie in the South African context see A. Cobley, *Class and Consciousness: The black petty bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950*, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1990), especially 2-12, 68-69, 225 ff.

9 The potential complexities of the situation was brought home to me recently when a very pale-skinned student in an impeccably upper class, South African English accent frostily informed me that he took exception to the way I used of the term 'African' because he regarded himself as African and my out-of-date usage excluded people like himself from that category. This student explained that he preferred to use the term 'black' for the people I called 'African' and to reserve 'African' for anyone who identified with the continent of Africa. He was not persuaded by my counter that his use of 'black' might be distasteful because it co-incided with the apartheid state's usage in its latter phases and that 'African' used in his inclusive sense might be confusing.

10 Pace pale-skinned, fellow Africans.

11 Pace Khoisan revivalists.

lobby that rejects its use and argues for a broader black or South African identity.¹² The emergence of a rejectionist voice within the Khoisan revivalist movement - a number of youths at the Khoisan Consultative Conference at Oudtshoorn in 2001, for example, wore tee-shirts sporting the slogan 'Fuck Coloured'¹³ - indicates that negative associations attached to Coloured identity still rankle with many. Given these and other sensitivities around the issue I am driven to the tautology of stating that in this study the term 'Coloured' is used to refer to those people who regard themselves as Coloured. And wherever it is necessary to mention people who are generally regarded as being Coloured but who are known to reject the identity, this is indicated by placing the word between quotation marks where this is not apparent from the context of the discussion.

During the apartheid period and after, some scholars, the author included, refused to capitalize the first letter of the term 'Coloured' both to indicate opposition to the enforced classification of people into racial and ethnic categories as well as distaste of racio- and ethnocentric values. This was further justified by the assertion that since 'coloured' was not derived from a proper noun there was no need to capitalize it. This study, however, resorts to the more normal practice of capitalizing the 'C-word', except for quotations using the lower case. This is partly a response to the gradual normalization of South African society in the post-apartheid period and partly in recognition of a growing grassroots sentiment neatly expressed by journalist Paul Stober, 'As a distinct ethnic group with over three million members, we deserve a

12 See N. Duncan, "'Listen here, just because YOU think I'm a coloured...": Responses to the construction of difference in racist discourses' in N. Duncan, P. D. Gqola, M. Hofmeyr, T. Schefer, F. Malunga and M. Mashige, (eds.), *Discourses on Difference, Discourses on Oppression*, (Cape Town, Centre for Advanced Studies of African Societies, 2002), 113-37.

13 Personal communication from Dr. Nigel Penn, senior lecturer, History Department, University of Cape Town, who attended the conference.

capital letter.’¹⁴ It is also an indication of the rapid change the identity is experiencing as old sensitivities die down and as new concerns and agendas impinge on peoples’ consciousness.

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14 Quoted in J. Crwys-Williams, *The Penguin Dictionary of South African Quotations*, (Sandton, Penguin, 1999), 83.

CHAPTER 1

Continuity and context: An overview of Coloured identity in white supremacist South Africa

There is a general lack of familiarity with the history of the Coloured community of South Africa except perhaps for an awareness that it has generally been a story of racial oppression and that for nearly the whole of the twentieth century it followed a discernable trend of intensifying segregationism and a continual erosion of Coloured peoples' civil rights.¹ This blind spot in South African historical knowledge which is elaborated upon in the next chapter, is a direct consequence of the marginality of the Coloured people. As one Coloured commentator put it; 'We don't know our own history and out there in the community and schools there is no information about it because we are not empowered.'²

A contextualizing opening chapter that sketches the social and historical background is thus a particular necessity. First a thumbnail sketch of the history of the Coloured community is presented. This is followed by an elaboration of the core attributes that have defined the manner in which Coloured identity has operated in South African society during the era of white rule. The analysis here seeks to identify the fundamental impulses behind the assertion of a separate Coloured identity and to explain continuity and change in processes of Coloured self-definition. The overview

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- 1 This has been a consistent theme running through the more recent histories of the Coloured people. See especially Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*; Goldin, *Making Race*; and du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*.
 - 2 Comment from the floor by a young woman who identified herself as Coloured at a seminar, 'The predicament of marginality: Coloured identity and politics in South Africa' presented by

is rounded off by a discussion of the popular stereotyping of Coloured people by dissecting a well-worn joke about their origin. This section demonstrates how a range of pejorative connotations coalesce in the stereotyping of Coloured people in the popular mind.

From slavery to Khoisan revivalism: A synopsis of Coloured history

Contrary to international usage, in South Africa the term 'Coloured' does not refer to black people in general. It instead alludes to a phenotypically diverse group of people³ descended largely from Cape slaves, indigenous Khoisan peoples and other black people who had been assimilated to Cape colonial society by the late nineteenth century. Being also partly descended from European settlers, Coloureds are popularly regarded as being of 'mixed race' and hold an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population.⁴

There are approximately three and a half million Coloured people in South Africa today.⁵ Constituting no more than nine per cent of the population throughout the twentieth century and lacking significant political or economic power Coloured people have always formed a marginal group in South African society. There has, moreover, throughout the century been a marked regional concentration of Coloured people with approximately 90% within the confines of the old Cape Province, two

M. Adhikari at All Africa House, University of Cape Town, 12/10/2001.

- 3 Kole Omotoso describes the skin colour, the most important of these phenotypical features, of Coloured people as varying 'from charcoal black to breadcrust brown, sallow yellow and finally off-white cream that wants to pass for white.' *Cape Times*, 14/1/2002.
- 4 See M. Adhikari, 'Coloureds' in C. Saunders (consulting ed.), *An Illustrated Dictionary of South African History*, (Johannesburg, Ibis Books, 1994), 77-79.
- 5 *The People of South Africa Population Census, 1996: Primary tables – the country as a whole*, (Report No. 03-01-19), 6; *Statistics South Africa, 2000*, (Pretoria, Government Publications Dept., 2001), 1.1.

thirds resident in the Western Cape and thirty per cent in the greater Cape Town area.⁶

The Coloured category has also generally been taken to include a number of distinct sub-groups such as Malays, Griquas, Namas and Basters.⁷

Although Coloured identity crystallized in the late nineteenth century the process of social amalgamation within the colonial black population at the Cape that would in time give rise to Coloured group consciousness dates back to the period of Dutch colonial rule. It was, however, in the decades after the emancipation of slaves in 1838 that various components of the heterogeneous black labouring class in the Cape Colony started integrating more rapidly and developing an incipient shared identity. This identity was based on a common socio-economic status and a shared culture derived from their incorporation into the lower ranks of Cape colonial society.⁸ The emergence of a fully fledged Coloured identity as we know it today was precipitated in the late nineteenth century by the sweeping social changes that came in the wake of the mineral revolution. Not only did significant numbers of Africans start coming to the western Cape from the 1870s onwards but assimilated colonial blacks and a wide variety of African people who had recently been incorporated into the capitalist economy were thrust together in the highly competitive environment of the newly established mining towns.⁹ These developments drove acculturated colonial blacks to

6 Compare statistics in *Census of the Union of South Africa, 1911*, (U.G.32-1912), Annexure 1, 7-11 with *South African Census, 1996*, 6.

7 The term 'Cape Coloured' is usually used to distinguish Coloured people from the broader category that includes these sub-groups.

8 M. Adhikari, 'The sons of Ham: Slavery and the making of Coloured identity', *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, 1992, 107-08; N. Worden, 'Adjusting to emancipation: Freed slaves and farmers in mid-nineteenth century southwestern Cape' in W. James and M. Simons, *The Angry Divide: Social and economic history of the Western Cape*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989), 33-34; P. Scully, 'The bouquet of freedom: Social and economic relations in the Stellenbosch district, 1870-1900', (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1987), 11-12.

9 Adhikari, 'Sons of Ham', 110; W. Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds: Mineworkers and monopoly capitalism in Kimberley, 1867-1895*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987), chapter 2; R. Turrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1871-*

assert a separate identity in order to claim a position of relative privilege to Africans on the basis of their closer assimilation to Western culture and being partly descended from European colonists.¹⁰

Because of their marginality and the determination with which the state implemented white supremacist policies, the story of Coloured political organization has largely been one of compromise, retreat and failure. The most consistent feature of Coloured political history until the latter phases of apartheid has been the continual erosion of the civil rights first bestowed upon blacks in the Cape Colony by the British Administration in the mid-nineteenth century.

The process of attrition started with the franchise restrictions imposed by the Parliamentary Registration Act of 1887 and the Franchise and Ballot Act of 1892.¹¹ A spate of segregationist measures in the first decade of the twentieth century further compromised the civil rights of Coloured people. The most significant were the exclusion of Coloured people from the franchise in the former Boer republics after the Anglo-Boer War, the promulgation of the School Board Act of 1905 that segregated the Cape's education system by providing compulsory public schooling for white children only and the denial of the right of Coloured people to be elected to

1890. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), 29-31, 94-104; V. Bickford-Smith, 'Commerce, class and ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875-1902', (Ph. D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1988), 102-03, 185-88.

10. See M. Adhikari, *Let us Live for our Children: The Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1940*, (Cape Town, UCT Press, 1993), 11-18 and 'The sons of Ham', 95-112 for a more detailed discussion of the origins of Coloured identity. For case studies of the process in Cape Town and Kimberley respectively, see V. Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town, 1875-1902*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 186-209 and P. Lawrence, 'Class, colour consciousness and the search for identity at the Kimberley diamond diggings, 1867-1893', (M. A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1994).

11. S. Trapido, "'The friends of the natives': Merchants, peasants and the political and ideological structure of liberalism in the Cape' in S. Marks and A. Atmore, (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, (London, Longman, 1980), 266.

parliament with the implementation of Union in 1910.¹²

In the 1920s and 1930s the economic advancement of the Coloured community was undermined by the Pact Government's civilized labour policy¹³ and a number of laws designed to favour whites over blacks in the competition for employment. For example, the 1921 Juvenile Affairs Act set up mechanisms for the placement of white school leavers into suitable employment. Also, the Apprenticeship Act of 1922 put apprenticeships beyond the reach of most Coloured youths by stipulating educational entry levels that very few Coloured schools met but that fell within the minimum educational standard set for white schools. The 1925 Wage Act subverted the ability of Coloured labour to undercut white wage demands by setting high minimum wage levels in key industries.¹⁴ Furthermore, in 1930 the influence of the Coloured vote was more than halved by the enfranchisement of white women only.¹⁵

It was during the Apartheid era, however, that Coloured people suffered the most severe violations of their civil rights. Their forced classification under the Population Registration Act of 1950 made the implementation of rigid segregation possible. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Amendment Act of

12 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 43-55; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 30-39, 46-63.

13 This policy sought to ameliorate the poor white problem by absorbing newly-urbanized whites into industrial occupations and replacing black workers with whites at wages that ensured a 'civilized' standard of living. See T. R. H. Davenport and C. Saunders, *South Africa: A modern history*, (London, Macmillan, 2000), 636-37.

14 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 131-33, 161-63; S. Patterson, *Colour and Culture in South Africa: A study of the status of Cape Coloured people of the Union of South Africa*, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 71-72; G. V. Doxey, *The Industrial Colour Bar in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1961), 198-99; W. H. Hutt, *The Economics of the Colour Bar: A study of the economic origins and consequences of racial segregation in South Africa*, (London, Andre Deutsch, 1964), 35-36, 74-75.

15 L. Thompson, *The Cape Coloured Franchise*, (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1949) 20-21, 55; G. Lewis, 'The reaction of the Cape "Coloureds" to segregation', (Ph. D. thesis, Queens University, 1984), 330-31; T. Shifrin, 'New deal for Coloured people? A study of National Party policies towards the Coloured people', (B. A. Hons., thesis,

1950 respectively outlawed marriage and sex across the colour line. Under the Group Areas Act of 1950 tens of thousands of Coloured families were forcibly relocated to residential and business areas usually on the periphery of cities and towns. The Group Areas Act was probably the most hated of the apartheid measures amongst Coloureds because property owners were meagerly compensated, long-standing communities were broken up and alternative accommodation was inadequate. The 1953 Separate Amenities Act, which introduced 'petty apartheid' by segregating virtually all public facilities, also created deep resentment. After a protracted legal and constitutional battle the National Party in 1956, moreover, succeeded in removing Coloured people from the common voter's roll.¹⁶

Because their primary objective was to assimilate into the dominant society, politicized Coloureds initially avoided forming separate political organizations. By the early twentieth century, however, intensifying segregation forced them to mobilize politically in defence of their rights. Although the earliest Coloured political organizations date back to the 1880s, the first substantive Coloured political body, the African Political Organization (APO), was established in Cape Town in 1902.¹⁷ Under the leadership of the charismatic Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman who served as president from 1905 till his death in 1940, the APO dominated Coloured protest politics for nearly four decades. It became the main vehicle for expressing this community's assimilationist aspirations as well as its fears at the rising tide of segregationism until its demise in the mid-1940s. A number of ephemeral political organizations such as

University of Cape Town, 1962), 20-23.

16 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, ch. 16; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 261-62, 267-70; du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, chs. 4-8; V. Bickford-Smith, E. van Heyningen and N. Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An illustrated social history*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1999), 143-96.

17 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 10-25; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 1-30.

the United Afrikaner League of the late 1910s and the Afrikaanse Nasionale Bond (ANB) of the latter half of the 1920s - bodies that were promoted by Cape National Party politicians hoping to win Coloured electoral support - failed to subvert the dominance of the APO.¹⁸

Intensifying segregation and the failure of the APO's moderate approach contributed to the emergence of a radical movement inspired by Marxist ideology within the better-educated, urbanized sector of the Coloured community during the 1930s. The National Liberation League (NLL) founded in 1935 and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) established in 1943 were the most important of the radical organizations. Prone to fissure and unable to bridge the racial divisions within the society, the radical movement failed in its quest to unite blacks in the struggle against segregation.¹⁹ The South African Coloured People's Organization (SACPO),²⁰ which was founded in 1953 and affiliated to the ANC-led Congress Alliance, also organized protests and demonstrations, especially against the removal of Coloured people from the voter's roll.²¹ Organized opposition to apartheid from within the Coloured community was, however, effectively quelled by state repression following the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and only re-emerged in the wake of the Soweto uprising of 1976. A few scantily supported political organizations such as the Labour Party of South Africa and the Federal Coloured People's Party that were prepared to work within apartheid structures were, however, sanctioned during the heyday of

18 M. Adhikari, 'Abdullah Abdurahman, 1872-1940' in *They Shaped Our Century: The most influential South Africans of the twentieth century*, (Cape Town, Human and Rousseau, 1999), 438; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 124-26, 128-33, 250-56.

19 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 65 ff.; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 179-98, 207-44; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 209 ff.; A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and loyalties on the South African left*, (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000), 266-70.

20 SACPO was renamed the Coloured People's Congress (CPC) in December 1959.

21 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 263-71; Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 135-42, 157-59.

apartheid.²²

From the latter half of the 1970s onwards, starting with the popularization of black consciousness ideology, the nature of Coloured identity became an extremely contentious issue as increasing numbers of educated and politicized people who had been classified 'Coloured' under the Population Registration Act rejected the identity.²³ Colouredness increasingly came to be viewed as an artificial categorization imposed on the society by the ruling minority as part of its divide and rule strategies. The growth of a mass, non-racial democratic movement in the 1980s that burgeoned under the leadership of the United Democratic Front (UDF) founded in 1983 and conflict over the participation of some Coloured leaders in the Tricameral Parliament of the P. W. Botha government from 1984 onwards, intensified the controversy. Within the anti-apartheid movement any recognition of Coloured identity was rejected as a concession to apartheid thinking.²⁴

In spite of this, the salience of Coloured identity has endured. During the four year transition to democratic rule under president F. W. de Klerk political parties across the ideological spectrum made ever more strident appeals to Coloured identity for support. Not only did it once again become politically acceptable to espouse a

22 For a history of the Labour Party and information on other Coloured political parties that served on the Coloured Representative Council (CRC) see R. du Pre, 'Confrontation, co-optation and collaboration: The response and reaction of the Labour Party to government policy, 1965-1984', (Ph. D. thesis, Rhodes University, 1994) and for a collection of relevant documents see P. Hugo, *Quislings or Realists? A documentary study of 'Coloured' politics in South Africa*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1978), chs. 4 and 5.

23 The role of Coloured people in the Black Consciousness movement and its history in the western Cape, neglected topics in South African historiography, are discussed in E. Messina, 'Kleurlinge is ook swart: Swartbewustheid in die Wes-Kaap tot 1977', *Kronos*, Vol. 22, 1995, 115-40.

24 For a discussion of attitudes toward Coloured identity in the anti-apartheid movement see M. Adhikari, "'You have the right to know": South, 1987-1994' in L. Switzer and M. Adhikari, (eds.), *South Africa's Resistance Press: Alternative voices in the last generation under*

Coloured identity but post-apartheid South Africa has also witnessed a rapid retreat of Coloured rejectionism and a concomitant Coloured assertiveness. This has been due partly to a desire to project a positive self-image in the face of the pervasive negative racial stereotyping of Coloured people and partly as a result of attempts at ethnic mobilization to take advantage of the newly democratic political environment. The December 1st Movement of the late 1990s and the various Khoisan revivalist movements of the new South Africa are amongst the more prominent manifestations of this development.²⁵ The resurgence of Colouredism has, moreover, to a significant extent been due to fear of African majority rule and a perception that, as in the old order, Coloureds were once again being marginalized. A common refrain amongst disaffected Coloured people has been that 'First we were not white enough and now we are not black enough.' Though far from allayed, these fears have in recent years been alleviated by the fading influence of the National Party and its 'swart gevaar' (black peril) tactics and by the acclimatization of people to the new political order.²⁶

Hope, fear, shame, frustration: The dynamic of Coloured exclusivism

The central contention of this section - and as the sub-title implies, of the thesis as a whole - is that Coloured identity is better understood, not as having undergone a series of transformations during the twentieth century, but rather as having remained essentially the same despite obvious changes to the identity. This is not to argue that Coloured identity was static or that it was not fluid but that the changes that it did

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- apartheid*, (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2000), 349-54.
- 25 For a discussion of Khoisan revivalism see M. Besten, 'Khoisan revivalism and the limits of theory: A preliminary assessment', (unpublished seminar paper, Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape, 3/10/2000). For information on the December 1st Movement consult Anon., 'December 1st Movement: Retracing the path of memory', (Unpublished manuscript, African Studies Library, University of Cape Town, 1996).
- 26 Aspects of Coloured identity in the new South Africa are dealt with in W. James, D. Caliguire and K. Cullinan, (eds.), *Now that We are Free: Coloured communities in a democratic South Africa*. (Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1996) and Erasmus, *Coloured by History*.

experience did not alter it fundamentally. These changes were more in the nature of the accretion and sloughing off of elements around a core of enduring characteristics that defined the way in which Colouredness operated as a social identity rather than the evolution or mutation of the identity itself. It is this core that gave Coloured identity a high degree of stability during the period under consideration. Thus, viewed on the eve of the transition to democracy, Coloured identity was very much the same phenomenon it was at the inauguration of Union despite radical changes in the social and political landscape.²⁷

Besides the conventional expression of Coloured identity derived from this inner core there were a number of developments during this time-span that influenced processes of Coloured self-perception. The emergence of a radical movement in Coloured politics from the second half of the 1930s onwards, though limited in its impact, was significant because it introduced the idea that black unity or a class based identity was possible and initiated some impetus in this direction within the Coloured petty bourgeoisie.²⁸ From mid-century onwards apartheid thinking and the implementation of apartheid policies had the countervailing effect of reifying Coloured identity as never before. The latter phases of the apartheid era witnessed a reaction to this tendency with the growing rejection of Coloured identity within sections of the community. Coloured rejectionism was fed by the revival of mass protest against apartheid and an intensifying disapproval of any form of racial thinking within the

27 For an earlier version of this argument see M. Adhikari, 'Continuity and change in Coloured identity in twentieth century South Africa', paper presented at the conference, 'The burden of race?: "Whiteness" and "blackness" in modern South Africa', History Workshop and Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand, 7/2001.

28 For some examples of the expression of these ideas by ideologues within the radical movement see K. Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck: His place in South African history', *Discussion*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1952 and W. P. van Schoor, *The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Teachers' League of South Africa, 1951), 32.

anti-apartheid movement.²⁹ As mentioned earlier, during the transition to democratic rule in the first half of the 1990s insecurity at the prospect of majority rule and new opportunities for ethnic mobilization saw a resurgence of Coloured exclusivism.³⁰ Finally, from the mid-1990s onwards there have been initiatives to re-invent Coloured identity and have largely taken the form of attempts at stimulating pride in their Khoi and slave pasts amongst Coloured people.³¹

For much of the era of white rule there was a high degree of consensus both within the Coloured community as well as amongst outsiders about who the Coloured people were and what the concept of Colouredness embodied. The conventional wisdom - that Coloured people were a distinct racial group with its own historical trajectory and destiny - was first challenged in the 1930s when radical intellectuals rejected Coloured separatism as playing into the hands of the ruling classes who sought to divide the black majority and split the proletariat. The emphasis on Non-European unity during the middle decades of the twentieth century was not so much a rejection of Coloured identity than an assertion that racial differences were not in any way intrinsic and that Coloured particularism was damaging to the freedom struggle. From the early 1960s, however, there was an explicit rejection of Coloured identity within NEUM circles. This incipient rejection of Coloured identity remained extremely limited in its impact in that it did not penetrate much beyond the tiny intelligentsia

29 For discussion of the denial of Coloured identity in the anti-apartheid movement see I. Van Kessel, 'Grassroots: From washing lines to utopia', in Switzer and Adhikari, *Resistance Press* 308-10.

30 See especially D. Caliguire, 'Voices from the communities', 9-15 and B. Williams, 'The power of propaganda', 22-27 as well as the other eight chapters in sections 1-3 in James, et al., *Now that We are Free*.

31 For comment on this see Besten, 'Khoisan revivalism'; Z. Erasmus, 'Introduction: Re-imagining coloured identities in post-apartheid South Africa' in Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 13-28; P. D. Gqola, "'Slaves don't have opinions'"; Inscriptions of slave bodies and the denial of agency in Rayda Jacobs' *The Slave Book*', in Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 44-47. For a programme of the December 1st Movement and a discussion document motivating

within the Coloured elite. It was only toward the latter half of the 1970s when black consciousness ideology took hold within significant sectors of the Coloured community that the rejection of Coloured identity first found widespread support, growing to its zenith in the non-racial democratic movement during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Even at its height, however, the rejection of Coloured identity was limited to a relatively small minority of better educated and more highly politicized people associated with the anti-apartheid movement.³²

What is the essence of the stable core at the heart of Coloured identity and how does one explain the continuities that underlay the way in which it operated through the period of white rule? This chapter identifies four key characteristics that formed the foundation of this durable core.

The first of the essential features that constitutes the core element of Coloured identity is that of assimilationism. Throughout the twentieth century one of the strongest imperatives within the Coloured community was the urge to assimilate into the dominant society. The late nineteenth century genesis of Coloured identity emanated from a world view and a political strategy that was profoundly assimilationist. And during the twentieth century, despite criticism of the racist order, all that the Coloured political leadership and the petty bourgeoisie it represented really wanted - except for a small minority of radicals - was for Coloureds to be accepted into the dominant society and to share in its benefits on a meritocratic basis.³³ While the dominant current of opinion aspired to acceptance into English middle class culture there was a significant movement within the Coloured community for accommodation within the

its establishment see the anonymous pamphlet, 'December 1st Movement'.

fold of Afrikanerdom.³⁴ Despite their occasional warning that the continued oppression of Coloured people could have dire consequences for the society as a whole, the Coloured political leadership had no interest in overthrowing the system or changing South African society fundamentally except for eliminating institutionalized racial discrimination. Once again, and as is so often the case after the mid-1930s, the exception of a small minority of radicals needs to be noted.

This assimilationism, which in more recent times has often been misunderstood and denounced as collaboration by radicals, was rooted in a world view informed by nineteenth century Cape liberal values and environmentalist conceptions of racial difference.³⁵ For much of the twentieth century moderate Coloured political opinion still clung to a world view reminiscent of mid-Victorian progressionism. The key assumptions of this outlook were firstly, that humanity was on a path of inevitable progress towards the ultimate attainment of an elysian future of peace and prosperity. Secondly, it was assumed that all people, no matter what their current condition, were capable of self-improvement and the attainment of 'civilization', which in the minds of the Coloured elite equated to Western bourgeois culture. These assumptions were reinforced by deeply held religious beliefs which not only posited the equality of all humans in the eyes of God but also fed the progressionist vision with ideas of the ultimate redemption of humankind and its destiny being directed by the guiding hand

32 Adhikari, 'South', 354; van Kessel, 'Grassroots', 310; *South*, 13/6/1991.

33 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 14-17, 22-23, 150.

34 H. Giliomee, 'The non-racial franchise and Afrikaner and Coloured identities, 1910-1994', *African Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 375, 1995, 199-225; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 126-30.

35 In contrast to the pseudo-scientific racist theories that from the latter part of the nineteenth century propagated the idea that racial differences, especially in intellectual capacity, were immutable, earlier explanations based on environmental variations generally accepted that changes in the environment would affect both individuals and social groups, even to the extent of eliminating cultural and intellectual disparities. See 166-67 below.

of a just God.³⁶

These assimilationist hopes were remarkably resilient and underlay the longer term vision of the Coloured communal leadership regarding the future of the Coloured people and the destiny of humanity in general. The Coloured elite continued to nurture hopes of assimilation into the dominant society even as new obstacles were placed in their way and as the prospect of achieving these aspirations deteriorated with the continued tightening of segregationist measures through most of the twentieth century. Though disconcerted by each new discriminatory regulation and alarmed by the more draconian developments, setbacks were usually rationalized as temporary reversals and acceptance into white middle class society was often seen as something that Coloured people still needed to earn and would only be attained after a struggle worthy of the prize.³⁷ Indeed, this often served as justification for clinging to their assimilationist hopes in the face of intensifying segregation. Not even the utter rejection of any form of assimilation with the implementation of apartheid entirely extinguished these dreams. This desire for acceptance into the dominant society was evident in its most acute form within that small group of people who were prepared to take the risk of disowning their identity as Coloured people in an attempt to pass for white.³⁸ The durability of these assimilationist aspirations to a significant degree explain the eager response of so many Coloured people to National Party overtures in the 1994 general election.³⁹

36 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 14-15, 179-80.

37 See Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 17, 47-48, 157-60. The radical minority was clearly an exception.

38 See G. Watson, *Passing for White*, (London, Tavistock, 1970) and B. Unterhalter, 'Changing attitudes to "passing for white" in an urban Coloured community', *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 53-62, 1975 for case studies of the phenomenon.

39 Analyses of Coloured voting patterns in the 1994 election underplay the significance of this factor. See James et al, *Now that We are Free*, chs. 4-7; M. Eldridge and J. Seekings, 'Mandela's lost province: The African National Congress and the Western Cape electorate in

With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that these dreams of assimilation were badly misplaced and out of step with the social and political realities of white supremacist South Africa. This optimism might have had a degree of compatibility with nineteenth century Cape liberalism or have resonated with Western liberal or left opinion in the twentieth century. And in the first decade of the century hopes that individual Coloured people would be accepted into white middle class society on the basis of personal merit and that the community as a whole might in time assimilate into the mainstream of Cape society, though increasingly remote, were not entirely unrealistic. These desires were, however, completely out of place in the unified South African state whose policies were increasingly informed by Social Darwinist and racist assumptions.

The Coloured elite and the political leadership could, however, not avoid coming to terms in some way with the reality of intensifying segregationism that confronted them. Because they were denied their first choice of assimilation into the dominant society, politicized Coloureds had little choice but to mobilize along racial lines to defend their rights and promote their interests as a group. This brings to the fore a second fundamental attribute of Coloured identity in South Africa, namely, its intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy.

Coloured people experienced the South African racial hierarchy as a three tiered system in which Coloureds held an intermediate position between the dominant white

the 1994 South African elections', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1996; A. Reynolds, *Election '94: South Africa*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1994), 192-93; R. Mattes, H. Giliomee and W. James, 'The election in the Western Cape' in R. W. Johnson and L. Schlemmer, *Launching Democracy in South Africa: The first open election. April, 1994*,

minority and the numerically preponderant African majority. As sociologist Zimitri Erasmus put it; 'For me, growing up coloured meant knowing that I was *not only* not white, but *less than white: not only* not black but *better than black* (as we referred to African people).⁴⁰ Similarly in 1943 radical activist, Ben Kies, criticized the self-segregatory ethos of the Teachers' League; 'for thirty years they accepted the idea that their children were not fit to be taught with white children and were too good to be taught with African children.'⁴¹

The symbolism of referring to Coloured people as 'brown' neatly captures this intermediate status. The equation of Coloured people with the colour brown is even more entrenched in the Afrikaans language in which words such as 'bruinman', (literally, brown man) and 'bruinmens' (literally, brown person) are translated as '(Cape) Coloured man' and '(Cape) Coloured person'.⁴² Indeed, writing in 1960, leading Afrikaner literary figure, N. P. van Wyk Louw declared the conventional Afrikaans word for Coloured, 'Kleurling', to be a 'nare woord' (nauseating word) and that he preferred 'bruinmens'.⁴³ That Coloured intellectual, Christian Ziervogel, in the late 1930s entitled his book *Brown South Africa*; that Coloured poet and educationist S. V. Petersen in a 1956 address to the Stellenbosch Afrikaanse Studentebond protested that he was not a 'kleurling' but a 'bruin man' (brown man); that Coloured political leader Peter Marais regards himself as a 'bruin Afrikaner' (brown Afrikaner)

(New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996), 108-167.

40 Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 13. Emphasis in the original.

41 B. Kies, *The Background of Segregation*, (Cape Town, Anti-CAD, 1943), 5.

42 See D. B. Bosman, I. W. van der Merwe, L. W. Hiemstra, *Tweetalige Woordeboek: Afrikaans-Engels/Engels-Afrikaans*, (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1967), 117, 1088; P. Grobbelaar, (ed.), *Readers' Digest Afrikaans-Engelse Woordeboek*, (Cape Town, Readers' Digest Association of South Africa, 1987), 88-89; J. Branford and W. Branford, *A Dictionary of South African English*, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991), 51-52; P. Silva, (managing ed.), *A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), 115-16.

43 N. P. van Wyk Louw, 'Voorwoord', In D. P. Botha, *Die Opkoms van ons Derde Stand*, (Cape

and that this particular usage is common in Cape vernacular Afrikaans is sufficient indication that Coloured people have, on the whole, accepted this description of themselves.⁴⁴

Because their assimilationist aspirations were thwarted and their intermediate position gave Coloured people significant privileges relative to Africans, the basic dynamic behind the assertion of Coloured identity and the main thrust of mobilizing politically as Coloured people was to defend this position of relative privilege. Their minority status, political powerlessness as well as intensifying segregationism engendered fears that Coloureds might end up being relegated to the status of Africans and lose their position of relative privilege. These fears reinforced Coloured exclusivity and encouraged a separatist strategy within the Coloured political leadership.⁴⁵ Only a small minority of Coloured people opposed to this strategy in principle, chose the alternatives of communism or black unity or a combination of the two.

In daily life the most consistent, and insistent, element in the expression of Coloured identity was the association with whiteness, and a concomitant distancing from Africanness, whether it be in the value placed on a fair skin and straight hair, the prizing of white ancestors in the family lineage or taking pride in their proximity to Western culture. In a 1993 interview a working class Coloured woman, Mrs. D. E. articulated a common view, if somewhat vehemently;

Town, Human and Rousseau, 1960), vi.

44 C. Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, 1938); *Torch*, 19/6/1956; James et al, *Now that We are Free*, 60-61; G. L. Stone, 'An ethnographic and socio-semantic analysis of lexis among working-class, Afrikaans-speaking, Coloured adolescents and young adult males in the Cape Peninsula, 1963-1990', (M. A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1991), 389-90.

45 C. Ziervogel, *The Coloured People and the Race Problem*, (Ceres, Weber, 1936), 5; Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 13-14, 17-18, 149-50, 162-64.

En 'n kaffir al dra hy 'n goue ring, bly nog steeds 'n aap.... Hulle het niks, hulle sê hulle het 'n culture, hulle het nie 'n culture nie, hulle's rou. Hulle sê ons bruin mense is mixed masala, maar ons bruin mense staanaan die wit mense, as wat hulle aan die wit mense, as wat hulle staan. Want ons culture en die culture van die wit mense se culture is een. (And a kaffir, even if he wears a golden ring, still remains an ape.... They have nothing, they say they have a culture, they don't have a culture, they're raw. They say we brown people are mixed masala, but we brown people are closer to white people, than they are to white people. Because our culture and the white people's culture are the same.)⁴⁶

In spite of the racially egalitarian rhetoric that characterized so much of the discourse of Coloured protest politics it has to be recognized that Coloured political organizations were, on the whole, racially exclusive and strove to entrench the relative privilege Coloured people enjoyed. If the ultimate aim of much of Coloured political organization was that of assimilation into the dominant society then most of its day to day politicking was a narrow concern with the advancement of Coloured interests. Thus while there was an assertion of non-racial values and protest against discrimination, there was also an accommodation with the racist order and an attempt to manipulate it in favour of Coloured people.⁴⁷

That there was ambivalence about their identity within the Coloured community, especially within the petty bourgeoisie, should not come as a great surprise. While their assimilationism tended to dampen separatist tendencies from whites, their desire to protect their status of relative privilege pushed Coloured people into asserting a separate identity with respect to Africans. And while their being the victims of racism promoted the principle of non-racism, political realities forced them to organize on a

46 S. Field, 'Fragile identities: Memory, emotion and Coloured residents of Windermere' in Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 105.

47 Organizations within the radical tradition are obvious exceptions. Although, for example, the Anti-CAD was effectively, and SACPO exclusively, Coloured in membership, their ultimate goals were broadly socialist.

racial basis. The attempt to exploit segregationism to their own advantage confirms John Cell's observation that though 'force lay behind segregation... most of the time segregation was self-enforcing.'⁴⁸ The structurally ambiguous position of the Coloured community within the South African racial hierarchy thus played an important part in reinforcing and reproducing the identity.

The intermediate status of Coloured people in the racial hierarchy contributed to negative perceptions associated with the identity. Because of their lack of political and economic clout and because they formed a relatively small stratum within the racial hierarchy, the Coloured people tended to be perceived in terms of the larger groups. This was most notable in official definitions of the term 'Coloured' in which the category was usually described as consisting of those people who were neither white nor African.⁴⁹ The Coloured community was thus usually not identified in a positive manner, as social groups usually are, in terms of a set of distinctive characteristics but was identified in a negative fashion with reference to other groups, in terms of what it was not - as Erasmus put it, 'in terms of "lack" or taint, or in terms of "remainder" or excess which does not fit a classificatory scheme.'⁵⁰

This was one of the more subtle ways in which negative associations came to be attached to the concept of Colouredness. It reinforced ideas that the Coloured people were not of the same standing as other groups, that their claims to autonomous group status - usually articulated in terms of the words 'nation', 'people' or 'race' - were

48 J. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The origins of segregation in South Africa and the American South*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982), 19.

49 For discussion of official definitions of the term 'Coloured' see A. J. Venter, *Coloured: A profile of two million South Africans*, (Cape Town, Human and Rousseau, 1974), 1-2; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 3; Patterson, *Colour and Culture*, 361-63.

50 Erasmus, 'Introduction', 17.

deficient or lacked a degree of authenticity. The ultimate statement of this perception came from none other than former first lady, Marike de Klerk, who in a 1983 interview with a reporter expressed the opinion that;

...they (Coloureds) are a negative group. The definition of a coloured in the population register is someone that is not black, and is not white and is also not an Indian, in other words a no-person. They are the leftovers. They are the people that were left after the nations were sorted out. They are the rest.⁵¹

These ideas were often taken up within the Coloured community itself for as one working class Coloured informant in the early 1990s put it to me, 'We Coloured people are not a proper nation, we don't have our own culture or land that we can say is our own. The Coloured people is like a mixed bredie (stew) made up of all different kinds of people.'⁵² The perception that the Coloured community lacked cultural or ethnic distinctiveness not only reinforced their marginality but also the idea that Coloured people, being the product of miscegenation, were misfits, somehow inherently deficient. Charles Sebe, at the time director of state security in the Ciskei exemplified these attitudes in his rejection of miscegenation during a speech reported by Joseph Lelyveld, a *New York Times* journalist; "'What will you get from [black/white] *in-ter-mar-riage*? You get a Coloured.'" The word was pronounced with contempt. "You don't get a white person, you don't get a black person, but a frustated child which does not belong anywhere."⁵³

A second, and related, consequence of the intermediate status of the Coloured grouping in the racial hierarchy is that it served as a residual category into which smaller groups that did not fit into either the white or African categories were placed.

51 Quoted in B. McLennan, *Apartheid: The lighter side*, (Cape Town, Chameleon Press, 1990), 59 which cites the *Sunday Tribune*, 5/2/1989 as its source.

52 Unrecorded conversation with a middle-aged Coloured man translated from Cape vernacular Afrikaans.

53 J. Lelyveld, *Move Your Shadow: South Africa black and white*, (London, Michael Joseph,

This, again, is very much apparent in official practice where, for example, in census figures or in the compilation of statistics in official publications, those groups who were not manifestly white or African were lumped with the Coloured category. Thus groups such as Malays, Griquas, Rehoboth Basters, Namas, and even Indians were at times treated as distinct groups and sometimes included under the rubric of Coloured.⁵⁴ The Population Registration Act went to the ridiculous lengths of creating a category labelled 'Other Coloured' for those people who did not fit into either of the other six sub-categories into which the Coloured grouping had been divided.⁵⁵

In these ways the intermediate status of the Coloured grouping contributed to a third key characteristic of Coloured identity, namely, that it was largely the bearer of a range of negative and derogatory connotations. Except in relatively rare or transient instances, Colouredness was not enthusiastically embraced in a positive affirmation of self and group identity. There were far too many and very deeply entrenched negative associations attached to Colouredness - both by outsiders, especially whites, and, more importantly, accepted by many Coloured people themselves - for the identity to function in a positive, affirmative fashion. Coloured identity tended rather to be accepted with resignation and often with a sense of shame by its bearers, as a bad draw in the lottery of life.⁵⁶

Erasmus lists some of the negative associations attached to Coloured identity as

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- 1985), 173-74. Emphasis in the original.
- 54 See Patterson, *Colour and Culture*, 199; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 9-10, 128, 131; Venter, *Two Million South Africans*, 2, 14.
- 55 For a brief description of this act and its various amendments see M. Horrell, *Legislation and Race Relations: A summary of the main South African laws which affect race relations*, (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1971), 9-12.
- 56 For further discussion of Colouredness associated with shame see Z. Wicomb, 'Shame and identity: The case of the Coloured in South Africa' in D. Attridge and R. Jolly (eds.), *Writing South Africa: Literature, apartheid and democracy, 1970-1995*, (Cambridge, Cambridge

'immorality, sexual promiscuity, illegitimacy, impurity and untrustworthiness'.⁵⁷ The most pervasive of the negative characteristics attached to Colouredness, however, and one that is usually seen as the source of other weaknesses, was the idea that it was a product of miscegenation and that Coloured people were therefore not racially pure. Having internalized the racist values of the dominant society and having accepted racial mixture as the defining characteristic of their identity, Coloured people by and large viewed their community to be indelibly stigmatized by their supposed condition of racial hybridity. This has been an extremely onerous burden to bear, especially within the Coloured petty bourgeoisie and 'respectable' but poorer sectors of the community, in a society increasingly obsessed with racial purity and the dangers of 'mongrelization'. Reflecting on her own upbringing in a respectable Coloured family, Zimitri Erasmus comments, 'I can see how respectability and shame are key defining terms of middle class coloured experience.'⁵⁸

In this regard the Coloured community was trapped in a Catch 22 situation partly of its own making. In order to distance themselves from Africans and protect their status of relative privilege Coloureds emphasized their partial descent from European colonists. But it was precisely this claim that encumbered them with the stigma of racial hybridity. The import of white supremacist discourse about the South African past was that the Coloured people were the unwanted and unfortunate consequence of the colonization of southern Africa.⁵⁹ The Coloured people were thus a source of embarrassment to white racists as reminders of past lapses of morality and the present

University Press, 1998), 91-107.

57 Erasmus, 'Introduction', 17.

58 Erasmus, 'Introduction', 13. Although Erasmus made the comment in the context of the added dimension of the gendered stereotyping of Coloured women, the quote nevertheless holds true.

59 C. Hendricks, "'Ominous" liaisons: Tracing the interface between "race" and "sex" at the Cape', in Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 35.

danger of continued miscegenation and racial degeneration. The Coloured community served as tangible proof of the permeability of racial boundaries at the most intimate level and prompted fears that in the long run white supremacy and the survival of Western civilization in southern Africa were at stake. Sarah Gertrude Millin quoted Smuts as cautioning that ‘white South Africans (must) have a care lest one day... “little brown children play among the ruins of the Union Government Buildings.”’⁶⁰

A concomitant problem was the inability of organic intellectuals within the community to delineate a positive set of symbols, a distinctive culture or an acceptable myth of origin, around which those who regarded themselves to be Coloured could cohere with a sense of pride. Their slave past and Khoisan heritage were generally treated as embarrassments requiring a tactful silence rather than as positive symbols for rallying the group. While their assimilation to Western culture was emphasized because of their determination to distance themselves from Africans, organic intellectuals within the group were sensitive to the general perception that the Coloured people did not have a distinctive culture. This is illustrated by the emotional response of a prominent Coloured politician from the Western Cape upon visiting the museum at the Genadendal mission station. Asked afterwards why he had been visibly moved by the experience, the politician replied that he had always been under the impression that Coloured people did not have a culture but that the history of Genadendal had proved otherwise to him.⁶¹

What is more, those cultural features commonly accepted as distinctively Coloured have generally been denigrated and accorded low status. The Afrikaans vernacular

60 S. G. Millin, *The South Africans*, (London, Constable & Co., 1926), 276.

distinctive of the Coloured community and variously referred to as Cape, Capey, gamtaal (language of Ham) or kombuis (kitchen) Afrikaans has, for example, customarily been stigmatized as a mark of social inferiority. Until relatively recently, when the argument that Afrikaans is a creole language gained popularity,⁶² there appears to have been widespread acceptance within the Coloured community of white, especially Afrikaner, denigration of kombuis Afrikaans as a vulgar patois. By way of example, a middle-class Coloured informant in the mid-1990s told me that although kombuis Afrikaans was his home language he felt ashamed of using it when speaking to whites or 'respectable people' as it would mark him as 'low class'.⁶³ An Afrikaner school inspector in the mid-1970s exemplified white attitudes toward the dialect when, upon hearing me speak the vernacular to some of my high school students, in a gentle but paternalistic tone admonished me for using 'daardie gebasterde taal' (that bastardized language) and perpetuating uncultured practices amongst my students.⁶⁴ The Coon Carnival, a celebration of the new year particular to the Coloured community - though embraced by most working class Coloured people as their own and more recently touted as an example of colourful Cape culture to promote tourism - was similarly stigmatized amongst whites and middle class Coloureds as boorish, disreputable and even depraved.⁶⁵

61 This incident was related to me in confidence by a confidant of the politician who accompanied him on the tour sometime during the course of 2000.

62 For a sense of popular debate around the issue see 'Painful discovery of a rejected moedertaal' and 'Boere don't own Afrikaans' in *Cape Times*, 30/10/1996. For academic works in which this argument is made see A. Davids, 'Words the Cape slaves made: A socio-linguistic study', *South African Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 8, No.1, 1990, 1-24; H. den Besten, 'From Khoekhoe foreigner talk via Hottentot Dutch to Afrikaans: The creation of a novel grammar' in M. Putz and R. Derven, (eds.), *Wheels within Wheels: Papers of the Duisburg symposium on pidgin and creole languages*. (New York, P. Lang, 1989), 207-49; P. Roberge, 'The formation of Afrikaans' in R. Mestrie, (ed.), *Language and Social History: Studies in South African socio-linguistics*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995), 68-88.

63 Unrecorded casual conversation with a Coloured businessman.

64 The year was 1976 and I was teaching at Bonteheuwel High School in the working class suburb of Bonteheuwel, Cape Town. The name of the inspector has long since escaped me.

65 *Cape Standard*, 9/1/1940; 16/1/1940; *Torch*, 5/1/1948; 25/3/1952; *Muslim News*, 29/11/1968; *Cape Herald*, 20/12/1969; D. C. Martin, *Coon Carnival: New year in Cape Town, past and*

The lack of positive identification with Colouredness meant that much of the social mobilization and political activity done in the name of the Coloured people was in reaction to white racism rather than a pro-active marshalling of ethnic resources. Throughout the era of white domination anger, anxiety and fear engendered by social injustices suffered by Coloured people rather than a positive identification with Colouredness proved to be the more potent means for mobilizing people on the basis of their identity as Coloured. Coping with white racism rather than an affirmation of Colouredness motivated such separatist agendas. Virtually all Coloured communal organizations whether cultural, professional or political, were formed because Coloureds were excluded from the corresponding white bodies or were established in response to one or other segregationist development, as the case studies that follow demonstrate only too clearly. Coloured responses to segregationism, which, with the exception of the radical movement, generally sought to protect their position of relative privilege, thus tended to reinforce existing racial boundaries despite the non-racial rhetoric that usually accompanied it. Even in the most obvious exception to this pattern, the Anti-CAD, which sought to forge black unity, the outcome of fifteen years of endeavour within the Non-European Unity Movement was a split largely along racial lines in 1958.⁶⁶

The essentially opportunistic response to segregationism points to a fourth feature of Coloured identity, the marginality of the Coloured people. This attribute, more than

present, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1999), 117-119, 126-30; S. Jeppie, 'Popular culture and carnival in Cape Town: The 1940s and 1950s' in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien, (eds), *The Struggle for District Six: Past and present*, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, 1990), 74; L. Baxter, 'History, identity and meaning: Cape Town's coon carnival in the 1960s and 1970s', (M. A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996), 157, 172, 181-82.

66 A. Drew, 'Social mobilization and racial capitalism in South Africa', (Ph. D. thesis,

any other, shaped the character of the identity and determined the objective conditions under which it had to function. The Coloured community's response to its predicament of marginality is central to the manner in which the identity manifested itself socially and politically. The marginality of the Coloured people goes a long way toward explaining the way in which Coloured people perceived themselves as a social group, the contradictions and ambiguities within the identity as well as the changes it experienced through the twentieth century. It was also the source of a great deal of frustration and anger as well as a degree of fatalism within the Coloured community.⁶⁷

The Coloured people was a marginal group in that it never formed more than about nine per cent of the South African population throughout the twentieth century.⁶⁸ Although it constituted a significant minority the Coloured community did not enjoy anything near a commensurate level of influence or power within the society. A heritage of slavery, dispossession and racial oppression ensured that Coloured people lacked any significant economic or political power as a group. Under white minority rule the Coloured community had no meaningful leverage to bring about change in the society, to reform it or to influence the way in which was governed. Indeed, the Coloured communal and political leadership had great difficulty drawing attention to their standpoint and having their protestations taken seriously by the powers that be. Coloured political organizations were doomed to be bit players on the political stage and Coloured protest politics was little more than a side-show in the national arena. Even in the Western Cape where the majority of Coloured people were concentrated

67 University of California, 1991), 476-77; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 211-15. For a study of marginality within the Coloured community of Durban see H. F. Dickie-Clark, *The Marginal Situation: A sociological study of a Coloured group*, (New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1996).

68 Compare figures provided in *Statistics South Africa, 2000*, 1.4 which summarizes basic population census data from 1904 onwards.

and actually formed a majority of the population,⁶⁹ their political influence progressively declined through the greater part of the century. Other Coloured communal organizations were small, isolated and similarly powerless. This impotence was most clearly demonstrated by the APO's protest campaign against the Act of Union. Despite being remarkably successful in mobilizing Coloured opinion behind the campaign it was unable to change a single clause in the Draft South Africa Act.⁷⁰

The marginality of the Coloured community meant that it had little choice in the matter of accepting an inferior social status to whites or the second class citizenship imposed upon it by the state. As the case studies in this thesis will demonstrate, their marginality to a large extent accounts for the pragmatism and opportunism of much of Coloured protest politics as well as the incrementalism that characterised its strategies. Grappling with their predicament of marginality also goes some way toward explaining key developments in the history of the Coloured community such as the emergence of a radical movement in the mid-1930s, the rejection of Coloured identity from the late 1970s onwards and the resurgence of Colouredism at the end of the twentieth century. For, whatever else may have gone into their making, frustration engendered by impotence played a part in the adoption of new political strategies.

Trapped by their condition of marginality, the Coloured community found its options for social and political action severely constrained. Their assimilationist overtures spurned by whites, and joint organization with the African majority either not a practical or attractive option, the Coloured community was left isolated and powerless. The NLL, NEUM and SACPO initiatives were too narrowly based and

69 According to *South African Census, 1996*, 6 59.6% of Coloured people lived in the Western

ephemeral to have broken this isolation decisively. It was only relatively late in the century when a significant sector within the Coloured community broke categorically with the separatist agenda and embraced a broad non-racialism that individuals such as Alan Boesak, Trevor Manuel, Patricia de Lille and Franklin Sonn from within its ranks started having a significant impact on national politics and the broader society. Even then, in the 1990s the majority of Coloured people felt vulnerable and alienated from the African majority, preferring to ally themselves with their former oppressors. Their insecurity is captured in the colloquial expression, 'we are the jam', which likens Coloured people to the thin layer of jam squeezed between two slices of bread. The metaphor gives expression to both their marginality as well as their intermediate status. This expression, usually uttered in a resigned tone of voice and used to express alienation and political apathy or to justify support of the National Party, became especially popular during the uncertain times facing the Coloured community in the mid-1990s.⁷¹

The dynamic behind the assertion of a separate Coloured identity and the continuities in its expression identified here have been reinforced by the popular stereotyping of Coloured people. This stereotyping has played an important part in the social construction of Coloured identity both within the Coloured community but especially within the dominant society. Because of their marginality Coloured people have been more vulnerable than most to this form of prejudice. A grasp of this stereotyping is

Cape.

70 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 46-63; Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 23-24.

71 This expression appears to be a version of the more conventional 'ham in the sandwich' which is also meant to convey the idea of something being caught between two more powerful forces. It is appropriate that relatively expensive ham is substituted with jam, a staple in many working class Coloured homes. In my experience this expression was also taken up by conservative Indians fearful of majority rule. See quotation attributed to an anonymous Indian person in J. Crwys-Williams, *South African Quotations*, 134.

thus necessary for a fully rounded understanding of the nature of Coloured identity. The image of Coloured people in the popular mind will be explored through the analysis of a well-known, apartheid era joke that has done the rounds in South Africa for several decades.⁷²

God, Jan van Riebeeck and the Coloured people: The anatomy of a South African joke

The joke begins by describing a scenario which provokes a Coloured person into hurling racial insults at an African and repudiating him as an inferior being. A typical setting for the joke would be an apartheid-era situation in which an African person tries to gain entrance to some facility such as a cinema or public conveyance reserved for Coloured people. In a fashion all too familiar with the apartheid experience, the Coloured protagonist would expel the African from the facility and end off the diatribe by exclaiming 'No Kaffirs are allowed here!'. The African then counters this tirade with the punchline that 'God made the white man, God made the black man, God made the Indian, the Chinese and the Jew - but Jan van Riebeeck, he made the Coloured man.'⁷³

This joke which has taken on a variety of forms is well established as a means of teasing or deriding Coloured people and the premises upon which it is based are understood over a broad spectrum of South African society. In my experience it was a very common joke often openly told to, and by Coloured people during the apartheid period. Though never acceptable in politically progressive circles, the arrival of the

72 For an earlier version of this analysis see M. Adhikari, 'God, Jan van Riebeeck and the Coloured people: The anatomy of a South African joke', *Southern African Discourse*, Vol. 4, 1992, 4-10.

73 While I can never recall having seen it in print, I have heard this joke told on countless

new South Africa, with its heightened sensitivity to anything that might be deemed racially offensive, has led to the joke losing its appeal and, where still in evidence, is restricted to private discourse. Although typical of the apartheid era, the assumptions, images and values that underlie the joke would have resonated with South African audiences throughout the period under review. Its import would have been clear to South Africans in the early part of the twentieth century and was certainly so at its close. From the mid-1990s onwards, however, the racist assumptions on which the joke has been predicated have been blurred and complicated somewhat by political power passing into the hands of an African-led political party, the rise of a substantive African middle class and changing social norms.

The van Riebeeck joke harnesses several key features of the racial stereotyping of Coloured people current in twentieth century South Africa and reveals much about the popular concept of Colouredness. The punchline only makes sense if teller and audience share particular assumptions about Coloured people or, at the very least, acknowledge the existence of a popular image of Coloured people that embodies these characteristics. That a local entrepreneur, who in the late 1980s arranged tours of Cape Town's black townships aimed primarily at foreign visitors, kicked off the trip with a version of this joke 'about old Jan van Riebeeck and his comrades frolicking with the local maidens... giving birth to the "colourful folk"'⁷⁴ is an indication that these assumptions were sufficiently widely shared even for foreigners to be able to 'catch

74 occasions from the early 1960s onwards.
Cape Argus, 5/11/1988. The substitution of 'colourful folk' for Coloured people is a pointed reference to the stereotype of working class Coloured people as happy-go-lucky, 'colourful' people. See Wicomb, 'Shame and identity', 96; Erasmus, 'Introduction', 14, 20. Even whites highly sympathetic to Coloured people often stereotype them in this way. For example, economist and outspoken critic of segregationism, Professor W. H. Hutt described Coloured people as a 'race of half-castes (which) constitutes the most unjustly treated, the most cheerful and the most lovable group of people I have ever known.' Hutt, *Colour Bar*, 15.

the joke'. This exploration of the attitudes and assumptions that underpin the van Riebeeck joke seeks to reveal how associations of racial hybridity, illegitimacy, savagery and marginality coalesce in the stereotyping of Coloured people in the popular mind.

The exchange of insults between the Coloured and African protagonists in the van Riebeeck joke is set within the context of the racial hierarchy of white supremacist South Africa. The popular perception of this racial stratification has the ruling white minority on top, the African majority at the bottom and the Coloured people in-between. It is apparent from his endorsement of the racial system that the Coloured person in the joke shares this perception of the social order. In terms of the value system in which the joke operates, Coloured people are accorded a superior status to Africans within the racial hierarchy because they can claim to be partly descended from whites and more closely assimilated to Western culture. As the riposte from the African demonstrates, however, the conventional interpretation of the social order was not uncontested. Although the punchline does not necessarily challenge the dominant status of whites, the African rejects the relatively privileged status of Coloureds by asserting that racial purity trumps genetic proximity to the Caucasian race. Roy du Pre, a 'Coloured' academic sums up a common attitude amongst Africans towards Coloured people; '... Africans despise Coloured people in general. They... (look) upon them as "mixed-breeds" with no nationhood, no identity, no land, no culture. The African on the other hand, is a proud, full-blooded, "pure-breed" with a history, culture and identity going back centuries.'⁷⁵

75 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 225.

The punchline of the van Riebeeck joke invokes the most salient characteristic associated with Colouredness in the popular mind, namely, that of racial hybridity. Through this hybridity a second, and closely allied, notion of illegitimacy is also attributed to Coloureds. The joke turns upon a shared perception between teller and audience of the pejorativeness of racial hybridity and illegitimate conception. Without these associations the joke would hardly be considered funny.

The attribute of racial hybridity is virtually inherent to the concept of Colouredness in the popular mind and is the most prominent of the array of negative qualities associated with it. Coloured people are generally thought of as being of 'mixed race', or less flatteringly, as 'half-caste' or even a 'bastard' people. Indeed, before the exclusive meaning of the term 'Coloured' became current in the mid-1880s⁷⁶ words such as 'bastard' and 'half-caste' were the most common epithets used to refer to this social group as a whole or to its individual members. In other words, Colouredness is seen as the product of miscegenation, and racial mixture to be its defining characteristic. The idea of racial hybridity has been so intrinsic to the concept of Colouredness that even an ultra-left wing Coloured intellectual such as Kenny Jordaan, a member of the Trotskyist Fourth International Organization of South Africa (FIOSA), writing in 1952, accepted that Jan van Riebeeck was the 'father of the Cape Coloured people'.⁷⁷ The *Torch*, the mouthpiece of the Non-European Unity Movement, also accepted that the Coloured people 'arose as a result of the glandular

76 In the context of southern African history, the inclusive meaning of the word 'Coloured' refers to all black people and in its exclusive meaning refers to people of mixed racial origin only. My as yet unpublished research into the usage of the term indicates that it was used in both senses in the latter part of the nineteenth century at the Cape. There was a marked shift in favour of the exclusive meaning in the latter half of the 1880s indicating that Coloured identity in its modern form had crystallized in the period prior to this.

77 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck' 34.

carelessness of van Riebeeck and his men.⁷⁸ For evidence that this perception has survived into the 'new' South Africa amongst people regarded as politically progressive one could point to Tokyo Sexwale, former Gauteng premier who is married to a white woman, describing his children as Coloured⁷⁹ and novelist Achmat Dangor declaring that, 'In my own case, I'm so bastardized I can only call myself Coloured.'⁸⁰

If racial hybridity is the defining attribute associated with Colouredness in the popular mind, then the idea that Colouredness is an inherent racial condition that results automatically from miscegenation between black and white people is the fundamental misconception associated with the identity. In popular thinking Colouredness is not treated as a social identity but is reified into a cluster of innate qualities that spontaneously and inexorably are assumed to manifest themselves in the offspring of black-white sexual intercourse. As with another version of this joke, which dates the genesis of the Coloured people at nine months after the landing of van Riebeeck's party,⁸¹ the popular mind looks back to primal acts of inter-racial sex rather than processes of social interaction and identity formation in nineteenth century Southern African society for the making of Coloured identity. Thus, no matter how 'respectable' a Coloured person may be or what their level of personal achievement, the taint of that original sin still persists in racial thinking that is still entrenched in the broader South African society. Indeed, the risqué element of the van Riebeeck joke is derived from the image of the Coloured people having been fathered through illicit sexual intercourse immediately upon the landing of the first Dutch colonists. Implicit

78 *Torch*, 3/3/1947.

79 *Mail and Guardian*, 2/7/1999.

80 *Mail and Guardian*, 26/10/2001.

81 Du Pré, *Separate but Unequal*, viii also refers to this joke.

in most peoples' understanding of the joke is what Wicomb refers to as 'the nasty, unspoken question of concupiscence that haunts coloured identity'.⁸²

Throughout Western society, and probably more so in South Africa, racial hybridity carries a heavy stigma with ideas of miscegenation and 'mixed blood' conjuring up a host of repugnant connotations for most people. Negative attitudes toward 'hybridization' as opposed to 'purity of breed' are well entrenched in modern popular culture whether applied to household pets or humans.⁸³ Writing at the end of the 1930s J. S. Marais confirmed that, 'This philosophy of blood and race... leads to a passionate aversion to miscegenation... which is the primary article of faith of the South African nation.'⁸⁴ In South Africa these attitudes came to find concrete expression in the notorious Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts.⁸⁵ This kind of prejudice was still very much in evidence in the latter phases of white rule. Take, for example, the way Maria van Niekerk, a conservative white South African woman, expressed her horror at the repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act in 1985. Van Niekerk claimed that she 'did not stand for bastardizing our land' and that she wanted South Africa 'to be pure white, pure Indian, pure blacks (sic) and the Coloureds must be proud of what they are now.'⁸⁶ This is an example of the commonly held belief that miscegenation of necessity pollutes the resulting offspring and renders them inferior. While arch-

82 Wicomb, 'Shame and identity', 93.

83 See for example Cell, *White Supremacy*, 195-96; S. Dubow, *Illicit Union: Scientific racism in modern South Africa*. (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), 180-81; R. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race*, (London, Routledge, 1995), especially 100-18; Hendricks, 'Ominous Liaisons', 41; T. Reddy, 'The politics of naming: The constitution of Coloured subjects in South Africa' in Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 71-72.

84 J. S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*, (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1968), 282. This book was first published in London by Longmans, Green and Co., 1939.

85 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, No. 55 of 1949 and the Immorality Amendment Act, No. 21 of 1950. The latter extended the ban on sexual intercourse between whites and Africans, introduced by the Immorality Act of 1927, to all black people.

86 J. Gordon, *Under the Harrow: Lives of white South Africans today*. (London, Heinemann,

conservative Andries Treurnicht's claim that 'Coloureds are our 12-year-old children and must remain under our guardianship'⁸⁷ is at the extreme end of the spectrum of racist opinion, there was general acceptance amongst whites that Coloured people were intellectually and morally inferior to varying degrees as a result of their miscegenated origins.⁸⁸

In keeping with the Social Darwinist and Eugenist assumptions that have thoroughly permeated South African racial thinking at the popular level, it has generally been assumed that miscegenation breeds weakness as there is a tendency for the progeny of racially mixed sexual unions to exhibit the combined, or even exaggerated, weaknesses of their progenitors and for the positive qualities to be diluted or lost altogether. Indeed, many of the racial traits attributed to Coloured people have often been explained in terms of the deleterious effects of racial mixture. Allegedly inherent characteristics of Coloured people as a group such as their being physically stunted, lacking in endurance and being naturally prone to dishonesty, licentiousness and drink were often explained or justified in terms of the effects of racial mixture or of 'gebastenhed' (bastardization) resulting in physical and moral weakness.⁸⁹ In my experience it was not uncommon to find both serious and tongue-in-cheek explanations of the sort that Coloured people are morally weak and vacillatory by nature because their white 'blood' pulls them in one direction and their black 'blood'

1980), 171.

87 Undated quote from Crwys-Williams, *South African Quotations*, 83.

88 For further elaboration on this topic see Young, *Colonial Desire* especially ch. 6; J. M. Coetzee, 'Blood, taint, flaw, degeneration: The novels of Sarah Gertrude Millin' in *White Writing: On the culture and letters of South Africa*, (Sandton, Radix, 1988), 136-62. Erasmus, 'Introduction', 17.

89 In my personal recollections, which dates back to the late 1950s, these perceptions of Coloured people were very common amongst Indian and white people, and sometimes shared by middle class Coloureds as well. See Hendricks, "'Ominous" liaisons', 41 and D. Lewis, 'Writing hybrid selves: Richard Rive and Zoë Wicomb', in Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 133 for further discussion on these issues.

pulls them in another.⁹⁰

Popular assumptions about the racial hybridity of the Coloured community are based upon the premise that miscegenation gives rise to offspring that are related but nevertheless racially distinct from their parents.⁹¹ In this way sexual relations between male settlers on the one hand and Khoi and slave women on the other from the very start of Dutch colonization were pictured as having given birth to a distinct racial entity, the Coloured people. This much is apparent from the way the joke employs Jan van Riebeeck as the symbolic father of the Coloured people and the alternative version of the joke dates the origin of the Coloured people at nine months after the landing of van Riebeeck.⁹²

In popular thinking - and indeed in a great deal of academic writing - there is very little, if any, recognition of the necessary historical reality that Coloured identity arose as a result of social change and human agency rather than simply being an automatic product of miscegenation. Indeed, the assertion of a separate Coloured identity in the late nineteenth century proved to be a highly successful strategy because it utilized those very ideas and assumptions of racial difference and hybridity upon which the doctrine of white supremacy rested. The key assumption in this respect was that humanity consisted of a hierarchy of races in which status was determined by the degree to which a particular group conformed to the somatic and cultural norms of

90 See H. P. Cruse, *Die Opheffing van die Kleurlingbevolking: Deel I: Aanvangsjare, 1652-1795*, (Stellenbosch, Christen Studentevereniging, 1947), 36 for an example of this sort of thinking applied to the Khoisan.

91 I have, on occasion, heard such children jokingly referred to as 'zebras', that is having black and white stripes.

92 See Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 34; Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 6; Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 10; S. Field, 'Remembering experience, interpreting memory: Life stories from Windermere', *African Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2001. 122 for evidence that Jan van Riebeeck was generally accepted as their symbolic father within the Coloured community itself.

Western Europe.⁹³

As mentioned earlier, the claim to kinship with whites was a double-edged sword for the Coloured community. Although it allowed them to argue for a status of relative privilege it also meant accepting racial hybridity as an integral part of their being. For the white establishment there was of course no question that such kinship could be the basis for a claim to equality. For some, however, kinship underpinned attitudes of paternalism. For example, former rugby hero turned progressive farmer in the 1980s, Jan Boland Coetzee, was of the opinion that his 'Coloured labourers were like children... didn't know what was good for them, only wanted their daily *dop* (tot) of wine'. But when asked whether Afrikaners were different to Coloureds he replied; 'We made them', in acknowledgement of paternity as well as responsibility toward Coloured people.⁹⁴ For others the claim to kinship was embarrassing, even threatening, as demonstrated by the story of Mrs. C. S., who was born on a farm in Swellendam in 1922 and came to live in a Windermere squatter camp in 1950. Employed on a white-owned farm as a young girl, she rejected the farmer and his wife's claim that Coloureds were different and inferior to whites. Resorting to the van Riebeeck mythology she countered,

'Die bloed is dan die selfde bloed, daar's nie 'n wit bloed nie en 'n swart bloed nie of 'n bruin bloed nie... van Jan van Riebeeck se tyd hy't gepaar met die bruines, en die wittes saam met die bruines.' (The blood is then the same, there is not a white blood or a black blood or a brown blood... from Jân van Riebeeck's time he mated with the brown people and the whites with the brown people).

Both as a form of denial and reinforcement of master-servant relationships the farmer

93 See for example G. Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient roots of modern prejudice in western culture*, (London, Routledge, 1999) especially chs. 5-7; J. Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and blacks in western popular culture*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992) 47-49; N. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*, (London, Macmillan, 1982), especially ch. 3; Dubow, *Illicit Union*, 67-74.

dragged her into his garage and gave her a thrashing for her insolence.⁹⁵

It is through the misconception about their racial hybridity that the stigma of illegitimacy has also been imputed to Coloured people. In terms of popular thinking Coloured people originated from black-white sexual unions outside of wedlock. There is an enduring myth that the Coloured people resulted from prostitution and casual sex between slave and Khoisan women on the one hand and passing soldiers, sailors and other white riff raff on the other.⁹⁶ This has contributed to the perception that Coloured people lack a proper heritage or pedigree for as Hombi Ntshoko, an African woman from Langa, maintained, 'Coloureds don't know where they come from. We know where we come from. Whites know where they come from'.⁹⁷ Cedric Dover's memorable description of the half-caste in Western literature, 'His father is a blackguard, his mother is a whore' is an indication that it is not a peculiarly South African perception that miscegenation is indulged in by the lowest elements of society.⁹⁸ Winnie Mandela's comment in 1991 that the Coloured people came about as a result of white men raping black women demonstrates that the idea that the Coloured community originated from extra-marital unions across the colour line is current not only amongst white racists but is broadly accepted in South African society.⁹⁹ Despite coming from an ideological position diametrically opposed to that of white racism, Mandela's remark reveals a similar misunderstanding regarding the nature and origin of Coloured identity.

94 Lelyveld, *Move your Shadow*, 261.

95 Field, 'Remembering experience', 122.

96 See Marais, *Cape Coloured People*, 9-10, 31 for instance.

97 Caliguire, 'Voices from the Communities', 11.

98 C. Dover, *Half-Caste*, (London, Secker and Warburg, 1937), 13.

99 *Cape Times*, 30/4/1991.

Perceived to have originated largely from illicit sexual relations the Coloured community as a whole has also indelibly been stained by the mark of illegitimacy. In the words of Zimitri Erasmus, 'Being coloured is about living an identity that is clouded in sexualized shame'.¹⁰⁰ The idea that at its very genesis the Coloured people had been conceived in 'sin' contributes to the notion amongst racists that Coloureds are somehow defective and form a special breed of lesser beings - God's step-children as Sarah Gertrude Millin vividly put it.¹⁰¹ This is also apparent from the way the punchline of the van Riebeeck joke sets Coloured people apart from the rest of humanity. This outlook is, furthermore, reflected in jokes that depict Coloured people as the unintended consequence of the devil's hapless attempts at imitating God's creation of humanity. In these jokes the devil's creations turn out to be brown and not white and when placed on earth walk off singing, dancing and drinking wine.¹⁰² A variant on this joke has God baking figures of clay that come to life when placed on earth. Every now and then God would be heard to exclaim in frustration 'Damn, I burnt another one!' and toss it into Africa. Depending on the degree of scorching the damaged figure would turn out to be either Coloured or African and exhibit behaviour appropriate to their racial stereotype - another reflection of the racial hierarchy in South Africa.

To evoke laughter, the punchline draws mainly upon a shared perception between teller and audience that both racial hybridity and illegitimacy are humiliating and shameful conditions. It is clear that for people to react spontaneously to this joke the images, values and assumptions about Colouredness that are evoked have to be part

100 Erasmus, 'Introduction', 14.

101 S. G. Millin, *God's Stepchildren*, (Cape Town, A. D. Donker, 1924).

102 I recall this joke in the 1960s and 1970s to have been one of the favourites of a well-to-do Coloured businessman and former member of the Union Council of Coloured Affairs (UCCA)

and parcel of their waking consciousness and instantaneously accessible to their minds, given the appropriate cues. The joke, however, goes beyond the imputed trait of hybridization and illegitimacy and draws upon other aspects of Coloured stereotyping for embellishment.

Although not raised directly by the joke, the natural question of who van Riebeeck and his merry band's sexual partners were, evokes the popular association of Coloured people with the Khoisan and hence with a 'savage' past. Whereas the Coloured protagonist in the van Riebeeck joke might put much store by his or her partial European descent and assimilation to Western culture, both teller and audience are nevertheless likely to be mindful of the Khoisan heritage associated with Colouredness.

In the popular mind the association is an extremely derogatory one. This much is evident from the terms 'Boesman' (Bushman or San) and 'Hotnot' (Hottentot or Khoikhoi) being amongst the most opprobrious of racial slurs that can be hurled at Coloured people.¹⁰³ The contractions 'Hottie', 'Bushy' or 'Boesie' are also sometimes used.¹⁰⁴ The extreme derogation of these words lie in the images of physical ugliness, repulsive social practices and mental and social inferiority they conjure up. In 1919 a

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- who used it to denounce the supposedly improvident habits of the Coloured working class.
- 103 My own, admittedly subjective, observation is that these terms have lost some of their pejorativeness in recent times through frequent airing in public as Coloured people challenge racial stereotyping and insults and as they sometimes apply these terms to themselves. A good example is Peter Marais' assertion in late 2001 that the Democratic Alliance was a party of rich white people who needed a few Hotnots to win an election. An interesting aside is that wildly popular winner of the 'Big Brother, South Africa' reality television contest, Ferdinand Rabie, characterized himself as 'the last white Boesman of the Western Cape', presumably a reference to his foul-mouthed and boorish behaviour which included urinating and defecating in the garden. Ferdi, to my knowledge drew no criticism for using the 'B-word'. See *Cape Times*, 20/12/2001.
- 104 Stone, 'Socio-semantic analysis', 386-87, 391; Branford, *Dictionary of South African English*, 56; *Oxford Dictionary of South African English*, 88, 295. Stone, 387, records the comic

correspondent to the *S. A. Clarion*, a newspaper aimed at a Coloured readership, remarked that 'one would have a quarrel on one's hands if one addressed a coloured in a Cape Town street as Hotnot even if that person had three-quarters Hotnot blood in his veins.'¹⁰⁵ Gerald Stone's description of the meaning of 'Boesman' in the lexicon of working class Coloured people more than half a century later is; 'a seriously insulting reference to coloured person, denoting putatively San features: sparse peppercorn hair, flat nose, wizened face, dry yellow skin, steatopygic posture, small stature: connoting insignificance, ugliness, poverty, vagrancy, treachery'.¹⁰⁶ From my experience of the way in which the term has been used by outgroups to describe Coloured people, moral and intellectual inferiority should be added to this list. Generations of South Africans, both black and white, have had the negative stereotypes of 'Bushmen' and 'Hottentots' instilled into them especially during school history lessons.¹⁰⁷ The deep opprobrium and emotive associations attached to these terms is demonstrated by a riot being sparked off in the sleepy West Coast town of Laaiplek in 1987 when a local white resident called one of the Coloured townsmen a 'Hotnot'.¹⁰⁸

In popular discourse the Khoisan origins of Coloured people are often used to explain racial traits ascribed to them. Negative characteristics attributed to the Khoisan have

105 version 'Boesmanian' and Branford, 167, the term 'kroesie' a rhyming reference to frizzy hair. *S. A. Clarion*, 26/4/1919.

106 Stone, 'Socio-semantic analysis', 386-87.

107 For an analysis of the negative stereotyping of Khoisan peoples in school history texts see A. Smith 'The Hotnot syndrome: Myth-making in South African school textbooks', *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1983, 37-49. For accounts of the repugnance evoked by the Khoisan in Western society see Z. Strother, 'Display of the body Hottentot' in B. Lindfors, (ed.), *Africans on Stage: Studies in ethnological show business*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999); van Wyk Smith, M., "'The most wretched of the human race": The iconography of the Khoikhoi (Hottentots), 1500-1800', *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 5, No. 3-4, 1992, 285-330; L. Merians, *Envisioning the Worst: Representations of 'Hottentots' in early-modern England*, (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2001).

108 *Cape Times*, 16/11/1987.

thus been projected onto the Coloured grouping as a whole. Images of inveterate laziness, irresponsibility, dirtiness and a penchant for thievery are often assumed to have been inherited by Coloured people from their Khoisan ancestors. This much is apparent from another popular joke that sometimes also served as an utterance of frustration, especially amongst employers, at the alleged waywardness of Coloured employees; 'You can take the Coloured out of the bush but you cannot take the bush out of the Coloured' or an alternative more to the point; 'You can take the Coloured out of the bush, man, but you cannot take the Bushman out of the Coloured.'¹⁰⁹

It is worth noting that while Coloured people have been strongly associated with their Khoisan progenitors there has not been a corresponding identification with a slave heritage. There are two basic reasons for this. Firstly, the Cape, unlike most New World slave societies, did not develop a vigorous slave culture largely because of the atomized pattern of slaveholding, the extreme ethnic diversity of the slave population and the high death rate amongst importees.¹¹⁰ Since slaves were thus, by and large, not able to transmit a coherent body of learnt behaviour and communal experience from one generation to the next, an identifiably slave culture remained weak and attenuated at the Cape.¹¹¹ The conscious identification with a slave past did thus not survive much beyond the lives of freed slaves themselves. Secondly, because slaves were defined in terms of their legal status, their descendants were able to escape the stigma of slave ancestry fairly easily after Emancipation. In popular consciousness vague

109 I have heard versions of this saying applied to Africans as well along the lines of 'You can take the Kaffir out of the bush but you can't take the bush out of the Kaffir.' See Field, 'Fragile identities', 105 for an example of a Coloured man using this expression to denigrate Africans.

110 N. Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 93-100; Adhikari, 'Sons of Ham', 99-102.

111 Malay identity, of which the profession of Islam is the main feature, is closely associated with a slave past as well as Malaysian and Indonesian ancestry.

connotations of a servile past have been attached to Coloured identity through, for example, the annual reminder of the coon carnival and the use of the pejorative label 'Gam'¹¹² to describe working class Coloured people.¹¹³

Coloured people, however, could not so easily avoid being associated with the Khoisan because the defining characteristics in this instance were racially attributed and genetically transmitted physical traits. Many Coloured people have had little choice but to live with physical traits that have served as markers of the Khoisan physical type as the colloquialisms 'boesman korrels' (Bushman corns or tufts)¹¹⁴ and 'Hotnot holle', vernacular Afrikaans for steatopygia, indicate. I have personally known a number of Coloured people, all within the working class, nick-named 'Boesman' or 'Hotnot' because they displayed what were taken to be typical Khoisan physical features.¹¹⁵ While these nicknames could signify endearment or be ironic and

112 Gam is the Afrikaans word for Ham and is a reference to the biblically derived justification for the enslavement of black people and later served as a rationalization for their menial status. See Adhikari, 'Sons of Ham', 95-96; Wicomb, 'Shame and identity', 100; G. Stone, 'Identity among lower-class Coloured people' in M. Whisson and H. van der Merwe, (eds.), *Coloured Citizenship in South Africa*. (Cape Town, Abe Bailey Institute of Inter-racial Studies, 1972), 34-37. Both Branford, *Dictionary of South African English*, 101 and *Oxford Dictionary of South African English*, 243-244 wrongly attribute the origins of the word to a contraction of 'Gammat' an Afrikaans version of Mohamed. See Stone, 'Socio-semantic analysis', 407-08. For a general discussion of the Hamitic myth see W. Evans, 'From the land of Canaan to the land of Guinea: The strange odyssey of the "Sons of Ham"', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 1, 1980, 15-43; W. Jordan, *White over Black: American attitudes toward the Negro*. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina university Press, 1968), 17-20, 35-37.

113 In my experience few people who use the term 'Gam' do so with any knowledge of its servile origins. This is confirmed by Stone; 'Nearly all speakers are unaware of its Biblical reference and historic origin.' Stone, 'Socio-semantic analysis', 407.

114 Z. Erasmus, 'Re-imagining Coloured identities in post-apartheid South Africa', paper presented at the 'Burden of race' conference, 3. 'Kroesie' and 'korrelkop' are other terms applied to Coloured people that evoke an association with Khoisan ancestry. See Branford, *Dictionary of South African English*, 164, 167, 240; *Oxford Dictionary of South African English*, 394, 400, 548.

115 Not only does the use of such language run contrary to the sense of decorum – and more recently, the dictates of political correctness – of the Coloured middle class but Khoisan physical features are also conspicuously less common within this social group. This is due to the Khoisan being assimilated into colonial society largely as farm labourers in the more remote rural areas. Their descendants thus tend to be poorer and relatively recent migrants to urban areas.

self-deprecating,¹¹⁶ they are generally derogatory and are an indication that white racist values have to a considerable degree been internalized by Coloured people who use them.

The van Riebeeck joke also draws on the marginality of the Coloured community for heightened effect. While whites are represented by a pro-active and familiar figure, symbolic of white supremacy,¹¹⁷ in the supposed making of the Coloured people, the black ancestors of the Coloured people remain faceless and passive. There has been an abiding perception that Coloured people played little or no constructive part in the history of South Africa and thus do not merit the recognition of historical personalities beyond what is necessary for whites to make sense of their own history. This is very much part of the depersonalization that is almost universally present in the way that dominant groups perceive those whom they dominate. For the quintessential expression of the depersonalization of the Coloured people one need go no further than Marike de Klerk's characterization of a Coloured person as a 'no-person'.

Coloured marginality is evoked in a second, more subtle, way by the joke. In human interaction one of the psycho-social functions of humour is to demonstrate and affirm power. Jokes therefore often seek to humiliate and demean or depend on vituperation to raise a laugh as the international examples of 'Paddy' or 'blonde' jokes and local

116 Amongst Afrikaans-speakers, both black and white, expressions such as 'my (ou) Hotnotjie' (my little [old] Hottentot) or 'my (ou) Boesmantjie' (my little [old] Bushman) are used as terms of endearment equivalent to 'my little darling' or 'my dear boy'. Bosman et al., *Tweetalige Woordeboek*, 103, 300; Grobbelaar, *Tweetalige Woordeboek*, 80, 211.

117 The National Party government conceded as much when it in 1992 announced that the portrait of Jan van Riebeeck was to be phased from the currency as part of its reforms.

examples of 'Gammatjie and Abdoljie' or 'Raj' jokes demonstrate.¹¹⁸ Thus, those who considered themselves superior to Coloureds were likely to have found the joke all the funnier because it reinforced their conceit that they were able to laugh at Coloured people with impunity. On the other hand, Coloured people who laughed at it - in my experience many more Coloured people laughed at the joke than took offence - confirmed their marginality by acquiescing in their own denigration.

The targets of demeaning humour are, however, not entirely powerless because humour can of course also be harnessed for retaliation. This would explain the immense popularity of 'van der Merwe' jokes amongst Coloured people during the apartheid era. The 'stupid and uncultured Afrikaner' stereotype represented by van der Merwe provided the perfect foil for Coloured people to assert their worth as human beings and to get back at those whom they regarded to be the most rabidly racist and their main oppressors.¹¹⁹

The popularity of the van Riebeeck joke has waned in recent years. The amelioration of inter-black political divisions in the post-1976 environment, the growth of a mass, non-racial democratic movement during the 1980s and the dawning of the 'new South Africa' have progressively made the values and sentiments embodied in the joke less acceptable in public discourse. The growing rejection of Coloured identity by politicized Coloureds from the mid-1970s onwards meant that crude racist thinking of

118 Gammatjie and Abdoljie, contracted, diminutive, Afrikaans forms of Mohamed and Abdullah are stereotypes of the stupid Malay and have a female equivalent 'Meraai'. 'Raj' is the stereotype of the stupid Tamil-speaking Indian. The former predominated in the Western Cape and the latter in Natal.

119 Two examples of van der Merwe jokes:
 Why would a doctor never use a rectal thermometer on van der Merwe? It is likely to cause brain damage.
 Why does van der Merwe have a hole in his trouser pocket? So he can count to eleven [some would say thirteen].

the sort embodied in this joke became unacceptable to a widening constituency of people. By the late 1980s even the likes of the Reverend Alan Hendrickse, the leader of the collaborationist Labour Party, at times, rejected Coloured identity. In a heated moment in parliament he, for example, lashed out at the National Party: 'God made me a man, the National Party made me a Coloured man.'¹²⁰

Although the image of van Riebeeck is far less pervasive than it was in the 'old' South Africa it has nevertheless remained a powerful symbol of white supremacy in the new millennium.¹²¹ Bizarre confirmation of this occurred at a formal dinner organized by a local black economic empowerment company to promote Cape Town's cultural diversity on 31 October 2000. At the dinner held in the banquet hall of the Castle in Cape Town one of the guests, Priscilla De Wet-Fox who claims to be the head-person of the Chainnoquia Khoi-Khoi tribe of Oudshoorn, heckled speakers and subjected the gathering to a tirade about the colonial oppression of the Khoi. Upon being escorted out of the function she attacked a bust of van Riebeeck in the foyer, damaging it and causing its eyes to pop out when she pushed it off its pedestal. She later justified her actions by saying that 'van Riebeeck lied to my ancestors' and that he was a symbol of European colonialism that made her feel 'ashamed of being me, of looking like me.'¹²²

Humour is intrinsic to human interaction and forms an integral part of popular culture. For these reasons jokes disclose much about the societies and communities in which they become current. Because people reveal their values, aspirations, fears, hatreds

¹²⁰ *Cape Times*, 28/9/1988.

¹²¹ See *Cape Times*, 30/11/2001 for a discussion of the controversy over whether the 350th anniversary of the arrival of van Riebeeck should be celebrated or not and *Cape Times*, 7/12/2001 for a report of a protest march against the idea organized by De Wet-Fox.

and most other aspects of their social experience through humour, jokes especially the more enduring and popular ones, are authentic reflections of the perceptions, attitudes and mores of the societies in which they circulate and are often more reliable indicators of popular thinking than the conventional sources used by historians and social analysts.¹²³ This authenticity is guaranteed to the extent that jokes not only have to resonate with the values, sensibilities and experiences of their target audiences to survive, but have also to make sense instantaneously to elicit the appropriate response. By any measure the van Riebeeck joke provides an accurate and dependable gauge of popular attitudes toward Coloured people.

This overview of Coloured identity and the history of the Coloured people in white-ruled South Africa has provided insight into the way Coloured people viewed themselves, their community, as well as its place in the broader society. It has elucidated the dynamic behind the expression of a separate Coloured identity, highlighted continuities in processes of Coloured self-definition and explored the role of popular stereotyping in the social construction of the identity. These themes are elaborated upon in the following chapter which investigates the ways in which Coloured people viewed their history and changing interpretations of this history within the community, especially the intelligentsia.

122 *Cape Argus*, 4/11/2000.

123 See for example, A Dundas, *Cracking Jokes: Studies of sick humour cycles and stereotypes*, (New York, Ten Speed Press, 1987), vi-vii.

CHAPTER 2

History from the margins: A historiography of Coloured writing on their community's past

The marginality of the Coloured community is reflected in South African historiography in that relatively little has been written on the history of this social group and much of what has been written is polemical, speculative, poorly researched or heavily biased. In many general histories Coloured people have effectively been written out of the narrative and marginalized to a few throw-away comments scattered through the text.¹ In addition, only a handful of works on the subject have been written by Coloured people themselves. As early as 1913 Harold Cressy, a Coloured educationist and school principal, decried this state of affairs when he urged the Coloured teaching profession to help build self-confidence and pride in their community by dispelling the myth that Coloured people played little part in the history of their country.² Les Switzer, historian and professor of communication at the University of Houston, summed up the situation eloquently when he in 1995 wrote that, 'South Africa's coloured community has remained a marginalized community - marginalized by history and even historians.'³

1 The Coloured people are completely marginalized in older, more conservative histories. See for example, C. F. J. Muller, *Five Hundred Years: A history of South Africa*, (Pretoria, Academica, 1969) and F. A. van Jaarsveld, *From van Riebeeck to Vorster, 1652-1974*, (Pretoria, Perskor, 1975). While Coloured people do feature more prominently in modern, progressive histories they are nevertheless still confined to the margins. Refer to the indices of W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994); Davenport and Saunders, *South Africa*; R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999); N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, segregation and apartheid*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994) The only general history that makes a concerted effort to write Coloured people into South African history is J. Pampallis, *Foundations of the New South Africa*, (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1991)

2 *Cape Argus*, 22/3/1913; *Cape Times*, 22/3/1913.

3 L. Switzer, review of Adhikari, *Teachers' League of South Africa* in the *Journal of African History*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1995, 338.

Except for an introductory outline of the various approaches to the history of the Coloured people, exclusive attention will be given to texts produced by Coloured authors⁴ in which they reflect on the nature of Coloured identity and the history of their community. Because the emphasis of this study is on popular perceptions within the Coloured community of their history, the focus will be on published work and interventions that have either been influential or mark significant changes in the way this history was perceived.⁵ Excluded from the scope of this study are works that examine an aspect of Coloured history without attempting a broader interpretation of the history of the Coloured past, especially where authors reject being labelled Coloured.⁶ Where historians have produced more than one relevant work that essentially repeat a particular standpoint, attention will be centred on the more influential and representative piece of writing.⁷ The intention is less to be comprehensive than to chart changing perceptions of their history within the Coloured community itself.

Historiographical paradigms

Historical writing on the Coloured community, both of a popular nature and that emanating from the academy, can be divided into three broad classes. The first category of writing on the Coloured community in South African historiography is what may be termed the essentialist school. This is by far the most common approach and coincides with the popular view of Coloured identity as a product of miscegenation that goes back to the earliest days of European settlement at the Cape.

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- 4 I include in this category writers who, though they might reject Coloured identity, have at one point regarded themselves as Coloured or have generally been perceived to be Coloured.
- 5 One can, for example, point to a number of academic theses written by Coloured people, which, though valuable in their own right, have had a limited impact on popular perceptions.
- 6 The work of Bill Nasson and Neville Alexander are obvious examples.

Racial hybridity is therefore taken to be the essence of Colouredness within this approach. For essentialists there is usually no need to explain the nature or existence of Coloured identity because it is part of an assumed reality that sees South African society as consisting of distinct races of which the Coloured people is one. The existence of Coloured identity poses no analytical problem because it is regarded as having developed naturally, and self-evidently to be the result of miscegenation.⁸ This approach is inherently racist because it assigns racial origins and racial characteristics to the concept of Colouredness, though it has to be recognized that not all writing within this category is intentionally racist. Indeed, a good deal, and some of the best writing in this genre, was intended to help break down racial barriers and expose the injustices suffered by Coloured people under the South African racial system.⁹ Because the essentialist approach embodies the conventional wisdom about Coloured identity virtually all of the popular writing and most of the older and more conservative academic work are cast in this mould.¹⁰

A second approach to the history of the Coloured people emerged in the post-Soweto era in reaction to the prejudicial assumptions of the traditional mode of analysis and a desire amongst scholars within the 'liberal' and 'radical' paradigms of South African history to distance themselves from any form of racist thinking. This school, which will be referred to as the instrumentalists, regarded Coloured identity to be an artificial concept imposed by the white supremacist state and ruling groups upon a

7 Christian Ziervogel, Richard van der Ross and Roy du Pre are cases in point.

8 See for example, Cruse, *Die Opheffing van die Kleurlingbevolking* and W. M. MacMillan, *The Cape Colour Question: A historical survey*, (Cape Town, Balkema, 1968), first published in London by Faber and Gwyer, 1927.

9 Marais, *Cape Coloured People* and van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid* are leading examples.

10 Popular works include Venter, *Two Million South Africans* and E. Durbach and J. Rubython, *With Mixed Feelings: A glimpse of 'Coloured' life*, (Cape Town, Don Nelson, 1976). Above-mentioned books by MacMillan, Marais, Cruse and van Jaarsveld serve as examples of academic work that fall into this category.

weak and vulnerable sector of the population.¹¹ Positions in this respect range from seeing Coloured identity simply as a device for excluding people of mixed race from the dominant society to viewing it as a product of deliberate divide-and-rule tactics by the ruling white minority to prevent black South Africans from forming a united front against racism and exploitation.¹² The instrumentalist approach was grounded in the growing rejection of Coloured identity that gained impetus in the latter half of the 1970s from Black Consciousness thinking and was further buttressed by the studied non-racism of the mass democratic movement of the 1980s and early 1990s. This represented the politically correct view of the turbulent two decades that followed the Soweto uprising and stemmed from a refusal to give credence to apartheid thinking, or in the case of the expedient, the fear of being accused of doing so.

A third paradigm, to which this thesis subscribes and which has been dubbed social constructionism,¹³ emerged from the latter half of the 1980s in response to the inadequacies of both the essentialist and instrumentalist approaches.¹⁴ Its main criticisms of both the essentialist and instrumentalist approaches are that they tend to accept Coloured identity as given and to portray it as fixed. Their reification of the identity, it is argued, fails to take cognizance of fluidities in processes of Coloured self-definition or ambiguities in the expression of the identity. In essentialist histories this is a product of a profoundly Eurocentric perspective and a reliance on the simplistic formulations of popular racist conceptions of Coloured identity. The problem in instrumentalist writing partly stems from a narrow focus on Coloured protest politics and the social injustices suffered by the community. This has had the

11 Examples include Hommel, *Capricorn Blues* and Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*.

12 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal* and Goldin, *Making Race* respectively represent these two standpoints.

13 The term is used in H. Trotter, "'What is a Coloured?': Definitions of Coloured South African identity in the academy", (unpublished paper, Yale University, 2000), 11-12, 21.

effect of exaggerating the resistance of Coloured people to white supremacy and playing down their accommodation with the South African racial system. The overall result has been an over-simplification of the phenomenon in this literature.¹⁵

The cardinal sin of both these schools, however, is that they commit the condescension of denying Coloured people a significant role in the making of their own identity. Essentialist interpretations do this by assuming Colouredness to be an inbred quality that arises automatically from miscegenation. Instrumentalists share the essentialist premise that Coloured identity is something negative and undesirable but try to blame it on the racism of the ruling white minority. Though they may have had the noble intention of countering the racism of essentialist accounts, instrumentalist histories have nevertheless contributed to the marginalization of the Coloured people by denying them the basic cognitive function of creating and reproducing their own social identity. Even the best of these histories, Gavin Lewis' *Between the Wire and the Wall*, despite its firm focus on the Coloured people themselves and its stress on their agency in the political arena, is nevertheless condescending by suggesting that 'the solution to this dilemma (of defining Coloured identity) is to accept Coloured identity as a white-imposed categorization.'¹⁶ Both approaches treat Coloured identity as something exceptional, failing to recognize it for what it is - a historically specific social construction, like any other social identity. In this respect, both schools have betrayed undue concern with contemporary ideological and political considerations.

14 See Adhikari, *Teachers' League* and Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice* for examples of the social constructionist approach.

15 For a more detailed discussion of these issues see M. Adhikari, "'The product of civilization in its most repellent manifestation': Ambiguities in the racial perceptions of the APO, 1909-1923' *Journal of African History*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1997, 283-85; "'A drink-sodden race of bestial degenerates': Attitudes toward race and class in the *Educational Journal*, 1913-1940' in E. van Heyningen, (ed.), *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, Vol. 7, (Cape Town, UCT Press, 1994), 109-32.

The main concerns of the social constructionist approach have therefore been to demonstrate the complexity of Coloured identity and, most importantly, to stress the agency of Coloured people in the making of their own identity. In my own work emphasis has been placed on the ways in which ambiguities in their identity and the marginality of Coloured people influenced their social experience and political consciousness.¹⁷ It also seeks to demonstrate that far from being the anonymous, inert entities of the essentialist school or the righteous resisters of instrumentalist histories, Coloured people exhibited a much more complex reaction to white supremacy that encompassed resistance as well as collaboration, protest as well as accommodation. Social identity is by its very nature largely, and in the first instance, the product of its bearers and can no more be imposed upon people by the state or ruling groups than it can spring automatically from miscegenation or peoples' racial constitution. Social identity is cultural in nature in that it is part of learnt behaviour and is moulded by social experience and social interaction.¹⁸ At best social identities can be manipulated by outsiders but then only to the extent that it resonates strongly with the bearers' image of themselves and their social group.

Within the broader category of essentialist writing it is possible to distinguish three further divisions. Firstly, there are what might be termed traditionalists who analyze Coloured identity and history in terms of the racist values and assumptions prevalent in South African society.¹⁹ Secondly, there are the liberal essentialists who dissent from the dominant racist view and seek to demonstrate that co-operation and interdependence rather than racial antagonism marked historical interaction between

16 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 4.

17 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*; 'Racial perceptions of the APO'; 'A drink-sodden race'; 'South'.

18 This can be established from any introductory Social Psychology text. See, for example, D. Abrams, 'Social identity, psychology of' in N. Smelser and B. Baltes, (eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 21, (Oxford, Elsevier, 2001),

South Africa's various peoples.²⁰ The third distinct strand within the essentialist school is what might be termed the progressionist interpretation of Coloured history and which, for the greater part of the twentieth century, represented the conventional view within the Coloured community of their own history. Until challenged by ideas emanating from a Marxist inspired radical movement during the 1940s and 1950s the progressionist version reigned supreme within the better educated and politicized sector of this group. This approach was progressionist in that it was based on the assumption that human society, and together with it the Coloured people, was on a path of inevitable progress to a future of peace, prosperity and social harmony.²¹

Earlier perspectives

The progressionist perspective in essence wove together key elements from the traditionalist and liberal strands in that it accepted the racist view that Coloured people formed a separate 'race' and were socially and culturally 'backward' compared to whites but stressed their common history and their cultural affinities. The progressionist interpretation was not so much an alternative to the white supremacist version as an acceptance of it in broad outline but with a re-interpretation of crucial aspects to provide it with a positive spin and an optimistic outlook for the future. The critical difference between Coloured progressionist visions of their own history and the traditional genre of white South Africa was that, even though they admitted to being 'backward', they did not accept their inferiority as permanent or inherent. Combining an environmentalist concept of racial difference with liberal values of personal freedom, equality in the eyes of the law, inter-racial co-operation and status

14306-09.

19 Cruse, *Opheffing van die Kleurlingbevolking* is the pre-eminent example.

20 MacMillan's *Cape Colour Question* and Marais' *Cape Coloured People* are the main works within this school. Botha, *Opkoms van ons Derde Stand*, is an example of Afrikaner writing in this vein.

based on individual merit, progressionists argued that the history of the Coloured people demonstrated that they were well advanced in the process of becoming as fully 'civilized' as whites and thus deserved inclusion in the dominant society. Espoused publicly by organic intellectuals and political leaders within the Coloured community, this interpretation of their history was usually coupled with a plea for fair treatment or the preservation of their status of relative privilege within the South African racial hierarchy.²²

Although there was no attempt from within the Coloured community to produce any formal or systematic account of their history until the latter half of the 1930s, educated and politicized Coloured people nevertheless exhibited a clear sense of the trajectory of their history as a community. This much is evident from Harold Cressy's exhortation to his colleagues to raise the profile of their community's history.²³ Though it had not yet been formalized as a written history, during the earlier part of the twentieth century this historical consciousness can be inferred from Coloured peoples' image of themselves as a community within the broader body politic of South African society, their political ideals as well as their social aspirations and was usually expressed in terms of a common oppression dating back to slavery and the dispossession of the Khoisan. This sense of history was implicit in the endeavours and strategies of Coloured communal organizations and can be deduced piecemeal from a range of evidence in which Coloured people reflected on their community and their status in South African society. This historical consciousness found expression less as an interest in their past for its own sake than it was pressed into service to justify

21 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 14-15 for further discussion of the issue.

22 The best example of a progressionist history is Ziervogel's *Brown South Africa*.

23 See *APO*, 25/9/1909 for a comment of similar import by J. H. Raynard, a prominent member of the APO's Oudtshoorn branch. For an example of where Coloured intellectuals appear to accept the white supremacist version of South African history at face value see *Educational*

social and political demands and support strategies for communal advancement. John Tobin's address to a 'Stone meeting' in November 1903 and Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman's presidential addresses to the 1909, 1923 and 1939 APO conferences are good examples of the progressionist interpretation of Coloured history harnessed to support a particular social or political agenda.²⁴

This popular perception of Coloured history which was implicit in discourse about the community and its past looked back to the period of Dutch colonial rule as a dark night of slavery, savagery and serfdom during which the Coloured people came into being as a result of miscegenation. Abdurahman in 1923 described the Dutch policy of 'conciatie' as having 'always meant, for the Coloured races, the acceptance of servitude'.²⁵ It was the introduction of liberal policies under British rule and the endeavours of missionaries on their behalf that was seen to mark the start of the Coloured people's ascent from servile and brutish origins into the light of civilization. The repeal in 1828 of the vagrancy laws that had enserfed the Khoisan and the emancipation of slaves in 1834 were regarded as the main watershed in the history of the Coloured people because it gave them personal freedom and the opportunity of cultivating a communal life. The establishment of the principle of equality in the eyes of the law and the introduction of a non-racial franchise in 1853 was viewed as the other key development because it bestowed citizenship rights upon them and provided a means for their integration into the mainstream of Cape colonial society. In the words of Abdurahman during his 1939 presidential address to the APO, 'The Ordinance (50 of 1828) was the real foundation of the broad political framework of

24 *Journal*, 6/1916.
South African News, 28/11/1903; *APO* 24/5/1909; 21/4/1923; 19/5/1923; R. van der Ross, 'Say it out Loud': *The APO presidential addresses and other major political speeches, 1906-1940, of Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman*, (Bellville, University of the Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, 1990), 106-17.

1852 (sic) within which White and Coloured were joined together by a bond of loyalty as free and equal citizens.²⁶ Their conversion to Christianity, acquisition of education and assimilation to Western culture was presented as proof of their on-going integration into the civic life of the Cape Colony until Unification, which allowed the triumph of northern racism over southern liberalism, reversed this process. Dr. Abdurahman summed up the course of this history in his 1923 Presidential Address; 'Since van Riebeeck's day there was a period of bitter struggle, then followed a period of comparative tranquility and hopefulness in the Cape... from 1854 to 1910 during which years the Non-European races enjoyed political privileges.' After that, however, 'the policy of van Riebeeck has been steadily, vigorously, and relentlessly followed.'²⁷

The earliest known attempt from within the Coloured community itself to provide an account of the history of the Coloured people is to be found in a history textbook entitled *The Student Teacher's History Course: For the use in Coloured training colleges*, published in 1936 by two relatively junior members of the Coloured teaching profession, Dorothy Hendricks and Christian Viljoen.²⁸ Hendricks was the daughter of Teachers' League of South Africa stalwart Fred Hendricks and lectured at the Zonnebloem Training College. The twenty six year old Viljoen, who taught at the Athlone Institute, a Coloured teachers' training college in Paarl, was to become a leading member of the Teachers' League, serving on its executive committee in the late 1930s and elected president in 1941.²⁹ Hendricks, who had Bachelor of Arts and

25 APO, 21/4/1923.

26 Van der Ross, 'Say it out Loud', 107.

27 Van der Ross, 'Say it out Loud', 75. This did not necessarily contradict Abdurahman's progressionist vision because he saw these reverses as temporary and was confident that 'right' would ultimately prevail.

28 D. W. Hendricks and C. J. Viljoen, *Student Teacher's History Course: For the use in Coloured training colleges*, (Paarl, Huguenot Drukkery, 1936).

29 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 66, 185.

Bachelor of Education degrees, and Viljoen, with a Masters of Arts and Bachelor of Education degrees, were not only very highly qualified by the standards of their community at the time but also held amongst the most prestigious teaching posts to which Coloured people could aspire.

The textbook, following the history syllabus for training Coloured primary school teachers, provided a broad outline of modern European, British imperial and South African history from 1652 through till the 1930s. Interspersed in the section on the history of South Africa are short sub-sections on Coloured history, which if stitched together, would provide a coherent sketch of the history of the Coloured people.³⁰ Hendricks and Viljoen's rendition of South African history conformed to white settler views as one would expect of a textbook diligently following the syllabus set out by the Cape Education Department. Accordingly, the writing on the history of the Coloured community was suffused with the phraseology and perceptions of white supremacist discourse.

The authors largely accepted settler stereotyping of the indigenous peoples in that they present the 'Bushmen' as primitive, dangerous and essentially unassimilable while the 'Hottentots' are described as an incorrigibly lazy and thieving people. Slaves are depicted as having adapted well to civilized life under the paternalistic care of colonists and the relatively benign conditions of the Cape economy.³¹ They follow the customary line that miscegenation and a limited degree of inter-racial marriage from early on gave rise to a 'half-breed' population that formed the nucleus of 'a new race that was emerging'. They claim that; 'This hybrid race, together with pure-

30 The South African history section is covered by pages 150-251 while the sub-sections relevant to Coloured history are to be found on pages 157-61, 169-70, 192-99, 240-41.

31 Hendricks and Viljoen, *Student Teacher's History Course*, 158, 169-70, 192.

blooded slaves and detribalized Hottentots, became known as the Cape Coloured people and gradually developed more and more homogeneity as they became subjected to positive and constructive forces of European society.³² According to Hendricks and Viljoen the emergent Coloured race benefited not only from the conscious civilizing efforts of the colonists but also from 'the unconscious influence of example and suggestion which acted with peculiar power upon an imitative and susceptible race.'³³

The authors assert that with the emancipation of the Khoi in 1828 and then of slaves in 1834 the Coloured people 'entered a new era of development... to work out their own salvation, to rise as a class or revert to barbarism'.³⁴ By 1834 the Coloured people are seen to have come into existence as an identifiable race for 'when emancipation took place they had already developed the physical and psychological characteristics which they today exhibit.'³⁵ Not able to adapt well to the competitive environment engendered by the mineral revolution the Coloured people 'remained hewers of wood and drawers of water.' Hendricks and Viljoen go on to declare that they then 'gradually began to develop into a distinct community and withdraw to the slums and locations (where) the church continued to take care of them.'³⁶

This abject complicity in the denigration of their own community was clearly in part the result of the authors' need to comply with the syllabus for their text to be accepted as a course reader. Although there is only the slightest trace of the progressionist vision in this book there can be little doubt that Hendricks and Viljoen, being typical

32 Hendricks and Viljoen, *Student Teacher's History Course*, 158-60.
 33 Hendricks and Viljoen, *Student Teacher's History Course*, 160.
 34 Hendricks and Viljoen, *Student Teacher's History Course*, 199.
 35 Hendricks and Viljoen, *Student Teacher's History Course*, 240.
 36 Hendricks and Viljoen, *Student Teacher's History Course*, 241.

members of the moderate faction within Coloured politics, subscribed to this view but were prepared to suppress it for the sake of having the volume approved as a textbook for Coloured teacher training colleges. Their meek conformity with the expectations of the Education Department is also an indication of Coloured marginality as negotiation with its officials or any form of protest or assertive action on their part would have been futile.³⁷ The only alternative was not to publish at all. A controversy involving Viljoen in the very same year this book was published underscores Coloured marginality and the arrogance of the Education Department toward the Coloured teaching profession. With his excellent qualifications and reputation as a brilliant teacher Viljoen was appointed principal of the Rhenish Teachers' Training College for Coloured students in Worcester by its governing committee. This caused a stir amongst whites in the town because it meant that Viljoen would be in charge of the eight white teachers who taught at the college. The Education Department's decision to veto Viljoen's appointment to rescue these white teachers from an embarrassing situation caused widespread outrage in the Coloured teaching profession and the community as a whole.³⁸

That Hendricks and Viljoen, in line with the progressionist vision, would presumably have believed that the Coloured people were indeed 'backward' and had relatively recently emerged from a barbarous past probably helped make their distasteful task a little easier. And, at the very least in the case of Hendricks, a personal identification with whiteness and dissociation with Colouredness played a role. Ralphe Bunche, an African-American professor of political science at Howard University who spent three months travelling through South Africa toward the end of 1937, reported that a Miss Hendricks, 'a coloured teacher at Zonnebloem from a recognized coloured family...

37 See Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 116-28.

though known to staff as coloured, has nothing to do with coloured people.’ He relates that when she one day cautioned her students ‘you coloured people shouldn’t colour your nails’ one boy responded ‘Shouldn’t you say “we coloured people” Miss Hendricks?’³⁹

Corroborating evidence that the authors did not fully accept the negative picture of the Coloured people painted in this textbook comes from an earlier publication of Viljoen’s co-authored with one P. Hartzenberg, a colleague with whom Viljoen shared the history teaching at the Athlone Institute. In this privately published volume entitled *History: Summary and notes*, a significantly more sympathetic, though nevertheless still highly racist and derogatory, picture of the Khoi and San are painted.⁴⁰ This book, which consisted of a summary and course notes for the Primary Lower First Year Course in History at Coloured teacher training colleges, offered some positive comment on the Khoisan peoples and tried to explain that aspects of their supposedly negative behaviour were rational when taking their circumstances and likely point of view into account.⁴¹ Students, furthermore, were cautioned that it was difficult to give an accurate and unprejudiced account of the indigenous peoples as all descriptions were ‘from the pens of Europeans.’⁴²

While there is no indication whether Hendricks and Viljoen’s volume was approved as a textbook or how widely it was used, one thing is clear, though. To the extent that it was taught in Coloured training colleges and schools, their version of Coloured

38 *Educational Journal*, 8/1936; *Sun*, 3/7/1936, 10/7/1936; *Cape Standard*, 29/6/1936, 6/7/1936.

39 R. Edgar, *An African American in South Africa: The travel notes of Ralph Bunche*, (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1992), 96.

40 C. Viljoen and P. Hartzenberg, *History: Summary and notes*, (Paarl, private publication, 1933), 3-7, 104-05. This book does not provide an account of the history of the Coloured people. It does, however, have a section on the history of Coloured teacher training in South Africa.

41 Viljoen and Hartzenberg, *History*, 3-7.

history is representative of what Coloured teacher trainees were fed and in turn passed on to their pupils.⁴³ It would have taken a degree of independence of mind and politicization for individuals to have developed an alternative vision to the racist propaganda dished up in school history lessons during the period under consideration. That most Coloured pupils exposed to this white supremacist version of their history would develop an alternative perspective could not be taken for granted until perhaps the latter phases of the apartheid period when alternative visions took popular root.⁴⁴

A late 1930s progressionist interpretation

Because of the schematic nature of Hendricks and Viljoen's outline history and because of the constraints placed on their interpretation by the need to conform to the syllabus, Christian Ziervogel's *Brown South Africa*⁴⁵, a slim volume which appeared a mere two years later, deserves recognition as the first history of the Coloured people to have been written by a Coloured person. An autodidact, who had worked his way up from humble origins, Ziervogel devoted his energies to the spiritual, cultural and socio-economic upliftment of the Coloured community, particularly in District Six.⁴⁶

42 Viljoen and Hartzenberg, *History*, 3-4.

43 I have a very clear memory of having been taught this sort of racist history in primary school during the 1960s by teachers who, whether they accepted these ideas or not, were obliged to 'follow the syllabus'. I also recall attempts by high school teachers in Coloured schools during the latter half of the 1970s to teach the 'real history' alongside the syllabus 'for exam purposes'. Predictably, these attempts generally failed because most students confused the two versions. See also B. Nasson, 'The Unity Movement: Its legacy in historical consciousness' in *Radical History Review*, Vols. 46-47, 1990, 189-90, 195-96.

44 A. Odendaal, 'Developments in popular history in the Western Cape in the 1980s', *Radical History Review*, Vols. 46-47, 1990, 369-75; L. Witz, 'The "Write Your Own History" project', *Radical History Review*, Vols. 46-47, 1990, 377-79. R. H. du Pre, *The Making of Racial Conflict in South Africa*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1990), viii.

45 C. Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, 1938). Where the bibliographical details of a work cited considerably earlier in the text might be of significance, the details are repeated for the convenience of the reader.

46 In addition to working as librarian, Ziervogel served as lay preacher and part-time social worker. According to the *Cape Standard*, 14/2/1939, he, in addition, initiated the Circle of Fifteen, a discussion club, was a founder member of the Cape Literary and Debating Society, established the Western Province Boxing and Physical Culture Club and was the prime mover behind the Social Welfare Group.

He was a noted bibliophile and worked as librarian at the Hyman Liberman Institute⁴⁷ in District Six at the time his book was written. He had a reputation as one of the leading Coloured intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s and was nicknamed the 'Professor of District Six'.⁴⁸ In this book he writes self-consciously as a Coloured intellectual deliberating on the history and current status of his community.⁴⁹ Ziervogel also authored a number of pamphlets and newspaper articles on the Coloured community, parts of which were incorporated into *Brown South Africa*.⁵⁰

Ziervogel is an enigmatic and contradictory figure. On the one hand he was active in left-wing circles, supporting the National Liberation League and contributing to its journal, *The Liberator*.⁵¹ He confided to Ralph Bunche that he not only had "'left' inclinations' but also 'hates white people and can't help it'.⁵² Yet, *Brown South Africa* as well as his other publications are politically conservative, racist in outlook and, although critical of white supremacism, nevertheless deferential toward white authority. His work, moreover, contains not the slightest trace of class analysis or radical rhetoric of the sort that could ordinarily have been expected from one with left-wing sympathies. In tone and content the book is typical of moderate, assimilationist discourse within the Coloured elite. And, in keeping with the moderate political agenda, a key objective of the book was to plead for fair treatment of the

47 The Hyman Liberman Institute was set up as a community centre for the poorer residents of Cape Town in 1934 by the Cape Town City Council with a bequest from Hyman Liberman, a Polish immigrant who became a prominent Cape Town merchant and served as mayor between 1904 and 1907. The Institute, to which Ziervogel donated his entire collection of 3000 volumes, included a reading room, a nursery school and hosted various sporting, cultural and recreational activities. Edgar, *Ralph Bunche*, 333. Bickford Smith et al., *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1999), 84.

48 For biographical information on Ziervogel see *Christian Science Monitor*, 6/6/1934; *Cape Standard*, 5/7/1937, 14/2/1939; G. Manuel, *Kampvegters*, (Cape Town, Nasou, 1967), 32-37.

49 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, preface.

50 The pamphlets he wrote include *The Coloured People and the Race Problem*, (Ceres Weber, 1936); *Know This - Brown South Africa*, (Cape Town, private publication, 1939); *Who are the Coloured People*, (Cape Town, The African Bookman, 1944).

51 M. Adhikari, (ed.), *Jimmy La Guma: A biography by Alex La Guma*, (Cape Town, Friends of the South African Library, 1997), 58; *Liberator*, 2-3/1937.

Coloured community and for help with their upliftment from whites.

Ziervogel's use of the term 'brown' in the title signals his acceptance of the racial hierarchy of South African society and the Coloured people's intermediate status within it. It also implies that he perceived of Coloured people as a product of miscegenation. Indeed, he regarded the term 'coloured' to be inaccurate and preferred 'brown hybrid'.⁵³ Ziervogel's interpretation differs little from white supremacist versions of Coloured history in broad principle except that he weaves a strongly progressionist strand into his narrative arguing that racial differences should, at least in the case of Coloured people, not lead to their exclusion from the dominant society. The contorted logic and profoundly racist assumptions that at times informs Ziervogel's tract can be gauged from his explanation of why various sections of the Coloured community could be expected to develop at different rates;

The hybrids of South Africa, the coloured people, are in many cases partly descended from English people, and must of necessity have inherited some of the virtues of that race. Hence, though they are comparatively backward at the present time, it is reasonable to suppose that it will not take them nine centuries to reach their ancestors' high standard of development. Those descended from Asiatics will naturally develop in accordance with the stage of development previously reached by their ancestral race. That is, the people of Indian descent will develop more rapidly than those of Javanese descent, since the former come from a stock where there has been greater enlightenment. On the other hand, the hybrids of Bantu origin cannot be expected to develop as rapidly as others, since the degree of development reached by the Bantu is not equal to that of the Europeans or the Asiatics.⁵⁴

All this despite the author's declared standpoint that 'humanity is greater than race', that "'pure races" are hypothetical... and have no present existence' and his rejection of the 'Nordic Myth' of Aryan superiority.⁵⁵

52 Edgar, *Ralphe Bunche*, 78-79.

53 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 19-20.

54 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 21-22.

55 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 86, 29. Not only is Ziervogel's writing riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions but it is also discursive to the extent that the outline of his argument presented here gives a false sense of its coherence.

Ziervogel's interpretation of the history of the Coloured people not only typifies the progressionist vision but is the most comprehensive and fully developed example from this paradigm. Its appearance was also conveniently timed, coming as it did at the point when Marxist-inspired views of this history were about to challenge the conventional wisdom. The unifying thread of his none-too-coherent and often rather vague narrative is the persistent struggle of the Coloured people to rise from a benighted past to ever higher levels of civilization, their distinctive characteristic as a people being that they were 'constantly responsive' to the 'progressive' influence of Western civilization.⁵⁶

Brown South Africa follows the conventional pattern of having the Coloured people originate as a result of miscegenation during the Dutch colonial period, describing van Riebeeck's landing as 'the beginning of White South Africa, and also of Brown South Africa'.⁵⁷ He regarded the emancipation of slaves as pivotal to the emergence of a specifically Coloured identity although he gives no explanation of how Coloured identity came about, offering no more than; '...before and after 1834, the half-castes, Hottentots and slaves were merged together as the Cape Coloured people.'⁵⁸ The real significance of emancipation for Ziervogel was that it 'released coloured energies for self-improvement and ambition up to then repressed by social injustices.' Their newfound status as free citizens gave them the incentive to profit from their own effort and aroused a quest 'for education, the acquiring of property and the cultivation of the mind.'⁵⁹ And although at first 'mental and spiritual progress' was slow, with the help of sympathetic whites the Coloured people always managed to find ways of

56 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 22.

57 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 6, 10.

58 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 15.

overcoming obstacles - not least of which were legal impediments imposed by the colonial government - to their 'upward course in the common life of South Africa.'⁶⁰

Ziervogel saw Coloured people as having been well on their way to being integrated into the dominant society on an equal footing with colonists by the mid-nineteenth century when the 'strong rush of the Bantu peoples sweeping downwards from the north, and the European advance upward from the south, meant that the two virile forces came face to face'.⁶¹ The ensuing struggle for supremacy and the growing incorporation of Africans into the South African economy after the discovery of minerals instilled a 'fear complex in whites'. The consequent hardening of racial prejudices not only put an end to Coloured integration into the dominant society but reversed the trend to the extent that in the twentieth century they had fallen victim to white South Africa's segregationist policies.⁶²

The author accepted that the Coloured people were 'comparatively backward at the present time' but rejected the view of racists such as Sarah Gertrude Millin who regarded this condition as permanent.⁶³ He asserted that during nearly three centuries of miscegenation and acculturation 'this half-caste type has evolved into something very like the Southern Europeans'.⁶⁴ Despite obstacles in their path the Coloured people had made great strides in the last generation and were rapidly catching up with whites. He viewed educated Coloureds as a dynamic, modernizing group fully imbued with the 'spirit of civilization' and the most progressive elements of western culture.⁶⁵

59 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 23.

60 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 22, 32.

61 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 49.

62 Ziervogel later identified the implementation of Union in 1910 as the critical turning point in this regard. See Ziervogel, *Who are the Coloured People*, 12-13.

63 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 21, 24, 59-60; Ziervogel, *Race Problems*, 8.

64 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 18.

65 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 25-26.

He thus resented white perceptions that 'the coloured man is only fit to be a messenger or a hawker'⁶⁶ and the tendency not to judge Coloured people as individuals but to make the automatic assumption that they were 'a representative of an inferior race, whose most striking characteristics are those of lower intelligence, lower knowledge and lower general constitution.'⁶⁷ Ziervogel was also frustrated by the indifference of the state and whites in general to the plight of the Coloured working classes living in squalor and the detrimental effect of the civilized labour policy and other discriminatory measures on their progress as a people.⁶⁸ His views thus resonated much more strongly with the conservatism of the APO and the Teachers' League than the radicalism of the National Liberation League.

Writing in a context of intensifying racial chauvinism internationally and tightening segregationism at home, Ziervogel feared that Coloureds could suffer a fate similar to that of Africans and perhaps even find themselves subject to territorial segregation. He was thus at pains to stress the long history and cultural affinities that Coloured people shared with whites. Although he did not broach the issue directly in *Brown South Africa*, in his pamphlet 'The coloured people and the race problem' published two years earlier, he explicitly raised the question of 'on which side of the dividing line is he (the coloured man) to be placed?' After making the point that in many cases it was difficult to distinguish between Coloured and white people, he argued that Coloured people;

have practically nothing in common with the Bantu. While the Native is one who is at home in the countryside, has a language of his own, a culture of his own, and lives in many cases under tribal law, the coloured people came into

66 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 25. Significantly, Ziervogel had worked as both messenger and hawker in his youth. He had also served as wagon driver, shop assistant and bottle washer before working his way up to travelling salesman, foreman and then general manager in the firm J. Milner and Son. *Cape Standard*, 14/2/1939.

67 Ziervogel, *Race Problems*, 8.

68 Ziervogel, *Brown South Africa*, 73-80.

being and live the whole of their lives in the midst of European civilization and culture.⁶⁹

On this basis he invoked the call attributed to Lord Selborne, High Commissioner for South Africa from 1905 to 1910; 'Give the coloured people the benefit of their white blood' and appealed for 'absorption' and not segregation to be the solution to the 'Coloured problem'.⁷⁰

By 1944, however, Ziervogel had changed his outlook completely, asserting in the concluding sentence to his pamphlet, *Who are the Coloured People*, that 'Freedom is not likely to come to the Coloured people if it does not come to all other Non-Europeans in South Africa.'⁷¹ The probable reason for this change of heart was the profound effect that the controversy over the establishment of the Coloured Affairs Council in 1943 and the consequent founding of the Anti-CAD and Non-European Unity Movement had on political opinion within the Coloured community.⁷²

Radical counter-positions of the 1940s and 1950s

It was fully forty three years after the publication of *Brown South Africa* that the next significant book on the history of the Coloured community by a 'Coloured'⁷³ author - Maurice Hommel's *Capricorn Blues* - was to appear. Meanwhile, during the 1940s and 1950s, the radical movement in Coloured politics developed an alternative interpretation of Coloured history to the progressionist version. It is this competing

59 Ziervogel, *Race Problems*, 5.

70 Ziervogel, *Race Problems*, 6.

71 Ziervogel, *Coloured People*, 16.

72 Eddie Roux, general editor of this particular series of booklets, may also have influenced the views expressed by Ziervogel.

73 Quotation marks have been used in this instance because Hommel rejects the label Coloured which he sees as having a 'derogatory connotation', Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 1. Because he once identified himself as Coloured and would generally be accepted as Coloured in the South African context, Hommel qualifies as a Coloured author for the purposes of this study. Quotation marks will not be used in subsequent references to Hommel as Coloured. Their rejection of Coloured identity by other authors in a similar position will also be signalled in

vision of the Coloured past and associated writing that Hommel's study would draw on and assimilate into a political history of the Coloured people.

The elaboration of an alternative version of Coloured history was spear-headed by intellectuals within the Trotskyist tradition of radical politics of which the Non-European Unity Movement and the Fourth International Organization of South Africa (FIOSA) were the main factions during the 1940s.⁷⁴ The rival tradition, allied to the Communist Party and later the Congress Movement, made little contribution to the fleshing out of this conception, either by way of debate or written discourse, though they would have shared the broad radical vision based on common Marxist principles. With their emphasis on political activism, the Communist Party faction appears to have been too caught up in the cut and thrust of day-to-day politicking to pay too much attention to abstractions such as the history of the Coloured community. Deliberations over the significance of history and debate over the implications of South Africa's past for current and future revolutionary strategy suited the more highly theorized and cerebral approach of the Trotskyists. Coloured political activists in this tradition were much more conscious of the precept expressed by FIOSA member, Kenneth Jordaan, that 'in history (lies) the key to understanding the present which in turn is the indispensable guide to the future.'⁷⁵

Radical perceptions of Coloured history covered a spectrum of political opinion

this way.

- 74 For discussion of the Trotskyist tradition of the South African left see Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, ch. 7; A. Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A documentary history*, Vol. I, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, Mayebuye Books and UCT Press, 1996), Part Four; B. Hirson, 'A short history of the Non-European Unity Movement - an insider's view', *Searchlight South Africa*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1993; R. Kayser, 'The struggle for land and liberty in South Africa: The revolutionary path of the Non-European Unity Movement of South Africa, 1933-1970', (B. A. Hons. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1997).
- 75 K. Jordaan, 'The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa - by W. P. van Schoor. A Critique', *Discussion*, Vol. 1, No. 3, June 1951, 13.

ranging from the black nationalism of Jimmy La Guma to the rigorous Trotskyism of an intellectual such as Jordaan. Like its progressionist counterpart, the radical view of the trajectory of Coloured history was implicit in the ideology and aspirations of the left-wing movement as well as in its political strategy. In addition, this historical consciousness was at times invoked for political purposes such as arguing that black unity was a prerequisite for overthrowing South African 'herrenvolkism' or to score points off each other in ideological in-fighting. The best example of such an exchange involving the history of the Coloured people is Kenny Jordaan's riposte to Willem van Schoor's history of segregation in South Africa.⁷⁶ Besides wanting to refine the relatively crude analysis of van Schoor, Jordaan was also clearly engaged in a contest of one-upmanship between FIOSA and the NEUM, of which van Schoor, president of the TLSA for much of the 1950s, was a leading member.

This radical discourse, however, differed from the progressionist interpretation in that little attention was paid directly or exclusively to the history of the Coloured people per se and did not find expression in a focused history in the way *Brown South Africa* came to represent the progressionist view. Drawing on Marxist theory, radical historical analyses were usually situated within a framework of international capitalism and developments within imperialism.⁷⁷ In contrast to the more parochial concerns of the progressionist view, social issues tended to be viewed in the context of global relations and world history.⁷⁸ And, given their explicit goal of promoting

76 See W. P. van Schoor, *Development of Segregation* and Jordaan, 'Critique of van Schoor'. Jordaan's 'Jan van Riebeeck' article is also a critique of aspects of NEUM interpretations of South African history.

77 Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 2 makes the point that, 'Socialism, especially Marxist socialism, sees itself as an international movement in opposition to the international capitalist system.

78 Good examples are provided by B. M. Kies, *The Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to World Civilization*, (Cape Town, Teachers' League of South Africa, 1953) and E. Maurice, *The Colour Bar in Education*, (Cape Town, Teachers' League of South Africa, 1957). Both are reproduced in M. Hommel, (ed.), *Contributions of Non-European Peoples to World Civilization*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1989).

black unity, radical reflections on South African society and its history by and large transcended narrower issues relating to localized identities such as the specific role or significance of the Coloured people on any particular question. This emphasis on black unity was a matter both of strategy as well as of political correctness for left-wing ideologues. And, more importantly, their principled stance on black and working class unity discouraged separate consideration of the Coloured community.

In the writings of radical Coloured intellectuals, issues relating specifically to the Coloured community were therefore either ignored, subsumed under a broader black rubric or were referred to obliquely or parenthetically. The collective radical perception of the history of the Coloured people thus needs to be unravelled and extracted by inference from broader analyses of the history of South Africa or of the 'oppressed'.

Although Coloured radical politics has been rent by fierce ideological in-fighting and irreconcilable doctrinal splits, there was nevertheless sufficient common ground for one to discern the existence of a generic radical notion of the history of the Coloured people. The spirit with which Coloured activists in the radical movement, especially the Trotskyist faction, approached history in general, and the history of South Africa in particular, is neatly summed up in the opening and closing sentences of Willem van Schoor's address on segregation to the Teachers' League of South Africa in October 1950; 'A people desiring to emancipate itself must understand the process of its enslavement.' He went on to explain that; 'We who have thus far been the victims of South African history, will play the major role in the shaping of a new history. In order to make that history we must understand that history.'⁷⁹ Radicals would also

79 W. P. van Schoor, *The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa*,

have shared Edgar Maurice's instrumentalist, if not conspiratorial, view that 'The phenomenon of colour prejudice and the colour bar is largely one of capitalist exploitation of peoples... a purposeful social instrument, politically manufactured to serve certain ends.'⁸⁰ Radical historical writing in so far as it referred to the Coloured people was framed in these broad terms.

Historical analyses by radical Coloured intellectuals, while recognizing the existence of the Coloured people as a separate social entity, avoided treating them as an analytical category distinct from the African majority. Van Schoor's monograph on the origin and development of segregation in South Africa, for example, focuses almost entirely on the African experience and hardly makes any mention of Coloureds and Indians. It is noteworthy that in this review of South African history stretching back to the arrival of van Riebeeck, the first substantive comment by van Schoor on the Coloured people relates to the establishment of the Coloured Advisory Council in 1943. He indirectly justified this approach by claiming that Africans formed a large majority of the oppressed and that exploitative measures had largely been directed at them.⁸¹

Jordaan criticized this tendency of 'placing the Cape Coloured people in the same category as the Bantu' as ahistorical and a distortion of the past.⁸² It should thus come as no surprise that it is in Jordaan's writing that one finds the most explicit treatment of the history of the Coloured people in radical writing. But even he does not address the history of the Coloured people directly as an independent topic of enquiry. In his

(Cumberwood, APDUSA, 1986), 7, 32.

80 Maurice, 'Colour bar' in Hommel, *World Civilization*, 82.

81 Van Schoor, *Development of Segregation*, (1986), 20.

82 Jordaan, 'Critique of van Schoor', 19.

disquisition, 'Jan van Riebeeck: His place in South African history',⁸³ Jordaan chalks out the barest outline of the history of the Coloured people as a by-product of his analysis of the 'social systems'⁸⁴ that have characterized South African history and a concomitant attempt to provide a rough periodization of the South African past.⁸⁵ Besides using his analysis to support the call for a boycott of the van Riebeeck tercentenary festival, one of Jordaan's aims was to correct ahistorical perceptions that the treatment of South African blacks through history can be explained in terms of an abstract, uniform white racism. He wanted to demonstrate that each social system had its own set of policies 'toward the black and mixed people' grounded in their specific 'living historical reality which grew out of a definitive stage in the productive process.'⁸⁶ For all its sketchiness, Jordaan's text will have to serve as the model for the radical perception of Coloured history in the absence of any other more explicit example.

Born in Cape Town in 1924 and a teacher by profession, Kenneth Jordaan was a prominent member of FIOSA in the latter half of the 1940s. Jordaan, together with a small band of associates who declined to comply with the Fourth International's recommendation that FIOSA amalgamate with a rival Cape Town Trotskyist grouping, the Worker's Party of South Africa, formed the Forum Club, an independent left wing discussion group that met during the early 1950s. During the 1950s Jordaan won broad respect in left-wing circles for a number of theoretical papers he wrote on the nature of South African history and its implications for revolutionary strategy. He went into exile in 1964, living first in London and after

83 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 21-35.

84 Jordaan identifies four social systems, apart from the 'primitive tribalism' of precapitalist African societies, in South Africa, each with its own social and political systems and methods of production, exchange and distribution. By 'social system' Jordaan meant something akin to the concept of mode of production elaborated by left-wing scholars in the 1970s.

1981 in Harare where he died in 1988.⁸⁷

The first social system of South African history identified by Jordaan existed during the era of Company rule at the Cape that lasted from 1652 till 1795. He claims that because the Cape served mainly as a refreshment station and military outpost, the economy was not expansionist and there was no attempt to bring indigenous peoples under direct Dutch control. Because of the colony's simple social organization and its imperative of consolidating control over the southwestern tip of the continent, Jordaan claims that 'there was no colour policy' and Cape colonial society 'absorbed all mixed elements - the result of miscegenation between whites, blacks and imported slaves.'⁸⁸ Jordaan is emphatic about the miscegenated origins of the Coloured people and that they were an integral part of Dutch colonial society; 'The father of the Cape Coloured people is therefore van Riebeeck. It is he who, by encouraging mixed unions, called them to life and it is he who, realizing their close affinity to the Dutch, made them an indissoluble and indistinguishable part of the European population.'⁸⁹ Although he indicates that substantial numbers of miscegenes passed into the settler community, he does not explain how and why the rest of this supposedly 'indistinguishable part of the European population' nevertheless remained separate.

According to Jordaan, the second stage of South Africa's development, which lasted from 1795 to 1872, was dominated by the ideology of British liberalism. Under this social system the integration of Coloured people was taken further in that 'all the

85 K. Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 23-24.

86 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 23.

87 For biographical information on Jordaan see B. Hirson, 'A question of class: The writings of Kenneth A. Jordaan', *Searchlight*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1989, 21-22; A. Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A documentary history*, Vol. II, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, Mayebuye Books, UCT Press, 1997), 14, 60. *Discussion* was the journal of the Forum Club.

88 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 23.

89 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 34

Coloureds and detribalized Hottentots were assimilated into European society on the basis of complete legal and political equality for all.⁹⁰ At the same time that black people were being integrated into Cape society a third social system that implemented a rigid constitutional colour bar co-existed in the Boer republics. Jordaan characterizes this system, which he sees as having lasted from 1836 till 1870, as consisting of isolated, and isolationist, peasant communities.

Then from 1870, argues Jordaan, 'the entire face of South Africa was radically transformed by the discovery of gold and diamonds which heralded the Industrial Revolution.'⁹¹ With the introduction of wage labour and industrial methods of production the relationship between white and black, employer and employee changed as all pre-existing social systems were rapidly eroded and the integration of Coloured people into the dominant society was reversed with the introduction of segregationist policies to facilitate the exploitation of black labour. Jordaan does not pursue the point any further, making it clear that his concern in this essay was with pre-industrial South African society.⁹²

What is most striking when comparing progressionist and radical visions of Coloured history are the similarities they share despite a vitriolic mutual antagonism and the ideological gulf that separated them. That both accepted the Coloured people as originating from miscegenation during the earliest days of Dutch rule is an indication of just how hegemonic white supremacist conceptions of Coloured identity were in South African society. Secondly, both see the Coloured people as experiencing a long period of acculturation and incorporation into the dominant society followed by a

90 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 23.

91 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 24.

92 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 24.

sudden reversal leading to twentieth century segregationism. Though the reasons for, and timing of, the about-face differ, the pattern remains consistent. This period of incorporation is presumably necessary to support the perception that Coloured people were the product of miscegenation and to explain their assimilation to Western culture. Finally, the radical view is also progressionist, and even more dogmatically so than its moderate counterpart, in that it followed Marxist doctrine that society would progress through a series of stages culminating in the inevitable achievement of a socialist utopia - only the timing and method of its attainment were in question. Instead of an inner impulse for self-improvement of one such as Ziervogel, amongst radical intellectuals it was the objective conditions of capitalist development that was seen to drive progress.⁹³

A new approach in the early 1980s

The views of Jordaan and other radical theorists had a very limited impact on popular consciousness because debate and discussion of their ideas were confined to a small elite. But these ideas remained alive within this intelligentsia, even through the quiescent heyday of apartheid, and were to feed into the climate of resistance from the mid-1970s onwards. The views of radical theorists, especially those of Jordaan, were to be extremely influential in the writing of Maurice Hommel who took up their ideas and arguments - even verbatim chunks of their writing, some of it unacknowledged - in *Capricorn Blues*.

Maurice Hommel was born in Uitenhage, South Africa, in 1930 where he worked as a teacher and journalist. Claiming he was unable to find suitable employment because of his radical sympathies and his work within the South African Non-Racial Olympic

93 For comment on the progressionism of the socialist movement generally see Drew,

Committee, he emigrated in 1964. Taking up residence first in Zambia and then in the United States and Canada, Hommel made a living as a journalist and writer. He obtained masters and doctoral degrees in political science from Fairfield University, Connecticut, and York University, Toronto, respectively. He went on to lecture at the University of Louisville, Kentucky in the 1980s before returning to South Africa in 1985 where he spent four years teaching at the University of the Western Cape.⁹⁴

Capricorn Blues is based on Hommel's doctoral dissertation.⁹⁵ The book is not so much about 'the struggle for human rights in South Africa' as the volume's sub-title claims but about 'the organization and evolution of Coloured political movements' as its abstract and introduction admit.⁹⁶ Hommel's study represents something of a landmark in the historiography of the Coloured community. Besides being the first book on Coloured history written by a Coloured person in over four decades, it is the first to deploy an instrumentalist argument and to assert that the Coloured people were an integral part of a wider black constituency. These are not original insights as they were derived from the radical critique of coloured separatism dating back to at least the 1920s.⁹⁷ *Capricorn Blues*, however, represents the first time they appear in a formal history.

Discordant Comrades, 1.

94 Biographical information about Professor Hommel, who has since retired to Toronto, was obtained from the back covers of *Capricorn Blues* and Hommel, *World Civilization* and was supplemented through telephonic interviews with Mohamed Adhikari on 28/10/2001 and 21/1/2002.

95 M. Hommel, 'The organization and evolution of coloured political movements in South Africa', (Ph. D. thesis, York University, 1978). The dissertation was not consulted. The reference was obtained by accessing York University's library catalogue via the internet.

96 M. Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, abstract, 1. The book is unconventional in that it has an abstract, presumably taken from the thesis on which it is based. It also has two introductions; one a laudatory piece by poet and film-maker Paul Roubaix and the other by the author. The abstract and first introduction are unpaginated.

97 Activists such as John Gomas and Jimmy La Guma who joined the Communist Party of South Africa, the African National Congress and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union in the early 1920s, for example, espoused these ideas. See, D. Musson, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the working class - A political biography*, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, 1989) chs. 2-4; Adhikari, *Jimmy La Guma*, ch. 2.

The novel feature of the book, however, is that it was the first to switch the focus of Coloured history from narratives of miscegenation and acculturation in pre-industrial South Africa to the evolution of Coloured protest politics in industrializing South Africa. The other major studies of Coloured history published in the 1980s, namely, Van der Ross' *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid* as well as Lewis' *Between the Wire and the Wall*, and to a lesser extent Goldin's *Making Race*, are written from a similar perspective but were not necessarily influenced by Hommel.⁹⁸ It is clear that van der Ross had developed his approach independently of Hommel as his book which appeared in 1986 is based on an extensive, unpublished four volume study started in the late 1960s and completed in 1973.⁹⁹ By all indications, van der Ross was oblivious to the existence of *Capricorn Blues* while producing his 1986 study as it does not appear in his bibliography and he does not in any way engage with Hommel's ideas and arguments which he undoubtedly would have found controversial. Although Hommel's claim that Lewis effectively plagiarized his work cannot be sustained,¹⁰⁰ Lewis certainly did write within a broad framework first adumbrated by Hommel and since he does cite *Capricorn Blues* in his bibliography, it is not unfair to assume that its novel approach to Coloured history would have had some influence on his work.¹⁰¹

Hommel is confused and confusing on exactly what the concept of Colouredness entails. He denies that the Coloured people 'constitute a cultural group distinct from

98 For a comparative evaluation of these three books see M. Adhikari, 'Responses to marginality: Twentieth century Coloured politics', *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, 1988, 115-25.

99 R. van der Ross, 'A political and social history of the Cape Coloured people, 1880-1970', 4 Vols., (unpublished manuscript, University of Cape Town Manuscripts and Archives Division, 1973); *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, preface.

100 The accusation of plagiarism was made in an untaped telephonic conversation with me on 28/10/2001. Hommel claims to have sent David Philip, the publisher of Lewis' book, a letter of complaint but to have received no response.

101 Goldin cites van der Ross but neither Hommel nor Lewis. Oddly enough, Lewis does not cite

the white community' and instead asserts that they are 'best described in terms of their socio-economic characteristics'.¹⁰² This does not make much sense because the Coloured community is far from homogeneous in its socio-economic make-up and how Coloured people are to be distinguished from others of similar socio-economic status is left unexplained. Hommel skirts around racial definitions of Colouredness, it would appear, because of an emphatic rejection of apartheid ideology. He repudiates what he calls 'a genetic analysis' of the role of Coloured people in South African society 'because it mystifies relations between ethnic units in the State' and forms 'part of the ideology of domination'. The 'genetic analysis' he refers to is the apartheid idea that 'the Coloured people constitute a "volk" (people) in their own right, as a nascent nation in the making, requiring a separate and distinct orbit for socio-political development.'¹⁰³

The underlying tenet of Hommel's study, by contrast, is that the Coloured people 'are politically and economically an integral part of the black base on which white domination and privilege rests' and that their liberation 'is contingent on the liberation of the African people with whom their destiny is inextricably bound.'¹⁰⁴ It is around this axiom that Hommel inter-weaves the two principal themes of the book. The first motif is that the formation of separate Coloured political organizations was a consequence of 'the antagonistic response of a group of people opposed to white racism and economic domination'.¹⁰⁵ Hommel argues that racial discrimination, especially from the early twentieth century onwards, forced a separatist strategy onto the Coloured people and that this in turn facilitated the state's divide and rule

van der Ross' manuscript, a remarkable oversight for a diligent researcher.

102 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 2.

103 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 2.

104 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, abstract.

105 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 1.

strategies through 'the imposition of the artificial ethnic State divisions.'¹⁰⁶ The second motif is Hommel's attempt to demonstrate how a combination of deliberately divisive strategies by the state, assimilationist tendencies within the Coloured community and weaknesses within the Coloured political leadership frustrated the fruition of the natural alliance between Coloured and African peoples against white domination. By far the greater emphasis of this study is on the Non-European Unity Movement and its opponents with nearly two thirds of the book devoted to the two and a half decades from the founding of the NEUM in 1943 to the establishment of the 'puppet' Coloured Representative Council by the National Party government in 1969.¹⁰⁷ Although Hommel is critical of the NEUM, his political sympathies very clearly lie with the Trotskyist tradition in radical Coloured politics.¹⁰⁸

Hommel starts off his account with the conventional line that 'the arrival of the first white person from Europe was, in fact, the beginning of the evolution of the Coloured people' and refers to Jan van Riebeeck as the 'father of the Coloured people.'¹⁰⁹ The introductory chapter, which is heavily dependent on Kenny Jordaan's 'van Riebeeck' treatise, covers the period from the landing of van Riebeeck through to the early twentieth century. It has very little to say about the origins and history of the Coloured people and is used instead to sketch out the consolidation of white domination in South Africa. Exactly how his claim that the Coloured people originated as a result of miscegenation in the mid-seventeenth century squares with his insistence that an 'artificial' Coloured ethnicity was imposed on society by the white supremacist state

106 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 1.

107 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 1-72 is devoted to the period prior to 1943 and 73-181 to the period from 1943 to 1969.

108 These sympathies are openly expressed in Hommel, *World Civilization*, see especially xii-xx. This book consists of a collection of five key essays by intellectuals in the Trotskyist tradition.

109 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 8, 10.

in the twentieth century, is never made clear.¹¹⁰ That there is a contradiction in his analysis appears to have escaped Hommel.

Where Hommel parts company with previous histories is by following Jordaan's insistence that a new set of socio-economic conditions engendered by the mineral revolution rather than a process of historical evolution dating from the first landing of the Dutch at the Cape, shaped twentieth century racial antagonisms in South Africa.¹¹¹ His focus being the evolution of Coloured political organization, Hommel's analysis proper starts with the founding of the African Political Organization in 1902. He depicts the APO as vacillating between making common cause with Africans and the deluded idea that it could advance Coloured interests on its own. The political weakness of the APO and the flawed leadership of the charismatic but ambitious Abduraman, according to Hommel, led the APO into political compromise and the blind alley of reformist politics that failed to deliver any gains for the Coloured people.¹¹² In the meantime, especially from the mid-1920s onwards a reactionary and divisive tendency that Hommel refers to as 'Colouredism' arose as a result of false promises of Coloured assimilation into the white community made by Hertzog's Pact government.¹¹³ He then goes on to assert that during the 1930s the emergence of 'a new radicalism on the part of the sons and daughters of the APO's founding fathers' polarized Coloured politics. This cleavage became particularly acute when the Smuts ministry announced the formation of the Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) in 1943 which Hommel conspiratorially sees as a deliberate attempt to sap the strength of the liberatory movement by smothering its most progressive element, the Coloured

110 Compare for example, Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 1 with 8 and 10.

111 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 16-22.

112 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, ch. 2.

113 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 56-59.

intelligentsia.¹¹⁴

On the one side of this rift there were the 'conservative integrationists' represented by the Coloured People's National Union (CPNU), founded in 1944 in response to the radical take-over of the APO. The CPNU argued in favour of collaboration and using segregated institutions to advance the Coloured cause.¹¹⁵ On the other side there was the NEUM which rejected any form of collaboration with the ruling group and advocated a total boycott of all racially segregated bodies.¹¹⁶ The achilles heel of the NEUM, Hommel argues, was the predominance of teachers in its leadership corps. Intimidation by the state and fear that they would lose their jobs prevented NEUM leaders from translating its revolutionary programme into political action.¹¹⁷ During the 1950s fierce ideological disputes leading to schism within the radical left, the removal of Coloureds from the common voter's roll in 1956 and intensified political repression emasculated Coloured resistance to apartheid even before the quelling of extra-parliamentary opposition in the wake of the Sharpeville shootings. With the passing of the Prohibition of Political Interference Act of 1968 that outlawed formal inter-racial political co-operation and with the inauguration of the 'dummy' Coloured Advisory Council in 1969, the apartheid state is completely in the ascendent when Hommel draws his study to a close.¹¹⁸

Despite being based on a doctoral dissertation, Hommel's study has several serious flaws and can hardly be described as scholarly. There are substantial lacunae in his narrative of Coloured political history, particularly in the period prior to 1943, as a

114 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 73 ff.

115 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 90-92.

116 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 92-98.

117 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 99-101.

118 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, ch. 6.

reading of van der Ross or Lewis' studies will confirm.¹¹⁹ The book is heavily reliant on a limited selection of secondary sources and contemporary political tracts with works by Jordaan, Simons and Simons and Tabata featuring prominently.¹²⁰ There are times when sizeable sections of Hommel's writing does little more than summarize one or two secondary sources. Hommel's lack of primary research shows in his decidedly eccentric interpretation of a range of issues and developments in Coloured political history which cannot be sustained by the evidence. His interpretations of both the APO and ANB are cases in point. The book, moreover, is poorly structured and extremely repetitious.

A most objectionable feature of Hommel's book is his unacknowledged appropriation of other peoples' writing. The similarity of a key sentence in Hommel's book;

'In every social system based on privilege, the privileged rationalize their position in an attempt to give meaning, purpose and protection to their ranking'¹²¹

with the opening lines to Kies' *The Contribution of Non-European Peoples to World Civilization*;

'In every social system based on privilege, the privileged always rationalize their position by claiming inherent or divinely bestowed superiority which, moreover, gives meaning, purpose and protection to the lives...'¹²²

is no coincidence. For an even more clear-cut example of such unreferenced 'borrowing' compare another important sentence from Hommel;

'The liberation of the Coloured people is contingent on the liberation of the African people with whom their destiny is inextricably bound; without the emancipation of the latter, the former will remain a disadvantaged and disheartened group'¹²³

119 Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, chs. 1-6; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, chs. 1-9.

120 Jordaan, 'van Riebeeck'; H. J. Simons and R. E. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950*, (London, Penguin, 1969) and I. B. Tabata, *The Awakening of a People*, (London, Spokesman Books, 1974).

121 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 4.

122 Kies, *Contribution of Non-European Peoples*, 7.

123 Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 1.

with a passage from Kenny Jordaan's 'van Riebeeck' piece;

'thus the liberation of the Cape Coloureds is contingent on the liberation of the African people with whom their destiny is inextricably bound. Without the emancipation of the latter, the former will continue to remain an oppressed and disheartened group.'¹²⁴

Several other examples can be cited. There are also numerous instances where the exact words of authors are used and referenced but the lack of quotation marks create the impression that Hommel was merely using information from these texts or paraphrasing them. At best this is cut-and-paste history, at worse plagiarism.

In the final analysis, *Capricorn Blues* is a work of rather poor quality. It is highly derivative, poorly researched and idiosyncratic in its interpretation of many aspects of Coloured history. There are times, however, when Hommel makes good use of limited source material¹²⁵ and produces useful insights. This is especially the case with the history of the NEUM, in which Hommel displays particular interest. For much of the time, however, the analysis is decidedly amateurish.

A liberal essentialist intervention in the mid-1980s

Five years after the publication of *Capricorn Blues* a history of Coloured politics, written from an opposing ideological viewpoint, appeared on the shelves. Richard van der Ross' *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid*,¹²⁶ a much more detailed and comprehensive work, falls squarely within the liberal essentialist approach to Coloured history. Indeed, van der Ross goes so far as to present his work as a continuation of the narrative Marais' *The Cape Coloured People* left off in the early

124 Jordaan, 'Jan van Riebeeck', 34-35.

125 Access to South African material appears not to have been a problem as Hommel was able to come to South Africa to conduct research. Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 'Acknowledgements'.

126 R. van der Ross, *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid: The study of political movements among the Coloured people of South Africa, 1880-1985*, (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1986).

twentieth century.¹²⁷

Van der Ross, the son of a leading Coloured teacher, was born in Cape Town in 1921. His long and varied career has included work as a teacher, educationist, journalist, politician, community leader and most recently as South Africa's ambassador to Spain. One of the more prominent and articulate representatives of the moderate faction within the Coloured petty bourgeoisie during the post-World War II era, and generally recognized as a leading intellectual in his community, van der Ross represents as authentic a voice of this social group as one is likely to find.¹²⁸ Contrary to the politically correct stance of the time, van der Ross embraced Coloured identity and did not shy away from using the term. Rejecting the effete political correctness of the anti-apartheid movement, his retort to those who found the word 'Coloured' repugnant was, 'I use the term as the most widely understood, if not universally accepted. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."¹²⁹ Van der Ross was very clearly conscious of himself as a leader and spokesman within his community and that he was providing an insider's view of the history of the Coloured people in this book.¹³⁰

While its main title is misleading, the sub-title of the volume accurately describes its content. The book is a narrative and descriptive account of organized Coloured politics from the founding of what was purportedly the first Coloured political organization, the Afrkander League (Coloured) in Kimberley in 1883 through to the response of Coloured people to the violence-wracked unravelling of apartheid in the

127 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, xi.

128 For biographical information on van der Ross and the most recent assessment of his career see P. Kapp, 'Richard van der Ross' in *They Shaped Our Century*, 377-81

129 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 'preface'.

130 This consciousness comes through most clearly in a previous book he had written. See R. van

mid-1980s. It focuses on the steady erosion of Coloured civil rights over this period of a century and their increasingly hostile reaction to the deterioration in their socio-political status. Van der Ross tries to distance himself from any high-flown intellectual pretensions or overt ideological bias by describing his book as being 'essentially a record' and that 'it does not set out to interpret the course of events from the standpoint of a particular philosophy of history.'¹³¹ Despite these disclaimers van der Ross' liberalism nevertheless shines through brightly and his allegiance to the moderate faction within Coloured protest politics is never in doubt.

In line with the essentialist approach, van der Ross perceives South African society as consisting of distinct races and the Coloured people as a product of miscegenation.¹³² Despite having previously written a polemical book on myths and fallacies surrounding Coloured identity,¹³³ he takes the identity for granted and sees no need to analyse or explain the phenomenon. *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid* describes the emergence of the Coloured people as a gradual process of miscegenation characterizing it as an 'ever-continuing process'.¹³⁴ Indeed, van der Ross claims that the 'very existence of the Coloured people belies apartheid' and predicts that they 'will prove to be the moral and logical undoing of apartheid.'¹³⁵ After briefly reviewing the main milestones in the essentialist narrative of the making of Coloured identity, in particular the Ordinance 50, slave emancipation and the 1853 constitution, the author conducts the reader through all of the major developments in Coloured political history.

der Ross, *Myths and Attitudes: An inside look at the Coloured people*, (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1979).

131 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, xi.

132 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, xii, 1-2.

133 Van der Ross, *Myths and Attitudes*.

Van der Ross starts his analysis proper in the late nineteenth century by recounting the first tentative steps toward separate Coloured political organization with the formation of the Afrikaner League in 1883, the Coloured People's Association in 1892 and Ahmed Effendi's candidacy for the Cape parliament in 1894. From there he moves onto the coming of the Anglo-Boer War and the formation of the APO in 1902 in response to growing racial discrimination at the turn of the century and Coloured people being barred from the franchise in the former Boer Republics. Van der Ross successively describes the APO's subsequent domination of Coloured protest politics, the rise of the radical movement through the 1930s and 1940s, the trauma of the imposition of apartheid policies upon this powerless minority and their response to the new political environment which ranged from the opportunistic collaboration of the Tom Swartzes¹³⁶ to the revolt of township youths. Numerous related issues such as the holding of the Stone meetings, the ANB challenge to the APO, developments on the labour front in the 1920s, the Joint Council Movement, the Non-European Conferences and the establishment of the Union Council of Coloured Affairs (UCCA) and the Coloured Representative Council (CRC) are worked into a rather disorganized narrative.¹³⁷ His discussion of the apartheid period, moreover, draws extensively on his personal experience in the political arena.

Despite the author's reputation as an intellectual, his academic achievements and distinguished career as an educationist - which included a twelve year stint as rector

134 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 2.

135 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, xii.

136 Tom Swartz was the quintessential Coloured 'quisling', to borrow a stock taunt from the NEUM's verbal arsenal. A former vice-president of the CPNU, he was chairman of the UCCA, president of the Coloured People's Federal Party and first chairman of the CRC.

137 This description of the content of van der Ross' book is deliberately brief because of the conventional nature of his narrative and because the story he tells has to a large extent already been recounted in chapter 1.

of the University of the Western Cape immediately prior to the book being launched¹³⁸ - *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, cannot be regarded as a scholarly work. Van der Ross' history of Coloured politics is for the most part a bland chronicle of organizations being formed and fading from the scene, of racially discriminatory measures from the white supremacist state being piled one on top of another, of leaders making speeches, conferences being organized and protest meetings passing resolutions. The narrative is recounted, often in bewildering detail, in nearly four hundred pages of tightly-packed print but within an over-simplified analytical and theoretical framework that has limited explanatory value. Throughout the book lists of various sort, lengthy quotations and the wholesale reproduction of documentary material clutter the writing and substitute for analysis.¹³⁹

And, although he covers the broad sweep of Coloured political organization, van der Ross' history is episodic and the inclusion of material indiscriminate in that he provides very uneven coverage of the subject. Some aspects are examined in exhaustive detail, others are rather sparsely dealt with and there are some omissions such as the failure to deal with the United Afrikaner League of the late 1910s or the Cape Malay Association of the latter half of the 1920s, for instance. These weaknesses stem partly from the limited range of both primary and secondary source material consulted by van der Ross. The content of the book appears to have been determined more by van der Ross' extensive personal collection of documents relating to Coloured politics¹⁴⁰ than the systematic research of source material available in libraries and archives. Thus, for example, one gets two pages of

138 The book was presented to van der Ross on the occasion of his retirement. See van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, iv.

139 For some examples see van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 23, 29, 47, 49-51, 56, 69, 85, 127, 149-50, 185, 202-04, 206, 229-32, 239-41, 250-51, 291, 299-301.

140 Some of these documents are reproduced in van der Ross, 'A political and social history', Vol.

biographical detail on the relatively obscure Peter Daniels but very little on more important figures other than Abdurahman. More seriously, extended sections of writing draw on a single source.¹⁴¹ In addition, despite a broadly chronological approach, the book is poorly structured with frequent digressions and clumsy flash-forward and flash-back techniques disrupting the narrative flow. Repetitiousness is another symptom of the book's poor structure.

The approach of trying to provide an objective chronicle was doomed to failure and is effectively abandoned halfway through the study. While van der Ross remains reasonably detached during the first half of the book he becomes much more subjective when dealing with the post-World War II period when he himself was politically active. For example, van der Ross tends to exaggerate the importance of organizations in which he played a leading role, most notably the Convention Movement¹⁴² and his one-time political ally, George Golding, and the Coloured People's National Union receive decidedly generous treatment. In contrast, the Non-European Unity Movement, the severest critic of his more accommodationist political philosophy, is subjected to close, fault-finding scrutiny not extended to other organizations.¹⁴³ The repeated description of the NEUM and its supporters as 'virulent' and 'vituperative' is an indication that van der Ross was still smarting from the scorn heaped upon him and his political associates by the Unity Movement.¹⁴⁴

Ironically, it is precisely in its subjectivity - as an informed and comprehensive

IV.

- 141 See especially the references to chapters 10 and 16, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 398-403 for the extent to which van der Ross can be dependent on a single source.
- 142 See van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 286-96.
- 143 Compare for example van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 205-08 and 250-55 with 233-47.
- 144 See van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 167, 185, 191, 239 for some examples and *Educational Journal*, 7-8/1965 for an example of NEUM comment on van der Ross.

account of Coloured political history by a prominent member of the moderate faction of Coloured politics - that its value lies. Van der Ross was a participant in many of the events he describes and in this way is able to provide first-hand information and interesting insights into aspects of Coloured politics. The latter half of the book thus reads more like a memoir than an impartial history. Although the book is a mine of information on Coloured politics its superficial analysis does not do the complexity of its subject full justice. Another major merit of van der Ross' study is that it provided an easily accessible body of knowledge - a framework of names, dates, events and organizations relating to Coloured politics - that up to that point had not been readily available to either layman, student or researcher.

An angry outlash at the close of apartheid

A highly eccentric work on the history of the Coloured people conveniently appeared at the very end of the period under review. The book in question, *Separate but Unequal: The Coloured people of South Africa - A political history* by Roy du Pre,¹⁴⁵ is remarkable not for any reason its title might suggest but for du Pre's sustained and angry denunciation of whites, especially Afrikaners, for their oppression of Coloured people and his outraged rejection of the apartheid system that had forcibly classified him as Coloured.¹⁴⁶ The book is historiographically ambiguous because the author mixes up essentialist and instrumentalist views. The latter, though, is dominant and his intended standpoint.

At the time of publication du Pre, a former high school and college of education teacher, was lecturing in the History Department at the University of Transkei and is

145 R. du Pre, *Separate but Unequal: The Coloured people of South Africa - A political history*, (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1994).

146 For an extended evaluation of the book see M. Adhikari, 'Blinded by anger: Coloured

currently executive director of the Committee of Technikon Principals.¹⁴⁷ The three volumes he previously published on the history of the Coloured people were essentially dress rehearsals for *Separate but Unequal*.¹⁴⁸ The earlier and much the shorter of the three, *Making of Racial Conflict* is more composed and rationally argued than the latter two books that are written in the same censorious tone as *Separate but Unequal*. In all of these books the same material is duplicated, often in the same words. In 1994 de Pre also completed a doctoral dissertation on the history of the Labour Party of South Africa.¹⁴⁹

It needs to be said right at the outset that despite Dr. du Pre's academic credentials *Separate but Unequal* is not a work of scholarship. It is on the whole poorly researched, openly biased, inadequately referenced and simplistic in its formulations. The author does, however, acknowledge his lack of academic rigour by characterizing the book as a 'polemical history' and trying to justify his approach by claiming that 'it was written with the layman in mind'. Indeed, du Pre freely admits to being 'subjective in my analysis', confesses his 'bias against whites, especially Afrikaners' and that he 'makes no excuse for writing from the viewpoint of anger'.¹⁵⁰

The title of this book is misleading in that it falls far short of a political history of the Coloured people. Neither can it be considered a study of Coloured social experience

experience under apartheid', *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, 1996, 169-82.

147 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, notes on dustjacket.

148 See du Pre, *The Making of Racial Conflict; Strangers in Their Own Country: A political history of the 'Coloured' people of South Africa, 1652-1992*, (East London, Southern History Association, 1992); *The Rape of the Coloured People: The political and social onslaught on the 'Coloured' people of South Africa in the twentieth century*, (East London, Southern History Association, 1992).

149 R. du Pre, 'Confrontation, co-optation and collaboration: The response and reaction of the Labour Party to government policy', 1965-1984, (Ph. D. thesis, Rhodes University, 1994). His masters thesis was also on the Labour Party, see R. H. du Preez, 'The role and policies of the Labour Party of South Africa, 1975-1978', (M. A. thesis, University of South Africa, 1987).

150 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, xii-xiv.

under apartheid as the chapter headings collectively suggest. Although it does deal with aspects of these topics, it does not attempt to do so in any systematic way. It is also far too personal and circumscribed an account to be taken as representative of experience within the Coloured community as a whole. The book consists instead of a curious amalgam of the author's fulminations against 'Afrikaner racism, English hypocrisy, National Party immorality and government brutality'¹⁵¹ for their role in the oppression of Coloured people on the one hand, and a fragmentary history of the Labour Party of South Africa, on the other. This odd combination comes about as a result of du Pre scrambling together an outpouring of bitterness at having been a victim of apartheid and the research he did for his masters and doctoral theses.

The study is divided into four parts of which the first and last are devoted primarily to du Pre's rant against apartheid. Part One takes the reader on a haphazard, sixty-page ramble through South African history from 1652 through to 1948. This section serves little more than as a vehicle for castigating whites for their maltreatment of Coloureds from the earliest days of Dutch settlement at the Cape. The second section deals with the imposition of apartheid on Coloureds, focusing in particular on issues of race classification, the Group Areas and Separate Amenities Acts, job reservation, 'gutter' education and the disfranchisement of Coloureds. Part Three, which is entitled 'The political separation of the Coloured people, 1943-1993' is devoted mainly to aspects of the history of the Labour Party. Hardly any mention is made of the Non-European Unity Movement, the South African Coloured People's Organization or the United Democratic Front, al. key players in Coloured protest politics during this period. In the concluding section du Pre redirects his full attention to upbraiding whites, this time under the guise of examining the consequences of racism and apartheid. He ends

151 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, vii.

off by offering gratuitous advice to Coloured people on moving from 'second class citizen to first class human being', to 'stop thinking like "Coloureds"' and to 'hold their heads high and look the white man in the face'.¹⁵²

The above outline, which largely follows the table of contents, gives a false sense of the coherence of the volume. The book is extremely poorly organized both in the way chapters and themes fit together, as well as the manner in which paragraphs, ideas and individual sentences mesh on the page. Tim Couzens, in his review of the book, graphically describes the disorder that greets the reader;

Themes in this book jump around like fleas off a sinking dog... At one moment there will be a Jungian analysis on lightness and darkness and their correspondence to masculine rationality and female emotionality in the 17th century, the next, one will be pondering over the devastating blow to Afrikaner masculinity and superiority brought on by the loss to England in a rugby test.¹⁵³

This lack of organization is most evident in the extreme repetitiousness of the book which also suffers from a number of other stylistic and technical shortcomings.¹⁵⁴

What analysis du Pre does offer has little explanatory value and often accounts for apartheid and the oppression of Coloured people in terms of the 'vengefulness' of the Afrikaner towards Coloureds or simply the 'base naked racism' of the National Party'.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, du Pre is of the opinion that 'The Afrikaner has an over-developed sense of vengeance which he will carry into the next century'¹⁵⁶ and that 'it is the nature of Afrikaners to discriminate against people who are different to them and to practice segregation'.¹⁵⁷ Du Pre never fully explains his oft-levelled allegation that

152 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 253.

153 *Sunday Times*, 21/8/1994, 'Analysis lost in a sloppy tirade'.

154 See Adhikari, 'Blinded by anger', 172 for further detail.

155 For further elaboration of this point see Adhikari, 'Blinded by anger', 172-73. See also du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 22-23.

156 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 141, 130.

157 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 248, 46.

Afrikaners harboured deep-seated feelings of revenge against Coloureds. At one point, though, drawing on Jung, he suggests that apartheid might be due to displaced anger over their maltreatment by the British which they projected onto black people in general.¹⁵⁸ The irony is that, whatever the motives of Afrikanerdom may have been, du Pre is himself clearly driven by revenge. While Afrikaners are by far the main target of du Pre's invective, he does enjoy the occasional swipe at the 'spineless English'.¹⁵⁹

Seething with anger and resentment at the injustices Coloured people suffered under apartheid, du Pre allows his emotions to get the better of his judgement. The author who claims the moral high ground of non-racism for himself, uses racist arguments to judge and condemn Afrikaners. Du Pre recognizes the contradiction in his thinking but is so set on getting his own back that he, paradoxically, resorts to contorted reasoning that echoes the twisted logic of the system he rails against;

This book discusses Afrikaners as if they are a homogeneous group, which of course they are not. However, it is difficult for the layman to distinguish them in any other way, because Afrikaners have presented themselves as such. By setting themselves up as an exclusive people, a 'chosen' nation and 'die volk', Afrikaners have created in the minds of others the idea that they are indeed a homogeneous group. They cannot now expect others to see them as anything else.¹⁶⁰

Du Pre's aversion to Afrikanerdom, it would appear, extends to the point where he has tried to disguise the Afrikaner origins of his surname.¹⁶¹

This book in the end has little to say about Coloured people themselves because du Pre uses it primarily to vent his personal anger and frustration at the system of

158 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 22, 44.

159 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, vii, 7-8, 49, 62, 92, 106, 137, 234, 262.

160 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, xiii.

161 Somewhere between 1987 when he completed his Masters thesis, and 1990 when he published *The Making of Racial Conflict in South Africa* du Pre dropped the last two letters of his

segregation that blighted his life. It would seem that the writing of this book was an emotional catharsis for the author.¹⁶² It is very much his own anger, bitterness and humiliation he is writing about. Throughout the book du Pre does not so much write about Coloured people than speak for them, substituting his voice for theirs, generalizing his opinions for theirs. He at times does this literally, as for example, when he writes; ‘Whites will therefore have to understand when Coloureds today say: “We don’t trust De Klerk; we intensely despise the Afrikaner; we hate the NP; we want to have nothing to do with whites”’.¹⁶³

If anything, du Pre has an extraordinarily condescending attitude toward Coloured people. In this book Coloured people are presented as faceless, voiceless victims of white aggression and not autonomous people with minds and wills of their own. Coloureds are repeatedly described as ‘uncomprehending’, ‘befuddled’, ‘cowering’, ‘pitiful’, ‘wretched’, ‘hopeless’, ‘apathetic’, ‘docile’, ‘placid’, ‘silent’, ‘inactive’, and ‘degraded’. On one occasion, for example, he claims that the National Party had transformed Coloureds ‘... a proud section of South Africa’s citizens into pitiful, grovelling beggars reduced to waiting for crumbs to fall from the master’s table’¹⁶⁴ and on another that collaboration had ‘reduced Coloured people to grovelling, begging, unprincipled and vindictive people’.¹⁶⁵ Whites, on the other hand, are consistently labelled as ‘brutal’, ‘callous’, ‘vicious’, ‘treacherous’, ‘fanatical’, ‘mean’, ‘violent’, ‘immoral’, ‘unscrupulous’, ‘evil’, ‘vengeful’, ‘scurrilous and mindless neanderthals’ to name but a few of the disparaging terms used. The two stereotypes come together nicely in a sentence describing the Coloured people’s response to the

162 surname, changing it from du Preez, a typically Afrikaner surname, to one that sounds French.
 162 See *Separate but Unequal*, xv for an indication that du Pre was aware of this.
 163 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 105.
 164 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 164.
 165 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 149.

implementation of apartheid; ‘... the dazed Coloured people, cowering in the face of bullying, aggressive, fanatical fascists, simply rolled over, resigned themselves to the inevitable and gave up the fight.’¹⁶⁶ Here, as in other instances, du Pre defeats his own purpose by turning what is meant to be tragic and calamitous into something comical through inappropriate language and imagery.

Although du Pre claims to speak for all Coloured people, his book is written from the perspective of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie and focuses almost exclusively on the concerns of this social class. Hardly any mention is made of the impact of apartheid laws on the urban working class or the impoverished rural proletariat, who together make up the majority of the Coloured population. The book, accordingly, is pre-occupied with the sensibilities of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie and disproportionate attention is paid to the humiliation that apartheid visited upon them.¹⁶⁷ Du Pre occasionally also displays the class prejudice that the Coloured middle class all too often manifested toward their working class counterparts. For example, he is incensed at the ‘odious practice’ of building ‘“Coloured” slums next to middle and upper class “Coloured” suburbs’,⁶⁸ sympathizes with ‘“better class” Coloureds who were forced to travel in the same coaches as their poorer brethren who were ‘often under the influence of liquor’¹⁶⁹ and complains that Coloured hotels were ‘grubby and surrounded by [Coloured] drunks using the bars and off-sales’.¹⁷⁰ At one point he even appears to condone Coloured and Indian racism toward Africans;

Afrikaner officials made it a practice to book coloureds, Indians and Africans in the same compartments of 1st and 2nd class coaches. Coloureds from the Cape and Indians in general objected vehemently to sleeping with Africans as

166 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 221.

167 See du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 72, 94-125, 258-59 for examples and Adhikari, ‘Blinded by anger’, 175 for further detail.

168 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 89.

169 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 96.

170 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 103.

they never mixed with Africans on a personal level. Railway officials ignored all complaints by 'Hotnots' and 'Coolies' about sleeping with Africans in the same compartment. Afrikaner ticket examiners retorted that as far as they were concerned, all non-whites were the same, and therefore the (sic) could not understand what the objections were about.¹⁷¹

The author appears to be oblivious of the irony that he is criticising bigoted white officials for not being sensitive to the racist sentiments of Coloured and Indian passengers.

In *Separate but Unequal* intellectual coherence is sacrificed to du Pre's polemical purpose in that it consists of a mish-mash of contradictory arguments, wild exaggerations, sweeping judgements and an indiscriminate borrowing of ideas unified only by the author's drive to castigate whites for their oppression of Coloured people. This is most evident in du Pre's treatment of the origin and nature of Coloured identity in which he replicates the essentialist and instrumentalist practice of presenting Coloured people as having had little or no part in the creation of their own identity. His claim that 'the only glue which held the Coloured people together after 1950 was the law which classified them as such' is clearly untenable.¹⁷²

Much of the time du Pre is content to follow Lewis' lead and have the powerful white establishment thrust upon the diverse group of 'mixed race' people in South Africa the artificial identity of Colouredness.¹⁷³ He presents Coloured people as having no will or creativity of their own, passively accepting a view of the world and of themselves imposed upon them by whites. On occasion, however, du Pre feels the need to emphasize just how cunning and self-serving whites were in their dealings with Coloured people. He then follows a line taken by Goldin and presents Coloured

171 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 95-96.

172 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 17.

173 See Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 3-4.

identity as the duplicitous invention of white supremacists who use it to divide and rule the black majority.¹⁷⁴ Here Coloureds are depicted as nothing more than the dupes of a white ruling class that manipulates them at will to bolster white supremacy in South Africa. Thus, for example, du Pre claims that;

In 1950, the government needed a tangible and identifiable group against which to discriminate so that it could carry out its Nazi plans of social engineering. Africans were easily identifiable. So were the 'Europeans' who were to do the discriminating. It was not so easy to discriminate against those in-between, many of whom could easily have passed for white or African. The solution was to create a group by law so that there was something tangible to discriminate against. And so, what nature could not do, the law did - the NP created a new volk, the 'Coloured' people.¹⁷⁵

The author has no qualms about bestowing upon the state the power to create a new social identity by simply legislating it into existence.¹⁷⁶

Du Pre's single-minded drive to chastise whites and a cavalier attitude to intellectual consistency leads him into hopeless contradiction about the nature of Coloured identity. Du Pre's deep confusion about the nature of Coloured identity is demonstrated by the conflicting timing he proposes for the emergence of the identity. In keeping with the politically correct view that prevailed within the radical left during the latter stages of apartheid, du Pre on several occasions denies that Coloured identity ever existed except as an artificial category in apartheid legislation which 'created a new nation out of the leftovers of other nations'.¹⁷⁷ On several occasions, however, he accepts the popular perception that Coloured identity came into existence as a result of miscegenation from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.¹⁷⁸ He goes on to assert that 'Coloured people as a legal grouping seem to have emerged only after

174 See Goldin, *Making Race*, xxvi. Because *Separate but Unequal* lacks adequate referencing it is unclear to what extent du Pre expressly draws on Lewis or Goldin.

175 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 16-17.

176 An analytical distinction needs to be made between a status which can be imposed by legislation and an identity which can not.

177 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 4.

178 See du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, vii, xii, 13, 16, 36-37 for examples.

1834.¹⁷⁹ To compound the confusion du Pre, in addition, accepts the idea that Coloured identity developed 'in the early 1900s' as a result of growing racial discrimination at the turn of the century.¹⁸⁰ That the three explanations entail assumptions and implications that are mutually exclusive seems to matter little to Du Pre. What is important is that he finds a stick with which to beat whites.

Although the book does have some useful insights and perceptive commentary, especially on the history of the Labour Party, the poverty of du Pre's overall analysis is demonstrated by his prediction that 'Hatred, anger and bitterness born out of humiliation, betrayal and brutality will fester for a long time yet. The next generation, still to be born, may forgive the Afrikaner but this generation cannot forget and will find it difficult to fully forgive'.¹⁸¹ Four months after he penned these words Coloured people flocked to the polls in their thousands to give the National Party a majority of the vote in the Western Cape.¹⁸² Later du Pre flatly contradicts his confident prediction by claiming, this time with greater perception, that 'Today, coloured people would rather endure the rule of the National Party than risk an African government and competition from Africans in the workplace...'¹⁸³ There is little point in trying to reconcile these and other contradictions in the book because du Pre is less concerned with being rational and consistent than he is with denouncing whites and their treatment of Coloured people.¹⁸⁴

179 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 38.

180 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 17-18.

181 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 106.

182 While Godfrey Muriuki in his review of this book claims that 'it provides a satisfactory answer as to why the Coloureds flocked to the NP flag during the 1994 elections in the Western Cape' it needs to be pointed out that at no point does du Pre try to explain this. Du Pre completed the book before the 1994 election, and as pointed out above, in his opinion coloureds would not vote for the National Party or want to associate with Afrikaners for a long time to come. See *Kronos*, Vol. 22, 1995, 150.

183 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 232.

184 Typical of the logic, or lack thereof, he employs, du Pre, at one point, admits his bias against whites but claims that it is unintentional, and maybe even a good thing if it counterbalances pro-white bias in much of South Africa's written history. Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, xiii.

Perhaps the most significant feature of *Seperate but Unequal* is that it provides several sustained examples of a discourse that, in my experience, was fairly common within the private domain of Coloured middle class life during the apartheid years but rarely surfaced in the public arena. I have often enough heard people privately express their rejection of apartheid in the vehement tone that du Pre uses in this book. Never have I seen it done so explicitly and with such lack of restraint in print, though. A good example comes from Appendix I, entitled 'The mark of Cain',¹⁸⁵ which du Pre describes as 'a personalized account of the effect apartheid had on the lives of those South Africans who were classified "Coloured"'¹⁸⁶. Although he claims that it blends the views and experiences of a number of people he had interviewed and does not reflect the experience of any one person, there can be little doubt that du Pre is expressing his own views here and that this appendix is a thinly camouflaged device for pouring some of his bitterest vitriol on his former oppressors.

Slowly, but steadily, I developed a hatred of the Afrikaner. This hatred manifested itself mostly in an aversion to his language. Even today, I detest listening to any Afrikaans radio programmes and refuse to watch Afrikaans programmes on TV.... My special hate was the Afrikaans epilogue. When the pious and righteous-looking 'dominees' appeared on the screen and began to pontificate in those dulcet 'holy' tones, I almost wanted to puke....I suddenly realized that I intensely hated the brutal Afrikaner; I despised the cowardly Englishman; I was disgusted with the pathetic Alan Hendrickse and the opportunistic Labour Party; I had nothing but contempt for the unprincipled members of the House of Representatives; and I loathed whites in general.¹⁸⁷

This is not the tirade of a lone eccentric but a fairly representative example of the private rage with which many Coloured people, especially within the politicized petty bourgeoisie, expressed their visceral rejection of apartheid. If the unrelenting diatribe of *Separate but Unequal* has any value, then it is that it sheds light on the private

185 Presumably du Pre meant Canaan rather than Cain. Canaan, the son of Ham, would have been the first one upon whom Noah's curse would have been visited. See J. Comay, *Who's Who in the Old Testament*, (London, J. M. Dent, 1993), 58.

186 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 257.

response of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie to a social system that frustrated their ambitions, stunted their lives and humiliated them deeply.¹⁸⁸

In the writing of this book Du Pre was been blinded by his anger to the extent that he was incapable of rational argument or cogent analysis. The long-winded tirade, though at time entertaining,¹⁸⁹ is sterile and does very little to advance our understanding of a complex aspect of the Coloured past. *Separate but Unequal* was fortunate to have appeared at a singular time in South African history that gave it a degree of relevance it would not otherwise have enjoyed. During the fluidity of the transition to democratic rule in the mid-1990s, when white guilt over apartheid was at its height and rainbowism¹⁹⁰ at its most auspicious, the impotent fury of a marginal man venting his anger did not appear quite as incongruous as it does today.

To round off this review, a word needs to be said about the exclusion from this survey of the work of two 'Coloured' historians who have shed light on aspects of Coloured history. Firstly, there is Neville Alexander, historian, polemicist, political activist and academic, characterized by Jeremy Seekings as a 'remarkable socialist and anti-racist intellectual'¹⁹¹ who has written on various aspects left-wing Coloured politics.¹⁹² Secondly, there is Bill Nasson, a Cambridge-trained historian who has written on Coloured involvement in the Anglo-Boer War, the Non-European Unity Movement

187 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, 260-62.

188 Du Pre, *Separate but Unequal*, xvii is correct when he states that 'Much of what appears in this book has been expressed in countless houses, schools, church gatherings, conversations...'
189 See Adhikari, 'Blinded by anger', 176 for some examples.

190 This refers to the idealized vision of a multi-cultural post-apartheid South Africa or 'rainbow nation' in which all cultures are respected and people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds live in peace and harmony.

191 J. Seekings, *The UDF: A history of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 2000), 79.

192 N. Alexander, (No Sizwe), *One Azania, One Nation: The national question in South Africa*, (London, Zed Press, 1979); *Sow the Wind: Contemporary speeches*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1985); 'Non-Collaboration in the Western Cape', 1943-1963' in James and Simons, *The Angry Divide*, 180-191.

and aspects of the social history of the Coloured working class of District Six.¹⁹³ In both cases, because of their unequivocal rejection of racial thinking they make a point of dealing with these aspects of Coloured history as part of a broader South African experience and stress the significance of class. They de-emphasize the particularity of the Coloured experience and make no attempt to provide an interpretation of the history of the Coloured people per se. For these reasons their work falls outside of the scope of this survey.¹⁹⁴

Coloured social experience in white-dominated South Africa is mirrored in the historiography of Coloured writing on their own history in a number of ways. Features of this historiography that stand out in this regard are its relatively poor quality, its paucity and its confusion or lack of deliberation over the nature of Coloured identity. There is also a tendency for opinions to be polarized with Coloured identity either being taken for granted as in the case of Ziervogel and van der Ross or the concept being intensely politicized and rejected with vehemence as with Hommel and du Pre.

The poor quality and scantness of this historiography is to a very large extent a product of racial oppression and the marginalization of the Coloured community. Inferior education for the mass of Coloured people, restricted access to tertiary education for the small petty bourgeoisie and a virtual absence of employment

193 B. Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War: A black South African war in the Cape, 1899-1902*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), see especially chapter 7, 'Martyrdom, myth and memory: Abraham Esau's War', 120-141; 'She preferred living in a cave with Harry the snake-catcher: Towards an oral history of popular leisure and class expression in District Six, Cape Town, circa 1920s-1950s', in P. Bonner, I. Hofmeyer, D. James and T. Lodge, (eds.), *Holding their Ground: Class, locality and culture in 19th and 20th century South Africa*, (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press and Ravan Press, 1989); 'Oral history and the reconstruction of District Six' in Jeppie and Soudien, *District Six: 'Unity Movement'*, 189-211.

194 Some of the work of scholars such as Crain Soudien and Shamiel Jeppie similarly falls beyond

opportunities in the field for much of the period under consideration, meant that only a handful of professionally-trained, academic historians have come from within the ranks of the Coloured community. And, such historians emerged only in the latter stages of the apartheid period.¹⁹⁵ The bulk of historical writing from within the Coloured community was thus produced by untrained amateurs, especially teacher-intellectuals and political activists. The two 'Coloured', professional historians to have contributed to this historiography, both strongly reject being labelled Coloured. The one, Roy du Pre, wrote a book of singularly poor quality because he was unable to transcend his outrage at having been a victim of apartheid¹⁹⁶ while the other, Bill Nasson, produced work of exceptional quality partly because of the distance provided by a decade of overseas study.

The confusion over Coloured identity stems from more than one source, not least of which is the ambiguous status of Coloured people in the South African racial hierarchy, that regulated so much of the society's life. Given this ambiguity, the subjective nature of historical enquiry as well as long-standing and highly politicized disputes over the nature of Coloured identity within the community as well as the anti-apartheid movement, it is not at all surprising that there is controversy over Coloured identity amongst Coloured historians or that individual authors exhibit a degree of confusion over the issue. Thus, for example, Ziervogel and van der Ross accept Coloured identity as given and did not find it necessary to enquire into its nature, while Hommel and du Pre for much of the time deny that Coloured identity existed except as a state enforced category but then proceed to write about it as if it

the compass of this study.

195 One possible exception, Hommel, is a political scientist by training. He was able to become an academic only because he left the country and studied overseas. Another, van der Ross, had no professional training in the discipline and did not regard himself as a professional historian.

196 It needs to be said that du Pre's Ph. D. thesis is a competent piece of work. By coincidence

were a social reality with its origins in the seventeenth century. The contradictions within Hommel and du Pre came from the tension that existed between an impassioned rejection of apartheid thinking and the need to come to terms with the reality of Coloured identity.

The controversy and confusion over Coloured identity is also reflective of the hegemony of racist thinking with regard to Coloured identity. The idea that Colouredness was the product of miscegenation was so deeply entrenched in South African society that few people, including academics challenged this assumption until the latter phases of the apartheid era. Even a hard-nosed Trotskyist intellectual such as Kenny Jordaan could accept Jan van Riebeeck as the 'father of the Cape Coloured people'.¹⁹⁷ But once that leap of understanding was made that Coloured identity was not necessarily an organic outgrowth of South African historical development and the automatic consequence of miscegenation but that it functioned as a tool of social control, the basis for the opposing instrumentalist approach was laid. The strong emotions that this could awake were nowhere more evident than in du Pre's *Separate but Unequal*.

Another striking feature of this body of writing is that despite the controversial nature of Coloured identity authors fail to engage with one another - or for that matter with other historians - on the issue. Instead the polemic, the accusations and refutations are directed at the state and white South Africa. While this is due partly to inadequate research and poor conceptualization of their projects, it is also due to the emotion-laden response evoked by apartheid and attempts to vindicate ideological positions taken up in relation to it. Other consequences of the emotional and politicized

Bill Nasson happens to have been one of the examiners of the thesis.

response is that there is no clear trend in the historiography and no sense of a growing sophistication of analyses as authors build on work that has gone before.

The first two chapters of this study have explored general themes in the expression of Coloured identity, the analysis traversing the entire period of white domination. The next three chapters will be devoted to a series of chronologically arranged case studies that individually corroborate aspects of, and collectively confirm the contentions of this dissertation. The first set of case studies will focus on the official organs of the two most important Coloured communal organizations during the earlier decades of Union.

CHAPTER 3

The predicament of marginality: Case studies from the earlier period of white rule

This chapter is based on two case studies of key texts produced within the Coloured community during the first three decades of the Union of South Africa. The first focuses on the *APO* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the African Political Organization, which was by far the most dominant Coloured political pressure group until challenged by an emergent radical movement in the late 1930s. The second examines the *Educational Journal*, the organ of the Teachers League of South Africa, the largest professional organization within the Coloured community. Produced by the most prominent leaders and respected intellectuals within the community, these two publications are broadly representative of Coloured opinion on matters of politics, identity and communal relations.¹ In addition to a discussion of issues of Coloured identity, the *APO* case study will also be used to outline aspects of the socio-political context necessary for a full understanding of the analysis presented. The two case studies in this chapter are intended to perform several purposes. Firstly, they will serve as illustrations of the expression of Coloured identity during the earlier decades of white domination. In addition, they are also meant to serve as examples of how the core element of Coloured identity functioned in specific social settings, and therefore as well as of the conventional expression of Coloured identity throughout the era of racist rule. Together these case studies spell out the impetus behind the expression of a distinct Coloured identity and the ambiguities that arose from their separatist strategies and agendas.

¹ See M. Adhikari, 'Voice of the Coloured elite: *APO*, 1909-1923' in L. Switzer, (ed.), *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of protest and resistance, 1880s-1960s*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 127-46; 'A drink-sodden race', 109-32.

Ambiguities in the racial perceptions of the APO: 1909-1923

Founded in Cape Town in 1902 as a result of intensifying segregationism in the late nineteenth century and disappointment at Coloured people effectively being excluded from the franchise in the Transvaal and Orange Free State by the Treaty of Vereeniging, the APO was the first substantive Coloured political association and was to dominate Coloured protest politics for nearly thirty five years. Spearheading the Coloured community's protests against segregationist measures in the run-up to Unification, the organization grew rapidly in the first decade of its existence, especially after the charismatic and politically talented Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman became president in 1905. By the time of Union the APO had grown into a national body with several thousand members in a countrywide network of branches and was the largest black political organization of the time.²

At its seventh annual conference in April 1909 the APO took the decision to publish its own newspaper to help promote its protest campaign against those clauses of the Draft South Africa Act that denied black people outside of the Cape the franchise and deprived those within the Colony of the right to be elected to the new Union Parliament.³ Besides the immediate concern of mobilizing Coloured people in defence of their civil rights the newspaper was also seen as an invaluable tool for educating the Coloured community politically and furthering the aims of the organization in general.⁴ The first issue of the

2 Gavin Lewis' estimate in *Between the Wire and Wall*, 30, 72 that the APO had a membership of 20 000 by the time of Union is clearly exaggerated and is based on a figure jokingly mentioned in the APO's humorous column, 'The office boy's reflections' of 14/1/1911. An estimate of 5 000 would be more realistic. The only other estimate of the size of APO membership available is a figure of 6 000 for 1924 that Dr. Abdurahman supplied J. S. Marais. See Marais, *Cape Coloured People*, 276.

3 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 50-52; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 43-44; L. M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902-1910*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1960), 305-06, 340-41.

4 The APO defined its objectives in its constitution as; (a) The promotion of unity between the

APO, which appeared on 24 May 1909,⁵ justified its existence on the grounds that the Coloured community needed a mouthpiece to voice its opinions and advocate its cause. Claiming that no other newspaper dared to champion 'our just claims to political equality with whites', it accused the existing press of promoting only the 'rights of property for the few who have it, rather than the broad rights of humanity' and of acting 'on the assumption that South Africa belongs to the whites ... by right of conquest'.⁶

A quarto-sized fortnightly published on alternate Saturdays, the *APO* was bilingual, having an English section that took up at least three quarters of the space and a Dutch section confined to the back pages. Editorials and the more important articles appeared in both languages. Over and above reports on social, sporting and cultural events within the Coloured community, the *APO* news agenda concentrated mainly on local and national politics in so far as it affected Coloured people. It is also clear that Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman had by far the greatest influence in shaping the political outlook of the newspaper despite Matt Fredericks, the general secretary of the *APO*, being editor.⁷ Abdurahman was the pre-eminent leader of the organization and dominated it for the

Coloured races of British South Africa. (b) The attainment of better and higher education for the children of these races. (c) The registration of the names of all the Coloured men who have the necessary qualifications as Parliamentary voters on the Voters' List. (d) The defence of the social, political and civil rights of the Coloured races. (e) The general advancement of the Coloured races in British South Africa. See *APO*, 25/2/1911.

5 Although a pioneer in many respects, the *APO* had a predecessor in Francis Peregrino's *South African Spectator* which appeared sporadically between 1901 and 1908. Being a Pan-Africanist, Peregrino directed his newspaper at both a Coloured and an African readership. See C. Saunders, 'F. Z. S. Peregrino and the *South African Spectator*', *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, Vol. 32, No. 3, (1978), 81-90; B. Willan, 'Correspondence' *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*, Vol. 33, No.1, (1978), 34-36. The only other newspaper intended for a Coloured readership to have appeared before the 1930s was the *S. A. Clarion* (1919-21), which Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 123 correctly characterizes as being little more than a propaganda paper of the Cape Nationalist Party. See Adhikari, 'Voice of the Coloured elite', 131, 141-42.

6 See also *APO*, 4/6/1910.

7 Matthew J. Fredericks, born in Cape Town in 1874 and an insurance agent by profession, was a key figure in the *APO*, second in importance only to Abdurahman. He served as general secretary of the *APO* from 1903 until his death in 1936. Applying his considerable organizational skill to the day to day running of the *APO*, Fredericks neatly complemented the high public profile of Abdurahman. In 1925 he was awarded the King's Medal for 'civil services of outstanding merit' for his involvement in a wide range of Coloured communal organizations. Lewis, 'Reactions of

entire thirty-five years of his Presidency from 1905 to his death in 1940. Not only did Abdurahman decide on editorial policy but Fredericks was also his closest collaborator within the APO.⁸ The *APO* appeared regularly until it temporarily ceased publication in November 1915 when it ran into financial difficulties. Resurrected in August 1919 the newspaper appeared less regularly until its demise in December 1923.

Despite repeated claims of speaking for the Coloured people as a whole, which at the time of Union numbered just over half a million out of the total South African population of about six million,⁹ the APO represented the interests of the emergent Coloured petty bourgeoisie. Its newspaper thus reflected the values and aspirations of this social group which formed the elite stratum within the Coloured community. This was especially true of that period during which the *APO* was published because the Coloured petty bourgeoisie was never more united in its political aims and its social aspirations. The APO completely dominated Coloured politics during these years.¹⁰ Other contemporary Coloured political organizations such as Francis Peregrino's Coloured People's Vigilance Committee, the South African Coloured Union under the leadership of James Curry and the United Afrikaner League of the late 1910s drew negligible support.¹¹ And although John Tobin, a former vice-president of the APO who had been expelled from the organization in 1905, still called Stone meetings¹² till at least the late-1910s, they were

Cape Coloureds', 613.

8 *APO*, 4/6/1910; *S. A. Clarion*, 26/4/1919; *Sun*, 1/3/1940; T. Shifrin, 'Abdullah Abdurahman', in W. J. de Kock, (ed.), *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. I, (Cape Town, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1968), 1-4.

9 *Census of the Union of South Africa, 1911*, (U.G.32-1912), Annexures to the general report, 10-11, 24.

10 *APO*, 14/1/1911; *South African News*, 9/8/1905; S. Trapido, 'The origin and development of the African Political Organization', *Institute of Commonwealth Studies Collected Seminar Papers on Southern Africa, 1969-70*, 97, 103.

11 For details of these organizations see Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 34-39, 49-53, 81-82, 122-26, 129-30.

12 These were open-air political meetings held on Sunday mornings in the vicinity of a large boulder on the lower slopes of Table Mountain above District Six. Because of the absence of Coloured political organizations Tobin, a local cafe owner, convened these meetings from May 1901 onwards to foster the political education of the Coloured community and to establish a forum for

held sporadically and had little influence within the Coloured community, especially the petty bourgeoisie. Also, it was only during the latter half of the 1920s, after the APO had ceased publishing its newspaper, that a serious rival in the form of the Afrikaanse Nasionale Bond, emerged. The APO, however, remained far more popular than the ANB which supported Hertzog's National Party and was formed partly at the instigation of leading Cape nationalists.¹³ It was only towards the end of the 1930s that the APO was finally eclipsed by the National Liberation League representing the radical political movement that had emerged within the Coloured community during that decade.¹⁴ Throughout its life the *APO* newspaper therefore proved to be as authentic a voice of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie as one could hope to find.

The Coloured elite, forming little more than five per cent of the Coloured population, consisted largely of artisans, small retail traders, clerks, teachers and a handful of professionals in the earlier decades of the twentieth century.¹⁵ This emergent petty bourgeoisie was assimilated to Western bourgeois culture, on the whole sharing its values, aspirations and social practices. Despite some rhetoric about the need to cultivate race pride amongst Coloured people, the aspirations of this social group were almost entirely assimilationist. They wanted little more than to be judged on merit, to exercise citizenship rights and to win social acceptance within white middle class society. Politicized Coloureds did not wish to effect any fundamental changes to the society except for the abolition of institutionalized racial discrimination. The *APO* therefore

the debate of political issues. The APO grew out of these meetings that drew considerable interest from both the Coloured community as well as white politicians courting their support. After he broke with the APO in 1905 Tobin continued to call Stone meetings, especially at election time, to publicize his pro-Afrikaner political stance. See Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 18-19, 45-46, 52-57; M. Adhikari, *Straatpraatjies: Language, politics and popular culture in Cape Town, 1909-1922*, (Pretoria, van Schaik, 1997), 30-31.

13 Van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 75; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 128; *Cape Standard*, 27/2/1940; G. Pretorius, *Man van die Daad: 'n Biografie van Bruckner de Villiers*, (Cape Town, HAUM, 1959), 116.

14 For details of the NLL see van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid* 104 ff.; Lewis, *Between*

continually reiterated the sentiment that 'it is not race or colour but civilization which is the test of man's capacity for political rights'.¹⁶ This meritocratic egalitarianism underpinned the political strategy of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie. Being marginal, assimilation into the dominant society appeared to be the only viable means whereby they could prosper and provide the rest of their community with the opportunity for future advancement.¹⁷

Within the Coloured petty bourgeoisie their sense of group solidarity by and large transcended religious boundaries. Although a small but significant proportion of the Coloured population consisted of Muslims who were generally known as Malays, religious differences were not a significant source of conflict within the Coloured community. This is amply illustrated by the absence of a Malay political organization at the time and the acceptance of Dr. Abdurahman, a devout Muslim, as leader of the APO despite the majority of its members being Christian. At a public meeting called on 12 July 1909 to consider the proposal that a Cape Malay Association be formed, the initiative was rejected with the prevailing sentiment expressed by an unidentified speaker that 'Adonis and Abdol are brothers, and they are of the same colour. There is one political organization. What more do they want?'¹⁸

Although the majority of the APO's membership could not be described as 'working class' there was no great social distance between the Coloured petty bourgeoisie and the Coloured labouring poor during this period. The greater part of the Coloured elite had during the course of their lives graduated from poverty to respectability or were in the

the Wire and Wall, 184-98, 204-06.

15 Refer to pages 12-13 above for a discussion of this concept.

16 *APO*, 18/12/1909; van der Ross, 'Political and social history', 484.

17 Adhikari, *Teachers League*, 6-7, 148 ff.

18 Adonis and Abdol were stereotypical figures representing Coloureds and Malays respectively. *APO*, 17/7/1909.

process of doing so. Virtually all lived in, or close to, working class neighbourhoods and continued to socialize with friends and relatives from the humbler ranks of the community. Even the most Anglicized members of the Coloured elite were fluent in Cape Vernacular Afrikaans, the language generally spoken by the Coloured working classes.¹⁹

The most eminent member of the Coloured elite, Dr. Abdurahman, was a case in point. Abdurahman's family was of humble origin, his grandparents having been slaves who had managed to buy their freedom. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the Abdurahman family did well enough out of the greengrocer's business they ran in Cape Town to be able to provide the precocious young Abdullah, who had been born in 1872, with a secondary education, something quite exceptional for people of their social status. Abdurahman went on to qualify as a medical doctor in Glasgow in 1893 and to become the first black person elected to the Cape Town City Council in 1904 and the Cape Provincial Council in 1914.²⁰ Despite his social standing, Abdurahman had nevertheless remained acculturated to Coloured working class life. He, for example, expressed a clear preference for the humble, but flavourful fare of traditional Coloured working class cooking and freely spoke vernacular Afrikaans in his day-to-day dealings with patients and political supporters.²¹ By retaining the common touch he became immensely popular within the Coloured community and gained a reputation as a champion of the poor.

Despite their strong ties to Coloured working class life, this modernizing elite regarded English bourgeois culture as the epitome of 'civilization'. The predominance of English

19 M. Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 5-6.

20 Abdurahman retained both seats until his death in 1940. He exerted considerable influence on local government because of the exceptional level of support he enjoyed amongst Coloured voters and through his energetic chairing of a number of council committees. See Adhikari, 'Abdullah Abdurahman' *They Shaped our Century*, 437-41; Manuel, *Kampvegters*, 8; van der Ross, *Say it out Loud*, 3-13; M. Adhikari, (ed.), *Dr. Abdurahman: A biographical memoir by J. H. Raynard*, (Cape Town, Friends of the South African Library, 2002), 9-17.

21 A. Davids, 'Straatpraatjes: An extension of slave Afrikaans?', (unpublished manuscript, Centre for

in the *APO* points to both the aspiration of the Coloured elite to conform to Western bourgeois culture as well as to the class attitudes prevalent within this social group. Whereas by far the greater majority of the Coloured population spoke Cape Dutch or one of its labouring class variants, the educated elite preferred English. In general English enjoyed far greater prestige within the Coloured community because it was an international language with a rich literature and was identified as the language of 'culture', 'civilization' and 'progress'. Very importantly, there was a general perception that proficiency in English held the key to social and occupational advancement. The emergent Afrikaans language, or Cape Dutch as it was often called, was derided as a 'vulgar patois fit only for the kitchen' because it lacked a formal grammar or a significant literature. The *APO* therefore considered it 'the height of impudence to claim for it the same rights as for the language of Shelley, Milton and Tennyson'.²² In contrast to English which was associated with the liberalism and racial tolerance of British rule, Cape Dutch was identified with the racism and the boorishness of the Afrikaner.²³ Being the language of the Coloured labouring poor, Cape Dutch was also regarded as a badge of social inferiority. For this reason most status-conscious Coloured people preferred English even though Cape Dutch or Dutch may have been their mother tongue.

It was with these considerations in mind that an *APO* editorial advocated that Coloured people should;

... endeavour to perfect themselves in English - the language which inspires the noblest thoughts of freedom and liberty, the language that has the finest literature on earth and is the most universally useful of all languages. Let everyone ... drop the habit as far as possible, of expressing themselves in the barbarous Cape Dutch that is too often heard.²⁴

African Studies Library, University of Cape Town), 2; *APO*, 9/10/1909.

22 *APO* 8/4/1911.

23 *APO*, 13/8/1910; 10/8/1912; E. L. Maurice, 'The development of policy in regard to the education of Coloured pupils at the Cape, 1880-1940, (Ph. D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1966), 332-34.

24 *APO*, 13/8/1910.

However, perceiving itself as representing the Coloured community as a whole and feeling the need to carry its message to its entire constituency, the APO published part of its newspaper in Dutch. That only a quarter - or sometimes less - of the newspaper appeared in Dutch is a measure of the *APO*'s class bias and the degree to which it considered English bourgeois culture to be normative.

Till mid-1910, protesting against the conditions of Union was by far the main focus of the *APO*. For the first year of its existence the newspaper was largely devoted to campaigning against the Draft South Africa Act, which it characterized as 'The Great Betrayal', and pointing to the unfairness and the folly of Union on these terms.²⁵ In addition, much publicity was given to the joint Coloured and African delegation to petition the British Government to modify the Draft South Africa Act. After the inauguration of Union on 30 May 1910, which it observed as a 'day of mourning' for the Coloured people of South Africa,²⁶ a demoralized *APO* changed its strategy and gradually, its political outlook as well - shifts that were clearly evident in its newspaper.

The organization was forced to reconsider its methods and objectives because the failure of its high-profiled political campaigns in the decade prior to Union had brought home the extent of Coloured political impotence and the futility of these tactics. Coloured assimilationist aspirations were excited by the prospect that their support for the British war effort during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) would be rewarded with the broadening of civil liberties, especially the extension of the liberal Cape franchise to the Boer republics in the event of a British victory. That these promises came from imperial officials as highly placed as Lord Milner and Joseph Chamberlain greatly encouraged

25 See *APO*, 24/5/1909; 11/9/1909; 9/4/1910 for some examples.

26 *APO*, 7/5/1910; 4/6/1910.

these expectations.²⁷ Politicized Coloureds were therefore severely disappointed in May 1902 when the Treaty of Vereeniging effectively ruled out the enfranchisement of blacks in the former Boer republics by stipulating that the question of black voting rights would only be settled after they had attained self-government. It is thus not surprising that Britain's willingness to sacrifice black political rights to appease the Boers helped to precipitate the formation of the APO later that year.²⁸

In 1905 the Coloured political leadership, together with a handful of white liberal allies, failed to have the provisions of the School Board Act extended to Coloured people despite the most spirited protest campaign yet launched in their name. This Act introduced statutory segregation into the Cape school system by providing for compulsory public schooling for all white children up to standard IV or the age of fourteen²⁹ and confining black children to the vastly inferior church schools. This measure greatly angered the Coloured elite because it blocked one of their main avenues for social advancement.³⁰ The following year the APO sent a delegation to London to petition the British Government to extend the franchise to Coloured males in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony upon their attainment of Responsible Government in 1907 and 1908 respectively.³¹ The failure of this deputation to secure the Coloured franchise in the northern colonies was a severe setback to the Coloured elite and foreshadowed the 'humiliation' of Union in 1910, the clearest demonstration yet of

27 *Cape Times*, 9/1/1901; *Cape Mercury*, 8/1/1901; *South African Spectator*, 20/4/1902; Marais, *Cape Coloured People*, 275-76.

28 Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War*, 39; Marais, *Cape Coloured People* 275-77; Trapido, 'Friends of the natives', 256.

29 In 1917 the School Board Act was amended to extend compulsory schooling for whites to the age of fifteen or standard V, and in 1919 to sixteen or standard VI.

30 Maurice, 'Coloured education', 13-14; *The Owl*, 17/3/1905; *South African News*, 17/8/1904; 25/2/1905; 6/3/1905; *Cape Times*, 26/8/1904; 'Speech on the Education Bill by Dr. Abdurahman', Abdurahman Family Papers, (microfilm of the University of Chicago's Manuscript Collection), University of Cape Town Manuscripts and Archives Division; Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 21-22.

31 *Cape Times*, 1/10/1906; *South African News*, 13/6/1906; *APO*, 19/6/1909; Thompson, *Unification*, 23-27; G. H. Le May, *British Supremacy in South Africa, 1899-1907*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1965), 205.

the political impotence of the Coloured community.

These reverses since the turn of the century had an important influence on the post-Union strategy of the APO and the outlook of its newspaper. The string of failures accentuated the political marginality of the Coloured community, furnishing what appeared to be clear proof that the APO's tactics were not effective. The *APO* had thus come into being at a time when Coloured people were feeling particularly threatened by segregation and the decision to publish the newspaper was primarily a consequence of the embattled Coloured elite's failure to stem the erosion of its civil rights. And after Union the APO faced a political environment far less sympathetic to Coloured aspirations than the old Cape colonial system had been. Union, in addition, had the effect of further marginalizing Coloured political influence as well as significantly diluting the clout of their main allies, the Cape liberals.³²

In the face of this deteriorating socio-political climate, the APO after Union, progressively abandoned its activism and its ambitious political campaigning of the previous decade in favour of the more pragmatic strategy of pursuing smaller, but more immediately attainable, goals and adopting a cautious, less obtrusive and incremental approach.³³ Mass protest meetings, high-profiled depositions and denunciatory oratory increasingly gave way to discreet lobbying, cautiously worded appeals and a focus on the socio-economic upliftment of the Coloured people. This shift was noticeable within the *APO* newspaper as early as mid-1911 as it became progressively less outspoken and less aggressive in its demand for civil equality. Indeed, in 1919 the APO altered its name to the African People's Organization to reflect this change in outlook.

32 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 70-74.

The adoption of this strategy of pragmatic incrementalism on the part of the *APO* was largely a result of the marginality and the intermediate status of Coloured people in South African society. Having few choices open to them and little room in which to manoeuvre, Coloured political associations tended to be pragmatic and opportunistic. Coloureds were, however, successful in holding the middle ground between the dominant white and the numerically preponderant African groups by claiming to be culturally more advanced than the latter and being partly descended from the former. Together, the marginality and the intermediate position of Coloured people within the society resulted in ambiguities and unresolved contradictions within Coloured identity, especially the elite strata.³⁴

One of the most striking of these ambiguities, the tension between the ideal of non-racism and the practice of Coloured separatism, was clearly manifest within the organizational life of the *APO* and therefore also in its newspaper. In the early part of twentieth century the Coloured petty bourgeoisie was under stress from contradictory social pressures and faced a predicament common to many racially-defined, subordinate elites in modern society.³⁵ While increasing numbers of Coloured families were growing wealthier and acquiring the means to sustain standards of middle class respectability, their civil rights were being eroded. Their assimilationist overtures were rejected by whites and they were subject to increasingly stringent segregation. Their marginality, moreover, prevented Coloured people from asserting themselves politically or penetrating the institutions, associations and more prestigious professions of the dominant society to any meaningful extent. Thus no matter what degree of 'respectability' or personal accomplishment Coloureds achieved, they were nevertheless automatically branded as social inferiors by

33 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 14.

34 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 145, 152-53.

35 For relevant examples see A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, (Boston, Beacon, 1967), 90 ff.; L. Spitzer, *Lives in Between: Assimilation and marginality in Austria, Brazil and West Africa, 1780-1945*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 127 ff.; C. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and race relations in Brazil and the United States*, (New York,

whites and were forced to accept a second class citizenship.

The Coloured elite was thus faced with a moral and political dilemma. With their ultimate objective being assimilation into a meritocratic society and as the victims of racism, they, as a matter of principle, embraced the ideal of non-racism.³⁶ But being marginal and having a subordinate status thrust upon them, Coloureds had little option but to mobilize politically on the basis of this racial identity. Furthermore, as explained earlier, the advantages of holding a status of relative privilege vis-a-vis Africans within the racial hierarchy provided the Coloured elite with added incentive for cultivating Coloured separatism. The blatant injustice of white privilege only served to encourage racial exclusivity within the Coloured community by heightening their group consciousness and prompting them to rally together in defence of their rights.³⁷

These ambiguities were clearly evident in the *APO* which espoused non-racial and assimilationist ideals but in practice promoted Coloured separatism. Although its constitution did not contain explicit racial bars and a few whites and Africans became members,³⁸ the *APO* saw itself as an organization expressly for Coloured people. Notwithstanding its name³⁹ the organization did not seek to recruit Africans or to make common cause with African political organizations. In his Presidential Address to the 1910 *APO* Conference Abdurahman confirmed that the *APO* was 'an organization of the Coloured people only' and explained that;

MacMillan, 1971), 138 ff.

36 Neither the term 'racism' nor 'non racism' were in use at the time but the ideal that race should not be a factor in the judgement of individuals or social groups certainly found expression. This early twentieth century conception of 'non-racism' differed from later twentieth century variants in that the concept of race itself was not rejected.

37 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 162-63.

38 *APO*, 4/11/1911; Trapido, 'African Political Organization', 100-01.

39 The term 'African' in this instance was meant to denote the geographical location of the organization and in a vague way to imply international solidarity with black people. At this time Africans were generally referred to as 'Natives', or more disparagingly as 'Kaffirs', a term

We have a deep interest in the native races of South Africa, and the Union Act of South Africa puts us all into one fold but it is my duty as President of the APO... to deal with the rights and duties of the Coloured people of South Africa as distinguished from the native races.⁴⁰

The APO was thus in effect a racially exclusive organization, its stated aim being the advancement of the Coloured people. It should therefore come as no surprise that despite the leader page of all issues of the *APO* displaying the credo that it 'will advocate a policy of justice and equality for all men in South Africa', the newspaper nevertheless in many ways acquiesced in the principles governing the South African racial system.

Although the *APO* displayed much sympathy for Africans as fellow sufferers under an unjust racial order, it was careful to demarcate Africans as a separate group that needed to minister to their own needs. The *APO* was highly sensitive to this racial distinction because it recognized that for Coloured people to be too closely associated with Africans would jeopardize their chances of acceptance into the dominant society. It was clear to the Coloured political leadership that the numerical superiority of Africans posed a threat to white supremacy in the long run and that their greater cultural distance from Western bourgeois norms evoked more virulent prejudice from whites. They thus sought to stress the affinity of Coloured people to the white sector of the population and to set themselves apart from Africans. This much was apparent from the way the very first issue of the newspaper characterized the Coloured people;

Everyone is well aware that in South Africa there is a large population of Coloured people as opposed to natives... They are the product of civilization - in its most repellent manifestation according to some. They are of varying degrees of admixture. Their complexions vary from the black skin of the Kafir to a light tint that hardly discloses any trace of the Negro. The features of a large proportion of them are wholly Caucasian and their mode of life conforms with the best European model.⁴¹

occasionally used by the *APO*.

40 *APO*, 9/4/1910.

41 *APO*, 24/5/1909.

The *APO*'s assimilationism and its Coloured exclusivism, however, did not preclude it from supporting the political initiatives of other black groups or decrying instances of racial discrimination against them. The organization, on occasion, even sought limited cooperation with other black political organizations in matters of common concern. The *APO* thus showed some interest in Gandhi's ideas of passive resistance and supported protests organized by the Indian community. The newspaper even set up an Indian Passive Resistance Fund as a gesture of solidarity with Indians in their political struggles.⁴² Similarly the *APO* also supported African political initiatives. It, for example, welcomed the founding of the South African Native National Congress in 1912 'as one of the most important events that has ever happened in South Africa' because it 'has transformed them [the Native races] from a congeries of warring atoms into a united nation'.⁴³ Executive members of the two organizations met for discussions soon after the SANNC's inauguration when it sent a delegation to Cape Town to protest against the Native Squatting Bill. Despite resolving to cooperate on matters of mutual concern and to meet annually for discussion of such issues,⁴⁴ there was no collaboration between the two organizations until the late 1920s when Abdurahman convened the first of a series of Non-European Conferences in response to the Hertzog Bills.⁴⁵

The *APO* reconciled the contradiction between its rejection of racism and its acceptance of an inferior status for Coloureds relative to whites by adopting a political philosophy influenced by the ideas of Booker T. Washington.⁴⁶ The *APO* regularly quoted

42 See *APO*, 24/12/1910; 6/12/1913; 30/10/1920 for a few examples.

43 *APO*, 24/2/1912.

44 *APO*, 23/3/1912.

45 The Non-European Conferences consisted of a series of four conferences held between 1927 and 1934 convened by Dr. Abdurahman with a view to fostering co-operation between Coloured, Indian and African political organizations. The movement had very limited success. *Cape Times* 18/4/1927; *Sun* 10/5/1940; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 79, 121, 141-42.

46 Washington argued that African Americans should temporarily accept their inferior status instead

Washington and held him up as a role model for all black people to follow.⁴⁷ Like Washington, the *APO* believed that a pragmatic strategy of incrementally improving the socio-economic condition of the Coloured people would break down white prejudice and in time win them civil equality within the dominant society. At the time this line of reasoning seemed eminently sensible to the Coloured elite because the second decade of the twentieth century remained one of relative optimism amongst the Coloured petty bourgeoisie in spite of the political setbacks they had experienced since the turn of the century. Although they were apprehensive about the immediate future,⁴⁸ their progressionism persuaded the Coloured elite that these reverses were temporary and that it was a matter of time before liberal values were re-asserted and Coloureds continued their social and political advancement as South Africa evolved toward a meritocratic society. The *APO* leadership was confident that by demonstrating their 'rise in the scale of civilization', Coloured people would in time overcome white racial prejudice and win acceptance into the dominant society.⁴⁹ After all, the most advanced members of their 'race' already had a just claim to full equality with whites.

The political tactics of the *APO* after Union rested on these hopes of assimilation and were aimed at expediting the process through active promotion of Coloured self-improvement. Contemplating the most effective way for the Coloured people to gain 'full political freedom and privileges' the *APO* asserted that '... we have to better ourselves, improve our education, mode of living and environment, seek to become proficient in our

of protesting against the injustices they suffered. They should rather endeavour to elevate themselves through hard work, educational improvement and strict observance of the Christian moral code. He reasoned that by achieving economic self-sufficiency and by demonstrating that they were responsible citizens blacks would win the respect of whites who, through self-interest and their innate sense of justice, would accord African Americans full civil rights. See L. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The making of a black leader*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1972), 204 ff.; A. Taylor, *Travail and Triumph: Black life and culture in the South since the Civil War*, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1976), 54-5; A. Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 1966), 100 ff.

47 See for example *APO*, 31/7/1909; 12/2/1910; 5/11/1910; 19/10/1912; 8/8/1914.

callings and trades'.⁵⁰ A later article explained that 'we shall be required to prove that we are worthy of these and other rights which we claim as loyal British subjects.'⁵¹ This strategy partly explains why the APO was prepared to relinquish its political activism after Union and concentrate on the socio-economic upliftment of the Coloured community. The fallacy in the APO's reasoning was of course that it was precisely when black people demonstrated their competence that white prejudice tended to harden because it raised fears of black economic competition and claims to social equality.

During the earlier years of Union, the emergence of a new slant to the racial exclusiveness of the Coloured elite helped to reinforce the APO's separatist tendencies. While the pragmatism exemplified by Booker T. Washington remained dominant within the APO, the younger generation of educated and politicized Coloureds found the more assertive and self-confident stance of W.E.B. du Bois more attractive.⁵² Those influenced by du Bois felt that Coloured people were too diffident and too dependent on whites in matters relating to the welfare of their community. To overcome this self-deprecation, they argued, Coloureds needed to build self-confidence and themselves take the initiative in uplifting their people.⁵³ Accordingly exhortations for Coloured people to develop a positive self-image and an affirmative group identity, or 'race pride', became more frequent within the pages of the *APO*. Colouredness was increasingly rejected as a badge of derogation and was instead promoted as a positive and desirable quality. In a lecture to

48 *APO*, 8/4/1911; 6/12/1913.

49 *APO*, 24/5/1912; *Educational Journal*, 12/1917; Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 39-40.

50 *APO*, 31/7/1909.

51 *APO*, 3/12/1910.

52 The dominant theme of Du Bois' philosophy was the need for black people to take pride in their racial and cultural distinctiveness and not to adopt the negative image that whites held of blacks. See M. Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*, (Boston, Twayne, 1986), 75 ff.; M. Weinberg, *W. E. B. du Bois: A Reader*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1970), xi-xvii; Meier, *Negro Thought*, 190 ff.

53 See *APO*, 8/10/1910; 26/8/1911; 1/6/1912; 8/8/1914 for some examples.

the Cape Town branch of the APO Harold Cressy, a leading Coloured teacher,⁵⁴ indicated a predilection for this more affirmative strain of thought when he complained of South African blacks lacking self-esteem and being too passive in promoting their communal interests. He lamented that whereas;

In America, no people make a greater study of the Negro than the Negro himself. The same cannot be said of the Coloured and Native races of South Africa... They have so little race pride and lack national feeling. Consequently they have taken little or no interest in questions that affect their welfare as a race.⁵⁵

As attested by the influence of both Washington and du Bois, politicized Coloureds were remarkably receptive to the political ideas and strategies of the Afro-American petty bourgeoisie in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. This was partly because black Americans appeared to be making real strides in their struggle for civil equality. Also, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was of African American origin and had operated in South Africa from 1896 onwards, served as a conduit for these ideas. The AME Church had considerable influence within the Coloured elite and several AME churchmen were intimately involved in Coloured politics. For example, William Collins, the first President of the APO, was a lay preacher for the AME Church and Dr Francis Gow of the AME Bethel Institute in Cape Town was elected APO President in 1942.⁵⁶

Besides the focus on African American politics the *APO* displayed a growing interest in the fortunes of black peoples in other parts of the world, especially those subject to colonial rule. It thus drew attention to ways in which Africans and Asians were being exploited by whites and painted an exaggerated picture of the progress made by blacks

54 For biographical detail on Cressy see M. Adhikari, '*Against the Current*': *A biography of Harold Cressy, 1889-1916*, (Cape Town, Harold Cressy High School, 2000)

55 *APO*, 25/3/1911.

56 Evidence of Bishop D. H. Simms before the Cape Coloured Commission, 24/11/1934, Abdurahman Family Papers, University of Chicago; C. Lowers, (compiler), *AME Church 75th Anniversary*, (Cape Town, AME Church of South Africa, 1971); *South African Spectator*, 13/5/1902; *Sun*, 18/5/1934; 19/6/1942.

internationally.⁵⁷ Ironically, although the *APO* identified strongly with black people throughout the world it, for pragmatic reasons, sought to distance itself from Africans in South Africa itself.

The newspaper often pointed to the achievements of black people as proof that they had the potential for matching whites. Although the *APO* was prepared to admit that Coloureds and most other black peoples were 'backward' compared to whites, unlike most racists it did not regard this inferiority to be inherent or permanent. The superiority of whites was assumed to be due to historically and environmentally favourable conditions which allowed the European peoples to outpace the rest of humanity. The *APO* thus endorsed the opinion that '... the Negro, given the environment, the education, and the opportunity of the white man, will behave, think, and live in much the same way as the average white man.'⁵⁸ To the *APO* it was thus a matter of time before black people caught up with whites as Western education and technology spread to the rest of the globe.

After the exceptionally promising first two years of its existence, the *APO* gradually lost its vitality. It was especially from the latter half of 1913 onwards that the enthusiasm and the motivation that had sustained the newspaper in the previous years appeared to evaporate as its circulation shrank, advertising revenues declined and it sank more deeply into debt. The organization itself was slowly declining into a state of dormancy. As production of the *APO* became increasingly arduous so the reporting lost its incisiveness and the content became suffused with a prosaicness and a banality that bespoke of the demoralization of the Coloured elite in the aftermath of Union.

57 See *APO*, 26/3/1910; 17/6/1911; 13/1/1912; 7/11/1919; 2/10/1920 for a few examples.

World War I, however, provided the newspaper with a temporary reprieve. The War gave the Coloured elite hope of a new dawn after the conflict and provided the *APO* with sensational news that could be garnered with relatively little effort or cost. At the same time war-induced inflation undermined the commercial viability of the *APO* by increasing production costs and reducing circulation. The newspaper struggled along until November 1915 when, beset by financial difficulties, it ceased publication for nearly four years.

From August 1914 the content and editorial policy of the *APO* was completely dominated by the First World War. The attitude of the newspaper to the conflict was largely determined by the assumption that the War would mark a watershed in the progress of subject peoples the world over. It had little doubt that the Allied forces would triumph and hoped that much of the racial injustice suffered by blacks would be eliminated by the need for governments world-wide to reconstitute social and international relations on a footing that would ensure peace and stability for the future. The *APO* trusted that their patriotism and the contribution of Coloured people to the war effort would be recognized and rewarded with an amelioration of racial discrimination. It expected the Coloured people to be commended for remaining loyal to the Empire while many whites had opposed South African involvement in the War and some had even revolted against British authority.⁵⁹ The *APO* thus anticipated a gradual elimination of racial barriers and the integration of Coloureds into all levels of national life in the post-War world.

The newspaper thus supported the Allied cause with enthusiasm and ostentatiously

58 *APO*, 12/2/1910; *Educational Journal*, 6/1918.

59 *APO*, 3/10/1914; 31/10/1914; J. D. Shingler, 'Education and the political order in South Africa', (Ph. D. thesis, Yale, 1976), 11-12; van der Ross, *Myths and Attitudes*, 76.

displayed its loyalty to the Empire and its patriotism for South Africa.⁶⁰ Indeed, the APO eagerly helped to recruit volunteers for the Cape Corps, an infantry regiment instituted to allow Coloured soldiers to serve in an auxiliary capacity during the War. The Coloured petty bourgeoisie took great pride in the Cape Corps and several APO leaders either served on the Cape Corps Comforts Committee or helped with its fund-raising efforts.⁶¹ Abe Desmore, a prominent APO member and a leading intellectual within the Coloured elite during the first half of the twentieth century, volunteered for service and wrote a book about his experiences. Echoing the feeling of his community, Desmore described the Cape Corps as the answer to the 'prayer of the Coloured community to be allowed to do their share in the toils of the Great War'.⁶²

Because the *APO* only resumed publication in August 1919 it contains little direct evidence of its expectations as the war drew to a close. The hopes of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie in this regard can be gauged from the *Educational Journal*. Published from May 1915 onwards by the Teachers' League of South Africa, a Coloured teachers' association initiated by the APO, the *Educational Journal* was in a real sense an associate publication of the *APO* at this time.⁶³ The *Journal*, eager to show its allegiance, in its very first issue proclaimed that, '... we look forward with calm confidence to the triumph of British might and British right. We are prouder than ever of being subjects of the glorious British Empire'.⁶⁴ The expectations of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie were evident in the way the *Educational Journal* reported Justice Gardiner's speech at a memorial service for Cape Corps men who had fallen in the East African campaign. Entitling the article 'For the Empire and Right', the *Journal* savoured his praise for Coloured men having 'nobly

60 *APO*, 17/10/1914; 31/10/1914.

61 *APO*, 5/9/1914; 19/9/1914.

62 A. Desmore, *With the Second Cape Corps through Central Africa*, (Cape Town, Citadel, 1920), 5

63 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 15.

64 *Educational Journal*, 5/1915.

answered the call [to enlist] in a way that must have shamed some of the young White men ... [and for helping to] bring home to those of European parentage a sense of duty.' Gardner struck a deep chord within the Coloured elite when he extolled the Cape Corps for having fought 'to free the world of slavery ... for the cause of humanity and civilization and ... the claim of Coloured people to be civilized'.⁶⁵

Contrary to their expectations that an Allied victory would see a re-assertion of liberal values in South Africa, by the time the *APO* resumed publication it was clear that Coloured people could not expect to be rewarded for their patriotism and their contribution to the war effort. If anything, it would appear that Coloured disappointment in this regard played an important role in 1919 being a year of revival for the *APO*. Not only did it organize a national conference for the first time since 1913 but it also resurrected its newspaper in August of that year.⁶⁶ The period immediately after the War, in addition, witnessed a brief flurry of the political activism that had marked the organization in the years prior to Union. The *APO*, amongst other things tried unsuccessfully to organize Coloured workers into labour unions under its aegis and petitioned the British Government not to place South West Africa under South African control until Coloured political rights had been restored. After this request had been brushed aside by the Colonial Secretary, the *APO* sent a similar appeal to the Paris Peace Conference in March 1919.⁶⁷ When its petition was ignored and the discriminatory franchise of South Africa extended to South West Africa, it was apparent that the Coloured community would not reap any reward from its support of the war effort.

65 *Educational Journal*, 12/1917.

66 M. Simons, 'Organized Coloured political movements', in H. W. van der Merwe and C. J. Groenewald, (eds.), *Occupational and Social change among Coloured people in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Juta, 1976), 212 claims that the newspaper was reconstituted with financial aid from the Unionist Party but offers no evidence to substantiate this claim.

67 *APO*, 1/8/1919.

Despite these disappointments and growing segregationism, the period between the end of the War and the demise of the *APO* in 1923 nevertheless remained one of relative optimism amongst the Coloured petty bourgeoisie that they would in time achieve their quest for civil equality. There was some justification for the sanguine expectations of the Coloured elite since the legislative onslaught on black civil rights of the 1920s and 1930s still lay in the future. The false expectations of the Coloured elite were nourished by their progressionist assumptions and continued faith that liberal values would somehow prevail in the end.⁶⁸ The Coloured petty bourgeoisie, moreover, was growing in size and gaining confidence in its ability to sustain the standards of white middle class respectability. In addition, the Coloured vote was a growing force in the politics of the Western Cape as Coloureds increasingly became politicized and able to meet the franchise qualifications.⁶⁹

Until the mid-1920s the *APO* leadership, furthermore, drew encouragement from opposition amongst Afrikaners to the South African government, especially when given violent expression as with the 1914 revolt and the 1922 Rand Rebellion. They hoped that Afrikaner rebelliousness would serve as a foil for their patriotism and that by comparison Coloureds would be shown to be responsible, law-abiding citizens worthy of full acceptance into the dominant society. By ridiculing the extremism and lack of refinement of white workers, the *APO* invited direct comparison between 'respectable' Coloureds and the factious white working class.⁷⁰

Given its assimilationist aspirations and the marginality of the constituency it represented, the *APO* had little choice but to persist with its pragmatic incrementalism

68 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 7, 39.

69 *Union of South Africa Year Book, 1946*, (G.P.53895-1947), 46-47; Thompson, *Coloured Franchise*, 55; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*: 72-78. The black vote had grown from 15% of the Cape electorate at the time of Union to 21% by 1921 while the Coloured share of the electorate had grown from 9.5% to 14% over the same period. See also *Cape Times*, 19/10/1915; *APO*, 1/8/1919; Shifrin, 'New deal for Coloured people', 10.

after its resurrection. The tone and content of the newspaper during its latter phase reflected this outlook and there was increasing stress on self-help and socio-economic upliftment. Indeed, at the APO conference of 1923, the very year the organization ceased publishing its newspaper, it launched two very successful self-help ventures aimed at utilizing the savings generated within the Coloured community.⁷¹ The APO Burial Society and the APO Building Society both outlived the APO that collapsed in 1944 and are still in existence today.⁷² After 1919 the *APO* never regained the vigour or the enterprise it displayed in the earlier years of its existence. With the organization itself struggling to hold its ground in the face of declining membership and general disillusionment about its failure to stem the tide of segregationism, the newspaper inevitably suffered, reflecting these strains. Once again as in 1913-15, the quality of the reportage declined as deepening financial problems and falling circulation sapped the morale of its staff. After a somewhat erratic career during the early 1920s the *APO* finally expired at the end of 1923.

The *APO* stands out as being by far the most important newspaper specifically aimed at a Coloured readership prior to the emergence of a commercial Coloured press in the 1930s.⁷³ The *APO* is important both in terms of the degree to which it represented Coloured opinion as well as for the bulk and range of evidence it contains about the weltanschauung and social experience of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie. Facing the predicament of Coloured marginality and trying to capitalize on the intermediate status of Coloureds in the South African racial hierarchy, the *APO* had to negotiate a tricky path between protest and accommodation, on the one hand, and between assimilationism and

70 *APO*, 28/1/1922; 25/3/1922; *Educational Journal*, 4/1922.

71 *APO*, 21/4/1923; 22/12/1923.

72 The APO Building Society has since changed its name to the Cape Town Terminating Building Society. Both have offices in Athlone, Cape Town.

73 The *Sun* published from August 1932 and the *Cape Standard* from May 1936 onwards were the first commercial newspapers aimed at a Coloured readership.

Coloured separatism, on the other. Continually adjusting their responses to white supremacy to try and gain the best compromise between these competing interests, the APO and its newspaper inevitably displayed ideological inconsistencies and were ambivalent in their political outlook.

Contrary to the impression created by the current literature on Coloured history, the response of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie to the exclusionary political dispensation of the Union of South Africa and the ensuing upsurge in segregationism was not simply one of protest and resistance. As this examination of the APO demonstrates, the response of politicized Coloureds was more complex. There was opposition to be sure, but there was also a degree of acceptance of the racial order and an attempt to work within this system for the benefit of the Coloured people. Despite a commitment to non-racism there was nevertheless a perception that Coloureds needed to come to an accommodation with the racial order and in spite of their over-riding desire for assimilation into the dominant society the Coloured elite saw the only practical political option open to them to be one of mobilizing by appealing to Coloured identity. These ambivalences and contradictions were a direct consequence of the marginality of Coloureds and their intermediate status within the racial hierarchy. The next case study will not only confirm that these conclusions held true for the period following the demise of the APO but will also broaden the analysis to take into account perceptions of class in the expression of Coloured identity.

Ambivalences of race and class in the *Educational Journal*, 1915-1940

The *Educational Journal*, published from May 1915 onwards, was the official organ of the Teachers' League of South Africa founded in Cape Town in 1913 as a professional

association expressly for Coloured teachers.⁷⁴ The Teachers' League was established at the instigation of the African Political Organization and although it operated as a fully independent organization throughout the period under review, the social, political and ideological goals of the two organizations remained broadly compatible.⁷⁵ Representing what was by far the largest professional group within the Coloured community, the League reflected the social experience and the *weltanschauung* of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie. And, as the mouthpiece of one of the most influential Coloured communal organizations of the time, the *Journal* mirrored the values, aspirations and frustrations of the Coloured elite.⁷⁶

Despite its name, the TLSA was not a national body. Its membership was confined to the Cape Province and its organizational life was largely centred on Cape Town. By far the greater part of its leadership was drawn from the city and most of the association's annual conferences, executive meetings and social functions were held there.⁷⁷ These centripetal tendencies were very much a consequence of the regional concentration of the Coloured people. Fully one third of all Coloureds were resident in the greater Cape Town area and about two thirds were located within the Western Cape during the first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁸ Thus while the Boland branches of the TLSA were able to participate in League activities centred on Cape Town, the more distant ones such as those in Kimberley, Port Elizabeth and the outlying rural areas tended to be isolated and to lead independent lives.

Although it started off as a relatively small organization the League had nevertheless

74 *Cape Times*, 24/6/1913; *APO*, 28/6/1913; *Educational Journal*, 5/1915.

75 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 16-17, 24-25, 35-37, 58-59, 121, 171.

76 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, see especially Introduction and chapter 3.

77 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, Appendix III, chapter 3.

78 *Union Census, 1911*, 2-3; *Seventh Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa, 1946*, (U.G.51-1949), 4-5. Nearly 90% of all Coloureds lived in the Cape Province.

grown to the extent that it was able to draw the majority of Coloured teachers under its wing by the early 1940s.⁷⁹ Notwithstanding the dominance of the Cape Town based leadership, the League was nevertheless fully representative of the Coloured teaching profession and, in its social outlook, of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie as a whole. Sporting several of this social group's most eminent individuals and leading intellectuals within its ranks, the League and its periodical played an instrumental role in the on-going process of Coloured self-definition and the construction of Coloured identity.

Although conditions of economic exploitation and class domination principally determined the socio-political status of the Coloured community, the racial dimensions of their situation were uppermost in the minds of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie and therefore of League members. They experienced their society primarily as members of a racial category, the Coloured people, and their consciousness was filtered through the prism of their identity as Coloureds. It was therefore racial oppression rather than class exploitation that excited anger and resentment within their breasts and informed their political outlook. Class consciousness within the Coloured elite was thus attenuated and largely articulated in terms of their identity as Coloured people. This much is evident from the League being a racially exclusive body with the explicit aim of fostering the educational interests of the Coloured people.⁸⁰

Colouredness was, as explained earlier, first and foremost a racial identity because it was defined in terms of racial criteria and phenotypical characteristics. The most salient features of the Coloured community that shaped their relationship with other groups

79 *APO*, 28/6/1913; *Cape Standard*, 7/6/1938; 28/6/1938; *Educational Journal*, 8/1940; 8/1943; Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 49-53, 60-62.

80 *Rules and Bye-laws of the Teachers' League of South Africa*, (Cape Town, Teachers' League of South Africa 1913), 1; *Rules and Bye-laws of the Teachers' League of South Africa*, (Cape Town, Teachers' League of South Africa, 1916), 1; See *Educational Journal*, 6/1931; 6/1933; 2/1936 for updated versions of the *Rules and Bye-Laws*.

within the broader context of South African society during the earlier decades of Union were their marginality and their intermediate status within the social order. Their marginality,⁸¹ as may be recalled, meant that Coloured people had very little choice in the matter of accepting an inferior social status to whites as well as the second class citizenship imposed upon them by the white supremacist state. Coloureds were, however, successful in holding the middle ground in the South African racial hierarchy between the dominant white and the numerically preponderant African groups by claiming to be culturally more advanced than the latter and being partly descended from the former.⁸²

Together, their marginality and intermediate position within the society resulted in ambiguities and unresolved contradictions within Coloured identity and presented Coloured people with a series of dilemmas and paradoxes in their day to day living. This in turn led to inconsistent and equivocal behaviour that was particularly conspicuous within the Coloured elite and hence also evident in the *Educational Journal*. These inconsistencies reflected ambivalences inherent to the way in which Coloured people perceived themselves as a group and the manner in which they related to other social groups. Coloured identity was therefore highly sensitive to the immediate context in which it operated and had a degree of fluidity in any given situation. This flexibility was, however, constrained by the parameters of popular understanding of the concept of Colouredness as outlined in chapter one and restrictions of varying degrees of severity imposed by the state. Whereas racial identities are notoriously intractable, especially in instances of stark contrast, because they are based on visible and essentially immutable phenotypical features, especially skin colour, facial features and hair texture,⁸³ Coloured

81 Coloured people formed about 8% of the population during this period. Compare the population statistics in *Union Census, 1911*, 2-3 with those in *Sixth Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa, 1936*, vol. I, (U.G.21-1938), 4-5.

82 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 2-4, 24-6, 121.

83 M. G. Smith, 'Pluralism, race and ethnicity in selected African countries' in J. Rex and D. Mason, (eds.), *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986),

identity, was by comparison relatively versatile and fluid.

Besides being partly derived from their intermediate status, this fluidity was also a consequence of the Coloured people forming a residual category encompassing a wide range of people and social groups that did not fit into either the white or African camps. The Coloured category thus covered the entire spectrum of racial gradations between the Caucasoid and Negroid somatic norm images. Lacking definitive ethnic or racial indicators or positive symbols with which to identify, Coloured identity was continually in tension between white and African oppositions in terms of which it delineated itself and was represented by others. Indeed, the difficulties of demarcating the Coloured category with any precision usually resulted in Coloured people being defined by a process of exclusion as those people who were neither white nor African. Because of their ambivalent position within the society and the insecurity that this engendered, Coloureds were engaged in a process of continually modulating their reactions to their situation in order to strike a balance between their assimilationist aspirations, the realities of their exclusion from the dominant society and their fears at being cast down to the status of Africans.⁸⁴

The resultant ambiguities within Coloured identity were manifested in a range of inconsistent behaviour within the Teachers' League and in a disjuncture between the ideals and actions of its leaders. For example, within the Coloured community the League demanded the deference commensurate with its elite social standing, yet often willingly accepted an inferior status to whites and meekly acquiesced in the humiliating treatment

191; S. Wallman, 'Ethnicity and the boundary process in context' in Rex and Mason, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 229; M. Banton, *Racial and Ethnic Competition*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10.

84 Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, chs. 4, 5; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 71 ff.; Goldin, *Making Race*, 29 ff.; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 2-4, 60.

meted out to it by a bullying white officialdom.⁸⁵ More conspicuously, the *Educational Journal*, like the *APO*, opposed racial discrimination and rejected race as a principle for ordering human affairs yet zealously promoted Coloured separatism and in this way endorsed the precepts governing the racial hierarchy of South African society. The TLISA, in addition, claimed to stand for a broad South Africanism and strove for the full integration of Coloured people into national life. Yet it failed to extend this cherished ideal of assimilation to Africans and did all it could to distance itself from them. Another glaring inconsistency in the make-up of the League was that its leaders had a strong sense of social responsibility toward the Coloured labouring poor and were genuinely concerned about their welfare, but often displayed disdain toward working class Coloured people, doing little to hide their feelings of superiority.

This last-mentioned ambiguity is perhaps one that is the least surprising because it is not uncommon for elites to have such ambivalent attitudes towards those whom they consider to be their social inferiors. Thus, despite Coloured people forming a subordinate group within the wider South African society, League members nevertheless displayed a robust chauvinism towards their working class counterparts. Class prejudice consequently manifested itself in a myriad of ways within the *Educational Journal*.⁸⁶

For the quintessential expression of class prejudice within the League toward the Coloured labouring poor, one need go no further than Dan Sampson's Presidential Address to the 1916 annual conference in which he attempted a 'class analysis' of the

85 For an extended discussion of League experience in this regard see Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 116-28.

86 See *Educational Journal*, 5/1915; 6/1917; 5/1922; 10/1932; 8/1937 for some examples. See also M. Friedling, 'The Jeanes Plan and its application to Coloured education' (B. Ed. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1940), 71, 84; F. Joshua, 'An analysis of the social, economic and educational background of Coloured school children in the Cape Peninsula', (B. Ed. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1943), 111, 117-8.

Coloured community.⁸⁷ Sampson's is the most comprehensive and vivid statement of the assumptions and prejudices that informed League attitudes towards the Coloured working classes. His speech is important for the coherence and frankness with which it delineated the Coloured elite's perception of the social hierarchy within the Coloured community. Sampson also exemplified League ideas about the cause of these social problems as well as how they ought to be tackled. Furthermore, in his address Sampson articulated the attitudes and assumptions that underpinned the League's civilizing mission towards working class Coloured people and which informed its struggle for educational reform throughout this period.

Sampson divided the Coloured people into three categories, namely, the sunken, the sinking and the uprising classes. Of the sunken class he commented, 'What an accumulation of filth, vice, dissipation and crime! Such a combination seems to defy all the influences of human healing. "Past social redemption" we exclaim.'⁸⁸ The sinking class was characterized as containing neither the 'openly vicious nor the hardened criminal' but as one that was indifferent to its own advancement and with its faculties susceptible to corruption. Their 'indispensable needs are not prison accommodation, reformatories or police officers, but schools and teachers, or in other words, education.'⁸⁹ The uprising class, predictably, embraced 'those who, being concerned about their advancement in life, zealously watch over the moral and intellectual training of their offspring.'⁹⁰ That the *Coloured Commission Report* more than two decades later made a similar tri-partite class distinction within the Coloured population, indicates that this was a common perception of social stratification within the Coloured community.⁹¹

87 Sampson's speech was serialized over three editions of the *Educational Journal*, namely, 8/1916, 9/1916, and 10/1916.

88 *Educational Journal*, 9/1916.

89 *Educational Journal*, 10/1916.

90 *Educational Journal*, 10/1916.

91 *Report of the Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Cape Coloured Population of the Union*,

A critically important assumption underlying Sampson's reasoning and one which was generally shared by the League, was that hooliganism, crime, immorality and social degradation were largely the result of 'ignorance' or 'a lack of knowledge'. This 'ignorance' included not only such tangible concerns as illiteracy, the lack of economically useful skills or mothers not knowing the basics of good nutrition but also such elusive qualities as peoples' insensibility to 'virtue' and their indifference to the 'noble things in life'.⁹² In this respect the religious and professional values of League members converged so that there was an automatic association between ignorance and evil on the one hand and knowledge and virtue on the other. 'Ignorance' was seen to breed social degeneracy while 'knowledge' was the basis of progress, civilization and all that was noble in humankind. That the *APO* contrasted ignorance as 'the most soul-withering blight that can afflict mankind' with knowledge as 'the wing that flieth to heaven' is an indication that this was a common perception within the Coloured elite.⁹³

It is therefore not surprising that the *Journal* considered educational improvement to be the most effective means for eliminating 'ignorance' and reforming the Coloured working classes to fit its image of bourgeois respectability. Besides being the most direct means of exposing them to the superior ways of the dominant culture, education was regarded to be the most effective way of instilling the skills necessary for economic success and inculcating the values needed to turn the mass of Coloured people into exemplary citizens. These attitudes were evident in the commonly expressed belief within the League that the school formed the 'bulwark of civilization'. Sampson echoed these sentiments by reiterating that only education could effectively remedy the social malaise

1937, (U.G.54-1937), 13-16.

92 *Educational Journal*, 1/1917; 1/1931; 1/1933; 10/1936; *Sun*, 27/6/1941.

93 *APO*, 28/1/1922.

induced by 'ignorance'.⁹⁴

But for this strategy to succeed, it required the cooperation of the state and the dominant society as a whole. League leaders recognized that it was only through massive government intervention that sufficient educational facilities and other social services could be provided for the Coloured proletariat to be coaxed into the habits of 'civilization'. But this goodwill was clearly not forthcoming and the *Journal* therefore blamed the perpetuation of social problems within the Coloured community on the state's indifference to 'the large number of poverty-stricken children who are growing up in an atmosphere of vice and ignorance.' The *Journal* considered the corruption of the Coloured youth to be an ineluctable consequence of prevailing social conditions because;

There are bands of children of tender years roaming the streets who have no homes, there are others who have homes of sorts, but who have to shift for themselves, and there are others, a considerable number, whose parents continue to scrape together sufficient to prolong their school lives to Standard II to enable them at twelve to enter a factory or domestic service. A child at twelve in a factory! What is the future of these children? Let there be no beating about the bush. The girls fall under the suggestive influences of the streets, weaken and take the easiest path,...The boys become addicted to smoking dagga, drinking, gambling and thieving.⁹⁵

Having drawn attention to the 'deplorable condition' of the Coloured masses, the natural question that arose for Sampson and the *Educational Journal* was, 'Whence are the hooligans who throng our streets and fill our gaols; by whom were they created?' The answer he provided was typical of League reasoning on the matter; 'The benevolence of a Creator intended them to be human, but the passivity of the State, with its mistaken economy is largely responsible for their degradation which brings them almost to the level of the brute.'⁹⁶ Like Sampson, the League blamed the state for the social

94 *Educational Journal*, 10/1916. See also for example the 1/1923 and 3/1929 issues.

95 *Educational Journal*, 10/1917; See also the 8/1915 and 1-6/1927 issues.

96 *Educational Journal*, 8/1916. For other examples see the 5/1923 and 1/1931 issues.

degradation of the Coloured masses for refusing to provide them with proper educational facilities. Although not explicitly articulated as such, this argument was also a rejoinder to the all too familiar racial explanations that whites commonly offered to account for the social condition of the Coloured community.

Sampson's reference to the 'mistaken economy' of the state echoed a favourite refrain in the *Journal's* periodic call for the reform of Coloured education. The League held that it was false economy and socially ruinous for the state to squander an increasing proportion of the society's resources on law enforcement, the administration of justice and the other costs of endemic criminality. It instead advocated the preventative policy of providing all sectors of the population with adequate educational facilities. The League argued that this would in the long run benefit the whole of society by reducing expenditure on the police force, courts, jails, reformatories, hospitals and the like.⁹⁷ Deploring the short-sightedness of the government for refusing to reform Coloured education, the *Journal* rhetorically asked of its policies, 'What is the result but hospitals and prisons filled with human beings, who had but a little care and money been expended upon them when children, might have been a credit to the state and a source of happiness to their fellow men?'⁹⁸

It was sometimes darkly hinted that by refusing to improve Coloured education, the state was passing up the opportunity of procuring a well-behaved and skilled working class and that the price for this mistake would be widespread social unrest that might prove to be a 'menace to our future peace, happiness and prosperity'.⁹⁹ In his Presidential Address of 1923 Philip Scholtz warned the authorities that; 'You may increase your police...

97 *Educational Journal*, 8/1915; 7/1917; 3/1922; 7/1923; 1-3/1925; 10/1931; *APO*, 15/7/1912.

98 *Educational Journal*, 10/1917.

99 *Educational Journal*, 5/1915; 1/1917; 3/1921; 7/1923; 1-3/1925; 1-6/1927; J. H. Rhoda, 'A contribution toward the study of education among the Cape Coloured people,' (B. Ed. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1929), 51, 72.

enlarge your reformatories, your palaces of justice, you will need them all and more, if you do not call a halt to this state of affairs'.¹⁰⁰ There was, however, not much conviction behind these tactics because League leaders were well aware that neither they nor the state had reason to fear the Coloured working classes who were too small and powerless to pose a serious threat to the social order.

Besides their altruistic motives, there was also an important element of self-interest in the League's incentive to raise the social condition of the working classes. While they regarded the 'advanced' sectors of the Coloured community to have attained the requisite level of 'civilization' to merit acceptance into the dominant society, it was clear to them that the majority of Coloured people had not. The *Journal* recognized that, in the minds of whites, Colouredness was intimately associated with a range of negative, racially attributed characteristics. It was extremely conscious of white racist judgements of the sort that Coloureds were 'a backward, lazy, debased people for whom it was better to build strong jail's and that they 'lack sincerity of purpose, are too easy-going, poor in determination and possessing no stamina'.¹⁰¹

In addition, rowdiness, drunkenness, criminality and the whole gamut of 'immoral' and delinquent behaviour were sufficiently common amongst the Coloured working classes to embarrass 'respectable' Coloureds acutely. The *Journal*, for instance, was ashamed of the 'Coloured hooligans and loud vulgar Coloured girls who perturb our streets, parks, public gardens, foreshore, trains etc.'¹⁰² League leaders realized that such behaviour provided bigoted whites with ample ammunition to justify racial discrimination. They feared that individual Coloureds would not be able to take their rightful place in the society as long

100 *Educational Journal*, 7/1923.

101 *Educational Journal*, 2/1936.

102 *Educational Journal*, 9/1921.

as they were being discredited by an unruly Coloured working class. The Coloured elite argued in vain that individuals should be judged on merit, that any community should be evaluated by its upper rather than its lower classes and that the poor could not be held responsible for their predicament.¹⁰³

Denied the option of quietly assimilating into the dominant society on the basis of individual merit, a longer term strategy of the Coloured elite was to adopt a civilizing mission toward the Coloured masses. Realizing that they would not be able to dissociate themselves from the Coloured labouring classes in the minds of whites, League leaders resigned themselves to the task of raising the entire Coloured community to a 'level of civilization' where there would be no justification for discrimination against them. The League therefore assiduously applied itself to the pragmatic and incrementalist strategy of raising the socio-economic condition of Coloureds and patiently demonstrating that there were Coloured people worthy of acceptance into the dominant society. Eroding white prejudice gradually in this manner appeared to be the only viable option open to the *Journal*. Although the idea seemed never to have occurred to League members, the repudiation of Colouredness could have been little more than an empty gesture.¹⁰⁴

For the *Journal*, an essential part of the civilizing process was the inculcation of habits such as thrift, punctuality, honesty, cleanliness, temperance, moderation, dignity and respect for authority into the Coloured masses.¹⁰⁵ These values were central to Western bourgeois perceptions of 'civilized behaviour' and opposite to the traits attributed to the Coloured stereotype. These were the sorts of values that were taken to separate the

103 *Educational Journal*, 3/1929; Rhoda, 'Education among Coloured people' 44; Evidence of a Coloured deputation from Beaufort West before the Cape Coloured Commission, 13/5/1936, Abdurahman Family Papers.

104 See van der Ross, *Myths and Attitudes*, 26-29 for commentary on this issue.

105 *Educational Journal*, 4/1917; 3/1922; 7-9/1926; 9/1928; 8/1934; 2/1938.

'civilized' from the 'savage', the 'progressive' from the 'backward'. The subjective connotations with which the League invested the quality of thrift provide a good illustration of the way in which such traits were imbued with racial significance. Discussing the need to instill the habit of providence into the Coloured people, 'Advance', a regular contributor to the *Educational Journal* asserted that, '...the savage races of man such as the Bushmen and the Australian Aborigines have no idea of providing for a future supply when food is plentiful' and concluded that 'for a race to make progress, it is necessary that thrift habits be inculcated in the young.'¹⁰⁶ Because they accepted this reasoning, none of his colleagues contradicted E.C. Roberts when, in his 1937 Presidential Address he attributed the 'backwardness' of the Coloured people to 'a lack of thrift'.¹⁰⁷

Ernest Moses, a prominent T.L.S.A. member and Chairman of the Coloured Welfare Association, neatly summarized the rationale behind the League's civilizing mission:

The progressive development of any nation or people is retarded and its vitality sapped by dire attacks of immorality, drunkenness, hooliganism, gambling and extravagance.... While the Coloured people of South Africa have an aristocracy of their own they also have a large mass of uneducated, undeveloped individuals without ambition, who far outnumber the handful who have been blessed and privileged to develop a taste for the better and higher things of this life.... For many more years to come the Coloured people are to be judged according to the number of its weaker members, and that salvation lies only in the general uplift of the masses....the weaker brothers and sisters should be schooled into virtue, and this can be done by no other method than by educational development.¹⁰⁸

Thwarted in their attempts to shake off the automatic racial stereotyping of Coloured people and to be judged as individuals, League leaders, on occasion, expressed exasperation at both whites and the Coloured working classes for their predicament. Thus E.C. Roberts complained that, 'It is astonishing to find men, good and sensible,... who

¹⁰⁶ *Educational Journal*, 8/1932.

¹⁰⁷ *Educational Journal*, 8/1937.

consider hybrid people as possessed of vices only, with no virtues... [and] relegate the hybrid people to the lowly position of hewers of wood and drawers of water.’¹⁰⁹ In his Presidential Address of 1934, Ned Doman vented his frustration at the tendency of whites to ‘point with scorn and contempt at the lowest type of Coloured person he can find ... as an example of the Coloured man’ when they were in fact responsible for Coloured working class degradation.¹¹⁰ Similarly, an impatient John Abrahamse, despairing of the moral redemption of the Coloured people cried out during his Presidential Address of 1938 that, ‘We are knee-haltered because a large portion of our people drag us down into a mire of filth.’¹¹¹

As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, within the League class attitudes were indissolubly bound up with racial perceptions. Like white supremacists, the *Journal* tended to conflate class distinctions with racial differences, but unlike racists they did not regard these differences to be inherent or permanent. Despite its contradictions and vacillations with regard to issues of race, the League ultimately believed that all human beings were potentially equal and that this fundamental truth would become increasingly evident as human society advanced to higher stages of civilization. It was on this premise that the *Journal* held out hope that Coloureds would eventually be fully integrated into a society in which race would be irrelevant to social status. This partly explains why, despite intensifying segregationism throughout this period,¹¹² the Coloured political leadership and the League persisted with its pragmatic incrementalism and retained hope of their eventual acceptance into the dominant society. Notwithstanding these aspirations, the League in its daily affairs nevertheless had to come to terms with the realities of the

108 *Educational Journal*, 3/1929.

109 *Educational Journal*, 8/1937.

110 *Educational Journal*, 8/1934.

111 *Cape Standard*, 5/7/1938.

112 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 119 ff.; Goldin, *Making Race*, 33-40; *Cape Standard*, 27/6/1939.

racially stratified society and the marginality of the Coloured people.

In this regard League leaders, as pointed out earlier, were faced with a dilemma common to the Coloured petty bourgeoisie as a whole. Because their primary objective was assimilation into the dominant society on the basis of merit and because they were the victims of white racism, politicized Coloureds embraced the ideal of non-racism as a matter of principle. They therefore rejected race as a basis for ordering society and cosseted the ideal of a meritocratic social system regulated by Western norms and values - without the racism. Their marginality, however, meant that they had little option but to mobilize politically by appealing to Coloured identity. Not only did the Coloured political leadership accept Colouredness and the inferior status that went with it as a social reality but they were also very much aware that there were potential rewards consequent upon their cultivation of Coloured separatism. Thus, in contradiction to their cherished ideal of non-racism, virtually all Coloured political leaders chose to work within the racial system of South African society for the betterment of their community thereby accepting the position of Coloureds within that hierarchy.

As with the *APO* these ambiguities manifested themselves clearly in the organizational life of the League, which espoused non-racial and assimilationist ideals but for all practical purposes was racially exclusive. It is therefore not surprising that the League did not behave consistently in matters of race, and throughout the period under review, vacillated between accepting and rejecting the inferior status imposed upon the Coloured people. As a result, the organization developed an opportunistic attitude toward the racial system and Coloured identity. Given the inability of Coloureds to influence government policy in any meaningful way, the League realized that it needed to operate in a pragmatic manner and that it needed to be practical about its organizational objectives.

Perceiving no other option but to bow to white power, it deliberately set out to play the racial system to the minimum disadvantage of Coloureds. The *Journal* therefore conceded the pursuit of full equality with whites to be unrealistic for the foreseeable future and to be an exercise in futility. Both within the League and the Coloured political organizations of the day, it was generally accepted that more could be gained by adopting a compliant attitude toward white supremacy than by taking a principled stand on racial equality or a militant assertion of their rights. The *Educational Journal* thus tended to object to segregation when it was considered to be detrimental to Coloured interests but accepted, even applauded, racial discrimination where it was perceived to be to their advantage. Its pragmatism therefore led the *Journal* to a qualified acceptance of white privilege and segregationism and even induced it to try and trade its acceptance of their inferior status for concessions from the state.

The *Journal's* readiness to sanction white privilege was, however, predicated upon the condition that the Coloured people were not to be denied the opportunity of progressing at an acceptable pace. For example, Israel Oppelt, after pointing to the huge discrepancy between state expenditure on white and Coloured education in his 1927 Presidential Address, made it clear that he had 'no quarrel with the state at differentiating. But that a difference out of all proportion be made... is unfair.' His explanation that '... though we may not succeed in shaking the conscience of the lawmakers so effectively as to obtain half the European child's grant, yet by consistently agitating we shall succeed in getting more than in the past',¹³ typified the League's cautious incrementalism.

With the tightening of segregation against Coloured people throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the *Educational Journal* increasingly resigned itself to accepting racially

113 *Educational Journal*, 7-12/1927.

discriminatory measures. It preferred to try and salvage whatever it could from a deteriorating situation and to manoeuvre within the new constraints that were being placed upon it than to assert its rights or to fight the system. This meek capitulation and acquiescence in their denigration is demonstrated by the League's reaction to the exclusion of Coloured students from the Cape Town Technical College in 1925. Quite predictably, initial League objections at this racial bar were ignored by the authorities.¹¹⁴ When it became clear that it could not reverse the decision, the League's Executive tried to negotiate the best deal for Coloureds that it could manage. The *Journal* subsequently reported that;

... interviews with the College Council have been held and the matter discussed calmly and reasonably.... The League has recognized the spirit of the times as manifested in present-day ideals and prejudices and has made no pretentious attempt at trying to force the Council to open the doors to Coloured students.¹¹⁵

The Editor nevertheless felt that the League could 'modestly congratulate itself' for having persuaded the College to allow Coloureds to register for segregated classes in a few subjects for which it boasted 'the League had been the first to clamour.'¹¹⁶

The *Journal* was even prepared to accept an inferior professional status for Coloured teachers. This was illustrated by the League not seeming to mind so much that white teachers in mission schools received a higher War Bonus¹¹⁷ than Coloured teachers. It did, however, object to Coloured teachers who had managed to pass for white, qualifying for the higher bonus. It would appear that it was especially female teachers who, 'with the adventitious aids of rouge and powder - lots of it', were able to claim the higher bonus paid to whites. This was an emotive issue within the profession for as a correspondent to

114 *Educational Journal*, 4/1923.

115 *Educational Journal*, 4-6/1925.

116 *Educational Journal*, 4-6/1925; 7-9/1926.

117 The War Bonus was a temporary salary supplement paid to teachers between 1916 and 1921 to compensate them for the erosion of the purchasing power of their salaries as a result of high wartime inflation. For annual percentage changes in inflation in South Africa since 1910 see R. McGregor, *McGregor's Who Owns Whom: The Investor's Handbook*, (Cape Town, Juta, 1990),

the *APO* explained, it was unfair that distinctions be made between 'European-Coloured' and 'Coloured-Coloured' teachers.¹¹⁸

The League's readiness to accept an inferior professional status was, however, nowhere more apparent than when it endorsed the Watermeyer Commission's finding that Coloured teachers had no claim to equal remuneration with white teachers.¹¹⁹ The *Journal* conceded that 'The European teacher will have the best pay... No one will cavil at this.' But, the corollary to this acquiescence was that the League expected the Education Department to implement the Commission's recommendation that Coloured teachers be paid between sixty and seventy-two per cent of the equivalent white teachers' salaries.¹²⁰ The League was prepared to accept Watermeyer's proposals because it would have led to a substantial improvement in existing salaries.¹²¹

In cases such as this, the League accepted discriminatory measures as a way of highlighting the shortcomings of existing conditions by the standards that whites themselves set for Coloureds. To the leadership of the League, any improvement in prevailing conditions was welcome. And no matter how small a step it was or how distasteful its implications might have been, what mattered was that it brought them a step closer to their ultimate goal. Their progressionism led League representatives to believe that such incremental improvements would eventually result in the attainment of their longer term ideal of assimilation into the dominant society.

League leaders were prepared to compromise their non-racial ideals in these ways not

rear foldout.

118 *APO*, 30/10/1920; *Educational Journal*, 11/1920; 12/1920.

119 C.E.Z. Watermeyer, 'Report on Coloured Education', 15/3/1920 in *Superintendent General of Education (SGE) Report, 1919*.

120 For a discussion of Coloured teachers' salaries during this period see M. Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 28-29, 120-27.

only because it appeared futile to make demands for full equality but also because they considered it to be counter-productive to anger the authorities, to alienate possible allies and to forego opportunities for advancement, however small. A *Journal* editorial explained that with

The intrusion of the element of Colour in a discussion of any of our ordinary human relations... immediately a lofty wall is erected, barring all possibility of progress... so convinced have most people become of the futility of getting any further along the road towards solving this vexed question that the little difficulties are shelved and the whole matter relegated to a temporary and convenient oblivion.¹²²

It is also apparent that League leaders regarded an uncompromising stance on the principle of non-racism to be positively dangerous. They feared the damage that a white backlash and retribution from the state could do to their cause and their private interests.¹²³ Another reason the *Journal* did not want to complain too loudly about discrimination was that they did not want Coloured people to stand out too conspicuously as a group. Wishing nothing more than for Coloureds who had acquired the necessary social skills to filter quietly into the dominant society, to make too great a fuss about discrimination or to assert Coloured group rights too vigorously, would have compromised their assimilationist aspirations.

However, the strains of adopting non-racism in principle but accepting the racial system in practice, emerged from time to time. They surfaced most forcefully in the organization's ambivalent response to the government's announcement in 1938 of its intention of implementing residential segregation for Coloureds. J. G. Beukes in his Presidential Message to the League proffered the well-worn response of the *Journal* to the inexorable advance of segregation. He urged Coloured teachers to strive for the

121 *Educational Journal*, 9/1920; 10/1920; 4/1922.

122 *Educational Journal*, 2/1921.

123 For a discussion of the League's relationship with the Cape Education Department in this regard see Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 113-14; 116-28.

upliftment of their community and tried to communicate a message of racial tolerance to the wider society. In a demonstration of the continued influence of the ideas of Booker T. Washington within the Coloured petty bourgeoisie, he pointed to the interdependence between the various racial groups in South Africa;

Let us remember that we who educate are also "race-builders". Let us instill racial pride into our pupils, make them love the members of their group. There need be no clash with other groups - no antagonism, as all the different groups in South Africa must be taught to be tolerant towards each other, with mutual understanding for the common good of the whole nation. As the five fingers make the one hand, so the different groups must needs comprise a happy and prosperous South African nation.¹²⁴

But the extreme urgency with which politicized Coloureds viewed the issue of residential segregation was sufficient for the Editor of the *Educational Journal*, Fred Hendricks, to depart from League custom and to hit out at segregationists. In the process Hendricks also administered an indirect but sharp censure to the President for airing views that he himself on numerous occasions had expressed as editor of the *Journal*. He rejected the argument that the cultivation of Coloured separatism was beneficial to the Coloured community in that it stimulated the supposedly 'enviable quality of race pride.' This he held to be an absurd argument for Coloureds to make;

For to be proud of one's race is to be proud of one's language, ancestors, customs and achievements. And the language of the Coloured man is the language of the European; his forebears are Europeans; his mode of living is that of the European and what he has achieved thus far has been in collaboration with the European. Only idle fancy of a warped imagination can visualize for the Coloured people of South Africa a set of qualities or ideals entirely distinct from those of the European.¹²⁵

The *Journal's* rejection of race as a valid measure of human worth on the one hand, and its propagation of Coloured separatism on the other, were contradictory but were not necessarily mutually exclusive. These contradictory ideas could be held simultaneously

¹²⁴ *Educational Journal*, 4/1939. For further examples see the April and May issues of 1922. The

because they reflected different levels of consciousness amongst members and because they applied to different spheres of the organization's existence. The non-racism belonged to the ethereal realm of the ideal and of abstract morality that formed part of the ultimate goal of their striving, while the accommodation with racism was necessary for them to come to terms with the realities of everyday living. Although the League had utterly compromised its ideal of non-racism, assumptions about the theoretical equality of humankind continued to inform its thought and discourse. These contradictory values continued to exist side by side within the organization and to inform the thought and actions of its members.

In keeping with its non-racial ideal, the *Journal* intermittently denied the inherent inferiority of blacks and made clear its feeling that racial prejudice and discrimination were unfair and immoral. This, for instance, was the spirit in which the *Journal* commented on such issues as the segregation of public transport and the discourtesy of white shop assistants toward Coloured customers.¹²⁶ A *Journal* correspondent echoed League sentiment in this respect when he appealed for 'social and economic standards and not colour' to determine access to rights and privileges within the society.¹²⁷ The League nevertheless recognized that there were substantive disparities in the objective abilities of different 'races' - that some were indeed superior to others. This apparent contradiction needs to be understood in terms of the world-view of the League, in the way it comprehended its own society, perceived of human diversity and the ultimate destiny of humankind.

'five fingers make one hand' metaphor was a favourite of Booker T. Washington's.

125 *Educational Journal*, 4/1939. See also *Cape Argus*, 29/6/1938.

126 For some examples see *Educational Journal*, 4/1917; 6/1918; 7/1921; 1/1922; 4/1922; 7-12/1927; 11/1928; 8/1938.

127 *Educational Journal*, 4/1939.

The League regarded humanity as consisting of distinct population groups or 'races', although its concept of race remained vague and fluid. The *Journal*, for example, described the British Empire as consisting of '... many races from the bronzed races of the East to the fur-clad tribes of North-West Canada.'¹²⁸ It was accepted that some races or peoples were 'advanced' and others 'backward' with the basic division between the two being that of colour. The League interpreted the undisputed global domination of the Western powers and their overwhelming technological lead as proof of the 'superiority of the white man'. Also, in comparing whites and blacks in their daily experience, the former appeared unambiguously superior in all respects. Faced with what appeared to be incontrovertible evidence of white superiority, the League numbered the Coloured people amongst the 'backward' races of the world. Assumptions of Coloured inferiority were also implicit in such oft-articulated fears and self-deprecating statements that the Coloured people were 'rapidly sinking to a level far below that of a civilized race', that Coloureds were becoming a 'drink-sodden race of bestial degenerates' or that Coloureds were 'at last emerging from the Dark Ages.'¹²⁹

The acceptance of Coloured inferiority did not necessarily contradict the League's egalitarian principles because the superiority of whites was assumed to be due to historically and environmentally favourable conditions which allowed them to outpace the rest of humanity. The implication was that any of the 'backward' peoples would under the same circumstances have developed at a similar rate and to an equivalent level.¹³⁰ The *Journal* advanced this thesis on the one occasion it broached the question of why the 'White race is so much more intelligent than the Black'. It explained that '...this greater or higher mentality is second nature, due to favourable circumstances' and

128 *Educational Journal*, 4/1916.

129 *Educational Journal*, 6/1916; 3/1917; 11/1920; 6/1922; 6/1929; 8/1932; 5/1934; 5/1935; 8/1938.

130 *Educational Journal*, 6/1918; 8/1938.

rhetorically asked:

If the black Negro were to be placed in similar favourable circumstances and remain free from all mixture with lighter-skinned races would he steadily become more intelligent and ultimately reach the level of the white race in mentality, while remaining black-skinned?¹³¹

The assumption that Coloured inferiority was temporary and not due to innate racial disabilities, was critically important to the world-view and self-perception of the Coloured elite because it allowed them to square their acceptance of Coloured subordination with their assimilationist aspirations and non-racial ideal. Thus while the *Journal* conceded that 'We know the problem of the Coloured population is a difficult one' it argued that 'there are forces and potentialities in it that are perhaps undreamt of at present.'¹³² The League firmly believed that Coloured 'backwardness' would in time be overcome through improved education and exposure to the right social and cultural environment. Eventual parity between white and black was seen to be the inevitable outcome as the level of education of disadvantaged communities improved, as Western culture and technology spread across the globe and as humanity progressed to its ultimate destiny of peace, prosperity and racial harmony. A *Journal* editorial therefore rejected the 'pathetic belief in the utter immutability of primitive nature'.¹³³ And John Abrahamse in his 1938 Presidential Address explained that 'There is truth in the advantages of birth bringing with it inherited qualities, but the claims of a race being inherently superior denies the evidence of education and opportunity being able to transform a backward people into a society of the highest culture.'¹³⁴

The *Educational Journal* pointed to the rapid advances made by blacks the world over as

131 *Educational Journal*, 6/1918.
 132 *Educational Journal*, 10/1920.
 133 *Educational Journal*, 1/1921.
 134 *Educational Journal*, 8/1938.

proof that Coloureds not only had the potential to match whites but also that its prediction of future racial equality was becoming a reality as blacks started catching up with whites. Like the *APO*, the *Journal* drew attention to the achievements of black people, painting an exaggerated and romanticized picture of the progress being made by African Americans, West Indians, Africans and Asians.¹³⁵

In this respect, the Coloured elite held special admiration for the Japanese who had transformed their society from an insular, tradition-bound people into a world power within a few decades. Coloureds were particularly enamoured by the Japanese because they perceived them to be a 'brown race' like themselves and were impressed by Japanese warships, inimitable symbols of power and technological development in the early twentieth century, that periodically docked in Cape Town harbour. The Coloured elite of the early twentieth century thus evinced a deep respect for the Japanese people. There is no more revealing expression of Coloured petty bourgeois attitudes toward the Japanese during this period than J. R. Strydom's observations when a Japanese warship visited Cape Town harbour in 1922. Strydom, a regular contributor to the *Journal*, drew hope for the future of the Coloured people from those 'little yellow men', the Japanese. 'Commend me to the silent Japanese' he enthused;

The wonderful little Japs...those little, narrow-eyed, high-cheekboned and determined-looking sons of the Land of the Rising Sun [who have]... rapidly risen to one of the most exalted and powerful positions in the civilized world.... We saw them associating with our most distinguished and autocratic citizens on a footing of exact equality, and I believe it did our hearts good to see it all. Hopes were refreshed and revived... Some saw our future in a different light and new possibilities appeared on the horizon, for here we saw the members of a race not quite dissimilar from ours in variegation of origin and the circumstances that attended their progress...in the civilized world.¹³⁶

135 See for example *South African Spectator*, 18/5/1901; 15/6/1901; *APO*, 26/3/1910; 1/6/1912; *Educational Journal*, 8/1916; 1/1917; 11/1917; 6/1918; 3/1922.

136 *Educational Journal*, 3/1922.

That Strydom attributed the success of the Japanese to their 'ever moving, ever Westernizing' tendencies is an indication of the belief within the Coloured elite that Western bourgeois culture represented the apogée of human achievement and that the degree of conformity with its norms and values provided an objective scale for the measure of human development. Because they assumed Western culture to be an absolute standard of 'civilization', conforming to its practices automatically meant 'progress' for entire peoples and communities, and personal accomplishment for the individual. The Coloured elite therefore aspired to the acquisition of the social attributes and practices of white middle class society because they genuinely believed Western culture to be inherently superior to other forms of human culture. Anxious to make the point that it was 'culture' and 'civilization' and not colour that mattered, the *Journal* endorsed Sir John Carruthers Beattie's opinion that 'It was not merely by having a white skin that we should maintain a white aristocracy but by being white in mind and spirit and achievement.'¹³⁷

To many petty bourgeois Coloureds one of the most important aspects of the 'white achievement' referred to by Beattie was artistic and cultural in nature. They thus felt that an effective way of proving themselves was to demonstrate their proficiency in these activities of elite culture. The emphasis the Coloured elite placed on aspects of Western elite culture, especially literature and music, was partly motivated by their belief that these 'refined' practices constituted a critical distinction between 'civilized' and 'barbarous' peoples. In addition, the assumption amongst white supremacists that the inability of 'inferior races' to perform the intricate and esoteric procedures constituting these 'arts' to exacting standards was proof of their inferiority, further spurred the

137 *Educational Journal*, 12/1917. Beattie was about to become the first principal of the University of Cape Town.

Coloured elite to show off their talents in this regard. It was with this consideration in mind that the *Journal* wryly commented that '... in this land of racial prejudice it is a relief to know that our voices do not depend upon our colour.'¹³⁸ By indulging in appropriate forms of musical and literary activity, members of the Coloured elite hoped to dispel suppositions about Coloured inferiority and to assert their claims for acceptance into the dominant society.

It was in this context that Mr. C. Dantu complimented the Music Society of the Spes Bona Club that '... if the Musical Society were able to present one of their programmes in the North, it would certainly do away with much of the prejudice now prevalent in that Province.'¹³⁹ Although Dantu, a former APO stalwart who had lived in the Transvaal, was clearly not so naïve as to actually believe this - he was trying to find a novel way of complementing the high musical standard of the Spes Bona Club - it does reveal the hope common within the Coloured elite that racists would change their views if confronted with sufficient evidence of their error. Ironically, their proficiency in any of the 'arts' was likely to elicit the usual 'aping the white man' response from white racists.¹⁴⁰

There was also an implicit belief within the Coloured elite that people, if exposed to high-minded cultural influences, would be infused by the ethereal ideals and noble values embodied in the particular activity or work of art. Artistic and elite cultural activities were believed not only to embody the noblest and the most exalted facets of the human spirit but also to have the power of fostering these same emotions and sensibilities within the individual. The classic works of Western art were taken to represent the pinnacle of

138 *Educational Journal*, 1/1934.

139 *Educational Journal*, 9/1918.

140 One J. S. Mnguni explained the contradiction black people faced in this regard, 'It is the white man who educated and civilized me. He taught me to wear clothing; he taught me to dwell in a European fashioned house, but after I have done all that he wanted me to do he now condemns me for imitating him.' See *Natal Mercury*, 9/9/1929.

human artistic achievement¹⁴¹ and were invested with an almost magical ability to foster those elusive qualities of being 'cultured' and 'civilized' in people who were continuously exposed to their wholesome influence. Thus, for example, J. R. Strydom, one-time editor of the *Educational Journal*, described the effect of 'great music' on the individual in the following terms:

He becomes conscious of a deeper purity and nobility of mind, and all that is ideal and refined in him is lifted to a lofty standard.... Yet surely, though imperceptibly, in the lives of those who frequently listen to the best of music there is a steady change taking place all the time. Gradually the finer feelings and nobler nature of the musician and listener are being strengthened and developed and raised to a more elevated position.¹⁴²

Similar profound processes were deemed to be at work by the *Journal* articles that described 'collective singing' as having a 'civilizing' influence on the participants and that equated the playing of the piano with 'nobility of mind and character'.¹⁴³

'Cultivating the arts' was but one way in which the League tried to manipulate South African racial ideology to the advantage of Coloured people. The League's opportunistic attitude toward race was also apparent in the way it sought to establish a status of relative privilege for Coloureds vis-à-vis Africans on the grounds of their higher 'civilization' and their blood ties to the white community. By assenting to work within the racial system the League automatically laid claim to this position of relative privilege for Coloured people because the conventional wisdom of South African racial ideology accorded Coloureds an intermediate status within the tri-partite racial hierarchy. One of the reasons the Coloured political leadership was prepared to accept an inferior status for Coloured

141 A similar veneration of Western bourgeois culture and denigration of indigenous culture has been noted amongst assimilated black elites in other parts of the world. See Degler, *Neither Black nor White*, 110; F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York, Grove Press, 1967), 18; Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 120-23; Spitzer, *Lives in Between*, 66-67, 139-40, 159-60. Brian Willan's 'An African in Kimberley: Sol T. Plaatje, 1894-1898' in S. Marks and R. Rathbone, (eds.), *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness, 1870-1930*, (London, Longman, 1982), 238-58 and Cobley, *Class and Consciousness*, 60-61, 85-88, establishes the existence of comparable attitudes toward Western culture within South Africa's African petty bourgeoisie.

people in relation to whites was that it allowed them to bargain for a position of relative privilege for Coloureds with respect to Africans.

The political strategy that naturally arose from this situation was for Coloured communal organizations such as the League to try and secure the intermediate status of Coloureds and to use this as a platform to agitate for further concessions and reforms. The result, as a *Journal* editorial once put it, was that 'the Coloured people have quietly and steadily segregated themselves either voluntarily or under pressure of circumstances'.¹⁴⁴ Calling on the League to capitalize on the increasingly rigid distinctions being made between Coloureds and Africans in the implementation of segregation, David van der Ross in his Presidential Address of 1922 urged his colleagues to use their Coloured identity in more creative and affirmative ways to benefit their 'race'. He argued that 'The classification of the races of this country under three distinct heads has come to stay, and is being more rigidly observed each day. It is expected of us now, as a people, to assert our individuality and to take the initiative in devising means for our advance.'¹⁴⁵

This tri-partite racial ordering of the society was recognized by the state and was built into government policy. It found expression in education policy through the ever more rigorous separation of schooling into the three racial categories of white, Coloured and African. After the 1905 School Board Act achieved the state's primary aim of segregating white from black and providing whites with compulsory public schooling, the Education Department progressively separated Coloureds from Africans in the education system in the ensuing decades.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, a relatively thorough segregation between Coloured and

142 *Educational Journal*, 1/1925.

143 *Educational Journal*, 11/1916; 3/1923.

144 *Educational Journal*, 4/1939.

145 *Educational Journal*, 8/1922; 9/1922.

146 See for example, *SGE Report, 1918*, 15; Cape Archives Depot, Cape Town, (hereafter CAD), Provincial Administration of Education, (hereafter PAE), Vol. 250, SF/A2/6, SGE. to

African schooling had developed as a matter of course because by far the greater proportion of Coloured people lived in the Western half of the Cape Province and relatively few Africans were to be found in this area. Also, where Coloured and African people lived together both the Education Department and the churches had, wherever feasible, from the start implemented a rough and ready allocation of educational resources along racial lines.¹⁴⁷

The League was encouraged in its separatism by both church and state legitimating the racial order and their striving to implement segregation ever more rigorously within the education system throughout the period under consideration. The *Journal* thus early on in its life claimed to find the segregatory policies of the Education Department to be a 'welcome sign' that it was making 'a genuine attempt to place Coloured education on a definite basis, apart from that of the Native and the European.'¹⁴⁸ But given its simultaneous commitment to racially egalitarian principles, the *Journal* displayed mixed feelings toward Africans. On the one hand, there was genuine empathy towards Africans within the League and a recognition that they were fellow citizens who suffered even more severely from racial oppression than Coloureds. But at the same time, there was also a strong feeling that Coloureds were superior to Africans because of their closer assimilation to Western culture and because they were partly descended from Europeans.¹⁴⁹

Administrator of the Cape, 21/1/1920; PAE, Vol. 1882, EM/372, correspondence spanning 2/9/1919 - 10/2/1920; *Education Gazette*, 17/11/1938; 27/7/1939; 10/8/1939; Maurice, 'Coloured education', 384-85.

147 CAD, Magistrate and Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Engcobo, (hereafter 1/ECO), Vol. N2/3/3/106, correspondence spanning 17/10/1932 - 4/5/1933; *SGE Report, 1932-33*, 50; *SGE Report, 1938*, 18-19; *Educational Journal*, 7-12/1927.

148 *Educational Journal*, 7/1917.

149 *Educational Journal*, 5/1915; 4/1916; 3/1917; 4/1921; 6/1923; *Report of the Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Cape Coloured People of the Union of South Africa, 1937*, (U.G.54-1937), 14-15; Maurice, 'Coloured education', 328.

Because they recognized that for whites the primary racial distinction was that between white and black, the Coloured elite often felt threatened that Coloured people would lose their status of relative privilege and be relegated to the rank of Africans.¹⁵⁰ These feelings of insecurity put the moderate Coloured political leadership at pains to underscore the affinity between Coloureds and whites and to stress their differences with Africans. It was with the aforementioned considerations of colour and class in mind that the League Executive passed a motion thanking Canon Lavis for his evidence before the Provincial Finances Commission that;

It is a mistake to judge of the educational ability of Coloured children as a whole by the lower class only and one which happens to approximate more nearly to the Aboriginal. Colour is not one thing, but many, and in dealing with children who are perhaps 70 per cent European in blood, it should not be surprising to find that they have intellectual ability equal to that of European children, and expressing itself on European lines.¹⁵¹

The League therefore often responded to segregatory measures by arguing that Coloureds and whites shared a symbiotic relationship and that by discriminating against Coloureds whites would inevitably harm themselves as well.¹⁵² This sentiment was evident when the *Journal* highlighted a quotation from the local press that 'the Coloured population was now interbred throughout our whole social life and the well-being of the white depended on the well-being of the Coloured.'¹⁵³ This was also the premise that lay behind Dr. Abdurahman's warning to whites reported in the *Journal* that 'The Coloured man is going to drag you down if you don't educate him.'¹⁵⁴

The League's stress on the affinities between the white and Coloured communities and its concern to distance the Coloured people from Africans was predicated upon the

150 *Cape Coloured Commission*, 14-15.

151 *Educational Journal*, 9/1923; 12/1923.

152 *Educational Journal*, 7/1921; 7-9/1926; 8/1932; 8/1939; 8/1943; *Cape Times*, 11/4/1923; *Sun*, 5/5/1933.

153 *Educational Journal*, 7-9/1926.

154 *Educational Journal*, 7-9/1926. See also for example, CAD, PAE, Vol. 1862, EM/62, General Secretary of the Cape Malay Association to the Administrator of the Cape, 23/11/1928.

awareness that for Coloureds to identify too closely with Africans would diminish their chances of gaining further concessions from the state and erode their hopes of assimilation. Politicized Coloureds recognized that Africans suffered much more virulent prejudice than Coloureds because of their greater cultural distance from Western norms and because their numerical preponderance posed a real threat to white supremacy in the long term. Thus both the social aspirations as well as the political pragmatism of the Coloured elite dictated that the League distance itself from Africans. To League leaders the cultivation of Coloured exclusivism was a more realistic alternative to either uniting with Africans or making a principled stand on the grounds of non-racism. The more progressive elements within the moderate Coloured political leadership expressed sympathy and goodwill toward Africans but were not prepared to undertake any substantial political or organizational cooperation with them.

Although the League did not initially include explicit racial bars in its constitution, in practice it restricted its membership to Coloured teachers. Whereas earlier versions of its *Rules and Bye-laws* did not place racial restrictions on membership to the League, it later stipulated that 'membership shall be open to all Coloured teachers' but made the vague provision that 'others' who were 'interested in the advancement of Coloured education, may join as associate members.'¹⁵⁵ In practice this meant that the League did allow those few white mission school teachers who sought membership to join the association, but that it excluded African teachers. The *Journal* responded icily to a suggestion in the *APO* that African teachers be allowed to join the League. It replied emphatically that 'The view held by the League has always been that our body stand for the Coloured teacher as distinct from the European and Native.' Soon after this, when a group of African teachers

155 Whereas the 1913 and 1916 versions of the *Rules and Bye-laws* did not contain explicit racial bars the next available version dated 1931 did. Although it is not clear when the change was introduced an informed guess would be that the amendment was probably made in 1920-21 when the League

volunteered to affiliate to the League as a separate branch, they were spurned.¹⁵⁶ It was only in 1934 that the TLSA was prepared to accept African teachers as full members and this privilege was extended only to the handful of Africans teaching in Coloured schools.¹⁵⁷ The necessary amendments to the League's constitution were made against the sustained opposition of a minority group within the organization.¹⁵⁸

The *Journal* justified its racial exclusiveness by arguing that Coloured separatism was necessary for the Coloured community to achieve their full potential as a people and that this would in itself help to make for more harmonious intergroup relations. Especially fearful of alienating whites, the League was at pains to persuade other groups that Coloured separatism was in no way hostile or antagonistic to them. The *Journal* therefore tried to reassure others that 'We are not of those that preach antipathy toward any race in this land. Our profession is one that makes for harmony amongst the various peoples and communities'.¹⁵⁹ In spite of its separatist rhetoric there was a tacit understanding within the League that the white, middle class was the role model they were trying to emulate.¹⁶⁰ David van der Ross intimated as much when he informed the inaugural meeting of the Caledon Branch that '... the Teachers' League was not established to work in opposition to the Europeans but to make them their friends and in such a way improve their own race.'¹⁶¹

The problem of Africans being disadvantaged by Coloured exclusivity was very seldom

156 was confronted with the question of whether or not it should admit Africans and decided against it. *APO*, 30/10/1920; *Sun*, 24/3/1933; 10/3/1935; *Educational Journal*, 12/1920; David van der Ross interviewed by Mohamed Adhikari, 29/6/1981.

157 See the statistical indices on the racial designation of teachers at schools in the Cape Province in the *SGE Reports, 1934-40*.

158 *Sun*, 29/6/1934; 6/7/1934; 13/7/1934.

159 *Educational Journal*, 11/1920.

160 *Report of the Commission on Coloured Education, 1925-26, (C.P. 1-1927)*, 6; *Education Gazette*, 3/9/1931; 9/8/1934; *Cape Standard*, 11/6/1940; *Sun*, 9/8/1940; Maurice, 'Coloured education', 338.

directly addressed by the *Journal*. Unlike the question of the social injustice that Coloureds suffered at the hands of whites, which constantly occupied their minds, League leaders rarely confronted the moral problem of their exclusion of Africans from the association. The League's attitude to the matter, that Africans were a group apart that needed to attend to their own interests, was settled at the founding conference. This much was clear from the absence of African teachers from the inaugural gathering and the unanimous acceptance of the motion requesting that the Education Department separate statistics on black education into Coloured and African categories.¹⁶² On one occasion, however, Philip Scholtz berated the Coloured teaching profession for being too conscious of class distinctions within its own community and of racial differences in general: 'We blame the European for making distinctions; and we do the same, in some cases with more severity.' He quoted a couplet from Kipling to drive his point home:

On our own heads on our own hands
The sin, and the saving lie.¹⁶³

It is clear that the men and women who formulated League policy and produced the *Educational Journal* were sensitive, compassionate individuals motivated by strongly humanitarian ideals. The moral dilemmas of exploiting the racial system to the advantage of Coloured people did not escape them. Neither were they oblivious to the implications that their acceptance of a second class citizenship held for their dignity. But League members in their hearts and minds did not accept the inferiority of the Coloured status as permanent or inherent as evidenced by their assertions of a theoretical equality between human beings and their ideal of assimilation. Their acceptance of the racial hierarchy and their willingness to work for Coloured advancement within that framework was a direct result of Coloured marginality. The League leadership and the Coloured petty

161 *Educational Journal*, 5/1922; See also Rhoda, 'Education among Coloured people', 54-5.

162 *Cape Times*, 25/6/1913; *Cape Argus*, 25/6/1913.

bourgeoisie as a whole faced the age-old predicament of marginal or colonized elite groups of having to weigh up the merits of resistance as opposed to cooperation with an oppressive ruling power. The ideological inconsistencies and the contradictions within the pages of the *Journal* should therefore not simply be seen as hypocrisy and glib casuistry or the result of self-serving justification for personal advancement and opportunism as latter day 'radical' critics were wont to do.

The position of the Coloured community - and much more so of its petty bourgeoisie - within South African society was ambiguous and this was reflected in their ideology and behaviour. Their subordination, and intermediate status together engendered ambivalent responses to white domination as well as their predicament of marginality as the examples of both the *APO* and the *Educational Journal* demonstrate. In the words of Shula Marks, 'Ambiguity has been the price of survival in a contradictory world.'¹⁶⁴

The case studies in this chapter provide concrete examples of the way in which Coloured identity operated in real social contexts over substantial periods of time as opposed to the generalized, more abstract explanation provided in earlier chapters. Based on the two most important Coloured communal organizations of this period these representative examples unequivocally bear out arguments about the nature of Coloured identity outlined in the opening chapter. They illustrate the central roles that the marginality, assimilationism, intermediate status and negative connotations attached to Colouredness played in the expression of the identity. They also confirm aspects of the popular stereotyping of Coloured people. In addition, these case studies, together with those that follow in the rest of the thesis, will corroborate the central contention of this thesis

163 *Educational Journal*, 7/1923.

164 S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, nationalism and state in twentieth century Natal*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1986), 14.

regarding the stability of Coloured identity throughout the period of white domination.

The next chapter will examine the impact of the rise of the radical movement in Coloured politics on the identity during the middle decades of white supremacist South Africa. Given Marxism's dogmatic emphasis on the importance of class and its penchant for unmasking racial, ethnic, national and religious mythology it is not unreasonable to expect Coloured radicals to have rejected race as an analytical concept and with this, any personal identification as Coloured.

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CHAPTER 4

The hegemony of race: Coloured identity within the radical movement during the middle decades of white domination

This chapter will use two case studies to explore the ways in which the rise of the radical movement in Coloured politics influenced the expression of Coloured identity through until the early 1960s when it was crushed by state repression. The first will examine the *Torch* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Non-European Unity Movement that appeared between 1946 and 1963 and which fell squarely within the Trotskyist tradition of the South African left.¹ The second, drawn from the rival Communist Party faction, focuses on Alex La Guma's novella, *A Walk in the Night*, written in the early 1960s.² Both case studies will demonstrate that analysts have exaggerated the impact of left wing ideology and politics in the promotion of non-racism before the 1960s. It will also be argued that they have underplayed the extent to which conventional attitudes and perceptions on Coloured identity held sway amongst radicals.

Although the first significant manifestation of the radical movement within the Coloured community came with the founding of the National Liberation League in 1935 and its off-shoot, the Non-European United Front in 1938,³ and although there was a

1 For basic information on the history of the Trotskyist movement in South Africa see Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 3, 137-65, 266-72. See also B. Hirson, 'The Trotskyist groups in South Africa'; 'The Trotskyists and the trade unions'; 'Profiles of some South African Trotskyists', all in *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1993 as well as R. Kayser, 'Land and liberty: The Non-European Unity Movement and the agrarian question, 1933-1975', (M. A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 2002).

2 A. La Guma, *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*, (London, Heinemann, 1967).

3 The NEUF, set up as a federal body, was an attempt by the NLL, which had little clout outside of the Western Cape, to draw a wider range of organizations into its ambit and to extend its influence nationally. It had a limited degree of success in that branches were formed in Port Elizabeth, Pretoria and Johannesburg amongst other places. The Johannesburg branch, in particular, under the leadership of Yusuf Dadoo and Moses Kotane led an active campaign against segregation.

groundswell of support for the movement in the late 1930s, before it faded away in the early 1940s,⁴ the National Liberation League is not a suitable candidate for a case study of the sort needed here. The NLL was not only relatively transient but also atypical in that it embodied the unlikely combination of Trotskyist and Communist Party factions within a single organization. After a purge of the Trotskyists and other more radical elements in 1939 it, moreover, lapsed into a reformism not all that far removed from the APO's moderate strategies.⁵ More importantly, the NLL has not left behind a significant body of organizational records or publications of any substance that provide first-hand evidence of its opinions and perceptions.⁶ The *Liberator*, the only periodical it produced, consists of six slim, crudely produced issues released monthly between February and September 1937 when the Trotskyists enjoyed a short-lived ascendancy in the organization.⁷ The main concerns of the *Liberator*, edited by Jimmy La Guma, were to attack international imperialism and spotlight the evils of capitalist exploitation. It thus did not comment on issues of Coloured identity in any substantive way. The Non-European Unity Movement, on the other hand, has bequeathed a far richer legacy of source material to posterity, an important element of which is the *Torch* newspaper. Others include the *Educational Journal*, which fell under the control of radicals from the middle of 1944 onwards, and a number of pamphlets, published public addresses as well as a few books.⁸

4 The most comprehensive and coherent account of the National Liberation League is to be found in Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 179-98, 204-06. See also van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, chs. 8 and 9; Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 214-19; Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 65-71.

5 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 195-96, 204-05.

6 Besides a few documents in the Abdurahman Family Papers and the odd letter or memorandum scattered in state archives, precious little of the NLL's organizational records have survived. Researchers are largely dependent on contemporary newspapers, especially the *Sun* and *Cape Standard* for information on the movement.

7 The issues were mimeographed and contained a number of roughly drawn, child-like illustrations. Alex La Guma recalled helping with the artwork in the production of the *Liberator* as a twelve year old together with the children of other activists. See Adhikari, *Jimmy La Guma*, 61. There were no issues for July and August.

8 The *Educational Journal* is still being published. Many of the more important NEUM publications can be found in Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vols. I and II as well as in Hommel, *World Civilization*. The *Anti-CAD Bulletin*, which consisted of a single A4, mimeographed sheet and was produced

The National Liberation League was nevertheless of considerable significance for initiating a new perspective on race and Coloured identity because it pioneered a novel approach in the arena of Coloured politics that challenged the relatively rigid ethnic and racial divisions that prevailed.⁹ By forming a broad, non-racial popular front that stressed the need for black unity in opposition to white supremacy as well as class solidarity against capitalist exploitation, and being active principally in the Western Cape where Coloured people formed a large majority of the black and working class populations, NLL activists introduced ideas and possibilities for alternative forms of social identification that had potentially profound implications for the way in which politicized Coloured people perceived themselves and their community. The concept of uniting black people within a single organization, not merely seeking co-operation between racially distinct bodies as envisaged by Abdurahman's Non-European Conferences,¹⁰ represented a significant advance in non-racial thinking, even if it was mainly confined to radical activists and intellectuals.

Discourses of race and identity in the *Torch* newspaper

After its incubation in the NLL, the idea of black political unity as a precondition for the overthrow of white rule¹¹ became the cornerstone of the Non-European Unity Movement,

weekly between 1943 and 1950, is a neglected source. For the key books by NEUM activists see those listed under H. Jaffe, I. B. Tabata and D. Taylor in the bibliography.

9 The NLL was not the first political organization to recruit membership across racial and ethnic divides. The ICU and the Communist Party, for example, attracted a few Coloured activists into their leadership ranks and organized Coloured workers in the Western Cape during the 1920s. The NLL was, however, the first organization with significant influence in the Coloured community to transcend racial boundaries and was thus effectively the first to present Coloured people with an alternative to Coloured exclusivity or assimilation into the dominant society.

10 Between 1927 and 1934 Dr. Abdurahman together with D. D. T. Jabavu convened a series of four conferences of black political organizations to formulate a co-ordinated response to segregation and the Hertzog Bills. Although they were unable to turn this loose coalition into a permanent body because of personal jealousies and organizational rivalries, it is nevertheless significant as the first initiative at forming a black political front. See Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 121-22, 135-36, 141-43, 175-76 and van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 90-101 for details.

11 The All African Convention, founded a few months before the NLL, helped foster the idea of

a number of whose leaders had cut their political teeth in the NLL. The NEUM was set up as a federal body at its founding conference in Bloemfontein in December 1943 as a deliberate strategy to accommodate organizations and individuals from all sectors of society and to allow co-ordination of their activities without requiring that they surrender their separate identities.¹² Besides building a united, black political front, the core objective of the NEUM was to implement a policy of non-collaboration with white authorities using the tactic of boycotting all racist institutions. The leadership positioned the NEUM as an organization for national liberation with a set of minimum demands for full democratic rights outlined in the 'Ten Point Programme' adopted at its inaugural conference.¹³ These transitional demands, it was theorized, would win the NEUM mass support within the black peasantry, urban proletariat and petty bourgeoisie. While they were not expected to play a progressive role in the early stages of the struggle, the white working class would in time realize that their fundamental interests lay with the rest of the working class as the movement grew in power and crises in the capitalist economy eroded their privileged status. When the struggle for national liberation had progressed to an appropriate stage the radical demands of the working class would be asserted and provide the impetus for social revolution in South Africa.¹⁴

The NEUM's main affiliates in turn consisted of two federal bodies, one almost entirely

black unity by allowing Coloured and Indian membership.

- 12 Tabata, *Awakening*, 22, 55; Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II, 16; Alexander, *One Azania, One Nation*, 112.
- 13 See Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II, 62-63 for a copy of the 'Ten Point Programme'. The Ten Point Programme called for 'the removal of all the disabilities and the restrictions based on grounds of race and colour, and acquisition by the Non-Europeans of all these rights enjoyed by the European population'. Its demands included the franchise, free education, civil liberties, a redivision of the land and revision of the legal code, taxation and labour laws in accordance with the principle of equality. Since their disabilities were seen to stem from a lack of political rights the franchise was to be the main focus of struggle.
- 14 For a more substantive outline of the NEUM's political philosophy see R. Davies, D. O'Meara and S. Dlamini, (compilers), *The Struggle for South Africa: A reference guide*, (London, Zed Books, 1984), 310-14; Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II, 14-16; *Torch*, 11/3/1946. See also Kies, *Background of Segregation*, 1-16; Tabata, *Awakening*, ch. 8; *A Declaration to the People of South Africa from the Non-European Unity Movement*, (Cape Town, NEUM, 1951), 1-16.

Coloured and based in the Western Cape, the Anti-CAD; and the other almost wholly African and drawing support mainly from the Eastern Cape, the All African Convention (AAC). These two wings had an overlapping leadership, most notably in the persons of Goolam Gool, his sister, Jane, and her husband, Isaac Tabata. Despite concerted effort the NEUM failed to draw in either the African National Congress or the South African Indian Congress (SAIC).¹⁵ It did, however, manage to attract a small break-away faction from the Natal Indian Congress known as the Anti-Segregation Council into the federation.¹⁶

The Anti-CAD had been formed a mere ten months prior to the NEUM, in February 1943, in Cape Town under the leadership of a group of Trotskyists which included Goolam Gool, Ben Kies, Solly Edross, Hawa Ahmed, Jane Gool and Ali Fataar.¹⁷ It had been established to mobilize opposition to the Smuts government's announcement the month before of its intention of setting up a Coloured Affairs Department within the Department of the Interior as well as a consultative body of Coloured leaders, the Coloured Advisory Council. The anti-CAC campaign precipitated a deep split within the Coloured community between those who saw this government initiative as an opportunity to co-operate with the authorities in implementing reform and those who regarded it as a segregatory measure designed to isolate Coloured people and strip them of their remaining rights as had already happened with Africans. Although the anti-CAC campaign initially drew fairly widespread support amongst politicized Coloured people, the NEUM's ideology did not and its influence was restricted largely to the more militant

15 The ANC, which had initially been part of the AAC, saw it as a rival for influence amongst Africans and favoured its liquidation. The SAIC, while under the control of conservatives, regarded the NEUM as too radical whereas the radicals, under the leadership of Yusuf Dadoo and Monty Naicker, who took control of the organization in 1946, preferred to ally themselves with the ANC which they perceived to be more viable and better disposed to their own political agenda.

16 Kayser, 'Land and liberty', 14; S. Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: The Natal Indian Congress, 1894-1994*, (Pietermaritzburg, Natal University Press, 1997), 52.

17 The Anti-CAD was the initiative of individuals within the Workers Party, one of two small Trotskyist groupings in Cape Town. See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 243-44; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall* 213. For information on the Workers Party see Drew, *Discordant Comrades*,

elements within the urbanized elite.¹⁸ Within the Coloured community the organization's main support over the longer term came from within the Teachers' League of South Africa¹⁹ and a few civic and parent-teacher bodies as well as cultural and political discussion clubs generally referred to as fellowships. This support was concentrated in the western Cape.

By 1943, the NEUM's other major affiliate, the All African Convention, consisted predominantly of the radical remnant of this former umbrella body which had been founded in 1935 to co-ordinate African opposition to the Hertzog Bills. Under the leadership of I. B. Tabata, Jane Gool and Eastern Cape teacher activists such as Wycliffe Tsotsi, Nathaniel Honono and Leo Sihlali, the radicals drew most of their support from the Cape African Teachers' Association (CATA) and had some influence in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape.²⁰ Tabata and Gool who lived in Cape Town were also active in the Anti-CAD and formed a crucial link between the two organizations.²¹

These two factions co-existed with varying degrees of unease within the federal structure of the Non-European Unity Movement for fifteen years until simmering tensions over differences in doctrine and strategy led to a split largely along racial and regional lines in

143-58.

18 For details see Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 213-15, 231-33; Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, 75-92.

19 Three years of jostling between moderates and radicals for influence within the Teachers' League was brought to a head in early 1943 when five moderate TLSA leaders agreed to serve on the CAC. The minority radical faction within the TLSA instigated a campaign of social and political ostracism of these 'quislings' and unsuccessfully tried to capture the executive at the League's June 1943 conference. This led to an irreparable split which paralyzed the organization. The moderate faction hived off to form the Teachers' Educational and Professional Association in mid-1944 leaving the TLSA in the hands of the radicals. See Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 67-71; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 196-97, 217-18, 223-25.

20 For information on the All African Convention see C. Higgs, *The Ghost of Equality: The public lives of D.D.T. Jabavu of South Africa, 1885-1959*, (Athens, Ohio University Press, 1997), 121-46; Tabata, *Awakening*; Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour*, 495-501, 541-43; R. Kayser, 'Revolutionary path of the NEUM' chs. 1-3.

21 From at least the mid-1940s till his banning in 1956 Tabata undertook annual tours of the eastern Cape to make and maintain political contacts and to assess conditions in the reserves. Kayser,

1958, each faction subsequently claiming to represent the NEUM.²² The AAC faction went on to form a revolutionary wing, the African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa, in 1961 which organized in South Africa's main urban centres as well as in some African reserves, most notably eastern Pondoland, before being suppressed by bannings and arrests in the latter half of the 1960s. A small leadership contingent which maintained a residual presence in exile changed its name to the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) in 1964 to divest the organization of the racial connotations attached to the term 'Non-European' and because of the need to identify it as South African in the context of exile politics.²³ The Anti-CAD wing, already largely inactive and isolated from the liberatory mainstream in the latter half of the 1950s because of an unwillingness to engage in mass campaigns, declined into dormancy in the face of state repression, particularly after the Sharpeville massacre. It has, however, managed to maintain a strident anti-imperialist and anti-apartheid polemic in the *Education Journal* which was kept alive and today serves as an organ of the New Unity Movement which was revived in 1985.²⁴

The Non-European Unity Movement has built up a formidable reputation for its principled and uncompromising stand on non-racism. NEUM ideologues have for decades been delivering incisive and scathing criticism of the racism evident in the assumptions, actions and utterings of a wide range of individuals and organizations. A puritanical insistence on the principle of non-racism has become one of the hallmarks of the NEUM's discourse and political philosophy. Bill Nasson, for example, wrote that the

'Land and liberty', 25-26.

22 A *Torch*, 18/11/1958 headline ironically reported that the 'ANC split on racial lines' little more than a month before the NEUM was itself to split on racial lines.

23 See Tabata, *Awakening*, xii; Kayser, 'Land and liberty', 148.

24 For information on the history of the Non-European Unity Movement see Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 207-44; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, chs. 11-15; Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 266-72; Hommel, *Capricorn Blues*, chs. 4-6; Kayser, 'Land and liberty', ch. 1.

NEUM had;

an abiding commitment to non-racialism. This was not only a tactical imperative to overcome 'enslaving' ethnic divisions... but also a fierce and uncompromising rejection of the very construct of 'race' or ethnicity itself... The traditional position of Unity Movement thinkers has always been that race or racialism is a 'mere excrescence of capitalism', its existence the bondage of forms of false consciousness.²⁵

Writing in 2000, Crain Soudien echoed these sentiments; 'The movement was fiercely non-racial and challenged at every opportunity the racial labelling of South Africans.'²⁶

Even more recently Shaun Viljoen asserted that;

...a key progenitor and proponent of the concept of 'non-racialism' was the Non-European Unity Movement.... The ideology of the NEUM was marked by a strong internationalism and a non-racialism which challenged the notion of 'race' and insisted on a definition of national identity stressing common interests rather than differences among all South Africans.²⁷

Scrutiny of the *Torch* and other NEUM documentation, however, indicates that non-racism had not always been a central tenet of the organization.²⁸ Generalized assertions that the NEUM was non-racist in the sense of it rejecting the validity of race as analytical concept or social reality are exaggerated and do not reflect the intricacies of its ideology and political strategy or the complexities of its history. They at the very least need to be modified to take into account an acknowledgement by NEUM ideologues of the salience of racial distinctions within South African society, the very considerable concessions the organization made to various forms of racial thinking and its own lapses into racial thinking in unguarded moments during the earlier period of its existence.²⁹ The NEUM's

25 Nasson, 'Unity Movement', 192.

26 C. Soudien, 'Social conditions, cultural and political life in working class Cape Town, 1950 to 1990' in H. Willemsse, (ed.), *More than Brothers: Peter Clarke and James Matthews at Seventy*, (Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2000), 35.

27 S. Viljoen, 'Non-racialism remains a fiction: From Richard Rive's "*Buckingham Palace*", *District Six* to K. Sello Duiker's the *Quiet Violence of Dreams*', unpublished paper, presented at the 'Burden of race' conference, University of the Witwatersrand, 5-8/7/2001, 2.

28 See Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, 180-81. Neville Alexander in his classic study, *One Azania, One Nation*, 111 notes a degree of confusion in the NEUM regarding the concepts of 'race' and 'nation'.

29 A distinction needs to be made between the terms 'racist' and 'racial' as used in this study. Whereas the former always involves a judgement about the supposed inferiority or superiority of one or other racial group or groups, the latter refers to distinctions made between groups of people

attitude to race and Coloured identity was more complex, and more pragmatic, than a blanket denial of the significance of race suggested by commentators. Its uncompromising stance on non-racism was a feature of its later history, apparent only towards the end of the *Torch's* existence.³⁰ Viewed within the perspective of the development of Coloured identity and notions of political correctness through the twentieth century, to expect otherwise would be anachronistic.

At the time of its founding and for the duration of the period during which the *Torch* was published it was clear that forging black unity and implementing its policy of non-collaboration were the primary objectives of the NEUM and that promoting non-racism was not central to its agenda. This much should be evident from the name of the organization which spotlights its stress on black unity. The very use of the term 'Non-European' made an explicit racial distinction - between white and black. It also implied the existence of racial and ethnic differences within the black population because in response to the tacit question of who the Non-Europeans were - both the NEUM and white supremacist South Africa would have replied, the African, Coloured and Indian people taken collectively.³¹

on the basis of racial characteristics but does not necessarily contain inferences of superiority or inferiority. Such recognition of racial differences are, indeed, often accompanied by explicit assertions of racial equality.

30 All of the evidence that Nasson offers comes from the 1970s and later while Viljoen and Soudien offer no support for their contentions. They appear to be assuming that this stringent non-racism was a natural consequence of the NEUM's Marxist philosophy and to be projecting back into its past the non-racial outlook of a later period.

31 The second edition of Tabata's *Awakening*, published in 1974, acknowledged with hindsight that the term 'Non-European' was problematic and replaced it with 'Black', a switch that updated the terminology but did not eliminate racial connotations from its discourse. It explains that the name 'Non-European Unity Movement was historically conditioned. It stressed the community of interests, the common oppression and the common goal of all of the oppressed, namely, Africans, Coloureds and Indians. It aimed to counter the deep-seated racialism fostered amongst the blacks themselves by the policy of divide and rule.' See Tabata, *Awakening*, xii. For the expression of similar sentiments see transcript of interview with Richard Dudley, a leading figure within the Anti-CAD faction, by Robin Kayser, 30/9/1999, 5-6. Copies of the transcript are in the possession of both the author and Kayser.

Indeed, one of the most prominent leaders within the NEUM dismissed as unrealistic and politically premature the idea that racial differences within the black population could be ignored. In his highly influential address, 'The background of segregation' delivered to the first national Anti-CAD conference on 29 May 1943, in which he called for the establishment of a united front of black political organizations, Ben Kies, a founder member and key ideologue within the movement, explained that;

When we speak of a united front of ALL non-Europeans we do not mean lumping all non-Europeans holus-bolus together and fusing them all together in the belief that, since ALL are non-European oppressed, the African is a Coloured man, the Indian is an African, and a Coloured man is either Indian or African, whichever you please. Only those who are ignorant of both politics and history can believe in this nonsensical type of unity. When we speak of the unity or the united front of all non-Europeans, we simply mean this: they are all ground down by the same oppression; they have all the same political aspirations, but yet they remain divided in their oppression. They should discard the divisions and prejudices and illusions which have been created and fostered by their rulers. They should remember only that they have a common foe and that they should unite to liberate themselves. When they have thrown off the chains, then they can settle whatever national or racial differences they have, or think they have. After we rid ourselves of our common oppressor, the national question will remain.³²

This unequivocal acknowledgement of racial and ethnic differences within South African society and the pragmatic disposition in dealing with them³³ is the approach that was, on the whole, to inform the NEUM's attitude toward race in general and Coloured identity in particular until the early 1960s. That Kies clearly regarded such distinctions as ultimately superficial did not preclude him from recognizing their social reality and political salience. It bears pointing out that there was a recognition by Kies that black unity in any meaningful sense of the term did not yet exist,³⁴ and although political unity might be

32 Kies, *Background of Segregation*, 13-14. Emphasis in the original. An abridged version appears in Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II, 48-55.

33 In response to some pessimism expressed at the second national Anti-CAD conference about the feasibility of achieving black political unity, Kies is reported as having replied that 'We should not sit down to bewail the fact that there were differences and cross-currents among the people. Life was life and we had to get on top of it.' 'Report of the proceedings of the Second National Anti-CAD Conference, 4-5 January, 1944' in Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II, 65. See also *Torch*, 15/11/1948.

34 At the NEUM's third national conference in Cape Town, January 1945, Kies stressed that 'The

achieved, racial divisions were still expected to remain after national liberation had been secured.³⁵ But this did not matter all that much to Kies and the NEUM because what was needed for the overthrow of white supremacy in their eyes was not a sublimation of all racial distinctions but the political unity of black South Africans, whatever their underlying racial or ethnic identities. The key point to note is that though non-racist in outlook and despite its recognition that 'the real cleavage is one of class, not one of colour',³⁶ the NEUM leadership was prepared to make a tactical concession to the existence of racial identities within the ranks of its constituency for the sake of achieving the all-important preliminary goal of national liberation.

The NEUM's pragmatic approach to dealing with inter-racial divisions within the black population and its consequent tolerance of a degree of racial thinking within its ranks was derived from an analysis of the South African situation first aired in Kies' 'Background of segregation'. This analysis formed the basis of the NEUM's 'Declaration of Unity' adopted at its inaugural conference as a general statement of principles and objectives and as a preamble to the Ten Point Programme.³⁷ Kies' interpretation subsequently became the dominant current of thought within the NEUM, informing its view of South African history, the character of contemporary South African society as well as the nature of its political mission, especially within the Anti-CAD faction.

building of real unity on the basis of such a programme (the Ten Point Programme) is the work of years and years.' B. M. Kies, *The Basis of Unity*, (Cape Town, Non-European Unity Committee, 1945), 5, 10. This view was supported in an address the following day by Tabata. See I. B. Tabata, *The Building of Unity*, (Cape Town, Non-European Unity Committee, 1945), 12.

35 Cementing black political unity proved to be far more difficult than the NEUM at first anticipated. In 1951 it admitted that, 'we are making so little progress in building that unity of the Nation'. See *Declaration to the People of South Africa*, 2.

36 Tabata, *Awakening*, 4.

37 For a copy of the 'Declaration of Unity' see Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II 60-61 and Abdurahman Family Papers. See also *Cape Standard*, 11/1/1944. Being concise and focused on the immediate political task of effecting black political unity, the 'Declaration' made no reference to imperialism or the white working class both of which were key elements of Kies' and the NEUM's analysis of the South African situation.

Broadly, the NEUM worked from the premise that the white establishment of South Africa, the 'Herrenvolk',³⁸ were the 'lackeys' of international capitalism, especially British imperialism. Whereas blacks had been subjugated and dispossessed to form a pool of cheap labour, the white working class had been co-opted as a labour aristocracy bribed with part of the proceeds of black exploitation to act as 'overseers' and 'managers' for British imperial interests. Segregationist policies were seen as a variant on the highly successful tactic of divide-and-rule used by British imperialism throughout the world. Besides cleaving the South African population into white and black, it also split the black population into African, Coloured and Indian sections. Inter-racial divisions were fostered by a policy of giving one group preference over another and by propagating 'vicious racial myths' to set off one against the other. In addition, each of the racial groups was further segmented by fomenting tribal, religious and ethnic divisions. According to the NEUM, this racist ideology had permeated the whole of society and had been internalized by black people themselves.³⁹ Kies graphically described the situation as one in which;

The white minority looks upon the African as a 'raw kaffir', and such he has been to the majority of Coloureds and Indians. The white minority looks upon the Coloured as a 'bastard Hottentot' and such he has been to most of the Africans and Indians. The white minority looks upon the Indian as a 'bloody coolie', and such he has been to most Africans and Coloureds. The African is told he is superior because he is 'pure blooded' - and he has believed this. The Coloured man is told that he is superior because the 'blood of the white man' flows in his veins - and he has believed this. The Indian has been told that he is superior because he belongs to a great nation with a mighty culture - and he has believed this... the slaves have taken over the segregationist ideology of their master.⁴⁰

Hobbled by their racist outlook and the sectarian responses of a reformist leadership, the

38 'Herrenvolk', German for master race, was one of the NEUM's trademark terms and was used to refer to white supremacists and the racist power structure in South Africa. An effective piece of invective during, and in the aftermath of, World War II, its usage became a quaint reminder of an outdated analysis in later decades. 'Quisling', used to refer to collaborators, is another term emblematic of the NEUM in the context of South African liberatory politics.

39 Kies, *Background of Segregation*, 5; *Declaration to the People of South Africa*, 4-5; Tabata, *Awakening*, 4-5; *Torch*, 18/4/1949; 15/7/1952; 17/8/1952; 2/9/1952.

'oppressed' would thus never attain freedom without uniting politically to fight white supremacy and capitalist exploitation because their efforts were being 'dissipated either in fruitless, isolated outbursts, or in meaningless argumentation over trifles, or in the harmless channel of appeals, resolutions and petitions.'⁴¹ What was needed according to NEUM thinking was a militant and united mass front of all black people to fight for full democratic rights.

Recognizing racial and ethnic tensions within the black population to be a real obstacle to political unity, the NEUM adopted a federal structure, insisting that this was the only effective configuration for any South African liberatory movement because racial prejudice and economic competition within the black population made unitary organization impractical. It claimed that a federal structure was the only way of accommodating racial and other differences within a broadly-based, popular movement while allowing its activities to be co-ordinated nationally. Writing in 1945, Tabata, for example, concurred with Kies' analysis and claimed a federal structure to be indispensable for the liberatory movement because the 'oppressed' had 'imbibed the ideas of the ruling class' to such an extent that they 'were steeped in a segregatory outlook' and still thought 'in terms of separate national groups'.⁴² Twelve years later a *Torch* editorial discussing the challenges faced by the liberatory movement explained that 'there are difficulties arising from the fact that the oppressed people of this country have been carved up into different so-called "racial" groups with a multiplicity of organizations'. It insisted that 'the first major step' in solving this problem was 'the federation of the various organizations... [as] taught by the Non-European Unity

40 Kies, *Background of Segregation*, 5. See also *Torch*, 15/4/1946.

41 *Declaration to the People of South Africa*, 2.

42 From I. B. Tabata, 'The Ten Point Programme in practice', quoted in Kayser, 'Revolutionary path of the NEUM', 36. See also Tabata, *Building of Unity*, 13; *Declaration to the People of South Africa*, 2. See also *Torch*, 18/4/1949.

Movement'.⁴³ The expectation was that as active political education took effect and intergroup co-operation melted racial prejudice, the federal structure would wither away.⁴⁴ The key to understanding the NEUM's pragmatism with regard to race is to appreciate that the NEUM did not see itself as a socialist party with a socialist programme but as a movement for national liberation with a socialist leadership.

To gain a fuller grasp of the NEUM's pragmatic approach to matters of race prior to the early 1960s a distinction needs to be drawn between non-racism and what it referred to as 'non-sectarianism'.⁴⁵ While the former implies a rejection of the validity of race as intellectual construct or even as social reality, the latter is merely the refusal to act in ways that promote racial divisions. While non-racism implies intolerance of racial thinking and conduct, non-sectarianism does not necessarily do so, but would eschew racist behaviour.⁴⁶ Although the NEUM leadership was clearly non-racial in outlook in the sense that they recognized the fallacies of racist thinking, they did not position the NEUM as a non-racial organization nor, as explained earlier, was the propagation of a non-racial ideology its chief priority. NEUM ideologues were not overly concerned with promoting non-racial ideals because of their view that it was the more realistic goal of black political unity rather than the elimination of racial thinking that was necessary for the defeat of white supremacy. While the NEUM during this earlier period cannot therefore be described as non-racial, it was, however, very self-consciously non-sectarian and explicitly characterized itself as such. This is illustrated by the NEUM refusing to cooperate with organizations such as the ANC and the South African Indian Congress

43 *Torch*, 29/1/1957.

44 Tabata, *Building of Unity*, 15.

45 By sectarianism the NEUM meant organizing only within one racial group or special pleading for one section of the black population.

46 Refer to footnote 29 above.

because of what it described as their sectarian nature.⁴⁷ This non-sectarianism is also apparent in the NEUM's insistence that it was not anti-white but anti-segregationist and that white individuals and organizations genuinely prepared to fight segregation were welcome to join the movement.⁴⁸

Living in a world in which political correctness was not yet a major consideration, and functioning in a society in which virtually every aspect of life had become racialized there was inevitably a fair degree of unconscious racial thinking and an automatic acceptance of racial categories as part of social reality within the NEUM. There was also a general tolerance of inadvertent racial thought and expression within the organization though any form of racist thinking was clearly not acceptable. When Tabata, for example, wrote that 'A single political party cannot represent a whole community or race for the mere fact of belonging to the same race has nothing to do with a man's political affiliations'⁴⁹ the logic of his argument appears to have been taken at face value and colleagues did not question his apparent acceptance of the construct of race. Similarly when Wycliffe Tsotsi, in his 1950 presidential address to the AAC proclaimed that 'the African people look to the AAC for a lead' it did not result in accusations that he was fostering racial division within the liberatory movement.⁵⁰

A purist non-racial stance was, however, already being taken during the early 1950s by a

47 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 226, 229-30. This was, for example, the reason it cited for declining to support the ANC's 1944-45 anti-pass campaign or the SAIC's passive resistance campaign of 1946. It is, however, very difficult to see how the the Anti-CAD and its activities in practice were any less sectarian than the ANC or SAIC campaigns.

48 The NEUM's stance on the white working class was succinctly articulated by Kies; 'We... must never confuse the European worker, aristocrat of labour though he may be today, with the European ruling class... the irrefutable fact remains that the European worker must ultimately become the ally of the Non-European oppressed, for economic exploitation and national or colour oppression spring from the same root, even though the branches of the tree point in entirely different directions. Kies, *Basis of Unity*, 8.

49 Tabata, *Awakening*, 35.

50 See *Torch*, 26/12/1950 for a report of Tsotsi's address.

handful of ultra-left Trotskyist intellectuals grouped within the Forum Club. Criticism that the NEUM's 'Non-Europeanism' was a form of 'voluntary segregation' that favoured the interests of capital and the racist state came from these remnants of FIOSA, which advocated a strictly non-racial strategy.⁵¹

The *Torch*, named after the Bolsheviks' *Iskra*,⁵² reflected the values and policies of the NEUM. Faced with a hostile press and with no regular outlet other than the single-paged *Anti-CAD Bulletin* the movement during its first years felt a dire need for a newspaper or periodical of its own. The NEUM thus set up the Torch Printing and Publishing Company in consultation with the Anti-CAD, AAC, TLSA and other affiliates in the latter part of 1945 to publish its own newspaper.⁵³ The *Torch* was, however, more in the nature of a magazine in format and a political organ in content than a newspaper, as it has generally been described. It was a quarto-sized, weekly publication that consisted of eight pages.

Publishing the *Torch* at any given time was the work of a shifting group of between twenty and thirty activists who shared the tasks of writing, producing, distributing and even selling the newspaper on street corners and at bus queues. Producing the paper was an entirely voluntary effort in that no-one at any stage received compensation and all the work was done by part-time staff.⁵⁴ The paper received no outside funding at all and since advertising and sales revenue covered only part of printing and other overhead costs

51 Alexander, *One Azania, One Nation*, 112-13 quotes P. Dreyer, 'Against racial status and social segregation: Towards the liquidation of multi-racialism and Non-Europeanism', (Cape Town, A Citizen Publication, 1959?), 4 as voicing such criticism. See also 'Discussion on the role of the Non-European teacher in the liberatory movement', *Discussion*, Vol I, No. 5, 1952, 12. The Dreyer pamphlet could not be consulted because the South African Library, the only library with a copy of it, has either 'lost' or 'temporarily mislaid' it.

52 *Iskra* translates into English as 'spark'. Since the Workers Party had already claimed that name for its paper the NEUM settled for Torch. Richard Dudley interview, 30/9/1999, 10. Henceforward when citing an untranscribed interview the abbreviated format is 'Joe Soap, interviewed, x/y/z.' but where information comes from a transcription the abbreviated format is 'Joe Soap interview, x/y/z, p.'

53 Richard Dudley interview, 30/9/1999, 10-13.

54 Hosea Jaffe, interviewed by Les Switzer and Mohamed Adhikari, 21/3/1994; Richard Dudley

the editorial board regularly organized dances, bazaars, house parties and the like to make up the shortfall.⁵⁵ This became an increasingly important source of income as advertising revenue started drying up from the early 1950s onwards. In times of financial crisis such as when the paper was being sued or it was unable to cover overheads, appeals for donations were also made.⁵⁶ Producing the *Torch* took a huge degree of commitment and hard work by a dedicated core group of part-time workers, most of whom were teachers.⁵⁷ Keeping the paper alive for eighteen years was therefore no mean feat.⁵⁸ But, as Richard Dudley attests, most of the regular contributors found it a highly rewarding experience that played an important part in their personal and political development.⁵⁹

From the start the *Torch* carried the occasional Afrikaans article and it was only from October 1959 onwards that it published some articles in Xhosa.⁶⁰ The paper carried very little non-political reporting. In the earlier years it contained a smattering of community news, a single page of sports reporting and regularly included mundane items such as puzzles, recipes or household hints on 'what the young bride should know'. By early 1953 the sports and other non-political reporting had disappeared from its pages. The

interview, 30/9/1999, 10-13; *Torch*, 22/6/1953.

55 The *Torch*'s Spring Ball became a major social event in NEUM circles during the 1950s. See for example *Torch*, 1/9/1953; 12/10/1954; 18/9/1956; 17/9/1957; 16/9/1958; 1/9/1959.

56 *Torch*, 6/6/1949; 22/6/1954; 7/9/1960; 19/9/1962.

57 Edward Ramsdale, joint secretary of the NEUM, was the *Torch*'s first editor and was followed by Hawa Ahmed, the wife of Goolam Gool, for a short period in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Joyce Meissenheimer, who took over the role of editor next, served until her banning in September 1961. She was replaced by Joan Kay, treasurer of the Anti-CAD since 1953. Kay was banned in October 1963 shortly before the demise of the paper. Editors co-ordinated the compilation of issues while editorial policy was decided by an editorial committee dominated by key NEUM ideologues such as Kies, Jaffe and Dudley.

58 Jaffe, interviewed 21/3/1994. The *Torch*, 7/9/1960, characterized the previous fourteen years as having been a 'struggle for existence'.

59 Richard Dudley interview, 30/9/1999, 11. Dudley, currently president of the New Unity Movement, was throughout its life an integral part of the team that produced the *Torch*. He declined to be interviewed citing reasons of health and pressures of political organization.

60 See *Torch*, 27/10/1959 for the first article in Xhosa. The writing and translation of articles into Xhosa was done mainly by Saul Jayiya and Cadoc Kobus who were amongst the most prominent African members to have sided with the Anti-CAD faction after the 1958 split. Richard Dudley interview, 30/9/1999, 11-12.

focus henceforth was almost exclusively political.⁶¹ The *Torch*'s intention was clearly not so much to report news objectively as to promote the political agenda of the NEUM. Although it did allow a degree of debate it did not provide an open forum for discussion and its columns were not available for political opponents, be they Coloured moderates on the right or the Communist Party on the left, to express their opinions. Though by far the greater part of its readership was restricted to Cape Town and the western Cape, it did attract a significant readership in Johannesburg⁶² and, in its heyday, was distributed as far afield as the eastern and northern Cape, Natal, South West Africa and the protectorates.

The *Torch*'s main fair consisted of local politics of interest to the NEUM. At various times major areas of focus included protest against the Coloured Advisory Council, resistance to train apartheid, opposing the city council's segregated housing schemes on the Cape Flats, fighting the removal of Coloureds from the voter's roll, the boycott of the van Riebeeck festival, the implementation of the Group Areas Act and state repression of left wing political activity. It carried news from affiliates such as the Teachers' League, the Cape African Teachers' Association, the APO,⁶³ the Gleemoor Civic Association, as well as reports of protests, strikes and social unrest. Because of the prominence of teachers in the NEUM, education and teacher politics was a special focus of interest in the paper's reporting. The *Torch* also maintained a vociferous anti-segregationist polemic. The paper never tired of hurling invective at 'quislings' and high-lighting the absurdities of South Africa's racial system.⁶⁴ It also pursued disputations with the ANC,

61 The only non-political content of any note that remained was a weekly column entitled 'Science and the people' authored mainly by Richard Dudley and that lasted until early 1961.

62 By mid-1950 the *Torch* attracted a sufficiently large readership in Johannesburg for the editorial board to experiment from May 1950 onwards with a separate northern edition which carried local sporting and political news. The project was abandoned at the end of that year. See *Torch*, 10/4/1950; 1/5/1950; 5/12/1950.

63 The APO was 'captured' by the NEUM when it successfully conspired to have its supporters elected to all the executive position in the APO at its acrimonious March 1944 conference. See Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 222-23.

64 A favoured target was the apartheid government's idea of establishing a separate homeland for

the Communist Party and the South African Indian Congress, amongst others, with some gusto. There was some reportage of international developments in an anti-imperialist vein, particularly with regard to India, Indonesia and China but with surprisingly little comment on Africa. A feature of the newspaper was the running of serialized articles on themes relevant to NEUM politics. A series could be as long as the one hundred and twenty installments of 'A history of despotism' which examined aspects of South African history from an NEUM perspective⁶⁵ or the more typical eight part series on 'Problems within the liberation movement'.⁶⁶

The first issue of the *Torch* which appeared on 25 February 1946 pledged 'full and uncompromising support to the movement for full democratic rights for all, irrespective of race, colour or creed' and that it 'will be used to enlighten, to fight discrimination in every form and to unite the oppressed and exploited people.'⁶⁷ It rather disingenuously added that the *Torch* 'is not tied directly or indirectly, to any political party' and that it was 'neither the official or unofficial mouthpiece' to any political organization. In 1949 it repeated that the *Torch* 'owes allegiance to no political sect or section of the oppressed' and for much of its life tried to maintain the charade that it was independent of any political organization.⁶⁸ Careful not to create the impression that it supported any form of black chauvinism the paper's first editorial also made it clear that the *Torch* would not allow 'our columns to be used to foster racial ill-feeling either against the Europeans or

Coloured people. See *Torch*, 18/7/1949; 20/1/1953; 23/8/1953; 13/3/1956; 28/7/1959; 5/4/1961; 25/7/1962; 16/10/1963 for examples.

65 *Torch*, 29/8/1949 - 22/1/1952. The series was written by Hosea Jaffe, one of the key ideologues within the movement, and drew on his forthcoming book, *Three Hundred Years*, (Cape Town, New Era Fellowship, 1952) written under the pseudonym Mnguni.

66 *Torch*, 8/1/1957 - 26/2/1957. Examples of other series include 'The true story of Jan van Riebeeck' which ran in 1952 as the tercentenary celebrations drew near; 'Life under the CAD'; 'The decay of Herrenvolkism'; and 'Anatomy of independence' in the early 1960s.

67 *Torch*, 25/2/1946.

68 *Torch*, 25/2/1946; 26/6/1949. Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 229 is clearly mistaken in treating the *Torch* as an independent newspaper that happened to support the NEUM's point of view. Both the editorial board as well as its board of directors were prominent members of the NEUM and its reporting was transparently partisan. For an acknowledgement that the *Torch* was

any section of the Non-Europeans.⁶⁹ Besides wanting to keep the door open for the white working class to join the revolutionary movement, there was a feeling that with racial tensions escalating in the society, there was a need to steer black people away from 'race pogroms' and the possibility of a race war against whites.⁷⁰

Given the Trotskyism of the NEUM leadership there was surprisingly little Marxist rhetoric or class analysis in the *Torch*. It tended to approach the liberatory struggle as one between white and black and thus to present social and political issues in racial terms. This was no doubt in large part due to its conscious strategy of promoting black unity for the achievement of national liberation but can also be ascribed to the pervasiveness of racism and racial thinking in South African society resulting in an unconsciously racial approach to matters generally. The Marxist underpinnings of the newspaper's strategy did, however, occasionally surface and were usually presented in a simplified and racialized form intended to educate a readership unschooled in left-wing ideology. A *Torch* editorial trying to explain a basic Marxist insight furnishes a typical example;

What the Non-Europeans fail to understand is... that *all the wealth of the country is produced by them*. They are the workers on the mines, on the farms and in the factories. They create the wealth and the prosperity yet they do not enjoy the fruits of their labour. They create civilization for the whites yet they are not permitted to obtain the benefits of civilization. The usurpers have obtained control of their father's home.⁷¹

Occasionally, this standard line would be further embroidered. An illustration is provided by the *Torch*'s response when its policy of not fomenting anti-white feeling was challenged by a letter to the editor. The letter-writer argued that white racism was so pervasive that 'if you really intend helping the Coloured man you cannot help being anti-

the mouthpiece of the NEUM see Jaffe, interviewed, 21/3/1994.

69 *Torch*, 25/2/1946.

70 *Torch*, 18/4/1949; 20/1/1953.

71 *Torch*, 2/12/1946. Emphasis in the original. See also *Torch*, 14/10/1946.

white' and that the *Torch's* stance was but another version of the "'Ja Baas" (Yes Boss) attitude of Coloureds'.⁷² The *Torch* replied that it was unconditionally opposed to any form of racial discrimination and, since the real cleavage in South African society was one of class, to promote anti-white sentiment would be counter-productive. It explained that; 'No matter how steeped in racial prejudice the European workers may be' their ultimate interests lay with the black working class rather than the white ruling class which bought their loyalty with a 'share in the profits derived from the exploitation of Non-Europeans.' Only a 'strong, united movement of the Non-European oppressed' will bring this home to them eventually 'when the South African economy can no longer afford to pay them the bribe.'⁷³

Although the *Torch* was meant to act as the mouthpiece of the Non-European Unity Movement it was in practice far more representative of its Anti-CAD faction. This is not surprising as it was essentially an initiative of the Anti-CAD wing and was based in Cape Town. The paper's focus was very much on Cape Town and the Coloured community and nearly all of its staff and management were part of the Anti-CAD grouping.⁷⁴ A telling feature of this bias is that virtually all of its sports reporting and community news related to Cape Town and the Coloured community. Another measure of this partiality is that it reported far more frequently and at greater length on TLSA activities than those of CATA. This was also partly a function of the Anti-CAD being more politically active and thus the more dominant partner within the executive structures of the NEUM.⁷⁵ Not unexpectedly, the paper remained under the control of the Anti-CAD faction after the

72 *Torch*, 11/3/1946.

73 *Torch*, 11/3/1946; 18/4/1949; Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II, 14; Kies, *Background of Segregation*, 14.

74 Jane Gool and Isaac Tabata who were initially involved in the publishing of the paper complained of being edged off the editorial board. Dudley counters that this friction was a normal part of working relationships on an enterprise of this sort rather than a deliberate attempt to sideline them. Richard Dudley interview, 30/9/1999, 11.

75 See *Torch*, 15/11/1948 for the article entitled 'Get rid of Colouredism' that questioned the racial

1958 split.

Like their moderate counterparts, the radicals responded to white racism in an ambiguous fashion and the *Torch* was no exception. Its columns reveal not one consistent outlook on issues of race and Coloured identity but a wide spectrum of perspectives and approaches. These approaches ranged from an unconscious acceptance of race to a principled rejection of racial thinking, from confusion about notions of race and human difference to the tactical acknowledgment of racial identities to achieve broader political ends.

Viewed chronologically, the racial perceptions reflected in the newspaper passed through three recognizable phases. In the early years, till about the early 1950s the discourse in the newspaper is decidedly racialized with frequent lapses into inadvertent racial thinking. There is during this period also a fair degree of inconsistency and confusion about the concept of race and one is left with the impression that the paper was grappling to find ways of dealing with a thorny issue in a rough and tumble milieu of political turmoil and rapid change. Secondly, for much of the 1950s the paper was dominated by a more muted racial discourse that played down inter-black racial distinctions with greater consistency and emphasized the cleavage between black and white as being one of oppressed versus oppressor. Thirdly, evident in a tentative and inconsistent manner in the late 1950s, but growing to a recognizable trend by the time the *Torch* ceased publication at the end of 1963, was a politically correct approach to matters of race.⁷⁶ Though these were identifiable stages in the development toward a more self-conscious and consistent non-racism, the progression was by no means linear. They were more in the nature of

imbalances within the leadership of the movement.

76 Although the term 'politically correct' became current some two decades later and today might carry connotations that were not applicable at the time, the *Torch's* approach to race was politically correct in the sense that it developed a set of conventions that served to distance itself from racist values when discussing issues of race.

racism, the progression was by no means linear. They were more in the nature of tendencies rather than clear cut stages as evidence of non-racial values can be found in the early years of the newspaper just as there were lapses into racial thinking in the latter.

Viewed thematically, at least four distinct discourses around issues of race can be discerned in the *Torch*. A pervasive approach to matters of race in the pages of the paper was what might be termed the tactical response which coincided with the political strategy of the NEUM in dealing with the problem of racial divisions within the ranks of the black population. This was the pragmatic outlook advocated in Kies' 'The background of segregation' which recognized the reality of racial divisions amongst blacks and rejected the 'nonsensical type of unity' of simply lumping all black people together and pretending that such differences did not exist.⁷⁷ The tactical response was thus characterized by an expedient acknowledgement of racial distinctions accompanied by a calculated intention of undermining the racist edifice of South African society. The *Torch* made it clear that 'we do not deny that the people are divided' but affirmed that 'it is one of our most urgent tasks to destroy the barriers erected by the *Herrenvolk*.'⁷⁸

When in tactical mode the *Torch* made a distinction between 'European' and 'Non-European' by which it meant the African, Coloured and Indian people taken together. It self-consciously referred to each of the three racial groups as a 'section' of the Non-European population.⁷⁹ Phrases of the sort 'all sections of the Non-European oppressed - African, Coloured and Indian' and 'European, Coloured, Indian, African - that is all South Africans' are common in the *Torch*.⁸⁰ While for most of the time it did not specify

77 Kies, *Background of Segregation*, 13-14.

78 *Torch*, 19/8/1952.

79 For some examples see *Torch*, 1/4/1946; 15/4/1946; 13/3/1947; 18/9/1951; 30/6/1953; 12/1/1954; 18/1/1955; 13/3/1956; 7/9/1960.

80 See *Torch*, 15/7/1952; 29/7/1952 respectively. In practice the NEUM's outlook on race was thus

racial identities it frequently did identify people or organizations as either white, Coloured, Indian or African when their racial identities were salient. It in particular specified racial categories when reporting incidents of racial discrimination or racially motivated violence. Typical examples are provided by the articles headlined ‘Coloured youths and constable attacked by white hooligans’ or ‘Attack on Pretoria Coloureds’, which described the segregatory moves of the Pretoria municipality, as well as reports of the sort that ‘Du Plessis, a European, was charged with assaulting a Coloured teacher, Eddie Baatjies’.⁸¹

The *Torch*’s tactical discourse was racialized in other ways as well. At times it might address the Coloured people directly on issues that affected them such as when it asked ‘Will all Coloured people please note that...’⁸² or when it ran the headline ‘Boycott call to Coloured people’ to draw attention to a TLSA resolution spurning all racially segregated institutions.⁸³ It also did not shy away from using racial terminology to attack racism or in polemical exchanges with opponents. On one occasion, sarcastically echoing cabinet minister Ben Schoeman’s usage of ‘Hotnot’ to refer to Coloured people, a *Torch* editorial dubbed the CAC the ‘Hotnot Advisory Council’ and another editorial on disagreements between two ‘quisling factions’ appeared under the heading ‘“Cape Boy” politics’.⁸⁴ Similarly, one of its articles denouncing the tercentenary celebrations was headlined ‘April fool’s day for “Hotnots” and “Pankies”’.⁸⁵ And although the tone of the *Torch* was deadly serious, it on occasion allowed itself the luxury of using humour to attack racism

not all that far removed from the ‘four nations’ concept of the Congress Movement of which it was heavily critical. A key difference, however, was that the NEUM opted for a federal structure which it expected to become redundant and did not set up racially separate organizational structures for different groups. It in principle also rejected sectional political campaigning.

81 See *Torch*, 3/4/1950, 1/1/1952 and 12/4/1955 respectively.

82 *Torch*, 16/1/1950.

83 *Torch*, 8/7/1952.

84 See *Torch*, 11/7/1949 and 21/6/1961 respectively.

85 Derived from ‘pang’ meaning man and which is part of the ‘Cape Malay’ vernacular, ‘Pankie’, a diminutive form, is mildly derogatory Afrikaans slang for a Malay person, usually male.

such as when it quoted the limerick;

There was a young woman from Starkey
Who had an affair with a darkey
The result of her sins
Was quadruplets not twins
One white, one black and two khaki.⁸⁶

to mock white, and indirectly also, Coloured assimilationist, attitudes toward inter-racial sex. The *Torch's* use, in its Afrikaans articles, of the term 'Afrikaan' and its plural 'Afrikane' in deliberate contrast to 'Afrikaner' and 'Afrikaners' was one of the small, but telling, ways in which black claims to equality with whites was asserted. Besides, as the paper pointed out, the alternatives of 'Bantu' and 'Naturel' were derogatory.⁸⁷

Within the *Torch's* tactical framework the Coloured people were not only seen as a separate 'section' of the Non-European oppressed but it at times even encouraged their solidarity as a group. An example of this is provided by the *Torch* editorial that pondered the tragedy of sixteen year old pupil, Billy Repenaar. Billy committed suicide because, as the only darker-skinned one of five siblings in a family that was trying to pass for white, he was forced to attend a Coloured school. Criticizing those Coloured people who tried to dissociate themselves from their background, a *Torch* editorial proclaimed that 'We are proud to state that the majority of Coloured people... scorn subterfuges of this brand. They are for one not accepting the badge of inferiority.... they take pride in their colour and greater pride in those who remain with them to lead them towards freedom from oppression.'⁸⁸ In keeping with this sentiment the *Torch* mockingly referred to those who tried to dissociate themselves from their Coloured background as 'Nearopeans' and as 'European Non-Europeans'.⁸⁹ The appeal for solidarity amongst Coloureds is also

86 *Torch*, 1/11/1948.

87 *Torch*, 17/3/1947. The use of 'Afrikaan' was also meant to assert the prior claim of Africans both to the land and to Africa as homeland.

88 *Torch*, 14/10/1946.

89 See, for example, *Torch*, 5/1/1948; 7/8/1951; 6/1/1953.

apparent in such articles in which large front-page headlines addressed a 'Rallying call to the Coloured people'⁹⁰ or announced the 'Biggest Anti-CAD conference ever: Authentic voice of Coloured people'.⁹¹

More than this, the *Torch* on occasion also treated the Coloured people as a group with a common history that had forged them into a distinct social entity. This comes through clearly in the TLSA's 'Manifesto to the Coloured people' published in June 1953 as part of its rejection of the Commission of Enquiry into Coloured Education recently appointed by the Cape Provincial Council.⁹² Described as 'stirring' and quoted in full in the *Torch* the manifesto starts off by briefly reviewing the history of the Coloured people;

The Cape Coloured People have always constituted a section of the oppressed majority of South Africa. Throughout the history of the country they have always been forced to hold an inferior and subservient position in the social system. For almost two hundred years many of their forebears were held in slavery and bondage and since then the laws and administration of the country have always been devised to maintain their subjection and oppression. Such rights and privileges as were accorded them from time to time were either effectively nullified by the ruling class practices or gradually whittled away so that they could be none other than a section of the oppressed millions of South Africa.⁹³

A similar perception of the Coloured people as a social group created by the forces of history, albeit one determined by the pressures of capitalist development, is presented in an article entitled 'How Coloured people developed' which reported the gist of Apollis Slingers' address on 'The challenge to the education of the Coloured people' to the annual conference of the Teachers' League.⁹⁴

When in the tactical mode, neither the NEUM nor the *Torch* can be described as being

90 *Torch*, 27/2/1951. See *Torch*, 8/7/1952 for the similar 'Boycott call to the Coloured people'.

91 *Torch*, 12/1/1954.

92 The commission reported in 1956. See the Cape Provincial *Report of the Coloured Education Commission, 1953-56*. The report lacks a CP serial number.

93 *Torch*, 30/6/1953.

94 *Torch*, 3/7/1956. See *Educational Journal*, 8/1956, 1-24 for a full transcript of Slingers' address. Slingers was a history teacher at Trafalgar High School, Cape Town, and treasurer of the TLSA from the early 1960s till he was served with a banning order in mid-1966. See *Educational*

non-racial or even having rejected the notion of race because its discourse was overtly racial and there was an acceptance of the reality of racial distinctions within South African society. And, as mentioned earlier, the aim of this particular tactic, building black political unity, placed a manifestly racial agenda on the table. This is not, however, to discount the *Torch*'s constant concern to promote unity between the various 'sections' of the Non-European people or to lose sight that the ultimate goal of this strategy was to undermine the racist system. In terms of the NEUM's tactical approach it was not so much the use of racial terminology or even racial thinking that mattered so much as their intent and net effect. Thus when the *Torch* accused others of being racist - it preferred the term 'racialistic' - it was not for giving cognisance to the idea of race or for thinking in racial terms but rather for making negative judgements of people or discriminating on the basis of race or in any way promoting racial sectarianism. Thus referring to people as African or Coloured was not in itself regarded as 'racialistic' in the eyes of the *Torch* but asking that inter-marriage between Coloureds and Africans be banned, as the Federal Council of Coloured Churches did in March 1956; demanding that those few African pupils attending Coloured schools be removed; or claiming that Malay youths were more prone to becoming 'skollies'⁹⁵ than their Christian Coloured counterparts, certainly were.⁹⁶

The stock assessment of the *Torch* regarding its tactical concession to racism was that it was making headway in uniting blacks but could not yet claim victory. In 1948 the *Torch*, in a front page article, repeated the latest *APO*'s exhortation to readers that they 'unlearn the bad habit of thinking as a Coloured man' but was encouraged that the

Journal, 6/1966.

95 'Skolly/Skollie' is a South African colloquialism for a hoodlum or petty gangster.

96 See *Torch*, 27/3/1956; 27/10/1953 and 8/9/1947 respectively.

Coloured people 'have made progress in the correct direction toward Unity'.⁹⁷ Later, in 1952, it claimed that 'in the growing principled unity of the oppressed people the *Herrenvolk* see the writing on the wall' and a 1955 editorial asserted that 'the Coloured people have increasingly learned - particularly through the teachings and practical lessons of the Anti-CAD Movement over the past twelve years - to look upon themselves as Non-Europeans, part and parcel of the oppressed majority of this country.'⁹⁸ In later years the manifest lack of progress towards black unity was glossed over or blamed on the sectarianism of rivals.

Alongside the tactical approach, inter-twined with it and shading into it was an unconsciously racial discourse with an a priori acceptance of the concept of race and in which the conventional racial divisions of South African society were taken as given. For much of the time the *Torch* blithely reported about Europeans, Non-Europeans, whites, Coloureds, Africans, Indians and Malays. It routinely used these terms and their Afrikaans equivalents and occasionally other racial epithets such as 'Bantu' for Africans, 'Ampies' for poor or uncouth Afrikaners, 'Negro' for African Americans and Yanks for Americans as, for example when it ran the headline 'Yanks arm Japs'.⁹⁹ All of these racial terms were used in normative fashion, without explanation or qualification, as if their meanings were self-evident. Often these racial terms were used when there was no real need to make racial distinctions or when the tactical distinction of 'European' and 'Non-European' would have sufficed. While this racial terminology was accepted usage at the time and to expect a more politically correct approach would be anachronistic,¹⁰⁰

97 *Torch*, 15/11/1948. Copies of the *APO* newspaper published during its radical phase appear not to have survived.

98 *Torch*, 19/8/1952; 18/1/1955.

99 For some examples of the use of Bantu see *Torch*, 25/10/1948; 16/10/1950; 19/2/1957; for Ampies *Torch*, 4/9/1951; 7/10/1952; for Negro *Torch*, 22/7/1946; 13/6/1949; 16/8/1955; 13/3/1956; 12/2/1957; 4/12/1963; for Yanks *Torch*, 4/11/1946; 20/12/1948; 26/4/1961. On one occasion the term 'Native' was also used in its normative sense. See *Torch*, 25/2/1946.

100 After all African Americans at the time used the term 'Negro' in a normative sense and some

its use does indicate a considerable degree of unconscious racial thinking within the NEUM and contradicts unqualified assumptions that the organization was non-racial during this period. The *Torch* nevertheless from time to time displayed an awareness that the use of racial terms was problematic such as when it criticized a new Afrikaans dictionary for using racist terminology, when it published an article by George Padmore on derogatory terms used for black people in Britain and when it carried the caption "Native" education for Africans'.¹⁰¹

In many instances it was not clear whether particular examples of the use of racial terminology or concepts represented a tactical deployment of race or were lapses into racial forms of thinking.¹⁰² There were, however, times when the *Torch's* slippage into inadvertent racial usage is clear cut. Its story of '150 Coloured soldiers involved in a drunken brawl', the reference to 'each of our four racial groups' and headlines of the sort 'SA Coloured XV vs Bantu XV', or 'African and Coloured students debate' are but a few of the myriad of examples of slippages into unconscious racial reportage that are to be found in the pages of the *Torch*.¹⁰³ As mentioned earlier, the *Torch's* non-political reporting - its sports news, the few human interest stories and the community news it carried - displays a very clear cut racial orientation in that it is almost entirely focused on the Coloured community which indicates that the paper was written largely with a Coloured readership in mind. This bias, though far less evident in its political reporting, is nevertheless noticeable there as well. For instance, a *Torch* editorial was justifiably indignant that the latest salary scales for teachers pegged the salaries of Coloured

Africans regarded themselves as 'Bantu' as, for example, members of the Western Province Bantu Teachers' Association of the 1940s and 1950s did.

101 See *Torch*, 17/3/1947; 18/7/1949; 30/1/1950 respectively.

102 For a few examples of ambiguous usage see articles titled 'Threat to Coloured vote' in *Torch*, 11/8/1947; 'Africans stand firm' in *Torch*, 3/10/1949 and 'Luring Coloureds away from unity' in *Torch*, 21/10/1952.

103 For these examples see *Torch*, 4/3/1946; 5/8/1946; 16/10/1950 and 25/9/1951 respectively. For a few more examples see *Torch* 22/7/1946; 19/8/1946; 16/3/1954.

teachers at four fifths of what their white counterparts were paid. It, however, made no mention that the remuneration of African teachers was set at three fifths of white salaries.¹⁰⁴ The *Torch*, in addition, regularly ran racially exclusive employment advertisements inviting applications from 'Coloured' nurses, teachers, clerks and housekeepers. On one occasion it offered boarders 'accommodation with a respectable Coloured family'.¹⁰⁵

It is possible to point to several examples where non-racial discourse or the strategic use of race is compromised or contradicted by a lapse into unconsciously racial usage on the same page or even in the same article. An illustration is provided by the very first issue of the *Torch*. In the column right next to the editorial that pledged the newspaper to the promotion of the non-racial ideal, it ran an article that expressed great pride that in a local production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* 'the carefully chosen cast is entirely Non-European'. Echoing the assimilationist sentiment of despised moderate Coloureds, the article was confident that the play would discredit white racist notions that 'the artistic abilities of the non-European is limited to the Coons, Zonk and Kaatjie Kekkelbek'.¹⁰⁶ In terms of the non-racial values it had expressed in the previous column the *Torch* should have condemned this play produced by whites for an entirely 'Non-European' - presumably Coloured - cast.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, an article entitled 'Race and heredity' which

104 *Torch*, 28/10/1946.

105 See *Torch*, 13/5/1946; 16/6/1947; 11/10/1948; 9/1/1950; 30/1/1950; 20/2/1950; 10/3/1953 for examples. Although the *Torch*, in terms of non-racial ideals, should have run adverts that made no mention of race, acceptable usage for the *Torch* by its usual standards, would have been to use the term 'Non-European' as it did in other similar advertisements. It appears that the *Torch* simply accepted the wording of adverts as given to them by advertisers.

106 *Torch*, 25/2/1946. The *Torch*, 1/4/1946 reported the play to have been 'a thrilling success'.

107 The play was produced by Rosalie van der Gucht, head of the Department of Speech Training at the University of Cape Town and the dances were arranged by Dulcie Howes and her student David Poole. *Torch*, 25/2/1946; 4/3/1946. It is ironic that Poole, who was born into a poor Coloured family from Woodstock, managed to carve out a distinguished career as dancer, choreographer and director of the Capab Ballet Company by passing for white. For further detail on Poole see *Cape Times*, 17/8/2001. See *Torch*, 13/3/1956 for an example of the paper attacking this sort of 'European guidance... (of) Coloured(s) inspired with the striving of their own cultural education'.

reported on an eponymous lecture delivered to the New Era Fellowship by prominent Coloured teacher and Unity Movement supporter, Stella Jacobs, is confused and contradictory on the concept of race. Despite a strongly non-racial and egalitarian tone rejecting the drawing of racial distinctions or any notion that one group of people may be racially superior to another on the basis that 'all human beings are descended from the same ancestor and belong to the same species', it nevertheless repeats Jacobs' claims that there 'are three primary races namely, white, yellow-brown and black' and that the 'Australian blacks are the purest race today'.¹⁰⁸

Part of the confusion about racial issues in the *Torch's* reporting comes from it often trying to combat racism using racial concepts and racial forms of thinking. For instance, one of the earlier *Torch* editorials laudably rejected the idea that there is such a thing as 'white civilization' and the assumption that whites were the only creators of 'civilization', citing the xenophobic deliberations of parliamentarians in debates over the 'Anti-Indian Bill'. The editorial, however, lapsed into a racialized mode of thinking when it tried to refute these racist assumptions by claiming Simon van der Stel to be 'one of the most outstanding Coloured men in the history of South Africa.'¹⁰⁹ Similarly, after making the commendable point that civilization 'belongs neither to white or non-white people', it in the very next breath exhibits an a priori acceptance of the concept of race by asserting that civilization is 'neither the product of any *race* or nation' and that it has 'its roots

108 *Torch*, 29/7/1946.

109 This claim was probably based on Theal's observation that Simon van der Stel's mother was a free Indian woman, Monica of the Coast, who accompanied his father and gave birth to Simon in Mauritius in 1639. See G. M. Theal, *Willem Adriaan van der Stel and other historical sketches*, (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, 1913), 172. It is more likely though that Simon van der Stel's mother was Maria Lievens and that his maternal grandmother was of Indian and possibly slave origin, which in twentieth century South African terms would have made him Coloured in the eyes of most people. See A. J. Boeseken, 'Jan Anthonie van Riebeeck' in W. J. de Kock, and D. W. Kruger, (eds.), *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. II, (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1968), 815; P. J. Moree, *A Concise History of Dutch Mauritius, 1598-1710: A fruitful and healthy land*, (Leiden, Kegan Paul, 1998), 115. See *Torch*, 27/2/1950 for another instance where Simon van der Stel is claimed as 'one of the most outstanding Coloured men South Africa produced.' I am grateful to Satyendra Peerthum for drawing my attention to much of the information and several of

embedded firmly and indisputably in cultures and *races* and nations in all corners of the globe.¹¹⁰

In addition to the tactical approach and the unconsciously racial discourse that together dominated the content of the paper there were occasions when the *Torch* switched into a non-racial mode of discourse or analysis. These instances were relatively few and far between and were confined to specific articles in which the paper tried to debunk the myth of race and educate its readership in non-racial ways of thinking. This approach is apparent, for instance, in the article headlined ‘Professor explodes myth of “European race”’ which reported Meyer Fortes’ evidence at a TARC¹¹¹ trial that the idea of a ‘European race’ had no scientific foundation at all.¹¹² A second example is provided by the article, ‘Man and the apes’ which stressed the common ancestry and African origins of humanity.¹¹³ The overall message of this discourse, which revealed the underlying non-racial outlook of the NEUM leadership, was that the concept of race had no scientific validity and that racial thinking was morally indefensible because of the essential unity of humankind. Their position was succinctly stated in an article entitled ‘Racialism - weapon of exploitation’ which reported Edgar Maurice’s delivery of the A. J. Abrahamse Memorial Lecture;

Race and colour attitudes were not part of the nature of man; they did not develop of their own accord, but were a deliberate man-made product used to serve the interests of the dominant ruling classes in societies in which domination and

the references that appear in this footnote.

- 110 *Torch*, 22/4/1946. Emphasis added. For fuller elaboration of the NEUM’s non-racial standpoint on race, culture and society see *Torch*, 9/9/1952; 16/9/1952; Kies, *Contribution of Non-European Peoples*.
- 111 The Train Apartheid Resistance Committee, was an abortive joint venture by the NEUM, the Communist Party and FIOSA to combat the National Party’s attempt to extend segregation to Cape Town’s suburban trains in 1948. For accounts of this episode see R. Donaldson, ‘The train apartheid issue in the Cape Peninsula, 1948-53’, (B. A. Hons. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1981); Drew, *Radical Tradition*, Vol. II, 81-86, 97-103.
- 112 *Torch*, 18/10/1948. Meyer Fortes, reader in social anthropology at Oxford University, at the time occupied a temporary professorial post in the department of anthropology at the University of Cape Town.
- 113 *Torch*, 23/10/1951. See H. Jephta, ‘Race and education’, *Educational Journal*, 8/1949 for an example from an associated publication.

exploitation of peoples of colour were part of the economic patterns of these societies.¹¹⁴

The pre-eminent example of this non-racial discourse in the *Torch* is, however, to be found in the series of twenty five articles entitled 'Science and race' published weekly between May and October 1952.¹¹⁵ This series was meant to educate readers in the basic tenets of non-racism and to debunk common racial myths. The opening article in this series stressed that all human beings 'belong to one and the same species known as *Homo sapiens*', that 'the classification of people into "races" is quite arbitrary' and goes on to make the important point that in any given 'race' while 'the group of people forming it have common characteristics, the differences among the individual people are just as great as the differences between the "races" themselves'.¹¹⁶ Subsequent installments argued against racial fallacies of the sort that a superior race existed, that blacks were inferior to whites or all alike, that race determined character, that heredity occurred through blood mixing or that miscegenation led to degeneration.¹¹⁷ The series also explained how traits were transmitted genetically, that particular groups were oppressed not because of inferior genes but because they were deliberately exploited, that there was no such thing as a pure race and that there is only one race - the human race.¹¹⁸ It examined issues of race with regard to Jews, Coloureds, Indians, culture, education, group areas, the child, the individual and in each case it emphasized non-racial values and argued against popular myths, misconceptions and abuses of racist ideas.¹¹⁹

114 *Torch*, 16/4/1957. For a similar statement by Stella Jacobs in which she appears to have eliminated much of the confusion noted in her earlier lecture, see *Torch*, 13/10/1953. Jacobs described racism as the 'base rationalizations of a society characterized by oppression... (which) serves to cloak or justify social inequalities.'

115 See *Torch*, 13/5/1952 - 28/10/1952. Stella Jacobs was most likely the author of this series.

116 *Torch*, 13/5/1952.

117 *Torch*, 20/5/1952; 27/5/1952; 3/6/1952; 10/6/1952.

118 See *Torch*, 27/5/1952; 3/6/1952; 10/6/1952 and 15/7/1952 respectively.

119 *Torch*, 17/6/1952; 19/8/1952; 26/8/1952; 2/9/1952; 9/9/1952; 23/9/1952; 30/9/1952; 7/10/1952;

The 'Science and race' series is significant not only because it confirms the essentially non-racial outlook of the NEUM leadership but, in addition, provides a fairly systematic and detailed indication of the content of these ideas as well as of popular racist misconceptions it felt needed debunking. The series, inevitably, was also used to promote the NEUM's political agenda which often detracted from its efficacy as demonstrated by the article on 'The Coloured people and race'. This article is disappointing in that it failed to address obvious issues around race and Colouredness and instead did little more than denounce what it saw as conspiratorial attempts by the 'Herrenvolk' and the establishment press to sow division within the ranks of the Coloured people and to laud NEUM counter-strategies. The unintended subtext of this article, however, was that the Coloured people formed an organic social entity.¹²⁰

From the late 1950s a fourth approach to issues of race and Coloured identity is detectable in the columns of the *Torch*. Starting from about 1957 there is an increasing frequency with which terms such as Coloured, African, race, racial groups, Bantu, Kleurling and Herrenvolk are placed in quotation marks, italicized or prefaced with 'so-called' to distance the paper from their racist implications and presumably to counter possible accusations of racism.¹²¹ The increasing incidence of phrases such as "'so-called" races', 'persons described as Europeans' and, of course, "'so-called" Coloured' signalled this new sensibility¹²² as did the coining of terms such as 'Bantuization' and 'Colouredization'. Through the late 1950s and early 1960s a consciously non-racial tone progressively pervaded the journalism of the *Torch* so that by mid-1962 the practice of qualifying racial terms by using quotation marks or 'so-called' became fairly consistent.

14/10/1952.

120 *Torch*, 19/8/1952.

121 For some examples of such usage see *Torch*, 29/1/1957; 16/4/1957; 21/4/1959; 28/7/1959; 23/2/1960; 28/9/1960; 26/4/1961; 17/5/1961; 27/2/1963; 21/8/1963.

122 See *Torch*, 19/1/1957; 4/11/1958; 20/10/1959 respectively.

The development of this politically correct approach needs, in the first instance, to be viewed against the backdrop of growing international intolerance of racism. The increasingly high profile of the American civil rights movement, the move toward African independence, the strengthening voice of the non-aligned movement founded in 1955 and intensified global condemnation of apartheid fed non-racial sympathies worldwide. These developments impinged on the consciousness of the NEUM which, because of the significance it attached to imperialism and global capitalism, had a more broadly international outlook than rival liberatory organizations. On the domestic front, the implementation of apartheid social engineering, which only kicked into high gear in the late 1950s, also contributed to this growing anti-racist sentiment. As segregation became more pervasive and especially as petty apartheid measures intruded on peoples' daily lives, so an anti-racist counter-thrust was likely to assert itself amongst opposition groups. This was likely to occur not only at the emotional level of a gut reaction to apartheid but would also tend to raise the moral imperative and political salience of the principle of non-racism.

While an anti-racist position was likely to have won political organizations support amongst black people during this period of intensifying white chauvinism and racial discrimination, a contrary dynamic was at play in the *Torch* and the Anti-CAD faction's adoption of this stance. As this political grouping became less active and politically more isolated through the latter half of the 1950s, so pragmatic considerations that came with active political organization became less relevant and the strategic approach to race was quietly abandoned. A more uncompromising and idealistic stance on most issues, including non-racism, became attractive, if for no other reason than for the NEUM to claim the moral high ground. As one commentator broadly sympathetic to the NEUM put

it; 'Once the Unity Movement stopped doing real political work it could afford to make a stand on high principle.'¹²³ Critics of the NEUM, furthermore, have often accused it of using this principled stance as an excuse for remaining on the sidelines and thereby not exposing itself to either the hard work or the risks of mass mobilization.

It is clear that for the greater part of its existence, non-racial thinking within the *Torch* had not yet advanced to the stage of it becoming sufficiently self-conscious about its use of racial terminology and concepts - or of the implications of it having adopted the vocabulary of the 'Herrenvolk' - for it to desist from doing so or seeking alternative ways of expressing itself. During its politically active phase political correctness had not yet become a major consideration internationally and the non-racial ideal was not sufficiently important to the political agenda of the NEUM for it to be overly concerned with such niceties. Not until the early 1960s did the *Torch* consistently scrutinize its vocabulary and the concepts it used with a view to sanitizing them or distancing itself from their racist connotations. In this respect NEUM ideologues, together with a handful of ultra-left Trotskyist critics before them, were the first to develop a rigorously non-racial perspective and discourse and to start viewing Coloured identity in a different light.

The *Torch's* ambiguous approach to race and Coloured identity prior to the early 1960s should not come as any great surprise. Without the etiquette of political correctness as a guide there was bound to be varied usage of racial terminology. And given the complexities of the South African situation, the prevalence of racial thinking and relatively undeveloped popular sensibilities around issues of non-racism, there was bound also to be a degree of conceptual confusion. In a newspaper turned out, moreover, under

123 This informant, who made this comment during an unrecorded conversation in April 2002 in response to the question of why the NEUM changed its pragmatic stance, has a decades-long association with the movement. He wishes to remain anonymous.

pressures of production deadlines, financial stringency, state harassment, polemical exchanges with opponents, political campaigning and the vagaries of being dependent on part-time, amateur staff, inconsistencies are to be expected under close scrutiny. There was not necessarily a contradiction between the *Torch's* non-racial discourse and the tactical concession to the social reality of race if it is accepted that the goal of achieving black political unity took priority over the principle of non-racism. There are, however, clear contradictions between the non-racial and tactical approaches on the one hand and the unconsciously racial discourse on the other.¹²⁴ These contradictions were largely resolved in the early 1960s when the NEUM became much more self-conscious of its discourse around issues of race.

The *Torch* entered a long period of decline, a trend observable from as early as 1953 onwards and that broadly reflected the fortunes of the Non-European Unity Movement. Never having attracted a mass following, its organ had a small circulation which shrank as the NEUM became progressively less active from the late 1940s onwards because of its refusal to mount or participate in mass campaigns or to confront the state directly. The organization was rent by ideological in-fighting through the 1950s and was especially vulnerable to state intimidation because of its strong support amongst teachers. Direct repression of the NEUM leadership started in the mid-1950s with the dismissal of Kies and van Schoor from their teaching posts in February 1956 and the banning of Tabata the following month.¹²⁵ This decline was greatly exacerbated after the Sharpeville shootings as the state cracked down hard on the liberatory movement.

124 These sorts of contradictions were not confined only to the issue of race and can, for example, be observed in the paper's treatment of the concept of nationalism. A *Torch* editorial discussing 'Some problems of the liberatory movement' was of the opinion that 'nationalism or chauvinism is a menace to the liberatory movement.' Yet it immediately afterward declared itself in favour of the movement for *national* liberation and committed to the 'struggle for, and the building of, a united *nation* that is free and takes its place as an equal in the comity of nations.' *Torch*, 22/1/1957. Emphasis added. Neville Alexander has also noted instances in which racial groups are referred to as 'nations' by the NEUM. Alexander, *One Azania, One Nation*, 111.

As the paper went into decline through the 1950s its tone became shriller and more denunciatory. Its content grew less diversified and more propagandistic as it contained less and less hard news and was filled more and more with condemnations of apartheid and western imperialism. Its reporting also became repetitious, rhetorical and jaded.¹²⁶ It is, in addition, apparent from the pages of the *Torch* that advertising revenue started drying up from the early 1950s onwards so that for the last seven or eight years of its life the paper carried virtually no advertising.¹²⁷ Although the venture was never commercially viable and depended on donations, periodic fund-raising and voluntary work to remain afloat, the loss of advertising revenue made production all the more arduous.¹²⁸ The temporary closure of the paper when it was banned for five months during the state of emergency from the beginning of April to the end of August 1960, was disastrous as it lost readers, revenue and a significant part of its distribution network.¹²⁹ Although publication of the *Torch* resumed in early September 1960, its parent company was under severe financial strain. By September 1962 the paper was in such dire straits that it published a front page appeal for donations, claiming that it immediately needed a sum of R750 to avoid being scaled down to four pages. The climate of fear in left wing circles in the early 1960s and the risks of bannings and detention made publication and

125 *Torch*, 21/2/1956; 13/3/1956.

126 The *Torch* has often been criticized for being vituperative. Although its tone was usually acerbic and it had little besides withering scorn for opponents, its harsh criticism of the apartheid regime and of collaborationists was not unjustified. For accusations of the *Torch* being 'vituperative' see L. Switzer and D. Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A descriptive bibliographic guide to African, Coloured and Indian newspapers, newsletters and magazines, 1836-1976*, (Boston, G. K. Hall, 1979), 61 and R. Ainslie, *The Press in Africa: Communication past and present*, (London, Gollancz, 1966), 53.

127 From its inception about 15% of the *Torch's* space was taken up by advertising. This rose steadily to as much as 40% by mid-1948 and then declined to the 15-20% level through the early 1950s. *Torch* advertisers included a number of national and international brands such as Lion Lager, Ponds Vanishing Cream, Johnson's Baby Powder, Brylcreem, Aspro, Pepsi-Cola and a range of cigarette brands. There was a sharp drop in advertising in mid-1954 and by mid-1957 the paper carried very little advertising except for a few trifling panel ads by small black businesses.

128 *Torch*, 22/6/1954; Richard Dudley interview, 20/9/1999, 10.

129 *Torch*, 7/9/1960; 19/9/1962. The newspaper was banned immediately after its 5 April issue had come off the press. And to make matters worse it was being sued for libel by six UCCA members.

distribution hazardous for the individuals involved. It was the spate of banning orders served in the early 1960s on NEUM leaders, many of whom were involved in the running of the *Torch*, that finally crippled the newspaper.¹³⁰ Most significantly, in September 1961 the *Torch*'s longstanding editor, Joyce Meissenheimer, was banned for five years under the Suppression of Communism Act.¹³¹ Then in October 1963 her replacement, Joan Kay, school principal and treasurer of the Anti-CAD since 1953, was also served with a five year banning order.¹³² The last issue of the paper appeared on 4 December 1963.

The *Torch* is the most important and representative of the serial publications produced within the Trotskyist tradition of left-wing politics in the Coloured community. There being no similar periodical within its Communist Party counterpart, Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* will instead be used as a case study. Written with the intention of providing an authentic portrayal of life in the Coloured working class area of District Six, La Guma being a dedicated Communist Party activist and himself having lived in 'the District' for nearly three decades, the novel is eminently suited for this purpose.

Race, identity and realism in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night and other Stories*

*A Walk in the Night*¹³³ opens with the protagonist, Michael Adonis, a young Coloured man, alighting from a trackless tram on the bustling streets of late afternoon District Six. Adonis was nursing a 'pustule of rage and humiliation deep down within him' because he had earlier that day been fired from his menial factory job for backchatting the white foreman. He goes to a local diner where he meets his friend Willieboy who survives by

130 Richard Dudley interview, 30/9/1999, 17.

131 *Torch*, 27/9/1961. In addition to Meissenheimer, Victor Wessels, Cosmo Pieterse and Allie Fataar were served with banning orders at that time.

132 *Torch*, 30/10/1963; *Educational Journal*, 10-11/1963.

133 A. La Guma, *A Walk in the Night and other Stories*, (London, Heinemann, 1967).

hustling on the streets of District Six. There he also meets up with Foxy and his gang who are looking for an accomplice they need for a burglary they have planned for that night. After his meal Michael makes his way to a nearby pub. On the way he is cornered by two white policemen who search his pockets for dagga (marijuana) and accuse him of having stolen the money he has on him. Although outwardly compliant Michael is furious at this racially motivated harassment. At the pub Michael gets drunk on cheap wine before returning to his tenement. In the passageway he meets Uncle Doughty an elderly, alcoholic Irishman who invites him to his room for a drink. With the liquor further fuelling his rage, Michael vents his frustration at being humiliated by whites on Uncle Doughty. He lashes out at the decrepit old man with a wine bottle, killing him. Michael escapes from the scene of the crime undetected but Willieboy, who comes looking for Michael to borrow money, stumbles across the corpse of Doughty. Panic-stricken he flees but is spotted by tenement dwellers and is blamed for Doughty's death. Later that night Willieboy is hunted down by constable Raalt, a sadistic white policeman, who shoots him in cold blood. Willieboy later dies in the back of the police van. Michael, after walking the streets of District Six, later that night decides to join Foxy and his gang, thus beginning his descent into crime.

A Walk in the Night was first published in 1962 by Mbari Publications in Ibadan. La Guma started writing the novella in 1959 and completed it by the time he was detained in April 1960 under the state of emergency declared following the Sharpeville shootings. He had little option but to publish overseas for after being banned under the Suppression of Communism Act in July 1961 nothing he said or wrote could be published in South Africa.¹³⁴ *A Walk in the Night* was La Guma's first substantive piece of fictional writing and won him immediate recognition as an exciting new author. In 1967 the novella, or

134 A. La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, (London, Kliptown Books, 1988), Preface by Brian Bunting,

'long story' as he preferred to call it,¹³⁵ was republished together with a selection of six short stories as *A Walk in the Night and other Stories*.¹³⁶ These works have a common theme in that they have Coloured people as protagonists and deal with aspects of Coloured working class life. Four of the short stories, as well as *A Walk in the Night*, are set in District Six during the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹³⁷

Alex La Guma was born in District Six on 20 February 1925. He grew up in a highly politicized household because his father, James La Guma, was a life-long political activist and a pioneering figure in the liberatory movement. At the time of Alex's birth Jimmy La Guma was general secretary of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union. A few months after his son was born Jimmy joined the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and was elected to the Party's Central Committee the following year. During the latter half of the 1920s he served as organizing secretary of the Western Cape Branch of the ANC and played a leading role in the creation of the fledgling black trade union movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Jimmy was, in addition, a founding member of the National Liberation League in the mid-1930s. He was serving on the Communist Party's Central Committee at the time of the Party's banning in 1950 and was president of the South African Coloured People's Organization (SACPO) from 1957-59. Jimmy La Guma died in 1961.¹³⁸

vi.

- 135 In an interview with Cecil Abrahams La Guma explained that he had not set out to write a novel. 'I just started at the beginning and ended at the end.' C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1985), 69.
- 136 The short stories 'At the Portagees', 'Tattoo marks and nails' and 'Blankets' appeared in *Black Orpheus* during 1963-64 while 'The gladiators', 'A matter of taste' and 'The lemon orchard' were first published in this volume.
- 137 District Six was an inner-city, commercial and residential area of Cape Town adjacent to the central business district. Although highly cosmopolitan in the earlier part of the century by the time of La Guma's portrayal of it, the population of District Six was largely Coloured and working class in character. V. Bickford-Smith, 'The origins and early history of District Six to 1910' in Jeppie and Soudien, *The Struggle for District Six*, 35 ff.; N. Worden, E. van Heyningen and V. Bickford-Smith. *Cape Town: The making of a city*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1998), 250-51.
- 138 For further biographical detail on Jimmy La Guma see M. Adhikari, 'James Arnold La Guma', in E. Verwey, (ed.), *New Dictionary of South African Biography*, (Pretoria, HSRC Publishers, 1995),

In 1928 Jimmy La Guma and his wife Wilhelmina, whom he had married in 1923, set up home at no. 1 Roger Street, District Six, where Alex lived for the better part of three decades before moving to Garlandale on the Cape Flats. Alex attended Trafalgar High School in District Six. He left school in 1942 to help support the family while his father was on wartime service with the Cape Corps in East and North Africa. He was nevertheless able to matriculate in 1945 by attending night classes at the Cape Town Technical College. La Guma found employment first as factory worker then as clerk and bookkeeper. It was not until 1946 that he was initiated into active politics when he was fired for his part in organizing a strike amongst fellow workers at the Metal Box factory in Maitland. In 1947 he joined the Young Communist League and the following year became a member of the CPSA. Alex La Guma rose to national prominence in the anti-apartheid movement in the latter half of the 1950s after becoming a founding member of the South African Coloured People's Organization and serving on its executive committee. In 1956 he started working as a reporter for *New Age*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the banned Communist Party. In December of that year La Guma was amongst the 156 members of the Congress Alliance who were arrested and charged with treason. In May 1958 he was the target of an assassination attempt. After his acquittal in the Treason Trial in 1960, Alex was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act and placed under 24 hour house arrest in 1963. Suffering continuous harassment by the security police, he left South Africa on an exit permit with his family in 1966. Both his exposure to the radical political tradition and his experience of growing up in District Six were essential ingredients to La Guma's writing of *A Walk in the Night*.¹³⁹

123-27; Adhikari, *Jimmy La Guma*.

139 For further biographical detail on Alex La Guma and his life in exile see Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 1-20 and K. Balutansky, *Alex La Guma: The representation of a political conflict*,

A Walk in the Night was written at a time when District Six had a notorious reputation as a crime-ridden slum and life in the area had not yet gained the aura of romanticism that surrounds it today. It was only later, from the late 1960s onwards, with the mass removal of over thirty thousand inhabitants under the Group Areas Act and the demolition of the houses they had occupied, that District Six became an international symbol of the brutality of apartheid. Writing a decade before the Group Areas removals, there is no question of La Guma romanticizing life in District Six nor of him succumbing to the 'we were poor but happy then' syndrome that afflicts so much of the more recent writing about the area.¹⁴⁰ Reflecting upon his childhood in the autobiographical *Writing Black*, Richard Rive, who also grew up in District Six, noted that 'It is notoriously easy to romanticize about slum life and sentimentalize it. In truth the slum was damp, dirty and dank... where drunkenness, debauchery and police raids were the order of the day.'¹⁴¹ In an interview with *South* newspaper just before his death Rive noted that 'When I was young people hid the fact that they came from District Six in their back pockets. Now it is a mark of great social prestige to have come from there.'¹⁴² Like Rive in *Writing Black*, La Guma reveals District Six for what it was, a ripe slum. At one point in the novel he characterizes it as a 'whirlpool world of poverty, petty crime and violence'.¹⁴³ This, of course, is not to say that he did not write with sensitivity and compassion about its people or that District Six was not a vibrant community.

There can be little doubt that La Guma aimed to provide a faithful representation of working class life in District Six as the setting for the novel. *A Walk in the Night* was

(Washington, Three Continents Press, 1989), 1-12.

140 For a few examples see R. Rive, 'Buckingham Palace', *District Six*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1986); H. Adams, and H. Suttner, *William Street District Six*, (Cape Town, Chameleon Press, 1988); A. Forbes, *Birds on a Ledge*, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, 1992); C. Schoeman, *District Six: The spirit of Kanala*, (Cape Town, Human and Rosseau, 1994).

141 R. Rive, *Writing Black*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1981), 4.

142 *South*, 1/6/1989.

143 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 4. Rive's *Writing Black* presents a much more realistic picture of

inspired by a short paragraph that La Guma saw in a newspaper about a young 'hooligan' who had been shot by police and later died in the back of their van. Wondering how and why this could have happened, sparked his imagination and culminated in La Guma creating this story based upon 'what I had thought life in District Six was really like'. He confirmed that '... most of the description of action or places in District Six is based upon actual characters and events.'¹⁴⁴ His journalist's eye for detail and the insights gained from having grown up there, gives La Guma's writing in *A Walk in the Night* a hard-edged realism and an incisiveness not attained in his subsequent work. And, given the political messages he wanted to convey about the harshness of working class existence and the inhumanity of apartheid, there is no place for sentimentality in his evocation of life in District Six. Contrary to latter day romanticizers who idealize the spirit of District Six as a way of castigating the National Party government for having destroyed a vibrant community, La Guma is concerned to show District Six in all its squalor as a means of condemning the apartheid state for its neglect and heartlessness.

Anyone familiar with 'the District' of the 1960s will recognize the accuracy with which La Guma describes the crumbling tenements, the smell of decay that hung over the place and the struggle of daily life for the majority of its inhabitants. Throughout the novel Alex deftly details the wretched privation of the place. In a typical passage he describes the landscape of District Six beyond the 'artificial glare' of Hanover Street as consisting of;

... stretches of damp, battered houses with their broken-ribs of front-railings; cracked walls and high tenements that rose like the left-overs of a bombed area in the twilight; vacant lots and weed-grown patches where houses had once stood; and deep doorways resembling the entrances to deserted castles. There were children playing in the street, darting among the overflowing dustbins and

District Six than the nostalgic *Buckingham Palace*.

144 Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, 48, 51. Abrahams, who quotes from interviews he had conducted with Alex in London in March 1978 and in Havana in June 1981, goes so far as to claim that 'Alex consciously sat down to be the social historian of the coloured people.' See preface.

shooting at each other with wooden guns. In some of the doorways people sat or stood, murmuring idly in the fast-fading light like wasted ghosts in a plague-ridden city.¹⁴⁵

While his style of writing has, with some justification, been described as 'revolutionary romanticism', *A Walk in the Night* comes closest to La Guma's characterization of his own style as 'socialist realism'.¹⁴⁶

Although Lewis Nkosi's judgement that 'La Guma has written nothing since the appearance of *A Walk in the Night* which compels a fresh evaluation of his work'¹⁴⁷ cannot be justified, it is clear that the vividness and the gritty realism with which he portrayed Coloured working class life in *A Walk in the Night* was not matched in subsequent novels. While the literary merits of La Guma's various works are obviously open to debate, there is little doubt that *A Walk in the Night* represents his most convincing portrayal of social reality. The reasons for this are two-fold.

Firstly, having lived in District Six for much of his life, Alex was intimately familiar with life in 'the District' and had a deep reservoir of personal experience on which he could draw in the writing of the novel. That he was writing about a community and a locality in which he had grown up accounts for the powerful sense of place in *A Walk in the Night*. The characters have an authenticity and the scenes a vividness not present in his later fictional writing. *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*, both set in Cape Town and written while he was still resident in the city, display La Guma's keen powers of observation but do not have the social perceptiveness and the depth of insight of *A Walk in the Night* which drew on decades of lived experience. His later novels, *In the Fog of*

145 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 21.

146 G. Cornwell, 'Justin Alexander La Guma' in Verwey, *Dictionary of South African Biography*, 128.

147 L. Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and styles of African literature*, (London, Longman, 1981), 86. See also Nkosi's *Home and Exile and Other Selections*, (New York, Longman, 1983), 137-38.

Season's End and *The Time of the Butcherbird*, written in exile and set in Cape Town and the Karoo respectively, bear evidence of La Guma's separation from South Africa.¹⁴⁸ Whatever their literary merits, these works lack the intimacy and finely grained depictions of a particular social setting that mark *A Walk in the Night*.

Secondly, the progressive intrusion of a political agenda in La Guma's novels detracts from the realism of his writing. There is a fairly clear cut progression in each succeeding novel in that South Africa is increasingly depicted as a society polarized between black and white with blacks becoming more and more militant and united in the struggle against apartheid.¹⁴⁹ In the process the complexities and the nuances of racial identity in South African society are blunted. Although the oppression of apartheid is ever-present in *A Walk in the Night* and La Guma's political values pervade the novel, it is different to the ones that follow in one important respect. In this novel the depiction of the social reality of inter-black racial prejudice takes precedence over the author's political conviction of the need to promote black unity and non-racism through his writing. In *A Walk in the Night and other Stories* racial exclusivity within the Coloured community is clearly evident and although the author's private condemnation of such attitudes may be read as part of the sub-text, the integrity of the characters is retained in this respect. Thus, for example, Michael Adonis, for whom La Guma clearly has much sympathy, is shown to harbour racial prejudice towards Africans as was likely to have been the case in real life.¹⁵⁰ By the time he wrote his next novel, *And a Threefold Cord*, the political imperative of depicting racial harmony and solidarity between Coloured and African squatters took precedence over the reality of there being a degree of racial tension

148 See La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord; The Stone Country*, (London, Heinemann, 1974); *In the Fog of the Season's End*, (London, Heinemann, 1972); *Time of the Butcherbird*, (London, Heinemann, 1979).

149 This trend has also been noted in J. M. Coetzee, 'Man's fate in the novels of Alex La Guma', in D. Attwell, (ed.), *Doubling the Point: Essays and interviews*, (London, Harvard University Press,

between them.

Scholarly appraisals of *A Walk in the Night* have tended to cast the work, especially the racial dynamic it depicts, in somewhat simplistic terms. The novel has on the whole been interpreted as a parable about black and white in apartheid South Africa. Hence Abdul JanMohamed's characterization of La Guma's fiction as depicting a Manichean world. JanMohamed asserts that;

'The life and fiction of Alex La Guma perfectly illustrate the predicament of non-whites in South Africa and the effects of apartheid on their lives.... Due to the racial basis of the South African social organization, his political and social experience can be considered generic to the extent that *all* non-whites are treated as interchangeable objects by the Afrikaner.'¹⁵¹

Kathleen Balutansky, in her exploration of multiple 'dialectical oppositions' at play in the novel, endorses JanMohamed's view.¹⁵² Cecil Abrahams also interprets the novel in terms of unambiguous racial oppositions that apartheid is assumed to have spawned. While Abrahams had himself grown up within the Coloured community and is presumably aware of the racial complexities underlying Coloured identity, he nevertheless chooses to construe the novel in terms of dichotomies that arise in a white police state that oppresses black people.¹⁵³ Although a more nuanced understanding of the social context informs the analyses of John Coetzee and Michael Wade, they do not explore issues of racial identity in the novel as the theme is not directly relevant to their respective arguments.¹⁵⁴ Nahem Yousaf's sensitive analysis of the dialectic between

1992), 345.

150 See La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 4, 16.

151 A. JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The politics of literature in colonial Africa*, (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), 225. Emphasis in the original. See, in addition, A. JanMohamed, 'The literary and political functions of marginality in the colonial situation', (African Studies Centre Working Papers No. 52, Boston University, 1982), 1-2, 6.

152 Balutansky, *Alex La Guma*, 9, 10, 16, 29; See also K. Fatton (aka Balutansky), 'The Novels of Alex La Guma; The representation of a political conflict', (Ph. D. thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1984), 28.

153 Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 46 ff.

154 See Coetzee, 'Man's fate in the novels of Alex La Guma' and M. Wade, 'Art and morality in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* in K. Parker, *The South African Novel in English: Essays in criticism and society*, (New York, African Publishing Company, 1978), 164-91.

writing and resistance in La Guma's novels similarly neglects the theme of Coloured identity in *A Walk in the Night*.¹⁵⁵ Balasubrian Chandramohan, on the other hand, recognizes the 'emphasis that La Guma placed on the ethnic specificity of the Coloureds' and notes the 'neglect of ethnicity and community origins' in scholarly analyses of La Guma's work.¹⁵⁶ Having presented this significant insight Chandramohan, however, proceeds to dismiss the salience of racial and ethnic identity in La Guma's writing by emphasizing the extent to which it transcends ethnicity by 'substituting racial divisions with class divisions' and portraying a situation in which 'a community of poor people [is] oppressed by another community of privileged people'.¹⁵⁷

The Manichean oppositions of white and black, privilege and poverty, oppression and domination that critics have read into the social relations depicted in *A Walk in the Night* apply only in a limited sense to the novel. They are more relevant to La Guma's subsequent novels, especially the ones he wrote in exile. These stark contrasts apply only to specific situations in this volume such as the encounters between white policemen and Coloured people and in 'The Lemon Orchard', the short story about a Coloured teacher in a small town who is about to be flogged in a lemon orchard by a group of white vigilantes for having laid charges of assault against local white notables.¹⁵⁸ Outside of these limited instances, in which he tries to convey the racial arrogance of the white ruling class and Coloured resentment at this treatment, La Guma's writing in this volume is predicated on a much more sophisticated analysis of social relations and on a more complex perception of racial identity in South African society than critics have hitherto conceded.

155 N. Yousaf, *Alex La Guma: Politics and resistance*, (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2001), 25-46.

156 B. Chandramohan, *Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa: The writings of Alex La Guma*, (Lampeter, Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 7.

157 Chandramohan, *Trans-Ethnicity*, 29.

158 See La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 11-12, 131-36. 'The Lemon Orchard' is based on a true story

Despite the main distinction under apartheid being that between black and white, race relations in South Africa have always been complex. Coloured identity, occupying an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, lies at the centre of this complexity. Having grown up in District Six and himself espousing a Coloured identity, La Guma was very much aware of the nuances and ambiguities that permeated it. Although he does not explain these intricacies to the reader or explore them in any systematic way in the book, *A Walk in the Night* is nevertheless played out against this complex backdrop. To readers who have not had first hand experience of the subtleties of race relations in South Africa, *A Walk in the Night* may well appear to be a story of stark contrasts, about the oppression experienced by black people under apartheid. Hence JanMohamed, Balutansky and others' interpretation of the novel in dichotomous terms. The intricacies of the private politics of race and identity prevalent within the Coloured community are, however, clearly evident in the pages of this volume. In the context of the novel, as in the reality of inner-city life in Cape Town, there can be no talk of 'all nonwhites' sharing an overarching, primary social identity, having a common social experience or being treated as 'interchangeable objects' under the apartheid system as JanMohamed would have it. Nor can any credence be given to the idea that class solidarity superseded racial identity in the consciousness of most working class Coloured people or the characters portrayed in *A Walk in the Night* as Chandramohan asserts.¹⁵⁹

Written at the time of his immersion in grass-roots political activism, La Guma was deeply concerned with the problem of Coloured exclusivism and the implications this had for the building of a multi-racial resistance movement to apartheid.¹⁶⁰ This is evident

of a teacher in Calvinia. See Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 26.

159 See JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*, 225 and Chandramohan, *Trans-Ethnicity*, 29. For further elaboration on the significance of racial versus class identities within the Coloured community refer to Adhikari, *Teachers' League*, ch. 5.

160 Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 48.

from the meanings vested in the title of the book. Alex intended the name *A Walk in the Night* to resonate with readers on several levels. Most obviously, the novel derived its name from the main protagonists, Michael and Willieboy, embarking on several walks through the streets of District Six during that fateful evening, with each walk driving the plot forward and taking them to their respective destinies. At a more abstract level, La Guma depicts his characters as having little control over their lives. This story focuses on the underclass of District Six, the unemployed, petty thieves, gangsters and outcasts, what La Guma at one point refers to as 'the mould that accumulated on the fringes of the underworld beyond Castle Bridge'.¹⁶¹ Buffeted by a racially oppressive system, these people had few choices open to them and little prospect of improving their lives. Unable to shape their own destiny in any meaningful way, they reacted to events and tried to roll with the punches that life threw at them. They might, in the words of Balutansky, be seen to be 'walking the night of Apartheid'.¹⁶² La Guma also chose this title to symbolize the political conservatism and racial exclusivity of the Coloured community. In an interview with Cecil Abrahams in Havana in 1981 Alex explained that:

One of the reasons I called the book *A Walk in the Night* was that in my mind the coloured community was still discovering themselves in relation to the general struggle against racism in South Africa. They were walking, enduring, and in this way they were experiencing this walking in the night until such time as they found themselves and were prepared to be citizens of a society to which they wanted to make a contribution. I tried to create a picture of a people struggling to see the light, to see the dawn, to see something new, other than their experiences in this confined community.¹⁶³

La Guma was conceding that despite their having suffered under apartheid, Coloureds were on the whole racially exclusive and had internalized many of the values of white supremacism. Coloureds were still 'walking the night' politically.

161 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 3. Castle Bridge, situated at the lower, or city, end of Hanover Street, the main thoroughfare through the area, was generally regarded as the entrance to District Six.

162 Balutansky, *Alex La Guma*, 22.

As explained earlier, their marginality and intermediate position within the society resulted in ambiguities and unresolved contradictions within Coloured identity and presented Coloured people with a series of dilemmas and paradoxes in their day-to-day living. The most conspicuous ambiguity at the political level was the contradiction between adopting non-racism in principle but accepting racial divisions in practice. La Guma was no exception. He clearly abhorred racism and devoted his life to the struggle for an egalitarian society. And, as is well known, he suffered a considerable degree of persecution for the vigour with which he pursued this ideal.¹⁶⁴ And although this is never made explicit in *A Walk in the Night*, there can be little doubt that La Guma identified himself as Coloured and accepted Coloured identity as given. He, for example, appealed to peoples' identity as Coloured to mobilize resistance to apartheid and appeared to have no qualms about being the office-bearer of an organization, SACPO, that explicitly identified itself as Coloured.¹⁶⁵ La Guma was thus confronted with the contradiction of professing non-racial values in principle but having to come to grips with the reality of Coloured identity. This conundrum is also integral to *A Walk in the Night* for here one has the situation of an author who regards himself as Coloured pondering the very problem of overcoming Coloured exclusivism.

In his journalistic writing La Guma's frequent use of words such as 'we', 'our' and 'us' when writing about Coloured people indicates his personal identification as Coloured. There were even times when La Guma appeared to take pride in his Colouredness. Writing in 1955 about the upcoming Congress of the People at which the Freedom Charter was to be adopted, he pronounced that, 'I look forward to attending it and hope

163 Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, 49.

164 For details of the persecution Alex suffered at the hands of the apartheid state see A. Odendaal and R. Field, *Liberation Chabalala: The world of Alex La Guma*, (Bellville, Mayebuye Books, 1993), ix-xv.

165 Chandramohan, *Trans-Ethnicity*, 67 makes passing reference to this contradiction.

that the example set by many other coloured people who are attending will be an inspiration to their people to come closer to the struggle for democracy in South Africa'.¹⁶⁶ There were also occasions when he invoked the tripartite racial hierarchy of South African society while, ironically, espousing non-racial, egalitarian sentiments. For example, reflecting upon the political consequences of the declaration of a State of Emergency in his *New Age*¹⁶⁷ column, 'Up my alley' he proclaimed that, 'We, who stand for a free, equal society of all South Africans, Black, White and Brown, have gained enormously in fellowship, in confidence and in allies.'¹⁶⁸ Although he took Coloured identity for granted and accepted his membership to that social category as a matter of fact, he did not regard it as an inherent quality or in any way relevant to determining human worth. This much is evident from one of his very first 'Up my alley' columns;

The census declares that we [the Coloured people] are almost one and a quarter million. But if you identify people, not by names and the colour of their skin, but by hardship and joy, pleasure and suffering, cherished hopes and broken dreams, the grinding monotony of toil without gain... then you will have to give up counting. People are like identical books with only different dust jackets. The title and the text are the same.¹⁶⁹

Here, as in other examples one can point to, there is the ambiguity of La Guma identifying himself as Coloured while at the same time dismissing Coloured identity as irrelevant.

La Guma, however, recognized that there was a high degree of race consciousness within the Coloured community at large and was particularly perturbed by Coloured antipathy toward Africans. While this concern is present as an undercurrent in *A Walk in the Night* it comes to the fore strongly in the 'The Gladiators', one of the short stories included in

166 *New Age*, 23/6/1955.

167 *New Age*, formerly the *Guardian*, was the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of South Africa. After repeated banning orders by the state, the *Guardian* (1937-52) re-appeared as the *Clarion* (5/1952 - 8/1952), *People's World* (8/1952 - 10/1952), *Advance* (11/1952 - 10/1954), *New Age* (10/1954 - 4/1962) and *Spark* (10/1962 - 3/1963). Odendaal and Field, *Liberation Chabalala*, xi characterize *New Age* as the 'semi-official mouthpiece of the ANC'.

168 *New Age*, 8/9/1960.

the volume. It tells the story of Kenny, a race conscious Coloured boxer, who was proud of his fair skin and Caucasian features. Epitomizing the intermediate status of Coloured people and their desire to assimilate into the dominant society Kenny was, in the words of the narrator, 'sorry he wasn't white and glad he wasn't black.'¹⁷⁰ Kenny's racial arrogance leads him to underestimate his opponent because he is African and is beaten to a pulp for this indiscretion.¹⁷¹

Politically La Guma adhered to the multi-racial strategy of the Congress Alliance which replicated the racial and ethnic divisions of South African society in its political structures. While on the surface it might appear that Alex had embraced a pragmatic attitude toward race, upon closer scrutiny it is apparent, however, that La Guma did not consciously distance himself from Coloured identity nor did he use it simply as an instrument for manipulating public opinion or mobilizing people to further his political cause. In both his journalistic and fictional writing at this time there was an ambivalence about racial identity and an uncomplicated acceptance of Coloured identity as given, indicating that La Guma had not yet fully come to terms with these contradictions for himself.

In one sense it should come as no surprise that La Guma espoused a Coloured identity because he wrote at a time before the rejection of Coloured identity had become widespread. The repudiation of Coloured identity, especially by educated and politicized people who had been classified 'Coloured' under Apartheid laws, only spread beyond the intelligentsia from the latter part of the 1970s as the ideology of black consciousness

169 *New Age*, 30/8/1956.

170 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 114.

171 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 114-20.

started taking root in the Coloured community.¹⁷² By the early 1960s, as demonstrated earlier, only a handful of intellectuals, particularly those within the fold of the NEUM and FIOSA had questioned the validity of Coloured identity.¹⁷³ The popular mind-set of the time, even within politically progressive circles, generally accepted the racial divisions of South African society as given. Alex, for instance, appears not in any way to have questioned this racial segmentation of the liberatory movement. He was a founder member of SACPO which was formed in 1954, served on its executive committee and worked as full-time organizer for the body between 1954 and 1956. He only gave up this position when he was forced to find employment because his wife, Blanche, a mid-wife, had to stop working while pregnant with their first child.¹⁷⁴

Yet, viewed in another light, it is quite extraordinary for La Guma to have accepted Coloured identity so uncritically and himself to have espoused the identity. Alex was after all a committed socialist. For him the primacy of the class struggle ought to have been gospel and the 'false consciousness' of racial and ethnic identities obvious. Given that his life was dedicated to the eradication of a system of racial oppression, and that he suffered severe persecution at the hands of the apartheid state, makes this particular blindness doubly surprising. What is more, the idea of rejecting Coloured identity was by the early 1960s not an entirely novel one within the Coloured intelligentsia of which La Guma was undeniably part. Non-racial thinking amongst Coloured radicals can be traced as far back as at least the mid-1940s with the establishment of the Anti-CAD and the NEUM.¹⁷⁵ With Congress and Unity Movement ideologues in the western Cape engaged in a running polemic about the nature of black oppression in South Africa and the most

172 Messina, 'Kleurlinge is ook swart', 125 ff.

173 H. Jaffe, *European Colonial Despotism: A history of oppression and resistance in South Africa*, (London, Kamak House, 1994), 177-78.

174 Odendaal and Field, *Liberation Chabalala*, ix.

175 Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 221, 227; van der Ross, *Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, 170 ff.

appropriate strategy for overthrowing the state through much of the 1950s,¹⁷⁶ it is difficult to imagine La Guma not having been exposed to the idea that Coloured identity was an artificial construction of the ruling classes used to enslave the minds of black people and to divide and rule them. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect La Guma by this time at the very least to have been grappling with an existential crisis over his personal identity and the essence of Colouredness. There is, however, no evidence that this was the case. While deeply troubled by Coloured racial exclusivity, the thought of rejecting Coloured identity appears not to have occurred to La Guma at this stage.

Of all La Guma's novels, racial attitudes prevalent within the Coloured community are at their clearest in *A Walk in the Night*. Alex recognized that in the Coloured community there was in general a high degree of sensitivity to racial features, especially skin colour and hair texture. Even though racial traits were of little consequence to La Guma personally, he was nevertheless sensitive to them because he had been socialized into a community in which fine gradations of skin colour and other racial characteristics were significant determinants of status.

It is presumably because he recognized that these racial markers would have been of significance to the characters he was writing about in *A Walk in the Night*, that La Guma paid particular attention to shades of skin colour and to hair texture in the book. One of the first things La Guma notes in providing a physical description of Michael Adonis was that 'he had dark, curly hair, slightly brittle but not quite kinky, and a complexion the colour of warm leather'.¹⁷⁷ La Guma introduces the other main character by noting that 'Willieboy was young and dark and wore his kinky hair brushed into a point above his

Jaffe, *Colonial Despotism*, 161.

176 Jaffe, *European Colonial Despotism*, 170-78.

177 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 2.

forehead.¹⁷⁸ The skin colour of characters are variously described as 'brown', 'yellowish', 'olive-skinned', 'hammered-copper', 'off-white or like coffee', 'the colour of worn leather', 'tan-coloured', 'brown sandstone', 'blue-black', 'like polish (sic) teak. Not exactly like teak because he's lighter'.¹⁷⁹ Hair is characterized as 'coarse', 'wiry', 'stringy' or most often as 'kinky'.¹⁸⁰ He also notes that Kenny the boxer's nose is 'a little flat from being hit on it a lot, almost like a black boy's nose.'¹⁸¹ Moreover, disparaging racial epithets such as 'Moor' for Indians, 'hotnot' and 'bushman' for Coloureds, 'kaffir' and 'tsotsi' for Africans, 'boer' for Afrikaners, 'play-white', 'pore-white' (sic) and 'whitey' are scattered across the pages of the book¹⁸² just as they would have peppered the conversations of the people he was writing about.

In this volume La Guma goes beyond simply evoking the sensitivity of Coloured people, and South Africans in general, to racial traits. On several occasions he invests his characters with racist sentiments and a sense of Coloured exclusivity that one might commonly have expected to have encountered in the community he was writing about. For example, Adonis is greatly offended by his supervisor referring to him as 'black' thereby lumping him with Africans. 'Called me a cheeky black bastard. Me, I'm not black. Anyway I said he was a no-good pore white'.¹⁸³ Similarly, Willieboy remonstrates with a brothel keeper that Americans and foreigners 'have no right to mess with our girls'.¹⁸⁴ The internalization of the racist values of the dominant society by Coloured people is again depicted by Adonis regarding himself as 'brown', that 'the negroes isn't like us' and the way in which he attempts to justify his killing of Uncle Doughty to

178 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 3.

179 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 5, 6, 14, 33, 35, 41, 50, 51, 114, 115, 117, 122.

180 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 22, 23, 36, 63, 80, 123, 125.

181 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 114. The eccentric grammar of this quotation is explained by the narrator of the story speaking what one might term Cape vernacular English.

182 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 12, 31, 39, 63, 65, 79, 86, 88, 91, 117, 119, 127, 132, 133, 134.

183 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 4.

184 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 54.

himself, 'Well, he didn't have no right living here with us coloureds.'¹⁸⁵ Moreover, that Uncle Doughty, a white man, is made to utter the non-racial sentiments with which La Guma himself identified, belies any idea that *A Walk in the Night* depicts a Manichean world. In response to Adonis' fulmination, 'You old white bastard, you got nothing to worry about', Doughty replies 'What's my white got to do with it? Here I am, in shit street, and does my white help?'¹⁸⁶

Although it takes fully eighty pages before La Guma identifies any of his main characters explicitly as Coloured, he signals their racial identity right at the outset in a variety of ways. In case the location of the story and the physical description of Adonis and Willieboy leaves any uncertainty about their being Coloured, La Guma removes all doubt by giving his protagonist a surname almost exclusively found within the Coloured community. The name Adonis, like many others peculiar to the Coloured community, is a legacy of their servile past. Surnames corresponding with months of the year, such as February, April and September or with mythical Greek and Roman figures, such as Adonis, Appollis and Cupido, are common within the Coloured community. Slaves were often given demeaning names as part of a process of dehumanization that helped to reinforce the master's control. Thus a slave might be named after the month in which he or she was acquired or born, or named after a Greek or Roman figure who exhibited a particular trait with which the slave was associated. In the case of Adonis - in Greek mythology a youth of particular beauty and beloved of Aphrodite - the name was usually bestowed upon a slave the master considered to be particularly ugly.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, La Guma signifies the social status of other characters by using names such as Willieboy,

185 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 4, 16, 29, 43, 44.

186 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 27.

187 The name entered the Afrikaans lexicon in a similarly ironic fashion so that the word 'adoons' today means 'ugly' or 'ape-like'. I am indebted to Emeritus Professor Roy Pheiffer of the Afrikaans Department, University of Cape Town, for this insight.

Sockies, Foxy, Flippy, Banjo, Gogs, Chips, Choker, Noortjie and Chinaboy which are typical of nicknames adopted within the Coloured, urban working class.¹⁸⁸

His use of colloquial language is another way in which La Guma signals that he is writing about the Coloured community. In this respect he is faced with the problem that the people he is writing about would normally speak Cape vernacular Afrikaans or kombuis Afrikaans, popularly stereotyped as a peculiarly Coloured manner of speaking the language. To have rendered his characters' speech in colloquial Afrikaans would, however, have made much of it incomprehensible to the greater part of his intended readership. La Guma instead paraphrased their speech in colloquial English distinctive of inner-city Cape Town, also stigmatized as a Coloured, working class variant of the language. Thus instead of speaking vernacular Afrikaans with a sprinkling of English words as they would normally have done, the characters of *A Walk in the Night* are made to speak colloquial English strewn with Afrikaans words and phrases.¹⁸⁹

Some examples of the Afrikaans colloquialisms La Guma uses are 'hoit/het pally' (hallo friend), 'oubaas' (jail), 'lighties' (youngsters), 'stop' (small parcel of dagga), juba/burg/joker/rooker (man, fellow), laan (big shot), squashie (weakling), goose (young woman), endjie (cigarette butt), metchie (match), ching/chink/start (money) and 'beece' (bioscope).¹⁹⁰ Where he uses these colloquial Afrikaans words and phrases La Guma either translates for the reader by having the character repeat it in English or expects their meanings to be deduced from the context. Liberal use of discourse fillers such as 'mos',

188 Stone, 'Identity among lower class Coloured people', 35 for some comment on the significance of these nicknames.

189 It is worth making this distinction between colloquial English and Afrikaans for it is not strictly true that the characters of *A Walk in the Night* speak a mixture of English and Afrikaans as Vernon February contends. V. February, *Mind Your Colour: The 'Coloured' stereotype in South African literature*, (London, Kegan Paul, 1981), 96-97, 141-42, 156-58.

190 For some examples see La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, 32, 33, 44, 46, 52, 59, 63, 69, 75, 80, 87, 102, 111, 117.

'ja', 'jong' and 'ou' does much to make the conversation sound natural as does the frequent occurrence of swear words such as 'bogger' (bugger), 'sonofobitch'/'sonsobitches', 'blerry' (bloody), 'bastard' and 'eff/effing' (a milder form of the expletive 'fuck').¹⁹¹

La Guma also puts a number of colloquial English words and phrases, generally associated with working class, Coloured speakers of the language in the mouths of his characters. Some examples are 'law' (policeman), 'make finish' (finish), 'nervous like' (nervously), 'braggy like' (braggishly), 'pull up' (beat up), 'because why' (because) 'don't I say' (is that not so), 'I'm just like this to him' (I said to him), 'I reckon to him' (I said to him), 'how goes it with you?' (how are you?), 'on the book' (on credit).¹⁹² In addition, Alex often imitates what is typecast as the Coloured working class pronunciation of English words as with 'gwan/garn' (go-on, get lost), 'fif' (fifth), 'or'er' (order), 'execkly' (exactly), 'faktry' (factory), 'reshun' (ration), 'caffies' (cafés), 'theff' (theft), and 'awright' (all right).¹⁹³ It is certainly no coincidence that in 'A matter of taste', a short story about two Coloured workers who share their humble billy-can of coffee with a white drifter, La Guma has the white derelict saying 'coffee' while the Coloured characters pronounce it 'cawfee'.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, whereas John Abrahams, a Coloured character in *A Walk in the Night*, utters the words 'law and or'er' and 'execkly' Constable Raalt enunciates them as 'law and order' and 'exactly'.¹⁹⁵

La Guma is on the whole very successful in substituting colloquial English for the colloquial Afrikaans his characters were likely to have spoken. Because most urban

191 For some examples see La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 4, 14, 19, 27, 31, 45, 72, 84, 88, 116, 128. La Guma was not able to bring himself to use the word 'fuck' itself and substituted the euphemism 'muck' (4, 60, 115) and sometimes used 'basket' (100, 104, 121) instead of bastard.

192 See for example La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 4, 6, 13, 19, 50, 68, 84, 114, 115, 116.

193 See for example La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 17, 37, 54, 58, 59, 63, 73, 87, 101, 127.

Coloureds are bilingual and because Alex mimics patterns of speech encountered in daily life, the colloquial English speech of his characters for the most part sounds natural. There are times, however, when his English renditions of Afrikaans phrases simply don't work. For example 'catch wire' for 'vang draad' (know the ropes, be impertinent); 'bum-hanger' for 'holhanger' (sponger); 'hold a candle' for 'kershou' (keep watch) 'real awake' for 'regtig wakker' (real cool, impressive), 'strike a luck' for 'slaan 'n geluk', 'turning sticks' for 'stokkies draai' (playing truant), 'give over' for 'gee om' (care), and 'piece' for 'stuk' (film) sound stilted.¹⁹⁶

It is clear that *A Walk in the Night* goes beyond the simple racial oppositions that a superficial understanding of racial identity in apartheid South Africa might suggest. Far from reflecting a Manichean world of white versus black, privilege versus poverty and power versus oppression in South African society, the novel operates in a more fluid milieu of complex social relations and multifaceted social identities in the specific urban setting of District Six. Because the author is intimately familiar with the private and public politics of Coloured identity, himself espousing the identity, the novel reflects much of the complexity, and irony, of racial attitudes within the Coloured community as well as within the broader South African society. Adonis' denial that he is black and Doughty's dismissal of his whiteness as consequential should be sufficient to dispel any thought that *A Walk in the Night* is played out in a Manichean world in which all black people are interchangeable entities under the apartheid system.

The significance of these two case studies is that they belie any easy assumption that the radical movement in Coloured protest politics during the middle decades of white rule

194 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 126-27.

195 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 59, 63.

196 La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, 6, 22, 50, 67, 76, 109, 112.

was non-racial in the sense that it rejected the salience of racial identity or of Colouredness in South African society and politics. The first case study demonstrates conclusively that neither the *Torch*, nor the NEUM during its politically active phase, can be described as having taken an uncompromising stand on the principle of non-racism. It argues that though its leadership had always had a non-racial outlook, the principle of non-racism had not always been central to the NEUM's political agenda. Not only had a tactical concession to the reality of inter-black racial divisions been made by the NEUM leadership but there were frequent lapses into racial thinking in its mouthpiece. A non-racial approach and discourse did not spring ready-made from the organization at its inception. The NEUM's emphasis on non-racism evolved over a period of two decades and it was only from the early 1960s onwards that a non-racial discourse emerged as a consistent, self-conscious mode of expression within the Unity Movement. The second case study attests to the hegemony of traditional racial modes of thought in that a Coloured intellectual such as Alex La Guma, a committed socialist and anti-apartheid campaigner, still operated within the customary boundaries of the South African racial system and with many conventional assumptions about the nature of Coloured identity. This chapter also confirms that it was intellectuals within the Trotskyist tradition of the South African left that pioneered a non-racial approach to Coloured identity.

Non-racial thinking about Coloured identity in the early 1960s was confined to a tiny intelligentsia, an elite within the Coloured elite and was only to start spreading, slowly at first, in the 1970s with the revival of the anti-apartheid movement in which non-racial democratic values were paramount. The next chapter assesses the significance of this trend.

CHAPTER 5

The emperor's new clothes: Coloured rejectionism during the latter phases of the apartheid era

This chapter will focus on the growing rejection of Coloured identity, a development that started within a small section of the Coloured intelligentsia in the early 1960s and grew into a significant movement by the time it peaked at the end of the 1980s. It will also trace the reversal of this tendency during the four-year transition to democratic rule as radical changes to the political landscape in the first half of the 1990s once again made the espousal of Coloured identity acceptable in left-wing and 'progressive' circles. Two case studies supplemented by analyses of two complimentary texts will be used to document these developments in Coloured identity.

The Black Consciousness¹ poetry of James Matthews, internationally recognized Coloured writer from the Cape Flats, will form the basis of the first case study. Matthews' poetry of the first half of the 1970s is emblematic of a new consciousness of defiance and black solidarity within particular sectors of the Coloured community.²

Within the Coloured community Black Consciousness ideology with its stress on black

1 There is an extensive literature on the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa. Useful sources include G. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The evolution of an ideology*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978); R. Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The dialectics of ideological resistance to white supremacy*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1986); B. Pityana, M. Ramphela, M. Mpumlwana, and L. Wilson, (eds.), *Bounds of Possibility: The legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991); T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), ch. 13; A. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African internal opposition, 1960-1990*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), chs. 2-3. See also S. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, (London, Bowerdean Press, 1978).

2 For studies of the Black Consciousness movement in the Coloured community see E. Messina, 'Swartbewustheid in die Wes-Kaap, 1970-1984', (Ph. D. thesis, University of the Western Cape, 1995) and Messina, 'Kleurlinge is ook swart'.

unity and self-determination appealed especially to the better educated, urbanized groups outside of the NEUM's sphere of influence and to the increasingly politicized student population. And it was particularly in the wake of the 1976 revolt that these ideas flourished within the Coloured community. The second case study will consist of *South* newspaper, published between 1987 and 1994. During the first half of its existence *South* epitomized the populist non-racial approach to Coloured identity that characterized the extra-parliamentary opposition of the 1980s. This movement, under the leadership of the United Democratic Front (UDF), formed in Cape Town in August 1983, initiated a substantial popularization of Coloured rejectionism and shifted the focus of the liberatory movement away from the exclusivist tendencies of Black Consciousness to a much more inclusive and strongly non-racial outlook. The latter half of the newspaper's life will be used to illustrate the breaking down of Coloured rejectionism from the height of its popularity at the end of the 1980s through to the formal inauguration of the new South Africa in mid-1994.³

In addition, two texts will be used in a supplementary capacity to fill chronological and thematic gaps in the unfolding story of Coloured rejectionism. The first text consists of the *Educational Journal* during the 1960s. This short opening section takes up the story of the emergence of a politically correct approach to matters of race and Coloured identity where the last chapter left off. From the early 1960s the *Educational Journal* embodied a new anti-racist discourse that became characteristic of the Unity Movement and that was highly influential amongst left-wing, Coloured intellectuals and political activists till well into the 1980s.⁴ The western Cape community newspaper, *Grassroots*,

3 For a more detailed study of *South* newspaper see M. Adhikari, "'You have the right to know': *South*, 1987-94' in Switzer and Adhikari, *Resistance Press*, 327-77.

4 L. Chisolm, 'Making the pedagogical more political, and the political more pedagogical: Educational traditions and legacies of the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943-1985' in W.

the second of these texts, will be used to complement the analysis of *South* which appeared late in the 1980s. Launched in early 1980 and published for almost exactly a decade, *Grassroots* was especially influential during the first half of the decade and integral to the regeneration of the anti-apartheid movement in the western Cape.⁵ Whereas the *Educational Journal* will be analyzed separately, observations on *Grassroots* will be integrated into the *South* case study because the degree of overlap between these two texts does not warrant separate treatment.

Debunking 'Bruinmanskap': The *Educational Journal* during the 1960s

A similar process of a growing political correctness relating to race and Coloured identity that was evident in the *Torch* from the late 1950s onwards can be discerned in its sister publication, the *Educational Journal*. As with the *Torch*, from the late 1950s onwards words and phrases with racial connotations, especially the term 'Coloured', were increasingly qualified through the use of quotation marks, italics, and wording such as 'so-called', 'so-classified', 'what is described as' or 'known as'.⁶ Already in March 1958 one can point to an elaborate example in the *Journal* - as it was also known in Unity Movement circles - which wrote not of the 'Coloured people' as it customarily had done but of 'the section of the oppressed people who have come to be known and classified as the Coloured people.'⁷ It is clear that the *Educational Journal* developed a more consistently non-racial approach somewhat earlier than the *Torch* as a comparative perusal of the 1958 issues of the two publications will demonstrate despite there being

Flanagan, C. Hemson, J. Muller and N. Taylor, (compilers), *Vintage Kenton: A Kenton Education Association Commemoration*, (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1994), 243; Nasson, 'Unity Movement', 192; Soudien, 'Social conditions', 35; Alexander, 'Non-collaboration', 183.

5 For a study of *Grassroots* see I. van Kessel, 'Grassroots: From washing lines to utopia', in Switzer and Adhikari, *Resistance Press*, 283-326.

6 For some examples see *Educational Journal*, 7-8/1958; 9/1958; 10/1958; 11-12/1958; 5-6/1959; 1-2/1960; 9/1960; 1-2/1961; 8/1961; 1-2/1961; 10/1962.

7 *Educational Journal*, 3/1958.

considerable overlap between the teams of activists producing the two publications. This was due partly to the far less frenetic publishing schedule of eight issues per annum of the *Journal*. What is more, because the *Journal* focussed on educational issues and was written by practicing educators who brought a high degree of professional knowledge to their writing, the content of the *Journal* was much more carefully considered. Finally, the concentration of the ablest minds in the Unity Movement within the Teachers' League cannot be overlooked as a contributory factor.⁸

Although the non-racial rhetoric characteristic of later NEUM writing was certainly starting to bloom in the *Torch* during the early 1960s, fully-fledged examples were not yet observable in the paper by the time it folded. The first mature examples of such rhetoric were, however, already to be found in the *Educational Journal* which was to become the main voice of the Anti-CAD faction of the NEUM in its dormancy. In this respect its April 1962 article entitled '*Ons Bruinmense*' (Our Brown People), written under the pseudonym I. M. Human, is something of a landmark as it represents the first sustained, full-blown example of the non-racial rhetoric that came to be the hallmark of the NEUM.⁹ The biting sarcasm, the scorn poured over 'quislings' and the implacable anti-racist stance of this article is vintage NEUM - in its politically dormant phase, that is;

An examination of the techniques employed to establish the sub-species 'Bruinman' reveals... Piet Botha, I. D. du Plessis and company were given the job of creating the political *Bruinman*. His identity was founded on the Separate Representation of Voters Act which gave him a temporary *bywoner* status until such time as he could 'come into his own.'... To establish their 'separateness' and *eiesoortigheid*, the 'special' needs of the *Bruinmense* were 'recognized', and a benevolent Government, ever anxious to reward those who were prepared to accept inferiority, set aside 'their own' Department of State to cater for their social needs.... Outa Tom and his *handlangers*, at every secret session with foreman Botha, ask for bigger and better doses of *apartheid* in housing schemes,

8 The person that many would consider the most accomplished intellectual within the NEUM, Ben Kies, was editor of the *Educational Journal*. And when his banning prevented him from filling this post his wife, Helen, took over the mantle.

9 Nasson, 'Unity Movement', 189 aptly describes NEUM rhetoric as 'coruscating'.

on the trains, in post offices in employment, in prisons.¹⁰

By this time it is apparent from the pages of the *Educational Journal*, as with its contemporary, the *Torch*, that the TLSA and the NEUM had abandoned the strategic approach of recognizing the reality of racial divisions within the society for the sake of achieving a larger political goal. This much is apparent from the 'Ons Bruinmense' article which ended off with the warning that, 'people must know that the status *Bruinmens* marks them with the badge of inferiority, of being less than human.'¹¹ Coincidentally, in the following article on the same page the *Educational Journal* states the opinion of the Teachers' League and the NEUM on the nature of Coloured identity in its simplest and starkest form when it characterized Colouredness as 'a concept legislatively and socially created, with intent' (to divide, rule and exploit).¹² The unequivocal rejection of Coloured identity by the Unity Movement which crystallized in the early 1960s was in stark contrast to its earlier ambiguity on the issue and marks the start of Coloured rejectionism as a public movement.

Through the early 1960s the discourse of the *Educational Journal* became rapidly homogenized along the lines of that exhibited in the 'Ons Bruinmense' article as more and more of it was written by a handful of like-minded NEUM stalwarts and less and less of its content was drawn from the broader membership which had started dwindling from the late 1940s onwards and contracted sharply during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Its support base had also become less diverse because of factionalism within its ranks, the

10 *Educational Journal*, 4/1962, emphases appear in the original. P. W. Botha was minister of the Department of Coloured Affairs, constituted as a separate department 1959, and I. D. du Plessis was secretary of Coloured Affairs. 'Outa Tom and his *handlangers*' was a reference to Tom Swarts and the Union Council of Coloured Affairs.

11 *Educational Journal*, 4/1962.

12 *Educational Journal*, 4/1962.

ranks, the movement experiencing a major split in 1958. More moderate members were alienated and the less committed withdrew for fear of retribution by the authorities while some younger members dissatisfied with the inactivity of the leadership also broke away. By the end of 1963 the organization was effectively dormant as its branch structure had atrophied and it held its last conference in June of that year. By this time the uncompromising non-racial stance of the NEUM and the acerbic rhetoric that went with it was standard fare in the *Journal*. For example, in April 1963 it characterized the object of government policy to be 'the production of "Coloured" labour-robots who will defend kleurlingstan as part of "Herrenvolkism"'.¹³ A few months later it carried a description of apartheid as creating;

Life in a *kleurling* location, with *kleurling* neighbours only, attendance at a *kleurling* school, entertainment in a *kleurling* bioscope or *kleurling* civic centre, recreation in a *kleurling* swimming pool or on a *kleurling* sports field, news from a *kleurling* newspaper, livelihood from a *kleurling* job, marriage in a *kleurling* church and the prospect of eventual burial in a *kleurling* cemetery.¹⁴

It then called upon teachers, 'Let us convince our pupils, despite all these contrary indications, of their human identity.'¹⁵ There is a real sense in which the growing dominance of this caustic rhetoric and its uncompromising non-racism within the NEUM was an index of its declining political activity.

For the rest of its existence the *Educational Journal's* discourse held true to the principle it proclaimed in April 1965 that, 'The TLSA has no colour bar in its constitution, practices no colour bar and does not classify people racially.'¹⁶ On one occasion, however, a *Journal* editorial grudgingly conceded the stubborn persistence of the 'myth of Colouredism'. Besides being bolstered by the tactless blandishments of the apartheid

13 *Educational Journal*, 4/1963.

14 *Educational Journal*, 7-8/1963.

15 *Educational Journal*, 7-8/1963.

16 *Educational Journal*, 4/1965.

government and the expediences of ‘opportunists’ and ‘collaborators’ Colouredism, it explained, insinuated itself subtly in peoples’ minds because they had no option but ‘to live in a “Coloured” location, to go to a “Coloured” school, to obtain a teaching licence labelled “Coloured”’ and as a consequence ‘a good many honest people carelessly or unthinkingly refer to ‘our school’ or ‘our musical talent’ or ‘our doctors’’.¹⁷

This non-racial outlook and the Coloured rejectionism that went with it was highly influential within those sectors of the Coloured elite with left-wing sympathies through until the 1980s, especially in the western Cape. This rather restricted constituency tended to narrow further through the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s as the influence of the NEUM waned and the strictures of the apartheid state limited its ability to function. Its ideas were, however, kept alive within a small elite of radical intellectuals, in schools where Unity Movement teachers retained influence and within the fellowship movement where university students were particularly prominent.¹⁸ The NEUM’s non-racial philosophy was nevertheless to have a significant impact on the mass democratic movement that emerged in the western Cape in the early 1980s. Firstly, many politicized Coloured people, including a number of Black Consciousness supporters, were exposed to NEUM thinking and its critique of Black Consciousness in educational institutions and through its literature without necessarily becoming members of the organization or consciously supporting it. For some, such as journalist and former Black Consciousness adherent, Rashid Seria, it was this exposure that prompted them to question both the

17 *Educational Journal*, 1-2/1967.

18 Chisolm, ‘Making the pedagogical more political’, 242, 256-57. The fellowships, of which there were no more than about half a dozen operating at any one time, were discussion groups started mainly in the 1950s. They had their origin in left wing study circles dating back to the 1930s and were based on the New Era Fellowship founded in 1937. Fellowships met monthly to discuss issues of political, social and cultural interest with meetings usually drawing between twenty and fifty people. These meetings together with the publication of the *Educational Journal* represented the main activity of the Anti-CAD faction of the Unity Movement during its dormancy. The fellowships collapsed in the mid-1980s when the NEUM became politically active again.

morality and the political wisdom of countering white racism with black exclusivism.¹⁹ Journalist and UDF political activist Zubeida Jaffer spoke for many when in an open letter to Richard Dudley and the New Unity Movement in 1992 she wrote;

I have never been a member of the Unity Movement but I will always appreciate the guidance and information provided by your organization in the seventies when I was in my formative years. Those of us in Cape Town who were nurtured by your organization, although often unknown to ourselves, would distort history if we did not acknowledge the role played by so many of our brave teachers when the times were much darker.²⁰

Secondly, defectors from the Unity Movement - Dullah Omar and Trevor Manuel being the most prominent examples - helped to infuse these ideas into the UDF-dominated mass democratic movement of the 1980s. The influence of the NEUM was by and large restricted to the educated middle classes. The self-consciously working class James Matthews, for example, claims that the Unity Movement had no influence on his thinking.²¹

From Manenberg to Soweto: The Black Consciousness poetry of James Matthews

James Matthews was born on the 25 May 1929 in a run-down tenement in the predominantly Coloured working class neighbourhood of Bo-Kaap, along the lower slopes of Signal Hill bordering Cape Town's central business district. Matthews was forced to end his schooling at Trafalgar High School while in standard VIII to supplement the family income. He held a series of menial jobs which included selling newspapers on street corners, running office errands and working as night telephonist and clerk at the *Cape Times* before pursuing a career as a reporter at the *Golden City Post* and

19 Rashid Seria, interviewed by Mohamed Adhikari, 16/1/1998. The *Educational Journal*, 9/1971 scorned Black Consciousness as 'nothing but racialism (with perhaps a dash of American dressing) - using the Panthers and Soledad Brothers to make the racialism more palatable'. See also *Educational Journal*, 3/1976, 4-5/1976 which carried a series of articles titled 'Black Consciousness: A reactionary tendency: Origins, nature and fallacies of a dogma', written under the pseudonym Mildred Poswa.

20 *South*, 25/4/1992.

the *Muslim News* during the 1960s and 1970s.²²

Besides an acute personal sense of grievance at the injustices suffered by black South Africans, Matthews' political awareness matured through his exposure to Communist Party teachings during the latter half of the 1950s. He remembers Wolfie Kodesh's 'talks' to clusters of locals on street corners whilst selling *New Age*²³ in his neighbourhood as being particularly influential in 'crystallising... my political awareness'. He, however, resisted joining the Communist Party or any other political organization because he felt the need, both as writer and independent thinker, to maintain a personal autonomy free from the constraints that came with allegiances of that sort.²⁴ Matthews claims to have developed the ideas of black pride and solidarity expressed in his writing independently of the local Black Consciousness Movement and to have been influenced mainly by the philosophy of the Black Panthers in the United States and the ideas of Negritude in the writings of Léopold Senghor, Cheikh Anta Diop and Aimé Césaire.²⁵ The closest he came to direct political affiliation to any particular organization was serving on the executive of the Black Consciousness inspired Union of Black Journalists formed in January, 1973.²⁶

In the meanwhile, having published his first piece of fiction in the *Sun* newspaper at the

21 James Matthews, interviewed by Mohamed Adhikari, 18/6/2002.

22 H. Willemse, 'More than brothers: Peter Clarke and James Matthews at seventy' in Willemse, *More than Brothers*, 7, 12-13; 'Living through a chunk of the century: Peter Clarke and James Matthews in conversation with Kayzuran Jaffer and Hein Willemse, 2/5/1999' in Willemse, *More than Brothers*, 41-43.

23 *New Age*, published between 1954 and 1962, was the successor to the *Guardian*. It was the unofficial mouthpiece of the Congress Movement and of the banned Communist Party. For further information on *New Age* see J. Zug, "'Far from dead": The final years of the *Guardian*, 1960-1963' in Switzer and Adhikari, *Resistance Press*, 129-39, 153-57.

24 J. Matthews, 'The pictures swirling in my mind', in Willemse, *More than Brothers*, 104.

25 James Matthews, interviewed, 18/6/2002.

26 M. Mzamane and D. Howarth, 'Representing blackness: Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement', in Adhikari and Switzer, *Resistance Press*, 186; van Kessel, 'Grassroots,' 324.

age of seventeen, Matthews had made a name for himself as a short story writer from the mid-1950s onwards. He confirms that he started writing less out of any ambition to become an author than as a form of catharsis, 'just to get a lot of shit out of my head'.²⁷ His stories were published in a range of newspapers and magazines including the *Cape Times*, *Cape Argus*, *Drum*, *Hi-Note*, *Africa South*, *Transition* and *New African* as well as in several anthologies of South African prose.²⁸ Two stories in particular, 'Azikwelwa' first published in 1958 and 'The park' in 1962, both of which had strong anti-apartheid and black solidarity themes, gained international recognition. It was particularly in Sweden, West Germany and Holland that he gained a following.²⁹ In 1973 Matthews started his own publishing house BLAC - the acronym standing for Black Literature, Art and Culture - which he used to publish his own work and that of other township artists.³⁰ Matthews' writing career was stunted by the apartheid state's refusal to grant him a passport. This not only cut him off from international contacts and a large part of his readership but also prevented him from taking up numerous opportunities to present his work overseas and to develop as an artist. It was only through the intervention of the West German government in 1980 that Matthews obtained a passport to allow him to attend the Frankfurt Book Fair. The passport being valid for five years, he was able to

27 James Matthews, interviewed by Paul Boobyer, 8/11/1988, 1. A transcript of this interview is available in the African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.

28 The main anthologies of the 1960s and 1970s include R. Rive, (ed.), *Quartet: New Voices from South Africa*, (New York, Crown, 1963); R. Rive, (ed.), *Modern African Prose: An anthology*, (London, Heinemann, 1964); E. Komey and E. Mphahlele, (eds.), *Modern African Stories*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1964); J. Moore, (ed.), *Cry Sorrow, Cry Joy!: Selections from contemporary African writers*, (New York, Friendship Press, 1971); S. Gray, (ed.), *On the Edge of the World: Southern African stories of the seventies*, (Johannesburg, Ad Donker, 1974); J. Marquard, (ed.), *A Century of South African Short Stories*, (Johannesburg, Ad Donker, 1978).

29 'Azikwelwa' was first published in *Africa South*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1958, 118-123 and 'The park' in *Presence Africaine*, Vol. 16, No. 44, 1962, 95-105. These and other works have been translated into Swedish, German and Dutch. For a comprehensive list of Matthews' outputs see Willemse, *More than Brothers*, 133-137. See also J. Matthews, *The Park and other Stories*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983).

30 Willemse, 'More than brothers', 13, 16; 'Living through a chunk of the century', 40. Matthews attests that by the mid-1980s 'All in all BLAC produced nine books and three broadsheets before it was forced to close because of lack of funds brought about by pressure from the state.' See Matthews, 'Pictures swirling', 107.

travel abroad and returned to Germany in 1984 to receive the freedom of the cities of Nürnberg and Lehrte.³¹

All of Matthews' work, though not necessarily always overtly political, in one way or another, commented on the experience of black people under apartheid. While his stories described the squalor, degradation and humiliation of the apartheid oppressed, it also testified to their anger, defiance and, above all, their humanity. Drawing on his own rich experience of Cape Town's working class life, which included the male street corner culture of drinking, gambling, smoking marijuana and petty gangsterism - he was a member of the Cluster Buster gang³² - Matthews' writing mediates the harsh realities of life in the city's townships and inner-city localities. Despite indulging in the decidedly middle class pursuits of journalism and literary production Matthews remained fiercely loyal to his working class roots. Recalling their first meeting in the mid-1950s, long-standing friend and fellow-author, Richard Rive, testified that Matthews looked 'ostentatiously working class' and 'I realized immediately he saw in me everything he despised. I not only looked Coloured middle class, but I spoke Coloured middle class and behaved Coloured middle class.'³³ In 1988 Matthews with characteristic self-effacement dismissed himself as 'just another ghetto writer'.³⁴

31 Matthews, 'Pictures swirling', 107; K. Jaffer, "'Being Coloured is a state of mind" or the complexities of identity, selfhood and freedom in the writing of James Matthews', in Willemse, *More than Brothers*, 117; Willemse, 'More than brothers', 13; James Matthews, interviewed, 18/6/2002. The apartheid government refused to renew the passport after it had expired.

32 Matthews, 'Pictures swirling', 102; Willemse, 'More than brothers' 14-15. In 1974 Matthews reflected on this past;

could i forget my past
 where violence sprouted wild as weeds
 and the blades of grass we pluck
 to stab and jab, cut and slash...
 i chewed the weed of violence
 washed it down with wine...

See J. Matthews, (ed.), *Black Voices Shout!: An anthology of poetry*, (Cape Town, BLAC, 1974), 45.

33 Rive, *Writing Black*, 11.

34 James Matthews interview, 8/11/1988, 3.

Starting in 1970 Matthews for a variety of reasons switched to poetry as his main form of artistic expression. In the first place, he found it increasingly difficult to publish his short stories because their political content or implications offended the white establishment and because liberal publishers, especially the English-language press, were cowed into self-censorship by the apartheid state.³⁵ Secondly, he was being harassed by security police. Fearing for his safety and the welfare of his three young children should he 'suddenly disappear after a mid-night visit from them (the security police)',³⁶ Matthews felt that it made better sense for him to write poetry that could be read and distributed at small gatherings rather than to produce short stories disseminated through the mass media. Although he admitted that at first, '...I chickened out. I got shit scared'³⁷ there was no question that he would desist from writing for as he confirmed, 'I could not contain my anger at the injustice of racial laws.'³⁸ He attested that it was this anger that 'catapulted' him into writing his first volume of poetry in which he described himself as 'a man of no account who refuse(s) to remain silent at all the injustices done to blacks'.³⁹ Thirdly, Matthews found the idea of writing poetry that could be read directly to the people he wanted to communicate with most - township inhabitants, many of whom were illiterate or semi-literate - very attractive as he was becoming increasingly exasperated that his work was being consumed mainly by an overseas readership and a small elite at home. He also realized that poetry as oral performance was a most effective way of grabbing peoples' attention and conscientizing them.⁴⁰ Through the 1970s and 1980s he thus took to reading his poetry at gatherings ranging from mass protest rallies and literary

35 'Living through a chunk of the century', 39; Willemse, 'More than brothers', 15.

36 Matthews, 'Pictures swirling' 105.

37 James Matthews interview, 8/11/1988, 5.

38 Matthews, 'Pictures swirling' 106.

39 J. Matthews and G. Thomas, *Cry Rage*, (Johannesburg, Spro-cas Publications, 1972), introduction.

40 James Matthews interview, 8/11/1988, 6.

get-togethers to youth club meetings and shebeens. Very importantly, poetry was also a more intense medium that allowed him to give vent to his outrage and frustration.⁴¹

Matthews was at the forefront of a new wave of black protest poetry that emerged in the early 1970s that primarily addressed a black readership rather than a general audience or the white or western conscience as earlier protest poetry had tended to do.⁴² Wally Serote acknowledged Matthews as its leading exponent, 'At the head of this group was James Matthews, who set the standards of how we were going to deal with things around us'⁴³ and Mbulelo Mzamane made it clear that 'Matthews was an influence on, and not influenced by, Black Consciousness.'⁴⁴ He is also generally recognized as the angriest of the Black Consciousness poets who wrote before the 1976 uprising, being described by Hein Willemse as a 'despatcher of raging Black Consciousness poetry'.⁴⁵

The bulk of Matthews' poetry of this genre is to be found in the aptly titled *Cry Rage!* which appeared in 1972 and also contains a collection of poems by Gladys Thomas, a long-standing friend. Other poems of similar complexion appeared in the 1974 anthology *Black Voices Shout!*⁴⁶ edited by Matthews, while a few more were published individually in newspapers and magazines.⁴⁷ In his Black Consciousness poetry Matthews not only gave voice to the anger that many Coloured people felt but also to the as yet embryonic

41 James Matthews, interviewed, 18/6/2002; Messina, 'Kleurlinge is ook swart', 131; Willemse, 'More than brothers', 16; Jaffer, 'Being coloured', 119.

42 G. Cornwell, 'James Matthews' "protest songs": The problem of evaluation' in M. Chapman, (ed.), *Soweto Poetry*, (Johannesburg, McGraw-Hill, 1982), 184.

43 M. Serote, 'Panel on contemporary South African poetry', *Issue*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1976, 25.

44 M. Mzamane, 'Cultivating a people's voice in the criticism of South African literature', *Staffrider*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1991, 68.

45 Willemse, 'More than brothers', 7. In 1982 Cornwell in 'Protest songs', 184 still regarded Matthews' poetry as 'yet unmatched in polemical intensity'.

46 *Black Voices Shout!* was banned within three weeks of its appearance leaving the straightened Matthews with a large printer's account and no means of recouping his outlay. The volume was republished under the same title by Troubadour Books, Austin in 1975.

47 See Willemse, *More than Brothers*, 134 for a list of such poems.

feeling of solidarity with Africans that was to grow significantly after the Soweto revolt and the death of Steve Biko. Matthews was ahead of his time in these respects in that very few people, particularly within the Coloured community, were as outspoken as he was in *Cry Rage!* which had the distinction of being the first volume of poetry to be banned by the National Party government.⁴⁸ Secondly, it was only after the Soweto revolt that Black Consciousness sentiment took popular root in the Coloured community and that the public expression of outrage became more common.

In the opening poem of the *Cry Rage!* compilation Matthews makes it clear that;

I am no minstrel
 who sings of joy...
 but the words I write
 are of pain and of rage...
 my heart drowned in bitterness
 with the agony of what white man's law has done.

He denied that what he wrote should be labelled poetry. According to Gareth Cornwell Matthews preferred to call these poems 'protest songs' because of his intention that they perform a popular conscientizing function and because the urgency of his message did not allow for indulgence in the luxury of 'literaryness'.⁴⁹ Matthews himself has on several occasions referred to his poetry as 'gatherings' or 'expressions of feelings'.⁵⁰ In the closing poem of the *Cry Rage!* collection he writes

To label my utterings poetry
 and myself a poet
 would be as self-deluding
 as the planners of parallel development⁵¹

48 Matthews, 'Pictures swirling', 106; 'Living through a chunk of the century', 40.

49 Cornwell, 'Protest songs', 184.

50 Matthews used this as the sub-title of his next volume of poetry. See *Pass Me a Meatball, Jones: A gathering of feelings*, (Cape Town, BLAC, 1977). See also James Matthews interview, 8/11/1988, 6; J. Matthews, *No Time for Dreams*, (Cape Town, BLAC, 1981), back cover and Jaffer, 'Being coloured', 114.

In line with Black Consciousness thinking Matthews sought to transcend his personal identity, and his classification by the apartheid state, as Coloured by taking pride in his blackness. In a memorable section of verse he affirmed this broader identity;

I am Black
 my Blackness fills me to the brim
 like a beaker of well-seasoned wine
 that sends my senses reeling with pride⁵²

Pride in his blackness kindled within Matthews a sense of fellowship with Africans in the rest of South Africa,

Our pain has linked us
 from Manenberg to Soweto⁵³

as well as with black people globally,

I share the pain of my black brother
 and a mother in a Harlem ghetto
 with that of a soul brother in Notting Hill⁵⁴

At times Matthews pushed his identification with the suffering of Africans to the point of imagining that he personally experienced their oppression, such as when, writing about influx control, he rhetorically asked of 'the white man',

can he feel my pain when his laws
 tear my wife and child from my side
 and I am forced to work a thousand miles away?...

is he with me in the loneliness
 of my bed in the bachelor barracks⁵⁵

In Matthews' Black Consciousness poetry there is a clear-cut opposition between black and white - of oppressor versus oppressed and persecutors against the dispossessed. He continually contrasts black poverty, suffering and rightlessness with white opulence, hypocrisy and lack of compassion, at one point describing South Africa as,

51 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 70.
 52 Matthews, *Black Voices Shout!*, 64.
 53 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 12.
 54 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 12.

...my fair land a'dying of the stench
of valleys of plenty⁵⁶

Although he mainly focused on anti-apartheid themes such as the human toll of influx control, forced removals, immorality legislation, police brutality, deaths in detention and the iniquitous effects of 'sad, sick segregation',⁵⁷ Matthews also wrote of colonial dispossession and economic exploitation;

the fields that were ours
our cattle can no longer graze
and like the cattle we are herded
to starve on barren soil

we die in the earth's depth
to fill his coffer with gold
his lust for shiny pebbles
outweighs his concern for our lives⁵⁸

Matthews lashed out at whites in general, at one point crying out in anguish;

White South Africa
you are mutilating my soul⁵⁹

And he makes no apology for his heavy-handed excoriation of white South Africa, stating in the introduction to *Cry Rage!* that it was his intention to 'show contempt for white man's two-faced morality'.⁶⁰ He thus has little compunction cursing them,

Goddam them!
They know what they've done⁶¹

passing judgements of the sort that,

the word of the white man
has the value of dirt⁶²

55 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 9.

56 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 7. See also *ibid.*, 20, 21 and 29 for examples of explicit contrasts being made.

57 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 55.

58 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 5.

59 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 40.

60 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, introduction; see also *ibid.*, 14.

61 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 28.

62 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 5.

and to the University of Cape Town students who were beaten by police when they protested against apartheid education on the steps of the St. Georges Cathedral in the centre of Cape Town in 1972.⁶⁷

In accordance with Black Consciousness principles Matthews was scathing not only of black opportunists and collaborators who sought to profit from apartheid, but also of black - and by implication especially Coloured peoples' - assimilationist aspirations which he saw as a betrayal of their black heritage;

white syphilization
taints blacks
makes them
carbon copies...
the women
faces smeared
skin bleached
hair straightened

wake up
black fools!⁶⁸

In the same vein he decried what he regarded as subservient behaviour on the part of black people. On the only occasion he used the term 'Coloured' in a normative sense in his poetry, Matthews upbraided participants in the coon carnival;

Coloured folks garish in coon garb
Sing and dance in the hot sun
Their faces smeared a fool's mask
Happy New Year, my baas, a drunken shout
To whites who applaud and approve
Their annual act of debasement⁶⁹

started a forty day fast at the Muslim shrine, or kramat, on Signal Hill to publicize his call for a judicial enquiry into the death in detention of Imam Haron two years earlier. By the time he broke his fast sixty seven days later the National Party government still refused to consider his request but Wrankmore had succeeded in attracting international attention to the abuse and torture of political prisoners in South African jails. For further detail on Wrankmore see *Cape Times*, 15/2/2002.

67 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 35.

68 Matthews, *Black Voices Shout!*, 29. See also Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 48.

69 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 51. See also *ibid.*, 3.

This represents a significant about-face for Matthews who had been co-owner of the prominent coon troupe, the Ragtime Millionaires during the 1960s.⁷⁰

Because of his stress on black unity, in only three instances did Matthews make explicit racial distinctions between black people in this poetry.⁷¹ He, however, freely made such distinctions indirectly, through the use of place names or by mentioning the different forms of oppression apartheid visited upon different sectors of the black population. References to the people of Illinge, Dimbaza, Sada and Limehill⁷² or to suffering inflicted by the pass laws signalled that he was writing about Africans⁷³ whereas Manenberg, Heideveld and Lavistown and urban forced removals were signifiers for the Coloured community.⁷⁴ On the second of the two occasions in which he used the term 'Coloured', it was with reference to the race classification system and he put the word in capitals to indicate that this was not his wording but official terminology.⁷⁵

Although Black Consciousness strongly tended toward a Manichean view of South African society, it nevertheless recognized the existence of racial and ethnic differences within the black population, most notably through its definition of the black community

70 Willemse, 'More than brothers', 15. Matthews explains that he had in the meantime become much more politicized. James Matthews, interviewed, 18/6/2002.

71 See Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 52 for the one example where he uses 'black and brown' and *ibid.*, 51, 59 for the two instances in which he used the term Coloured.

72 These were rural resettlement camps set up by the apartheid government for those Africans 'endorsed out' of white South Africa. Lacking any opportunities for economic activity or the most basic social services, and filled by those people whose labour was not needed in the formal economy - women, children and the elderly - these were places of despair infamous for their high infant mortality rates. In *Cry Rage!*, 8 Matthews wrote;

The people of Limehill and Dimbaza
like those of Sada and Illinge
are harvesting crops of crosses
the only fruit the land will bear
with the fields of their village
fertilized by the bodies of children
and the bones of the ancient ones.

73 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 6, 7, 8, 9, 58.

74 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24.

as consisting of Africans, Coloureds and Indians.⁷⁶ A 1970 *SASO Newsletter* editorial explaining the movement's understanding of the term 'black' and urging solidarity amongst all those racially discriminated against proclaimed,

By all means be proud of your Indian heritage or your African culture but make sure that in looking around for somebody to kick at, you choose the fellow who is sitting on your neck. He may not be as easily accessible as your black brother but he *is* the source of your discomfort.⁷⁷

Being a member of a minority group generally characterized as occupying an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy Matthews was sensitive to these differences. While he at no point in his poetry tried to explain or deconstruct his own identity as Coloured or even made explicit reference to it, Matthews all his life nevertheless regarded himself as Coloured and his adherence to Black Consciousness did not cause him to reject this identification.⁷⁸

In his strongly autobiographical novel, *The Party is Over* - written largely in the 1960s, published in German in 1986, then in English in South Africa only in 1997 and described by Hein Willemse as 'reality disguised as fiction' - the central character, David Patterson, struggles with the frustrations of being a Coloured writer and the expectations placed on black artists.⁷⁹ At one point Patterson declares, 'I can't really be classified as a Black African writer.' When asked, 'Why not?' he replies that;

'Let me put it this way: I don't come from a tribal background, neither do I speak an indigenous language. I'm not white, but I am not African either.' David fell silent. It would be a waste of time to explain to these misguided people that he

75 Matthews and Thomas, *Cry Rage!*, 59.

76 Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 35-38, 52; Fatton, *Black Consciousness*, 32; Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 104.

77 *SASO Newsletter*, 9/1970, 2.

78 James Matthews, interviewed, 18/6/2002.

79 J. Matthews, *The Party is Over*, (Cape Town, Kwela, 1997). Hein Willemse justifiably describes the novel as 'reality disguised as fiction' and Matthews admits that 'the writing of it was a form of catharsis'. Even more central to the novel than the issues of personal and social identity discussed here is Patterson and Matthews' attempts to come to terms with their broken marriages. See Willemse, 'More than brothers', 14; 'Living through a chunk of the century', 47. Jaffer, 'Being coloured', 122.

sometimes felt that the Coloureds had become the new lost tribe of Israel.⁸⁰

In an earlier draft published in the mid-1980s Matthews added the following passage to Patterson's explanation;

I can't truthfully say that my soul is one with that of Africa. There is a gulf between me and the (African)... Culturally my outlook is most certainly European... Racially, it's the African who pushes me aside, labelling me as Ama-Bushman.⁸¹

Interviewed in 1999 Matthews made it clear that; 'I have no problem being Coloured, but it is not an issue, unless its taken in a bantustan approach... We shouldn't be treated differently.'⁸² For Matthews there was no real inconsistency in him embracing Black Consciousness yet regarding himself as Coloured. In a 1998 newspaper article in which he reflected on the nature of Coloured identity as well as the history and aspirations of this community, he explains that;

For those who have absorbed the policy of Black Consciousness, the acceptance of being coloured and black is not as contradictory as it might appear, because being black does not mean rejecting being coloured. Being black is part of their political stance - a stance they still feel necessary now - and does not exclude them from their place in coloured ranks.⁸³

The significance of Matthews' Black Consciousness poetry is that it heralded the growing acceptance of ideas of black solidarity within the Coloured community during the latter part of the 1970s and was a harbinger of the popular fury of the post-Soweto era that periodically boiled over into mass protests and rioting. While the number of Black Consciousness activists in the Coloured community remained small, its ideological impact, on the youth in particular, was considerable.⁸⁴ Much of the political turmoil in

80 Matthews, *The Party is Over*, 62.

81 J. Matthews, 'An autumn afternoon: An excerpt from an unpublished novel', *Realities*, (Cape Town, BLAC, 1985), 7.

82 'Living through a chunk of the century', 45.

83 *Cape Argus*, 16/2/1998.

84 Messina, 'Kleurlinge is ook swart', 124-25, 130-31; B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto revolt: Roots of a revolution?*, (London, Zed Press, 1979), 221-22.

Coloured townships and educational institutions during the second half of the 1970s was informed by Black Consciousness thinking, albeit often in inchoate, rudimentary ways. For many Coloured people, especially amongst the younger, newly politicized cohorts that provided the main impetus behind the protest movement, exposure to Black Consciousness philosophy, even at the simplest level of sloganeering that 'Black is Beautiful', entailed raising questions about Coloured identity, about its significance, its legitimacy and the implications of espousing it.

But as the example of Matthews demonstrates, for most at the time, embracing Black Consciousness did not necessarily entail the rejection of Coloured identity. For the majority Colouredness was as yet too solid a social reality to be dismissed as a mere white, ruling class invention though its use as a means of dividing the black population was clearly recognized. Accepting the tenets of Black Consciousness did, however, mean consciously displacing Colouredness from its pedestal as their sole or primary social identity to a secondary status, if only in the arena of politics. For many politicized Coloured people, most notably those who were to become active in the mass democratic movement of the 1980s, this was a step towards the complete rejection of Coloured identity.

It is ironic that at the point that one would have expected his most wrathful and anguished outburst - during and immediately after the 1976 revolt when the anger of black South Africans reached unprecedented heights - Matthews' next offering consisted of a collection of pensive, introspective poems. The incongruously titled *Pass me a Meatball, Jones*⁸⁵ was written during his detention in solitary confinement in Victor Verster prison

85 Unlike his other collections of poems where the title echoes one or other significant line from the

in Paarl between September and December 1976. In this volume there is no explicit social commentary and no ranting against the system but an intensely personal evocation of the loneliness, fear and despair that Matthews experienced during his imprisonment. Dominated by a list of poem titles of the sort, 'the day has died on me', 'death dew is settling upon me' and 'greyness infiltrated my being'⁸⁶ and confirming his despondency;

my spirit is shredded as a
wind-ripped cloud⁸⁷

this sombre collection is concerned with Matthews' desolate prison experience as the following typical extracts demonstrate;

death pitched camp
in my heart
its coldness coursing veins
freezes every orifice...

fear, a snake
wrapped around my throat
make my eyes cockroach
at the blocking of breath...

foetus-fold i lay
fearful of night's
torn twisted thoughts⁸⁸

By the time of the appearance in 1981 of his next volume of poetry, *No Time for Dreams*, which does contain social and political commentary, Matthews' 'raging' had subsided

book, this collection contains no allusion, literal or figurative, to a meatball or Jones. The title derives from an 'in-joke' between Matthews and fellow detainee, Peter Jones. Inmates, who had recently won a legal battle for the right to buy foodstuffs from outside, pooled their money to buy essentials. Jones used this opportunity to indulge in his predilection for meatballs. James Matthews, interviewed, 18/6/2002. This volume was later republished as *Poems from a Prison Cell*, (Cape Town, Realities, 2001).

86 See Matthews, *Pass me a Meatball*, 1, 5, 35 respectively. For other poems describing his arrest and incarceration see 'Hot pot' (Cape Town, Community Arts Project, 1979). This pamphlet is available at the African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.

87 Matthews, *Pass Me a Meatball*, 39.

88 See Matthews, *Pass me a Meatball*, 11, 37 and 41 respectively. Lest this description create a false impression, it needs to be said that some of the poems testify to Matthews' resilience under these adverse conditions. See, J. Cronin, 'Foreword' in Matthews, *Prison Cell*, 7-8.

considerably and was replaced by a more controlled, and at times suppressed, anger.⁸⁹ Also, the emphasis on black solidarity was supplanted by an inclusive, non-racial outlook more accommodating of progressive whites. This more mellow and considered stance shines through most clearly in the final poem of this collection in which Matthews proclaims that;

Freedom is not the colour of my
black skin...
freedom coloured by blackness is
a dream
There is no time for dreams⁹⁰

He was prepared to acknowledge that;

the blood that will bring
about freedom
is an offering from the bodies
of the many freedom fighters
believers in the togetherness of people
and not the colour of their skin⁹¹

It is apparent that by the early 1980s Matthews had moved beyond Black Consciousness thinking and embraced a more inclusive ideology that, amongst other things, recognized the valuable role that progressive whites could play in the struggle for freedom. This writing reflected the liberatory movement's swing away from the binarism of Black Consciousness after the movement had been crushed by a spate of bannings and arrests in the aftermath of the Soweto revolt, towards the non-racial democratic ethos of the 1980s. Matthews participated in this move and was influenced by it, serving as he did on the first

89 In one of the poems in *No Time for Dreams*, 18, Matthews writes of his struggle to contain his anger;

i close my eyes
as my rage flares inside
and murmurs softly;...
the calmness of my voice covers
my pain.

90 Matthews, *No Time for Dreams*, 62.

91 Matthews, *No Time for Dreams*, 62.

editorial board of *Grassroots*, which was emblematic of this new outlook.⁹²

'We don't fit the ethnic stereotypes': Irony and ambiguity in South

Whereas the Soweto revolt resulted in the crushing of the Black Consciousness movement⁹³ it also marked the re-emergence of mass participation in the liberatory struggle and the revival of ANC influence in the internal opposition to apartheid. Many former Black Consciousness adherents turned their backs on black racial assertiveness and embraced the non-racial position of the ANC enshrined in the Freedom Charter it adopted in 1955 and generally referred to as Charterism. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of a large number of youth and community organizations participating in and initiating protests at local, regional and national levels of which the 1980 school boycotts and demonstrations against the institution of P. W. Botha's Tri-Cameral Parliament in the mid-1980s were the high points. In the meanwhile the collapse of white supremacist regimes on South Africa's borders allowed the exiled wing of the ANC to re-establish regular contact with supporters inside the country. Escalating protests and growing grassroots organization culminated in the formation in August 1983 of the United Democratic Front, an umbrella body to which over six hundred political and community organizations were affiliated, to co-ordinate this resistance. The UDF from its inception associated itself with the inclusive, non-racial stance of the ANC.⁹⁴

The revival of the ANC-aligned resistance movement spawned a wide range of

92 Van Kessel, 'Grassroots', 324.

93 By mid-1978 eighteen organizations had been banned, more than six hundred, mostly young, people had been killed, three thousand wounded, two thousand detained and over five thousand had fled into exile. Lodge, *Black Politics*, 330; Pampallis, *Foundations*, 260.

94 There is an extensive literature on the non-racial democratic movement of the 1980s. See Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, chs. 3-4; J. Seekings, *United Democratic Front*; T. Lodge, 'Rebellion: The turning of the tide', in T. Lodge and B. Nasson, S. Mufson, K. Shubane and N. Sithole, (eds.), *All Here and Now: Black politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991); I. van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the transformation of*

alternative newspapers, newsletters and other media⁹⁵ of which *Grassroots*, starting in 1980, and *South*, published from 1987 onwards, were the most important examples in the western Cape. *Grassroots* in Ineke van Kessel's judgement was 'a pioneering effort to forge a new genre of local community newspapers'⁹⁶ and, as its name was meant to convey, was very much part of the Charterist political strategy of that time of building community-based organizations to oppose apartheid. *Grassroots* was the product of a new generation of energetic, young and generally well-educated political and media activists who regarded themselves as Marxists. And though predominantly Coloured and Indian they, in accord with Marxist principles, eschewed any ethnic or racial affiliation. *Grassroots* sought to go beyond simply raising political awareness or articulating the views and interests of the working classes but also wanted to mobilize them against apartheid and capitalist oppression.⁹⁷ *Grassroots* staff saw themselves not as journalists but as media activists. their credo summed up in the acronym POEM which stood for Popularize, Organize, Educate and Mobilize.⁹⁸

In the first half of the 1980s *Grassroots* was a dynamic project that made a significant contribution to the liberatory struggle in the western Cape. In this earlier phase the paper played an integral role in creating a community of activists and extending the network of youth, community and social service organizations that underpinned the democratic movement. In addition to some political reporting, *Grassroots* focussed mainly on community issues such as everyday struggles around rent, housing, the cost of living,

South Africa, (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2000).

95 See Switzer and Adhikari, *South Africa's Resistance Press* for detailed treatment of this development.

96 Van Kessel, '*Grassroots*', 283.

97 Their inspiration for using newspapers as an essential organizing and propaganda tool was derived from Bolshevik thinking, in particular Lenin's *What is to be Done?* Van Kessel, *Grassroots*, 289.

98 Rehana Rossouw, telephone interview with M. Adhikari, 12/10/1998; See, in addition, D. Pinnock, 'Popularize, organize, educate and mobilize: Culture and communication in the 1980s' in K. Tomaselli and P. Louw, (eds.), *The Alternative Press in South Africa*, (Bellville, Anthropos,

labour and health. A good deal of space was regularly devoted to providing advice on matters ranging from pensions, divorce and unfair dismissals to good nutrition, forming buying co-operatives and dealing with medical problems such as hypertension, tuberculosis, venereal disease and even nappy rash. Its strategy was to mobilize people around workaday issues of immediate concern to them rather than to focus on 'high politics'. It sought to strive for attainable goals through community action and thereby to conscientize people politically and induct them into the broader struggle for democracy and a socialist future. *Grassroots* thus tirelessly promoted the message that it was only through collective action and communal effort that the 'racist capitalist system' which oppressed them could be combatted and peoples' lives improved. *Grassroots* activists did indeed help to mobilize people around a number of local issues and are able to point to a few, albeit small victories.⁹⁹ Given the intention of these activists to use the paper as a means of overcoming divisions within the deeply fragmented communities of the Western Cape, especially the racial divide between Africans and Coloureds, *Grassroots* from the outset adopted an unequivocally anti-racist approach in its reporting, stressing the overriding importance of unity and 'People Power'.

By the middle of the 1980s, however, the *Grassroots* project had become marginalized and in the latter half of the decade was increasingly irrelevant to the liberatory struggle. Firstly, intensified state repression after the declaration of a state of emergency in July 1985 completely disrupted the production and distribution of the paper. Staff were forced into hiding, several were detained, the newspaper's offices were raided by security police, the building housing these offices were gutted by fire in October 1985 and the

1991), 133-54 who used the acronym as the title of his chapter.

99 Amongst these victories were getting the Cape Town City Council to change the due dates for electricity payments, to repair washing lines in the courtyards of council flats in Lavender Hill and allowing people who had built penthouse roofs (*afidakkies*) without having the necessary building

following year *Grassroots* organizer, Veliswa Mhlawuli, was seriously injured in a failed assassination attempt.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, the collapse of community organizations and the inability of *Grassroots* organizers to operate openly, in the words of Ineke van Kessel, meant that '*Grassroots* operated in a vacuum. Cut off from its community links, the newspaper became the tool of a limited and mainly introverted circle of militants.'¹⁰¹ This new reality was reflected in its content that shifted focus from community organization to straightforward political reporting and the paper becoming a mouthpiece for the UDF.¹⁰²

By the mid-1980s the anti-apartheid struggle in the Western Cape had expanded in size and scope to the point where community newspapers such as *Grassroots* and its off-shoot *Saamstaan*,¹⁰³ were of limited value. The situation changed significantly with the formation of the UDF in August 1983 and the subsequent upsurge in social unrest as the localized, episodic protest of the early 1980s gave way to sustained, organized, mass resistance from the mid-1980s onwards. Its slow publishing cycle of five weeks¹⁰⁴ and the restricted volume of news it could carry made *Grassroots* unsuitable for the populist political agenda that now dominated the liberatory movement in the Western Cape. The focus of community newspapers was too narrow and their penetration too limited to service these needs. Media and political activists increasingly regarded a mass circulation political newspaper to be necessary to propel the democratic movement forward. It was

plans passed, to keep these structures. See van Kessel, '*Grassroots*', 284-85, 292-93, 302.

100 R. Abel, *Politics by other Means: Law in the struggle against apartheid, 1980-1994*, (New York, Routledge, 1995), 264, 300; *South*, 16/3/1989; 26/10/1989; *Cape Times*, 14/7/1998; Van Kessel, '*Grassroots*' 315.

101 Van Kessel, '*Grassroots*', 319.

102 By the mid-1980s the UDF leadership started exercising direct control over editorial policy of the paper. Van Kessel, '*Grassroots*', 308.

103 *Saamstaan*, meaning stand together, was a largely Afrikaans language community newspaper based in Oudtshoorn and servicing the southern Cape and Karoo regions. It was set up in early 1984 by *Grassroots* and proved to be a highly successful venture. For more information on this paper see G. Claassen, 'Breaking the mould of political subservience: *Vrye Weekblad* and the Afrikaans alternative press' in Switzer and Adhikari, *South Africa's Resistance Press*, 442-47.

104 The paper adopted a five week publishing cycle to avoid having to register as a newspaper and

felt that such a paper would provide the democratic movement with an effective channel of communication with its mass informal following as well as one through which it could promote its vision of an alternative society. It could also be used to counter the biased and watered-down reporting of 'struggle news' by the establishment press¹⁰⁵ which either openly supported the National Party government or practiced a high degree of self-censorship by complying with state curbs on the media and reporting only anti-apartheid news safe enough not to attract retribution from the state.¹⁰⁶ Media activists, moreover, hoped that, run as a successful business venture, a left wing commercial newspaper would free them from dependence on donor funding and generate capital to fund other anti-apartheid projects.¹⁰⁷

These were some of the main considerations that were behind the establishment of *South*, an independent weekly newspaper launched in the Western Cape in March 1987, by a group of media activists who had been instrumental in setting up and running the *Grassroots* project. *South* was born of one of the most troubled times in South African history. Apartheid South Africa had entered its most turbulent phase in the latter half of the 1980s. From late 1984 popular revolt and mass insurrection in black townships greeted the imposition of the tri-cameral parliamentary system on South Africa. As the

hence having to make a R40 000 security deposit.

- 105 Moegsien Williams, interviewed by Mohamed Adhikari, 15/7/1988; *Free the Press*, (Cape Town, South Press Services, 1988), 7; South Newspaper Collection (hereafter SNC), University of Cape Town Manuscripts and Archives Division, Seria, Feasibility report, 4; K. Tomaselli and P. Louw, 'Developments in the conventional and alternative presses, 1980-1989', in Tomaselli and Louw, *Alternative Press*, 8. The South Newspaper Collection consists of photocopies of documents in the possession of either Rashid Seria or David Bleazard deposited by the author in UCT's Manuscripts and Archives Division.
- 106 K. Tomaselli and P. Louw, 'The struggle for legitimacy: State pressures on the media, 1950-1991' in Tomaselli and Louw *Alternative Press*, 81, 89; Abel, *Politics by other Means*, 259; G. Jackson, *Breaking Story: The South African Press*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1993), 10, 152, 160-61. Of these newspapers the *Cape Times* was the most progressive and daring. Its publication in November 1985 of an interview with Oliver Tambo by editor Tony Heard is the most celebrated of the few instances in which the establishment press openly defied the government.
- 107 SNC, Seria, Feasibility Report, Summary, 1, 6; Addendum on consultations, 2-3; S. Johnson, 'Resistance in print I: *Grassroots* and alternative publishing', in Tomaselli and Louw, *Alternative*

crisis deepened and organized resistance escalated the National Party government responded with brutal repression. From July 1985 successive states of emergency were proclaimed annually to clamp down on the extra-parliamentary opposition. The emergency regulations armed the government with a number of authoritarian measures to block the free flow of information on politically sensitive issues and to muzzle dissenting voices, making the latter half of the 1980s the bleakest years in the annals of press freedom in South Africa.¹⁰⁸

South was the first left wing newspaper to be published in the Western Cape in twenty five years,¹⁰⁹ after papers such as the *Guardian* and *Torch* had been snuffed out in the repression of the early 1960s. After a decade and a half of calm, the revolt of 1976 and the widespread civil disturbances of the 1980s created what appeared to be a viable niche for a left-wing political newspaper in the media market of the Western Cape. As the populist campaign of the United Democratic Front gathered momentum in the mid-1980s media activists felt that the Western Cape generated enough anti-apartheid news to justify a regional newspaper. And as the number of community and youth organizations mushroomed in black residential areas in the region, so did the demand for news about unrest and for radical political commentary seem to grow. A glaring absence of news from black townships and rural areas appeared to be another weakness of the mainstream media that could be exploited.¹¹⁰

Press, 199.

108 For detailed discussion of the media curbs introduced by the various states of emergency see Jackson, *Breaking Story*, 128-57 and Abel, *Politics by Other Means*, 259-310.

109 *Grassroots* and other community papers were newsletters rather than newspapers.

110 SNC, R. Seria, Weekly newspaper project feasibility report, 1986, Introduction, 1-2; P. Louw, 'Resistance in print II: Developments in the Cape: *Saamstaan*, *Grassroots* and *South*', in Tomaselli and Louw, *Alternative Press*, 210; Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

While the deteriorating political climate created the opportunity to publish an independent radical newspaper in the Western Cape, it was the frustration of the handful of black journalists who worked for the white-owned, mass circulation newspapers in the region that provided the impetus for the establishment of *South*. Black journalists in the Western Cape had to contend with an alienating work environment in that the newspapers for which they worked reflected the concerns of the ruling white minority and their media strategies were seen to be supportive of the status quo.¹¹¹ These journalists also greatly resented the racist practices of these newspapers such as their carrying racially discriminatory advertising, publishing separate editions or special supplements aimed at black readers and their support of segregated sport. Their opposition to economic and other sanctions against the South African state and negative reporting on the extra-parliamentary opposition reinforced the perception that the English liberal press was 'written by white journalists for a white public'.¹¹² Black journalists also had to put up with the continual suppression of their reportage on politically sensitive issues such as civil unrest, trade union activity, police brutality and black political opinion.¹¹³ The mid-1980s were thus enormously frustrating times for black journalists, particularly those active in the anti-apartheid movement. Some found an outlet for their frustration in various forms of media and political activism.

The initiative for establishing *South* came from two such media activists, Rashid Seria, who became the first editor of *South*, and Moegsien Williams, who succeeded him in November 1988. By the time he took up the editorship of *South*, Seria had gained

111 SNC, Seria, Feasibility report, 2-3; SNC, M. Brey and R. Seria, 'Memorandum for the private placing of shares in South Press Services Limited', (Cape Town, nd.), 4. See also A. Akhalwaya, 'The role of the alternative press', *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 42, 1988, 14-18.

112 *Free the Press*, 6.

113 SNC, Seria, Feasibility report, Annexure 3, News suppression and manipulation of South Africa's liberal English Newspapers as experienced by black reporters, 3.

eighteen years of experience as a journalist on newspapers such as the *Evening Post* in Port Elizabeth, the *Cape Times* and *Cape Herald* and was working as sub-editor for the *Argus*. Seria had been instrumental in the establishment of the Cape Town branch of the Union of Black Journalists in 1976 and was a founding member of the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA) formed in 1980. He also served as treasurer to the United Democratic Front in the Western Cape in 1983-84. Williams had accumulated eight years of experience as a reporter with the *Argus* and the South African Broadcasting Corporation and was working as senior media officer for the University of the Western Cape before moving to *South*. He was also active within the UDF and was an executive member of MWASA. Seria and Williams were founders of *Grassroots* and were involved in the running of *Saamstaan*.¹¹⁴

Seria, who had since the late 1970s been mulling over the idea of establishing a left wing commercial newspaper for the Western Cape, saw a gap in the market when unrest flared up in the mid-1980s. With this resurgence of popular protest the market appeared ripe for a left wing commercial newspaper. After his release from an 80 day spell of detention towards the end of 1985 Seria conducted a feasibility study with the help of Williams.¹¹⁵ Seria and Williams used the results of this study to consult with key political leaders and progressive journalists about the possibility of starting a mass circulation weekly. Although these consultations took place throughout the country, Seria and Williams concentrated their efforts on the southwestern and eastern Cape as well as the midlands and Karoo regions, for as the name *South* indicates, they aspired to setting up a newspaper that would be distributed throughout the southern half of the country.

114 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; SNC, Seria and Brey, 'Private placing of shares', 8.

115 The document referred to is SNC, Seria, Feasibility report. Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998; Rashid Seria, interviewed by Mohamed Adhikari, 11/10/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed,

Encouraged by positive responses to their proposal as well as the success of the recently launched *New Nation* and *Weekly Mail*, Seria enlisted the aid of Dr. Allan Boesak to secure funding to the value of R450 000 for the project from the Interchurch Organization for Development Co-operation (ICCO), a non-governmental organization sponsored by Dutch Protestant churches.¹¹⁶

The appearance of the first issue of *South* on 19 March 1987 is a milestone in the history of dissenting journalism in the Western Cape. Not only was it two and a half decades since a radical newspaper had been published in the Western Cape but it was also the first left-wing commercial newspaper produced in the region in that predecessors were more in the nature of newsletters, magazines or the official organs of political organizations. *South* also lifted media activism to a higher plane by disseminating news about the democratic struggle in the region much more widely and more efficiently than the community papers had done.

In his first annual report on *South* delivered at a public meeting attended by over 300 people Rashid Seria declared that, 'It is a tightrope that we walk. We are hammered on all sides.'¹¹⁷ Seria was referring to the buffeting the newspaper was receiving from the state on the one hand and criticism levelled at it by activists and political organizations on the other. The state wanted to bully *South* into compliant reporting while various constituencies within the anti-apartheid movement expected the paper to perform a variety of functions that suited their particular political agendas. Having to operate in a

15/7/1998.

116 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998. A number of documents relating to the consultation process are in the private possession of Rashid Seria. Henceforth documents in the possession of Rashid Seria are referred to as the Seria Private Collection (SPC).

117 SNC, Annual report, 1988, 2; *South*, 18/2/1988.

hostile environment under exceptionally difficult circumstances, *South* all its life was engaged in a struggle for survival and in more senses than one found itself walking a tight-rope.

The main objective of *South* in the words of its founders was 'to articulate the needs and aspirations of the oppressed and exploited in the Cape and in so doing serve the interests of the working class people.'¹¹⁸ Its more immediate political aims were to provide the extra-parliamentary protest movement, particularly the United Democratic Front, with a voice and to keep the public informed of news and information the apartheid government wanted to suppress. It, furthermore, sought to challenge the monopolistic control of the media by government and a few large corporations.¹¹⁹ There was thus no question of *South* identifying itself as a Coloured newspaper or following a narrowly racial agenda.

The newspaper thus focussed on news relating broadly to extra-parliamentary politics and the injustices of apartheid in the Western Cape. News emanating from progressive political bodies and the activities of community organizations formed part of its staple fare. *South* covered protest action ranging from boycotts, strikes and mass marches, through running street battles between youths and police to the bombing of apartheid targets such as police stations. It ran feature articles and exposés on topics such as police brutality, township revolt, government corruption and problems in education, housing and social welfare. Issues of particular concern were workers' struggles, forced removals, the plight of detainees and the suffering of impoverished rural communities in areas such as Worcester, Robertson, Ashton, De Doorns and Swellendam. *South* monitored abuses of human rights and supported a wide range of left wing political campaigns such as the

118 SNC, Seria, Feasibility report, summary, 3.

Living Wage, Release Mandela, Unlock Apartheid Jails, Free the Children, Hands off the Press and End the State of Emergency campaigns. It seldom reported news from outside of the Western Cape and carried virtually no international coverage. The paper did not attempt to provide conventional news coverage except for some social, community and religious news. Its sports reporting was restricted to events and codes sanctioned by the South African Council of Sport (SACOS) which dominated internal resistance to segregated sport during the 1970s and 1980s.

South fiercely proclaimed itself to be 'the independent voice of the people of the Cape' and that it was 'free from vested interests and financial manipulation from any quarter.'¹²⁰ It also asserted a non-sectarian political stance claiming that 'We will not be dictated to by any political party or organization.'¹²¹ Despite these pronouncements *South* was nevertheless in effect the mouthpiece of the United Democratic Front in the Western Cape and thus firmly within the camp of the ANC. This should come as no surprise as the newspaper was founded by UDF activists and was openly 'charterist' in political orientation. Williams makes it clear that he was under no illusions that 'the raison d'être of *South* was to promote the ANC in the Western Cape'.¹²² *South* was, however, less partisan than one might have expected because it saw its role as one of fostering unity within the broader anti-apartheid movement and avoided a formal relationship with the UDF. Editors also jealously guarded the paper's editorial autonomy.¹²³

119 SNC, Seria, Feasibility report, summary, 3; SNC, G. Berger, Memorandum to South directors, 4/9/1993. Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

120 This message was carried in *South's* appearances panel.

121 *South*, 19/9/1987.

122 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

123 SNC, Minutes of meeting of trustees of South Press Services, 30/7/1987; Minutes of meeting of trustees and board of directors of South Press Services, 1/10/1987; Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; Derek Carelse, interviewed by Mohamed Adhikari, 13/10/1998; Rehana Rossouw, e-mail communication with author, 20/7/1998.

From its fifth issue onward *South* adopted the motto 'You have right to know' to signal its intention of challenging curbs on press freedom by reporting anti-apartheid news that the mainstream newspapers did not dare publish.¹²⁴ Printing news that the National Party government was intent on suppressing called for courage and a calibre of brinkmanship that would continually test the limits of government tolerance for the propagation of dissident views. *South* walked a tightrope in deciding the limits to which it could test censorship laws without being banned because it was not entirely clear to what extent the apartheid state of the late 1980s had the political will to implement fully the curbs on the press it had arrogated itself under the Emergency regulations. Despite its determination to break with the compliant reporting of institutionalized journalism, Seria readily admits that *South*, like other newspapers, exercised a degree of self-censorship.¹²⁵ The survival of the newspaper depended on judicious evaluation of all political reporting. Indeed, for the first two years of its existence *South* employed two lawyers to scrutinize every issue for infringements of the law and to advise it on legal risks being taken.¹²⁶

Being severely undercapitalized, *South* was run on a shoe-string budget, its resources stretched to the limit. Its premises were inadequate, equipment rudimentary and the project chronically short staffed. Despite salaries being approximately half the going market rate, exceptionally long hours were demanded of staff. Rehana Rossouw, who was working for the *Argus* at the time and joined *South* in 1989, relates that she had little option but to decline the initial offer in 1987 to work for the paper as she could not afford the two thirds drop in salary this would have entailed.¹²⁷ An added problem was that the

124 *South*, 2/4/1987.

125 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998.

126 Clive Thompson, Dennis Davis and Norman Arendse were amongst the lawyers who scrutinized *South*.

127 SNC, Seria, Funding proposal, 13; SNC, Minutes of meeting of trustees and board of directors of South Press Services, 1/10/1987; Rehana Rossouw, e-mail communication with author, 20/7/1998.

lack of training and experience of junior staff put great pressure on senior staffers who had to supervise their work, rewrite stories and provide on-the-job training. Both Seria and Williams were to regret the naive romanticism with which they started out, that with a paper such as *South* they would be able to 'take a bunch of raw youngsters and turn them into great journalists in a matter of a few months'.¹²⁸ Meeting the Thursday morning deadline for delivery of the paper to the printers was a perennial struggle. Staff were usually forced to work through the night on Wednesdays to meet the deadline. There were occasions when some members of the core production team of five or six individuals lived on the premises from Monday through to Thursday to put the paper together.¹²⁹

Intent on implementing the egalitarian values that informed the anti-apartheid struggle, in their day-to-day affairs, both *Grassroots* and *South* were run along scrupulously non-racial and democratic lines, eliminating as far as possible the usual hierarchies of the workplace. There was a deliberate attempt on the part of all involved to banish any recognition of race. The etiquette of political correctness of the time demanded nothing less. The only concession to racial thinking was the preference given to the training and employment of promising African journalists.¹³⁰ High expectations amongst an intensely politicized staff regarding progressive employment practices and the quality of the newspaper they wanted to produce, on the one hand, and the pressures of getting the paper out on time every week as well as financial stringency forced upon management, on the other, made for an extremely volatile working environment, especially during the first two years. There was often a great deal of tension between colleagues and long,

128 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 11/10/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998. The quotation comes from Williams.

129 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 11/10/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; Derek Carelse, interviewed, 13/10/1998.

acrimonious meetings were regularly held to thrash out differences.¹³¹

Despite these tensions and stresses one of the great strengths of *South* lay in its ability to draw on a team of people who were committed to the anti-apartheid struggle and who were prepared to make sacrifices for the paper. Working for *South* required commitment to journalism as a vocation and to media activism as an avenue for effecting social change. It called for resourcefulness and provided exposure to a range of skills not usually available in conventional journalism. It is for these reasons that so many of the young, inexperienced staff that *South* attracted displayed a flair for the profession and went on to become journalists of repute.¹³²

The greatest threat faced by *South* during the 1980s was proscription by the apartheid state.¹³³ The government's main strategy in persecuting the alternative press was for Stoffel Botha,¹³⁴ the Minister of Home Affairs and Communication, to use his powers under the emergency regulations to harass these newspapers.¹³⁵ Botha's first action against *South* was to ban the three issues from 23 July to 6 August 1987 as undesirable on the grounds that they were helping to create a revolutionary climate and cultivating a positive image of the ANC and its guerilla fighters. *South* won an important political and

130 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998, 11/10/1998.

131 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998, 11/10/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; Derek Carelse, interviewed, 13/10/1998; SNC, Annual report, 1988, 14; SNC, Minutes of meeting of the trustees and board of directors of South Press Services, 30/7/1987.

132 See Adhikari, 'South', 368 for further detail.

133 K. Tomaselli and P. Louw, 'The South African progressive press under emergency, 1986-1989', in Tomaselli and Louw, *Alternative Press*, 186; SPC, Letter from R. Seria to W. Minnaard, ICCO, Netherlands, 19/5/1988.

134 The dour, reserved Stoffel Botha was known as 'dom' (stupid) Stoffel in anti-apartheid circles in contrast to his more adroit and engaging colleague, Stoffel van der Merwe, Minister of Information, referred to as 'slim' (smart) Stoffel. Anton Harber, editor of the *Mail and Guardian*, coined the term 'to stoffel' meaning 'to snuff out' to ridicule dom Stoffel's month-long banning of the *Weekly Mail*. *Mail and Guardian*, 24/4/1998.

135 For a detailed discussion of state harassment of the alternative press during this period see Abel, *Politics by other Means*, 259-72. The SPC contains two files of correspondence between South Press Services, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Communication and various firms of attorneys

moral victory when it succeeded in having the Publications Appeal Board lift the banning orders.¹³⁶ Then in May 1988 *South* was served with a three month banning order, becoming the second newspaper after *New Nation* to be proscribed in this way. The paper, however, resumed publication after only five weeks because the emergency regulations expired on 10 June.¹³⁷ It would appear that the state used the banning order as an intimidatory tactic rather than as an attempt to close *South* down permanently.¹³⁸

State harassment of this sort was extremely damaging to the newspaper as it took up much of management's time, involved it in costly litigation and added greatly to the insecurity of the staff.¹³⁹ Williams estimates that as many as twenty four court actions were brought against *South* by the state during the 1980s and that in early 1989 it faced seven separate charges under the emergency regulations simultaneously. Ensnaring the paper in a web of legal regulation and wearing it down in a courtroom war of attrition seemed to be the conscious strategy of Stoffel Botha, a lawyer by training.¹⁴⁰

Because the newspaper was being run by seasoned activists the publication of *South* was in part an act of defiance. State harassment thus only served to strengthen their resolve to keep the paper alive. This defiance is captured in an open letter addressed to Stoffel Botha by the directors and trustees of South Press Services Limited, the public company founded to publish *South*, in response to his first warning notice;

Let us put it plainly. The deepest problem causing the violence in our country lies not with the press but with apartheid.... we are proud of our paper. We are

regarding state action against *South*.

136 *South*, 10/12/1987.

137 *South*, 7/4/1988; 14/4/1988; 4/5/1988; 15/6/1988; 25/8/1988.

138 It was estimated that a three month banning order would have cost South Press Services in excess of R100 000. SNC, Seria, Funding proposal, 20. See Adhikari, '*South*' 345 for details.

139 For a more detailed discussion of this harassment and of ad hoc victimization of the paper by shadowy operators within the state's security apparatus see Adhikari, '*South*', 346-47.

140 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998, 11/10/1998; SNC, 'Report of the chairperson', 8/1988; *Mail and Guardian*, 24/4/1998.

committed to the truth. We are committed to the struggle and true peace and justice. We are committed to the people of South Africa. This, we submit, is a noble cause and this cause will ultimately triumph.¹⁴¹

South with justification criticized the weak-kneed reporting of the mainstream press as tantamount to praising the emperor's new clothes.¹⁴² The paper, however, was itself guilty of praising the naked emperor's clothes in its treatment of Coloured identity. *South*, as did *Grassroots* before it, adopted the left wing orthodoxy of the 1980s of not only rejecting Coloured identity but also treating Colouredness as if it did not really exist except as a fiction created by white supremacists to divide and rule the black majority. In reaction to the overt racism of the apartheid order the democratic movement in the western Cape embraced an ever more dogmatic non-racism that refused to recognize the reality of racial identities and ethnic exclusivisms in South African society. In terms of these values, any recognition of Coloured identity was regarded as a concession to apartheid thinking and to be condemned as reactionary and racist. Though blatantly at odds with reality, the denial of Coloured identity within the democratic movement was an understandable emotional and political response to apartheid. Based, in the first instance, on a laudable principle, the rejection of racial thinking, the repudiation of Coloured identity became a meaningless gesture when pushed to the extreme of denying its existence. Investing the concept of Colouredness with the conspiratorial intent of the divide and rule tactics of white supremacism and refusing to acknowledge its existence became a common political and polemical counter to apartheid ideology in left wing circles in the last decade of apartheid rule.¹⁴³ This had from its inception been the stance

141 *South*, 26/11/1987. Williams, interviewed 15/7/1998, confirms that for him, defiance of the government played a very important part in publishing *South*.

142 See *South* 27/8/1987 for a cartoon that explicitly does this. The cartoon is reproduced in Adhikari, 'South', 350.

143 For an expression of these views see letter to editor entitled 'Drop all racial tags' in *South*, 14/1/1988. Refer to the discussion on instrumentalist approaches to the history of the Coloured community on pages 65-66 above.

of *Grassroots*, one of its pioneers.

Given its stress on working class unity and the power of concerted community action, *Grassroots* took a meticulously non-racial line in its reporting from the outset, diligently avoiding the use of racial terminology. Repeated close readings of the entire print run of the paper over a full decade has yielded only a handful of references to race, all of them in one way or another justifiable as necessary to make sense of a particular set of circumstances. Nearly all of these racial usages occurred in the first half of the decade when *Grassroots* was oriented towards communal organization rather than being a militant, political voice supporting the UDF. Even during its early years when there was less pressure to be politically correct *Grassroots* was more observant of these principles than *South* that was born at the height of this trend. This consistency was made possible by the five week publishing cycle of the paper and the painstaking process of scrutiny and consultation each issue of *Grassroots* underwent prior to publication. Indeed, *Grassroots* activists joked with some pride that they had pushed democratic practices to the point where they could legitimately be described as 'democracy'.¹⁴⁴

As part of its project of inculcating a non-racial ethos and a working class consciousness into its constituency, *Grassroots* ignored racial identities and instead simply made reference to people, residents, communities, workers, trade unionists, students and so forth. The paper shut its eyes to the racial divisions in South African society, even refusing to use terms such as 'white' or 'black' and glossing over distinctions between Coloured and African people.¹⁴⁵ It instead focussed on the opposition between 'bosses' and workers or wrote of oppressors and oppressed, both sets of terms, in effect,

144 Rehana Rossouw, interviewed 12/10/1998; See also *Grassroots*, 5/1983 for the article 'Are we all

functioning as substitutes for black and white. As was fashionable amongst left wing activists at the time *Grassroots* often referred to 'the People' or 'the Community' as if they represented a readily identifiable and homogeneous group. Where greater specificity was needed individuals were usually identified in terms of their place of residence, and communities in terms of geographical location. Because of the highly segregated nature of South African society this acted as a proxy for racial identification allowing readers to work out from these and other contextual clues what the racial identities of particular people were. Thus reports about the 'community of Schotsche Kloof' or 'Lotus River' were obviously about Coloured people and similarly references to the 'residents of Mbekweni' or the squatter camps of 'KTC, Nyanga Bush, Modderdam and Crossroads' were clearly to African people.

There were a few instances, however, in which *Grassroots* found it necessary to resort to the use of racial terminology. For example, a June 1981 article condemning the apartheid state for raising the salaries of Coloured, but not African, nurses to the level of their white counterparts, was forced to use these racial terms. In this instance it did not use quotation marks or any other device to indicate that it found them offensive.¹⁴⁶ A year later, however, in a piece advising people how to obtain old age pensions it again had no option but to use racial terms but on this occasion resorted to quotation marks to indicate its aversion to them.¹⁴⁷ *Grassroots* was not entirely consistent in its use of this convention for the following year it ran another article in which some racial terms were in quotes and others not.¹⁴⁸

going democracy?'

145 See *Grassroots*, 4/1980 for the only time the paper used the term 'black'.

146 *Grassroots*, 2/1981.

147 *Grassroots*, 7-8/1982.

At no point did *Grassroots* confront issues of race or Coloured identity, even at the level of explaining how race was used to divide and rule black people or the workers of South Africa. Its viewpoint, summed up in a letter to the editor that, 'the people only know about the Human race, not about "Coloureds, Indians, Whites and Blacks"'¹⁴⁹ was taken for granted and there appears to have been an assumption that by cultivating a working class consciousness racial identities would melt away. The closest the paper came to tackling these issues was in a cartoon strip published in the latter part of 1984 and early 1985 that depicted the ideal the paper wanted to help bring to fruition. In the opening sequence Mrs. Williams, a factory worker from Manenberg, welcomes the tri-cameral parliament on the grounds that 'we coloureds are getting the vote at last.'¹⁵⁰ It is not long, however, before a UDF activist canvassing the neighbourhood convinces her that to vote for tri-cameralism was to vote for 'more suffering, more hardships, more oppression for our people'.¹⁵¹ Later she buys a copy of *Grassroots* and learns about the Freedom Charter and how the capitalist system exploits workers. Interaction with her fellow workers, which includes an African man who holds a menial job but is highly knowledgeable about the freedom struggle, as well as a series of unpleasant encounters with her rude and exploitative employer reinforces her awareness of her status as a worker. This developing working class consciousness causes Mrs. Williams to respond to a scolding from her boss with the thought, 'One day, Mr. Measly, we'll make the laws. One day, we'll control the factories and your days of rudeness and bossing will be over.'¹⁵²

This fantasy was, of course, nowhere near the social reality of a South Africa rent by racial tension and ethnic exclusivism, of which antipathy between Coloureds and

148 *Grassroots*, 2/1983.

149 *Grassroots*, 4/1983.

150 *Grassroots*, 8/1984. See also van Kessel, 'Grassroots', 305-06.

151 *Grassroots*, 8/1984.

Africans was not the least important element. *Grassroots* itself had originated as the product of a group of Coloured and Indian activists and was justifiably viewed as a Coloured paper in the African townships. Not only did Coloured activists continue to predominate in the running of the paper but there was a clear Coloured bias in its reporting. Despite initiatives to make the paper more representative such as printing more news from African townships, hiring African organizers and publishing a few articles in Xhosa, *Grassroots* was never able to shake off its image as a Coloured paper. Van Kessel points to the irony that in the late 1980s when the paper was run by an introverted group of militants and had lost touch with its constituency, it came to be seen as an African paper by many Coloured people who were unable to identify with its radicalism.¹⁵³ An even more delicious irony that testifies to the pervasiveness of racial identities and the hegemony of white supremacist ideology was that *Grassroots* on occasion carried advertisements for hair straightener as well as for Ebony skin lightening creams and 'pigment tablets'.¹⁵⁴

Like *Grassroots*, *South* adopted a non-racial stance and avoided references to racial and ethnic identities wherever feasible. Working to a much more demanding schedule and having to report hard news, *South* was significantly more flexible in its attitude to race, making many more direct and indirect references to it. The paper nevertheless remained true to a core objective, as articulated by Seria, of promoting the establishment of 'a non-racial democracy in a unitary South Africa'.¹⁵⁵ *South* thus studiously avoided using the word 'Coloured' throughout the 1980s. When referring to Coloured people they were usually either subsumed under the generic term 'black' or some wider categorization such

152 *Grassroots*, 2/1985.

153 Van Kessel, 'Grassroots', 308.

154 See *Grassroots*, 8/1983 and 12/1985 for examples.

155 *South*, 9/2/1988.

as 'the people', 'the community' or 'the oppressed'. Racial identities were, however, usually obvious from the context of the discussion. When the word 'Coloured' was used it was usually to highlight the unjust and arbitrary racial distinctions imposed by apartheid laws or to expose the racist thinking of the dominant white minority. The word was usually placed in quotation marks to signify its superficiality and to distance the paper from the values implicit in its use. Prefacing Coloured with 'so-called' was another strategy of dissociation. Sensitivity to the label 'Coloured' within the democratic movement in the Western Cape is further demonstrated by *South* not placing other racial labels such as 'white', 'Indian' and 'African' in quotation marks.¹⁵⁶

The only time *South* addressed the issue of Coloured identity in the 1980s - and then only obliquely - was in an article entitled 'Quisling or realist?' based on an interview with Professor Richard van der Ross when the freedom of Cape Town was about to be conferred upon him. Van der Ross, who represents moderate, middle class political opinion within the Coloured community, made it clear that he embraced Coloured identity fully but did not support any form of segregation or differential treatment such as, for example, wanting 'a university of coloured people for coloured people'. In a barb directed at the politically correct left, van der Ross asserted that 'I have no hangups about being called coloured. Don't put the word coloured in inverted commas. As for those who speak of so-called coloured people, I've never understood what that means.'¹⁵⁷

Despite its avowed objective of promoting non-racism *South* nevertheless consciously targeted the Coloured working class. This contradiction did not escape anyone associated with the paper. The matter was thoroughly debated and despite some misgivings the

156 For some examples see *South*, 25/6/1986; 6/8/1987; 24/9/1987; 17/12/1987; 4/2/1988; 21/7/1988;

paper retained an underlying racial focus. The targeting of a Coloured readership was justified on several counts. Firstly, it made business sense because this was an area in which the founders of *South* had experience and was the one market segment that did not have a dedicated newspaper after the demise of the *Cape Herald* in 1986. Indeed, Derek Carelse, art director at *South* during 1987-88, claims that the paper deliberately copied the 'look' of the *Cape Herald*.¹⁵⁸ Secondly, writing for a working class African readership posed insurmountable problems of language, skills and resources. Also, *South* did not wish to go into competition with *New Nation* and *City Press* which were being distributed in Cape Town. Perhaps most importantly, there was a recognition that the Coloured working classes tended to be racially exclusive and politically reactionary. The editors of *South* thus adopted the spreading of the message of non-racism to the Coloured working classes as part of its mission. With this went the hope that *South* would help to secure political support for the UDF and ANC within this constituency.¹⁵⁹

Seria and Williams were greatly encouraged along this line of thinking by the perception that deep-rooted exclusivist tendencies within the Coloured community were at long last breaking down in the 1980s. Widespread social unrest in both urban and rural areas of the Western Cape from the mid-1980s onward convinced them that the Coloured community was shedding its insularity and was prepared to make common cause with Africans against apartheid. Williams saw 'the community pushing out people' such as Ashley Kriel, Ashley Forbes and other youths from Coloured townships who joined Umkhonto we Sizwe as conclusive evidence of a sea change within the Coloured community.¹⁶⁰ Thus, while to some the anti-racist position of denying the existence of Coloured identity

26/2/1989; 30/3/1989; 4/4/1990; 25/4/1990; 18/4/1991.

157 *South*, 7/7/1988.

158 Derek Carelse, interviewed, 13/10/1998.

159 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 11/10/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

was little more than a knee-jerk reaction to apartheid, to *South* editors promoting this fiction was a pragmatic strategy necessary to the building of a non-racial society.¹⁶¹

There was much optimism at the time that *South* was indeed helping to foster a non-racial ethos in the Western Cape. Williams' favourite metaphor at the time was to liken *South* to the footbridge spanning the railway line separating the Coloured housing estate of Manenberg from the African township of Nyanga. In the light of the subsequent resurgence of Coloured exclusivity and growing tensions between Coloureds and Africans, Williams admits to having been naive in thinking that ingrained racial antipathies could so easily be overcome. He feels that it would have been much more productive to have faced up to the ugly reality of racism within the Coloured community than to have swept it under the carpet as *South*, and the democratic movement as a whole, had done in the 1980s.¹⁶²

On 2 February 1990 F. W. de Klerk's epochal opening address to parliament launched South Africa on a four year course of transition to democratic rule. The state of emergency was lifted, outlawed political organizations were unbanned, political prisoners were freed and a wide range of political parties and organizations entered into negotiation to chart the transition to representative government. Despite continuing social unrest and political turmoil it was clear that circumstances had changed fundamentally. The management of *South* realized that if the newspaper was to survive, it would have to change with the times and re-position itself in the media market. *South* needed to change from being an organ of struggle dependent on donor money and justifying its existence on moral and political grounds, to a commercially viable concern. As the prospects for

160 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

democracy improved, so it became obvious that *South* could no longer be driven mainly by an anti-apartheid agenda nor could it for long escape the realities of the market-place. It was also evident that political change would make donor money increasingly difficult to procure as funding shifted from financing political activism to redressing the legacy of apartheid.¹⁶³

A problem that threatened to be the paper's undoing was *South*'s inability to sustain a circulation that would make it commercially viable. Its circulation averaged in the region of ten thousand copies per issue during the 1980s and spiked upwards occasionally when extraordinary political developments created greater demand for the paper.¹⁶⁴ By mid-1991 sales had slumped to between six and seven thousand and it was clear that desperate measures were needed to avert closure of the paper.¹⁶⁵ The management of *South* finally conceded that there was no real market for a left wing political paper in the Western Cape. It was decided to transform *South* from a serious political newspaper into a commercial paper with popular appeal. This was also seen as an opportunity to shake off the perception of *South* being an 'ANC rag'.¹⁶⁶

South thus embarked on a series of changes to broaden its appeal and become commercially viable, culminating in the relaunch of a revamped newspaper on 27 February 1992 that bore the slogan 'News for new times' to signal its fresh outlook. The most significant change was that *South* now tried to marry serious political reporting with

161 Rashid Seria, interviewed, 11/10/1998; Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

162 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

163 *South* was acutely aware of the looming funding crisis. See the series of three article on foreign funding in *South*, 7-21/3/1991.

164 *South* achieved its highest circulation ever of about twenty three thousand with the issue covering the release of Nelson Mandela. See Adhikari, '*South*', 347.

165 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; SNC, Seria, Funding proposal, 7.

166 SNC, Minutes of *South* bosberaad with directors and hod's, 7/5/1994.

racier sex and crime stories in an attempt to satisfy both its traditional readership as well as appeal to Coloured working class readers. Stories on drug abuse in schools, gang warfare, the life-styles of gang leaders, family murders, child rape, sexual harassment in the workplace and breast implants now jostled for space with the usual fare about worker militancy, apartheid exploitation and popular protest. The relaunch, however, was not a great success. These changes did little to improve the commercial viability of the newspaper and the financial position of *South* became ever more precarious. Circulation remained low and the paper continued to lose money.¹⁶⁷ *South* lost many of its traditional readers but failed to attract significant working class custom. The attempt to distance itself from the ANC did not last long as *South* soon 'slipped back into struggle mode'.¹⁶⁸ Ongoing problems of poor quality printing, poor marketing and distribution and perceptions of *South* as being 'too radical' by potential advertisers continued to plague the paper.¹⁶⁹

Political changes of the early 1990s also affected *South* adversely. As the incidence of local unrest died down and public attention shifted to the drama of negotiation for a political settlement at national level, *South* started losing much of its relevance to its traditional readership. Interest moved away from the Western Cape to the violence on the Witwatersrand and in Natal. *South's* regional focus was a liability at a time when the key questions of the day related to national issues such as whether a third force was operating to destabilize the society and whether the political centre would be able to hold against extremists of both the right and left in the quest for a political compromise. Newspapers such as the *Mail and Guardian* and the *Sunday Independent* became more attractive

167 SNC, Memo to South board of directors finance sub-committee, 15/11/1993; Rashid Seria, interviewed, 16/1/1998. SNC, Sales revenue, (11/1993?) contains a weekly breakdown of sales for 1993. See also SNC, Minutes of *South* bosberaad with directors and hod's, 7/5/1994.

168 SNC, Minutes of *South* bosberaad with directors and hod's, 7/5/1994.

week-end reading for *South*'s primary constituency. Also, as the emergency regulations were lifted and the more tolerant atmosphere of de Klerk's presidency took hold, the establishment press started encroaching on the terrain of the alternative newspapers, rendering the political reporting of papers such as *South* less distinctive.¹⁷⁰ As early as July 1991 Gabu Tugwana, editor of *New Nation*, complained that 'The mainstream newspapers have moved more like opportunists or hawks... our market has been sort of eaten'.¹⁷¹

Very importantly, with the lifting of media curbs and with liberatory organizations able to operate freely, *South*'s role as the voice of the democratic movement was also greatly diminished. *South*'s intimate relationship with the Western Cape UDF was broken when the unbanning of the ANC changed the nature of extra-parliamentary opposition politics virtually overnight. Rehana Rossouw, explains that during the 1980s;

We virtually had carte blanche on their (Western Cape UDF) news, and could attend any of their strategy and policy meetings. We also received copies of strategy and policy documents long before anyone else. It probably spoilt us somewhat, and (in the 1990s) we found ourselves out in the cold when South Africa became an international story and the 'in' we had was passed on to the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*.¹⁷²

Hopes in 1990 that *South* would somehow 'ride the wave of the ANC' did not materialize.¹⁷³

On the contrary, the relationship between *South* and the democratic movement, according to Rossouw, soured rapidly once free political activity was allowed and *South* started asking awkward questions. Antagonisms started building up already with the release of

169 SNC, Advertising Report, 7/5/1994.

170 C. Giffard, A. de Beer and E. Steyn, 'New media for the new South Africa' in F. Eribo and W. Jong-Ebot (eds.), *Press Freedom and Communication in Africa*, (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1997), 85.

171 Abel, *Politics by other Means*, 302.

Nelson Mandela in February 1990. Questions Rossouw asked about the inefficiency of arrangements around Mandela's appearance at the Grand Parade upon his release and why an unlicensed driver was allowed to chauffeur him on that day led to an abrupt termination of the interview and complaints lodged with the editor. The rapidity with which *South* became sidelined is demonstrated by the ANC 'forgetting' to invite *South* to its press conference the day before the Groote Schuur talks of 1 May 1990. Rossouw laments that after 1990 'there were times that the journalists became extremely frustrated, disillusioned and frankly, completely mystified at this change of attitude to us.'¹⁷⁴ The reality was that *South*, with its limited reach, had become expendable to the democratic movement that now pursued national and even international agendas.

As the political climate changed in the early 1990s it also became more acceptable to use racial terms and ethnic labels in public discourse. The salience of Coloured identity could no longer be denied as organizations across the political spectrum started appealing to Coloured identity for support in the Western Cape. Nelson Mandela's urging of the ANC to recognize 'Coloured ethnicity' as a political reality in the Western Cape in 1992 was an important step in the public acknowledgement of the existence of Coloured identity by the radical left.¹⁷⁵

There was a noticeable shift in *South's* reporting in mid-1991 as it started shedding the politically correct facade of pretending that racial identity did not have an independent existence amongst black people and started confronting issues of Coloured exclusivism and racism toward other groups, particularly Africans. The practice of putting 'Coloured'

172 Rehana Rossouw, e-mail communication with author, 20/7/1998.

173 SNC, Minutes of South bosberaad with directors and hods, 7/5/1994.

174 Rehana Rossouw, e-mail communication with author, 20/7/1998.

175 C. Saunders, (advisory ed.), *An Illustrated Dictionary of South African History*, (Sandton: Ibis

in quotation marks was dropped and racial identities and labels were much more commonly used in its reporting. The initial hesitancy of resorting to the use of racial terminology within the mass democratic movement as a whole during the early 1990s is reflected in the opening lines of a letter to the editor analysing the poor reception of the ANC within the Coloured community, even amongst those who had been enthusiastic supporters of the UDF; 'I apologize for the frequent use of certain terminology in this letter. However, to clear certain matters, this is unavoidable.'¹⁷⁶ By September of that year *South* had become sufficiently adventurous to refer to the earliest Coloured recruits to the National Party as 'Hotnats'.¹⁷⁷ The paper avoided gratuitous use of racial and ethnic labels, however, and remained true to its objective of fostering a non-racial democratic ethos in the society.

Already in June 1991 *South* noted the unseemly haste with which 'so many coloured people are prepared to forgive the Nats their trespasses.'¹⁷⁸ Issues of Coloured racial exclusivity, their antipathy towards Africans and the ANC as well as their preference of associating with whites, including those parties and leaders who had been directly responsible for their oppression, were particularly topical in the run-up to the 1994 elections and the post-mortem on the failure of the ANC to win the Western Cape provincial election.¹⁷⁹ The reality of racial tensions in the region were brought home forcefully to the paper when *South* staffers themselves fell victim to African hostility toward Coloured people. In August 1993 angry protesters from the Pan Africanist Student Organization turned on *South* journalists covering a march to demand the release

Books, 1994), 79.

176 *South*, 4/7/1991.

177 *South*, 12/9/1991.

178 *South*, 13/6/1991.

179 Refer to *South*, 4/7/1991; 12/9/1991; 7/11/1991; 2/5/1992; 23/5/1992; 14/11/1992; 20/2/1993; 3/3/1991; 10/4/1993; 3/9/1993; 9/12/1994 for a few examples.

of suspects arrested for the St. James Church massacre. When photographer Yunus Mohamed was felled by a brick that hit him in the groin a protester was heard to shout 'One settler down!' and reporter Ayesha Ismael was sworn at and taunted with being a 'coloured settler'.¹⁸⁰ It was subsequently joked that it would not have been inappropriate for the marchers at this point to have changed their usual chant of 'One settler, one bullet' to 'One coloured settler, one brick'.

Although *South* throughout its existence steadfastly maintained a non-racist stance it was unable to escape being seen by many as a Coloured newspaper. A double irony is that while it claimed to be non-racial and to be addressing the working class as a whole, *South* was not only perceived to be a Coloured newspaper by this self-same working class but actively targeted the Coloured component of the working class. *South* made no real attempt to reach the African working class and was virtually unknown to African readers except for a circumscribed circle of leading activists and members of the intelligentsia. The denial by a *South* editorial that '... we don't fit the ethnic stereotypes. We're not a coloured newspaper - nor white nor black nor anything else'¹⁸¹ confirmed its sensitivity in this regard. It is no co-incidence that this denial came precisely at a time when *South* became even more narrowly focused on the Coloured community as a result of a restructuring to make the paper more commercially viable.

The contradiction between maintaining a non-racial facade and targeting a Coloured readership is reflected in ambiguities over Coloured identity in the content of the paper. Most notably, although its political reporting was non-racial *South's* reporting on sports, social, church and human interest stories focused almost exclusively on the Coloured

¹⁸⁰ *South*, 14/8/1993.

community.¹⁸² This is emphasized by the disproportionate attention paid to Mitchells Plain, a sprawling, almost exclusively working class set of Coloured housing estates of over 400 000 people. An anomalous feature of *South's* non-political reporting in the 1980s, though, was its extensive coverage of the music scene in Cape Town's African townships. This is explained by the interest of *South's* arts and entertainment reporters in jazz music and the best jazz at the time being played in the African townships. The paper deservedly won the inaugural Carling Circle of Jazz Media Award in 1988.¹⁸³

Contemplating the charade of non-racism in the democratic movement during the 1980s *South* columnist Sylvia Vollenhoven commented that 'I heard so much talk of nonracialism and saw so little evidence.... Through it all there has always been a part of me that felt like the child in the crowd who saw no new clothes, only a fat, foolish, naked emperor.'¹⁸⁴

As a result of continuing losses, and pressure from funders the newspaper from mid-1993 embarked on a number of urgent changes to stave off closure.¹⁸⁵ It was decided to co-opt progressive businessmen onto the board of South Press Services at the August 1993 annual general meeting. There was a recognition that political and media activists who had hitherto dominated the management of the paper did not have the expertise to run the business profitably.¹⁸⁶ A major initiative in the bid for commercial viability by the new

181 *South*, 27/2/1992.

182 In the 1990s a greater attempt was made to report news from the African townships. *South's* non-political news remained overwhelmingly focused on the Coloured community though.

183 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998; Derek Carelse, interviewed, 13/10/1998; Rashid Seria, interviewed, 11/10/1998; *South*, 17/11/1988.

184 *South*, 13/6/1991.

185 Losses in the region of R400 000 were projected for 1993. See SNC, G. Berger and H. Veldsman, Staff bonus, 1993: A proposal by executive directors, 12/10/1993.

186 Rehana Rossouw, interviewed, 12/10/1998. Ebrahim Borat, prominent businessman and property developer, was appointed chief executive officer. Other well-known businessmen such as Sam Montsi, Fred Robertson and Yusuf Pahad were also appointed to the board. For a full list of the

board was the launching of a free sheet, *Southeaster*, from 18 February 1994 onwards. The free sheet was meant to be a purely commercial venture that would subsidise the political and ideological project of *South*. Although *Southeaster* had the potential to become a profitable enterprise, being situated in the one growth sector of the print media market, a lack of capital and gross financial mismanagement ensured that this ended up being an expensive failure that resulted in the liquidation of South Press Services when a desperate bid to sell the company to the black publishing firm New Africa Publications fell through in December 1994.¹⁸⁷

Given a broader perspective, however, *South*'s demise was essentially due to a combination of it being in no position to go into direct competition with the establishment press, which had massive technical and financial resources at its disposal, and its inability to find a niche large enough to sustain the paper. One of the ironies of *South* is that despite the noble intention of setting up a newspaper that 'would serve the interests of the working class' the paper was largely bought by the politicized and better educated sector of the Coloured middle class as well as white left and liberal sympathizers who wanted to keep abreast of struggle news in the Western Cape. This readership was not big enough to make *South* financially viable. The Coloured working class that it longed to serve presented an exceptionally difficult market for any newspaper to break into because the purchase of newspapers was very low on the list of priorities of most Coloured working class families. And by the time *South* came into existence television, which had been introduced into South Africa in the mid-1970s, had effectively displaced print media as a source of news and entertainment amongst the Coloured working classes.¹⁸⁸ Although a

new board of directors see SNC, Minutes of sixth annual general meeting of South Press Services, 16/8/1993.

187 For details see Adhikari, '*South*', 361-65.

188 M. Leahy and P. Voice, *SARAD Media Year Book, 1989* (Johannesburg: WTH Publications,

commercial failure, *South* can lay claim to considerable journalistic and political successes.¹⁸⁹ Both *South* and *Grassroots*, were very much products of the anti-apartheid struggle and it is not entirely surprising that they did not survive the apartheid era.

Moegsien Williams refers to *South* as having been 'schizophrenic'.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, it was engaged in a continuous juggling act to balance the demands of the market-place with that of the political arena, of trying to square the reality of its middle class readership with the unrequited desire to attract working class patronage and attempting to reconcile a studied non-racism with its targeting of a Coloured readership. The idea of serving the working classes was paradoxically its only hope for commercial viability but was at the same time a quixotic notion that had little chance of success. *South* management greatly underestimated the degree to which working class Coloured people actively disagreed with the radical politics of the UDF and of *South*. As Sylvia Vollenhoven put it, 'The politics of a relatively calm Mitchell's Plain is not the politics of a burning Spine Road'.¹⁹¹ Although the Coloured working classes were aggrieved at being victims of apartheid they did not necessarily subscribe to the radical politics of the UDF nor did they imbibe the democratic movement's non-racial, egalitarian message. This much is evident from the majority of working class Coloured voters heeding the National Party's racist appeal and flocking to its banner in the April 1994 elections.

This chapter has demonstrated that while Coloured rejectionism had grown into a significant movement by the time it climaxed in the latter half of the 1980s it was never a

1989), 59; G. Jackson, *Breaking Story*, 7; SNC, Annual Report, 1988. See also *South* 1/9/1988; SNC, Annual Report, 1989, 3.

189 See Adhikari, 'South', 367-69 for further detail.

190 Moegsien Williams, interviewed, 15/7/1998.

191 *South*, 13/6/1991. Spine Road, one of the main thoroughfares in Mitchell's Plain, was a favoured place for activists to erect barricades of burning tyres and where numerous clashes between youths

broadly-based popular current taken up by the mass of the Coloured people. It was generally confined to a highly vocal and visible politicized minority active within the anti-apartheid movement. Secondly, although Coloured rejectionism sprang from such worthy motives as wanting to banish racist thinking, exposing racial myths and fostering unity in the face of the divisions imposed by apartheid, it was in general not a credo held with deep conviction in the sense that most of its proponents firmly believed that Coloured identity did not exist or have any real social relevance¹⁹² even though this may have been proclaimed with gusto from political platforms or forcibly asserted in countless heated arguments over race, identity and strategies for ending apartheid. To most of those who renounced their identity as Coloured it was in the first place a refusal to countenance apartheid thinking and to many others it was also a recognition that this was a necessary step in the creation of a truly non-racial society rather than the expression of a genuine belief that Coloured identity did not exist and was purely the fabrication of the white ruling establishment.¹⁹³

and police took place.

192 Such peoples' commitment to non-racism, a different issue, is not being questioned. In my experience it tended to be trendy left whites whose social experience did not extend much beyond the leafier suburbs who implicitly believed that Coloured identity did not exist and was mainly a creation of the ruling order.

193 This is not to deny that there were some Coloured people who did hold such beliefs. See Duncan, 'Just because YOU think I'm a Coloured'.

CONCLUSION

Continuity and change: A review of Coloured identity in white supremacist South Africa

In this concluding chapter the enquiry will be brought full circle by analysing Hein Willemse's 1993 study of *Straatpraatjes*,¹ a newspaper column which appeared in the *APO* from its inception in 1909. This scholarly article, written at the very end of the era of white rule about a text that was not only produced during the formation of the white supremacist state but that also commented on this process, represents a perspective on Coloured identity and the community's history that gained currency amongst 'progressive', especially ANC-supporting, elements within the Coloured community during the dying days of the apartheid order. This view, characterized usually by an underlying tone of triumphalism in anticipation of a decisive victory over white supremacy, exaggerated Coloured resistance to white domination as well as their association with the African majority by stressing their identity as black. Though rejectionist in spirit this outlook grudgingly acknowledged the existence of Coloured identity as outright denial was no longer tenable by the mid-1990s.²

This case study will contest Willemse's interpretation of *Straatpraatjes* as one of the earliest examples of a tradition of resistance to white domination and self-assertion amongst black Afrikaans speakers.³ It will be argued that it is misleading to

1 H. Willemse, 'Die beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder in die *APO* (1909-1922)', *Stilet*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1993, 63-76.

2 See Willemse, 'Beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder', 65. Coloured rejectionism was not entirely dead yet as demonstrated by the Duncan chapter cited earlier.

3 Willemse in fact at one point claimed that *Straatpraatjes* was the first known example of such resistance expressed in the Afrikaans language. See H. Willemse, "'Ik is onbekend, ma ik is

characterize *Straatpraatjes* as the product of black Afrikaans speakers, or even to have been aimed at a black readership. *Straatpraatjes*, on the contrary, confirms the existence of profound ambiguities in Coloured identity and cannot simply be construed as an expression of black, or even Coloured, resistance to white domination.⁴ Willemse's analysis is based on a number of present-minded assumptions about the nature and history of Coloured identity through the twentieth century. And because he misunderstands the nature of Coloured protest politics of the early decades of the century, more specifically that of the APO, he ends up making misguided claims regarding the motives behind the writing of the *Straatpraatjes* column as well as the protagonist's identity and discourse.

This critique of Willemse's interpretation reinforces the dissertation's argument that throughout the period of white rule the continuities in the expression of Coloured identity were far more important to the way it operated as a social identity than the changes it experienced. The thesis will be rounded off with a brief review of its central contention that Coloured identity is better understood not as having evolved over the period under scrutiny but rather as having remained substantially the same.

Resistance, protest and accommodation: Piet Uithalder's *Straatpraatjes* column

Straatpraatjes was a satirical column that appeared in the Dutch-Afrikaans section of the *APO* newspaper between May 1909 and February 1922.⁵ Since the standardization

een van de ras so moet my nie veracht nie": Die beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder in die *APO* 1909-1922', unpublished paper presented at the fifth congress of the Afrikaanse Letterkunde-vereëning, University of Stellenbosch, 10/1992, 3.

4 For an earlier and more detailed version of this argument see M. Adhikari, "'Wanner gaat ons tog en eksampel neem uit die wit man s'boek": Resistance, protest and accommodation in Piet Uithalder's "*Straatpraatjes*" column, 1909-1922', *Stilet*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1996, 86-102.

5 For a detailed historical and linguistic analysis of the *Straatpraatjes* column see Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*.

of Afrikaans had hardly begun by 1909 and was only completed by the early 1920s this part of the paper contained a wide variety of language forms ranging from formal Dutch through Dutchified Afrikaans to the colloquial Afrikaans dialect spoken by the working classes of the southwestern Cape - what Professor Ponelis terms Cape Vernacular Afrikaans.⁶ *Straatpraatjes* was written in a variety of Cape Vernacular Afrikaans spoken in particular by the Coloured working classes residing in the inner-city areas of Cape Town.⁷

It was narrated by Piet Uithalder, a fictitious character, and tells of the social experiences and the political encounters of Piet and his friend, Stoffel Francis. Piet and Stoffel were former shepherds from the Kat River Settlement who had managed to acquire some education and had become politicized as a result. They had migrated to Cape Town where they joined the APO and Uithalder attached himself to the organization's Head Office staff as a voluntary worker. Piet, who is portrayed as socially unsophisticated and somewhat naive, could speak only Afrikaans. He relied on Stoffel, who had a rudimentary grasp of the English language and some knowledge of middle class social etiquette, to act as his guide and interpreter.⁸ Using this vernacular with wit and ingenuity Uithalder brought some humour to a newspaper otherwise given to high seriousness.

Amongst other things, Piet related his experiences at dinner parties, picnics along Cape Town's Atlantic seaboard and a wide variety of APO functions. He also gave

6 See F. Ponelis, 'Codes in contradiction: The socio-linguistics of *Straatpraatjes*' in Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 131-32.

7 For more detail see R. Pheiffer, 'Straatpraatjes - 'n vroeë voorbeeld van Alternatiewe Afrikaans' in Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 141-62; M. Adhikari, 'Coloured identity and the politics of language: The socio-political context of Piet Uithalder's "Straatpraatjes" column' in Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 6, 16.

his impression of public events such as the celebration of the King's birthday, election meetings and the Steilenbosch Agricultural Show. Uithalder often inveighed against white racism and took particular delight in ridiculing uncouth whites, especially 'boere' from the 'backveld'. He, in addition, chided Coloured people for being too colour conscious and poked fun at the social pretensions of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie. *Straatpraatjes*, at one time or another, also delivered commentary on all of the key political issues confronting the Coloured community during this period. Lampooning rival Coloured political organizations was one of Uithalder's main pre-occupations. He was relentless in his ridicule of their leaders and in parodying their meetings. Piet and Stoffel, moreover, regularly visited Parliament, especially during the earlier period of the column's existence. Much of *Straatpraatjes* was thus devoted to satirizing the proceedings of Parliament. It was especially the racist attitudes of parliamentarians and the passage of segregatory legislation that elicited comment from Uithalder.⁹

Straatpraatjes was one of the most effective weapons in the *APO*'s journalistic arsenal. The combination of Uithalder's razor sharp wit and the novelty of writing in colloquial language gave *Straatpraatjes* a popularity and political punch beyond that of the newspaper's other features. From the time it appeared in the *APO*'s first issue *Straatpraatjes* formed an integral part of the newspaper's agenda of furthering the aims of the *APO* and articulating the interests of the Coloured community. Piet clearly saw himself as a spokesman for the Coloured community as a whole and did not shy away from sensitive or controversial issues. If anything, *Straatpraatjes* had the virtue of allowing Uithalder to say in jest what the *APO* did not feel comfortable articulating

8 *APO*, 24/5/1909; 23/10/1909; 26/2/1912.

in the rest of the newspaper.¹⁰

Although there appears to be no special connotations attached to the name Stoffel Francis, other than that it hinted at his rural origins and Afrikaans background, the opposite is true of the narrator. Uithalder had meanings that resonated with the readership of the column at several levels. Most simply, 'uithalder' meant 'clever' or 'smart' and Piet Uithalder, being the equivalent of Smart Alec, was an eminently suitable pseudonym for the author of a column of this nature. But, as Hein Willemse points out, the term can also mean 'excellent' or 'the best' and could thus be construed as a conscious challenge to the stereotyping of Coloured people as intellectually limited and socially inferior.¹¹ Most significantly, however, the name Uithalder held strong connotations of black resistance to white domination for politicized Coloured people during the early twentieth century. Willem Uithalder was a prominent leader of the Kat River Rebellion of 1851. It is thus no coincidence that Piet Uithalder hailed from Kat River and was presumably a descendant of the rebel leader.¹²

The Kat River settlement had a special place in the hearts and minds of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century because they saw the grant of this land as symbolic of Britain's recognition of their loyalty to the Empire and their claim to full citizenship rights. This much is evident from the way Uithalder equated Kat

9 See Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 20 ff. for a selection of illustrated and annotated *Straatpraatjes* columns.

10 *Straatpraatjes* was, for example, used to level accusations of the embezzlement of APO funds at John Tobin, its former vice-president, and to finger Charles Hull, Transvaal Treasurer and MLA for Georgetown, as a 'pass-white'. *APO*, 4/12/1909; 15/1/1910; 18/6/1910; 4/4/1914; Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 63, 67, 81.

11 H. Willemse, "Ons het lang genoeg gekruip net soes gedierte na die wit man": Enkele aspekte van Piet Uithalder se "Straatpraatjes" rubriek, (*APO*), 'n eerste verkenning', unpublished paper presented at the conference, 'Taal en identiteit', Leiden University, 6/1992.

River with equal rights when describing his first encounter with W.P. Schreiner; 'Achter Stoffel my geintroduce het, toe gaat die geselserij aan. Mr. Schreiner vertel mij van die Kat River equal rights. Slavernij, excise, rebellion, Botha en so an' (After Stoffel introduced me the discussion really got going. Mr. Schreiner told me about the Kat River equal rights. Slavery, excise, rebellion, Botha and so forth).¹³ The loss of this land, however, was attributed to settler greed and racism of the sort they still had to contend with. While the Kat River Rebellion has today faded from popular memory in the Western Cape, at the time it was recalled with pride. At one point Piet thus warned racists that 'die Kat River's Hotnots... weet hoe om e boer agter die klip uit te haal' (the Kat River Hottentots... know how to remove a boer from behind a rock).¹⁴

Although the newspaper never revealed the identities of the authors of *Straatpraatjes*, the evidence points to Dr. Abdurahman having written nearly all of the columns. The consistency of style and the continuity of themes over the entire life of the column suggest that *Straatpraatjes* was largely the work of a single author. Uithalder's implacable opposition to the consumption of alcohol amongst Coloured people and his intense interest in the politics of Ward Six and the Castle Division are clear indications of Abdurahman's authorship.¹⁵ In addition, Uithalder displayed a knowledge of politics and a sophistication of analysis that very few, if any, APO members besides Abdurahman possessed. It is also no coincidence that Abdurahman

12 *APO*, 24/5/1909; 19/6/1909.

13 *APO*, 19/6/1909.

14 *APO*, 11/3/1911.

15 Abdurahman's relentless opposition to liquor interests derived both from his Muslim background and his knowledge, as medical doctor, of the pernicious effects of alcoholism on the individual and family life. It was accepted within the APO that the authorities encouraged the consumption of alcohol within the Coloured working classes as a means of providing the wine industry with a market for its poorer quality product and keeping Coloured people in subjection. Hence Uithalder's aphorism 'moenie stem ver goedkoop wijn nie, want het is duur betaal' (don't vote for cheap wine, for that is paying dearly). See *APO*, 11/9/1909. Abdurahman represented the Ward Six and the Castle Division constituencies as City

and Uithalder happened to attend the same social functions, witness the same incidents and travel around together. Writing in the *SA Clarion* eight years after he broke with the organization, N. R. Veldsman, the former Assistant Secretary of the APO, hinted that Abdurahman was the author of *Straatpraatjes*.¹⁶ One cannot, however, discount the possibility of some collaboration between Abdurahman and Fredericks, editor of the *APO*, in the writing of the column.

While it is not clear how the idea of writing *Straatpraatjes* originated, it appears to have been partly prompted by the *Parlementse Praatjes* column in *De Zuid Afrikaan*, the leading Dutch daily newspaper in Cape Town at the time.¹⁷ Written in an urbane, lightly humorous vein under the pseudonym Jan Kieser,¹⁸ *Parlementse Praatjes* reported on the doings of Parliament in language that is best described as an educated, white, middle class version of Afrikaans in contrast to the formal Dutch used in the rest of the newspaper. Thus, in the same way the *APO* saw *Parlementse Praatjes* representing the white supremacist interests of the Afrikaner in the language of the Afrikaner, so it instituted *Straatpraatjes* to voice Coloured interests in the language of the Coloured community. As the title of the column indicates, it was the intention of Uithalder to contrast his Afrikaans of the street and kitchen with that of white speakers of the language which he associated with parliament and parlour. By writing in what Hubertus Elffers in 1908 called the 'real patois',¹⁹ the language of the Coloured working classes of the south-western Cape, Piet consciously identified with

Councillor and Member of the Provincial Council respectively.

16 *S. A. Clarion*, 17/1/1920.

17 Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 182-85.

18 To my knowledge the identity of Jan Kieser was never revealed. There was, however, speculation that J. H. H. (Jannie) de Waal, journalist, politician and champion of the Afrikaans language, was the author of *Parlementse Praatjes*, a charge he hotly denied. *De Zuid Afrikaan*, 18/3/1913.

19 H. Elffers, *The Englishman's Guide to the Speedy and Easy Acquisition of Cape Dutch*, (Cape Town, Juta, 1908), 5-6.

the Coloured community and used the vernacular to appeal to their identity as Coloured people.

Straatpraatjies, unlike other examples of this patois in early Afrikaans literature, represents as authentic a replication of the Afrikaans vernacular spoken within the urban Coloured community of the western Cape as one could hope to find in print. The authors of the column were clearly mother tongue speakers of Cape Vernacular Afrikaans. And because there were no formal spelling and grammatical rules to follow they wrote the language as they themselves spoke it. The monologic format of the column, in addition, meant that Piet Uithalder addressed the readers directly as if he were speaking to them.

In nearly all instances where this patois occurs in early Afrikaans literature it was used by white authors to caricature blacks, their language being distorted for comic effect and reinforcing negative racial stereotypes.²⁰ In *Straatpraatjies*, however, Piet addressed his readers in the distinctive code of his community in order to demonstrate that he was one of them. He wanted to establish an emotional bond with them and to gain their confidence. It was therefore important that Uithalder's language come across as genuine. The popularity of *Straatpraatjies* and the enthusiastic response from readers are clear testimony to its success in this regard. Thus in *Straatpraatjies* Coloured people are invested with a dignity and the language they speak with a propriety not found elsewhere in early Afrikaans writing. Although Piet also distorts the language for comic effect, such as when depicting Stoffel's broken English or Sir

20 C. van der Merwe, *Breaking Barriers: Stereotypes and the changing of values in Afrikaans writing, 1875-1990*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1994), 22-34; February, *Mind Your Colour*, ch. 1; J. Gerwel, *Literatuur en Apartheid: Konsepsies van 'gekleurdes' in die Afrikaanse roman*, (Kasselsvlei, Kampen, 1983).

Thomas Smartt's attempts at speaking Afrikaans, these instances are relatively few and far between and were not used to demean any racial or ethnic group.²¹

Although both the authors and the majority of the column's readers were members of the Coloured elite it is clear that they were intimately familiar with the social practices and the language of the Coloured labouring poor for as indicated earlier²² there was no great social distance between the Coloured petty bourgeoisie and the Coloured working classes. Many members of the Coloured elite such as Uithalder himself and other *Straatpraatjes* characters including Mrs. Janewari and Mrs. Shepherd who were described as being 'partikelaar' (particular),²³ lived in or close to working class neighbourhoods and continued to socialize with friends and relatives from the humbler ranks of the community. Even the most Anglicized members of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie could still speak Cape Vernacular Afrikaans. In *Straatpraatjes* Abdurahman, for example, expressed a clear preference for Coloured working class fare such as 'krief kerrie', 'smoer vis en klein artapeljes', 'gebakte snoek', 'kweper sambal' and 'gars kofe' ('braised fish with baby potatoes', 'fried snoek', 'quince chutney', and 'barley coffee').²⁴ And in 1993 Achmat Davids quoted his ninety year old aunt as confirming that 'Dr. Doel was o'se heis dokter. Hy het Afferkaans soes o's ghapraat' (Dr. Doel was our family doctor. He spoke Afrikaans in the manner we did).²⁵

The higher status accorded to the English language and connotations of social

21 See for example, *APO*, 23/10/1909; Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 56.

22 See pages 126-27 above.

23 *APO*, 3/7/1909; 3/6/1911.

24 See *APO*, 9/10/1909; Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 6.

25 A. Davids, "'Straatpraatjes': An extension of slave Afrikaans?", (unpublished manuscript, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1993), 2.

inferiority attached to Afrikaans, attitudes common within the Coloured community, are clearly evident in *Straatpraatjes*. Uithalder's humble status was, for example, signalled by the variant of Afrikaans he spoke and his inability to understand English whereas Stoffel's social aspirations were evident from his determination to speak English even though he was hardly proficient in the language. Similarly, on numerous occasions Uithalder caused 'rouwe boere' to betray their lack of refinement through their broken English or by conversing in 'kombuis Hollans'.²⁶ The identification with English culture is also reflected in the personal names adopted by characters in *Straatpraatjes*. Thus the Gedults preferred the surname Patience, Miss November tried to disguise her Afrikaans background by calling herself Miss Wember and Mrs. Margaret Shepherd would have been mortified to be called 'ta Grietjie Skawagter' as she was known back in Kat River. Uithalder himself preferred Outholder when in refined company.²⁷

The most immediate reason for the *APO* resorting to colloquial language in *Straatpraatjes* was that it heightened the comic effect of Uithalder's satire. Uithalder demonstrated time and again that this flexible and highly expressive vernacular provided an unparalleled medium for taunting opponents, ridiculing the vain, exposing social injustice and evoking nostalgia for 'die ou dage' (the old days). It is also apparent from readers' responses that they enjoyed the novelty of seeing their home language, which they considered to be no more than a menial argot, in print. That Uithalder hit out at their oppressors in a code recognizably their own clearly added to their pleasure. Very importantly, Piet's use of the vernacular to appeal to Coloured identity underscored the *APO*'s claim that it represented the Coloured people. Even

26 For some examples see *APO*, 24/5/1909; 26/2/1910; 5/11/1910; 19/11/1910; 12/8/1911.

though the Afrikaans vernacular had become stigmatized and the APO, in its desire to live up to Western bourgeois norms and values distanced itself from it,²⁸ Uithalder nevertheless recognized the depth of its emotional appeal and its potential for mobilizing Coloured opinion.

Straatpraatjes was a very successful column and remained one of the *APO*'s most popular features. Piet Uithalder's perceptive observations and his penchant for broaching sensitive issues in a forthright manner provides unique insights into the social identity and political attitudes within the Coloured community during the early years of Union. Published at a time when the direct testimony of Coloured people is sparse in the historical record, *Straatpraatjes* adds nuance and texture not found elsewhere in the historical record. What is more, Uithalder is a pioneer of satirical writing in Afrikaans. Already in the earlier *Straatpraatjes* columns Uithalder employed satirical techniques thought to have been introduced into Afrikaans by Langenhoven in the mid-1920s.²⁹ Indeed, *Straatpraatjes* was so successful that it spawned an English equivalent, 'The office boy's reflections' authored by Johnny, the *APO*'s 'office boy'. It was, however, the *S. A. Clarion*, so often at the receiving end of Piet Uithalder's invective, that paid *Straatpraatjes* the ultimate compliment of copying the idea and publishing its own *Straatpraatjes* column written by Frits Johannes Vaalpens.³⁰

In an article published in *Stilet*, the journal of the Afrikaans Literature Association, of September 1993 Hein Willemse, who in the context of the South African racial

27 *APO*, 20/11/1909; 2/7/1910; 16/7/1910; 3/6/1911; 17/6/1911.

28 Refer to pages 128-29 above.

29 Pheiffer, 'Vroeë voorbeeld', 158-59.

30 Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 176-81.

system would be regarded as Coloured, explores the *weltanschauung* of Piet Uithalder's *Straatpraatjes* column, focussing in particular on the implications his discourse held for the racial stereotyping of black Afrikaans speakers.³¹ In this article Willemse, at the time a lecturer in the Afrikaans Department of the University of the Western Cape, presents Uithalder's writings as an unequivocal challenge to white cultural hegemony and the perception of black people as inferior, especially within the Afrikaans-speaking sector of the ruling minority. He also argues that Uithalder's discourse represented a form of intellectual resistance to colonial domination that laid the basis for later, more effective means of resisting white supremacy.

Willemse prefaces his analysis of the *Straatpraatjes* column by explaining that Afrikaans language and literature are on the whole elite, white-centred cultural constructions produced by generations of Afrikaner culture brokers. Oppositional voices to these ruling perceptions, he argues, were either absent as a result of illiteracy and social domination or, where they arose, were effectively silenced through being marginalized or ignored. To restore Afrikaans to its rightful status as a multi-vocal medium it is necessary to resurrect these silenced voices. Piet Uithalder, Willemse asserts, represents one such voice, his choice of the 'Kaapse werkerstaal' (Cape working class language) being a conscious act of resistance to white domination.³² *Straatpraatjes* therefore provides a rare opportunity of exploring an early counter-hegemonic voice from within the community of black Afrikaans speakers. Willemse argues that Uithalder's column challenged fundamental assumptions underpinning the colonial order and white supremacist ideology in South Africa. He focuses on four aspects of Uithalder's discourse, namely, the significance he attached to education, his

31 Willemse, 'Beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder', 63-76. See also H. Willemse, "'Ik is onbekend, ma ik is een van der ras so moet my nie veracht nie": Die beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder' in Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 163-75.

32 In this analysis Willemse draws in particular on F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act*, (London, Methuen, 1981) and H. Bhahba, 'The other question: Difference, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism' in F. Barker, et al., *Literature, politics and theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976-1984*, (London, Methuen, 1986).

deprecation of the consumption of alcohol amongst Coloured people, the status he assumes as traveller and independent observer and his attitude toward whites. All four, Willemse maintains, defined the relationship between oppressed and oppressor in significant ways and were effectively used by Uithalder to undermine colonial categorizations.³³

Firstly, Willemse points out that Uithalder often inveighed against discrimination in the education system because it impeded Coloured people's access to skilled employment and social advancement. Besides educational attainment in itself being a status symbol, Uithalder recognized education to be a fundamental source of power because literacy and technological advancement formed the basis of colonial domination. Secondly, Willemse holds that Uithalder's anti-liquor campaign was largely motivated by his perception that alcoholic abuse amongst Coloured people was symbolic of their subjection. Not only did whites induce alcoholic addiction through the tot system to ensure a docile labour force but they also used liquor to manipulate Coloured voters. Thirdly, Willemse claims that through his incisive observations and independent reportage during his travels in South Africa and England, Uithalder broke the stereotype of blacks as intellectually inferior to whites, fit only for subservient roles. By presenting Uithalder as an autonomous, reflective individual *Straatpraaijies* challenged the deeply entrenched assumption of Afrikaner paternalist ideology that Coloured people will find their destiny under the guardianship of the Afrikaner. Most significant of all in Willemse's view is Uithalder's attitude to whites. Not only was he highly critical of whites but his demand for 'equal rights' and portrayal of 'boere' and poor whites as socially inferior to middle class blacks further subverted the stereotyping of black people as inferior, degenerate beings incapable of civilization.³⁴

33 Willemse, 'Beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder', 63-64.

34 Willemse, 'Beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder', 66-70.

Willemse concludes by arguing that notwithstanding his identification with English culture, Uithalder's writings represent the beginnings of the intellectual liberation of black Afrikaans speakers and their resistance to Afrikaner domination. Not previously having made any mention of it, Willemse in his conclusion concedes that Uithalder's discourse does embody an element of assimilationism to white middle class culture but glosses over it as having the same purpose as resistance, namely, the creation of a worthy self-image.³⁵

Given the racial exclusivity of the APO³⁶ there can be no doubt, Willemse's claims notwithstanding, that Uithalder did not see himself as black but that he self-consciously identified himself as a Coloured person and that he wrote specifically for a Coloured readership. After all, the first thing Uithalder did was to introduce himself as 'een van de ras'³⁷ (a member of the race) to stress that he was Coloured. He characterized himself as a 'bruine mens' (brown person) and often voiced opinions about, and on behalf of, 'onse bruin mense' (our brown people) and 'onse ras' (our race).³⁸ Indeed, not only was he comfortable with his racially exclusive identity as a Coloured person but appeared to accept prevailing racial categories as a natural state of affairs. He thus, for example, freely used racial terms such as boer, hotnot (Hottentot), half-naatje (half-breed) and slams (Muslim) to describe people.³⁹ And although he clearly had sympathy for Africans as fellow sufferers under an unjust racial system, Uithalder had no compunction about using the pejorative 'kaffer'⁴⁰ or

35 Willemse, 'Beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder', 71.

36 See pages 133-34 above.

37 APO, 24/5/1909.

38 See APO, 24/5/1909; 19/6/1909; 17/6/1911; 10/10/1919 for examples.

39 Refer to APO, 5/6/1909; 4/12/1909; 12/2/1910; 11/3/1911; 17/6/1911; 18/11/1911 for further examples.

40 APO, 28/8/1909; 12/2/1910; 13/7/1912; 22/3/1913; 21/9/1919.

even 'rouwe kaffer' (raw kaffir)⁴¹ when referring to Africans. Uithalder also, as a matter of course drew distinctions between 'kleurling' (Coloured) and 'swartling' (African), 'bruine en kaffer', 'bruine en swart' (black) and 'kaffers' and 'hotnots'.⁴²

Willemse's description of Uithalder as a 'swart rubriekskrywer' (black columnist) and as representative of black Afrikaans speakers is thus misleading.⁴³ Uithalder certainly did not have a racially dichotomous view of South African society and distinctions he drew between white English speakers, Afrikaners, Coloured people and Africans are pivotal to a nuanced understanding of his discourse. What is more, at no point does Uithalder evince allegiance to a wider black identity nor does he ever describe himself as black in this sense. It also needs to be noted that his assimilationism, while it may serve as evidence of self-assertion, also functioned to associate Uithalder with the dominant society and distance himself from Africans.

Thus although Piet abhorred racial discrimination and castigated white supremacists he was not able to rise fully above the racist ideology that so powerfully shaped the world view of his society. The resultant ambiguities are abundantly evident in *Straatpraatjies*. Despite his frequent challenges to the ruling order with assertions of the sort that 'we are all South Africans'⁴⁴ and 'kleur gee e mens nie e gooie karakter nie' (colour does not give one a good character),⁴⁵ Uithalder just as often displays acceptance of the racial categorizations imposed by the dominant society. Faced with the predicament of Coloured marginality and trying to capitalize on their status of privilege relative to Africans, as argued earlier, the APO had to negotiate a tricky path

41 *APO*, 3/8/1910; 18/11/1911.

42 *APO*, 15/1/1910; 29/1/1910; 12/2/1910; 26/2/1910.

43 Willemse, 'Beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder', 63-64.

44 *APO*, 19/6/1909.

between protest and accommodation, on the one hand, and between assimilationism and Coloured separatism, on the other. Continually modulating its responses to white supremacism to strike a balance between these competing interests, the *APO* was inevitably inconsistent and ambivalent in its political outlook and this was clearly reflected in *Straatpraatjes*.

Uithalder's choice of language also does not represent an uncomplicated act of defiance by a black Afrikaans speaker intent on asserting the worth of his particular code of Afrikaans, as Willemsse seems to think. The use of colloquial Afrikaans in *Straatpraatjes* was fraught with tensions and ambiguities not least because it was written by authors, and for a readership, that preferred English even though Afrikaans may have been their mother tongue. As demonstrated earlier, Afrikaans was associated with social inferiority, cultural backwardness and Afrikaner racism in the minds of the Coloured elite while English was revered as the language of culture, civilization and progress.⁴⁶ Rather than simply being an act of resistance, the decision to write in colloquial Afrikaans was in part also a grudging concession to the prevalence and deep emotional appeal of the language amongst its constituency by a modernizing elite that wanted to distance itself from 'barbarous Cape Dutch'. Thus despite its appropriation of the Coloured working class patois and providing true-to-life descriptions of their popular culture, *Straatpraatjes* largely embodied the values and aspirations of the Coloured elite.⁴⁷

Published over a period of thirteen years - albeit with a break of five years between 1913 and 1918 - the 102 surviving *Straatpraatjes* columns inevitably reflect the

45 *APO*, 17/6/1911.

changing social and political context in which it operated. It also mirrors the changing fortunes of the APO from the optimism and vigour that marked its protest campaign of 1909-10 through the steady decline after Union and the revival of the organization in 1919 as outlined earlier.⁴⁸ There were critical changes in Uithalder's social and political outlook over the thirteen year period the column appeared that Willemse fails to recognize. Instead he presents a static and oversimplified picture of uncompromising resistance on the part of Uithalder.

Straatpraatjes came into being at a time of heightened concern amongst Coloured people about the erosion of their civil rights and the implementation of segregatory measures. The assimilationist overtures of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie had been firmly rejected by the dominant society and they experienced a hardening of racial barriers in the years following the Anglo-Boer War. Avenues for social advancement, particularly in education and employment were being closed and their civil rights were under serious threat. Frustrated by the deterioration in their social status, the Coloured elite rallied behind the APO which grew rapidly under the dynamic leadership of Abdurahman.⁴⁹ Representing a marginal group the APO was unable to stem the flood of discriminatory measures Coloured people faced in the early part of the twentieth century despite vociferous and well organized protests. The pressures of intensifying segregationism thus pervaded the Straatpraatjes column and each new discriminatory measure drew ascerbic commentary from Uithalder.

During the first year of its existence the newspaper, and hence also the Straatpraatjes

46 Refer to pages 127-29 in Chapter 3.

47 M. Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 7-8.

48 See pages 139-40, 142 above.

column, was largely devoted to campaigning against the Draft South Africa Act in terms of which the Union of South Africa was to be constituted. Uithalder's discourse was not opposed to Union per se but rather to those clauses of the Act that denied blacks outside of the Cape the franchise and deprived those within the Colony of the right to be elected to the new Union Parliament.⁵⁰ There was thus much discussion in the column about the Joint African and Coloured Delegation that travelled to London to petition the British Government to modify the Draft South Africa Act. Indeed, Piet and Stoffel were made to accompany the Delegation to London and related their adventures on the trip.⁵¹ Riding the wave of Coloured anger and apprehension at the imposition of a racially exclusive political settlement on South Africa, the APO was at its most vigorous and *Straatpraatjes* at its most spirited during this period. Uithalder displayed a remarkably creative impulse both in his use of the vernacular as well as in conjuring up images and scenes of great hilarity. This was also the time when Piet was at his most defiant and his satire at its most trenchant.

Not long after Union though, a subtle change is observable as Uithalder's satire started losing some of its bite. This was largely the result of a demoralized APO having changed its strategy and gradually, its political outlook as well in the aftermath of Union. The organization was forced to reconsider its methods and objectives because the failure of its high-profiled political campaigns brought home the extent of Coloured marginality and the limitations of this activist strategy. Enervated by its inability to stem the tide of segregation, the APO slowly declined into a state of

49 Trapido, 'African Political Organization', 97, 103; Lewis, *Between the Wire and Wall*, 27 ff.; *APO*, 14 /1/1911; *South African News*, 9/8/1905.

50 Thompson, *Unification*, 25-26, 340-41; *APO*, 24/5/1909; 17/7/1909; 28/8/1909.

51 See *APO*, 3/7/1909 - 9/10/1909; Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, 35-54.

dormancy by the beginning of 1914.⁵² By this time few branches were active and the leadership no longer even had sufficient will to organize a conference annually. This culminated in the *APO* ceasing publication for nearly four years.

The decline in the organization was not as obvious in *Straatpraatjes* as in the rest of the paper. Given its purpose of ridiculing opponents, exposing social injustice and satirizing South African society it kept up a brave front for longer. Although Uithalder managed to retain a tone of strident protest throughout, after 1912 he seldom wrote with the flair and humour that marked the earlier episodes. Also, the column appeared less regularly and a hint of despondency crept into the writing. At one point Uithalder lamented that; 'die pilserige dage is nou verbij. Nou moet e mens al dag sit te wagte wat Hertzog of een van die Vaal pense boere se. Ik woort so mismoedig partij keers dat ik soma wil e dop stik, net om mij spirits op te hou' (the good days are gone. All that one can do now is to sit and wait to hear what Hertzog or one of the greybelly farmers have to say. Sometimes I get so depressed I feel like taking a drink just to keep up my spirits).⁵³ The *Straatpraatjes* column was discontinued for six years in October 1913 without any reason being offered for the cessation.

The stresses and strains on the *APO* and its leadership in the post-World War I period detailed earlier⁵⁴ were clearly manifest in the revived *Straatpraatjes* column. By the time he took up the pen again in August 1919 Piet Uithalder had lost his sense of humour and assumed a hectoring tone. His creative impulse and resourcefulness with the vernacular had deserted him. The column became repetitious, perfunctory and appeared less regularly. During this period Piet Uithalder was almost exclusively

52 See pages 139-40 above for further detail.

concerned with discrediting Coloured supporters of the National Party grouped around the United Afrikaner League and its mouthpiece the *S. A. Clarion*.

A measure of the change in the APO's political outlook that had occurred in the meantime is demonstrated by Uithalder's retreat from the defiant challenge he issued to the white supremacist establishment in 1912;

Ons het lang genoeg gekruip net soes gedierte na die wit man. Dit is nou tijd dat ons moet reg op staan... en nie meer met hoet in die hand en met gebuide kneei 'asseblief baas' en 'ja baas' se nie (We have for long enough crawled like animals to the white man. It is now time that we stood up straight... and no longer with hat in hand and on bended knee say 'please master' and 'yes master')⁵⁵

to the frustrated resignation of 1922;

'Ma ons bly ma altoes agter wanner dit kom dat ons self moet iets doen... Wanner gaat ons tog en eksampel neem uit die wit man s' boek?'. (We are always tardy when we have to do something for ourselves.... When are we going to take an example out of the white man's book?).⁵⁶

Even more striking was Uithalder's about-face in his attitude toward the South African Party. Whereas the likes of Smuts and Botha were given short shrift in earlier columns and were characterized as 'vaalpense' (greybellies) and 'die vyand' (the enemy), in the revived column Uithalder praised Smuts as 'e knappe man' (a smart man) and 'e dappere leier' (a brave leader).⁵⁷ Upon his return to South Africa after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles Uithalder even went so far as to welcome him home with a fawning 'Ja Smuts... ons het jou baayan gemis' (yes Smuts... we missed you a lot).⁵⁸

53 *APO*, 8/3/1913.

54 See pages 142-44 above.

55 *APO*, 13/1/1912.

56 *APO*, 11/2/1922.

57 *APO*, 12/11/1919; 17/4/1920.

58 *APO*, 15/8/1919.

The latter volte-face on the part of Uithalder was very much a consequence of the dilemma that their marginality posed Coloured people in the party political arena. The APO had little option but to back the political party that best served Coloured interests, especially at election time. This in effect meant that the APO was forced to choose between the lesser of two or more racist parties. The APO's predicament in this regard was abundantly clear in the very first episode of *Straatpraatjes* when Uithalder gave vent to his disappointment at the Unionist Party's support of the Draft South Africa Act. As the political home of Cape liberalism the APO had depended on it to defend Coloured civil rights. It was therefore with some justification that the APO characterized the Cape Parliament's endorsement of the Draft South Africa Act as 'The Great Betrayal'.⁵⁹ After 1920, when the Unionist Party disbanded and most of its members joined the South African Party, the APO found itself with little choice but to switch its allegiance to the party of Botha and Smuts which it had formerly castigated as racist and unprogressive. The only alternatives were to support the even more racist National or Labour Parties or to pursue a futile policy of boycott.

The oppositional element of Uithalder's writing cannot therefore appropriately be characterized as resistance - 'verset' in Willemse's parlance.⁶⁰ In this regard a distinction needs to be drawn between the concepts of protest and resistance. At the very least the concept of resistance, whether violent or passive, implies rejection of the ruling order and the desire to embrace a social and political system informed by alternative norms and values.⁶¹ Given their assimilationism and the degree to which they were prepared to come to an accommodation with the South African racial

59 *APO*, 24/5/1909; 11/9/1909; 9/4/1910.

60 Willemse, 'Beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder', 65, 70, 71.

61 See P. Stearns, (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Social History*, (New York, Garland Publishing, 1994), 591-95; A. Barnard and J. Spencer, (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, (London, Routledge, 1996), 488-89.

system, the political strategy of the *APO* and *Straatpraatjes* can hardly be described as resistance. The political strategy of the *APO*, of which the *Straatpraatjes* column was an integral part, conforms much more closely to the concept of protest, the essential features of which are outlined by Crummey; 'Protest assumes some common social and political order linking protesters and those to whom the protesters appeal. Protesters tend to direct their energy to the redressing of grievances arising from that order.'⁶² It is abundantly clear that Uithalder did not want to overthrow or replace the system he was satirizing, he merely wanted to change it sufficiently for Coloured people to share fully in its benefits.

While not wishing to deny that there was a dimension of defiance to the *Straatpraatjes* column, it is clear that Piet Uithalder's response to white domination was more complex than simply being one of resistance. As this examination of *Straatpraatjes* and of the *APO* newspaper earlier on has demonstrated, the response of Uithalder, as indeed of most politicized Coloured people of the time, was characterized by a profound ambiguity in its racial perceptions, its attitude toward the white ruling establishment as well as in the political strategy it deployed. Though he in many ways opposed white supremacism and helped to undermine it, there were other ways in which Uithalder had come to an accommodation with the South African racial order and attempted both to work within the system and to work the system for the benefit of Coloured people. Despite professing non-racism there was nevertheless a tendency toward Coloured exclusivism and an over-riding desire for assimilation into the dominant society within the *APO* and hence within *Straatpraatjes* as well. Uithalder's chastisement of Coloured people for not taking 'en eksampel... uit die wit man se boek' in the last column he wrote is an indication that the impetus for assimilation and

62 D. Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, (London, James Currey, 1986), 10.

accommodation in his discourse came to overshadow his impulse to resist.

The argument presented by Willemse and the sentiment underpinning it typifies opinion within the 'progressive', largely ANC-supporting minority faction of the Coloured community that at the close of the apartheid period entertained exaggerated notions of Coloured resistance to white rule and their identification with Africans as fellows in oppression. The sub-text of his argument is that this tradition of resistance - of which *Straatpraatjes* is held to be one of the earliest, if not the first, examples to be expressed in Afrikaans - was to grow from strength to strength through the twentieth century culminating in an important contribution by Coloured people to the impending victory of the non-racial democratic movement over apartheid in the mid-1990s.

Not only is it ahistoric to read these mid-1990s assumptions and values back into Coloured responses to white supremacy during the early decades of the twentieth century but, as this dissertation has demonstrated, there is very little evidence or logical grounds for supporting such an interpretation. There is no identifiable tradition of resistance, intellectual or political, of the sort envisaged by Willemse dating back to the early twentieth century. Such an outlook can first be observed in very tenuous form from the mid-1930s onwards with the emergence of the radical movement in Coloured politics and then more substantively from the late 1970s onwards within the non-racial democratic movement. On the contrary, as this analysis has shown, *Straatpraatjes* provides evidence of a tradition of ambiguity between the egalitarian values of non-racism and assimilationism, on the one hand, and racial exclusivity driven by a desire to protect a position of relative privilege, on the other. Whatever

popular tradition of solidarity with a broader black identity or resistance around the principle of non-racism that may have been built up in the post-Soweto era, proved brittle and transient in the pragmatic 1990s as the 1994 elections results in the Western Cape were to prove so dramatically.

Conclusion

The initial intention behind the body of research presented in this thesis was to provide a history of Coloured identity through the twentieth century and to show how the identity changed and developed over this period. The original assumption was that after its late nineteenth century genesis Coloured identity continually evolved through the twentieth century with new departures such as the rise of the radical movement in the 1930s, the emergence of Black Consciousness thinking in the 1970s and Coloured rejectionism in the 1980s representing periods of accelerated transformation. Faced with the tasks of identifying actual changes in the identity and explaining its evolution, this enquiry was instead struck by how stable Coloured identity had been throughout the era of white domination and how superficial the influences of radicalism, Black Consciousness, and the rejectionist movement were. With the evidence failing to confirm its initial hypotheses based on orthodox approaches within the discipline, a reconceptualization of Coloured identity, its nature and history was clearly necessary.

The result has been that while the intention of elucidating the ways in which Colouredness operated as a social identity has remained, the study was limited to the era of white rule. It has, in addition, been theorized that Coloured identity is better understood not as having evolved through a series of transformations during this

period as conventional historical thinking tends to view it,⁶³ but to have remained remarkably stable throughout. In support of this contention the thesis has argued that this stability was derived largely from a core of enduring characteristics of the identity rooted in the historical experience and social situation of the Coloured community. It has, in addition, been asserted that limitations placed on the possibilities for social and political action of Coloured people by a white supremacist establishment that became increasingly oppressive and authoritarian through much of the twentieth century, contributed to its equilibrium.

The broad argument of the dissertation has been substantiated through a combination of thematic analyses covering the entire period under review in the first two chapters and a series of focused case studies presented in chronological order in the rest of the thesis. The emphasis throughout has been on the detailed analysis of key texts written by Coloured people, most of them prominent intellectuals or leaders within the community, in which they contemplate the nature of Coloured identity or give expression to their identity as Coloured people.

After outlining the history of the Coloured people as a necessary backdrop to the study, the first of the thematic chapters established the nature of the enduring core of Coloured identity. It identified Coloured assimilationism, their intermediate status in the racial hierarchy, the negative associations attached to the identity and Coloured marginality as the essential elements of this core and demonstrated how they intermeshed to reproduce and stabilize the identity. Their marginality has been pinpointed as the most significant of these characteristics as it determined the basic

⁶³ None of the studies of Coloured history pay much attention to the nature of Coloured identity

conditions under which the identity was able to operate and Coloured people were able to function as bearers of the identity. This contextualizing chapter then explained how the stereotyping of Coloured people, in particular the attribution of a range of pejorative qualities, influenced processes of Coloured self-definition as well as outsider perceptions. It used the van Riebeeck joke to demonstrate how associations of hybridity, illegitimacy, Khoisan primitiveness and marginality converged in the Coloured stereotype, reinforcing the identity and helping to reproduce it.

The second of the thematic chapters mapped out in some detail a historiography of Coloured writing on their community's past. The great value of these texts is that they, in essence, represent discourses on the nature of Coloured identity in which the authors ultimately try to account for the prevailing status and condition of their community. Thus although such writing is sparse and on the whole of rather poor quality, it nevertheless reveals a great deal about Coloured social experience. Not only do these writings epitomize thinking within sectors of the community about the essence of this social group, and not only do they reflect the social and political currents of the time, but they also contributed to the creation of a sense of Colouredness. Drawing on both popular conceptions of this history and the writing of Coloured intellectuals this survey covered the entire ideological spectrum of opinion on the subject, ranging from the self-abasing interpretation of Hendricks and Viljoen's school text book which mimicked white supremacist writing to the ultra-left, Trotskyist theorizing of Kenny Jordaan. While this historiography most clearly reflects the marginality of the Coloured community, it also corroborates other aspects of the analysis of the identity outlined in the opening chapter. Thus, for example,

and the changes it experienced over time. The assumption of an on-going process of

Hendricks and Viljoen, and Ziervogel confirm the internalization of the dominant society's racist values by many Coloured people; Abdurahman and van der Ross' analyses attest to the assimilationism of the Coloured community; Jordaan's writing indicates the hegemony of ideas relating to the miscegenated origins of the Coloured people; and du Pre's fulminations reflect the frustration and impotent rage that many Coloured people felt.

The first set of case studies focused on the earlier decades of the existence of the unified South African state and analyzed the official organs of the two most important Coloured communal organizations of the time. Together they outlined, within the context of concrete social settings, the functioning of Colouredness as a social identity as well as the impetus behind Coloured separatist strategies. They also explored ambiguities in the expression of Coloured identity that resulted from contradictory pressures on the community, especially within the petty bourgeoisie. The *APO* case study concentrated primarily on the predicament of Coloured marginality in the political arena and the ambiguities that resulted from their pursuing dreams of assimilation while at the same time trying to secure a position of relative privilege in the racial hierarchy. The enquiry into the *Educational Journal* broadened the perspective beyond protest politics, showing in particular how class attitudes were bound up with racial perceptions within the Coloured petty bourgeoisie. Viewed as illustrative examples of the conventional expression of Coloured identity, these case studies together confirm the analysis about the nature of Coloured identity and the workings of its enduring core presented in the preceding thematic chapters.

Both case histories illustrated how the defence of their position of relative privilege, the main driving force behind Coloured exclusivist agendas, operated in real social situations. They demonstrated that Coloured communal organizations worked on the premise that if they could not claim first prize of assimilation into the dominant society then they were determined not to be relegated to the status of Africans. This after all, was the main dynamic behind the late nineteenth century origin of Coloured identity. Several examples were also provided of how their marginality, intermediate status and the assimilationism of the Coloured community together gave rise to the opportunism and pragmatic incrementalism that marked its social and political responses to white supremacy. This was nowhere more evident than in the TLISA's preparedness to accept an inferior status for Coloured people compared to whites on condition they perceived some advantage accruing from their compliance. This chapter, moreover, explored the *weltanschauung* of the Coloured petty bourgeoisie revealing, amongst other things, how they viewed Colouredness in the context of human diversity, justified their beliefs and actions, tried to reconcile contradictions and ambiguities in their behaviour and devised strategies for coping with their predicament of marginality.

Very importantly, these case studies showed that while Coloured identity was fluid, this was a situational fluidity. Because of their intermediate status and ambiguities in their situation they were able to exploit, Coloured individuals, leaders and organizations had a range of options open to them when responding to social and political circumstances, giving it a degree of fluidity within a given situation. Both their marginality, and what seemed to be sensible choices given the circumstances, conspired to reproduce a range of similar responses that created a stability in the

expression of the identity during the period under scrutiny rather than a gradual transformation or an evolution punctuated by periods of rapid change as initially envisaged.

The second pair of case studies, the NEUM's *Torch* newspaper and Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, documented the impact of the radical movement on Coloured identity. These studies contested existing scholarly understandings of the influence of the Marxist movement on Coloured identity as well as interpretations of the particular texts analysed. This chapter challenged the notion that radicals, because of their Marxist principles and opposition to white supremacism, were automatically non-racial in outlook and therefore rejected Coloured identity. In the case of the *Torch*, reality was shown to be far more complex than the uncompromising non-racism that commentators assumed to have existed from the NEUM's inception. Not only did the paper contain a variety of discourses around issues of race, some of them contradictory, but this non-racism was shown to have developed over a period of two decades. This thesis' reading of *A Walk in the Night* also challenged accepted interpretations of the novel as depicting a Manichean world that supposedly existed under apartheid. It established beyond much doubt the nuanced portrayal of Coloured identity in the novel and that La Guma himself displayed ambiguities in his own personal and social identities, echoing those common within the broader Coloured community. This chapter supports the overall argument of the thesis by demonstrating that the influence of the radical movement on Coloured identity was relatively superficial in that it touched a small part of the community and that even amongst radical intellectuals it did not necessarily lead to a rigorous non-racism.

The final batch of textual analyses detailed the rise of Coloured rejectionism from the early 1960s through to its zenith at the end of the 1980s and its subsequent retreat in the final years of the apartheid order. The *Educational Journal* of the 1960s was used to trace its origins in the development of a politically correct approach to racial issues in Unity Movement circles. Though influential in certain sectors of the Coloured elite, the effect of the NEUM's principled non-racial stance remained very circumscribed beyond the left-wing intelligentsia. Using the earlier poetry of James Matthews the chapter identified the emergence a different strain of thinking that helped to undermine narrowly based Coloured identifications with the rise of Black Consciousness ideology. This investigation showed that while Black Consciousness encouraged a broader black identification, it did not necessarily cause people to reject their more exclusive identity as Coloured people. The chapter next described the rise of Coloured rejectionism within the anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s employing *Grassroots* and *South* as illustrations. The broad finding of these studies, and of the final chapter as a whole, was that Coloured rejectionism was a shallowly rooted movement because it was prevalent amongst a politicized minority and was clearly at odds with social reality. People rejected Coloured identity less out of conviction that it was nothing more than a white-imposed categorization with little social validity than out of a refusal to affirm apartheid thinking and a desire to display commitment towards non-racial values. The conclusion used a critique of Hein Willemsse's interpretation of the *Straatpraatjies* newspaper column to analyze a remnant strain of rejectionist thinking at the very end of the apartheid era and to comment on issues of continuity and change in the expression of Coloured identity throughout the period under review.

In contrast to the stability it displayed during the nine and a half decades of white supremacist rule, Coloured identity has been forced to undergo significant changes in adapting to the radically different environment of post-apartheid South Africa. The new South Africa has represented a time of flux and of unprecedented change in the way Colouredness has operated, and indeed needs to operate, as a social identity. In the first place, the new democratic environment has brought with it a degree of freedom of association and opportunities for ethnic mobilization not possible under white rule. Witness, for example, the attempts at re-inventing Coloured identity within the Khoisan revivalist movement. Secondly, though still very much in place in many areas of South African life, the racial hierarchy that has governed social relations for so long, has broken down in important respects. With an African dominated political party in power, the rise of a substantial African middle class, institutionalized white privilege a thing of the past and multicultural and Africanist values vying for dominance in public life, intergroup relations have become much more complex. With complexity has come confusion as well as opportunity. Most importantly, that bulwark of Coloured exclusivism, the protection of a relatively privileged status, is simply no longer a valid strategy in the new dispensation, though some organic intellectuals within the Coloured community have been trying to establish a new form of relative privilege by presenting Coloured people as the true indigenes of the country and arguing for first nation status. The old Coloured identity that prevailed in white supremacist South Africa is still very much alive, though somewhat chastened, and manifests itself in the form of an anti-African bigotry and a reactionary appraisal that 'we were better off under the white man'.

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8. Interviews² and E-mail Communications

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