Reflections on coloured identity in the Teacher's League of South Africa during the early 1940s. The introduction of the concept of non-European

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Abstract

During the early years of World War Two (WWII), the Union of South Africa went through several political, economic and social changes that had profound effects on the creation of what a few years later would be the apartheid system. Racial tensions became stronger as the local political context was in crisis. At the same time, the impact of racial discrimination in WWII introduced further reflections on racial theories, concepts and definitions among South Africans.

This paper focuses specifically on debates and disputes about racial definitions among coloured teachers in the Cape. Taking into consideration the historical specificities of that racial definition and racial group in the Union of South Africa, the impact of the international context and the local context, racial adscriptions among coloured teachers changed from exclusivism to non-racialism. Younger teachers went from being proudly coloured to looking for new concepts to redefine a common identity and explicitly choosing the notion of non-Europeans for that. To understand how and why this took place, interviews with former members of the Teacher's League of South Africa (TLSA), the leading organisation among the coloured educational community, were conducted by the author and placed in dialogue with qualitative research in the Educational Journal and other publications from that teacher's organisation.

Keywords: TLSA; coloured identity; Non-racialism; Non-European; WWII; Education; Intergenerational disputes.

Introduction

Some years ago, I was doing archival work at the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town Division. I was studying the *Educational Journal*, the leading publication of the Teacher's League of South Africa (TLSA), focusing on analysing the changes in that organisation with the rise of their younger leaders in 1944. While reading the journal, a particular event caught my attention. In the sixteenth volume of the journal, the issue for September 1941 was missing; it jumped from August to October and from number 1 to 3. I assumed that the library did not have that publication and looked for it at other libraries; it would be evident that the journal had a second number. However, as I continued reading, it was clear that the September issue (volume 16, number 2) had not been published. It had been written and edited, but the board members decided not to publish it. The resignation of editorial committee members, including a special section of letters, explanations and justifications given in the following issue (October 1941), led me to reflect on the conflict within the League before 1944.

The TLSA was created in 1913 by prominent members of the coloured community of the Cape Province[1]. It had the support of the African People's Organisation (APO), an exclusively coloured political organisation, which allowed it to expand throughout the province and increase its membership[2]. The initial aim of the TLSA was to bring coloured teachers together so that they could improve the quality of education in their community. However, during the early 1940s, with the changes in the government policies of the Union of South Africa, the TLSA became a space for the emergence of leaders with radical liberatory political and ideological perspectives.

The creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, shortly after the South African War (1899-1902), led to the formation of an alliance between the northern Boer republicans and the white English colonial sectors. Thus, white domination reaffirmed its power over other (non-white) sectors of society. In this context, the coloured population began to suffer the effects of the expansion of discriminatory policies.[3]

[1] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children: The Teacher's League of South Africa, 1913-1940* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

[2] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

[3] The basis for future segregation was the 1913 Land Act and the deeper implementation of the pass system which set aside less than 10 per cent of the lands for the majority of non-white population and reaffirmed non-white migrant labour exploitation. Along with those measures, the State confined the duty of military service to whites only in 1912, implemented the Mines and Works Act of 1911 to protect white workers positions and imposed several School Board Acts that ensured the educational segregation of non-white population and restricted their intellectual and professional possibilities.

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Reactions within the coloured community were not homogeneous. It depended on its members' generational, ideological and political differences; hence, their interpretations of the changing present. By the 1940s, the generation of older TLSA leaders (also known as the Old Guard), whose youth was characterised by the possibility of integration and upward mobility, reacted to the adverse policy environment by trying to join the state as a way of maintaining or regaining the rights of a previous era.[4] These leaders were influenced by colonial evolutionary theories, and their social position was determined by racial distinctions. The leaders tended to see their future as aligned with assimilation with white privilege.[5]

Nevertheless, the new generation of teachers (known as the Young Turks) were trained in a context of increasing segregation measures. They suffered increased racial discrimination and its educational, labour, political, territorial, civil and social effects.[6] Their future promised no positive changes; the prospects of skilled artisanal work or clerical opportunities in the civil service work were not possible or were heavily restricted, and as teachers, they earned less than their white counterparts.[7] As teachers, they could not hold senior positions, their schools were poorly equipped, their living areas began to be differentiated, they were displaced from their old suburbs, their political participation was restricted and their relationships with other sectors of society began to be controlled by the state.[8] Marxist theories expanded in the region because of interwar European Jewish immigration and the spread of the influence of the Soviet Union.[9] The young teacher leaders in the TLSA came to understand the adoption of racial categorisation as a form of imperialistic domination that obscured class exploitation and prevented the dominated population from becoming aware of their condition.[10]

[4] In 1943 the APO supported the creation of the Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) as they believed it would give them direct access to government departments. Main old members of the TLSA were elected to participate in the CAC. The young members of the TLSA saw that action as collaboration with the state and that the Council opened the door for segregation among coloureds.

[5] G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall. A history of South African 'Coloured' politics* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987).

[6] As Mohamed Adhikari explains, coloured population lost political influence during the early 1930s, coloured students saw their subsidy diminished and could not find suitable jobs with fair salaries (M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

[7] M Adhikari, "Coloured identity and the politics of Coloured education: The origin of the Teachers' League of South Africa", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27(1), 1994, pp. 101-126.

[8] M Adhikari, "Coloured identity and the politics of Coloured education…", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27(1), 1994, pp. 101-126.

[9] A Drew, *Discordant comrades: Identities and loyalties on the South African left* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

[10] BM Kies, "'The background of segregation', Address delivered to the National Anti-CAD Conference, 29th May 1943", A Drew, *South Africa´s Radical Tradition. A documentary history, Vol. 2 (1943-1964)* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1997).

Given these differences between both generations, the aim of this article is to analyse the debates over racial categorisation that arose among members of the TLSA before its rupture in 1944, when the old leaders were challenged by the new leaders, leaving the TLSA and creating the Teachers´ Educational and Professional Association (TEPA).[11] During the previous years, in the context of the early years of World War II (1939-1943), these two groups were discussing racial definitions and linking them with their positions on the war and the local segregationist measures.[12] The racial debates were focused on how the leaders could redefine themselves. Should they continue to embrace the racial and cultural coloured concept or should they find other ways of identifying themselves? The meaning of being coloured for the TLSA members changed over time. It was determined by personal approaches and communitarian identities' definitions and socio/political changes in the Union of South Africa and internationally.

Claims based on racial identity and being coloured as a unique feature were based on the idea of exclusivism. By the end of the 1930s and early 1940s, another self-perception began to arise—based on a non-racialist perspective—that was not based on racial uniqueness, but on the idea of shared experiences of racial segregation and exploitation. The first notion tended to be challenged by the political changes in the Union of South Africa and by the effects over the South African territory triggered by the Nazi regime in Europe, giving space to the development of alternative perspectives. An analysis of the Educational Journal allows one to observe how positions—exclusivism and non-racialism—around the racial category of 'coloured' were built among the leaders of the coloured community.

Literature review

The history of the TLSA has been studied from different perspectives over time. From a political perspective, the classic works of Richard van der Ross and Gavin Lewis[13] provided a historical overview of coloured political organisations. The latter underlined the importance of resistance movements against racial segregation among the coloured community. While Lewis' work is extremely valuable in opening the path to studying

[11] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

[12] L Chisholm, "Education, politics and organisation. The educational traditions and legacies of the Non-European Unity Movement, 1943-1986", *Transformation*, 15, 1991, pp. 1-23; C Sandwith, "Contesting a 'cult(ure) of respectability': The radical intellectual traditions of the Non-European Unity Movement, 1938-1960", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 16(1), 2004, pp. 33-60.

[13] G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall…* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987); 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).

the coloured community and its political organisations, it tends to reinforce conservative representations of the community by employing notions of morality, democracy and the naturalisation of the idea of a stable coloured identity.

Following the path laid out by Lewis, Mohamed Adhikari[14] renewed the political perspective by incorporating reflections on coloured identity within the study of political history. Adhikari's main aim has been to reconstruct the history of the TLSA from its inception to its fragmentation in the 1940s and to analyse the political positions adopted by moderate coloured leaders. By choosing the TLSA as his object of study, Adhikari opened a new space for reflection on the history of coloured identity. Politics and education cannot be understood as separate spheres, as for members of the community, better educational training was seen to ascend the social scale and thus, attain political and civil rights. In this sense, Adhikari deepened the study of the coloured community's history. His central claim is that the actions and positions taken by the TLSA and its intellectual leaders must be understood within a particular historical framework of profound changes in the state's social and racial distinctions, which shaped their strategies for community survival through adaptation.

Adhikari examines the TLSA to reflect on a broader issue: the formation of coloured identity. Understanding that this identity was historically constructed both by individuals themselves and through state racial categorisation, Adhikari defines it not in terms of racial differentiation, but as a cultural identity.[15] This perspective allows the author to identify continuities between the moderate essentialist and radical non-racialist sectors of the TLSA. According to Adhikari[16], the state's imposition of fixed racial classifications generated an identity crisis within the community, leading traditional elites to adapt to the discriminatory system to maintain certain rights and freedoms and thus resist imposed categorisations through everyday actions.

[14] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993); M Adhikari, *Not White enough, not Black enough: Racial identity in the South African Coloured community* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

[15] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993); M Adhikari, "Coloured identity and the politics of Coloured education…", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27(1), 1994, pp. 101-126; M Adhikari, *Not White enough, not Black enough…* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

[16] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993); M Adhikari, *Not White enough, not Black enough: Racial identity in the South African Coloured community* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

Studies based on the political-institutional analysis perspective have focused primarily on two historical periods: the early years of the Union of South Africa (1910) and the resistance to Apartheid (from the 1970s onward). This focus is mainly due to the presence of organisations during these periods that were based on a cohesive coloured identity. When addressing the history of this community during the 1930s and 1940s, these studies tend to depict a sharp division: on the one hand, a moderate majority (understood as The Community) sought to integrate into the existing government system to reform it from within; on the other, a minority labelled as radical, which not only sought to resist new racist policies through violence, but also broke with the fundamental values that distinguished coloured identity from other non-white sectors—liberal values. Consequently, these so-called radicals are not seen by such researchers as representative members of the coloured population, but rather as part of leftist organisations. This conservative perspective seeks to avoid internal conflicts within the community regarding the meaning of being coloured, instead portraying a homogeneous image of it.

The first contributions to studying coloured community organisations during the 1930s and 1940s emerged from the history of leftist movements. To apply a Marxist analytical perspective to South African history, Roy Gentle[17] focused on the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), an organisation that sought to unite all sectors of society excluded from the privileged white sector. By centering his analysis on this organisation, Gentle explores the influences of Marxism and Trotskyism on its founders, who were primarily members of the coloured community. His work does not seek to trace identity conflicts in cultural and social terms, instead it examines the relationship between non-racialist projects and different branches of Marxism. As a result, Gentle does not delve into individual experiences, the author instead focuses on organisations, their relationships and ideological tendencies.

An emerging renewal within this analytical current, which involves studying organisations during the 1930s and 1940s and analysing individuals, their actions and their thoughts, can be found in the work of Allison Drew.[18] Drew portrays a diverse landscape in which members of the coloured community engage in dialogue and debate among themselves and with other communities and where the varied experiences of racial discrimination and exploitation within activist practices shape leftist organisations.

[17] R Gentle, *The NEUM in Perspective*, BA in Social Sciences dissertation (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1987).

[18] A Drew, *South Africa´s Radical Tradition. A documentary* history, *Vol. 2, 1943-1964* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1997); A Drew, *Discordant comrades…* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

Drew successfully captures the complexity of leftist-coloured individuals' ideas and beliefs, highlighting their struggles to reconcile Marxist theory with family and community traditions. While these studies shed light on different historical periods and processes, they tend to categorise individuals strictly within (Eurocentric) class identities. Even when such individuals challenge the representation of the coloured community as homogeneous, they often construct new rigid identities that divide individuals sharply, preventing an analysis of the complex relationships among them and their multiple, often conflicting, identity affiliations. Moreover, by focusing their research on political activism, researchers fail to capture individuals' life experiences, overlooking the connections formed in other everyday spaces, such as family and work relationships, which also influenced their identity positions.

Two key works that help to understand the mindset of TLSA intellectual leaders are those by Robert Edgar[19] and Alan Wieder.[20] Edgar's edition of Ralph J. Bunche's travel diary in South Africa (1937-1938) provides a glimpse into South African reality through the eyes of an African American observer. By detailing his daily experiences across different regions, Bunche brings us closer to the everyday lives and ideas of prominent coloured intellectuals, such as the Gool family (including Goolam, Jane and Cisie). Moreover, Wieder reconstructs the history of coloured teachers and their struggles against racial segregation. The author's work is based on interviews with key TLSA members, with significant contributions found in his biography of Richard Dudley, where Wieder presents excerpts from interviews, offering insights into one of the movement's most influential leaders and his core ideas.[21]

The most significant efforts to break away from the use of Western-imported categories in understanding the complexities of the South African coloured population have emerged from postcolonial perspectives in intellectual history. Crain Soudien[22] proposed a new approach by prioritising the study of coloured leaders, viewing them not only as political and community leaders, but also as intellectuals. The author seeks to recover these

[19] R Edgard, An *African American in South Africa. The travel notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937-1 January 1938* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992)

[20] A Wieder, *Voices from Cape Town classrooms. Oral histories of teachers who fought Apartheid* (Cape Town: UWC Press, 2003); A Wieder, *Teacher and comrade. Richard Dudley and the fight for democracy in South Africa* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008).

[21] A Wieder, *Teacher and comrade. Richard Dudley and the fight for democracy in South Africa* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008).

[22] C Soudien, "The contribution of radical Western Cape intellectuals to an indigenous knowledge project in South Africa", *Transformation*, 76, 2011, pp. 44–66; C Soudien, *The Cape radicals: The intellectual and political thought of the new era fellowship* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019),

individuals' original and genuine ideas as knowledge developed from the Global South. By emphasising the historical figures who did not belong to the hegemonic Western academic world, Soudien invites reflection on the connections between knowledge production and lived experiences within a racist society. At the same time, by reviewing intellectual trajectories that were both anti-colonialist and non-racialist, Soudien recovers local experiences of non-Western ideas' production.

Methodological framework

This article focuses primarily on analysing the publications of the TLSA, mainly the *Educational Journal*, specifically Vol. XIV to XIX (August 1939 – June 1945), available at the South African National Library, Cape Town Division.

The journal was founded in 1915 and was published quarterly until 1941 when it became a monthly publication. It averaged twelve pages and featured articles aimed at the teachers who were members of the League. In other words, the journal was an internal publication—funded by membership fees—that aimed to communicate news, foster debates and encourage reflection among teachers. By 1943, the League had approximately 1450 members, however, it was difficult to determine the number of readers, as the print run of the journals depended on membership. Nevertheless, it is known that the journals circulated within coloured schools among the students and among other teachers outside the coloured community.

Over time, the journal reduced its page count and became a space for heated debates among members of the TLSA itself. A clear indication of this can be seen, as previously mentioned, in September 1941, when it was decided not to publish the issue for that month due to internal problems. The explanation and justification for this decision are found in the issue that followed. In other words, the journal began to serve as a space for competition for leadership between the older and newer generations of teachers.

In this article, the analysis of the *Educational Journal* has been combined with revisiting other TLSA publications and a series of formal interviews and informal talks conducted with various members of the TLSA and scholars. Many of them were active participants in the leadership of the organisation during the 1940s. Others were students in the schools where these leaders taught, and they were able to describe teaching practices both in the classroom and in non-formal educational spaces. The interviews were generally held in the interviewee's home. They were sessions of approximately two to three hours each time, in which dialogues and reflections were promoted.

Historical background

The Union of South Africa Act of 1910 consolidated four British-governed territories and gave them self-rule as a British Dominion. From that moment, the white groups agreed to vest themselves with full rights.[23] Tensions between Afrikaner nationalists and pro-British liberals dragged on. Tensions increased following the South African involvement in World War I, the 1930 economic crisis and the debates on the position to be adopted regarding participation in World War II.[24]

However, as Barbara Bush explains, both Afrikaner and British sectors agreed on a central element of the new government: the Union of South Africa was understood as a state in which the society would be organised along a racial hierarchy.[25] Thus, since its inception, segregationist measures began to be set up to reorganise society and define territories, activities and rights. All of these depended on the racial adscriptions that had been imposed from above. The racial hierarchy was sustained based on eugenicist, evolutionary and racist theories.[26]

The Laws developed prior to World War I, such as the Land Act of 1913, tended to be reaffirmed and deepened during the interwar period. As it is well known, the Land Act of 1913 designated the different rights of the various racial groups on land. Less than 10 per cent of the land territory was allocated to black the population.[27] This measure was inconsistent with previous histories of land occupation. Therefore, the impact of the rule was felt mainly among black people, who suffered the direct effects of land loss and displacement. By 1931, the Statute of Westminster gave the Union of South Africa greater legislative autonomy from the British Parliament. The effects of the Land Act plus the new statute generated general concerns, such as in the case of the coloured community, who feared future threats to their social status.[28]

The formation of the United Party government generated an alliance between the two sectors of the white population represented in the figures of Barry Hertzog as Prime Minister and Jan Smuts as Deputy Prime Minister.[29] During this period the statutes on

[23] LM Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
[24] B Nasson, *South Africa at War, 1939-1945* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2012).
[25] B Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 1999).
[26] S Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge. Science, Sensibility and White South Africa, 1820-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[27] LM Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
[28] G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall…* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987).
[29] B Freund, "South Africa: The union years, 1910-1948, political and economic foundations", R Ross, A

Industrial Conciliation (1924), Immorality (1927) and Native Representation (1936) were adopted. The Industrial Conciliation Act (1924) regulated labour ties between white employees and white bosses; non-whites lost their opportunities in the formal labour market. The Immorality Act (1927) prohibited sexual relations between people of different racial categories. The Native Representation Act (1936) revoked the right of the non-white population to have their own parliamentary representation in the Cape. Therefore, the political autonomy of the white population was based on the segregation of the rest of the non-white population and on the complicity of the British Government which benefited from the earnings of precious metal mining using cheap labour.[30]

Nevertheless, the advent of World War II would disrupt the balance of this system of domination. According to Allison Drew, the Afrikaner nationalists sought to maintain neutrality, however, refused to support the British government because of their historical ruling position.[31] Therefore, they were unwilling to sacrifice any further resources to help the British, hence, losing their achieved political and economic autonomy. At the same time, many identified with the nationalist and racist aspirations of the Nazi regime. Liberal groups understood the war as a struggle against authoritarian regimes and were inclined towards freedom and the expansion of democracy. Given such differences in worldviews, the flimsy stability of the white political parties broke apart. Hertzog resigned his post and was succeeded by Smuts, who declared South Africa's entry to the war alongside the Allies.[32]

The effects of this decision were soon felt in society. The Union of South Africa and its ports, set at the interconnection of the Atlantic and the Indian oceans, served the war effort. It supplied food and resources to the Allies, and its armies served in North Africa, Italy and Southwest Africa.[33] The broad economic recovery arising therefrom promoted the development of increased urbanisation. The non-white semi-skilled population began to fill the jobs of white males, who were active on several war fronts. At the same time, men who migrated for work to the cities began to settle there permanently, raising the percentage of the non-white population in urban areas.[34]

Kelk Mager and B Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge history of South Africa*, *Vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[30] B Freund, "South Africa…", R Ross, A Kelk Mager and B Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge history of South Africa*, *Vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[31] A Drew, *Discordant comrades…* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

[32] LM Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[33] LM Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[34] J Hyslop, "'Segregation has fallen on evil days': Smuts' South Africa, global war, and transnational politics, 1939–46", *Journal of Global History*, 7(3), 2012, pp. 438-460.

Therefore, during the early war years, segregationist measures faded somewhat about workers' broader urban needs.[35]

As mentioned before, the perceptions of non-white people on the war and the context of South African growth were filtered through generational, class and ideological-political differences. While for some sectors of the non-white population, this struggle opened the way towards democratisation, other groups understood the rise of Smuts and the participation in the war as part of the colonial logic that again subordinated the territory to the British capital.[36] Hence, the latter did not believe that fighting Nazism was more urgent than combating racial segregation in the Union of South Africa. These groups understood that the economic changes in people's lives were insufficient and would not lead to democracy.

Discordant views about the present within the TLSA

Those two different perspectives can be traced within the TLSA. The older generation, the Old Guard, chose to support the government as their strategy to acquire rights and improve their socio-political and economic situation. They saw in Smuts' leadership, a light in the road for a more egalitarian future.[37] However, the younger generation, the Young Turks, marked by their own experiences of segregation, and influenced by leftist ideas and movements, understood the war and the Union government as part and parcel of imperialism and capitalist exploitation. They identified the South African white political leaders with European colonialism and, therefore, could not associate them with deliverance from historical subordination and inequality.[38]

To understand the positions taken by both groups over racial identification, one must first frame them in their own historical contexts. The founders of the TLSA in 1913 were part of the elites of the coloured community of Cape.[39] They had grown up in a context where their family's socio-economic conditions were in full swing. As descendants of the union of different populations and other community groups, the founders of the TLSA experienced a period of expansion of their rights and access to missionary education. This enabled them to enhance their education, thereby acquiring qualifications as lawyers,

[35] LM Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
[36] G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall…* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987).
[37] G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall…* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987).
[38] H Ahmed, "Against the CAD *for* full democratic rights", A Drew (ed.), *South Africa´s radical tradition. A documentary history, Vol. 2 (1943-1964)* (Cape Town: UCT Press, [1943] 2014).
[39] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

doctors and teachers.[40] Thus, these sectors had managed to enter colonial society as members of a small coloured middle class, making their racial identity something to be proud of.

Adhikari explains that early TLSA social integration strategies were based on the writings of Booker T. Washington (1856-1915).[41] Born into slavery in the United States, Washington became a prominent leader in the African American community. He encouraged African Americans to work hard, improve their educational qualification and observe the foundations of Christian morality so that they could demonstrate their broader skills to the white population, demonstrating their capacity as responsible future citizens. Members of the coloured community in the Cape adopted Washington's collaborationist strategies, demonstrating their aspiration to and capacity for European civilisation.[42] This position involved the acceptance of the evolutionary theories of the time such as Social Darwinism, implying no challenge to the construction of the racial hierarchy of society, but instead accepting it and claiming the accompanying advantages.

The formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 threatened the social conditions of the Cape-coloured elite. It implied a territorial reorganisation; thus, the Cape Colony's liberalism was threatened.[43] It was no longer a colony, rather a province incorporated into a new domain comprising several other provinces under the direction of a central white government with its own agenda. Statutes passed under the rule of the British system of government regulated life in the Cape Colony; henceforth, in the newly formed Union, statutes were to be enacted by the local white government. The establishment of the APO, and subsequently of the TLSA, were attempts to protect the previously obtained political rights and improve the education of the coloured population.[44]

The early years of World War II witnessed profound changes in South Africa. Economic growth gave rise to non-white labour unions and increased segregationist measures, leading to radical left and ultra-right movements.[45] In that changing context, the social attitudes

[40] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

[41] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

[42] M Adhikari, "Coloured identity and the politics of Coloured education…", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27(1), 1994, pp. 101-126.

[43] S Marks, "War and Union, 1899-1910", in R Ross, A Kelk Mager and B Nasson, B. (eds.), *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[44] M Adhikari, "Coloured identity and the politics of Coloured education…", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27(1), 1994, pp. 101-126. S Marks, "War and Union, 1899-1910", in R Ross, A Kelk Mager and B Nasson, B. (eds.), *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[45] LM Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

of the older generation of coloured elites were now *démodé*.[46] Thus, old strategies were no longer effective in these new circumstances. Although Smuts was shown as a political leader with greater tolerance over racial differences than Hertzog and DF Malan, it was clear that the sociopolitical conditions of the non-whites would not improve.[47] The old coloured leaders did not adapt to these changing circumstances.

In 1943, the collaboration strategy to secure future integration into the political system was used once more by the old coloured elite when they agreed to participate in the Cape Coloured Permanent Commission (CCPC).[48] The creation of this body generated a crisis that would subsequently lead to future tensions within the coloured community of the Cape. These members, who saw hope for a better future in this organisation, were heavily criticised by younger political leaders who understood this new body as a tool for deepening segregation.[49] The new generation of teachers also understood their presence against the decline of racist theories internationally. The Pan-Africanist movement developed across the Atlantic,[50] leftist organisations grew, and the expansion of Nazism showed the beginning of the decline of European modernity ideas.

Coming from relatively well-to-do coloured families, embedded with the old methods of political negotiation, the younger generation of teachers grew up in an environment of community activism. Many of the young leaders took their first steps in political activism in the APO with their parents and close relatives. However, they no longer shared the goals set by that organisation or their elders. While the APO proposed the slogan of seeking 'equal rights for civilised men', these young leaders were demanding full equality (economic, political and social) between 'European' and 'Non-Europeans'.[51] They questioned the racist evolutionary theories and opposed the idea of a distinctive identification for the coloured community from the rest of the segregated groups. The leitmotif of the leaders

[46] Personal interview with Ursula Fataar in her Wynberg, Cape Town home in March 2013.

[47] P Bonner, "South Africa society and culture, 1910-1948", R Ross, A Kelk Mager and B Nasson, *The Cambridge history of South Africa, vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); B Freund, "South Africa", R Ross, A Kelk Mager and B Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[48] This body became the specific state mediator with the coloured population. Sectors critical of such participation understood involvement to be a form of support for the regime and a way of providing the state information about the community in exchange for keeping small spaces of residual power. A Drew, *Discordant comrades…* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

[49] H Ahmed, "Against the CAD *for* full democratic rights", A Drew (ed.), *South Africa´s radical tradition. A documentary history, Vol. 2 (1943-1964)* (Cape Town: UCT Press, [1943] 2014).

[50] In the case of the Cape, Pan-African ideas arrived in early 1900 with Francis Zaccharius Santiago Peregrino. He was a journalist and public intellectual born in Accra that moved to Cape Town and lived in District Six. Since then, he created the *South African Spectator* and promoted gatherings and the emergence of coloured political organisations. For more information, read Saunders, 1978.

[51] G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall…* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987).

was no longer the search for acceptance into Western civilisation, but rather the rejection of colonial domination that still prevailed in the territory.[52]

This change in their political perspective was accompanied by changing behaviours and sets of values, which underlined and criticised the Old Guard's leadership and to a certain extent, Western colonial legacies and continuities. The most disputes with the conservative sector occurred between 1943 and 1944.[53] The events that unfolded at the organisation's Annual Conferences, held in Kimberley, show the rapid increase in conflict and the beginning of an explicit dispute over leadership in the TLSA and colonial subjectivities, values and ways of acting. The interview with Ursula Fataar[54] describes such conflicts around identities, representations and attitudes. In the words of the wife of the radical political leader:

"…What became known as the Young Turks…The Young Turks… where Young teachers were now fed up with the ruling… the officials…of the old TLSA. Moreover, these old officials were straitlaced, collar and tie, well behaved, respectable, and did not put a step wrong… and did everything the government wanted them to do. So here comes this Gang of young men into the conference! Moreover, they invade the place! Moreover, they got uproar; they showed no respect to the older adults! Moreover, the old people do not know how to confront them! So they are sitting there, kicking their tables (Ursula knocks on the table, showing how they did it), knocking on their chairs, making noise, and not allowing any discussion to take place. Furthermore, I am certain my husband got a terrible reputation for being very rude in there…"

These critical positions were forged through a complex process of formal academic learning and training (in high schools and universities, in political groups such as the Lenin Club, the Spartacus Club, the South African Communist Party and the Labour Party) as well as in informal study groups, called fellowships.[55] The latter offered theoretical and historical training that broke with the racist logic of society as in these places teachers, students and academics from different social strata and racial groups came together to discuss the South African reality in terms of the international context.[56] Here, young teacher leaders developed new critical perspectives and projects.

[52] G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall…* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987).

[53] M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children…* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1993).

[54] Personal interview with Ursula Fataar in her Wynberg, Cape Town home in March 2013.

[55] As Alan Wieder's interviews to TLSA members (see A Wieder, *Voices from Cape Town classrooms…* (Cape Town: UWC Press, 2003) and my own interviews to Polly Slingers, Richard Van der Horst, Jean Pease and Ursula Fataar during 2013 show, formal education was complemented with informal education which provided wider and more critical perspectives to teachers and students.

[56] C Soudien, *The Cape radicals…* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

The main political study group was the New Era Fellowship (NEF). Founded in 1937 and initially led by Isaac Bongani Tabata, Goolam Gool, Cissie Gool and Dora Taylor among others, gathered weekly at the Stakesby Lewis Hotel, located in District Six.[57] Participants such as Richard Dudley and Ursula Fataar reported that their participation in the NEF allowed them to discover alternative ways to tackle their present situation, relate it to the international context and develop collective knowledge.[58] The high intellectual demands participants were exposed to were based on the belief that thinking was the primary tool to free the consciousness of the oppressed. They sought to transform the ways of thinking and acting of segregated groups. Given this mission, these meetings tended to include men and women of different ages, professions, socioeconomic conditions and racial groups. According to Polly Slinger,[59] the NEF promoted the formation of new social ties among the oppressed that were neither racialised nor class-based.

For the younger generation, these gatherings became spaces where the state's logic of social and racial control was denounced. These gatherings provided the younger generation with theoretical and practical tools to think critically about their reality and to formulate alternative projects.[60] Thus, the new generation of TLA teachers and their students challenged the imposed racial categorisation and looked for new ways to define their oppressive present.

The concept of Non-European

From August (1940), Benjamin Kies became involved in the TLSA. He began writing critical articles about the features of the South African education system. Kies's first article in the *Journal* was published in October of that same year. Under the title "Comparative Education Series", Kies published three consecutive articles in which he compared the ideological and structural similarities of both the South African and the Nazi education systems.[61] While Kies focused on the similarities between the two systems, the author classified categories differently from those used by other authors of the *Educational Journal*.

[57] L Chisholm, "Education, politics and organisation…", *Transformation*, 15, 1991, pp. 1-23; C Soudien, *The Cape radicals…* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

[58] A Wieder, *Voices from Cape Town classrooms…* (Cape Town: UWC Press, 2003).

[59] Personal interview with Polly Slingers in his Athlone, Cape Town home in March 2013.

[60] Personal interview with Ursula Fataar in her Wynberg, Cape Town home in March 2013; Personal interview with Polly Slingers in his Athlone, Cape Town home in March 2013.

[61] BM Kies, "Comparative education series. The Nazi education", *The Educational Journal*, XV(2), October 1940, pp. 12-13; BM Kies, "Comparative Education Series. The Nazi educational practice", *The Educational Journal*, XV(3), February 1941a, pp. 4-5; BM Kies, 'The results of Nazi education', *The Educational Journal*, XV(4), March 1941b, pp.3-4.

For the first time, existing racial classifications are set aside, and the concept of non-Europeans is used. Kies understands, by this term, all those segregated and subordinated sectors under white domination. His words are clear: 'It is not, and never has been, the object of our education system to train the *non-European groups* for anything but a subservient role in the life of the country'.[62]

Various aspects of the conflict between the two generations of teachers were condensed: positions about the war, views on the South African reality, and differences in identity adscriptions. Concerns about the Nazi expansion were part of a broader theoretical reflection on the effects of modernity and imperialism on various territories.[63] His articles opened a new phase in the *Journal,* where the perspectives of the older and younger generations of TLSA were constantly confronted until the TLSA split in 1944. The introduction of international issues about the South African reality was published along with those based on classroom practice.[64]

The choice of the comparison with Nazi Germany was not random. The concern of the young teachers in subsequent issues of the *Journal* focused on the idea that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism, that it promoted the exacerbation of racial differences as a way of deepening the exploitation of workers, and that it was in Germany where exploitation had reached its highest levels.[65] The comparison allowed them to understand the policies of the South African state as part of a larger project, subordinated to international capital, whose population suffered from the effects of racial segregation. In Kies's words:

> *"... we find our educational system has been just as successful as that of the Nazis in the production of a defeatist attitude to the apparently overwhelming forces of oppression about them. (...) Nevertheless, still in South Africa, as in Nazi Germany, the hope of a decent and rational civilisation lies with that second product of their educational systems– those who are sufficiently educated to resent and eventually remove the forces militating against their entire growth by their abilities. And it will be left to the harsh school of life and circumstance to continue and correct the education which the little red-roofed schoolhouses began."*[66]

[62] BM Kies, "'The background of segregation'… 29th May 1943" p. 13, A Drew, *South Africa´s Radical Tradition. A documentary history, Vol.2 (1943-1964)* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1997).

[63] BM Kies, "Comparative Education Series…", *The Educational Journal*, XV(3), February 1941a, pp. 4-5.

[64] Kies' articles were published as part of the main articles and thus, were followed by articles on special training, on specific school subjects, etc.

[65] BM Kies, "Comparative education series…", *The Educational Journal*, XV(2), October 1940, pp. 12-13.

[66] BM Kies, 'The results of Nazi education', *The Educational Journal*, XV(4), March 1941b, pp.3-4.

Thus, the strategies to resist racist measures should be part of a larger project of struggle against capitalist domination. In this sense, awareness on the part of the oppressed became imperative. That is why this younger generation of teachers proposed and incorporated changes in their everyday lives. By doing so they sought to live in ways that would help them to identify as worthy, independent persons and not as racially alienated men and women anymore.[67]

The new teachers, Kies among them, took a stand to challenge the dominant racial categories. They explicitly rejected the racist descriptions of population groups, hence, they stopped talking about 'Bantus', 'Indians' and 'Coloureds'.[68] In these contexts in which it was necessary to discuss these categories, the teachers tended to add an adjectival phrase before the noun: thus, 'the so-called "Bantus"', 'the so-called "Indians"' and 'the so-called "Coloureds"'.[69] They also questioned the Eurocentric idea of civilisation.[70] The use of the concepts of 'European' and 'Non-European' as identity adscriptions creates multiple resistances: resistance to the dominant mentality within the coloured community that persists in staying differentiated from the rest of the oppressed population; resistance to white domination by challenging its controlling theoretical foundations; resistance to the prevailing Eurocentric points of view, both in South African territory and the international community, which understand European societies as the engine of 'civilisation'.[71]

While it could be argued that the new identity label—'Non-European'—is composed of harmful elements (being not European, not white, and that the designated do not have equal rights), it implied at the same time the revaluation of their own worth.[72] Features and

[67] Informal chat during June 2014 with ex-students of the schools where those teachers used to work allowed me to recover everyday actions that those teachers tended to do inside and outside the schools. They stimulated their students and encouraged them to adopt solidarity as the main value and to think of futures with much more opportunities than the ones imposed by the State.

[68] In their perspective, "Bantu", "Indian", "Coloured" were categories imposed by the State to divide, control and exploit society. As the State began to consolidate the segregation measures, divisions within society tended to become rigid and compulsory, therefore, going against those categories was seen as a way of confronting domination.

[69] Extracted from interviews made during 2014 with ex-students of the schools (anonymous) where the teachers used to work. Most of them explained that teachers used to correct them whenever they used the State racial categories and suggested the use of the idea of "so called…"

[70] Personal interview with Polly Slingers in his Athlone, Cape Town home in March 2013; C Soudien, "The contribution of radical…", *Transformation*, 76, 2011, pp. 44–66; C Soudien, *The Cape radicals…* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

[71] BM Kies, *The contribution of the non-European peoples to world civilisation* (Cape Town: Teacher's League of South Africa, 1953); Rev. ZR Mahabane *et al.,* "A declaration to the nations of the World", Statement of the non-European Unity Movement, July 1945; C Soudien, "The contribution of radical…", *Transformation*, 76, 2011, pp. 44–66.

[72] Personal interview with Polly Slingers in his Athlone, Cape Town home in March 2013.

elements that were viewed by the dominant sectors as unfavourable were regarded by these young teachers as positive aspects of their identities. Claiming they were neither white nor European allowed them to assert who they were.[73] First, they were part of complex societies that made their own contributions to the development of humanity. Their cultural and intellectual values had to be understood as an enrichment of civilisation.[74] Thus, the idea of civilisation should cease to be understood as European private property. It was transformed into a feature common to different societies. Civilisation, therefore, was universal and universalising at the same time.[75] Second, they were individuals with their own agency. For these young individuals, defining themselves implied a long process involving freeing consciousness, facing the condition of their oppression, and trying to reverse its consequences in their daily lives. To that end, their primary strategy was the non-cooperation with the segregation system and the establishment of places for alternative training.[76]

Avoiding racial categories was a strategy that went against the hegemonic logic of denomination and domination. It became almost impossible to name social groups without using historically constructed identification concepts. The resistance to arbitrary designations could not be carried out by using new concepts. Therefore, although debates about categories were important, the engine of change did not lie in the denominations as such, but in daily practice, in the actions of the persons who resisted state control and thereby gave new meaning to old concepts. In that sense, fellowships should be understood as spaces in which new thoughts, new ways of interacting and new communities begin to be created.[77] Even today, the effects of those experiences are still present among former fellowships' members and broadly in South African society.

As the younger teachers in the TLSA were appealing to non-racialism as a weapon to struggle, not only against state segregation, but also against capitalist class exploitation, the old members intended to reaffirm their exclusivism as a strategy to keep race solidarity.[78] Both strategies must be analysed historically when the country's future is uncertain.[79]

[73] Personal interview with Polly Slingers in his Athlone, Cape Town home in March 2013.

[74] BM Kies, *The contribution of the non-European peoples to world civilisation* (Cape Town: Teacher's League of South Africa, 1953); C Soudien, *The Cape radicals…* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

[75] BM Kies, *The contribution of the non-European peoples to world civilisation* (Cape Town: Teacher's League of South Africa, 1953); C Soudien, "The contribution of radical…", *Transformation*, 76, 2011, pp. 44–66.

[76] BM Kies, *The contribution of the non-European peoples to world civilisation* (Cape Town: Teacher's League of South Africa, 1953.

[77] C Soudien, *The Cape radicals…* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

[78] M Adhikari, *Not White enough…*Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

[79] J Hyslop, "'Segregation has fallen on evil days'…", *Journal of Global History*, 7(3), 2012, pp. 438-460.

During the inter-war period, debates and discussions over both positions were held in the Educational Journal. However, these dialogues intensified, and teacher relations became more violent by 1944. The old teacher's denial of sharing the leadership and the younger's intransigence made the dialogue between them difficult and finally impossible. Nevertheless, those first exchanges of ideas and open discussions created the ground for new and more radical projects in the future. Recovering and re-evaluating them is a way of making the history of the TLSA more complex.

Conclusion

In this paper, changes in the identity adscriptions within a sector of the coloured community, namely the intellectual leaders of the TLSA, have been tracked, as reflected in the contents and categories of *The Educational Journal*. Since World War II, the journal has been a space for disputes on the political and ideological perspectives of the older and younger generations of leaders. *The Educational Journal* allowed room for confrontation and critical reflection on international perspectives, the place they should (or should not) take in South African society, and the role of teachers in these matters.

The historical construction of coloured identity is strongly related to the various contexts in which it was framed. In the early years, the members of the TLSA claimed that coloured identity adscription was a way of strengthening the unity of a diverse community, maintaining ties of solidarity and cooperation. As time went by, different meanings arose. With the confirmation of the colonial state, identity nomenclature became a tool for social control, while community members used it to obtain rights.[80] The deepening of segregationist measures during the inter-war period and the symbolic effects of the expansion of Nazism led the new generation of TLSA leaders to reject that identity construction in favour of a new encompassing identity that included all the oppressed people, the 'Non-Europeans'.

While the older generation of teachers was interpreting reality from a colonial mindset, the younger generation of leaders were able to build a critical and thoughtful interpretation since they were raised in a context of deeper oppression while in response to Trotskyist ideas, Pan-Africanism and appreciation of difference were emerging. The Eurocentric racist and evolutionist theories encountered a turning point in South Africa during World War II,

[80] B Freund, "South Africa…", R Ross, A Kelk Mager and B Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); S Marks, "War and Union, 1899-1910", in R Ross, A Kelk Mager and B Nasson, B. (eds.), *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Vol. 2, 1885-1994* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

while new theoretical perspectives emerged. These leaders encouraged the re-evaluation of subordinated identities, resulting in the development of new social practices questioning the methods of control and state domination.

The theoretical reflections and new daily practices laid the foundations for a new community, no longer based on racial definitions. The solidarity developed among various oppressed groups generated hope for change. The beginning of the apartheid period (from 1948) put paid to such efforts, however, the main ideas of non-racialism remained alive and reemerged in new and more radical political programmes.

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