PROTEST AND ACCOMMODATION: AMBIGUITIES IN THE RACIAL POLITICS OF THE APO, 1909-1923

MOHAMED ADHIKARI
University of Cape Town

Historical writing on the coloured community of South Africa has tended to accept coloured identity as given and to portray it as a fixed entity. The failure to take cognizance of the fluidity of coloured self-definition and the ambiguities inherent to the process has resulted in South African historiography presenting an over-simplified image of the phenomenon. The problem stems partly from an almost exclusive focus on coloured protest politics which has had the effect of exaggerating the resistance of coloureds to white racism and the advance of segregationism. Furthermore, little consideration has been given to the nature of coloured identity or to the manner in which it shaped political consciousness within the coloured community. This is particularly true of analyses of the period following the inauguration of the Union of South Africa in 1910, a time when the legitimacy of coloured identity was not in any way questioned within the coloured community and when coloured protest politics was dominated by one body, the African Political Organization (APO).

These inadequacies are clearly evident in recent academic writing on coloured history. Richard van der Ross, in his account of the history of coloured political organization, for example, appears oblivious of the need to investigate these issues despite previously having written a polemical book on coloured racial identity. Gavin Lewis’ view that coloured identity is a ‘white imposed categorization’ is a simplistic formulation which ignores a wide range of evidence to the contrary. Ian Goldin’s book, written from a neo-Marxist perspective, at one point acknowledges the complexity of coloured identity but then proceeds to treat it as little more than a ploy the white supremacist state used to divide and rule the black population.

1. 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 people descended largely from Cape slaves, indigenous Khoisan peoples and other blacks 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 dominant white minority and the numerically preponderent African population.

2. It was only in the 1930s with the emergence of a radical movement in coloured protest politics that the legitimacy of coloured identity was first challenged. The trend has since grown to the extent that today a substantial pro­portion of people classified as coloured under the Apartheid laws reject the identity.


By exploring how ambiguities and contradictions within coloured identity helped shape the political consciousness of coloureds this article seeks to draw attention to complexities of their political experience hitherto neglected by historians. It thereby also hopes to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of a crucial period in the political history of the coloured community. Special emphasis is placed on the ways in which the marginality and the intermediate status of this social group resulted in ambivalences in their political outlook. The APO, the first newspaper to be directed specifically at a coloured readership, is an ideal vehicle for such an enquiry. As the mouthpiece of an organization at the very heart of coloured communal life at a time when the direct testimony of coloured people in the historical record is scarce, the APO provides unique insights into the social identity and political attitudes within the coloured community.

I

Founded in Cape Town in 1902, the APO was the first substantive coloured political association and subsequently dominated coloured politics for nearly four decades. 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 the terms of the Draft South Africa Act. The impulse to establish the newspaper sprang especially from the organization’s determination to combat the 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.7

Besides the immediate concern of mobilizing coloureds 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.8 The first issue of the APO, which appeared on 24 May 1909,9 therefore 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’.10

8. The APO defined its objectives in its constitution as; (a) The promotion of unity between 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 Feb. 1911.
9. 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, 32 (1978), 81-90; B. Willan, ‘Correspondence’ Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library, 33 (1978), 34-36. The only other newspaper intended for a coloured readership to have appeared before the 1930s was the St Clairion, which Lewis, 123 correctly characterizes as being little more than a propaganda paper of the Cape Nationalist Party.
10. See also APO, 4 June 1910.
Published fortnightly 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 concentrated mainly on local and national politics in as 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 the editor. Abdurahman was the pre-eminent leader of the organization and dominated it for the entire thirty-five years of his Presidency from 1905 to his death in 1940. Not only did Abdurahman write most of the editorials but Fredericks was also his closest collaborator within the APO. 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 its claims of speaking for the coloured people as a whole, the APO represented the interests of the emergent coloured petty bourgeoisie. Its newspaper thus reflected the weltanschauung of this social group which formed the elite stratum within the coloured community. This was especially true of the period during which the APO was published because the coloured petty bourgeoisie was at no stage more united in its political aims and its social aspirations. The APO completely dominated coloured politics during these years and had grown into a national body by the time of Union with several thousand members in a countrywide network of branches. Other contemporary coloured political organizations such as Francis Peregrino’s Coloured Men’s Political and Protectorate Association and the South African Coloured Union under the leadership of James Curry drew negligible support. And although John Tobin, who supported the Afrikaner Bond and later the National Party, still called Stone Meetings till at least the late-1910s, they were 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. 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.

13. 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 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 to publicize his pro-Afrikaner political stance.
during that decade. Throughout its life the APO therefore proved to be as authen-
tic a voice of the coloured petty bourgeoisie as one could hope to find.

The coloured elite consisted largely of artisans, small retail traders, clerks, teachers and a handful of professionals. 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 coloureds, 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 discrimi-
nation." The APO therefore 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

The prevalence of English 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 vari-
ants, the educated elite tended to be English-speaking. In general English enjoyed far greater prestige amongst coloureds because it was an international language with a rich literature and was identified as the language of ‘culture’, ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’. Most importantly, there was a general perception that proficiency in English held much better prospects for social and occupation-
al advancement. The emergent Afrikaans language, on the other hand, was derided as a ‘vulgar patois fit only for the kitchen’ because it lacked a formal gram-
mar 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’. 17 In contrast to English which was associated with the liberalism and racial tolerance of British rule, Cape Dutch was associated with the racism and the boorishness of the Afrikaner. 18 Being the language of the coloured labouring poor, Cape Dutch was also taken to be a badge of the lower classes. For this reason most status-conscious coloureds 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 coloureds 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. 19

17. APO 8 April 1911.
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.

II

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. 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, which the APO characterized as a day of 'mourning' for the coloured people of South Africa, 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-profile political campaigns in the decade prior to Union had brought home the extent of coloured political impotence and the futility of these tactics. After having their assimilationist aspirations excited by the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), politicized coloureds in May 1902 suffered the severe disappointment of having the Treaty of Vereeniging effectively rule out the enfranchisement of blacks in the ex-Boer republics by stipulating that the question of black voting rights would only be settled after they had attained self-government. It is therefore not surprising that this development helped to precipitated the formation of the APO in September of that year. A few years later, 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 coloureds despite the most spirited protest campaign yet launched in the name of the coloured people. The following year the APO sent a delegation to London that unsuccessfully petitioned the British Government to modify the highly discriminatory franchise to be granted to both the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony upon their attainment of Responsible Government in 1907 and 1908 respectively. This was followed by the 'humiliation' of Union, the clearest demonstration yet of the political impotence of the coloured community.

22. Cape Times, 9 Jan. 1901; Cape Mercury, 8 Jan. 1901; South African Spectator, 20 April, 1902; Marais, 275-76.
24. This Act introduced compulsory public education for white children up to Std. IV or the age of fourteen and instituted a programme to provide all white children with such education within a few years. Maurice, 13-14; The Owl, 17 March, 1905; South African News, 17 Aug. 1904; 25 Feb. 1905; 6 March 1905; Cape Times, 26 Aug. 1904; 'Speech on the Education Bill by Dr. Abdurahman', Abdurahman Family Papers, University of Chicago.
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 coloureds were feeling particularly threatened by the rising tide of segregationism. Indeed, the newspaper was primarily a product of the embattled coloured elite’s struggle to defend 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.

In the face of this deteriorating socio-political climate, the APO after Union, progressively abandoned its activism and its ambitious political campaigning in favour of the more pragmatic strategy of pursuing smaller, but more immediately attainable, goals and adopting a cautious, less obtrusive and incremental approach. This shift was noticeable within the APO as early as mid-1911 as it became progressively less outspoken and assertive and more concerned with the social upliftment of the coloured people. Indeed, in 1919 the APO changed its name to the African People’s Organization to reflect this shift away from the pursuit of coloured interests through political means to a concentration on the social upliftment of the coloured community.

This strategy of pragmatic incrementalism on the part of the APO was largely a result of the marginality and the intermediate status of coloureds in South African society. Coloureds were marginal in the sense that they at no stage formed more than ten per cent of the population and lacked significant economic or political power as a result of their heritage of slavery, dispossession and racial oppression. 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 coloureds within the society resulted in ambiguities and unresolved contradictions within coloured identity, especially the elite strata.

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. During the decades straddling the turn of the century the coloured petty bourgeoisie was under stress from contradictory social pressures and faced a predicament common to most racially-defined, subordinate elites in modern society.

26. Lewis, 70-74.
27. Adhikari, 14.
While many coloureds were growing wealthier and acquiring the means to sustain the standards of middle class respectability, their civil rights were being eroded. Their assimilationist overtures were rejected by whites and they were increasingly subjected to racial discrimination. Their marginality, moreover, prevented coloureds 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 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. 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, the potential 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 rank injustice of blatant 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.30

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 it did admit a small number of whites and Africans to membership,31 the APO saw itself as an organization expressly for coloured people. Notwithstanding its name32 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; ‘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’.33 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 carrying the credo that it ‘will advocate a policy of justice and equality for all men in South Africa’, the newspaper nevertheless in many ways accepted 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

31. APO, 4 Nov. 1911; Trapido, 100-01.
32. 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 often used by the APO.
33. APO, 9 April 1910.
group apart that needed to minister to their own needs. The APO was highly sensitive to this racial distinction because it recognized that for coloureds 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 and that their greater cultural distance from Western bourgeois norms evoked more virulent prejudice from whites. They thus sought to stress the affinity of coloureds to the white sector of the population and sought to establish a status of relative privilege for coloureds vis-a-vis Africans on the grounds that they were more 'civilized' and were partly descended from the white settler community. 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... and their mode of life conforms with the best European model.

The APO's assimilationism and its coloured separatism, 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.

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'. 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, 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.

The APO reconciled the contradiction between its rejection of racism and its acceptance of an inferior status for coloureds relative to whites by adopt-
ing a political philosophy greatly influenced by the ideas of Booker T. Washington. Like Washington, the APO believed that a pragmatic strategy of incrementally improving the socio-economic condition of blacks 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, the coloured elite had a progressionist vision of human history and consequently of the development of the coloured people. Educated coloureds tended to view the history of the coloured people as having been a steady march of progress from a dark past of slavery and savagery to their current level of 'civilization' where the most advanced members of their 'race' had a just claim to full equality with whites. For them recent political reverses were temporary set-backs. They regarded it to be a matter of time before liberal values were re-asserted and that 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', coloureds would in time overcome white racial prejudice and win them acceptance into the dominant society.

The political tactics of the APO rested on these assumptions and were aimed at expediting the process through active promotion of coloured self-improvement. Contemplating the most effective way for coloureds to gain 'full political freedom and privileges' the APO endorsed the opinion that '... we have to better ourselves, improve our education, mode of living and environment, seek to become proficient in our callings and trades'. 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.' This 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.

During the earlier years of its existence, the emergence of a new slant to the racial exclusiveness of the coloured elite helped to reinforce the APO's separatist tendencies. While the pragmatic approach of Booker T. Washington remained dominant within the APO, the younger generation of educated and politicized coloureds found the more assertive and self-confident ideology of 39. Washington argued that Negroes should temporarily accept their inferior status instead 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 Negroes full civil rights. See L. Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The making of a black leader, (New York, 1972), 204 ff.; A. Taylor, Travail and Triumph: Black life and culture in the South since the Civil War, (Westport, 1976), 54-5; A. Meier, Negro thought in America, (Ann Arbor, 1966), 100 ff.
41. APO, 8 April 1911; 6 Dec. 1913.
42. APO, 24 May 1912; Educational Journal, Dec. 1917; Adhikari, 39-40.
43. APO, 31 July 1909.
44. APO, 3 Dec. 1910.
W.E.B. du Bois more attractive. Those influenced by du Bois felt that coloureds were too diffident and too dependent on whites in matters relating to the welfare of their community. To overcome this self-abnegation, they argued, coloureds needed to build self-confidence and themselves take the initiative in uplifting their people. Accordingly exhortations for coloureds 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 the Cape Town branch of the APO Harold Cressy, a leading coloured teacher, indicated a predilection for this more affirmative strain of thought when he complained of South African blacks relying on whites to be their spokesmen and to act on their behalf. 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.

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 Afro-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.

Besides the focus on Afro-American politics the APO displayed a growing interest in the fortunes of black peoples in other parts of the world, especially those subordinate to Western powers. 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 internationally. 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

45. 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, 1986), 75 ff.; M. Weinberg, W.E.B. du Bois: A Reader, (New York, 1970), xi-xvii; Meier, 190ff.
46. See APO, 8 Oct. 1910; 26 Aug. 1911; 1 June 1912; 8 Aug. 1914 for some examples.
47. APO, 25 March 1911.
48. Evidence of Bishop D.H Simms before the Cape Coloured Commission, 24 Nov. 1934, Abdurahman Family Papers, University of Chicago; C. Lowers, AME Church 75th Anniversary, (Cape Town, 1971); South African Spectator, 13 May 1902; Sun, 18 May, 1934; 19 June 1942.
49. See APO, 26 March 1910; 17 June 1911; 13 Jan. 1912; 7 Nov. 1919; 2 Oct. 1920 for a few examples.
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.’ 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.

In this respect, the *APO* held a special admiration for the Japanese who had transformed themselves from an insular, tradition-bound society into a world power within of a few decades. The coloured elite was particularly enamoured by the Japanese because they perceived them to be a ‘brown race’ like the coloured people. Moreover, in their visits to Cape Town, the predominant manifestation of the Japanese presence was that inimitable symbol of power and technological advancement, the warship. The *APO* therefore evinced a deep respect for the Japanese. There is no more revealing expression of coloured petty bourgeois attitudes toward the Japanese during the early twentieth century than J. R. Strydom’s observations when a Japanese warship visited Cape Town harbour in 1922. Strydom, a prominent coloured teacher, 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 had] ... 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.

III

In the year prior to it temporarily ceasing publication in November 1915, 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 in a manner that would ensure peace and stability for the future. The *APO* trusted that their patriotism and the contribution of coloureds to

51. See *APO*, 7 May 1910; 6 May 1911; 13 Jan. 1912; 12 June 1920 for some examples.
the war effort would be recognized and rewarded with an amelioration of racial discrimination. It expected coloureds 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. Consequently the APO anticipated a gradual elimination of racial barriers and the integration of coloureds into all levels of national life in the post-War world.

The APO thus supported the Allied cause with enthusiasm and ostentatiously displayed its loyalty to the Empire and its patriotism for South Africa. Indeed, the APO eagerly helped to recruit volunteers for the Cape Corps, a coloured regiment instituted to allow coloureds 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. 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'.

Because the APO only resumed publication in August 1919, after coloureds had largely been disabused of their optimism that the ending of the War would usher in a new era of racial tolerance, there is little direct evidence of its expectations of the post-War world. The hopes of the coloured elite 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 Journal was in a real sense an associate publication of the APO at this time. 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’. The expectations of the coloured petty bourgeoisie, and hence of the APO, as the War drew to a close were evident in the way the 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 coloureds having ‘nobly 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’.

55. APO, 5 Sept. 1914; 19 Sept. 1914.
56. A. Desmore, With the Second Cape Corps through Central Africa, (Cape Town, 1920), 5.
57. Adhikari, 15.
While war-induced inflation undermined the commercial viability of the
AP0,60 World War I in another respect came to the rescue of the newspaper, albeit only temporarily. 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 it sank more deeply into debt, as its circulation shrank and as the organization itself slowly declined 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. By giving the coloured elite hope of a new dawn after the conflict and by providing the APO with sensational news that could be garnered with relatively little effort, World War I presented it with a reprieve. The newspaper struggled along until November 1915 when, beset by financial difficulties, it ceased publication for nearly four years.

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 coloureds 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 conference for the first time since 1913 but it also resurrected the APO in August of that year.61 The period immediately after the War witnessed a brief flurry of the political activism that had marked the organization in the years prior to Union. After the cessation of hostilities the APO appealed to 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 1919.62 When its petition was ignored and the discriminatory franchise of South Africa extended to South West Africa, it was apparent that coloureds would not reap any reward from their support of the war effort.

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 this was still prior to the legislative onslaught on black civil rights of the 1920’s and 1930’s. The false expectations of the coloured elite were nourished by their progressionist assumptions and continued faith that British liberalism would somehow prevail in the end.63 The coloured petty bourgeoisie, moreover, was growing in size and

60. See R. McGregor, McGregor's Who Owns Whom: The investor's handbook, (Cape Town, 1990), rear fold-out, for an index and annual percentage changes of the purchasing power of the Rand or its equivalent for the period 1910 to 1989.
61. 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, 1976), 212 claims that the newspaper was reconstituted with financial aid from the Unionist Party but offers no evidence to substantiate this claim.
62. APO, 1 Aug. 1919.
63. Adhikari, 7, 39.
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.\textsuperscript{64}

Until the mid-1920s the APO leadership, furthermore, drew encouragement from Afrikaner opposition 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 up as 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.\textsuperscript{65}

Given its assimilationist aspirations and the marginality of the constituency it represented, the APO had little choice but to persist with its pragmatic incrementalism 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.\textsuperscript{66} The APO Burial Society and the APO Building Society both outlived the APO that collapsed in 1944 and are still in existence today. But 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.

IV

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.\textsuperscript{67} 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

\textsuperscript{64} Union of South Africa Year Book, 1946, (G.P. 53895-1947), 46-47; L.M. Thompson, The Cape Coloured Franchise, (Johannesburg, 1949), 55; van der Ross, 1986: 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 Oct. 1915; APO, 1 Aug. 1919; Shifrin, 'New deal for coloured people: A study of National Party policies toward the coloured people, (B.A (Honours) thesis, University of Cape Town, 1962), 10.

\textsuperscript{65} APO, 28 Jan. 1922; 25 March 1922; Educational Journal, April 1922.

\textsuperscript{66} APO, 21 April 1923; 22 Dec. 1923.

\textsuperscript{67} The Sun published from August 1932 and the Cape Standard from May 1936 onwards were the first commercial newspapers aimed at a coloured readership.
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 coloured separatism, on the other. Having continually to modulate their responses to white supremacism to strike a balance between these competing interests, the APO and its newspaper inevitably displayed ideological inconsistencies and were ambivalent in their political outlook.

Contrary to the current literature on coloured history, the response of the coloured community 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 coloureds. 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 to mobilize 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.