

## Identity, place and politics in the auto/biographies of two South African educators

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### Introduction

Towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the life histories of two prominent South African educators appeared in print. Their stories were remarkably similar, and their lives followed parallel trajectories. They shared a first name, Richard, were both born in Cape Town in the early 1920s and grew up in the households of teacher parents who were members of the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA). Like their parents they attended church or independent schools since "non-European" (i.e. nonwhite) pupils were prohibited from attending government schools. Both attended University of Cape Town at a time when access to higher education for most South Africans was hard to come by. Both qualified as teachers, and by 1944 had gained Masters degrees in their respective fields. Following the electoral victories of the National Party in 1948 and 1953, and the subsequent policy evolution of social separation into formalised apartheid, both were statutorily classified as "Coloured",<sup>1</sup> and like other members of their "population group" were subjected to laws governing separate political participation, education and living space.

As young teachers both became members of a rapidly radicalising TLSA, and later emerged as civic leaders who set themselves firmly against apartheid. Both lived longer than eighty years, mostly as committed social activists. Yet, although their origins were similar, their eventual political paths were very different. In their youth and as young professionals they developed divergent political views, leading to opposing life choices. Their names were Richard Dudley (1924-2009) and Richard van der Ross (b. 1921).

In reading about these two men, one is immediately struck by the similarities but also by their divergent paths. Moreover, Alan Wieder's biography of Dudley, *Teacher and Comrade* (2008), and Richard van der Ross's autobiography, *A Blow to the Hoop* (2010) generate different kinds of silence and different world views. Yet both books give insight into the expectations and social experiences of an urban elite whose leading members were discriminated against because of the colour of their skin.

In an article on "the discourse of selfhood" and the "constructions of identity", Erzsébet Barát makes a number of theoretical remarks that are imminently relevant for the present discussion of life writing. The first of these is that identity is "an intersubjective, retrospective construction from within the existing, discursively mediated practices of writing and telling a life" (165); in other words, that we make sense of the world and our place in it through the stories we tell, and that auto/biographies are discursive acts reconstructing the past as a means of understanding the self and the other. Secondly, Barát remarks, quoting Norman Fairclough, that the genre of life writing is a mode of discursive practice functioning "to construct a continuous, unified personal identity at the intersection of multiple discontinuous, fragmented and often contradictory socio-cultural positionings" (165). Third is the related claim that biographical narrative presents itself as a "search for closure" or a "process of plotting a meaningful trajectory out of and for one's

life" (166). In many instances such constructions of identity emanate from the "resolution of a central dilemma" of the subjects' lives (166).

The subjects in *Teacher and Comrade* and *A Blow to the Hoop* are inscribed or inscribe themselves into their historical context, and their relation to this context involves a contested social and political identity. Political identity becomes, in Barát's words, the "dilemma" to be resolved. Under successive pre-1994 governments, South Africa's population had been categorised statutorily into virtually impermeable subnational identities, conferring rights on a sliding scale of racial privilege. The disparate group of people called "Coloured" had an intermediate status in apartheid's stratified hierarchy, between those classified "European" or "White," and those classified "Native", "Bantu" or "Black". The two strata represented the opposite ends of economic, educational, political and social power, privilege and opportunity. Ethnicities are not stable, but are "reinvented, reinterpreted, and rewritten in each generation by each individual of each ethnicity" (Davis 357), and the texts under discussion trace the battle around identity formation that took place within the generation represented by these two men.

### **Biography, autobiography and education**

The formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 created a state where the social place and advancement of nonwhite people were heavily curtailed. Throughout the country nonwhites were restricted in and excluded from labour and social and political arrangements, and also largely excluded from comprehensive state supported education. Education for white pupils had been compulsory since 1913, but it was optional for nonwhite children (Pells 66--67). Throughout the Union the latter had to rely on mission or church primary schools; some catered for secondary education but none went much beyond middle school level (Doman; Marais 271--274). Although there were several public high schools in Cape Town during the first three decades of the 20th century, they catered almost exclusively for white pupils, at least until the African People's Organisation (APO) under the presidency of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman established Trafalgar High in Cape Town in 1912. In 1926 Abdurahman again played a pivotal role, this time in the founding of Livingstone High in Cape Town's southern suburbs. For several years these were the only two high schools available to the region's large Coloured population. They became the alma maters of generations of opinion-makers, teachers and other professionals in the Cape Town community and beyond. Van der Ross completed his final two years of high school at Trafalgar, commuting by train from the southern suburbs to District Six, a working class neighbourhood close to the city centre (Blow 15). Dudley spent most of his life at Livingstone High, forty-six years in total, first as a pupil, and later as an influential teacher (Wieder 16--17, 24).

Dudley's longevity and his prominence at Livingstone High contributed to his stature in the teaching fraternity and the broader community. Over the years, thousands of students had passed through his hands, and many remembered him fondly (see Nasson). His American biographer recounts instances where several of his Cape Town informants referred to his "benign spirit," his striving for academic excellence and his leftist politics, "connecting academic discipline, nonracialism, social class and world imperialism" (Wieder 151, 17, 2). Wieder explores his subject's life history chronologically from his childhood and youth, through his university years, to his experiences as a committed

teacher dealing with the pressures of educational choices during the politically unsettled 70s and 80s. To let Dudley's voice be heard Wieder quotes extensively from their conversations, augmenting these with his own sympathetic interpretations. Apart from his reputation as a gifted, compassionate mentor Dudley was also closely identified with the left-leaning TLSA and its political ally, the Unity Movement of South Africa (a reconstituted formation of the Non-European Unity Movement, NEUM), where he worked as an activist participating in political theory discussion groups, drafting pamphlets or convening and participating in conferences.<sup>2</sup> Undergirding Dudley's narrative, as mediated by Wieder, is the dominance of his socialist beliefs, issuing in, for instance, his aversion to racial labelling and his resistance to the (racial) accommodative political structures of the apartheid state. Wieder chooses to present his subject through the prism of his educational and political identity: "The pedagogy and politics of Richard Dudley and his comrades have two foundational stands that are written in stone-- noncollaboration and nonracialism" (2). Each chapter title alludes to the dual features of education and politics in his life history: "Childhood and Youth, Learning Books, Learning Non-racialism" (chapter 2); "Education and Politics: Lessons for Teaching and Struggle" (chapter 3); "Becoming a Teacher, Becoming a Comrade: Pre-apartheid Years" (chapter 4), and so forth. The biography ends with Wieder's reflections on Dudley in the post-apartheid (post-1994) era. Wieder characterises his continuing principled stance as an "unbending adherence" to his organisation's political programme and a "total refusal towards co-operation with the government [...] and other opposition groups" (144).

Whereas the presentation of Dudley's biography is filtered through the dualisms of noncollaboration and nonracialism, and politics and teaching, van der Ross's autobiography is thematically free-ranging and reflective, while broadly chronologically organised. Education is also central to van der Ross's life history, although his political and social involvement went beyond teaching and teachers' unionism to the founding of a political party, the editing of a weekly newspaper, the administration of education in the Department of Coloured Affairs,<sup>3</sup> his membership of several government and private sector commissions, and, in his later life in the post-1994 era, his role as full-time regional politician and South African ambassador to Spain. Van der Ross's life was marked by adaptation to new challenges, with strategic compromise and pragmatic choices often creating alliances and friendships across the rigid boundaries of the South African social experience. In some instances he formed alliances with big business or foreign charitable foundations to build housing projects, and to fund and create educational outreach or cultural projects in lower class Coloured neighbourhoods. In his autobiography the recurring theme mostly is: "We [the Coloured people] had to survive, so we overcame the problems, the rebuffs, the slights and the insults" (*Blow* 10). His was also an intellect defined by his close attention to all matters pertaining to the 'Coloured experience'. He wrote several studies on the Coloured people including *Myths and Attitudes -- An Inside Look at the Coloured People* (1979) and *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid -- A Study of Political Movements among the Coloured People of South Africa 1880--1985* (1986). He says in his autobiography: "I have often been criticised for dwelling too much on 'the Coloured people'. But I make no apology for this. Some people study roses, others study cricket, I study the Coloured people. None of us needs apologise" (190).

In a world circumscribed for generations by social prejudice it is little wonder that education plays a key role in both narratives. Education for 'non-Europeans' during the

nineteenth century “laboured under considerable difficulties” and in some instances not even the barest skills, such as writing, were taught (Patterson 92). Dudley and van der Ross grew up in a period where the ruling party’s policies in the decades since the inception of Union favoured “civilised” labour. It was “accepted by many people that every European, no matter what his standard of living may be, is ipso facto civilised, but in the case of the non-European the onus is placed upon him to prove it” (quoted in Marais 265; see Patterson 175). Both Dudley and van der Ross were heirs to the nineteenth-century belief in education as a civilising force. The promise held out by the Cape liberal tradition lingered on well into the evolution of Union (Lewis 8). Ambitious nonwhite leaders seeking to improve their lot often cited the slogan “equal rights for every civilized man south of the Zambezi”.<sup>4</sup> The historian Gavin Lewis (8--9) has pointed out that even during its heyday in the late nineteenth century, Cape liberalism in practice entrenched colonial traditions and that little changed in the social circumstances of people of colour; it remained “a conservative creed, accepting social and economic inequalities as the natural order of things” while assuming “the inherent superiority of Western standards of ‘civilisation’”.

Yet, in spite of such deep-rooted odds, Dudley and van der Ross, like many of their peers, regarded education as a way of countering social prejudice and turning perceived personal inferiority around. Education became their calling, and community activism an extension of their teaching: the demands for political equality, knowledge, merit and social development converged. Generally, van der Ross in his autobiography sees it as a direct consequence of the state of a particular society that the teachers took on “major leadership roles”; valuing knowledge, they became “the custodians of the people’s heritage” (*Blow* 80). Van der Ross’s view is that he “must use the education which [he has] been privileged to receive, to enable others to receive theirs [...] the obligation to serve rates higher than any personal discomfort which [he] may experience in the discharge of [his] duty to others” (59).

Wieder’s biography of Dudley is an extended treatment of a personality who regarded teaching as an activist historical function, and who taught his charges with the following dictum: “I think that you’re worth far more and you’ve got a contribution to make. You’ve got to be new people in the new South Africa” (Wieder 75). The TLSA of which Dudley was a leading member saw a major task of teachers as “building the nation” which it described as “a process of attacking, weakening and finally eradicating” division. Teacher activism in schools also involved “removing blinkers and prejudices and clearing the mind in regard to colour and ‘race’” (Hugo 411--412; see also Wieder 91--93).

Despite their pronounced ideological differences (as will become apparent later), both Dudley and van der Ross departed from perspectives which valued education for its own sake. But, as members of politically dominated communities, they negotiated their relationships with the politically and economically powerful in very different ways, which makes their narratives – so similar in some ways – diverge in others, notably as regards social place and “race”, and the choice between pragmatism and principle in political activism.

Presenting social place and ‘race’

Writ large across both the autobiography and the biography are the histories of social place and “race” in South Africa and especially the life experiences of those officially classified “Coloured”. The two families -- both sets of parents were teachers -- lived in proximity. Van der Ross provides a context to this small set of petit bourgeoisie in the southern suburbs community of early 20th century Cape Town, with regards to social status, geographical place and social divisions:

Most Wynberg Coloured people lived ‘across the tracks,’ on the Cape Flats side of the railway and the Main Road; we lived on the mountain side, where mainly whites lived [...] More towards Constantia and near to the Victoria Hospital there was a group of houses occupied by Coloured persons, the Dudleys, the Mulders, the Beets and others. They were on the Cape Town side of Constantia Road [i.e. ‘where mainly whites lived’]. (van der Ross, *Blow* 4)

This “separation by custom” (van der Ross, *Blow* 9) was increased after the formation of Union and the institutionalisation of a variety of discriminatory measures. Around the 1920s and 1930s colonial perspectives on “race” had been mostly informed by remnants of mainstream Social Darwinist race theory (see for instance van Wyk). In literary texts, early history and sociological treatments, the “in-between-ness” of those classified Coloured was associated with disease, backwardness, impoverishment and innate moral and social deficiency (see February; Gerwel; Marais viii, 256--286; McDonald; Millin). Later a range of propositions on their marginality found its way into the academic literature (see Dickie-Clark; also Patterson [5] on “social marginality”). Yet the portrayals of their childhood in Cape Town’s southern suburbs show that Dudley and van der Ross looked upon and experienced their social positions quite differently from this.

It is inevitable that Wieder in introducing Dudley should focus initially on the politics of location and “race”. In recalling his childhood Dudley chose to emphasise the nonracial character of his upbringing and early social life in the southern suburbs. He reported on the apparent ease with which people interacted in their household: “Our house was [...] what one might call in modern terms nonracial in that you had people of different colors and different social classes visiting there” (in Wieder 34). Considering the undeniable practice of social separation throughout Cape society it appears that Dudley, in one quotation, almost had to convince his interlocutor of his early experiences of nonracialism: “There was Miss Ward [a white teacher] [...] I don’t think, man, I’m telling you quite honestly I didn’t think of those people in terms of color” (in Wieder 36).

Wieder remarks that Dudley had “such an aversion to racial classifications that he still [saw] the need to sometimes use the phrase ‘so-called coloureds’ or ‘so-called Jews’ or ‘so-called blacks’ or ‘so-called whites’” (33). In a social setting where skin colour variation meant either access or denial of access to economic advancement, even Dudley had to reflect those nuances in his speech. He once explained that since his two younger sisters “were not so deeply tanned” (22) they were able to take up clerical jobs reserved for white people. Elsewhere he said: “[my childhood was] ‘white and black and speckled’” (35). Both these quotations point to his attempt at resolving his identity dilemma. “Tanned” became his euphemism for avoiding the use of explicit South African racial terminology while “speckled” was his substitution for “Coloured”, a term despised among his political associates.

Van der Ross's reminiscences could not be more different: "I was born a South African, and grew up as a Coloured South African" (*Blow* 8). He immediately recognises the controversial nature of his statement and sets out to explain its usage and defend himself against his potential detractors: "Now, the appellation 'Coloured' was not regarded as unacceptable in the earlier years of my life, and before. It was a descriptive term meaning 'of mixed descent'. And being of mixed descent was not necessarily demeaning" (*Blow* 8). The "social custom" that van der Ross describes relates to all manner of social and vocational activities where people adapted to their social circumstances and "made the best of it": "the term Coloured was freely attached to sports unions, horticultural associations, charitable bodies and a host of other organisations" (*Blow* 9).

For van der Ross the social distances between nonwhite and white people, even neighbours, are apparent and noticeable where social spaces are integrated: "Yes, many of the neighbours who moved into the Silverlea Estate around us were white, but our association with them very seldom went beyond greeting or a polite enquiry after their health", and again, unlike Dudley, he notices the racial identity of his teachers: "In my high school years at Trafalgar, all the teachers except one [...] were white" (*Blow* 5, 15). The relationship between those defined as "Africans"<sup>5</sup> and Coloureds is not raised in Wieder's biography but van der Ross's description provides us with an understanding of their patterns of socialisation during the early 20th century in Cape Town:

In Cape Town at that time there were few African people of a reasonable degree of sophistication. I think there was one African medical doctor at the time. Most Africans were labourers on buildings, or doing menial tasks such as delivering milk or working petrol pumps. They were not semi-skilled workers in the factories, although some might be lorry-drivers. They were prevented from being tradesmen because the labour law did not allow that they could become apprentices. Most were migrant workers, being allowed to be in the Western Cape only as such, and having to return to their homes [...] about one month each year. These conditions were the result of history, of prejudice and of race discrimination. (46--47)

In reading these life writings, one has to keep in mind that they exist in a discourse created through other texts and pronouncements, as Barát (165--166) has indicated. The differences between the two alert us to a contradiction that becomes apparent when we read them against informed contemporaneous social descriptions of the broader social environment. The historian J. S. Marais wrote in 1939 that the country and local communities experienced considerable "strengthening [of] the spirit of racial exclusiveness even in spheres not yet affected by legislation" (284) while the anthropologist Sheila Patterson in the 1950s tried to dispel the enduring myths of "bad blood", "miscegenation" and "the mental, moral and physical inferiority of the mixed-breeds" (177), which were de rigueur in early century popular discourse and literary and scientific writing.

These views suggest that Dudley's recollection of his nonracial, multi-class home environment points to an extraordinarily inclusive social setting. Whereas the social distance between the Coloured working class and the (then newly emerged) Coloured petty bourgeoisie was not great and they socialised easily across class divides, the same cannot necessarily be said of interactions between nonwhites and whites or between

Africans and Coloureds, as van der Ross indicates (see also Adhikari, "Introduction" 11--12). The homely inclusivity Dudley alludes to is at variance with developments or experiences in the broader community.

What is the basis of this contradiction? Dudley's avowed nonracialism and his representation as one who "does not think in terms of color" is obviously derived from his ideological beliefs and his membership of the radicalised TLSA and NEUM. As a socialist Dudley's views on "race" and ethnicity were clear-cut: he denied the supposed significance of such social categories in his use of scare quotes or his addition of the qualifier 'so-called'. Although he did not express himself on the "future of the Coloured people", an anonymous opinion piece in the TLSA mouthpiece, *The Educational Journal* (he was a leading editorial member), clarified his organisation's position:

[W]e share the view that the future of this country belongs to those who accept and work for and will work in a single, non-racial democracy. Which means, in short, that the future of the 'Coloured People' lies in the disappearance of the species now classified as 'Coloured People', together with the disappearance of the categories 'Bantu', 'Indian', White and Non-White. (Hugo 428--429)

Dudley's avoidance of racial nomenclature clearly reflected this abhorrence of any form of racial classification, while his specific avoidance of the term Coloured probably spoke to his refusal of its association with inferiority, malformation and "Colouredism" or eiesoortigheid, the promotion of a distinct ethnic Coloured identity within apartheid's racial hierarchy.

Van der Ross's use of Coloured (always with a capital "C") is equally ideological. It is a choice one should understand against the perceived ambiguity of Coloured identity. From early on, as in Patterson's question "Where do the Coloured people fit into this situation?" (176) or Dickie-Clark's notion of the "marginal situation" .. The writers of a relatively recent history of the city of Cape Town refer as follows to the perceived dilemma of mid-century Coloured identity: "What were they: 'African' or 'European', 'Christian' or 'Muslim', 'English' or 'Afrikaans', 'Coloured' or 'Malay', working class or middle class, conservative or radical?" (Bickford-Smith et al. 80). Against this background van der Ross's resolution of any identity dilemma is self-affirmative, a positive, self-accepting declaration. As he puts it: "The purpose of language is to convey ideas as accurately as possible" (9, see also van der Ross, *Myths* 3--4). He understands this self-identification to be based on shared histories, social values, cultural practices and beliefs. As if to underscore this shared identity, his references shift from the autobiographical first person to the collective genitive: "These forms of social conduct have had a marked influence on *our* lives, and still do. The emergence of *the Coloured people* as a population group with a certain identity at the Cape was a gradual but real process. Our mixed descent was noticed and recorded" (van der Ross, *Blow* 10, added emphases).

### **Choosing sides: Pragmatism, principle and activism**

Through statutory machinations that violated the country's constitution, the National Party in the mid-1950s instituted legislation to remove Coloured voters from the common voters' roll. In his autobiography van der Ross (39--48) describes his actions with others,

including petitions and court cases, in trying to prevent this from happening. Previously, in the early 1940s, he did not formally join public pressure groups such as the Anti-CAD movement.<sup>6</sup> He describes his orientation to confrontation and politics as a call to reason: "Possibly the answer lies in my own personality make-up. Moderate, reasoning, [...] constrained more to argue than to be aggressive and possessed of a belief that the other person would respond positively to reason" (44-45). His inclination to moderation leads to his departure from an increasingly leftist TLSA in 1944, and coincides with political liberalism, logic and an aversion to the "mass hysteria" of public demonstrations: "I examined the standpoints of others as dispassionately as I could, seeking logical arguments and refusing to become emotional. Mass hysteria was not for me, although one could not altogether avoid demonstrations" (Blow 80). However, van der Ross and his colleagues' reasonable representations against disenfranchisement came to naught. In 1956, after protracted constitutional battles, Coloured voters were eventually removed from the common voters' roll. Later, in place of full franchise and as part of its web of interrelated statutory provisions to institutionalise apartheid, the government promulgated the Coloured Persons Representative Council Act, Act 49 of 1964 (the Act spells it without the anticipated apostrophe).

This body came into being in 1969. Van der Ross, although an opponent of apartheid, established a political party to participate in its elections. In his autobiography he justifies his establishment of the Labour Party of South Africa (based on the policies of the British Labour Party) and its participation in the separate representative structure -- from "a situation of political powerlessness" (107, 112) -- as a combination of oppositional and affirmative acts intended to demonstrate rejection of the apartheid system and gain a sense of self-worth:

[Several newly established Coloured] parties were all supportive of the government's policy of separate development of apartheid. [...] This I could not accept, and once again a group of us started to apply our minds to the question: How could we best demonstrate that the Coloured people on the whole did not support apartheid? How could we best put forward our claim for full citizenship? [...] [W]hy was it necessary to do this type of organising? [...] I think the answer is that we, as a Coloured people, were not only small in numbers, but economically weak. We also had a small educational base. But, importantly, we had never [...] been assured on a large scale that we *were* an important part of South African society and entitled to full citizenship. For various reasons, among which our slave past should be remembered, there was a negative self-image and a feeling that such matters as politics were best left in the hands of whites. (109, original emphasis)

Voters, particularly in the rural areas, voted to some degree for the Labour Party and their manifesto rejecting apartheid. On the whole, however, these elections were shunned through apathy or deliberate actions such as election boycotts, especially in urban centres. In the Cape Town constituencies all successive Coloured elections between 1969 and 1984 recorded turnout figures in the low single digits (Goldin 220). The Coloured Persons Representative Council had limited legislative and executive powers and their decisions could be (and were) overruled by the Minister of Coloured Affairs, a member of the National Party cabinet. The reality is that the majority of eligible Coloured voters overwhelmingly rejected this system of separate representation in favour of full



unqualified franchise, a point that van der Ross fails to mention. He presents the available choices as inevitable: "We had *only one option* (apart from emigrating to Canada, Europe or Australia), and that was to live within the laws as they affected us" (115, emphasis added). Again he fails to mention that the potential voters, mostly working class, exercised a different choice to middle-class emigration. Although registration was compulsory and punishable by law, most eligible voters had chosen not to register. As to his question "How could we best put forward our claim for full citizenship?" the resounding rejection of the system through non-registration and boycotts probably spoke louder than his and others' attempts at amelioration.

Dudley's biography is silent on these developments. This may be a consequence of Wieder's mediation as biographer, and his decision to recount this middle phase of his subject's life in relation to national political events, like the Rivonia trial (1963--1964) of Nelson Mandela and his African National Congress comrades, and the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, rather than the sectional battles in Cape Town politics. This silence may also be explained in more personal terms since happenings closer to home greatly affected his subject: when the state security police focused on fellow teachers at Livingstone High, some of Dudley's colleagues were convicted of sabotage, and the Dudleys were forcibly removed from their ancestral home under the provisions of the Group Areas Act (83--106). Wieder notes that Dudley was banned in 1961, although he could continue teaching at Livingstone (91--92). Being banned was a form of internal exile in terms of the country's security legislation. Dudley was prohibited from participating in the activities of his political organisations, NEUM and TLSA. His interactions with people outside his immediate family were heavily curtailed and he could not deliver speeches or publish, but by all indications this proscription did not dampen his influence or mentoring of younger activists (Wieder 63--64).

The absence of this phase of political struggle in the representation of Dudley's life could also be explained as a result of his personal choice to emphasise his avowed nonracialism and avoid any reference to sectional (read: Coloured) politics, and it may be that in the greater scheme of things the elections were of relative insignificance. Nonetheless, the reality is that *The Educational Journal* expressed views that shaped a significant counter-position in the Coloured election debate in urban centres such as Cape Town and among its influential TLSA members in the teaching community. Despite their antiracist inclinations TLSA and NEUM drew mostly Coloured members, and for these bodies (and, surely, by extension, Dudley) the elections were of immediate importance, constituting a long-standing political battle against "collaboration".<sup>7</sup>

Although Dudley was banned and had to resign as a member and General Secretary of the teachers' union (and as a member of the editorial collective of the *Journal*) it can safely be assumed that (in the nature of resistance politics) he continued to play a key role behind the scenes in the formulation of his organisation's opposition, even if it went unacknowledged. He had become a leading member of the editorial collective in the late 1940s and, as Wieder notes, his views were typically "dissected and critiqued and edited by other comrades", and then presented as "the voice of [an anonymous] collective [...] with the socialism that was espoused" (63).

In a steady stream of articles between 1964 and 1970, coinciding with Dudley's banning, the editorial collective of the *Journal* strongly reacted against the coming of the Coloured Persons Representative Council, derisively called the "quisling parliament", "*Kleurlingparlementjie*" (lit.: little Coloured parliament), "rubber stamp cabinet" or "dummy representation" with "eunuch power", and its proponents tagged "hirelings," "carpetbaggers", "quislings" and "collaborators" (see Hugo 407 ff). This tradition of resistance and the politics of vehement refusal went back to the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>8</sup> TLSA and NEUM (and Anti-CAD) members developed ways of shunning their opponents, often family members, colleagues and former friends (see Alexander 180--183). Lewis (214) cites the unrelenting advice given to supporters in the 1940s that certainly continued well into the 1960s and beyond:

Don't have any social or personal intercourse with them. Don't greet them. Don't have any conversation with them. Don't visit them, and don't invite them to your home. Don't meet them, even if it is necessary to cross over to the other side of the street. Don't see them, even if you do come face to face with them.

The commentators in *Journal* regarded the elections as apartheid strategies: "tribalisation" of those classified Coloured, the invention of a homogeneous grouping in line with the policy's hierarchy of "different nations", and the justification of "urban locations and rural labour camps as homelands" and of "debased labouring schooling as an instrument of *volkswording*" (lit.: nation building) (Hugo 425). They warned:

Once you accept the ghetto, geographically and spiritually, i.e. so that *you* are in it and *it* is in *you*, then you will be given every possible assistance to come to the fullest flowering that any ghetto product is capable of -- always in the ghetto, of course, because ghetto blooms are not meant for, even if they were capable of, transplanting. (Hugo 427, original emphases)

In a direct reference to van der Ross (the "chairman writing as editor of a C.A.D. paper"),<sup>9</sup> a *Journal* editorial regarded the establishment of the Labour Party as "consciously and deliberately tribalist and segregationist [...] indisputably pro-apartheid [...] [and] collaborationist" and advised their followers: "the more the manoeuvres and leadergoats of dummy representation change, the more they remain the same and the more they have to be treated as their precedents and predecessors were" (Hugo 436, 438). The left political opposition (and visceral language) that emanated from TLSA and NEUM ranks and those associated with Dudley left its mark on Cape Town politics, and van der Ross's characterisation of himself as "reasonable" and "moderate" speaks to this context of robust political exchange. The *Journal* editorial collective certainly had little appetite for such "realism" and "moderation":

It is never difficult to recognise the 'realists', whatever disguises they wear [...] whatever lies press and radio manufacture in order to present them to the world as the 'recognised' leaders of 'their people' [...] they exhibit the same behaviour pattern and exude the same political odour [...] They are always being 'practical' about their people's exploitation and helotry, they are always counselling 'moderation' and 'that we should take what we can get in order to get what we all want [...].' (Hugo 446)

In the sharply divided setting of Cape Town politics, the “realists”, for the formulators of the TLSA and NEUM position, were no more than traitors (“quislings”) and opportunists who “sup with the devil” while the “other side” -- their side -- consisted of those who “indefatigably [...] [carried] on the struggle in all principled and uncompromising ways [...], those who know basically where their true interests lie and whose loyalty to the cause is indisputable, and those whose general direction is correct [...]” (Hugo 446).

## Conclusion

All over the world racial prejudice has caused much harm. Historically, the unequal treatment of individuals or collectives was often based on notions of biological and supposed genetic difference, racial superiority or cultural and political considerations (Banton). Among former colonial states South Africa has gained a notorious place for its institutionalisation of racial prejudice. Apartheid as “a system of external identity formation” had imposed social categories which supposedly carried innate values and beliefs (Pickel 19). *Teacher and Comrade* and *A Blow to the Hoop* present us with narratives of leading figures attempting to deal with this circumstance. Beyond their rendition as individual identity constructions these texts also give us a window on the expectations and social experiences of a discriminated urban elite.

It is not uncommon in life writing that the subject constructs his or her auto/biography “to explain a present circumstance” where “the narration of ‘then’ is organized and nuanced by the reality of the ‘now’” (Davis 358). Although they share common beginnings, Dudley and van der Ross make contrasting identity choices or, in Barát’s terms, resolve their personal dilemmas of identity differently (166). I have illustrated van der Ross’ autobiographical acceptance and affirmation of an intermediate identity and Dudley’s fundamental rejection of racial classification, a position that has been for the most part sympathetically reproduced by his biographer. At base, both are acts of identity construction serving the greater goal of the representation of a unique self-in-history: they present individual witness accounts of lived experiences, while at the same time project the ideal of a common humanity. Importantly, both texts offer alternative versions of history, and rationalize the divergent choices around naming. In at least one of the texts, namely, the biography of Dudley, the commitment to an ideal identity construction may have led to an overemphasis or slight distortion of his own representation of an earlier life.

Van der Ross in turn ‘misremembers’ the overwhelming rejection of the Coloured Persons Representative Council. This is because his tale foregrounds and constructs his individual activist role in demonstrating that “Coloured people had to survive” (*Blow* 10) by shaking off negative self-images and being masters of their own future. As a retrospective construction, his story appears to be one way of making sense of historical choices. In Dudley’s biography, the complete silence on the Coloured elections contributes in creating a consistent identity formation of what Fairclough calls “a continuous, unified personal identity” (in Barát 165), a subject who attempts to reach beyond the ethnic and racial dynamic of Cape Town. This identity projection had to deal with the fact that TLSA and NEUM remained localised organizations (despite their best efforts to broaden their appeal) catering mostly for left-leaning Coloured teachers, professionals and intellectuals.

As genres, autobiography and biography hold out tacit expectations of referentiality, suggesting that a life account will be "true", and that a high degree of correlation will exist between signifiers and signifieds. Numerous life writing studies have shown that this expected referentiality, given the subjective nature of memory, may not always be realised or that recall in its nature cannot be total (see Anderson 57ff). In both *Teacher and Comrade* and *A Blow to the Hoop* moments of selective remembering and selective forgetting have been obvious, as indicated above. However, this does not imply any deliberate mendacity on the part of the subjects or their biographers. Nevertheless, in texts of subjective reflection, what is remembered and what is forgotten are probably more significant than total recall.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In South Africa the use of the racial term "Coloured" is controversial. Since its inception around the late eighteenth century the term has undergone several changes in nuance, and depending on historical circumstances it often had its promoters and detractors. Today the term broadly refers to those people often known in other postcolonial contexts as mixed race people, mestis, mulattoes, ladinos, zambos, etc. In South African popular and academic usage different forms of spelling have been established. Often such spelling conventions are premised on specific political or social orientations. The word is alternatively written in scare quotes or preceded by the qualifier "so-called" or capitalised or written with a small letter "c". My use of Coloured with a capital C in this paper indicates that such a discernible social grouping of people self-identifies via the term. However, it remains moot whether these people necessarily abide by common cultural practices, values or answer to the sense of homogeneity that ethnic identity implies. There remain observable levels of identity denial, rejection and refusal of the concept. See Adhikari, *White* xv; Goldin 3--29; Pickel 38; van der Ross, *Myths* 1--5; van der Walt 32ff.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander (184) noted: "Hardly any young intellectual in the Western Cape entered political life but through the portals of the NEUM [...] At its height the TLSA embraced more than two-fifths of all coloured teachers in the country. Because of the leverage which teachers then had in the community, this was an inestimably important fact of political organisation."

<sup>3</sup> When the government in 1943 established a Coloured Affairs section within the Department of Home Affairs the development was met with wide-scale opposition in Cape Town for it diminished Coloured people's demand for full unqualified franchise, equal facilities and administrative services. In response, the Anti-CAD movement was formed. It started out as an overarching grouping but later became closely identified with the intractability of NEUM and TLSA. Supporters of these bodies viewed persons who participated in the structures of the Coloured Affairs Department with suspicion and often labelled them "collaborators" or "quislings" (Lewis 209--218; van der Ross, *Rise* 170ff).

<sup>4</sup> The colonial industrialist and politician Cecil John Rhodes explained the slogan more prosaically as a "man whether white or black, who has sufficient education to write his name, has some property or works, in fact is not a loafer" (quoted in Marais 277n).

<sup>5</sup> In current South African parlance "African people" refers to Bantu-speaking people, indigenous to the country.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander (183) in his treatise on the history of non-collaboration in the Cape region wrote that the Anti-CAD movement, the allied body of the TLSA and NEUM, created “a mass movement [...] as it had never done before [...] [It] applied the weapon of the boycott with devastating effect and ruined the careers and reputations of those who dared to work the [Coloured Advisory Council, a forerunner of the Coloured Persons Representative Council] or pleaded for a CAD.”

<sup>7</sup> Alexander (190) opined that the period between 1964 and 1974 “saw even greater prestige accrue to the policy of non-collaboration in the Western Cape.”

<sup>8</sup> The reference here is to van der Ross as founding editor of *The Cape Herald*, a weekly newspaper aimed primarily at a Coloured readership. On reflection van der Ross thought that although “Many Coloured people [did] not like the idea of supporting a paper ‘specifically for the Coloured People’, it was quite critical of government policy: “Looking back, I cannot discount the feeling that the politics of *The Cape Herald* might have been more antigovernment policy than the business world, who were the advertisers, might have relished” (*Blow* 89).