

War, education and identity: Discord at the Transvaal University College (1914–1919)

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Introduction

In recent years higher education and universities have increasingly drawn attention internationally as subjects of historical enquiry. This growing scholarship has moved away from traditional celebratory histories of institutions to include a wide range of perspectives on higher education which place the history of universities in the broader historical context and add significance to their study beyond the individual biography of a specific institution. The university has thus become a window on a wider historical setting, highlighting social, economic and political developments through its interchange with that setting. As institutions which are responsive to the demands and fluctuations of the societies in which they find themselves, universities offer historians valuable insights into different historical periods.¹ In terms of South African higher education historiography, current scholarship has begun to include fresh perspectives of South African universities, such as the role of students; the development of specific disciplines; and the matter of language medium.² Understandably, a dominant theme in recent studies has also been the relationship between universities and apartheid.³ World War I and matters of white identity have not featured prominently in South African higher education historiography, except as these questions formed part of the larger narrative of individual institutions.

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1. See for example, S. Rothbatt, "The Writing of University History at the End of Another Century", *Oxford Review of Education*, 23, 2, 1997; H. Silver, "Things change but names remain the same: Higher Education Historiography, 1975–2000", *History of Education*, 35, 1, January 2006; C.T. McIntire, "Hegemony and the Historiography of Universities: The Toronto Case", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 72, 3, 2003.
2. See H. Gillomee and G. Hendrich, "Die Slag van Andringastraat: Student-onluste op Stellenbosch, 1940", *Historia*, 50, 2, November 2005; J.C. Steyn, "'n Rektor Skors sy Voorganger oor 'n Onstuimige Hoofstuk uit die Taalstryd aan die UKOVs", *Joernaal vir Eietydse Geskiedenis.*, 20, 1, Junie 1995; J.C. Steyn, "Die Taalstryd aan die Grey Universiteitskollege ten Tyde van die Rektoraat van D.F. Malherbe", *Acta Academica*, 25, 4, Desember 1993; D.A. van der Bank, "Die Grey Universiteitskollege, 1904–1935: Stryd om Identiteit en Voortbestaan", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum Bloemfontein*, 11, 11, Desember 1995; D.M. van der Merwe, "'Taal op Tuks': A Reappraisal of the Change in Language Policy at the University of Pretoria, 1932", *Historia*, 53, 2, November 2008; H. Phillips, "First Lessons in South African History: University Teaching and the Writing of South African History, 1903–c.1930", *South African Historical Journal*, 34, May 1996; B. Nasson, "History at Large: Cape or Cairo? University History on the African Continent", *History Workshop Journal*, 55, 2003.
3. H. Phillips, "What did Your University do during Apartheid?", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26,1, March 2000. The commemorative issue of *African Sociological Review*, 9, 1, 2005, which considered Rhodes University during the apartheid era is also relevant here. See also B.K. Murray, "Defending the 'Open University': Wits University, Student Politics and University Apartheid, 1955–1959", *Perspectives in Education*, 17, 1, 1996; B.K. Murray, "Wits University, Student Politics and the Coming of Apartheid", *Perspectives in Education*, 12, 1, 1990.

South African higher education underwent a period of significant growth and expansion in the early years of the twentieth century in the wake of the South African War (1899–1902). A number of university colleges were established including the Transvaal University College (TUC) in Pretoria. Coupled to the development of higher education in the region was the promotion of a new unified white identity termed “broad South Africanism” which envisaged the bringing together of English and Dutch-speakers⁴ to form a new South African nation. This was also encompassed in the policy of conciliation pursued by Louis Botha and Jan Smuts’s Het Volk Party. According to the official and public record, higher education was a critical place in which this new sense of identity would be fostered. This article explores how the pursuit of this new white South African identity at the TUC in particular was affected by the outbreak of World War I. The affect of this international conflict on the consciousness of TUC students will be investigated through their voices in *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*.⁵

As far as can be ascertained, the first memorable evidence of the unifying view of higher education in South Africa was a speech given by Cecil John Rhodes at an Afrikaner Bond congress in 1891 in Kimberley.⁶ Speaking of a dinner which he had attended recently at Grey College, Rhodes explained his intention to found a residential university as follows:

It was the pleasantest dinner I had there, and I said to myself that If [sic] we could get a teaching university founded in the Cape Colony, taking the young people from Bloemfontein, Pretoria, Natal, having the young men going in there from the ages of 18 to 21, they would go back to the Free State, to the Transvaal, and to Natal – let me even say they will go back to Mashonaland – tied to one another by the strongest feelings which can be created, because the period of your life when you indulge in friendships which are seldom broken is from the age of 18 to 21. Therefore, if we had a teaching, residential university, these young men would go forth into all parts of South Africa prepared to make the future of the country, and in their hands the great question of Union could safely be left.⁷

This matched a prevailing belief at the beginning of the twentieth century “that nothing would weld the new nation more firmly together than that its future leaders should spend the most impressionable years of their lives in the social atmosphere of a residential university”.⁸

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4. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Dutch language had developed into a local variation known as Afrikaans. Dutch was used mainly as a written language and in formal settings, such as religious services, while Afrikaans was primarily a spoken language and in this regard Afrikaans gradually took the place of Dutch. In the transition period, designations in Dutch and Afrikaans were used interchangeably. For example, at TUC in the early period, Afrikaans-speaking students were often still referred to as Dutch and their requests to have lectures presented in Dutch led to lectures being given in Afrikaans. Likewise in the College’s student magazine, the contributions by Afrikaans-speaking students were selected by a “Dutch editor” while in fact the essays and poems are clearly no longer written in Dutch but in a language which more closely resembled modern Afrikaans.
 5. This magazine first appeared in November 1912. It was an annual or biannual publication comprising students’ poetry and prose written in both Dutch and English.
 6. F.C. Metrowich, *The Development of Higher Education in South Africa, 1873–1927*, (Maskew Miller, Cape Town, 1928), pp 24–25.
 7. Quoted in J. Edgar, “Union and the University Question”, reprinted from *The State*, April and July 1910, p 19.
 8. T. Reunert, “The University Question and the Rand”, paper presented to the Witwatersrand Local Centre of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science, February 1916, p 3.

“We have already been bribed into schism” (1914–1918)

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 had a dramatic influence on the tentative pursuit of the white unity at the TUC envisaged by broad South Africanism. From the beginning there was disruption, even on such seemingly minor issues like whether the Student Representative Council (SRC) funds should be donated to the War Fund.⁹ The armed rebellion this same year led by former Boer generals against the government’s decision to participate in World War I on the side of Britain was particularly influential in polarising the campus and breaking down the intended broad South Africanism.

The third edition of *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine* was published in September 1914, at the time of the outbreak of World War I. The English editorial notes indicated that its publication came “at a time of crisis, disturbed by the eddies of a distant storm”.¹⁰ At this stage, the only outward or noteworthy impact the war had had on student life was the cessation of certain sports tournaments, notably rugby.¹¹ The shortage of recreational distractions for students in the war years made it a difficult time for them.¹² This may have also been a reason that students took up more serious issues in these years, as will be shown.

In line with the timing of its publication, war was a prevailing theme in many of the contributions published in the September 1914 issue. Interestingly, the outbreak of World War I in Europe brought to mind the recent South African War for many students and the latter features prominently among Afrikaans contributions. For example, a student M.J. Schoeman gave some perspective on the outbreak of World War I in a piece entitled “n Paar Gedagtes” (“A Few Thoughts”). He explains the necessity and inevitability of war in bringing in new orders and change and in shaping nations. Human suffering is counterbalanced with patriotism which the writer defends and celebrates.¹³ The piece speaks generally of the role of conflict in the world, but ends with a very specific reference to South Africa’s recent war and Britain’s scorched earth policy. The student writes:

Griefs bring forth life, new life, greatness. Therefore do not condemn patriotism, the treasure of the nations, more valuable than life, stronger than death, higher than love. It is the source of freedom, the strength for heroism and survival, the working of the natural law of self-preservation. Houses can burn and women and children be exterminated, but through this the nation lives and becomes great.¹⁴

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9. University of Pretoria Archives (hereafter UPA), D-11-3-1-2, Student Representative Council Minutes, 30 October 1914.
 10. U. Rissik, “Editorial”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 1, 3, September 1914, p 1.
 11. Rissik, “Editorial”, p 2.
 12. UPA, D-11-9-3-2, Kollegehuis “Sewentig Jaar van Kollegehuis”, *Kollegehuisgedenksblad (1915–1985)*, p 5.
 13. Interestingly, patriotism was equated with narrow-mindedness in the article on the “true South African” in the previous issue and was thus viewed as the antithesis of broad South Africanism. See R. Vale, “South Africa and the Africander”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 1, 1, November 1912, p 16.
 14. M.J. Schoeman, “n Paar Gedagtes”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 1, 3, September 1914, p 9. My translation.

Two more contributions in this issue focus on the South African War, dwelling particularly on the effects of Britain's scorched earth policy.¹⁵ These pieces highlight the impact of the concentration camps of the South African War and the deaths which they caused. These and the common memory of the war as "a shared national tragedy"¹⁶ had a long-lasting and unifying effect on Afrikaners, through its common victims, common suffering and the common wish for the return to republicanism.¹⁷ In contrast to this, English-speakers "had few myths or heroes to symbolise their place in South Africa"¹⁸ and thus had a less certain identity and heritage in the country behind which to rally. The comparative silence of English-speaking students in the magazine on political, historical and national issues is also evidence of this state of affairs.

Given that there was relatively little writing about the South African War from the Afrikaner perspective in the first few decades after the conflict,¹⁹ it is striking that it was such a recurrent theme in *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine* barely a decade after the conclusion of the war. Furthermore, republican nostalgia has been identified as a main feature in the pro-republican sentiments which led to the 1914 Rebellion. This nostalgia was not necessarily a desire for a particular political system, but rather a hankering for a past way of life, which was idealistically linked to the former republican era. These sentiments were not necessarily based so much on practical politics as on the feelings arising from poverty, loss of identity as "Boer" and the way racial questions were experienced. This hankering for a lost past, as well as an uneasiness over the present, is discernible in these student contributions and increasingly became a stumbling block in the path of furthering a broad South African identity.²⁰

World War I received direct treatment in this issue in a story headed "Die Eerste Gewonde van die Unie" ("The Union's First Casualty"). It is a tongue-in-cheek description of a naive young man's anticipation of participating in World War I. He patriotically considers the honour and bravery attached to such a noble calling until he is actually called up to join the Union Defence Force. He then reconsiders the situation and the terrible possibilities which await him in active combat and therefore stages an "accident" while cleaning his gun, thus becoming the first wounded soldier of the Union.²¹ It may be assuming too much regarding

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15. J. Beyers, "n Winternag in die Bosveld", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 1, 3, September 1914, pp 17–18; H. Grobler, "Terugblik", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 1, 3, September 1914, pp 21–23.
 16. A.M. Grundlingh, "The War in Twentieth-Century Afrikaner Consciousness", in D. Omissi and A. Thompson (eds), *The Impact of the South African War* (Palgrave, New York, 2002), p 24.
 17. Le May, *British Supremacy in South Africa, 1899–1907* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1965), p 213; Grundlingh, "The War in Twentieth-Century Afrikaner Consciousness", p 24.
 18. J. Lambert, "An unknown people: Reconstructing British South African Identity", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, 4, December 2009, p 602.
 19. Grundlingh, "The War in Twentieth-Century Afrikaner Consciousness", p 24.
 20. A. Grundlingh and S. Swart, *Radelose Rebelle? Dinamika van die 1914–1915 Afrikanerrebellie* (Proteaboekhuis, Pretoria, 2009), p 121. Giliomee also points out the role of belief in "a common descent and shared history" as part of the construction of a national identity. He characterises the Afrikaner nationalist narrative at this time as one that was "built around a common origin, the notion of two cycles of suffering and death – the Great Trek and the Anglo-Boer War – and the imagined promise of a republican future". See H. Giliomee, "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1870–1915", *South African Historical Journal*, 19, 1987, p 139.
 21. Paul, "Die Eerste Gewonde van die Unie", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 1, 3, September 1914, pp 24–25.

this humorous piece, but it highlights perhaps the lack of enthusiasm among some Afrikaners for participation in the World War by linking the desire to fight in it to stupidity.

“The Khaki Line” is an English poem in this 1914 issue which tells of the call to the entire British Empire to take up arms.²² As such, this poem sheds light on the initial reaction of South Africans of British descent to the war and demonstrates the fact that for some of these, loyalty to the British Empire was a part of their South African nationality and that these two matters for them were not incompatible.²³ The writer refers to the unity of interest and duty in the Empire in the lines:

The Sons of the Flag come forth to war
When the Empire calls “To Arms!”

In fact, Lambert feels that for most British South Africans their national sentiments were rather tied to Britain and to the Empire and thus to some the notions of broad South Africanism had little appeal. For a large part of the early twentieth century, many English-speakers in South Africa still regarded themselves as British subjects and despite the diversity of the English-speaking population, for many the rallying point remained the Union Jack and the symbolism of the Crown. World War I served to strengthen these sentiments, as seen in this poem.²⁴ Furthermore, duty to the Empire was viewed as both reasonable and worthy, in light of the “benefits” the Empire afforded, as the following lines of the poem also illustrate:

The land of Ind sends forth her sons
To die in the foremost line,
Saying, ‘I have eaten the White King’s bread
And the White Kings’ foes are mine.

The demands of the Empire, to which this poem refers, made some Afrikaners feel ill at ease because their sense was that the most important connection for many English-speaking South Africans was with Britain and not with South Africa. This type of attitude, which in many instances amounted to jingoism, has also been considered as a significant obstacle to the furthering of white unity envisaged by broad South Africanism.²⁵

In the next issue of *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, that of November 1915, the Dutch editor begins immediately by commenting on national events which had taken place since the previous issue. South African events took precedence over the war in Europe because, as the editor commented:

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22. Anon., “The Khaki Line”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 1, 3, September 1914, p 13.
 23. J. Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s”, *South African Historical Journal*, 43, November 2000, pp 202–207.
 24. Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?”, pp 202–204, 213; J. Lambert, “Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners: Onseker van hul Identiteit”, in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika: Van Voortye tot Vandag* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2012), p 537; Lambert, “An unknown people’: Reconstructing British South African Identity”, pp 601, 606.
 25. Lambert, “Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners: Onseker van hul Identiteit”, pp 531, 533.

The blood of brothers has flowed in our beloved South Africa, and today some of our unforgettable heroes are still sitting behind bars; others are no longer with us. Also in Europe the canons still rumble and thunder over the old battlefields. The great struggle is still undecided.²⁶

The Dutch editorial continues by referring to disharmony among the student body. The editor explains: "The year was also witness to mutual discord among the students. We were nevertheless prepared to solve our differences satisfactorily by taking recourse in a court of arbitration."²⁷ The editor then refers to political differences among students, "and rightly so, as what would the world become if it were only made of people who thought alike?"²⁸ The political atmosphere of the country even permeated the annual SRC election which revolved around the rebellion. Candidates were elected based on their support for or against the rebellion and when M. Prinsloo, known as the "Rebel King" was elected, the comment was made that "The 'rebs.' seem to have won the day".²⁹ Thus, the events of the year which followed the September 1914 issue appear to have severely tested unity among the students at the TUC and stirred up controversy, albeit at this time the discord appeared short-lived. Although the 1914 Rebellion had an immediate effect on student politics at the TUC, its influence on the student body was also of a much longer duration.

The English editorial also comments that the "harmony has come amongst the students [something] for which many have had cause to pray. Uproar has ceased, and a comfortable keenness reigns again."³⁰ The rest of the editorial is written with a rather tongue-in-cheek tone so that it is unclear how serious the discord on the campus was, or whether this English-speaker regarded it in a serious light.

The year 1915 was an important one in the development of student life at the TUC because the male students moved into a new residence, College Hostel,³¹ built on the College grounds. This was the more formal beginning of a long tradition of residences at the institution. A formative experience in the residence's first year, according to later accounts, was the women's march to the Union Buildings. About 4 000 women gathered in Pretoria on 4 August 1915 and silently marched in rows to the Union Buildings. Their aim was to plead for clemency for some of the leaders of the 1914 Rebellion.³² In descriptions of this event the presence of young men is noted; they walked beside the marching women in case of possible violence.³³ The College Hostel commemorative magazine, published seventy years later includes recollections of College students who acted as escorts for the women and emphasises how this event was believed by some to have left a permanent impression on the spirit of the residence.³⁴

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26. H.J. Grobler, "Editoriaal", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 1, 4, November 1915, p 1. My translation.
27. Grobler, "Editoriaal", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 1, 4, p 2.
28. Grobler, "Editoriaal", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 1, 4, p 2.
29. Quoted in C.H. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum: Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria* (Voortrekkers Beperk, Johannesburg, 1960), pp 370–371.
30. G. Findlay, "Editorial", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 1, 4, November 1915, p 2.
31. Known in Afrikaans as Kollegehuis.
32. Grundlingh and Swart, *Radelose Rebelle?*, p 64.
33. Grundlingh and Swart, *Radelose Rebelle?*, p 63.
34. UPA, D-11-9-3-2, "Sewentig Jaar van Kollegehuis", p 5.

These years saw evidence of some discord in the student body and also the birth of demands for the use of Afrikaans as a medium at the College. In the middle of 1915 a complaint was received by the SRC about the exclusive use of English at general student meetings.³⁵ In 1917 and 1918 the matter of the language medium was examined officially by the College's Senate and Council for the first time following requests from students for the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium in certain disciplines.³⁶ These events show how the talk of unity, conciliation and broad South African principles was being tested by demands that its promise of equal rights and mutual respect be put into practice. However, these demands became increasingly complicated to accommodate. In 1917 one lecturer, Prof. DF du Toit Malherbe, began to give lectures in Afrikaans to some of his senior students in Chemistry.³⁷

A.N. Pelzer, historian and author of the institution's first official history, attributes the awakening of national sentiment among Afrikaans-speaking students to Du Toit Malherbe's actions, stating "[a]s if woken from a slumber, the generation of 1918 discovered itself and for the first time in the history of the T.U.C. showed signs of an enlivened national feeling." He also comments on the number of articles in the June 1918 issue of *The T.U.C. Student Magazine* which gave expression to this "slumbering national feeling".³⁸ While a more definite direction concerning the language policy was begun in 1918, and the June 1918 magazine was a highpoint in distinctly ethnic expression, Afrikaans-speaking students had already "woken up" by 1917, as the request to Senate and the June 1917 issue of the magazine also affirm. From 1917 there was a marked increase in the number of patriotic contributions written in Afrikaans in the TUC magazine. By contrast, the English contributions remained intriguingly apolitical, in the form of philosophical, academic or humorous articles and sketches.

It is noteworthy that the June 1917 Dutch editorial of the magazine speaks of the student body or the College community as "democratic" and even "cosmopolitan", alluding to the variety of backgrounds of students at the TUC.³⁹ In this issue the English editor makes reference to a development in TUC's residential affairs. Despite the newly constructed College Hostel on the campus, space for male students was soon insufficient. In 1917 the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk, the church to which many Afrikaans-speakers belonged, established a private men's residence known as Sonoptehuis (Sonop Hostel). It was open to all students regardless of their religious persuasion, but was under the protection and administration of the church.⁴⁰ The English editor, in referring to this event, spoke hypothetically of a time twenty years on when according to him:

... there will be, alas, some fifteen or so *denominational* hostels, and there will be many glorious scraps and skirmishes. The beginnings of all these things are clearly visible. We have already been bribed into schism, and the results make us all long for the breezy turmoil of those distant days (emphasis original).⁴¹

35. UPA, D-11-3-1-2, 17 April 1915 and 15 May 1915.

36. UPA, B-5-1-1, Minutes of a regular meeting of Senate, 2 April 1917, p 212.

37. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, "Herinneringe van Prof. D.F. du Toit Malherbe".

38. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, p 50. My translation.

39. H.J. Grobler, "Editoriaal", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 1, June 1917, p 1.

40. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, pp 289–290. The idea of nations and national feeling waking from a slumber is a typical feature of nationalist narratives. See Giliomee, "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism", p 115.

41. G. Findlay, "Editorial", *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 1, June 1917, p 2. My translation.

He was not far wrong because in 1918, in response to the establishment of Sonop Hostel, the Church of England also opened a residence named Buxton Hostel after the incumbent governor-general. It housed mainly English-speaking students.⁴² Thus, the person to person contact with students from other backgrounds in the close environment of a university residence was restricted by interested parties from outside the university. The intention behind the establishment of these residences may have been honourable, but their establishment was a sign of unwillingness on the part of both sections of the white population to sacrifice their interests and a disregard for the conciliatory and broad South Africanist aspirations linked to a common residence. A student testimony from 1919 describes the residents of Buxton Hostel as “English and English-orientated students” under the English professor, J.P.R. Wallis as house father. He was so outspokenly English that he was given the ironic nickname of Hendrik van Wyk.⁴³ This type of description shows how despite efforts to promote broad South Africanism, to a certain extent barriers remained among students of different backgrounds. As far as English-speakers were concerned, Lambert has pointed out that in general “most bonds, including their religion, their language and culture, and their loyalty to the crown, linked them to Britain and did not give them cohesion as South Africans”.⁴⁴

The November 1917 issue includes a rather dramatic but telling prediction of the future for Afrikaners under the title “Proloog aan die Eeuwigheid” (“Prologue to Eternity”).⁴⁵ In stark contrast to the serious and foreboding tone of this essay, is the contribution which immediately followed in this issue – an English poem entitled “Drinking Song” which is a tongue-in-cheek toast to a number of Roman figures, full of classical Latin references.⁴⁶ This highlights again the seeming difference in the interests and preoccupations of English and Afrikaans-speaking students. This issue also includes a fiery piece in Afrikaans entitled “Ichabod” – the first article to address the question of higher education and Afrikaner interests.⁴⁷ The article is a direct attack on the notions of broad South Africanism and conciliation, using as a base what would become the philosophical foundations of the policy of segregation pursued during most of the twentieth century. This was the belief in the need to maintain ethnic and cultural differences. It was followed by an article in English entitled, “On the Artificial Production of Naturally Occurring Organic Bodies”. Once again, the disparate subject matter of these contributions causes one to wonder whether the English and Afrikaans students read each others’ compositions or how much real communication took place between these groups. Even in the divergent literary contributions one can see that the task of unifying the two groups was not a simple one. The articles appear side by side, but there appears to be a hidden barrier and they do not relate to each other. In a sense, like the two columns of the editorials which share a common page, according to the official policy, and yet are completely distinct from one another in the real situation.

42. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, pp 290–291.

43. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.

44. Lambert, “An unknown people: Reconstructing British South African Identity”, p 602.

45. Anon., “Proloog aan die Eeuwigheid”, *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 2, November 1917, pp 6–10.

46. Anon., “A Drinking Song”, *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 2, November 1917, p 10.

47. L.J. du P., “Ichabod”, *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 2, November 1917, p 13. All translations are my own.

The 1918 issue features two other interesting articles which touch on powerfully symbolic subjects for Afrikaners. The first is called “Die Afrikaanse Vrou”⁴⁸ (“The Afrikaans Woman”) and is a tribute to Afrikaner women. The Afrikaner woman is given the position of heroine in the eyes of the nation and the success it enjoys is attributed to her. This extremely hagiographic piece extols the positive virtues of the Afrikaner woman. She is remembered for the suffering in the concentration camps. She is also given credit for the decision taken by Voortrekkers to leave Natal and move north. She was responsible for encouraging her men to stand up against Britain in the South African War. Finally, the Afrikaner woman is praised for the protest march to the Union Buildings in 1915 to ask for the release of those convicted in the rebellion. The assertion mentioned earlier that this event had left an indelible impression on some of the TUC students is confirmed in this article, because the author, two years after the actual event, refers to the women’s protest as “one of the greatest milestones in South African history” and as “an act ... that will live on forever in the history of South Africa”.⁴⁹ This protest certainly has been considered a defining moment in the moulding of the idea of an Afrikaner nation and provided rich material for the later cultivation of national sentiment.⁵⁰

The second topic, with even stronger symbolic power, which appeared in this issue focused on the matter of language in a short poem entitled “Moedertaal” (“Mother Tongue”).⁵¹ Concerns and sentiments regarding the rights and position of the Afrikaans-speaking student, the Afrikaans language and Afrikaner culture and heritage at the College, which had come to the surface in 1917, became even more prominent in 1918. Both in their writing and in their actions, some Afrikaans-speaking students began a more focused plea for the use of their language at the TUC. Furthermore, a former student remarked that 1918 was an extremely tense year at the TUC with the lingering effects of the rebellion and the end of World War I approaching.⁵² The year also saw further demands for the use of Afrikaans or Dutch as a medium of instruction and it became clear that the English-only policy could not continue.⁵³ This matter of the language medium highlighted the practical difficulties of promoting broad South African ideals.

“Gedagte van ’n Afrikaner in 1918” (“Reflections by an Afrikaner in 1918”) is a window on Afrikaner sentiment of the time. The whole poem reads as follows:

Let larger nations murder and fight,
Let smaller nations suffer patiently,
Let the conqueror be who they may,
We remain silent, quiet in calm rest:
There’s One above who never forgets,
And brings each to their destination
Who leads nations through many afflictions
Even though the test was heavy and severe:
Lift up the eye, take courage my soul,
For whatever may have been in the past,

48. J.N., “Die Afrikaanse Vrou”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 2, 2, November 1917, pp 29–30.

49. J.N., “Die Afrikaanse Vrou”, p 30. My translation.

50. Grundlingh and Swart, *Radelose Rebelle?*, pp 65–66.

51. Anon., “Moedertaal”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 2, 2, November 1917, p 32.

52. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.

53. UPA, B-5-1-1, Minutes of a regular meeting of Senate, 4 March 1918, p 247.

The Ruler of All watches as before:
But – if our nation will rule in freedom
And Union blossom and move forwards
Or later be brought to be destroyed, –
Let Afrikaners always remain
Voortrekker children devout and free!⁵⁴

This poem makes reference to World War I, but shows that the “proper” attitude of the Afrikaner is one of detachment from such events. It gives a sense of providence – divine protection and destiny – and a call to remain true to the Voortrekker heritage.⁵⁵ It is a call to not break away from one’s heritage, despite the present or future situation. It is also an attempt to establish Afrikaner identity and the proper attitude of Afrikaners, as seen in the title. It is also in a sense a rejection of broad South Africanism because it urges Afrikaners to preserve their own identity.

In the piece “The Call of the New Age” a past TUC student rages against the human suffering and loss of World War I in the name of patriotism and duty. He concludes that the existence of Empires was a root of the War because it allowed countries the means and the men to engage in such large scale conflict, without regard for the minority groups involved.⁵⁶ His solution is an end to Empires and the rise of “Republicanism ... where small minorities shall not be bludgeoned into fighting for causes for which they have no regard”. This essay clearly underscores an underlying mistrust of the British Empire, a mistrust which had been fanned by World War I. The notion of republicanism expressed here is not however related to the former Boer republics, but one that would isolate the country from the horrors of another world war. The student concludes:

The world is now at the cross-roads – the one road, Imperialistic leading to new centuries of confusion, new vast and stupid wars, new despairs, new catastrophes, new beginnings in a plotless endless drama – the other Republican, leading to a new world, freed from tyranny, from armaments, from hatred, and one in which the “white passion of Statecraft”, shall be substituted for the concupiscent lust of Empire.⁵⁷

This contribution is interesting because it is one of the few English pieces to deal directly with current affairs. Furthermore, it is noteworthy in that it is an appeal by an English-speaker to throw off the obligations of the British Empire. It shows that for some English-speakers, although exceptional at this stage, the sense of “belonging” to Great Britain was waning. While it is a call to exit the Empire, this is not at all linked in the essay to the question of identity. Furthermore, this piece highlights the fact that English-speakers were by no means a monolithic group.⁵⁸

The contribution “Besware teen die Gees van Onse Eeuw” (“Objections to the Spirit of Our Age”) bears great resemblance to “Ichabod” of the previous November 1917 issue, leading one to conclude that the author, known only as “L.P.”, probably wrote both articles. It is another fiery protest against the spirit of

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54. L.W.H., “Gedagte van ’n Afrikaner in 1918”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 2,3, June 1918, p 7. My translation.
55. Giliomee points out “a strong tendency to see a Divine Hand in Afrikaner history”. Giliomee, “The Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism”, p 139.
56. J.D., “The Call of the New Age”, *The T.U.C. Students’ Magazine*, 2, 3, June 1918, pp 12–13.
57. J.D., “The Call of the New Age”, p 14.
58. See Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?”, p 205.

broad South Africanism embodied in the thought, as the student puts it, that “everything must be the same, colourlessly, monotonously the same – everyone the same as the majority”.⁵⁹ The student turns the attention to education which he perceives as the primary place where

... this poison eats away deeply: in the lower education, which must be religiously neutral and politically imperialistic, for sure! But more than anywhere else in Higher Education: there it crawls with it, in our colleges, with birds of every feather and colour.

The student goes on to equate the unifying goals of education with homogenising, claiming that the end result is inevitably an Anglophone and imperial product. He feels that this purposeful suppression of diversity is detrimental to the future of Afrikaner youth. In opposition to what he views as the suppression of the minority (by which he means the Afrikaners) by the majority (the English-speakers) and argues the case for separation:

The first separation which is required is between Boer and Brit. Boer is the ‘besembos’ (broom-brush), he must have sun above and rocky ground below; Brit is the fern which grows in the shade and damp, in the same soil the two can never get along! It is the law of nature!⁶⁰

In other words, he feels that attempting to unify the two sections of the white population according to broad South Africanism is contrary to both natural laws and divine principles. One could even extend this argument further and draw the conclusion that according to this student, the British fundamentally did not belong in South Africa. The “Boer” here is adapted to the rocky sunny environment, but the climate described for the “Brit” seems to refer to the climate of England and not to South Africa. This is in line with the idea that for many Afrikaners their English-speaking counterparts were not considered to be true South Africans.

The November 1918 English editorial of the student magazine begins by highlighting the end of World War I. The editor expresses the hope that the battle will now continue on intellectual grounds for the rebuilding of ideals. The English editor also comments that the “strenuous sincerity of former issues has fortunately abated very largely, and though there is rubbish enough, in all conscience, it is satisfactory rubbish if examined closely”.⁶¹ The November issue certainly did not continue the trend of weighty and earnest subjects seen in the previous two issues.

The Dutch editorial also comments on the distinct change of tone in the magazine from the June issue. The editor also remembers some students who died in the conflict of World War I. He concludes by writing that at last “[t]here is peace on earth. What lies ahead in the future is uncertain, but we hope for the best for South Africa. ... And in these doubtful circumstances, we bring you our gravity and humour”.⁶² It appears that the end of the World War coincided with an ebb in nationalist fervour at the College. The flag incident of the following year caused these questions to resurface again in an apparently more visible manner.

59. L.P., “Besware teen die Gees van Onse Eeuw”, *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 3, June 1918, p 19. All translations are my own.

60. L.P., “Besware teen die Gees van Onse Eeuw”, p 20. Translated.

61. Findlay, “Editorial”, *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 4, p 1.

62. Van Rooy, “Editoriaal”, *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine*, 2, 4, p 3.

The flag incident revisited

At the end of 1918 the College was affected by the Spanish flu epidemic to such an extent that it closed early, thus bringing to an end a rather tense year at the TUC in terms of patriotic and nationalist sentiment.⁶³ Without doubt, feelings regarding the language question were running high among the students in 1918. So much so, that Pelzer feels that if the College had not closed early something dire would probably have happened. Something did indeed happen, but this event, which involved the burning of a British flag, took place the following year.⁶⁴ In addition, the incident was related to the ending of World War I in 1918, so in a sense it was a continuation of that year. The episode was identified later as a critical milestone in the passage of the College to becoming an exclusively Afrikaans medium institution.⁶⁵ Furthermore, it was the only act of outward aggression related to patriotic feeling which took place at the TUC in these early years.

Following the end of World War I and the return of the Union's soldiers from the front, the town of Pretoria arranged festivities to receive the country's returning leaders, Botha and Smuts, and to celebrate the peace in August 1919. All over town Union Jacks were raised and in the tense situation which existed at the TUC, Pretoria folk wondered whether English students would have the courage to raise the flag on the College grounds.⁶⁶ The Union Jack was a powerful symbol for English-speakers, one of the few behind which they would mobilise.⁶⁷ Several of these English-speaking students approached Prof Wallis and asked if they could borrow his Union Jack for the celebrations. This particular flag had been recovered by Wallis from the retreat at Mons during World War I. The students were granted permission to raise the flag and the fire brigade arrived and tied it to the top of the pole as a preventative measure so that it could not be removed.⁶⁸ This was seen by Afrikaans-speaking students as a direct challenge which they could not allow to pass. One student, the later famous Afrikaans poet, W.J. du P. Erlank,⁶⁹ on an impulse, climbed up the pole and tore the flag off the top. He then took it into the tea room of College Hostel where a number of other nationalistically inclined students were still gathered discussing the matter of the flag. Some of these young Afrikaners then tore up the flag, doused it with lamp oil and burned it in a coal bin behind the hostel.⁷⁰

According to Erlank's account, the time leading up to the event was characterised by hostility in Pretoria, largely due to the returning soldiers. There were periodic physical clashes between the soldiers and TUC students in the town and a great deal of mutual antagonism was aroused. Some Afrikaners resented

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63. UPA, D-11-9-3-2, "Sewentig Jaar van Kollegehuis", p 5; UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.
64. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, p 52.
65. UPA, D-11-9-3-2, Kollegehuis, "Die Vlaginsident", *Kollegehuisgedenksblad (1915–1985)*, p 7; Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, p 53.
66. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.
67. Lambert, "An unknown people: Reconstructing British South African Identity", p 606.
68. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.
69. Also known as Duke Erlank or Eitemal.
70. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974. Van der Merwe casts doubt on many of the details of the incident, although the account by W.J. du P. Erlank, which is the primary source on the event does not appear to be untrustworthy due to the amount of detail it includes and because Erlank provides a critique of his own part in the affair. For Van der Merwe's views, see "Taal op Tuks".

the upsurge of loyalist sentiment for Great Britain and the Empire which the conclusion of the war had engendered. On the campus, however, there was “a kind of more serious underground stirring”.⁷¹ According to Erlank, although not an organised movement, in the tea rooms of the residences, small groups of students had begun to gather periodically to discuss the language situation and their priority was to do what was necessary to transform the College into an Afrikaans institution.⁷²

A few days after the flag incident, the College rector, Prof. A.C. Paterson, addressed the student body in what Erlank avers was “the most troubled speech that I have heard in years”. He describes Paterson’s shaking voice, expressing more disappointment than anger. After this meeting, Erlank went to see Prof. Paterson and claimed responsibility for the incident. Prof Paterson’s handling of the affair, as told by Erlank, is very interesting and displays, as do other aspects of this story, that a sense of honour and broad-mindedness in line with broad South Africanism existed among staff and students, regardless of their political or patriotic convictions. Erlank gave Paterson three reasons for his actions.⁷³ In the first place, he objected to political speculation at the College; secondly, as one who was “republican born” he saw the flag as a symbol of lost independence; and in the third place, he objected to the fact that the flag was not raised in the usual manner but had been tied at the top of the flagpole by the fire brigade, thus making it “a challenge to every nationalist Afrikaner”. He went on to say: “We have a queer way of accepting all challenges forced upon us, like for instance the challenge of the Anglo-Boer War.” Erlank states that for a brief moment he saw something of a smile behind Paterson’s glasses. Paterson conceded that he could understand Erlank’s last two reasons but objected to his first, stating: “I would be the last person in the world to make this college a field for political speculation”. The meeting ended with a warm handshake.⁷⁴

In the period following the incident, Paterson did what he could to soften the official reaction to Erlank’s actions, demonstrating his commitment to conciliation and his hopes to preserve the broad South African ideal at the College. In later accounts of the flag incident, emphasis is laid on how Erlank was punished for his role, without mention of the fact that the decision to rusticate him for six weeks was a much softer punishment than other parties had deemed appropriate.⁷⁵ This punishment was viewed as harsh for an act of “youthful indiscretion”.⁷⁶ Erlank later heard that Paterson pleaded for him like a father when the matter was discussed on the College Council and certain members felt that he should be expelled from all South African universities for a period of five years. There was also a bitter struggle in the joint meeting of Senate and Council regarding the matter. Furthermore, when Paterson wrote to Erlank’s father about the misdemeanour, he attempted to soften the blow by only referring briefly to Erlank’s actions and punishment and expanding at length regarding Erlank’s commendable attitude.⁷⁷

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71. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974. All translations from Erlank’s reminiscences are my own.
 72. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.
 73. Van der Merwe casts doubt on later beliefs in Erlank’s nationalist motivations and merely ascribes his actions to the boisterousness of youth. See Van der Merwe, “Taal op Tuks”.
 74. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.
 75. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, pp 52–53; UPA, D-11-9-3-2, “Die Vlaginsident”, p 7.
 76. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, p 52; UPA, D-11-9-3-2, “Die Vlaginsident”, p 7.
 77. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.

Another aspect of Erlank's firsthand account of the flag incident which is missing from various retellings of the episode is the pervasive sense of broad-mindedness which existed among a good number of the students and staff. In her discussion of the language policy of the College, D.M. van der Merwe also comments that this is an aspect that is missing from the official account of the institution's history as a whole.⁷⁸ The later abridged versions of the flag incident which evidently used Erlank's account as a basis, omit sections such as his experiences at the English Potchefstroom High School; the details of his dealings with Prof. Paterson; the fact that the English-speaking but republican minded registrar, Advocate A.A. Roberts offered Erlank lodging at his home when he was asked to leave the College residence; and the visit of the English students (those who had been responsible for the raising of the flag in the first place) to Erlank to discuss the matter over a cigarette. The actual burning of the flag captures the nationalist imagination, but many of the details of the incident confirm that white identity was not such a cut and dried affair and that broad South Africanist sentiment was not completely lacking at the College.⁷⁹

There is no doubt, however, that the flag incident was very definitely a blow for those who had been pursuing broad South African ideals at the College. Erlank recalls how in Paterson's speech to the student body after the event he said, among other things, that "[o]ne night of racialistic hooliganism has destroyed what we have arduously built up in ten years".⁸⁰ This event had brought to the surface the undercurrent of disaffection among some students at the TUC who, even according to Erlank's account, were a minority among Afrikaans-speakers. It was the first open protest, because of its wild, rash nature, that went outside the more acceptable lines of petitions and deputations. Furthermore, though the act of a minority, it damaged the image of the College in the eyes of English-speakers, thus Paterson tried to keep the incident from reaching the ears of the public.⁸¹ Apart from punishing Erlank, the response from the College administration was also to try to limit the effects of the incident. For example, with regard to Erlank "it had been urged in the interests of Education that the boy concerned should not be sent to his home, where political ill feeling was bound to be engendered".⁸² Instead he was provided lodgings with the registrar.⁸³

As already indicated, the official retelling of this account in later years from an Afrikaner nationalist perspective viewed the flag incident as an important milestone in the College's path towards becoming an Afrikaans institution. What is interesting is that while emphasis is always laid on Erlank's behaviour as a rash act of youth, it is also credited with important meaning in the struggle for Afrikaans rights at the TUC. Pelzer feels that although this was a passing act, it highlighted among some the backward position of the Afrikaans-speaking student and inspired them to strive to further their interests.⁸⁴ A later rector of UP, E.M. Hamman (1970–1981), explained the significance of the event as follows:

78. Van der Merwe, "Taal op Tuks", p 161.

79. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974; UPA, D-11-9-3-2, "Die Vlaginsident", p 7; "Die vlag-episode sal Duke Erlank ewig met Tuks verbind", *Hoofstad*, 23 April 1980; Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, pp 52–53.

80. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.

81. UPA, B-5-1-1, Minutes of a special meeting of the Senate, 27 August 1919, p 334.

82. UPA, B-5-1-1, Minutes of a special meeting of the Senate, 1 September 1919, p 336.

83. UPA, D-6-5-1-6-22, W.J. du P. Erlank – C.H. Celliers, 21 September 1974.

84. Rautenbach (ed.), *Ad Destinatum*, p 53.

That flag incident of early 1919, symbol of the resistance of the Afrikaner student at Tukkies against foreign control and against foreign ideologies, I regard as having been the seed out of which this great Afrikaans University, the largest among the residential universities in the RSA, rose up and grew.⁸⁵

What is interesting here is that the English-speaking influence at the College was regarded as “foreign”. This strengthens the thought, highlighted by Lambert, that for many Afrikaans-speakers in the twentieth century, English-speakers were not regarded as true South Africans, a fact which stood in the way of cultivating a new broad South African nationality.⁸⁶

Much like the rebellion, the retrospective retelling of this incident added more symbolic significance and meaning to it than was probably due. The version told by the chief protagonist, Erlank, reveals that it was more nuanced and complex. Nonetheless, it did in some respects signal the decline of broad South African ideals at the College. The language medium question was destined to flare up again in the early 1920s at the College, with a stormy battle in the press in which the foundations of conciliation and broad South Africanism were debated.⁸⁷ Paterson resigned as rector in 1921 due to ill health, although some perceived that his departure was because of the growing tide of Afrikaner cultural aspirations at the College.⁸⁸

Conclusion

On the one hand, the overall environment at the TUC seemed to genuinely favour the cultivation of broad South Africanism. There is much evidence of the atmosphere as one of personal contact between staff and students and of a vibrant student life, indicating the existence of the “friction of mind on mind” deemed essential for promoting broad mindedness and tolerance. Certainly this broad mindedness did exist at the College to a greater degree than was later portrayed in the institution’s official history. Students and staff were willing to give equal recognition to both sections of the white population and even in the more aggressive flag incident there is evidence of a broad South Africanist spirit of understanding and conciliation. On the other hand, however, there was a growing, albeit small, voice of opposition to the homogenising effect of broad South Africanism. This voice calling for the preservation and furtherance of an exclusive white Afrikaner identity became stronger after the outbreak of World War I. This international conflict stirred up sentiments at the College among students of both white backgrounds. English-speakers were quick to embrace the rallying call of the British Empire while for Afrikaans-speakers, the World War brought to mind associations with their own recent conflict with Britain during the South African War. Thus it can be argued that World War I and the ensuing 1914 Rebellion hindered the development of broad South Africanism at the TUC. At the same time the increasing demands for the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium at the College which took place during these years of World War I highlight a growing

85. UPA, D-11-9-3-2, “Die Vlaginsident”, p 7. My translation.

86. Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?”, p 203.

87. “Politics and the T.U.C.: Charge Refuted”, *The Pretoria News*, 25 August 1922; “The T.U.C. A Question of Medium”, *The Pretoria News*, 2 September 1922; “Politics and the T.U.C.: Dr Reinink’s Letter”, *The Pretoria News*, 5 September 1922; “Medium Question: Another Open letter”, *The Pretoria News*, 12 September 1922; “Language and the T.U.C. Students’ Bilingualism: The Ideal”, *The Pretoria News*, 19 September 1922; “The T.U.C.”, *The Pretoria News*, 21 September 1922; “The T.U.C.”, *The Pretoria News*, 25 September 1922.

88. F. Van der Watt, *Rectores Magnifici* (Proteaboekhuis, Pretoria, 2003), p 26.

pursuit of an exclusive Afrikaner identity among some students. The 1919 flag incident brought many of these sentiments into the open and can be seen as a kind of bubbling over of the frustrations of a small group of nationalistically inclined students.

Abstract

Before the outbreak of World War I (1914–1918), broad South Africanism appeared to have had a tentative but solid beginning at the Transvaal University College (TUC). This international conflict, however, re-ignited tensions among white South Africans, and students at the TUC were no exception. The proximity of these events to the establishment of the College seemed to push the ideal of broad South Africanism at the College beyond reach. This article considers the striking effect of World War I and the 1914 Rebellion on the consciousness of the TUC students as seen in student contributions to *The T.U.C. Students' Magazine* and other events at the College. It examines in particular changing and conflicting notions of white identity at the College at this time.

Keywords: Transvaal University College; University of Pretoria; World War I; white identity; higher education; broad South Africanism; university history.

Opsomming

Voor die begin van die Eerste Wêreld Oorlog het dit geblyk asof breë Suid-Afrikanisme 'n tentatiewe maar stewige begin by die Transvaalse Universiteitskollege (TUK) gehad het. Maar hierdie internasionale konflik het weer spanning tussen blanke Suid-Afrikaners veroorsaak en in hierdie opsig was TUK studente geen uitsondering nie. Die feit dat hierdie gebeure so kort na die stigting van die Kollege plaasgevind het, het die verwerkliking van die ideaal van breë Suid-Afrikanisme by die Kollege baie moeilik gemaak. Hierdie artikel oorweeg die blywende indruk wat die Eerste Wêreld Oorlog en die 1914 Rebelle op die bewussyn van die studente van die TUK gelaat het soos uitgebeeld in die studentebydrae tot *Die T.U.K. Studenteblad* en in ander gebeurtenisse by die Kollege. Dit kyk spesifiek na veranderende en teenstrydige idees van blanke identiteit by die Kollege in hierdie tydperk.

Sleutelwoorde: Transvaal Universiteitskollege; Universiteit van Pretoria; Eerste Wêreld Oorlog; blanke identiteit; hoër onderwys; breë Suid-Afrikanisme; universiteitsgeskiedenis.