

The Discourse of the New Unity Movement: Recalling Progressive Voice

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Abstract

This paper provides insight into how the discourse of the New Unity Movement (NUM) can potentially contribute to educational development in the context of South Africa's social inequality. It describes the political lens of the NUM and how its discourse countered the oppressive forces of a capitalist-apartheid system, in a struggle for an alternative world order. NUM's discourse is posited as a progressive voice whose educational analysis and sound pedagogic principles could be recalled towards transforming education in South Africa today. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is applied to recontextualise the societal role of teachers and the role of critique in what Fairclough (2010) describes as evaluating society and possible ways to change it. The analysis of the NUM's writing also draws on Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony that enables further insight into cultivating an educational philosophy that is emancipatory.

Keywords: progressive voice; New Unity Movement; transformation; education; politics of oppression; people-centred development

Introduction¹

The purpose of this paper is to provide insight into how the discourse of the New Unity Movement (NUM) can be recontextualised to potentially contribute to educational development, through contemplating the former's relevance to current social, economic and political conditions in South Africa. The Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) and its

¹ This article is informed by my personal journey as an activist and teacher. I was not a member of the New Unity Movement but was exposed to its teachings, which contributed to my political education. Therefore, I acknowledge the possible familiarity that might be conveyed, however my intention is to contribute to placing their ideas on record.

UNISA 
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRESS

Education as Change
www.educationaschange.co.za
Volume 22 | Number 2 | 2018 | #3711 | 25 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/3711>
ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)
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mother body, the New Unity Movement (NUM), were positioned as political organs whose discourse on the relationship between schools and society could potentially offer useful insights into transforming education in South Africa. I contend that a voice such as theirs that reflects educational analysis and pedagogic principles needs to be recalled to help combat current hindrances to positive change in South African education. This article draws on an archive dating back to the 1940s and evokes a sense of remembering principles and ideas that are possibly still relevant. I will refer to this political movement hereafter as NUM which particularly incorporates the TLSA.

The status of this organisation in South African resistance politics was due partly to its propagation of a strategy towards establishing a discourse that set out to counter the oppressive forces of a capitalist-apartheid system, and argued for an alternative world order, particularly in the South African educational context. NUM's narrative is considered along three lines. First, I identify recurring features in their narrative in order to distil the principles, teachings and analyses that stand to possibly inform how we respond to a current deadlock in education. I explore whether particular features in their writing constitute a "progressive voice" insofar as it demonstrates the effects of their teachings and its relevance to the purpose, identity and agency of teachers. Second, I consider how their scholarly work built resistance against a powerful discriminatory social system, and whether its message of emancipation is still relevant in a post-apartheid social order. Third, I apply critical discourse analysis to set out thematic extractions, as a chopping block to think about current problems in the South African educational system. The NUM's publications and speeches are used as a basis for an investigation into how their discourse interrogated the quality of education, then, and now.

In essence, NUM's discourse of argumentation will be discussed as a rhetorical and pragmatic device that served to persuade and propagate precepts of liberation, democracy and social struggle. These were aimed at teachers in particular, who, with few exceptions, represented the intelligentsia among the poor-urban and poor-rural disenfranchised population in the 1950s to the 1980s.

Background

NUM and Its Struggle Against Capitalist-Apartheid

NUM was formed in apartheid South Africa to oppose the effects of legalised racism and separate development. Parts of its origins can be dated back to 1943 with the formation of the

Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). It was subsequently renamed the New Unity Movement in 1985 (hereafter referred to as NUM) which, at a particular point in time, represented a majority of teachers in what was called the Cape Province, that stretched as far as rural towns. The NUM was almost synonymous with its teacher body called the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA).

Alexander (1989, 184) notes that the “TLSA became a power in the land, an organization with branches in remote villages of the Cape Province. Because of the leverage which teachers then had in the community, this was an inestimably important fact of political organisation.” The underlying theoretical basis of the work of the NUM and its ideological content places on record a contribution to the broad liberatory movement in South Africa. NUM’s members studied a range of subjects plaguing social development at the time. These include, amongst several others, the basis of unity (Kies 1953), the origins of segregation and oppression, and the colour bar (Maurice 1946), in a sustained attack on capitalism and imperialism. Such subjects of study sought to provide strategies for alternative political and educational agendas and relate directly to the role of teachers.

The NUM’s central concern about state schooling under apartheid was that it deliberately indoctrinated children to take up subordinate positions in society and in so doing further subverted the political and economic aspirations of racially oppressed people. NUM’s writings reveal their commitment and identity as sociopolitical writers² of a repressive historical period, i.e. they can be found in a range of publications such as *The Torch*,³ *The Educational Journal*,⁴ public lecture papers and study material.⁵

Hendricks (2010, 373) states that crucial to NUM’s response to apartheid and post-apartheid eras was the principle of

non-collaboration as a theory and strategy of social change (that) remained firmly embedded in the organisation’s efforts to achieve what it viewed as democratisation, equal citizenship and educational transformation in South Africa.

² A few of the contributors to activist historiography who wrote prolifically as scholars are Ben Kies, I. B. Tabata, Goolam Gool, Victor Wessels, Edward Maurice, Ali Fataar and R. O. Dudley.

³ Ben Kies was a founding member of this organisational newspaper in 1943.

⁴ This journal was the mouthpiece of the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA) from the 1960s.

⁵ See for example *Imperialism: Profit, Plunder, and Poverty* (NUM n.d.), “The Background of Segregation” (Kies 1943), “The Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to World Civilization” (Jafe 1992), “Education for Barbarism” (Tabata 1959), and *Majority Rule: Some Notes* (Mokone 1982).

The discourse of the apartheid government in the sphere of social practice and social structures was interrogated by the critique and spirit of the NUM. Against a background of colonial and apartheid legacy, the NUM's voice aimed to elevate an oppressed people to assert, and later occupy, their rightful place in society.

The Current Juncture in South African Education

Many problems persist in schools as a result of the legacies of colonial conquest and apartheid-based education. Schoolchildren in South Africa are severely compromised in later life because their education does not prepare them for social realities such as poverty and unequal life chances. Education ought to play a critical role in preparing children for such conditions in society.

Multinational studies bear evidence to the lingering inequalities and poor educational performance that the legacies of colonialism and apartheid entrenched in school communities. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) found that "South Africa scores lowest in reading out of 50 countries and 78% of grade 4 students cannot read for meaning" (Howie et al. 2016, 4).

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) confirms that there is a "large difference in reading scores between rich and poor pupils in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mauritius" (Hungu 2011, 13). The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) notes that "South Africa is still one of the lower-performing countries in mathematics and science in comparison to other TIMSS participating countries" (Zuze et al. 2017, 11). Their research also makes the point that "school performance and teaching reveal largely unacknowledged poor teaching of mathematics in the majority of schools" (Zuze et al. 2017, 3). Education in South Africa faces deep inequalities on multiple levels, including less than sufficient teacher preparation and unequal distribution of material resources. Political and psychosocial oppression left role-players in education with racialised conceptions of themselves. These inferiorised self-perceptions underpin the findings in the abovementioned studies.

In reflecting on the crisis in the South African education system we observe how elements that relate to the legacy of apartheid and poor pedagogy make quality and success in education elusive for the majority of school children. Inequality in the South African education system

persists with the rural and poor-urban schools underperforming compared to their middle-class counterparts. Poor quality in education has many dimensions to it, such as shortcomings in leadership at most levels in the education system, mismatched language medium practice in schools, school communities that are afflicted with gang cultures, weak pedagogy in classrooms and poor teacher preparation. Educational vision seems absent; there is no effort to relate what happens in classrooms to building a transformed society that is free of inequalities and poverty. Decades of deliberate social engineering strategies left psychological scars on the majority of people, scars which are still evident into post-apartheid South Africa. Institutional cultures that are reminiscent of that era are still intact. School cultures were conditioned into complying with a system that entrenched a slave mentality, as opposed to cultures that project excellence, autonomy and self-determination.

One of the contributory factors under apartheid rule was the Bantu Education Act (Union of South Africa 1953) that deliberately aimed at creating an underclass to feed a growing capitalist system. The discovery of diamonds and gold in the 19th century made this workforce an imperative for imperialists and local accumulators of capital. In the words of Verwoerd (cited in Tabata 1959),⁶ who during apartheid was the Minister of Native Affairs,

When I have control of Native education Natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them. People who believe in equality are not desirable teachers for the Natives.

A legislated instrument such as this, combined with a fascist state apparatus, imposed serious and long-term damage on the people of South Africa, as it conditioned minds and created the conditions for the oppressed masses to take on an inferior image of themselves. Central to the state apparatus was the institution of the school, which through a curriculum, resource allocations, and a colonised mindset, imposed a deficit-based identity on people.

Against this background I pose the question: how far have we come to address consciously and systematically the effects of a deeply racialised, apartheid education? I contend that it is worthwhile to ascertain whether mobilising the NUM discourse, or elements of it, could assist pragmatically to help address current problems in education and in broader society. What follows is a discussion of the NUM's discourse to explore whether their ideas to combat a

⁶He is generally known as the architect of the Bantu Education Act and of apartheid.

capitalist-apartheid South Africa can be recalled at best, or remembered at least, to help address the problem of poor quality in education. I consider how the application of critical discourse analysis (CDA) can process the task of contemplating the NUM's narrative.

The Method to Work with the NUM's Ideas

Three conceptual lenses are pursued to process the pertinence of NUM's narrative. First, Fairclough's (1992) construct of what language conveys is useful to shed light on the role of education, as well as other objects of change in society, and reads as follows: "Discourse is an element of all social processes, events and practices, though they are not simply discourse" (Fairclough 1992, 1).

NUM's emphasis on the written word subsumed language as a political tool as they used it to interrogate "the nature of social power and dominance"—what van Dijk (1993, 254) understands as the key objective of critical discourse analysis. Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, which views those in power to influence relations in society by forms of consent or coercion, which in turn advance a political elite's agenda, is a concept that was applied by NUM as an analytical lens. This concept is extended to interrogate how "consensus" (Chomsky 2010)—notably amongst the dominated—is "manufactured" to perpetuate positions of privilege and sources of power. Critical discourse analysis enables an understanding of how the NUM viewed sociopolitical phenomena. The content that the language of the NUM embodies is explored to lift out the features that formed the tenets of their orientation towards social transformation and, to see how such features informed the political questions that they posed. Noting how the organisation's key lenses on society formed knowledge of the context of society, and how it fed into an interpretation of the role of education in society, will be a central point of the discussion later.

Second, intertextuality (Fairclough 2003, 6), as a tool of discourse analysis, will be used to deepen our understanding of NUM's outlook, as it allows for a probing of the underlying voices which contributed to the ideas that shaped the NUM's programme of action. The NUM's discourse drew on a range of thinkers, including Karl Marx, which is signalled by emphatic statements such as "national liberation movements must be subordinated to the requirements of the supreme struggle—the class struggle" (Tabata 1985, 47). Similarly, Leon Trotsky's influence is evident in how their analyses incorporate world events that served to link the NUM's struggle to that of the international working class, through the concept of permanent

revolution. Cross-influence of ideas in written works is evident in their narrative, what Fairclough (2003, 6) terms “interdiscursivity.” Their written word was the basis of their spoken word. Interaction between discursive and strategic action is seen, for example, in their Trotskyist outlook of openly rejecting the bureaucracy as part of the revolutionary process and always framing their national struggle within an international perspective.

Third, using corpus tools to direct its followers’ thinking was a prominent feature of NUM’s strategic, generally educational approach. Unique lexical items distinguished the discourse of the NUM. The use of the term *herrenvolk*, for example, which has fascist connotations, was their descriptor for the apartheid regime and it was used consistently, over decades. It is also indicative of how their analysis incorporated a correlation between racist-capitalist South Africa and oppression in other countries, such as Germany. Lexical items such as “international working class,” “emancipation,” “ideology,” and “liberation” signalled the plight to fight conditions of domination and oppression. “International working class” is a Trotskyist notion and depicts how the NUM’s thinking networked with writings akin to the Russian Revolution. Essays by NUM theorists recontextualised and clarified notions of race, class and gender which served to guide teachers’ thinking.

Remembering the time of South Africa fighting against racial oppression is also situated at a time when there was a wider anti-colonial struggle in Africa. Melber notes how the movement for liberation in Africa launched military opposition to oppressive regimes that later “turned liberators into oppressors and victims into perpetrators” (2009, 452). Fanon (2010, 97) makes the point that it is not unusual for a new regime to quickly resemble an old one.

An Analysis of the NUM Discourses on Transformation

The analysis draws on the above three concepts of intertextuality, corpus tools and the complexity of what language conveys. Extracts and key concepts of NUM’s writings are used to unpack their lines of thought, ideology and strategy to transform education. Integrated in the analysis are themes of the NUM’s narrative that are recontextualised for contemplation of the current educational juncture.

Conceiving of Teachers as Key Agents of Social Change

In a public address Ben Kies (1943, 15), one of the NUM’s leading thinkers, sketched the role of teachers as follows:

We should constantly keep before us the example of those mighty teachers in France, who for decades and decades fought against darkness and despotism until the dawn of the French Revolution; we should always remember and follow the generation of teachers who, for a full hundred years prepared the way for the Russian Revolution. For it is the duty of the true teacher to pull off the mask and scrape off the scales of ignorance that blind the youth. It is the duty of the true teacher to give his/her pupils knowledge so that they may KNOW the world, and so that they may CHANGE the world. For it is not enough for them to know; they must also change things for the benefit of humanity. And more than this, the true teacher's duty does not end with his/her pupils. He/ She has the vital and active part to play in the liberation of the people.

Three features are evident in this text: First, the element of historical analysis that shows how time and space infuse the practice of teaching; the French and Russian revolutions depict how a fuller political understanding is formed that is distilled from history.

Second, there is causality between a speech event, such as this, and how teachers are orientated to undertake the dual task of academic excellence and political schooling. Rhetoric of this nature helped develop teachers as social agents. Interviews bear testimony to how transference of political substance to teaching practice and consciousness formation was effected through written and verbal events. The NUM established political schools where they infused their classroom practice with ideas of being a free human being. Livingstone was one of these schools and as an attendee confirms, "had I not gone to Livingstone, my life would have been totally different. ... [U]ltimately that [education at Livingstone] led to a much greater freedom than just a political freedom" (Adams interview cited Wieder 2003).

Third, a co-occurrence of words such as "liberation," "revolution," "teacher," and "humanity" depicts a consistent theme in the narrative of NUM of political struggle against oppression and racism and the explicit agency exercised by teachers.

Emancipatory Pedagogy

Schools were viewed as crucial spaces in which to prepare a generation for a changed society that is free from all forms of oppression and exploitation. Schools were regarded as cherished spaces by the NUM as they represented the conduit through which to shape minds afresh for an alternative society. It was where Freire's philosophy of emancipatory pedagogy was honed, so that children could understand the role between society and education in a way that would build their confidence and their ability to view the world critically.

Informal Political Education and Community Work

Teachers were viewed as the most critical resource in this regard and undertook alternative education to augment their subject knowledge and to refine the methodologies for conveying such subject matter in classrooms. The study circles amongst teachers were used to reflect on key texts which would broaden their political perspectives so that they would be better able to relate their pedagogy to politics. Parents teacher student associations (known as PTSAs) were formed so that education amongst the oppressed gained prominence as a priority in the community. In these, retrogressive state policies were rejected and a growing unity was forged to retaliate against further impositions. One teacher recalls how the state required of them to administer intelligence tests so that they (the government) could show differentiated intelligence scores according to racial classifications. NUM schools rejected this ploy to further entrench separatist thinking and thus it could not succeed. State directives, in the form of oppressive texts, were rebutted by the PTSAs in an act of unity that bolstered teachers' morale and standing, with people's power. Unity defined their strength and signalled their identity. Teachers were, in essence, committed to a political cause as they pursued their mission of preparing pupils to transform society. It was an integral facet of their lives and they approached school life with dedication, discipline and purpose.

Participatory Classroom Strategies

Fear of being detained or being harassed by the Special Branch of the South African Police was constant in those days. Under such pressure they felt impelled into a sense of urgency to prepare pupils for a very hostile social environment as they could be arrested any day. Opportunities were created in classrooms to discuss, think, write and dramatise as a way of cultivating hope for a transformed society. Students were trained to think critically in ways that enabled them to question relations between education, ideology and material conditions. Students who came through the portals of this education, which combined pedagogy with politics, were assets in the post-apartheid era. They were familiar with the principles and thinking that allow for a fresh perspective to emerge by participating and intersecting freely in the cultural, social and political arenas of a diverse society.

Participatory strategies developed critical thinkers out of students who were supported to grapple with relationships between "text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture" (Van Dijk 1993, 253). Teachers intended to raise the consciousness of pupils to empower them to understand how social systems work and how their current sociopolitical conditions impact

on their lives. Enabling students to understand the complexities of social inequality was a deliberate dimension of their task as teachers. By way of illustration, teachers would compile internationally representative reading lists so that a wide range of perspectives would become available to them. Pupils were taught to read with discernment and purpose. Combined with this was the nature of the content that teachers brought to the classroom. Studying local history for example went beyond what the syllabus offered and provided a counteractive method to the Eurocentric and derogatory (as it imposed inferior perceptions) kind of content that schools were expected to cover. Teaching was conducted purposefully for the broader community and parents looked to these teachers for guidance and leadership. They evoked confidence and stood in solidarity within the broader community.

Transforming Teacher Identity

For these teachers the attainment of freedom was linked to their personal life. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* ([1807] 2001, 66), he writes that

It is solely by risking his life that freedom is obtained ... [T]he individual who has not staked his life may, no doubt, be recognized as a person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.

“To be independently self-conscious is to reject the image of the self imposed by the oppressor” (Tabata 1959, 5). Teachers brought a particular content to the classroom to counter the racist identities that were imposed on pupils, perspectives that prepared pupils to take a stand in presenting themselves as a human race as opposed to the imposed racial categories. Such perspectives sought to generate pupils' faith in themselves and to transmit the thinking that they are capable of making a valuable contribution to world civilisation. Teachers lived by the dictum, “Let us live for our children.” The critical tone of teachers' ideas was theoretically embedded in Trotskyist traditions and opened up fresh perspectives of how to understand the role of education in society. It appears that such a philosophy is absent in the current education system.

Teachers were committed to undoing the slave mentality that was one of the effects of widespread racial prejudice. They went the extra mile to develop a sense of freedom within the self-consciousness of pupils. They went to the homes of their children and triangulated efforts of the school, home and pupil. Such interactions led to the development of increasingly strong

PTSAs, while instruments to oppress the majority of people were rife. Teachers viewed education as an important conveyer of ideology, politics and social change.

Interrogating Policy and Propagating Non-Racialism

Policy as an Act of Oppression

One of the tasks that these intellectuals undertook was to interrogate the specificity of policies and oppressive acts, such as what Tabata (1959, 18) describes here as a reign of terror on teachers:

Members of the Criminal Investigation Unit (C.I.U) have swooped on schools, interrogated teachers in front of pupils and searched them. Some teachers were discharged without any charge or trial. The only reason given was that they were not suited for Bantu Education. Some teachers were dismissed on the eve of retirement so that the state avoids paying them pension.

Policy discourse and repressive tactics went together, and such terror tactics agitated increased activism in the organisation. With the ongoing interrogation of repressive policy clauses in NUM's writing, apartheid clauses, ironically, became an intertextual feature of their discourse. In other words, as part of NUM's critique extracts of apartheid policy found their way into their writing. Intertextual features formed part of a polemic that portrayed contradiction in society. Texts as intentions of specific actions and discourses as statements of ideology were shaped by the social milieu of that historical period.

Tabata's text also exposes this event as an act of oppression and its effect connected people to the reality of how discriminatory policy upholds the state's machinery of subjugation. His writing is a representation of a struggle to gain control over seemingly impossible sociopolitical conditions, as he juxtaposes unequal power relations, the terror of the Criminal Investigation Unit and the vulnerability of children.

The Philosophy of Christian National Education

The philosophy of Christian National Education (CNE)⁷ came under severe scrutiny and was seen as a political function of the oppressor by the NUM, who responded with ardent critique and rejection, based on its belief that education was the primary critical space for political expression and activism.

⁷ For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Tabata's essay on "Education for Barbarism" (1959, 26–36).

The Afrikaners, who became synonymous with being the oppressor in those days, (although this identity has changed substantially in post-apartheid South Africa), regarded Afrikaans and religion or Calvinist doctrine as two sides of the same coin, as is noted in this statement in the policy (in Tabata 1959, 38) of CNE:

Our Afrikaans schools ... must be the palaces where our children are soaked and nourished in the Christian-National spiritual cultural “stuff” of our nation.

The NUM (Tabata 1959, 31) extracted the following to expose the dogmatism of CNE:

Every subject must be taught in the light of the word of God, namely, on the basis of the applicable principles of Scripture.
The church must exercise the necessary discipline over the doctrine and lives of the teachers ...
Unless [the teacher] is a Christian, he is a deadly danger to us.

And similarly (Tabata 1959, 31), at universities,

The Christian doctrine and philosophy should be taught and practiced. But we desire still more; the secular science should be taught to the Christian—Nationalist views of life.

These quotes are taken from Tabata’s (1959) interrogation of the CNE, as interrogation of such texts was central to the NUM’s political struggle. Critical discourse analysis was common practice for cadres, who viewed the written word as a weapon against the oppressor. They sought an alternative set of values that related to critical thought with which to combat the CNE. Pedagogic methods developed the understanding that unequal power relations existed as a force in society and had to be changed through the adoption of values of equality. Precepts like this were considered important in how pupils processed subject matter.

NUM’s critique was most useful in exposing the blatant and inhumane beliefs about people. It was believed and legislated that people possess different degrees humanity, such that the “white” had to be the trustee of the “coloured.” This is in accordance with “Native education that should be based on the principles of trusteeship, non-equality and segregation” (Tabata 1959, 32).

The Bantu Education Act

Another illustration of how the NUM’s discourse tore into apartheid policy and legislation is a critique by R. O. Dudley. It has bearing on the Bantu Education Act (1953), which was an

instrument to ensure that schoolchildren were conditioned into political and economic servitude and dependency. The Eiselen Commission (early 1950s) that was set up to feed into educational policymaking, determined three principles of cash, competence and consent, for strengthening the implementation of the Bantu Education Act. This political ploy was dissected by NUM so that they could use critical rhetoric and consciousness-raising to retaliate against the attacks on the psychological and material conditions of subjugated people. In summarising R. O. Dudley's analysis (Dudley 1955, 34–41) of this particular aspect, he observes with penetrating thought that it intended to raise money from the parents (without their consent) through taxation levies to pay for the inferior Bantu Education. It was designed to exclude children from entering the economy and from participating in the mainstream of modern society. Competence and consent were used as principles to foster active participation and acceptance by parents in actualising Bantu Education. In this way, parents would become collaborators in brainwashing their own children into subservient roles in society, such as cheap labour on farms, factories and mines.

Serious consideration of the construction of an alternative education included observing developments on the international scene. The NUM drew the conclusion that CNE was based on the Nazi philosophy of Nationalist Socialist Education. This form of Nazi ideology used education as a means to condition the population into obedience so that the state acquired full control over their actions. The fascist state could thereby determine their function in society with precision.

Understanding Civilisation

Another embedded theme of the NUM's broader narrative was the subject of civilisation. The lucid essay by Ben Kies, "The Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to World Civilisation" (1953), critiques the false notion of Western civilisation's portrayal of "non Europeans"⁸ as inferior beings who should be indebted to Britain for what they brought to the "uncivilised" people of Africa. This theme relates to the project of "colonising the mind," and in eloquent style he (Kies 1943, 1) states that

The deception of the people is an art of government which has been practiced by every ruling class since the dawn of society. Oppressors have used whips and chains; they have used torture, bullets and prisons. But their most important weapon has been the enslavement of the mind.

⁸ This refers to those people who have a different geographical location to those from Europe, in this instance people from Africa.

In addressing this form of discrimination, namely the idea that the British came to civilise the indigenous peoples, he poses the question: “What is civilisation?” He proceeds with a detailed historical exposition of how the world and its people came into being. The scientific analysis leads him (Kies 1953, 14) to conclude the following:

First, 98 per cent of our human history belongs to a previous era (Kies 1953, 14). Human development, in its current form, is an iota of time in the trajectory of the evolution of the human species. Archaeological evidence shows that people of diverse backgrounds lived together and thus all contributed to making tools and devising means of survival, not only particular kinds of Caucasian descent, as alleged, but rather a combination of Caucasoids, Negroids and Mongoloids.

Second, non-Europeans from Africa, Asia, China, and the Euphrates region formulated the founding precepts in the fields of mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy while western Europe was still evolving from a glaciated state and thus was largely uninhabitable. Reasoned and sophisticated conceptualisations were used to give depth to the analysis that concludes civilisation has a much longer history in Africa, Asia, China and the Middle East. Culture, as an attendant idea of civilisation is described as follows: “It is the sum total of the technical, social, and conceptual apparatus evolved in the process we call culture. It is from this culture that humans derive their humanity and begin his/her social history” (Kies 1953, 14).

Third, he aligns his thinking with three stages of human development, namely, savagery, barbarism and civilisation. He contends that the development goes into stagnation and he uses the Dark Ages as an illustration of the effects of one group deriving privilege by disadvantaging another group in a society. This leads to plunder for profit, as became evident in the imperialist stage of capitalism where a particular version of civilisation was imposed on societies that gave rise to inequality and the subjugation of people.

The contested notion of civilisation was used rhetorically for oppressive means, but was appropriated by the NUM as a means of study and enlightenment for the construction of a positive self-image.

Anti-Imperialism and Internationalism

As indicated earlier, the NUM understood the correlation between CNE and Nazi influences very well and knew how far removed their values of democracy and freedom were from the current sociopolitical order. Rhetorical spaces such as their mouthpiece, *The Educational Journal*, formed part of an ideological strategy to launch counter-attacks on CNE. Critical analysis in these journals provided original and strategically formulated ideas. Such analysis formed a foundation on which to germinate alternative social formations, as later became evident in the NGO sector and in a wide range of social services including the medical, legal and professional services, extending into areas such as the arts and sport. NUM took the lead in these formations that provided a fuller life for the oppressed. Sheer self-determination undergirded by an alternative worldview offered ordinary people a better life, a life of hope. This presented freedom for many despite them being shackled to poor material conditions.

Tabata's essay, "Education for Barbarism" (1959), is a lucid exposition of how Bantu Education, and apartheid more generally, would destine South African society to backwardness economically, socially and politically. He forecast in 1959 already that, given the then narrow and inhumane separatist policies, the country would face stagnation in the future. Today, we face grave challenges in the social services like education and health as well as economic problems such as unemployment and a shortage of skills and other competencies. His accurate forecast includes an observation on the progress in Russia, which was then perceived by the West as a poor Asiatic country, but it was actually on par with, if not ahead of, the USA in scientific innovation, particularly in space science. Launching Sputnik in 1957 bears this out—it was the first artificial satellite that brought in new data that could measure orbital changes which, in turn, signalled the beginning of the Space Age. The South African situation that was set against humanitarian values is contextualised in this broader scheme of world developments. The NUM notes that education is the bedrock of such progress, as became apparent in Russia (Tabata 1959, 56–7). It was predicted that *Herrenvolk* backwardness, which entailed applying the fallacy of race superiority as an economic, political and social basis to administer the country, would fail. This prediction holds true, as the backwardness has contributed to our current dilemmas of skills shortages, a collapsed education system and a general mismatch between economic activities and the sources required to feed into such activity. This is not to say that education serves purely economic ends; on the contrary, it has wider societal purposes such as developing critical minds, caring dispositions and an inspired people who can exercise life choices.

Related to the overt racist policies since 1948 was the NUM's position on imperialism. An analysis of the impact this would have on South Africa was undertaken with precision. NUM defines imperialism with the usual tone of assertiveness: "it is a parasitic system, deriving its wealth and power from the exploitation of the resources and the people of the poorer nations. It is a system designed to benefit the rich and to make the poor even poorer" (NUM n.d., 7). Political and social institutions were set up in neocolonial countries, and with the help of collaborators, these served to entrench political and economic domination by the imperialist country. Incremental capital outflows from the neo-colony deprived, in this instance South Africa, of basic social services. Economic and political independence was thereby denied. NUM launched an anti-imperialist struggle which was a key aspect of their work. In setting out a political solution to imperialist forces, NUM members drafted theses under the name of the South African Workers Party. Trotsky's opinion was elicited and one of his points was that "[t]he struggle for the expulsion of British Imperialism, its tools and agents, enters as an indispensable part of the programme of the South African proletarian party" (Trotsky 1935, 2). He also stressed the importance of the need for the indigenous people to develop confidence in their collective strength, a heightened personal consciousness and cultural initiatives. This interaction characterises the Trotskyist outlook and can be located in the range of networks that the NUM established. An evolving NUM narrative accompanied a broadening political network abroad, which emphasised a long-range transformative process rather than an imminent political outcome.

One of their distinguishing assertions was that education for social transformation was conducted on the principle of non-collaboration. Wieder (2008, 4) describes this concept as a "stand that challenged the government and confronted power-seeking politicians who were referred to as quislings." Non-collaboration was defined as not colluding with or being complicit with the government's political agenda. The political principle of non-collaboration was not only a discursive and strategic device but also an identity marker of a particular teacher. Moreover, it was a "foundational stand, written in stone with non-racialism" (Wieder 2008, 2). Non-collaboration with the state apparatus was a defining feature of the NUM, but Alexander notes that it was sometimes applied in ways that "assassinate[d] the political characters of any who did not agree with the NEUM leadership" (cited in Johnson 2018).

Building an Intelligentsia

Developing teachers as intellectuals was a very clear objective of the NUM and the strategy for such development has a strong “textual character” (Fairclough 2003, 21). Essays were viewed as a rhetorical weapon to inform the conflated political and social lives of its members. The NUM consciously built a layer of intellectuals that provided communities with moral and political leadership to shred the image of a slave mentality. Tabata was the chief proponent of this idea of liberating the mind from such self-perception, because he believed it gave people a false consciousness of themselves.

On entering university, prospective teachers were expected to contribute toward the upliftment of those in communities who were beleaguered by socio-economic and psychological oppression. Gramsci’s proposition that while all people are intellectuals, not all are intellectuals by social function, is borne out here. Teachers were tasked by NUM to fulfil this social function.

The NUM was conscious of the ruling class possessing the dominant ideas in society in the languages of dominance and of vertical rule. Gramscian thought influenced their undertaking of a particular revolutionary task—to build a social consciousness in teachers and academics through ideological struggle along two lines. First, to build a critical layer of organic intellectuals from those involved in the practice of teaching and second, to persuade traditional intellectuals to join the rank and file.

Their purpose was to equip themselves with intellectual virtues which would enable them to combine theory and practice in such a way that it would feed into an emancipatory movement. Schools were thus regarded as preparatory grounds at which to develop activists to liberate those under oppression. A teacher’s vocation was perceived by NUM as having a revolutionary function. For them, writing was a means of social action as they deliberately set up political schools as critical sites—towards the objective of social transformation. These political schools are located in the ghettos of the oppressed but due to the emphasis that NUM teachers placed on academic excellence, they performed better⁹ (Chisholm 1991, 10) than many feeder schools from the privileged cohort of schools.

⁹ Evidence to this effect is found in a “report listing the top 100 schools for the University of Cape Town in 1983, Harold Cressy and Livingstone High Schools, both NUM schools came 10th and 11th respectively” (cited in Chisholm 1991, 10).

Transforming Conceptions of Leadership and Power

NUM developed schools as a structural basis from which to wield power and its membership unleashed scathing discursive attacks on those with official power. Schools provided both structure and agency in the balance of forces between the government and the NUM. NUM teachers, their brand of politics and political education, took on an identity I would argue meets Fairclough's description of discourse as "discourse reflects the power structures of society that is determined by the conflict between the dominant and dominated classes of modern capitalist society" (1991, 265). Their respected position in society was undergirded by their clarity and assertion of ideas, conveyed in a lexical style that was persuasive and authoritative.

Teachers were the educated and respected in society during the 1940s to 1960s when about 80–90 per cent of the community was illiterate. In parliament in 1949, the state expenditure on education (cited in Tabata 1959, 14) is noted as follows:

There is free and compulsory education for the White child only. The cost per head for the White child was £50; and for the African child it was £7 ... [T]he £7 was for the few African children actually in schools.

Therefore, high school leavers who had had the privilege of university, and who had undergone political training by NUM, came to be thought of as leaders in communities. This practice of grooming a layer of professionals to take up the political struggle towards social, economic and political emancipation entailed placing an emphasis on developing teachers into thought leaders. While much of this development happened organically it was at the same time a deliberate strategy of the NUM to develop a cadre of organic intellectuals. The rhetoric that shaped these minds was characterised by clarity of purpose, self-assuredness and unwavering principle, which armed them with confident minds. As one of the leaders (NUM n.d., 4) has said:

The essays are very definitely intended to arm political cadres with a basic practical understanding of the greatest enemy of the international working class, so that cadres may be all the better prepared to make a solid contribution to the ideology of liberation and the practical tasks that face us all in the struggle for emancipation.¹⁰

¹⁰ The essay is titled *Imperialism: Profit, Plunder and Poverty* (NUM n.d.).

Intellectual power translated into personal power so that teachers of the day could have an advantage over a bureaucrat or policymaker that sought to gain a psychological upper hand. Moreover, knowledge in this sense was used to develop young minds to believe that they could achieve in the world, and that an educated person is one with opportunity and good prospects in life. Education was considered the main means to overcome the psychological oppression of inferiority that the fight for non-racialism entailed. To this end, teachers were very well prepared for teaching, were very knowledgeable in their subject areas, were disciplined, principled and set high standards. Several of these teachers involved themselves in reading groups and read widely to enable themselves to fulfil their mission of political education—one which went beyond the prescribed curriculum. The ethos of combativeness, intellectual assertiveness and the possession of a critical perspective (Chisholm 1991, 1) infused their classroom practice.

State organisations as well as the liberatory movement used teachers to carry out the respective political agenda of each. Leadership within NUM denounced the idea of leaders as individuals, instead propagating the idea of leadership as the collective (Rassool 2006, 32). This act of “selflessness” was also evident in the anonymity of their publications and while admittedly this was for security reasons mainly, it also expressed the element of principle before personality. Power was located in what the organisation stood for, in the content of its programme and in the principles it upheld. Therefore, as thought leaders they scientifically pursued sociopolitical analyses and perfected the skill of argumentation and reasoning.

The spoken and written word were used to direct thinking and action, but also bolstered their analytical talents with an arsenal of ideas. This was the most formidable threat to the opposition who could not match the depth of their analyses and their intellectual dexterity. Their works were often written under pseudonyms, as they lived in a time of severe state repression where they could face banishment from work or arrest and interrogation at any given moment. The organisation was cohesive in its strong leadership which based their writings on clear political principles and on a 10-point programme of action. Despite leaders wanting to de-emphasise their role as front-end personas, the strength with which they conveyed their political convictions left no doubt as to who were offering the strategic direction. Leaders set the standard of intellectual robustness, a hallmark of their organisation.

Image of Self and the World

NUM's political analyses were formulated with a timeframe that considered aboriginal aspects of human development. For example, the subject of "civilisation," and how this concept was later distorted to take on bigoted worldviews, formed an in-depth focus of study—in both directions of time (Kies 1953, 7–40). Conceptualisations that led to an alternative and scientifically based worldview became very important in elevating the self-image of oppressed people to counter imposed and racialised images. Perspectives that relate to varying outlooks on the world, which project self-confidence and self-determination—particularly from the point of view of the political South—are essential to a movement that will shape identity at personal and group levels. In understanding such a national development process we note Kies's (1943, 5) point in his exposition of world civilisation: "It is a historical fact that the ways, manners, customs of a society, even amongst the oppressed, are the ways, manners, customs of the ruling class." Assertions such as this rallied against the ruling class, as they sought to influence an alternative worldview. They used such points as directives to position themselves in intergroup relations, and hence, to form alternative identities. In a context of globalisation, the value accorded to linguistic diversity, cultural heritage, scientific practices and location, is predetermined, and thus continues to be an imperative political undertaking for the formation of alternative identities. In this sense, NUM's discourse is a *product* of an ongoing social reality of inequality; it is also a *process* that belongs to a unique historical trajectory with long-term transformative potential.

Conclusions

The NUM as a movement for liberation has a narrative that inspired hope for people at a time when the most inhumane and legalised oppressive forces were imposed on them. They stood firm in the belief, in Kies's (1953, 11) words, that

[t]he human race is now, as it was when homo sapiens evolved, one biological species, with the same number and formation of bones, the same brain and nerve structure, the same internal organs, the same four types of blood groups, A, B, AB and O and the same capacity, in fact, propensity, [for] interbreeding. There is no way of knowing with any certainty the colour of emergent man/(humans), although most scientists are agreed that (s/)he was probably darkskinned. But one thing is quite certain, and that is that mutations in skin colour, hair texture, shape of nose or skull, and stature, owing to geographical dispersal, isolation and diet, have made not the slightest difference to the biological unity of man/(humans) as a single species, and provide no scientific basis for a division into what are popularly miscalled "races."

They were clear in their political mission that they wanted to build a generation of critical minds which, in the face of social and political terror, would contribute to constructing an

alternative society based on democratic and humanitarian values. In the post-apartheid period, such a society is still in the process of being defined. The NUM offers ideas to contribute to this society, although the road ahead is still riddled with potholes.

NUM's contribution is captured in a view by Neville Alexander (2003) that asserts their schools developed a generation of people who ran NGOs, formed community organisations, educated people and organised alternative education. He stated further that in the post-apartheid era they did not inherit the world but contributed to the fundamental things, like questions concerning alternative social forms required by society. NUM brings a perspective to a country like South Africa that sees the school as an organ of social transformation, ideology as a unifying force in society and teachers as organic intellectuals whose task it is to shape minds. Their politics emphasise participatory processes that are to be guided by clear principles as opposed to a management-driven approach within rigid hierarchies.

Their narrative conveys the tensions between state terror and grassroots organising around opposing ideological bases that construct diverging social realities. In-depth analysis of subjects like civilisation, for example, shape a community's thinking towards the freedom of the human spirit as one of society's treasures for posterity. Select subjects like these shaped an alternative worldview that instilled confidence and competence in its people.

It is time to return to a people-centred democracy that seeks to build a social consciousness where people are indeed free to pursue ideas and make choices about their lives. Such a point of departure can potentially render the equality of outcomes for everybody a possibility, notwithstanding external forces such as globalisation, as another set of considerations. There are recurring elements in the narrative of the NUM that we can draw on for this conception of development.

First, self-determination by those who are on the margins of society, to exert agency in defining their rightful place in society, irrespective of external factors, is vital. In other words, it is the freedom of mind to take a perspective that renders one's material conditions changeable. Second, as a community of people we need to build political unity and a shared vision to overcome the apartheid legacies that keep schools mired in underdevelopment and mediocrity; thorough social and political analysis that is located in a global context is imperative in this regard. Third, schools are critical sites for transforming society and for creating a society that

will breathe life into the values of freedom and equality for all; teachers should share an understanding of the purpose of education that relates directly to the kind of society that we envisage. Critical pedagogy should be a deliberate dimension of the task of a teacher so that children are nurtured into coping with difficulties relating to scarcity and deprivation. But more importantly, a democratic teaching practice enables the construction of a better future for the incoming generation, as became evident with those under the tutelage of the NUM teachers. We have the benefit of history to address waning educational standards. There is evidence to suggest that instrumentalist approaches have not yet yielded results that can take South Africa up from the bottom of the ladder as far as basics like literacy and numeracy are concerned (see Howie et al. 2016; Hungi 2011; Zuze et al. 2017). While post-apartheid heralded a departure from institutionalised racism, it is clear that as a country much still needs to be transformed.

In reflecting on post-1994 South Africa, Prince Mashele's (2011) narrative describes the country as being in an intellectual desert, attributing this to a dearth of new ideas. He states, quite perceptively, that "our intellectual crisis is in the field of politics and in the realm of ideas" (2011, 111). Motta (2018) makes a similar point—that there is a tendency for countries to be governed by an ethos of anti-intellectualism. In a compelling argument he notes how the United States, for example, under President Trump, pushes against well-reasoned and informed decision-making.

It appears that our progressive social policies and human rights-based Constitution disguises actual material and psychological conditions of the very people who were oppressed in the former regime. It is at this juncture that analyses, such as the NUM's, which devised a strategy for social upliftment, are still relevant.

I contend that the shortcomings that detract from an educated and intellectually vibrant citizenry cut across both apartheid and post-apartheid eras. These shortcomings relate to societal damage that can be traced back to the entrenched institutional cultures of underperformance and mediocrity. Residing within these cultures are internalised self-perceptions of inferiority—in other words, an aftermath of entrenched racism.

Recalling progressive voices from our own experience as a country is what critical discourse analysis enables us to do. Are the historical effects of bludgeoning people into subserviency still manifest in the current reality of unemployment, inequality and poverty? Does the

perpetuation of the socio-economic and political dilemmas in South Africa, and in the political South more generally, suggest an anti-intellectual mindset? If so, then it follows that education, as a key equalising agent in society, needs to be grounded in a philosophy that is in essence emancipatory. In this article, I illustrated how progressive teacher voices from the past can possibly contribute to cultivating an emancipatory philosophy in our schools, teachers and classrooms and, perhaps, in the official structures of education departments as well.

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