

Segregated schools of thought: The Bantu Education Act (1953) revisited

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Abstract

Various political parties, civil rights groups and columnists support the view that one of South Africa's foremost socio-economic challenges is overcoming the scarring legacy which the Bantu Education Act of 1953 left on the face of the country. In light of this challenge, a need arose to revisit the position and place of Bantu Education historiography in the current contested interpretation of its legacy.

It is apparent from the plethora of literature available on this topic that academics are not in agreement about whether or not the passing of the 1953 Act was a watershed moment in marginalising education for black pupils. On the one hand, it would seem that the general consensus is that the 1953 Act was indeed a turning point in the formalisation of education reserved for pupils of colour – thus a largely “traditional” view. On the other hand, the Marxist school, as coined by P Christie and C Collins, argues that securing a cheap, unskilled labour force was already on the agenda of the white electorate preceding the formalisation of the Act.

The aim of this article is two-fold. Firstly, to contextualise these two stances historically; and secondly and more chiefly, to examine the varying approaches regarding the rationalisation behind Bantu Education by testing these approaches against the rationale apparent in primary sources in the form of parliamentary debates and contemporary newspaper articles.

Keywords: Apartheid; Bantu Education; Education; History; Marxism; Historiography.

Introducing differing discourses

The World Economic Forum's Africa Competitiveness Report of 2017 rated South Africa as one of the worst educational performers globally, rating it 126th out of the 138 nations assessed in this report for the quality of its primary school education,¹ which is a statistical tendency that has plagued

1 World Economic Forum, “The Africa Competitiveness Report 2017”, May 2017 (available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_ACR_2017.pdf, as accessed on 15 November 2017), p. 147.

South Africa's recent past. Together with this, ongoing reports of failures in the national education system, such as the textbook delivery crisis that plagued Limpopo in 2012, over-crowded classrooms, educators who lack pedagogic and content knowledge, as well as the leaking of final matric examination papers, all point towards decay in the current educational sphere of South Africa. Various political parties, civil rights groups, ministerial spokespeople and columnists support the view that one of the foremost challenges facing South Africa is overcoming the scarring legacy that the Bantu Education Act of 1953 left on the face of the country.

It is apparent from the vast amount of literature available on this topic that academics are not in agreement as to whether or not the passing of this Act was a watershed moment for deliberately keeping the black population undereducated and by extension ensuring a cheap and exploitable labour force. Historiographically, there appears to be two distinct positions relating to the importance of the legislation that was passed in 1953, which could be termed a "traditional view" and a "Marxist view", if one accepts the terms as suggested by the Marxist historians.

Before the differences between the two purported schools of thought are discussed, a brief history of black education in South Africa should be explained and assessed, as an understanding of this history is imperative to grasping the essence of the two approaches to Bantu Education. South Africa, as with the majority of colonial African countries, saw the early development of black educational systems in the hands of the missionaries. When the Dutch East India Company settled in the Cape in 1652 with the sole intention of establishing a refreshment station, their prerogative was to maximise profits as their maritime and trading industries expanded to the East, and involvement in the affairs and educating the local population of the country was not on their agenda.² This precedent of prioritising education as relatively unimportant would continue into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – not only in the Colony but also in Europe. It would only be in the nineteenth century that a more noticeable shift would be seen to missionary education³ and this was for the purpose of proselytization. Frank Welsh argues that some Protestant missionaries did work in conjunction with authorities, specifically to guide the black population, as the church and the government shared the same stance regarding "the link between salvation, virtue, monogamy and

² RB Beck, *The history of South Africa* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 2013), p. 34.

³ F Welsh, *A history of South Africa* (London, Harper Collins, 2000), p. 108.

trousers”.⁴ More insight into the American missionaries’ approach is provided in DJ Kotze’s *Letters of the American missionaries, 1835-1838*. One such example is illustrated by the missionaries, BB Wisner, R Anderson and D Greene, who were secretaries to the American Board Mission Collection. In a letter, which was signed by all three parties, it was related how it was their responsibility to educate the “heathen”, so that they “may be very useful in the church”.⁵

One of the most notable missionary educational establishments was Lovedale, which was founded in 1841.⁶ This missionary school provided education to mixed races until 1878, where after it focused on educating black South Africans. It would certainly appear that this school enjoyed success, as by 1887 more than two thousand black students had passed through its doors.⁷ Lovedale and other missionary schools shared principles of discussion, accommodation and compromise, which would influence the manner in which black intellectuals would argue for economic and political emancipation during the course of South Africa’s history.⁸ The missionaries adopted English as their *lingua franca*, which would ultimately lead to an educated black population speaking English and utilising this language for their political discourse. It is hardly surprising that eventually several prominent black political leaders in South Africa’s history were English-speaking, missionary-educated individuals, such as Tiyo Soga, Sol Plaatje, ZK Matthews and perhaps most famously, Nelson Mandela.⁹

The missionaries became more rigid in the implementation of their paternalism in schools, as time progressed and the number of pupils attending these schools increased. One such example is where the Cape government started extending their control in these academic institutions by limiting the funding of mission schools to those which met set criteria including the

4 F Welsh, *A history of South Africa...*, p. 108.

5 BB Wisner, R Anderson & D Greene, DJ Kotze, *Letters of the American missionaries, 1835-1838* (Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1950), p. 45.

6 F Welsh, *A history of South Africa...*, p. 217.

7 H Giliomee & B Mbenga (eds.), *New history of South Africa* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2007), p. 191.

8 F Welsh, *A history of South Africa...*, p. 357.

9 Tiyo Soga had close ties to missionaries and was responsible for translating the bible into isiXhosa in the late nineteenth century. Sol Plaatje and ZK Matthews were both esteemed intellectuals in their respective communities. Plaatje served as the first general secretary of the South African Native National Congress (which would later become the ANC), while Matthews lectured at what is now the University of Fort Hare. Matthews eventually resigned from the institution in the mid-twentieth century as a statement against contemporary discriminating apartheid legislation. Similarly, Nelson Mandela devoted his life to the resistance against the apartheid regime, famously serving as one of the leading figures in the struggle against apartheid before becoming South Africa’s first democratically elected president.

condition that students perform manual labour. By 1879, the first syllabi for elementary black schools would ensure that a fifth of school time was spent doing manual work, such as carpentry for the male pupils and dress-making and cooking for female students. The Superintendent of Education at that time, Langham Dale, did not have much sympathy for black education, stating that it was his main priority to “see that the sons and daughters of the [European] colonists ... have at least such an education ... as will fit them to maintain their unquestioned superiority on this land”.¹⁰ This attitude would ultimately spread to the educational sphere that missionaries found themselves in, due to the fact that they were reliant to a certain degree on government funding.¹¹

Overall, missionary education was of a paternalistic nature, irrespective of which official body funded the education of black students or who was responsible for teaching it. The *Christian Express*, a newspaper that served as a mouthpiece for Christian missionaries in Lovedale, provides keen proof of this paternalistic attitude. The extract is rich in revelations:¹²

The subject of work is burning in this country. No complaint is more common We want to see the natives become workers how this ... comes is twofold. Christianity creates needs. Generally speaking, every man will work just as much as he requires to do and not more. There will be constant relation between the time a man works and his necessities

So to Christianize a Kaffir is the shortest way, and the surest, to make him put his hand steadily and willingly to work that is waiting to be done. This will make it both his interest and his duty to work, will enlist, besides his bodily appetites, his home affections, his mental powers, and his conscience, on the side of industrious habits.

The purpose of education was thus solely, in the eyes of many missionaries, to transform black pupils from “heathens” to what was perceived as useful, industrious citizens, in keeping with Calvinist ethic inculcating the notion that idle hands were the devil’s workshop. Consequently, black pupils and their communities were at this stage not entirely satisfied with the quality of education that they were receiving, in addition to not perceiving the point of attending such a schooling environment. For example, the Natal Native Commission stated in 1882 that they did not foresee that ordinary “Natives”

10 F Welsh, *A history of South Africa...*, p. 293.

11 F Molteno, “The historical foundations of the schooling of black South Africans”, P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education* (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1984), p. 53.

12 *Christian Express* 8(95), 1 August 1878.

would have the desire for schooling, while *The Kaffir Express* noted in 1872 that students at Lovedale actively rejected the principle of engaging in two hours compulsory work in the afternoons, labelling it “the bane of their lives” and “an utter abhorrence”.¹³

South Africa’s labour platform was set to change irrevocably from the 1870s with the discovery of diamonds and gold. These developments would in turn and inevitably also affect education. By 1905, however, the South African Native Affairs Commission found that black pupils and their communities were becoming increasingly disgruntled at the quality of education that they were receiving. The twentieth century would see a tremendously important shift in this regard, but not for the better. Missionary education would permeate black society to such a degree that by 1914, every single African school but one was associated to some degree with missionaries in the Natal province.¹⁴

Natal, as a former British colony, was home to several missionaries who originated from English-speaking countries and their presence was certainly reflected in the majority of Africans educated by their hand. In Natal in particular, for example, the most influential missionary group was the American Zulu Mission.¹⁵ The American Zulu Mission’s work, amongst several others, are detailed in Charles Loram’s book, where he not only explored contemporary schools’ history, but also proposed new methods with which to improve the missionary education system based on examples from segregated schools in the American south.¹⁶

One of the pivotally important aspects of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, is the fact that the education of black pupils was placed solely in the hands of the state, taking the educational power out of the hands of the missionaries. However, in order to understand this implementation, one needs to be aware of what the funding and administration of black education comprised of prior to the 1953 legislation. The first important legislative change that saw the formalisation of a nation-wide finance policy regarding education came with the Union of South Africa in 1910. The Act of Union¹⁷ stipulated that education was a provincial

13 F Molteno, “The historical foundations of the schooling of black South Africans”, P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, p. 53.

15 Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (NAB), Department of Education, Reference 8/5/3: *Report of the Superintendent of Education for the year 1914*.

15 R Hunt Davis Junior, “Charles T Loram and the American model for African educators in South Africa”, P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, p. 110.

16 C Loram, *The education of the South African native* (London, Hard Press, 1917), pp. 53-73, 163-233.

17 Statutes of Great Britain, *The South African Act, 1909* (available at <https://law.wisc.edu/gls/cbsa1.pdf>, as accessed on 9 November 2016).

matter for the period of five years. Concurrently, however, “native affairs” were classified as national concerns, which meant that the administration of black education was the responsibility of the Union’s policy. The Union Government established a Union Native Affairs Commission in 1920, which would seek to advise on matters pertaining to black education.¹⁸ Subsequently, there was an incremental shift from each of the four provinces, which used to fund black education from their own tax revenues, to vesting the responsibility solely in the Union Government twelve years later.¹⁹

However, no consistency was enjoyed on an administrative level with regards to black education. Each of the four provinces had their own approach to education, whilst the only real conformity existed in the sense that all four provinces practised segregational education during this period. To serve as an example, in 1937 in Natal, government-aided schools, which were almost exclusively run by missionaries, numbered 627 which constituted 67 897 students.²⁰ The Cape Province, with its colonial and missionary legacy, accounted for 76.5 percent of government support for African education, while the Transvaal only expended 11.6 percent of government aid on its black schools.²¹

At the turn of the twentieth century, with significant political, economic and social changes occurring in black communities, English and Afrikaans missionaries started differing in relation to the methods they were adopting. English missionaries saw it as imperative that black South Africans be taught the habits of Western culture and have a strong command of the English language as a method of ensuring that black South Africans could adapt successfully in the transforming economic and political landscape.²² Conversely, Afrikaans missionaries continued to stress the importance of mother-tongue and cultural education for blacks, which would ultimately be part and parcel of the recommendations that the Eiselen Commission of 1951 would make. Despite these differences, however, these two groups of missionaries would only officially part ways in the 1950s with the advent of Bantu Education.²³

18 *Report of the Native Affairs Commission, 1927-1947* (available at <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/18738>, as accessed on 07 September 2015).

19 R Hunt Davis Junior, “The administration and financing of African Education in South Africa 1910-1953”, P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, p.129.

20 NAB, Provincial Notice No. 60, Province of Natal, *Report of the Education Commission, 1937*, p. 92.

21 R Hunt Davis Junior, “The administration and financing of African Education in South Africa 1910-1953”, P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, pp. 130-131.

22 H Giliomee & B Mbenga, *New history of South Africa...*, p. 256.

23 R Ross, *A concise history of South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 130.

With this historical context in mind, historians approaching the Bantu Education Act do so within two proposed schools of thought. On the one hand, it would seem that the general consensus is that the 1953 Act was indeed a turning point in this regard – a largely “traditional view”. It should, however, be noted from a semantic point of view that “traditional” does not refer to being conservative and is not an indication that these historians belong to a group more aligned to the political right. On the contrary, many of the historians in this group wrote from a liberal, post-apartheid point of view. This term was selected on the basis that Marxist historians often refer to the view enunciated in this particular article (that the passing of this Act in 1953 was a pivotal moment in educational history) as the “traditional” or “traditionalist view”.²⁴ Thus this term was selected for this article as an umbrella-concept to denote all historians who believed that Bantu Education was the formal start of marginalised education, irrespective of their alignment as apartheid apologists or active opponents thereof.

Another school of thought that becomes apparent, the Marxist group, states that while securing a cheap, unskilled labour force was the explicit purpose of the Act, this economic motivation was already on the agenda of the white electorate preceding the formalisation of the Bantu Education Act in 1953. This school of academics proposes that their theory be known as a “Marxist” theory, as “Marxists argue that the system can be fully comprehended only if analysis is situated within the broad set of economic interests underlying the present structure, that is class analysis”. For the purpose of this paper, the “Marxist” group of historians and commentators are those individuals who prescribe to the view that for economic reasons, black pupils were exposed to established segregated and marginalised educational practices at the hands of the missionaries well before 1953.

Several South African academics can be considered as leaning towards a Marxist paradigm, including most notably, Pam Christie and Colin Collins²⁵ for their work based specifically on the South African educational situation preceding apartheid. Their hypothesis supports the notion that marginalised education was already on the cards for missionaries preceding the formal implementation of Bantu Education in 1953. In addition, the Marxist

²⁴ P Christie & C Collins, “Bantu Education: Apartheid ideology and labour reproduction”, P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, p. 162.

²⁵ P Christie & C Collins, “Bantu Education:...”, P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, p. 163.

historian Martin Legassick²⁶ is included amongst the protagonists already mentioned, as he wrote a significant body of work that approached South African history from a Marxist interpretation. Although his focus was not predominantly on education, but rather on the capitalist accumulation and labour reproduction process as a whole, it provides insight into the Marxist approach, as well as its influence on the educational situation, as he often alluded to the contentious issue of education in his writings. Furthermore, the work of Marvin Hartwig and Rachel Sharp²⁷ were examined, as they studied the role of the state in the South African capital accumulation process. Moreover, Harold Wolpe²⁸ whose array of work focused on the role of capital distribution in notably rural areas and the historian John Davies²⁹ stance on capital accumulation, were also considered.

It is imperative to bear in mind the economic and the social contexts from which these historians wrote, as this provide insight into the prevailing thought and trends of the time. When investigating the historians Harold Wolpe and Martin Legassick, it is interesting to note that their writings dated back to 1974 and 1975, respectively. This was that period in South African history immediately before the Soweto Uprisings of 1976. Legassick was an anti-apartheid activist who experienced the turmoil in South Africa vicariously, as he was based in London at the time of his publication.³⁰ These factors ostensibly had an indelible impact on Legassick's world-view, as Marxist thought was exhaustively discussed by international scholars at the time. Similarly, a transnational context also impacted Wolpe's approach to Marxism in his interactions with his Marxist peers in the United Kingdom during his exile.³¹ Wolpe, in addition to Christie and Collins, as well as Hartwig and Sharp all contributed to Peter Kallaway's 1984 publication, *Apartheid and education: the education of black South Africans*.³² Subsequently, one can argue that this publication enjoyed the advantage of wisdom in hindsight. These

26 M Legassick, "South Africa: Capital accumulation and violence", *Economy and Society*, 3(3), 1974, pp. 253-291; M Legassick, "Gold, agriculture and secondary industry in South Africa 1885-1970", R Palmer & N Parsons (eds.), *The roots of rural poverty in central and southern Africa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), pp. 175-200.

27 M Hartwig, & R Sharp, "The state and the reproduction of labour power in South Africa", P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, pp. 296-324.

28 H Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid", *Economy and Society*, 1(4), 1972, pp. 425-456.

29 J Davies, "Capital, state and educational reform in South Africa", P Kallaway, *Apartheid and education...*, pp. 341-366.

30 C Saunders, *The making of the South African past* (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1988), p. 165.

31 S Friedman, *Race, class and power: Harold Wolpe and the radical critique of apartheid* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 2015), p. 190.

32 P Kallaway, *Apartheid and education. The education of black South Africans...*

historians reflected upon relatively recent history in an attempt to understand the way forward for the country.

The traditionalist group of historians whose work was examined for the purpose of this article include Cynthia Kros,³³ Bill Nasson, John Samuel,³⁴ Jonathan Hyslop,³⁵ Linda Chisholm,³⁶ Scott Couper³⁷ and Bekisizwe Ndimande³⁸ and others. In keeping with the term “traditional” this group comprises historians who believe that 1953 and the passage of the Bantu Education Act was a watershed period for education in South Africa. Consequently, some of the historians included in the group are somewhat of an anomaly, as they could be regarded as apartheid apologists (such as JJ Ross, WM Kgware, JJ de Wet, JP van S Bruwer and R Cingo) while others, such as Cynthia Kros and Bill Nasson are not. Irrespective of their political convictions and apparently being strange bedfellows, their respective stances pertaining to the importance of the legislation justified their placement in the traditional group.

These historians wrote from largely varying historical contexts. Academics who published in PA Duminy’s edited book published in 1967, *Trends and challenges in the education of the South African Bantu*,³⁹ include JJ Ross, WM Kgware, JJ de Wet, J van S Bruwer, Brian W Rose and WG McConkey. These historians reported on Bantu Education in the 1960s and 1970s and the vast majority of them were fervent supporters of this legislation. Their support for the Bantu Education Act does not suggest that historians (such as Duminy and Ross) were wholly allies of the apartheid regime, but their support for Bantu Education as a whole highlighted their bias, as their rebuttals to critique was often made in a vehemently emotional fashion.

Bill Nasson, John Samuels and Jonathan Hyslop wrote in a pre-democratic era during which South Africa was proverbially on fire. It was apparent at

33 C Kros, “Economic, political and intellectual origins of Bantu Education 1926-1951” (Ph.D., Wits, 1996.); C Kros, *Seeds of separate development: Origin of Bantu Education* (Pretoria, Van Schaik, 2010).

34 B Nasson & J Samuel (eds.), *Education: From poverty to liberty* (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1990).

35 J Hyslop, “Schools, unemployment and youth: origins and significance of student youth movements, 1976-1979”, B Nasson & J Samuel (eds.), *Education: From poverty to liberty...*, pp. 79-85.

36 L Chisholm, “Redefining black skills: Black education in South Africa in the 1980s”, P Kallaway, *Apartheid and education...*, pp. 297-406; L Chisholm, “Continuity and change in education policy research and borrowing in South Africa”, P Kallaway, *The history of education under apartheid, 1948-1994* (Cape Town, Pearson Education South Africa, 2002), pp. 94-108.

37 S Couper, “What am I fit for? Negative manifestations of Bantu Education at Inanda Seminary during the 1970s”, *Prism: A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ*, 25(1), 2011, pp. 99-125.

38 BS Ndimande, “From Bantu Education to the fight to socially just education”, *Education, Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(1), 2013, pp. 20-35.

39 PA Duminy (ed.), *Trends and challenges in the education of the South African Bantu* (Pretoria, Van Schaik, 1967).

this stage that the ideologies of apartheid were failing dismally, that there was large-scale discontent and that economic hardships were apparent as a result of international sanctions and political dissent.⁴⁰ Since 1985, South Africa was in a continuous state of emergency and several commissions of inquiry pointed towards the decline of the apartheid regime.⁴¹ As a result, these three historians were very much of the opinion that the black schooling system could not survive in a political vacuum – everything was a direct consequence of a detailed plan instigated by the apartheid state.

The remainder of the traditional historians wrote within a more politically stable context of a post-apartheid society. Kros, Couper and Ndimande were able to write without fear of retribution by draconian state legislation and a plenitude of sources, both primary and secondary, were at their disposal. They were able to analyse the effects of Bantu Education from its inception to its demise. However, the context in which they approached Bantu Education is one with its own set of complex issues. The legacy of Bantu Education, to this day, permeates South African society and as a result remains a contentious historical issue.

When these two interpretations are juxtaposed, insight can also be gained into this crucial element of South Africa's past and present by studying Hansards of parliamentary debates at the time of the implementation of Bantu Education. By focusing on these verbatim parliamentary transcripts, one is able to discern the different positions of the two standpoints, as the Hansards provide the stance of those who predominantly aligned themselves predominantly with the two standpoints, notably regarding the ultimate rationale of the Bantu Education Act. Another dimension of the particular standpoints can be determined from how the media presented the opinions of parliamentarians to the public as represented within the alternate press in *Die Vaderland* and *Rand Daily Mail*, respectively. In addition, the *Christian Recorder* provided a primary voice of missionaries and their respective reaction to the Bantu Education Act at that time.

In this article the position and significance of the Bantu Education Act as interpreted by two different schools of thought is discussed. This is achieved through analysing primary evidence such as Hansards and newspapers and by primary sources against Marxist and traditional interpretations.

40 P Maylam, "The rise and decline of urban apartheid in South Africa", *African Affairs*, 89(354), 1990, pp. 57-84.

41 See various discussions in R Wilson, *The politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimising the post-apartheid state* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), as well as R Aminzade, *Silence and voice in the study of contentious politics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Primary evidence

In order to understand the approaches followed and the stances taken by these two groups, attention should be given to the primary evidence which they utilised. In the years preceding the Bantu Education Act, apartheid parliamentarians debated the merit of the Eiselen Commission (which was submitted in 1949) before eventually sitting through three readings of the Bantu Education Bill until it was formally passed in 1953. Thereafter, the Bantu Education Amendment Act was passed in 1956.⁴² An array of different educational concerns were debated in Parliament, including matters such as the dissipating control of missionaries, feeding schemes, the funding of Bantu Education, the Fort Hare University College, and implementing apartheid at universities. Due to the fact that the traditional school of writing on Bantu Education often focused on the Soweto Uprising of 1976 as a result of the particular historical context in which they wrote, this event is also briefly included in this article. The parliamentary debates that were analysed for the purpose of this article took place between 1950 and 1959 with a succinct evaluation of the events of 1976.⁴³

In addition to the Hansards, three relevant editions of circulating newspapers were consulted. These include the English liberal newspaper, *Rand Daily Mail*, the Afrikaans conservative daily newspaper, *Die Vaderland* as well as the missionary weekly newspaper, *Christian Recorder*. Circulation figures were ascertained through Morris Broughton's records of South African newspapers in his *Press and politics in South Africa*. These figures were obtained from the booklet distributed by the Audit Bureau of Circulations for the first six months of 1959.⁴⁴ According to these figures, the *Rand Daily Mail* was highlighted as one of the daily newspapers with the highest circulation figures in the Transvaal. The only English newspaper to exceed readership of the *Rand Daily Mail* at that time was *The Star*.⁴⁵ However, due to the *Rand Daily Mail's* more liberal reputation, this newspaper was selected for the purposes of this article.⁴⁶ Similarly, *Die Vaderland*, a pro-United Party newspaper, served as the largest evening daily in the Transvaal during this period. For the purpose of this article,

42 DISA Archive, Statutes of the Union of South Africa, *Bantu Education Amendment Act. Number 44, 1954*.

43 It should also be noted that the majority of *Hansards* consulted are Afrikaans and quotes have subsequently been translated. While every effort has been made to translate the quotes with accuracy, there may be some essence that cannot be conveyed accurately through translation.

44 M Broughton, *Press and politics of South Africa* (Cape Town, Purnell, 1961), p. 304.

45 M Broughton, *Press and politics of South Africa...*, pp. 304-305.

46 L Switzer, *South Africa's alternative press: Voices of protest and resistance, 1880-1960* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 46.

one of the largest English daily newspapers as well as the largest Afrikaans daily newspapers in the Transvaal were studied.⁴⁷ The *Christian Recorder*, a weekly publication, included religious articles and spiritual interpretations of current events from an array of Christian denominations. This publication was selected, as the majority of missionary newspapers in South Africa had by this time either become intermittent or had ceased to exist.⁴⁸

In the wake of the Eiselen Commission's report submitted in 1949, several debates were held in Parliament about issues relating to the education of the black population in South Africa. However, the Commission's recommendations were only released in Parliament in 1951, and even then these recommendations were initially released in an unofficial capacity. Preceding that, however, parliamentarians debated which of the Commissions' recommendations related most to missionary schools and the funding of black education. An example occurred during a House of Assembly debate on 23 May 1950. WA Maree, a member of the National Party (NP), already entertained the idea which was to be entrenched in both the Bantu Education Act and by HF Verwoerd in his ministerial cabinet, and later in a prime ministerial capacity, that education's primary function was "to prepare [a pupil] for the life that lies ahead of him".⁴⁹ Another NP member, JH Visser, echoed this sentiment, stating that the "simple teaching scheme of the earlier missionaries is of no use today." He further elaborated on the "God-given task" that was placed on the shoulders of the white demographic population to educate black pupils, to prepare and guide scholars so that they could "practically maintain [themselves] in the community in which [they are] placed".⁵⁰ Two representatives of the black population in the House of Assembly, as was legally required in Parliament under the Representation of Natives Act of 1936,⁵¹ were WH Stuart and Margaret Ballinger, who both fiercely contested the Bantu Education Act. Stuart discussed the dwindling government funding to missionary schools as well as his unease with the apparent direction that education for black children was taking. As these were

47 M Broughton, *Press and politics of South Africa...*, pp. 304-305.

48 This weekly newspaper should not be confused with the long-standing publication of the same name, which is published by African Methodist Episcopal Church and is based in the United States. The *Christian Recorder* referred to in this article was published in southern Africa from 1951 to 1971. It served as a 'journal for unity' for the collective English-speaking Christian community in the region at that time and a clear decision was made to include contributions by authors from an array of Christian denominations, including Baptist, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican and Methodists.

49 Union of South Africa (USA), *House of Assembly debates*, 72, 1950, p. 1019.

50 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 72, 1950, p. 7024.

51 Statutes of the Union of South Africa. *The Representation of Natives Act No 16 of 1936* (available at www.nelsonmandela.org, as accessed on 23 May 2014).

preliminary discussions that pre-dated the release of any official report by the state, these discussions merely scratched the surface of the education debate in the country, and coverage of them was omitted by both the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Die Vaderland*.

The first mention of the imminent upheaval in black education in newspapers occurred less than a month later, when the Eiselen Commission's recommendations were officially discussed in Parliament.⁵² At this stage, several members of the House of Assembly had not yet had the opportunity to study the Commission's recommendations as these recommendations had not yet been translated. However, the Minister of Education, Art and Science, Jan Viljoen, announced the most important recommendations on 7 June 1951, so as to ensure that these recommendations could be debated to some extent in that particular session.⁵³

One of Parliament's native representatives, Ballinger, was quick to draw the House of Assembly's attention to certain issues of contention.⁵⁴ She discarded the Commission's critique in relation to the missionary schools, stating that missionaries had until that point in time provided the education that they deemed absolutely necessary for the black populace.⁵⁵ She also cautioned against exclusionist education, as it would in all probability be to the detriment of society in general. In her opinion, adoption of the recommendations proposed by the Eiselen Report would result in the majority of the black urban population being required to function in a Western society without the benefit of a Western educational background.⁵⁶

The NP's JAF Nel stated that the black educational sphere of South Africa was in a state of chaos and that education was detached from the development of the black population. Nel's view was supported by a member of the Reformed National Party's (HNP) Dr AJR van Rhyn, who stated that the practice of looking at black children through the "white man's glasses" would inevitably be to the detriment of these children. He believed that this had been a practice necessitated by not including a black educational policy and subsequently supported the Eiselen Commission's recommendation of developing such a strategy.⁵⁷

52 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, pp. 9131-9133.

53 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, pp. 9132.

54 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, p. 9137.

55 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, pp. 9134-9136

56 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, p. 9137.

57 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, p. 9159.

The *Rand Daily Mail* labelled that day's debates as: "what was probably the busiest day of the session For the first time both Houses sat right through from 10.45 a.m. until late at night".⁵⁸ However, the detail of their reporting was limited – focusing predominantly on Ballinger's arguments against the Commission's recommendations. Despite this intensive debate, *Die Vaderland* made no mention whatsoever of the discussions surrounding the Commission or the education of black pupils.⁵⁹

During the second reading of the Bantu Education Bill, Verwoerd declared that:⁶⁰

Racial relations could not improve so long as the wrong kind of education was given to Natives by persons who, by instilling into them false expectations, turned them into frustrated people who expected more than their country could provide.

He continued to say that provincial control was ineffective and expensive. In addition, he commented on the "absurdity" associated with teaching average black pupils general world and academic subjects (such as mathematics and science) and that they should only be taught skills deemed to be useful in their future life. Furthermore, during this particular debate the missionary school system came under fire by the NP's Albert Hertzog, who stated that their educational philosophy attempted to "convert the Native into a European".⁶¹

In this instance, *Die Vaderland* focused on Verwoerd's utterances in the House of Assembly by detailing how Bantu Education would be implemented in terms of making it more cost-effective and unified. The newspaper provided details of the three goals stipulated by the Department in ensuring that the policy was implemented effectively. Furthermore, *Die Vaderland* quoted Verwoerd as saying that he would not beat around the bush, stating that missionary education would be taken over by the government.⁶² The double-page feature also focused on the support announced by respective provinces with regard to the new legislation after Eiselen's thorough report was discussed. In contrast, the *Rand Daily Mail* focused on the opposition's reaction to Verwoerd's speech. They chose to pay attention to the fact that Verwoerd aimed to educate the black population "different from European children".⁶³ In their opinion, Bantu Education was "illogical and undesirable", and the United Party's PA Moore was

58 *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 June 1951.

59 *Die Vaderland*, 9 June 1951.

60 Longman publishers, *Keesings record of world events* (London, Longman, 1953), p. 13350.

61 Longman publishers, *Keesings record of world events...*, p. 13350.

62 *Die Vaderland*, 18 September 1953.

63 *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 September 1953.

quoted with regard to equating the proposed system to the science of education applied by communist Russia and Nazi Germany.

After the Bill's third reading in the House of Assembly, the Act was passed in the Senate on 1 October 1953 by 21 votes to 14 (Act No. 47 of 1953).⁶⁴ The following year was the first year in South African history where the Bantu Education Act was implemented.

These developments unsurprisingly led to a public outcry by missionaries. The *Christian Recorder* made its first objections against Bantu Education known in a front page article in August 1954, entitled "Bantu Education may cease to be Christian". It lashed out against the Act, stating that it was a "poor reward" for missionaries' past efforts to educate black South Africans. The article alluded to the fact that missionaries had previously done seminal work in educating black pupils in order to prepare them for a role in western society, without facing discrimination based on their race. This article revealed the *Christian Recorder's* apprehension with unfolding events, stating that the proposed education black pupils would receive under the apartheid government is "not education at all". JB Webb from the Methodist church was quoted as saying that this legislation was "ethically indefensible and wrong from a Christian point of view".⁶⁵

The House of Assembly started debating the consequences of the Bantu Education Act in 1955 when the Finance Amendment Bill was under discussion. During this debate, Verwoerd announced government's intention to subsidise black education, but pointed out as before that the black population should take greater financial responsibility for funding their own education.⁶⁶ The *Rand Daily Mail* mentioned the day's events in passing, focusing predominantly on Moore's (UP) support of educational freedom.⁶⁷ *Die Vaderland* in turn reported on the Minister of Education, Art and Science's ambitions to co-ordinate educational institutions.⁶⁸ The *Rand Daily Mail* reported on Verwoerd's promise to Parliament to increase the quality of black education by utilising the same amount of money with better results.⁶⁹ *Die Vaderland* explored the expansion of "non-white" universities, most notably

64 DISA Archive, Statutes of the Union of South Africa. *Bantu Education Act No. 47, 1953.*

65 *Christian Recorder*, 6 August 1954.

66 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 87, 1955, p. 628.

67 *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 February 1955.

68 *Die Vaderland*, 2 February 1955.

69 *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 February 1955.

to be concentrated in Durban and at Fort Hare.⁷⁰

The most notable protests against the Bantu Education Act were heard a decade and a half later with the Soweto Uprising, which occurred on the 16th of June 1976. This uprising was triggered after the government resolved to make Afrikaans the *lingua franca* in black schools for certain subjects. Unsurprisingly, the event received extensive coverage in both the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Die Vaderland*, with both newspapers featuring a collection of articles and photographs relating to the day's tragic events. The *Rand Daily Mail* featured articles with headlines ranging from the army being on standby, to the government having been warned of the impending event by a Member of Parliament before it occurred. The newspaper also focused on black reaction, including commentary by the Anglican Dean of Johannesburg, Desmond Tutu, as well as homeland leaders.⁷¹ *Die Vaderland's* response to the uprising was more emotive, referring to the arson of several buildings and how one of the murdered white victims had dedicated his life in assisting the black community. It also featured young gangs and anticipated how a "weekend of fear" lay ahead.⁷² The Minister of Justice and Police, James T Kruger, released an official statement in the House of Assembly the day after the uprising, detailing the number of "official" casualties. In addition, he expressed that it was regrettable that so many buildings were destroyed and that lives were lost.⁷³ The blame for this incident was placed on the shoulders of the "tsotsi" element in Soweto, and not because the instruction of some subjects in black schools was to be changed to Afrikaans. Kruger commented that black people were "grateful for what government is doing to uplift them".⁷⁴ CW Eglin from the Progressive Reform Party (PRP) stated that although the opposition was deeply shocked, they were not surprised. Black pupils were given no choice but to revolt.⁷⁵ Not surprisingly, the revolts and subsequent reaction by the police in suppressing them were met with wide-spread condemnation by the international community.

Marxist interpretations

The Marxist historians analysed primary sources in a particular manner

70 *Die Vaderland*, 3 February 1955.

71 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976.

72 *Die Vaderland*, 17 June 1976.

73 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 21, 1976, p. 9714.

74 Longman publishers, *Keesings record of world events...*, 1976, p. 27888.

75 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 21, 1976, pp. 9705-9714.

which would support their largely socio-economic historical approach. During a debate in the House of Assembly, a NP Member of Parliament stated that the state could not allow missionary education to continue, as the party regarded it as a “wrong system”.⁷⁶ This is indicative of the fact that there was something inherently misguided with missionary education – a stance that the Marxist orientated historians identified with. NP representatives also alleged during the debate that missionary education had failed to educate the black population to the point that they would not be able to assume responsibility for their own education and that the apartheid government could not attempt to teach the black population to be self-sufficient in the future. Furthermore, he stressed how missionaries taught black pupils only elementary skills such as to:⁷⁷

... read his Bible, to know the catechism and be able to sing psalms and hymns The missionary also taught the Native handicrafts. The Native built his own church; he built his own school; he built his own little hospital and the girls at the missionary stations were taught to be good housewives The simple teaching scheme of earlier missionaries is of no use today.

Visser’s view was shared by several of the Marxist historians, in stating that missionaries also had their own personal agenda of spreading Christian principles within their mission stations by teaching black pupils to serve within a predetermined mould in their society.⁷⁸ In opposition, Ballinger discussed the poor attendance figures at schools, stating that only forty percent of black pupils attended schools under missionary education, but that the figure had not improved since the government had put education under provincial control, notwithstanding the fact that education was not compulsory for black children at the time, in contrast to white pupils who were required to attend school to the age of 16 years of age. This statistic was used by both the Marxist and traditional historians as an indication of one of the shortcomings of missionary education. However, the Marxist historians further postulate that this was proof that missionary education undermined the intellectual development of black pupils.

Nel (NP), in his inference that missionary education placed black pupils on a proverbial road to nowhere, indicated that it was the government’s intention to provide black pupils with the best possible schooling, especially with the intention of preparing them for their role in a society, which would develop

76 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 72, 1950, p. 7019.

77 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 72, 1950, p. 7023.

78 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 72, 1950, p. 7024.

separately from that of their white cohorts. Again, this argument made by the NP supports the Marxist historians' view that missionary education was inferior.

Verwoerd was highly critical of the wastefulness of the missionaries with regard to the manner in which they funded their endeavours. He stated that Christian institutions had not utilised their funds effectively and that the apartheid government would ensure that they would do "much more with the same money".⁷⁹ In critique against the missionaries, the Marxists utilised sources which supported their own interpretations of Bantu Education and the marginalisation of education preceding it, such as by focusing on a lack of formalised curriculums, innate paternalism and the absence of centralised funding for the education of black learners.⁸⁰

Traditionalist interpretations

The NP's Maree stated during a debate in the House of Assembly in 1950 that the previous educational system, adopted by the former Union government, was flawed as it did not prepare black pupils for the lives that lay ahead of them.⁸¹ The fact that the NP believed this to be true in the wake of the Eiselen Commission (1951) preparing to release its findings, suggests that the NP had already started formulating its own approach to education when it gained control in 1948. Visser (NP) also explicitly stated that a European educational system should not be applied to black pupils, as it is "totally unsuitable" in the undertaking of preparing the black pupils for their future position in society.⁸² This argument supports the traditional historiographical approach that the Bantu Education Act served as seminal and segregatory legislation in South Africa.

During a debate in Parliament in 1951, the Minister of Education, Art and Science, JH Viljoen, discussed the core recommendations of the Eiselen Commission.⁸³ These recommendations, along with the Commission's report itself, was used as primary evidence by the traditional school of thought of the significant changes that Bantu Education brought to the scholastic sphere of black society.⁸⁴ In analysing Hansards, it became apparent that the traditional historians supported the view of the liberal members of Parliament of that

79 *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 February 1955.

80 P Christie & C Collins, "Bantu Education:...", P Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education...*, p. 162.

81 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 72, 1950, p. 7019.

82 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 72, 1950, p. 7024.

83 UG No. 53/1951, *Report of the Commission on Native Education, 1949-1951*. UG No. 53/1951.

84 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, pp. 9130-9133.

time, despite using the NP's legislation as a guide for their stances. Similarly, the black population had to, according to Ballinger, receive an education that would assist them in developing Western values, as that was ultimately the circumstances under which they would find employment, casting doubt on whether Eiselen's recommendations would enable this, echoing the educational decay for black schools under Bantu Education which some of the traditional historians focus on in great depth.⁸⁵

Nel's (NP) view pertaining to wasteful missionary expenditure, as discussed above, was used by traditional historians to allude to the dramatic changes which occurred in black schooling with the introduction of Bantu Education. Nel also referred to the chaos which reigned in black education in the early 1950s, as there was no central educational authority which guided missionary schools. Van Rhyn (HNP) further supported this view. He stated that a central educational authority would be able to successfully relegate the black community to a system that would prepare them for the lives that lay ahead of them as "subordinate members of society".⁸⁶ Lastly, with reference to this particular Parliamentary debate, the *Rand Daily Mail* quoted the NP Member of Parliament, Loubser, as saying that by providing bursaries as well as high quality and expensive education to black pupils, the government was "taking the bread out of the mouths of our own children".⁸⁷ This view supports numerous traditional historians' hypothesis, most notably the hypothesis of Cynthia Kros that Bantu Education served as a cog in the greater apartheid machine, which was wholly geared towards ensuring the best opportunities for the white population of the country in line with their ideas of self-determination.

The *Rand Daily Mail's* angle regarding the Eiselen Commission report was in line with the viewpoint of the traditional group, as the newspaper reported cautiously about the complete control that the Minister of Native Affairs would be able to exercise, notably in making vital determinations regarding curriculum developments for black pupils. The consequence of being able to "order mission and other private schools to conform to his ideas and to use official syllabuses"⁸⁸ was indicative of foresight at that time, pertaining to the damaging extent of the Bantu Education Act. Similarly, the South African Liberal Party's statement that the Act made "serious inroads on personal freedoms" supports the traditional view.⁸⁹

85 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, p. 9136.

86 USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 76, 1951, p. 9160.

87 *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 June 1951.

88 *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 August 1951.

89 *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 August 1951.

It is also not surprising that traditional historians focus in great detail on the utterances of the Minister of Native Affairs at that time. Verwoerd's commentary made the NP government's intentions easily discernible.⁹⁰

The influential South African businessman, Harry F Oppenheimer, who was the Kimberley representative of the United Party in Parliament detailed in 1954 how the Eiselen Commission's recommendations were distorted by the apartheid government to suit their own agenda. In addition, he argued that South Africa was being kept at a disadvantage as a result of its discriminatory education system. This stance is in line with the traditional view of Bantu Education that the Commission's report served as a blueprint not just for inferior education, but in ensuring large-scale discrimination and affecting the ultimate course that apartheid would take.⁹¹

The traditional school echoes the Marxists' criticism regarding the shortfalls of missionary education, but maintains that despite this, the formalisation of the educational system under the apartheid government was responsible for far more damaging and far-reaching consequences. In complete contrast to the Marxist perspective of Bantu Education, the traditional group of historians associated themselves to a far greater extent with the liberal voices in Parliament. The process of studying opposition to the legislation, both in the House of Assembly and in newspapers, helped the process of ascertaining where difficulties in the educational system appeared in society once the system was in place. As so much primary and secondary evidence indicative of the damaging legacy of Bantu Education exists, the traditional school of thought is certainly the most utilised historiographically. Ultimately, when studying the primary sources associated with Bantu Education, the large-scale overhaul of the educational system on so many levels does point towards the traditional argument that the Bantu Education legislation was indeed a watershed in the marginalisation of education in South Africa.

Conclusion

In this article it was sought to analyse and provide primary evidence as to why various historians have a diverse and varying approach to the Bantu Education Act, despite the fact that they perused the same source material. Evidence was provided and analysed in terms of how similar information was

⁹⁰ Longman publishers, *Keesings record of world events...*, p. 13350.

⁹¹ USA, *House of Assembly debates*, 85, 1954, pp. 3718-3719.

taken and processed by historians and commentators from their particular positions. Ultimately, the two groups selected primary evidence and wrote to support their own respective “agendas”. The Marxist historians, who highlighted the fact that the Bantu Education Act was not the seminal moment in marginalised education, wrote from an economic perspective, an aspect which is inherently entrenched in Marxism. It is subsequently unsurprising that their approach to Bantu Education falls within this mould and that they chose to interpret primary sources from an economic perspective. The traditional historians approach Bantu Education as an important moment in history where education formally became state-controlled. In approaching primary sources from this perspective, they selected evidence aligned with their views. It is only in assessing both these schools critically, and considering both sides of the argument, that one can hope to gauge the stance of these respective approaches and engage in the pursuit of a reliable knowledge pertaining to the institution of the Bantu Education Act.

As Peter Kallaway illustrates in his publication: *The history of education under apartheid, 1948-1994*,⁹² the inability to remove oneself from one’s direct ideological surroundings and interpretations thereof will always make it impossible to view history objectively. It is not only the nature of being a historian, but the inherent nature of being human. It is thus the author’s intention that this article illustrated that educational history, like any other history, cannot exist in isolation and that it is influenced by a complex array of factors relating to political and economic climates, impetuses, considerations and personal agendas.

92 P Kallaway, *The history of education under apartheid, 1948-1994*..., p. 8.