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The Social Reproductive Role of Christian Missionary Education in Apartheid South Africa: Evidence from History and Research

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Abstract

The role of Christian missionaries in initiating and establishing education institutions in colonial Africa is well documented. In South Africa, the origin and spread of formal education is attributed to the arrival of Christian missionaries who sought converts among Africans. From their mission stations, they planted and administered schools and training colleges. This article uses the neo-Marxist theoretical paradigm to examine the educational objectives, activities and outcomes of Christian missionaries among black communities in apartheid South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select study participants, and individual and focus group interviews were conducted with former students, teachers, evangelists and church members who had direct contacts with the Christian missionaries in Venda, a former 'self-governing' state in apartheid South Africa. Using a combination of narrative data from eye-witnesses and historical literature, the paper illustrates that although the educational objectives of the Christian missionaries contradicted the apartheid policy of Bantu Education, the process and outcomes of their education served the needs of capitalism in apartheid South Africa.

Introduction

Apartheid by definition promoted racial inequality, namely the superiority of the white race and inferiority of the black race (Zungu, 1977; Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Booyse, 2011; Oliver, 2011). Through the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the apartheid political and capitalist order sought to use education to perpetuate its policy of racial separatism (Zungu, 1977; Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Oliver, 2011).

However, most Christian missionaries such as Roman Catholics,

Methodists, Lutherans, Anglicans and Presbyterians who came to South Africa after 1820 from Britain, France, Norway, Sweden and America aimed to promote the concept of equality of all people before God (Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Munyai, 2007). This aim is observed by Christie and Collins (1982: 60) who comments that, in contrast to the vision of the Afrikaner National Party's government apartheid racial policy of Bantu Education, "The Christian English-speaking churches opted for equality of opportunity in education, attempted to 'raise' blacks to 'European' standards".

In view of the variance between the aims which informed the policies and activities of the apartheid government and the European Christian missionaries in South Africa, this study uses the neo-Marxist sociological paradigm to analyse the European Christian missionaries' educational activities among black community in the former 'homeland' of Venda.

The neo-Marxist theoretical paradigm posits that education in capitalist societies is part of the superstructure which is shaped and economically determined to perpetuate the interests of the economically and politically dominant groups (Sarup, 1982; Marginson, 1999; Swingewood, 2000). Education in this sense is an ideological apparatus of the ruling elite which serves to reproduce social inequalities of capitalism. It is on the basis of this neo-Marxist theoretical position that this paper critiques the role of Christian missionary education in apartheid South Africa based on the reflections of primary-witnesses of former mission education stations.

Literature study

Missionary education for evangelism

The overriding aim of European Christian missionary societies in colonial South Africa was the conversion of the indigenous people into Christianity and Western civilisation (James, 1973; Zungu, 1977; Behr, 1984; Christie & Collins, 1982; Mathivha, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999; Ravhudzulo, 2001; Ndlovu, 2002; Lewis & Steyn, 2003). According to James (1973, p. 49) all other considerations and activities of the

Christian missionaries in Africa were subservient to the guiding principle of "conversion of the heathen to Christian convictions". Likewise, driven by this Christianising objective the missionaries that operated among black communities in South Africa, founded, erected, financed, maintained and administered their ventures without formal partnership with the colonial state. Guided by philanthropic principles and the mission of seeking Christian converts among Africans, they operated in multi-skilled teams of preachers who were also teachers, brick-makers, bricklayers, carpenters, gardeners and medical practitioners, in order to survive and at the same time provide basic education to the black communities where they served (Mphahlele & Mminele, 1997; Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999). From small beginnings, the missionaries built a number of schools which became important agents at their disposal for their evangelising work and used education and skills training as a dangling carrot to invite Africans to the Word (*Report of the Commission on Native Education, 1945-1951*). Education was not simply the accumulation of knowledge and skills, but a useful tool that enabled the converts to read the Bible and other religious material on their own and preferably in their own languages. Evangelising was therefore the underlying principle and motive of the missionary educational activities (Prinsloo, 1999; Ravhudzulo, 2001; Ndlovu, 2002; Lewis & Steyn, 2003). As observed by James (1973, p. 50), "few men and women had a vision of Bantu education that went beyond the literacy levels sufficient for Bible reading". Ndlovu (2002, p. 167) also adds that missionaries "established mission schools in South Africa to provide illiterate Black people with Western formal education to enable them to read the Bible, to accelerate the spreading of the gospel".

Missionary education in Venda

By 1900, the Lutheran and Presbyterian missionaries had become the main Christian missionary groups in Venda and had set up their main mission stations at Tshakuma, Maungani and Gooldville (Ravhudzulo, 1999). From these stations, they established schools, hospitals and skills training centres. For example, the Presbyterians used Gooldville as the springboard from which their evangelists and teachers spread the Gospel to surrounding communities in Venda. From Gooldville, they

established and administered schools such as Muhuyu, Makonde, Vondwe, Mufulwi, Murangoni, Thengwe, Ngwenani, Gundani, Ngulumbi, Mukumbani, Piet Booi, Phiphidi and Madzimbangombe. The Lutheran had Tshakhuma, Maunagani, Ha-Luvhimbi, and Khalavha as their main centres, from where they established educational institutions such ,as Tshisimani College, Maungani's Beuster and Georgeholtz primary schools. The Dutch Reformed church, which was closely connected to and shared the same racial separatist vision with the Afrikaners, operated from Maungani, in Thohoyandou (McDonald, n.d.; Ravhudzulo, 1999).

Until the 1950s, all education for blacks in Limpopo, the then South African Transvaal province was a missionary undertaking (Behr, 1984). The colonial state had little direct interest in the education of blacks beyond little subsidies to the mission schools and requiring them to give instruction in accordance to central government's curriculum policy. Questions regarding the physical, mental, moral, social, economic, cultural and spiritual development of the blacks received scant attention from the government (Mphahlele & Mminele, 1997). It was only after the official institutionalisation of the apartheid policy that the colonial government in the newly constituted Transvaal province began to give its attention to the education of blacks in order to enforce the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Zungu, 1977; Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985; Ravhudzulo, 1999, 2001; Muthivhi, 2010). Before that, government policy allowed Christian mission societies to continue with their educational and evangelising endeavours while the central government controlled curriculum policy and instruction at schools through inspection and payment of teachers (Behr, 1984). This partnership is summed up by Mphahlele (1972, p. 165) who indicates that in order to have firm control over education, the colonial government "dictated terms on such vital matters as curricula, syllabuses, qualifications of teachers, duties and powers of headmasters, and managers, fees, and medium of instruction".

Christian missionaries' response to colonial state policy on education

While the missionaries were widespread in South Africa, their

objectives, activities and influence on the black communities differed depending on how they perceived their role in colonial Africa (Dube, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Oliver, 2011). Missionary work in Africa was profoundly influenced by their historical background, culture, perceptions' of reality, social position and situation, context, ideology and perception to the colonial conquest of the regions where they operated (Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Leach, 2008; Christie & Collins, 1982). Some would support while others critiqued colonial government policies and this shaped their relationship with both the colonial government and the indigenous people. For example, while most English-speaking Christian missionaries were viewed with suspicion by the apartheid government in South Africa because they intended to benefit Africans (Christie & Collins, 1982; Ravhudzulo, 1999, 2001), others such as the Dutch Reformed Church sought to reify the white race as the chosen one of God, and the blacks as their hewers of wood and drawers of water (James, 1973; Zungu, 1977; Dube, 1985; Muthivhi, 2010; Oliver, 2011; Lewis & Steyn, 2003).

Modern and postmodern paradigms on Christian education in South Africa

Lewis and Steyn (2003) categorises Christian missionary education in South Africa within the historical context of the modern (Enlightenment) and postmodern (Ecumenical) paradigms. They argue that in the modern era, which was characterised by the perceived white superiority and European expansionism, there was some collaboration between the colonial government and missionaries. The collaboration was founded on the belief that "Christianity reigned supreme over heathen religions.... This attitude also extended to the education provided by missionaries" (Lewis & Steyn, 2003, p. 103). In line with this, African indigenous religions, languages, practices and knowledge systems were negated and excluded from Christian teachings and education. In the same vein, Munyai (2007, p. 143) observed that "although the missionaries made a significant contribution in bringing the Gospel to Venda, neither the main tenets of Vhavenda traditional religion, nor the Venda language, was given proper consideration".

With regard to the Western nature of missionary education, Lewis and Steyn (2003, p. 103) argue that "missionaries were educated in Western

pedagogies and they sought to convey the same educational philosophy to their charges". This implied that African culture had no space in the early days of the missionary school curriculum in colonial South Africa. Because modernity in the 19th century was viewed from a Eurocentric perception and that the missionaries were chosen for the task of bringing the Christian light to the heathen world, missionary education was one agent used by colonial regimes in South Africa to endorse the ideology of racial segregation and the reproduction of cheap labour among Africans. As such, "Mission education also reflected the colonial government's policies of expansion" (Lewis & Steyn, 2003, p. 104). In the larger part of the 19th century, missionary education therefore served to create a docile black labour force which would accept the ideology of white superiority, which strengthened white religious and political authority over the indigenous people. The Dutch Reformed Church is cited by some scholars as one example of a Christian group that served as an extension of the colonial government's racist apparatus through both their evangelism and education (Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Oliver, 2011).

The 20th century was characterised by postmodernism paradigm, which led to emerging opposition to the eugenic racist theory of white supremacy by some English-speaking missionaries such as "the Roman Catholic, whose educational policy called for non-discrimination between people on the grounds of colour" (Lewis & Steyn, 2003, p. 104). The stereotyping of blacks as less intelligent than whites, and the view that Africans were suitable for manual and repetitive jobs was rejected as scientifically illogical (Dube, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999; Lewis & Steyn, 2003). This resulted in the growing rift between the English-speaking missionaries and the colonial government, especially when the National Party came to power in 1948. The Eiselen Commission of 1951, whose recommendations led to the racist Bantu Education Act of 1953, was a result of the colonial government's suspicions on the religious and educational activities of English-speaking churches among the black communities.

However, missionary opposition to colonial state policies should not be generalised across the board because, as noted by Lewis and Steyn

(2003, p. 105), in most cases "although English-speaking churches disagreed with government policy of segregation, little was done to oppose it". Dube (1985) is actually of the view that to Africans, both the Afrikaans and English-speaking whites shared an equal role in racial segregation.

The extent to which missionaries' educational activities benefited the African communities where they set up mission stations is a controversial subject, not only for South Africa but for the continent as a whole (Dube, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999; Leach, 2008; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Oliver, 2011). Lewis and Steyn (2003) argue that missionary education in colonial South Africa responded to the contextual, situational and contemporary paradigms of their time. As such, in the 19th century, some European missionaries and the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) are said to have collaborated with the colonial state system in extending white cultural and political control over black South Africans (Christie & Collins, 1982; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Oliver, 2011). Other writers, such as Zungu (1977), Christie and Collins (1982), Dube (1985), Munyai (2002) and Oliver (2011), although making a clear link between racial segregation and educational provision in colonial South Africa, credit the English-speaking missionaries for introducing formal schooling among the indigenous people.

However, issues of racial equality in educational access and opportunity have continue to create a dark shadow on South African history of education (Zungu, 1977; Dube, 1985; Booyse, 2011). It is therefore the objective of this paper to reclaim and critically examine how the educational practices of Christian missionaries among the Venda communities reproduced the needs of capitalism in apartheid South Africa.

Social reproduction as the theoretical underpinning to Christian missionary education in South Africa

The neo-Marxist theory is a useful tool for critical introspection of how education, as a superstructure is shaped by the needs and interests of the economically and politically dominant elite in capitalist social systems (Sarup, 1982; Marginson, 1999; Swingewood, 2000; Astiz, 2007).

According to Bowles and Gintis (1976), schooling in capitalism reflects and reproduces social relations that are characterised by domination and subordination. As such, the "educational system is an integral element in the reproduction of the prevailing class structure of society" (Blackledge & Hunt, 1993, p. 137). Schools in capitalist societies teach working class children to be properly subordinate by rewarding docility, passivity and obedience. In this way, education prepares young people for their place in the world of class-dominated and alienated work by creating those capacities, qualifications, ideas and beliefs that are appropriate to a capitalist economy (Blackledge & Hunt, 1993).

Bowles and Gintis (1976) posit that through a hierarchical power structure, emphasis on observation of rules and authority and alienation the curriculum, schools prepare and legitimate working class children to take up their subordination in the capitalist master-servant relations of production. Since the ruling class does not rule by means of force alone, among others, education in capitalist system disseminates the ruling class ideology by reproducing and legitimating social inequalities (Blackledge & Hunt, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994).

From this perspective, it is argued that alongside the apartheid system in South Africa, there was capitalism which was mainly based on white dominated mining economy (Prinsloo, 1999; Lewis & Steyn, 2003). Education in apartheid South Africa therefore had to serve the interests of both racial discrimination and capitalist exploitation of the non-whites races. It was meant to reproduce racial discrimination and classes of apartheid; with the whites as the dominant class who owned the means of production and political power. We therefore demonstrate from literature and empirical evidence that missionary education, due to its ideals and process of teaching and learning, largely reproduced subservient, docile and servile-skilled black graduates who were suitable for subordination in capitalist and apartheid South Africa.

The paradox that we explore in this paper are the contradictions in missionary education, which was supposedly founded on the intention of prospering South African black communities, but actually reproduced the needs of capitalist apartheid South Africa.

Research focus

The contribution of Christian missionaries in the initiation and establishment of education among the colonial subjects in South Africa is well documented (James, 1973; Behr, 1984; Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985; Prinsloo, 1999; Ndlovu, 2002; Lewis & Steyn, 2003). Consequently, one of the commonly held assumptions is that early Christian missionaries in Africa always acted to cushion African subjects from the negative impact of settler colonial rule. This study departs from this assumption by using the neo-Marxist paradigm as a tool for data analysis to illustrate how the educational objectives, activities and outcomes of the early European Christian missionaries who operated among the Venda communities in northern South Africa were a hand-maid for perpetuating the apartheid socio-economic system.

Research methodology

Since we sought to investigate an educational phenomenon of the past, a historical research approach which included the use of historical literature, individual biographies and focus group interviews to reclaim the eye-witness accounts was employed (Berg, 2001; Eisenhardt, 2006; Creswell, 2007). We made use of the qualitative case study approach and purposive sampling to identify and select study informants who had direct experience on early Christian education as former students, teachers, evangelists and church members of Gooldville, a once flourishing Presbyterian mission station in Venda.

The research sample and sampling procedure

Where there is a limited population to sample from, purposive sampling is the most appropriate method for selecting participants, who have experienced the phenomenon under study, and therefore, most knowledgeable and informative on the topic (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). We complemented purposive sampling with snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) by asking the interviewed participants to identify their peers who were active in or directly experienced Christian missionary activities among the Venda community. Consequently, the

participants were selected because they experienced or were affected in different ways by the activities of Christian missionaries in Venda district. The following categories of participants provided narrative data on early Christian missionary policies, curriculum content and practices, influence of religious activities on education, mode of learning, school discipline and utility of Christian education to the job market during the apartheid era:

- Eight former students and graduates of mission schools and colleges participated in a focus group interviews.
- Eight retired teachers who worked at the early Christian missionary schools also participated in focus group interviews.
- Six evangelists participated in individualised interviews. The evangelists included those who had retired or broke away from the white led churches to form their own ministries.
- Ten church members who were active worshippers at the former European Christian mission stations also participated in their own focus group interviews.

Data analysis

The study generated narrative data and documentary data, and hermeneutic data analysis was employed for inductive interpretation of the narrated lived experiences of the selected eye-witnesses (Ploeg, 1999; Thorne, 2000). As qualitative researchers, we mediated between the different meanings that the study participants gave, to distil the gathered narratives into findings of the study. The data generated were presented from a naturalist context of the study participants' meanings through quoted statements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings and discussion

In order to conceptualise and contextualise the narrative eyewitness accounts from the contemporaries of early Christian missionaries in Venda communities, we juxtaposed their views with available literature and earlier studies on African education in apartheid South Africa. The neo-Marxist theoretical discourse was employed as a critical and analytical instrument for both the gathered narrative data and literature study, as well as to inform the conclusions of the paper. From the gathered data, three key themes were identified and used for discussion

of the findings. These themes, which are outlined and discussed in this section, are:

- Christian education for character building
- Christian education for servile vocational training
- Christian curriculum policy as an agent of apartheid

Christian education for character building in apartheid South Africa

Religious and moral training was the focal point of the European Christian missionaries for African education. In principle, this sounded noble, but in practice, mission schools were self contradictory in that Christian education emphasised values of morality, punctuality, honesty and loyalty to authority which was like spoon-feeding blacks to be subservient not only to God, but also to their white masters.

Missionary education was implicitly the training ground for white superiority, conformity to apartheid, domination of the whites and subordination of the blacks, thus defeating the objective racial equality. This created confusion among African converts and evangelists on the meaning of Christian equality and the difference between religious leadership and the colonial state authority. A retired black evangelist from the break-away faction of the white led Presbyterian Church explained that:

> *At a mission school or college, white missionaries were our masters. To us all whites were meant to be at the top, even in church* (Retired Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelist).

This split between the espoused Christian religious theory and practice concurs with other researchers' analysis of missionary education in South Africa who also noted that "churches' internal affairs concerning racial issues were not in order and reflected segregationist practices which were again realised in the education provided" (Lewis & Steyn 2003, p. 105). It was the partnership between capitalism and the Christian church in Europe that partly explains why Karl Marx coined religion as the opium of mankind, because religion was used to promote poverty and human suffering.

Outside the Venda town of Thohoyandou, the Presbyterian Church

schools were renowned for their strict discipline. They were against foul language, sexual immorality, alcohol and drug abuse, and any breach of church discipline. According to eye-witnesses, trespassers in these categories were expelled from mission stations and mission schools. One retired teacher narrated the commonly expressed view that:

> *Good behaviour was not only checked at school or during church services. One had to be witnessed by others in the community to be of noble character, and that his or her family was also Christian if you wanted to remain at a Christian school or train as a teacher. Recommendations to enrol for training were from evangelists or teachers approved by the white superintendent at the station* (Retired school teacher 6).

The ideal Christian convert was defined as a person of disciplined character, and whose personal and family life was an example to the community (Nkuna, 1986; Hlatswako, 1989; Ndlovu, 2002). In many Christian circles, being an ideal Christian is understood to mean being unquestioning to authority, which was also the model character needed in colonial capitalist Africa (Ndlovu, 2002; Leach, 2008). The apartheid regime in South Africa was therefore, not upon request, assisted by missionaries to manufacture such a character because of the design and functioning of Christian missionary education system among African communities. A study by Ndlovu (2002, p. 167) concurred that at mission schools "teachers were expected to have.... reverence for, and appreciation of, the Word of God by their loyalty, obedience, patience and respect". A study of missionary historical documents in Sierra Leone also revealed that missionary education reproduced domesticity, docility and selflessness among African women, as the ideal Christian wife. From the documentary study, Leach (2008, p. 337) concluded that: "Mission schools were ... a key site for the performance of the mutually reinforcing relationships of race, gender and class".

White missionaries believed that strict school discipline was the cornerstone for all educational work and effective teaching. Teachers were expected to be exemplary in promoting discipline as role models of their pupils, in and outside the school (Ndlovu, 2002). Discipline

meant submission to rules or any kind of orders from the superintendent at the mission station, the church and the government leadership. Retired teachers recounted the following to illustrate the nature of discipline at mission schools:

> *Teachers were to be teachers everywhere and at all times. They were not expected to drink beer; those who drank were suspended from work. If a male teacher was found guilty of adultery, he was unceremoniously driven away from the mission station* (Retired school teacher 3).
>
> *The missionaries did not hesitate to discipline the child using corporal punishment. We were taught that the Bible says if you spare the rod you spoil the child* (Retired school teacher 5).

According to most of the focus group participants, who were former pupils at mission schools, discipline was defined and enforced at missionary schools using the following methods:

- Corporal punishment with a light cane, suspension and expulsion from school for offences such as drunkenness, fighting, strikes, theft and smoking.
- The formula for administration of punishment in schools included admonition for first offence, whipping for second offence and expulsion from school for the third offence.
- Insubordination and disrespectful attitudes by pupils towards teachers and other school authorities were regarded as serious offences which were largely punishable by expulsion.

Instilling fear and strict discipline which was enforced by a militant police among subjects was the means by which colonial governments operated and survived throughout the African continent. Missionary schooling, as observed and described by informants of this study, therefore reflected and reproduced the desired racial and social relations for apartheid South Africa. While corporal punishment had long been legally abolished in most of Europe and America, its use as a discipline enforcement mechanism among African children at missionary schools was like reclamation of slavery in colonial Africa. In fact the Marxist criticism of Christianity is founded on the hypocrisy of preaching the *good news* and the principle of human equality and

salvation of the oppressed while acting like, and on the side of, the capitalist oppressors. In view of the foregoing, it can be concluded that the apartheid regime and not the African communities, were the beneficiaries of the strict and unquestionable discipline at mission schools.

With regards to teaching and learning methods, most informants during focus group discussions indicated that the telling method and rote learning were the most common methods by which they were taught at mission schools. The teacher described while learners listened passively. Teachers were viewed as the repositories of knowledge, the talking libraries and the living books of reference. Since character-formation was the basic aim of Christian education, no other method provided such scope for educational encounter between teacher and learners than the telling method. From the neo-Marxist perspective, this approach is called the banking method, whereby the teacher deposits knowledge during teaching and withdraws it during examinations. It is the pedagogy of the oppressed classes who have no say on what, how, when and by whom they are taught, just as they are not part of the decision making process in the capitalist mode of production (Freire, 1993). At Christian mission schools, a teacher was like an evangelist, who taught a lesson like a sermon. Questioning what the teacher taught was like challenging authority, as one of the former mission school graduates recounted:

> *There was no time to ask questions or to doubt what was taught. Even if you did not understand, you had to memorise and recite a full paragraph. But as pupils, we could challenge each other during debates* (Former student 3).

Narratives from focus group participants revealed that it was customary for the teacher to read sentences or a paragraph from an English text to students and then have them to repeat it after and memorise. Candidates for confirmation and baptismal classes were taught to memorise from catechisms, hymns, psalms, passages from scriptures and church doctrine. This resulted in students memorising information without conceptualisation of content since they struggled in both English and Afrikaans (*Report of the Commission on Native Education, 1949-1951*).

Like the text book and telling methods, rote learning also reproduced passivity and docility for the black graduates.

Christian education for servile vocational training

Early Christian missionaries in Africa had to be multi-skilled for their survival in the rural environment where they operated among the African populations. A study of historical literature by Dube (1985) revealed that the aim of vocational training by Christian missionaries among blacks was to inculcate regular habit of work among the indigenous people so that they might be of service both to themselves and to their communities. The Report of the Commission on Technical and Vocational Education (1948) delimitated vocational education to include nursing, agriculture, needle work, welding, carpentry and various other mechanical skills which missionaries used as a strategy to attract and advance the *gospel* among black communities in the neighbourhood of their mission stations.

A technical graduate from the Lutheran missionary institute which was established at Tshakhuma, in the former homeland state of Venda had this to say on the nature of training they received:

> *One needed to be a proven convert in order to be enrolled for a technical course; even without passing any standard at school. The certificate was only be recognised by the same missionaries who trained you. In the mines, it would not give you a job* (Former student 2 and self employed carpenter).

A study by Ndlovu (2002) in Bushbucksridge, another rural community in northern South Africa also revealed that mission schools largely taught agriculture and other basic hand skills such as making clay pots, baskets, mats, tables, door mats and grass hats for self-reliance in their rural localities. Thus, this type of manual training kept Africans away from towns, which were a preserve of the whites in apartheid South Africa.

The manner in which vocational or non-academic education was introduced in apartheid South Africa has had negative implications, even in post-apartheid South Africa. Like elsewhere in colonial Africa, despite its relevance to, commerce, industry and economic

development, technical education was relevant for manual jobs which were equated to poor academic performance and meant to supply cheap labour for capitalist colonial Africa (Siyakwazi, 1997; Chirwa, 1999). In an analysis of the origin of negative perceptions to technical education in post-colonial Malawi, Chirwa (1999, p. 229) observes that there was a "widely held belief that technical subjects are a reserve of the uneducated". Similarly, with specific reference to Zimbabwe, Siyakwazi (1997, p. 77) concurred that "domestic science...was basically meant to train women as domestic workers for white settlers". Technical schools that missionaries established were therefore like the training ground for black manual labourers, whom the apartheid capitalist economy regarded as the hewers of wood and drawers of water (Zungu, 1977). Commenting on early artisan and crafts schools introduced by the London Missionary Society for South Africa blacks, Dube (1985, p. 90) views "these schools as having been started for the purpose of making the Africans better servants for the colonialist". As noted from elsewhere, such education, which focused on basic literacy and lacked the scientific mode of thinking, was common in colonial Africa to promote racial differentiation (Siyakwazi, 1997; Chirwa, 1999; Leach, 2008).

Christian mission school curriculum policy as an agent of apartheid

There is no doubt that Christian missionary societies were responsible for establishing most of the first schools in the rural communities during the early colonial era in South Africa (Christie & Collins, 1982; Dube, 1985). These schools played a dominant role in raising the nationalist or self-determinism and consciousness among Africans. In the largely rural communities of Venda, the Presbyterian society from their Gooldville mission station, also contributed in this respect. According to eye-witness accounts, education was used as the main auxiliary for evangelisation in Venda, which was one of the neglected areas by the South Africa colonial state:

> *The white government did not care about areas like Venda because there is no gold or diamonds. The Christian churches came to our rescue by teaching us to read the Bible and other things like building, welding carpentry* (Retired Presbyterian Reverend).

The lack of exploitable resources was indeed the major reason for the establishment of the apartheid 'self-governing homelands' which were in line with the policy of racial segregation and separatism (Zungu, 1977; Booyse, 2011). The apartheid state policy was that education in the homelands such as Venda, Bophuthatswana, Transkei and Ciskei had to promote racial segregation and separatism. Eyewitness accounts revealed that white Christian missionaries contradicted the espoused biblical teaching of equality and this led to consciousness on racial segregation among some black believers:

> *The aspect of free will and equality were taught by missionaries, according to scriptures. From Biblical teachings we realised that it is wrong to oppress other people. This is why some black evangelists broke away to form the Reformed Presbyterian church, when they saw that white missionaries were not always practising equality* (Reformed Presbyterian Church member).

Although opposed to colonial policies and practices that were informed by racial inequality, the missionaries contradicted themselves by outright condemnation of the culture of the same people that they claimed to protect from colonial neglect and brutality (Dube, 1985; Ndlovu, 2002; Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Munyai, 2007; Leach, 2008; Muthivhi, 2010). Muthivhi (2010) identifies one convert, chief Makwarela, a pioneer of community schools in Venda, who had accepted Christianity but could not be baptised because he was polygamous, which is a common tradition among the Venda. As an alternative to the total exclusion of African culture in the Christian mission schools, community schools became a symbol of modernisation among the Venda, accommodated Venda initiation rites in their curriculum and competed with Christian mission schools (Muthivhi, 2010). Faced with such challenges, which were viewed as a compromise of the Scriptures, some Christian missionaries chose to become partners with the colonial governments in enforcing central government educational policy which prescribed and emphasised English or Afrikaans as the media of instruction in schools. As an illustration of the exclusion of indigenous knowledge systems from the apartheid education curriculum, a retired educator at a former missionary school concurred that:

> *Venda traditional dance and music had no place at a mission school. This was made clear before one could start teaching or teacher training. Music was only from the church hymn book or praise choruses which were sang at church* (Retired school teacher 7).

In this regard, the school culture which the Christian missionaries promoted in South Africa was therefore neither neutral nor pro-African because generally, African culture was not given space in Christian education. This concurs with an earlier observation that "mission schools throughout South Africa were generally un-coordinated, offering for the most part a European classical curriculum" (James, 1973, p. 51). From a modernity point of view which prevailed during the early period of African colonialism, Lewis and Steyn (2003) and Prinsloo (1999) posit that early European missionaries excluded African culture from the school curriculum because they were themselves products of Western education and believed in Western cultural superiority over Africa. Ndlovu (2002, p. 173) is more adamant that "missionary education ... was aimed at stamping out Black traditional religious beliefs" which were viewed as heathen and evil (Lewis & Steyn, 2003; Munyai, 2007; Leach, 2008). With specific reference to Venda, an earlier observation by Munyai, (2007, p. 143) indicated that "although the missionaries made a significant contribution in bringing the Gospel to Venda, neither the main tenets of Vhavenda traditional religion, nor the Venda language, was given proper consideration".

As an illustration of the emphasis of the use of English from the upper primary grades, one retired teacher remembered that:

> *We were punished for speaking in the mother tongue while in school grounds. A chief medal would be put around the neck of a Venda speaker. It was a bad label which was also a mockery to our chiefs* (Retired school teacher 1).

This was a clear form of symbolic violence and cultural reproduction which neo-Marxist scholars such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1994) attribute to differential school achievement following social class line. Due to the fear of such

embarrassment, narratives from focus group participants of this study indicated that they resorted to remaining silent during lessons. The ultimate result was reproduction of capitalist inequalities and work place social relations in which education reproduced African cheap labour for their white colonial masters.

The use of the second language as a medium of learning therefore retarded school participation and performance for most black students. The interference of language on the academic performance and access of blacks to higher education continues to be an issue of great concern in democratic South Africa (Mammino, 2006). From a study on how black students at the University of Venda struggle with the study of sciences, Mammino (2006, p. 221) concluded that "students learning science through a second language ... are unavoidably at great disadvantage". By putting emphasis on colonial languages in the school curriculum, the Christian missionaries in apartheid South Africa also inadvertently kowtowed to the colonial state policy of protecting whites from academic competition, which perpetuated the status quo of white superiority and black subordination. Booyse (2011) reports that the political involvement of black South African youths from the 1960s is largely attributed to their violent response to the apartheid National Education Policy Act of 1967 which imposed Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction in all South African schools.

Recommendations

In view of the post-apartheid South African democratic dispensation, we end this paper by recommending that:

- History of the South African education structure and functioning in both apartheid and democracy should be part of the teacher education curriculum.
- A social constructivist teaching and learning methodology, which contextualises curriculum knowledge and skills to local needs, should be infused into the school curriculum.
- The state should give more support in terms of infrastructural development, financial grants and human capacity building to

the previously disadvantaged education institutions in former homelands like Venda.

Conclusion

Due to contradictions between the Christian beliefs on emancipation of humanity, equality and human dignity on the one hand, and the needs of apartheid capitalism in South Africa on the other hand, the Christian missionaries were met with the paradox of how education could achieve Christian virtues of discipline, diligence, honesty and semi-skills among Africans without at the same time benefiting colonial interests. In this paper, we demonstrate from a neo-Marxist perspective that in their quest to achieve these noble virtues as a means of uplifting the standard of life of Africans, Christian missionary education policy, practice, process and outcomes ended up reproducing the needs of apartheid capitalism in South Africa. This was done by producing African graduates who were docile and loyal to authority, as well as semi-skilled personnel for manual labour for the white dominated mining economy. From earlier research and oral evidences from this study, we posit that Christian education in South Africa, albeit characterised by good motives, served an apartheid socio-economic system. We therefore conclude that, notwithstanding the good intentions of missionary education in South African black communities, in practice, it contradicted its positive intentions.

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