
Ploughing new fields of knowledge: culture and the rise of community schooling in Venda

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Abstract

This article examines the history of community schooling in Venda and explores the historical conditions and cultural traditions of late nineteenth- and early- to mid twentieth century Venda and their consequences on the development of formal schooling, specifically on the rise of the community school system. The article presents a history of community schooling in Venda as emerging from the changing socio-political context of this period, characterised by the contradictory relations between missionary and colonial traditions on the one hand and the traditions of indigenous culture on the other hand.

Introduction

The history of schooling and society in Venda,¹ let alone the history of community schooling, remains largely under-researched in present South African scholarly circles and as a result, little is known about this crucial aspect of South African society. Meanwhile, there are specific challenges pertaining to historical investigation in traditional societies² as little, in terms

¹ The use of the name denotes a geographical and linguistic region in and around the present-day Zoutpansberg area in the northern part of South Africa. The name refers to a pre-colonial geo-political and cultural-historical region and is therefore not limited to its *apartheid* usage and Bantustan connotation (see for example Blacking, 2001, 1964b; Nemudzivhadi, 1998; Kirkaldy, 2002; Hammond-Tooke, 1993; De Vaal, 1986).

² I have used the term society interchangeably with community. By society I refer generally to a larger social group, as in references to Venda society or South African society and sometimes a larger socio-political entity such as a collection of smaller communities forming a relatively larger socio-political unit, in the sense of, for example Mphaphuli territory which encompassed the rest of eastern Venda and several semi-autonomous chieftaincies under the Mphaphuli paramountcy. The same could be said of Tshivhase and Mphaphu (Wessman, 1908; Van Warmelo, 1940; Nemudzivhadi, 1998). The term community often refers to a relatively smaller social group such as a village, or a smaller collection of these.

of records, tend to be available. Existing historical accounts in Venda, in particular, comprise mainly of missionary reports and oral narratives. Missionary accounts themselves, especially on pre-colonial Venda, were based on oral tradition.

As a result, the process of putting together an account about specific events to demonstrate their historical significance may be limited by the lack of reliable records and the limitations of oral accounts. However, notwithstanding these limitations, these accounts provide an important basis for understanding the events and contradictions of the past.

The aim of the paper is to provide an analysis of the historical conditions that gave rise to, and shaped the development of community school system in Venda at the beginning of the twentieth century. The analysis explores the historical encounter of missionary and colonial traditions *vis a vis* the traditions of Venda socio-political and cultural institutions as constituting a rapidly changing socio-cultural context within which the emergence of community schooling and its unique institutional successes could be understood. A particular interpretation of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of 'history' underpins the analysis of the interplay between the contradictory histories of missionary and colonial institutional practices on the one hand and the institutional practices of Venda society on the other hand.

The paper begins by providing an account of a rapidly changing socio-political context of nineteenth and early twentieth century Venda, as constituting contradictory interpenetration of institutional histories and traditions that gave rise to the specific system of schooling the paper examines.

Socio-political instabilities of late nineteenth and early twentieth century

The period spanning the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century was the most unstable historical period in Venda society. The Mfeqane and its aftermath of inter- and intra-tribal conflicts, the widespread social and political instability across southern Africa, the advent of Boer migrants and Portuguese adventurers, and the activities of the Berlin Missionary Society, and other missionary organisations, shaped much of the social experiences and events of the time. Meanwhile, the invading Portuguese

adventurers to the east led by Albasini, the establishment of the Voortrekker-Boer³ settlement in the area and the Boer interference in local politics, contributed to the anxieties and discontent of the period (Shillington, 1989; Nemudzivhadi, 1998; Wessman, 1908; Van Warmelo, 1940).

The nineteenth century was, in particular, a period of unprecedented social upheaval across the entire southern African subcontinent. Specifically, the Mfeqane – triggered around 1816 by ‘intra-tribal’⁴ conflicts within the Nguni-Zulu clans of the south-eastern seaboard (Shillington, 1989), forced vast population migrations, fragmenting tribes, destroying older chieftaincies and creating new ones. Even in relatively inaccessible Venda, where the difficult terrain helped to restrict foreign infiltration (Van Warmelo, 1940), communities were vulnerable to attacks and plunder of their livestock and grain reserves, both from outside and internally, since at the same time the Venda ruling clans were consolidating their sovereignty over the area through their own wars and offers of patronage (Wessman 1908; Dzivhani, 1940; Mudau, 1940; Van Warmelo, 1940; Nemudzivhadi, 1998).

The social and political tensions and dislocations caused by the Mfeqane coincided with conflicts over land with Portuguese explorers and traders from the east and later, during the 1830s, with the arrival of Boer migrants, or Voortrekkers, from the south. The arrival in 1836 of a group of Boer migrants under Louis Trichardt sharpened internal rivalries between the rival sons of Venda paramount ruler Mpofu. Ramabulana, the elder of the two brothers and rightful heir, had been defeated in battle by his younger brother, Ramavhoya, but with Louis Trichardt’s military assistance Ramabulana was restored to the throne, and this in turn led to the establishment of a white settlement at Oudedorp in 1849. This set a precedent for Venda chiefs to seek assistance from white settlers as well as from other neighbouring tribes in order to settle succession rivalries. It also increased social instability, exacerbated by inroads from the Swazi polity under Ngwane, to the east, and the consolidation of the Pedi and Tlokwa polities to the south. Relations with the Boer settlers soured with the introduction of taxation and the appointment of Albasini as tax

³ The term refers to the migrating Dutch settlers from the Cape colony (Hartshorne, 1992; Shillington, 1989; Bher, 1988).

⁴ The term, ‘tribe’ has a negative colonial connotation. The term is used here, pragmatically, to refer to the various socio-political identities which were forming during this period and is therefore not based on its *apartheid* usages.

collector (De Vaal, 1986; Wessman, 1908; Van Warmelo, 1940; Delius, 1983).

Makhado, Ramabulana's son, rejected the South African Republic's insistence that its political authority incorporated Venda, and in 1867 mounted a successful attack which destroyed the Boer settlement of Schoemansdal and ended white occupation of Venda for a while. In 1869 Albasini led an army against Makhado, but was defeated at the Nzhelele river valley (De Vaal, 1986; Nemudzivhadi, n.d.b.; Wessman, 1908). In 1883, at the time of the first British colonial administration of the Transvaal, Sir Theophilus Shepstone met several Venda chiefs at Commandoboom and at Palmaryville and extracted a promise from them to pay tax. Makhado had defiantly refused to attend the meeting (De Vaal, 1986).

However, in 1884 and 1889, once the South African Republic had been restored, General Joubert visited Venda with a similar aim of forging cooperation for taxation purposes, at the same time seeking to win the allegiance of as many chiefs as possible against Makhado. In 1885, legislation was passed allowing the president of the South African Republic to appoint chiefs, and also prohibiting black people from carrying firearms. These events prepared for the victory of the South African Republic in the 1898 'Mphephu war' (Nemudzivhadi, 1998, n.d.b; Wessman, 1908).

The growing influence of the South African Republic and its success in winning the allegiance of some of the Venda chiefs weakened Venda socio-political hegemony and pacified the political influence and military power of the Venda king. Without this strategy, it would have been difficult to wage a successful war against Makhado, and indeed against any paramount ruler in the mountainous and difficult landscape that comprise much of Vendaland (Kirkaldy, 2002; Nemudzivhadi, 1998; Wessman, 1908; Van Warmelo, 1940). Making it even more difficult was the unique political organisation which allowed for relative independence of individual chiefs from each other, to the effect that winning a war against one chief did not necessarily translate to victory over the next one (Wessman, 1908; De Vaal, 1986; Nemudzivhadi, 1998).

Mphephu, Makhado's son who succeeded his father after his death in 1895, also took a hard-line stance against the South African Republic. By 1898, the South African Republic had the support of most of the Swazi and the Tsonga communities, and had won over several Venda chiefs, including Sinthumule and Davhana, Mphephu's cousins. Thus prepared, the Republic declared war

and Mphephu was defeated on 16 November 1898. His capital in the Zoutpansberg mountains at Luatame was bombarded and set on fire. The defeat of Mphephu brought to an end the last resistance to colonial control in South Africa (Wessman, 1908; Van Warmelo, 1940; Nemudzivhadi, 1998). However, it would be naïve to think that this was the end of resistance to colonial domination. The events that characterised missionary activities in Venda, especially regarding their attempts at providing formal schooling, reveal deep feelings of antagonism and resistance on the part of the communities among whom the missionaries worked.

The reason for the difficult relationship between the missionaries and the communities and their chiefs related to the perception of missionary collusion with the colonial administration, the later resisted for imposing itself politically. Military might for example, did not guarantee complete political authority for the Singo ruling clan after they conquered Venda in the fourteenth century. A system of patronage and special, culturally-rooted forms of diplomatic processes became necessary to assume real political authority, which even after it had been accepted remained fluid and continued to be renegotiated (see Blacking, 1964b for an instance of cultural renegotiation of political authority). Some of the culturally rooted means of entrenching political authority involved acceptance of the cultural traditions and practices of the people and forging familial relationships through intermarriages. None of these culturally rooted processes were conceivable to missionary and, indeed, colonial religious and political organisations (Blacking, 1964b; Kirkaldy, 2002; Hammond-Tooke, 1993; Van Warmelo, 1940; Wessman, 1908).

The defeat on Mphephu marked the end of sovereign nationhood for the Venda, ushering in a phase of systematic dispossession and exploitation. After the end of the South African War between the British and the Boer Republics in 1902, Mphephu was recalled from exile by the British colonial administration of the Transvaal and given a humble location in the arid Nzhelele river valley, a far cry from his once imposing kraal on the Zoutpansberg mountains. At the same time, a village town of Sibasa was established in east-central Venda for tax collection and general administrative purposes. A police station, post office and tax station were established as some of the first colonial services points. With these services points also emerged the need for local clerical assistants and formal schooling was well positioned to play a role in these changing socio-economic conditions.

The post-1902 dispensation ushered in a period of systematic dispossession of land and other possessions such as weapons. Resistance to the colonial authority or its administration was countered through the use of state force comprising the police and the law courts. Traditional courts were systematically abolished or their powers considerably diminished. Communal duties in the royal fields, as was participation in cultural activities such as initiation ceremonies, spiritual rites, traditional dance and musical activities, as well as other aesthetic forms were discouraged by the missionaries and, as a result also omitted deliberately from the school curriculum (Blacking, 1964a and b, 1980; Kirkaldy, 2002).

As the political power of the colonial administration increased, the authority of traditional leaders diminished. This caused immense tensions and anxieties in the communities. In these communities, the authority of traditional leaders was perceived as inextricably connected to the natural order of being and therefore intricately interwoven with personal as well as communal well-being. The cosmology of being was constituted by the natural order involving the creator god, the ancestors, the elders, the traditional leaders and traditional doctors, etc., all of whom were appointed to fulfill their role in harmony with nature. That is, if rain fails, a traditional doctor may be called upon to perform rituals and give offerings to the gods while an offence to the gods through behaving contrary to cultural norms such as not attending the initiation rites may offend the gods and bring misfortune, in the form of natural calamities like drought (Wessman, 1908; Motenda, 1940; Dzivhani, 1940; Mudau, 1940; Van Warmelo, 1940; Kirkaldy, 2002; Blacking, 1964a and b, 2001).

Therefore, the demise of traditional political authority and the abandonment of cultural practices and traditions would not be a small matter because of the belief in the interconnectedness of traditional institutions and practices of culture (Blacking, 1964b). This 'cosmic wholism' could have made the idea of missionary schooling even more difficult because of the perceived negative effects it would have on oneself and society's fortunes.

Traditional institutions of culture, such as traditional leadership, as missionaries Kuhn and Beuster, respectively (in Kirkaldy, 2002) have noted, possibly held the key for the 'conversion' of an entire nation. Accordingly, the community school system would probably not have achieved the success that it did, had these institutions not played a leading role in their formation, as

exemplified by the roles paramount chief Makwarela and the *Domba*⁵ women played.

The establishment of community schools

The first community school in Venda was built at Sibasa in 1920 by *Domba* initiates, on the site of their initiation activities. Mathivha (1992) reported that these girls decided that to make mud bricks for the construction of a school which they would attend after the *Domba* rites had been concluded. Missionary doctrine discouraged converts and those attending school from participating in cultural activities such as the initiation ceremonies. It was therefore not surprising that this initiative came from the *Domba* initiates (Blacking, 1964a and b; Kirkaldy, 2002; Mathivha, 1992; M.E.R. Mathivha, personal communication, 14 November, 2001).

There was widespread dissatisfaction with missionary work in general, and their schooling system in particular. Missionaries, in particular, attacked Venda culture as ‘heathen’ and encouraged people to denounce their culture and traditional ways of living. Traditional initiation schools⁶ for girls were also denounced as ‘heathen’. This limited the opportunities for Venda youth to participate in missionary schooling. Attendance of missionary schooling required conversion into missionary faith (Nemudzivhadi, 1991, 1987, 1969, n.d.a and b; Mathivha, 1992. This approach in missionary provision of formal schooling has resonance with that reported by Holmquist (1984) and Natsoulas (1998) regarding missionary activities among the Gikuyu of Kenya in the 1930s. The colonial government’s reluctance to permit Gikuyu independent schools is reported to have been motivated primarily by the fear of control of these schools by the nationalist political opposition parties.

⁵ This is the most important and most elaborate initiation ceremony for Venda girls, connected with the traditions of Lake Fundudzi, believed to be the political and cultural base of ancient Venda. However, the ceremony also involves all other members of society, according to their different social roles and could last for up to two years to conclude (Blacking, 1964b, 2001).

⁶ The term, ‘school’ here is after Blacking’s (1964b) usage and is primarily aimed at emphasising the formal school-like progression stages of the rites of passage that *Domba* involved. *Domba* was attended in separate but sequential stages that involved graduating from less demanding to more demanding and socially more valuable phases (Blacking, 1964b, 2001).

Meanwhile, there was a growing realisation, in early twentieth-century Venda, of the pressures that missionary institutions and colonial political authority had exerted on traditional socio-political and economic organisation. There was also a growing tension in society on how to participate in missionary schooling, with its strict requirement for conversion and abandonment of traditional ways of the ancestors without unsettling ‘the order of being’ of traditional society’s life-world. This tension is nowhere better illustrated than in the reported wishes of chief Makwarela to be baptised and the missionary, Klaas Kuhn’s objection on the ground that he must first stop practicing polygamy, which missionary doctrine condemned in strictest terms. Unfortunately, these were terms Makwarela could not agree to, as he was obliged to lead by example through adhering to the cultural values of his society (Kirkaldy, 2002).

Meanwhile, Makwarela had learnt the workings of the colonial political system through his long association with the missionaries, his self-taught abilities to read missionary texts and the scriptures as well as his exposure through his extensive travels to places as far as Zimbabwe and Kimberley (Kirkaldy, 2002; Mathivha, 1992). Consequently, Makwarela was probably better positioned, after taking over as paramount chief upon the death of his father in 1901, to introduce formal schooling as a means of countering the effects of the colonial and missionary activities on traditional social organisation.

The *Domba* initiates were better positioned for the role that they took upon themselves; making the mud bricks⁷ to be used for the construction of what became the first community controlled school in Venda. In this school, the initiates would freely learn with pride – the pride of their culture which binds them to the rites of passage of the *Domba* that they could not freely choose to abandon without unsettling their traditional life-world (see Blacking, 1964 for a detailed discussion of the central role *Domba* played as a symbol of chiefs’ political authority and the central role of women in it).

After that the school was built, the chief acquired the services of a qualified teacher, S.M. Dzivhani – known to be the first Venda qualified teacher

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Blacking observes that the *Domba* also functioned as a source of labour for construction of royal residences. In Venda tradition, the school was historically associated with the construction of the kingdom’s famous stone ruins of Dzata, perhaps an indication of the high regard traditionally accorded to the *Domba* as a crucial source of collective labour for important royal projects (Blacking, 1964b).

(Mathivha, 1992). Dzivhani had resigned from his erstwhile position in the missionary schooling system. The new community school named ‘Camp School’, after an unofficial name for the town of Sibasa which was established as a military camp by the post 1902 colonial administration. More teachers were appointed and were paid in kind by the chief for their services to the community, while their appointments were being processed by the Union government (Mathivha, 1992; Nemudzivhadi, 1969, n.d.a and b).

The new school attracted learners from all over Venda,⁸ with the chiefs actively encouraging their communities to send their children to school. Aware of the changing socio-political circumstances and the decline in subsistence economy due to the loss of land, many parents began to encourage their children to go to school. There was less fear of formal schooling detracting children’s participation in traditional life and cultural activities as formal schooling and the practices of culture were no longer considered as necessarily mutually exclusive. As a result, formal schooling began to be appropriated into traditional cultural practices, and vice versa. For example, participating in *Domba* rites of passage did not – in itself, necessarily exclude one from continuing with formal school learning after the *Domba* concludes and the duration of *Domba* began to take account of the time during which the girls would have to be in school (Blacking, 1964a and b). Formal schooling therefore began to be accepted as an integral part of society’s institutional configuration, with chiefs and communities playing a crucial role in the governance of the schools.

From its humble beginning, the school grew into a system of schools that comprised a junior primary, a senior primary and a senior secondary school. The school’s primary section, which remained in the original location of the first building, comprised sub-standard A to standard six while a post-primary section – Mphaphuli African High School, comprised form I and form II by 1953 and incorporated form III to form V by 1955. The inclusion of a matriculation class was a milestone achievement for the school, and comprised the first matriculation to be offered in the rest of Venda. There were three schools: junior primary, senior primary and senior secondary or high school.

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Notwithstanding this development, many parents continued to doubt if it was culturally appropriate to send their children to school, especially girls, of whom it was believed that school will make them ‘mad’, teach them to write letters to boys, sleep around and even end up falling pregnant before they get married (Blacking, 1964).

These schools were named after the different Mphaphuli chiefs,⁹ namely, Makwarela Junior Primary, Phaswana Senior Primary and Mphaphuli Memorial High School.

The Mphaphuli community schools were the only schools in Venda during this period to offer a science-based curriculum, which included mathematics. The curriculum comprised of General Science, Biology and Agricultural Science, TshiVenda, English, Afrikaans, Mathematics, History, Bookkeeping and Religious Education. Although missionary schools at Maungani's Beuster mission, Khanani and William Eadie missions had also begun to offer Form I classes during the early 1950s, these were not as popular as the classes at Mphaphuli and they did not last long as they were later discontinued (Mathivha, 1992; Nemudzivhadi, 1991, 1969).

Growing demand for secondary education prompted the Mphaphuli community to expand Mphaphuli High School and provide additional classrooms and buildings, despite the lack of state funding. The South African government in Pretoria objected to the requests for subsidy on the grounds that Mphaphuli High School did not have the capacity to offer matriculation education. In 1955, a community meeting called by chief Raluswielo decided that an amount of one pound per taxpayer would be levied over a period of three years. In the meantime, teachers and pupils had already begun contributing labour by making the bricks for the construction of the new school buildings. The ten-roomed school buildings were completed in 1958 and bore the cultural murals¹⁰ characteristic of Venda traditional residences, with the main entrance carrying the royal emblem of an elephant head.¹¹ (Mathivha, 1992; M.E.R. Mathivha, personal communication, 14 November, 2001).

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Schools in Venda are usually named after chiefs in whose land they are built. This practice resonances with that pertaining to *Tshikona* royal reed-pipe music which includes abstract dance movements named after past chiefs; or the sacred spears tradition which served as register of past chiefs (Blacking, 1964b)

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Professor M.E.R. Mathivha, who taught at Mphaphuli High School and was its founding principal reported, during personal communication with the present researcher, that he referred to the Venda murals that were common in traditional Venda residences in a way of motivating his students and in response to the view held by many of his former missionary colleagues that Venda children had no capacity to understand mathematics.

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This is also a totem of the ruling Singo dynasty to which Mphaphuli ruling family is also believed to belong (Blacking, 1964b; Nemudzivhadi, 1998; Kirkaldy, 2002; Hammond-Tooke, 1993).

The South African Minister of Education, H.W. Maree, opened the school in 1959. Chief Raluswielo Mphaphuli, accompanied by his *Tshikona* – Venda royal music,¹² imprinted his foot below the foundation¹³ stone, uttering the words: “This fulfils the work of education that was long begun by the Mphaphuli community. Now this is the new communal royal fields for all people at Mphaphuli territory” (author translation – AEM – of the original Tshivenda, quoted in Mathivha, 1992)

The metaphor of a communal royal field has important symbolic meaning. In Venda traditional society, all members of the community were duty-bound to perform labour at the communal or royal fields before they began preparing their own fields for planting. This applied as well to all other cultural activities such as the offering of the *marula* wine to the chief in honour of the gods and the ancestors before the community can make theirs for their own enjoyment (Blacking, 1964a and b). Communal fields and the associated collective labour offerings which were required of all community members point to the centrality of the community and the collective in Venda productive activity. Hence, it was not surprising that the Venda Bantustan leaders chose the words ‘shumela Venda’ – [work for Venda] as their motto (Blacking, 2001). Labour offering may also symbolise political power and authority a traditional leader has over his people, as people would turn out in large numbers when they are happy with the leadership provided (Blacking, 1964; Kirkaldy, 2002). The success that characterised the collective action of the communities responding to their changing historical circumstances was however curtailed by the introduction of new legislation governing the provision of schooling.

¹² *Tshikona*, is aptly described as “communal music par excellence. . .an orderly movement of people who are united and voluntarily overwhelmed . . .by a force greater than themselves. . .deeply conscious of the brotherhood of man and the oneness of creation” (Blacking 1964a, p.99).

¹³ Imprinting a foot on the foundation of a building has important symbolism in Venda tradition, cementing the patronage of the chief and thereby setting formal schooling at the centre of Venda traditional institutional culture. The pre-historic footprints at Kokwane in western Venda’s Nzhelele region and at Mulenzhe outside Thohoyandou have historically been appropriated into sacred groves and places of the ancestors under guardianship of the local chiefs (Blacking, 1964b; Kirkaldy, 2002).

Resistance to the apartheid government's interference

The Bantu Education Act, Act no. 47 of 1953 brought all education for Africans under the apartheid government's control, instituted a national curriculum and restricted all black post-primary educational expansion to the various 'homelands' or Bantustans. The apartheid period was the most difficult period in the history of schooling in Venda, and especially so for the community school system. The apartheid authorities were comparatively lenient in dealing with missionary schools, while community schools were treated inequitably. The community schools operated with insufficient classrooms for the rapidly growing population of learners seeking admission every year, and many classes were conducted under trees, at least until 1959 (Mathivha, 1992; Mathivha, personal communication, 14 November, 2001).

There was an acute shortage of qualified teachers for the subjects that the secondary school had introduced, especially teachers for science and mathematics. Because of this shortage, appointments were usually made on the basis of perceived capabilities to teach specific subjects and not necessarily on the basis of qualifications. Most teachers enrolled for the junior certificate and matriculation examinations together with the learners they taught (Mathivha, 1992; M.E.R. Mathivha, personal communication, 14 November, 2001; V.N. Ralushai, personal communication, 6 September, 2000).

In 1954 the government issued a letter ordering the withdrawal of all secondary school classes at Mphaphuli. Its intention was to have only one school – the missionary controlled Vendaland Institute of Higher Education at Tshakhuma, which was also the sole centre for teacher training in Venda – providing matriculation education for the rest of Venda. Infuriated by this treatment, the community resisted the order. The chief decreed that the order be ignored while representations were made to government. Faced with this resistance, Pretoria withdrew the order. However, in the following year another act of government interference badly affected the school's morale. Authorities, acting on behalf of Pretoria, issued an order declaring the oral examinations that had been conducted by black officers invalid and instructed that this be re-done by white officers (Mathivha, 1992; M.E.R. Mathivha, personal communication, 14 November).

The apartheid government did not take kindly to the community schools in spite of their unquestionable successes in improving access to schooling for

the majority of children in Venda and for promoting active involvement of parents in their children's schooling. The apartheid government wanted to control, especially, what happens in the classrooms – the curriculum. This seems to have been an overriding attitude of colonial administrations apparently born out of the perception that these communities could not manage their own affairs effectively. Holmquist (1984) reports a similar attitude – that the British colonial government appeared to be willing to support missionary schools and not the Gikuyu independent schools, in spite of the low enrolment numbers in missionary schools compared to the independent schools.

Therefore, for different ideological reasons, the apartheid government, as did the missionaries, failed to provide a science-based curriculum to Venda children. The government for example, argued that the community schools did not have the capacity, such as qualified teachers and teaching resources such as the laboratories to offer such a curriculum effectively. Government, however, made no attempt to subsidise the provision of such capacity and the basic educational recourses to support the communities' efforts, as would normally be expected.

On the contrary, the failure of missionary education to provide a science-based curriculum to Venda children, although also aimed at social control, was however not so much motivated by an explicit political ideology of racial supremacy – although this might as well been the case when considered from other levels of analysis. The overriding motivation for not offering a science-based curriculum, for the missionaries, appears to be based on the desire for 'control through omission'. That is, to ensure the success of the missionary agenda an avoidance of a science curriculum, with its then prevailing emphasis on Darwinian theory of evolution, would have been reasonable (Blacking, 1964b; Kirkaldy, 2002). It would have been difficult for the missionary to introduce science, on account of the possibility of such a subject potentially contradicting missionary doctrine, specifically regarding the scriptural account of creation.

As many of the missionaries had no training in mathematics and science and, since they mostly acted as teachers as well, they further perpetuated the status quo regarding a religious orientation of a missionary school curriculum. However, in the later years – that is the 1950s, when the state began to offer more funding, especially to missionary schooling (Hartshorne, 1992), the missionaries' failure to introduce a science-based curriculum at Tshakhuma,

their educational headquarters in Venda, may well suggest complacency, or collusion with the apartheid ideology and educational policies.

The period after 1955, saw the gradual take over of community schools by the apartheid government, finally bringing all the activities of schooling under state control. Funding procedures and legislative requirements were used to appropriate these schools and place them under state control. Curriculum decisions were subordinated to government policy, and representatives of the state dominated school governing boards (Hartshorne, 1992). Community participation and control of their children's schooling were almost entirely curtailed, while government control increased.

The takeover of community schools was followed by a period of state patronage in the form of construction of new schools in several parts of Venda (Nemudzivhadi, 1987, 1969). Community participation on matters of education was considerably curtailed while the patronage of chiefs through naming the new schools after them ensured their cooperation. Those chiefs who objected to the apartheid system were dethroned while others were exiled (Shillington, 1989; Nemudzivhadi, 1998). The post-1955 period therefore marked the end of community ownership and active participation in the education of their children and ushered in a new period of political patronage and active exclusion of communities from meaningful participation in schooling matters.

Conclusion

Community schooling in Venda illustrates a specific historical trajectory in the development of schooling in South Africa. This paper has examined this history, as a consequence of complex forces of social and political changes of late nineteenth and early to mid twentieth century Venda. The analysis of the history of society and the emergence of community schooling reveals that the Mphaphuli community in eastern Venda employed the institutions of their culture effectively as a resource for creating the future they envisaged for themselves in the context of the early- to mid-nineteenth century rapid social transformation. Unfortunately, this possible future life-world was untimely terminated by the apartheid take-over of community schools in 1955.

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