

Book review

Between Worlds: German Missionaries and the Transition to Bantu Education in South Africa by Linda Chisholm

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Linda Chisholm, one of the most talented educational researchers in South Africa, has published on a great variety of topics over the past thirty years and has been one of the most prolific commentators on educational policy and practice. Her most recent endeavour relating to the history of the Hermannsburg Mission Society and its educational involvement in South Africa over a period of a century and a half is therefore to be applauded as a unique endeavour to engage with the complexities and ambiguities of educational policy and practice in a colonial context. It focuses on the continuities and ruptures that were presented to South African black education from the 1950s by Bantu Education. This is therefore an important contribution to the literature on the South African history of education to set in the context of the impressive relatively recent collections edited by Hanns Lessing et al. (2012, 2015 on German Protestant missions in Southern Africa and Richard Elphick's definitive work on Protestant Missions (2012)). As Chisholm demonstrates through a careful use of previously neglected sources in Germany and South Africa, this is a complex story that challenges many of our easy preconceptions about colonial education and it defies any simple categorization of missionaries as agents of colonialism.

One of the key points here is that these missionaries were not agents of the dominant colonial power; the early Hermannsburg missionaries were much more comfortable with the ZAR government than they were with the British authorities after 1902. These Pietist Lutherans from rural Germany, like their colleague Bruno Gutman in East Africa, placed great emphasis on culture and *Volkstum* (national ethos) in transplanting their version of Christianity to Africa, placing a strong emphasis on indigenous culture and language and promoting the use of indigenous languages in schools as part of the overall project of the mission. This policy often made Lutheran missions more attractive to traditional authorities in African communities since it held out the promise of continued rural community coherence in the context of a radically changing political environment after World War I. Yet the very same policies gradually provided an easy environment for collaboration with apartheid education in

the 1950s with the National Party's emphasis on ethnic identity and political segregation. The major focus of this study is Chisholm's mapping of the complex terrain navigated by the Hermannsbergers during this century of change up to the point where their own position as missionaries and educators is challenged by complex streams of resistance from African communities and students and a gradual collapse of amicable relations with the secular government in the form of the Bantu Education Department, resulting from student resistance, community dissent, and internal dissension among the missionaries.

Chisholm's engagement with this field highlights the complexity and messiness of history that defies a neat and coherent narrative with a simple story line. The Hermannsberger Missionaries were one of a number of Lutheran missions, including the influential Berlin Mission Society, operating in South Africa; the two geographical spaces occupied by the Hermannsbergers were in many senses radically different so it is not easy to chart common education policies developed over time both within their own contexts and in relation to government policy in the time of apartheid and Bantu Education. In both the sites of mission that Chisholm selected for consideration (the Western Transvaal and Natal/Zululand) the missionaries operated in an area that was also occupied by German settlers who seldom shared their goals and objectives.

The book begins with an overview of the history of German Lutheran missions in South Africa and their relationship to the German political context of the pre-World War I German colonial era through Weimar to the times of National Socialism when the Lutheran Church faced severe challenges. In South Africa the tension that arose in that context often kept German missionaries away from confrontation with segregationist politics and meant that they were not at the forefront of the opposition to apartheid education after World War II.

Most of the book refers to the period between the introduction of Bantu Education in 1953 to the 1980s and the end of formal apartheid. There is a focus on the history of the two key educational institutions, Bethel Training Institute (near Ventersdorp) and Umpumulo teacher training college/theological college (near Mapumulo), and their gradual shift from prestigious centres of learning to sites of revolt and opposition to apartheid. But as Chisholm is at pains to demonstrate, the conflicts were seldom simply between secular and mission authorities, with a complex mix of community, tribal interests, and apartheid homeland politics (Bophutswana and KwaZulu) demanding to be taken into account.

Informing all these tensions are the educational issues involved relating to curriculum choice, the language used in schools, the production and distribution of textbooks, and the training of teachers.

The challenge to future scholars is to relate this story to the wider history of black education in what was then Natal and the Transvaal, which has still to be written. A full study of the origins of so-called "native education" in the then Western Transvaal and Natal would surely demonstrate the significance of these initiatives and the extent to which they supported or opposed state policy. The little that we know about native education in Natal at the time of the policy making initiatives of C.T. Loram in the 1920s would seem to indicate that the

Hermannsbergers would have been very comfortable with his form of *adapted education* for rural life which was in keeping with the recommendations of the Phelps Stokes Commissions on Education in Colonial Africa (1922–1924). That policy was to be challenged at the time and by the 1950s, when it became the foundation of apartheid education, it had lost all credibility in the world of educational policy debate. It is to be hoped that this important contribution to the history of South African education stimulates other researchers to expand on this work in order to provide a sound historical platform for policy debate in the future.

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