

# A REVISIONIST VIEW OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF DR EISELEN TO SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION: NEW PERSPECTIVES

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## ***Abstract***

*This article discusses the philosophical ideology advocated and promoted by the academic, anthropologist and politician, Dr WWM Eiselen, during different periods of history in South Africa. The central focus is on the ideology that influenced his academic writings and the consequent influence of this academic knowledge on government theory and practice. The need to preserve Bantu institutions and the emphasis of language to promote ethnic culture were central aspects of his political project has been demonstrated. Further it is pointed out that these recurring themes had a significant influence on the crafting of education for Bantu people. In conclusion Eiselen's pronouncements and writings, which were underpinned by his philosophical and political theories, should be understood in terms of what was happening at that particular period in South Africa's history.*

**Keywords:** WWM Eiselen; "Volkekunde"; Eiselen Commission; Bantu education; Culture; Ethnos theory.

## **Introduction**

Education for Black people started three centuries ago in what is now known as the Republic of South Africa. In order to understand education for African people, it is critical to understand the overall context and development of the social, philosophical, political, religious and cultural dimensions of South Africa itself. In this article, I explore and investigate some of the writings and speeches of Dr WWM Eiselen, a prominent Nationalist, former Secretary for Native Affairs and former Chief Inspector of Native Education in the Transvaal (1936-1946). Dr Eiselen was also a "Broederbond", i.e. a member of the secret society from 1936 to 1946 and he played a role in assisting the Nationalist government to gain power in 1948 (Wilkins & Strydom 1978:1).

Robertson (1973:551) describes him as a leading fascist intellectual.

Following Foucault (1972, 1980, 1993), I make use of a “genealogical analysis.” Such an analysis seeks to deconstruct history as a chronological pattern of events emanating from a confounded but all-determining point of departure, whilst also making an attempt to single out an underlying continuity which is the product of discontinuous systematicities (Foucault, 1993:210-220). Foucault’s genealogical analysis overlooks the spectacular but preserves the singularity of events by favouring what is discredited and neglected. It reveals the multiplicity of factors behind an event. Foucault distinguishes three major types of techniques that can be used in a genealogical analysis approach: the techniques that permit one to produce, transform or manipulate things; the techniques that permit one to use sign systems; and finally, the techniques that permit one to determine the conduct of individuals and impose certain ends or objectives. In other words, the techniques of production, of signification or communication, and of domination (Foucault 1993:203). I focus on the second technique because its elements are less immediately transparent. Techniques of signification, or linguistic techniques, are quite familiar to us and refer to certain rhetorical styles or institutionalised ways of speaking or writing. In this article, I examine the genealogy of Dr Eiselen’s personal ideological background by looking at the pronouncements he made during various time periods and their social effects. I argue that Eiselen’s personal ideological background was a form of knowledge and power that played a significant role in the legitimation and reproduction of the apartheid government’s social order.

As stated, Dr Eiselen fulfilled a number of official portfolios: he was an academic, the Secretary for Native Affairs and Chief Inspector of Native Education in Transvaal (1936-1946) and also the chairperson of the Commission on Native Education (1951-1953). In all these capacities he made official pronouncements. The following section investigates and analyses his institutionalised way of writing and speaking across different historical periods.

### **The Academic life of Dr WWM Eiselen**

Eiselen was born in 1899 near Botshabelo in the former Eastern Transvaal. He was the son of Ernst Ludwig Gustav Eiselen, a missionary in the Berlin Mission Society (BMS). The BMS viewed the extension of missionary work

into the Transvaal as another German presence in a foreign country, in this case the Transvaal or the “Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek” (ZAR) was identified as a possible station (Boshoff, 2007:99). During his childhood he learnt to speak Northern Sotho. He was awarded a Bachelor’s degree in phonetics and anthropology from the University of South Africa, a Master’s degree from the University of Stellenbosch, and a doctorate from the University of Hamburg where he studied from 1922 to 1924.<sup>1</sup> On completion of his doctorate, Eiselen taught at a high school for a year before being appointed as a senior lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch. In 1932 he was promoted to Professor of Ethnology at the University of Stellenbosch based on his experience gained from teaching anthropology at the University (Eloff & Coertze, 1972).

As an academic, Eiselen found himself wedged between two opposing approaches to anthropology. He subscribed to the prevailing one upheld by the predominantly Afrikaans university which focussed on the anthropological style or tradition that emerged in South Africa, namely ethnology as practiced by Afrikaans speakers. Their discipline was called “volkekunde” (Gordon, 1988:535). To be able to understand the cultural and political ideology that underpinned Eiselen’s ideas, it is imperative to understand both the diverse writings on the history of “volkekunde” and the material and social circumstances that prevailed during the introduction of this ideology. Dr Eiselen worked together with Dr PJ Coertze, a university academic who advocated the ideology of “volkekunde” (Eloff & Coertze, 1972).

Image 1: Dr WWM Eiselen in his capacity as the Secretary of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (Eiselen, 1959:1)



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<sup>1</sup> The research topic for his doctoral degree was *Die Veränderung der Konsonanten durch ein Vorbergehendes i in den Bantusprachen*. Loosely translated, it means „The change of consonants by a Previous i in the Bantu languages”.

Although “Volkekunde” as a teaching subject was introduced at one Afrikaans university in the 1920s, it did not spread widely until the 1940s. Initially “volkekunde” was the dominating ideology adopted at the two Afrikaans universities (the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Pretoria) and the Bantustan universities. “Volkekunde” was also offered as a subject at the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. The first lecturer of the subject “volkekunde” at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education was Prof JH Coetzee and the subject was later offered by Prof Hendrik van der Wateren. Proponents of the ideology ensured that the notion of a “native question” was built into the “volkekunde” curriculum (Gordon, 1988:539). Braukamper (1979:6) states that the term “volkekunde” is derived from the German study of “volkekunde”, and refers to the desperate search for new perspectives which dominated the scene in German anthropology after the First World War. Coertze (1973:1), a lecturer at the University of Pretoria, explains:

*Volkekunde studies people as complex beings as they lead a creative existence, following their nature and character, in changing social-organic entities, called etniee (ethnoses), which are involved in a process of active adaptation to a complex environment existing in space and time.*

Sharp (1981:19) maintains that the ideology of “volkekunde” was more of a descriptive ethnography and assigned significant power to the phenomenon of ethnicity. The ideology proposed that mankind is divided into “volke” (nations, ethnic groups) and that each “volk” has its own particular culture. The “volkekunde” ideology further postulates that an individual is born into a particular “volk” and that its members are socialised into a particular “volk” personality (Coertze, 1966:4-11).

Intellectually, the ideology of “volkekunde” can be traced back to Germany in the 1920s when it was a leader in the field of ethnology and especially in African languages (Gordon, 1988:536). Both Afrikaans and English ethnologists in South Africa were required to study some of the German classics at one time or another. It is not surprising therefore, that Eiselen and others went to Germany to study. On their return from Germany, supporters of “volkekunde” promoted the notion that Afrikaans universities should move towards the development of a “Volksuniversity”. Such a university is defined as an institution which provides students with an opportunity to express their Afrikaner soul and be educated for the wonderful task of leading their “volk” to self-realisation and an indestructible love for their race and country (Degenaar, 1977:153). Most of the people recruited to study

“volkekunde” were poor whites. In Eiselen’s first year as lecturer, the University of Stellenbosch introduced a degree in Bantu languages and ethnology, or “Bantuology”; and by 1927, 103 students had enrolled for the course. Within a decade this number increased to around 600 students (Gordon, 1988:539).

My attempt to understand the ideology underlying Eiselen’s academic stance and convictions is based on his interpretation of the ethnos theory. Eiselen and his colleague Coertze drew heavily on the work of the German anthropologist, Mühlmann<sup>2</sup> who in turn based most of his writings on ethnos theory and the work of the Russian anthropologist, Shirokogoroff. Sharp (1981:32) argues that both Mühlmann and South African academics/ anthropologists who wrote on the subject of ethnos theory misrepresented Shirokogoroff delineation of ethnos theory. In his exposition of the ethnos theory, Shirokogoroff did not refer to ethnos as ethnic groups themselves but referred to ethnos as designating a process in which groups are involved (Shirokogoroff, 1935:14). Shirokogoroff’s parameter on ethnos theory was confined to ethnos as a process of relationships between groups (Booyens, 1989:434-435). Shirokogoroff maintains that stable ‘ethnic units’ are a possible temporary outcome of the process of ethnos. He further mentions that any functional group which differentiates itself from a given population will be inclined to develop a specialised language and common culture, a notion that raised questions amongst many anthropologists (Gordon, 1981:32). The work done by some advocates of ethnos theory, including Coertze and Eiselen, is far removed from the contextual exposition of Shirokogoroff’s work. According to Coertze (1966:4-11), the word “ethnos” refers to “ethnic” groups rather than what Shirokogoroff calls an “ethnic process”.

The ethnos theory, distorted and misinterpreted as it might have been by Afrikaner anthropologists, had ethnic locations and zonings as focal points. In South Africa, the theory was advanced through “volkekunde” and nurtured by Abraham Kuyper’s<sup>3</sup> (the neo-Calvinist Dutch theologian, journalist and politician) viewpoint and conception of ethnic locations. Kuyper’s theory called sphere sovereignty can be ascribed to the authority and coercive power of sovereignty: ‘the authority that has the right, the duty, and the power to break and avenge all resistance to his will’.<sup>4</sup> Kuyper’s theory of “Souvereiniteit

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2 Eiselen was familiar with the work and most likely with Mühlmann as a person and he has been heavily influenced by his writings on ethnos theory (Sharp, 1981).

3 Kuyper was one of the outstanding students at the University of Leiden; he had been a Member of Parliament in the 1870s but had not been accepted by the political culture of his days.

4 See Abraham Kuyper (1931), *Sphere Sovereignty*, in: Abraham Kuyper. A Centennial Reader 1, 461, 466 (James D. Bratt ed.).

in Eigen Kring”, or “sphere sovereignty” has always been misrepresented and distorted, especially by Afrikaner anthropologists. The “sphere sovereignty” doctrine promotes the view that human life is “differentiated into distinct spheres”, each featuring “institutions with authority structures specific to those spheres” (Wolterstorff, 2008:11). In his writings, Kuyper explicated his views by explaining that the notion of ‘sovereignty in one’s own sphere’ broadly refers to institutions that comprise civil society. Kuyper (1931:96-97) argues that these institutions serve as a counterbalance to the state, ensuring that it (the state) “may never become an octopus, which stifles the whole of life”. As a Calvinist, Kuyper offered a different conception of sovereignty, a “primordial” sovereignty which radiates in mankind in a threefold deduced supremacy, “viz.,” sovereignty in the “state”; sovereignty in “society”; and sovereignty in the “church”. In this study, I focused on sovereignty in the state and the sovereignty in society.<sup>5</sup> Kuyper (1931:96-97) defines the sovereignty of society as follows:

*In a Calvinistic sense we understand hereby, that the family, the business, science, art and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the state, and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the state, but obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority which rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the State does.*

The social institutions Kuyper refers to above are all “social” and communal institutions; they range from the smallest unit, the family, to churches and institutions of higher learning or associations. These institutions may be functional in nature and geographically widespread or politically discrete. Kuyper (1931) further argues that the state may not encroach on these separate spheres. These institutions are synchronised with the state but not subordinate to it.

The second type of sovereignty is what Kuyper call the “sphere of spheres” (sovereignty of the state) which embraces the whole extent of human life. Kuyper describes three obligations of the state as follows:

1. Whenever different spheres clash, to compel mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each;
2. To defend individuals and the weak ones in those spheres, against the abuse of power of the rest; and
3. To coerce all together to bear “personal” and “financial” burdens for the

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<sup>5</sup> For a useful discussion on the three fold arrays sovereignty, see Kuyper (1931) lectures on Calvinism. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

maintenance of the natural unity of the State.<sup>6</sup>

Mouw (2007:87-89) explains that the state plays three central protective and boundary-maintaining roles. Firstly the state plays a role in the adjudication of intersphere boundary disputes. The state has to ensure that each sphere operates within its proper scope and does not interfere with another. Secondly, the state has an obligation to not leave the members of various social spheres to fend for themselves, but must intervene and protect them from exploitation within a particular sphere. Thirdly, the state has a responsibility to take measures for the provision of public goods such as infrastructure and military protection (Mouw 2007:89-90).

Finally, Kuyper (1931:467-468) considers the sovereignty of religious entities. He recognises the vital role that churches play but argues that no single church should dominate another.<sup>7</sup> The theory of sphere sovereignty requires comprehensive elucidation but it is unfortunately not possible to unpack it within this article. However, this brief summary provides sufficient insight into the contribution of Kuyperian sphere sovereignty and assists in understanding the concept of relations between the state and society as propagated by “volkekunde” advocates such as Eiselen.

It is clear from the discussion above that the modification or misrepresentation of the ideology underpinning the concept *ethnos* by Eiselen and Coertze contributed immensely to the shaping of South Africa’s political landscape. The Afrikaner “volkekundiges” insisted that Black people be studied as distinct groups with unique and separate cultures and geographical locations. During the five decades of Afrikaner dominated government rule in South Africa, university departments that offered the subject of “volkekunde” were expected to contribute to the theory and practice of apartheid; in general they did what was expected of them. Eiselen confirmed his contribution to theory and policy towards the end of his career when he stated that:

*As a South African of European descent, closely connected earlier with the Bantu through mission endeavour, anthropological and linguistic research and also in the field of education, and now associated just as intimately with the moulding of our State policy and its translation into administrative practice, I naturally look at our problems from within and not in the detached manner of an indifferent outside observer (Eiselen, 1959:15).*

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6 See Kuyper, A. 1931. Sphere Sovereignty, in: *A Centennial Reader 1* supra note 106, at 467-68.

7 Kuyper regarded the church as fundamentally distinctive, and regarded its independence under the sovereignty of God as more fundamental than that of any other institution (Wolterstorff 2008).



It is imperative to note that Eiselen subscribed to political ideologies such as the one held by the Broederbonders.

### **Eiselen as a Broederbonder**

In 1918 a secret organisation called the Afrikaner Broederbond (translated as “Association of Afrikaner Brothers”) was formed. Its membership comprised less than 3000 and included several Cabinet Ministers and a number of leading Nationalist Members of Parliament. Eiselen played an important role in compiling some of the policy of this secret association. The main reason why the Broederbond was formed was described by its General Secretary, Mr IM Lombard as follows:

*The Afrikaner-Broederbond is born from a deep conviction that the Afrikaner nation has been planted in this country by God's hand and is destined to remain here as a nation with its own character and its own mission (Die Transvaler, 1944:1).*

The Afrikaner Broederbond was formed to advance the Afrikaner cause and its interests. It aimed to find ways for Afrikaners to attain positions of power throughout the entire South African society. Wilkins and Strydom (1978:1) argue that the Broederbond was a fraternity that was formed “to harness political, social and economic forces... to Afrikaner domination” Verkuyl (1971:1) postulates that the Broederbonders were driven by two basic, ideologically-determined motifs: the Christian National motif and the “eiesoortige” (autogenous) motif. The first motif, the Christian National, promoted the idea that the Afrikaner nation was separate and should therefore be identified with western Christian civilisation. The second motif had the notion that the non-white groups were guaranteed, within certain limits, an “eiesoortige” (their own separate kind of) development (Verkuyl, 1971:1).

In 1933 the executive council of the Afrikaner Broederbond formulated a document which called for the settlement of ‘different tribes’ in separate areas, which over time would attain a certain degree of self-government under the supervision of the Native Affairs Department (Pelzer, 1979:163). Towards the end of the 1930s the Afrikaner Broederbond had shifted to become a Christian-national organisation which resisted any form of “samesmelting” (amalgamation) between the English and Afrikaners, and it succeeded in asserting itself as the institutional and intellectual core of the nationalist movement (Dubow, 1992:215).



## **Eiselen and the territorial zoning of the Bantu people**

Many arguments were raised during various historical periods in South Africa in support of, or against the policy of separate territorial zoning or, as it was commonly referred to, of “separate development”. The main argument advanced for territorial segregation was political, “viz.” that non-whites on no account be allowed to become ordinary organs of government, whether on a national, provincial or local level. If non-whites were to be given a say in matters affecting their welfare, they were to do that in their separate institutions described as their “own” areas. Another fundamental key argument was that a cultural difference existed between the different groups of people making it impossible for different people to form part of one community. Segregation in South Africa had existed in history as a matter of custom and practice but after 1948, it was enshrined in various legislative frameworks (Soudien, 2006:41-43). On 29 March 1948, the National Party government, under the leadership of Dr DF Malan made the following statement:

*There are two sections of thought in South Africa in regard to the policy affecting the non-European community. On one hand there is the policy of equality... [o]n the other hand there is the policy of separation (apartheid) which has grown from the experience of established population of the country, and which is based on the Christian principles of justice and reasonableness.*

*We can act in only one, one of two directions. Either we must follow a course of equality – which must eventually mean national suicide for the White race, or we must take the course of separation (apartheid) through which the character and the future of every race will be protected and safeguarded with full opportunities for development and self-maintenance in their own ideas, without the interests of one clashing with the interests of the other, and without regarding the development of the other as undermining or a threat to himself (United Nations, 1952:139-140).*

Eiselen was not in total agreement with the segregationist ideology long before it could be legislated. For example, from the early 1920s, Eiselen had questioned the morality of the policy of separation to the extent that he even labeled the Hertzog Native Bills<sup>8</sup> as being morally suspicious. As the son of Berlin Mission Society parents, the theological principles of his parents had a significant bearing on his interpretation of and insights into government practices. For Eiselen, the benefit of racial domination or separateness

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8 Hertzog's Native Bills include: the Amendment to Natives Land Act of 1913 – a fund to enable the Natives to acquire land outside the existing reserve areas if it adjoined those areas; Representation of Natives in Parliament Bill – Bantu voters were to be removed from the common voters' roll in the Cape and 7 white representatives were appointed to represent the Natives in the House of Assembly; Union Native Council Bill – Union Native Council to be established comprising of Native delegates; the Coloured Persons Rights Bill – drawing up of a Coloured voters roll; and the Mines and Works 1911 Amendment Bill (Davenport, 1991).

of groups based on racial prejudice was of secondary importance when compared to preserving ethnic diversity amongst the Bantu speaking people. The preservation of culture in different locations (reserves) was of primary importance to him.

Eiselen (1957:114) stated that the development of the Bantu people should be within their communities:

*However, the most important result is the nature of the educational work of the German Missionary Societies in South Africa itself. It is supported by (the utilisation of) the vernacular as instructional medium and is directed at development within the own community.*

*[Die vernaamste gevolg is egter die aard van die opvoedkundige werk van die Duiste sendinggenootskappe in Suid Afrika self. Dit word gedra deur die moedertaalmedium en is daarop toegespits om ontwikkeling binne eie gemeenskap te dien – original text].*

This observation by Eiselen reflects the ideology of Bantu people developing in their “own” communities. As the son of a Berlin Missionary and an academic who studied anthropology and specialised in the study of Bantu languages, he believed in separation on the basis of cultural or ethnic identity. Fielder (1996:16), a German writer, posits that “volks” should be kept apart so that they can remain true to their cultural identities.

Eiselen, in his capacity as the Secretary of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development in 1959 further remarked that “neither of the great Bantu groups properly belonging to the Union [of South Africa] is by any means homogeneous either as regards language or culture” (Eiselen, 1959:2). He presumed that the majority of Bantu populations were firmly attached to different cultures along ethnic and linguistic lines and that they did not have the desire to do away with the traditional ethnic groups in order to form a single Bantu community. He stated:

*White South Africa is numerically not strong enough to absorb and can therefore only choose between being absorbed or surviving by the maintenance of separate communities. It has chosen the latter alternative. I do not think that any reasonable person will deny that in this they are acting in the natural and honourable way (Eiselen, 1959: 3).*

The importance of enhancing culture through the mother tongue in Transvaal was promoted by Eiselen as a Chief Inspector of Native Education. In 1942, Eiselen sat on the Committee on Bantu Languages where the possibility of making Bantu languages available to Bantu students at a higher grade was explored. Eiselen promoted the idea that it is imperative and should possibly

be compulsory that the Bantu people in particular learn their own languages. The notion of the Bantu people being compelled to learn their mother tongue was in line with ethnos theory. The introduction of the mother tongue as a third language should be seen or interpreted in terms of the Bantu people adapting to a complex environment existing in space and time.

The development of a Bantu culture propagated by ethno-anthropologists such as Eiselen is commendable, but it should have taken into consideration a number of additional factors. Culture cannot be restricted to specific racial groupings and should take into consideration universal phenomenon applicable to the whole human being. Culture involves factors such as language, socio-economic and geographical development, and philosophy and art (Abutt & Pearce, [S.a]:11). In his project on separation of the Bantu people predominantly on the basis of cultural difference, Eiselen did not consider these factors. Mawasha (1969:144-145) mentions that Bantu education lost sight of the multi-racial and multi-cultural citizenry of South African society.

In his capacity as the Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development, Eiselen established Regional and Tribal Authorities whose main function was to advise or make representations to the Minister on matters pertaining to: the establishment of schools, bridges, roads, water facilities, soil conservation and forestry; to combat stock disease; to erect hospitals and clinics; and agriculture related matters (Eiselen 1959). The establishment of these authorities was in accordance with the resolution taken already in 1933 by the executive council of the Afrikaner Broederbond that different tribes be settled in separate areas, and that over time these would attain a certain degree of self-government under the supervision of the Native Affairs Department. These authorities had no real authority and were predominantly advisory bodies (Horrel, 1968). The issue or notion of ethnos referred to groups themselves but did not refer to designating a process in which groups were involved.

The introduction of the Bantu Authorities Acts was the Government's move to institutionalise its policy of separate development, something Eiselen openly supported. These institutions (separate locations) were to be created and they were not functional in nature, were geographically widespread and were not politically judicious as Kuyper suggested. The financial burden for the maintenance of these units fell on Regional and Tribal Authorities. These very same authorities were not given support. As someone who had immersed himself in ethnos theory, Eiselen was of the view that the state had to provide

all kinds of support to other spheres or institutions. Amongst others, the Nationalist government passed the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951<sup>9</sup> and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959.<sup>10</sup> The national units identified in the Bantu Authorities Acts were later to become the basis for the establishment of future Bantustans.

### **Eiselen and the Bantu Education Act of 1953**

When the Commission on Native Education was set in 1949 under the chairpersonship of Dr Eiselen, Native education was still a controversial issue within the National Party government. The National Party believed that schooling was essential to promoting sovereignty. Dr Eiselen compiled a document known as the Eiselen Report. Kros (1996:326) is of the opinion that it is not the crude document it has often been thought to be, but that it is simply a report concerned with reordering of Black people and making an attempt to keep them in a servile status and on the marginal side of white society. The Report absorbed several predominant ideas of the time and it attempted to outline the foundations of a regulated education system. Soudien (2006:42) argues that the Eiselen Commission essentially laid out the philosophical and organisational foundations for the much of the affronting 1953 Bantu Education Act.

The Commission was expected to consider and report upon:

1. The formulation of the principles and aims of education for natives as an “independent race”, in which their past and present, their inherent racial qualities, their distinctive characteristics and aptitude, and their needs under the ever-changing social conditions are taken into consideration.
2. The extent to which the existing primary, secondary and vocational education system for Natives and training of Native teachers should be modified in respect of the content and form of syllabuses, in order to conform to the proposed principles and aims, and to prepare Natives more effectively for their future occupations.
3. The organisation and administration of the various branches of Native education.
4. The basis on which such education should be financed.

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9 The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was established to create a machinery for enabling the Bantu people in certain specified areas to gain expertise in self-rule during a series of stages (Republic of South Africa, 1986:202).

10 The Act advocated the idea that the Bantu people of the Union of South Africa do not constitute a homogenous people but form separate national units on the basis of language and culture (Union of South Africa, 1959:514). This is precisely what Eiselen believed.

5. Such other aspects of Native education as may be related to the preceding. (Union of South Africa, 1951:7).

The other Commissioners who were involved in the Commission on Native Education were: Jan de Wet Keyter, Professor of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Free State; Andrew Howson Murray, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town; Peter Allan Wilson Cook, Malherbe's successor as Director of the National Bureau for Educational and Social Research; Gustav Gerdener, Professor of Theology at the Stellenbosch Seminary; Michael Daniel Christiaan De Wet Nel, a Nationalist Member of Parliament; and John Macleod, a former Chief Inspector of Native Education in Natal (Fleisch, 1994:243-244; Beyers 1981: 276-277). This clearly shows that the Commission comprised academics. Soudien (2006:44) points out that four out of eight appointees of the Commission were prominent Afrikaner 'race' intellectuals and that two (Eiselen and de Wet Nel) were important National Party members. It is noteworthy that none of the members was African (Davies, 1972:9).

After the Commission had completed its investigation, it came up with a Report which was divided into three parts: (1) The Bantu and the Present System of Education; (2) Critical Appraisal of the System of Education; and (3) Proposals and Recommendations.

The Commission was concerned with what Fleisch (2002:44) calls bureaucratic efficiency and social planning. Since the Commission was composed predominantly of academics, the Report was more of a technical document. The Commissioners were concerned about scientific facts and tables which detailed expenditure, enrolments, rates of retardation, examination scores, *etc.* The Commissioners' investigations exposed the inefficiencies of mission schools and revealed that Black people started schooling late, that classes were overcrowded and that teachers were inadequately trained (Union of South Africa, 1951:par 266-267; 579-588; 625-753).

The Commissioners believed that all aspects of Bantu education should be controlled and coordinated by the state. It recommended that the state took over the central control from the provinces and that the community take over local control from religious bodies (Union of South Africa, 1951: par 911). The executive authority for Bantu education was to be transferred to the Union Department of Native Affairs whereas local school levels were to be transferred to local Bantu Authorities. This arrangement was in line with

Eiselen's belief in the total separation of Bantu people for their own cultural development. This is confirmed by what he said in 1969 in an opening address at the Conference on Bantu Education:

*After giving this matter much thought, I regretfully came to the conclusion that in order to achieve the latter aim the mission bodies would have to surrender their management of schools to Local Bantu Authorities truly representative of the entire community (Eiselen, 1969:8).*

The Commission further believed that the Bantu people should be involved in the educational affairs of their children. This is indeed a sound educational principle; however it had to happen in their own territories. At local level Eiselen was critical of the systems in place for management and control. When criticising the mission schools, Eiselen (1969:7) argued that the mission "schools existed within the community but were not of it. The parents had no knowledge of what was being done in the schools and no share in the conduct thereof". In some instances, Eiselen observed that different denominational rivalry existed and that there was an unsystematic distribution of physical resources. As an academic rooted in ethnos theory and "volkekunde" ideology which both take the language issue into consideration, it was important for him to ensure that the Bantu people receive education in their ethnic locations. In his opening address, he iterated the following:

*By firmly anchoring the schools in the life of the people, education would no longer encourage escape from Bantu society but would fulfil its true function of uplifting the community as a whole and of training leaders for this community (Eiselen, 1969:10).*

Eiselen succeeded in ensuring that the home language be taken as a subject and used as the medium of instruction. Eiselen (1969:10) states that the reasons for the advancement of the language issue for Bantu people are twofold: it facilitates the process of acquiring meaningful and dynamic knowledge of their culture and it ensures that the Bantu people take part in their education.

## **Conclusions**

A number of perspectives that come into play for one to understand Eiselen's contribution to the history of South Africa have been discussed. One can suggest that the proponents of the ideology of "volkekunde" played a crucial role in the particularization of South African political ideology, which over time has displayed itself in different ways. The different official and overlapping portfolios that Eiselen fulfilled helped him coordinate the formulation of

Afrikaner opinion which locked him into an Afrikanerdom encampment. Eiselen challenged racial inequalities and felt them to be morally unacceptable. However, he accepted official positions such as that of Chief Native Inspector in Transvaal and Secretary of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development and was also a member of the Broederbond. This fact makes his claim for not being in favour of racial discrimination questionable and should therefore be understood in the context of ideological factors that influenced his thinking during various periods. Historians are usually trapped in a stance in which they fail to acknowledge the personal motives or circumstances surrounding prominent historical figures within the context that shaped their intellectual, political and social development. Eiselen's personal ideological background, as seen in some of his writings, interwove knowledge and power and this played a critical role in the legitimisation of the apartheid government's social order and the configuration of African education. It is imperative that the contribution that Eiselen made to government policy and practice be understood and analysed in that context.

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