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A question invariably asked of penal reforms is whether they worked or not. A paper on Alan Paton's experiment at Diepkloof reformatory must surely address itself to this question. To do so is however to attempt to calculate the incalculable. Positivists and econometricians have attempted and may still try this: the measurement of crime, its punishment and reward, the impact of rehabilitative strategies on both the individual and society. Historians should find, amongst other things, that rising and/or declining rates of recidivism do not speak for themselves.

A more interesting question, and one that lends itself more readily to historical investigation, is whether an attempt at penal reform succeeded in being generalised to the rest of the society or not and, if not, why not? What were the conditions of both the introduction of the changes and their success or failure to be taken up more widely than they were? What was the social and political significance of both the reforms and their inability to lay the basis for wider change? These considerations, in turn, raise crucial questions about the role of the individual and the individual experiment and wider social change.

In 1934 Alan Paton was charged with the task of transforming Diepkloof reformatory into a school. He was one of several Principals appointed by the new liberal Minister of Education, Jan Hofmeyr, to reformatories which had been administered by the Prisons Department since 1882 when first established.

Paton's approach, like many other educational reformers in the twenties and thirties, was inspired by the goals and methods of the prevailing progressive child-centred pedagogy. His educational outlook was profoundly shaped by the M.Ed he took, whilst teaching at Maritzburg College, in 1930:

The course included a study of McDougall's Abnormal Psychology, not now well regarded. There was John Dewey on Democracy and Education; Sigmund Freud on the interpretation of dreams, sexuality, the unconscious; Giovanni Gentile on education; the educational theories of Comenius, Pestalozzi and Rousseau, A.S. Neill, Froebel and Montessori; more Watson and Kohler; and a history of education in Natal, our lecturers being Professor Allopp and the redoubtable Dr. C.T. Loram, then Superintendent of Education for Natal, and later Professor of Education at Yale University. And then a book that was to change the direction of my life - Cyril Burt's The Young Delinquent ....Cyril Burt's book The Young Delinquent had quickened my interest, and this was increased by the books of Sheldon and Elleanor Glueck, and by reading the work of the George Junior Republic and Homer Lane.9

Amongst others things, many of the writers dealing with delinquency stressed a new relationship between pupil and teacher; an emphasis on individual psychological
Paton drew not only on the principles and practices of the child welfare movement and child-centred pedagogy, but also more directly on his own teaching experience in the Natal provincial education system where he had taught after 1928, the practical example of industrial schools and the open and closed borstals established by Alex Paterson in England between 1932 and 1938, when the borstal system reached its apogee. "Closed" borstals were converted prisons and had a security wall, although the boys' daily life was not confined within the wall. "Open" borstals, for the less "hardened" juvenile offender had no security wall.

When white industrial schools were transferred from the Prisons to the Education Department in 1917, many of their newly-appointed teachers and Principals likewise sought to introduce these modern, child-centred principles and approaches which stressed greater freedom within the institution, self-government by inmates and schooling and trades-training rather than the punitive, repressive methods which had characterised the system before 1917. During the 1920s they were supported by the Pact government's "civilised labour policy" which sought to re-allocate many "poor whites" to different places in the social and racial division of labour. Unlike industrial schools, reformatories were brought into being after 1911 not only for white children but also for "coloured", African and white, male and female children committed there by the courts. These were also governed by the punitive, penal ethos of the Prisons Department, and not the Education Department.

In 1934 these reformatories, which included Diepkloof, faced the prospect of reform, of transformation from prisons into schools. The Great Depression and realignment of political forces which had brought the United Party consisting of Hertzog's National Party and Smuts's South African Party into being in the Fusion government of 1934 led to the transfer of reformatories from the Prisons to the Union Education Department. New analyses and solutions to delinquency emerged. Frequently these acted as metaphors through which questions about the social order and the social reproduction of the urban African working class were posed. In the
same way that a concern for stabilisation of the white working class in the 1910s and 1920s was represented in and through the question of white juvenile crime and its appropriate treatment, so concern for the stabilisation of the black working class in the thirties was represented in anxiety about delinquency, schooling and housing. Whereas the question for the white working class was raised in the context of the establishment of the mining industry and the existence of a fully-proletarianised white working class, the question for the black working class was raised in the context of an increasingly fully-proletarianised African working class.

Alan Paton formed part of that constituency which sought the stabilisation of the black working class through adequate wages, housing and education. He saw his role as reforming in order to build and maintain greater social and individual stability. In tackling the question of juvenile crime he saw himself as simultaneously responding to and alleviating wider social stresses. Theoretically, the purpose of reformatory work, adjustment of the individual to the social environment, drew on dominant anthropologically-based functionalist arguments and reflected a desire to see the status quo stabilised. Stability of the social order was sought through steadying the mentality of offenders who were seen first as children, as innocents, as good but corrupted by their environment. As such they were seen as reformable and malleable. The institution existed not to minister to its own needs, but to the needs of society.

The rate of proletarianisation of Africans, hastened by structural underdevelopment of the reserves as a consequence of repeated assaults on African land ownership and natural disasters such as periodic droughts, had quickened during the depression. Between 1921 and 1936 the urban African population increased from 587,000 to 1,142,000. Although the numbers of Africans of schoolgoing age in the Transvaal more than doubled between 1917 and 1927, from 21,421 to 47,632, only 16% were in school in 1936. Numbers of children and youth appearing before the courts also trebled. The growth of this apparently uncontrolled, undisciplined youth culture created great concern. Not only was 'many a promising young house-boy-gardener...spoiled in this way', but neither the courts nor the reformatories could cope with the numbers. Different strategies were promoted within and outside the state for creating 'law abidingness'. The main strategy adopted by a liberal lobby of social workers and missionaries under the
direction of the South African Institute of Race Relations was expressed by its Director, J.D. Rheinallt-Jones, at a conference on urban native juvenile delinquency convened in 1938 by the Non-European Housing and Native Administration of the Johannesburg Municipality:

Mere police action leads nowhere. We must build a new environment, we must re-build the home and put the juvenile on solid ground through adequate employment, decent wages, enough education and wider social interests. 12

Diepkloof reformatory should provide some test case of the changes brought about after 1934. Of these, several key questions can be asked. To what extent were the penal features of the 1911-1934 regime abandoned or transformed? In what ways did the racial differentiation in the rehabilitative regime continue to correspond to the growing segregationist patterning of the wider society? What was the relationship between aims and intentions and institutional realities? Analysis of these questions can perhaps provide greater insight into the nature of the innovations stripped of their rhetoric; their possibilities and limits, and what they represented. In probing the changes more closely it is necessary to examine the systems of graded freedom and self-government implemented and the nature of preparation of boys for the outside world through education and training and apprenticeship. The aim is not simply to provide a corrective to the picture presented by Paton himself,13 but to examine the contradictions between stated goals of reform and institutional reality, the relationship between the institutions and the wider society, and the possibilities they held out for youth who passed through their gates.

The system of graded freedom at Diepkloof was a modification of standard penal systems of reward and punishment. Set in motion in 1934, it was in operation by 1937.14 In this system discipline was exercised through a different architecture, which combined old enclosures with that of the ‘cottage system’ in use at Industrial schools.

As in any total institution, release was still part of the privilege and reward
structure, imbricated in the architecture of the institutions. All discipline was graded. Paton's system of freedom began with the opening of the dormitories, of the younger boys in the main block, and proceeded with the taking down of the double barbed wire fence surrounding the building. As soon as Paton arrived, he submitted proposals for his 'village plan or rondawel system', which would allow for greater freedom outside the main block. His hostel system was built on an open piece of land below the main block, and consisted of five rondawels, each accommodating 5 boys, and arranged around a cottage. As the inmates showed improvement in behaviour they would be transferred to these hostels which would be conducted without the 'ordinary paraphernalia of detention'. Paton defended its structure on the grounds not of the 'freedom' it would provide some of the boys, but on the grounds that it approximated 'native community life', that inmates would learn to 'preserve law and order in such a community' and 'respect for the property of others'. The 'village plan' would also, Paton argued, 'enable us to embark on the programme of domestic-servant-training desired by your Department'. These hostels, where boys were in personal contact with black housemasters and ate 'special' food, better than that in the Main Block, and enjoyed certain other privileges like being allowed to listen to music, allowed for differentiation within the reformatory on the basis of conduct, and individualisation of treatment. Although the buildings looked different, their emphasis on replicating the family and a miniature 'community' resonated with the ideology of industrial schools. When privileges were abused, or when a boy absconded, he was sent back to the Main Block as punishment.

The system of 'self-government' developed at reformatories was as much a part of the disciplinary process as that of graduated, residential freedom. Conformist behaviour was rewarded with the privileges of freedom and control over other boys. 'Striving for these freedoms', wrote the Principal of Tokai, 'is seen as a method by which the boy can be taught to control himself. In the same way the system of self-government is intended to achieve corporate control of boys by boys'.

The system of co-option and collaboration was never as advanced at Diepkloof as it was in the European section at Tokai, although a headboy and prefect system was incorporated, the 'standard of duties' reportedly being 'extraordinarily high'. Headboys were also graded. Each grade carried with it a badge, duties of control and privileges. In 1936 there were 20 headboys. Each month averaged three new
appointments. Boys could also be downgraded or 'de-graded' as Paton preferred to refer to it in his 1937 report.

A unique feature of Paton’s system, but not of the total institution, was his importation of public ritual and ceremony into the discipline of rewards and punishments.22 The receipt of a badge of freedom became a deeply individual, public act of obedience over which Paton presided binding, through his person, the state and the offender in a mutual moral obligation. Each graduation was punctuated with a ceremony and ritual of obedience. At the ceremony for the granting of the ‘vakasha’ badge:

- Each boy would be given a shirt the pocket of which had been covered with a piece of green cloth. This green pocket soon became known as the ‘vakasha badge’, the word ‘vakasha’...meaning in Zulu ‘to go for a walk’. On Fridays at evensong these chosen boys would be paraded before the whole congregation, and facing me. As the names were called out, each boy in turn would come and stand in front of me. I would say to him, 'Today you are receiving your ‘vakasha’ badge. What do you have to say?' The boy would then turn to face the congregation and say:

Today I receive my ‘vakasha’ badge
I promise not to go beyond the boundaries of the farm
I promise not to touch anything that is not mine
I promise to obey the rules of the school.

He would then turn to me again and be given a shirt with the green badge. When all the badges had been given, I would say to the congregation, 'Today these boys you see before you have received the ‘vakasha’ badge', and the congregation would applaud.23

At the ceremony for his special leave badge, an inmate promised under similar conditions to return at the time fixed by the Principal, not to bring forbidden articles such as dagga (marijuana) into the yard, and not to damage the reputation of the school.24 This semi-religious and quasi-military ritual was intended to shift control from the physical to the moral realm; from external restraints to internal, individual self-discipline. The badge, given at various intervals depending on conduct, signified privilege, maturity, responsibility, reliability: the law-abiding citizen who knew his limits, respected private property and the law of the institution.

Likewise Paton relied on public confessions for disobedience. A ritualised obeisance to authority and public shaming of the individual he saw as preferable to corporal punishment, although he did not stop administering the cane.25 In this
theatre of guilt, 'repentance of the offender' in the form of a 'public confession' was considered to 'have a good moral effect'. Paton was thus extremely proud when a boy who had absconded and run 450 miles finally gave himself up 'because of my promise' and that another, who had been a determined absconder until he received his freedom said: 'When I made my promise, it was like a chain on my leg'.

Paton continually stressed the need for a working boys' hostel as part of the reformatory system. The idea was that:

Here, after having spent nine months in the main block, having survived the temptations of the vakasha badge and the home leave, and after having lived for six months or more in a free hostel, a Johannesburg boy would be allowed to spend his last six months in a working hostel, where he would earn, spend and perhaps save money. If it worked well, other hostels would follow.

In June 1940 some toys were transferred to the Wierda Hostel in Pretoria on a monthly basis. The staff was insufficient, and headed by Bob Moloi, an ex-teacher from Diepkloof. By 1944, Mrs Rhelnallt-Jones, member of the Board of Management of Diepkloof Reformatory, reported that Moloi was 'somewhat bitter that he had no equipment for educational and recreational activities'. She also intimated that boys had no freedoms or privileges associated with Diepkloof.

In 1948 the government eventually built a hostel for twenty Diepkloof boys in Orlando. This was not, however, the realisation of Paton's dream, which was the establishment of a system for blacks paralleling that for whites. This he outlined in his letter of resignation in 1948:

...The failure of the authorities to break up Diepkloof into three totally separate institutions, on three noncontiguous pieces of land, under three separate principals. Approximately one quarter of our seven hundred pupils would have gone to a half-open, half-security institution; in general they would have been of ages seventeen to twenty one, and the majority of them would probably lead lives of conflict with the law. Approximately one quarter of the pupils, those of the ages eleven to fifteen or sixteen, those most likely to profit from schooling and the most likely to lead a law-abiding life, would have gone to an institution which would be predominantly open; the middle fifty percent would go to an institution very like Diepkloof Reformatory itself. The second part of my grievance was the failure of the authorities to provide the first working-boys; hostel, where boys ready to return to ordinary life would live, working by day in the city and returning by night to the hostel.

While Paton's proposals for the extension of state supervision over black delinquents through developing the hostel and after-care system was at one level an attempt to broaden the range of social services available to urban Africans, they were at another
a direct contradiction of his theory that the best state is the one that intervenes minimally in the affairs of its 'citizens', which black delinquents also were not. So too was his repeated call for the state to lengthen rather than reduce reformatory sentences, so that his plan could be made to work. His 'free system' paradoxically depended on lengthening a boy's sentence and the duration of his institutionalisation.

The major component of 'educational' as opposed to penal discipline hinged on the question of freedom and self-government. The reformatory regime before 1934 was characterised in terms of its deprivation of freedom as manifested in the external and physical constraints barring freedom of movement and interaction with the outside world. It was now characterised as embodying an extension of freedom. This freedom was considered achieved in the extent to which the reformatory managed to discipline boys and girls without the use of direct external controls in the form of 'locks, bolts and bars' and to integrate its regime and pupils into wider social life and values. This notion of freedom rested on a liberal theory of the state which saw the best government as that which relied on market forces and the social contract for regulation of individual interests. The state should only intervene in order to protect breaches of the social contract, and to enforce market relations. The fundamental assumption of this theory of the state was that all men entered the market place as free and equal.

A corollary of this view was that individual character was conceived of in terms of moral freedom and responsibility. Freedom as rehabilitation implied internalised respect for law and order, the family, discipline and private property. The most powerful disciplining and socialising agent in any community was believed not to be external force, but 'the community itself, and participation in its life...The reformatory boy who most needs the personal influence of the teacher and supervisor is the one most likely to fail in the outside world'. The development of self-restraint and self-discipline was pursued through shifting control from external to internal sources by gradually relaxing controls over movement as part of a modified system of reward and punishment, a prefect system and a system of 'self-government'. Reform in the end depended on the individual.

In practice, Paton sought to reduce external controls, but also to lengthen the period of the individual's subjection to the authority of the institution, and thus to the
state. This brought him into conflict with the state which was committed to extending state surveillance over the white but not the black proletariat. Especially during the 1920s strategies for the stabilisation of the white working class involved the elaboration of a range of non-institutional, community-based sanctions. Juvenile and children’s courts sentenced black male children to imprisonment, apprenticeship, caning, fines and repatriation to the rural areas. By contrast, white children were exposed to a wider range of welfare provisions and community control. Whereas the role of the children’s court vis a vis European children appears to have been mainly ideological, in displacing the locus of control from itself to civil society through the construct of the family, the role of the juvenile court was central to the state apparatus of helping to exclude blacks from civil society and instead, to police and de-stabilise, through repression, a settled urban working class. It was kept weak and insecure, jostled from rural to urban and from the urban to the rural areas. For the black child, the reformatory existed alongside the prison, as a form of control over movement and labour; for the European, the Industrial school and reformatory existed alongside the school, for the re-allocation and re-socialisation of the children of the urban unemployed.

These developments were a direct consequence of the impact of a labour-repressive, migrant labour-based economy developed under the hegemony of mining capital, the segregationist solution advanced by the state, and the racial conception of rights that, as a consequence, dominated thinking on social policy in urban areas. Wider state policy was not moving in the direction of acknowledging the presence of a black proletariat and extending social, welfare and educational facilities to blacks in urban areas. Politically it was, during the mid-thirties, removing Africans from the common voters’ roll through the Hertzog Bills of 1937. The recommendations of the Welsh Commission of Inquiry that full responsibility of African education become that of the central government were also not acted upon.

One of the consequences of state policy to expel black delinquents from urban areas was the massive overcrowding of existing institutions. It materially affected the extent to which penal experiments could be conducted, and made a complete mockery of the claims of rehabilitation. Overcrowding was not an unmitigated disaster for all concerned. For pupils, it meant that many were released, after a short
Diepkoof's congestion began almost immediately after Paton's arrival. Diepkoof provided accommodation for 330 pupils. On 2 November 1936, there were 443 and on the 7th, 438 pupils. In 1936, committals were at the rate of 360 a year. In practice, this meant that all pupils had to be discharged on licence after a year's detention if all new committals were to be admitted. During that year, the average period of detention had been reduced to 16 months. This led to the practice of discharge on licence after a year's detention. The persistence of this whole process, according to van Schalkwijk, 'reduce[d] reformatory training...to a farce'.

It was agreed to admit only offenders on remand to Diepkoof. But between October 1939 and October 1940, numbers ranged from 616 to 456 pupils. In 1941 and 1942 they dropped to the high three hundreds, but shot up to 450 by May 1943. After mid-1943, numbers did not drop below 450. There were regularly some 600 boys in Diepkoof.

If overcrowding set very real limits to the experiments being conducted, the continued existence of the main block as a detention centre gives another angle on the lie to the publicity about freedom at Diepkoof for the vast majority of boys continued to be housed here. Only a small minority (100 boys) lived in the hostels at any one time. The stress on the new hostels thus deflected attention away from the very punitive side of life at Diepkoof. Its dilapidated buildings seemed, even to many visitors, to neutralise the educational reforms conducted in other parts of the institution. By contrast, 'the whole tone and lay out (of the hostels) is cheerful and pleasing'. Both Paton and his Visiting Members agreed that conditions at the Main Block were not what they could be. The visitor for 1942 also found that:

The native dormitories have, on the one side, open windows barred with iron rods. In stormy weather the rain beats in through the bars and not only makes the place most uncomfortable, but any beds near these openings get wet. This is most unsatisfactory and definitely unhygienic. The bars ought to be replaced by wooden louvres or mosquito netting.

Many were agreed that restrictive provision was necessary for a 'hard core' of delinquents. During the early 1940s Paton increasingly urged upon the Board of Management the need for more systematic classification, separation of older and incorrigible from the younger and reformable and the incarceration of the former in an 'institution which would more closely resemble a prisons institution'. Paton's success was thus limited to those boys who did not constitute a 'hard core'. For that
reason he preferred to separate these off from those with whom he could work, to retain Diepkloof as an 'industrial school', as he once referred to it. In 1945 the Management Board and Paton began discussing the need for a new building 'for hardened and more mature pupils'. By 1947 the Main Block was still impressing visitors with its 'institutional grimness'. While, by the end of Paton's career at Diepkloof, it was thus found that 'on average the hostel pupil benefitted more from the reformatory process than a pupil who for any reason had never lived outside of the Main Block', and that the absconding rate had fallen from 13 per month in 1935 to 3 per month in 1948, the Main Block still constituted part of the process of freedom as conceived by Paton. There was a necessary relationship between the grim old dormitories and the new free hostels. It was the necessary relationship between reform and repression, the inequality at the heart of the conception of the liberal theory of the state and its concomitant political strategy of incorporation and privilege of a few and oppression and prohibition for the majority.

The scheme of graded freedom (and self-government) was just that: a scheme which boys had to learn to work. As Victor Bailey has noted of borstals during this period, 'Learning the ropes was not, however, the same as learning to live in the outside world: it was a form of institutionalisation'. To this institutionalisation, boys responded in the classic ways of non-participation: deliberate infractions of rules, escape and open rebellion. Absconders remained an inescapable problem for the authorities. Whilst absconding did not cease at Diepkloof, Paton was fond of arguing that numbers had not increased, despite enhanced opportunity for escaping. Between December 1935 and December 1937 absconders averaged 1.74% per month, as against 2.10% during the last six months of 1935. During 1937 there was a total of 83 absconders, of whom 62 returned to the reformatory and 3 were sent to prison. In 1937 only 30 of the 280 pupils granted the 'vakasha' badge absconded. Free pupils constituted 45% of the total enrolment and contributed only 34% of the total of absconders. In other words, the majority of escapes still tended to be from the Main Block.

Absconders were treated in much the same way as they had been before. The moment the alert went out, the police would be informed, and then there would be a search. Usually they were caught and returned to the reformatory where their sentence was extended and they lost any privileges they had.
That the word 'absconding' continued to form part of the discourse of reformatory training, irrespective of the actual numbers and process is, however, indicative that the 'willing obedience' aimed for was but conditional and that the regime was still that of the penal institution, albeit modified.

In conclusion, then, Paton’s conception of 'freedom as a reformatory instrument' was a practical enactment of the liberal theory of the state in penological terms in a colonial context. It was contradicted by his advocacy of extension of state surveillance over youth in the context of a state policy not committed to stabilising the urban proletariat through provision of facilities in urban areas. His theory and plan could only work in abstract. It was also profoundly shaped and modified by its context. While new rehabilitative models were certainly put into practice, certain structural features of the penal institution were retained: a system of reward and punishment built around residential and social privilege and deprivation within the institution.

The role of reformatories in inculcating habits of work and preparing reformatory boys for manual labour did not change after their transfer to the Union Education Department. Initially all that did change was that a small proportion of the European boys were given the chance of technical training. Eventually, towards the end of Paton’s Principalship, there was discussion of training African boys for similar, semi-skilled work. On the whole, black boys - 'coloured' and African, at Porter and Diepkloof - were used to maintain the institutional gardens, 'a fairly ideal method of keeping the gardens clean', but also raising 'so many other questions'.

Education and training at Diepkloof reformatory was initially determined by the expectation that suitable employment for ex-prison and black labour was gardening. 'Diversification' of activities at Diepkloof began with the establishment of the gardens to prepare boys as gardeners in white, suburban Johannesburg. Further diversification into different trades sections occurred in accordance with the establishment of new institutional needs. When it was decided boys were not to go
barefoot, but were to wear sandals, a shoemaker's department was begun; when it was decided that the reformatory should make its own clothes and then its own tin dishes, mugs and spoons, tailoring and tinsmithing were introduced.  

Schooling was not a major requirement for gardeners. The rudiments of literacy and numeracy was, however, necessary for the growing industrial requirements for black semi-skilled labour during the Second World War. At Diepkloof there were 110 pupils in school by 1937, but this was confined to the small boys and all boys who had made satisfactory progress before admission and who might possibly resume their schooling after discharge. For the rest, boys performed different institutional duties like agricultural work, horticultural work, yardwork (sanitary work, clearing, kitchen, bakery), hospital attendance, domestic service and brickmaking.  

In 1936, Paton wanted to start preparing them for standard six. He was required to use the syllabus as prescribed by the Transvaal Education Department, the equivalent of a 'white' standard four. During 1945 a Bursary Fund was started, subsidised by the Union Education Department, to send Diepkloof boys to ordinary schools. In 1947 the Visiting Member and Paton began discussing the possibility of introducing technical drawing into the syllabus, possibly 'in amended form to suit (the reformatory's) peculiar conditions and for successful pupils to qualify for recognised Government certificates'. In 1948 the Board appointed a Committee to investigate the introduction of technical training. In 1949 electrical machines were introduced to the tailoring section. In this way, then, the reformatory was beginning to respond, through Paton, to the growing need of manufacturing industry for semi-skilled machine operatives.  

Whether such training would have made much difference to the futures of pupils is unclear. Despite differentiation in trades and schooling at other reformatories and industrial schools, trade training did not equip either a white or black boy for anything specific, or anything more than unskilled work. The intention of equipping boys with a trade or skill was constantly subverted by the institutional logic of employing boys in its upkeep. This is further demonstrated by an examination of the operation of the apprenticeship system.  

White agricultural interests continued to exert an influence over reformatory discipline through the 'apprenticeship' system throughout the thirties and forties. Training in 'willing obedience' thus became training to exchange miserably arduous
PATON AND DIEPKLOOF REFORMATORY

manual work in exchange for making a living through crime. At Diepkloof, 75% of the inmates were released on licence or apprenticed before expiration of the period of their detention in 1934. Boys under 16 were generally apprenticed, whilst those over 16 were licenced. Almost all of these were licensed out to employers - very few to their parents. The contract generally lasted till their 18th year. The magistrate of the district to which the inmate was sent received a copy of the contract and the police were expected to provide supervision. In 1948, Paton admitted that these provisions were largely a 'dead letter': as far as children at Diepkloof were concerned, reports were not submitted on children so released 'until recently' when the Union Education Department made representations to the Social Welfare Department. The reports that had begun to come in, revealed that 'in the great majority of cases, the supervising officer reports that he no longer knows where the child is'. As the Secretary for the Union Education Department replied to a question of whether 'there is still a service of natives available for farm service from Deepkloof(sic)': 'servants may still be obtained from Diepkloof reformatory'.

In practice, then, the distribution of labour to suitable employers was retained as a central strategy in the regime of the reformed institution. The system of education and training was correspondingly also more concerned with the 'character' than the skills of labour. This was hardly surprising, given that juvenile crime was interpreted as a sign of the breakdown of stable social relations, both in agricultural districts and in industrial centres.

If the system was going to change, a great deal clearly depended on the staff that was available. Great emphasis had been placed, in the campaign for transfer, on staff trained to deal with delinquents. To what extent was this realised?

One of the greatest difficulties that Paton had at the outset of his term of office was the warders. Their attitude to the boys was considered inappropriate to an educational regime. What was needed were teachers and staff who would support the reforms which both were to implement. Paton's staff consisted of two sections, one white and one black. After 1934, the white staff was largely drawn from the Special Services Battalion established by Oswald Pirow for 'poor white' boys 'to give a moral training, to prevent moral degeneration and to keep the young men off the labour market'. They were Nationalist to a man, and keen disciplinarians, their training of a military rather than a penal character. The black staff consisted of
warders and teachers, the most written about being Bob Moloi.

Tensions seem to have existed between Paton and members of both the white and African staff. Amongst the former, there was opposition to his attempt to Africanise many of the clerical and supervisory posts, as well as his curricular innovations away from training boys solely for gardening. Amongst the latter, there appears to have been some frustration with his authoritarianism and exclusion of black members of staff from policy discussion and decision making. Relations deteriorated badly in 1943, as Native Supervisor James Gubevu attested in a Memorandum on ‘Misadministration at Diepkloof’.

Paton was evidently caught on the one hand between an increasingly assertive and apparently radicalised black staff in the early 1940s and a growing backlash in the ranks of his white staff, many of whom had been mobilised by the appeals of Afrikaner nationalism. In 1942 J.A. Herholdt, in charge of the farming section at Diepkloof, submitted a report in which he put forward the view that the hostel system was uneconomic, that the Main Block offered opportunities for better discipline and more intensive treatment, and sounded a warning against any attempt to divorce the Native from his inherited traditions:

We must be careful not to apply methods which will alienate them from their native traditions or de-nationalise them; that will be a flagrant mistake and a disservice to them.

Herholdt represented a different kind of species being from that reared in Hofmeyr’s Education Department. He opposed the contention that ‘there are really no bad boys’, seeing delinquents as inherently bad, their badness stemming from their inborn national character. He thus rejected what he saw as an attempt ‘to turn these youth into a “gentleman” with a white collar and tie’. He proposed that all that these delinquents needed was a knowledge of the Bible, basic literacy and numeracy, a knowledge of sedeleer (morality) and gedragsleer (behaviour) and, lastly, gardening.

His views did not go uncontested. James Davidson’s Visitor’s Report of 1943 reiterated the view that the boys in Diepkloof were ‘urban boys’ and that, as such, their ‘schooling is all to the good’, and that their training ought to be pursued on a ‘mechanical’ rather than a ‘manual’ basis. Herholdt responded a month later with a eulogy on the dignity of labour and the great urban need for African gardeners.
June 1945 the Board meeting decided to call for a round-table Conference between the Department and members of the Board to discuss the report. It came very shortly after an editorial, sharply condemnatory of Paton's methods, and penned by H.F. Verwoerd, appeared in the Transvaler. Since Herholdt's proposals were not radically different from what was already on offer, their threatening nature needs explanation. The conflict would seem to have been based in wider political affiliations, and the general strategy to be taken towards urban Africans, rather than educational differences per se.

Reading the signs correctly, dissatisfied with many aspects of reformatory training, and no longer needing the reformatory after publication of Cry the Beloved Country, Paton resigned in 1948. He was immediately succeeded by W.W.J. Kieser on 1 January 1949. Kieser's M.Ed thesis for Potchefstroom University was completed in 1952 and was entitled Bantoejaugmisdaad aan die Rand en die behandeling daarvan deur die Diepkloof-verbeteringskool, Johannesburg (Black juvenile delinquency and its treatment at the Diepkloof Reformatory). His first meeting with the Diepkloof staff revealed that he was 'a great believer in the dignity of labour and would endeavour to foster that maxim at Diepkloof reformatory'. In 1949 the first signs of the new approach appeared when Kieser argued for the closing down of the placement hostel recently built, on the grounds that the 'majority of pupils released to homes on the Rand were unwilling to work'. Instead, he recommended the formation of a 'Work Corps for Natives, something on the same pattern as the Special Services Battalion'. The emphasis also began to shift from technical and vocational training to 'the moral side of education'.

Assessment

Paton's experiment was less innovative than it might have been. Not only was the scheme of graded freedom not his own brain-child, and a standard penal strategy for the times, but his much-vaunted anti-authoritarianism also had its limits. The initial impetus and encouragement to change the reformatory system came not from Paton, but from within the Union Education Department in the shape of Louis van Schalkwijk whose visits to reformatories in early 1934 issued in recommendations for improvements to buildings, sanitation and system of discipline. Paton's work was to fill in the detail. Anti-authoritarianism also did not prevent Paton from being a strict
Disciplinarian. Discipline went hand in hand with his schemes for graded freedom. Military discipline was no less integral to the success of this system than it was to the British borstals. 'None of us desires a freedom which weakens in any way the authority of the staff', he maintained:

...To that end we hold parades, give drill and expect a conventional politeness and obedience; and what is more, punish anyone who breaks the convention. Boys were organised in a military fashion into platoons or 'spans'; his prefect system also shared the ranking system of the military, prisons and industrial schools.

What was novel about Paton's work was that he was given the freedom to apply a diversified system of juvenile justice and welfare in existence for whites to blacks. The conditions for this freedom to experiment lay in the backing he had from J.H. Hofmeyr and the Union Education Department, and the combination of forces which had brought them to power.

Under one roof, Paton attempted to introduce the principles of industrial school, hostel and after care 'treatment' as they existed in a variety of custodial and non-custodial methods of dealing with white delinquent youth and children 'in need of care'. This represented a move from uniformity of treatment to individualised treatment; from mass treatment to treatment which depended on differentiating the criminal from the non-criminal, the 'children' from the 'hard core'; from classification for purposes of segregation to classifications which would trace out the 'normal' from the 'abnormal' and 'pathological'. In all of this there was a shift to knowledge; questions of knowledge about the circumstances of the offender became important.

More specifically, Paton tried to turn Diepkloof reformatory into something akin to an industrial school with an after-care section and a working boys' hostel. This embodied attempts at diversification, differentiation and individualisation of treatment through a mix of military discipline and child-centred pedagogical methods within the parameters of one institution. Elsewhere it has been shown how, in industrial schools and hostels in the 1920s, the 'cottage system' enhanced surveillance; the system of punishment and reward was manipulated to divide boys against one another; the system of 'self-government' was part of a system of control through inmates; the training provided equipped boys for little more than unskilled, semi-skilled or military work; disciplinary training was imbued with the militarist ethos of uniformed youth movements; how industrial schools purveyed a white 'South
Africanist' ideology and how, through all this, the schools were linked to the national project of constituting the white working class in patriarchal form. Paton's reforms were not a departure, but a refinement of these principles of institutionalisation. Their novelty lay in their linkage to concerns about stabilising the urban black working class and in so doing in bringing black delinquency within the ambit of a normalising discourse.

Paton's work was also notable for its deep inspiration by Christian morality and the liberal political economy of a free market economy. In this there was a fine irony, unseen by Paton himself. For he maintained the fiction of 'freedom as a reformatory instrument' while training African boys for a poverty, farm labour and 'unfreedom' which they did not choose. He refused any recognition of the conditions that produced delinquency as being 'unfree' and not chosen. He also did not see the paradox that emerged from reducing the shackles of reformatory control over the delinquent (in the form of removing barbed wire fences, and allowing boys limited freedom of movement at specified times) while wanting extension of state surveillance, albeit through means other than the classic reformatory, over black youth. The interventionist state was thus promoted by people who did not see themselves as 'statist'.

Whatever Paton achieved in practice, he was, at another level, implicitly and unconsciously representing the problem of how the social order was to be maintained in new ways. Once again, penalty became a field in which larger social problems and questions were asked and resolved. Social order through discipline was unquestionably Paton's aim, although he differed from previous administrations as well as with one another in the specific methods to achieve it. The key underlying question for Paton was how order could be maintained without recourse to punishment and repression. In other words, how could the legitimacy of the social order be conserved at the same time that punishment was inflicted, how could the offender be bound to his captor, while being punished? How could the offender be convinced of the justice and morality of his gaolers? If respect for law and order amongst offenders and, in particular, the black urban population at large, was being eroded, how could the law be enforced without alienating the populace? Paton's achievement was to devise and implement a system of punishment, by no means novel, which used the guilt of the offender to build a firmer basis for social order in a
politically unfree and unequal society. In this he could have echoed the words of the nineteenth century reformer, Mary Carpenter, that 'love draws with human cords far stronger than chains of iron'. His system of freedom represented in microcosm the social order he wished to conserve, but which was seemingly coming apart around him. The graded freedom of the institutional structure and inmates' passage from detention to society, as well as the emphasis on self-government, reflected an attempt to locate the source of control in the individual. It is in this light that the 'success' or 'failure' of the experiment has to be assessed; whether, in his words, 'the Non-European (has become)...their policeman, and the law...their law'.

The difference between Paton and his predecessors, between the old and the new penology for juvenile delinquents, was a difference of control through repressive, or control through more ideological means. Paton tried to develop a system of 'rule by consent', a system whereby the reformative principle of 'willing obedience' was a metaphor for the liberal democratic ideal in which freedom could be guaranteed only by a measure of restraint. More than this, he tried to develop this at a time when the wider society was closing these avenues to blacks. The change was the consequence of a combination of forces relating to the establishment of a modern state, the rise of professional social workers and educationists responsive to British and American intellectual currents and their interest in managing the terrain of delinquency. Of this stratum, Paton was a representative example, bringing with him and engraving his practice with his own particular brand of vocational, philanthropic and religious enthusiasm.

**Conclusion**

In the mid thirties, reformatories were transferred from the Prisons to the Union Education Department. By this stage, wider economic and political developments had led to favourable conditions within the government and civil service for this transfer to take place. The ideological climate had also changed; delinquency was now incontrovertibly a matter for psychologists and educationists rather than penal officers to manage.

When Alan Paton became Principal at Diepkloof, he immediately set about attempting to transform the institution into a school. His approach was informed by the borstal school system as well as by the development of the industrial school in
South Africa which combined penal and vocational methods of correction. Reformatories, if Diepkloof is to be taken as the representative example, did not become 'schools'; they also did not, however, remain unchanged. New models of rehabilitation were introduced which did allow boys greater freedom of movement than before. These changes took place, however, within the limits of the over-arching concept of institutionalisation and confinement as the primary method of reform. Paton himself tried to break down the boundaries in a gradual manner; he was ultimately defeated as much by political opponents with a different vision of what ought to be done about black delinquents as by the contradictions between his aims and the social and political realities in which he attempted to realise them.

Notes and References:

1. Alan Paton was born on 11 January 1903 and was educated at Maritzburg College and Natal University College where he obtained his B.A. and H.D.E. Between 1924 and 1934 he taught first at Newcastle High School, then Ikopo High School, and finally returned to his alma mater, Maritzburg College, in 1928 where he stayed until he left for Diepkloof. According to Paton, his work at university with the Students' Christian Association, convinced him that 'life must be used in the service of a cause greater than oneself'. (Towards the Mountain, p. 59). In 1948 his book, Cry the Beloved Country was published to international acclaim. He then left the Union Education Department to devote his life to politics and writing. In 1953 he helped to found the Liberal Party. Alan Paton died in 1987 at the end of a relatively distinguished career as a liberal in South Africa.


5. See Bailey, Delinquency, pp. 205 and 246: These new borstals intended to instill responsibility, self-discipline and self-reliance into borstal lads and to ensure their eventual re-integration into society as honest citizens. Paterson strove, no less than his predecessors, albeit through different means, to teach the boys the 'habits of industry' and to 'send out honest, steady workmen, satisfied with their lot, willing to 'play the game' without challenging the rules or the referee'. There was, in the end, no consensus on what constituted the primary objective in the training scheme: technical instruction, production of manufactured goods or character training. Whatever the objective may have been, the system depended on an inflexible discipline.


PATON AND DIEPLOOF REFORMATORY

47. Paton, Mountain, p. 179.
64. T.A.D., U.E.D., vol. 2003, File E221/8, General Correspondence, Louw van Schalkwyk, Notes arising out of a visit to Dieploof Reformatory, 8 November 1938.
65. Paton, Mountain, p. 165.
The thing that I resented bitterly about my home was my father's authoritarianism maintained by the use of physical force. His use of physical force never achieved anything but a useless obedience. But it had two important consequences. One was that my feelings towards him were almost those of hate. The other was that I grew up with an abhorrence of authoritarianism of the State, and a love of liberty, especially liberty within the State.