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Truth about tradition

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For the past 25 years the statement has been reiterated that the Separate Development policy logically stems from a state of affairs that began with van Riebeeck. Speaking in the Senate in June, 1954 Dr. Verwoerd called the policy of Separate Development "one which we have pursued from the beginning". Since the Bantu Education Bill was then before the House, it may be pertinent to ask whether the assumption that separate educational development operated "from the beginning" is justified in fact.

Apart from van der Stael's rather unhappy interlude as an amateur schoolmaster, Ernestus Back, appointed in 1662, appears to represent the Honourable Company's first official concern in Cape education. Back's school contained twelve white pupils, one Hottentot and four slaves. Like much of early Cape education, Back's tenure of office proved brief and the arrival of a comet convinced the troubled administration that this was a final warning to their hard drinking pedagogue and he was packed off to Batavia.

Thirteen years later a school was opened in the slave lodge, with a black teacher more, one suspects, so that teacher and taught could speak the same language, for members of the Company's administration at the Cape do not seem to have been Angolan-speaking to any extent.

For the first 150 years the Cape was a Dutch community into which even the Huguenots were absorbed. In 1685 we find Commissioner van Rhede vehemently insisting on the strict separation of black and white children in schools — a situation unlikely if that separation was in fact being applied. Then, almost a century later (still under Dutch rule, though) a licensed teacher at the Cape informed the Scholarchs that he had on his school roll 49 white boys, 62 white girls and 25 slave children. Another local school reported a roll of 50, 16 of whom were coloureds. There was at this time no question of the intrusion of an alien liberalism into the Cape. So one may conclude that although there may have been support for separate school facilities it was certainly not sufficiently entrenched in the 17th and 18th century to be called our 'traditional policy'.

During the better part of the 17th century such separation as there was was based on religious and linguistic grounds. Admission to the Church placed black and white on equal footing. Marriage between black and white was prohibited as early as 1685 — but one should bear in mind that Abraham Lincoln, great liberal that he was, said in 1854 that his own feelings would not permit him to make the negro socially his equal. "Whether" he added, "this feeling accords with justice and sound judgement is not the whole question. A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, cannot safely be disregarded. We cannot make them our equal".

Actions and judgements of previous centuries should be interpreted in terms of their particular ethos rather than that of our own. Lincoln was a child of his age when in 1858 he declared that he was not in favour of allowing marriages between whites and blacks.

In the preceding century much the same ethos had prevailed at the Cape. Miscegenation was never officially countenanced by the D.E.I.C. though it may well have been practised. There has always been a difference between Dutch attitudes in this respect and those of either the French or Portuguese colonists. Whereas the Dutch **generally** saw themselves as part of a massive trading corporation in which they could be transferred on 'tours of duty', they were essentially **not** colonists intending permanent settlement — except, be it noted, in the later development of the Cape. The Portuguese, however, approached their colonial development in a different manner. They tended the more easily to sever their connections with "the old country" and to identify themselves with the new community. A different sexual morality was inevitable. A married Dutch official of the D.E.I.C., for instance, accompanied by his wife, would hardly win her approval by philandering with local black women, and in so far as sexual morality understruts the concept of Separate Development, it reflects to

a large extent the surveillance of "company wives". Portuguese settlers on the other hand, often young soldiers of fortune, had no need to consider a "home morality", and satisfied their sex needs by local intermarriage. Certainly the sexual basis of separate development would seem to owe much to the conditions of service in the D.E.I.C. The persistence of this ethos into modern times in sections of our South African community reflects group norms that external public opinion violates at its peril — as we have seen under different circumstances in Cyprus and Ulster.

The British entry into the Cape Community

Even trying to think about the pre-19th century Cape community as a homogeneous group is an over-simplification. Before the coming of the British there would appear to have been two distinct elements: the increasingly urban community centred round the Mother City and the pioneer communities thinly extended over frontier areas-communities which were concerned with the pragmatics of survival.

What the British occupation did was to crash the isolation barrier that 5 000 miles of Atlantic Ocean had provided for centuries. Although the very nature of the Colonial Service was at best gently conservative, the ideas expressed by missionaries, the Philanthropists and social theorists such as John Stewart Mill could hardly be regarded by the Cape Dutch as anything but **avant garde.** Cape Town began to hear reports of Wilberforce's speeches to the Commons, and some may even have wondered what J. S. Mill was doing at the India Office (of all places!) where he appeared to be working on a blueprint for political democracy for Britain's dependencies.

Associated with all this heady new thinking was the built-in demand of Protestantism for basic literacy, so that converts might have access to the Word.

If the more urbane community of Cape Town itself could assimilate much of the new world that had suddenly burst in on them, the impact of new ideas on the rigid simplicities of the frontier proved explosive. When, a little later, the British seemed resolved on a policy of anglicisation and even imported Scots ministers to fill Cape Dutch pulpits, the frontier communities felt culturally beleaguered. There was a mental in-gathering — a laagering — and a series of withdrawals that quite logically ended in the Great Trek. Despite the batter of world opinion, no group can be expected to submit to its own extinction.

Speaking in approximations, the concept of Separate Development was articulated as a policy among the Cape Dutch frontiersmen somewhere between 1825 and 1850. And it was not the general policy of **all** the Cape Dutch* either.

Round the city and the prosperous country towns feelings were not nearly so polarised. The first free school established by the Governor, Sir John Craddock, had no colour bar. Children were simply required to be clean and well-dressed. In Cape Town most schools continued to be multiracial, and white parents (predominantly Cape Dutch) voluntarily sent their children to schools with slave and Hottentot children.

Largely due to the growing liberal influence in England, discriminatory legislation against the Hottentots was removed in 1828 by a Government Ordinance, and by 1834 Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire. These actions certainly disturbed the Cape labour "market" and led to the social turbulence that Anna Steenkamp was later to complain about. And indeed — as always happens — legislation for social change is not always accompanied by alteration of human behaviour. The Government had, for instance, made it clear that free schools as from 1839 should be open to all children, irrespective of colour, a regulation that was in force for a number of years. In 1850 the Revd. W. Thompson was appointed by the London Missionary Society as its Superintendent in the Cape, and in this capacity much of his work involved school management. In his evidence before the Educational Commission of Enquiry in 1863, he told of a prosperous coloured man who had removed his son from a Mission school and placed him at a government free school. "I contend," said Mr. Thompson "that where there are any government schools, all classes of the community have an equal right to avail themselves of the

* The author uses this term as applicable until 1900, after which the term Afrikaner seems more appropriate.

advantages they offer". Incidentally, because of Thompson's mediation, the coloured boy remained at his desk and the whites eventually returned to theirs. This type of "Selma incident" must have had the effect of polarising rural attitudes. But to see the Cape Dutch lined up on the side of Separate Development against the English — lined up to support an integrative policy, is nonsense. It was not a simple split between conservative Cape Dutch (the whole community) and liberal English (the current administrative power group). Many of the 1820 settlers, who had also become frontiersmen, were more sympathetic to the viewpoint of their Boer neighbours than they were to the liberal administration at Cape Town. On the other hand a Dutch Reformed Church minister from Wynberg, giving evidence to the Commission of 1863 recorded that he had little difficulty in his parish about white children mixing with coloured children. He saw no objection to the attendance of coloured children at the local government school, although he doubted whether the public was yet ready for this as a general policy. He added regretfully: "I wish that there were one colour and one language in this colony".

This relatively liberal statement from a predikant stands in contrast with that of the wellknown historian, George Theal. Theal contended that the so-called Herschel schools were wrecked almost at the beginning "through an attempt by certain people with peculiar ideas to force coloured children as well as whites into those schools". Theal, conservative often to the point of stereotype, was scandalised at the attempt to "force Hottentot children into schools beside white children".

The aid given to Mission schools by Dr. Innes from 1841, as the Report of the Commission of 1879 comments, was not to support schools for coloured children specifically, but to provide for the **poor** irrespective of colour. As the report adds: "For 50 years the colours mixed pretty freely on their benches".

By the 1800s the Superintendent estimated that 10 994 pupils at undenominational schools were white, and some 573 were coloured. However, at mission schools 8 385 were white and 28 552 were coloured.

In so far as Separate Development could be called a policy (in the sense of a pattern of behaviour that was given general community acceptance) it emerges with the Great Trek and the founding of the two Boer Republics. Article 58 of the 1855 Constitution of the South African Republic says unambiguously "the people will have no equality between blacks and whites". Nor, as the constitution adds, would the people have slavery. Indeed, apart from a limited amount of missionary effort (some of which was supported by Paul Kurger) no official attempt was made in the Transvaal to tackle black education until the Smuts Act of 1907 instituted separate provision for native schools.

The story of education in Natal is much the same as that in the Cape — from the moment a Lieutenant Governor, nettled at being accused of "dragging his feet" in the provision of native education replied indignantly that blacks had access to white schools at Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Verulam had a school of 50 children, 15 of whom came from The Native Christian Society and were probably Zulu. Until 1887 there were several Indian children attending Durban Primary schools — which continued to be the case until schools were provided for the Indian community.

It would be nearer to the facts to say that in its history South Africa has tried both separation and integration of colours on the school bench. Separation is not even a traditional Afrikaner policy, though it would certainly seem to be confirmed Trekker policy. It was not until the 1890s that we find the Superintendent of the Cape proposing a new type of school for the children of the poor — the 4th class school. This was designed to draw off white children from mission schools, on the grounds, as Langham Dale, an English South African put it, that it was not fit that white girls should be in close association with coloured street boys.

To recapitulate, Separate Development as applied to education itself developed during the years 1825-1850 as expressing a sectional viewpoint but became increasingly accepted until, by the end of the 19th century it probably commanded general adherence. To call it our **national** policy **from the beginning** is not consistent with the facts.