

‘This is our school...’:Identity, cultural hybridity and the development of an education system among the BaSotho in the Dewure Purchase Areas, Gutu 1932-1960

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Abstract

The development of an Education System among the BaSotho people in Gutu largely revolved around Bethel School, which they established in 1937. In no time at all the school had grown to represent the development of education among the people in the Dewure Purchase Areas, in general, and that of the BaSotho people, in particular. This article seeks to demonstrate that in many ways Bethel School represented the triumphs, failures and challenges faced by the BaSotho in Gutu in the field of education. It also asserts that the way the BaSotho people ran Bethel School reveals some contradictions in the colonial administration’s perceptions of the BaSotho people. Whilst in the early years of the BaSotho people’s settlement in Gutu the colonial administrators viewed them as ‘more advanced natives’ their constant bickering and failures to properly run their school led to the colonial administrators changing their perceptions about the BaSotho. The article is also an attempt to evaluate the success of an attempt at an education system primarily aimed at catering for the needs of the BaSotho people in an area dominated by the Shona people. It endeavours to use the concept of ‘cultural hybridity’ in analysing the development of an education system among the BaSotho in Gutu. The paper grapples with the image of Bethel School more than a school for BaSotho children but as an important part of BaSotho Identity in the Dewure Purchase Areas.

Introduction

The BaSotho came into present day Zimbabwe in the early years of colonial rule from Lesotho and the Transvaal Region of South Africa, some accompanying the Pioneer Column and others the Berlin Missionary Society (B. M.S.) Missionaries and a large number with the Dutch Reformed Church (D. R. C). It should be highlighted that the history of the BaSotho in Gutu is inextricably linked to the history of the evangelization of the southern Shona. It is interesting to note that the majority of the missionaries who went to the area north of the Limpopo took with them some BaSotho converts and evangelists who helped them in their missionary work. The prominence of the BaSotho in the evangelization of the southern Shona people was a result of the fact that Evangelization Missions had taken root in Basutoland at an early stage than in other areas in Southern Africa. In this light, the BaSotho held a very high position in the ethnic hierarchy in these churches, especially the D. R. C. Thus, it is therefore very difficult to write the history of the BaSotho people to the north of the Limpopo River without reference to the works of the Paris Evangelical Society (P. E. S.), the B. M. S. and the D. R. C. missionaries. Their first places of settlement were the Niekerk's Rust and Erichsthal Farms in the Fort Victoria area. They were, however, evicted from these farms following the enactment of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. The rationalization of land, which followed, saw Niekerk's Rust and Erichsthal farms being declared European farms and the BaSotho being asked to move from these farms and take up farms in Purchase Areas, which were specifically meant for African farmers. They were offered exchange farms in the Dewure and Nyazvidzi Divisions of the Purchase Areas in Gutu whilst others went to Mungezi Purchase Areas in Bikita.

When they settled in Gutu, the BaSotho began to mobilise funds to purchase a farm that they would communally own by asking people to contribute funds towards the purchase of the farm. This community Farm was to be used for religious activities, establishment of a school and as a site for a Dip tank, cemetery and also for the construction of a clinic among other functions. Jacob Molebaleng as the representative of the BaSotho community made several applications to the Native Land Board (N. L. B.) to have the BaSotho granted the farm.

Having considered Jacob Molebaleng's application for a community farm, the N. L. B. agreed to grant the BaSotho a farm in the Dewure Purchase Areas, which was to be communally owned. The conditions for this however, were that, the farm would be, 'for the use and benefit of the BaSotho community for religious, educational and recreational purposes and also as a site for a dipping tank and burial ground and clinic.'¹ The deed also stated that Jacob Molebaleng would be the one in whose name the rights for the community farm would be vested in his capacity as the 'chief' of the BaSotho community.² The agreed purchase price for the farm was pegged at £75, which included the cost of pegging. The size of the farm was to be 151.70 Morgen.³ The N. L. B. thus issued Farm number 24, which the BaSotho named Bethel Farm.

This paper is an attempt at analysing the growth of an education system among the BaSotho when they settled in the Dewure Purchase Areas in Gutu. The central argument in this paper is that though at its establishment, Bethel School was meant for the children of BaSotho farm owners, purportedly to teach them Sotho culture and etiquette thus preserving Sotho culture, in the end it did not achieve this. What later emerged was a culturally hybrid community with various cultural interfaces that in the end the school could not be viewed as purely a 'BaSotho school'. It is against this background that this paper is premised on the 'cultural hybridity' discourse, which was propounded by Homi Bhabha. According to Bhabha, 'cultural hybridity concerns the fluidity of a culture, a movement back and forth, not making any specific or essential way of being.'⁴ This concept accepts the possibility of not only black and white areas but also the grey areas or the third space, which entertains difference without any assumed hierarchy.⁵ It is argued here that though the BaSotho people in the Dewure Purchase Areas viewed Bethel School as 'our school' the history of this school revealed how fluid the community was.

Education among the BaSotho

Since the BaSotho people were among the earliest Christian converts in Southern Africa, they were also quick to appreciate European education. Some of them had also acquired

some level of education before coming to what later became Rhodesia. This was largely a result of their contacts with the Missionaries who desired to have them work as evangelists, interpreters and teachers.⁶ As a result of their early contacts with European missionaries and appreciation of European education, the BaSotho were keen to establish schools in the places they settled. The BaSotho also realised that an educated person stood a better chance of getting a paying job in the job market. It is against this background that they established two schools in Niekerk's Rust and Erichsthal Farms.⁷ Since among them were some qualified teachers the establishment of the schools was not a difficult goal to achieve.

Apart from sending their children to the two schools the BaSotho had established in the Fort Victoria area, they also sent their children to mission schools such as Pamushana, Morgenster, Chibi, Waddilove and Howard among others.⁸ In some instances some BaSotho parents even sent their children to South Africa to learn at schools there. Jona Mmkola was sent to a South African school and the Dutch Reformed Church missionaries paid part of his school fees the remainder being paid by his parents. Mmkola matriculated and also obtained a teacher's Provisional Certificate before coming back to colonial Zimbabwe.⁹ This shows that the BaSotho had a great appreciation of education and were very keen to have their children acquire European education leading to their establishment of two schools on Niekerk's Rust and Erichsthal Farms.

Prior to their departure from Niekerk's Rust and Erichsthal Farms in Victoria District, the BaSotho had established two schools. Rev. I. Botha, who first made an application to the Native Commissioner (N. C.) of Gutu for the establishment of a school among the BaSotho in Dewure Purchase Areas, pointed out that the BaSotho people had two schools under the D. R. C. in Niekerk's Rust and Erichsthal Farms and wished to open a school in the Dewure Purchase Areas.¹⁰ Rev. Botha also stated that the BaSotho wished to appoint BaSotho teachers, Jona Mmkola and his wife Selina Mmkola. Jona held a Teacher's Provisional Certificate of Transvaal whilst Selina was a standard three teacher.¹¹ The Superintendent of Natives for the Victoria Province also reiterated the point that the BaSotho people could establish their own school because among them were some

qualified teachers. He noted that ‘amongst their community (BaSotho) are qualified teachers and tradesmen of all kinds.’¹² Hence, because of the availability of people who could teach their children, the BaSotho people saw the establishment of a school in their community farm as an achievable goal.

In anticipation of the BaSotho people’s purchase of a community farm which, among other things, was to be a site for a school, Rev. I. Botha of Pamushana Mission and later Rev. van der Merwe of Alheit Mission applied for the establishment of a school in the BaSotho community farm.¹³ The first application was turned down by the N. C. of Gutu on the grounds that the BaSotho people had not yet acquired any rights to the land on which they wished to establish the school.¹⁴ The matter was then shelved until such a time when the BaSotho people would have acquired rights over their community farm. In 1936 however, Rev. van der Merwe successfully applied for the establishment of a school among the BaSotho people and the school was opened in January 1937.¹⁵ By this time the BaSotho had purchased a community farm and now had full rights to it, thus the N. C. could not object to the establishment of the school. The BaSotho people themselves built the school infrastructure. The farm owners contributed the funds for the establishment of the school.¹⁶

Though the two D. R. C. missionaries, Rev I. Botha of Pamushana Mission and Rev van der Merwe of Alheit Mission had played a big role in the establishment of Bethel School, the BaSotho people flatly refused to have the D. R. C. interfere with the running of their school. This is quite interesting, given that the two schools that the BaSotho people had on Niekerk’s Rust and Erichsthal farms were under the D. R. C.¹⁷ This was a rather sharp turn of events in the relationship between the BaSotho people and the D. R. C., which at least on the surface, had seemed to be quite amicable.

When the BaSotho people left Niekerk’s Rust and Erichsthal they agreed that they would not allow any mission or denomination to interfere with their affairs, the D. R. C. included. This was largely because of the issue that though the majority of the BaSotho belonged to the D. R. C. quite a number belonged to other denominations other than the

D. R. C. The domination of the D. R. C. would have created discord among the BaSotho given the different denominations they belonged to. Consequently in the sector of education, they resolved not to have their school controlled by the D. R. C. In 1935, the N. C. of Gutu noted that,

The Basutos wish their school to be
under direct government supervision,
and quite distinct from mission control
something similar to a farm school.¹⁸

The BaSotho people never clearly stated the reason for their decision, save for their usual argument that they wished to have autonomy over their community farm, school and church. Thus, they regarded D. R. C. control of their school as being a sign of giving in to D. R. C. control. Another probable reason why the BaSotho people did not wish to have their school placed under the D. R. C. was their desire to control their school funds, which they thought would be abused by the D. R. C.¹⁹

In the light of the above, Bethel School was run like other farm schools in the District. The N. C. of Gutu was the Chairman and treasurer of the school whilst Rev. van der Merwe was appointed the superintendent of the school.²⁰ The first structure erected at the school was a classroom block measuring 28 ft by 24 ft, which was built using burnt bricks and thatch.²¹ In November 1935 the N. C. of Gutu reported that he expected the first intake of pupils at Bethel School to be fifty BaSotho children and five Shona children.²² The school, however, failed to open in 1935 but opened in 1937.

It is important to highlight that though some Shona children enrolled at Bethel School the only languages taught at this school were English and Sesotho.²³ Hence the few Shona pupils at this school had to do with learning in English and in Sesotho, the language of the BaSotho people. Close comparisons can be drawn with Gwebu School in Buhera that was established in 1934 for the Ndebele people resettled in this area. Buhera is a district dominated by the Shona people but due to the evictions induced by the Land

Apportionment Act of 1930 some Ndebele speaking people from Fort Rixon were evicted and relocated in Buhera. Since Gwebu School was specifically meant for the Ndebele people Sindebele and not Chishona was taught alongside English until 1965 when Chishona replaced Sindebele.²⁴

Since most of the BaSotho people in Gutu originally came from the Transvaal Region of South Africa, which was occupied by the Afrikaners, this Afrikaner influence was also seen in their education system. According to Davis and Dopcke, 'from its inception the white community in Gutu was overwhelmingly Afrikaner. Afrikaans was the language of instruction in the schools. In 1936, 279 of the 374 whites in the district were adherents of the Dutch Reformed Church.'²⁵ Thus, because of this Afrikaner influence most schools in Gutu taught Afrikaans. Nevertheless, though Afrikaans was not taught at Bethel School the syllabi followed at this school in the early years of its existence were largely borrowed from South Africa and were influenced by Afrikaans.²⁶ Quite a number of the BaSotho also could speak Afrikaans apart from Sesotho and English.²⁷ Aletta Mphisa who learnt at this school remembers that because of the Afrikaner influence the first grade at Bethel School was commonly referred to as Dom A which was an Afrikaner term for the first grade.²⁸

Just like at any other school in the District, attendance (of school children) was taken seriously at Bethel School. Davis and Dopcke note that at Alheit Mission School, attendance was so insisted upon that truancy was punished through payment of fines, labour or grain.²⁹ In the same vein attendance was also insisted upon on pupils at Bethel school. Below is a table showing the total enrollment of pupils at Bethel School in its first year and the number of pupils present on 16 October 1937 when the Circuit Inspector visited the school.³⁰

BETHEL SCHOOL REGISTER 16 OCTOBER 1937

ON ROLL			PRESENT			
	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
1 ST YEAR	17	9	26	12	6	18
SUB A	5	4	9	5	4	9
SUB B	6	1	7	6	1	7
STD 1	5	----	5	5	----	5
STD 2	2	2	4	2	2	4
STD 3	1	2	3	1	2	3
STD 4	2	----	2	2	----	2
TOTAL	38	18	56	33	15	48

All in all, only eight pupils out of 56 were absent on this particular day showing a very high percentage of attendance at the school. Be that as it may, the attendance for a single day could be deceiving given that if the teachers were aware of the visit of the Circuit Inspector they could have done everything within their means to ensure a very high attendance. The number of pupils in Standard Four shows the problems that were rife in running these high standards. Generally very few pupils reached Standard Four, let alone Standard Six. The Kerr Commission noted that very few pupils in the 1950s reached Standard Six and it also established that Standard Three was still the ‘distinct terminus’ for African children.³¹ This explains the very small number of pupils in Standard Four at Bethel in 1937. In 1942 the Circuit Inspector of Gwelo pointed out that though the BaSotho were to have Standard four at their school the number of pupils did not allow for it.³² Since teachers could not teach very few pupils, the problem of small numbers of pupils in the upper Standards also affected the running of the school.

The subjects taught at Bethel School were quite similar to those taught at other schools in the district. These included Arithmetic, Religious Education, English, Music and

Industrial work among other subjects.³³ However, instead of Chishona that was taught at other schools in Gutu Sesotho was the African language taught at Bethel School. Industrial work was emphasised because the colonial government perceived it as having a ‘civilizing role’ to the Africans whom they viewed as indolent.

As a result of such perceptions about Africans and their presumed indolence, industrial work was made a priority subject at African schools and Bethel School was not an exception. In 1940, A. R. Mather, who was the Circuit Inspector of schools that included Bethel reported that though he had been impressed by the quality of academic work of pupils at Bethel School, he had not been particularly impressed by the boys’ industrial work and he recommended that this subject be prioritised.³⁴ He recommended that Agriculture and vegetable gardening be taken more seriously at this school.³⁵ This shows the amount of importance that was put on Industrial work by the colonial administration.

It is in the light of the above that one of the conditions imposed on schools for them to obtain Government Grants by the Education Ordinance was to have four hours per day devoted to the teaching of Industrial Work.³⁶ The Southern Rhodesia Education Commission of 1962 noted that ‘certain African witnesses certainly claim that the industrial subjects are useful in the preparation of the school-leaver who wishes to earn his living as a jobbing builder or carpenter in his rural areas.’³⁷ Industrial work was thus recommended because it was viewed as providing the pupils with skills that could be useful to them in the society. Whilst boys did carpentry, agriculture and carpentry girls were taught home craft, which involved sewing, cookery, and other skills that were considered important for future housewives.³⁸ Such ideas were premised on the colonial perceptions of the Africans as indolent. Thus they argued that Industrial Work would teach them not only to work but also to work for Europeans. As M. O. West argues, Industrial work was meant to make Africans tractable labourers and docile subjects.³⁹ In essence Industrial work was meant to train Africans for lower level jobs which involved manual work and were seen as commensurate with their position as subjects.

In the early years of the establishment of the school, pupils wrote on slates using slate pencils and books imported from South Africa for various subjects.⁴⁰ Davis and Dopcke note that the D. R. C. schools faced a number of problems, which include large numbers of pupils in one class, shortage of black boards, slates and pencils.⁴¹ In spite of the many problems the school faced, at least in the early years of its existence, Bethel School pupils seem to have had sufficient books and slates. In March 1938 the N. C. of Gutu reported that he visited Bethel School and found all pupils present on that day provided with a full compliment of slates, slate pencils and books.⁴² Hence, at least in the early years of Bethel School's existence, pupils seem to have been well provided for.

Since the BaSotho people insisted on having their children taught in English and Sesotho, the teachers who taught at Bethel School were, in most cases, members of the BaSotho community. The first teacher at this school was Malachi Phosa who was the son of Laban Phosa a Sotho farm owner.⁴³ Malachi Phosa had been trained at Waddilove Institute where he obtained a teaching course and as a Sotho he could also teach both Sesotho and English.⁴⁴ It is however, not clear whether Malachi Phosa had learnt at one of the two schools on Niekerk's Rust and Erichsthal Farms. Other teachers who taught at the school include Laura Moeketsi, Dickson Zinondo, Reuben Mphisa, and Michael Mojapelo among others.⁴⁵

To curb the problem of the long distances the pupils had to endure to get to Bethel School, the school established some 'Boarding facilities' for those pupils coming from areas very far away from the school. In 1940 the Circuit Inspector, Mr. A. R. Mather, recommended that all pupils in Standard Two and above become 'boarders' because of the amount of schoolwork they had to cope with.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, what needs to be pointed out is that the so-called 'Boarding Facilities' did not resemble a boarding school in any way but name. From the narratives of the former 'boarders' at this school, the so called boarding facilities were just a couple of ramshackle buildings where pupils stayed from Monday to Friday preparing their own food and doing all other house hold chores and attending school. On Friday they would go to their respective homes to get more food provisions to last them for another week.⁴⁷ Though this solved the problem of children

having to travel for long distances every day to attend school at Bethel, the 'Boarding school' was no more than a self catering system for pupils which took much of the pupils' time as they had to look for relish, firewood and other necessities as well as attending to their school work.

The payment of school fees formed the backbone of the running of Bethel School. This was largely because of the fact that part of the teachers' salaries had to come from the school fees.⁴⁸ As Davis and Dopcke argue, Gutu gained the notoriety of having schools charging the highest school fees in the country, which ranged from 5/- for lower grades to 10/- for Standard Four.⁴⁹ Bethel school was charging even higher fees. In 1937, the fees at Bethel school were pegged at 12/- and the Circuit Inspector even recommended that the figure be maintained.⁵⁰ Such a move created problems for the community because quite a number of the parents who sent their children to the school could not afford the high school fees. Furthermore, the constitution also stipulated that the school committee was vested with the powers to investigate complaints made by parents, teachers or pupils about anything at the school and to report their findings to the school Inspector in the event of anything adversely affecting the school being revealed by the investigation. The school committee was also vested with the powers to dismiss any member of the school staff if he/she was found guilty of any misconduct.⁵¹ Thus, though the school committee worked in conjunction with the superintendent, the N. C. and the Circuit Inspector, the constitution empowered it to deal with any disciplinary issues at the school and also to dismiss any staff member.

A school committee ran the school, under Rev. van der Merwe, who was also the superintendent of the school.⁵² Though van der Merwe was a D. R. C. minister the BaSotho did not object to him being the superintendent of the school as long they retained control of their school. The school committee handled the school finances, collected school fees, paid teachers and also purchased school equipment among other necessities. This school committee was composed of BaSotho farm owners only. The constitution of the school stated that any member of the BaSotho community who was a part owner of Bethel Farm could be elected to the school committee at a general

meeting.⁵³ This effectively meant that though some Shona farm owners had children attending school at Bethel, they could not be elected into the school committee for the simple reason that they were not part owners of Bethel community Farm.

Bethel or ‘Brothel’ School?: The management of Bethel School by the BaSotho

When the BaSotho people settled in Gutu, the colonial government through the N. C. of Gutu showed high hopes at its potential impact on the local people. This was influenced by the general perception in the colonial circles that the BaSotho people were ‘more advanced natives’. In 1935 the N. C. of Gutu wrote to the C. N. C. saying, ‘I find these BaSutos decent, law-abiding members of the district and consider their presence among the vaKaranga will induce a general urge amongst local ‘natives’ to copy the Basuto’s more advanced ideas and ideals.’⁵⁴ Nevertheless, in no time at all, contradictions in the colonial government’s perception of the BaSotho people began to emerge. One of the reasons for this sudden change of perception about the BaSotho people by the colonial government was the way the BaSotho people ran their school.

The issue of the failure of parents who had children at Bethel School to pay school fees caused so much trouble in the BaSotho community because the day to day running of the school largely depended on the amount of school fees paid. The issue of the timeous payment of school fees became a huge drawback to the development of Bethel School. Rev. A. A. Louw Jr, who in the 1940s was the superintendent of the school, also complained about the time the BaSotho people took in paying fees and threatened to turn away those pupils who had not paid school fees. He wrote to the N. C. of Gutu saying that,

I understand also that a large number of the parents have up to date not yet paid the school fees fixed by the School Council, and it seems if the council is unable to get the fees from them I know what I would do in such a case (sic).

I would just refuse to admit the children to attend
School until all the fees have been paid up.⁵⁵

Coming from the superintendent of the school such an analysis of the state of affairs at Bethel School gave a very gloomy picture. It is noteworthy that though the colonial government constructed the BaSotho as progressive people whose ideals had to be copied by the 'Karanga' their failure to pay school fees for their children and to run their school reveals their failure to fit into this constructed image. As a result of the laxity of the BaSotho people in as far as the payment of school fees was concerned, the superintendent of the school and the N. C. were more often than not left with no option but to recommend drastic measures to ensure the smooth running of the school.

The school fees payment problem led to a high staff turnover at the school as teachers resigned from their posts at an alarming rate. This was largely because teachers went for long periods of time without receiving their monthly salaries often because the parents would have not paid the school fees or the funds were mismanaged. The rate of resignation of teachers at Bethel was so acute that 1943 was the fourth consecutive year when the school began the year with a complete change of staff.⁵⁶ At the end of 1942, Dickson Zinondo and Kathleen Thema resigned from their teaching posts at Bethel School citing, among other things, the late payment of their monthly salaries.⁵⁷ Dickson Zinondo's salary from 1 April to 31 December 1942 had not been paid and Kathleen Thema was also owed her salary from the 1st of June to the 31st of December 1942.⁵⁸ This situation forced the two teachers to resign from their posts at the end of 1942. Rev. A. A. Louw Jr stated that he was not going to appoint any new staff at the school for 1943 until he was satisfied that the school committee paid what it owed the teachers who had served in 1942. He also suggested that the school be reduced to a one-teacher school or even close it if the problems persisted.⁵⁹ This created a situation, which was not conducive for a sound education system.

Not only were the BaSotho people rapped by the N. C., the Superintendent of the School and the Circuit Inspector for their sluggish payment of school fees, but also for their

handling of the school fees and other school finances. There was gross mismanagement of funds at Bethel School and at one time the police had to be called in to carry out investigations into the case of missing funds.⁶⁰ This greatly infuriated the N. C. of Gutu that he wrote to Rev. A. A. Louw Jr who was superintendent of the school arguing that, ‘these Basutos are the most non-cooperative crowd of Africans I have yet struck and to my mind nothing short of closing the school will bring them to their senses.’⁶¹ Though the N. C. did not have the school closed then, what is interesting is the way the various N. Cs’ perceptions about the BaSotho people as ‘decent and law-abiding members of the District’ which had been expressed by the then N. C. in 1935, had completely changed by 1946. What emerges here is that by 1946, the N. C.’s office had got disillusioned by the way the BaSotho people handled their affairs, especially their school.

Due to the limited number of schools during the colonial period, some people enrolled for the first grade when they were already in their teens. Consequently, the issue of sexual abuse of pupils by their teachers was a common problem in schools. This problem also rocked Bethel school as well. One interesting case of abuse of school children was the case in which Reuben Robert Mphisa was accused of raping his student, Rhoda Tawu, in 1942.⁶² The principal witness in this case was Priscilla Molebaleng who was a teacher at the school.⁶³ After an investigation into the case was carried out, overwhelming evidence implicating Reuben Mphisa was found and he was dismissed from his work in September 1942.⁶⁴ Reuben Mphisa was however not arrested because, for unclear reasons the Attorney General declined to prosecute him and the case was dropped.⁶⁵ The case of the abuse of Rhoda Tawu could have been a tip of the iceberg in a widespread abuse of school children by Reuben Robert Mphisa and other male teachers at Bethel School over the years. It was not surprising that it took Priscilla Molebaleng a female teacher at the school to expose the sexual abuse at the school. But again, because of the gender dynamics in the BaSotho community the BaSotho saw it convenient not to pursue the issue for fear of tarnishing the image of the school and the community at large though this was done at the expense of the victim or victims.

The abuse of female pupils at the school could have been more widespread than the case of Rhoda Tawu revealed. It is in the light of such a possibility that the N. C. of Gutu commented that though no criminal charges were leveled against Reuben Mphisa, 'what is recorded reveals a dreadful state of affairs sufficient to justify the name of the school being altered from Bethel to 'Brothel' School.'⁶⁶ Fredrick Komo one of the members of the BaSotho community argued that the only reason why the perpetrators were never convicted was that the BaSotho community felt it would expose both the school and the whole community.⁶⁷ From this background, sexual abuse of pupils at Bethel School could have possibly been higher than the case of the abuse of Rhoda Tawu by Reuben Robert Mphisa revealed.

The sexual abuse of pupils at Bethel School could be said to have been one reason why the Circuit Inspector, A. R. Mather, ordered the 'Boarding School' at Bethel to be closed. Aletta Mphisa, who was one of the pupils at this school at the time, remembers that Mather was disturbed by the living conditions of pupils in the 'Boarding' facilities and ordered it to be closed.⁶⁸ Instead of being saddened by the closure of the 'Boarding' facilities, pupils at Bethel School were very happy to leave the 'Boarding' because of the problems they encountered in these boarding facilities, which include shortage of food and other necessities.⁶⁹

In addition to the closure of the 'Boarding' facilities, the Education authorities also began to consider removing Standard Four from the school because of the many problems encountered in running it. The Superintendent of the school saw the higher standards, especially Standard Four, as the ones that caused so many problems for Bethel School because of the problems associated with running them.⁷⁰ It was against this background that Mr. A. R. Mather, lamented that it was a mistake to have Standard Four allowed at Bethel School.⁷¹ Consequently, Rev. van der Merwe ordered Standard Four to be discontinued for the year beginning January 1943 and all the affected students to be transferred to Pamushana Mission.⁷² The BaSotho people thus lost Standard Four largely because of their failure to properly run their school and also their mismanagement of school funds.

The problems that were increasingly bedeviling Bethel School drew the concern of the Dewure Division Native Council in 1948. It began to be debated by the councilors whether in the backdrop of the cited problems the school could remain under the control of the BaSotho or be placed under the direct control of the Dewure Division Native Council. This council was composed of both BaSotho and Shona councilors. Councilor J. Moeketsi who was one of the BaSotho councilors recommended that the school remain under the BaSotho because, ‘this was primarily a Basuto School put there to teach in Sesutu (Sesotho) and English Languages and for the purpose of teaching the Basuto children their own customs.’⁷³ From this background Moeketsi argued that the school advanced Sotho culture and as such had to remain under the BaSotho.

It is however interesting to note that one of the Sotho councilors J. Mojapelo had quite different views with regards to the future of the school and also its significance in the sustenance of Sotho culture and identity. He argued that he had been a teacher at Bethel School for a number of years, ‘but to his certain knowledge, no Basuto customs are being taught there. Most of the Basuto children have left Bethel School and the majority of the pupils are *vaKaranga*.’⁷⁴ Mojapelo’s argument summed up the fluid nature of the BaSotho community in Gutu at that time and also the ambivalent nature of their identity. Furthermore, Mojapelo exposed the rhetoric of Bethel School having been important in teaching the BaSotho children their culture. Moreover, though at the time the school was established, in 1937, the majority of the pupils were children of the BaSotho farm owners, by 1948, as Mojapelo argued, the Shona had become the majority due to the fact that quite a number of the BaSotho had enrolled at other schools in the District and beyond and also because the Shona people were generally many in the area as compared to the BaSotho. In the end it gradually became difficult to identify Bethel School as a ‘BaSotho School’ whose mandate was to teach Sotho children their culture when the majority of the pupils were children of the local Shona people. Against this background, one can take Homi Bhabha’s argument that viewing identities as pure or as having fixed properties could be problematic since there is a possibility of hybrid identities emerging from the interaction of two or more identities.⁷⁵ Thus what emerges here is that the

BaSotho community became more and more fluid due to its interaction with the local Shona people and adoption of Christianity that it could no longer be viewed as pure. Furthermore, not only were the BaSotho dropping some of their cultural practices like ethnic endogamy by marrying from the Shona and other culture but they were also gradually losing their language and adopting Chishona in their day-to-day activities. At present it is quite difficult to find a Sotho person in the Dewure purchase area who can speak Sesotho though they still consider themselves Sotho.⁷⁶ Since language is one of the most important primordial infrastructures in identities the adoption of Chishona and loss of Sesotho by the Basotho provides quite an interesting scenario in the identity of the BaSotho in Gutu. As Bhabha argues there is need to ‘think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.’⁷⁷ By the 1940s it was clear that the BaSotho community had greatly mixed with the Shona people and had adopted their language and other customs that they could best be described as having been a hybrid community. In the end, Bethel School could no longer be purely viewed as a ‘BaSotho school’ solely meant to teach Sotho children their ‘culture and customs.’

As a result of the highlighted problems, by 1956 Bethel School was closed and it was never reopened again.⁷⁸ One other reason for the closure of the school was the fact that the Roman Catholic Church had opened up Masema School close to Bethel School. This school charged very low school fees and offered Standard Four, which was no longer being offered at Bethel.⁷⁹ Therefore, it made more sense even among the BaSotho people themselves to send their children to Masema School. Moreover, Tirizi School was opened close to the Dewure Purchase Areas and Dewende School was also opened in the Purchase Areas. This meant that people could now send their children to those schools closest to them rather than making them travel long distances to Bethel School.⁸⁰ The problems at Bethel School had pushed more and more pupils to transfer to other schools.

Furthermore, the BaSotho people also began to move away from their isolationist tendencies. Fredrick Komo recalls that whilst in the early years of their settlement in Gutu the BaSotho people insisted on having their children learn two languages only, that

is, English and Sesotho, from the 1950s they began to see the need for their children to also learn local languages to help them interact better with other societies. As a result, they began to send their children to mission schools and other schools where they could learn other languages such as Chishona and Sindebele.⁸¹ Other people who were working in towns and mines also took their children there and they enrolled at schools there. Junerose Phosa argued that she was one of those people who transferred from Bethel School to other schools. She enrolled at Senga School in Gwelo (now Gweru) where her brother Antipas was teaching.⁸² Such a situation meant that Bethel School, which in the first place did not have many pupils, was left with pupils who were too few for the sustenance of the school leading to its closure.

Though their school closed in the 1950s, this did not mean an end of education for the children of the BaSotho people in the Dewure Purchase Areas as they sent their children to other schools in the area such as Masema, Tirizi and Dewende. This also meant a closer co-operation between the BaSotho people and the Shona people who dominated the other schools in the area. The BaSotho began to send their children to these local schools, which nevertheless, were dominated by the Shona and did not offer Sesotho as a subject. This engendered a closer cooperation between the BaSotho and the Shona in the area of education, which can be argued to have led to the emergence of a hybrid community. At present the children of the BaSotho people learn at Masema, Dewende School, Shumba, and Tirizi Primary schools and to Dewende and Tirizi Secondary Schools. The headmaster of Tirizi Secondary School confirmed that quite a large number of BaSotho children learn at the school and added that though most of them can speak ChiShona fluently, the teachers have problems in spelling their Sesotho names and surnames.⁸³ Be that as it may, Tirizi and other local schools have provided the BaSotho people with education over the years.

Conclusion

From the foregoing exposition it can be concluded that by establishing and running Bethel Sschool, the BaSotho people played a significant role in the development of

education in the Dewure Purchase Areas. However, in spite of this, the ever-present conflicts between the BaSotho community and the D. R. C. greatly affected the smooth running of Bethel School. Moreover, the BaSotho people failed to constantly pay school fees, a situation, which was not healthy for the smooth running of the school. More often than not, a year began with a completely new staff complement at Bethel School due to the numerous problems at the school, among them the late payment of teachers' salaries. The problems at Bethel School later led to the removal of the coveted Standard Four from the school and later the closure of the school. Nevertheless, the closure of the school did not mean an end of education among the BaSotho people as they sent their children to other schools in the District and beyond. Bethel School, however, left an indelible mark on the history of the development of education in Gutu District in general and the Dewure Purchase Areas in particular. Though in many ways the school formed part of the broader BaSotho Identity in the Dewure Purchase Areas, with time the school became dominated by the Shona speaking people that it became a cultural melting pot rather than a site for the advancement of BaSotho culture and identity. In the end in as much as the BaSotho could argue that 'this is our school' in reference to Bethel School the Shona (VaKaranga) could also make similar claims with a measure of justification.

Endnotes

- ¹ S1044/9 Superintendent of Natives-Fort Victoria to Chief Jacob Molebaleng, Erichsthal, 23 February 1934.see also S1859 Rev. Dr. W. J. van der Merwe Makumbe Mission Buhera to Director of Native Lands (no date).
- ² Ibid
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ H. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, (Routledge, London, 1994), p.3.
- ⁵ Ibid, p.4.
- ⁶ Interview by Kumbirai Diza with Mr. and Mrs. Leboho, Dewure Purchase Areas, Gutu, 6 January 2005
- ⁷ S 1859 Rev. I. Botha (Pamushana Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 27 December 1934.
- ⁸ Interview by Kumbirai Diza with Mr. Phosa, Dewure Purchase Areas, Gutu, 11 January 2005
- ⁹ S 1859 N. C. Gutu to C. N. C., 23 September 1936. Jona Mmkola was one of the proposed teachers for Bethel School when it was being established.
- ¹⁰ Ibid
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² S924/G33/ App. 3 Superintendent of Natives (Fort Victoria) to C. N. C., 2 February 1933.
- ¹³ S 1859 Rev. W. F. van der Merwe (Alheit Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 29 June 1942, S1859 Rev. I. Botha (Pamushana Mission) to the N. C. Gutu, 27 December 1934.
- ¹⁴ S1859 N. C. Gutu to Rev. I. Botha (Pamushana Mission), 10 January 1935.
- ¹⁵ S1859 Rev. W. F. van der Merwe (Alheit Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 20 June 1942.
- ¹⁶ Interview by Kumbirai Diza with Mr. A. Phosa, Dewure Purchase Areas, 11 January 2005.
- ¹⁷ S1859 Rev. I. Botha (Pamushana Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 27 December 1934.
- ¹⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁹ Interview with F. Komo.
- ²⁰ S1859 Rev. W. F. van der Merwe (Alheit mission) to N. C. Gutu, 20 June 1942.
- ²¹ S1859 N. C. Gutu to C. N. C., 6 November 1935.
- ²² S1563 N. C. Annual Reports, Gutu 1935.
- ²³ Interview with F. Komo, Interview with A. Mphisa.
- ²⁴ F. Musoni, 'Educating the Ndebele in Buhera District, Zimbabwe; A Case for a Multicultural Approach?' Paper presented to the Curriculum and Arts Education Departmental Seminar, University of Zimbabwe, 31 March 2006, p.9
- ²⁵ B. Davis and W. Dopcke 'Survival and Accumulation in Gutu: Class Formation and the Rise of the sate in colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939' in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 14, No. 1, October 1987, p.85.
- ²⁶ Interview with Aletta Mphisa.
- ²⁷ Interview by Kumbirai Diza with Mr and Mrs Leboho, Dewure Purchase Areas, 6 January 2005.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ B. Davis and W. Dopcke 'Survival and Accumulation in Gutu: Class Formation and the Rise of the sate in colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939', p.79.
- ³⁰ Table adopted from S1859 C. E. Davis Circuit Inspector Gwelo, Report on Bethel School, 16 October 1937
- ³¹ A. V. Judges et al 'Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission 196' Presented to the Legislative Assembly 1963, Rhodesia, 27 June 1963, p.69.
- ³² S1859 A. R. Mather Circuit Inspector Gwelo to Rev. A. A. Louw Pamushana Mission, 7 October 1942.
- ³³ Interview with A. Mphisa.
- ³⁴ S1859 A. R. Mather Circuit Inspector Gwelo, to the N. C. Gutu, 5 August 1940.
- ³⁵ Ibid
- ³⁶ M. O. West The rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965 (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 2002), p.41
- ³⁷ A. V. Judges et al 'Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission 196' Presented to the Legislative Assembly 1963, Rhodesia, 27 June 1963., p.50
- ³⁸ Ibid.

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- ³⁹ M. O. West The rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965, p.40.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with A. Mphisa.
- ⁴¹ B. Davis and W. Dopcke 'Survival and Accumulation in Gutu: Class Formation and the Rise of the state in colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939', p.79.
- ⁴² S1859 N. C. Gutu to C. N. C., 7th March 1938.
- ⁴³ S1859 C. E. Davis Circuit Inspector Gwelo, Report on Bethel Scholl, Date of Visit, 16 October 1937.
- ⁴⁴ S1859 Malachi Phosa (Morgenster Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 11 October 1936.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with A. Mphisa.
- ⁴⁶ S1859 A. R. Mather Circuit Inspector, Gwelo, to N. C. Gutu, 5 august 1940.
- ⁴⁷ Interview with A. Mphisa.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid
- ⁴⁹ B. Davis and W. Dopcke 'Survival and Accumulation in Gutu: Class Formation and the Rise of the state in colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939', p.78.
- ⁵⁰ S1859 C. E. Davis Circuit Inspector Gwelo, Report on Bethel Kraal School Gutu District, 16 October 1937.
- ⁵¹ S1859 Bethel School Committee to N. C. Gutu, 19 June 1950.
- ⁵² Ibid
- ⁵³ S1859 Constitution of Bethel School, 19 June 1950.
- ⁵⁴ S 1859 Schools 1933-1949 Basuto Settlement, Gutu, N. C. Gutu to C. N. C., 6 November 1935.
- ⁵⁵ S 1859 Rev. A. A. Louw Jr Pamushana Mission, to N. C. Gutu, 9th September 1946.
- ⁵⁶ S 1859 A. R. Mather Circuit Inspector Gwelo to Rev. A. A. Louw (Pamushana Mission), 7th October 1942.
- ⁵⁷ S 1859 Rev. A. A. Louw (Pamushana Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 14th December 1942.
- ⁵⁸ S 1859 N. C. Gutu to Rev. A. A. Louw Jr (Pamushana Mission), 22 December 1942.
- ⁵⁹ S1859 Rev. a. A. Louw Pamushana Mission to N. C. Gutu, 14 December 1942.
- ⁶⁰ S 1859 N. C. Gutu to Rev. A. A. Louw Jr (Pamushana Mission), 13th September 1946.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² S 1859 N. C. Gutu to the Circuit Inspector Gwelo, 22 April 1943.
- ⁶³ S1859 N. C. Gutu to Circuit Inspector. Gwelo, 22 April 1943., Interview with P. Molebaleng (She was the one who reported the case of the sexual abuse of Rhoda Tawu.
- ⁶⁴ Interview with F. Komo.
- ⁶⁵ S1859 N. C. Gutu to Circuit Inspector Gwelo, 22 April 1943.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Interview with F. Komo.
- ⁶⁸ Interview with Aletta Mphisa.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid
- ⁷⁰ S 1859 Rev. A. A. Louw Jr (Pamushana Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 14 December 1942.
- ⁷¹ S 1859 A. R. Mather Circuit Inspector Gwelo to Rev. A. A. Louw Jr Pamushana Mission, 7th October 1942.
- ⁷² S 1859 Rev. W. F. van der Merwe (Alheit Mission) to N. C. Gutu, 22 September 1942.
- ⁷³ S2797/4663 Minutes of Dewure Division Native Council Meeting, 18 March 1948.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid
- ⁷⁵ see H. Bhabha The Location of Culture, (Routledge, London, 1994)
- ⁷⁶ In fact all of the BaSotho informants I interviewed in the course of my field work spoke fluent Chishona and admitted that only the elderly had some scanty knowledge of the language whilst the younger generation knew virtually nothing.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, p.1
- ⁷⁸ Interview with A. Mphisa, Interview with F. Komo.
- ⁷⁹ Interview with A. Mphisa, Interview with R. Mphisa.
- ⁸⁰ S2929/8/3 Delineating Reports Gutu, Report of Dewure N. P. A., By C. J. K. Latham, 19 February 1964.
- ⁸¹ Interview with F. Komo.
- ⁸² Interview with Junerose Phosa.
- ⁸³ Personal Communication with Mr. S. Mapwanyire, Headmaster Tirizi Secondary School, Gutu District 28 December 2005.

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