

Phyllis Ntantala: An African Woman's Leadership in the Struggle against a Pan-Eurocentric Education

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Abstract

The years 2021 and 2022 marked a significant period in the Pan-African struggle against the Pan-Eurocentric academy's destruction of African dignity and freedom. 2021 marked the 70th anniversary of the Eiselen Commission's report on Bantu Education. 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of the publication of Phyllis Ntantala's autobiographical work, *A Life's Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala*. Ntantala's book documents African teachers' and parents' resistance to Bantu Education, which culminated in some African teachers being fired for refusing to "poison the minds" of African children. While the "heroism" of resistance to Bantu Education is well-recorded and celebrated, the "sheroism" of the struggle against Bantu Education is less illuminated and appreciated. This article, by examining Ntantala's intellectual legacy in African people's struggles for justice—including justice in education in South Africa, as well as in Europe and the United States of America—celebrates African sheroes' institutional leadership in the struggles associated with education in politics and politics in education. A critical examination of Ntantala's leadership against Bantu Education gives recognition to an important, yet often overlooked, aspect in decolonisation and re-Africanisation struggles in education, namely, that colonialism did not only express itself through racism, but also sexism.

Keywords: colonial; education; Eurocentric; decolonisation; racism; sexism



Education as Change
<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/EAC>
 Volume 26 | 2022 | #11308 | 19 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/11308>
 ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)
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Background and Introduction

In 1949, the apartheid government, headed by the National Party (NP), set up the Eiselen Commission to produce a blueprint for “Education for Natives as a Separate Race” (Lodge 1985, 116). The 1951 Commission’s report recommended that “Bantu culture”, and increased use of African languages, should constitute Bantu Education (116). This recommendation, Giliomee (2019, 129) suggests, was motivated by Werner Eiselen’s “great respect for the culture of blacks and genuine concern about the preservation of Bantu languages”.

To the contrary, the Afrikaners were removing African children from the influence of the English language taught in English missionary schools, which “stressed Westernisation and the central importance of a good command of the English language” (43). This became clear, later, as the NP regime abandoned its pretence when, in 1974, South Africa’s Department of Education “instructed schools in Soweto and other townships in the Southern Transvaal to teach mathematics and social studies through the medium of Afrikaans in Standard 5 and upwards, starting in 1975” (131). Resistance to this draconian practice resulted in the Soweto uprisings and shootings on 16 June 1976 (Jordan 1994). This pretence found further expression when the NP introduced the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, which created separate universities for Africans along ethnic languages (Karis and Gerhart 2013b, 91; Manganyi 2016, 15; Tabata 1980, 46). In these institutions, on the one hand, “[n]early all faculty members were white, with a heavy preponderance of Afrikaners”, while on the other hand, “[b]lack faculty members were excluded from university policy-making councils, paid on lower salary scales, and promoted at a slower rate than whites” (Karis and Gerhart 2013b, 92). Access to these campuses was “tightly monitored to exclude unwanted influence and careful screening sought to ensure that curricula, library holdings, and campus cultural life were cleansed of corrupting intellectual materials” (92).

Giliomee (2019, 126) notes that “[d]espite its flaws, Bantu Education signalled the introduction of a modern system of mass primary education for blacks”, further observing that for 20 years after its introduction, the new system encountered “little black opposition, with black parents failing to heed the ANC’s call for school boycotts”. Contrary to Giliomee’s suggestion that opposition to Bantu Education “only surfaced in the mid-1970s after the policy had been adapted to enable large numbers of black children to advance to much higher standards than was possible in the preceding decades” (126), there was no “little black opposition” to Bantu Education, but a vigorous widespread resistance. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was “vigorously opposed in the South African press, various public forums and by some white and many black opposition politicians” (Lodge 1985, 114). In fact, opposition to Bantu Education was not limited to South Africa—there was a persistent condemnation in countries overseas as well (Benson 1985, 171). This is because Bantu Education was viewed as “designed with only one purpose in view, namely, to deprive the most vulnerable sector

of the population—the African child of obtaining a modern, free, and enlightened education” (Gool 1966, 1).

The earliest concerted resistance to Bantu Education came from teachers, particularly the Cape African Teachers’ Association (CATA) and the Transvaal African Teachers’ Association (TATA) (Lodge 1985, 117–18). In these struggles, one of the leaders, Phyllis Ntantala, a political activist and a member of CATA, is recognised as being among women leaders who were responsible for producing, “if not a golden age for Cape Town [...], then certainly an age that was pregnant with possibility” (Soudien 2019, 14). Ntantala (Jordan 1984, 3; Ntantala 1992, 230–32) held very strong views regarding (a) the need for particular recognition and appreciation of women’s role in the liberation struggle, (b) women’s leadership role in political struggles, in general, and (c) women’s leadership role in education struggles, in particular.

In the struggle against oppression, Ntantala (Jordan 1984, 3) argued that women had to be a “central pillar” and that “unless the freedom to be achieved will in turn grant them equality and human dignity”, they had “no cause to commit themselves totally to the liberation struggle”. Ntantala (1973a) was very sensitive to women’s role in the struggle, arguing that it is one of the ironies of history that the most pervasive and total expression of oppression, the repression of women, has been, for the most part, neglected by scholars and academicians. This marginalisation of women, she argued, could, in part, be explained by the “male chauvinism” that pervaded Western scholarship and, in part, by the “total neglect, until recently of the history of the oppressed” (1973a, 1). This male chauvinism, however, was not confined to Western academicians. Ntantala (Jordan 1984, 3) pointed out that the oppression of women had been, to a large extent, “neglected by scholars within the ranks of the [liberation] movement”, with male chauvinism being the “bane of colonial liberation movements”. This article is an expression of faithfulness to Ntantala’s revolutionary commitment to the liberation of women from all forms of oppression, including capitalism and sexism (Ntantala 1973b). In celebrating Ntantala as a thought leader/intellectual, I begin by examining the circumstances that gave birth to her political consciousness. I then give attention to her confrontation of Eurocentric and colonial education, in general, and Bantu Education, in particular. That is followed by concluding remarks.

Ntantala’s Early Political Awakenings

Phyllis Ntantala was born in Gqubeni, along the bends of the Nqabarha River in what is now known as the Eastern Cape (Ntantala 1992, vii). Her political awakenings went through at least three phases. The first was during her days as a high school student at Healdtown (ix). The second was when she went to Kroonstad as a teacher where her anger was “roused” by her students “whose hopes and ambitions seemed to end in a cul-de-sac”, leading her to “ask ‘why’ and seek answers to the problems of poverty that thwarted the ambitions of such good students” (x). The third phase was when she went to live in Cape Town where she learnt that capitalism, “a system of exploitation that benefited only a few and saw the rest of mankind as units of labour that could be

exploited for the benefit of those few who held economic power” (x), was responsible for human misery, leading her to conclude that “not until this system of exploitation of Man by Man [sic] had been smashed and disbanded could there be freedom in the world” (x). Thus, she decided to join the liberation struggle in order to create “a new world, a humane world of free, liberated people” (x).

At Fort Hare, together with other students, Ntantala (1992, 116) questioned some of the content taught, and concluded that “South African history is a lie” (116). While they did “not have all the facts to prove” their statement, they, somehow, “knew that South African history was like the story of an animal hunt that glorified only the actions of the hunters and said nothing or very little about the heroism and strategies of the hunted” (116). Her earlier history lessons from her father taught her that “the African people had been cheated and robbed” (116).

It was while practising teaching in Kroonstad that things began to be clear, as she witnessed “poverty, poverty, poverty” all around, especially among the students she was teaching (Ntantala 1992, 84). This community was so poverty-stricken that even though school fees were low, few could afford them (85). Ntantala recalls that she had “yet to see children as hungry for education as those African students”, many of whom came from “illiterate and semi-illiterate homes, where the parents did not even read a newspaper, let alone a book” (85). The students’ attitude to their education created mutual love between Ntantala and them (87). To each of them, she was “My teacher” instead of “Our teacher”. An isiXhosa-speaking African from the Eastern Cape, Ntantala embraced and drew them even closer to her by learning and speaking their language, Southern Sotho, a move that had an electrifying effect on the students (87).

As Ntantala (1992, 116) looked at her class of 40–45 students, “knowing that of these only about ten could say for certain that they would go beyond what our school gave”, she often asked herself “Why? But why?”. She was sensitive to her pupils’ needs and situation because she had been brought up “in a home where the destitute always came for help” (116). While the students she had studied with in educational institutions such as Healdtown, Lovedale and Fort Hare had known from primary school their educational destiny, most of her students in Kroonstad “did not see any future for themselves beyond their school. They remained in school because it was a good place, better than life in the location” (116). She instinctively realised that “something was wrong somewhere”, but what it was, she “had not figured out” (116). She established what it was in 1942, after listening to a white lawyer, Hyman Basner, addressing the Free State African community in a public meeting where he put himself forward to be their parliamentary representative since Africans, in apartheid South Africa then, were denied this right (17–18). Basner told them of the injustice of Africans’ and their children’s poverty, considering that it was their labour that built South Africa’s economy (118). Basner asked the community to vote for him so that he could have the mandate to go around the farms, factories and mines “telling the African people”, his “constituency, that they and they alone can right the wrong against them; that united as

a body of workers, the creators of the wealth of South Africa, they can grind to a halt the economic machinery of South Africa, that they can bring down the whole system” (118). It was at this meeting that Ntantala (120– 21) found some answers she was looking for, and she resolved to “involve myself in the struggle of my people”.

In the then Orange Free State province, where teachers, just like in the then Transvaal province, were not treated as professionals, Basner’s candidacy “awakened” the teachers and mobilised them (Ntantala 1992, 119). This awakening resulted in the Orange Free State African Teachers’ Association (OFSATA) and TATA starting to look “critically at their contracts and their conditions of service” (120). Teachers in the Orange Free State, including some farm teachers, “at great risk to their lives and jobs” (120), were organised to join OFSATA, with the result that in March 1943, teachers in Bloemfontein “staged one of the biggest demonstrations ever held in the city by Africans, protesting against the new service contract that had just been drawn up” (120). Ntantala “marched with the teachers to the offices of the Secretary of education” (120). When the teachers arrived, the Secretary of Education’s assistant came out with a new service contract, “trying to tell the teachers that this was the best ever in the whole country”, whereupon “Joey Jacobs grabbed it out of his hand, tore it to pieces and threw the pieces into his face” (120).

In August 1944, Ntantala’s husband, A.C. Jordan, was offered a lecturing post at Fort Hare university, resulting in her and her children relocating from Kroonstad to Alice (Ntantala 1992, 122). The opportunity to go to Fort Hare, where both Ntantala and Jordan had been students before, was an exciting moment (122). Her declarations that she was going back, “permanently”, to “our Fort Hare”, “an intellectual centre”, reveal her unmistakable affinity with the institution, and high levels of enthusiasm and expectations about her future at the institution (122). However, soon after their arrival at Fort Hare, her enthusiasm was dampened when she saw Fort Hare as a little island where the inhabitants lived a life of their own, “completely unaware of what was going on in the world around them” (122).

While Fort Hare had a “multiracial” staff, it was predominantly a white staff (Ntantala 1992, 122). Disappointed, Ntantala observes that the few Africans who taught at Fort Hare “were the most frightened people” she ever had the “misfortune to meet” (122). While African lecturers “were not happy about the discrimination there, [...] they spoke of it in whispers, for fear of losing their jobs” (122). With a sense of disgust and contempt, Ntantala notes that the “whole atmosphere stank” (123). The conversations among both the academics and the students—with some exceptions—were about the weather, sports, movies, “the war (without any depth) [...] all the things that intellectuals in their ivory towers talk about” (122). This sense of frustration on Ntantala’s part was informed by the fact that life in the Orange Free State had brought home “the disabilities of the African people”, leading to her and Jordan making the choice to be “part of that section of our people that was struggling for liberation” (124).

A practical expression of this choice was joining the ANC and OFSATA, of which Jordan was the president (124).

Active resistance to combining politics with education was expressed by Fort Hare lecturers, both black and white.

Fort Hare Lecturers' Resistance to Mixing Education with Politics

This resistance emerged when, in May 1945, Jordan gave a public lecture on "The Ethics of War of the Bantu" (Ntantala 1992, 124). Focusing on the clashes between Africans and European colonial intruders, Jordan "interpreted each episode from the point of view of the Africans—the lions, this time, telling their own story", an act which made "an indelible impression on the students" (124). The students were excited because here was "an African who was not afraid to interpret African history as it should be" (124). Jordan had taken a conscious position to present an African history seldom found in books written by historians of the conquerors (107). While, on the one hand, the students were "excited", on the other hand, some of Jordan's fellow African colleagues were "embarrassed" and, consequently, "shunned" him and his wife, meeting them only when necessary (124–25). The Fort Hare "old guard, the white liberals were shocked" (124). As Ntantala was battling with racial politics, she became conscious that colonialism did not only impose racism, but sexism as well.

Ntantala Confronted by, and Confronting, Patriarchy

It was not until she went to boarding school and university that Ntantala was confronted by sexism (Jordan 1991). In this new environment teachers demonstrated an attitude that showed they believed that boys were mentally superior to girls, an attitude that boys happily embraced. At Fort Hare university, which Ntantala referred to as that "cradle of black elitism and male chauvinism in South Africa" (Jordan 1991, 2), men condescended to women. But it was her years of teaching in the Free State that "sealed it all" for Ntantala (2). She was able to confront sexism head on because, fortunately for her, her father had told her and her sisters before they went to boarding school that they should "never take second place to anybody, including men" (1), because they were equals to everyone, black and white. It is against this background that "[i]n these days of women's liberation" (Ntantala 1992, 14), Ntantala told those who cared to listen that she was "a charter member of that organisation" and that it was her father who "inducted" her into it, meaning that she regarded her father as the first feminist, let alone first male feminist, she got to know (14). The foregoing gives an indication that Ntantala identified with feminism, an intellectual outlook she described as a "refusal to accept being defined by others" (Jordan 1991, 7). The "very act of refusal" (Jordan 1984, 15), Ntantala argued, was a reclamation of humanity denied by oppression:

The wholeness Black women seek can be attained only by our throwing off the tattered garments of submissiveness and obedience to men. Only by asserting our rights as equal

human beings will Black womanhood be able to make her own special contribution to the reclamation of our common humanity. (Jordan 1984, 15)

Ntantala held the view that “feminism [is] for both men and women” (Jordan 1991, 8) and that “the women’s fight for equality [...] is a fight for all of us and through it the whole mankind will be liberated” (Ntantala 1973a, 11). Further, Ntantala (Jordan 1991, 7) advanced the view that feminism should begin at “home with the husband who must learn to accept that the old customs and traditions are now gone, never to come back”. Ntantala was aware that the “act of refusal” would be a cause of discomfort in communities confronted with new ideas, but she insisted that it “is absolutely impermissible [to] censor or outlaw radical ideas merely because they cause some of us discomfort” (Jordan 1984, 15). In calling out to women to wage their feminist struggles in their households, Ntantala led from the front.

When European missionaries came to the African continent, not only did they seek to displace African spirituality and replace it with Christianity, but they also imposed Christian denominations—the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, the Dutch Reformed Church—that characterised European Christianity. This divisive approach was to be felt by Ntantala and Jordan early in their marriage. With Ntantala belonging to the Presbyterian Church, and Jordan belonging to the Anglican Church, without discussing this aspect of their lives, it was “assumed [...] that as I was going to drop my name and assume his[;] this was going to be the case even as regards church” (Ntantala 1992, 110–11). While Ntantala does not raise this issue, it must be pointed out that changing a woman’s name and adopting that of the husband is not an African tradition, but one practised by Africans as a result of European colonialism’s imposition (Diop 1989, 40).

What Ntantala (1992, 110) “resented” as well as “the arrogance of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches maintaining that they and they alone were the true churches and whoever comes to them must be re-admitted”. Ntantala conveyed her reservations about this arrogance to her husband, who “could not conceive of his wife not being a member of his church” and who was, consequently, “hurt” (Ntantala 1992, 110–11). After intense debates around this issue between Ntantala and Jordan, the latter even calling his priest to intervene, Ntantala (1992, 111) decided on a compromise: she would accept being confirmed as an Anglican Church member but without attending classes, an issue on which she was “not prepared to budge” (111).

Using or not using her maiden name appears to have been an issue that confronted Ntantala. While, on the one hand, Ntantala’s (1992) autobiography is signed with her maiden surname, some of her papers (Ntantala 1973a; 1973b), on the other hand, are written under her maiden surname with her husband’s surname, Jordan, put in brackets. In other papers (Jordan 1994; 1996), she uses her husband’s surname.

While in Alice, Ntantala (1992, 125–26) secured a position of librarianship at Lovedale High School, a move that sent shockwaves among the wives of teachers both at Lovedale and at Fort Hare. This was the case because at the time in those environments, teachers' and other professionals' wives did not go out to work—they stayed at home, looking after their homes, husbands and children, homemaking being regarded as a “respected calling” (126). Directly and indirectly, some women expressed displeasure that Ntantala left a three-month-old baby at home (126). It later emerged, though, that there were other women who wanted to work as well but did not have the courage to challenge the norm (126). So, when Ntantala initiated the practice, they followed her lead.

Her other source of inspiration was her “red-blanket aunts back home, wives of men of means” (Ntantala 1992, 114). The reference to “red-blanket aunts” refers to women in the rural areas who resisted the imposition of European dress codes, which, in order to be “accepted as Christians, the Africans had to wear [... and] which they could only get from the traders” (4). Not only did this attitude, on the part of European colonialists, undermine African spirituality, but it also disempowered Africans economically (4). Whenever the red-blanket aunts went out to earn money, “it was known by their husbands that such earnings were for their personal use, to buy themselves beads and other ornaments they wanted. Their husbands had no say in such things” (114). Having observed her red-blanket aunts' relationships with their husbands, Ntantala decided early in her married life with Jordan that she “would always work, so as to have my own account and use my money to buy the things I wanted, and let him pay the house bills. I never asked him for permission to do that. I just told him this was how I was going to do it” (114).

When Ntantala's colleague, Ronnie Segal, invited her to write an article, “a story of an African woman”, for *Africa South*, he asked her to pen it in her maiden name (Ntantala 1992, 164). When she wrote for *Africa South*, Ntantala took a conscious decision to write about African women about whom nothing was heard, “whose story [had] never been told” (164). Reflecting on her consciously pro-African women stance, Ntantala was “glad” that she had “opened the windows on these women. Before that no one had thought their story was worth telling” (167). Other articles that she wrote for the *Africa South* were included in the series “An Abyss of Bantu Education”. As a result of her deliberately pro-African women stance, through her autobiography, we now know about brave African women's names such as Annie Silinga, “a veteran fighter and opponent of every anti-African law” (167). Another daring woman, who was vociferous in parents' meetings discussing Bantu Education, was Winnie Siqwana (161). In these struggles, women played leading and prominent roles informed by African cultural perspectives, which taught that “every mother is every child's mother” (160). In line with the foregoing observation, Ntantala notes that in traditional African cultures women were given recognition as the founts of life, pointing out that the “notion of unequivocal love/kindness is expressed, in Nguni, as ububele—literally, female-breastedness, which is evocative of a mother fondling a nursing child” (Jordan 1984, 6).

It is Ntantala's political consciousness, the idea of the African mother, that led her to confront Bantu Education, which was assailing African children.

Bantu Education: A Eurocentric Political Instrument of Oppression

The history of colonial education for Africans demonstrates a number of issues regarding the relationship between education and politics. Firstly, in a deliberate move to use education as a political instrument of oppression, a leader of the NP in the then Transvaal, J.G. Strijdom, warned the NP's leader, D.F. Malan, in 1946, that "it would be impossible to maintain racial discrimination if the level of black education was steadily improved" (Giliomee 2019, 125). Secondly, deliberate formulation of education, specifically for African children, goes back as far as 1903 and 1905, driven by South African Native Commissions (Reilly 2016, 2). Thirdly, designing education for African children as a political tool of subjugation was a concerted effort by European colonialists, whether in Africa, Europe or in the United States of America (USA) (6). Noting the "philosophical commonalities of educational policies in British-ruled African states" (6), Reilly points out that "many British colonial administrators worked throughout the Empire in places like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, then-Rhodesia and South Africa, as well as West Africa, the Caribbean and India" (6), where, "[i]n some cases, these administrators met and discussed, debated and shared their experiences in an effort to formulate basic guidelines for education policy throughout the British Empire" (5–6). In this regard, personal relationships between US policymakers and those who were in charge of native colonies in Africa, including South Africa, were established in order to formulate colonial education policies jointly (6). These concerted efforts were aimed at advancing, through education, a pan-Eurocentric project, that is, centring Europe and its interests, while marginalising everyone else's interests (wa Thiong'o 1986, 93). Fourthly, Africans "deeply distrusted the Bantu Education Act of 1953, fearing that Bantu Education would be of an inferior type, designed to condition Africans to accept subservience" (Karis and Gerhart 2013a, 19). This can be fully appreciated when taking into consideration the point made by Verwoerd that Bantu Education had to stand "with both feet in the Reserves and have its roots in the spirit of the Bantu society", there being no place for the African child "in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour" (Tabata 1980, 38). This attitude was consistent with the NP government's policy known as the Bantustan homeland system, aimed at confining Africans to certain so-called homeland states, thus denying Africans citizenship in their own country (Tabata 1980, 39).

Among Afrikaners' many manifestations of using education as a *political tool* of preserving their identity, and destroying the Africans', was the establishment of Stellenbosch University, "an institution that was unmistakably Afrikaans" (Giliomee 2016, 38). Stellenbosch University's political identity can best be understood if its historical background is taken into cognisance. Stellenbosch University was established amidst "a language struggle [...] in higher education" (Giliomee 2003, 363). In South

Africa, in the early 20th century, except for the college at Potchefstroom, “all university colleges in South Africa used English as the medium of instruction” (363).

In addition to this, there was a plan advanced by Cecil John Rhodes for “a single university using English as the medium of instruction” (363). The objective was to bring the Afrikaners and the English together and, “thereby, to strengthen imperial ties” (363). Of great significance is that “[t]wo mining magnates, Julius Wernher and Otto Beit, offered a substantial grant”, insisting on English as the medium of instruction in order to attract the best academic talent from Britain (363). At Stellenbosch, a town constituted by a large community of Afrikaners, “a stiff opposition built up against this proposal” (363). It was in Stellenbosch where Victoria College existed, which had, for many years, been “intimately connected with the spiritual, moral and national life of the Dutch-speaking section of the people” (363). Early in 1913, a committee of three, which included D.F. Malan, who in 1948 became South Africa’s Prime Minister on the ticket of apartheid spearheading the NP, penned a memorandum that described the proposed English university as “an institution artificially called into being for political and other reasons” (363). The Stellenbosch Afrikaner community wanted Victoria College to maintain its Afrikaner identity because it had become an emblem of an “own, vigorous, growing national life for the Afrikaners seeking to express itself. ... It stands for an idea” (363). Subsequent to a meeting between a Victoria College delegation and the government of the day, “the cabinet withdrew its support for a single teaching university” (364). However, the plan for a university in Cape Town would go ahead, while the government insisted that “Victoria College had to raise £100 000 publicly before it would agree to a university in Stellenbosch” (364). Significantly, in 1915, a “Stellenbosch businessman and politician”, Janie Marais, left an amount of £100 000, not without stipulating that “Dutch or Afrikaans had to occupy no lesser place than English at the institution” (Giliomee 2003, 364; see also Giliomee 2016, 38). In line with Marais’s stipulation, by 1930, “virtually no lectures were given in English”, and, in line with being a university with “an idea”, between 1919 and 1978, “all the prime ministers were US [University of Stellenbosch] alumni” (Giliomee 2016, 37; see also Giliomee 2003, 364).

Confronted by the aggressive invasion of Bantu Education, African teachers took a stand against this system led by the Cape African Teachers’ Association (CATA) and the Transvaal African Teachers Association (TATA).

African Teachers’ Mobilisation against Bantu Education

Before delving into this discourse, it needs to be pointed out that the Cape Province referred, before the 1994 dispensation, to what today is known as the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape. Transvaal referred to what today is the Gauteng province.

Formed in 1925, CATA was as an exclusively African organisation, a breakaway from the “multiracial” South African Teachers’ Association (SATA) (Ntantala 1992, 145). African teachers within SATA felt that they were “treated as a ‘kitchen’ department, in

that all matters pertaining to them were never given serious consideration by the organisation and were always tabled last on the agenda” (145). While this break was, in Ntantala’s view, a “progressive step” (145), she was unhappy with how CATA became “elitist, drawing its membership only from the teachers in the African Ivy League schools, the big cities and a few friends of these elite in the rural areas” (145). In the 1930s, CATA “degenerated into a social club for the elite, and the important items on the body’s agenda became receptions and tennis matches” (145–46). In the 1940s, there was improvement in that new members, “who saw the teachers as part and parcel of the community in which they lived”, joined (146). But even then, there were some who insisted that CATA was a “professional” and not a “political” organisation (146). Following CATA’s annual conference held in Port Elizabeth in 1945, some members complained that a few fellow members “were trying to bring politics into the organisation” by having “the nerve to ask conference to allow I.B. Tabata, an avowed politician from Cape Town, to address them” (125). That request was refused because the teachers “knew that Tabata would speak nothing but politics” (125). The majority still insisted that “politics was something outside their calling as teachers and therefore outside their organisation. They were professionals and wanted to keep CATA that way” (146).

In 1946, CATA’s membership accepted, after discussions, that African teachers had to take the responsibility of being “leaders of thought in the community” (Ntantala 1992, 147). The organisation “called on the African teachers to come home, home to the African community where they belonged”, further pointing out that the “political fight of the African people was their fight” (147). This means that the notion of “thought leadership” was part of the political vocabulary of CATA even before the NP government set up the Eiselen Commission in 1949. CATA demonstrated revolutionary action by sharing “thought leadership” with township women and men as opposed to the false notion that thought leadership is a preserve and privilege of certificated people. Those African teachers took thought leadership to where it belonged—the African masses—as a tool of liberation: simplifying issues so as to *include* and *empower* the masses, instead of complicating issues so as to *exclude* and *disempower* them. This intellectual engagement with the African masses would later be conceptualised and practised by the revolutionary historian and academic, Walter Rodney (2019, 63), as “The Groundings with My Brothers”, a concept he gave to the title of his book published for the first time in 1969.

It was in the midst of this elevated political consciousness of CATA that the Eiselen Commission emerged. While CATA decided not to appear before the Commission, the organisation drew up a memorandum, which it submitted to the Commission:

We repeat that the fundamental guiding principle in education should be to equip every individual to take his place in society according to his capabilities and make his contribution to it as a fully responsible citizen. All the inhabitants of the Union of South Africa should receive the same facilities for education. All the children, irrespective of

race, colour or creed, should be regarded as its future citizens. Knowledge is the heritage of Mankind. (Ntantala 1992, 148)

In 1950, CATA, together with the All-African Convention (AAC), confronted the South African government by challenging new provincial legislations, which sought to impose a quota system on schools in order to ease overcrowding, a move that threatened to exclude 30 000 pupils in the Eastern Cape (Lodge 1985, 118). When, in 1951, the Eiselen Commission published its recommendations, CATA took it upon itself to mobilise parents to oppose Bantu Education (Ntantala 1992, 153). In a meeting that was held jointly by CATA and parents, in 1953, at Langa Hall in Cape Town, the following resolutions were made (156–57):

- That children shall continue attending school, the logic being that even Bantu Education was better than no education at all;
- That teachers remain in their posts, teaching children what was right as opposed to the “poison” that Bantu Education would require them to administer to African children;
- That, as the parents’ fight, in the fight against Bantu Education parents “will refuse to co-operate and collaborate with the government in the elections of school boards and school committees to run the Bantu Education schools”.
- That all quislings and those collaborating with the apartheid government be ostracised in the African communities.

The resolution to continue sending children to school, even though Bantu Education was referred to as “poison”, and the singling out of collaborators and quislings were made against the ANC’s recommendations of withdrawing children from schools (Ntantala 1992, 155). I will address the ANC’s approach later, since Ntantala referred to it.

When CATA held a conference at the end of 1953, it resolved to adopt the above resolutions of the Parent-Teacher Organisation of the Western Cape (Ntantala 1992, 158). For “three full years, 1955 through to 1957, the authorities tried without success to get the people to elect school board and school committee members” (159). Alarmed by CATA’s effectiveness, the South African government reacted by withdrawing recognition from CATA, bestowing it on the newly established Cape African Teachers’ Union (CATU), which was formed with the support of the apartheid government in order to counter CATA (Lodge 1985, 119; Ntantala 1992, 153). In what Tabata (1980, 43) refers to as “a reign of terror [...] let loose on [...] teachers”, the apartheid government “saw to it that the executive members of the Cape African Teachers’ Association [...] were thrown out of the profession” and “pursued them relentlessly wherever they tried to get any other employment”.

At CATA’s conference in 1953, young people requested Ntantala (1992, 159) to address the gathering so as to “give courage to the other women in the conference”. Driven by

the conviction that the “fight against Bantu Education was a fight for the mothers of the nation” and that if they “stood firm” they could defeat its ends, Ntantala obliged (159). The foregoing observations give a clear indication that African women participated in the struggles against Bantu Education not simply as African parents, but as African mothers.

In 1951, the same year that the Eiselen Commission’s report was released, TATA’s leaders at Orlando High School “began to campaign quite effectively along the Reef, organising meetings of teachers and parents to explain and condemn the findings of the Eiselen Commission” (Lodge 1985, 120). As if in anticipation of Giliomee’s later analysis, Lodge points out that the “success of the [...] boycott [...] is testimony to their effectiveness in arousing parental concern at the threatened changes” (120). TATA’s leaders, such as its president, Zephania Mothopeng, its secretary, Es’kia Mphahlele, and the editor of the association’s journal, Isaac Matlare, travelled, during school vacations, to various districts in the province “to crusade against the recommendations of the Eiselen Report” (Mphahlele 2004, 158).

These teachers who opposed Bantu Education could have chosen a safe route to protect their pockets, as some teachers did (Mphahlele 2004, 158). As Mphahlele observes, “[t]eachers had not long before gained a substantial rise in salaries, for what the rise was worth, and they couldn’t afford to risk their jobs by openly sympathising with us” (158). As Mphahlele further notes, Orlando High School’s principal, where Mphahlele taught, warned them that they had “children to feed”, and that it would not do them good “to be sacked”, further warning them that they were “heading for it” if they did not “stop talking politics” (158). For the principal, education and politics did not mix.

Failure on the part of TATA’s leaders to heed the principal’s warning did, indeed, lead to job losses. Notices of dismissal came and there were no reasons given, since conditions of employment “in the case of African teachers” were such that “a dismissed person [could not] contest the case in court, and the Education Department [was] not bound to give the reasons for its action” (Mphahlele 2004, 158–59). As if that was not enough, the notice stated that they were barred from teaching in any South African school (158).

The fired teachers soon learnt that the long arm of the apartheid system reached far beyond South Africa’s borders. When Mphahlele applied for a teaching post in the then Bechuanaland Protectorate, a British High Commission territory now known as Botswana, a reply came, informing him that “communication had reached them from the provincial department of education” that Mphahlele had been “dismissed for subversive activities” (Mphahlele 2004, 159). When Matlare went to teach in the then Swaziland Protectorate, now known as eSwatini, the Security Branch of South Africa “visited the school and a day after he was given summary notice by the school authorities to leave” (159). Ultimately, in 1953, both Mothopeng and Mphahlele found work in a high school in the then Basutoland Protectorate, now known as Lesotho (173).

Even then, the apartheid government made its presence felt in Lesotho (173). Mphahlele notes that a report about their “subversive activities” (173) reached Lesotho, though nothing came of it.

In addition to leaving their families behind, the salary offered in Lesotho was almost half of what African teachers were paid in South Africa—only a little higher (Mphahlele 2004, 173). Banned from teaching in South Africa, Mphahlele left the country to take up a teaching post in Nigeria (190). He took this decision after agonising debates with himself, torn by seeing the condition of African children under the Bantu Education system, and leaving, “instead of fighting it out side by side with those whose children are also being brought up in a police state” (190).

It must be pointed out, though, that TATA members’ journey was not a lonely one. The fired teachers at Orlando High School received support from students’ parents (Lodge 1985, 117). A parents’ protest committee organised a school boycott and established a “people’s school” for boycotters (117). As a consequence of the two-month-long school boycott, less than a third of the school’s students attended classes, meaning that the protest action “apparently gained wide local support” (117).

The narrative above demonstrates two significant issues in this discussion. Firstly, Giliomee’s claims that there was “little” black opposition to Bantu Education, and that African parents did not heed the ANC’s call to reject it, are false. Secondly, as Ntantala has observed, while some (not all) African parents rejected school boycotts as a method to resist Bantu Education, they also rejected Bantu Education. So, the difference was in the method of resistance, not the ANC’s notion of rejection of Bantu Education, as the discussion below demonstrates.

The ANC’s Resistance to Bantu Education

The ANC’s National Executive Committee (NEC) report for the organisation’s conference in 1954 observed that the “Bantu Education question” had been handed over to the ANC’s women and youth sections, “working together with other organisations whose purpose is to fight against this Devil’s piece of legislation” (Karis and Gerhart 2013a, 264). In this conference, the ANC resolved upon “total rejection of Verwoerd’s evil Act as the moral and spiritual enslavement of our children” (278). In order to “defeat” Bantu Education, the ANC resolved to call upon “African parents to make preparations to withdraw their children from primary schools indefinitely as from April 1, 1955” (278). The ANC further mandated its NEC “to keep a vigilant eye on the situation and issue directives from time to time that will give a disciplined lead [...] as well as to approach individual sympathetic societies for their support” (278). In line with this mandate, Z.K. Mathews, an ANC leader, informed the ANC’s Cape provincial conference in 1955 that the ANC had “adopted the total withdrawal of African children from Bantu Schools as a method of fighting against the Bantu Education Act” (284). The ANC was aware that it had “chosen the hard road”, and that for its campaign to succeed, it “depend[ed] on the co-operation of African parents”, and that there existed

a possibility it could “fail to persuade them that withdrawal is the right road to take” (284).

It has been noted that “[o]f all campaigns conducted by the ANC, the campaign against Bantu Education was the most poorly-planned, the most confused and, for Africans generally, the most frustrating” (Karis and Gerhart 2013a, 21). Leading the criticism against the ANC was the organisation itself. Having noted that for a sustained campaign against Bantu Education “an efficient organisation machinery [was] absolutely essential”, the ANC’s NEC report to the organisation’s 1955 conference noted that “because of organisational weakness, the fight against Bantu Education [had] fallen short [...] of expectations”, the reason being that the ANC’s provincial and local branches had “paid little, if any, attention to the Executive Report adopted by [the ANC’s 1954] Annual Conference” (346). In January 1955, instructions were issued to provinces to hold a series of meetings to assess the progress of the campaign and prepare reports (345). But when the NEC met in March 1955 to consider such reports, it reported that “no such reports were available and there was no evidence that the country would be ready for the withdrawal on the 1st April” (345). Consequently, the NEC decided to postpone the withdrawal to a later date (345).

The ANC’s experiences taught the organisation that it was “one thing to wish to see a complete national withdrawal of all children from Bantu Education schools [and] another to achieve this” (Karis and Gerhart 2013a, 347). The organisation realised that for a campaign such as the one against Bantu Education, preparedness was not an “overnight” act, but one that required “steady, even slow, patient, persistent work” (347). Impatience, the organisation noted, “would not bring victory nearer of its own” (347). The ANC realised that a deep-rooted system such as Bantu Education could not be “effectively attacked by means of sensational dramatic campaigns of short durations, except where such campaigns flow systematically from, and are part of a steady, deep-rooted and enduring campaign, planned and conducted on the clear understanding that it involves a long and bitter struggle” (346). Taking the foregoing into cognisance, the ANC frankly admitted that its branches “everywhere had not [...] put in this necessary spade work” (347). These challenges and failures notwithstanding, “mass withdrawals” of children did take place, and where this happened, the children were absorbed into cultural clubs that had been established for this purpose by the African Education Movement (AEM) (345). The AEM was established as a result of the ANC’s NEC decision to form a National Council of Education, consisting of representatives of all organisations opposed to Bantu Education (345). Admirable as these initiatives were, the ANC cautioned its members against believing that, without a budget behind it, the organisation could, in the immediate future, “substitute a national education system” (345). Believing that African parents had to be mobilised against Bantu Education, the organisation told its members that African parents should not be lied to and misled into believing that their children would be “given adequate alternative education” because “they will be disillusioned with the Congress if such education is not provided” (345). The ANC further told its members that African parents had to be mobilised on the basis

of awareness of the “sacrifice” involved in the struggle against Bantu Education so that they could act out of a “political conviction” (345).

As a result of her articles in *Africa South*, Ntantala’s name drew the attention of Florence Mahoney, an academic from the Ivory Coast, who, based at Atlanta’s Spelman College in the United States of America (Ntantala 1992, 231), invited Ntantala to Spelman College to run a seminar on the theme “African Women, South of the Sahara”, which she divided into three sections, namely (a) Women in society, (b) African women in society, (c) African women under colonialism (231). The invitation presented Ntantala with an opportunity to wage a pan-Afrocentric struggle against a pan-Eurocentric education.

Ntantala in Combat against Pan-Eurocentric Education

In this presentation to both the staff and students, Ntantala pointed out two significant issues. The first was that “though in traditional society women had no political rights, they were not totally dependent on men for they had property rights, and that even in the political sector there were checks and balances to see that women were not abused” (Ntantala 1992, 231). The second point was that while under the traditional African system women had property rights, under the colonial European system in Africa, African women were “stripped of every right they once had, and made to depend totally on the men” (231).

Ntantala’s lectures were significant because she disputed Eurocentric education’s false claims, both in Africa and in the Western world, which taught that Africa was the birthplace of patriarchy—the oppression and exploitation of women by men. Ntantala missed the point, though, in saying that in traditional African societies women had no political rights. As Rodney (2018, 92, 274) observes, African women were military commanders and, “[m]ore important, still, some women had real power in the political sense. [...] In a few instances, women were actually heads of state”. Ntantala (1992, 62–63) does not recognise this significant point even as she writes in her own autobiography that Queen Hoho, the wife of the Khoikhoi king, Hintsathi—after whom *amahlathi kaHoho* (forests of Hoho) were named—“commanded the Khoi forces after the death of her husband” and “carried on her guerrilla warfare against the Rharhabe”.

Ntantala’s pan-Afrocentric approach was not by default but by design. This is so because in 1969, addressing students at Loop College, an all-black college in Chicago in the United States of America, Ntantala (1992, 231) “drew parallels between the position of blacks in America and those in South Africa”, pointing out that African struggles in South Africa were “intricately bound up with the struggle of blacks in America”.

Concluding Remarks

The historiography of resistance to Bantu Education as an instrument of oppression has given little recognition to the historic role played by African women—as teachers and parents. While the struggles and suffering of male African teachers such as Es'kia Mphahlele are well recorded, the struggles of female African teachers are either little known or not known at all. While Mphahlele's book *Down 2nd Avenue* is widely read in South Africa, and enjoys being prescribed in some high schools, Ntantala's book, *A Life's Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala*, is little known, or not known at all. Yet, Ntantala's book is a treasure piece of work that has not only meticulously recorded struggles of resistance against Bantu Education in South Africa, but has also captured the struggles against Eurocentric education by African Americans in the United States of America. Ntantala's book enables us to understand how African people, both in South Africa and the United States of America, utilised institutions set up by their oppressors, and institutions set up by themselves, to advance types of education that would serve African interests. Ntantala's book highlights the role played by African women, whose names she recorded, in resisting and challenging colonial and Eurocentric education. As a member of CATA in South Africa and an academic in the United States of America, she highlights the role that her organisation, CATA, played in building strong links with African parents in challenging Bantu Education. CATA's institutional leadership has many lessons to offer both for present-day and future teachers' and students' movements in the endless struggle to advance education for humankind's liberation and progress. The first lesson is that instead of letting students wage solitary struggles against an unjust system of education, teachers took the lead at great personal cost. The second is that CATA and TATA built strong networks of active solidarity with African parents, thus giving them a vote of confidence. This act informed, empowered and enabled African parents to be involved in issues that might have remained complex to them. This approach is sorely lacking in students' continuing struggles in the present day for decolonised and Afrocentric curricula.

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