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A Crooked Path to Apartheid Education: Segregating the University of Natal, 1936–1959

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This article examines the implementation of a form of segregated higher education at the University College of Natal (later the University of Natal) between 1936 and 1959. It argues that this programme became an exemplar as a pathway to segregated higher education for the apartheid government before it moved to implement fully ethnically segregated universities in 1959. Yet the origins of the 'Non-European Section' (NES) at Natal were ideologically rooted in a liberal project, one that had connections to expanding education for women and workers as well as black South Africans. The structural constraints of providing higher education for black South Africans under segregation meant that liberal reformers and apartheid policy makers sometimes converged on a crooked path to apartheid education, despite their fundamentally different ideological positions. The article argues that the peculiar trajectory of the NES was shaped by contingency at every step – from its ad hoc formation and early years running out of Sastri College to its expansion and establishment on its own campus at Wentworth and its eventual championing by the government's Holloway Commission. The NES was also directly responsible for the establishment of the Natal Medical School, South Africa's first segregated facility for training black doctors. The article argues that, through these two institutions, the University of Natal was pivotal in shaping early apartheid educational policy before the turn to a more fully realised university apartheid after 1959.

Keywords: universities; apartheid; segregation; higher education; Natal University College

In 1936 Natal University College (NUC) began to offer university-level education to African, Indian and Coloured (collectively then so-called 'Non-European') students in Durban, South Africa. The University College, founded in 1909, had, up till that point, rejected all applications from these students on racial grounds, referring them instead to the University College of Fort Hare, nearly 700 kilometres away. In addition to Fort

Hare, which was the only university college designated for the use of black[1] students at the time, small numbers of black students were allowed to study at the 'open' universities: the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Cape Town (UCT). Unlike Wits and UCT, though, which held integrated classes with small numbers of black students amid large white majorities, NUC set out to achieve black university education differently, by establishing a segregated, parallel degree programme for so-called 'Non-European' students. The design and implementation of this segregated programme were driven largely by white liberal administrators. It resulted, by the late 1940s, in what proclaimed itself 'the largest University institution for non-Europeans in the whole sub-continent of Africa';[2] and, as this article will argue, it was representative of an era of experimentation in higher education that was also increasingly bounded by racial restrictions. This era was brought to an end by the passage of apartheid legislation that prescribed the building of new, more fully segregated universities: the euphemistically named Extension of University Education Act of 1959. But in the two decades preceding this legislation, the establishment of the University of Natal's Non-European Section (NES) both opened and foreclosed educational possibilities for hundreds of black students from Durban and its surrounding areas.

Although the NES was founded and developed by liberal educational reformers, it resulted in models for segregating universities that were eventually adopted and adapted by the apartheid state. The relationship between the model of segregated university education at Natal and the eventual so-called 'extension' of university education under apartheid was not linear. In the 1940s the University of Natal's experiment was one of many in higher education, but by the early 1950s it emerged as one of the dominant modes for providing tertiary education to black and Indian South Africans. This model of a segregated system within an ostensibly 'white' university informed early debates regarding the most practical way to manage tertiary education provision under segregated conditions. Even after the apartheid state opted for full segregation of universities on ethnic grounds, the University of Natal's legacy in the system endured in the form of its 'non-European' medical school, the only place dedicated to training black doctors in South Africa before 1976. This was the case despite a strong thread of resistance to segregation and government control that was woven through the history of the NES and the Natal Medical School. This crooked path from segregated higher education to apartheid reveals continuities in practice between pre-apartheid and apartheid educational policy and highlights the degree to which pragmatism and contingency, as much as ideology, influenced educational policy at both institutional and governmental levels between the 1930s and early 1950s.

1 Orthography for racial groups in the period covered by this article shifted between a variety of problematic and sometimes pejorative terms: the colonial 'native' and later apartheid 'Bantu' were common parlance for Africans, while the collective 'non-European' and 'non-white' included these and took in South Africans of Indian and South Asian ancestry, as well as coloured South Africans. When quoting from primary source material, I use these historical terms, signalling their problematic nature with quotation marks. In my own prose, I use the collective term 'black' for all of these racial groups, following the positive collective political identity developed by the Black Consciousness movement and later adopted more widely. When referring to a single group, I use Indian, Coloured, or African. Fort Hare, though founded for African students, also admitted small numbers of Indian and Coloured students before 1960. In 1955, Indian and Coloured students at Fort Hare made up 22 per cent of the student body: D. Massey, *Under Protest: The Rise of Student Resistance at the University of Fort Hare* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2010), p. 96.

2 University of KwaZulu-Natal Archives-Pietermaritzburg (hereafter UKZNA-Pmb) H6/1/2, Help Your People – The Natal University Non-European Section Appeal for Funds, 1953, p. 7. However, I have been unable to substantiate this claim.

Scholars have explored points of continuity between the early apartheid state and its predecessor, commonly called the Segregation era,[3] particularly in relation to urban influx controls and access to land.[4] Education has not been a key area of focus in this literature, although Jonathan Hyslop, in his work on secondary schooling, situates the roots of apartheid's signal educational policy, Bantu Education, in the rapid urbanisation of the 1940s and argues that efforts to control a growing population of urban youth occupied both the pre-apartheid and apartheid governments.[5] More often the historiography of education has highlighted points of disjuncture between Segregation and apartheid, with the passage of transformative legislation like the Bantu Education Act (1953) and the Extension of University Education Act (1959). But university education provides a unique lens to consider points of continuity as well as disjuncture, as the provision of higher education for black South Africans was caught between two of apartheid's competing priorities: the subjugation and limited education of black South Africans, on the one hand, and the construction of self-contained ethnic 'national units' that could fully achieve separate development and eventual nationhood on the other.[6] Even before apartheid, Segregation had required existing programmes to surmount similar challenges in order to extend the advantages of a university education while maintaining the constraints of a racist, unequal society. Thus, the new government looked to the range of existing approaches to providing higher education to black South Africans in order to address these priorities. This article explores this inherent tension, how the University of Natal navigated it in the decades before and after the implementation of apartheid, and its influence on apartheid educational policy in the 1950s.

The article also contributes to a small but growing historiography on the history of universities in South Africa. Even before apartheid, segregation shaped all South African universities. The so-called 'open' universities, UCT and Wits, admitted relatively small numbers of black students into ostensibly integrated academic life, although scholarship on these institutions has challenged and problematised the degree of racial openness and integration they actually exercised; Mervyn Shear argues that, despite its commitment to 'academic non-segregation', Wits in the 1940s effectively exercised a form of academic segregation as well as social segregation.[7] Similarly, Teresa Barnes has highlighted a range of support for apartheid at UCT, challenging what she describes as a 'protest only' narrative within the historiography of the open universities.[8] As Barnes' critique suggests, the very category of open universities should be problematised. It has been used to describe the four English-medium universities that existed before 1960: UCT and Wits, as well as Rhodes and Natal. Paul Maylam's work on Rhodes has demonstrated that that institution was always more deeply mired in racial separation than the 'open' or 'liberal' descriptors sometimes applied to it imply.[9] As this article will argue, this was clearly the case at Natal as well,

3 To distinguish Segregation as a historical period in South Africa's history, encompassing the time from the Act of Union (1910) to the election of the National Party and establishment of apartheid (1948), from the process of creating racially divided institutions, I have indicated the historical period by capitalising the term.

4 See W. Beinart and S. Dubow, *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London, Routledge, 1995), 'Introduction'; P. Maylam, *South Africa's Racial Past: The History and Historiography of Racism, Segregation and Apartheid* (London, Routledge, 2001), Chapters 5 and 6.

5 J. Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940–1990* (Scottsville, University of Natal Press, 1999), pp. 2–5.

6 For a discussion of these contested priorities within the broader concept of apartheid, see D. Posel, 'The Meaning of Apartheid before 1948: Conflicting Interests and Forces within the Afrikaner Nationalist Alliance', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 1 (1987), pp. 125–6.

7 M. Shear, *Wits: A University in the Apartheid Era* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1996), pp. 4–6.

8 T.A. Barnes, *Uprooting University Apartheid in South Africa: From Liberalism to Decolonization* (London, Routledge, 2019), pp. 48–9.

9 P. Maylam, *Rhodes University, 1904–2016: An Intellectual, Political and Cultural History* (Grahamstown, Rhodes Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2017), pp. 107–8.

where even liberal efforts to expand provision for black students resulted in the establishment of a separate and unequal system.

There is a small historiography on the segregated programmes at NUC and those who participated in them. This falls into two categories: biographies of key figures, most notably administrators, and institutional and programmatic histories. In this latter category, Bill Guest's work chronicling the history of the University of Natal in three volumes, *Stella Aurorae: The History of a South African University*, stands out as a landmark in university institutional histories. Guest provides a wide-ranging and incisive analysis of the university and its place in the region, from its foundation in 1909 up to its merger with the University of Durban-Westville and the creation of the new University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2004.[10] Within this masterwork, the creation and administration of the Non-European Section is considered in depth and situated within the institutional constraints and imperatives of the time.[11] On a smaller scale, Vanessa Noble has written about the founding of the Natal Medical School, which, like the Non-European Section, catered for black students. Hers is the first work considering the institutional history of the Medical School, and Noble has compellingly argued that it formed an important space for experimenting with new approaches to medical curriculum in the 1940s and 1950s.[12] In addition to these institutional approaches, there have been biographies of key organisational figures at NUC and the NES, most notably Sylvia Vietzen's work on Mabel Palmer but also Julie Parle's unpublished biography of Florence MacDonald.[13] MacDonald and Palmer were two key figures in the establishment of the NES. Palmer's later life is also chronicled in Shula Marks' *Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women*.[14] Vietzen, Parle, Marks and Guest have all noted the leading role of Palmer, in particular, in driving the creation of the NES. It was, for her, a calling. But Surendra Bhana and Goolam Vahed offer a different perspective on Palmer and other white liberals in their establishment of the NES. Their study, grounded in extensive oral history, centres the perspective of NES students and argues that figures like Palmer were both unable, and perhaps also unwilling, to fundamentally challenge the racial and racist mores in which NUC was steeped, and that as a result the NES was always both separate and unequal.[15]

This article takes a somewhat different approach to much of this literature. Following Bhana and Vahed's important critique of the ways in which liberal educational reformers failed to fundamentally challenge prevailing racist parameters that constrained the possibilities for providing equitable higher education in Natal during this period, I argue that those very parameters shaped the possibilities for higher education not just in Natal, but beyond. From this perspective, reconsidering the establishment of the NES is illuminating for understanding the further segregation of higher education under apartheid. The article argues that the 1940s were characterised by educational experimentation that was shaped by

10 See B. Guest, *Stella Aurorae: The History of a South African University, Vols. I, II and III* (Pietermaritzburg, Natal Society Foundation, 2015, 2017 and 2018).

11 Guest, *Stella Aurorae, Vol. I*, Chapter 5: A Break with Tradition: The Natal Experiment, pp. 175–201.

12 V. Noble, 'A Medical Education with a Difference: A History of the Training of Black Student Doctors in Social, Preventive and Community-Oriented Primary Health Care at the University of Natal Medical School, 1940s–1960', *South African Historical Journal*, 61, 3 (2009), pp. 550–74.

13 S. Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer and Black Higher Education in Natal, *c*.1936–1942', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 6, 1 (1983), pp. 98–114; S. Vietzen, 'Beyond School: Some Developments in Higher Education in Durban in the 1920s and the Influence of Mabel Palmer', *Natalia*, 14 (1984), pp. 48–58; J. Parle, 'Mrs Florence MacDonald and University Education for Non-Europeans in Natal, *c*.1936–1952' (Honours thesis, University of Natal, 1983).

14 S. Marks, *Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987).

15 S. Bhana and G. Vahed, '"Colours do not mix": Segregated Classes at the University of Natal, 1936–1959', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 29, 1 (2011), pp. 66–100.

two priorities: the impetus of extending higher education to a wider range of black South Africans; and the challenge of doing so in a racist and racially segregated society. Although its ideological origins were liberal, the NES emerged as a key influence on the early apartheid state's education policy, which also grappled with these competing aims, and, through the Medical School, it created an enduring legacy of a multi-ethnic segregated 'non-European' programme within a 'white' university. The article does this in four parts: the first two sections consider the establishment of the Non-European Section and the influence of Mabel Palmer and other educational reformers on its organisation and curriculum amid wider structural constraints. The third section looks at the establishment of the Natal Medical School, the only dedicated medical school for black doctors in the country until the establishment of the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA) in 1976. The final section sets these developments in Natal against the wider backdrop of higher education in South Africa in the 1940s, 1950s and beyond, comparing this experimental process to debates about segregation in the government, cultural organisations and other universities. The article concludes with reflections on how the experimentation of the 1930s and 1940s shaped policy decisions in the 1950s at both institutional and governmental levels. It argues that the structures built in Natal during this period were, perhaps paradoxically, the most insulated from government interference well into the apartheid era, with the Natal Medical School eventually becoming the birthplace of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and the Black Consciousness movement in the late 1960s.

This article draws on archival material from the South African National Archives in Pretoria, the University of KwaZulu-Natal institutional archives in Pietermaritzburg, the Killie Campbell Africana Library and Archives in Durban and the University of Glasgow institutional archives, and situates this primary research in a wider discussion about the segregation of higher education than previous histories of the programmes discussed here have yet done. By bringing this material into dialogue with debates about education within and beyond the National Party, it demonstrates the fluidity and range of possibilities that opened – and were eventually foreclosed – in the decades before the apartheid state formally segregated universities.

Mabel Palmer and the International Influences on Higher Education in Natal

Mabel Palmer arrived in Durban in 1921 to take up a post as the staff tutor for the Natal Technical College's Workers' Educational Association classes. Her appointment represented Tech's (as it was fondly called) commitment to education for workers and, as Vietzen has noted, came at a moment in which the power of organised labour was rising in Natal.[16] In the year of Palmer's arrival, the Labour Party won five out of eight seats in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Indeed, around South Africa organised labour was flourishing: as Vishnu Padayachee, Shahid Vawda and Paul Tichmann have argued, the First World War, with its economic and industrial expansion, 'ushered in a period of militant worker action'.[17] New unions, including the Indian Workers' Industrial Union and the Industrial Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), were formed. Meanwhile in Durban, a joint committee of representatives from the Technical College and from the Federation of Trades and Labour Unions had worked to build a workers' education programme based on the Workers' Educational Association in Britain; they started by offering a short series of lectures in 1916 and expanded to evening tutorial classes, eventually meeting twice weekly the following year. It is important to note that these programmes were exclusively

16 Vietzen, 'Beyond School', p. 52.

17 V. Padayachee, S. Vawda and P. Tichmann, *Indian Workers and Trade Unions in Durban: 1930–1950*, Report no. 20 (Durban, University of Durban-Westville Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1985), p. 5.

available to white workers, despite growing numbers of both Indian and African workers being employed by the various industries based in and around Durban.[18] By 1920 a desire to expand these efforts beyond Durban's city centre led the college to apply for and receive a grant from the Union government for £200 to support the appointment of a permanent staff tutor for the programme.[19]

Mabel Palmer as the choice of staff tutor was apparently a straightforward one for Tech's Principal B.M. Narbeth and other members of the committee: she had strong academic credentials and was an experienced lecturer, having been part of one of the first cohorts of women to obtain her degree from the University of Glasgow and then going on to hold fellowships at the London School of Economics and at Bryn Mawr College in the United States.[20] She took up her first lecturing post at Durham University's Armstrong College (which later became part of Newcastle University) and, after four years there, moved to London, where she lectured in Economics at King's College for Women. While in London she became 'the first woman tutor for the Joint Committee of the University of London and the Women's Educational Society' as well as a freelance journalist.[21] In London, she also became involved in the nascent Workers' Educational Association through her work for the Fabian Society.

Fabianism and her work for the Workers' Educational Association contributed to Palmer's commitment to the principle that university education be extended as widely as possible. Indeed, as part of only the second cohort of women students admitted to the University of Glasgow (in 1893), she identified with those who were excluded from spaces of higher education. Although her classes at Tech were restricted to white students (and predominantly white men), upon her arrival in South Africa Mabel Palmer became exercised by the most prominent divide in South African society: race. She was an early supporter of the black Industrial Commercial Workers' Union, although she did not hesitate to criticise ICU leaders Allison Champion and Clements Kadalie when she felt it was warranted.[22] She was also an early member of the multiracial South African Institute of Race Relations, joining soon after its founding in 1929, and of the Durban Joint Council for interracial co-operation.[23] Membership in these organisations points to Palmer's long-standing involvement in liberal politics from the early days of her arrival in South Africa, and before.[24] As a lecturer, though, her primary field of activism was in education, and she soon began offering informal tuition in her home to black students.[25]

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18 Padayachee *et al.* note that the 1920s and 1930s were a time of increasing urbanisation and employment in industry for Indians in Natal: Padayachee *et al.*, *Indian Workers and Trade Unions in Durban*, pp. 21–2.

19 Vietzen, 'Beyond School', p. 52.

20 University of Glasgow Archives R/4/1/2, Mabel Atkinson Graduation Record, 17 April 1900, Schedule of Graduates in Arts Under New Regulations, 1900–1903; UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/1, 'Women of Natal Profile: Mabel Palmer', *Natal Witness*, 4 December 1947.

21 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/3, 'Mabel Palmer', *Nux*, Natal University Newspaper, 6 June 1947.

22 For a more extensive discussion of Palmer's role in supporting the Industrial Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), see E. van Heyningen, 'Illusion and Disillusion: White Women and the ICU', in D. Johnson, N. Nieftagodien and L. van der Walt (eds), *Labour Struggles in Southern Africa, 1919–1949: New Perspectives on the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU)* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2023), pp. 168–80; Marks, *Not Either an Experimental Doll*, p. 7.

23 For more on the establishment and work of the Joint Councils as a key space for liberal political organisation during the interwar years, see R.J. Haines, 'The Politics of Philanthropy and Race Relations: The Joint Councils of South Africa, 1920–1955' (PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1991).

24 Notably, Elizabeth van Heyningen argues that Palmer was a socialist, contrasting her views to 'those of the liberals of the Institute of Race Relations and the Joint Councils Movement' (p. 170), but Palmer was a proactive member of both the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Durban Joint Council. Although her scepticism of capitalism sometimes put her at odds with others on these bodies, her commitment to gradual change – reflective of her lifelong commitment to Fabianism – shared much in practice with her liberal colleagues: van Heyningen, 'Illusion and Disillusion', p. 170.

25 Palmer's biographer Sylvia Vietzen dates this as early as 1931, and notes that she was assisted by friends like Florence MacDonald, another NUC lecturer.

In 1930, Palmer transferred from Tech to Natal University College, and in 1931 she joined Howard College, the new Durban-based campus of Natal University College.[26] Howard College had been founded as part of an NUC expansion strategy that would lead to a dual-campus institution modelled on multi-site federated universities in the UK; it was a controversial choice for many in Pietermaritzburg, the original campus of NUC, and the two campuses developed quite distinctly as the university grew.[27] Relatively early in her tenure at Howard College, Palmer began to advocate that the new Durban campus provide teaching for black students. Pressure for this was coming from external sources as well. In 1934 the Agent-General from India to South Africa,[28] Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh, approached the Principal of NUC, J.W. Bews, after two applications from Sastri College students to attend NUC were rejected on grounds of race in 1933.[29] Sastri was a high school for Indian boys in Durban, founded by the first Agent-General, Srinivasa Sastri, in 1930.[30] Bews brought the issue to the attention of the University Senate in late 1934. Although Senate declined to give him discretion to admit blacks, it endorsed a motion put forward by Mabel Palmer, as a result of which two committees were established to investigate the possibility of offering provision to black students. Palmer headed one committee, which reported to the University Senate, and Maurice Webb led a second committee, which reported to the University Council. Senate was composed of senior professors, academics and administrators within the university; Council was made up of external university stakeholders and prominent figures in the community. These two bodies comprised the governance structures of Natal, as was the case for most other universities and university colleges. In early 1935 both committees reported back in favour of providing tuition for black students, but the Webb report was met by resistance from conservative forces on the Council who strongly rejected the possibility of any integrated classes at NUC.[31] A compromise was offered by H.E. Jones, a member of the NUC Council and then principal of Natal Technical College: separate facilities would be provided and segregated classes would be offered to 'non-European students in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, provided that sufficient demand is forthcoming'.[32] The following year, 1936, marked the inauguration of the Natal University College's 'Non-European Section'.

The Non-European Section

Despite NUC's ostensible commitment to providing facilities and teaching for 'Non-European' students, at first the NES operated on a fairly ad hoc basis. Indeed, recalling those early years, Palmer herself wrote that the section had been allowed to proceed despite

26 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/3, Mabel Palmer's CV. For more on the founding of Howard College and the establishment of Natal as a federal university with campuses in two cities, see B. Guest, *Stella Aurorae, Vol. I: Natal University College, 1909–1949* (Pietermaritzburg, Natal Society Foundation, 2015), especially Chapter 4: The College Comes of Age, pp. 127–4.

27 Guest, *Stella Aurorae, Vol. I*, pp. 121–2.

28 The Agent-General was a post established by the 'Cape Town Agreement', a bilateral agreement between South Africa and India made in 1927 that sought to manage the position of Indians in South Africa; it provided avenues for repatriation, advocated by the South Africans, but also provision of welfare and educational and health facilities for those who stayed, advocated by the Indian delegation. For more on the details of agreement, and the diplomatic process by which it was reached, see V.K. Thakur and S. Sundaram, 'India, South Africa and the Cape Town Agreement: A Diplomatic History', *Indian Politics & Policy*, 2, 2 (2019), pp. 3–25.

29 Bhana and Vahed, 'Colours Do Not Mix', p. 71.

30 Sastri College, 'History of Sastri College', available at https://sastricollege.co.za/history, retrieved 20 June 2023.

31 Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer and Black Higher Education', pp. 99–100.

32 NUC Council Meeting Minutes, 15 March 1935, quoted in Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer and Black Higher Education', p. 100.

'adamant' opposition, and 'only if they did not use the same buildings as Europeans and did not involve the college in any expenditure'.[33] In part because of these constraints, the programme opened only in Durban and not in Pietermaritzburg, where the main campus of NUC was located. Durban was chosen for the pilot of the NES for several reasons: it was a larger urban centre, with a larger black urban and peri-urban population of likely students. It was also the home of Mabel Palmer, who had retired from her lectureship in 1936 and taken on the full-time role of organiser of the NES. And, because NUC refused to commit space to the project, Durban offered alternate options to address the problem of where the NES could be accommodated. Eventually NES was granted rent-free classroom space in Sastri College, but only at weekends and in the evenings, after the College's own classes had finished. The administration of the section was initially run from Mabel Palmer's home on Clair Avenue, and she recruited her friends to provide the teaching because, she observed, 'at first, most of the Professors were not interested in the project'.[34]

By all accounts, Palmer was hard to refuse: her most steadfast teachers at the NES were her friends Florence MacDonald and Elizabeth Sneddon (both also with MAs from the University of Glasgow). MacDonald recalled how Palmer 'cajoled, bullied'[35] friends and colleagues into helping with the NES, and Elizabeth Sneddon described her as 'the most undemocratic democrat' in pursuit of her goals for the section.[36] But this approach, as well as other material limitations, also meant that the range of courses on offer at the NES was much more restricted than those available to white students enrolled at NUC. In 1936 the section opened with a limited offering of arts and humanities classes, reflecting the capabilities of the teachers Palmer had been able to recruit, and a range of classes that she taught herself, including English, Politics, Economics, Geography and Botany (the only science course on offer). Writing later, in 1957, when the NES faced closure by the state and was the subject of a heated debate in the pages of Natal's *Daily News*, Palmer defended this choice. She reasoned that 'half a loaf of bread is better than no bread at all' and that the extension of limited university education followed the pattern of European universities' provision of education for non-Protestant religious groups – and later women – and could be expected to continue along increasingly inclusive lines, as had been the case with these examples. Finally, she argued that by 1957 the NES had produced 250 graduates, many of whom she mentioned by name as leaders in their fields.[37] Readers would be forgiven for noting a defensive tone to Palmer's accounting of her more than two decades of work on the NES. She was responding to critiques raised in an ongoing debate within the letters to the editor section of the *Daily News*, a debate which demonstrated that not all observers perceived the NES as an unalloyed good. A pseudonymous writer named VUGA SACS (possibly after a UCT-based medical journal of the same name) criticised the University of Natal for 'having of its own accord introduced apartheid' and 'voluntarily destroyed its own potential universality' with the implementation of the NES.[38] Oral histories conducted by Bhana and Vahed also demonstrate that students at the NES were keenly aware of, and frustrated by, the separate and unequal nature of their education.[39]

33 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/3, M. Palmer, 'How Non-European Classes Began at Natal University', *Daily News*, 15 March 1957. The structural limitations on support for the NES can also be seen in Killie Campbell Memorial Library (hereafter KCM) 00/12/15/15, Florence MacDonald Papers, Non-European Section Memo on Finance, 1940; KCM 00/12/15/7, Florence MacDonald Papers, Natal University College – Durban, Non-European Classes, Report on Loans, May 1938.

34 Palmer, 'How Non-European Classes Began at Natal University'.

35 Quoted in Guest, *Stella Aurorae, Vol. I*, p. 186.

36 Quoted in Bhana and Vahed, 'Colours Do Not Mix', p. 67. Similar reflections on Palmer's recruiting tactics are represented in Parle, 'Mrs Florence MacDonald and University Education for Non-Europeans', p. 44.

37 Palmer, 'How Non-European Classes Began at Natal University'.

38 KCM 10/17144, Mabel Palmer Papers, 'University Apartheid: Natal and its Medical School', *Daily News*, 4 March 1957.

39 Bhana and Vahed, 'Colours Do Not Mix', pp. 66–100.

Despite the manifest inequities of the NES – with its temporary space at Sastri College and separate teaching staff and curriculum – uptake of the offer was first steady, and then rapid: in the section's first year, 1936, 19 students enrolled, predominantly Indian school teachers who sought to further their qualifications.[40] That number had nearly doubled within two years: in 1946, the NES's tenth year of operation, 239 students were enrolled, and in 1947 that number rose to 330.[41] One factor influencing the growth of enrolment at the NES was demographic change in Durban itself: as Bhana and Vahed have noted, between 1925 and 1946 the Indian school population in Durban more than quadrupled as a by-product of increasing urbanisation.[42] Indian students remained the majority of those enrolled for the duration of the NES's existence. In the first 1936 cohort, 11 of the 19 students enrolled were Indian, and they were still a substantial majority by the early 1950s although, as Palmer noted in her 1951 report on the programme, 'the next largest [group] which is growing both in proportion and in absolute number' was Africans.[43] This hints at an important aspect of NUC's approach to segregated education: there was a firm colour bar separating white students from black students, but within the latter category there was no formal division between different racial groups. By the 1950s, this flew in the face of apartheid legislation that was designed to explicitly draw such lines. Despite legislation such as the Group Areas Act (1950), which enforced physical segregation of racial groups, the NES continued to be a space that allowed for some degree of racial mixing in higher education.

This was, perhaps, especially evident at the annual winter vacation schools run by the NES. These fortnight-long residential sessions during the winter break were designed to offer students of the NES something like an 'ordinary' university experience, and so for two weeks students and lecturers decamped to Adams College for a residential programme of lectures and tutorials, but also social events, sporting fixtures, Student Representative Council (SRC) meetings, and house competitions for a trophy.[44] Although not all students were able to attend, by most accounts the vacation schools were very popular and, at their peak in the late 1940s, about two-thirds of enrolled students did attend. In 1948, the vacation school had 234 students, with 17 members of academic staff in attendance.[45] Enrolment at the vacation schools, and in the NES overall, was highly gendered: out of the 234 students at the 1948 Vacation School, only 17 were women.[46] Co-educational facilities at the vacation schools were rigorously managed to ensure propriety: men and women were housed separately, and, despite the fact that the average age of student was 'more mature' than that of their white peers at NUC and that many NES students were working adults, they were supervised by a Dean of Men and a Dean of Women while at Adams College. The women, in particular, had their movements closely monitored. In a report on the 1947 Vacation School, Mabel Palmer described the steps she took to ensure this:

> I saw all the women students before the Vacation School, and told them clearly what rules they must follow (i.e. that they must never be out of [Dean of Women] Mrs Thomas's sight after supper. That if they left campus they must leave a note of their destination with Mrs

40 M. Palmer, 'Higher Education in Natal', *African Affairs*, 50, 199 (1951), p. 135; also UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/3, 'Non-European Classes' timeline.
41 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/3, 'Non-European Classes' timeline; Palmer, 'Higher Education in Natal', p. 135.
42 Bhana and Vahed, 'Colours Do Not Mix', p. 69.
43 Palmer, 'Higher Education in Natal', p. 135.
44 Descriptions of these activities are represented in annual vacation school reports, of which the 1945 report is representative: KCM 00/12/15/44, Florence MacDonald Papers, Natal University College, Non-European Classes, Report on Vacation School – 1945.
45 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/2, Vacation School at Adams – NUC Non-European Section Folder Report on Vacation School – 1948 [11–24 July].
46 *Ibid*.

> Thomas, and if any group of students went for a long walk there must be two girls of the same race in the party). I also urged them to be modest and discreet in their behaviour.[47]

It is notable that this passage, from a letter from Palmer to NUC Vice Chancellor E.G. Malherbe, was written in the aftermath of an incident in which one male student, George Lawrence, assaulted another, M.D. Naidoo, and his sister Theresa Lawrence after he accused the two of being 'on too familiar terms' during the 1947 Vacation School.[48] As well as being constrained by racial mores, as Bhana and Vahed have argued, Palmer and the NES were often socially conservative in their attitudes to women students, even as Palmer, in particular, was quite progressive in her quest to expand women's education.[49] The tension between Palmer's progressive commitment to extending higher education to black men and to women of all races, on the one hand, and her profoundly conservative social leanings regarding both race and gender, on the other, are evident in this example. Already 71 at the time of the 1947 Vacation School, Palmer was shaped by the Victorian mores of her youth. She was also keenly aware of the precarity and tenuous position of the NES, which existed on the sufferance of the University Council, and in 1947 had just been allocated formal staffing commitments from the university for the first time since its founding a decade earlier. Ensuring propriety that was seen to be beyond reproach in the vacation school may have been part of her effort to protect this highlight of the NES experience.

The vacation schools declined from their peak in the late 1940s and had all but disappeared by 1953. In part, this was the result of external factors: after the peak enrolment of 1948, the 1949 Vacation School was cancelled in the aftermath of the Durban 'riots' in January of that year. This violence had manifested in conflict between Indians and Africans in the city and resulted in the deaths of 142 people by the official count. Although plans for the vacation school initially proceeded, in the end a petition to postpone the residential school was organised by students who were concerned about being away from their families in the context of the recent violence, and they prevailed on administrators to cancel the 1949 Vacation School. When vacation schools resumed in 1950, enrolment numbers were down to about half of what they had been just two years earlier. The following year, Mabel Palmer was unable to get enough staff to commit their time to come and teach on the residential programme, and it had to be cancelled again.[50]

The decline of vacation schools coincided with a push from the University of Natal (as it became in 1949) to formalise the position of the NES, and to finally install it on its own campus. Land on the south side of Durban at Wentworth, which had previously been used as a naval installation in World War II, was acquired by the University in 1948 and earmarked for the construction of a full campus for Natal's black students. It was to become the new home for the NES, finally supplanting the borrowed space at Sastri College. This represented the formal spatial entrenchment of segregation at the University of Natal, which was no longer temporary or ad hoc but now required the construction of a dedicated campus. It ended Mabel Palmer's expectation that the university would eventually move towards greater integration for its Non-European Section. The move to Wentworth was also controversial; it was at some distance from other University of Natal sites in Durban as well as from the neighbourhoods where students resided, requiring lengthy and costly bus

47 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/2, Vacation School at Adams – NUC Non-European Section Folder, Correspondence from Mabel Palmer to E.G. Malherbe, 6 August 1947.

48 *Ibid*.

49 For more on this, see Marks, *Not Either an Experimental Doll*, which explores Mabel Palmer's relationship to and mentorship of the pseudonymous Lily Moya.

50 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/2 Vacation School at Adams – NUC Non-European Section Folder, Correspondence from Mabel Palmer to E.G. Malherbe, 29 September 1951.

journeys to get to and from campus.[51] Yet it would also allow for the significant expansion of the NES curriculum: although from 1947 staff at NUC had been required to allocate teaching time to the NES as well as to teaching white students, and this had equalised the content of teaching in a wide range of subjects, the deep inequity of facilities still meant that no science courses could be offered through the NES due to lack of laboratory facilities. The new campus at Wentworth was intended to redress those deficiencies. It was also earmarked to become the temporary home to South Africa's first medical school for black students, an outcome that arose in part because of the legacy of the NES.

The Natal Medical School

Beginning in the late 1930s, the South African government, led by the United Party, began to investigate the possibility of establishing a medical school to train black doctors. Medicine was a highly segregated profession, with very few black doctors practising in South Africa, and those who were had mostly trained abroad.[52] The introduction of a full medical school was deemed necessary 'primarily for Non-Europeans, but also for those whose object is to serve non-Europeans'.[53] A National Health Services Commission was established, and in 1944 this committee advised the government of Jan Smuts that the best place for such a medical school would be Durban, despite active lobbying from Wits to host the school in Johannesburg. The main reasons for this were twofold: first, Durban was the site of King Edward VIII Hospital, a large urban hospital for 'Non-European' patients; second, Durban was home to the NUC's Non-European Section, the only fully segregated higher education programme in an urban centre in the country. For these reasons, NUC was seen to be the logical choice to situate a segregated black medical school. In the mid 1940s, Wits was the only medical school graduating African doctors (on average around six per year), as part of their integrated policy as an open university.[54] The decision of the government to reject their application to establish a wider medical programme for 'non-Europeans' and the choice to house the new medical school in Durban instead further demonstrate the government's commitment to segregation in higher education (notably before the formal introduction of apartheid) and the influence that the NES had in shaping this. Permission to establish the medical school in Durban was officially granted in early 1948, although the elections that year which ousted the United Party and installed the National Party led to a delay. In 1949, however, 'Dr A.J. Stals (who was both Minister of Health and Minister of Education [for the National Party]) … reaffirmed the approval given in principle for the establishment of a Faculty of Medicine in the newly constituted University of Natal'.[55]

It is perhaps unsurprising that the nascent apartheid state supported the creation of segregated medical training, but from the outset the University of Natal attracted criticism for this pursuit of segregation: the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) called for Europeans to also be admitted to the new Medical School in Durban, arguing that 'the provision of separate facilities would seriously lower the standard of training provided for Non-Europeans'.[56] In a letter to the editors of the Natal *Daily News*, the pseudonymous

51 KCM 00/12/16/31, Florence MacDonald Papers, Premedical Courses in Arts and Sciences and the Non-European Hostel.

52 See P.V. Tobias, 'Apartheid and Medical Education: The Training of Black Doctors in South Africa', *The Journal of the National Medical Association*, 72, 4 (1980), pp. 395–410, for a comprehensive breakdown by race of the numbers of doctors trained at South African universities between 1946 and 1977.

53 I. Gordon, 'The Durban Medical School', *The South African Medical Journal*, 34, 21 (1960), p. 415.

54 Tobias, 'Apartheid and Medical Education', p. 397.

55 Gordon, 'The Durban Medical School', p. 415.

56 UKZNA-Pmb H6/1/1-10, 'NUSAS Wants Europeans in Durban's Medical School', *Daily News*, 13 July 1950.

VUGA SACS contended, '[w]hen the Medical School was created, as when racially segregated classes were established elsewhere in Natal University [a direct reference to the NES], the University Council bargained away the birthright of the true university to admit students of all races for a mess of government financial pottage'.[57] Despite such criticisms at and after the creation of the new institution, when the medical school opened its doors and its new campus at Wentworth to 33 students in early 1951, the moment was praised as historic by many observers.[58]

Noble's argument that the medical school's segregation allowed space for new forms of curricular experimentation is convincing. She points to the emphasis on community-oriented primary health care (COPC), which became integral to the teaching approach at Durban, and argues that this was distinct from the predominantly white medical schools elsewhere in the country.[59] COPC involved training students in outpatient curative and preventive care outside the space of hospitals, which was very innovative for the time. Students also undertook 'family practice clerkships', where they went into the homes and communities of their patients. The Natal Medical School also required all of its students to undertake an extra year of study – making the usually six-year medical degree seven years for its graduates. This 'Year 0' included language, humanities and social science courses, which were not part of a traditional medical school curriculum at a white universities; it was designed to compensate for inequities in the schooling system, but was highly controversial among students, for whom it made a long and expensive degree even longer and more costly, as well as diverging from the standard medical curricula at the time.[60] Though the COPC approach was born, as Noble argues, from racial segregation and sometimes racist attitudes to indigenous communities' health and healing practices, through the efforts of Durban doctors who later fled apartheid – notably Sidney and Emily Kark – it contributed to the rise of community-based social medicine internationally.[61]

The addition of social science courses in the preliminary year for medical students also tied Natal's Medical School to the Non-European Section. Although administered separately, from 1952 these two branches of the University of Natal shared space on the campus at Wentworth, and it was agreed that they would also share teaching staff in courses such as English, Psychology and Sociology.[62] They also initially shared an SRC, although in 1952 two medical students resigned from this body in protest at the segregated system, advocating for a Medical School SRC and the principle of 'academic non-segregation', as was ostensibly practised at 'open' universities.[63] This indicates that, for some students enrolled in the medical school at least, they perceived the segregation of the NES as fundamentally different to the segregation within the Medical School, although both operated under the same colour bar by excluding white students and including African, Indian and Coloured students.

Natal's establishment of a fully fledged segregated section within its regional university was relatively short, however: by 1957 the National Party government was extending its reach into the organisation of higher education and announced the Extension of University Education Bill, which aimed to further segregate university education throughout the country. This provoked protests on campuses around South Africa: at Wits and UCT,

57 KCM 10/17144, Mabel Palmer Papers, 'University Apartheid: Natal and its Medical School'.
58 UKZNA-Pmb H6/1/1-10, 'Medical History: 33 Indians, Natives Begin Courses', *Daily News*, 6 March 1951.
59 Noble, 'A Medical Education with a Difference'.
60 See Noble, 'A Medical Education with a Difference', p. 563.
61 Noble, 'A Medical Education with a Difference', p. 570.
62 UKZNA-Pmb STP5/1/2, Vacation School at Adams – NUC Non-European Section Folder, Correspondence from Mabel Palmer to E.G. Malherbe, 29 September 1951.
63 UKZNA-Pmb H6/1/1-10, 'Medical School Race View', *Daily News*, 13 August 1952.

academics and students marched in solemn processions in academic garb.[64] Across the country, especially at the 'open' universities where there were small numbers of integrated classes, protests over government encroachment on academic freedom were raised. At the University of Natal this was a concern as well, and in 1957 the University found itself in open conflict with the government over plans to take control of the Medical School and place it within the purview of the Department of Native Affairs.[65] Notably, the attempt failed. It was prevented by coordinated efforts from the University administration, staff, students, the Medical Association of South Africa and from the Natal Provincial Council, which threatened to 'withdraw its 50% subsidy from the medical school and deny the use of any facilities at King Edward VIII Hospital to any state appointed staff'.[66] These groups successfully rebuffed the threat of a government takeover of the medical school, and Durban continued to host the only black and independent medical school as the country's institutions moved into the apartheid era. This is all the more noteworthy because it was, by and large, the only institution that was able to avoid the fate of government intervention when the Extension of University Education Act became law in 1959.

The National Landscape of Higher Education and the Road to the 'Extension of University Education'

The tension that was at the heart of the development and expansion of the NES and the Natal Medical School – between the impetus to offer university education to black South Africans and the constraints of doing so in a highly segregated system – also imbued other debates about education in the 1940s. It was reflected in early ambiguity regarding the idea of apartheid itself as well. Although 'apartheid' was the campaign platform of the National Party in its surprise election victory in 1948, many scholars have argued that what, precisely, the slogan entailed was a matter of debate and contestation even within Afrikaner nationalist circles.[67] Was racial segregation to be an end in itself, or was it imbued with a purported 'higher' purpose of 'guardianship' that sought to achieve development within African, Coloured, and Indian communities? The idea of guardianship (or trusteeship) was based in racist thinking that held white society to be superior to other racial groups, but which believed that this superiority conferred responsibility on the white-led state to support the development of other racial groups. How individuals and organisations answered this question – of what apartheid was for – influenced different ideas among prominent nationalist thinkers about the role of education for black South Africans. These were contested over the 1940s in the lead-up to the National Party's victory, and the development of the NES in Natal contributed to such ongoing debates.

In 1948, the same year that the National Party came to power, the Sauer Commission Report on the 'Colour Question' was released. Because of the timing of the report and its principal concern with the racial segregation of South African society, the Sauer Commission has sometimes been called the blueprint for apartheid. However, Deborah Posel argues that the report was 'an internally contradictory blueprint' that contained a wide range

64 See, for example, B. Murray, *Wits, The Open Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1939–1959* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1997), p. 322; H. Phillips, *UCT under Apartheid: From Onset to Sit-In, 1948–1968* (Johannesburg, Jacana Media, 2019), pp. 262–5.

65 UKZNA-Pmb H6/1/1-10, 'Natal University to Lose Medical School: Viljoen Announces First Move in Apartheid Policy', *Daily News*, 8 February 1957; 'Medical School Goes Under Native Affairs Department', *Daily News*, 12 February 1957.

66 UKZNA-Pmb H6/1/1-10, 'End Subsidy if State Runs Medical School', *Daily News*, 15 February 1957.

67 See Posel, 'The Meaning of Apartheid before 1948', pp. 123–39; S. Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948–1994* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 13-16.

of ideological positions, which reflected an inherent ambiguity in the concept of apartheid.[68] Posel positions the Sauer Report as one space in which contradictory ideas were contested, while Saul Dubow argues that the 'real purpose [of the Sauer Report] was bringing together different ideological strands within Nationalist thinking'.[69]

One prominent such strand within Nationalist circles was the call for *Christelike Nasionale Onderwys*, or 'Christian National Education', which was highlighted in the Sauer Commission Report:

> The education for Africans had to be on a firm Christian-National basis, and must take account of the needs and level of development of the mass of natives. It must build character and anchor the native to his national characteristics. The African would ultimately have to be responsible for the expenditure on and control of his own education under white supervision.[70]

This demonstrates an ambivalence between the impulse for Africans to be responsible for the development of public goods and services like education within their communities, and the contrary expectation for whites to retain and maintain control over these systems. This tension would come to characterise the apartheid's state approach to education from primary schools to universities. Notably, although it did not come from an ideology of Christian National Education, in its early years the NES conformed to the same principles of white control and black expenditure; control of the programme was wholly under the auspices of white administrators at NUC but, in accordance with the guidance from the University Senate and Council, the programme had received no funding or material support from the university. Instead, the NES was funded by student fees, and students in need were supported by loans financed by donations from the local Indian community and from overseas donors. After a couple of years, the NES was entirely self-sustaining. Indeed, by 1940, as Florence MacDonald noted in her financial report that year, 'Natal University College is wealthier by about £550 in virtue of the existence of the Non-European Section'.[71] This was one aspect that made it of interest to the nascent apartheid state, but NES was not the only experiment in higher education that captured their attention. As I have suggested, the late 1930s and 1940s were characterised by a range of new ways of thinking about providing higher education in a segregated society; while Wits and UCT defended the model of open, integrated education (albeit on a very limited scale and with constraints), other universities and bodies argued for university provision within the framework of segregation.

In 1938 the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations (Federasie van Afrikaanse Kulturvereniginge, or FAK) opened an Institute for Christian National Education, which Ruth Molete has identified as the origins of Christian National Education within Nationalist circles.[72] The Institute set out to outline the principles that Afrikaner nationalists might bring to education across South African society and, a decade later, it released a policy document for the new government that identified segregation as a key principle for educating black South Africans:

> We believe that he [a black person] can be made racially conscious if the principle of separation ['apartheid'] in education, as in his church life, is strictly applied. Furthermore, we believe that it is essential to emphasize the principle of the mother tongue as the medium of

68 Posel, 'The Meaning of Apartheid before 1948', pp. 123–4.
69 Dubow, *Apartheid*, p. 15.
70 Verslag van die Kleurvraagstuk-Kommissie van die Herenigde Nasionale Party (1948) [Commission Report on the Colour Question for the United National Party (1948)], quoted in F. Troup, *Forbidden Pastures: Education under Apartheid* (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1976), p. 20.
71 KCM 00/12/12/15, Florence MacDonald Papers, Natal University College Non-European Section Memo on Finance (1940).
72 R.P. Molete, 'The Influence of Commissions of Inquiry in the Evolution of Educational Policy for Blacks, 1934–1984' (PhD thesis, Potchefstroomse Universiteit, 1995), Chapter 4.

> education in the case of the [black[73]] person. We believe that the salvation and happiness of the [black] person lies in the fact that he realizes that he is in a separate racial group, will be proud of it, and that he will be educated accordingly in Christian and National principles.[74]

These seeds took root in the soil of the new nationalist government, which pursued the implementation of segregated education, in the first instance, through a series of Commissions of Inquiry. One of the new government's first tasks was the establishment, in 1949, of the Commission on Native Education, commonly called the Eiselen Commission after its chair, W.M.M. Eiselen, an anthropologist and member of the Department of Native Affairs. In 1951 the Eiselen Commission submitted its report to Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister for Native Affairs. The Eiselen Report advocated state control of education for black South Africans and, like the Sauer Commission and Institute for Christian National Education before it, emphasised the necessity of educating Africans within their own racial and ethnic groups, and for the ultimate ends of their own 'national' development. The Eiselen Commission laid out a plan for the overall structure of education, from primary to higher education. Even more than the Sauer Commission, it considered the role of universities in the development of South Africa's different racial groups; Eiselen argued that university provision for black South Africans was inadequate and must be increased – albeit through segregated structures.[75]

The Eiselen Commission has been widely analysed for its influence on the Bantu Education Act (1953). Molete and Crain Soudien have both pointed to the disproportionately high power that Commissions of Inquiry in general have had in shaping South African racial policy and, specifically, racialised education policy.[76] The groundwork that Eiselen had established in making the case for expanding segregated university education was taken up in late 1953, when the Holloway Commission was appointed 'to investigate and report on the practicability and financial implications of providing separate training facilities for non-Europeans at universities'.[77] At the time the Minister of Education, J.H. Viljoen, expressed approval of existing forms of university segregation in a speech to parliament. In particular, he singled out the NES at Natal as a successful implementation of segregation, noting that they had achieved a 'large measure of apartheid at the Natal University in the sense that they have apartheid in academic accommodation, classrooms, laboratories and class attendance, while this form of apartheid is complete at Fort Hare'.[78] Viljoen's support for Natal's and Fort Hare's approaches to segregation in higher education – and implicit rejection of the 'open' admission policies at universities like UCT and Wits – was further reinforced when he appointed E.G. Malherbe, the Vice Chancellor of NUC who had overseen Mabel Palmer's implementation of the NES, as one of only three appointees to the Holloway Commission. It is noteworthy that of the two most established forms of segregation in existing universities – at Natal and Fort Hare, which Viljoen praised – neither arose from an ideological basis of Christian Nationalism, or even ethnic segregation of the type envisioned

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73 The original text uses the term '*kleurling*', which is more closely translated as 'coloured'; however, coloured in this context is a collective and pejorative term, and does not specifically refer to those in the Coloured community. I have translated it here as 'black' for clarity and to more closely reflect the collective racial groups that the Institute's policy sought to target.

74 Quoted in Molete, 'The Influence of Commissions of Inquiry', pp. 76–7 (translated from original Afrikaans by author).

75 National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA) TAB TED_206_E136/9_1, W.W.M. Eiselen, Report of the Commission on Native Education (Eiselen Report), 1951, Chapter 10: Universities.

76 C. Soudien, 'Racial Discourse in the Commission on Native Education (Eiselen Commission), 1949–1951: The Making of a "Bantu" Identity', *Southern African Review of Education*, 1, 11 (2005), p. 41; Molete, 'The Influence of Commissions of Inquiry'.

77 *Government Gazette*/*Staatskoerant*, 18 December 1953, Notice no. 2789.

78 J.H. Viljoen speech to parliament, August 1953, quoted in M.A. Beale, 'The Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid', *Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, 44 (1992), p. 83.

by the FAK. Fort Hare had been founded as the South African Native College in 1916 and had its roots in the mission schools of the Eastern Cape.[79] The NES at Natal, as has been demonstrated, had its roots in a liberal, Fabian project of expanding access to higher education across races, gender and classes. Despite these divergent ideological origins, structural constraints had led both institutions to develop segregated educational programmes, and their success in this regard appealed to the new state.

The remit of the Holloway Commission was to investigate and propose logistical and organisational solutions to the problem of segregating higher education. It assumed this segregation to be a desired outcome, and so submissions to the commission focused on proposing a range of ways to achieve it, rather than debating its merits. As the examples of the FAK and its Institute for Christian National Education and the Eiselen and Sauer Commissions demonstrate, there were wide-ranging debates about what form university segregation should take – relating to the role of the state, other universities, location of facilities and the degree of independence that was desirable. Viljoen's speech praising both Natal's NES and Fort Hare for their implementation of a colour bar (excluding whites from their programmes) demonstrates that, despite the liberal ambitions of academics like Mabel Palmer, the state understood both institutions to be practising a form of apartheid. Submissions to the Holloway Commission likewise reflected the range of ideas about how education could be segregated that were circulating at the time, from the establishment of wholly separate and ultimately black-run 'Bantu university institutions' for different ethnic groups, which was advocated in a submission by W.W.M. Eiselen, to the suggestion posed by a submission from the University of Pretoria, that white universities act as guardians for new (or co-opted) black tertiary institutions until they could operate independently.[80] This proposition reflects the endurance of the trusteeship/guardianship narrative that had influenced earlier debates over the very purpose of segregation and higher education for black South Africans.

The Pretoria submission also demonstrates the fact that white, Afrikaans-medium universities played their own role in the development of a segregated university system and were active players in the debates surrounding its implementation. Eiselen himself had begun his career as an anthropologist in the field of *Volkekunde* (Folk Studies) at Stellenbosch University with an interest in racial and ethnic groups. Johannes Seroto has argued that Eiselen's commitment to ethnology, the study of different ethnic groups, shaped his later political positions on segregated education.[81] In this, Eiselen was representative of larger trends at such institutions. Janeke Thumbran has shown that the University of Pretoria 'demonstrated a vested interest in the training of black leaders' at segregated institutions like Kolege ya Bana ba Afrika, and later the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA), both of which they seconded their own teaching staff to in order to support a project of separate development and 'self-reliance'.[82]

There were differences in opinion about how to achieve so-called separate development – as shown through the range of submissions to the Holloway Commission and the debates over higher education that preceded it – and the government demonstrated itself open to this range of possibilities by soliciting different versions of what 'apartheid' universities might

79 L. Wotshela, *Fort Hare: From Garrison to Bastion of Learning, 1916–2016* (Epsom Downs, KMM Review Publishing, 2018).

80 J.E. Holloway, 'Report of the Commission on the Implications of Providing Separate Training Facilities for Non-Europeans at Universities' (Holloway Commission Report), (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1954). For more discussion on the debates before the Holloway Commission, see Beale, 'The Evolution of the Policy of University Apartheid'.

81 J. Seroto, 'A Revisionist View of the Contribution of Dr Eiselen to South African Education: New Perspectives', *Yesterday and Today*, 9 (2013), p. 94.

82 J. Thumbran, 'Separate Development and Self-Reliance at the University of Pretoria', *Kronos*, 43 (2017), p. 121.

look like. Ultimately, Holloway advocated the simplest logistical solution for the short term: the expansion of existing programmes for black students at Fort Hare and at Natal's NES and the new Natal Medical School. This is noteworthy because it indicates – in the case of the University of Natal– a willingness by the state for 'non-European' higher education to be provided through a nominally white university, and for a significant degree of racial mixing below the colour bar at both Natal and Fort Hare. By the late 1950s this pragmatic approach had been jettisoned with the introduction of the Extension of University Education Bill (1957), which proposed the establishment of individual university colleges for different ethnic groups, following Eiselen's earlier proposal to the Holloway Commission. This bill became the Extension of University Education Act in 1959, and it ultimately set the course for developing a system of segregated universities over the next three decades.

Conclusion

The passage of the Extension of University Education Act in 1959 changed the course of higher education in South Africa, establishing new racially and ethnically segregated universities in tandem with the development of Bantustans as part of the grand apartheid project of developing ethnic groups into 'national units'. It was grounded firmly in an ideology of ethnic as well as racial segregation and geographical separation. But it was not a foregone conclusion that this would be the version of segregated education that the state ultimately pursued. This article has argued that there were a range of ideas about how higher education might be expanded under apartheid, from the direct advisory capacity of government commissions of inquiry to sympathetic nationalist cultural organisations such as the FAK. In contrast, 'open' universities like Wits and UCT led prominent protests against any incursion of apartheid into higher education. Amid these, the University of Natal's Non-European Section stood out as an illustration or model of what de facto segregation might look like and was seized on by the state as an exemplar in the early and mid 1950s. This position would have been a highly uncomfortable one for liberal white educators like Mabel Palmer, who had invested so much in establishing the programme and expanding the opportunity for black students to study at university level in Durban, in the hope that it would lead to a fully integrated regional university in Natal.

Despite enthusiasm from Viljoen and the Holloway Commission in the mid 1950s, the Extension of University Education Act led directly to the closure of the NES by the end of that decade. In 1960, a set of new universities broke ground – in Natal, two hours north of Durban at Ongoye, the University College of Zululand opened for Zulu students, and on Salisbury Island immediately off the coast of Durban, the University College for Indians opened exclusively for Indian students. These new university colleges, under the auspices of the University of South Africa, were more fully segregated than the NES had ever been, and the students who had made NES such a bustling programme were now legally required to study at one of these (or another ethnically segregated university elsewhere in the country).

Of the universities designated for black South Africans, only the Natal Medical School was spared government takeover or closure and, going into the 1960s, it was the only remaining independent and racially integrated (below the colour bar) space for higher education in South Africa. It remained so until the government started its own medical school in Pretoria, in 1976, and required Natal to restrict its admissions on racial grounds. It is noteworthy that in this period the Natal Medical School also became an important space for incubating Black Consciousness ideas. Steve Biko, Mamphela Ramphele, Aubrey Mokoape and other student activists who would go on to found SASO studied medicine at Natal. Barney Pityana, an early SASO activist, has described how conversations in the Alan Taylor Residence at the Wentworth campus in 1967–68 shaped Biko's and others' early ideas for a black student organisation, and one that used a collective definition of black,

including African, Indian, and Coloured people.[83] I do not intend to suggest that the racial make-up of the medical school directly contributed to SASO's – and later the Black Consciousness movement's – inclusive conceptualisation of what it meant to be black. Instead, I suggest that the unique inclusivity at the Natal Medical School in this period allowed students to mix in ways that the system explicitly sought to prevent, and this stood in direct contrast to the experience of their comrades at other campuses. Durban was also the only place in the country in this period that housed two black universities, one segregated by the colour bar and the other by ethnic group – the Natal Medical School and Salisbury Island[84] – and this facilitated cross-campus networks.

The role of the Natal Medical School is one facet in the story of the founding of Black Consciousness; it is also a particular and peculiar feature held over from an earlier period of educational experimentation that the apartheid government initially praised but eventually foreclosed by the end of the 1950s. Revisiting the decades that preceded that moment – and the formal establishment of apartheid in universities – reveals an era of educational contestation and experimentation in which the political and ideological aims of actors involved sometimes diverged quite significantly from their outcomes. The Non-European Section at the University of Natal is a prime example of this. Providing university education for black South Africans in segregated circumstances posed challenges for liberal reformers and apartheid policy makers alike. The contingent ways in which these challenges were navigated during the 1930s and 1940s meant that the NES at Natal, with its roots in liberalism and Fabianism, was nevertheless a key influence on apartheid higher education policy in the early 1950s. This positioned the Natal Medical School to remain a pillar of black professional training under apartheid into the 1970s.

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83 B. Pityana, 'Selfless Biko 40 Years On', *City Press*, Johannesburg, 10 September 2017.
84 Strini Moodley, another prominent SASO activist, was a student at Salisbury Island during these years.