

The Berlin Mission Society and German Linguistic Roots of *Volkekunde*: The Background, Training and Hamburg Writings of Werner Eiselen, 1899–1924

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This article presents a case for the centrality of race and racism in the training and early ethnographic writings of Werner Eiselen (1899–1977). Together with further discussion in two other articles, it demonstrates that Eiselen was not the consolidator of the British functionalist anthropological tradition in South Africa nor a strong affiliate of the liberal school of African studies in South Africa as other scholars have proposed. On the contrary, he was the founder of a radically different ethnographic tradition: an anti-humanist and deeply racialised tradition of cultural study with its roots in Berlin Mission Society ideology and German Africanist linguistics. I track the origins of Eiselen's volkekunde to his missionary background in a former Boer Republic, his Afrikaner nationalist schooling and university career, and especially to his training in African linguistics in Hamburg (and Berlin) between 1921 and 1924 under the leading international figure in the field, the German linguist and ethnologist Carl Meinhof (1857–1944), whose racially informed theories and politics profoundly shaped Eiselen and the school of volkekunde that he would father during his decade-long tenure at Stellenbosch University.

Keywords

Werner Eiselen, Carl Meinhof, Berlin Missionary Society, German linguistics, *volkekunde*, racism, Afrikaner nationalism

The sexual drive is particularly strong [in the African] and therefore the marriage between an African and a white woman is always unhappy ... The animal in him will awaken [if we do not lay a new, Christian, foundation for his spiritual life] and will threaten our [white South African] society; the sexual urges that are untamed by ethical-religious principles will become a source of lasting difficulty to us, because we will have to fear for our mother, our sister and our wife. The black peril of the German Empire is also our peril; the African stands low spiritually; it is our duty towards our fellow whites to lift him [the African] up and to bring about a cultural movement of which our children will reap the benefit.

Werner Eiselen, Hamburg, 1923

The Meinhof-Eiselen Line

Historians of segregation and apartheid¹ have long been aware that the two men most commonly referred to as 'the architects of apartheid', Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd (1901–1966) and Werner Willi Max Eiselen (1899–1977), spent some years of their university careers in Weimar Germany.² Yet until recently the historiographical consensus has been that the German intellectual influence in both cases was relatively muted given the limited role played by overt biological concepts of racial difference and of Nazi ideology in the mainstream Afrikaner nationalist movement, of which they were such an integral part. Apartheid, it is usually argued, was the product of an inward-looking Christian Afrikaner nationalist ideology of self-development, with one prominent scholar even questioning whether apartheid was fundamentally based on notions of race and racism at all, preferring to view it as the consequence of the Afrikaner's quest for political survival.³

This muting of the role played by racism and racial ideology in twentieth-century South Africa has, to some extent, been reflected in the literature on the history of *volkekunde*, a distinctive Afrikaner nationalist ethnological tradition that flourished in twentieth-century South Africa and played a crucial role in legitimising apartheid. The pioneering articles on the roots and development of *volkekunde*, published during the late years of apartheid, rightly highlighted the German roots of this tradition, associating it at various stages with the apartheid-sympathetic Berlin Missionary lineage in South Africa, the German linguistics of Carl Meinhof, and German *völkerkunde* (ethnology).⁴

In the decade following apartheid there was a retreat from this emphasis. In large measure this was the result of the influence of what soon became the accepted conventional narrative of the history of social anthropology and *volkekunde* in South Africa by David Hammond-Tooke. Published in 1997, *Imperfect Interpreters* downplayed the German connection, vehemently questioning any hypothesis regarding links with Nazi ideology and portraying *volkekunde* as a powerful homespun ideology of Afrikaner nationalism that only effectively emerged in the 1940s.⁵

The only book-length study of the intellectual development of the now disavowed founding father of this tradition, Werner Eiselen, seemed to confirm this interpretation. In the widely endorsed view of Cynthia Kros, initially developed as a

1 The warmest of thanks to my ever-generous friend Russell Martin for making this story readable, Sue Ogterop for extensive research assistance on all sections of the article, and Sakkie Niehaus for a focused and incisive critique that prompted a thorough revision. Thanks to Patricia Davison, Saul Dubow, Robert Gordon, Nancy Jacobs and Kees van der Waal for enthusiasm and additional comments. Thanks too, to Jan van Heerden and Ria van der Merwe, who gave the references and scans for Figures 3 and 4. Thanks to Priscilla Hall for judicious copy-editing.

2 The term 'architect of apartheid' was often applied to Verwoerd during his lifetime and was the title of a 1981 biography by Henry Kenney: H. Kenney, *Architect of Apartheid H.F. Verwoerd: An Appraisal* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1980). The term was first applied to Werner Eiselen by W.D. (David) Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters: South Africa's Anthropologists, 1920–1990* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2nd edition 2001 [1997]), 68 and has since been used in this way by other scholars including Herman Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 2003), 553.

3 Ibid, 469–70.

4 J. Sharp, 'The Roots and Development of *Volkekunde* in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8, 1, 1981, 16–36; R. Gordon, 'Apartheid's Anthropologists: The Genealogy of Afrikaner Anthropology', *American Ethnologist*, 15 3, 1988, 535–55.

5 Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters*, chs 2, 5 and 6; W.D. Hammond-Tooke, 'N.J. van Warmelo and the Ethnological Section: A Memoir', *African Studies*, 54, 1, 1995, 119–28.

doctoral thesis in 1996, there is relatively little emphasis on Eiselen's connections with Germany. In a brief and 'aberrant' moment at the beginning of his career as a lecturer in ethnology and Bantu languages at Stellenbosch University, he published a newspaper article highlighting differences in the racial biology of black and white South Africans, but is said to have immediately returned to what is read as the benignly paternalist Berlin Mission Society tradition in which he was reared. Already by the mid-1920s it is said to have been culture and ethnicity rather than race that took centre stage, an emphasis allegedly reinforced in the early-mid 1930s by friendships with liberals on the Inter-University African Studies Committee, including R.D. (Dave) Rheinallt-Jones and Isaac Schapera. Eiselen went on to develop a discourse of 'positive apartheid' in full-blown form during the 1940s. Here the liberal segregationist ideas of his intellectual friends were simply pushed to their logical conclusion, which is seen to explain the relative absence of references to race in the Eiselen Commission of 1949, which formed the blueprint for the Bantu Education Act of 1953.⁶

This article challenges the Kros and Hammond-Tooke narrative regarding the racial ideology of Werner Eiselen and the foundations of *volkekunde*. In doing so it draws on a dynamic new literature that seeks to return attention to race and racism in South African history,⁷ but also more particularly to the significance of German racial thinking in the intellectual history of segregation and apartheid, now tracked in a more nuanced way through particular disciplinary channels. In the field of applied psychology, for example, Christoph Marx has highlighted the salience of Hendrik Verwoerd's Stellenbosch University student essays on the 'poor white problem' and especially the significance of his later work based on theories of childhood development and *völkerpsychologie* that he learned during his formative post-doctoral studies at the Leipzig School of Psychology.⁸

In the fields of Bantu linguistics and ethnology, and with obvious relevance to this article, Sara Pugach's groundbreaking study *Africa in Translation* tracks the development across the nineteenth century of German linguistics and ethnology, reaching its height during the German colonial period and interwar years under the undisputed leadership of Carl Meinhof (1857–1944). Directly contradicting Hammond-Tooke's claims that Meinhof had a limited and strictly scientific influence on his numerous South African students, she traces a direct connection between Meinhof's racist theories of African linguistics and the writings of one of his favourite South African students, Nicholas van Warmelo. She reads the government ethnologist Van Warmelo's *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa*, the 1935 text which would serve as the blueprint for the social engineering of ethnic identities and

6 See Cynthia Kros, 'Economic, Political and Intellectual Origins of Bantu Education, 1926–1951' (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1996), published in abridged form as *The Seeds of Separate Development: Origins of Bantu Education* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010). For a condensed statement of the argument see also Kros, 'W.W.M. Eiselen: Architect of Apartheid Education' in P. Kallaway (ed), *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948–1994* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 53–73.

7 See also S.E. Duff, 'Facts about Ourselves: Negotiating Sexual Knowledge in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa' and Saul Dubow, 'Racial Irredentism, Ethnogenesis, and White Supremacy in High-Apartheid South Africa' in this issue.

8 C. Marx, 'Hendrik Verwoerd and the Leipzig School of Psychology in 1926', *Historia*, 58, 2, November 2013, 91–118. He challenges the benign interpretation of the racial politics of Verwoerd's university years in R.B. Miller, 'Science and Society in the Early Career of H.F. Verwoerd', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 4, December 1993, 634–61.

boundaries under apartheid, as a continuation of the intensive collaborative work that he and Meinhof had completed just three years earlier: the translation into English of Meinhof's career-defining study *Grundriss einer Lautlehre der Bantusprachen* (Foundations of Bantu Phonetics).⁹

Her case is not confined to Van Warmelo. She indicates that most of the leading linguists and ethnologists in interwar South Africa were in thrall of Meinhof, whom they regarded as 'the great master'. His South African disciples included Van Warmelo's predecessor as government ethnologist G.P. Lestrade, the linguists Clement Doke, Johannes Anthonie Engelbrecht and B.I.C. van Eeden, and of course Werner Eiselen, the latter three all having trained under Meinhof in Hamburg.¹⁰

In this article I re-examine and extend Pugach's case for the connection between Carl Meinhof and a racialised branch of Bantu Studies in South Africa by tracing the origins of the discipline of *volkekunde* to the two-and-a-half year Hamburg (and Berlin) doctoral training of Werner Eiselen, undoubtedly Meinhof's most influential disciple. Her own reading of Meinhof's influence on Eiselen is, however, limited by her lack of any first-hand reference to Eiselen's extensive ethnographic and linguistic writings, which began, significantly, in the very years that he was under Meinhof's mentorship in Hamburg. As a result she falls back on Kros's image of Eiselen as a man who structured his ideas about difference in terms of culture and ethnicity.¹¹

The products of Eiselen and Meinhof's 'co-production of scientific knowledge', to use Lyn Schumaker's much-cited term,¹² and the prominence of race in this process are encapsulated in three hitherto unreferenced essays published by Eiselen in Afrikaans and German during and immediately after his time in Hamburg: 'Die Seksuele Lewe van die Bantoe' (The Sexual Life of the Bantu), which was published in the newly established Afrikaner nationalist *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns* (Journal for Science and Art) in 1923; 'Geloofsvorme van Donker Afrika' (Religion in Dark Africa) published in the *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns* in 1924; and 'Die Veränderung der Konsonanten durch ein vorhergehendes 'i' in den Bantu-Sprachen' (The Change of Consonants through a Prefixed "i" in the Bantu Languages), his 75-page Hamburg doctoral thesis, which was later published in 1924 as a two-part journal essay and then as a book.

Based on a close reading of these essays I argue that his Hamburg trilogy provided the blueprint for the subsequent establishment of *volkekunde* during Eiselen's decade-long tenure as lecturer and then professor of 'Bantologie' (Bantology) at Stellenbosch

9 S. Pugach, *Africa in Translation: A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond, 1814–1945* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012). For a fuller account of the argument in relation to Van Warmelo, see S. Pugach, 'Carl Meinhof and the German Influence on Nicholas van Warmelo's Ethnological and Linguistic Writing, 1927–1935', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 3, 4, December 2004, 825–46.

10 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, ch 7: After the Colonial Moment: German Influences on South African Linguistics and Ethnology, 1920–45. For an argument for the influence of the leading figure in an earlier generation of German ethnographers, Adolf Bastian, on another German-speaking South African linguist Dorothea Frances Bleek, see J. Weintraub, *A Working Life: The Life and Work of Dorothea Frances Bleek, 1873–1948* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2015).

11 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 177–8.

12 Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press), 1–22, 227–59.

University (1926–1936).¹³ Firstly, his essays were premised on an overt hostility towards the British liberal political tradition in South Africa, something that would remain a cornerstone of his own writings and those of his students who dominated the *volkekunde* tradition across the twentieth century. Secondly, his essays identified Bantu sexuality, marriage and religion as the core themes in the development of *volkekunde* as a discipline based on an ideology of racial difference. Thirdly, his arguments were based on a core set of German missionary and ethnographic texts, mainly produced during the period of empire between 1884 and 1918, which would be used in his founding of the discipline of *volkekunde* at the University of Stellenbosch between 1926 and 1936. These texts, as my opening quote from one of Eiselen's essays suggests,¹⁴ were so deeply dismissive of African culture and so strongly informed by the physical anthropological tradition that predominated in imperial Germany that they formed a distinct ethnographic tradition.

Yet, in keeping with our emphasis on the micro-politics of knowledge production in this volume, this is also an intensely personal story. The collaboration between student and disciple was based on a friendship that began when Eiselen spent the months between October and December of 1921 living in the Meinhof home. In order to understand the imprint of this warm relationship and why the two men, a 22-year-old German Afrikaner nationalist from South Africa and a 64-year-old pastor-turned-linguist, hit it off so well, it is essential to locate the story of their friendship and collaboration in the context of Eiselen's and Meinhof's life histories. In the case of Eiselen I will highlight the racialised nature of his Berlin Mission Society upbringing and the importance of Afrikaner nationalism in his education. I do not share Cynthia Kros's view that Werner Eiselen's life was relatively 'bland and banal',¹⁵ even if our ability to reconstruct the personal aspect is constrained by the surprising absence of an archive of private papers.

'A Son of the Berlin Mission', 1899–1912

Werner Willi Max Eiselen was born on 13 June 1899 on the mission station of Botshabelo ('Place of Refuge' in Northern Sotho), just over three decades after its founding in the district of Middelburg in what was then still the independent South African Republic. We should imagine the mission station of his birth as a town with a population of several thousand and what contemporaries described as 'the finest [church] in the Transvaal'.¹⁶ Racial politics had been an inextricable part of the mission's history from the very outset. The Pedi chief Sekhukhune had evicted the founding

13 On Eiselen during the Stellenbosch decade, see A. Bank, 'Fathering *Volkekunde*: Race and Culture in the Ethnological Writings of Werner Eiselen, Stellenbosch University, 1926–1936' and "'Broederbande'" [Brotherly Bonds]: Afrikaner Nationalist Masculinity and African Sexuality in the Writings of Werner Eiselen's Students, Stellenbosch University, 1930–1936', *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38, 3–4, Sept.–Dec. 2015, 163–179, 180–197.

14 W. Eiselen, 'Die Seksuele Lewe van die Bantu' (The Sexual Life of the Bantu), *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, 2, 1923, 174. Here and elsewhere all translations are my own, from Afrikaans or German.

15 Kros, *Seeds of Separate Development*, xiv. The heading in the subsection below is taken from Kros, 'Economic, Political and Intellectual Origins of Bantu Education, 1926–1951', ch 2.

16 Cited in P. Delius, T. Maggs and A. Schoeman, *Forgotten World: The Stone-Walled Settlements of Mpumalanga Escarpment* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014), 132.



Figure 1: Werner Eiselen's parents, Gustav and Dorothea, Germany, 1902. National Archives of South Africa, Cape Town, AG Photographic Collection, AG8807

father, Alexander Merensky, from his chiefdom. This had forced him to relocate to Botshabelo under the protection of the South African Republic, to whose segregationist racial policies he and his successors remained unanimously and fiercely loyal.¹⁷

None more so than Werner's father Ernst Ludwig Gustav ('Gustav'), who had a German university training in theology, an unusual qualification among the missionaries of the Berlin Mission Society in South Africa. He studied Lutheran theology in Tübingen and Friedrichs University in Halle-Wittenberg in the early 1880s, the universities where Martin Luther himself had trained. Ordained in 1887, he worked as an assistant minister and teacher in the Prussian province of Brandenburg for a year before coming out to South Africa in 1889. Within a year of his arrival at Botshabelo he married Dorothea Nauhaus, daughter of the mission superintendent Carl Nauhaus, a man who was a trained student of Bantu languages. At nineteen, Dorothea was more than ten years Gustav's junior (see Fig. 1). They were immediately sent north to found a new mission station at Arkona, a 14-day wagon trek north into Sekhukhuneland. For almost a decade Gustav and Dorothea lived in this remote outpost consisting of no more than two small rondavels, with Gustav often leaving his wife and children alone as he went in quest of converts in the neighbouring countryside.¹⁸ Werner was their fifth and youngest child, his four siblings having all been born on this isolated mission station (see Fig. 2). He was born a year after their return to Botshabelo after Gustav succeeded Carl Nauhaus as the head missionary and master of the evangelical school.

17 W. van der Merwe, 'Die Berlynse Sending en "Apartheid" in Suid-Afrika', *Historia*, 32, 1, 1987, 1–19.

18 L. Zöllner and J.A. Heese, *Die Berlynse Sendelinge in Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria: Promedia, 1984), 72–6.



Figure 2: The Eiselen children, Germany, 1902: (left to right) Werner, Martha Maria, Gotthilf, Irmgard and Siegfried. National Archives of South Africa, Cape Town, AG Photographic Collection, AG8807

In the 'Lebenslauf' (Life History) that Werner Eiselen appended to his Hamburg University doctoral thesis, he recorded that he had been home-schooled by his parents up to the age of 13.¹⁹ He spent three of his early childhood years back in Germany. This was during and shortly after the South African War. His family returned to Botshabelo in 1903 when he was four.²⁰ His two closest siblings, Martha Maria who was two years his senior and Gotthilf who was four years his senior, in all likelihood shared lessons around the family table. Latin would have featured in his early training,²¹ but parental lessons would have been dominated by religious studies in the German Lutheran tradition.

Luther's reformation had been driven by a rejection of outward form and institutional structure in favour of an impassioned call for inner transformation. While the Lutheran church retained a respect for ritual and structure, its theology was a religion of the spirit, a vision of the importance of inner life and the possibilities of the inner transformation of each individual.²² In the case of the nineteenth-century German Lutheran tradition, this emphasis on the individual was accompanied by a growing emphasis on the *Volk*, the community or nation, and the development of a *Völkskirche*, a German national church.²³ Leading missionary theologians like Gustav

19 W. Eiselen, *Die Veränderung der Konsonanten durch ein vorhergehendes 'i' in den Bantusprachen* (Hamburg: C. Buysen, 1924), 76.
20 Zöllner and Heese, *Berlynse Sendelinge*, 73.

21 It did in the case of his elder brother Gotthilf. See A. Eicher, 'Gotthilf Theodor Sebastian Eiselen', *Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol 3 (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1977), 266–7.

22 H.A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

23 On the impact of the German *völkische* doctrine on the missionary movement in South Africa see B. du Toit, 'Missionaries, Anthropologists and the Policies of the Dutch Reformed Church', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 22, 4, December 1984, 617–32 and esp. Van der Merwe, 'Berlynse Sending', 9–13.

Warneck, who visited South Africa during the 1920s, pushed the Berlin Society missionaries to embrace the idea of the conversion of 'tribes' rather than individuals.²⁴ Under the influence of German Romanticism, the potentially radical message of the promise for each individual of salvation through faith was muted by a deeply conservative insistence on the need for the purity and preservation of the inner life of communities.

In order to convert tribes one needed to learn their languages. Werner learned to speak North Sotho (Pedi) from early childhood. He would almost certainly have been shown, if not taught, from Alexander Merensky's 1891 practical North Sotho handbook *Wörterverzeichnis zum Gebrauch bei Bearbeitung Afrikanischen Sprachen* (Vocabulary for Use in Working with African Languages) as well as North Sotho texts and translations by his linguistically trained father-in-law Carl Nauhaus. His father would have encouraged Werner to read from his decade-long collaborative translation of the Bible into North Sotho eventually published in 1903.²⁵ The Berlin Mission Society placed a heightened emphasis on the importance of conveying the Christian message in vernacular languages. While this encouraged engagement with indigenous culture, it was always within a firmly hierarchically and racially predetermined framework. Anecdotes from Werner's published writings reveal an early interest in African culture cast in racially paternalistic terms.²⁶

Above all, childhood lessons included an induction into racial politics. Gustav Eiselen was a passionate advocate of white domination and racial segregation. In response to a government questionnaire in 1895, he called for the immediate conquest of all African chiefdoms so that the indigenous people could be put under the protective care of whites.²⁷ He was strongly opposed to the liberal assimilationist policies of the London Missionary Society and the idea of educating Africans to become 'black Englishmen', a phrase that would be echoed by his son in later years. The strident terms in which Gustav presented his ideas in a series of articles published in *Deutsch Afrikaner* in the early 1920s suggest that his call for cultural separation and political segregation was deeply informed by racism. As quoted with approval by his son, Gustav Eiselen declared that 'Europeans and indigenous peoples differ not only in colour, smell and appearance, but also in their deepest inner being, attitude and characteristics'.²⁸

Werner Eiselen would, in fact, explicitly identify his advocacy of apartheid during his decade-long tenure as secretary for Native Affairs (1949–1960) as having its roots in the policy espoused by his father and the Berlin Missionary Society in South Africa.²⁹ By marked contrast with, say, the Lovedale tradition in South Africa, which produced generations of highly literate Xhosa intellectuals, the Lutheran missionaries

24 Van der Merwe, 'Berlynse Sending', 12–13.

25 Zöllner and Heese, *Berlynse Sendelinge*, 73.

26 For an account of a meeting with a Pedi chief see W. Eiselen, 'Über die Hauptlingswürde bei den Bapedi' (On the Regality of Chiefs among the Bapedi), *Africa*, 5, 3, July 1932, 298; for a story about listening to Sotho folktales see W. Eiselen, 'Christianity and the Religious Life of the Bantu' in I. Schapera (ed.), *Western Civilisation and the Natives of South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1934), 75.

27 Van der Merwe, 'Berlynse Sending', 11.

28 Cited in W. Eiselen, 'Duitse Sendingwerk in Suid-Afrika en die Bantoe Volkseie', *Journal of Racial Affairs*, 8, 3, April 1957, 116.

29 Eiselen, 'Duitse Sendingwerk', 113–20.

produced very few educated Africans (the artist Gerard Sekoto being a notable exception). This was because they placed minimal emphasis on high school education, but instead confined their curricula to biblical studies in vernacular languages and the basics of literacy and numeracy. Peter Kallaway makes a forceful case for the under-acknowledged importance of this German mission tradition in South African educational debates of the early to mid-twentieth century. He shows that the German Lutheran model emerged in the interwar years as one of the three major schools of thought in the intensifying debate about the future of African education in South Africa, in competition with the English missionary model of assimilation and the American Phelps-Stokes rural development model. Ultimately, due to Eiselen's central role as architect of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, it was this Berlin missionary model with its emphasis on 'culture, community, ethnicity, *volk* and race' that triumphed over its British and American competitors.³⁰

Education in a Time of War and Nationalism, 1913–1920

In 1913 Eiselen was sent to King Edward VII High School, one of the most prestigious English-language high schools in Johannesburg, two years after his elder brother Gotthilf had matriculated there. The context in which the two brothers attended the school would differ radically, with serious consequences for the younger Eiselen. At the beginning of his third year at the school, England declared war on Germany. Eiselen's eldest brother Siegfried had returned to Germany to train as a missionary and then enlisted in the Kaiser's army in 1914. The official school history captures the anti-German spirit more than fifty years after the event and of how this 'most patriotic of schools dedicated to the service of empire reacted with horror [to the news of the outbreak of war]'.³¹ There would have been no traffic with traitors associated with the enemy. One can imagine that his classmates would have had little sympathy when he heard the news about the death in combat of his eldest brother at Verdun. Such an atmosphere must have been traumatic for a teenager who had spent his early childhood in Germany, whose home language and culture was emphatically German, and whose family's political sympathies were actively in support of the Kaiser. Eiselen's memories of being ridiculed and stereotyped by English classmates were doubtless more painful than this later account to an Afrikaner academic audience reveals.

I attended [literally 'visited'] a pure English school and there I often heard from my classmates that I was a 'square head', even though I am a long-skulled person. A German is a square head regardless of how he looks and he belongs to a less privileged race – or *volk* – than the Englishman.³²

30 P. Kallaway, 'Völkische, Völkerkunde and Apartheid Education: Missionary Education, German Anthropology, and Science in African Education', paper presented at the University of Cape Town Anthropology Department Seminar, April 2014), 3–5.

31 A.P. Cartwright, *Strenue: The Story of King Edwards VII School* (Johannesburg: Purnell, 1974), 59.

32 W. Eiselen, 'n Rassevraagstuk van Ons Tyd: 'n Lesing deur Dr. W.M. Eiselen op Stellenbosch' (A Racial Issue of Our Time: A Lecture by Dr. W.M. Eiselen in Stellenbosch), *Huisgenoot*, 6 August 1926, 17 (translation).

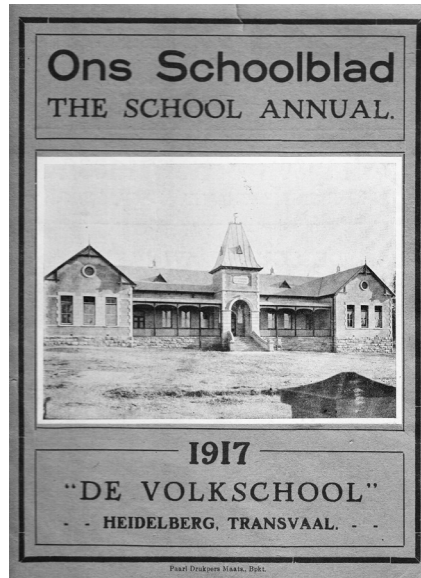


Figure 3: *Hoër Volksskool Heidelberg* in 1917, the year after Eiselen matriculated. Cover image of *Volksskool Heidelberg Jaarblad*, 1917

Because of this anti-German feeling, he was sent for his matric year to Hoër Volksskool (Afrikaner nationalist high school) Heidelberg. This was a working class school established for orphaned Afrikaner children in the wake of the South African War. The curriculum was, however, dominated by classical languages, the school offering both Latin and Greek. Eiselen was one of only two students at the school to achieve a first class matric. He also obtained a first class pass for the Taalbond exam in the category ‘Hollands – Hoogere Afdeling’ (Advanced Dutch).³³

Eiselen decided to study classics at Pretoria University, still known as the Transvaal University College (TUC), gaining his BA degree in 1919. He took courses in Latin and also Greek, the biblical language that lay at the heart of Luther’s challenge to Roman orthodoxy. In retrospect these undergraduate years were formative in the making of a German Afrikaner nationalist. Most of the lectures were given in English, but this led to growing discontent among Afrikaner students following the 1914 Rebellion and World War I. The broad South Africanism before the war gave way to a strident Afrikaner nationalism that reached its height during the years that Eiselen studied there.³⁴ Indeed, his student career provides a striking illustration of the change. By his third and final year he was a member of the six-man committee of the TUC Afrikaanse Studentebond (Afrikaner Nationalist Student Organisation). He was selected to attend the national Bondskongres (Afrikaner Nationalist Student Organisation Congress) in Bloemfontein in April 1919. Here he and his fellow

³³ *Volksskool Heidelberg Jaarblad*, 1917, 33.

³⁴ B. Strydom, ‘War, Education and Identity: Discord at the Transvaal University College (1914–1919)’, *Historia*, 59, 2, 2014, 194–209; on the history of ‘South Africanism’ as a political ideology in South Africa, see S. Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South Africa, 1820–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

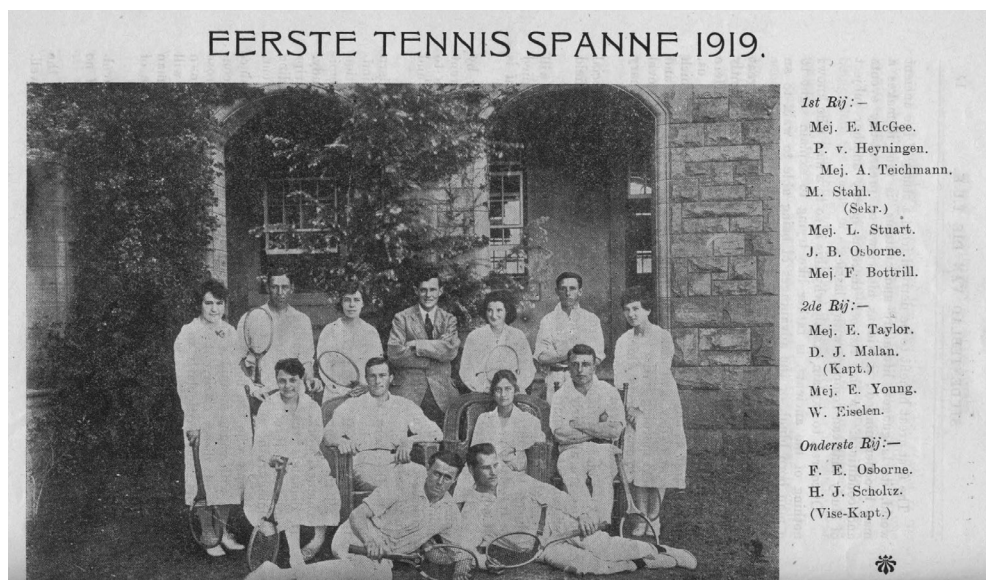


Figure 4: Transvaal University College, 'Eerste Tennis Spanne [First Tennis Teams] 1919': Werner Eiselen is seated on the far right-hand side with arms folded. 'Eerste Tennis Spanne', *T.U.C. Student Magazine*, 3, 6, November 1919, 18

delegates voted in favour of separate education for Afrikaans- and English-language students at schools and universities throughout South Africa, a policy proposal that had ominous resonance for his later political intervention in relation to Bantu education.³⁵

His new-found identity as a German Afrikaner made the newly inaugurated Stellenbosch University an obvious choice for his MA studies in classics in 1920. Eiselen was among the first cohort of students to be awarded a university bursary,³⁶ suggestive of impressive undergraduate results from the Transvaal University College, which then wrote the national exams through the University of South Africa.³⁷ Eiselen took these lessons into the classroom when he began his working career in January 1921 as a Latin teacher in an Afrikaner *volkskool* in the Transvaal. But his career in South African education was put on hold by an exciting opportunity to embark on doctoral studies at Hamburg University, beginning in October 1921.

Sitting at the Feet of Carl Meinhof: Hamburg (and Berlin) University, 1921–1924

The intellectual framework for the discipline of *volkekunde* was laid by the German linguist Carl Meinhof rather than the German ethnologist and sociologist Wilhelm Mühlmann, as John Sharp proposed in his analysis of this intellectual tradition.³⁸ Mühlmann did study and work at Hamburg University, but only some years after

³⁵ 'Afrikaanse Studentebond', *T.U.C. Student Magazine*, 3, 6, November 1919, 61.

³⁶ *Stellenbosch Universiteit Jaarboek*, 1921, 103.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1920, 67–8.

³⁸ Sharp, 'Roots and Development of *Volkekunde*', 31–2.

Eiselen had completed his doctoral degree and returned to South Africa to father *volkekunde*. The two men are therefore very unlikely to have met, unless it was during Eiselen's return visit to Hamburg with his family in 1936.³⁹ This was the year in which Mühlmann, now working at the Völkerkundemuseum in Hamburg, published the study in which he most explicitly outlined his racially informed 'ethnos theory'.⁴⁰ By this time, however, Eiselen had retired from the Department of Volkekunde at Stellenbosch University to take up a post in the Transvaal Education Department. There is, accordingly, no reference in Eiselen's published writings to the work of Mühlmann nor to ethnos theory, which only become the organising concept of *volkekunde* in a more mature phase of its history.

We know more about Eiselen's life during his two and a half years of doctoral study at Hamburg and Berlin Universities between October 1921 and March 1924 than about any other period in his career. This is due primarily to two essays in which he paid glowing tribute to the contribution of his highly respected mentor and friend Carl Meinhof to African studies and to South African linguistics. The first of these essays was published in 1927, on the occasion of Meinhof's retirement from Hamburg at the age 70, the second and more personal memoir in 1946 as part of a collection of obituary articles by Meinhof's dedicated South African disciples.⁴¹

Meinhof was very much at the height of his influence when Eiselen studied under him, despite his relatively mature years. In her intellectual biography of Meinhof, Pugach follows his rise to national and international recognition through decades of prolific publication from the turn of the century and through being at the centre of the institutional professionalisation of African studies in Germany.⁴² His 1899 study *Grundriss einer Lautlehre der Bantusprachen* (Foundations of Bantu Phonetics) was the turning point in his transition from theologically trained country pastor turned informal mentor of Berlin Society missionaries at Zizow (Cisowo on the Baltic) to foremost world authority on Bantu languages. A few years after the publication of *Grundriss* he secured an appointment at the Berlin School of Oriental and African Languages, then still a small outfit, before taking up an appointment as professor of African languages at the Hamburg Colonial Institute. Here he founded a journal and a department after the institute was transferred to the newly created Hamburg University. Consistently an outspoken proponent of German colonial expansion, the loss of Germany's colonies after World War I, rather ironically, enhanced rather than diminished his reputation as Meinhof transferred his energies outwards to spreading his missionary-driven linguistics abroad with South Africa being the major beneficiary of what Pugach terms 'the great turn outward'.⁴³

Eiselen would be the first in a succession of South African linguists to be mentored by Meinhof, the man whom Clement Doke, head of Bantu Studies at the University

39 W. Eiselen, 'In Memory of Carl Meinhof', *African Studies*, 5, 2, 1946, 79.

40 D. Kaesler, 'Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann (1904–1988)' in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol 18 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot), 293–4.

41 W. Eiselen, 'Carl Meinhof', *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, 5, 3, 1927, 209–13; Eiselen, 'In Memory of Carl Meinhof', 77–9.

42 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 71–116. This paragraph is a summary of her analysis.

43 Ibid, 164.

of the Witwatersrand, would later hail as ‘the greatest student of African languages’.⁴⁴ When Eiselen attended his seminars in the early 1920s there were no fewer than 94 students enrolled for the study of African or Pacific languages in Meinhof’s department at Hamburg University,⁴⁵ suggesting that the accolades of his former students were more than overblown fan mail.

Eiselen began his obituary essay by explaining that one of his uncles had been a very close friend of Meinhof. We know that Eiselen’s father-in-law Carl Nauhaus had studied Bantu languages with Meinhof in the 1890s, while the latter was still a country pastor in Zizow.⁴⁶ Eiselen was immediately impressed by the ‘striking appearance’ of the 64-year-old mentor who kindly collected him from Hamburg station, nostalgically recalling ‘his beautiful silver-white beard, his dominant nose and his powerful build’. Eiselen had already acquainted himself with Meinhof’s two foundational texts, *Grundriss* (1899) and *Grundzüge einer Vergleichende Grammatik der Bantusprachen* (Essentials of a Comparative Grammar of Bantu Languages) (1906). These would form the framework for his later doctoral thesis. Eiselen spent his first few months in Hamburg in the Meinhof home, which gave him a rare chance ‘to get to know my mentor both as a scholar and a person.’ They struck it off from the outset with Eiselen introducing his host to one of the most famous books of short stories ever published in Afrikaans.

I was an interesting informant for Meinhof because I could speak Afrikaans and Sotho. Of the latter language he knew a great deal, but Afrikaans was *terra incognita* for him. With enthusiasm he began to draw me out about the sound and form of Afrikaans. I was the master and he was the very promising student. After just a few days he was in a position to read [C.J.] Langenhoven’s *Sonde met die Bure* [Mischief with the Neighbours, first published in 1921] with a little help and great aptitude. Neelsie’s humour was to his taste. He greatly enjoyed the amusing escapades and he himself learned to tell all sorts of anecdotes in ‘*Platduits*’ [dialectical Dutch: here Afrikaans].⁴⁷

Meinhof’s interest in linguistics had initially been sparked, in part at least, by research he had done on ‘*Plattdeutsch*’ (dialectal German), the subject of a few essays that he had written in his early twenties.⁴⁸

Eiselen went on to tell a story about his master’s alleged modesty. In 1915 a local German newspaper reporter had asked Meinhof about the range of his mastery of African languages. ‘He sent him [the journalist] away with the words: “No, I am a

44 C. Doke, ‘In Memory of Carl Meinhof’, *African Studies*, 5, 2, 1946, 73.

45 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 167.

46 Ibid, 75. His Afrikaner German missionary students of this period included Theodor and Paul Schwellnus, leading Bantu linguists and biblical translators of the Berlin Mission Society in southern Africa.

47 Eiselen, ‘In Memory of Carl Meinhof’, 77 (translation). Langenhoven used the pen-name ‘Sagmoedige Neelsie’ (Gentle Neelsie) in his column in the Afrikaner nationalist newspaper *Die Burger*. By 1976 Langenhoven’s collection would go into its forty-first print run.

48 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 73.

perfectly ordinary person. I speak just one language, my mother language, and even that one stutteringly.”⁴⁹ The anecdote well illustrates the nature of Eiselen’s intellectual debt to Carl Meinhof. For Meinhof, African linguistics was the study of the written rather than spoken word. He had only actually visited Africa twice before Eiselen’s arrival in Hamburg, working from mission stations in East Africa in 1902–1903 and prisoner-of-war camps in North Africa and the Sudan in 1914.⁵⁰

His methodology involved the meticulous and exhaustive scrutiny of the structure of the languages recorded in vernacular texts rather than the messier business of real-life engagement with living speakers, as say the radically different Malinowskian method of participant observation would demand of social anthropologists. The single most important lesson that Eiselen learned from Meinhof was indeed this: that African studies was a textual science, one concerned above all with detached scholarly classification of collected materials rather than with ‘intimate’ encounters with Africans in the discourse of contemporary social anthropologists in the British tradition.⁵¹ As I have explored elsewhere, Eiselen and his students remained true to this classificatory vision of his craft across his 15-year career as a linguist-turned-ethnologist in the German tradition. When he or they did later venture to do a few weeks of fieldwork, it would be in order to collect objects and texts through dictation, ideally from elderly male subjects with the exclusion of African interpreters who might distort the ‘data.’⁵²

Eiselen had gone into more detail about Meinhof’s meticulous scientific method in the essay he had published in 1927. Eiselen was now actively teaching Bantu linguistics at Stellenbosch in the second year of what would be his decade-long tenure in the department he named ‘Bantology’ (the science of the Bantu), where Meinhof’s foundational texts would serve as core readings for his students. In Eiselen’s words:

The importance of these two books [Meinhof’s *Grundriss* and *Grundzüge*] lay in the careful applied scientific method of research. Intensive phonetic study put Meinhof in a position to transcribe all his language materials using one and the same orthography, to compare them and to track them back to one hypothetical original African language ... It is exactly this almost pedantic meticulousness, satisfied with nothing less than the full truth and analysing each combined linguistic feature in terms of the smallest of details, that sets our man head and shoulders above polyglot workers like [the amateur English linguist] Sir H.H. Johnson ... Many of the Bantu language sounds are difficult and foreign to us. To cut out the subjective factor in the description of such sounds, he [Meinhof] proceeded to subject them to phonetic experiments. This is why he called into life a phonetic

49 Eiselen, ‘In Memory of Carl Meinhof’, 77 (translation).

50 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 79, 161.

51 On the engaged fieldwork and discourse of ‘intimacy’ in South African social anthropology, see A. Bank, *Pioneers of the Field: South Africa’s Women Anthropologists* (New York: Cambridge University Press in association with the International African Institute, 2016 forthcoming).

52 See Bank, ‘Fathering *Volkekunde*’ and A. Bank, ‘“Broederbande,”’ *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 31, August 2015, 1–17; 18–36.

laboratory, which was first an appendix to his own department but has since become an independent department at Hamburg University and is today [1927] far and away the most famous initiative of its sort in Europe.⁵³

Eiselen experienced at first hand the workings of Meinhof's language laboratory in Hamburg, where Africans were treated as 'living phonographs' in the evocative description of a visiting scholar.⁵⁴ He took a course with Guilio Panconcelli-Calzia, the naturalised German whom Meinhof had appointed as the first director of a laboratory equipped with the very latest technology for 'determining, dissecting, classifying, and researching the conditions of change in phonetic processes'.⁵⁵ He and his many classmates would have observed the African laboratory assistants articulating the sounds of different languages, while German phonologists provided the expert analysis. The division of labour in this language laboratory was rigidly hierarchical, with African assistants effectively serving as little more than exhibits defined by their roles as visual displays of the ways in which particular language sounds were enunciated.⁵⁶

The legacies of Meinhof referenced in this passage extended beyond his concept of African linguistics as a laboratory rather than a field science. Eiselen was influenced by his master's evolutionary concept of African language development, most famously articulated in his theory that there was one original African language, which he termed Ur-Bantu, from which all current Bantu languages had evolved. This would be the subject that Eiselen developed in his 1924 doctoral thesis, as we will see below. In this regard Eiselen's fluency in North Sotho (Pedi) would have been of particular interest to Meinhof. Pugach reveals that Meinhof 'developed his hypothetical Ur-Bantu from observations on Pedi'. In his foundational text 'Meinhof speculated that Sotho provided the best example of regular sound shifts away from Ur-Bantu, and that it would be easiest to demonstrate how modern Bantu differed from its parent using Pedi [North Sotho] as a case study'.⁵⁷ The Ur-Bantu theory, taught with strict adherence to Meinhof's texts, would be a standard feature of Bantu language study as introduced by Eiselen at Stellenbosch University in 1926, which was reinforced when his Meinhof-trained colleague Johannes Anthonie Engelbrecht joined him the following year as the leading linguist with Eiselen taking responsibility for establishing ethnology as a discipline in the Afrikaans language.⁵⁸

The anti-English reference in the extract above also warrants further comment. Pugach's account of Meinhof's career demonstrates that a sense of superiority towards the English (whom he described as 'primitive', albeit 'friendly', on his first visit to England in 1910) turned into a deep-seated hostility, one might even say hatred, in the decade following World War I. Meinhof was an ardent champion of

53 Eiselen, 'Carl Meinhof', 210 (translation).

54 Cited in Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 131.

55 On Panconcelli-Calzia, see *ibid.*, 136–7. On Meinhof's acknowledgement of him see Eiselen, *Veränderung der Konsonanten*, 76.

56 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 117–40.

57 *Ibid.*, 78.

58 See Bank, 'Fathering *Volkekunde*', 1–17.

German colonialism, his very career as a linguist having effectively been sparked by the emergence of Germany as an imperial power. He deeply resented the loss of Germany's colonies after the war and especially the way England and her allies then treated Germany as well as the Berlin Society missionaries who were subject to their rule. While his anti-English sentiment and stereotyping seems to have reached their height only in his public correspondence in the late 1920s, with implications for his differential receptivity to English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South African scholars,⁵⁹ it is fair to assume that, in private, these anti-English emotions were particularly intense in the years immediately after the war, the very period when Eiselen was living in the Meinhof home. Meinhof's strident anti-English German nationalism could scarcely have failed to make an impression on a receptive young student like Eiselen, who had, after all, already been active in an anti-English Afrikaner nationalist movement during his student years in South Africa.

Eiselen recalled that, while philological matters were not discussed within the Meinhof home, politics was actively encouraged as a topic of conversation. Three years before Eiselen's arrival Meinhof had joined the right-wing *Deutschenationale Volkspartei* (DNVP, the German National People's Party). For many years he had actively campaigned for German colonialism, having called on the Hamburg business community to come out in support of German missionaries in Africa shortly after his appointment at the Hamburg Colonial Institute in 1909. In short, he was and remained a 'rabid [German] nationalist' whose vehement support for the re-establishment of the German empire would be the main reason for his decision to join the Nazis in 1933, given that he did not share their anti-Semitism.⁶⁰

Religion was the other main subject of discussion around the Meinhof dinner table. Here there was an even deeper-seated affinity between master and disciple, the one a 'son of the Berlin mission', the other one of the Berlin Missionary Society's greatest and longest-standing propagandists. Eiselen recalled having heard his mentor preach in Hamburg and then some years later in Stellenbosch, highlighting the applied nature of Meinhof's understanding of the significance of African linguistics.

I heard him preach in different churches in Hamburg, but the last of his sermons that I attended was in later years in front of the German Afrikaner community in Stellenbosch where he spoke about the missionary's task [while staying with Eiselen and his family during his first and only visit to South Africa in 1927–1928]. Meinhof was a great friend of the missionaries. His interest in the languages of Africa was indeed first awakened by the visits of missionaries from Africa to his congregation. For him African studies was not just a science for the sake of science, but a service in the great work of [African] upliftment by missionary churches.⁶¹

59 This paragraph is based on Pugach, 'Carl Meinhof' and, for the earlier period, Pugach, *Africa in Translation*.

60 This paragraph is based on Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 169.

61 Eiselen, 'In Memory of Carl Meinhof', 78 (translation).

This notion of spiritual service, more specifically of a religiously inspired sense of service to the *volk* or nation, would become one of the defining features of the *volkekunde* tradition in twentieth-century South Africa.⁶² This would be pronounced among the first generation of Eiselen-trained *volkekundiges* at Stellenbosch University, some of whom would have heard Meinhof's Stellenbosch sermons and most of whom had come to the university to train as ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church tradition before being persuaded by Eiselen to become ethnologists or at least ethnologically trained preachers.⁶³ Eiselen reflected that Meinhof's long career as a preacher shaped his style as a university teacher. In his early days of preaching in rural communities, Meinhof had been forced to convey his message in simple and direct language,⁶⁴ a style that Eiselen adopted as a lecturer at Stellenbosch, to judge from the recollections of his former students.⁶⁵

Eiselen's Hamburg Essays, 1923–1924

The impact of Meinhof's mentorship is strikingly apparent in three articles that Eiselen published during and shortly after his final year in Hamburg. He published two of these essays in the newly created Afrikaner nationalist journal *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, which would remain a favoured channel for publishing his and his students' writings in later years. The founding editor D.F. Malherbe explained the journal's Afrikaner nationalist purpose in his opening preface in 1921: 'Let the journal be a means of giving Afrikaans importance in the scientific world ... through its multiplicity of expression to allow our Afrikaner culture [*volkskultuur*] to blossom.'⁶⁶ As Isabel Hofmeyr established, the project of inventing Afrikaans as a literary language took off only after the South African War, but it developed in the following two decades as a highly dynamic process. Afrikaner nationalist writers, publishers, teachers and other cultural brokers were forced to forge, almost from scratch, a new written language out of the richly diverse dialectal rural forms of nineteenth-century Afrikaans as a spoken tongue.⁶⁷

Eiselen played a central role in this process. While he published ethnological essays in Afrikaans, German and English across his 15-year career as a linguist-turned-ethnographer, it was Afrikaans that emerged as his consciously promoted language of choice, particularly in his early years as head of *volkekunde* at Stellenbosch when he explicitly saw himself as crafting new Afrikaans language translations and texts for his growing cohort of undergraduate and graduate Afrikaners.⁶⁸ Among other

62 Sharp, 'Roots and Development of *Volkekunde*', 29–30.

63 For a full account of the religious backgrounds and ethnographies of Eiselen's graduate students at Stellenbosch University, see Bank, "'Broederbande'."

64 Eiselen, 'In Memory of Carl Meinhof', 78.

65 On Eiselen's simple and direct style as recollected by his most influential student and effective heir as father of *volkekunde*, Pieter Johannes Coertze, see R.D. Coertze, 'Die Aanvang van Volkekunde aan Afrikaanstalige Universiteite in Suid-Afrika' (The Beginnings of *Volkekunde* at Afrikaans-Language Universities in South Africa), *South African Journal of Ethnology*, 14, 2, 1989, 27.

66 D.F. Malherbe, 'Ons Doel' (Our Goal), *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, 1, 1921, 2.

67 I. Hofmeyr, 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnic Identity, 1902–1924' in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987), 95–123.

68 Bank, 'Fathering *Volkekunde*'.

things he would create an entirely new subject terminology, frequently drawing on German sources. For example, he used 'Groot familie' for the concept of the wide language family that Meinhof referenced by the term 'Grossfamilie' or, more mundanely, coined technical terms like *blaasroer*, *vuisklip* and *stomhandel* from the German words *das Blasrohr*, *die Faustkeile* and *stummer Handel*.⁶⁹

Hostility to interwar South African liberalism was the political thread running through Eiselen's essays of the 1920s. This is why Kros's image of Eiselen as a liberal, or at least strongly liberal-affiliated, scholar is so deeply misleading.⁷⁰ It may well be, as Kros suggests, that he did establish a kind of friendship with the South African Institute of Race Relations director Dave Rheinallt-Jones, who also advocated a policy of segregation, and that he developed a working relationship in the mid-1930s with his University of Cape Town colleague, the liberal social anthropologist Isaac Schapera. It is also certainly true that he took to quoting liberals like R.F.A. (Alfred) Hoernlé and Jan Hofmeyr as segregationist forebears in political essays of the 1940s.⁷¹ Yet none of this should obscure the fact that his racial ideology and politics rested on a fundamentally different foundation from those of interwar liberals in South Africa.

This is nowhere more evident than in his first published essay, 'Die Seksuele Lewe van die Bantu' (The Sexual Life of the Bantu), written during his third and final semester in Hamburg, following two semesters working under Meinhof's Africanist friends and colleagues at Berlin, the linguist Dietrich Westermann (1887–1956) and the anthropologist Felix von Luschan (1854–1924). Eiselen began by explaining that he was motivated to write about Bantu sexuality primarily in order to prove the falsehood of 'the widespread legend that the Bantu is spiritually pure. My ideas on the subject are based on my own knowledge of the Transvaal native and on a series of monographs about tribes that belong to the Bantu family', the latter concept bearing the mark of his mentor. He explained, in terms that were in keeping with an emerging Afrikaner nationalist historiography, that a 'mistaken Native policy in South Africa' had been introduced by British liberals a century earlier. 'This was the "noble savage" politics of the Cape government which had pushed the [Afrikaner] colonists across the Orange River.' This misguided British policy of assimilation had made life 'unbearable' for the Afrikaners, who were forced to leave the Cape Colony. These liberal delusions about African purity, he complained, were still frequently expressed. By way of example he cited the linguist and ethnographer A.T. Bryant repeating this misguided stereotype in a recent public lecture in Johannesburg, claiming that the Zulu was 'originally noble'.⁷²

Bantu tribes, he continued, were no longer primitives in the true sense of the word. The 'stage of development' that they had reached is usually referred to as 'totem-

69 Coertze, 'Aanvang van Volkekunde', 27. This process would be facilitated by the location of the *Afrikaanse Woordeboek* (Afrikaans Dictionary) at Stellenbosch University and the active and ongoing involvement in this process of his junior colleague J.A. Engelbrecht. On Engelbrecht's contribution to the *Woordeboek* and especially his incorporation of words of Khoikhoi origin, see the two warm references on Engelbrecht written by the founding chair of Afrikaans-Nederlands and editor of the *Woordeboek*, J.J. Smith, in 1927 and 1933.

70 See Kros, *Seeds of Separate Development*, ch 3: The Stellenbosch Years.

71 Ibid, 23–4.

72 W. Eiselen, 'Die Seksuele Lewe van die Bantoe', *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, 2, 1923, 165 (translation).

culture', an argument drawn from Meinhof's writings about African religion which he would refer to in more detail in his second essay. Here it was the degraded marital status of Bantu women and the oversexed nature, especially of Bantu men, that were his primary subjects of interest. 'The woman is not viewed as a full human being in the Bantu world. A [Bantu] man's wealth is always measured in relation to the number of his cows and wives.' Not surprisingly, the influence of Meinhof was explicit. He quoted from Meinhof's 1911 essay on *Afrikanische Rechtsgebräuche* (African Legal Customs): 'Property is so prominent that one doubts whether [African] marriage belongs to property or to personal law.'⁷³

Beyond this framing concept, it was the ethnological literature from German missionaries and imperial ethnographers that signalled Meinhof's influence. Meinhof had published extensively in the field of African ethnology during the 1910s with studies on African literature, folktales and religion. Meinhof introduced Eiselen to a wide sweep of ethnographic texts, almost all of which were produced by German missionaries and anthropologists at the height of their nation's imperial conquest in South West Africa, Togo, Cameroon and Tanganyika. These texts were uniformly judgemental about the lack of morality in African society. In this essay, for example, the older texts of the Berlin Society missionary ethnographers in southern Africa, including A. Kropf, *Das Volk der Xosa Kaffern* (The Tribe of the Xhosa Kaffirs) (1869), Alexander Merensky, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis Süd-Afrika* (Contributions to a Knowledge of South Africa) (1875) and Carl Hoffman, *Die Mannbarkeitschule der Basotho* (The Male Initiation School of the Basotho) (1912) were supplemented by those of German anthropologists writing about distasteful African customs, with a particular emphasis on female circumcision in German East Africa. Here his descriptions were drawn from Max Weiss, *Die Völkerstämme in Norden Deutsch-Ost Afrika* (The Tribal Families of Northern German East Africa) (1910), Ernst Kotz, *Sitten und Gebräuche der Neger* (Manners and Customs of the Negroes) (1922) and George Buschan, *Die Sitten der Völker* (The Customs of Tribes) (1920).⁷⁴

The thrust of Eiselen's argument was that the Bantu were 'losbandig' (promiscuous). The cause of their promiscuity was their immoral education. It came from the lack of restraint in relation to sexual lessons in childhood with most Bantu tribes encouraging sexual experimentation, and often intercourse, long before marriage. The contrast with the civilised customs of Germans and Afrikaners was explicit. 'In our European family life we only teach children privately (literally "in secret") about the workings of their sexual organs. In the life of the Native sexual feelings are so prominent that he is certainly not planning to keep them hidden from his children.'⁷⁵

The racist stereotyping is typically crude and generalised, as, for example, in his general assertion that: 'The African is by nature a practical man; romantic feelings are foreign to him.'⁷⁶ In the tribal initiation schools, about which he would later write in what he self-consciously advertised as the first book-length ethnography in the

⁷³ Cited *ibid.*, 172–3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

Afrikaans language,⁷⁷ the whole point was ‘to stimulate sexual feelings to the greatest degree’ through dance and song. These ceremonies would always end with ‘a wild orgy’. ‘No young woman is allowed to stay away.’ All circumcised young boys would ‘get full satisfaction of their desires’. Here he quoted from the 1875 ethnography of his Berlin Missionary Society founding forebear Alexander Merensky, which alleged that, at this concluding feast, ‘the [Bantu] witchdoctor is obliged to offer up certain human body parts for consumption ... served up to the young men as a magical means of making them stronger.’ His account of female initiation practices was more sexually explicit.

Where circumcision still takes place, only the clitoris is removed. With one or two authors I have found the claim that the so-called ‘Hottentot Apron’ originates from this initiation period, but the general opinion is that it is the result of a particular and still reported sort of masturbation. Whether the masculine sex, by analogy, follows this [custom of] self-gratification or masturbation is not entirely clear.⁷⁸

In a footnote he indicated that ‘Prof. [Dietrich] Westermann [his Berlin doctoral co-supervisor] assures me that among Sudanese Negroes this is still a widespread practice already among small children.’⁷⁹ His conclusion was cited in the epigraph to this essay: he warned his Afrikaner readers of the danger that the oversexed Bantu male posed to their sisters, mothers and wives, invoking the German imperial experience as justification for these fears.

Eiselen’s sequel in the *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap in Kuns* of 1924 was also far from subtle in its stereotypical judgements about African culture, in this instance ‘religion’. Again it drew on an explicit contrast between European Self and African Other. ‘Geloofsvorme van Donker Afrika’ (Religion in Dark Africa) began with the claim that knowledge and intelligence were related to belief and religion. Here Africa and Europe were seen to be at different ends of the scale.

It is self-evident that the whole sphere of human life may be divided into two parts: the area of rational intelligence and the area of belief. The greater the intelligence, the more the role of belief will shrink. It is for this reason that we [white South Africans or Europeans] have understanding, while the black African entertains vague and misleading beliefs. In relation to religious practice and forms of belief our continent is truly ‘Dark Africa’.⁸⁰

77 See W. Eiselen, *Stamskole in Suid-Afrika* (The Tribal Schools in South Africa) (Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1929), 1. For analysis see Bank, ‘Fathering Volkekunde’, 7–8.

78 Ibid, 170. The ‘Hottentot Apron’ was a term coined by early European travellers to the Cape Colony to describe the cultural practice of some Khoikhoi women of elongating the labia. It soon became a standard feature of colonial discourse about the sexual ‘deviance’ of ‘Hottentots’.

79 Ibid, 170 n 5.

80 W. Eiselen, ‘Geloofsvorme van Donker Afrika’ (Religion in Dark Africa), *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, 3, 1924, 84–98 (translation).

He went on to question recent theories that viewed religious forms in terms of a developmental sequence from animism to polytheism to monotheism. This evolutionary theory of religion was most closely associated with the British anthropologist James Frazer, whose famous study *The Golden Bough* (1912) was referenced in the bibliography. 'Victorian anthropologists' like Frazer tracked cultural forms in relation to 'progress-in-civilisation' with all cultures located at different stages of what was seen a linear trajectory that would be followed by all societies. While this model was clearly based on assumptions about the superiority of European civilisation, it did rest on an underlying notion of a common humanity and shared path of development.⁸¹

The German anthropological tradition was dualistic with a clear distinction drawn between *Kulturvölker* and *Naturvölker*, a discourse that permeated the later writings of Eiselen and those of his students.⁸² Onto this was grafted his mentor's particular theories of language diffusion and the role of higher and lower 'races' in this process. Drawing instead on Meinhof's writings about African religion, primarily his 1912 book *Afrikanische Religionen* (African Religions), published in Berlin by the Evangelical Mission Press, but also his 1911 study in this series, *Die Dichtung der Afrikaner* (The Literature of the African), Eiselen hypothesised that most Africans belonged to a 'totemic culture' in which religious beliefs were associated with 'one or other form of animal worship'. These practices could be traced back to Ancient Egypt. The article again made reference to African cannibalism, here as an alleged feature of religious practice. He felt that one should not underestimate the religious impact of 'taboo' in Africa, a term with origins in the religious customs of Pacific Islanders. These forms of ignorance needed to be combated by the missionaries.

Is it not the time for our missionaries to challenge these beliefs [associated with totemism] through their evangelical preaching? ... At the forum in Athens Paul addressed the Greeks: 'Men of Athens! You have made an altar in honour of unknown false Gods. I announce the existence of this God.' The lesson of Paul is being ignored – I would be the last to ridicule the services of the missionaries in relation to African language study, but they have ignored research into African religion.⁸³

This was a rallying cry for missionaries to stamp out the superstitious beliefs that he characterised as 'religion in Dark Africa', by exposing African superstitions and mythologies and shining the light of the true monotheistic religion, Protestant Christianity, the product of deep understanding and reasoned cultural intelligence. Space constraints do not allow for a fuller analysis of what, in effect, turned into a

81 See G.W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free, 1987). Though published in 1912, Frazer's study fits within the framework of 'Victorian anthropology'.

82 On centrality of this concept in German anthropology, see A. Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 50–1; on its application in the text of the founding generation of *völkerkundiges*, see Bank, 'Fathering *Völkerkunde*' and "'Broederbande.'"

83 Ibid, 88.

rambling assemblage of ill-informed and borrowed hypotheses about alleged African religious beliefs across the continent, with particular attention to former German colonies. We should, however, note that there was explicit support in the latter sections of the essay of the 'Hamitic theory', which Pugach identifies as the central element in the racist framework of Carl Meinhof.

Based on [the German South African linguist Wilhelm] Bleek's early formulations of linguistic difference in Africa, Meinhof claimed that there were three main sub-Saharan language families: the Hamitic, Bantu and Nigritic/Sudanic. They were supposedly divided by linguistic criteria, but in fact biology also played a role. Hamites were understood as 'white' Africans, while Sudanic and Bantu-speakers were viewed as 'black' or 'mixed'.⁸⁴

Eiselen fully endorsed Meinhof's theories of the relationship between language and race, and followed this threefold classification of the races of Africa to the letter. In his later ethnological writings he consistently defined the Bantu as a 'mixed race',⁸⁵ while in this essay he expressed his conviction that 'we will not go far wrong if we assume that the higher religious forms came from the north with the Hamites'.⁸⁶ Here he footnoted yet another essay that he published in his highly productive Hamburg year. Entitled '*Die Rasse van die Mensdom, met Spesiale Inagneming van die Afrikaanse Inboorlinge*' (The Races of Man with Special Attention to Africans), it featured in the *Kristelike Skoolblad* (Christian School Journal), which we may assume was a South African missionary publication directed at young readers.⁸⁷

While there is no surviving record of the latter essay, the explicit reference to racial classification in the title, cited in the context of his support for Meinhof's Hamitic hypothesis, suggests that this article promoted his mentor's threefold racial and linguistic division of African peoples. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that racial classification and overt support for biological concepts of racial difference between Europeans and Bantu, as well as between different European races with 'the Nordic race' paramount, would be the most pronounced feature of his public speeches and political and ethnological writings in his first year at Stellenbosch University, especially in the context of his vocal support for the segregationist policies of General Hertzog at the time of the 1926 election.⁸⁸ This biological concept of racial difference was probably derived from Meinhof himself, although it is likely that Meinhof's friend and long-time collaborator Felix von Luschan, the physical anthropologist under whom Eiselen studied for two semesters in 1922–1923, also played a role. In his thesis Eiselen indicated that his doctoral studies at Hamburg and Berlin Universities had been in three primary fields: African studies, phonetics and anthropology (which in

84 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 88.

85 Bank, 'Fathering *Volkekunde*', 8–9.

86 Eiselen, 'Geloofsvorme van Donker Afrika', 97.

87 Ibid, 97.

88 Bank, 'Fathering *Volkekunde*', 2–7.

the German tradition referred exclusively to physical anthropology), with Luschan as his mentor in the latter field.

Luschan had been the inspiration behind the Bushman body-casting project of the South African Museum in Cape Town, an initiative he proposed on his 1905 visit to South Africa with far-reaching consequences.⁸⁹ He was a founder member of the German eugenics movement, which had been established in 1907. He had also provided the photographs that served as an appendix to Meinhof's 1912 study on the Hamitic race,⁹⁰ a text with which Eiselen would have been well acquainted. We can only guess which of them introduced him to the voluminous textbook of the German physical anthropologist Rudolf Martin, whose classificatory framework based on the physical measurement of different human races, *Klassifikation der Menschenrassen* (Classification of Human Races) (1914) was extensively referenced in Eiselen's political speeches and newspaper articles of the mid-1920s, and set as a core text for his undergraduates at Stellenbosch University through to the mid-1930s.⁹¹

The influence of Meinhof was also pronounced in the third 'essay' in this Hamburg trilogy, Eiselen's 75-page doctoral thesis, which was submitted in February 1924 under the title 'Die Veränderung der Konsonanten durch ein vorhergehendes "i" in den Bantusprachen' (The Change of Consonants through a Prefixed 'i' in the Bantu Languages). Meinhof had it published in full original form as a short book and as a two-part essay in his journal *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen Sprache*. Here the influence is evident in the racial assumptions underlying Meinhof's framing theory that African languages originated from a single source rather than in racist stereotypes of African sexuality or religion. In the opening pages Eiselen explained that Meinhof had set him to work substantiating one aspect of the Ur-Bantu theory that African languages had a single source and then evolved in divergent and traceable ways from this original pure version.

The problem is here conceived in etymological terms. In the individual [Bantu] languages the prefixed 'i' has often disappeared, but it is clear that in the original Ur-Bantu such an 'i' had earlier been associated [with a given consonant]. It was *my exercise* to explore all possible cases in which this 'i' changed in the following sound ... whether this 'i' was retained in the language or not.⁹² (my emphasis)

His scientific method involved the meticulous breaking down of the phonological structure of different Bantu languages, relating to this particular feature, and then comparing it across a wide range of languages. The legacy of this comparative methodology for the later development of *volkekunde* in South Africa was profound: by analogy, the Afrikaner ethnologist engaged in a detached textually based exercise in

89 P. Davison, 'Human Subjects as Museum Objects: A Project to Make Life-Casts of "Bushmen" and "Hottentots", 1907–1924', *Annals of the South African Museum*, 102, 5, 1993, 166–7.

90 Pugach, *Africa in Translation*, 111–2.

91 See Bank, 'Fathering *Volkekunde*', 5–6.

92 Eiselen, *Veränderung der Konsonanten*, 3 (translation).

the classification and comparison of specific features of the cultural lives of 'tribes', identifying (usually 'superstitious' or 'exotic') tribal rituals that were then located in a wide regional comparative grid, usually in order to demonstrate that a particular cultural practise could distinctively be associated with its wider 'Bantu family'. Implicitly or explicitly, such allegedly shared Bantu tribal customs, whether in relation to premarital promiscuity or superstitious religious beliefs, would be contrasted with the white South African or 'European' norm, be it proper and restrained sexual education for children, or monotheistic religion in its Protestant form.⁹³

A book review that Eiselen published in the *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns* some months after his graduation may be read as an addendum to his thesis. Here too he punted his mentor's Ur-Bantu hypothesis. The author of the book under review was Walter Bourquin, a German-trained Moravian missionary who had studied Bantu languages under Meinhof at the Oriental Seminary in Berlin in 1907 before dedicating his life to serving as a Moravian missionary in South Africa.⁹⁴ Bourquin sought to lend support to the Ur-Bantu theory of his mentor by constructing an inventory of the alleged root Ur-Bantu words based on the analysis of their appearance in (no fewer than 75) contemporary Bantu languages. The review is notable for its adulation of the editor of the publication rather than its praise for the author. In this regard Eiselen waxed lyrical about the great value of a series of additional chapters that Meinhof has added as a practical guide to missionaries and linguists working with Bantu languages on the ground. Such studies, he rousingly concluded, suggest that 'the flourishing of the developing science [of African linguistics] is assured and there will soon appear works that deserve to be ranked alongside the great pioneering books of Bleek and Meinhof.'⁹⁵

Conclusion: The Meinhof-Eiselen Legacy

In the decades after leaving Hamburg, Werner Eiselen went on to play a, some would say the, central role in the development of the ideologies and practices of segregation and apartheid in South Africa. Between 1926 and 1936, during his decade-long tenure as lecturer, senior lecturer and professor of 'Bantology' at Stellenbosch University, he founded *volkekunde* as an Afrikaner nationalist and segregation-affiliated university discipline in South Africa.⁹⁶ His students P.J. Coertze and P.J. Schoeman later authored, with the Bantu linguist B.I.C. van Eeden, the first social scientific text to use the term 'apartheid',⁹⁷ by which time Eiselen had reinvented himself as the superintendent of Native Education in the Transvaal. He made a brief return to academia in 1947–1949, establishing what would become the new centre for the devel-

93 See Bank, "'Broederbande'" on the use of this comparative method by Eiselen's graduate students at Stellenbosch University in the 1930–6 period.

94 See the introduction to the Walter Bourquin Papers, Leigh University Library Services, <http://www.lehigh.edu/>, accessed on 2 October 2015.

95 W. Eiselen, 'Boekbeoordeling: W. Bourquin, Neue Ur-Bantu Wortstamme' (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1923), 256 pp., *Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, 4, 1924, 59.

96 See Bank, 'Fathering *Volkekunde*' and "'Broederbande'."

97 Sharp, 'Roots and Development of *Volkekunde*', 29.

opment of *volkekunde*, the University of Pretoria. On his departure to take up the post of Secretary for Native Affairs in the first apartheid government, he appointed P.J. Coertze as his successor as professor and head of department, a position Coertze retained until his retirement in 1973 after a hugely influential career.⁹⁸

Eiselen is of course best known for having chaired the South African government commission into Native Education from 1949 to 1951 and effectively authored the report that proposed a radical restructuring of the South African educational system along racially differential lines. The report began by stating that 'the Natives' were an 'independent race' with 'inherent racial qualities' and 'distinctive characteristics and aptitude',⁹⁹ although much of what followed was cast in his newly adopted discourse of cultural relativism and self-development.¹⁰⁰ The Eiselen Report, as it came to be known, formed the blueprint for the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which dictated that Africans be educated in a different and markedly inferior way from white South Africans with massive consequences for race relations in mid-late twentieth century South Africa.¹⁰¹

As apartheid's first Secretary of Native Affairs from October 1949, he worked under E.G. Jansen (1949–1950) and then under his former Stellenbosch University colleague H.F. Verwoerd (1951–1958). In a late-life interview Eiselen effectively claimed to have given Verwoerd a crash course on the 'Bantu way of life' when the two men began working together in 1951, reporting that his former university colleague had been 'a fast learner'.¹⁰² Eiselen and Verwoerd proceeded to introduce a radical restructuring of government native policy, one which involved much closer surveillance and an ambitious vision of social engineering. In these years Eiselen's name also came to be indelibly associated with spatial segregation. Drawn up in 1955, 'The Eiselen Line' marked off the Western Cape as a 'Coloured Labour Preference Area' from which Africans, now dubbed 'foreign natives', were systematically evicted, or 'endorsed out' in the euphemistic language of the day.¹⁰³ In short, Eiselen and Verwoerd transformed the Native (or Bantu) Affairs Department of the 1950s into 'a crusading political bureaucracy ... [that] undertook a programme of social engineering that would have been inconceivable in earlier times'.¹⁰⁴

Despite this massive political importance in the history of apartheid, Eiselen has remained an elusive subject in South African historiography. Most histories of segregation and apartheid mention him a few times, highlighting his role in creating Bantu Education. Some mention his public dressing down by Verwoerd in parliament in 1959, hinting at a divergence of opinions between the two men. Others refer to the

98 On Coertze's intellectual framework and influence see the festschrift volume by J.F. Eloff and R.D. Coertze, *Etnografiese Studies in Suidelike Afrika* (Ethnographic Studies in South Africa) (Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1972) and the critical retrospective overview in Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters*, 119–39.

99 W. Eiselen, *Report of the Commission on Native Education (Eiselen Report)* (Pretoria: Government Printer), 7.

100 For a detailed and sophisticated analysis see Kros, *Seeds of Separate Development*, 84–116.

101 For an account drawing attention to the underlying discourse of race and the particularly racist nature of the submissions by many of the Afrikaner informants to the commission, see C. Soudien, 'Racial Discourse in the Commission of Native Education (Eiselen Commission), 1949–1951: The Making of a "Bantu Identity"', *Southern African Review of Education*, 11, 1, 2006, 41–58.

102 Personal communication from Werner Eiselen to Henry Kenney cited in Kenney, *Architect of Apartheid*, 269 n 18.

103 On the Eiselen Line, see I. Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987).

104 S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–1936* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1989), 179.

advice he gave the Afrikaner Broederbond, an organisation he had joined as early as 1935,¹⁰⁵ on the etiquette whites should adopt with regard to shaking the hands of black South Africans.

Yet he remains a surprisingly silent presence. The mystery surrounding Eiselen is largely due to the absence of a collection of private papers, something one would not have expected given his significance as a public intellectual, and an elusive profile partly due to his skilful and strategic shifts in political discourse over different phases of his career. The silence arguably also owes something to the peculiar reluctance of modern scholars to explore the centrality of race in his intellectual history.

Many seem to have been taken in, to varying degrees, by his seductive discourse of 'positive apartheid', his self-announced identity as 'a friend of the natives'. Dunbar Moodie set the tone here in his highly influential study of Afrikaner nationalism published in 1975 by suggesting, rather astonishingly, that this architect of apartheid 'was never a racist; throughout his career he continued to insist that ethnic rather than racial differences were most important in South Africa.'¹⁰⁶ Even Robert Gordon, who has done more than any other scholar to document the impact of the racialised culture of German anthropology on southern Africa,¹⁰⁷ has been generous in his appraisal, misleadingly presenting Eiselen as 'more radical and humanistic than many of the social or cultural anthropologists of the time.'¹⁰⁸

In the introduction I have documented the role in this process of Kros and Hammond-Tooke, and, even to some extent Pugach, whose otherwise landmark study endorses the familiar view that Eiselen consistently framed his ideas in the discourse of culture and ethnicity rather than race. In short, a genial image of Eiselen's racial politics has almost become the conventional wisdom, most recently rehearsed in Richard Elphick's account of him in his exhaustive study of the Protestant religion in the shaping of apartheid.¹⁰⁹

While it is certainly true that Eiselen placed a heightened emphasis on culture and self-development from the mid-1930s onwards, I have sought to show how his political ideology was fundamentally structured on an ideology of racial difference. In order to appreciate the centrality of race and racism in his thinking, it has been necessary to narrate his intellectual biography in a way that pays close attention to 'the micro-politics of knowledge'. A 'micro-political' reading of Eiselen's life and work involves paying particularly close attention to the importance of personal relationships in shaping his racial politics.

In this regard his father Gustav had a profound influence. The primary source of the racial theories that informed his cultural analyses and political writing in later

105 On his association with the Broederbond, see R. Gordon, 'Serving the Volk with *Volkekunde*: On the Rise of South African Anthropology' in J. Jansen (ed), *Knowledge and Power in South Africa: Critical Perspectives across Disciplines* (Johannesburg: Skotaville), 81.

106 D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley CA: California University Press, 1975), 274.

107 See for example R. Gordon, 'The Rise of the Bushman Penis: Germans, Genitalia and Genocide', *African Studies*, 57, 1, 1997, 27–54.

108 Gordon, 'Apartheid's Anthropologists', 540. For the argument that South African social anthropology represented a radically different tradition, see Bank, *Pioneers of the Field*, 'Conclusion: A Humanist Legacy'.

109 R. Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 282–2).

years came, however, from his Hamburg doctoral supervisor. While Meinhof powerfully influenced numerous other South African disciples, Eiselen was the only one who lived for months in Meinhof's home at a formative stage of his career, getting to know 'the master' as a friend as well as a mentor, discussing politics and religion with him on a daily basis. The seeds of apartheid ideology, one might even argue, were sown in the dining and living room of the Meinhof home, beginning in the week that the impressionable young German Afrikaner nationalist shared with the doyen of African linguistics his passion for Afrikaans and the famous short stories of the Afrikaner Nationalist parliamentarian, journalist and writer C.J. Langenhoven. Those seeds began to flower in the phonetics laboratory and seminar rooms of Hamburg University, where Meinhof offered Eiselen a comprehensive crash course in the development of an abstract racial framework for analysing cultural difference.

During his decade-long period of founding *volkekunde* at Stellenbosch University, Eiselen adopted and promoted all the fundamental assumptions informing the Meinhof system: the Ur-Bantu theory, the Hamitic hypothesis, the notion that the Bantu were a 'mixed race', and that there were three 'Bantu' families in Africa, distinguishable by language as well as biology. While these theories have all subsequently been proven erroneous, they set in place a totalising system for the classification and analysis of the Bantu tribal family. The assumption that there was a radical, innate underlying difference between the European race and the Bantu race remained the bedrock of Eiselen's racial politics, even after it was recast in terms of cultural self-development.

In this sense we might argue that Meinhof had a far more lasting influence on South African intellectual and political life than Sara Pugach has recognised. Unlike Meinhof's later disciples, Werner Eiselen came to operate from within the very heart of the apartheid government, crucially assisting in framing the ideology and practice of racially differential governance during the 1940s and 1950s. So, while his political discourse did indeed shift in the mid-1930s and 1940s towards a language of cultural distinctiveness, often with an emphasis on Bantu potential, the core assumption remained one of a fundamental separation of the European race from the Bantu race: an ideology of difference bred on a Berlin mission station in a former Boer republic and given a 'scientific' framework in Meinhof's home, office and seminar room at Hamburg University between 1921 and 1924 – with lasting consequences for the political history of South Africa.