

# High apartheid and the erosion of “official” local politics in Daveyton in the 1960s

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## *Abstract*

The paper discusses the apartheid state’s onslaught against the limited rights enjoyed by Africans in urban areas in the 1960s. It focuses attention on the “modern model township” of Daveyton, which was seen in the early years of apartheid as a space where a settled urban African working class could be assured of a permanent presence in “white” urban spaces. But, crucial changes to apartheid policies from the late 1950s saw a reversal of these initial intentions and resulted in African’s urban existence constantly being under threat. Not only were the very limited “urban rights” further eroded but, importantly, “official” local politics was eviscerated of any substance, even to its conservative participants.

**Keywords:** Daveyton; Urban Bantu Council; Apartheid; Bantustans; Benoni; Ekurhuleni; Urban rights.

## **Introduction**

This article discusses the implications of the shift in state policies during the 1960s on the local administration of Daveyton and on the “urban rights” of the residents of the township. Established as a model modern township in the 1950s, Daveyton was meant to a place where Africans would enjoy a set of basic rights in recognitions of their permanent presence in urban areas. This was strongly implied with the provision by the state of housing provision, extension of Section 10 rights and the availability of employment, among others. However, from the late 1950s the Nationalist Party (NP) introduced changes to key facets of its policies, inaugurating a period of

“high apartheid”.<sup>1</sup> Whereas in the first decade of apartheid the government insisted on a strict differentiation between “detribalised”(urbanised) and “tribal” (rural) Africans, now it abandoned this distinction and assigned all Africans to one or other rural-based ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> The promulgation of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959 signalled the government’s intention to politicise ethnicity. Henceforth all Africans would be tied to a “tribal” community and authority. Two implications flowed from this piece of legislation. First, Africans were denied a permanent status in the urban areas and, consequently, also any urban rights. Second, systems would be devised for the different “races” or ethnic groups (as defined by the ideologues of apartheid) to develop separately. This concept of separate development, Posel has explained, “was largely the ideological means to legitimise the denial of the franchise to Africans.”<sup>3</sup>

A central aim of these new policies was to reverse African urbanisation. As a result in the 1960s various pieces of legislation were introduced to push Africans back to the reserves. In the words of a leading government minister, MC Botha, all “natives without work or who, as approved workers, have misbehaved, must disappear out of white South Africa, back to the reserves.”<sup>4</sup> The implication of this renewed and ideologically-driven policy was that only those Africans who acquiesced to white authority and were deemed to contribute usefully to the white economy would be permitted in white cities. Previous concessions made to Africans, such as Section 10 rights and home-ownership, came under attack in the 1960s. African women especially found their position in the urban areas rendered precarious and vulnerable to being endorsed out of the towns.<sup>5</sup> The promotion of “homelands” also resulted in a massive re-allocation of resources away from the urban areas to the reserves. The consequences of these policies in Daveyton were to undermine the possibility of any kind of “official” local politics, as the state attempted systematically to dismantle any vestige of urban permanency for Africans.

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1 D Posel, *The making of apartheid..., 1948-1961: Conflict and compromise* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), Chapter 9.

2 D Hindson, *Pass controls and the urban African proletariat in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), pp. 60-68; S Terreblanche, *A history of inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002) pp. 312-325.

3 D Posel, *The making of apartheid...*, p. 231.

4 J Lazar, “Verwoerd versus the ‘Visionaries’, The South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (Sabra) and Apartheid, 1948-1961”, P Bonner, P Delius & D Posel (eds), *Apartheid’s genesis, 1935–1962* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1993), p. 381.

5 HJ Simons, *African women: Their legal status in South Africa* (London, C Hurst & Co., 1968), pp. 281-283.

## **Local authorities brought under control of central government**

Until the late 1950s the central government encountered opposition from municipalities in the main urban areas that were under the control of opposition parties, resulting in delays in the implementation of its policies such as the declaration of Group Areas and forced removals. Benoni, which was a stronghold of the United and Labour Parties, was often among the most vocal opponents of NP policies especially when the application thereof threatened additional financial burdens on the municipality or was deemed adversely to affect its plans for local industrial development. However, the relationship between the two tiers of state, which was somewhat tense and even adversarial in the early days of apartheid, was transformed from the late 1950s into a fundamentally co-operative one. J.E. Mathewson, Benoni's leading administrator of Native Affairs address in 1960 to the Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs (IANA) explicitly endorsed the policy of separate development and praised Verwoerd's declaration that "homelands" would have their own cities "where self-rule will apply in the towns, with the management entirely in the hands of the Bantu."<sup>6</sup> For Mathewson the government's "homelands" strategy could therefore be reconciled with his own support for the development of African urbanites. With ideological convergence achieved between two apparently opposing approaches, a period of unprecedented co-operation between the UP-controlled municipality and the NP government was established. The former believed the NP's new policies acknowledged the permanent urbanisation of Africans and township residents' ability to handle certain aspects of their own local governance.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, the NP's electoral ascendancy at all levels of government virtually guaranteed compliance by the vast majority of municipalities. Moreover, its control over local authorities was enhanced by changes to the structure and functioning of Transvaal's municipalities. The Local Government (Administration and Elections) Ordinance of 1960 centralised authority in the hands of smaller and less accountable Management Committees.<sup>8</sup> Until then Councils operated on the basis of standing committees, which were responsible for carrying out various municipal functions. Henceforth, these functions were centralised in the hands of a Management Committee, which

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6 Record of proceedings of the ninth annual conference of the Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs (IANA), 1960.

7 Government Publications, University of the Witwatersrand, *Hansard*, National Assembly Debates, 15 June 1961, columns 8214-8217, Mr Ross, MP (Benoni).

8 *Municipal Affairs*, 26, 305 (January 1961), p. 5.

effectively served as cabinet at the local state level. Under the new system Council elections were only held every five years, instead of the existing three years, thereby reducing the influence the electorate might have on Councillors. The centralisation of authority in the councils mirrored the concentration of power in the higher echelons of the state. In both instances opposition was consciously marginalised and rendered increasingly ineffective. At a local level, it may be argued, the NP's electoral advances plus the creation of Management Committees tended to transform municipalities into compliant executors of government policy.

The effects of the national political realignment were of enormous consequence for Benoni, especially its African population. Notwithstanding continued differences between Benoni and the government, the municipality proved to be an even more reliable local arm of the state than it was in the fifties. Mathewson saw the role of the municipality as a conveyor belt for state policy. "An Act of parliament", he informed local politicians from Daveyton, "could not be changed by the Council no matter how it felt nor could it be changed by him even if he liked to do so... It was his duty to carry out the State's policy and he could not fight against it."<sup>9</sup> The primary consequence of the growing collegial relations between the local authority and the government was that control over urban Africans became easier to effect. Government policies affecting African townships and their residents were henceforth implemented virtually without opposition from the municipalities.<sup>10</sup> This was especially evident in the creation of Urban Bantu Councils in the 1960s.

### **Urban Bantu Councils**

Advisory Boards for African locations were established from the 1920s to serve as mechanisms of liaison between location residents and white municipal authorities. They were explicitly denied any real power and their overall functions were limited to an advisory capacity. In addition, municipalities were neither obliged to consult the Advisory Boards nor take into account any recommendations by them. The usefulness of Advisory Boards depended on the willingness of local authorities to consult them on township

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9 University of the Witwatersrand Library (UWL), Historical Papers (HLP), Report of the Daveyton UBC, 20 March 1964, Minutes of the Daveyton UBC, 25 February 1964.

10 See for example the discussion on the shifts in relations between the central and local tiers of state in S Bekker & R Humphries, *From control to confusion: The changing role of Administration Boards in South Africa, 1971-1983*, (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1985).

administration matters.<sup>11</sup> During the 1930s the conservative-dominated Advisory Boards were able to perform their perfunctory roles without too much opposition. In the subsequent two decades, however, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and the African National Congress (ANC) sought to utilise the Advisory Boards as platforms from which to propagate their views and to mobilise residents in campaigns to demands improvements from the authorities. As a result, as Baines has shown, many Advisory Boards ceased to function according to the government's prescription. Even then the alterations in the political configuration of the Boards had very little impact on the policies of the municipalities.

Moreover, from the early 1950s local black resistance was overwhelmingly concentrated on non-institutional mobilisation. These bodies were therefore rendered superfluous under the weight of the profound transformation of the place of Africans in urban areas. On the one hand, most Africans regarded them as ineffective vehicles for their political aspirations. On the other hand, the government perceived them as one more platform that had come under the sway of contentious urban blacks. In the late 1950s two broad views crystallised regarding the future of the Advisory Boards.

Conservative township politicians and some municipalities called for Advisory Boards to be given more powers to counter the "grievance among the Bantu... that they are not always consulted on matters affecting their interest."<sup>12</sup> Mathewson saw himself as a pioneer in re-imagining the future of Advisory Boards arguing that it was imperative "to avoid placing the Advisory Board in a position where the members have no function but to sit back and criticize knowing that there is little possibility of their being called upon to face any repercussion arising from the implementation of the policy they may enunciate." But he and the Benoni Council had no intention of allowing the Advisory Board to influence important policy decisions, insisting they should only be involved in decision-making on "non-contentious nature".<sup>13</sup>

A second view argued for the abolition of the Advisory Board system. WMM Eiselen (Secretary for Native Affairs from 1948 to 1960)<sup>14</sup> admitted that urban Africans were not interested in the Boards, with only a minority

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11 G Baines, "The contradiction of community politics: The African petty bourgeoisie and the New Brighton Advisory Board, c.1937-1952", *Journal of African History*, 35, 1994, pp. 81-82.

12 JE Mathewson, *The establishment of a Bantu Township* (Pretoria, 1957), p. 195.

13 JE Mathewson, *The establishment of a Bantu Township*, p. 196.

14 I Evans, *Bureaucracy and race. Native administration in South Africa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), p. 57.

of eligible voters bothering to register. Then there were complaints about the alleged pervasiveness of malpractices in the Advisory Boards, including “pre-election promises, [the] use of delaying tactics when amendment of regulations or estimates are considered, [the] influence of Shebeen Queens on elections [and the fact that] supporters of the majority group are almost exclusively recommended for the granting of business licences.”<sup>15</sup> A consensus was developing among state and municipal officials that the Advisory Boards system was inadequate and had to be replaced. Precisely what should replace them became the subject of much debate in the late fifties and early sixties.

Initially, when alternatives to the Advisory Boards were being considered it seemed the granting of some urban representation and more substantive powers to the successors of the Boards might be possible. However, the promulgation of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959 and the repression that followed the Sharpeville Massacre scuppered in further consideration of extending substantive rights and responsibilities to the Urban Bantu Councils (UBCs). The ideology of ‘separate development’ had little to do with the actual physical, social and economic development of the reserves. Its main aim was to deny Africans political rights in “white South Africa” by creating ethnically defined political entities where all Africans would supposedly have the opportunity to exercise the franchise. From this point on the government was determined to associate, by whatever means, the political aspirations of African people to the ethnic “homelands”. This had a profound influence on the state’s approach to the creation of local authorities in urban African townships.<sup>16</sup>

The parliamentary debate on the Urban Bantu Council Bill revealed both the government’s objectives in establishing these bodies and the flaws inherent in them. In his motivation for the Bill, the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development argued that the government was “creating the possibility for the Bantu to take the initiative themselves to a very large extent in matters relating to their residential areas”. He added that municipalities would have the authority to delegate powers to the new Councils and urged them to fulfil this responsibility.<sup>17</sup> Even now it was apparent that the proposed powers, which were to be delegated to the UBCs, would be severely circumscribed.

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15 Record of the proceedings of the seventh annual conference of IANA, 1958. Quoted in speech by Eiselen.

16 See for example, P Bonner & N Nieftagodien, Kathorus & Ekurhuleni, and P Bonner & L Segal, *Soweto - A history* (Johannesburg, Maskew Miller Longman, 1999).

17 Republic of South Africa (RSA), Minister of BAD address to parliament, *Hansard*, Assembly Debates, cols. 8141-8142, 15 June 1961 .

The Minister explained that the UBCs would be given powers to “co-operate in the laying out of streets, the improvement of streets, etc. and in future we hope also in connections with the provision of electric light, etc. and that they will also be able to co-operate in respect of the laying out of playgrounds.”<sup>18</sup> The opposition Progressive Party dismissed the new Bill as being merely “a façade which pretends to give administrative powers to the urban Bantu” because any power that a local authority might agree to confer to the Bantu Council would have numerous conditions attached to it, effectively rendering it powerless.<sup>19</sup> Despite these objections the government pressed ahead with its plan to introduce the new system of pseudo local authorities in urban African townships.

Crucially, Verwoerd insisted that any new local authority for urban Africans must be defined “on an ethnic basis because the greatest success is achieved where the relationship with traditional custom and the Native’s respect for his traditional authority is retained... It is necessary for them to revert back to this system for the sake of peace and order and especially for the welfare and good progress of the Native himself.”<sup>20</sup> As early as 1954, at a meeting with Pedi chiefs, Verwoerd suggested these aims might be achieved by installing “tribal representatives” in urban townships. The government claimed chiefs were becoming concerned about their “children” in the cities who had “drifted away from the tribe”. Verwoerd outlined his two-pronged plan to address these concerns:<sup>21</sup>

The one is to allow your “children” to live together as a community in one portion of the urban area (ethnic grouping). The tribal chiefs must [also] have representatives in the cities who will be in constant touch with their people so that they may know where their “children” can be found.

Even though the government acknowledged serious shortcomings among Advisory Boards, it is evident from the discussions in official forums that its initial suggestions to create new bodies with substantial powers to administer the townships were shelved in favour of what turned out to be little more than a name change. In practice the only material change to the Advisory Boards was the provision made for chiefs’ representatives. This was partly

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18 RSA, *Hansard*, Assembly Debates, col. 8143, 15 June 1961.

19 RSA, *Hansard*, Assembly Debates, cols. 8141-8142, 15 June 1961, contribution to the debate by Helen Suzman, col.8165.

20 University of the Witwatersrand Library, Record of the proceedings of the fifth annual conference of IANA, September 1956, Address by HF Verwoerd.

21 University of the Witwatersrand Library, Record of the proceedings of the seventh annual conference of IANA, 1958, Quoted in speech by WM Eiselen.

because Advisory Boards had stopped being platforms for the advocacy of oppositional politics and were therefore of less concern to the authorities. The silencing of the opposition in the early sixties also meant the government was under considerably less pressure to create township administrative authorities with any real powers. Under the circumstances, the government opted for minimal change.

The UBC Act was finally promulgated in 1961, but elicited very little public interest. On the East Rand a division emerged in attitudes towards the UBC between those townships created in the fifties and sixties and the old locations. Daveyton, KwaThema, Thokoza and Vosloorus established UBCs, while Payneville, Benoni Location and Katlehong refused to do so. The Payneville Advisory Board complained that the creation of UBC was a step in the wrong direction. Expressing a widely held view (or hope) among township Councillors at the time the Board said it “was looking forward to the time when Native Councillors would sit side by side with their White Counterparts and not a Council elected on a tribal basis to implement tribalism.”<sup>22</sup> Similar attitudes were articulated by politicians of the other old locations. The remaining residents of the old locations had generally resided there for many years and in the parlance of the time were thoroughly detribalised. In addition many of them were also standowners who were involved until the mid-sixties in opposing the government’s forced removals schemes.

What became apparent in the decade or so after the promulgation of the aforementioned piece of legislation was that the Daveyton Advisory Board seemed oblivious to the flaws in the UBC system. It was the first to apply for the establishment of an Urban Bantu Council, which was duly inaugurated in November 1963. At the time the Councillors appeared convinced a new era had dawned for the administration of Daveyton, namely, that they would be given increasing authority to run the township. This belief was derived from an over-optimistic interpretation of the legislation and faith in the willingness of the Benoni Council to delegate significant powers to the UBC. Contrary to the expectations of the township Councillors, the creation of the new body was not followed by an extension of its powers. The ensuing contestations that occurred in the 1960s are the subject of the following section.

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<sup>22</sup> Central Archives Depot (CAD), Municipality of Springs (MSP), 1/2/1/10, Minutes of the Management Committee, Meeting, report of the Payneville Advisory Board meeting held on 21 November 1961.



## **UBC's hope for more powers**

In the 1940s and early 1950s Benoni experienced a massive influx of Africans from the rural areas, resulting in the proliferation of squatter settlements. In conjunction with the central government, the Benoni Council established Daveyton township in the mid-1950s to house this new African population. Daveyton was widely regarded as a 'model township', due the careful planning that went into its location in relation to industry and white residential areas, its provision of housing and grid-like layout and for being one of the first townships to implement ethnic segregation.<sup>23</sup> The Benoni Council's instant endorsement of the Advisory Board's proposal to establish a UBC heightened expectations that the new body would differ substantially from its predecessor, as did its inauguration in December 1963 which was accompanied by much fanfare and praises from the authorities. Daveyton's Councillors embraced their new positions with considerable enthusiasm and within months of the launch requested the delegation of additional powers. More pertinently, the UBC requested that the Benoni Management Committee consult it on all matters pertaining to Daveyton before taking any decisions. This became the major source of contention between the newly formed body and white authorities. Councillor Bookholane was eager to confirm the status of the UBC and objected to the existing practice of the UBC being informed after the Town Council had taken decisions.<sup>24</sup> Mr. SM Sinaba, the Daveyton resident elected to the Transkei Parliament, was even more forthright and appealed to Councillors to "claim their rights and those of their people."<sup>25</sup> But he simply refused to accede to any of these requests. From this point on the UBC experienced one disappointment after another in its attempts to acquire additional powers. Theoretically, new powers and responsibilities could be conferred on the UBC but any decision of this sort required endorsement from the Bantu Affairs Department, Provincial Administration and the local authority. Even if the local authority proposed a transfer of power, the Minister had the final authority and could, if he wished, rescind any such measure.<sup>26</sup> Thus the possibility of UBCs acquiring any substantive authority was unlikely. In fact, subsequent requests for the extension of powers, even on seemingly uncontroversial matters, were immediately rebuffed by the

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23 P Bonner & N Nieftagodien, *Ekuhuleni: The making of an urban region* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2012), pp. 71-75; 94-98.

24 UWL, HLP, Records of Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 24 April 1964.

25 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 11 December 1964.

26 RSA, UBC Act, Act 79 of 1961, Section 4(2)(e).

Management Committee.<sup>27</sup> By mid-1965 it was apparent that an impasse had been reached between the UBC and the Management Committee. Early in 1966 the Management Committee made appointments without even consulting the UBC whose objections were reduced to expressing “dismay” at being informed about appointments and dismissals only after decisions had been taken.<sup>28</sup>

Despite these early rebuffs the UBC continued in its efforts to secure some influence over the important question of finances in Daveyton. It routinely recommended expenditure items for the budget of the local authority, regarding this as an integral part of its responsibility. Although they were allowed to submit proposed items of expenditure the opinion of the UBC on this vital matter was usually not seriously considered. For example, the UBC’s proposals for the 1964/65 and 1965/66 budgets were totally omitted from the official budgets drawn by the Council. All they could hope for was that their proposals would be considered the following year.<sup>29</sup> Even on trivial matters such as entertaining Ward Committee members, the UBC found it did not have the authority, let alone the finances, to proceed without the permission of the Benoni Council.<sup>30</sup>

By 1966 most members of Daveyton’s UBC seemed to have resigned themselves to the impotence of the body, while others continued to hope that persistent requests for some autonomy would eventually be acceded to. Some Councillors did however express strong objections. Councillor Myataza complained bitterly that “There was a feeling that the Management Committee ran the affairs of the Bantu Council in Daveyton and that in doing so, it ignored the Council. Things had been done without the Council’s knowledge... The Management Committee seemed to treat the Councillors as ‘toy councillors’”.<sup>31</sup> These sentiments were echoed by Councillor Bookholane, who went further to call for the removal of the white local authority from the management of the affairs to African townships. Instead, he argued, UBC’s should be directly accountable to the BAD.

In a manner which was not entirely dissimilar from the 1930s and 1940s many Councillors fell back on the one limited area in which they could

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27 For example, in 1965 the UBC requested authority to appoint black staff but the request was refused.

28 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 21 January 1966.

29 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 21 January 1966.

30 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 22 April 1966.

31 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, Minutes of meeting with the Mancom, 26 April 1966.

play a meaningful role: settling township disputes. Those who were called on to intervene in domestic problems, resolve squabbles between neighbours or discipline errant youth were usually people of some authority in the township. One of the main unofficial functions of the ward committees was to act, together with the councillor, as mediators in their respective wards. Elected councillors, who had the support of at least some, usually older and conservative residents often played the leading role in township dispute resolution. The authorities had an ambivalent attitude to this form of “township justice.” On the one hand, it recognised the importance of the practice and even encouraged “respectable” residents to instil peace in the township. On the other hand, it was opposed to giving black residents too much authority over important matters such as control and security. In the late sixties this ambivalence was resolved in favour of further restricting the role of the elected Councillors as township mediators while at the same time permitting selected councillors (who were mainly the urban representatives of “tribal authorities”) to become more active in this respect. It was move designed further to limit the already weak base of support enjoyed by elected Councillors and to augment the influence of ‘tribal representatives’. Almost inevitably, this strategy generated enmity between the two sets of councillors.

In 1967 these matters came to a head. At first there were complaints that selected Councillors, especially the Zulu representatives, were not confining their activities to their particular wards but were ‘just grabbing anybody anywhere’. Councillor Khumalo also accused selected councillors of becoming increasingly unco-operative.<sup>32</sup> The government was, however, unsympathetic to the concerns of the elected councillors. Mr. P.S. van der Merwe of the BAD responded to the complaints by emphasising the government’s support for urban “tribal” representatives:<sup>33</sup>

... the Government considered all Bantu people in urban areas as subjects of some chief or other. There was no Bantu person who belonged to a municipality. A chief’s representative who was a selected member of the Council had two sets of functions and duties. In the first place, he had a duty to his chief who appointed him. As a representative of a chief he had to work for the people whom the chief may have in a certain urban area and he was responsible to the chief and this Council at home as regards all the problems of the subjects of that particular chief. A selected member was also a chief’s

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32 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 21 April 1967, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 28 March 1967.

33 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 21 April 1967, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 28 March 1967.

representative; but whilst serving on the Council he undertook the functions and duties of the Council. In one instance he was the representative of the Chief and his Council (kgotla) at home, and in the other he was a selected member of a council the functions and duties of which he had to adhere to as a member of the council.

The government also formalised the mediation role of the “tribal representatives” by establishing local “tribal” boards. The Tswana Board was the first of these to be created and was specifically authorised to settle disputes among Tswana.<sup>34</sup> In 1970 the Benoni Council endorsed a government decree<sup>35</sup> which denied elected Councillors the right to settle disputes without the permission of the Township Manager. This new directive utterly disempowered the UBC as the Manager would henceforth decide whether or not a dispute warranted reference to the police, Welfare Department of the Bantu Affairs Commissioner.<sup>36</sup> The UBC was incensed by the latest diminution of its role. Councillor Phosa, who drafted a lengthy statement in response to this decree, claimed the whole community would be adversely affected if Councillors could not settle marital disputes or discipline children. He contended that the Advisory Boards and the new UBC have been working hand in hand with both the Township Manager and the SAP – but how is it going to be now that the UBC has to put its hands off such an important matter as the settling of disputes – How is our Township going to look like? ... Over weekends when the Township Manager will not be available and when people have over-enjoyed themselves somehow poor victims have nobody to run to for help.

The UBC thus wanted to retain the right to dispense “traditional” justice, which the government had previously endorsed. Phosa claimed “[t]here is no Bantu in the world who wishes to have his domestic affairs settled in court. All cases of dispute are dealt with by his own people and it is only when no solution is forthcoming that the matter is reported to higher authorities.”<sup>37</sup> However, the government was no longer interested in having any township structure mediate between it and township residents on political and judicial matters. By the late sixties crime in the townships was on the increase, especially

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34 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 22 October 1967, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 22 September 1970.

35 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 23 July 1970, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 23 June 1970. Reference to a government circular by Councillor Phosa.

36 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 23 July 1970, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 23 June 1970.

37 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 23 July 1970, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 23 June 1970. “Statement by Councillor Phosa on settlement of disputes”.

among youth, and the authorities were not convinced of the ability of UBCs to stem the growing tide of youth delinquency. It was equally concerned that if the UBC were successful in mediating all disputes in the township, an alternative, albeit informal, judicial system would develop that would not necessarily be under its control. Such a system would also be a source of power for the UBC or any other authoritative forum leading it. Reports that councillors were charging residents to settle disputes confirmed these fears.<sup>38</sup>

The Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Mr. Evans, was adamant the UBC would have to comply with the Department's directive and instructed them not to interfere in administrative matters. Councillors were even deprived of the right to refer or accompany people to the Commissioner's office.<sup>39</sup> The ever-tightening grip of authoritarian rule was being felt at every level of urban African society. Influx control measures were tightened, pass and permit controls were enforced more vigorously and surveillance of townships were augmented by extending police powers and the structure of townships.<sup>40</sup> With these measures, the Nationalist government systematically diminished the political space within which the compliant and conservative township politicians could operate, rendering them virtually ineffective. Not surprisingly, the UBC's were universally derided as a Useless Boys' Club and by the mid-1970s the state was forced to rethink its strategy of depriving township authorities of meaningful power.<sup>41</sup>

## **Residential and urban rights under attack**

In the late 1960s the government launched fresh attacks against the few rights enjoyed by urban Africans. For example, the Physical Planning and Utilisation of Resources Act of 1967 placed restrictions on the use of African labour in a conscious attempt to reduce the white-black ratio in industry.<sup>42</sup> This piece of legislation, together with a host of others promulgated in the late sixties, aimed at limiting the number of Africans working and living

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38 UWL, HLP, Records of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 23 July 1970, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 23 June 1970. "Statement by Councillor Phosa on settlement of disputes".

39 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton UBC, 22 October 1970, Minutes of the Daveyton UBC meeting, 22 September 1970.

40 P Bonner & N Nieftagodien, *Kathorus – a history* (Johannesburg, Maskew Miller Longman, 2001), pp. 48-58; P Bonner & N Nieftagodien, *Alexandra – A history* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 185-191.

41 P Bonner & N Nieftagodien, *Kathorus...*, pp. 58-62.

42 M Legassick, "Legislation, ideology and economy in Post-1948 South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1(1), 1974.

in “white” urban areas. The Minister of BAD, MC Nel, appealed to local officials to rally behind the government’s programme to reverse the tide of African urbanisation:<sup>43</sup>

One of the chief aims of my Department is to bring to fruition the State policy of reversing the stream of Bantu to the White areas and to bring about an exodus of these Bantu to their homelands.

I want to mobilize everyone into an active and effective taskgroup that will co-operate on this national goal. I ask all of you to widen your horizons to become nation builders instead of township builders.

You as my licensed officials, are not only legally obliged but also morally bound to promote the policy of my Department and I take it as granted that I can fully rely upon you in this respect.

Benoni’s white authorities concurred with the overall strategic approach spelt out by the Minister, evidenced by Mathewson caution to Daveyton’s Councillors not to criticise the government’s policies. He informed the UBC that:<sup>44</sup>

The “Minister” looked upon Daveyton and Wattville as being in a White area. Executive power could be in the hands of the Bantu in their homelands. It did appear that the “Minister” did not want a Council to talk about matters outside its jurisdiction. Matters of policy were not to be discussed.

One immediate consequence of this approach was to severely limit home-ownership in the townships.

In the late 1960s the UBC proposed the creation of a scheme to raise loans to assist residents to build their own houses. Few residents could afford to build their own house but there were some who had the means to service loans. Despite pleas from the UBC for support to this group, Benoni’s authorities insisted it would only consider such a step once at least three hundred applicants were received.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, nothing came of the proposal. National legislation governing housing loans to Africans also effectively excluded almost the entire urban African population from qualifying for such loans. Individuals could apply for State loans of £250 if the cost of the house did not exceed £450. The balance of the price had to be paid by the prospective home-owner to the state. Anyone who wanted to build a house costing more

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43 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 21 November 1968.

44 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 21 November 1968, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 29 October 1968.

45 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton UBC, 22 January 1965.

than £450 had to be rich enough to bear the entire cost. Qualifying for loans from building societies was also completely ruled out as these institutions could only grant loans to people who actually held the title to the land, which effectively excluded residents of the new townships.<sup>46</sup>

Residents from Benoni Old Location were especially affected by these restrictions. Many of them were home-owners in the location and wanted to purchase houses in the new township. Some of them wanted, and could afford, to improve their homes with the money received as compensation for the loss of their houses in the location. The UBC was understandably incensed and cognisant of the disappointment felt by many old location residents “who still looked forward to buying the houses they now occupied in Daveyton.” Councillor Ratale reminded the Council of the significance of purchasing house: “By buying a house”, he told the white local authority officials present at a UBC meeting, “residents were being enabled to invest in a small way. They then felt that they owned something and that even if they had to leave the areas, they would be compensated. They improved the houses because they knew the houses belonged to them.”<sup>47</sup> The government of course intended exactly the opposite and was determined to undermine any sense Africans might develop of permanence in the urban areas.

African home-ownership in the urban areas suffered a crippling blow in 1967 when the government prohibited any further house purchasing by urban Africans. In particular, local authorities were instructed that, “All dwellings in urban Bantu residential areas should, . . . , be made available to the inhabitants on a letting basis only.” To ensure compliance the government warned local authorities that it would not consider any application for the “erection of new housing schemes where the right of occupation of dwellings is to be sold to Bantu”. Furthermore, houses acquired by the municipalities due to payment default could not be resold to Africans.<sup>48</sup> These restrictions were directed particularly against “professional Bantu” who the government wanted to discourage from settling permanently in the urban areas. Local authorities were permitted to build houses for the professionals on condition that they only occupied on a letting basis. “Bantu falling within the higher income group”, the government’s policy stipulated, “should in all circumstances, be encouraged to erect houses of a higher standard in Bantu Township in the

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46 RSA, SAIRR, *Survey of Race Relations, 1955-1956*, p. 121.

47 UWL, HLP, Daveyton UBC Report, 21 March 1967, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 28 February 1967.

48 CAD, MB 2/3/97 AN10 (2), Circular from the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, 28 December 1967.

Homelands of their ethnic group and where they can obtain title for the land”.<sup>49</sup>

Curbing prospects for the growth of an urban-based African middle class was also extended to entrepreneurial activities. The government increasingly pressed Town Councils to persuade emerging businessmen or professionals to ply their trade in designated “homelands”. According to this policy “trading by Bantu in White Areas is not an inherent primary opportunity for them, but should be allowed only where necessary, within the urban Bantu residential area for the benefit of the Bantu.”<sup>50</sup> In reality this was a highly qualified right. In conformity with group area policies only Africans were allowed to trade in African townships. However, township businesses were restricted to meeting only the basic needs of residents. “The establishment of Bantu businesses”, the government instructed local authorities, “which do not confine themselves to the provision of the daily essential domestic necessities of the Bantu which must be easily obtainable must not be allowed.” African traders were not even allowed to own more than one business in the same urban area, whether it was of the same type or not. Again the government’s directives in this regard were explicit:<sup>51</sup>

The establishment in the White areas of Bantu companies and partnerships with the object of combining their resources in order to enable them to embark upon larger and more extensive business propositions is against policy and they must not be afforded trading facilities in urban Bantu residential areas.

It was the government’s policy to encourage and if necessary, coerce, African entrepreneurs to establish themselves in the homelands. A flourishing middle class, it hoped, would enhance the economy of the “homelands” and lend it some legitimacy. “Moneyed Bantu and Bantu companies”, insisted the government, “ought to establish themselves in the Bantu homelands where they can invest their capital on a permanent basis to the advantage of their people and own homeland.”

This left Daveyton bereft of shops to cater for the needs of residents. For example, in 1964 there was only one green grocer catering for the whole

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49 CAD, MB 2/3/97 AN10 (2), Circular from the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, 28 December 1967.

50 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 22 March 1963, Circular from the Secretary of BAD, 14 February 1963.

51 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 22 March 1963, Circular from the Secretary of BAD, 14 February 1963.



township.<sup>52</sup> Shopkeepers in the township also faced competition from outside traders. In 1965 the UBC voiced its alarm “at the amount of hawking by non-Bantu that takes place on the roads leading to Daveyton and also in the Township. We wish to urge that a stop be put to this practice.”<sup>53</sup> However, the Council was unsympathetic to their pleas arguing that these traders operated from land that fell outside the Council’s jurisdiction and could therefore not be prevented from trading. As the removal from the old location gained momentum and the population of Daveyton increased, the demand for extra trading also mounted. Under these circumstances the shortcomings in the existing policy became more apparent. The UBC accused the Benoni Council of treating townships unfairly by, for example, not allowing African businessmen to establish garages or dry-cleaners. Local traders, they argued, were prejudiced because the small shops provided by the Council made it impossible for them to store large quantities of goods. They were therefore unable to buy in bulk to lower their prices in order to become more competitive.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, many township residents preferred to shop elsewhere, using township traders only as ‘stop gap measures’. The restrictions of the sixties therefore left no sector of the townships untouched. Workers, entrepreneurs and even the conservative elite were subjected to various forms of oppressive measures that made their existence in the urban townships increasingly precarious and despairing.

### **The marginalisation of African women**

African women bore the brunt of the restrictions imposed on urban Africans. Walker has argued that the state was especially anxious to control African women. In her view, “what concerned the state most about African women in this early period of apartheid was their presence in the urban areas, and the growing permanency of the African community that it revealed.” In addition, the NP wanted to “bolster the myth of the reserves as the true “homelands” of the African people”, which aim required that women be coerced into residing there in large numbers.<sup>55</sup> These arguments are especially apposite to the second phase of apartheid.

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52 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 23 October 1964, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 22 September 1964.

53 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 24 September 1965.

54 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 22 July 1966, Minutes of the UBC meeting, 28 June 1966.

55 C Walker, *Women and resistance in South Africa* (London, Onyx Press, 1982), p. 127.

A primary concern of the state in the fifties was the apparent disintegration of the African family.<sup>56</sup> “Loose unions” and “illegitimacy” were blamed for the decline in social mores and as important contributory factors to the general lawlessness in the locations. Tsotsism, for example, was explained primarily as the outcome of the supposed lack of parental control and authority in the townships. In his assessment of urban African life, Eiselen enumerated what he believed to be the prominent social ills afflicting townships: “the social life is vitiated by loose morals, the incidence of illegitimacy is very high, parental control is ineffective, juvenile delinquency is prevalent, drunkenness is on the increase and life is made insecure by the unsavoury and dangerous activities of rival gangs.” The underlying problem (and therefore solution) seemed quite obvious to Eiselen:<sup>57</sup>

What is lacking... is the steady influence of a happy home life, strong family units and a healthy community spirit, factors which played such an important part in the tribal life of the Bantu.

Therefore, from the state’s perspective the establishment stable urban African family units became an important theme in overall policy to control urban Africans.

On the one hand, the authorities encouraged ‘urbanised Bantu women’ to settle down because their “presence had a stabilising effect on the family and on the community in general.”<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, “undesirable” or ‘loose women’ who did not contribute to building stable families became the main targets of influx control and “endorsement out” of the urban areas. Influx control was especially problematic for those women engaged in the informal location economy. Their very livelihood was threatened and their options progressively limited. For the overwhelming majority who were not prepared to return to the rural areas, there were only two options available to qualify legally to stay in the urban areas – either find formal employment or marry a man with section 10(1) rights.<sup>59</sup>

In the old locations men, and especially single women, could live without detection as lodgers or squatters. Under these circumstances their continued

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56 P Bonner, “Family, crime and political consciousness on the East Rand, 1939-1955”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.14, 1987, p. 395.

57 Record of proceedings of the sixth annual conference of IANA, 1957, Opening address by WMM Eiselen.

58 Record of proceedings of the sixth annual conference of IANA, 1957, Knoetze paper on “Socio-Economic problems arising from the presence or absence of Bantu women in the Bantu townships”.

59 D Posel, *The making of apartheid...*, p. 206.

presence in the town was not dictated by whether they were part of a family. In the new townships, however, it became virtually impossible to avoid marriage. Women were not allowed to own houses, which were allocated only to male family heads. As a result, they became more dependent on men for housing, which caused them to be subjected to another level of control, namely, male domination. Although women were also subjected to patriarchal domination in the old location, it was relatively easier to escape without the danger of losing the right to remain in the location. The precarious existence of women in the new townships became increasingly evident during the sixties.<sup>60</sup>

The Daveyton UBC routinely voiced concerns about the plight of women in the township, particularly over the apparently high incidence of men deserting their marital partners. Many cases were reported of men who, after entering into a union with a woman in order to qualify for a house, evicted her from the premises. Some of these men would enter into new marriages and insert the names of their new wives on the residential permit. The result was that the evicted woman, often with her children, were left destitute and without any prospect of finding a house.<sup>61</sup> D. Henwood, the deputy Director of Non-European Affairs in Benoni, confirmed that unmarried African women who lived with a man had no residential rights. Only women who were in legal unions could consider making claims for residential rights. Many women in these positions did not qualify for section 10 (1) rights and were therefore especially vulnerable to being “endorsed out” of the township to the “homelands”.

Throughout the 1960s the state further tightened the noose on women. For example, the 1964 Bantu Laws Amendment Act prohibited African women from entering the urban areas, except on a visitor’s permit. A directive issued in September 1967 by the Secretary of BAD expressly forbade African women from being placed on a housing waiting list, even if they qualified in terms of Section 10.<sup>62</sup> Many women of course did not qualify in terms of section 10 (1) rights, which increased their dependence on males. Councillor Lerutle explained the burdens faced by African widows who experienced enormous difficulty in finding accommodation for themselves and their dependants. He pleaded that the policy be relaxed in order to permit the allocation of houses to the widows of deceased tenants, who would within a reasonable

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60 P Bonner & N Nieftagodien, *Alexandra*, pp. 185-191.

61 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 19 November 1965.

62 UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 22 November 1967, Letter from the Secretary of BAD, 5 September 1967.

period after their bereavement acquire the necessary qualifications. Even those widows who qualified in terms of Section 10 (1) were forced to remain in the prescribed area where they were married. Failing to do so meant they could lose their urban rights. Again, Councillor Lerutle explained that this restriction prevented widows from returning to her own family's place for a period bereavement. Women who were married by customary rites only also faced problems when they were deserted by their spouses or widowed because they could not qualify to become tenants of the houses they occupied. The government however remained unperturbed by the plight of African women. Mr. Gray, the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, explained the state's attitude on these matters:<sup>63</sup>

The Department's policy is to persuade such widows to settle in the Bantu homelands. ... in terms of the law, females who transfer from one prescribed area to another lose their qualifications in the former area. Widowed daughters may return to their original places of domicile but they will not qualify as tenants of houses...

The precarious existence of African women in urban townships was reflected in the starkest terms the extent and callousness of apartheid. By the late sixties as the arrogance and power of the Nationalist Party ballooned, urban Africans experienced the most intensive control of almost every facet of their lives. The consequences of "high apartheid" however extended beyond the attack on urban rights. It increasingly also undermined the living conditions of the inhabitants of the "modern" townships.

## **Conclusion**

During the first decade of its existence, Daveyton was revered as the model African township, and for good reasons. From the point of view of the authorities it closely conformed to the government's main policies and achieved the two main aims for which it was created, namely, the stabilisation and control of urban Africans. However, even as the residents of Daveyton began to experience improvements in their lives from the early 1960s, the government began introducing policies that would eventually undermine these gains. The government's promotion of the "homelands" system in the 1960s and the post-Sharpeville repression stripped urban Africans of most of the

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<sup>63</sup> UWL, HLP, Report of the Daveyton Urban Bantu Council, 23 January 1968.

limited “freedoms” and “rights” which they had previously enjoyed. Women especially bore the brunt of the government’s tightening of controls on urban Africans. Even the compliant and conservative political elite who functioned in the UBCs found the authorities unwilling to vest any substantive powers in them, which rendered these bodies ineffectual either as representatives of township residents or as mediators between residents and the authorities. The government’s single-minded promotion of the “homelands” system occurred at the expense of urban African residential areas. Undoubtedly, it satisfied apartheid ideologues desire to excise all vestiges of urban rights from Africans and only recognise “political rights” for Africans in ethnic homelands. But this doctrinaire approach proved remarkably short-sighted as it completely alienated urban Africans and undermines subsequent efforts by the state to extend limited rights in response to mounting political opposition. As such, state efforts from the mid-1970s to reconstruct compliant local administrations foundered on the rocks of its ideological pursuits at the height of its power in the 1960s.