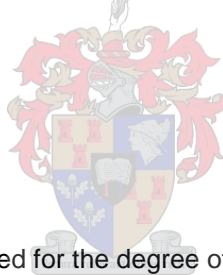


**Unsettling segregation:**

**The representation of urbanisation in black artists' work from the 1920s to the 1990s**

By

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in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
at Stellenbosch University

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

In this study I explore artistic representations of urbanisation produced by black South African artists throughout the twentieth century. Successive colonial and apartheid governments denied black people full rights to the city through, amongst other strategies, the systematic creation of black urbanisms or 'black cities'. Commonly known as townships, 'black cities' were built to house reservoirs of black labour beyond the major cities and industrial hubs. This forced separation resulted in selective and ambiguous integration for the urbanised black populace. The influx of black people into the peri-urban sphere led to an unprecedented proliferation of artists recording the black experience of living and working in segregated urbanisms. Regrettably, much of the discourses on urbanisation produced by white scholars constructed black urbanisation specifically as a 'problem', and the diverse artistic annals showcasing urban black life were classified as 'Township Art', a category that could not fully capture the multi-dimensional, complex, and layered experiences of the urban black. A Social-Darwinist teleology that rural-based African traditions necessarily had to make way for urban-based western modernity informed the way black artists' works were interpreted. Contesting these discourses, I use Afropolitanism, and the associated notions of multi-locality and New Africanism, to reframe depictions of twentieth-century urbanisation by black artists in order to redress the sweeping and essentialising binaries that characterised white writing on the phenomenon. Through a thick description of the major forces that shaped urban black life, I use the redeeming qualities of Afropolitanism to arrive at alternate interpretations of the artistic representations of black urbanisation created by black artists, which ultimately unsettle the rural-urban and tradition-modernity dichotomies.

## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek swart Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars se uitbeeldings van verstedeliking in die loop van die twintigste eeu. Opeenvolgende koloniale en apartheidsadministrasies het swartmense toegang tot die stad ontken, onder andere deur die sistematiese vestiging van 'swart stede'. Hierdie swart stede, algemeen bekend as 'townships', is gevestig om swart werkers buite die groot stede en industriële spilpunte te huisves, wat gelei het tot 'n dubbelsinnige en selektiewe integrasie vir die stedelike swart bevolking. Die instroming van mense na die stedelike sfeer het gelei tot 'n ongekende groei in kunstenaars wat die swart lewenservaring van apartheid-era stedelikheid ondersoek het in hulle werk. Wit skrywers het swart verstedeliking as 'n 'probleem' benader en die etiket 'Township Kuns' geskep om die verskynsel van stedelike swart kuns te beskryf, maar dié kategorie vang nie die kompleksiteit en veelvoudigheid van die swart stedelike ervaring volledig vas nie. Sosiale Darwinisme het 'n groot invloed uitgeoefen op interpretasies van swart kunstenaars se werk en gelei tot interpretasies van swart kuns wat gebaseer was op die teleologiese begrip dat landelike Afrika-tradisies noodwendig moes plek maak vir Westerse moderniteit. In hierdie studie pas ek egter die konsep van Afropolitanisme en gepaardgaande begrippe van multi-lokaliteit en Nuwe-Afrikaneit toe om kunstenaars se ervaring van swart 20ste-eeuse verstedeliking vas te vang, en sodoende wit veralgemenings en essensialistiese binêre interpretasies aan te spreek. Deur middel van 'n 'digte beskrywing' van die kernfaktore wat swart stedelike lewens beïnvloed het, gebruik ek die verlossende potensiaal van Afropolitanisme om 'n alternatiewe interpretasie van swart uitbeeldings van stedelike ervaring voor te lê, en sodoende die problematiese diskursiewe polarisasie van tradisie/moderniteit en platteland/stad aan te spreek.

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background and rationale

#### 1.1.1 Urbanisation and western modernity in Africa

In this study, I investigate visual presentations of urbanisation and the city created by black South African artists during the twentieth century. In 1904, only 10% of South Africa's black population was living in urban areas. However, by the end of the twentieth century (2001 to be exact) the figure had increased to almost 50% (Statistics South Africa 2006:22). This rapid urbanisation, crudely defined as the "shift in population from rural to urban settlements" (McGranahan & Satterhwaite 2014:4), was predicated on what Simone (2001:15) terms "the worlding of African cities", where modern African urban systems developed through the interrelated forces of colonisation and industrialisation.<sup>1</sup> At the risk of oversimplifying an entangled and fluid process, at a very basic level twentieth-century urbanisation in Africa was motivated by the socio-economic opportunities presented by cities. For the most part, the cities were built on a western capitalist sub-structure<sup>2</sup> (Harvey 1975). As such, Africans were prone to resettle in urbanised spaces because of the overall economic advantages and perceived higher standards of living that followed. This gravitation to the cities was particularly pronounced in settler colonies like South Africa during the early twentieth century where the native black inhabitants, displaced and impoverished by the destruction of local economies, sought a better life by moving to the metropolises (Peberdy 2010).

Industrialised colonial cities were the most effective agents for advancing westernised modernity. This situation resulted in an almost unchallengeable perception that urbanisation and westernisation were two sides of the same coin (Scargill 1979:213). This conceptualisation of the city as the quintessential symbol of western modernity was particularly true during the emergence of industrialised urbanisms in South Africa from the seventeenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it had become a commonplace notion that the city and modernity was a "European phenomenon because it was invented in Europe in accordance with the imperatives of European history" (Masilela 2013:340). The city and

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<sup>1</sup> According to Kiely (1998:3), industrialisation "is regarded as a total process, impacting on society through an unprecedented increase in goods and services". The industrialisation of African cities involved the increase in economic output in the areas of mining, manufacturing, and energy.

<sup>2</sup> Scargill (1979:1) postulates that besides cultural and social factors, modern cities are characterised by international economic forces such as capitalism that determine the essence and structure of the urban environment more than any other influence. Masilela (2013:336) corroborates this stance by stating: "[t]here can be many alternative modernities on the cultural plane or epiphenomenal level but there can be only capitalist modernity at the infrastructural level".

modernity were therefore always-already established as inseparable within the imaginary of many black South Africans, especially those who had been educated at Christian missionary schools. Such perceptions perpetuated the superficial and hugely problematic African-tradition versus western-modernity binary, which in turn gave rise to the rural-urban dialectic. The binary denoted that all things rural were African, while the city was paradigmatic of western modernity (Araeen 2005). This rural-urban dualism was best expressed in readings of black urbanisation by white scholars who claimed that there was passive “acculturation” among blacks who “adapted to life in the cities by becoming more westernised” (Eloff & Sevenhuysen 2011b:22). That is, blacks<sup>3</sup> automatically became westernised – and thereby modern – through their adoption of an urbanised lifestyle. These urbanised black individuals were even ascribed labels such as ‘black westerners’ or ‘black Europeans’.

Thus, blacks who were urbanised, and by implication westernised, were perceived to have become simultaneously de-ruralised and de-Africanised because they had presumably shed their rural and village-orientated cultural practices in favour of western norms of life in the city. This rural-urban division that van Robbroeck (2008:228) calls a “sham binary”, rendered blacks as idle receptors of a supposedly foreign realm unbeknown to them – that foreign realm being the city. In a probe of how Africans ‘engaged’ with western modernity through spaces like the city, Nettleton *et al.* (2003:14) refute the notion of mimetic modernity, reject the idea that blacks naively ‘aped’ western standards, by highlighting how Africans “accepted only those parts of western culture which suited their cultural modalities”. Nettleton’s *et al.* assessment points to a more determined encounter and exchange between blacks and western modernity within the urban environment. Despite the reality of the agency and adaptability shown by urbanised blacks, the rural-urban binary condemned blacks to the periphery of urbanness and, by association, to the periphery of modernity. As Robinson (2006:x) confirms, “racially divided South African cities made modernity a deeply ambivalent experience for many who lived there”. Laidlaw and Stockwell (1979:694) were more direct when they argued that the urbanisation of Africans “cannot be regarded as an unequivocal index that they are becoming more modern – from either an economic or a demographic perspective”.<sup>4</sup> In other words, regardless of their best efforts, urbanised black people could never be fully modern beings, which was further complicated by the active resistance to modernity and urbanisation by some Africans (Sivini 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the study I use ‘black’ or ‘blacks’ as convenient shorthand for the more cumbersome ‘black person’ or ‘black people’ respectively. I am aware of the offense related to saying ‘blacks’ instead of ‘black people’, but I am compelled to use the shortened version because it is more succinct and also to lessen the strain on readers.

<sup>4</sup> Although the authors here were talking about African urbanisation in general terms, their conclusions certainly applied to urban-based blacks in South Africa.



Thus, urbanised blacks were suspended between the realms of not being fully accepted into westernised modernity, and conversely, not being identified as intrinsically African on account of their externally imposed pseudo-European identity. Throughout the twentieth century, the colonial and apartheid governments tried to solidify this fictional rural-urban divide. According to Robins (1998:457), “South African administrators, planners and scholars have made repeated attempts to draw precise boundaries between rural and urban African spaces and identities”. Through the creation of ‘black cities’ (commonly known as townships), white urban designers sought to encamp city-based blacks within locations that were consistent with their rural predisposition. A product of colonial and apartheid policies of separate development, ‘black cities’ were socially engineered sites that served as reservoirs of black labour on the outskirts of the white metropole. Also, these black urbanisms were not actually considered as fully urban spaces. For example, in 1995, a study produced by the United Nations (1995) excluded residents of Soweto (the largest black township adjacent to Johannesburg) from the population statistics of the metropolis. Such examples underscore the tendency to exclude township-based blacks from the industrialised city.

However, blacks were not prepared to give in to this ideological and physical segregation. As Bailey and Rosenberg (2016:73) report, “[blacks] thoroughly rejected the rural identity that the state was trying to use as a means of control, and instead sought to develop an identity better suited to their new lives, rejecting at the same time the white definition of blackness”. To this end, colonial and apartheid cities were sites of contestation and conflict, where notions of blackness, modernity, urbanity, rurality, Africanness, and westernisation were intensely negotiated.

The overtly politicised and racialised urbanisation discourse in twentieth-century South Africa characterised black urbanisation as a ‘problem’ and a threat to white security (Labuschagne 1981:1). Black urbanisation was regarded a problem because it was simultaneously the jewel of South Africa’s economic miracle through the supply of numerous and cheap labour – ironically the very labour that physically built the cities and associated industries – were also the source of white society’s supreme angst, namely the possibility of full political, economic, and cultural integration between whites and blacks. How to reconcile separate development, as an apartheid ideology, with white financial dependence on black labour, became the driving force behind apartheid developmental city-planning (Freund 2019). This paranoia about white reliance upon the proximate black other, is the inevitable result of what Plumwood (1993:41) terms a “relationship of denied dependency”<sup>5</sup> that fuelled the majority of urban segregation

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<sup>5</sup> By ‘denied dependency’, Plumwood (1993:42) refers to binary thought systems ingrained in western civilisation, such as ‘culture/nature, male/female, public/private’, wherein both dominant and the subservient are reliant on each other to survive.

policies, such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 (augmentation of the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923), the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951, the Natives Resettlement Act of 1954, and the Bantu Homelands Citizen Act of 1970.<sup>6</sup> All these laws sought to spatially control and regulate the phenomenon of black urbanisation in South Africa. This disdain for and ‘denied dependency’ on the urban black manifested itself in punishing and inhumane ways. Unfortunately, even with its depressing effects, blacks could not, for the most part, escape the inevitability of urbanisation, primarily because urbanised towns and cities were “important employment centres for black workers” (Lodge 1983:130). Additionally, the success of the apartheid government’s modernist project relied heavily on the vast amounts of industrial labour offered by the black proletariat. Thus the presence of black labour within the industrialised cities escalated white enmity and fuelled the apartheid state’s increasingly desperate efforts to contain black proximity to white society during the latter half of the twentieth century. Even though black labour was essential for the growth of South African cities, there was a resistance to the idea of blacks as permanent urbanites, participants, and shapers of westernised modernity in the industrialised cities.

This brief contextualisation underscores the complex and often contradictory dynamics that shaped the rise of black urbanisation during the twentieth century. In the end, there is no denying that the initial encounter most blacks had with western modernity was through migration, whether by choice or necessity, to the urbanised and industrialised cities of South Africa. There is also no denying that this occasioned a seismic translocation from an established way of life towards an unavoidable new order.

### **1.1.2 Blackness in twentieth-century South Africa<sup>7</sup>**

According to Mbembe (2017:6), the noun ‘black’ typifies “exclusion, brutalisation, and degradation”. He further states that blackness is “the ultimate sign of the dissimilar, of difference and the pure power of the negative” (Mbembe 2017:11). Sithole (2020) arrives at a similar stance in his evaluation of what he terms the ‘black register’ that embodies the total suffering and dehumanisation experienced by dark-skinned Africans throughout history. Within the western colonial social order, to be classified as black meant the suspension of your humanity, ideologically, legally, politically, and economically. However, Hall (1997a) observes that race is a “floating signifier” with meanings and parameters that shift and morph

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<sup>6</sup> The Act enabled the formal creation of homeland states, self-governed regions geographically divorced from South Africa where blacks who were divided along cultural and language groups were expected to be citizens.

<sup>7</sup> At this point I must credit Parnell and Mabin’s (1995) assessment of twentieth century urbanisation in South Africa for informing much of my thinking regarding the significance of black urbanisation within the greater context of urbanisation. Their paper dismantles the theoretical segregation that is evident in much of the scholarship about South Africa’s urban history.

from region to region and over time. During the 1950s and 1960s, blackness, as a constructed and discursive identity marker, took on a more political and activist function. To be black and proud was the new order within the global black imaginary, be it in the newly decolonised countries in Africa or America as a result of the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements. To acknowledge one's blackness "expressed self-conscious membership within a broader collective that sought full independence and statehood" (Onaci 2015:69). In South Africa, Black Consciousness emerged during the 1960s as a socio-political crusade that emphasised self-determinism and self-sufficiency for all peoples who were abused by the colonial and apartheid system.

The Black Consciousness Movement recognised coloureds and Indians as black, even though the totality of their urban experiences and exploitation by the racist system did not fully match what the black Africans endured. Interestingly, the inclusion of coloureds and Indians into the 'black world' did not compromise nor erase the minor political and economic concessions they had received from the colonial and apartheid governments. However, as Zegeye and Ahluwalia put it, "this limited means of political expression for Indian South Africans still left a significant gap between them and the rest of the black oppressed" (quoted in Badsha 2001:464). Despite this gap, the common mission of fighting against the separatist system enabled solidarity among these diverse cultural groupings. While the colonial and apartheid authorities tried to separate blacks, coloureds, and Indians and further sought to augment the cultural and linguistic differences within African communities themselves, the universal suffering endured by urban-based blacks, coloureds, and Indians was the mortar that kept them together, for the most part.

However, within the colonial and apartheid logic, blacks, coloureds, and Indians were not seen as a collective. The racial classification system under colonisation and apartheid – popularised by research institutes like the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA)<sup>8</sup> – used the tags black, 'bantu' or 'native' to categorise the majority of South Africa's aboriginal population (excluding the Khoisan). In contrast, other so-called 'non-whites' were tagged independently as coloureds, Asians, Indians, and Chinese (SABRA 1972). While acknowledging the historical baggage and fabricated nature of these racial markers, in this study, I use the categories for practical considerations, and more importantly, for reasons linked to the overall aim of the research project. Because of forced separation through laws like the Group Areas Act of 1950 and reasons of historical origin, each of these population groups developed distinct political and cultural practices in response to their respective segregated urban spaces. Since

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<sup>8</sup> SABRA was established in 1948 as a think tank for the apartheid government. Based at Stellenbosch University, SABRA instituted the *Journal of Racial Affairs* in 1949 and used the journal as a platform to legitimate and advance the programme of apartheid.

this study clearly cannot deal with all these cultural variants, I have chosen to focus exclusively on black Africans. Furthermore, since this study aims to unsettle the rural-urban binary in how black urbanisation was represented in black art, a reading of coloured and Indian urbanisms would be inappropriate as this phenomenon did not really apply to them. However, in particular instances, I do mention important coloured and/or Indian writers and artists whose work intersected with the concerns and interests of blacks.

It is ironic that I rely on racial classification schemas that were derived from colonial and apartheid logic. I retain the use of 'black', 'coloured' and 'Indian' as demographic descriptors, even though these constructions cannot account for the nuance and intersectionally that existed between and beyond these ethnic and cultural groupings. However, as a historical study, I used these tags with the hope of subverting these engineered tropes.<sup>9</sup>

### **1.1.3 (Re)presenting the black experience through art**

I have used the phrase 'the representation of urbanisation' in the title of the study and indeed throughout the thesis to describe artworks produced by black artists depicting cityness. The idea of representation I gesture to here is not the broad definition of representation as the mirroring in cultural language of something pre-given. Rather, I reference representation as part of a complex consensual cultural system of communication. Hall (1997a & 1997b) decodes the sophisticated semiotics involved in cultural representations, especially the linguistic and visual, where cultural representation "is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings" (Hall 1997b:2). However, within the systematisation of these 'shared meanings' (re)presentation mutates from mere replication of existing phenomena towards the presentation of particular realities through language or visuals. Thus, within a cultural studies paradigm, representation is a dynamic process where creatives verbalise or visualise new social orders and norms through highly sophisticated and comprehensible signs and symbols.

Representation discourse accepts that all forms of creativity are essentially illocutionary (Currie 1985). Furthermore, this fictional nature of artistic representations produces slippery and ever-changing meanings, where "[t]here is thus no single, unchanging, universal 'true meaning'" (Hall 1997b:32). Thus, the meaning of being black as expressed in black art in urban South Africa during the twentieth century is inherently fluid, constructed, and contestable. While there is a documentary quality to the artworks discussed in this study, the artworks contain markers and signifiers of a more nuanced picture of urbanisation as a constructed

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<sup>9</sup> Terminology in a former settler colony is a difficult obstacle for any critical race theorist. It seems almost inevitable that one ends up using sensitive taxonomies that have developed over centuries of use, because these categories have been reified over time, and thus correspond to concrete realities that are the result of a long process of first colonial, and then apartheid 'separate development'.

reality through the eyes of black creatives. To this end, these artists were not producing mere simulations of the black urban experience, but were also creating new urbanisms and new urban subjectivities in and through their art.

A disadvantage of the constructed and non-fixed nature of representations of blackness is that anyone can hack into and assume a black personality and repackage the identity in ways that can be demeaning and disingenuous. This control over the representation of blackness is evident in the minstrel shows from America that developed during the early nineteenth century when white actors darkened their skins and performed as black jesters. Within the South African context, white voices also tried to mediate or represent the urban black experience. Besides commissioned reports and academic studies from bodies such as the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), fictional books were also written by white authors who assumed a black identity in their efforts to detail the plight of the urban black. For example, in 1936, Johannesburg-based lawyers J Grenfell Williams and Henry John May wrote the novel *I am black: The story of Shabala* (1936) that traces the life of a young Zulu boy who attempts to transition into a westernised urban lifestyle and finds the transition to be a frustrating and alienating experience.<sup>10</sup> Of interest is how this novel was punctuated by four woodcut prints which visualised Shabala's journey to the city by white artist Willem Hendrikz. Although some of these are benevolent attempts at translating the black experience through literature and art, they nevertheless remain forms of 'othering'. This study details how black creatives captured the urban black experience in ways that transcend the tropes of black urbanisation produced by non-blacks.

## 1.2 Research questions and aims

The study is premised on the following interrelated questions. Firstly, in light of the complex and racially charged developments of black urbanisation during the twentieth century in South Africa, how did black artists experience and subsequently artistically respond to and visually chronicle urbanisation, with a special focus on the period 1920s to 1990s?<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the question that arises from the background presented sets a theoretical parameter of how the description and interpretation of the main objects of the study is approached and asks in which ways can axioms like the New African Movement, Afropolitanism, and multi-locality dispel or

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<sup>10</sup> *I am black* received a favourable review in *The Bantu World*, one of the leading black newspapers of the twentieth century, wherein it was referred to as a "book which should be read" because it provides "reasons why the black man is developing an anti-white attitude" (*I am black* 1936:8).

<sup>11</sup> The use of this time span is neither arbitrary nor does it suggest an absolute periodisation of black urbanisation during the twentieth century; rather I have done so to acknowledge the undeniable impact the emergence of the Union of South Africa under British control in 1910 and later apartheid from 1948 had on black urbanisms, the effects of which are still with us today. Lastly, the 1990s was a period of uncertainty and great expectations after the unbanning of black political organisations and the formation of democratic governance in 1994.

decentre the problematic rural-urban binary that theoretically underpinned reductive historical discourses on black urbanisation and the art it inspired?

This study is concerned with reframing select representations of black urbanisation from the early to late twentieth century using the theories of the New African Movement, Afropolitanism, and multi-locality to unsettle the problematic rural-urban duality. By using these alternative 'black' theories, and by providing a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of the rich contexts of black urbanisation during the twentieth century, the study explores two core aims. Firstly, the study seeks to deconstruct and dismantle existing dominant discourses related to the representation of urbanisation in black art such as the reductive rural-urban split. The study achieves this by showing how the migrant labour system meant that the black proletariat moved freely between these domains, inter-alia. Thus, the study demonstrates the falsity of the binary construction and the purported incommensurability of these two domains. Secondly, the study builds on the first aim through a close reading of black artists' work that chronicles city life. The study demonstrates how black urbanisation during the twentieth century is revealed as a more complex and non-segregated experience than commonly suggested in white representations.

Because of the study's focus on the urbanised environment as a space/site for identity formulation and self-expression, I also explore various theories on space (both historical and contemporary) that grapple with the modern urban paradigm. I consider the growing polemic dealing with the nature of African cities (known as Afropolises) that take on forms distinct to the metropolises of the global North (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008; Bremmer 2010; Pinther *et al.* 2012; Pieterse & Simone 2013; Asmal & Trangoš 2015; Williams 2015). Although the notion of the Afropolis accounts for more recent manifestations of African urbanisation, the Afropolis nevertheless provides a solid theoretical foundation upon which to build a critical analysis of the development of raced South African urban spaces during the twentieth century.

### **1.3 Literature review**

Much has been published regarding black urbanisation during twentieth-century South Africa, and I engage with some of this vast and ever-expanding repository throughout the study (see Lemon 1991). Chabani Manganyi's seminal text *Being black in the world* (1973) is among the most authoritative accounts of twentieth-century black life written by a black scholar. The book covers a range of issues and was intimately concerned with the psychological state of urban-based black workers. For this discussion, I am interested in a chapter titled 'Who are the urban Africans?' From the outset, Manganyi (1973:9) posits that white scholars are incapable of

mediating what urbanisation meant for blacks because “the white experience is so existentially distant from the black experience”. Jordan K Ngubane (1963:viii), an influential journalist throughout the twentieth century and former editor of *Ilanga Lase Natal*, provided a similar remark when he wrote that “the emphasis on white initiative has given rise to the mistaken view that the Africans are the helpless victims of race oppression who need as much pity as assistance”. Both Manganyi and Ngubane were challenging the white liberals who consistently ‘represented’ and stood for the interests of the urban blacks. For Manganyi (1973:8), interpreting the experiences of the urbanised black populace was the responsibility of the “the black scholars of this country who will, first of all, ask the right sort of questions with a greater probability of arriving at the best answers”.

Besides investigating the phenomenon of urbanisation, I am specifically interested in literature that analyses the representation of urbanisation by black artists. Although not necessarily articulated as studies of urbanisation in the visual arts, there have been important readings examining the artistic illustrations of the urbanisation of blacks in South Africa. Warren Siebrits’ (2003a) *Art and urbanisation, South Africa: 1940-1970* is a catalogue for an exhibition he curated at his gallery in 2003 that explored the intersection between urbanisation and black art. Siebrits’ exhibition was a milestone event because it acknowledged urbanisation as an underlining trope in the artworks produced by many of the celebrated black artists from the twentieth century.

Other important readings were Badsha’s (1985) photographic narrative that explored the *imijondolo* (shacks) that mushroomed in KwaZulu-Natal in the wake of the forced removals campaign by the apartheid government from the 1950s onwards. Koloane and Mdanda’s (2004) essay ‘Urbanisation: Its influence on local expression’ was central in formulating the parameters of this study. Although the authors here do not focus on the representation of the urban environment, their contextualisation of the impact of urbanisation on artistic creativity was instructive. Lammas’ (1993) paper ‘Townscapes, townshapes, townships: Investigating experiences of urban South Africa through black art’ unpacks how black artists were invested in translating their encounter with the city into visual narratives. Lammas further argues that the images created by these often-overlooked artists can help urban planners and urban historians to understand the nuances of the ‘black city’ better. Eloff and Sevenhuysen (2011a & 2011b) published twin articles that investigate ‘Urban black living and working conditions in Johannesburg, depicted by Township Art (1940s to 1970s)’ and ‘Urban black social life and leisure activities in Johannesburg, depicted by Township Art (1940s to 1970s)’. Based on the periodisation of their articles, it is clear that Eloff and Sevenhuysen modelled their readings on Siebrits’ (2003a) exhibition and catalogue. While the general drift of these two articles

tended to be anthropological and not necessarily art historical, their evaluation of various urban lifestyles depicted by black artists was edifying.

Younge's *Art of the South African townships* (1988) is probably the most famous publication that popularises the notion of 'Township Art', and Sack's (1989) 'From country to city: The development of an urban art' made a lasting impression on my understanding of the ontogeny of urban black art. Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke's edited volume *African art in Southern Africa: From tradition to township* (1989) and various important and issue-focussed publications by Rankin (1990; 1991; 2011) explore the social dynamics of urban-based black art from the twentieth century. Rankin's work is of particular significance because it zoomed into specific vectors that influenced and shaped urban black art production throughout the twentieth century.

From a more discursive angle, an examination of the vitality of Johannesburg by Nuttall and Mbembe in *Johannesburg: Illusive metropolis* (2008), is particularly enriching in its theoretical engagement with cityness and its visualities. Within the book, individual essays, such as Bremner's 'Reframing township space', delve into the subtlety of Johannesburg's representation in art and literature, and how these cultural symbolisms of the city are central to how people relate to Johannesburg.<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, the compilation of essays by Okwui Enwezor *et al.* (2002) – linked to Enwezor's curatorial intervention at *Documenta 11* in Kassel in Germany – sheds light on the complexities facing megacities in Africa and how culture is at the heart of comprehending and existing within these spaces that are 'under siege' and beset with contradiction. While dealing with the artistic representation of Johannesburg after the 2000s, Cabral and Somayya's (2010) *Gold in graphite, Jozi sketchbook* is a tactile example of how an artist can reimagine the city through textual and visual-narrative strategies.

Other notable essays are Mdanda's (2011) 'Separate but unequal: Everyday apartheid as a theme in South African art' and Klopper's (2011) 'Home and away: Modernity in the art and sartorial styles of South Africa's migrant labourers and their families' that focus on the everyday experiences captured by urban-based black artists. Kayanja's (2009) master's degree dissertation 'Rural African perceptions of the contemporary metropolis' shows how black artists like Tommy Motswai idealise urbanity in their art. In their edited volume, *A long way home: Migrant worker worlds 1800– 2014*, Delius *et al.* (2014) engage with how cityness is inscribed in the subjectivities of migrant workers and how these subjectivities are catalogued through the arts. Another useful reading is Jewsiewicki's (1991) article that focuses on the illustration of urban social life through art in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I found

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<sup>12</sup> Bremner's *Writing the city into being: Essays on Johannesburg 1998-2008* (2010) also highlights how rhetorical inventions of the city are critical to our understanding of the history and social meaning of particular urban sites.



resonances with this paper on account of the similar political contexts in which the urbanised black artists of the DRC and South Africa lived during much of the twentieth century.

While acknowledging and drawing from these formative studies, this research project departs from these initial readings by viewing depictions of urbanisation by black artists through the theoretical lens of Afropolitanism and multi-locality. I also engage with ideas espoused by the New African Movement and other black intellectual and cultural movements from the twentieth century such as the Black Consciousness Movement.

#### 1.4 Problem statement and focus

Much has been said about the racist contempt or patronising liberalism of white<sup>13</sup> intellectuals writing about black art during the twentieth century. Among others, van Robbroeck's (1990; 1992; 1998; 2003; 2006) career-long assessment of these practices is by far the most comprehensive academic inquiry into of the myopic white gaze and speculative armchair research practices that resulted in essentialised readings of the art produced by black artists. One of the key observations van Robbroeck (1998:4) makes regarding white intellectualism about black art is that the "writing on Township Art is largely a-contextual". In other words, the commentary and analysis of black art by white writers were prone to abstracting the artwork from its place of making, which are the material, social, cultural and ideological conditions that necessitate its creation. Goniwe (2003:37) expressed this abstraction lucidly when reflecting on his experiences as a black art student in a predominantly white institution during the early-1990s: "[t]he content of my education was dominantly European and American. The very limited section on (traditional) art from the African content, including 'black' South African ('township') art was not only problematic, *but lacked contextual relevance and substance*" (my emphasis). To counter this lack of 'contextual relevance and substance' and discontinue this trend, the segregated urban contexts under which the artworks discussed in this study were produced have been discussed at some length in all the chapters.

In keeping with the socially engineered segregation of the twentieth century, artworks dealing with urbanisation produced by black artists were colloquially tagged as 'Township Art' by white writers and scholars,<sup>14</sup> or in the case of more modern rural-based art practices and in line with

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<sup>13</sup> White scholars have an ambivalent function in this study. On the one hand, I lean on the invaluable literature produced by white art historians who diligently researched and wrote about the black artists under investigation. But on the other hand, I am unreservedly critical of the colonial ideologies and racist impulses that filtered through their analyses of the meaning of black art and its place within the South African art canon.

<sup>14</sup> I must state at the outset that this study questions the essentialising term 'Township Art' of theorising and appreciating the art of black urban spaces. It is odd that all manner of art produced by black artists living in South African townships is tagged 'Township Art'. On the other hand, art produced by white artists living in suburbia is

the obstinate rural-urban binary, as 'transitional art'<sup>15</sup> (Nettleton 1988). This study seeks to debunk the rural-urban dichotomy with all its attendant binaries, such as tradition-modernity, primitive-civilised, by reframing so-called township and transitional art as intentioned portrayals of complex black urbanisms in their varied and often conflicting manifestations. Dismissing the rural-urban binary, van Robbroeck (2006:255) calls for discourses that will acknowledge "the black subject as actively engaged in the production of counter-cultures and counter-discourses, rather than the passive victim of surrounding racist texts and practices".

The focus of this study is squarely on the art created by black artists depicting the urban environment. Further to this, the type of art investigated as the main objects of this study are two-dimensional paintings, drawings, prints, mixed media works, three-dimensional sculptures, and installations. I have limited my investigation to these types of works because the works possess both documentary qualities and narrative interpretation. I also rely on other historical accounts of black urbanisation, such as literature, documentary photography, and newspaper clippings to enrich my arguments. I must concede here that while black photographers like Ernest Cole (1967), Peter Magubane, Bob Gosani, Santu Mofokeng, and Zwelethu Mthethwa, to name a few, have left a profound repository of images showcasing twentieth-century black urbanisation, photographic work is not part of my focus here because it will increase the scope of visual material beyond the parameters of this study.

The artists and artworks indexed in this study do not pretend to represent the totality of images dealing with the urbanisation of blacks. Tens of thousands of artworks were produced by black artists throughout the twentieth century that explore the peculiarity of urbanisation. My selection<sup>16</sup> of these specific artworks was determined by the relative prominence of the makers, the availability of the images, and finally, how closely aligned those artworks were to the thematic concerns I identified as salient. Besides a handful of examples like Louis Maqhubela, Ernest Mancoba (see Miles 1994), and Selby Mvusi, I have deliberately left out artworks that were created by black artists in exile. My interest in this study was to examine how South African urbanisation was captured by black artists based in the country. Even though black artists in exile produced lasting visualisations of urban-based black subjectivities, the visualisations were done from afar and lacked some of the grounded aesthetics found in the art of the numerous black artists who remained in the country.

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not tagged 'suburban art' or 'city art' (Goniwe 2003). More pointedly, art produced by non-black artists who used township scenes as their main subject matter is also not termed as 'Township Art'.

<sup>15</sup> The term 'transition art' in itself implies an inevitable teleology of tradition, transition, and modern.

<sup>16</sup> Many of the images discussed in this study are part of the Javett Foundation's Bongzi Dhlomo Collection, housed at the Javett Art Centre at the University of Pretoria. Bongzi Dhlomo, after whom the collection is named, provided incredible insight into many of the artworks and artists in that collection.

As stated before, white creatives have also provided enduring recordings of urban black life, especially photographers like David Goldblatt (Bester 2015). This could be seen in Goldblatt's 2020 exhibition at the Goodman Gallery in London that showcased images of Johannesburg between 1948 and 2018. While his photographic essays on Soweto, for example, provide invaluable visual evidence of "everyday acts, from sports and religious gatherings to domestic scenes, shopkeepers and children at play", the images remain a representation of the black city from a distinctly 'white gaze' (Goodman Gallery 2020). Besides Goldblatt, various other photographers documented quite sincerely the skewed development of black urbanisation since the 1950s, such as Bryan Heseltine who was cited as having "an aesthetic interest in the visual quality of life in black townships" (Newbury 2010:226). Although such efforts are lauded, this study only considers the art of select black artists who were immersed and profoundly affected by the phenomena under investigation.

## 1.5 Theoretical framework

One of the seminal discourses that grounds this study is the New African Movement. Led by pioneers such as Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Henry IE Dhlomo, Richard V Selope Thema, and Davidson DT Jabavu, the New African Movement advocated for a purposeful engagement between urban blacks and westernised modernity "with the intent of subverting it to a form of modernity that would emerge from the democratic imperatives of African history" (Masilela 2013:xiii). The New African intellectuals hated and sought to depose the oppression and inconsistencies<sup>17</sup> engendered by the very western civilisation they emulated. The New Africans' mostly liberal attitudes filtered across multiple social platforms such as politics, literature, journalism, education, and especially the arts. Artists were urged to "articulate new forms of artistic representation" in line with the epistemology of the New African Movement (Masilela 2013:xvii). The New African Movement hoped to provide a psychological compass to aid the increasingly urbanised black populace to process the new historical experience of living and working in westernised urban spaces in ways that would subvert white power structures. Regrettably, these progressive efforts by the New African Movement failed to appease the white colonial masters, and total equality among the races was never achieved.<sup>18</sup> Even with this glaring failure, I propose that the subversiveness of the assimilationist strategies

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<sup>17</sup> Masilela (2013:335) mentions that the frustration "the New African intellectuals encountered was that they sought to overcome their oppression with the political, cultural, and economic instruments invented by the very European modernity they detested".

<sup>18</sup> The unachieved equality is lamented by van Robbroeck (2011a:131) who states that "the educated African's attempt at identification with western cultures was rejected, and sameness and equality were never achieved".

punted by the New African Movement provided a blueprint of how urbanised blacks could successfully hack into and recontextualise western modernity for their benefit.

Like the New Africanism Movement, Afropolitanism is part of contemporary theoretical attempts by African scholars to make sense of and reconcile the interminable binaries between westernised modernity and the trope of Africa, especially for urbanised and cosmopolitan black Africans. According to Hassan (2011:15), like most of the post-colonial theoretical terms, Afropolitanism promotes the ideas of “self-definition and self-articulation” among Africans living on the continent and those in the diasporas. Of particular significance to this study is that Afropolitanism seeks to crystallise the experiences and identities of Africans living in heterogeneous urbanised settings. Afropolitanism induces Africans to think of themselves as citizens of the world and products of global determinants, while also being co-conspirators in shaping the world. In this study, I propose that blacks living within and around South African cities during the twentieth century were the early Afropolitans. Blacks occupied a flux and ambivalent positionality in relation to the city because they were never considered full urban citizens, nor were they completely attached to their so-called homelands. Therefore, blacks represented a hybrid kind of Afropolitan consciousness that transcended the rural-urban split and created a singular alter-modernity in which these domains functioned as a continuum.

Afropolitanism calls for a more fluid formulation of Africanness, where “Africa awakens to the forms of multiplicity (including racial multiplicity) which are constituents of its identity” (Mbembe 2005:29). South Africa is seen by many as the quintessential Afropolitan nation. For example, Mbembe (2005:29) describes Johannesburg as “the centre of Afropolitanism par excellence” in Africa. Following Mbembe, I propose that urbanised blacks of twentieth-century South Africa – although living under completely different strictures than the modern-day Africans Mbembe references – were the first Afropolitan generation, and by extension created early forms of Afropolitan art through their representations of the urban black experience.

In a similar vein to Afropolitanism, multi-locality advocates for multi and plurinational conceptions of being, where individuals are not confined to live their lives in one or limited locations based on their nationalities or race (Kingsolver 1996). Multi-locality emerged within the discourses of anthropology during the 1970s in an attempt to make sense of workers, mostly migrants, who lived and sold their labour in multiple locales, often across borders. Multi-locality speaks of highly mobile persons whose “incomes are drawn from work in geographically distant places” (Elmhirst 2013:171). Because of their migrant labourer status and the constant urban displacement they endured throughout the twentieth century, black workers from across southern Africa were the quintessential multi-locals, who had multiple homes and family attachments in the city and rural countryside. In this study, I use the notion

of multi-locality to rationalise the identities and creative legacies of black artists who lived and worked within and beyond the segregated South African city.

It is worth noting at this point that the duty of the artist within the New African and Afropolitan rationalism, was to mirror urban black life in their art, and also to depict urban black life as the coming into being of the 'new' cosmopolitan and modern African – the Afropolitan. Art gave visual and creative expression to the New African idealism of what it meant to be black and progressive in the twentieth century. Thus, the New African Movement inspired representations of black urbanisation created by black artists can be reassessed as possessing Afropolitan sensibilities. There is enough evidence in the artworks under investigation of a calculated rapport between blacks and western modernity via the urban space, which warrants a reevaluation of these artistic practices as early versions of Afropolitan and multi-local subjectivities. The illustrations of black urbanisation sampled in this study, and the motivations informing those images, satisfy the central tenets of the philosophies of Afropolitan and multi-local subjectivities.

A delimitation I must acknowledge relates to the use of urbanisation as the theoretical anchor of this study. Notions of the urban, urbanisation, urbanity, the city, and cityness are complex and widely theorised taxonomies that speak of particular yet varied processes and manifestations of being a citizen of the metropolis. While it is important to acknowledge the nuances of this nomenclature, in this study I have elected to use them interchangeably in the service of advancing the singular idea of urbanisation as the shift from rurality to the city. Due to the historical emphasis of this project, which seeks to rethink how the artistic representations of an urban-based black subjectivity were theorised during an era of race-based segregation, it was expedient to limit the study to this more basic and unsophisticated understanding of urbanisation.

## **1.6 Research design and methodology**

The overall design of the study is descriptive, exploratory, and highly analytical. To achieve the aims of the study, I use a mixture of two interwoven qualitative research methods. Firstly, and in the main, the study relies on a conventional survey of the literature. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:336) outline that scrutinising existing literature serves the critical role of demonstrating that the researcher has “a good grasp of the major theoretical and empirical research” pertinent to the field. This strategy is used mostly for illuminating the theoretical underpinnings of this study, where I analyse and interpret literature related to urban space, twentieth-century black art, the New African Movement, Afropolitanism, and multi-locality.

The second model I use is qualitative content analysis, which allows the researcher to interrogate “the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way” (Schreier 2012:1).<sup>19</sup> Drisko and Maschi (2016:85) establish that one of the advantages of using qualitative content analysis is that the researcher can tap into “contextual information and latent content” to provide an enriched reading of the topic under scrutiny. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis affords researchers the flexibility to dissect content ranging from the visual to the textual, but more importantly, this content can either be oral or archival. The decision to use this approach was motivated by van Robbroeck (2006) who advocates for multi and transdisciplinary approaches akin to cultural studies in the study of modern black art created during the early to late twentieth century. Van Robbroeck (2006:258) argues that such art “can only be meaningfully rewritten as part of a much more encompassing South African culture – which includes newspapers, advertisements, magazines, film, music, theatre and literature”. In line with this prompting, I review archival materials from the twentieth century and texts related to magazines like *Drum* (Sampson 1956), newspaper entries, and select novels. However, most significantly, qualitative content analysis provides the framework I use to dissect the artworks, which are the primary and central objects of this study.

This study relies heavily on archival records. Even though much revisionist work into South African art history has been done, delving into the archive is essential to develop emancipated historical discourses of the representation of urbanisation not bound in the colonial binaries of self-other, rural-urban, and traditional-modern. Gbadamosi (2019) reminds us that the archive, as an inanimate entity, cannot speak. It is the researcher or scholar who speaks through their interpretation and appropriation of the archive. Thus, it matters greatly, especially within the South African context, to ask the question: who has been privy to speaking through the archive? Based on the list of prevailing literature on the representation of urbanisation in black art, it is clear that bar a few instances, this work has been the domain of white intellectuals and scholars. A new cadre of scholars, with different demographics, worldviews, and social histories, must re-appropriate the archive to speak alternate histories into the fore. I must stress here, that while in this specific study I exclusively reference the museum, library, and university archive, there is also the imperative of engaging with the living archive, which consists of oral narratives, life stories, and the lived experiences of artists and intellectuals hidden away in black communities. This living archive of black aesthetics is equally, if not more significant than the static museum and library-based repository.

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<sup>19</sup> Schreier goes on to outline how this systematic reading can be actualised after determining the research parameters. Firstly, the relevant “material” must be shortlisted, the next step involves “building a coding frame”, followed by “dividing your material into units of coding”, and the final steps are related to “interpreting” the data (Schreier 2012:6). In Chapters 3 and 4, I use these processes to categorise and thematise the selected artworks.

## 1.7 Significance of the study

Westernised modernity, mediated through the urbanised conurbation, and its so-called antithesis, African tradition, are important concepts within this study. Building on van Robbroeck (2008) and Eisenstadt (2000) who urge us to go 'beyond the tradition-modernity dialectic' and embrace the notion of 'multiple modernities', this reappraisal of art showcasing black urbanisation during the twentieth century seeks to slay the rural-urban dichotomy. The artworks discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate the irreducible complexities of the urban black experience and the creative strategies the experience elicited. Because urbanisation, and by extension westernised modernity, are irreversible proponents presently proliferating in the African landscape, it is worthwhile to investigate urban history and its depiction from a non-binary lens. The investigation will reveal how the early Afropolitans, who negotiated and actively realigned their identities with industrialised western modernity, visualised this change in their art. I hope that through this study, the liberating ideals of the New African Movement, Afropolitanism, and multi-locality will continue to rehabilitate and stimulate discursive engagements on black South African art, both present and historical. I hope that there will be a more pragmatic reconciliation of western modernity and the African experience. On a more socially conscious level, such studies are necessary to bridge the gaps that persist between the segregated urbanisms in South African cities. Although much has happened to blur these segregated distinctions, Robins (2005:12) laments that "[d]espite mega-development initiatives aimed at desegregating the apartheid city, the everyday socio-spatial legacies of apartheid continue to be reproduced: middle-class whites seldom venture near the black townships". Perhaps a nuanced reinterpretation of twentieth-century black art dealing with urbanisation can deliver a more conciliatory appreciation of the complexities and anxieties inherent within black urbanisms.

To this end, this study contributes to the body of literature dealing with historical-cultural interpretations of urban living in Afropolises. Perhaps more than any other creative medium, visual artefacts edify an understanding of particular human experiences, especially of peoples and individuals marginalised both politically and economically based on problematic identity markers. This study provides alternate theoretical and interpretative perspectives on the history of urbanisation in South Africa as experienced and recorded by black visual artists. As a largely macro review of the visualisation of urbanisation through black aesthetics, the study hopes to inspire other microanalyses of the visualities of the modern city that have been created through the multiple gazes of artists who are citizens of the city, either as settled dwellers or as multi-local wanderers.

## 1.8 Outline of chapters

In Chapter 1, I provide a summation of the main components of the study and the rationale behind the topic. By introducing the various theories and methods, the chapter sets the tone for the rest of the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I provide a discourse analysis of how white authorities (intellectual and political) rationalised the urban space before and during the twentieth century. This analysis includes a discussion of the various laws that hoped to spatially contain black urbanisation in South Africa and how the city was “edited to suit the segregationist agendas of the rulers” (Beeckmans 2013:622). Since segregated cities were created by white politicians and urban planners, this chapter privileges the ‘white perspective’ on how the modern industrialised city in Africa emerged.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate using analytical methods how the depictions of black urbanisation during the twentieth century can be reframed as early versions of Afropolitan and multi-local art. In an attempt to deflate the rural-urban binary, I provide an interpretation of the main objects of the study using Afropolitanism, Black Consciousness and multi-locality. This chapter forms the theoretical basis for a more holistic and nuanced understanding of how black urbanisation was experienced, processed, and finally aestheticised by the key mediators of black culture during the twentieth century.

In Chapter 4, I present a thick description of the contexts and socio-political complexities in which black artists existed and from where they produced the cultural artefacts discussed throughout the study. As in Chapter 3, the artworks I discuss in this chapter are also evaluated thematically, and take into account the seismic changes that occurred in how blacks experienced urbanisation throughout the twentieth century.

In Chapter 5, I provide a summary of the study and a conclusion of the main arguments presented in the thesis. I also stress the significance of cultivating renewed discourses and research on contemporary and future artistic visualisations of black urbanisms in South Africa.



## CHAPTER 2: Designing urban segregation in South Africa

### 2.1 Introduction to chapter

In this chapter, I present an abridged survey of literature on the formation of segregation in modern cities in South Africa. Spatial segregation is a massive and complex issue, and one I cannot possibly do justice in an introductory chapter. Therefore, I must caution that this is a selective overview. In the interest of this thesis, this overview focuses on the role that race and class (always-already intersectional) played in the design of first the colonial settler cities, and after that in apartheid South African urban town planning. The finer historical, legal, and technical details I leave to experts in political science, history, and town planning.

This general overview serves to show how a combination of sometimes-conflicting ideological demands – the desire for race purity in the city and the practical need for cheap labour – resulted in hierarchical and ambiguous urban spaces. This bipolar attitude simultaneously exercised control over the black body and delimited social interactions within the urban paradigm, while ironically enabling black, inter-ethnic solidarity and agency. In addition, such a brief historical sketch provides an overview of the main forces involved in the development of urban modernity in South Africa. Therefore, to appreciate the dynamics of black urban experiences during the twentieth century and the black urbanite's artistic exploration thereof (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4), it is primarily necessary to understand how the segregated urban space and its 'raced' anatomy came to pass. This understanding is the purpose of this chapter.

I begin this roughly chronological account during the seventeenth century when the European presence emerged as a prime driver for the formation of western-style cities in the country. However, the choice to sketch the story of South African urbanisation parallel to the arrival of Europeans should not be read as a dismissal of the existence and significance of urban spaces in Africa before the 1600s (see Kusimba *et al.* 2006). Although I am specifically concerned with the country's urban history, the chapter is more or less structured according to Magubane's (1979) five-phase chronology of modern South African history. In Magubane's schema, the first phase parallels the arrival and subsequent rule of the Dutch East India Company in the Cape region from 1652 until the late eighteenth century. The second phase looks at the period of British imperial occupation and expansion within South Africa during the nineteenth century. The third phase chronicles the discovery of mineral wealth during the 1880s, which resulted in the rapid industrialisation of the country. The fourth phase explores the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which saw "the consolidation of white

supremacy and the ascendancy of Afrikaner political and economic power” (Magubane 1979:17). The fifth and final phase reflects on the coronation of the Afrikaners as the commanders-in-chief in 1948, which resulted in “increasingly oppressive forms of rule” against blacks, coloureds, and Indians, especially within the urban environment (Magubane 1979:18).

What is consistent throughout these phases was the unceasing tug-of-war between Dutch (later naturalised Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaners) and British (later naturalised English-speakers) interests, both vying to control the urban machinery and by extension, South Africa itself. However, beyond their conflicts, these European communities were instrumental in injecting a westernised DNA into South Africa’s urban geography. The Afrikaner and British minority groups established instruments of domination over the black, coloured, and Indian urban inhabitants that protected and guaranteed white privilege and superiority in all areas of social, economic, political, and educational encounters. Simply put, so-called ‘non-whites’ could not be masters of their own fate within the urban landscape.

Since my historiography of South African urbanisms largely relies on texts written by white scholars, this reading is necessarily done from the white lens. The white lens exposes the major fears and anxieties that underpinned race-orientated urban planning throughout the twentieth century. Given space constraints, this historical overview is perforce limited to the major urban centres of Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and a few others. The overview does not engage with the development of the smaller towns. Furthermore, the chapter provides an expansive account of the most important factors impacting urban developments in general. This chapter does not attempt to account for local historical peculiarities that had an impact on the development of particular cities, except where such information is relevant to specific artworks discussed.

## **2.2 The beginnings of westernised urbanisms**

In architectural historian Spiro Kostof’s canonical *The city Shaped: Urban patterns and meaning through history* (1991:33), he demonstrates that cities are almost always created by an “authority” or “generating force”. For Kostof (1991:33), cities are not random sites that house a concentrated populace, but rather evolve calculatedly from “an act of will on the part of a leader or a collectivity”. In the case of South Africa, the modern network of conurbations was set in motion at the arrival of the Dutch East India Company, or *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* in Dutch (hereafter VOC), in the Cape region during the seventeenth century. As such, the development of Cape Town into South Africa’s first modern international city is inextricably tied to the VOC, the largest and most influential business enterprise of its era.

Giliomee (2003:3) calls the VOC “the world’s first multi-national corporation”. The VOC was a vast trading empire that spanned the globe and the Cape’s convenient location between Europe, and Asia made it an ideal location for establishing a port town. In 1652, Jan van Riebeeck<sup>20</sup> arrived in the Cape to oversee the interests of the VOC. As the company’s chief merchant, van Riebeeck’s mandate was to establish a trading port that would increase the fortunes of his employers. Many of van Riebeeck’s actions and decisions sowed the seeds of segregation that would characterise South Africa as a nation for several centuries.

Van Riebeeck’s initial dealings with the indigenous Khoi Khoi people (hereafter Khoisan) were civil, and the VOC sought to barter fish and tobacco in exchange for livestock, which the Khoisan owned in the thousands. However, the Khoisan were not easily swayed. As a semi-nomadic society, their livestock moved around with them and represented the totality of their wealth. Because the Khoisan were protected by a Law of Nations decree that recognised “the sovereignty and independence of heathen nations” (Ward 2008:138), van Riebeeck and the VOC dealt with them peacefully and with fairness. However, van Riebeeck was already convicted for breaking company statutes during his prior assignment in Asia<sup>21</sup> and was tempted to adopt forceful and illegal tactics to gain much-needed livestock and agricultural land to feed the mushrooming European and slave population in the Cape port. In 1658 a treaty was signed between Khoisan leader Gogosoa and van Riebeeck. However, this agreement did not last because the VOC continued to infringe on Khoisan lands (Ward 2008). A war ensued between the Khoisan and the VOC from 1659 to 1660, where the Dutch firearms imposed their military superiority over the Khoisan bows and arrows (Marks 1972). In 1660, in the wake of the Khoisan resistance, van Riebeeck ordered the construction of a hedge from Kirstenbosch along with Wynberg Hill, which became “a boundary separating the Dutch from indigenous Africans” (Marback 2004:254). Besides being a physical barrier, the hedge symbolised the chasm between European and African civilisations. Van Riebeeck’s hedge was the beginnings of the rural-urban, black-white, modern-tradition dualisms that manifested in almost every area of race relations ever since.

Although the VOC officials who controlled Cape Town had harboured racist ideals during the 1650s, the central concern of the company was trade and profit accumulation. Thus, the first inclination of the multinational enterprise upon encountering the existing residents of the Cape (the Khoisan) was to attempt to establish bartering agreements for land and livestock. Unfortunately, these exchanges did not materialise on account of the innumerable differences

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<sup>20</sup> Jan van Riebeeck managed the VOC’s affairs in the Cape for a decade, and was therefore instrumental in shaping the future of what became the most cosmopolitan city of that era.

<sup>21</sup> While serving as an assistant scribe in Batavia (Jakarta, Indonesia), van Riebeeck was “convicted of private silk trading and sentenced to a fine and temporary banishment to the fatherland in 1648” (Ward 2008:132).

between the two cultures. Instead, through their superior military disposition, the Dutch took advantage of the indigenous people, dispossessing them of their land and animal holdings. This land dispossession was significantly more profitable than establishing trade agreements.

Furthermore, the prejudiced interpretation of their cultural practices led to accounts such as those provided by Nicolaus De Graaf, a Dutch explorer who sailed to the Cape in 1640, who termed the Khoisan “wild heathen... [whose] customs were more like beasts than men” (quoted in Lindfors 1999:3). Because of their minuscule numbers, the Khoisan population in the Cape were only a minor headache for the VOC and they were killed with impunity, or easily integrated into the vast number of slaves imported from Asia.<sup>22</sup> Although there was a noticeable military presence that maintained the racial hierarchy and drove away rebellious natives, seventeenth and eighteenth-century Cape Town remained a fairly organic city.

Van Riebeeck’s hedge also served as a pragmatic protective fence that insulated the VOC’s property and business interests in the Cape. So valuable was the Cape port that between 1652 and 1662 (the exact number of years van Riebeeck spent in the region), over 40,000 people in 205 ships arrived and departed through the Cape from Europe and Asia (Giliomee 2003:3). During this time, the Cape was nicknamed the ‘tavern of the seas’ on account of the amenities and conveniences it offered to the passer-by sailors (Pama 1977:15). By the end of the eighteenth century, this dense traffic of goods and people had effectively launched Cape Town as the first westernised and semi-industrialised city in South Africa. The VOC lorded over the Cape until 1795 when the British gained control of the area. The British lost the city in 1803 when the Cape was ceded to the Batavian Republic (the Netherlands). However, by 1815 the British crown had obtained “legal acquisition” of the Cape to the dismay of the free burghers<sup>23</sup> – former VOC men who became the first Europeans to settle permanently in the town (Davenport & Saunders 2000:43).

Besides the convenience of the Cape as a waystation for trading ships, its scenic beauty and welcoming climate also made it an alluring destination, both for inland based Africans and incoming Europeans and Asians. The iconic Table Mountain exemplified the region’s natural splendour. Table Mountain was known as Hoerikwaggo (Mountain in the Sea) by the local Khoisan, and the name Table Mountain was coined by Admiral Antonio de Saldanha in 1503

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<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, not much is known in terms of the number and scale of Khoisan slavery, because VOC archives “do not include people that the [VOC] considered outsiders, notably the indigenous Khoisan labourers who worked alongside slaves on many farms of the colony”, as Nigel Wodern (2014:28) points out.

<sup>23</sup> After realising that the company needed local suppliers for essential plant and animal agricultural produce, and that it was more cost effective to outsource such services, van Riebeeck decreed that the VOC unburden some officials from their duties so that they “would be allowed to become farmers, owning their own land and implements” (Groenewald 2012:2). In turn, these free burghers, had to supply the company with milk, meat, vegetables, alcohol, among other produce, at rates sanctioned by van Riebeeck.

and became an instant symbol of the town (Table Mountain National Park 2019). During the late seventeenth century, Johannes de Grevenbroek<sup>24</sup> (credited as being the ‘first Cape intellectual’), provided the following deeply personal account of the region: “This remote corner into which I have been thrust is more fertile than I had hoped for or believed, and charms me more than the refinements of European civilisation. That I should love it will not surprise you” (quoted in Giliomee 2003:4). This veneration and emotional connection that European visitors developed for Cape Town’s natural environment was also tied to the idea of discovering what they considered ‘un-owned’ land.<sup>25</sup> Even though the Khoisan occupied the Cape, the resistance of natives was easily brushed aside. Thus, the prospect of being a lord of one’s own property was irresistible for the multitudes of incoming Europeans.

At this point, a brief discussion of the shifting identity, classification, and group dynamics of the Boers (as proto-Afrikaners) is warranted. Van Wyk Smith (2003:430) details how within the late nineteenth-century British imaginary “there existed a widespread uncertainty about Boer cultural identity”. At the centre of this uncertainty were the Boers who trekked to the interior during the 1830s and were a “culturally and racially fluid and heterogeneous population” (van Wyk Smith 2003:431). As a result of the fluidity of the population, there was a distinction drawn between the cultured Afrikaners of the Cape who stayed behind and the trek Boers who were mostly farmers who “lived a simple, largely rural existence” (Fremont-Barnes 2003:10). Extensive lineage tracing white South African families shows that by the 1860s, South African whites consisted of Boers (with families’ ancestry mainly Dutch, German, and French with a little ancestry by Africans and Asians),<sup>26</sup> the British, and other Europeans (de Villiers & Pama 1966; Heese 1971; Heese & Lombard 1986, 1992). The creole nature of the Boers resulted in them being a racial category that could “no longer be described as European but were also not quite African” (van Wyk Smith 2003:432). This liminal outsider status caused the formation of a more self-deterministic and holistic Afrikaner national consciousness during the early twentieth century. This notion of a homogenous Afrikaner identity was engineered to galvanise political unity, economic ascendancy, and cultural

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<sup>24</sup> Johannes de Grevenbroek landed in the Cape in 1684 under the employ of the Dutch East India Company. He worked in the office of the local Council of Policy in the Cape for ten years, after which he became a free burgher in Stellenbosch (Hochstrasser 2016:213). De Grevenbroek also produced writings and illustrations of the Khoisan peoples.

<sup>25</sup> The English author Arthur Conan Doyle (who served the British war campaign against the Boers in South Africa during 1900) expressed similar sentiment about un-owned land in his famed novel *The Lost World*, published in 1912. In the novel one of his main characters refers to the colonial lands as “big blank spaces in the map” (Doyle 1912:s.n.). The metaphor here is that these big blank spaces were virgin territory that could be occupied and cultivated by British explorers.

<sup>26</sup> In a more recent genome mapping, Jaco Greeff (2007:674), an Afrikaner professor of genetics, reveals that at least 6% of his own genes are attributable to ancestors who were slaves from Africa and Asia.

renewal. Hereafter, Afrikaner denotes both the creole Boer origins from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries and the monolithic idealism of the twentieth century.

Throughout the Dutch occupation of the Cape, and especially after the arrival of the French Huguenots<sup>27</sup> in 1688, the Cape was a “complex plural society” (Giliomee 2003:9). Although the VOC officials never openly promoted any “integrationist desires” between themselves and the locals comprised of the Khoisan and Xhosas (Besteman 2008:5), the lack of European women resulted in what Besteman (2008:5) describes as a “racial fluidity” between white men and black African women.<sup>28</sup> This inter-racial procreation sowed the human seeds of what became the Cape coloured community, though indigenous Khoisan populations were also eventually incorporated into this political classification (Giliomee 2003:37). However, despite this pragmatic and largely exploitative<sup>29</sup> (van Heyningen 1984) co-existence between European men and African women, inter-racial relationships were not encouraged. The stifling of inter-racial unions led to a bizarre situation during the 1730s wherein over 50% of white men living in the Cape region were condemned to bachelorhood because marrying a black woman and openly fathering a mixed-race child “entailed a loss of status” (Giliomee 2003:37). Despite these inhibitions, inter-racial procreation continued well into the nineteenth century, and by the 1820s the region had three main inhabitants, the English, the Afrikaners, and the Cape coloureds – a creole of black, white, Khoisan, Indonesian, Indian, and Ceylon (now Sri Lankan) peoples (Besteman 2008:4). Giliomee (2003:28) summarises the mixing of races best by reminding us that Cape Town was the blueprint of how South African cities would sprout in later years and was a “multi-racial and multi-lingual city” from its genesis.<sup>30</sup>

During the nineteenth century, British dominion of the Cape regulated “the cultural life of colonial society to the legal realities of British rule” (Davenport & Saunders 2000:45).<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> French Huguenots were Protestants who migrated to the Cape from France and parts of Belgium in 1667. In the Cape, the Huguenots joined the Dutch, who held similar Calvinist beliefs, to form what became the creole Boers. The closeness between the Dutch and the Huguenots is exemplified by the marriage between Jan van Riebeeck and Maria de la Queillerie, a French Huguenot (Ward 2008:133).

<sup>28</sup> The story of Coenraad De Buys (1761–1821) is worth citing here. De Buys was descendent of the Cape-based French Huguenots and his life is an exemplar of this fluidity. During the nineteenth century De Buys married and mated with multiple black women, sowing the seeds of a mixed-race community. Through the Great Trek, the mixed-race community eventually settled in Buysdorp near the Louis Trichardt (Makhado) town in the Limpopo Province. According to de Jongh (2004:90) the Buysdorp community, heirs of Coenraad De Buys, “regard themselves as a people of a middle world; not accepted fully by either the blacks or the whites”. The story of the Buysdorp community is a near fantastical symbolism of the story of coloured people as a race in South Africa.

<sup>29</sup> Van Heyningen (1984:170) describes how the “extreme deprivation of the slave women drove them to prostitution” during the seventeenth century. As a result, the slave lodge in Cape Town became notorious. The dynamics of the prevailing race relations at the time meant that the sexual relations between European men and African and Asian women was extremely exploitative to the latter.

<sup>30</sup> Ironically, during the first half of the twentieth century, Cape Town was comparatively to other major cities in South Africa, the “least segregated” city, but by 1981 the picture had changed completely and it was the most divided (Besteman 2008:47).

<sup>31</sup> Religion was another integral element of British hegemonic rule, evidenced in the prominent role the London Missionary Society that set up camps and mission stations in the Cape from 1799, and played a role in the civic and administrative activities of Cape Town (Boas & Weiskopf 1973).

cultural supremacy of the English turned the Cape into one of the most attractive colonial outposts within the British Empire. In 1820 alone, over 90,000 British applied for passage to the Cape, but only 4,000 eventually arrived at the city (Davenport & Saunders 2000:45). The increase of British migrants and the insistence that all residents of Cape Town had to conform to British law, civic customs, and religious practices did not sit comfortably with the ever-increasing number of second and third-generation Afrikaners. The Afrikaners had persevered against the VOC ordinances only to encounter an even more bureaucratic foreign government. Besides being confined to British systems, the language policy that compelled Afrikaners to adopt English as the lingua-franca of the city did not suit the Afrikaner community.

The Afrikaner community had already started to move inland by 1839 because of British control over the area (Pama 1977:10). Cape Town ordained its first municipal council in 1839, and that council structure provided the overall organogram and modus operandi of running the city that was maintained well into the twentieth century. Even though the British had full control of the city, the Afrikaner community, and more specifically the VOC, had left a permanent imprint on the character of the city. The now-iconic Cape-Dutch house design owes its birth to the first generation of free burghers who developed farms throughout the region, and whose produce was essential to the sustenance of Cape Town's growing population. Their semi-urban "gridded agricultural settlements had a free-standing Cape-Dutch house at the head of the deep lot, and an intensively cultivated yard at the back" (Kostof 1991:148). The length of these deep-lot stands enabled the landlords to provide their workers with living quarters at the back of the house and created the requisite separation between the workers, who were mostly black Africans or imported Asian slaves, and the bosses, who were white Afrikaners or French Huguenots.

The same grid method that was deployed to map the farm plots was also used within Cape Town's city centre. Paumier (2004:12) explains that for European city planners, subdividing space with a grid system was seen as "the simplest approach" to organising cities because it made the streets easy to manage and also created standardisation. Until the nineteenth century, traditional European cities were mostly cosmic or 'holy' cities whose layout pivoted around a cathedral or monastery (Kostof 1991:15). However, colonial and company towns, such as Cape Town, were characterised by practical urban design. Although these towns tried to mimic the physical traits of those from the metropole, pragmatic considerations often prevailed over ideological necessities. Beeckmans (2013:616) details how "the transfer of colonial planning to Africa was not limited to a simple 'cut' and 'paste'. Instead, metropolitan modes of planning were applied selectively and with a great deal of 'editing' to the colonial terrain".

Thus, nineteenth-century Cape Town developed in a fairly organic, pragmatic, and utilitarian manner.<sup>32</sup> However, spatially organic formations are prone to generating some form of the disorder (Arnheim 1971). Within the context of Cape Town, the organic nature of the city echoed its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population, and “by the nineteenth century its form had come to be shaped in larger part by its non-European inhabitants” (Anderson & Rathbone 2000:6). The presence and influence of the black, coloured (including Cape Malay), and Khoisan communities on Cape Town’s civic and cultural life was seen as a stain and a form of disorder by the municipality’s European management. However, as Kostof (1991:64) concludes, such “disorder is a condition of order – unlike chaos, which is the negation of it. Disorder is provisional and correctable”. In other words, Cape Town was merely unordered and not fully chaotic, and order could thus be restored to the city if it was ‘cleansed’ of black ubiquity without undoing or breaking apart the whole urban machine, which depended on the existence of black slaves and workers to thrive.

I will return to this ‘cleansing’ in later sections. However, what is an important take away from this brief account of Cape Town’s becoming is that since the eighteenth century, the city evolved piecemeal. Initially, development was through the VOC’s presence, later through British occupation, and further into the first fully-fledged colonial city in South Africa. More significantly, this colonial city, which became the grand-father to other westernised cities in the country, was characterised by mobility and slippages between the races who co-habited the space. These slippages defy conventional readings of segregated colonial urbanisms. In many ways, the formative urban systems that emerged in Cape Town, and later Durban and Johannesburg, although not immune to the colonial virus of race-based inequality, discrimination, and exploitation,<sup>33</sup> were malleable spaces that were racially porous and, for the most part, impressionable. To use a different metaphor, the concrete of race-based segregation that would typify twentieth-century South African urbanisms had not yet set.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the Cape developed what can only be described as a bipolar attitude towards its black inhabitants. On the one hand, the region was experimenting with racialised ordinances and bylaws that were detrimental to urban-based black progress. Moreover, on the other hand, the Cape was the most progressive region in

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<sup>32</sup> While Cape Town mushroomed naturally, its schema was slightly cosmic in that it had a city centre, from where the rest of the city grew. Paumier (2004:9) stresses that, in the European logic, the city centre was the “civic and cultural centre and a symbol of community identity”. To this end, the VOC and British officials advanced the centre as a multipurpose hub for trade, administration, and living.

<sup>33</sup> An example of colonialism was that slaves were imported into Cape Town in their thousands until the trade of humans was rescinded in 1834.

<sup>34</sup> It was only during the twentieth century that hard boundaries between black, coloured, and white communities were established in Cape Town with the creation of spaces like Ndabeni (est. 1901), Langa (est. 1918), Nyanga (est. 1948,) and Gugulethu (est. 1958).



South Africa when it came to acknowledging the place of the black franchise within the British Empire. The inclusive system became known as Cape Liberalism (Bickford-Smith 1995). Through two colour-blind laws of 1853 and 1872, Cape Liberalism enabled black men who owned land and could read adequately the opportunity to vote representatives in the House of Assembly or Legislative Council. According to Cobley (2018:30), by 1910, around 15,000 Cape-based black men had taken advantage of this legislation. However, as Bickford-Smith (1995:444) notes, these laws were largely ineffective because too few blacks, comparatively, were able to attain these requirements. Ultimately, blacks living in nineteenth-century Cape Town were technically emancipated, but not literally.

### **2.3 The rise of inland urbanisms, 1830 to 1900**

In this section, I explore some of the motivations that fuelled the mass exodus of Boers from the Cape region into the interior heartland and how these invasions had a profound impact on the personality of South African urbanisms. The Great Trek of the 1830s and 1840s was a major force in the genesis and growth of modern cities in South Africa's interior. Westernised settlements beyond Cape Town were already in existence when the Trek gathered momentum, and importantly many of these outposts were influenced by and mapped according to pre-existing trade channels engineered by African merchants before colonisation (Davenport & Saunders 2000:192). Davenport and Saunders (2000:42) stress that any attempt to comprehend the Great Trek should first acknowledge that many Voortrekkers "made big financial sacrifices" when they decided to advance inland. However, despite these sacrifices, the Boers left the Cape because of "a desire to escape from distant authorities", namely the British Empire government (Davenport & Saunders 2000:53), so that they could farm freely, own land, trade with Africans – and also benefit from their cheap labour – and self-actualise.

Although often unacknowledged, the moves and countermoves made by the Boers in their quest for self-determinism were consistently influenced by the issue of black labour. Harrison's (1981) celebratory chronicle of the trek cites that the Boers embarked on the exodus primarily because they detested British rule in the Cape. But more to the point, the British enacted the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833 and the enforcement of this reform within the entire British Empire was the final straw that pushed the Boers away from the Cape. In reality, the Boers feared impending equality between black and whites (a distant reality at the time). Champion of the Great Trek, Piet Retief, had a close relative, Anna Steenkamp, who once expressed:

And yet it is not their [the slaves'] freedom that drives us to such lengths, as their being placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and religion, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow down beneath such a yoke; wherefore we rather withdraw *to preserve our doctrines in purity* (my emphasis) (quoted in Harrison 1981:14).

Quite clearly, the thought of having to give up the expendable labour of black slaves and worse to share equal rights with what would become a Christianised urban black populace, was enough motivation for the Boers to embark on the risky and arduous trek inland. Of significance is that this Calvinist need to preserve their 'doctrines in purity' would ultimately manifest in the spatial design of the frontier towns and cities that sprang out of the trek, notwithstanding the contextual and environmental differences of each.

Another coastal city, Durban, was central to the multiplication of non-coastal westernised South African cities during the nineteenth century. Firstly, more so than Cape Town, Durban's eventual status as a "merchant-dominated colonial Victorian city" (Freund 2000:149) was critical in the formation of a sovereign Boer state because Boer trekkers were forced further inland during the 1840s. Secondly, Durban was engineered according to race-based codification, which evolved through the presence of black urban dwellers and imported indentured labour from India. Although the region had thrived economically since the sixteenth century, European settlement of Durban intensified during the 1820s. In 1835, the port town was christened after Sir Benjamin D'Urban, a prominent British governor of the Cape. Like Cape Town, the increase in global oceanic trade necessitated the development of Durban into a major port municipality. However, the town could not grow exponentially due to the limitation of natural resources in the region.<sup>35</sup> The urban relations that formed between the British colonialists, the Boer trekkers, and the black and Indian urban dwellers were a precursor of how race relations would develop during the twentieth century.

With regard to the Boers, the Natal region was instrumental in laying the foundations for an independent Boer state. It is estimated that around 15,000 Boers left the Cape between 1834 and 1840, and many of them settled in Durban and Pietermaritzburg (Davenport & Saunders 2000:53). As in Cape Town, the Boers met an indifferent British government vying to control the Natal expanse. Additionally, the Boers encountered the powerful Zulu Kingdom that was equally prepared to ward off foreigners on their land. Relations between British occupiers and

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<sup>35</sup> Even though large industries like sugarcane farming were developed in the Durban surrounds, the city was more dependent on shipping imports and exports. The spectacular growth of Johannesburg in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries transformed Durban into the third largest city in South Africa. Its strategic location as a gateway between the inland markets and the ocean trade turned Durban into an industrial powerhouse post-World War I (Freund 2000:152). For example in 1936 Durban had almost 5,000 flats, which doubled to 10,000 by 1946 (Joyce 1981:79).

the Zulu Kingdom were also strained and characterised by numerous military conflicts. Tensions between the Voortrekkers and the black communities who lived in the lands they moved into were motivated by the Voortrekkers who “insisted on ownership” of the land permanently, as opposed to “mere occupation”. The Zulus had been prepared to consider a conditional and temporary land occupation by the Boers (Davenport & Saunders 2000:77).<sup>36</sup> In 1838, driven by a desire for self-determination, the Boers boldly declared Pietermaritzburg the capital of the ‘Free Province of New Holland in South-East Africa’. The Boer farmers quickly established their imprint on Pietermaritzburg by turning it into a deep-lot city, akin to Cape Town. In 1841, the Boer Volksraad decreed that no more than five Zulu families were allowed to stay on Afrikaner farmland to work as servants in these deep-lot stands. However, this move only intensified tension between the British and Boers within the Natal region and led to further forays inland by the Boers in 1843.

The first Boer families settled in what would become the Transvaal region during the 1830s when a small village was established in Zoutpansberg. The early years of frontier towns like Klerksdorp (est. 1837), Potchefstroom (est. 1838), and Pretoria (est. 1855), mimicked the structure of pre-colonial southern African cities, which were predominantly constituted by “groups of village-like settlements with joint urban functions” (Kostof 1991:62). These village-like urban clusters were predicated on “[t]he frontier Boer [who] lived the simplest of sufficient lives, natural dangers were few, the climate moderate, and food and water were easily obtained” (Patterson 1957:17). Despite the Boer presence, the British were also ubiquitous in the frontier towns. The British established and developed Bloemfontein into a colonial town from the 1840s, with the region further expanding after the discovery of diamonds in the 1870s (van der Westhuizen 2011).

It was only in the 1850s, symbolically two hundred years since van Riebeeck’s entry to the Cape, that the British formally recognised the Free State and the Transvaal as self-governing Boer republics (Harrison 1981:21). However, this did not end the continual conflicts between the Boers, the British, and various black kingdoms throughout the rest of the 1800s, especially within and around the Transvaal’s fledgling urban sites of Potchefstroom, Pretoria, and Pietersburg (now Polokwane). In 1877, the Transvaal was taken over by the British, which resulted in the first major war between the Boers and British (1880 to 1881). The Boers won the war and reassumed control of the Transvaal in December of 1881. However, the discovery of diamonds in 1886 and later gold “in undreamed-of quantities” (Harrison 1981:23) within these disputed territories, provided the British with the necessary impetus to annex Transvaal

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<sup>36</sup> A war ensued between the Afrikaners and the Zulus over the land rights, capped by the Blood River Battle of 1838. As part of the war spoils, Andries Pretorius, general of the Afrikaner legion, retrieved and captured 60,000 cattle from the Zulus and Dingane after the Blood River Battle (Harrison 1981:20).

for a second time. The British-controlled Transvaal imposed exacting demands on the mostly peasant Boer communities, the consequences of which would crescendo into the South African War (also called the Anglo-Boer War) at the turn of the twentieth century.

The South African War from 1899 to 1902 is an important nodal point for appreciating how South Africa's urban geography evolved throughout the twentieth century. The escalation of animosities between these two 'white nations', the Boers and the British, and the hundreds of thousands of blacks who were sandwiched by the war, should be seen in the light of the initial motivations of the free burghers for leaving the Cape district – the British abolished slavery. Primarily, this was a war over the land and the natural resources, and secondarily the right to control black labour. As the more powerful aggressors in this war, the British overran the Boers' military resistance through the effectiveness of the 'scorched earth' policy in which the British set ablaze Boer farms and killed their livestock.

The British captured prisoners of war were concentrated into what became known as concentration camps – large sites that held and controlled enemies or those considered dissidents. Some 190,000 Boers (mostly women and children) and 107,334 black allies (mostly farm labourers) were detained in an attempt to contain the mobility and threat of the Boer population, especially the urban-based Boers. Altogether there were over 100 camps established, and more than 26,000 Afrikaner and 14,000 blacks died in these encampments (Joyce 1981:23; South African History Online 2017). The concentration camps were a fateful phenomenon, not just for world history as seen in how Nazi Germany appropriated this invention to brutal effect against the Jews in Europe, but in terms of how British and Boer relations would impact urban development for the rest of the twentieth century.

The concentration camps left an almost unhealable scar for generations of Boers and their black workers who were devastated by the terrible deaths that befell vulnerable women and children within the camps. Firstly, generational wounds were exacerbated by the British's lack of empathy towards the Boers and blacks. As Joyce (1981) recounts, the British soothed their conscience by stressing that they did not directly inflict any brutality or killings within the camps. Instead, they claimed that it was 'sickness' that "killed the internees – measles, amoebic dysentery, pneumonia" (Joyce 1981:23). In other words, the British had not brought down the ultimate judgement on Boers and blacks, but rather it was nature that took the lives of the encamped. Be that as it may, the British had played a defining role by cultivating the conditions for these deaths to occur. As Joyce (1981:23) outlines: "[b]ad organisation (especially in the early days), inadequate food, the poor health of those entering camps from the water-ravaged land – all these contributed to the appalling number of deaths from disease".

Secondly, this denial of culpability by the British around the deaths in the camps links a significant outcome of this concentration-camp strategy on South African urban design. The concentration camp structure sowed the seeds of the character and nature of black townships that mushroomed throughout the twentieth century. Although the townships were functionally very different from the British concentration camps, they nevertheless had the same temperament and outcomes. The policies that led to urban-based blacks living in townships with insufficient housing, lack of amenities, inadequate schools, poor health care facilities, among others (discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4), contributed towards making an environment wherein the ills of disease, overcrowding, poverty, and crime would ravage and suffocate the inhabitants of these spaces. Moreover, like the British warlords during the South African War, the white architects of the black townships absolved themselves of responsibility for the dire conditions and awful human costs borne from segregated urban planning.

After the South African War, the British appeased the Boers by providing them with financial assistance through the Public Debtors Commission (later renamed the Public Investment Corporation), which enabled the Boers to re-establish their farms and invest in property. As Ngcukaitobi (2018:56) explains, “their debts and liabilities were taken over by a state fund”. Sadly, such incentives were not provided to blacks. However, importantly, although blacks also suffered heavy losses, the war had been profitable for some black farmers. As Steyn (2015:42) explains: “The war had been good for African tenant farmers, who had supplied both sides with food when Boer farms became inoperable. As a result, many Africans were unwilling to leave their communal land”. Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, it was better for most black men to remain in their rural homelands than risk their lives in the deadly mine gallows, where they were underpaid.

## **2.4 Twentieth-century urbanisation: Constructing the ‘white city’**

By the start of the twentieth century, the foundations had been laid for the development of a network of modern industrialised cities throughout the country. During the early 1900s, the mining of precious minerals like diamonds and gold transformed spaces like Kimberly and Johannesburg into some of the fastest-growing cities in the world. Anderson and Rathbone (2000:6) acknowledge that these two cities in particular “are rare examples of industrial cities in Africa, unique creations dramatically spawned in an unregulated and squalid clamour”. Before the discovery of diamonds and gold, the urban make-up of the country was “little more than a loosely knit collection of towns and people” (Joyce 1981:41). However, the secondary impact of the export demand for South Africa’s mineral wealth contributed to the growth of port cities like Durban, Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Bay), and East London. Johannesburg

remained the ultimate symbol of the surge in urbanisation throughout South Africa. Even though Johannesburg was the newest kid on the block, by 1896 Johannesburg had a population of 102,000 residents who were split 50/50 between whites on the one side and blacks, coloureds, Indians (who were grouped with the Chinese<sup>37</sup> migrants), and 'Malays' on the other (Joyce 1981:79). As the newest major city in South Africa, authorities used Johannesburg to refine and implement the race-based urban segregation, which had already been tested in the existing cities. Crankshaw and Parnell (2002:5) confirm that Johannesburg evolved into "a quasi-colonial city" that "was structured in ways that reinforced racial inequality". However, the almost uncontrollable nature of the rapid urbanisation that was overtaking Johannesburg also made it difficult to maintain it as a racially divided city.

The white minority were captains of the Johannesburg urban behemoth that took shape. The power shifted and circulated between the British and the Boers, but the main welder in urban development was, without doubt, the British authorities. With the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the Boers gained moderate agency when it came to political, economic, and social matters. However, the English-speaking industrialists, scholars, and politicians determined the flavour of urbanisation. Leaders like Jan Smuts<sup>38</sup> slowly and symbolically withered the bitterness between the Boers and the British, though not entirely successfully. Even the staunchest of Afrikaner nationalists, DF Malan<sup>39</sup> once wrote (originally in Dutch) to a newspaper editor during the 1900s as a student: "South Africa is a country inhabited by two white nationalities who stand independently alongside each other, and that both are free and do not reign over one another" (quoted in Koorts 2014:48). However, while Malan recognised the value of collaborating with the British, this co-existence between the two white races was meant to advance Boer interests.<sup>40</sup> As such, the Boers slowly and painstakingly engineered political, economic, educational, and cultural institutions that would position them to take the lead in urban making throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Key to this mission was the establishment of what would become an Afrikaner Nationalist identity, where the multi-ethnic and multi-racial Boers were collapsed into a single and definite identity. The Afrikaner

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<sup>37</sup> In 1906, Lord Milner, who controlled the Transvaal region, had imported Chinese indentured labourers to plug the shortfall of 130,000 miners that was left after the South African War (Joyce 1981:22). Many of these Chinese labourers who worked under the harshest conditions were returned to China after a few years, but some remained, adding to the Asian presence within Johannesburg.

<sup>38</sup> Jan Smuts was an influential politician and intellectual who served as Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1919 to 1924 and again from 1939 to 1948. Among other extraordinary accomplishments, Malan was instrumental in the formation of the British Commonwealth and the League of Nations, which was the predecessor of the United Nations (Steyn 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Like Jan Smuts, DF Malan was a prominent politician who became Prime Minister of South Africa from 1948 to 1954. Malan was instrumental in advancing Afrikaner Nationalism through advocating for the adoption of Afrikaans as an official language in 1925, among other things, (Koorts 2014).

<sup>40</sup> An example of the thinking that whites should work together for mutual benefit is LE Neame's *White Man's Africa* published in 1952 was an emphatic declaration of the moral authority white South Africans had to occupy land and advance their interests.

Broederbond (Afrikaner brotherhood) was formulated in 1918 as an organisation that sought to establish the Afrikaner identity and “to help Afrikaners to adapt and to make a successful transition to urban life” (Wilkins & Strydom 2012:xiv). Although Malan sought reconciliation with the British, to the Afrikaner Broederbond, the British remained the English danger (*Engelse gevaar*) and the enemy of Afrikaner political and economic progress. After the founding of the organisation, a violent English mob raided an Afrikaner Broederbond meeting at Selbourne Hall in Johannesburg where DF Malan was the keynote speaker, causing some destruction of property in the process<sup>41</sup> (Harrison 1981:86).

The Afrikaner Broederbond set in place the ideological architecture for Afrikaner dominance within the realms of business, politics, and education (Harrison 1981).<sup>42</sup> In the same year of the Afrikaner Broederbond’s founding, life insurance company Sanlam<sup>43</sup> was also established, “which enthusiastically supported Afrikaner business” (Strydom 2019:34). The 1930s philanthropist Frederik Ziervogel donated his wealth towards the Joanna Ziervogel Fund, which had a directive to generate monies “for the struggle of the Afrikaner worker” (Wilkins & Strydom 2012:112). Also in the 1930s, Afrikaner banks like Volkskas<sup>44</sup> were incorporated “from the sixpences and shillings of poor Afrikaners”<sup>45</sup> that chartered the requisite financing pool aimed at benefiting and uplifting Afrikaner farmers and urban dwellers (Harrison 1981:13). In 1939, the First Economic Congress of the People (Eerste Ekonomiese Volkskongres) was convened to advance Afrikaner-owned businesses. After the congress, Anton Rupert was given a loan for the purchase of wine and tobacco farms (du Toit 2019:62). Later, in 1965, the founder of Pep Stores, Renier van Rooyen, benefited immensely from the support provided by such funding schemes (Ehlers 2008).

Until the rapid industrialisation of South African cities during the late nineteenth century, the Afrikaner *volk*<sup>46</sup> were mostly agrarian. During the early 1900s, for example, only 10% of

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<sup>41</sup> I will get back to this point of deploying urban violence in the next chapter when reviewing the dissident strategies used by black urbanities who were denied living rights within South Africa’s cities.

<sup>42</sup> A notable Afrikaner trailblazer within the economic and educational realms was Dr Hendrik van der Bijl, an extraordinary renaissance man and an accomplished scientist. He founded South Africa’s ESCOM (later Eskom) in 1923, Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation (Iskor) in 1928, and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) in 1940 (Langley 1997). Vanderbijlpark where Iskor’s plant resides is named after van der Bijl.

<sup>43</sup> In a well-argued attempt to defuse the Afrikaner heritage of Sanlam, Halleen (2013:34) prefers to think of it as “a local company that was established in an industry dominated by foreign companies”. Through a comprehensive account of the company’s client base, Halleen (2013) reveals that it is too reductive to tag Sanlam as a purely Afrikaner business. Although Halleen’s argument is feasible, the reality is that the company used its profits, which were generated from a diversified client base, to uplift and benefit the Afrikaner people.

<sup>44</sup> By 1981, Volkskas was the third largest in South Africa and had considerable influence on urban development schemes throughout the country.

<sup>45</sup> A ‘poor white’ was defined as “an impoverished white person of rural origin, the product of an outmoded economic system” (Patterson 1957:141). In other words, poor Afrikaners were non-urban, ruralised, not educated, and paradigmatically not modern.

<sup>46</sup> When translated into English, *volk* means people or nation. However, within the Afrikaner imaginary, *volk* referred explicitly to whites of Boer/Afrikaner heritage. The term also had a political and social function in that the *volk* were seen as ordinary and often impoverished Afrikaners who needed to be helped by the political and business elite

Afrikaners resided in urban areas. However, this ratio exploded to more than 50% by 1936 because the “subsistence economy and pastoral lifestyle” was “increasingly untenable” under the new economic paradigm (Visser 2005:134). The drought during the 1930s and the Great Depression of 1929 forced Afrikaner and black peasant farmers into the cities to compete for work. The Afrikaners benefited immensely from industrialisation and urban growth that resulted in upward mobility in education, income, and political agency. As Visser (2005:154) concludes, the “Afrikaner working class emerged as a consequence of urbanisation”.

For the most part, the rapid industrialisation and modernisation of South African cities were not influenced by Afrikaner forces until the twentieth century, save for the agricultural produce generated by the farmers. Afrikaners had been ambivalent to the modernisation project on the grounds of their exclusion from the capitalist machinery controlled by English-speaking South Africans. This animosity towards capital was most vibrant in the cities, especially Johannesburg. Giliomee (2003:423) highlights how “[t]heir feelings were most intense in Johannesburg, a city built, as they saw it, on crude materialism, exploitation, corruption, vice, and almost all other forms of human degradation”. So, Afrikaners harboured a valid distrust against the urbanisation project because it placed them at the periphery. However, organisations like the Afrikaner Broederbond tried to channel this anger towards the advancement of Afrikaner interests, especially within the very same urban domain. Ironically, the ancestors of the 1930s Afrikaner generation had eschewed an urban existence in the Cape in search of an autonomous, yet simple, rural farming lifestyle. However, approximately one hundred years after the Great Trek, the Afrikaners had concluded a reverse trek towards the burgeoning urban hubs of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban in search of a modern lifestyle, and organisations like the Afrikaner Broederbond had been established to facilitate this re-entry into industrialised modernity.

The power tussle between the Afrikaner and British urban planners was also palpable in the milestone urban-based architectural projects of the twentieth century. After the South African War, the British used the vast amounts of foreign exchange garnered from the gold trade to expand the infrastructure of Johannesburg and surrounds. In 1915, for example, the Republican-style Market Building was razed to the ground. The building was promptly replaced by the Johannesburg City Hall, whose “Edwardian pomp” was reflective of “British domination” (City of Johannesburg 2004:24). The brazenly far-right intellectual champion of Afrikaner nationhood, Dan Roodt, wrote a book curiously titled *Raiders of the Lost Empire: South*

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(Van Deventer & Nel 1990). For example, Sanlam’s slogan at its founding was *Uit die volk gebore om die volk te dien*, which means, “born from the people to serve the people (*uit die volk gebore om die volk te dien* born from the people to serve the people)” (Beukes *et al.* 2018:550). Once again, the people or *volk* in this instance were the Afrikaners.



*Africa's 'English' identity* (2014) that critiques Britain's role in South African history. Here he sums up how “ugly” and “out of place” British architecture was in an African climate (Roodt 2014:24).<sup>47</sup> The Randlords or “mining magnets” of English, German, and American ancestry “who took part in the rough-and-tumble scramble for gold and diamonds before adopting an upper-class lifestyle in Britain” (Stevenson 1997:ii), were instrumental in shaping the architectural character of Johannesburg during the early twentieth century.

However, the Afrikaners countered the ‘British pomp’ by building infrastructure that communicated a uniquely Afrikaner idiom. In a study of prominent buildings erected during the 1930s and 1940s, Freschi (2006:119) concludes that buildings such as the Sanlam/Santam headquarters in Cape Town (opened 1932) were a concrete illustration that Afrikaners were “no longer confined, either literally or metaphorically, to the rural margins of the city and its riches”. The ascendancy of the Afrikaner Nationalists into political power during the mid-twentieth century provided a unique historical opportunity to reassert Afrikaner idealism and sense of progress and superiority on a grand scale. The completion of grand projects in 1973 like Johannesburg’s Carlton Centre, which until recently was Africa’s tallest building, and in 1988 the South African Reserve Bank tower in Pretoria are unmissable testaments to this.<sup>48</sup> This architectural back and forth also played out in how urban homes were designed and built. For example, the idyllic Afrikaner house was modelled along the lines of the Dutch architectural heritage first implemented in the Cape by the VOC. Even the interiors of British and Afrikaner homes and offices were symbolic of sacrosanct settler identities.<sup>49</sup> Referencing twentieth-century colonial house designs in Africa, Schilling (2014:186) points out that rather than being inspired by the modernist design trends of the era, the interiors were “instead an aesthetic informed by issues of religion, class, and race”. Over and beyond being a space for living, the home had to be an extension of Britishness or Afrikanerdom.

One of the greatest triumphs of twentieth-century white urban planning was the provision of houses for white residents. For example, in 1936, Johannesburg had over 4,000 flats. In 1946, a mere decade later, the number had multiplied fivefold to 22,000 (Joyce 1981:79). After World War II, the need for urban housing swelled for both white and black residents. The returning

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<sup>47</sup> While berating the inappropriateness of British-inspired buildings and homes, Roodt simultaneously praises the novelty and context specific nature of Afrikaner Cape-Dutch inspired farm houses.

<sup>48</sup> Freschi (2006:iv) shows how architects of the Old Mutual building in Cape Town attempted to beyond the Afrikaner/British binary by cunningly developing “a hybrid ‘South Africanism’ that neatly elides Boer and Brit imagining”.

<sup>49</sup> There are examples from the colonial era of advice books that targeted homemakers based in British colonies in Africa. Among the most widely read were Bradley’s (1950:67) advice pamphlets wherein she reminded English housewives that “[y]our home is a microcosm of the world in which you live, and your attitude to the whole race will be determined, or at least affected, by your contact with it at first hand”. In other words, the race relations hierarchies in the colonies also needed to be reinforced in the home context, by *inter alia*, how the home was designed and how blacks were then expected to act within that space.

soldiers, the local transition of rural Afrikaner peasants into the cities, coupled with the increase in migrants from places like Europe and Lebanon entering the country, created a heightened need for housing.<sup>50</sup> In 1984, the Van Eck Committee estimated that 180,000 dwellings were required for the white population alone. An unprecedented and collaborative building campaign between the state and the private sector went about tackling this shortfall. Within three decades, the number of urban homes available for white occupation had surpassed demand.<sup>51</sup>

In 1971, the Transvaal Provincial Administration published a commemorative review of South Africa's first decade as a republic.<sup>52</sup> Although the book itself was presented in English and Afrikaans, and can thus be read as an integrated analysis of the urban triumphs of white South Africans living in the Transvaal, it can equally be argued that the publication was an overt and unreserved celebration of Afrikaner progress, especially in the urban domain. Sybrand GJ van Niekerk, Administrator of the Transvaal at the time punted that the publication aimed to mould "spiritually resilient citizens" who will be engrossed with "gratitude" for the advances and opportunities found in the province (quoted in Hefer 1971:7). Of course, the citizens were white (or more to the point Afrikaners) and not the multitude of other peoples of various ethnicities who lived in the region. Naturally, the council and management of the province were dominated by Afrikaner men, many of whom were part of the Afrikaner Broederbond that promoted Afrikaner interests. The structuring of the book is also telling in terms of the overall priorities of the Transvaal administration. The first section deals with the natural environment, which was considered "one of the province's greatest assets" (Hefer 1971:17). The primary focus on the natural environment comes as no surprise when juxtaposed to the Afrikaners' love for the land, be it for farming, hunting, leisure, or dwelling, which was first expressed by the free burghers of the Cape during the 1700s. The second focus was law enforcement, which also reflected the obsession the apartheid state had with maintaining order and separation, especially within the urban domain.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> In 1946, over 21,000 migrants entered the country, followed by another 28,000 in 1947 (Joyce 1981:79).

<sup>51</sup> For example, in the late 1940s the Johannesburg Ex-Servicemen's League constructed eight blocks of flats, laundry facilities, and a park for children, all within a year (Joyce 1981:76). Flats were relatively cheaper to build, easier to maintain, and inexpensive to rent out. Sadly, this vigour was completely absent when it came to housing for black urban dwellers.

<sup>52</sup> South Africa exited the British Commonwealth in 1961, which also ushered in a decade of unparalleled economic growth (Joyce 1981:38). During this time many African governments received independence from their former colonial masters, which unfortunately resulted in rapid de-industrialisation in those countries and regions. However, South Africa entered an advanced stage of colonisation and industrialisation which was not based on the old model of extraction of resources "to get immediate superprofits", best described by Walter Rodney (2018:162) in *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* (first published in 1972). Rather, the prevailing economic model in South Africa under Afrikaner lordship was that of internal consumption and the establishment of local industries, which was ironically aided by the international economic and cultural sanctions placed on the country due to its apartheid policies.

<sup>53</sup> Finance, local government, health, education and so on, were also indexed in this nuanced celebration of Afrikaner urban progress.

## 2.5 Dealing with the swart gevaar

### 2.5.1 The fear of the swart gevaar

Having introduced the main influencers to South Africa's urban morphology leading up to and during the twentieth century, in this subsection, I zoom into the dynamics of the encounter between blacks and whites within the urban zones. When the Afrikaner Broederbond was formed in 1918, it devised a strategy for dealing with what it termed the *swart gevaar* (black danger or black peril) (Wilkins & Strydom 2012:xiv). The black danger was a reference to the millions of blacks who lived among and around the Afrikaner *volk* and the key concern for the Afrikaner leaders and intelligentsia was how to deal with the black question. As alluded to earlier, before the late nineteenth century the first collection of westernised urban centres in South Africa had not yet formalised the demarcations and segregation between races

The initial large-scale European contact with the Zulu and Xhosa-speaking black communities within the coastal regions of the Cape and Natal created angst among the new white urban communities. Although there were negotiated attempts at non-violent co-existence along the frontiers, the confrontations were those "of cattle-raiding and of war" and unlike the situation with the Khoisan, "Bantu policy, in the face of great numbers, was seen in terms of military operations, not as the possibility of peaceable assimilation" (Reader 1961:2). This resulted in the 'Kaffir Wars' that were waged between the white settlers and the blacks who inhabited the lands and resources that were being contested. However, despite these contestations, the need for black labour within the sprouting urban centres forced compromises from all sides. For example, during the 1820s, Durban "was a free-standing frontier community which had at first to accept the suzerainty of the new Zulu state" (Freund 2000:147). The presence of the powerful Zulu Kingdom meant that the British had to treat the Zulu-speaking community with a reluctant tolerance, which was nevertheless based on racist convictions. Black workers and traders were therefore allowed into the urban domain, but with some restrictions. As Bass (2011:130) confirms, 1820s Durban "was indicative of a host of creolising and interactive social practices". One of these interactive social realities was evidenced in the "heavy but transient presence of Africans" within the white city centre<sup>54</sup> (Freund 2000:150). Throughout much of the nineteenth century, Durban became a bustling merchant town filled with traders of all persuasions. The importation of indentured Indian labour in 1860 to work the sugar mills aided in further unsettling the racial divides that were promoted by the colonialists. Unforeseen by the British planners was that the arrival of Indian workers unwittingly "engendered the

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<sup>54</sup> According to Freund (2001:529) "places of employment in the towns were in quite easy reach of workers intent on commuting or on short-term employment"

emergence of an important Indian commercial community” (Freund 2001:530).<sup>55</sup> Like the black workers, the Indian presence in Durban was within touching distance of the white communities.

Consequently, Durban’s municipal council, established in 1854, began to experiment with separatist urban planning and enforcing legal statutes. The separation and legal measures curbed the growing Indian and black enterprises within the city, especially when those businesses started to compete with or at times surpass white businesses. As Freund (2000:149) reveals, the layout of Durban’s infrastructure and overall zoning during the late nineteenth century “represented a reaction to the uncertain and potentially menacing natural and human environment around the colonial community”. Whites were fearful of the existence and uncomfortable proximity of these ‘othered’ peoples within the urban areas. As a relatively new city at that time, Durban was able to implement a racialised urban design that compartmentalised black, Indian, and white inhabitants more readily than Cape Town,<sup>56</sup> and these constructs were refined and replicated well into the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> After the Anglo-Zulu War of the late nineteenth century, the interaction between the various black communities throughout South Africa’s landscape and the colonialists became increasingly non-violent as large numbers of blacks were assimilated into westernised modernity, largely through the work of the Christian evangelists. However, even within these putatively and deceptively benevolent spaces of the missionary churches and schools, blacks were still viewed as inferior subjects, and complete egalitarian racial mixing was forbidden and controlled.

Other British-controlled towns, such as East London, initiated urban control based on race as early as 1876 (Reader 1961:11). The East London administration set in motion laws that would become the blueprint of spatial management in South Africa during the twentieth century. These laws were founded on the following racist principles, namely residential segregation, social segregation, economic maintenance, sanitation and hygiene, and registration and labour control (Reader 1961:10). Furthermore, within the Afrikaner and British psyche, the policies, laws, and investments made by their political elite were not so much motivated by a desire to make blacks suffer, but rather by an obsession to elevate the Afrikaners [and British]

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<sup>55</sup> Freund (2000:150) highlights how the Hindu and Muslim Indians “involved themselves in market gardening (often on municipal land), fishing, petty commerce and other activities while living in shacks they constructed themselves and gradually extended”.

<sup>56</sup> In the opening line of their landmark publication on the personhood of Indian slaves brought to Durban during the nineteenth century, Desai and Vahed (2010:vi) confirm that contemporary twenty-first-century Durban “still bears the signs of indenture”.

<sup>57</sup> Although the impact of the racist constructs was far reaching, the white city planners did not fully destroy the creole and fluid makeup of Durban, even during the height of apartheid. In an article aptly titled ‘The integrated community apartheid could not destroy’, Maharaj (1999:250) details the story of the Warwick Avenue Triangle, “one of the oldest mixed residential areas in Durban” that resisted attempts to split its residents up according to racial categorisation.

to the apex of civilisation in Africa.<sup>58</sup> Wilkins and Strydom's (2012) meticulous account of the Afrikaner Broederbond (first published in 1978) reveals how this obsession with elevating the peasant Afrikaner dominated every aspect of Afrikaner political, economic, and cultural organisation. However, as the authors put it, having to deal with the black question was seen as a testing and "traumatic experience" (Wilkins & Strydom 2012:177). In the ideal Afrikaner cosmos, the black 'problem' would not exist in the first place. Thus, Afrikaners often approached the black danger in "abstract terms", which was a "reflection of the Afrikaner nationalists' insulation from the majority of South Africa's population" (Koorts 2014:xiii).

Apart from being ingrained with a colonialist undercurrent, this insulation was motivated by the pursuit of self-preservation. Contemporary records show that, as minorities, both the English and Afrikaners always harboured anxiety related to their fate if political power was shared with the more populous black citizenry. Unlike most other settler colonies, where indigenous populations had been decimated by smallpox or genocide, South Africa's indigenous peoples significantly outnumbered the white population. The angst this caused was accentuated in the urban sphere, which led to the 'whitification' of South Africa's urbanisms. A Senator in the National Party-led government during the 1950s, JH Grobler, wrote a book curiously titled *Africa's Destiny*<sup>59</sup> wherein he defended the separatist worldview of the ruling white nationalists. Grobler (1958:53) expressed this fear most acutely: "The reasons why *total integration would be fatal* in a country like South Africa should be clear to anybody who is not blinded by prejudice and party-political considerations" (my emphasis). From Grobler's perspective, the idea of complete, unrestrained integration between whites and blacks, especially in the urban spaces, was seen as a suicidal mission. The migration and mobility of black South Africans into the cities during the early twentieth century, a process that "dwarfed the Great Trek in terms of scale" (Bonner 1995:115), heightened the fear of white South Africans. Since black Africans were characterised as irredeemably backward, pagan, barbaric, and inherently unclean, the urbanised black person was seen as a cancerous horror threatening the very fabric of white civilisation on the African continent. The spatial reorganisation of the city was an attempt to stem the growth of this cancer.

The intensification of the movement of black and white job seekers to the gold-rich Rand region after the South African War necessitated the nationwide legalisation of these racist

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<sup>58</sup> To elevate Afrikaners, for example, DF Malan diagnosed the influx of hundreds of thousands of black migrants into the cities at the start of the twentieth century as an ostensible contributor to the poor-white problem (Koorts 2013:555). So, when the Afrikaner legislators gave preferential employment to poor Afrikaners, this process was not meant to punish black workers – although it ultimately did – but rather to eliminate poverty among Afrikaner people.

<sup>59</sup> Published in 1958, the text provides a telling account of the historical undercurrents that drove the political, economic, and by implication, urban developments in South Africa. But somewhat prophetically, the book affirms how these same attitudes would impact the country's anatomy for the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

viewpoints. The white colonialists feared that the urban space, if unchecked, would result in undesired and irreversible mass creolisation between whites and black urban dwellers. Coertze<sup>60</sup> (1972) conveyed this apprehension in a prophecy of the horror that would befall whites in South Africa if blacks and whites were to coexist in the urban environment freely. He wrote: “If we should accept that they remain settled here in large numbers on a family basis, that they live and work here, the problem will be that white and bantu (black) interests become so intertwined in the course of time that separation becomes completely impossible” (Coertze 1972:59). In other words, it was likely that a racially, culturally, and linguistically hybridised South Africa was going to emerge from the urban melting pot where blacks, whites, Indians, Malays, and Chinese shared living and working amenities. This miscegenation had to be avoided at all costs. Newbury (2007:586) confirms that although the British and later Afrikaner governments “saw black Africans in an urban setting as economically necessary, they also viewed this situation as *culturally damaging or threatening*” (my emphasis).

### 2.5.2 Cleansing the city of the swart gevaar

The solution was to create ‘culture-specific zoning’, which “led to the demarcation of different zones and housing types according to the religious and cultural background of future residents” (d’Auria 2014:330). Cultural or racial zoning was further institutionalised through various legal frameworks<sup>61</sup> that blocked the feared bastardisation<sup>62</sup> of white purity through urban intermixing. A precedence for the removal of blacks from the inner city was set initially in Cape Town in 1901 at the advent of the bubonic plague, and later in Johannesburg in 1904 when the ‘Coolie Town’ was established. This outbreak enabled the Johannesburg Municipality to relocate 5,000 black inhabitants of the city to Klipspruit<sup>63</sup> in 1905, where the council provided the now-iconic corrugated iron structures “as temporary shelters” (French 1983:5). Other prejudicial legal reforms, such as the Natives Land Act of 1913 that created land encampments for blacks away from white locations, were also instrumental in the ‘whitification’ of the city. Commenting on the Natives Land Act, Moguerane (2016:247) reminds us that the act’s “conception did not lie in the lobbies of white settler power, but in the mind of the colonial government. It was a policy designed to serve as a cornerstone instalment towards

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<sup>60</sup> RD Coertze was a researcher and head of the Ethnology Department at University of Pretoria, a position he assumed from his father, CJ Coertze (Sharp 1981:16). Coertze senior was “aologised” as one of the pioneers of “of an authentically Afrikaner anthropology” (Sharp 1981:26).

<sup>61</sup> The Immorality Act of 1927 and its Amendment in 1950, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, and the Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Act of 1985 were institutionalised attempts at maintaining racial and cultural piety.

<sup>62</sup> Dan Roodt (2015:81), an unapologetic champion of the Afrikaner separatist ideology, bemoans how this bastardisation horror has come alive in the non-segregated democratic South Africa of today: “South Africa has not only embraced so called ‘blackness’ as its new imperial principle, it has become a black hole of identity. It is a nightmare come true and we shall flatter it if we call it post-modern”.

<sup>63</sup> Klipspruit was situated 15km south west of Johannesburg.

segregation. Its purpose was to undermine the institutions of black landlordism in African society". In other words, the Natives Land Act was conceived by the British Empire to weaken the black franchise in South Africa. Another critical aspect to note about the Native Land Act's contribution to urban segregation is that the law formally "recognised rather than caused dispossession" (Beinart & Delius 2014:669). Urban-based land dispossession and segregation were already in play before 1913 and intensified after. The Urban Areas Bill of 1918 forced "blacks to live in locations" set out by city councils and gave the administrators legal grounds "to exclude the unemployed from towns" (French 1983:18). Since blacks in the major cities were legally barred from municipal processes, they had no say in their relocation and housing needs.

The next major legislation that further entrenched urban segregation was the Natives [Urban Areas] Act of 1923, which denied blacks property rights within the city. According to Morris (quoted in French 1983:20), the act was a formative component of the influx-control laws, and was premised on the following ideology:

The Native should only be allowed to enter into the urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to administer to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases to so minister.

Such sentiment reduced blacks into objects that served the needs of white society. Black workers had to be invisible in the 'white man's' urban spaces, and like chlorine in water, they had to serve their purpose without being noticeable or causing trouble. Later in 1928, the Johannesburg municipality established the Native and Non-European Affairs Department, which began to administer the housing affairs of Johannesburg-based blacks. Before the creation of this department, housing for urban blacks was managed under the Parks and Recreation Department, which also dealt with matters related to the Zoo (Stadler 1979:117). Furthermore, a Native Revenue Account was established to administer the rentals, levies, penalties, and income of beer halls within the various black districts as a way of regulating urban-based black business (French 1983:20). Limited trading licenses were provided to black entrepreneurs within select service sectors, which were a simultaneous "concession and a control" (French 1983:21).

Once again, fear of the *swart gevaar* was at the centre of these legislations. A white member of the Johannesburg City Council expressed this segregationist logic of the law in 1930 (quoted in French 1983:28) as follows:

To herd them in locations, as remote as may be from the residence of white men, is no doubt the simplest way to prevent a nuisance arising, from the point of view of either public health or *of social contact*; and such locations as the council provides should be as light a burden as possible on municipal funds. Finally, as regards the life lived by the Native within the locations, the most important aim of the council must be to maintain discipline (my emphasis).

The counsellor's final point about the importance of maintaining discipline within these 'native locations' indicates the white supremacist rationale that condemned blacks, whether Christianised, educated, or urbanised, to a sub-civilised status that required the policing and constant nurturing of the all-knowing white master. The distance between black areas and the city space was a successful attempt to buffer the white urban dwellers from any kind of social unrest and rioting by disgruntled blacks. It was commonly understood by urban planners that "as the city grows it expands outward" whether in concentric circles, zones or nuclei (Weber & Lloyd 1975:29). As such, the need to have a significant distance between black and white environments was further justified so that the two would never meet.<sup>64</sup>

When the Herenigde Nasionale Party (commonly known as the National Party) was formed in 1913, a year after the African National Congress (ANC), and took power in 1948, the approach to urban segregation evolved somewhat. Whereas segregationist policies had been in place during the previous United Party government, the "government failed to deal through planning with very real urban problems" (Mabin 1992:419). For example, the Squatter Movement in Johannesburg compromised both the municipal and state plans by their being forced to extend Orlando onto land that had been provisioned for other developments (discussed in detail in Chapter 4). One of the changes within the municipal and state strategy after 1948 was the insistence that urban segregation should be applied retroactively. Mixed race areas were to be undone to make way for purified urban spaces along racialised lines. This retroactive policy was implemented because some cities, such as Cape Town, had developed a degree of "racial tolerance before the coming of apartheid" (Bickford-Smith 1995:63), which was a concern for the National Party.

In April of 1950, the then Prime Minister DF Malan announced the Group Areas Act, which embodied the soul and final solution of apartheid rationality. This act gave the central government the power to enforce "compulsory segregation" (James 1992:46). Malan's government wanted to achieve three major aims through the Group Areas Act. Firstly, to create residential segregation based on ethnicity. Secondly, to control the political and labour-

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<sup>64</sup> Today, the physical distance between the township and the city (as theorised and built in the twentieth century) is becoming shorter. For example, suburbs in the south of Johannesburg have expanded to almost touch Soweto and vice versa.



based campaigns that were on the rise at the time. It was hoped mass political rallies could be closed off in the townships, because of the limited routes into and out of those black urbanisms. Thirdly, the Group Areas Act sought to create economic separation between black and white urban dwellers. As Platzky and Walker (1985:102) show us, “[m]any white shopkeepers used the act to put themselves in business at the expense of their black competitors”.

The Group Areas Act also brought into law two critical drivers of urban planning: “allocation of racially-zoned land for new areas; and deciding on, and achieving, uniraical areas where many 'groups' lived and worked” (Mabin 1992:423). Municipalities had to conform to the Group Areas Act if they wanted to access money from the National Housing Office. The success of the principle of group areas was mixed. Some cities pounced on the directive immediately, but “some local authorities refused to co-operate in this procedure” (Pirie 1983:347). The act impacted as many as 600,000 people, and of that number only 8,000 were white (Pirie 1983:348). The forced removals were meant to uproot the surplus urban residents, and they hoped it would drive blacks back to their homeland reserves. While forced removals were most devastating in the large urban centres, there were also removals in the homelands. The initial pockets of the native land reserves were birthed because of the resistance of certain chiefdoms to the taking of their land by the Transvaal government (Platzky & Walker 1985:73).

By the time the Group Areas Act was enforced, over 3.5 million blacks had been relocated from urban areas to the homelands (James 1992:42). While blacks were certainly impacted by Group Areas legislation, it was the Indian and coloured communities – because they lived among whites – who were worst affected because many owned property in what would become exclusively white suburbs. Therefore, black resistance against the Group Areas Act was somewhat muted. For example, according to Southworth (1991:7) “[a]t ANC annual conferences throughout the 1950s participants rarely discussed [the Group Areas Act]”. However, black leaders took notice of the legislation when the relocations started to create animosity between black, coloured, and Indian urban communities when any of these groups were relocated to make way for the others. As Southworth (1991:8) concludes, “[l]eaving home to make way for whites was bad enough. Leaving homes to make way for non-whites was insulting”.

Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, white politicians enacted laws that sought to curtail and control the movement of black bodies within white areas. One of the strategies adopted by the Afrikaner Nationalist state during the 1950s was to halt the movement of rural dwellers into the urban centres through the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 and the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952. However, these efforts failed to stem the tide of

urbanised blacks as their size swelled from 2.4 million in 1950 to 3.9 million a decade later (Hindson 1987:585). In 1970, the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (1972:3) reported that more than 4.4 million blacks were urbanised inside South Africa. This figure outnumbered the whites living in the same urban spaces at the time. According to Besteman (2008:48), even though the Group Areas Act and the influx-control laws barred blacks from occupying the city “Africans entered the city illegally by the tens of thousands during the apartheid era, squatting throughout the metropolitan area in unused space, in backyard shacks on employers’ land in white neighbourhoods, and in between rental units in townships”.

In a bid to control this tide, local urban scholars,<sup>65</sup> administrators, and policymakers turned to the segregationist urban practices and theories from the rest of the world, specifically Europe and America. The lessons derived from the racial tensions in American cities and how the American urban authorities responded was of particular interest. During the early to mid-twentieth century, there was a mass exodus of African Americans from the South<sup>66</sup> to the major urban hubs of the north. This migration continued unabated after World War II (Rose 1971:16). Since white America harboured the same racialised contempt for blacks as South Africa, ghetto encampments within American cities were formed as an attempt to manage the urbanisation of blacks. Initially, municipalities had fashioned inner-city segregation through large buildings reserved for blacks. The Pruitt-Igoe housing project in the city of St. Louis in Missouri, is a well-documented example (Bristol 1991). The building complex was built in 1954 by internationally acclaimed architects at a high cost to the local authorities. The complex was demolished in the 1970s and became a symbol of “the failure of the high-rise architectural wonders which concentrate and restrict the black poor to a limited territorial niche” (Rose 1971:42). In the main, the Pruitt-Igoe project failed because it was a segregationist project that did not involve its intended inhabitants during its design and construction (Wendl 2013).<sup>67</sup>

In the logic of the white segregationists, the central weakness of America’s inner-city segregation was the proximity of blacks to the central business district of the city. Thus, the most unemployed, underpaid, politically excluded, and disheartened urban black populace could easily disrupt the critical functions of the city through mass action campaigns and rioting. Riots were synthesised as “a major threat to the stability of most large cities” (Connery 1968:v). At the time, over 70% of African Americans were living in spaces that were classified as urban.

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<sup>65</sup> For example, Izak van der Merwe’s (1975) *Die stad en Sy Omgewing: 'n Studie in nedersettingsgeografie (The city and its environment: a study in settlement)* draws from the formative European and American thinkers on urban design, such as Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Homer Hoyt, Chauncy Harris.

<sup>66</sup> During the 1960s alone over 100,000 African Americans left Mississippi (Rose 1971:16).

<sup>67</sup> By 1970, the Pruitt-Igoe complex only had 30% occupancy and many of those residents could not afford the rent because they lived below the poverty line (Comerio 1981:27).

A Senator in the House of Representatives, Clair Drake<sup>68</sup> (1968:15), saw the increasing number of urban-based civil rights campaigns during the 1960s as a challenge to state security, contending that “the involvement of Negro Americans in urban violence is of increasingly serious concern to the nation, for members of this particular ethnic group are now concentrated at the nerve centres of American life”.

The apartheid government endeavoured to avoid such miscalculations because they could neither tolerate nor afford to have disgruntled blacks living within ‘the nerve centres’ of white South Africa, nor could they allow blacks to riot within the city in the same manner that blacks did in America. The inverse demographics between America and South Africa necessitated a different approach to inner-city segregation. In America, the majority-white population was trying to control the minority blacks, while in South Africa, the minority white population was imposing its will on the majority black population. Thus, though based on the same brand of racism found in America, the urban segregation in South Africa took on a more meticulous and draconian stance. Also, while many of the buildings within the industrial zones were tendered to local and foreign developers, and various other businesses, the building of the townships where blacks lived was done directly by the government and its district municipalities, as a way of ensuring that its urban ideology was translated accurately.

In a speech to parliament in 1977, almost two decades after the establishment of the Group Areas Act, Senator PZ van Vuuren (quoted in Western 1981:85) expressed no regret for the act, instead choosing to praise it for bringing order to South African cities:

We make no apologies for the Group Areas Act, and for its application... We put that Act on the Statute Book, and as a result, we have in South Africa, out of the chaos which prevailed when we came to power, *created order and established decent, separate residential areas for our people* (my emphasis).

By the 1980s, however, the logic of the Group Areas Act was tested and eroded. According to Elder (1990:265), “a relaxed influx control policy and a severe black, coloured, and Indian housing shortage, forced the Government to reassess its ideological stand of segregation”.

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<sup>68</sup> Drake (1968:21) compared the violent and barbaric riots by blacks to the relatively harmless rioting by the woman’s suffrage movement, arguing that the latter was “minimal” and that “the woman never fought back when attacked, preferring to submit to arrest”, while the black rioters did the opposite.

## 2.6 Black urbanisation as a ‘necessary evil’

### 2.6.1 The urban black person as a non-being

While on the one hand, white South Africa did all it could to uphold its racial purity by cleansing the cityscape of the black presence, it could not do without black labour. As stated before, the discovery of the first diamond in 1867 and the gold rush kick-started the country’s rapid industrialisation, which in turn escalated the need for cheap labour. The advantages of a cheap and expedient black workforce resulted in an insufferable ‘denied dependency’ complex wherein blacks were a threat to white society, and, equally, an economic anchor. This ambivalent attitude towards blackness resulted in the commodification of the black body and what Césaire (2000:42) called its “thingification”.<sup>69</sup> In the Comaroff’s (2003:163) analysis of the history of the black proletariat in South Africa, they describe ‘thingified’ black workers as people who “have been turned into phantom labourers”. The Comaroffs (1999:290) further warn that this “phantom proletariat” has been harmful to black communities because “it also destroys the labour market, conventional patterns of social reproduction, and the legitimate prospects of ‘the community’ at large”. The black proletariat within the urban environments were non-citizens, void of employee rights and platforms of fair recourse. They were coerced into surrendering their bodies as functional tools for a capitalist economy in which they had no share.

The leaders of the Boer Republics, made of Transvaal, Orange Free State, and Natal (although the Natal Republic was short-lived), facilitated the controlled and manipulated integration of black labour into urban industrialisation during the nineteenth century. It was estimated that there were 773,000 blacks versus the 43,260 whites residing between the Vaal and Limpopo rivers during 1880 (Heydenrych 1986:153). While this ratio intimidated whites who feared the ‘black peril’, for the farmers and industrialists, these numbers represented what Marx (1909:s.n.) famously termed “a surplus population of workers... ready for exploitation by capital”. At the time, black labourers were not easily lured into the farms and cities because they could exist relatively comfortably within their non-city-based communities. Furthermore, throughout most of the nineteenth century, blacks preferred to live in a fluid, multi-local<sup>70</sup> existence. Blacks sought out the best opportunities and moved along if the area they settled in was not ideal. Peires (1986:44) characterised these fluid nineteenth-century black

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<sup>69</sup> ‘Thingification’ was a term used by Césaire (2000:42) to describe the way colonial subjects were treated by the European imperialists. For Césaire “colonisation = thingification”.

<sup>70</sup> This concept is explained in depth in Chapter 3.

communities as 'segmented', which was more appropriate than the conventional notion of 'migrant', which as he puts it, suggests "nomadism and rootless wandering".

However, in 1866, the Transvaal Republic introduced pass laws that required black persons to carry authorisation from their employer, chief, magistrate, or local missionary if they desired to move freely. The pass laws disrupted the fluidity and constant flow of black communities at the time. Heydenrych (1986:153) notes that this policy was motivated by the need to transform and "compel" blacks into "a settled way of life". Heydenrych (1986:153) further lists the imposition of various taxes such as the house tax of 1870 and the poll tax of 1905 as attempts to force blacks to work on white-owned farms, and later on the mines, to earn money to pay the taxes. As Laband (2014:40) explains, black inhabitants of Boer-controlled lands "were required to perform tribute labour (*opgaaf*) for the proprietor of the farm". However, black farmers used *opgaaf* to their advantage as they are able to graze their own livestock on the same Boer farms due to the farms' considerable sizes. According to Laband (2014:40), "this allowed [blacks] to remain relatively economically independent, and to retain their homes and families and the support of their kinship groups".

Essentially, these policies disturbed the wilful transition of blacks into urbanisation, a process that was already underway, and turned urbanisation into an inevitable eventuality. Kostof (1991) explains that this coerced form of colonial urbanisation contaminated processes that would have occurred organically and with much less trauma and fatal consequence. For Kostof (1991:59): "Colonialism disrupts the passage from a rural to an urban landscape which is the benchmark of continuous human settlement. The colonial power can, out of hand, wipe away past land tenure systems, and the social and legal systems they support, opening the way for formal planning". The pass laws and taxation strategies worked. By 1875, over 50,000 blacks were working in the Kimberly diamond mines, and some used the income to buy guns (such as the Pedi) and defended their land using those weapons (Heydenrych 1986:153). This coerced urbanisation ensured that colonial authorities always controlled the terms under which black urbanisation occurred and consequently, controlled the urbanised black inhabitants.

By the start of the twentieth century, the number of black migrant labourers within the urban centres was in the hundreds of thousands, and many of these workers came from all over southern Africa. Maloka (2004:28) details, for example, how Shangaan men from Portuguese-controlled Mozambique (at the time) were sought after by mining companies because they "stayed on the mines for up to three years (compared to local recruits whose contracts averaged three to six months); and were largely employed underground while local recruits preferred surface work". Because blacks were allowed to work among their white counterparts, legalised labour protection for white workers was instituted during the 1900s, thereby denying

blacks the opportunity to become professional artisans. Bonner (1995:118) stipulates that the “exceptionally racist and despotic pattern of supervision” resulted in abnormal levels of employee turnover among black workers.

Furthermore, black workers could not access recourse related to labour disputes on account of the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953, which resulted in unequal and unfair working conditions. Unsurprisingly, the wages offered to black workers did not match those of their white colleagues and were woefully below the living wage demand of the urban environment. The mining corporations brazenly justified these exploitative remunerations accorded to black workers on account that some of the supplies the families of miners needed could be “produced in the rural areas” (Stadler 1979:112). The mining companies lobbied for the native land reserves legalisation because they could then classify and treat black workers as migrants (Platzhy & Walker 1985:80).

The mining companies’ outlook was consistent with a general desire on the part of whites to treat the urbanised black worker as a migrant labourer and sojourner, whose home and family was destined to remain in the distant rural areas. Further to this, the measly pay accorded to black labourers stifled their permanent settlement in the city, such as the ability to purchase or build a home in the few city-based residential areas where blacks could own land at the time. In 1910, the ratio of Johannesburg-based black men to women was 23 to 1, which justified the hostel-style living conditions provided by industry. However, by the 1920s the quotient had dropped to 6 to 1, and thus family accommodation became an irresistible need (French 1983:24).

### **2.6.2 Controlling urban black people**

Since black settlement in urban spaces was unavoidable, the white government resorted to controlling the living and movement patterns of the black workers. At the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, various Native Administration or Native Affairs departments were instituted to supervise urbanised black residents. The departments’ functions were twofold. On the one hand, the departments were supposed to regulate the lives of the urban-based blacks in a manner that upheld the separatist and hierarchical status quo. Conversely, the departments were mandated to ensure that blacks were kept ‘happy’ within their township reservations. Robinson (1994:20) believes that many of the white urban administrators who were charged with overseeing the black ‘problem’ within these departments typified the “contradictory notions of sympathy and control”. Speaking of Charles Travis Boast, the Native

Administrator of New Brighton<sup>71</sup> in Port Elizabeth from 1945, Robinson (1994:10) reveals how Boast “prided himself” in being available to assist the black residents of the township with their challenges. The staff at the office also had to connect with the residents by being conversant in isiZulu and isiXhosa, and “this language requirement was the basic qualification for the job” (Robinson 1994:12). Robinson (1994:11) further highlights how these actions “seem to disrupt apartheid conventions – seeing people as human beings too, not natives or Bantu only; feeling and at times expressing sympathies with the plight of their subjects”. Put simply, some of the officials in these departments went out of their way to assist and ameliorate, as best they could, the challenges and frustrations their black clients encountered. Nevertheless, these departments and their officials were deployed to buttress the race-based urban compartmentalisation.

Another control mechanism was the influx-control policy that sought to limit and place a curfew on the black presence within the city. Policymakers hoped that this strategy would maintain white sanctity within the urban space, while also retaining the much-needed black labour. While altruism was certainly evident in some of the interactions between white sympathisers and blacks, the self-appointed nurturing of black interests through these Native Affairs departments was another display of the patronising colonial attitude. These white officials were urban evangelists, entrusted with the age-old ‘white man’s burden’ of caring for hapless blacks. In 1980, the Chairman of the West Rand Administration Board that controlled the South Western Townships (Soweto), JC Knoetze, unapologetically pronounced that “[i]t is my desire to make Soweto the most beautiful *black city* in Africa” (my emphasis) (Knoetze 1981:18). Knoetze’s ironic and condescending attitude was consistent with a late-twentieth-century approach among white urban administrators that wanted to appease urban-based black inhabitants by providing them with housing, essential services, and amenities.

Attempting the absolute control of the urbanised black population resulted in the apartheid government conceding to major compromises. Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, the white city planners had to balance the need to keep black society close enough to access its labour, while also confronting the influx of more unwanted blacks into the cities. Even with strict influx-control measures, by 1980, 32% of the black population was urbanised, and the number of blacks in the urban space far outnumbered the white population (Hindson 1987:584).

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<sup>71</sup> In 1922 there were 22,000 black residents in the Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Bay) area, a number that swelled to 161,900 by 1960 (Cherry 1992:8). In line with segregation, these people were encamped in New Brighton, a black township, that like other urban-based black residential compounds was “equally lacking in the normal urban amenities – entertainment, schools, health facilities” (Freund 2006:122).

Since the 'black cities' were annexed from the economic arteries that fueled the industrialisation of traditional 'white cities', the provision of critical services was becoming an unbearable liability to the state and its municipalities. By the mid-1980s, the principals in government had hatched a grand initiative that they catalogued in the White Paper on *An Urbanisation Strategy for the Republic of South Africa* (1986). The initiative was aimed at tweaking the traditional state-led urbanisation planning to a market-orientated strategy. Hindson (1987:589) interprets this market-orientated strategy as "decentralised apartheid in which market forces are to be given play within a regional planning framework based on the principles of racial residential segregation and the spatial dispersal of industry and population". The state, facing widening social spending related to urban blacks, desired the assistance of the market by crafting "a policy of privatisation and self-help" which the state hoped would be met with approval from the black inhabitants (Hindson 1987:591). Critically, there was still no desire for full socio-economic and political integration between urban whites and their black contemporaries.

In tandem with the state's urban policies was the rise of white-owned big business as a player in the urbanisation debate through the formation of the Urban Foundation. Bankrolled by oligarchs such as Harry Oppenheimer<sup>72</sup> and Anton Rupert, the foundation had a four-prong mission to provide black South Africans with (1) housing and urban development; (2) urban management and local government; (3) regional development; and (4) rural development (Murray 1987:18). The inaugural chairman of the foundation, former Supreme Court judge, Jan Steyn, emphasised that "the foundation was not to be some kind of charity" but a driver of sustainable development among black communities. Importantly, the foundation did not support the de-urbanisation of blacks, on account of the potential upside of more integration and "heavy urban concentration" (Hindson 1987:593). Working within the prevailing constitutional confines, the foundation poured significant investments into housing for black urban residents in places like Soweto, Khayelitsha, and Botshabelo. However, the benevolent actions of the foundation were met with scepticism among the black beneficiaries who suspected that the industrialists behind the foundation would profit handsomely from the state's policies of segregation and were not doing enough to unsettle the racist superstructure of South African society.

An article that appeared in a Cape Town-based periodical *Grassroots* (1980:16) succinctly summarised the hypocritical nature of the Urban Foundation:

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<sup>72</sup> In 1957 Sir Ernest Oppenheimer provided a R6 million loan to the Johannesburg municipality to build over 11,000 homes in Soweto (Joyce 1981:77).



[P]eople all over the country live in poor conditions, these same [poor] people work for the men who belong to the Urban Foundation. Their bosses pay them low wages which makes it impossible for them to improve their living conditions... instead [of] helping communities, the Urban Foundation is helping the government, it is giving communities what the government should be giving them – houses, crèches, and community centres.

## 2.7 Constructing the rural-urban dichotomy

The white intelligentsia colloquially diagnosed the black presence within the urban centres as a ‘problem’ that needed to be handled appropriately for the benefit and security of the white society (Thinkers Forum 1981:1). Central to the notion of managing this ‘problem’ was the mission of transitioning blacks from their rural African disposition to a westernised urban lifestyle. In other words, the duty of civilising the backward African. White society was prepared to tolerate moderate contact and co-existence with blacks only if the blacks assimilated into a European version of modernity by eschewing their tribal past and belief systems. Those who chose not to integrate into westernised urban life were seen as backwards and “socially pathological adults” (Reader 1961:142).<sup>73</sup> As Reader (1961:142) puts it, “it is evident that these are people who have failed: *failed to adapt, failed to settle down*, failed to get what they wanted out of life” (my emphasis). Urban-based blacks were discouraged from practising their African customs, which were characterised as regressive and mal-adaptive to western modernity. Instead, black men and women were incentivised to ‘assimilate’ into white civilisational standards by becoming more westernised.

In *Tribe to Township*, Dr Peter Becker<sup>74</sup> (1974:124) emphatically pronounces that, “[n]ow, right before us, in vivid reality, we see great communities of black urban dwellers – labourers, clerks, nurses, teachers, businessmen, lawyers, doctors”. However, Becker’s enthusiasm was sandwiched by analyses of how black workers had to attain “the white man’s standard” of productivity, which was seen as vastly more demanding than the “traditional tribal methods” (Becker 1974:124). The cover illustration of Becker’s book is also suggestive of this teleological progression from classical African initiation practices towards a sophisticated westernised modern personality (Figure 2.1). The colonial binaries underpinning this kind of discourse (traditional-modern, natural-cultural, rural-urban) saw the ‘progression’ towards

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<sup>73</sup> The irony of the belief that blacks are “socially pathological adults” (Reader 1961:142) is that colonisation, as Fanon (1986) diagnosed it, was a machine that literally made blacks into a mad race. Thus, whether blacks became westernised or chose to stay true to their customs and practices, within the colonial imaginary, they were perpetually and “inherently plagued by madness” (Sithole 2014b:324).

<sup>74</sup> Peter Becker can be described as a cultural interlocutor. He was not typical of apartheid academia. He spoke several African languages and strove to familiarise whites with black culture.

westernised urbanisation as the inexorable and inevitable march of human progress (Reader 1966).

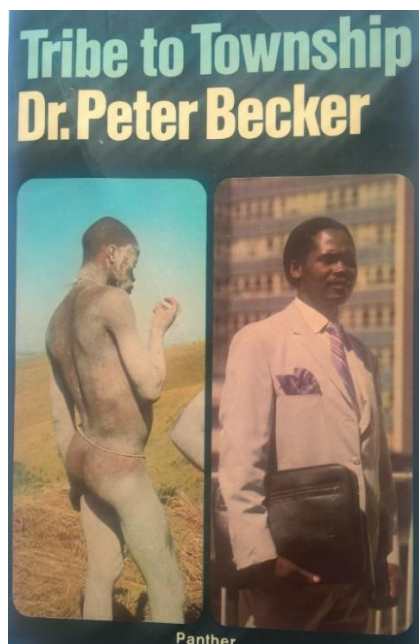


Figure 2.1. Cover page for *Tribe to Township*. Photos and design by Dr Peter Becker. (Photograph taken by author)

The reality that the two conditions co-exist quite comfortably for contemporary black South Africans was unfathomable to the white observer. Becker (1974:132) concludes that the adaptability of blacks living in urban areas is evidenced in how they “have extended their attitudes to work and reward far beyond those of their ancestors and present-day cousins of tribal areas”. That blacks accepted the city-based work standards should not be read as a confirmation of the inferiority of labour practices in rural African settings, as opposed to the advanced and industrialised commerce. This racist view was upheld by key voices in urban scholarship, such as when Jenkins (1966:46) confidently noted that “African cities are the targets of migration for people unable to achieve but demanding the rewards of modern industrial society, rewards which African cities suggest but cannot fulfil”.<sup>75</sup> The African city and by extension, the black African urbanite would never attain the levels of development experienced in the global north.

There was a feeling that Indians and coloureds in South Africa, more so than blacks, possessed the development gene. Du Plessis and Spies (1988:27) point to the difference

<sup>75</sup> Jenkins expressed these views in the summation of the key outcomes of the *African Urban Research Conference* held in America in 1966.

between blacks, coloureds, and Indians by suggesting that, “[i]n other urban areas such as the Durban/Pinetown/Pietermaritzburg metropole, segregated residential zones did not prevent communities (with specific reference to the Indian and coloured communities) from becoming *progressively integrated into the industrial society*” (my emphasis). In some ways, the economic ascendancy of Indians and coloureds, which was accorded to them by more lenient but still racist policies, improved how they were perceived by white society. Because whites were perceived to be more modern, sophisticated, and economically successful, it was presumed that they were superior to black Africans. The rural-urban, backward-progressive dialectic did not apply to Indians and coloureds to the same degree as it did to blacks.

## 2.8 Segregation through Bantu homeland urbanisation

Parallel to reversing black urbanisation in the ‘white cities’, authorities also promoted the growth of cities within the Bantu homelands. The homelands were central to the urban segregation project because blacks were subjected to live among themselves, away from ‘white cities’. The creation of homelands also resulted in urbanisation that was in some ways similar to the urban formations in white communities, but also substantively different. The development of the homelands was essentially a modernisation and legalisation of the pre-colonial ethnic and tribal formations that existed across southern Africa. The apartheid government capitalised on the ethnic disparities that existed among the black communities who grouped themselves based on language and cultural similarities, such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, Tshivenda, Xitsonga. The government banked the success of their separate development policies on the refortification and institutionalisation of existing differences. Marks (1995:94) summarises this process succinctly by stating that, “[whites] were able to utilise the pre-colonial structures for their own ends”.

Besides the desire to retain whiteness within the cities, the growing calls for self-governance by urban-based black voices were becoming a political liability. The answer to both concerns emerged through the creation of homeland states (also called ‘Bantustans’). According to MacDonald (2006:15):

Segregation responded by seeking to reinforce what it took to be ‘culture’, trapping Africans under chiefs and chiefs under the state. Separate development likewise sought to buttress and control chiefs and likewise sought to confine Africans to ‘their’ tribal cultures. But separate development also insisted on translating particular tribal culture into particular nations, institutionalising tribes as political units and fragmenting the unity of the oppressed that was immanent in the shared experiences of apartheid.

The watershed policy that reasserted and cemented these ethnic and linguistic boundaries was the Bantu Authorities Act 68 of 1951, which gave administrative powers to predetermined tribal authorities. Upheld by a host of other complementary laws, the homeland concept climaxed with the establishment of the Bantu Homeland Citizenship Act of 1970, which led to the creation of self-governing states – independent of yet oddly nestled within South Africa's borders. The homelands were amended revisions of the 'Native reserves' forged by the Boers during the 1800s and Land Acts of 1913 and 1936, all designed to prevent the permanent hybridisation of blacks and whites.

On a political level, the apartheid state hoped that the homelands would repeal the growing black communist action within the urban centres during the 1950s and 1960s. Nicholls (quoted in Marks & Trapido 1989:5) fittingly records that "Bantu communalism is the answer to Bantu communism", which as MacDonald (2006:15) succinctly explains, "insisted on translating particular tribal culture into particular nations, institutionalising tribes as political units and fragmenting the unity of the oppressed that was immanent in the shared experiences of apartheid". As will be highlighted later, this unity of the oppressed started to form within the urban networks and as such had to be reversed.

The homelands were meant to bolster the apartheid system by keeping blacks happy within their own regions. So elaborate was their faith in separate development that approximately R2 billion was spent over 15 years (1961–1976) and no less than three investment corporations constituted with the specific mandate of generating economic growth within these areas (Rhodie *et al.* 1973:25). These investments in the homeland economies also signalled a move toward industrial decentralisation that was "directly associated with the aims of territorial apartheid". New economic hubs would be created within the homelands to limit the exodus of black job seekers to the cities in South Africa (Hindson 1985:421). Big business that was owned exclusively by white men was incentivised to establish manufacturing and production facilities within – but mostly on the borders – the homelands with the hope that it would lead to job creation and economic stability.<sup>76</sup> The disadvantage of this vast fiscal and structural support was that these new states depended on "South Africa for funds to pay for government

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<sup>76</sup> An example of white-men-owned big business was Pepkor, the largest retailer in South Africa during the late twentieth century, which owned the Pep and Shoprite franchises. Pepkor opened subsidiaries in the Bophuthatswana and Transkei homelands during the 1980s (Strydom 2019:75). However, Christo Wiese, the executive chairman of Pepkor, was conflicted in making this investment into the homelands because he understood that the real growth potential for his companies among black consumers lay in the urban areas within South Africa and not the homelands. Therefore, he collaborated with Reggie Hlongwane and created Pep Reef "a public company controlled by black shareholders" that operated in the black townships like Soweto. During the state of emergency in the late 1980s, white-owned businesses located in the townships were regularly looted and vandalised, "but Pep Reef's stores were never gutted" largely due to the public knowledge of its black ownership (Strydom 2019:74).

and public services” (Study Commission on United States Policy Toward Southern Africa 1981:152).

Alas, this dependency unwittingly stifled innovation and frustrated the forecasted economic growth. Formative urban centres started to shape within the homelands from the late 1960s, and there were pockets of relative success. However, what was essentially created were sites that were not fully urbanised nor outrightly rural. These ubiquitous spaces would later be recategorised as peri<sup>77</sup> and semi-urban because they were suspended between the urban and the rural (Dewar 1994). To the apartheid social engineers exemplified by Senator JH Grobler, financing the homelands was a necessary sacrifice for whites to maintain their political and economic ascendancy. However, beyond political and economic motivations, the homelands were a way of securing the identity and cultural authenticity of the black and white populations – and Afrikaner society more specifically – because any form of unrestrained integration would lead to “racial suicide” as the white culture and worldview would be contaminated and ultimately enveloped by blackness (Grobler 1958:54). The desired endgame was the complete removal of affixed urban-based black residents within South Africa into the homeland regions. Thus, the establishment of the homelands must be seen alongside and as a result of the city-based forced removals and relocations that began during the early 1900s and intensified throughout the 1930s until the 1960s. As I show in the next chapter, the homelands failed to quell the flow of black bodies into the major cities of South Africa.

## 2.9 Urban segregation at all costs

As I draw towards a conclusion, it is worth highlighting that the white political principals were prepared to pursue racialised urban segregation at all costs. White society benefited immensely from apartheid policies, economic protectionism, and job preservation, among other advantages. However, the enforcement and upkeep of segregation were not free. Earlier I detailed the costs of separate development through the fruitless investments pumped into the homeland governments that amounted to billions of rands. Within the homelands, the ideology of segregation had to be total, even if it resulted in economic losses. As Dubow (2014:67) reports: “[t]he policy of industrial decentralisation, which encouraged firms to locate on the white side of the borders adjoining the homelands, was an expensive and wasteful policy that was largely driven by political and ideological concerns”.

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<sup>77</sup> Peri-urban spaces were “settlements which are dependent on commuting to proclaimed towns for labour, shopping, and other services”, whereas semi-urban spaces were those that had 5,000 or more inhabitants (de Villiers Graaff 1986:1).

Another urban-based example of the economic unsustainability of racialisation in twentieth-century South African cities was the requirement for separate amenities for blacks and whites, such as distinct bathrooms and entrances to buildings. While this directive was easily enforceable by state institutions such as the South African Post Office, for example, it did not make business sense for most of the private sector, wherein “business was not happy about subsidising the costs of racial privilege” (MacDonald 2006:62).

One of the wealthiest entrepreneurs in South Africa’s modern history and a bastion of Afrikaner capitalism, Christo Wiese (quoted in Fisher 2013), once expressed in an interview that Pep Stores (which he bought from Renier van Rooyen<sup>78</sup> and subsequently expanded into an empire) did not promote a racialised shopping experience:

There used to be an Act that prescribed that in an office building, you had to have separate toilets for white and non-white ladies. We just decided in those days ‘bullshit’, we will have a toilet for ladies and toilets for men, and that is it.

Strydom (2019:34) explains that this non-segregationist strategy, although not abiding by the law of the land, was essential “to lure the rands and cents of coloured and black consumers”. However, despite rare dissidents like Pep, MacDonald (2006:62) reveals that white business as a whole complied to and supported the racialised policies “because the political economy was grounded in access to state power and the state was grounded in race... And because blacks were disenfranchised, whites could load the costs of the bargains among themselves onto blacks”. Ironically, as du Toit (2019:24) details, a white-owned business, like Naspers, Sanlam, and Shoprite “flourished after [being] unshackled from apartheid”. In other words, from the 1980s and especially during the 1990s, when the chains of segregation somewhat loosened, these businesses tapped into a much bigger client pool than under apartheid. However, during apartheid these companies did very little to challenge the racialised policies of the old order, even if it meant lower profits at the time. Thus, throughout the twentieth century adhering to racialised and segregationist legislation, especially in the urban centres, was a much greater currency than the actual capitalist economy.

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<sup>78</sup> Renier van Rooyen was the founder of Pep Stores. During his funeral in 2018, it was stated in his obituary that Pep created stores that became “islands of non-racism with no segregation of any kind” (quoted in Strydom 2019:33).

## 2.10 The discursive production of space<sup>79</sup>

The historicisation of urban developments in South Africa provided in this chapter underscores how the urban space was produced into its segregated form. Urban separation among the races was not a natural process, it was invented. One of the ways this segregation was invented is through various modalities of representation. The grand ancestor of our modern understanding of representation, Arthur Schopenhauer (1969:30) famously postulated that the “world is entirely representation”. For Schopenhauer, objects could only be comprehended within a theorised subject. Therefore, the knowledge paradigms, cultural attitudes, and overarching worldviews that frame the representation of space are critical for decoding the various images of urbanisation that emerged throughout the twentieth century in South Africa. In this continuum, space is a multi-layered object produced through theoretical prisms. Space can be regarded as “a text upon which histories and cultures are inscribed and interpreted” (Darian-Smith *et al.* 1996:5).

Lefebvre theorised the production of space as being contingent on three interrelated factors. First, there is the ‘ideal’ conceived space, a “conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic sub-dividers and social engineers” (1991:38). Throughout this chapter, I explored the formations of the ideal modernist South African city wherein the races were neatly compartmentalised and only allowed to interact when it benefited the white ruling classes. The production of this ideal space was the preserve of white European men who worked for the government, its municipalities, and urban planning research institutes.

Secondly, there is the perceived space of social practices which Healey (2007:204) frames as the “routine material engagement and experience of being in and moving around urban areas”. Of interest to me, however, is Lefebvre’s third leg of space production, which he termed “representational spaces” (1991:38). For Lefebvre (1991:39), these representational spaces are those that are “directly lived through its associated images and symbols”, spaces “which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate”. Lefebvre (1991:14) further diagnosed representational spaces as the real yet fictional “space of social practice”.

If representational practices are implicated in the theoretical production of space, the manner in which Africa was rhetorically signified by colonial interests demands a brief mention. The discursive ‘invention of Africa’, as Mudimbe (1988) labelled it, through philosophy, literature, and the arts was consistent with the imperialist conquest of the so-called ‘lost world’. As

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<sup>79</sup> I must acknowledge Kundani Makakavhule, a fellow PhD candidate from the University of Pretoria, who clarified certain concepts and debates related to the production of space. The sections that follow are a result of the many discussions we had and the guidance she provided during the NIHSS writing retreats coordinated by Prof Siphamandla Zondi.

Macamo confirms (2005b:7) Africa's invention through colonial representational practices resulted in "the construction of a notion of Africa which did not necessarily represent reality on the ground". In a Foucaultian sense, the fictional production of African space, which was not much concerned with or informed by reality, is an expression and recycling of Europe's intention to dominate Africa. Therefore, the trope of a backward, tribal, illiterate Africa was essential for maintaining the racialised system that segregated blacks and whites within the urban space. While urban spaces in South Africa inhabited by whites were rendered in terms of the industrialised, capitalist-driven, concrete-built, and ordered cities, the township or 'black city' where blacks were forced to live, was not accorded the same status. These townships were designed merely to be "temporary workforce housing" spaces, a model South African city planners adopted from the French architect, Le Corbusier, who first introduced it in 1922 (Findley & Ogbu 2011). As already shown, the white gaze was foundational, both as influence and thesis, in how the urban space was subsequently produced by black artists as an antithesis. By mainly taking up the oppositional stance, black artists un-designed the urban space in ways that compromised the perfect, ordered, and ideal city that had been created by the white urban planners and geographers.

In *The urban revolution* (first published in 1970), Lefebvre (2003) traces the origins of modern representations of the western city to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when European urbanisms were manufactured through maps, architectural drawings, plans, and artworks. As Lefebvre writes (2003:12) these formative images of the city were "a cross between vision and concept, works of art and science, they displayed the city from top to bottom, in perspective, painted, depicted, and geometrically described". In other words, the city was discursively represented using rhetorical strategies that imagined urban space through the eyes of the beholder, be it the cartographer, the writer, or the visual artist.

One of the systems used by the colonialists to produce racialised urban space in South Africa was cartography, a practice which Lefebvre identified as one of the main fabricators of an idealised and prototypically modernist conception of space. Cartography was paramount to the colonial superstructure, exemplified by the partitioning of the African continent by the warring European imperialists during the Berlin gathering in 1884/5 (Rodney 2018). Within a South African context, the manner in which the urban and the non-urban were ordered hinged on mapping. Maps were used to legitimise the fake binaries between black and white, African and European, modern and traditional, urban and rural, to the degree that they validated and eventually reified the boundaries between peoples, spaces, and places. Darian-Smith *et al.* (1996:5) confirm that "competing or overlapping histories are either 'presenced or silenced through the cultural power of maps and place names". An apt example that highlights the



theoretical, yet equally concrete and almost irrefutable power of the map is how the ‘black city’ was plotted throughout the twentieth century. While the ‘black city’ in South Africa is a real phenomenon, we also need to appreciate it as a fictional and imagined space. Its fictionalising was most evident in the mapping and cartographic practices of successive white governments.



Figure 2.2. PJ Sticker, Revised urban map of South Africa (detail), 1990.  
(Stickler 1990:332)

Maps paradoxically provide what is perceived as objective but equally abstract information about the geographic concentration of people and territories. Within the arena of urban planning, maps are central to the allocation of resources and essential services. However, more significantly, maps predetermine the movement, or lack thereof, and location of people. Referencing the history of colonial and apartheid cartography in South Africa, Stickler (1990:329) outlines how, throughout the twentieth century, “large black settlements” or the ‘black city’, which bordered the industrialised ‘white cities’ were “downgraded or *made invisible* in maps of South Africa” (my emphasis). Stickler was bemused at how black settlements that had a population density four or five times that of many small ‘white towns’, were omitted or given less prominence on the map. These omissions resulted in what he called “an increasingly false representation of the urban landscape” (Stickler 1990:333). He cites ‘black cities’ like Botshabelo (meaning a place of refuge) near Bloemfontein, Khayelitsha (meaning a new home) near Cape Town and Winterveld on the outskirts of Pretoria as prime examples of inappropriately mapped urban spaces where blacks resided. In an attempt to reform this anomaly, Stickler (1993) created his own maps where ‘black cities’ are appropriately

reconfigured into large urban settlements and given the status of capital or prominent spaces (Figure 2.2).

This symbolic and literal erasure of spaces inhabited by black bodies on South Africa's maps was consistent with the desire to literally erase blackness from the streets and suburbs of the industrialised 'white cities'. Malcolm Miles (1997:34) writes that "city zoning is a form of *purification*, of setting up a rigid model which excludes difference, of *splitting off the unacceptable other*, the dirt" (my emphasis). Thus, the denial of the 'black city' on the maps was the denial of the urban black in the streets of the metropolitan centres. Yet, we must never forget that the tactile existence of the 'black city' is irrefutable, on account of the millions of blacks who experience urban living in and through those spaces. However, equally true is that the 'black city' was also fictional, the product of a grand, utopian scheme of a racist regime, the fictionality of its status confirmed by its casual erasure from official maps, thereby sanctioning its state of non-being.

On account of its fabricated genealogy, the 'black city', as seen through the white gaze, has almost always been represented as the embodiment of the backward, disordered, anti-city. As Simone (2017) infers, the 'black city' "is considered a spectral effusion of excess – too many bodies, too many things, too many trades, too many intensities, too many demands of what is offered as available – infrastructure, services, rights of ways". 'Black cities' – and not only in South Africa – are projected as sites of mal-development and chaos, which is ironically the product of their systemic exclusion from the arteries that feed and maintain the ordered 'white city'. For Simone (2017) "black cities' came to represent particular dangers, and to a large extent could become the danger they represented". While acknowledging the malignant problems associated with the 'black city', Simone advocates the dismantling of representations that confine these spaces to perpetual stasis and backwardness. He further conjectures that blacks "have long earned the right to say something about the city that nobody else can" (Simone 2015:217). In other words, it is blacks or residents of the 'black city' who have to create counter-narratives, or in the case of artists, counter images that (re)present such spaces beyond their racialised and bigoted heritage.

## 2.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined some of the historical markers and moments that underpinned urban planning during the formative colonial years leading up to twentieth-century apartheid South Africa. I showed how white society shaped and controlled the country's urban spaces. What is clear from this historical account is that South Africa's urban formation – from its earliest

iteration in the VOC-controlled Cape region through to the emergence of Johannesburg as the biggest and richest city in Africa during the twentieth century – was advanced through a fractured, contradictory, and at times, incoherent process. Urban development was complicated at both macro and micro levels. Throughout the twentieth century, the white authorities tried to impose hard boundaries between themselves and black, coloured, and Indian urban residents. As James (1992:54) concludes, “[r]esidential segregation, therefore, was neither marginal nor just a by-product of apartheid. It came to define its very character”.

Kostof (1991:10-11) maintains that to understand the formation of urban spaces, we first have to explore the “structure of society” and “empowered agencies and laws” that bring cities to life. Cities come to be via the convergence of multiple factors, and chief among these are individuals who wield political, economic, and, to some degree, cultural supremacy. In South Africa’s case, the emergence of its modern cities is a tale of European protagonists (and antagonists), foreign slave labour, and various African groups that waged war against one another in their quest to gain sovereignty within and beyond the urban apparatus. To gain sovereignty, the British and Afrikaners left an undeniable imprint of themselves and their animosity to others on modern South African urbanisms, evidenced in the segregated architecture and town planning. Further to this, their ambivalent contempt for the imported slaves from Asia (namely, Indian, Malay, and Chinese) and the local Africans profoundly shaped the nature and styles of cities like Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Bay (formerly Port Elizabeth), Pretoria, and the many towns that exist besides and in between these major urban centres.

## CHAPTER 3: Slaying the rural-urban binary: Imag(in)ing Afropolitanism during the twentieth century

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I ascribe Afropolitanism and multi-locality as redemptive labels and conceptual frameworks that unsettle the rural-urban binary. To achieve this, firstly, I consider artworks that highlight the various black subjectivities that evolved within the urban paradigm, and secondly, I inspect how the urban space itself was re-invented in the art produced by black artists. As outlined in the introductory chapter, one of the aims of this study is to dispel the rural-urban schism which rendered blacks in the urban space as migrants who were economically indispensable but socially, culturally, and politically unwanted aliens in the 'white city'. I unpack how artists showed a more harmonious reconciliation of their urban and rural subjectivities.

The central motivation for appropriating Afropolitanism into a rereading of twentieth-century black urbanisation is to cure the cancerous categories and labels<sup>80</sup> previously imposed on urban-based black creatives. Much of the existing literature produced by white intellectuals on historical urban black art is replete with problematic perceptions of urbanised black artists as fundamentally lost and alienated in the urban maze. Once again, van Robbroeck's (2006) thorough analyses of these 'white on black' writings decode the totalising arguments that were used to justify such assertions. Ultimately, as van Robbroeck (2006:191) discovers: "[t]he tendency to 'read into' modern black art the evidence of an alienated and deeply divided black identity, suggests that by innate characteristics, the modern black artist can never be fully 'at home' in the modern sphere of the city (and by extension, in the sphere of modern culture)". This was an attempt to relegate blacks (artists included) as urban outsiders who could only survive in the urban areas with the guidance of the white master. This urban-outsider status bestowed on blacks also defined the areas where they were forced to live. As noted in the previous chapter, townships were not considered fully urban locations by the white town planners. To these administrators, townships were no more than densely populated rural slums close to the city, yet distant enough to keep white suburbia pure of a permanent black presence. Also, these 'black cities' were deliberately and strategically not zoned as urban areas so that essential urban services would be systematically denied to them.

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<sup>80</sup> In an article aptly titled 'Township art': libel or label?' van Robbroeck (1998) argues that the labels placed on black artists throughout the twentieth century were in effect libels that did not properly account for the range, diversity, and uniqueness of art created in black urban spaces.

While I use Afropolitanism as the main theoretical lens throughout this chapter, my intention in doing so is not to declare these artistic expressions of urbanisation as Afropolitan art, but rather to use Afropolitan thinking to arrive at alternative and redemptive interpretations of twentieth-century urban black life and the art it inspired. Without question, the most enduring label used by the white art establishment to identify and neatly package the art produced by urban-based black artists during the twentieth century is ‘Township Art’. The assumption was that since urban-based black artists lived in the so-called townships, then all art created by these black artists had to have a ‘township flavour’. In Younge’s (1988) iconic text, artists such as Dr Phuthuma Seoka, Noria Mabasa, Johannes Maswanganyi, and others who were quintessential multi-locals – a term I explore in detail in the Section 3.2.3 – were problematically tagged as township artists. Joja (2019) sees such racialised classifications as part of the “social Darwinist monikers” such as ‘transitional’ and ‘traditional’ that sought to restrict black art to “a different temporal order”.

In this chapter, I investigate and reframe ‘Township Art’ as representations of an Afropolitan phenomenon.<sup>81</sup> I also show how artworks are implicated in the rhetorical construction of space and how people engage with the artworks. Additionally, I consider how various educational spaces and the formal art market influenced the type of Afropolitan representations that black artists produced. Whereas Chapters 2 and 4 deal with the histories of black urbanisation in chronological schemas, the expositions of the visual manifestation of Afropolitanism in this chapter do not adhere to a strict linear chronicle. Rather, these creative renderings of early Afropolitanisms are discussed according to thematic tropes because the various expressions of Afropolitanism were produced across multiple and overlapping time periods.

## 3.2 Understanding Afropolitanism

### 3.2.1 Cosmopolitanism: The ancestor of Afropolitanism

Since Afropolitanism is crudely defined as “cosmopolitanism with African roots” (Gehrmann 2016:61), cosmopolitanism – and its genealogy, aspirations, virtues, and shortcomings,

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<sup>81</sup> Early in this study, I had harboured the idea of reframing twentieth-century urban black experiences as Proto-Afropolitanism, but in the end I settled on Afropolitanism as is. Even though I did not end up using Proto-Afropolitanism, I would like to acknowledge and thank Liese van der Watt who advised that I consider thinking of twentieth-century urban black art as proto or early Afropolitan creativity instead of pseudo-Afropolitan, as I had originally proposed to her. I presented a paper titled ‘The early Afropolitans: Representations of twentieth century black urbanisms’ in a panel coordinated by van der Watt at the ACASA Triennial Conference hosted by the University of Ghana, Legon, 8-13 August 2017. The panel was titled ‘African Utopias, Afrofuturism, Afropolitanism: imagining and imaging African futures’. While the panel’s focus was on the future of African creativity, myself, and Darren Newbury, another panelist, explored how notions of Afropolitanism and Afrofuturism can be appropriated to reframe Africa’s creative history as well.

warrants a closer (but necessarily brief) look. As I show later, Afropolitanism is inevitably bound to, yet simultaneously redeemed from the heritage of cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitan idealism and its praxis are traced to classical Greek and Roman beliefs, where notions of the *cosmos* (the universal) and the *polis* (the city-state) converged into what Douzinas (2013:60) describes as “an ontological interlocking of all beings as they tend towards their purpose”. The ordering of humanity, within and beyond the cultural, political, and physical parameters of the city walls, were thus central to the emergence of a cosmopolitan sensibility. Braidotti (2013:8) sees cosmopolitanism as the “the affirmative response to the processes of planetary interrelation”. Throughout history, trade, conquest, and imperialism have facilitated this planetary human interrelation. When the Roman Empire expanded its territorial influence, these processes of cosmopolitan interrelation replicated and Europa became more aware of the world beyond itself and the interconnectedness and interdependence between these worlds. During the era of western imperialism and the duration of the industrial age, cross-cultural, cross-ethnic, cross-religious, and cross-racial contact exponentially increased, and cosmopolitanism became central to the western imaginary of both itself and the proverbial other. Thus within this globalised world order, where city walls and country borders are crossed and collapsed at greater frequency and with relative ease, “the processes of making oneself ‘at home everywhere’” (Meskimmon 2011:30), as a key aspect of cosmopolitanism, were heightened.

A key proponent of cosmopolitanism, Kwame Anthony Appiah<sup>82</sup> (1997:621), who self-identifies as a “liberal cosmopolitan”, advances the idea that cosmopolitanism enables people to construct a global humanism, where all human beings are free to embrace a de-territorialised subjectivity. For Appiah (1997:618), the cosmopolitan “circulation of people among different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora”. This element of unrestrained human mobility is among the biggest allures and selling points of cosmopolitanism. The modern imaginary widely accepts that mobility in engendering notions of movement, flow, exchange, and most importantly freedom is “vital” to a self-actualised existence (Adey 2010:4). In essence, cosmopolitan mobility is the promise to temporarily or perpetually – for some – transcend the restraints of place (and its politics), space, and time. Among other apologists like Appiah (1997; 2006; 2007), Knight (2011) defends cosmopolitanism by distinguishing between a weak variant of it,

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<sup>82</sup> Appiah can be described as the quintessential cosmopolitan. Born in London in England in 1954. He was raised in Kumasi in Ghana where his father held an important political post. Appiah studied philosophy at Cambridge University and is classified as “a black, gay, American man who is descended from aristocrats and speaks English with one of those BBC accents you pick up at the better British schools” (Vandeveldt 2018). Appiah holds citizenship in Ghana (because his father was Ghanaian), Britain (because he was born there and his mother is also British), and America (because he spent most of his working life at Ivy League American universities).

which is essentially theoretical and rhetorical, and a stronger brand. According to Knight, in weak cosmopolitanism “equal concern is shown for all persons”, but such concern is not always practised, whereas strong cosmopolitanism endeavours to practicalise its ideals by ensuring that everyone is “subjected to equal treatment” simply based on their humanness (Knight 2011:19).

Yet, as all-embracing as cosmopolitanism projects itself to be, Douzinas (2013:8) avers that its limitation is that it remains, paradigmatically, “the continuation of a unique European vocation”. Douzinas shows how European Enlightenment philosophers like Immanuel Kant and WGF Hegel advanced a binary definition of cosmopolitan humanity, where the European self and the non-western other were unequal members of the universal human race. As Douzinas (2013:64) eloquently states:

Full and lesser humanity face each other across a line. This is often a geographical border that distinguishes humans from savages, civilised from barbarians, old from new worlds; at other times, it is a metaphorical bar that separates the fully human from the inhuman, rational from irrational, men from women.

While optimistic about the potentialities of cosmopolitanism to make the world more harmonious, Appiah (2015) concedes that it has been unable to account for the racial inequalities and prejudices that still persist in the modern world due to the binary formulations of what constitutes the “universal man”. As Appiah argues: “[t]here will be times when these two ideals – universal concern and respect for legitimate difference – clash” (Appiah 2007:31). The matter of difference is central to cosmopolitan philosophy, for it is postulated that cosmopolitanism embraces difference and encourages unity in diversity. Thus, notions like multiculturalism, which speak to the co-existence of multiple cultures, ethnicities, races, and language groups, are synonymous with cosmopolitanism. However, Gilroy (2013:114) sees multiculturalism and by association cosmopolitanism as “distinctive ways of thinking about difference [that] encourage the projection of ‘whiteness’ as a generic form of identity”. Although cosmopolitanism is trumpeted as the harbinger of equality among planetary beings and the promoter of de-nationalised and de-racialised positionalities, it remains an affiliate to the networks of global capital and geo-power that favour those located in the richer and more powerful countries in the global North. Gilroy reminds us that formulations of nationalisms are inherently, though not explicitly, racist (Gilroy *et al.* 2019:182). Moreover, since cosmopolitans depend on their nationality-linked privileges to travel the world such as passports and various national currencies, in cosmopolitanism is thus responsible for perpetuating new forms of racism that are not overtly biological but are increasingly cultural, economic, and nationalist.

These new forms of discrimination are evident in how travellers from particular regions of the world are assuredly tagged as global nomads, but those from other locales who also travel beyond their country borders are debased as migrants. As Nail (2015:193) explains, migrancy “is the collective name for all the political figures in history who have been territorially, politically, judicially, and economically displaced”. Ultimately, there are two sides to the cosmopolitanism coin. On the one side is global humanist idealism, which has been transformative for millions of people worldwide who have taken residence in different regions of the world to access better economic opportunities, living conditions, educational training, and more. Yet, on the other side, there are billions of people who are unable to take advantage of global cosmopolitanism. In fact, the latter have often been victims of modern cosmopolitan-linked capitalism and geopolitics. Sithole (2014:141) captures the major shortcomings of cosmopolitanism succinctly when he writes that it “struggles to grapple with the pressing issues like migration, racism, xenophobia, just to name a few”.

While cosmopolitanism is not a perfect political philosophy, to deny its place in the world today would be to throw the baby out with bathwater. Appiah captures it best when he notes that, “there’s a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge” (Appiah 2007:31). Cosmopolitanism is indeed the challenge of our globalised age with which our current and future world must grapple. Yet, cosmopolitan thinking does contain within it some redeeming qualities that can advance the economic, political, and cultural interests of Africans. As Meskimmon (2011:8) states: “[c]osmopolitan imagination generates conversations in a field of flesh, fully sensory, embodied processes of interrogation, critique and dialogue that can enable us to think of our homes and ourselves as open to change and alterity”. For those fortunate enough to wield cosmopolitanism or be cosmopolitan, it provides agency that breeds transformative practices and performances of self and belonging in the urban world.

### **3.2.2 Afropolitanism: Its prospects and problems**

It is these transformative potentialities of cosmopolitanism that African thinkers appropriated when Afropolitanism was codified as a cultural and political philosophy. While Afropolitanism is a twenty-first-century term, its roots can be found as far back as the dawn of the twentieth century when WEB Du Bois and Henry Sylvester Williams sought to galvanise a kind of proto-Afropolitanism through their creation of the Pan-African Congress, which held its first meeting in London in 1900.<sup>83</sup> Appiah (2007) finds evidence of a cosmopolitan (and hence arguably

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<sup>83</sup> Black delegates from countries like the America, Canada, Ethiopia, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana (then known as the Gold Coast), and the West Indies were present at the first conference of the Pan-African Congress.



Afropolitan) drift in Du Bois's work from that period. However, Mbembe sees differences between Pan-Africanism [closely associated to Afro-centrism] and Afropolitanism because, as he puts it, "Pan-Africanism, to a large extent, is a racial ideology. Afropolitanism is not, insofar as it takes into account the fact that to say 'Africa' does not necessarily mean to say 'black'" (quoted in Mbembe & Balakrishnan 2016:30). Yet traces of Afropolitanism are identifiable in the plans and ideals of the Pan-Africanists of the early twentieth century and the political organisations they inspired. For example, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which later became the African Union, was established in 1963 by the newly independent African states and sought to create a unified continent with unrestrained trade and free movement – markers of an Afropolitan ideology.

Taiye Selasi officially introduced the concept of the Afropolitan into literary and scholarly discourse in 2005 in an attempt to reconcile her own entangled transnational and 'multi-local' diasporic personality. Selasi's Afropolitan biography is almost identical to Kwame Appiah's cosmopolitanism. Selasi was born in England and grew up in America. Her parents are also quintessential Afropolitans. Her mother was born in England, grew up in Nigeria, and resided in Ghana. In contrast, her father was born in Ghana (when it was still under British colonial rule) and has lived in Saudi Arabia for over thirty years (Selasi 2014). These parallels between the life stories of Selasi, who identifies herself as Afropolitan, and Appiah, who is unequivocal about his cosmopolitan disposition, are paradigmatic of the synergies between the two concepts. One could say cosmopolitanism is the city and the Afropolitanism is a block or suburb within that city. Hassan (2011:18) confirms that Afropolitanism "speaks of cosmopolitanism and a sense of belonging to the metropolis".

Mbembe advanced Afropolitan reason in an essay in Simon Njami's seminal *Africa Remix* exhibition (2005-2007), to crystallise the experiences and identities of Africans living in heterogeneous urbanised settings. For Mbembe (2007:28), Afropolitanism "is a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity". That is, Afropolitanism represents an occasion for Africans to re-articulate their position within the global theatre of culture, economics, and politics. Contemporary Afropolitan discourse and practice is an opening for Africans to speak back to the empire. To this end, Afropolitanism is a variant of Afrotopia,<sup>84</sup> which Hashem (1987:71) enunciates as the stitching together of a distinctly "African vision of the world" as it ideally should be. These African utopias are rooted in classical African myths

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The purpose of the gathering was to caucus on the challenges that were facing people of African descent around the world, especially those located in the western diaspora.

<sup>84</sup> Felwine Sarr expounds on the theory in a book titled *Afrotopia* (2019).

and fables but are firmly located within the globalised, industrialised, and urbanised modern world.

Akin to cosmopolitanism, Afropolitanism encourages narratives “told by a pluralist group of people with hybrid forms of story-telling and identifying themselves” (Artner & Stanislawski 2013:49). To this end, densely populated African cities are enclaves of Afropolitan subjectivities because the cities enable people of diverse backgrounds and hybrid identities to insert their contrasting narratives and histories into the mainstream. In Mbembe’s final analysis of Afropolitanism, he suggests that cities like Johannesburg, where Africans of different nationalities, races, religions and sexual orientations meet, is representative of the apex of Afropolitanism. As a result, modern African urbanisms like Johannesburg are described as quintessential Afropolises<sup>85</sup> – Africanised versions of the traditional metropolis – and are distinguished from urban centres located in the global North (Pinther *et al.* 2012; Pieterse & Simone 2013). Since Selasi’s essay, Afropolitanism has been firmly entrenched in both academic and popular discourse through its use in fashion, popular culture, and the media.<sup>86</sup>

Like classical cosmopolitanism, Afropolitanism advocates for the egalitarian mobility of Africans within and beyond the continent. However, mobility in Africa is a double-edged sword. On the one edge, the rise of modern forms of travel has made transnational mobility accessible to almost every human being, even those considered part of the bottom-billion, most of whom live in Africa. However, the other edge or underbelly of glamorised neoliberal mobility is a coerced mobility that is often a by-product of regional conflicts, sectarian wars, the effects of climate change, and extreme famine. These factors result in forced human movement happening at regular intervals and unprecedented levels. Images of refugee camps made of flimsy tents are all too common in all corners of the world, and more so in Africa. Yet, in John Kenneth Galbraith’s seminal reading of the *Nature of mass poverty* (1979), he promoted mobility as the panacea for extreme and self-replicating deprivation in places like Africa. Galbraith posits that a fluid exchange of human resources can minimise mobility.

Ultimately, Afropolitanism has been subjected to the same criticism brought against cosmopolitanism. For example, those indifferent to the notion of neoliberal mobility contend

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<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting that Afropolises are distinguishable from urban centres located in the global North because they contain the excretions of imperialism, coloniality, and capitalism. For example, Johannesburg is surrounded by decommissioned mines, whose discarded chemical waste threatens to poison the fresh water systems of the city. Additionally, the city is surrounded by urban ghettos (townships) whose residents feed and continue to feed the commercial industries with cheap labour.

<sup>86</sup> One of the leading radio stations in South Africa, Kaya FM, which is based in Johannesburg, calls itself ‘the home of the Afropolitan’. Kaya FM also openly endorses *The Afropolitan* magazine, which can be retrieved online at <http://www.afropolitan.co.za/>.

that it creates fresh forms of exclusion and capital-based inequality (Littler 2018). Sithole (2014:28) offers the following simple yet profound criticism of neoliberal Afropolitan mobility:

What about the passport then? The passport has the power to determine the status of citizenship in terms of inclusion and exclusion, and also equality and inequality... The possession of the valid passport and visa does not mean that the African subject is immune from subjection.

In Sithole's (2014:30) final evaluation, "the passport is a colonising tool in that it regulates, controls and restricts the movement of the people". While Africans can claim rhetorical emancipation to articulate their own identities, their passports that are linked to their nationalities are an inescapable noose that dictates the manner and reach of their transnational travels. The cosmopolitan promise of freedom of movement is not so free, after all. Sithole (2014:147) further discredits Afropolitanism as "that which advocates for the accommodationist project in the asymmetric power dynamics of the world". For Sithole, Afropolitan rationality is a continuation of an unreformed and unrepentant Euro-American civilising mission.

Afropolitanism has also become a polarising descriptor separating the politically connected African bourgeoisie and the majority of Africans who exist on the periphery of Africa's capitalist modernity. The Marxist scepticism towards Afropolitanism is best articulated by Dabiri (2016:105) who laments that:

It is largely in the pockets of the mobile Afropolitan class that much of the wealth is held. What I want to ask is this: In what way does Afropolitanism go about challenging the enduring problematics of duality and compartmentalised society, identified by Fanon as one of the major stumbling blocks to African post-colonial independence?

This view criticises those who emphatically profess their Afropolitan identity as simply recycling neoliberal capitalist practices that continue to relegate Africa's marginalised to poverty, economic exclusion, and political exploitation. Dabiri (2016:104) bases her opposition to Afropolitanism on its putative connection with capitalist-driven consumerism, arguing that the essence of Afropolitanism must be infused with "progressive activism" for it to be relevant to the socio-political imperatives of Africa.

Other sceptics like Matsipa (2014) are critical of how Afropolitanists are silent on the gendered nature of being a citizen of the city, especially in South African cities where the woman's body is subjected to indiscriminate torment, violence, and violation. The unwanted attention black women regularly receive on the city streets, in malls, and at taxi ranks and train stations is a

subliminal and regrettably normalised form of violating and objectifying black women, especially those who dress in a manner that accentuates their feminine features (Gqola 2015). Matsipa (2014:12) goes further to show how Afropolitan logic negates “the specific ways in which race, gender and power continue to pattern the aesthetic articulations and representations of cities”. Therefore, it is unsurprising when looking at twentieth-century visuals of urbanisation, to find that the perspective of the black woman’s city experience was massively under-represented.

While mindful of the various critiques of Afropolitanism, my use of the concept in this study draws on its optimistic and redeeming properties, which reframes Afropolitanism from its overtly highbrow and western heritage (as represented in Selasi’s life story) by thrusting it into the heart of Africa. Within this non-elitist version of Afropolitanism, as Eze (2014:240) argues, “one does not need to be an elite or even to live in one of the big cities of Africa or the west to be an Afropolitan”. Here, Eze attempts to democratise the theory by suggesting that the average African can also lay claim to being Afropolitan, insofar as ordinary Africans are also mobile and exposed to multicultural urban milieus. Thus, unsurprisingly, one of the main attributes of this egalitarian Afropolitan spirit, is mobility. Eze (2016:115) again advocates that this movement need not be confined to connections between Africa and the west, arguing that these links and exchanges can also be intra-continental “between one African city and another, or even within an African city”. This intra-continental and/or intra-city mobility makes Afropolitanism accessible to millions of ordinary Africans who traverse African cities daily. I support Eze’s (2016:88) proposal of adopting a plurality of Afropolitanisms “to account for the different public apprehensions and possible multiple future theoretical trajectories of this cultural phenomenon”. Eze’s assessment affords us the latitude to unravel the potentialities of Afropolitanism as an interpretative framework for a redeemed understanding of what was regrettably imprisoned as Township Art.

By transporting Afropolitanism from its twenty-first-century context into the formative years of black urbanisation in South Africa, I propose that the artworks that were inspired by these early versions of black urbanisms (townships or ‘black cities’), regardless of the political and raced engineering of these spaces, can be reread as illustrations of Afropolitanism. My interest lies in how these artists negotiated their encounter with the urban world, a world into which they were inserted and simultaneously excluded. The black experience of urbanisation during the twentieth century was what Mbembe described as superfluous, and was “on the one hand, the valorisation of black labour-power, and on the other hand, its dispensability – the dialectics of valuation and dissipation, indispensability and expendability” (quoted in Shipley, Comaroff & Mbembe 2010:660). Even though blacks were ascribed this confused insider-outsider status,

black artists tapped into their inventiveness and Africanness to articulate what can be seen as an Afropolitan sensibility of urbanisation.

When re-inscribing so-called ‘township life’ as Afropolitan, I do not deny or silence the devastation and human cost of segregationist policies related to urbanisation in twentieth-century South Africa. The legacies of urban segregation haunt the country to this day. Later in the chapter, I acknowledge these dehumanising realities, poetically and graphically depicted by Julian Motau, Cyprian Shilakoe, and Dumile Feni as a part of the story of Afropolitan life told through the gaze of the various artists whose work was sadly reduced to the problematic and flattening categorisation of Township Art. The lives, careers, and art of black artists were profoundly affected by apartheid laws and practices. Urban suffering was part of the Afropolitan experience during the last century. However, so too was joy, agency, and self-actualisation. Throughout the various readings of twentieth-century black urbanisation using Afropolitanism, I will provide interpretations that both strengthen and complicate the notion of Afropolitanism as a descriptor of black people’s experience of and impact on urbanisation.

### **3.2.3 Afropolitanism and multi-localism**

The manufactured and essentially false distinction between urban and rural black identities was best described by Manganyi (1973:9) who termed those with “important personal relationships” in the urban area as ‘townsmen’ and those with “rural-area-oriented” networks as ‘migrants’. While I understand the reasons for settling on these designations, I propose a more redemptive concept that dispels the tags bestowed on urban blacks as migrant labourers, alien, outsider, and ultimately non-urban. I rethink blacks who were forced to experience urbanisation throughout the twentieth century in South African from the margins as ‘multi-local’ Afropolitans.<sup>87</sup> This renaming not only applies to those who travelled great distances to access the city daily, seasonally, or sporadically, but also to blacks who lived permanently on the fringes of the city in the townships and maintained a connection with their kin in the rural homelands.<sup>88</sup> The concept of multi-locality was first used in anthropological studies during the mid to late twentieth century to describe families who owned multiple homes in various area codes. The Embers (1972:382) describe multi-locality as “the co-occurrence of any two or more fairly frequent patterns of consanguineal residence”. Over the years, the concept grew beyond a sociological analysis of family living patterns in modern urbanisms to encompass the frequent

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<sup>87</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use the terms multi-local and Afropolitan interchangeably, because both speak of black mobility and an urban situatedness within and beyond African cities.

<sup>88</sup> In Klopper’s (2011:123) careful analysis of the creative exploits of migrant labour communities, she acknowledges the existence of “emerging working-class communities” mainly comprised of mine workers who “continued to return to their rural homes once or twice a year, sometimes over Easter and, more usually, in December”. Here Klopper was essentially defining a multi-local situation.

mobility of people who inhabit multiple places during their lifetime. Within an increasingly globalising world, multi-local<sup>89</sup> living patterns became the norm for many urban dwellers – either due to pressures and opportunities related to work, disasters (natural, economic or political), and/or leisure.

In 2014, Selasi, one of the progenitors of Afropolitanism, delivered an inspired TED Talk that sought to answer questions related to her identity and its connection to place. In her presentation, titled ‘Don’t ask where I’m from, ask where I’m a local’ (2014), Selasi evoked the notion of multi-locality as a descriptor of her personal and family history, which is rooted in and shaped by numerous locations in Africa, Europe, North America, and north-west Asia. Selasi explains that “to be multi-local is just to be informed by the totality of your local experiences” (quoted in Witte 2018). For Selasi, these localised<sup>90</sup> experiences generated from spending time in a city or country leaves a mark on one’s personhood. Selasi describes a local as an individual “who feels herself shaped by the rituals and the relationships she’s had in specific locations” (quoted in Witte 2018). At the same time, Selasi’s somewhat bohemian conception of multi-localism is associated with the neoliberal cosmopolitan networks that emerged from rapid globalisation. However, multi-localism can be appropriated to explain the subjectivities of those who are forced to live in manifold locations through wars, poverty, and the effects of global warming, migrant labourism, and the like. So, although multi-locality as “a definite, actively chosen way of shaping one’s life” (Hilti 2016:468) was conceived by western scholars to explain the phenomenon of individuals or groups that traverse various parts of the world as a progressive and self-actualising endeavour, I extend this courtesy to twentieth-century black artists by rereading their work as multi-local expressions shaped by diverse contexts and positionalities. By reframing twentieth century black artists as multi-local, I am unbinding the artists from concepts that limit their subjectivities and creativity to a singular and fixed space, place or context, be it township or rural, or a fictional space in-between, also known as the transitional.

However, Wulff (2002:132) warns that we should not make the mistake of seeing multi-locality as a theory of de-territorialisation. Multi-local individuals are still rooted in a physical, political, economic, and psychological sense to a place and space, be it temporally, seasonally, or

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<sup>89</sup> Multi-locality has also been appropriated as a neo-liberal capitalist strategy of enterprise where multinational companies clone themselves into various markets around the world. The British-Dutch conglomerate, Unilever is one of the world’s mega producers of household products and exemplifies this new system of commerce. Unilever has branded itself as “a multi-local multinational” (Unilever 2006:1). Djarova (2004:211) explains that for Unilever, the multi-locality strategy is a process whereby the company localises its existing brands and establishes new products that “reflect specific needs of local consumers”.

<sup>90</sup> For now, I will evade the problematics related to the idea of localism wherein the boundaries between the ‘locals’ and the ‘outsiders’ are deeply political and can become forms of exclusion and segregation (Schragger 2001; Troutt 2007).

permanently. Multi-local individuals have fixed nationalities (sometimes multiple), and are defined by racial markers and certain economic dispositions. Being multi-local does not abstract an individual from the singular or multiple environments in which they live. However, within the paradigm of multi-localism, these multiple positions are interchangeable. Also, a multi-local sensibility is essentially 'distopian' in its outlook and makeup.

Coined by Runette Kruger (2017:3), distopia is a neologism that characterises "a subversive and disruptive utopia created to challenge lingering global deep-structural biases, specifically with regard to race and culture". Kruger arrived at this notion by marrying the revolutionary qualities of dystopia with the progressive ideals of utopia. According to Kruger (2017:113), the core of distopian philosophy is a desire "to disrupt socio-political othering". Although twentieth-century urban spaces the world over were used as the battlefield for the enforcement of power and hegemony, Kruger sees the refractory nature of people in their masses as a key ingredient for an active and emancipatory performance of distopia. According to Kruger (2017:83), distopia is synonymous with notions of anarchy and renewal that fashion "a specific kind of space established through counter-cultural praxis and dissent and conducive to equity, human rights, and cultural pluralism".

While explaining how smooth space operates within the rigidly ordered city, Kruger (2017:112) suggests that "distopia is also multi-locational in a figurative sense, in the same way that smooth space is constituted by the actions of the evasive, yet troublesome, nomad, wherever she finds herself". Here Kruger was gesturing to individuals who navigate repressive and often violent borders and boundaries between or within cities and countries, against the wishes of those in authority. These peoples may be described as distopians because they use their multi-local mobility as a strategy of subversion. Thus, black urban dwellers, and by extension, black artists of the twentieth century, were multi-local distopians who defied the invisible and sometimes fixed barriers of the colonial and apartheid city.

Marback (2004:255) reminds us that "even though the line between a European city and African country was clear, the boundary between the two was always porous". Oddly enough, the smoothness of the boundaries between the rural and the urban were enabled by the mobility and flow into and out of the city engineered by the white segregationists. The desire by the pre-apartheid and apartheid governments to establish a buffer between black and white communities inadvertently created channels of exchange between the rural and the metropolitan that were re-appropriated by blacks. These complex transportation networks were the most sophisticated on the whole continent and were critical to the formation of a multi-local urban black subjectivity. Thus, work by urban-based black artists that would be seen as naïve rural folk-art by white viewers was a representation of entangled multi-local identities that

straddled the rural and city spaces seamlessly, thereby compromising the rural-urban split. Samuelson (2007:248) infers that “while city-spaces stand at the heart of the national imaginary they simultaneously present nodal points in transnational networks”. These transnational,<sup>91</sup> inter-city, and intra-city multi-local networks were palpable throughout South African urbanisms during the twentieth century. Thus, the artists cited in this study were frequently transnational, trans-ethnic, trans-rural, and trans-urban multi-locals who existed within and beyond these permeable paradigms.

Ironically, this non-fixed Afropolitan urbanite is a consequence of apartheid’s draconian attempts to contain the ‘natives’. The various efforts to push blacks away from the white city, but yet retain their presence as labourers, resulted in Africans developing Pan-African solidarity with their compatriots from neighbouring African countries, and also caused frequent exile to the ‘first’ world where trans-Atlantic Black Consciousness networks were forged. A classic example of a black intellectual and creative who forged such transnational diasporic partnerships was the poet Keorapetse Kgositsile, who was forced into exile during the 1960s on account of his political connections with the ANC. While in America, where he lived for most of his adult life, Kgositsile remained an active member of the ANC, coordinating the organisation’s cultural activism. However, of greater significance is that he “made a name for himself in both the cultural and political developments of black America in the cauldron of fighting for civil rights”, as Phalafala (2017:308) reports. Ironically, Kgositsile and many other black artists fled segregation and discrimination in South Africa only to encounter other forms of persecution based on race, albeit less devastating than apartheid, in the ‘white’ worlds they settled in.

This small band of transnationalised Afropolitan artists and the vast majority of the local Afropolitans who were consigned to the country were engaged in creating art that transcended the realms of their blackness, segregated urban worlds, and westernisation. Through their imaginations and art, multi-local black artists were “crossing borders without leaving” as phrased by Kgositsile (1991:5). This statement was the title of Kgositsile’s self-reflexive letter published in the *Staffrider* periodical in 1991 during his first visit to the country after 29 years in exile.

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<sup>91</sup> The transnational character of South African cities is evident in the fact that African, European, Indian, Chinese, and Malay peoples, were and remain a prominent feature of South African cities. As already mentioned, during the eighteenth century, Cape Town was among the most cosmopolitan cities in the world.



### 3.2.4 Afropolitanism and urban mobility

While discussions of cosmopolitan mobility tend to focus on transnational travel within or linked to the global North, I am interested in the intra-city and in-country Afropolitan mobility that Eze (2014) espouses. That is, the mobility of the ordinary city-based black South African during the twentieth century. While the New African elites like Plaatje, Rubusana, Seme, and Dube travelled the world, there was another class of Afropolitans who could only move within South Africa's cities. In Chapter 4, I show how the colonially inspired transportation grids that spanned the entire country created a mobility and human flow that formed this generation of early Afropolitans who travelled across South Africa, the rest of the continent, and the world in search of the dream of an African modernity. These movements and realities were captured by artists like Gerard Sekoto and George Pemba who illustrated the straining commutes or what Bester (2001:222) termed the "nightmare rides" endured by thousands of black workers travelling from the cities back to the townships and distant homelands during the 1930s and 1940s.

By his own account, Sekoto was captivated by the ordered chaos of the daily commute of blacks into and out of the cities, as illustrated in *The train crowd* (c.1945) and *Going home* (1940) (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Speaking of the crowded buses that moved between the Pretoria city centre and the Eastwood multi-racial suburb where he lived during the mid-1940s, Sekoto declared that he "enjoyed the travelling, more especially in the evenings as the workers came back home" (quoted in Lindop 1988b:25). Sekoto painted these scenes with a high degree of empathy for blacks who had to negotiate this difficult Afropolitan life daily. Although the transportation networks that connected blacks to the city were an essential function of systematic segregation, the networks' connective function advanced an emerging Afropolitanism by creating continuous movements between the ultra-urban city, peri-urban towns, and rural villages, at a density and frequency that warrants describing these flows as Afropolitan.

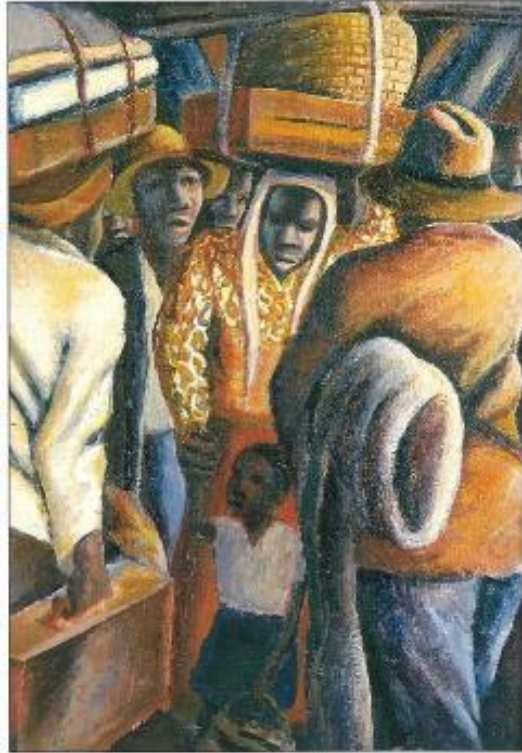


Figure 3.1. Gerard Sekoto, *The train crowd*, c.1945. Oil on canvas, 45.5 x 35.5 cm. (Miles 1997:80)

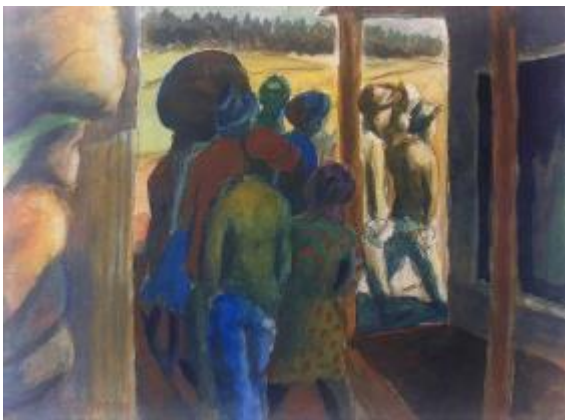


Figure 3.2. Gerard Sekoto, *Going home*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 46.6 cm. (Going home [s.a.]



Figure 3.3. George Pemba, *Trek*, 1975. Oil on canvas board, 55 x 75 cm (Trek [s.a.]

Another illustration of early twentieth century Afropolitan mobility is seen in George Pemba's painting titled *Trek* (1975), a picture of a family in the process of the traumatising and back-breaking labour of relocating (Figure 3.3). In the context of South African history, the word 'trek' immediately evokes the *Great Trek* by the Boers who traversed the interior of South Africa two centuries before the making of this artwork. Much was made of this event as a major Grand Narrative in Afrikaner's bid for national power. Although black movement throughout the twentieth century was predicated on colonial and apartheid policies seeking the total

disempowerment and domination of black bodies, by titling this artwork as *Trek*, it can be argued that Pemba injects a more purposeful dimension to this reality by juxtaposing it with the *Great Trek*, which although different in scope and context from the movement of black people Pemba is referencing in this painting, nevertheless repositions the 'black trek' as a search for an improved existence akin to the motivations of the Boer's during the 1800s. Therefore, Pemba's *Trek* may be interpreted as a political intervention and a bid for recognising that the flows of black people into the cities, whether forced or self-directed, was nevertheless transformational.

Both Sekoto's and Pemba's artworks are reflective of modern-day international and inter-city mobility. Although the contemporary bourgeois version of cosmopolitan mobility is often portrayed as a classy, sexy, and exciting activity, for those disenfranchised and displaced by modernity, it is equally a frightening, disruptive, and excruciating experience. Regrettably, the difficulty of the experience was felt by urban-based blacks almost daily. We must remember that the artists themselves embodied the multi-local Afropolitan experiences of those they painted since they too moved between villages, townships, cities, and even between countries. These formative Afropolitan artists used this agency, as limited as it was, in profoundly creative ways. Drawing attention to Afropolitan lifestyles will hopefully refashion an appreciation of twentieth-century urban life for blacks in South Africa. Black artists' experiences empowered them to transcend the subliminal and physical boundaries of displacement and inequality in the segregated urban environments in South Africa. This reading subverts the classical white reading of urban black experience as necessarily 'trapped' between the worlds in the traditional sphere (where blacks supposedly belonged) and the city sphere (wherein they were alienated).

### **3.3 Un-designing segregation: Towards Afropolitan urbanisms**

The work of aesthetically un-designing the 'black city' is crucial for redeeming black urbanisms as Afropolitan sites of progress, agency, family, play, and possibility. Putting their weight behind black creative visualisation of urbanisation, Mbembe and Nuttall (2008:13) argue that "far less attention has been paid to the imbrication of city and township and, in spite of unequal social relations, to townships dwellers' practices and imaginations of cityness". In the case of black artists, these visual imaginings of cityness were attempts at decolonising and de-segregating the Afropolitan 'black city'. Artists sought to un-design the colonial and apartheid manufactured spatiality by reimagining the African city through the black gaze.

Ironically, one of the avenues used by black artists to un-design the 'black city' was mapping. This mapping modality had been deployed by colonial and apartheid governments to falsify or

negate black settlements. As noted before, mapping is an act of power over the land and environment, and also over the people who inhabit that land. By reclaiming this power, albeit symbolically, black artists inserted themselves into the realm of reordering and refashioning their spaces and consequently their place within those spaces. While numerous black artists have charted South African cities during the twentieth century, it was Titus Matiyane during the 1990s who produced the grandest and most emphatic mappings, or what I call panoramas of Afropolitan urbanisms. In his elongated mix-media drawings of South African cities, Matiyane re-engineers the discursive and problematic invention of the 'black city'. Drawing on a Post-African logic that implores us to transcend racial, ethnic, national, and even continental subject positions in favour of an emancipated supra-colonial and planetary conception of selfhood (Ekpo 2010), Matiyane's expansive drawings regenerate 'black cities' into modern Afropolitan spaces.<sup>92</sup> Matiyane reinvents the 'black city' in his art, and like many other black artists, unsettles the normative white gaze that diagnoses black urbanisms as inherently non-urban, ghettoised, and ultimately non-modern. As Silverman (2007:22) aptly perceives in her reading of the *Atteridgeville* (1990) panorama drawing (Figure 3.4):

Matiyane refuses to indulge white perceptions of the township as a place of poverty and deprivation. To Matiyane, the township is a modern space... The township is not a space of otherness, but a place where modern urban Africans engage in modern urban life.

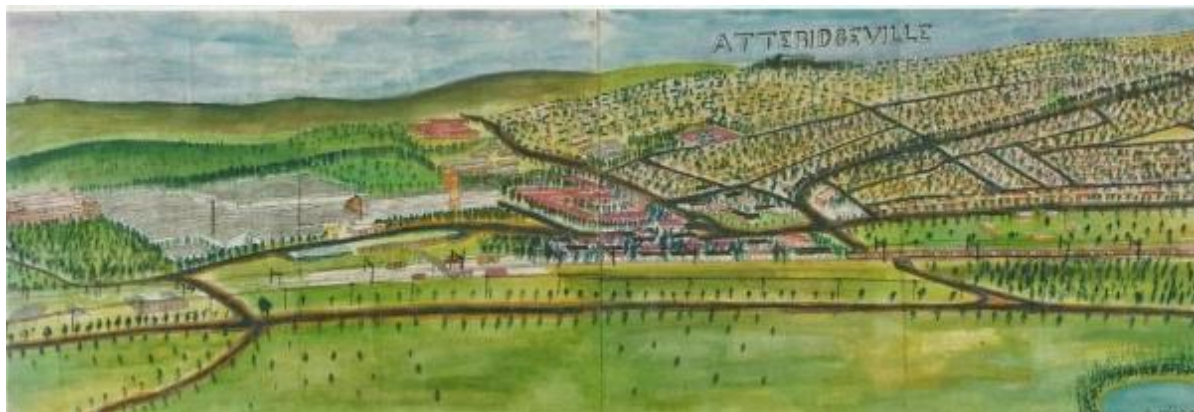


Figure 3.4. Titus Matiyane, *Panorama Atteridgeville (detail)*, 1990. Mixed media drawing, 6 m. Museum Africa Collection. (de Kler 2007:21)

First produced in 1990, the panorama of Atteridgeville is among the first large-scale portrayals of 'black cities' Matiyane made. As a lifelong resident of Atteridgeville, Matiyane relied on his lived recollection of the space to produce the drawing, and he claims that he never referenced any maps when rendering this work. Nevertheless, he was able to transcend the limitations of his ground view to conceive Atteridgeville from an aerial perspective, a vantage very few

<sup>92</sup> See Sidogi (2018) for a detailed Post-Africanist interpretation of Matiyane's drawings of African cities.

Atteridgevillers ever see. Matiyane takes on the gaze of an all-seeing eagle and remakes Atteridgeville after his own subjective interpretation. Through his panoramas, Matiyane performed the function of a black town planner during a time when professional urban planning was the preserve of white men and women. Speaking on the world-making propensity in Matiyane's panoramas, Kruger (2019) postulates that:

The drawings are cosmically vast, yet simultaneously so detailed that one can determine where one lives, where one works, where acquaintances or loved ones some distance off might be finding themselves at that very moment. This coincidentally zoomed in and zoomed out geographical experience is also an exercise in temporal simultaneity, allowing one to occupy a city one knows in a different way, through an utterly new means of embodiment, in a different time that is not merely a past, or a future, but more wonderfully alters.

By un-designing the 'black city' in his maps, Matiyane produced South African urbanisms as smooth Afropolitan spaces. According to Bremner (2010:74) smooth space or what she terms loose space:

refers to conditions where activities not originally intended for locations take place, or to spaces where fixed use no longer or never did exist. Looseness is not a property of space, but a mode of spatial practice. It encapsulates ideas of reduced or evaded regulation, mobility, speed, unpredictability, hybridity, opportunity and possibility, transformation and risk.

Smooth space is essentially a site of agency that allows fluid and dynamic performances of self that transgress normative and restrictive social conventions. At this point it is worth noting that Matiyane did not only make panoramas of black urbanisms. He also produced vast renderings of South African and major international cities. Matiyane's mappings of South African and global urbanisms attempt to crystallise and capture in one composition the complexities that characterise any major city of the world. His depiction of cities is a kind of leveller, where individual identity is free to be imagined and performed without fear of persecution. Commenting on Matiyane's work, Dreyer (2015) writes that "there are superficially neither perceivable binaries of have and have-not, poverty and wealth, nor anxieties, losses or racial discrimination. East meets West meets Africa in a global blueprint of urban patterning". This assessment is particularly applicable to Matiyane's earliest panoramic maps where the segregation between urban and rural, white and black, is flattened. Despite a sustained discursive focus on the alienation of the urban terrain, Matiyane's panoramas create possibilities for greater social and cultural integration and tolerance. Thus, Matiyane's images are panoramas of Afropolitanism, where difference is embraced, and Africanity can be performed within a localised cosmopolitan paradigm.

Darian-Smith *et al.* (1996:4) remind us that “maps embody both knowledge and possession but also a sense of the tenuousness of such possession”. Maps contain important data and information that orders how people move and interact with space. Yet, the maps’ two-dimensional, diagrammatic nature fails to convey the complexity and mutability of real, lived spaces. While Matiyane’s maps perhaps do not tame or contain black urbanisms, by imaginatively re-ordering the South African urban landscape, the maps succeed in symbolically recreating these manufactured spaces into non-binary, non-hierarchical, heterotopic zones of human possibility and agency.

While mapping as an artistic reclamation of urban space was an important aspect of Afropolitan visions of cityness, mapping also had its limitations. The technically and factually inaccurate maps created by both white geographers and black artists were unable to capture the nuances of Afropolitan life during the twentieth century as it played out on the ground. Referencing Michel de Certeau’s *The practice of everyday life* (1984), Bremner (2010:29) points out that elevation or seeing the city through the map or via the window of an aeroplane, “transfigures the city into an abstract, theoretical-visual concept. It takes on the appearance of a rational construct, ordered, purified and flattened”. This flattening of urban life is evidenced in Matiyane’s panoramas and the maps produced by government cartographers. Lammas (1993:45) corroborates Bremner’s statement by highlighting how “the complex network of intention, myth, and meaning that texture everyday experiences of the world find no symbols on modern maps of the country and they have largely been evicted from other geographical texts too”.

While assessing the damage white cartographers have done in creating false accounts of black urbanisms, Lammas simultaneously stresses the importance of artistic representations of the ‘black city’ produced by black artists as more trustworthy recordings of such spaces. Lammas (1993:50) went as far as challenging South African geographers to “take up the humanist project” by relying on and exploring “the landscapes of art, not only as descriptive documents but as embodiments of an urbanised socio-political consciousness and an escalating resistance movement”. Lammas was effectively proposing the creation of counter Afropolitan-like maps of South African urbanisms and the ‘black city’ specifically that were freed from the colonial and racialised syndrome. Throughout the rest of this chapter and Chapter 4, I explore these visualisations of the texture of everyday experiences of twentieth-century urbanisation seen through the eyes of black artists.

## 3.4 Black Consciousness, Afropolitanism, and art

### 3.4.1 Black Consciousness and urban black art

Before articulating the impact of the Black Consciousness Movement on black art and Afropolitanism, it is worth acknowledging that whereas the movement emerged in the 1970s, the Black Consciousness psychology and its cultural expression has a much deeper heritage that stretches back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, it is clear that when the Black Consciousness Movement took hold in the 1970s, it was a reaction to the prevailing political strategies and assimilationist cultural thinking of its forebears, namely, the New African Movement. The reaction was especially in regards to the difficult subject of how to manage race relations. In the New Africans' quest for a mutual co-existence with white society, and by only advancing their middle-class concerns, they unwittingly compromised the interests of the black masses. The rise of the Black Consciousness Movement was essentially a backlash against the failures of the New Africanists. In this respect, the role of Black Consciousness within black creativity, especially visualisations of the urban black (Afropolitans) is a paradox. On the one hand, Steve Biko warned that the creation of an urban-based black middle class, namely the New Africanists or elite Afropolitans and the artists they inspired, would render the majority-black populace as hapless and poor sub-citizens forever bound to servitude and exploitation (Biko 2004). However, on the other hand, Black Consciousness thinking was the very oxygen that flowed through the veins of the ordinary blacks (and the New African elites) who lived and worked in urban South Africa throughout the twentieth century. These ordinary Afropolitans were engaged in subversive acts that sought to destabilise white hegemony. According to Mngxitama *et al.* (2008:1) "Black Consciousness made resistance not only imaginable but possible". This resistance was imaged in the art produced by black artists who witnessed the manifold daily acts of transgression and 'radical imagination'<sup>93</sup> by urban-based blacks.

In 1972, one of the pioneers of the Black Consciousness Movement, Strinivasa Moodley, delivered a nationwide lecture tour wherein he outlined what I see as the unofficial 'manifesto for Black Consciousness art'.<sup>94</sup> Moodley's lecture commenced by providing an overview of Black Consciousness, noting that the philosophy "fills the black heart with a pride, a dignity

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<sup>93</sup> The notion of a 'radical imagination' is used by Bogue (2012) to describe how subjugated and oppressed blacks throughout history have always found strategies that upset the normative strictures of society through various enactments of freedom.

<sup>94</sup> Strinivasa Moodley's lecture was published in the South African Student Organisation (SASO) newsletter in 1972. I am tempted to call it the 'unofficial' manifesto for Black Consciousness art because in my view it is the most comprehensive and earliest account of the expectations of art and artists within the Black Consciousness Movement. While Steve Biko also wrote and spoke of about the importance of culture and creativity in emancipating the black soul, Moodley's lecture fleshed out the content and stylistics of such creativity.

and a forthrightness that will stand the test of any confrontation... Black Consciousness probes, examines, redefines – it rejects negativeness – it rejects those white values that attempt to make us inferior, to make us hate ourselves” (Moodley 1972:18). Moodley was also emphatic in denouncing the role the white art market had played in the value-chain of urban black art, stating that white society had essentially “defined” what black art ought to be because “the black artist was conditioned into preparing his works for white readership” (Moodley 1972:19). Thus, the first and foundational tenet of Black Consciousness art was its blatant denial of white influence no matter how benevolent, and of the western art market regardless of the opportunities, adulation, and success the white market had accorded black artists.

An example of the influence of the white hand on the careers and profiles of urban-based black artists were the comparisons between black artists and European modernists. For instance, Eli Kobeli was branded the ‘Chagall<sup>95</sup> of Soweto’ because of the similarity of style and subject matter in their work. This naming was both positive and problematic. Firstly, the naming was constructive in the sense that it positioned Kobeli within the prestigious lineage of iconic European modernism and made his work extremely popular and marketable in Johannesburg, especially among the Jewish art patrons who readily identified with Marc Chagall’s art. What is odd and problematic about Kobeli’s designation as the ‘Chagall of Soweto’ was the fact that, as Schmahmann (2001:88) notes, “‘Chagall’ is not a well-known name in black communities”. By branding Kobeli the ‘Chagall of Soweto’, the astute gallerists in Johannesburg further alienated Kobeli from blacks in Soweto and South Africa generally who did not know Chagall and his art. Regrettably, Kobeli was not the only artist subjected to comparisons with European masters. Winston Saoli was marked the ‘black Paul Klee’ and Dumile Feni the ‘Goya of the townships’. George Msimang was another black artist who fell victim to this practice. Anthea Martin from the African Art Centre in Durban (an important outlet for selling his work) called Msimang a ‘modern-day Hogarth’ (quoted in Mutumba & Ngcobo 2016). Besides this link to Hogarth, Hayden Proud (2015b) further associated some of Msimang’s art with Italian artists from the sixteenth century such as Francesco Salviati and

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<sup>95</sup> South African, or more specifically, white (probably Jewish) middle class audiences have had an intimate affinity with Marc Chagall’s work. This love for Chagall was spectacularly displayed during a major exhibition of his work held at the Standard Bank Gallery and the Iziko National Gallery in 2000 titled *Marc Chagall: The light of origins*. In a review of the exhibition at the Standard Bank Art Gallery, Schmahmann (2001:87-88) was both impressed and surprised by higher than expected numbers of people who attended the lecture sessions and walkabouts related to the exhibition. Numbers of viewers recorded mid-week of over 300 and well over 400 for weekend sessions, which made the exhibition “an unqualified success”. In her attempt to diagnose why Chagall had garnered this kind of phenomenal public interest, Schmahmann (2001:89) speculates, tongue in cheek, that “it seems, *Marc Chagall: The light of origins* was largely understood to signify, finally, the arrival of ‘real’ art in South Africa, and, for this reason alone, the show was a ‘must see’ for any cultivated citizen”. This fascination with Chagall was at the core of the Johannesburg art market’s love affair with Kobeli.



Agnolo Bronzino. Once again, names of antiquated white artists who are completely unknown by black South Africans, even those among the bourgeoisie, were attached to black artists.

While it is common practice for art historians and critics to do such a tracing of artistic precedence based on stylistic, formal or iconographic characteristics, the tracing has some unfortunate effects. Firstly, and above all, tracing implies a first-ness to European art and always-already renders African modernists secondary or derivative. Secondly, tracing further alienates black artists from the black constituency they represent and rather situates them firmly within the patronage of the white, art-going elite. Artist and intellectual, Lefifi Tladi, was bothered by such labels and commented on the Winston Saoli-Paul Klee association and other links between black and European artists:

This is the kind of [absurdity] mixed with ignorance and wanting to find a white man behind any African creative genius... Klee and Saoli have nothing to do with each other... the *Blue Riders* of Kandinsky are so far removed from the forces that create these so-called Soweto artists" (quoted in Hattingh 1998:54).

Unsurprisingly, artists like Lefifi Tladi were inspired by Black Consciousness thinking, because it spoke to their desire to undo the cultural dominance of Europe within the African mind and undo the domination that stunts the self-actualisation of blacks. Thus such practices of lineage tracing, which further entrenches whiteness as the standard and vanguard in art-making, were denounced by Moodley and the Black Consciousness Movement. Moodley (1972:19) went on to detail some of the attributes that Black Consciousness art should be layered with:

Artistic creativity, in any form, in centuries passed, was always interwoven in the everyday existential experiences of the people. Even today a fine example of the creativity that comes out of our own black community is the gumboot dance of the mineworkers or the chain gang songs of our road-workers. The artistry and the creativity reflected here was not merely to break the monotony of their work, but to reflect their feelings, their attitudes, and their perceptiveness for their labour. What then is the duty of the black artist? In the first instance, the black artist must look afresh at the premise or the basis of his existential experience. A true artist cannot extract himself from his own experience and then talk in objective universal terms. His artistry must not be trapped in the maze of sophistries and sophistications of western cultural value... All too simply the black artist is the ears, the eyes, the musician and the lover of his people, and his works will go out to his people and tell them of their compassion, paint for them their reality, and recite to them their passions, their desires, their joys and their sorrows. The black artist will direct, will shock, will cajole, will caress, and will bring tears to the eye of blacks.

In short, the Black Consciousness logic purposed black artists to serve the cultural interests of their own people, especially in the wake of an urban context where blacks were

economically exploited, politically excluded, and socially dehumanised. While Moodley's pronouncements were directed to university-based black youths at Fort Hare and Durban-Westville and other black universities during the fiery 1970s, a Black Consciousness ethos is palpable in the earliest works created by urban-based black artists from the 1940s, as will be discussed in the next sub-section. I must acknowledge here that the indifference the Black Consciousness thinkers had towards the western art market was not a full denial of the artistic and social value western art forms such as painting, drawing, and printmaking had brought to Africa. To be sure, black artists like Mancoba, Pemba, and Sekoto who had made a name for themselves by adopting and mastering these European techniques of art-making, were after all celebrated and honoured among black communities. What the Black Consciousness vanguard like Moodley despised was the racial paternalism and double-standards that black artists had to suffer at the hands of the white market and its legitimating institutions.

### **3.4.2 Towards an Afropolitan Black Consciousness**

To appropriate terms popularised by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968:vi), much of twentieth-century black art inspired by Black Consciousness represented the "self-actualisation" and "full-humanness" of blacks within and beyond the urban paradigm. Since Afropolitanism is itself a philosophy of black determinism within an urban and cosmopolitan context, Afropolitanism and Black Consciousness are ideological cousins. Thus, most of the images of black subjectivity within the urban environment discussed throughout this study are inward-looking and underpinned by black pride. Contrary to prevailing sentiment, black artists were not only concerned with satisfying the tastes of the white art market. For Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko, the self-actualisation of blacks could not happen at the behest of white liberals. The white hand could not facilitate the economic and political emancipation of blacks nor free their minds. Nevertheless, the representation of an Afropolitan self-actualisation did not necessarily mean the complete erasure of whiteness within the black imagery.<sup>96</sup> As seen in the examples discussed here, black artists illustrated the white hand in their art, either implicitly or explicitly, with a kind of adversarial aesthetic in their art. The prominence and privilege of whiteness was intentionally compromised. Speaking in a post-apartheid context, van der Watt (2004:105) advocates for the adoption of an adversarial aesthetic in the following terms: "We have to make whiteness visible first, to work for its disavowment. Upsetting whiteness as norm and making whites aware of their own raced

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<sup>96</sup> I must clarify that many black artists were interested in whiteness as an artistic subject matter. For example, there are numerous paintings by Moses Tladi that depict the urban and country living of whites. Of interest is that black artists were barred from gazing or surveying the white world by white society itself, and not as one would presume by a Black Consciousness calling. Ironically, whites did not always appreciate seeing whiteness reflected in art produced by black artists, the very art they ultimately consumed (Powell 1995a).

subjectivities are small though significant ways in which ‘usual’ racial signification may be challenged”. Thus, the duty of the black Afropolitan artist either pre or post-1994 was to acknowledge the presence and realness of whiteness in the lives of urban-based blacks and to do so in a manner that did not privilege white subjectivity over black interests or black self-determination.



Figure 3.5. Gerard Sekoto, *Song of the pick*, 1946/7. Oil on canvas. South 32 Collection. (Lindop 1995:48)

An iconic example of an Afropolitan Black Consciousness artwork that achieves this delicate balance is Gerard Sekoto’s *Song of the pick* (1946/7).<sup>97</sup> The painting was based on a photograph Sekoto had in his personal collection by Andrew Goldie that showed a group of black men engaged in hard labour within an urban setting (Lindop 1995:16). Sekoto re-conceived this all-too-common scene by creating a striking composition where the pick-wielding men are re-invented as a proud and defiant group working in unison (Figure 3.5). Furthermore, the ever-present white boss is rendered a mere bystander to the visual orchestra of brightly coloured, well-built workers who exude pride in completing this most difficult, back-breaking, underpaid, and class-defining task. In Sekoto’s painting, the pick is not a prominent and over-bearing object either visually and metaphorically. In the image by Andrew Goldie (Figure 3.6) and the etching by Dorothy Kay’s (Figure 3.7) (precursors to Sekoto’s artwork), the tools almost over-power the labourers, and there is a real sense of the picks’ weight pressing against the bodies of the black men. Sekoto subverts this relationship by defusing the heaviness of the pick and transferring all the might and strength to the men. Sekoto belittles

<sup>97</sup> Sekoto had created an initial watercolour study of this composition in 1939 that has the same layout as the final painting. Also, Sekoto intentionally named his artwork after Dorothy Kay’s 1938 print also titled *Song of the pick*, which although technically impressive, rendered the black men as servants of the pick. Their upward gaze and open mouths bears similarities to acts of worship and total surrender.

the pick, almost to the point of turning it into a mere rhythmic device and thereby restores the individual dignity of the labourers. Sekoto's representation of black labour in these dignified terms is by no means its romanticisation. Hill (2015:xx) stresses that the potency of Black Consciousness philosophy is its ability to generate a "counter-aesthetic". Thus, what Sekoto achieved in this and other paintings was the creation of counter aesthetics that reimagined urban black subjectivities in redemptive and empowering roles.



Figure 3.6. Andrew Goldie, *Men at work*, undated.  
Photograph. (Lindop 1995:16)



Figure 3.7. Dorothy Kay, *Song of the pick*, 1938. Etching, 38 x 32 cm.  
(Strauss & co. 2018a)

The celebration of black culture and black talent was central to Black Consciousness idealism and the expression of full-humanness among urban blacks. Tommy Motswai's *Choir* (1987) is a prime example of such a performance of black creativity (Figure 3.8). Motswai depicts an assembly of uniformly dressed yet unique individuals – distinguishable by their varied body types and facial features – in full song as a smartly dressed conductor leads the varied voices into a symphony. *Amakwaya* (loosely translated as choirs in isiZulu) are commonly referred to as South African Choral Music and were more than musical acts. *Amakwaya* enabled the expression and celebration of cultural difference in South African cities where all the various black language groups co-existed together during the twentieth century. The history of *Amakwaya* extends to the mission schools during the nineteenth century. Although musicology scholars like Mugovhani (2007:139) are rightly critical of the colonial attitudes within the church that "denigrated" black aboriginal musical styles, the impact of what emerged from these missionary conservatories of black musical traditions and the urban black psyche during the twentieth century cannot be wished away.



Figure 3.8. Tommy Motswai, *Choir*, 1987. Pastel on paper. (Invitation to International Biennial 1987:1)



Figure 3.9. Eli Kobeli, *Gumboot dancers*, undated. Pastel on paper. (Photograph by author)

Dating as far back as the formation of *The African Native Choir* or *The African Choir* (as some prefer to call it) that toured England in 1891 with the aim garnering support for the improvement of black livelihoods in South Africa at that critical historical moment, “*Amakwaya* performance developed into a powerful means whereby class identity and consciousness could be constructed and communicated” (Detterbeck 2002:i). The existence of *Amakwaya* within the various urban-based black ethnic groupings during the twentieth century was vital to the cultivation of a modern Afropolitan subjectivity, captured so colourfully in Motswai’s drawing. Teachers, nurses, clerks, and entrepreneurs participated in the choirs and also played an instrumental role as cultural ambassadors and political activists for black interests generally. Commenting on the significance of *The African Choir*’s members such as Charlotte Maxeke, Katie Makanya, and Paul Xiniwe, Farber and Mussai (2018) note that “these figures went on to become leading social activists and reformers”. But as *Amakwaya* multiplied throughout all South African cities towards the end of the twentieth century, they also enabled the interaction of middle-class elites and the ordinary proletariat. However, more fundamentally, through regional and national festivals and competitions, these choirs created the space for the numerous black language groups to celebrate their Afropolitan subjectivities.

Besides *Amakwaya*, black pride and black collectivism were also expressed in the gumboot dance tradition or *isicathulo* (isiZulu for shoe). Although gumboot dancing was an activity performed exclusively by men, especially miners, it mutated into a special urban dance form that was prominent within the black social imaginary (Osborne 1990). It is said that the genesis of the dance came during the early twentieth century from the signals black miners would send to their colleagues by slapping their rubber gumboots and whistling. This form of non-verbal communication evolved into a social and recreational dance that was practised in almost every mine where blacks worked. Besides its celebratory dimension, gumboot dancing also

embodied “military and authoritarian elements” (Osborne 1990:50), where members of the dance group were expected to adhere to a strict code of brotherhood and solidarity. To this end, gumboot dancing was a recreational spectacle and the performance of a proud subjectivity that sees the value of being black as not confined to the manual and demeaning work to which these men were subjected. As captured in Eli Kobeli’s *Gumboot dancers* (undated), the ability to find joy and express uniqueness while wearing gumboots spoke of the vibrancy and resilience of black migrant labourers in the city (Figure 3.9). Like Kobeli’s figures, gumboot dance groups would dress uniformly and augment their overalls with colourful hats or stylish tops and jackets.

### 3.5 Idealising black urbanisms: Afropolitanism as utopia

As will be discussed in greater care in Chapter 4, during the early twentieth-century blacks saw urbanisation and industrialisation in a positive light. Urbanisation represented an opportunity for blacks to transcend their rural-based and colonially imposed hardships. While the realities of becoming urbanised were bleak, black artists often illustrated the urban spaces they inhabited in glowing and idyllic terms. The most compelling Afropolitan idealisations of urbanisation were those of spaces in Johannesburg like Sophiatown and Newclare, or Eastwood and Lady Selbourne in Pretoria, or District Six in Cape Town, or Cato Manor in Durban, where blacks could perform the fullness of a distinctly Afropolitan urbanness. Because black families could own homes and sub-lease their properties in these spaces, the families transformed the spaces into enclaves of black self-determinism within the modern industrial city. Gerard Sekoto’s *Yellow houses – a street in Sophiatown* (1940) is paradigmatic of artworks that aestheticised Afropolitan black urbanisms as both progressive and desirable (Figure 3.10). To achieve this effect, Sekoto employed his distinctive “highly subjective colour” palette to transform a dull, dirty, and unhygienic street in Sophiatown into a picturesque suburban scene (Berman 1970:417). Callinicos (quoted in Spiro 1989:23) presents a truer reflection of Sophiatown at the time Sekoto painted *Yellow houses – a street in Sophiatown*:

[T]he roads were mere dirt tracks, muddy channels in the summer, and dust bowls in the winter. There was no street lighting, and water supplies were drawn from wells dug by the people themselves. These wells were open. Refuse and drowned animals often infected them, and this spread disease. Sewerage buckets were not collected regularly – after 1935 three times a week at most.



Figure 3.10. Gerard Sekoto, *Yellow Houses - a street in Sophiatown*, 1940, Oil on board, 50.8 x 74.55 cm. Johannesburg Art Gallery Collection. (Manganyi 2004)



Figure 3.11. Gerard Sekoto, *Yellow houses: District Six*, 1942. Oil on canvas. Javett Family Collection. (Photograph by author)

Callinicos's description was the actual reality of living in Sophiatown, a space the Johannesburg municipality had deliberately mismanaged to render it unliveable. But this did not deter blacks from taking up residence and turning the area into one of the most vibrant, colourful, and culturally chic suburbs of its era in Africa. In 1990, renowned writer Es'kia Mphahlele presented the opening address at Sekoto's homecoming exhibition at The Art Museum in Pietermaritzburg, and spoke lucidly about Sekoto's early work, including *Yellow houses – a street in Sophiatown*:

We can observe clearly from the work of the 1940s how successfully he has tamed his environment, its ugly and distressing immediacy; how he has subdued the disorganised world around him: the world of poverty, poor housing and struggle, broken up by only a few shafts of daylight we can identify as cheerful moments. In a sense, as in the case of all art, Gerard was fleeing from the coarseness of raw reality into the protective, if often painful, embrace of art (Mphahlele 2002:193).

Here, Mphahlele<sup>98</sup> lyrically narrated how Sekoto transformed Sophiatown into a picturesque suburb by going beyond mere factual recording, as seen in Callinicos' historical account, and instead traversing into his imaginative and artistic recesses to paint the area in line with how the black residents who lived there saw it – as home. This feeling of home is the magic of Sekoto's painting. The painting is not a fantastical image. Rather, the painting put into art the

<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to juxtapose Mphahlele's analysis of Sekoto's art with those written by white academics. In Emsé Berman (1970:17) seminal anthology on South African art, the art historian described Gerard Sekoto's art as "colourful primitive work". Berman (1970:243) went on to define primitive art as creativity that "is characterised by the absence of the sophisticated stylistic devices which have been developed in western art since the Renaissance". Azaria Mbatha, Tshidiso Motjuoadi and Gladys Mgudlandlu were also categorised as producers of 'primitive art'. Tagging these black artists who were all working and living in urban settings, as 'primitive artists' was an attempt to de-modernise their art by associating it with traditional, non-modern modes of creativity.

feelings and attachment residents of Sophiatown had towards the space. The painting captured the deep sense of hope and pride that Sophiatown provided blacks in Johannesburg.

Sekoto also painted *Yellow Houses: District Six* during his brief stay in Cape Town that has similar stylistics to the more renowned Sophiatown version. In *Yellow Houses: District Six* (1942), the viewer is again exposed to a clean and desirable neighbourhood with people going about their daily business (Figure 3.11). In his famed autobiography, Nelson Mandela (1994) recounts the dignity black urbanisms bestowed on blacks during the early to mid-twentieth century. Mandela recalls that when he arrived in Johannesburg during the 1940s, he was disappointed to discover that black urban spaces such as Alexandra (where he lodged) had dusty streets, no electricity, no running water, and poorly built houses. Mandela believed that the urban situation for blacks was not qualitatively better than what he had experienced growing up in the Eastern Cape. However, as he further reflects, these imperfect living conditions did not stop him from pursuing his aspirations within the big city, because: “it was a place of my own and I was happy to have it” (Mandela 1994). Although the living conditions in black urbanisms were for the most part deplorable, Mandela was content, but not blindly or naïvely. He was content in the sense that the ‘black city’ provided him with the base to advance his ambitions in Johannesburg. Sekoto aestheticised this conscious sense of pride harboured by Mandela and thousands of other black urban dwellers.



Figure 3.12. David Mogano, *Old Pimville T.ship*, 1993. Watercolour on paper. Bongzi Dhlomo Collection Javett Foundation (Photograph by Thania Louw)



Figure 3.13. Martin West, *Old Pimville, Soweto*, 1969-1971. Photograph. (West 2019)

David Mogano’s *Old Pimville T.ship* (1993) watercolour is also emblematic of counter-artistic narratives that were determined to visualise the urban spaces where blacks resided as idyllic suburbia (Figure 3.12). Mogano’s painting is a vision of a typical day in this fantastical version of Pimville. Although created in 1993, over 50 years after Sekoto’s painting, the artwork is an imaginative re-illustration of Pimville during its golden era in the 1940s and 1950s. The area



of Klipspruit where black residents of Johannesburg were relocated to in 1905 on account of a Bubonic outbreak was rebranded 'Pimville' in 1934, in honour of Howard Pim. He played a significant role in "the 'upliftment' of Africans in Johannesburg" (Ball 2012:106). Pimville was a precursor to Orlando and Soweto. Sadly, like many other black townships, Pimville was poorly managed by the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, which focussed on calculated but ineffective attempts to reverse permanent black urbanisation (Glaser 2000:100). During the 1950s, there were repeated attempts to relocate the residents of Pimville to the newly formed Orlando Township.

As noted before, the actual picture of black urbanisms such as Pimville and Sophiatown during the 1950s – seen in photographs by Martin West for example (Figure 3.13) – was that of mal-development, overcrowding, deprivation, and squalor. However, Mogano's painting edits out these troubling realities by creating the aura of idealised suburbia, where lovers embrace each other, children are at play, and neighbours are in conversation. Besides the formal and aesthetic qualities of the artwork, it also serves as an important historical record of early black urbanisms from the viewpoint of the black artist. Old Pimville, as the title of the artwork suggests, was as important as the erstwhile and iconic Sophiatown because it was a space where blacks in Johannesburg first experienced the city of gold. Ultimately, Mogano's painting is an image of nostalgia. An imaginative recollection of an un-realised yet glorious yesterday. For Dlamini, this longing among blacks should not be misread as a celebration of colonialism or apartheid. To the contrary, it is a human response to people who "missed something of the past" that they can no longer retrieve (Dlamini 2009:4).



Figure 3.14. John Mohl, *The moon behind the miners, Crown Mines (SA)*, c.1965. Oil on Masonite, 43 x 59 cm. (Michael Stevenson 2008)



Figure 3.15. John Mohl, *These grew out of an ash pit*, undated. Oil on board, 66.3 x 91.4 cm. Johannesburg Art Gallery Collection. (John Koenakeefe Mohl 1992)

Another artist who deployed similar sentimental euphemisms in his art was John Koenakeefe Mohl. In Mohl's *The moon behind the miners, Crown Mines (SA)* (c.1965), he painted the

infamous Crown Mines in Johannesburg that operated from 1909 to 1976 and produced over 80 tons of gold, making the mine one of the single-most profitable mines in the modern history of gold mining (von Ketelhodt 2007). The mining industry was a prime enabler of the dramatic industrialisation of South Africa and was concurrently the biggest offender in the exploitation, maiming, and ultimate massacre of urban black workers. However, Mohl eschews these crimes and beautifies the mineshaft and black miners in a poetic and romanticised style (Figure 3.14). The composition foregrounds a group of miners returning from a shift, holding lamps that light their path. Mohl elevates the workers on floating clouds of dark smog. The moonlight illuminates their black bodies and clothing so that their lowly, dangerous, underpaid, and often degrading vocation is visually suspended into a saintly status. Mohl transforms the miners into noble men engaged in honourable labour. In another painting, *These grew out of an ash pit* (undated), Mohl again metaphorically focusses on the potentiality and progressive possibilities of urbanisation (Figure 3.15). In this painting (used as the cover image for the South African Arts Calendar in a 1992 issue) Mohl illustrates flowers, plants, and vegetables germinated from an ash pit. While it is unclear where this ash pit was located, it is safe to speculate that he probably witnessed the growth of the plants in an ash pit somewhere near his Soweto residence (Mohl stayed in Soweto after being forcibly removed from Sophiatown in the 1950s). The painting is a symbolic aestheticisation of the aspirations of blacks and their views of the life-giving potential of urbanisation, regardless of the actual ash pit of segregation and exploitation that urbanisation offered.

One of the few celebrated black female artists of the twentieth century, Gladys Mgudlandlu, was also prone to creating slightly utopian visualisations of black urbanisms. While there are several examples I could reference, the *Nyanga landscape* (1962) painting is among her most impressive. Miles (2002:46) correctly evaluated this image as a “picturesque rendering” of the ‘black city’ of Nyanga in Cape Town (Figure 3.16). Mgudlandlu chose to paint this urban landscape as a colourful, hilly, and fertile region, much like the suburbs of Clifton or Sea Point in Cape Town. In this image, Nyanga is transformed from the barren, dry, and mostly treeless landscape that it was, into a desirable suburb that overlooks the Cape greenery and mountain horizon. In the foreground, there appear to be female church congregants singing and dancing.

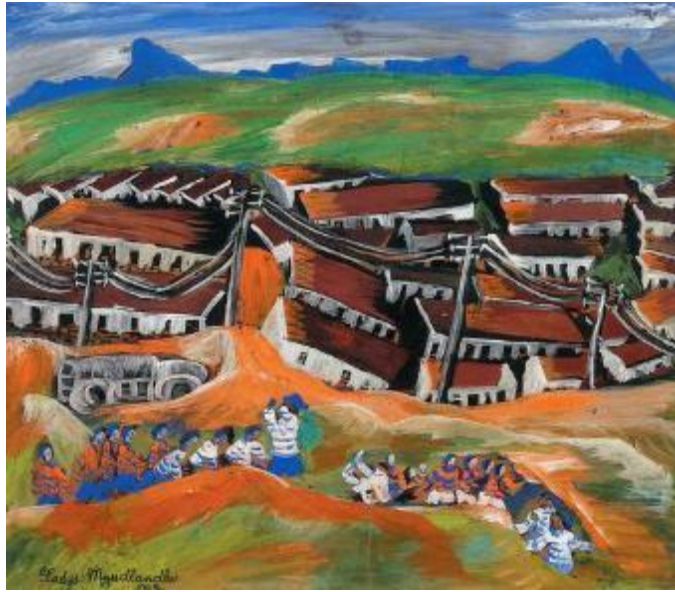


Figure 3.16. Gladys Mgudlandlu, *Nyanga Township*, 1962.  
Gouache on board, 57 x 60 cm. (Miles 2002:45)

Selby Mvusi was another artist who represented idyllic Afropolitan subjectivities in the desegregated suburb of Cato Manor in Durban before it was zoned as a whites-only area in 1954. Although relations between Indians and blacks were not always smooth throughout the twentieth century, Mvusi's painting attests to the relative order and settledness of black families within this multi-racial suburb (Figure 3.17). Both parents in what looks like a mixed family are shown nursing their offspring in a sensitive embrace. The image is uncharacteristic in that it was unlike the common picture of mother and child, where the black father is absent. The artwork reinforces the "joint responsibility of parents" in black urbanisms at the time (Miles 2015:80). Another artist who delicately catalogued his non-racial and integrated urban experience was Moses Tladi. Like almost all black artists discussed here, Tladi also lived through the trauma of forced removals. During the mid-1950s, Tladi began a painting of his home in Kensington B titled *The house in Kensington B* (1955/6), which sadly was never completed (Figure 3.18). Kensington was situated in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Tladi and his family had lodged there after the end of his service in World War II.<sup>99</sup> As Read Lloyd (2009:136) points out, although unfinished, within this composition "there is the sense of space, the expanse of the surrounding country, and the size of the trees shows them to be mature and established". Tladi's painting is among the few historical and equally romantic paintings that showed how some of the privileged black families lived fairly comfortably in the

<sup>99</sup> In 1956, the Tladis were forced to relocate to Soweto under the Group Areas Act. Tladi was so devastated by the move that he stopped making art altogether when he arrived in Soweto (Senong 2017:2).

mixed-race suburbs before the forced relocations. As evident in the composition, the yards and houses were large and spacious.



Figure 3.17. Selby Mvusi, *Family in Cato Manor*, 1954. Ink and watercolour on paper, 25 x 33 cm. Estate of Selby Mvusi, Johannesburg. (Miles 2015:76)



Figure 3.18. Moses Tladi, *The house in Kensington B*, 1955/6. Oil on Masonite, 37.5 x 77 cm. (Read Lloyd 2009:136)

The handful of examples discussed here are typical of the plethora of similar artworks that had a utopian drift. Although referencing Fikile Magadla and Ezrom Legae's art specifically, Siebrits (2003b:22) highlights that many black artists "acted against the prevailing township imagery of hopelessness, producing drawings of great beauty and mystery". These images of great beauty and technical mastery were concerned with the unrequited hopes of the emergent Afropolitans, who sought to imagine their uniquely African urbanised utopia. In an exposition of how these Afrotopian impulses are weaved into African creativity, Ashcroft (2013:113) is astounded by "the stunning tenacity of its hope and its grounded vision of possibility". It is this hope-filled possibility that was dominant in such artistic renderings of twentieth-century black urbanisms. A poignant example of Afrotopian images is Derrick Nxumalo's vision of mines and industrially undeveloped landscapes. Nxumalo worked in the mining industry as a labourer, and his futuristic drawings attest to a relentless desire by blacks to conceive the ideal urban edifice. In *Drakensberg Mountain* (1987), Nxumalo created an ultramodern visualisation of a complex network of highways and bridges populated by high-speed trains along the Drakensberg Mountains (Figure 3.19). This drawing was a powerful declaration that blacks could also dream of fantastical space-age urban worlds. The colour palette and drawing style used by Nxumalo is reminiscent of a colouring book where children are free to colour the world according to their unrestricted and raw imaginations. Nxumalo achieves similar pictorial energy in his drawing of the *Vaal Reefs Exp & Mining Company Limited* (1987) in Johannesburg (Figure 3.20). The dull mine is remodelled into a modern metropolis with a skyscraper-like shaft. The rest of the buildings transform the composition into a city-scape of brightly coloured modernist structures. The mound of excavated sand and

earth that lies behind the buildings is renovated into a majestic mountain covered in what looks like snow. In other words, the mine has become a utopian urban space.



Figure 3.19. Derrick Nxumalo, *Drakensberg Mountain*, 1987. Felt-tip pen ink on paper. (Younge 1988:53)



Figure 3.20. Derrick Nxumalo, *Vaal Reefs Exp & Mining Company Limited*, 1987. Felt-tip pen ink on paper. (Younge 1988:52)

These Afrotopian and hence Afropolitan urbanisms are also found in Tito Zungu's intricate and miniature pen drawings of cities and modern forms of travel. In *Plane and building* (1987), Durban-based artist, Zungu, imagines a modern jet, akin to the erstwhile but iconic Concorde supersonic plane, flying over a set of three interconnected round structures (Figure 3.21). Distinctive geometric shapes inspired by classical Ndebele African patterns adorn both the buildings and aeroplane – an undeniable Africanisation of these essentially western icons of modernity. A similar Africanisation of what looks like a conventional European architectural building can be seen in *Untitled* (undated), where Zungu again layers the façade of a grand multi-storey building with designs and colours reminiscent of Ndebele decorations (Figure 3.22). Robinson (2006:x) sees Zungu's art as paradigmatic of his technical and conceptual "investment in the modernity of the city – its skyscrapers, speed and energy". By localising these buildings and forms of modern transportation, Zungu inserted his African and Zulu subjectivity into the modern urban paradigm, not by worshipping western technological advancement, but by appropriating it. In his explication of the function of art in Africa, Mbembe (2010:74) expresses a similar sentiment by arguing that art has to serve a higher purpose than mere literal representations of known abnormalities, nor should it venerate western ideas of progress and development:

To me, the function of art in Africa is precisely to free us from the shackles of development both as an ideology and as a practice ...the work of theory and the work of culture is to pave the way for a qualitative practice of imagination – a practice without which we will have no name, no face, no voice in history. I hate

the idea that African life is a simple bare life – the life of an empty stomach and a naked body.

The artworks discussed in this subsection are compelling examples of such qualitative imaginative practices. As I show in the sections that follow, these images did not sanitise the problematic aspects of the ‘black city’, but rather imagined what it could become.

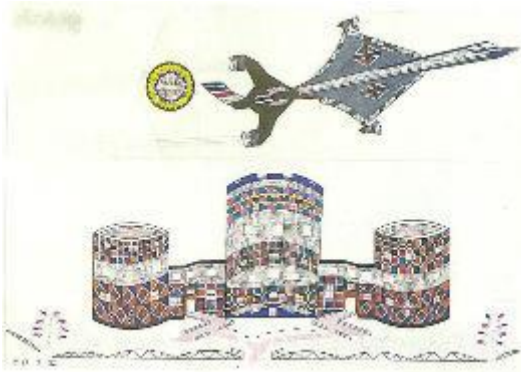


Figure 3.21. Tito Zungu, *Plane and building*, 1987. Pencil, ballpoint, felt-tipped pens, shiny paper and cardboard, 17 x 32 cm. (*Incroci del Sud: Affinities: Contemporary South African art* 1993:69)

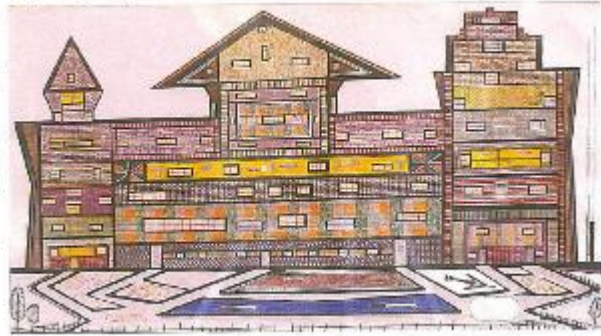


Figure 3.22. Tito Zungu, *Untitled*, undated. Felt pen, 17 x 32 cm. (*Incroci del Sud: Affinities: Contemporary South African art* 1993:69)

### 3.6 Afropolitan joy in black urbanisms

The significance of music and its influence on how visual artists within black urbanisms expressed their Afropolitan subjectivity is incalculable. Perhaps more than any other creative expression, the performing arts are the most vibrant and self-determining creative medium within black urbanisms. For the most part, a key contributor to the influence of music is that black musicians were not fully beholden to a white market to survive as creatives. Although the publishing houses, record labels, distribution channels, among others, were controlled by whites, black musicians could distance themselves from white control far more successfully than other art forms. The value of music within black urbanisms is that it offered a creative outlet and attendant expression of Afropolitan and black joy. The lack of recreational amenities in the ‘black city’ made it difficult for black joy and celebratory practices to flourish. Nevertheless, music, along with other recreational activities, provided an outlet for such articulations. The expression of black joy also has to be appreciated as a political strategy, because as Johnson (2015:180) writes, black joy is “a real and imagined site of utopian

possibility” and “is phenomenally transformational”.<sup>100</sup> The transformational power of black joy is evident in the repurposing of urban black homes into shebeens where illegal alcohol was peddled, and the use of community halls as dance halls in places like Sophiatown before its destruction. Naturally, black artists represented this performance of black joy in their art. For example, George Pemba’s *Kwa Stemele: Stemele’s place in the 1930s* (1981) is a painting that recalls the social gatherings that took place in Stemele’s New Brighton home during the 1930s (Figure 3.23). The composition shows an elegantly dressed couple in a blissful dance. On the right side of the painting, a maestro caresses a piano with his fingers, as a woman watches on in admiration.



Figure 3.23. George Pemba, *Kwa Stemele: Stemele’s place in the 1930s*, 1981. Oil on board, 33.6 x 43.5 cm. Johannesburg Art Gallery Collection. (Hudleston 1996:137)

The development of music genres like Bebop, Marabi, Kwela, and many more within black urbanisms underscored the inability of the racialised system to suppress black creativity completely. Mdluli (2016:33) posits that “the intersectionality between art and jazz offers a far more contemplative space than just issues of representation and inclusion”. Here Mdluli is gesturing towards the realisation that it was in the fusion of various creative modalities such as the written, visual, and performing, where genuine performativity of an Afropolitan Black Consciousness and self-actualisation manifested. Some artists embodied this intersectionality because they could paint, sing, and/or play a musical instrument. An artist who demonstrated this intersectionality in his career is Hargreaves Ntswana, a multitalented creative. Before becoming a fine artist, he played the tenor sax and piano for the first black musical, *King*

<sup>100</sup> Johnson (2015:180) further argues that “black joy allows us the space to stretch our imaginations beyond what we previously thought possible and allows us to theorise a world in which white supremacy does not dictate our everyday lives”.

*Kong*,<sup>101</sup> staged in Sophiatown in 1959. Ephraim Ngatane, an excellent painter, also played the pennywhistle and saxophone. Others like Monty Mahobe, one of the first participants at Polly Street Art Centre in 1948, gave up his visual art-making for several years to pursue a career in music before resuscitating his interest in art when he joined the Mofolo Art Centre during the 1980s. Mahobe (2018) concluded that “I have two hands, one for playing the cello and the other for holding the paintbrush”. These artists, and many others, interfaced their musical and visual arts gifts to create rhythmic and vibrant images that showcased an urban-based black subjectivity.



Figure 3.24. Motlhabane Mashiangwako, *The efforts of those who came before us (A dedication to Johnny Dyani)*, 1983-84. Burnt sand, glue and mixed media on board, 207 x 68 cm. (Hattingh 1998)



Figure 3.25. Welcome Koboka, *Man Playing Guitar*, 1990. Oil on Board, 109.8 x 70 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

Artworks like Motlhabane Mashiangwako’s *The efforts of those who came before us (A dedication to Johnny Dyani)* (1983-84), Welcome Koboka’s *Man playing guitar* (1990), and George Msimang’s *The concertina player* (1975) and *Rehearsal* (1978) showcase the centrality of musical entertainment in the homes, streets, and meeting spots of the ‘black city’ (Figures 3.24 to 3.27). These images were not mere figurations of musicians and their instruments. Rather, the images were visualisations of the frequencies, vibes, and energy that was released daily by musical sounds within the ‘black city’. But beyond visual artists’ representational role, they also worked closely with the musicians in a reciprocal arrangement, where the artists oftentimes designed the album covers of popular jazz players and singers.

<sup>101</sup> *King Kong* was the story of a famous boxer, Ezekiel ‘King Kong’ Dlamini, who dominated boxing during the 1950s.



For example, in 1971, Winston Saoli made the drawing for Dollar Brand's (Abdullah Ibrahim) *Peace* album (Figure 3.28). Ntukwana also designed album covers for Brand's *Underground in Africa* album and created illustrations for the praise poet and storyteller Gcina Mhlope. I must stress here that musical genres like jazz and choral choir competitions were prototypical of an eclectic, modern Afropolitan subjectivity. However, some of the musical styles like Mbaqanga, which was also quintessentially hybrid and urban, were rebranded as "African Jazz" that associated Mbaqanga with a tribal and rural subjectivity. Dalamba (2016:73) laments how Mbaqanga's "potential was thwarted" by such false categorisations. The rural-urban, traditional-modern binary also infiltrated the appreciation of twentieth-century black music.



Figure 3.26. George Msimang, *The concertina player*, 1975. Charcoal on paper, 27.2 x 38.6 cm. (Proud 2015b)



Figure 3.27. George Msimang, *Rehearsal*, 1978. Ink on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm. Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt. (Mutumba & Ngcobo 2016:151)



Figure 3.28. Winston Saoli, Album cover for *Peace* by Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim), 1971. (Dollar Brand [s.a.]

Even against such attempts at ‘tribalising’ urban black music, the power of these new forms and styles of black sonics was their ability to unite blacks who lived in different and transnational locales. The proliferation of jazz in Harlem in New York during the mid-twentieth century – where the greatest concentration of urban-based blacks lived outside of Africa – was consistent with musical developments in Sophiatown and later Soweto during the same period. The renowned poet Kgositsile (Phalafala 2017:311) once remarked that the gravitas of black music was because it was and is “experiential and contingent on black life”. That is, urban black music was a direct and creative performance of Afropolitan subjectivities that allowed blacks to articulate their cosmopolitan identities through a different and self-produced language. For example, the atonality of jazz, which breaks from the traditional notes and octaves found in antiquated classical European music, was symbolic of the daily disobedience enacted blacks in the city.

The emergence of the Hip Hop-inspired Kwaito genre during the 1990s also provided urban youths of the day the outlet to voice their hopes and anxieties about the new South Africa of post-1994 using music. Kwaito was the culmination in the evolution of urban-based musical styles such as Bebop (1950s), Mbaqanga (1960s), and bubblegum (1980s). According to Mhlambi (2004:121), “[i]n Kwaito music the emphasis lies not in the poetic essence of the lyrics but rather in the instrumental arrangement and the ‘danceability’ of the composition.” However, even though Kwaito is dominated by dance, there was substance and deep symbolism in the titles and lyrics found in many of the early Kwaito hits. For example, Arthur Mafokate’s *Kaffir* (released in 1995) is credited as the first Kwaito hit and has strong political and historical references that give the song a clear Black Consciousness grounding. The song begins with a white man calling his black servant in an irate tone, shouting at him Afrikaans,

using the word 'kaffir', which means 'black person', but has derogatory overtones akin to calling a black person a 'nigger' in America. A 'kaffir' was the epitome of a lazy, dirty, uneducated black person. After being called a 'kaffir', the black servant (Arthur in the song) retaliates by singing the following lyrics (Mafokate 1995):

Oh baas! [Hey boss]  
 Don't call me a kaffir.  
*Awu bone kuthi ngiyapanda maan?* [Can't you see I am trying my best?]  
 Hey baas? [Hey boss]  
*Ang' vele kwa satane maan* [I don't come from hell man]  
 Hey baas! [Hey boss]  
 Nee [No]

As Mhlambi (2004:120) argues, this iconic and genre-defining song "heightens the discontent against the atrocities of the past" that blacks felt even though they openly embraced the reconciliation mantra of post-1994. Ultimately, urban black music played the dual and interrelated function of entertaining its audiences, while also giving the Afropolitans an opportunity to voice their anger against segregation. Visual artists were responding to this interrelation in their representations of these musical traditions.

### 3.7 Transgressive Afropolitan subjectivities

Although Black Consciousness art was invested in cataloguing the hardships and difficulties encountered by urban-based blacks, the art also represented black defiance to colonial and apartheid urban oppression. Lammas (1993:51) described these illustrations of defiance as "angry images that condemn and challenge the socio-political reality of an unfair state and social order". Like most twentieth-century black art, these images of transgressive subjectivities were again subsumed into one grand category known as 'resistance art' made famous by Sue Williamson in her book, *Resistance art in South Africa* (1989). While many of the black (and white) artists discussed in Williamson's authoritative text were resisting the many laws and restrictions of apartheid South Africa, to class their creative exploits as 'resistance art' was, in hindsight, too reductive. Bongi Dhlomo, who worked closely with Williamson before the completion of the book, pushes back against the 'resistance/struggle artist' tag that was ascribed to all the black, but not necessarily white, artists mentioned by Williamson.<sup>102</sup> Dhlomo reflects: "I did not agree when I was labelled a 'struggle artist' in the

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<sup>102</sup> It is egregious how after Williamson's book, most black artists who worked from the 1960s until the 1990s were described as resistance artists. Yet in her book, Williamson refers to the art of several white artists, including herself, who are not recognised paradigmatically as 'resistance artists'. The tag only stuck to the black artists, reducing all their creative exploits to images of 'resistance'.

1980s because I did not hear that term used for writers and musicians. I feel that I am documenting history” (quoted in Dhlomo & Godby 2004:65). In Dhlomo’s analysis, what she and her fellow black artists were doing was recording history through their art. However, it just so happened that the historical moment they documented had to do with protest and defiance campaigns levelled against apartheid. Dhlomo was keenly aware of the fact that that images of resistance were not the only type of art produced by black creatives, and was fearful that the notion of ‘resistance art’ unwittingly totalised black art from that era as purely and singularly ‘resistance’. This tag effectively reduces all black creative commentary on the urban-based socio-political realities of the day to reactive rather than proactive.

The renowned academic and essayist Njabulo Ndebele corroborated Dhlomo’s stance in his review of twentieth-century black art as pictography. In 1988, Ndebele opened an exhibition of Gerard Sekoto’s work at the Cassirer Fine Art Gallery wherein he referred to three Sekoto paintings owned by his family. Ndebele expressed that the paintings had been “part and parcel of my understanding of the problems of this country because of the kind of things which Sekoto attempted to depict” (quoted in Lindop 1988a:9). For Ndebele, Sekoto’s artworks were more than just aesthetic re-enactments of resistance in Sophiatown, District Six, Newclare, and Eastwood. Rather, the artworks were layered texts dealing with the complexities of the black experience of urbanisation during its formative phase. These particular works were recordings of seminal historical moments in the defiance against state oppression. The artworks also documented the everydayness of black life during the twentieth century. Another disclaimer regarding the personification of black urbanisms as sites of perpetual resistance is the reduction of forms of resistance and protest to expressions of anger and destruction of property by uncontrollable mobs. While such acts were indeed part of the defiance campaigns, resistance to apartheid took many nuanced forms.

To illustrate, I reference a historic exhibition titled *Two decades of fire: An exhibition of black art to celebrate the history of Soweto*<sup>103</sup> which was held at the Funda Community College and Ekhaya Museum in Soweto in 1992. That the history of Soweto would be condensed into the metaphor of ‘fire’ was neither a mistake nor a mischaracterisation of the region from 1972 to 1992, the period the exhibition covered. As expressed by Mostumi Makhene (1992), an influential educationalist from Funda Community College, on the lead up to the exhibition:

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<sup>103</sup> This major, but largely forgotten exhibition, was funded by Total and the Alliance Française. Featured artists were Joe Ndlovu, Kay Hassan, Duke Ketye, Tankiso Mokhele, Sydney Selepe, Ben Macala, Ephraim Ngatane, Siphon Ndebele, Job Mokgosi, Sydney Beck, Louis Maqhubela, Gordon Gabashane, Durant Sihlali, Nhlanhla Xaba, Lungile Phambo, Muzi Danga, Wandile Mlangeni, Avhashoni Mainganye, Chabani Manganye, Velaphi Mzimba, Nat Mokgosi, Vincent Baloyi, Dumile Feni, Eric Mbatha, Charles Nkosi, and Hargreaves Ntukwana. Of course, a glaring omission from this list was female artists, and as noted before the exclusion of female voices from such legitimating events has been devastating to the overall appreciation of twentieth century black women’s artistic heritage.

“1972 to date, a period no more significant in the history of national struggle and yet the most conspicuous in images of conflict and triumph, is symbolised by the most creative but destructive of life forces, fire”. Nevertheless, interestingly, the actual exhibition contained a plethora of artworks with diverse themes and content. A survey of the titles of the artworks exhibited reveals that the artists explored life in Soweto in all its granular texture. Very few artists actually displayed burning, destruction, and anarchy. The exhibition celebrated the everyday feats of subversion and rebellion against apartheid. Furthermore, the exhibition was hosted in Soweto, making the hosting itself a political act. Makhene (1992) reiterated this point by noting that holding the exhibition at two sites in Soweto was “a call for communities to remember their artists and a campaign to redress the artist’s ever-growing alienation – as they benefit local and international art collectors whose main link to the art is money, while the artist remains lesser known to his people and his ‘words’ are unheard”. In other words, this project was an effort to show Soweto back to Soweto dwellers as chronicled by the artistic shamans of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s.



Figure 3.29. Paul Sibisi, *Red meat workers, strike*, 1981. Pen and ink wash on paper. (Younge 1988:73)



Figure 3.30. Paul Sibisi, *Umvavela unrest*, 1981. Pen and ink wash on paper. (Younge 1988:72)

Although protest and defiance against the ruling authorities should not be manacled to images of destruction, fire, and violent protests, artists also recorded such forms of mass and street-based resistance. Ngwane (2011) points out that strikes and protests have always possessed a Marxist-socialist element of creative rebellion that contests, through mass action, hegemonic capitalist tendencies that exploit labour. As the ultimate victims of capital’s ‘thingification’ of the worker, black artists were engaged in portraying the various movements and strikes that went hand-in-glove with the rapid industrialisation of South Africa throughout the twentieth century. Paul Sibisi’s *Red meat workers’ strike* (1981) shows a group of abattoir workers

partaking in a strike for better pay and working conditions (Figure 3.29). The men in Sibisi's composition are portrayed as a coordinated group of employees dressed in their work attire and walking in an orderly fashion along the street. They are not vandalising any property nor engaged any raucous actions. Although they are unhappy about the terms and conditions of their employment, they do not seem to be filled with a lust for violence and destruction. Sibisi deliberately depicts the workers in a manner that retains their dignity and decorum. As a teacher at a high school in KwaZulu-Natal during the 1980s and 1990s, Sibisi was attuned to the seriousness of the political, social, educational, and economic crises that confronted urban black communities, as reflected in his art (Younge 1988:72). Sibisi also portrayed the consequences of outward expressions of dissent against apartheid. In his *Umzavela unrest* (1981) series, a protester is violently maltreated by two white army officials, identifiable through their military dress (Figure 3.30).

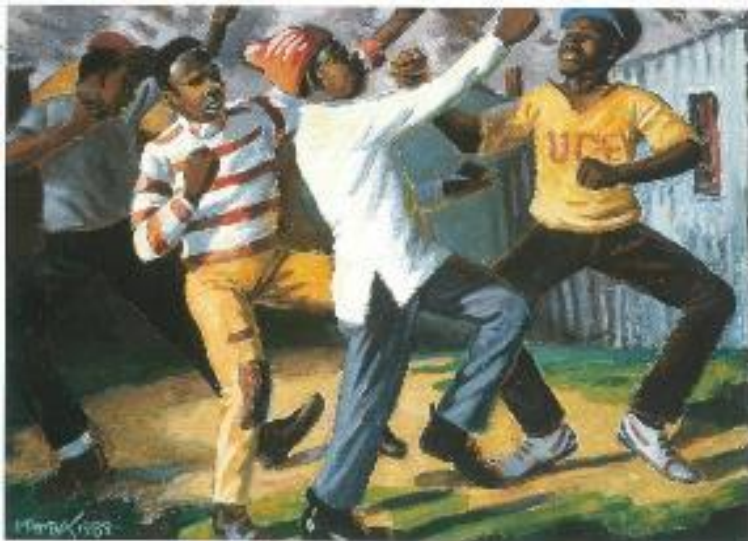


Figure 3.31. George Pemba, *Toyi-toyi*, 1989. Oil on board, 68 x 51 cm. (Hudleston 1996:143)

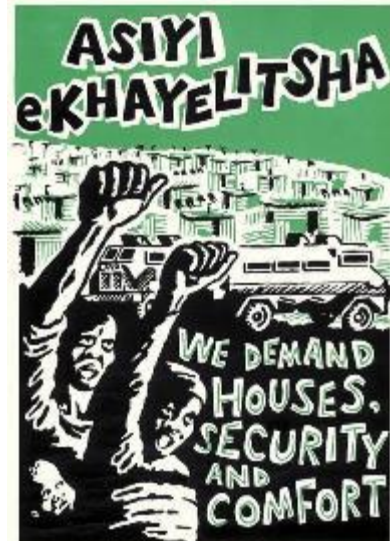


Figure 3.32. United Women's Congress, *We are not going to Khayelitsha*, 1986. Screenprint. (Centre for Humanities Research 2014)

After the June 16 marches in Soweto in 1976, the South African military was regularly deployed to quell protests within black urbanisms, and the deployment often resulted in brutal altercations and fatalities. The ruthlessness with which the apartheid government retaliated against urban protests did not slow the proliferation of mass demonstrations throughout the country, especially during the 1980s. Pemba's *Toyi-toyi* (1989) depicted the performative and near celebratory nature of chanting and dancing during mass protests (Figure 3.31). The *toyi-toyi* chant is characterised by harmonious singing, rhythmic, and upward fist-pumping, and re-enactments of combat poses. Simpson (2009:512) further describes *toyi-toyi*-ing as “a

muscular march mimicking the movements of Umkhonto we Sizwe guerrillas in training". As seen in Pemba's painting and in public performances throughout the streets of South Africa's cities during the previous century, *toyitoyi-ing* was the domestication of a military chant perfected in the guerrilla training camps of the ANC. Thus, the *toyitoyi* is not a random, disorderly outburst of anger. It is not a barbaric mob with a thirst for violence. *Toyitoyi-ing* is a coordinated expression of a defiant human spirit performed in unison through song, dance, and marching. It is the living embodiment of solidarity.

Protests and *toyitoyi-ing* were not the only forms of mass and community-based transgressive actions against oppression. The poster campaign at the Community Arts Project in Cape Town, like Thami Mnyele's Medu Art Ensemble, was perhaps the most efficient use of art to create mass public awareness of the ills of apartheid. The Community Arts Project specialised in the creation of posters with both an artistic and political outlook. At the heart of the poster initiative was a desire to counter the monopoly that the apartheid state had on communication that related to the experiences and interests of urban-based blacks, specifically the working class. Lionel Davis, who managed the media production section at the Community Arts Project, explained that the project was always centred on the needs of the organisations with which they worked (Oliphant 1989).

Furthermore, there was a clear delineation between the instrumentalist social and political aims of the posters, in contrast to the posters as mere subjective outputs by individual artists. As Davis expressed in an interview with Oliphant (1989:57): "[t]he emphasis throughout is on communication, collective effort and social relevance and not on high art or self-centred expression". More than media and communication campaigns, the posters were graphic and narrative embodiments of the struggles of urban-based black workers. The posters were recordings of the hopes and desires of those who were marginalised by regressive urban laws and exploitative labour practices. For example, the aspirational feelings of hope and personal safety are evident in the United Women's Congress' *We are not going to Khayelitsha* (1986) poster that highlighted the defiance of urban women against the forced removals of blacks to 'black cities' like Khayelitsha (Figure 3.32). Printmaking was the preferred and pragmatic artistic medium at the Community Arts Project. Hecker (2011:12) notes how the printmaking processes of linocut were undergirded by "accessibility and bold expressiveness", while screen printing and offset lithography were most useful "for overt political activism and public circulation", not least because the lithographs were was reproducible. Although the Community Arts Project mostly engaged with the interests of coloureds in Cape Town (the Western Cape being a designated 'coloured' area), black voices were also accorded an

opportunity to express their hopes and desires, and their messages were also transmitted beyond South Africa's borders.



Figure 3.33. George Pemba, *Police raid*, 1977. Oil on board, 49 x 75 cm. (Hudleston 1996:127)



Figure 3.34. Dumile Feni, *The Prisoner*, c.1977-1991. Conte crayon on Paper, 121 x 210 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

Another form of transgressive resistance that is difficult to reconcile with the other aspirations related to Afropolitan self-actualisation is criminality. Criminality within black urbanisms and the South African city, in general, played the dual and contradictory role of expressing black agency on the one hand and contributing to the dehumanisation of blacks on the other hand. By many measures, to be urbanised and black was ontologically felonious. This almost pre-set criminal-status was captured in Pemba's *Police raid* (1977), a snapshot of two police officers confronting a female owner of a shebeen (Figure 3.33). As noted before, black women in the 'black cities' were among the most prevalent offenders of urban by-laws by brewing what the apartheid government considered to be illegal beer. The officials went to great lengths to criminalise and squash such female enterprise. In the painting Pemba depicts the black police officers in a blue skin tone to signify how black law-enforcers during apartheid were viewed as aliens or semi-monsters that brought torment to their own people. Being jailed during apartheid was the norm rather than the exception for urban-based blacks. *The prisoner* (c.1977-1991) by Dumile Feni showcases the arbitrary imprisonment of black men. The drawing is a rendering of a majestic and imposing male figure standing behind a set of bars



(Figure 3.34). To the right of the figure are three faces lined above one another. The expressions on the faces agonise at their seemingly unjust imprisonment. The ideal form of justice rarely if ever featured in twentieth-century black urbanisms.

What remained was the performance of a transgressive kind of criminality. This criminal form of misconduct outsmarted the government's security services and preyed on the weak and vulnerable who were its primary victims. David Koloane illustrated this kind of maverick and untameable urban identity in his *Mgodoyi* series. The isiZulu word *mgodoyi* means a wild, filthy, and undomesticated dog. Koloane created many renditions of *mgodoyi* over several decades as an attempt to make sense of the urban subjectivity of black men who were forced to survive on the margins of society by fighting one another and feeding off the innocent and unfortunate residents of the 'black city'. Commenting on David Koloane's images of menacing dogs, van Robbroeck (2007:50) advances the following:

David Koloane's sinister dogs present a particularly dystopian perspective on urban, postcolonial Africa. Packs of yellow-eyed curs scavenging, howling, mating and fighting by the light of the moon are the denizens of the night-side, the baseline of survival in a merciless urban sphere. Their murky bodies, rendered in angry scrawls and scribbles, are barely distinguishable from the scarred backdrops from which they emerge.



Figure 3.35. David Koloane, *Mgodoyi I*, 1983.  
Charcoal and acrylic, 91 x 63 cm.  
(Goodman Gallery 2019)



Figure 3.36. David Koloane, *Mgodoyi III*, 1993.  
Five-colour lithograph, 56 x 76 cm.  
(The Artists' Press [s.a.]

In *Mgodoyi I* (1983) and *Mgodoyi III* (1993), Koloane captures this rough and near repulsive urban dog through his expressionistic and layered scratches and squiggles (Figures 3.35 and 3.36). Koloane crosshatches the dogs into visibility using the same intensity of line and colour that he used to formulate the urban backdrop where the dogs perform their transgressive, dangerous, and often destructive form of urbanness. At Koloane's funeral in 2019, former President Thabo Mbeki (2019) imposed a political interpretation of the *Mgodoyi* series, hinting that: "When [Koloane] made that series of paintings titled *Mgodoyi* he was making a statement

that there would people who want to exploit the condition of our people and behave as *mgodoyi* behaves... We should be vigilant so that we don't have *mgodoyi* taking charge of our lives". Of course, Mbeki was referencing the advent of political democracy in 1994 and how certain interests within and beyond the ANC had themselves become *mgodoyi*. Croucamp (2002:2) echoes Mbeki's analysis by suggesting that *mgodoyi* connotes "people who lack feelings and humanity and will do anything they can to survive".

If *mgodoyi* is indeed an individual who lacks humanity, and if such individuals were common in black urbanisms, how do we reconcile notions such as Ubuntu, which is universally recognised as an African performance of being and humanity, and the persistence of crime in black urbanisms? The very existence of crime within black urban communities confirms that Ubuntu is not a pre-set condition for being African. To suppose that it is, is again to essentialise the African experience. Rather, Ubuntu is an act of humanity, a deed that one accords to another through goodwill, and an attitude that is deeply inculcated in human choice. Unfortunately, this act of Ubuntu can also be subverted and bastardised, for example, when an individual takes away the humanity of another through criminality, as was the reality in black urbanisms throughout the twentieth century.



Figure 3.37. Keith Sibiya, *Untitled (Portrait)*, 1956. Pastel on Board. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation.  
(Photograph by Thania Louw)

*Untitled (Portrait)* (1956) by unheralded artist Keith Sibiya is a rare artistic snapshot of the pervasiveness of crime during the 1950s (Figure 3.37). However, it is also a representation of how a person can be stripped of their *Seriti* ('spirit' in Setswana). This highly emotive pastel drawing displays the head of a man smoking a pipe. His eyes have been erased to conceal

his personhood. The figure has a bandana tied to his forehead in a manner that was appropriated by the gang culture in prisons and streets of major cities around the world. Yet the portrait is not overtly that of a criminal. One could argue that this is a depiction of an anonymous youthful black male smoking a pipe. However, because the person could be anyone, it is in effect nobody. The 'anyone' accentuates how the criminal culture of the twentieth century is made up of hordes of ill-fated young black men who fall victim to limited opportunity and shattered hopes within racialised South African cities. Most significantly, because the figure has been partially defaced, the portrait speaks of how criminality destroys the Ubuntu or humanity of both victims and perpetrators. By denying and stealing the humanity of others, the criminal forfeits his own humanity. Sibiyi draws this disavowal of the criminal's Ubuntu or *Seriti* through the erasure of his eyes, the metaphoric removal of the window to his soul. By doing this, Sibiyi was performing Ubuntu by restoring the dignity of those affected by criminality, by metaphorically extracting the *Seriti* from the perpetrator, thus rendering the criminal un-human.

As noted before, to be black in the city was to be a criminal. Structurally, 'black cities' were spaces wherein Ubuntu was never meant to endure. Yet it did. Legal means of making a living were severely limited, and laws forbade black entrepreneurship and upward mobility, which led to the inevitability of criminal enterprise in black urbanisms. The only avenue for earning a livelihood was renting your body to whites for labour, or making money through criminal activity. Unemployment, the peer pressure of gangsterism, the construction of the black male body as always-already criminal, and the glamour associated with money as celebrated in magazines like *Drum*, resulted in criminality being aspirational.

### **3.8 Unsettling the rural-urban dialectic**

#### **3.8.1 Rural versus urban art-making praxis**

The rural-urban split augmented tensions and synergies between what is considered to be intrinsically rural-based art-making versus what is read as innately urban-based art-making. The distinction between the two was crudely demarcated along the lines of wood and stone carving and handmade ceramics as constituting rural and thereby traditional African art-making, whereas oil painting, drawing, printmaking, and sculptural practices such as bronze casting were seen as urban-based and thereby modern art forms. Wood and stone carving and certain aspects of ceramics were artistic disciplines that already had a rich heritage in Africa before the introduction of western art during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Black artists were trained in woodcarving, pottery, stone masonry, and various other

three-dimensional techniques of object making long before the establishment of art academies and studios that taught similar and new art-making techniques in the western paradigm. Therefore, these three-dimensional modes of art-making represented what can be crudely termed as localised and non-westernised black aesthetics that existed parallel to the emergence of the white art market. Naturally, the existence of these localised black art practices was bound to create fascinating theoretical and practical tensions when the practices eventually came into contact with the western art system.

Of interest here is how the conceptual tensions and possibilities that emerged from the inclusion and paradoxically sustained omission from the South African art canon of black sculptural and ceramics practices tied to representations cityness and industrial modernity by multi-local black artists based in the 'Bantustans'. As discussed in Chapter 2, the final solution for apartheid was the creation of separatist black homeland states constituted using arbitrary linguistic distinctions that existed within black communities. More so, the creation of the homelands was an attempt at reversing black urbanisation within the white industrialised cities. However, this desire to construct definite boundaries between the urban ('white city') and the rural (homelands) was compromised by artists who enjoyed intra-city Afropolitan mobility. Examples of the artists were sculptors from the northern regions of the country, namely Jackson Hlungwani, Dr Phuthuma Seoka, Noria Mabasa, Johannes Maswanganyi, Meshack Avhashoni Raphalalani, and Owen Ndou. This group of artists were what can be termed as the 'second-tier' of twentieth-century black artists as opposed to the now iconic 'first-class' black creatives such as Gerard Sekoto, George Pemba, John Mohl, and Ernest Mancoba. To be sure, I am not relegating the homeland-based artists to this 'second-tier' status, but reflecting on the critical reception of their work by the white art world, for example, when they were included in the *Tributaries*<sup>104</sup> exhibition of 1985.

Like the 'first-class' cohort, many of the homeland-based artists had benefited from the teacher training opportunities that were accorded to them, because, alongside maintaining a career in the arts, both Raphalalani and Maswanganyi worked as professional school teachers. In fact, Raphalalani obtained an Art Method teaching certificate in 1972 from the Ndaleni Training College in KwaZulu-Natal, which, although run by the apartheid government, had a vibrant art education programme that empowered countless black creatives. This teaching career meant that although the socio-economic standing of Raphalalani and Maswanganyi was not in itself ideal, they were relatively well off as compared to many other black artists of the twentieth

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<sup>104</sup> *Tributaries* was a significant exhibition. Nettleton (2000:26) says the exhibition "sent shock waves through the country's established art market". The exhibition's novelty was the inclusion of rural-based black artists next to urban-based white artists. So successful was the show that its curator and instigator, Ricky Burnett, relocated to England after its completion in 1985. Many of the now well-known black artists from Limpopo were 'discovered' by Burnett (1985) and seen for the first time at *Tributaries*.

century, because they were employed as educators and therefore could afford a moderately better material existence within the strictures of the apartheid disposition. However, despite some, if not all, of these artists having received some kind of formal, informal or non-formal tutelage in sculpting and other art forms, they were predominantly thought of as naturally gifted artists because they resided in the homelands, far away from the art academies and centres located in the big cities.

The so-called 'Bantustans' where these artists resided became sites for the development of an often unacknowledged homeland urban subjectivity. This homeland-based Afropolitan identity was palpable in the professional class who were employed in the homeland governments. Nurses, teachers, clerks, and police officials, among others, became the torchbearers of a modern urban subjectivity based in what were considered rural areas. For example, Noria Masaba was interested in illustrating these homeland Afropolitans. Although Mabasa was initially only sculpting rural subjectivities, when she joined Ditike in 1985 and through mentorship by Meshack Raphalalani and others, she turned her focus to picturing the homeland middle-classes. Ditike (which means 'support yourself' in Tshivenda) was a project of the Venda Development Corporation and was instrumental in promoting art from the Republic of Venda homeland and surrounds. David Rossouw was central to the success of Ditike until its demise in the early 1990s. Through the efforts of white interlocutors like Roussouw the artworks produced by these Venda-based artists were exposed to the art market at blockbuster exhibitions like *Tributaries* and *The Neglected Tradition*.<sup>105</sup> Nettleton (2000:29) notes that Masaba "transgressed the normal division of labour among the Venda men and women" through her involvement in Ditike.

Rural-based artists constructed their own interpretation of black modernity that "transcended" notions of rurality (Nettleton 2020:66). This aptitude is seen in Noria Mabasa's fascination with the homeland bureaucratic class from the Republic of Venda, portrayed in *Two nurses and eight soldiers*, (undated). Her small and repetitive figurines of nurses and police officers (Figure 3.38), and at times administrators dressed in suits, pointed to the prevalence of an educated, economically mobile, and increasingly well-travelled homeland-urban elite. These government professionals were highly respected within the homeland social imaginary and began to depose the pre-existing chieftaincy hierarchy as the new social, political, and economic gentry. Like their counterparts who lived and worked in the big cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, rural-based artists like Mabasa were concerned with the complex Afropolitan

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<sup>105</sup> *The neglected tradition: Towards a new history of South African art* was curated by Steven Sack and took place at the Johannesburg Art Gallery from late 1988 to 1989. This exhibition was part of the rush during the late 1980s and early 1990s to acknowledge black art by including it into the South African art canon.

subjectivities that were being performed by blacks within the metropolitans and the small towns in the homeland republics.



Figure 3.38. Noria Mabasa, *Two nurses and eight soldiers*, undated. Raw clay figures with enamel paint, 25 x 15 cm. (Bonhams 2014)



Figure 3.39. Dr Phuthuma Seoka, *Man with three faces*, c.1980s. Painted wood sculpture, 1,050 x 55 cm. Bongzi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

These visualisations of the modern urbanised African were most palpable in the representation of blacks (and at times whites) dressed in western clothing. More than any other signifier westernised dress was “linked to the emergence of particular occupational identities, which themselves reflect the powers of European modernity” (Nettleton *et al.* 2003:32). I do not suggest that the modern African could not be signified in non-western modes of dress, but rather that the most prominent markers of Afropolitan modernity were clothes associated to vocations such as nursing, teaching, preaching, administration, and the like. Essentially, dress was a class delineator, wherein the most progressive and economically mobile individuals wore clothing from the European tradition. Seoka, Maswanganyi, and Ndou dedicated much of their creative impulses towards imaging the modern urban black. The impulse towards imaging urban life is telling especially because these artists were based in the rural areas and were nevertheless creating the most exciting images of the urban black.

Like Mabasa, this tendency to depict the urban Afropolitan is evident in much of Dr Phuthuma Seoka’s<sup>106</sup> sculptures. For example, *Man with three faces* (undated) is both an iconic Seoka and at the same time uncharacteristic because it is one of a handful of sculptures where Seoka

<sup>106</sup> Dr Phuthuma Seoka was an entrepreneur from Modjadji in the Limpopo Province and was the epitome of the multi-local artist who resided in both the urban ‘black city’ and the rural village. Born in Modjadji in 1922, Seoka left school at a tender age and relocated to Johannesburg where he lived for 16 years. He eventually became an important sculptor, and his artworks can be found in prominent local and international collections.

placed three faces on the figure (Figure 3.39). Seoka was renowned for including two faces in his sculptural compositions, with the second face usually located on the midriff (front or back) of the figure. In a way, these dual faces allude to the double identities that individuals perform. WEB Du Bois (2014) (the first black academic to graduate from Harvard University) spoke of a double consciousness among African American slaves who performed a particular identity around their white masters that was distinct from how they lived among their kin. In *Man with three faces*, there is one face on the head, another on the chest, and a third on the midriff. All three faces, though varied in size, possess similar features, which confirms that they are representations of one person with multiple personalities. Another fascinating aspect is the ambiguous clothing the figure wears. It is unclear if he is wearing a uniform (perhaps of a law enforcer) or whether it is formal fashionable attire. But what is certain is that the person is a citizen of the city. Curiously, all three faces on the figure are almost expressionless. While the sculpture is monotone in body language, it is vibrantly and colourfully painted. Seoka usually finished his sculptures in paint, usually acrylics, and occasionally in enamels because enamels created a more vivid veneer.

Rural-based artists also fashioned images and narratives that explored the broader dynamics and happenings in South Africa during the twentieth century. As noted before, although these artists did not have the same transnational mobility exercised by Sekoto, Mancoba, and Feni they nevertheless did have intra-city mobility that was stifled by the various laws that prohibited the movement of black bodies across South African cities throughout the twentieth century. However, even with this curtailed movement, Limpopo-based artists still managed to travel into the major cities. Furthermore, they were au fait with the latest developments taking place throughout South Africa due to the dissemination of information through radio, newspaper, and increasingly, television during the 1980s and 1990s.

Access to information and latest developments in the city enabled rural-based black artists to make political artworks. For example, Meshack Raphalalani created the *Spirit of Revolution* (undated) sculpture that was a direct response to the 1976 protests on June 16 in Soweto located some 600km away from the then Republic of Venda homeland where Raphalalani resided (Figure 3.40). Even though there was a clear physical distance, the protest touched almost every black community in South Africa, including those in the homeland states. The protest touched black communities on two accounts. Firstly, because Soweto was a melting pot and every black ethnic and cultural group had family or friends who resided in Soweto. After the protests were broadcast to the world, these communities were worried about the livelihood of their kin in Soweto. Secondly, the ramifications of the protests were bound to

reverberate throughout South Africa as the apartheid government retaliated with extreme measures to limit similar uprisings in the rest of the country.



Figure 3.40. Meshack Raphaelalani, *Spirit of Revolution*, c.1976. Teak wood, 142 x 96 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

Amid the chaos and uncertainty that ensued after June 16, Raphaelalani produced what is perhaps the most majestic and signature sculpture of his career. It is unclear as to when the sculpture was finished, but the artist credits the June 16 happenings as the primary inspiration for its creation. The size and scale of the sculpture were slightly uncharacteristic of Raphaelalani who was prone to producing smaller, equally engaging pieces. *Spirit of the revolution* is a politically charged representation of two figures, one male with an enlarged, erect penis, and another smaller figure that stands behind this main protagonist. The male figure is poised to throw a stone in the same way that the youth in Soweto tried in vain to fight off the police using bricks and rocks. The angles, textures, and shapes that constitute the two figures are the epitome of the avant-garde sculpture of the twentieth century. Unlike Maswanganyi and Ndou who sought to reconstruct naturalistic humanlike figures (although not always successful), Raphaelalani was not concerned with these considerations and instead allowed the figures to be deformed, disproportionate, and almost organic.

This concern with blackness as a universal disposition comes across in Dr Phuthuma Seoka's *Page v Coetzee* (undated), a sculptural recording of the World Boxing Association (WBA) Heavyweight title match between Greg Page and Gerrie Coetzee in 1984 (Figure 3.41). The



match was highly politicised as many black South Africans supported Page, an African American, and much of the local white audience rooted for Coetzee, who was the WBA champion going into the fight. The artwork had a deep socio-political symbolism – the black underdog defeating the well-supported white champion. The location of the fight was also significant as it was held at Sun City, which was the grandest project in the homelands and was built by hotel developer Sol Kerzner at the cost of R30 million. The hotel was christened in 1979 by the President of Bophuthatswana, Chief Lucas Mongope, and immediately became iconic as a first-of-its-kind leisure destination in Africa. However, Sun City was also politically expedient because it showed that homelands could be economically viable (van Eeden 2000:15). Seoka's artwork debunks attempts at confining black artists to their 'tribal' identities, as Seoka suspends all associations to rurality by making a sculptural narrative that celebrates transnational black solidarity.



Figure 3.41. Dr Phuthuma Seoka, *Page v Coetzee*, undated. Carved and painted wood, 78 & 90 cm. (Strauss & Co 2018b)

In essence, and as gestured to before, homeland-based artists like Mabasa and Seoka are emblematic of black creatives who were unable to garner the same kind of recognition, celebration, and distinguished provenance seen in the careers of urban-based Mancoba, Sekoto, Maqhubela, and Feni. Besides their obvious contribution to our understanding of black urbanity in all its complexity, several important questions arise regarding these 'second-class' twentieth-century black artists. For instance, how did the urban dispensation look from the perspectives and experiences of the artists who lived in distant rural regions? How did the problematic exotic ideas that these sculptors and ceramists did not need any training impact their art-making? What were the nature of the artistic outputs of artists who were not connected to the famed Polly Street Art Centre, Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre, Federated Union of Black Artists (also known as FUBA), or the Community Arts Project conservatories and

associated networks? These questions are complex and deserving of a thesis in their own right, but are crucial to exposing the problematics of a pervasive notion of a strict rural-urban divide in the Afropolitan sphere.

Before these questions can be adequately engaged with, the oeuvre of this group of artists who were at the absolute periphery of the fine art value chain in South Africa during the twentieth century – that is until they were discovered and indexed into the art canon by Nettleton,<sup>107</sup> Burnett, Sack, and Younge – has to be unbundled from the nature versus nurture, art versus craft, and urban versus rural trap. These dichotomies resulted in Limpopo-based sculptors – and rural-based artists generally – being tagged as ‘folk artists’ (Mackenzie & Bischofberger 2009:61), which placed them in opposition to the established art canon.

This continual dismissal of black artists’ creativity as not-high-art is a double-edged blade. On the one edge, the dismissal is positive in that it positions their oeuvre as being highly marketable tourist-orientated creativity from South Africa, especially for living artists such as Mabasa and Maswanganyi who are still able to exploit this allure. However, most regrettably, the dismissal nullifies the case for their uncontested inclusion into the South African art canon, which in turn weakens the provenance of deceased artists who are perpetually framed as ‘naïve’, ‘folk’ or ‘outsider’ artists. For example, in 1990, Seoka, Maswanganyi, and others were represented in the *Art from South Africa*<sup>108</sup> catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art exhibition in Oxford. In a review of the exhibition, Perez-Barreiro (1997:92) described these artists as seeing the “world in a 'naive' manner”. This blatant misreading of their art was consistent with the inability of western art critics or scholars to see black creativity without recycling colonial binary constructs. Another point of contention is that the eventual inclusion of Seoka, Maswanganyi, Mabasa, and others, into the permanent collections of important public and corporate art collections during the 1990s was predicated on them being tagged as ‘transitional’ or ‘outsider’ artists.

Even when the sculptures or ceramics produced by black artists from the rural regions were inserted into the canon, it was done so with provisos. Basically, black sculpture or ceramics was not fully high art or fully modern and was on its way to becoming modern. Even Elza Miles uncharacteristically regurgitated these problematic categories. Miles’ chapter titled ‘Life in clay and wood’ in her expansive reading of the pioneer modern black artists chronicles the centrality

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<sup>107</sup> Here I must commend Nettleton for realising that she and her colleagues had made a miscalculation by calling these black artists ‘transitional’. In 1988, she published a well-argued article titled *The myth of the transitional* wherein she dismisses the erroneous logic of the category. Unfortunately, the damage had already been done and these ideas endured and replicated themselves in other sinister and degrading ways.

<sup>108</sup> Bar the inclusion of white artists, this exhibition and catalogue are unmistakably similar to Younge’s (1988) publication. In fact, almost all the artists from the 1989 publication are re-represented in this catalogue.

of ceramics and sculpture as transitional materials for modern black artistic expression. In her discussion of black artists who used wood such as Micha Kgasi and Daniel Maumu Tshikunde, Miles (1997:33) stresses that their artworks “reflect the customs and lives of the past and are of invaluable significance in following the *transition* from the past to modern times. They also reflect the groundwork done by artists involved in *breaching the gap between traditional expression and western modes of depiction*” (my emphasis). The notion of transitional art was coined by Randolph Bourne, an American intellectual, during the early twentieth century. Mutumba and Ngcobo (2016:s.n.) explain, “‘transitionalism’ specifies the movement of peoples and artefacts, breaking down borders and producing new identities”. To this end, Manaka (1987:12) saw the folly in calling rural-based black sculptors ‘transitional’<sup>109</sup> because, “all artists are transitional because of the eclectic nature of art”. However, for van Robbroeck (2006), the biggest problem with the label ‘transitional’ is that it pursues a teleology of development. ‘Development’ is based on the grand narrative of history as progress, which sees modernisation as inevitable and all prior art as leading to development.

Mdluli (2015:58) debunks the rural-urban binary myth by claiming that rural-based artists make artworks that “disrupt our delimitation of the category of black urban artists in that their work does not fit comfortably with the characteristics prescribed in the distinction between urban, ‘trained’ and ‘rural’, ‘untrained’ artists”.<sup>110</sup> I would like to take her assertion further by suggesting that the tropes in Seoka, Maswanganyi, and Ndou’s work are distinctly Afropolitan. Understandably, if one views sculptural art from the homeland regions through the rural versus urban prism, this perspective lends itself to misconceptions that credit the ‘naïve’ sculpture-gene as being distinctly rural. In truth, black sculptors from all around South Africa, in both rural and urban spaces were extremely prolific in their representation of urban subjectivities throughout the twentieth century (see Pissarra 2013). What made the Limpopo and specifically the Venda situation rather unique, was that the Republic of Venda homeland government invested in and supported the development of art in the region (Nettleton 2000). Through the Venda Development Corporation, Venda-based artists were provided with various sustenance mechanisms that enabled their art (mostly sculpture and ceramics) to be marketed and promoted more efficiently than their counterparts throughout the rest of South Africa. The success of Venda-based artists naturally attracted the attention of other artists from the region, such as Johannes Maswanganyi (a Xitsonga speaker from Giyani). The marketing success then led to the erroneous deduction that all sculptural art emanating from the northern parts of

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<sup>109</sup> Mdluli (2015:60) highlights the drawbacks of identifying these artists as ‘transitional’ because the term “devised a formula that in the end limited interpretations and other ways of thinking about particular art forms”. At this stage I must again stress that the core of this research project is the desire to rethink and rename these creative legacies.

<sup>110</sup> I must stress that Mdluli specifically referred to Titus Matiyane and Tito Zungu when making this statement about ‘trained’ and ‘untrained’ artists, but the statement nevertheless applies to Seoka, Maswanganyi, and Ndou.

the country was produced by Venda artists. Also, and as highlighted before, the exhibitions created a myth that Venda artists are somehow naturally great at sculpting, as opposed to painting or drawing, for example. Thus, some Venda-based artists, like Avhashoni Mainganye,<sup>111</sup> who was inclined to create two-dimensional mixed-media work and found it hard to shed the expectation to produce sculptures and ceramics.



Figure 3.42. Percy Konqobe, *Read all about it, Sydney's gone*, 1989. Bronze sculpture. Bongzi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

While I have dedicated much of my discussion of sculptural output by black artists to those who were largely based in rural areas, city-based black artists also created phenomenal sculptures of urban-based black subjectivities. One of the foremost black artists and educators of the twentieth century, Sydney Kumalo, was one of the few black sculptors who garnered a reputation as a black fine art sculptor. In part, his canonisation was due to his use of materials like bronze, which were held in higher regard than wood and clay. Kumalo's influence on a generation of black artists was symbolised by Percy Konqobe's *Read all about it, Sydney's gone* (1989), a bronze sculpture that chronicles Kumalo's passing (Figure 3.42). The sculpture shows a man holding newspapers (a common image in all big cities during the previous century) containing the story of Kumalo's death. The disproportionate posture of the man, where his legs are significantly larger, makes the otherwise smallish figure look monumental.

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<sup>111</sup> Born in Venda in 1957, Mainganye was trained at Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre in KwaZulu-Natal where he was introduced to printmaking and painting. Throughout his career Mainganye became a master etcher but could not shake the 'Venda artist' expectation to produce sculptures in wood.

When looking through twentieth-century bronze sculptures produced by black artists that represent the human figure, it is uncommon to find fully naturalistic figures.

### **3.8.2 Towards multi-local black art**

One of the primary motivations for pursuing this study is to complicate the rural-urban schism. There exists an undue binary between the seemingly modern creativity of the urban artist and the traditional work produced by creatives based in the rural hinterland. I have already argued that we need to think of the migrant labourer who lived on the rural outskirts of the city as a multi-local worker. The same logic should be applied to the art that was created by rural-based artists who went to the city seasonally. Such artists were creating multi-local art. Multi-local artworks are images that borrow, unreservedly, from both the rural and urban domains. Multi-local art uses idioms, styles, art-making strategies, and tools accorded to its maker from either the urban or the rural locale. Within this art, a more harmonious interaction is recognised between urban and rural subjectivities, where the one is not pre-eminent over the other.

During his 1940s grand tour of various South African cities, Pemba was surprised to find urban-based blacks performing rural subjectivities within the city. Reflecting on his experiences in his diary Pemba wrote that “I did not expect to find any tribal life in the city. I was more than surprised to find whole tribes working in their dress on the mines” (quoted in Hudleston 1996:40). Pemba felt that Durban, frequented by both Mnguni and Bhengu, had “much more Native originality” than any of the cities he had visited (quoted in Hudleston 1996:41). Pemba was more comfortable in rural environments, such as Basotholand (Lesotho) and Mbumbulu (75km from Durban). Hudleston (1996:43) remarked that these encounters with other rural villages in South Africa were “the land of [Pemba’s] dreams”. In July 1935, Pemba confided to his friend, Mfundisi, that “I like rural life in spite of having been born and bred in town” (quoted in Hudleston 1996:26). To appreciate Pemba’s feelings here, restating his own biography is important. Pemba was a product of New African professionals and grew up in a city. As the son of very Christian parents, he tended to romanticise the rural and tribal (that he did not personally experience), so that his admiration for it constituted a kind of nostalgia similar to white artists’ romantic notions of ‘the primitive’. That said, some black artists felt more at home in the tranquil rural settings, whereas others were comfortable with the speed and commotion of the city. Both sets of artists were multi-local because they existed in between and in many ways beyond the rural and the urban paradigms. As argued, they could exist, function, and manoeuvre between these spaces seamlessly. By extension, the types of images they produced were also multi-local in their nature and stylistics, reflecting the coming together of

the rural and urban positionalities of the people they captured and the fusion of artistic traditions from the rural and urban paradigms.



Figure 3.43. Simon Mnguni, *Portrait of an elderly gentleman*, undated. Watercolour on paper, 27.44 x 22 cm. (Self-portrait [s.a.]

Some of the earliest examples of this multi-local art were the portraits created by Simon Mnguni. According to Gule (2010:122), Mnguni's work exudes a refined "technical accomplishment". It is unclear as to when Mnguni created his first images, but it was certainly around the mid-1920s that he pursued being an artist as a fulltime venture. In *Portrait of an elderly gentleman* (undated), Mnguni represents a side-view portrait of an older man (Figure 3.43). The man is adorned in Zulu regalia, evidenced by necklaces and fur hat, while the button-up jacket points to a western subjectivity. In essence, this watercolour painting is that of a westernised Zulu man who was comfortable in displaying his creole identity through the mixture of different clothing traditions.

According to Blokland (2014:179), urban black life or "township culture typically blends traditional indigenous customs and rituals with modern western urban ways". To this end, it was not uncommon to find images of Sangomas and rural peoples within the creativity of urban-based artists. *Still-life with Sangoma's bones and other objects* (1964) is a still-life composition by Simon Lekgetho of various items used by *Sangomas* and spotlights the prominence of non-Christian African religious practices within the urban home (Figure 3.44). Miles credits this painting for inspiring "a significantly African dimension to still-life painting" (quoted in Proud 2006:150). The delicate, smooth style in which the objects are treated reveal a kind of reverence for the items and the rituals they performed. In this work, Lekgetho<sup>112</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Lekgetho probably produced this painting in his Ga-Rankuwa residence. His studio was initially located in Lady Selbourne, north of the Pretoria CBD, until the forced removals of 1958 when blacks were violently relocated to

reminds the viewer that Sangomas were significant aspects of urban life for blacks. Despite the best intentions of the Christian missionaries to discourage traditional beliefs and practices “belief in magic and science simply coexisted” (Macamo 2005a:90). Other city-based artists like Nhlanhla Xaba also dealt with themes related to African spirituality within an urban setting. Xaba’s *Ancestral objects* (1987) is a pastel drawing of collaged images that point to classical African religiosity (Figure 3.45). Two huts, a unisex figure wearing what seems to be Sangoma regalia, an enlarged commemorative sculpture, and other random non-recognisable items have been put together to create a colourful spiritual map, akin to the floor of a Sangoma’s consultation room when they throw an assortment of bones and objects to receive guidance from the ancestors.

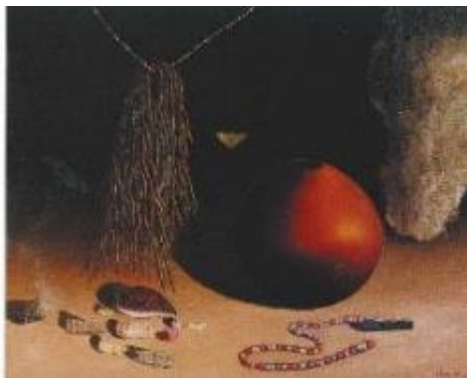


Figure 3.44. Simon Lekgetho, *Still-life with Sangoma’s bones and other objects*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 74 cm. (Proud 2006:s.n.)



Figure 3.45. Nhlanhla Xaba, *Ancestral Objects*, 1987. Pastel on Paper, 35 x 52 cm. Bongzi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

In what is perhaps the closest publication dealing with the representation of urbanisation by black artists, Siebrits (2003a) includes pictures of the land as part of the introductory section of the catalogue. Siebrits’s (2003a:s.n.) justification for including images of the rural hinterland and rural subjects in his *Art and urbanisation* exhibit is that the advent of mines in Johannesburg’s Rand region and the rapid urbanisation the mines induced led to “detransformation and the destruction of a traditional way of life”. However, what is evident in many of the artworks created by urban-based black artists dealing with the rural experience, is the transformation and renewal of these traditional customs and rural environments, and not necessarily their demise. Almost a century of rampant urbanisation has proven beyond doubt that rural practices and sensibilities have not been completely compromised nor destroyed. Like all cultural activities, they have taken on new and recalibrated life forms. Thus, urban-

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Ga-Rankuwa and later Soshanguve. Lekgetho lived and worked in Ga-Rankuwa until his death in 1985 (Miles in Hobbs 2006:150).

based black artists were able to reconcile numerous conflicting forces with relative ease within their multi-local art.

### 3.9 The influence of the market on Afropolitan expression

Throughout the discussions of these portrayals of the city, I have touched on the role of the market in advancing the work and careers of particular artists. In this subsection, I spotlight the defining impact the art market played in supporting and patronising certain representations of urban black life. In many ways, the visualisations of urbanisation created by black artists that are today celebrated as iconic were endorsed and propagated by the white market and its legitimating entities, such as the media, publishing houses, and academic institutions. For example, it is well-known that the appetites of white consumers is their desire to see 'naïve' or 'quirky' or 'untrained' art from black artists, for whichever reasons. The white consumers' desire filtered back into the studios and homes of black artists who sought to give the market what it wanted. Ironically, the same white patrons of black art accused black artists of creating 'factories' to mass-produce work for the urban markets, among other accusations. When the market became saturated with the same images the white consumers had initially demanded, the value of the art produced by the rural-based artists plummeted due to over-production. Mdluli (2015) is critical of how, after the *Tributaries* in 1985 and *The Neglected Tradition* in 1988 exhibitions, rural-based artists supposedly inserted into the canon by these legitimating exhibitions vanished into obscurity. While some artists became regular features in the local art scene, they certainly did not attain the recognition and market value that was enjoyed by their Soweto-based peers, for example. However, urban-based black artists fell into the same misfortune when there was an oversupply of their renderings of so-called 'township life'. Thus, the white art market played an ambivalent role in both generating a demand for scenes of urban black life, while at the same time sowing the seeds that led to the decline in the economic value and cultural gravitas of the same images.

At this juncture, I must raise the issue of how urban black art was seen as repetitive and self-duplicative. Indeed, one of the grand criticisms levelled against so-called Township Art was how certain styles and representational modes seemed to recycle themselves across artists, which resulted in a 'production-line' type of art. To a degree, it is understandable why certain artists were tempted to appropriate styles from their peers who appeared more successful because they too desired to achieve similar commercial spinoffs. However, many artists lamented this copy-cat culture, which was rife among Soweto artists. Displeasure that was vented by the sculptor Stanley Nkosi: "[t]he problem is that there is too much copying which lowers the standard of many black artists in this country. We've got talent. If only we worked



harder and explored new avenues we would definitely be great” (quoted in Ngwenya 1980:21). This quote proves that the desire to achieve new and exciting styles existed among urban-based black artists, but equally, they had to align their art with the demands of the market was a far stronger imperative.

Ute Scholz (1980), a lecturer in the department of art history at the University of Pretoria, made the bold claim that without white patronage, black art – which for the most part catalogued urban life – could not have flourished as it did. As she put it:

South African black artists on the whole depend on European sponsorship. One can even go so far as to say that without the Europeans who have recognised their work and have offered encouragement and advice, contemporary black art could hardly have developed, nor would it have found a market. This does not mean that the urban blacks have no appreciation for their own art, which mirrors their everyday situation. The contrary can be proved. However, the black man in the street is not yet able to afford the luxury of buying original works of art, and moreover, European colour prints are still very popular decorations in black urban dwellings (my emphasis) (Scholz 1980:14).

While the charge that without the white art market, urban black art ‘could hardly have developed’ is scandalous, it confirms that the nature and stylistics of the representations of cityness by black artists were tied to the tastes and gaze of the white market. Without doubt, white patronage of black art, especially at an institutional level, much exceeded that of black on black benefaction,<sup>113</sup> and it is therefore unsurprising that the main consumers of these images of the city held some sway over the way it was depicted. However, black artists still performed a great degree of agency in how they navigated the selfish interests of the white art market, on the one hand, and the imperative to depict their own view of the city on the other. For example, Siebrits (2003b:22) reveals that Fikile Magadlela (commonly referred to as Fikile), whose work was extremely popular and highly sought after by white collectors, post an exhibition at the *Goodman Gallery* in 1979, “decided not to use galleries, choosing to market his work directly to the residents of the townships”. This desire to create a market for his art among his own people was primarily motivated by the exploitative and prescriptive tendencies of the white art market that required work with particular stylistics and content.

Spaces like the *Goodman Gallery*, widely recognised as the most influential privately run gallery in South Africa’s modern history, were central in advancing a particular representation of black urbanness. Since opening its doors in 1966 as a storefront in Hyde Park

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<sup>113</sup> The influence of black on black patronage on the aesthetics of urban black art demands the same sensitive attention that white on black patronage has received previously (for example in Rankin 1990, Powell 1995a), something which I cannot cover within this section.

Johannesburg, the *Goodman Gallery* became an important site for promoting the most enduring and eclectic visualisations of black subjectivity produced by urban-based black artists. Dumile Feni, Julian Motau and Ezrom Legae were among the first black artists to show at the fledgling gallery during the 1960s and 1970s. As Hecker (2011:88) outlines, the *Goodman Gallery* “exhibited art with a political edge and encouraged non-racial gatherings, which often resulted in police raids”. That the *Goodman Gallery* positioned itself as a space where black artists could engage with the city, both visually and literally, in ways that upset the apartheid security services should not be undermined. Moreover, while some black artists like Fikile were rightfully disillusioned with the *Goodman*, seeing it as a conduit of the white art market, others like Koloane have credited the gallery for expanding his horizons and elevating the value of his work, which almost exclusively explored the dynamics of urbanisation and its impact on blacks (Mutumba & Ngcobo 2016). Ultimately, the white market was complicit in patronising and canonising certain depictions of cityness by black artists while denouncing others.

### **3.10 The influence of art education on Afropolitan expression**

Like the market, art educational spaces also played a part in perpetuating particular expressions of black urban living. Most, if not all, of the first generation of modern black artists yearned for formal westernised art tutelage. However, they were sadly denied access into white universities that were themselves offering fledgling art programmes during the 1920s and 1930s. Ironically, these black artists obtained art training via the mission schools and benign contributions from liberal white sympathisers (Rankin 1989b:3). This first tier of twentieth-century black artists, such as Sekoto, Mohl, Pemba, and Mancoba were trained as professional teachers, which meant they had a middle-class status. As noted before, these artists enjoyed transnational mobility where they could study and work in other countries like France, England, Senegal, Germany and others, unlike their rural-based counterparts who could only access an inter-city mobility within South Africa. This international mobility had an impact on how they depicted urbanness in their art, with some of them, like Mancoba, opting to use abstract and avant-garde approaches in his visualisations of the world, especially after relocating to Europe (Naidoo 2019). In the main, their Christianised training resulted in highly sanitised, non-confrontational, and mostly picturesque representations of black urbanisation (for example, Gerard Sekoto’s *Yellow houses*). It was only from the 1960s onwards that more aggressive, visceral, violent, and politically charged representations of urban black life began to emerge.

However, the confluence between the black artist as both teacher and the practising artist continued into the second half of the twentieth century when aspirant artists used teacher training colleges roughly as art academies. Spaces that allowed the nurturing of professional black artists were too few. However, sites like Ndaleni Training College in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands that was operated by the apartheid government between 1952 and 1981, were instrumental in creating an environment for almost 1000 black graduates of its programme to “study and develop their art” (Magaziner 2016:4). According to Rankin (1989b:12), “in the context of the 1950s [Ndaleni Training College] offered probably the most programmed art training available to black students... including classes in art history, design, picture making, clay modelling, crafts, and wood carving”.<sup>114</sup> During its operational years, the college was inundated with prospective students who wanted to obtain this formalised and overtly westernised art education opportunity. However, the school could only produce about 30 graduates annually (van Rensburg c.1975:60).

When apartheid took hold in 1948, many of the church-run mission schools were closed or taken over by the state. Nevertheless, ironically, new avenues for art education opened up during this time with the creation of night schools like the Polly Street Art Centre<sup>115</sup> in Johannesburg in 1949. This art centre and many other state-sponsored community centres mushroomed throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The centres were instrumental in introducing urban-based black artists to modern art styles and techniques. These art centres were critical spaces for both skilling and enabling the participating artists to produce their idiosyncratic reflections of urban black life. However, the desire to preserve the Africanness of the black students who attended workshops at Polly Street Art Centre during the Cecil Skotnes<sup>116</sup> era was consistent with the tendency of whites to steer black artistic interpretations of the world towards tribalist and Africanist tropes. For example, Ephraim Ngatane eschewed the teachings of Polly Street Art Centre by joining Durant Sihlali’s ‘weekend painters’ group in 1955, “which shared a belief in creating more naturalistic renditions of township life than had been taught at Polly Street [Art Centre]” (Bester *et al.* 2009:7).

According to Powell (1995a), teachers and mentors like Skotnes and Walter Battiss were the main culprits for the proliferation of a certain convention of art-making among black artists

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<sup>114</sup> It is worth noting here that the teachers-cum-artists who received their training at Ndaleni Training College, such as Meshack Raphalalani, Anthony Makou, were not taken seriously as artists by their peers from other art institutions like Rorke’s Drift Art and Craft Centre.

<sup>115</sup> Polly Street Art Centre was located in the Johannesburg CBD and moved from Polly Street to Eloff Street during the late 1950s to become the Jubilee Art Centre. However, on account of the Group Areas Act of 1955, its activities were again relocated to Mofolo Art Centre in Soweto during the early 1970s (Koloane 1996).

<sup>116</sup> Cecil Skotnes was a celebrated artist and educator. From 1952 to 1965 he was the principal teacher and coordinator at the Polly Street Art Centre. Mdanda (2018) prefers to think of Skotnes’s contribution to Polly Street Art Centre as that of a mentor rather than an outright teacher.

based in the Witwatersrand region. Again, this is an indisputable argument insofar as the imprint of the teacher, no matter how insignificant, can never fully escape the prodigy. However, many black artists found these associations to be demeaning of their own creative potential because whatever visual language they developed was always linked to a master teacher. More often than not, this student-master dialectic took on a racialised character, where the white male artist was the all-knowing master, and the black student artist was the empty vessel that needed to be filled with knowledge. For example, Ezrom Legae, who was always introduced as having being trained by Sydney Kumalo and Cecil Skotnes, elucidated that “Sydney and Cecil were not really my teachers. They only liberated my mind and creativity, and after that, they set me free to discover things on my own” (quoted in Ngwenya 1979:16).

Another institution that was seminal in the development of modern black art in South Africa was the Rorke’s Drift Art and Craft Centre established in 1962 in KwaZulu-Natal in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The fine art section operated until 1982. Many of the artists discussed in this study, some of whom went on to run other prominent art centres and schools throughout the country, were trained at Rorke’s Drift Art and Craft Centre. While it is near impossible to determine the exact causal relationship between the promptings the teachings provided at art schools like Rorke’s Drift and the type of images of urbanisation produced by black artists, it is undeniable that Rorke’s Drift, and all the other art schools that gave training to black students, provided the context from which many of the celebrated representations of cityness were produced. I must stress here that the location of some of these seminal art schools like Rorke’s Drift and Ndaleni was significant in dispelling the rural-urban binary. Both schools were located in the non-urban regions of KwaZulu-Natal, yet many of their students either came from the city or relocated there after completing their studies in order to establish their art careers. Thus, these rural-based schools (Rorke’s Drift and Ndaleni especially) had a profound influence on how black artists aestheticised their urban subjectivities.

Another point is that black artists in some of these educational spaces preferred to refer to themselves as cultural workers, to display solidarity and in revolt against western perceptions of the artist as individualist rather than collectivist. In 1985, the artist Thami Mnyele was assassinated by the apartheid government on account of his political activism a few months shy of his 37<sup>th</sup> birthday. He noted that making art in and of itself was not enough for the liberation work that had to be done. Other extra-artistic duties like doing “practical organisational work within the arts” was an absolute requirement of the freedom project (Mnyele 1986:28). As noted before, this kind of sentiment resulted in the proliferation of visualisations of urbanness that were politically rich and constitutive of the ‘resistance art’ trope.

Furthermore, within the confines of their buildings, the art centres became transgressive spaces that suspended, albeit temporarily, the problematic race dynamics that dominated the rest of South Africa's society. Speaking of the Community Arts Project in Cape Town, Lochner (2011:104) affirms how the centre was "an important space for people to cross the racial boundaries imposed by apartheid and to imagine community in a free South Africa". The problematic white-master black-student relationship prevailed in spaces like the Polly Street Art Centre where Cecil Skotnes was the lead instructor for over a decade. White-master black-student hierarchies were compromised when black instructors like Sydney Kumalo took on a more active role at the Polly Street Art Centre – even though he worked under the leadership of Skotnes. By the 1980s and early 1990s, the training avenues for aspirant black artists had increased significantly on account of the large investments into black urbanisms by the government and its allies (like the Urban Foundation), which were mostly overseen and run by black artists, educators, and administrators. The absence of the 'white hand' at these institutions had a profound impact on the nature of the work produced by the black students, and on the teacher-student dynamic. Spaces like Mofolo Arts Centre (established in 1972) and Funda Community College<sup>117</sup> (established in 1984) both in Soweto, and the Federated Union of Black Artists (established in 1978) in Johannesburg, were magnet institutions that provided essential art skills to aspirant black artists from around the country. In the end, these various training spaces were insulated from the racial segregation that surrounded them. Equally, these same spaces were a microcosm of the urban context in which they operated.

While I have noted the influence of the market and art institutions on how black artists visualised the city, I do not mean to oversubscribe the impact these external vectors had at the cost of the agency black artists displayed in their encounter with these spaces. Macdonald (2020:1) argues that there has to be an appreciation of the "multiple transactions by which black artists have navigated an institutionalised art economy of non-opportunity". Macdonald (2020) reminds us that while black artists appreciated the 'opportunities' accorded to them by the formalised art industry, they were equally suspicious and cautious of over-celebrating the role of the 'white-hand' in the development of urban black art. To stress his point, Macdonald references the words of Cyprian Shilakoe (quoted in Rakgoathe 1973:68), who emphatically declared that "I do not always have to be saying thank you" to the benevolence of white people.

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<sup>117</sup> It is worth noting here that white collaborators were still highly instrumental in the success of these black art schools. For example, in 1984 Steven Sack was seconded by the University of South Africa to head-up of the African Institute of Art, which was located at the Funda Community College. Lize van Robbroeck, a young scholar at the time, also art history part time at Funda when she was still lecturer at Unisa during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among her students were the likes of Matsemela Manaka, Avhashoni Mainganye, and Sydney Selepe.

### 3.11 Representational practices and Afropolitan spaces

An ongoing debate within theories of the representational production of space is the role of representational practices in how people interact with their real and lived environments (Healey 2007). Do discursive representations of space in literature and art influence how people relate to those sites? Speaking specifically on the role literature plays in the making of urban space, Boehmer and Davies (2015:396) rephrase this question more poignantly when they ask: “Can creative practices such as literary writing, that explicitly engage with cities, ask questions of urban space and its infrastructural coordinates, perhaps then stimulating different modes of spatial imagining?” For example, can someone read a book about Johannesburg and after reading that text begin to see and experience the city in a qualitatively different way due to the alternate “conceptual pathways” produced by the book that enables the reader to go “through, around, and beyond the city’s delimitations”? (Boehmer & Davies 2015:396).

To substantiate the claim that representations of the city have a material effect on people’s phenomenological encounter of the urban, Boehmer and Davies provide examples of textual and visual work by black creatives in South Africa. First, Boehmer and Davies reference the poetry of Mongane Serote, Mafika Gwala, and Oswald Mtshali, and conclude that “this writing not only critically investigated the lines of the urban landscape by reiterating and retracing them, therefore; it also on some levels sought to imagine, if not actually to trigger, their collapse from within” (Boehmer & Davies 2015:401). Boehmer and Davies also cite the work of Zafrica Cabral, who created a series of drawings, sketches, and mappings of Johannesburg titled *Gold in Graphite, Jozi Sketchbook* (2010). In Boehmer and Davies’ evaluation of Cabral’s visual renderings of Johannesburg, they underscore the role of artists in reshaping the experience of the urban environment. In their final analysis, Boehmer and Davies (2015:403) emphasise that both the visual and written “accounts of the city begin imaginatively and conceptually to resist the spatial control and social engineering that political and legal infrastructures are designed to instate”. Bremner reaches a similar conclusion when reviewing the work produced as part of a project with students from the Wits School of Arts called ‘Joburg: Interpreting the city’: “Fiction (and by extrapolation, other forms of cultural production) was validated as a source of evidence, in this case of the transforming city, but more generally for architectural enquiry” (Bremner 2010:265).

While I agree with Boehmer and Davies’ position that creative artefacts can reform and refract how we experience the urban space, representational practices can only be effective if accompanied by the transgressive social actions of those who inhabit the city. The symbolic reinventions of colonial cities in South Africa are only meaningful because of the actual people’s movements that reorder the city away from its segregationist format. The artistic

reclamations of urbanisation by black artists during the twentieth century and associated human agency of blacks who lived through this urbanisation are intertwined in a unitary dance that sought to uproot the divisive nature of urban South Africa. To this end, socio-political agency and artistic representation are bedfellows that rely upon each other to achieve the ultimate goal of decentring the ideal conceived space.

While Lefebvre duly accounts for lived practices as one of the pillars in the production of space continuum, there is a general lack of acknowledgement of the agency of blacks who experienced and influenced urbanisation in South Africa throughout the twentieth century. Beeckmans (2013:620) speculates that:

A possible reason why the role of local actors in the production of urban space has been given so little attention could be the many difficulties researchers face in the study of historical processes of agency, as these are very difficult to retrace directly from institutional sources such as archival documents, annual reports or official correspondence.

Analysing the transformative impact of protest movements, squatter campaigns, boycotts, strikes, and the strategic vandalisation of urban property and transport networks is indeed a complex task. As a result, it is always suggestive and speculative when drawing links between the agency of black urban dwellers and their art, and the impact the two had on the nature of twentieth-century urbanisation. My fear is that the non-acknowledgement of black agency also renders the creative expressions of that agency impotent. Appropriate appraisals of the art of urban-based black artists can only be done by properly accounting for the century-long struggles and triumphs of blacks who occupied those urban systems. A denial of the struggles and triumphs is a stain on the appraisal of the artworks that catalogued these experiences.

It is fitting to close this section with the words of Roque *et al.* (2016:657) regarding how blacks navigated the colonial city of Maputo in Mozambique during its occupation by the Portuguese. Roque *et al.* (2016:657) note that, “through their movements and everyday productions – forms of economy and of sociability and leisure – they bridge the different spaces and contribute to the emergence of new ways of being urban and to shaping new notions of cityness”. The central claim here is that the disenfranchised in colonial Maputo used “sociability and leisure”, including various artistic practices, to weave “new notions of cityness”. It is these novel and alternate notions of cityness that are found in the work of black artists. Whether or not there is a causal link between images produced by black artists sketching the urban environment and how blacks interacted with the city is immaterial. These imagined depictions of urbanisation were subjective outpourings of how black society as a whole rationalised their frustrations, aspirations, fears, and overall experiences of the urban space. Livesey (2004:13)

acknowledges that there are multiple forms of comprehending the modern city, including the arts, writing that “the plethora of languages involved in defining the systems of spaces that comprise the post-industrial city must be seen as the basis for the continuing evolution of the city as an ongoing project”.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have ascribed alternative terms for thinking through the twentieth urban experiences of blacks and the art that catalogued these experiences. In her celebrated study on what makes individuals unique among other equally unique persons, Tshivhase (2018:19) shows that “notions of irreplaceability, incomparability, and rarity fundamentally help to define uniqueness of persons among persons”. Regrettably, art historical discourses in South Africa and beyond collapsed the uniqueness of twentieth-century urban black art into totalising terms such as Township Art, transitional art, resistance art, and outsider art. By renaming such creativity through redemptive theoretical frameworks such as Afropolitanism and multi-locality, I hope to unsettle the problematic racial classifications and false binaries imposed on urbanised blacks and their representations of urbanisation.

Magaziner (2016:7) pronounces that “people everywhere are creative beings, capable of making manifest their unique visions of the world”. Segregation was unable to crush and suppress the creative spirit within urbanised and multi-local black artists throughout the twentieth century. In his exploration of how blacks transformed the ‘black city’ into a home, Dlamini (2009:19) stresses that we should never forget that there is “a richness, a complexity of life among black South Africans that not even colonialism and apartheid at their worst could destroy”. Joy, self-actualisation, and love existed in racialised and underdeveloped black urbanisms of the twentieth century. The selected artworks in the various categories, groupings, and tropes presented throughout this chapter are representations of how blacks encountered and influenced urbanisation in South Africa as an Afropolitan experience.



## CHAPTER 4: Being black in urban South Africa during the twentieth century

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore, in more specific references, the multidimensional experiences of blacks who populated South African cities and towns. Although the history of urban South Africa dates back to the seventeenth century, this thick description of black urbanisation focuses expressly on the twentieth century. The reading provides examples of black agency in the white-controlled urban spaces by zooming into carefully selected situations and events. I do not provide a comprehensive historiographic discussion about urban-based black actionism. Instead, I sketch the seminal nodal points of black urban life during the twentieth century that are foundational to appreciate the kind of art that was produced by black artists from that era. Throughout the chapter, I explore the worldviews that permeated the imaginations of urban-based blacks as expressed by black writers and intellectuals. I discuss the theoretical polemics related to being black in the urban sphere alongside the historical events that shaped these concepts. I must stress that this account does not pretend to be a comprehensive literature review of all the texts produced by black writers who explored or reflected on the lives of urban-based blacks during the last century. Apart from published books, the print media was also central in disseminating the ideas and personal reflections of urban-based blacks throughout the twentieth century. Therefore, I cite numerous statements from newspapers such as *Ilanga Lase Natal* (est. 1903) and *The Bantu World* (est. 1932) as examples of popular black discourse about urbanisation and urban experience.

Since the primary aim of this study is to review the representation of urbanisation by black artists, throughout the chapter, I reference artworks that illustrate and complement my historicisation of twentieth-century black urbanisation. While the narrative on black urbanisation is structured in a roughly chronological schema, the associated discussion of the artworks that represented these realities overlaps across various generations. For example, some phenomena that began during the early twentieth century were only represented much later during the 1980s and 1990s. As I showed in Chapter 3, the relationship between the tactile experiences of urban life and their artistic representations were simultaneously entangled and yet mutually exclusive – but in non-oppositional ways. The artworks sampled here were inspired by real-world phenomena, but equally were complete and autonomous texts that transcended those situations and markers.

The chapter is segmented into two broad sections. The first section explored the period from the 1900s until the 1940s when the country and its urban hubs were under the administration of the Union of South Africa. Although the urban advancements during the first half of the twentieth century were a continuation of developments from the late nineteenth century, the founding of the Union of South Africa in 1910 signalled the start of the 'South Africanisation' of local cities. The bulk of the content engages with the efforts of black agents who sought to make sense of and take advantage of early twentieth-century urbanisation. The second section explores the urban changes post World War II. South Africa's urban landscape was radically reformed by political and economic changes during the late 1940s. Due to severe economic, social and political costs, the war compromised British imperial rule across the world. In South Africa, the weakening of the British Empire enabled the rise of the Afrikaner-controlled National Party to the apex of political power. The handover of political power to the Afrikaner Nationalists brought with it drastic alterations to the character of urban life for black inhabitants.

When mapping this chapter, one of the big concerns was about the sources and voices I could lean on to obtain a balanced recording of the urban experiences of blacks throughout the twentieth century. Although it would be logical to suggest that the voices of black inhabitants who lived through this history are the most authentic and authoritative sources of information, the actual answer is slightly more complex. While I refer to black accounts to take note of the phenomenological experience of black urbanisation, I have to rely on white writers for an account of the contextual logistics and discourses underpinning urban planning. The fact that urban planning leading up to and throughout the twentieth century was a preserve of white agents, coupled with the reality that white scholars conducted most of the official studies and reports about this phenomenon, means that the white influence cannot be eschewed. Since the development of modern urbanisation in South Africa was intertwined with colonial history, both the imaging and imagining of the city was informed by western imperialist presuppositions regarding modernity as a western preserve. The presuppositions perpetuated the trope of the African primitive as fundamentally incompatible with modernity. These discourses underpin white South African urban planning and the white writings about the black experience of the city. These white voices, problematic as they are, were fundamental in recording the nuances of black life in urban South Africa during the previous century. Therefore, what follows is a delicately balanced reading of how black and white voices recorded the urbanisation of blacks throughout the twentieth century.

## 4.2 The politics of the urban: Negotiating white governmentality

In Chapter 2, I explored how white thought systems, politics, and policies played a defining role in the materialisation of urban South Africa. Throughout this chapter, I refer to the endeavours of black agents who retaliated against the control. However, at times there were benevolent actions taken by white administrators during the twentieth century, henceforth labelled the 'white hand'. The 'white hand' denotes a kind of urban governmentality that the semi-British controlled Union of South Africa and later the Afrikaner-run Republic of South Africa sought to wield on indigenous and exogenous people of colour. Although this chapter examines the undertakings of blacks, specifically, the 'white hand' was omnipresent in how blacks performed their agency. The 'white hand' consisted of both local and international characters and was a very visible and yet at times clandestine force that used a range of resources to assert its governmentality over the black populace. The regulation and policing of the urban-based black populations was part of the 'whitification' of the city that repurposed intellectual and state resources to safeguard white urban interests and privilege. At times, the strategies used by the 'white hand' were contradictory and self-defeating.

First coined by Michael Foucault during the 1970s in his analyses of power and how state authority is reproduced in modern societies, governmentality refers "to the complex array of techniques – programs, procedures, strategies, and tactics – employed by both non-state administrative agencies and state institutions to shape the conduct of individuals and populations" (Gabardi 2001:82). Governmentality is an ideal term to refer to the arsenal of structures and laws that white authorities deployed to control and frustrate the urbanisation process for blacks at the turn of the twentieth century. White governmentality was initially introduced during the years of colonisation, since, as Mbembe (2003:25) confirms: "Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area – of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations". The success of the colonising effort required the imposition of rigid and restrictive legal statutes aimed at controlling the colonised. Governmentality was initiated during the colonial contact and yet found its most refined expression within the urban climate of the twentieth century. Mbembe (2003:26) singles out apartheid spatial organisation as a symbolic late-modern manifestation of white governmentality wherein "the township was the structural form, and the homelands became the reserves (rural bases) whereby the flow of migrant labour could be regulated and African urbanisation held in check".

While acknowledging the overriding presence of white governmentality, Li (2007:76) reminds us that "Governmental power is not homogenous and totalising. It has limits". The actions of those in power, no matter how absolute their authority may be, are always compromised by

the agency and transgressive activities of the subjugated. As Li (2007:280) cautions: “While the will to govern is expansive, there is nothing determinate about the outcomes”. The results of governmentality are never identical to the designs of those in power. The disrupted aims of governmentality are certainly the case throughout twentieth-century South Africa.

Distopian<sup>118</sup> qualities were ingrained within the urban black masses who sought to undercut the racialised systems of colonial and apartheid South Africa, and yet wanted to advance their own political, educational, economic, and social interests through the very same state apparatus. The black urbanities did not want to destroy the existing capitalist modern infrastructure and systems completely. Rather, black urbanites wanted to undo the racist and exclusionary nature of the infrastructure and systems by expanding the pool of beneficiaries to include people who were not classified as white.

In order to advance their distopian interests within the urban space, blacks used the ‘white hand’ subversively. Blacks took advantage of the scant opportunities offered by the system to ameliorate their plight and to gain moderate educational and economic ascendancy. For urban blacks, whites had a defining role to play in the modernisation and integration of Africans into the globalised capitalist ecosystem. For example, black thinkers re-appropriated the notion of ‘the white man’s burden’, which symbolised the moral duty Europeans had placed on themselves to ‘civilise the primitive Africans’, and used it as a bargaining chip for whites to assist the black cause. In 1903, *Ilanga Lase Natal* published an article seemingly directed at white readers of the paper that outlined how the lack of adequate accommodation for blacks jeopardised the beauty and order of Durban. The writer of the article notes:

I do not think it speaks well for our Durban people to see their Natives eating bread standing on the street, without even a place to sit down and enjoy their bread. We think it is a part of the white man’s burden to endeavour to raise the condition of the Natives (Accommodation for Natives 1903:4).

The discursive strategies adopted by the author (whose race is unknown) are ingenious. The author appeals to the self-incurred duty of white society to ‘uplift’ the native and develop non-racialised urban policies. If the author were black, this would be a particularly interesting appeal given the use of the possessive pronoun ‘our Durban people’, who are presumed to be white, and ‘their natives’, which posits the indigenous populations as their possessions. Whether the author was black or white, by ventriloquising the patronising talk of white settlers, the appeal to improve conditions was much more likely to hit its target.

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<sup>118</sup> The notion of distopia was explained in Section 3.2.3.

The notion of 'upliftment' that accompanied economic exploitation in settler colonies is typical of the liberalism of the 'white hand'. While exploiting black labour in the mines, the 'white hand' also established goodwill institutions to aid blacks like the Helping Hand Club in Johannesburg (est. 1919). Sympathisers of the plight of Johannesburg-based black women operated the Helping Hand Club, which facilitated training, fundraising, and offered educational bursaries until its closure in 1990. Furthermore, "lessons in cooking, dressmaking, laundry, and general housework were given, as well as courses in English, reading, arithmetic, first aid, and home nursing" (The Helping Hand for Native Girls in Johannesburg 2019). Another challenge that arose from the racialised urban conditions was that blacks were unable to nurture the most vulnerable. Therefore, black agents appealed to benevolent white missionaries to aid the weakest and neediest within their ranks. For example, assistance for the blind was provided by the Athlone School for the Blind (est. 1927) in Cape Town. By 1936, the Athlone School for the Blind had over 40 black children from around the country (for example, Sibasa, Kuruman, and Mafikeng) attending the school and its facilities rivalled white institutions for the blind (Reason for giving blind children suitable education 1936:13). The Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind initiated a similar project for the blind in Sophiatown Johannesburg in 1937 (*The Bantu World* 1937:20). The practices of white liberal institutions such as these did not undo the racialised urban environment, but they arguably sowed the seeds of distopian strategies among black urban dwellers. Their actions were transgressive because they operated on the margins of what was legally acceptable for whites to do for blacks and similarly empowered blacks with tools to navigate South Africa's urban governmentality. Jacob Dlamini argues in *Native Nostalgia* (2009:8), that "there was a fine line between resistance and collaboration. Sometimes collaborators would become resisters and vice versa". In other words, the 'white hand' was both enabler and impeder of the development of modernity for blacks who resided in the cities.

What is essential within the context of this study is that the quest for political, economic, social, and cultural freedom by blacks was largely an urban-based struggle. Paramount to this was to find ways of negotiating white governmentality. However, Foucault argues (1982:222) that the amorality of power enables power to counter the nonconformist actions of those the power seeks to control, with brutal force if needs be. The 'white-hand', and in particular the police force and (later) the armed forces, were extremely efficient in quelling and defusing the various urban-based crusades enacted by black agents and their sympathisers, so much so that it took the entire twentieth century for blacks to obtain political emancipation.

## 4.3 Urban black life, 1900s to 1940s

### 4.3.1 Christianity and black urbanisation

Having processed some of the theoretical issues related to being black in the urban, I now discuss the actual experiences and processes of twentieth-century black urbanisation. The start of the twentieth century marked the proliferation of a highly Christianised and educated black class. Throughout the nineteenth century, blacks who were, for the most part, connected to the royal and ruling tribal structures were integrated slowly and gradually into Christianity. These 'New Africans', an articulation of modern black selfhood, grew from the missionary churches and schools in the coastal regions of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The New Africans, with white benefactors and sympathisers, forged socio-political worldviews aimed at aiding the incoming generation of educated urban blacks to process the "new historical experience" of life in westernised urban spaces (Masilela 2013:175). The mission-trained New Africans saw religion or more specifically, Christianity, as symbolic of "the future" of Africa (Attwell 1999:272). For example, HIE Dhlomo, one of the champions of the New African Movement, acknowledged European missionaries as 'pioneers' of African modernity by developing written African language/literature and music (Couzens 1985). Masilela (2006:31) notes that "whereas in Europe the making of modernity was a process of secularisation, in Africa modernity was constructed through a process of religious proselytising".<sup>119</sup> In Africa, Christianity played a pivotal part in laying the foundation for the emergence of modern African personhood, precisely because the only avenues for education were through the Christian missionary schools. The mission-school education meant that blacks first had to be Christian to become modern, as highlighted by Macamo (2005b:1) and "failure to convert marked the difference between being European or not being European". This desire to modernise resulted in the rapid adoption of Christianity among urban-based black men and women.

However, Macamo (2005a:87) reminds us that the mass adoption of Christianity by so many Africans "was not a rejection of tradition, as one might be tempted to assume, but rather an answer to a real problem of orientation in a rapidly changing world". Africans recognised that the existing colonial systems predetermined their entry into capitalist modernity. Since the political and economic domains barred black participation, the religious spaces were critical enablers of black urban modernity. Thus, especially within the urban sphere, Christianity was by many measures a means to an end, especially because the Christians provided much

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<sup>119</sup> Elsewhere, Masilela (2013:248) interprets that "this contrast may be at the centre of the African crisis in modernity".

needed educational opportunities. Some missionaries,<sup>120</sup> like the Swiss missionary church (that later became the Presbyterian Church and initially operated in South Africa during the late nineteenth century and later in Mozambique) promoted modernity among Africans because they saw “no contradiction between religion and science” and “tried as much as possible to instil in their converts scientific habits of mind” (Macamo 2005a:89). These scientific habits were inculcated through education and cultivated the first generation of western-educated black thinkers and professionals. However, beyond providing schooling for blacks, the missionaries and especially the British-linked institutions based close to the urban cities, “encouraged among blacks western consumption habits and technological innovation and brought Africans within the nexus of the white economy as both consumers and producers” (Glaser 2001:18). In other words, the missionaries evangelised and aided in advancing capitalist-driven patterns of living among Africans.

However, Christianity also presented a dialectical problem for the newly assimilated black congregants and believers. According to Kretzschmar (1986:2), ideas of racism and the racialised colonial logic had also “penetrated the faith”. In other words, although the missionaries sought to advance modernity among Africans, the notion of white European men being the apex of humanity also dominated interactions between blacks and whites within the churches. Initially, black members of the churches had sincerely hoped that ‘Christian morality’ would eventually ‘compel’ white society, especially the church community, towards equality (Kretzschmar 1986:4). However, the black church members’ hope was misplaced because missionaries failed to promote black pastors to leadership positions and did not accord blacks the same treatment that whites received. As Kretzschmar (1986:46) concludes, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century churches were characterised by “missionary paternalism, racism, inflexibility, and misunderstanding”. Naturally, this situation resulted in secessions during the late nineteenth century when black pastors established their own churches parallel to the existing European missionaries. By 1913 there existed 30 African Independent/Indigenous Churches (AIC), and their number grew exponentially throughout the rest of the twentieth century.<sup>121</sup> Besides the lack of opportunities for black pastors within the mission churches, the rise of the AICs and later African theology was necessitated by the incompatibility of the Christian message with the lived experiences of urban blacks. Setiloane (1986) explains that part of the emergence of AICs and African theology were the vulgarities of urban life that forced blacks to live what Christianity considered immoral and unclean lives.

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<sup>120</sup> The establishment of mission stations like Gooldville established by Scottish missionaries in 1904 in the village of Vhufuli (Limpopo Province) aided in transforming the region. According to Duncan (2015:102), “[e]ducational work was fundamental to the work of the Scottish missionaries and this led to an inward migration from not only southern but central Africa”. Mission stations that had schools, medical facilities, and at times manufacturing capacity, were extremely attractive destinations for Africans who wanted to access western modernity.

<sup>121</sup> The number of AICs had exploded to over 3,000 by 1970 (Kretzschmar 1986:44).

I amplify this disparity between Christian expectations and lived experience later in the chapter when discussing the high degree of criminality among black urban communities. For Setiloane (1986:33), the “morality, ethics, and social practice” of Christianity was out of sync with the realities of the urban African, further suggesting that Christianity’s challenge was in actuality “a clash of cultures rather than that of faith”. Besides these contradictions, Macamo (2005a:90) sees the value of Christianity as being a tool that provided the urban black populace with “a sense of purpose under the most difficult circumstances”.

Despite its contradictions, the centrality of Christianity within urban black society was depicted by Moses Tladi who painted a scene of African congregants titled *Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa, founded 1933* (1939) which was commissioned by the church (Figure 4.1). This image is among the earliest artworks that highlight the importance of spirituality in modern African societies. The image is telling in how it illustrates the hierarchies that existed within the AICs. The male Bishop or Pastor is shown in the foreground, while hordes of female worshippers, dressed in well-coordinated uniforms, line the background of the composition. The number of female members within the AICs far outweighed their male counterparts, yet the positions of power and influence were dominated by men.

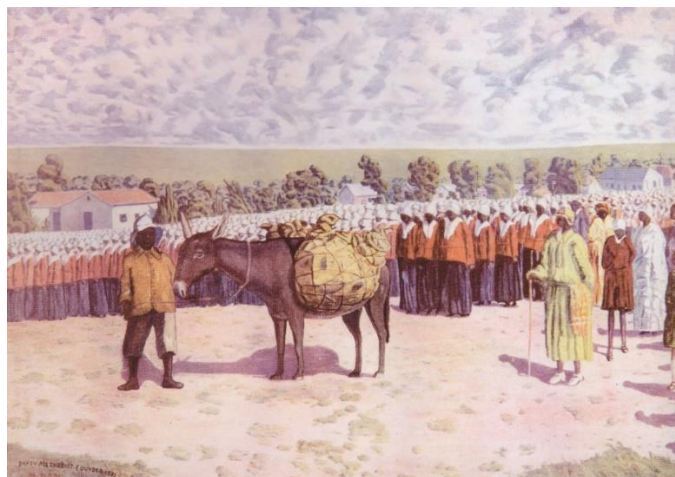


Figure 4.1. Moses Tladi, *Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa, founded 1933*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 10.5 x 13.5 cm. (Read Llyod 2009:194)

Perhaps the arena where Afropolitan blackness was expressed most impressively is in the AICs. As already highlighted in the previous chapter, the largest of the AIC’s was the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). Founded in 1924, the ZCC fused Christian beliefs with certain African customs in ways they produced a distinctive religious practice that cut across all spheres of black life in southern Africa. By 1948, the ZCC membership had grown to 50,000, ballooning



to over 3.87 million by 1996, making it one of the largest and most significant religious movements in sub-Saharan Africa. Ephraim Ngatane's *Zion Church dancers* (1964) is noteworthy for its depiction of this African Zionism (Figure 4.2). Ngatane's Zionist dancers are in the act of worship, performed through rampant song and dance, a unique trait that distinguishes ZCC worshipers from other Christian denominations. Rafapa (2013; 2018) has traced the centrality of music in the ZCC worshipping practices and suggests that part of the appeal of the church has been its ability to translate songs from the popular urban black culture that denote "free, pleasure-loving lifestyles" into sonics and lyrics that promote "Christian and African cultural values distinctively associated with the church" (Rafapa 2013:23). However, in the main, the artwork was a homage to the AIC's centrality to urban black life and a celebration of the untameable ubiquity of AICs within the black social imaginary.



Figure 4.2. Ephraim Ngatane, *Zion Church Dancers*, 1964. Mixed media on paper, 52 x 74 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

As an extension of global Pentecostalism known as the African Faith Mission, the ZCC embodies the transnational attributes of Afropolitanism due to its popularity among the migrant workers who came to South African cities from across southern Africa, in countries like Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Mozambique. According to Müller (2015), the ZCC is an unparalleled cultural institution in South Africa because of its ability to create its own world that intersects and exists with the multiple worlds of blacks in southern Africa. The key ingredient that has made the ZCC so central to urban black life throughout the twentieth century has been its success in negotiating the "tightrope between localisation and globalisation" (Müller

2015:174). ZCC and other AICs like the Nazareth Baptist Church<sup>122</sup> are syncretic and largely invented religions that display a fully realised modern African phenomena.

### 4.3.2 The urbanised New Africans

The twentieth century can be broadly summarised as the period when South Africa, through European imperial networks, “was incorporated into the capitalist world-system” (Munslow Ong 2018:7). Thanks to the gold boom, South Africa and all who lived in it, were weaved into the new world order founded on the vast industrialisation and expansive urbanisation of the modern nation-states that emerged before, after, and in between the two great wars that defined the century. The black vanguard comprised of western-educated men and women, who were also part of the traditional African hierarchies, saw the opportunities opened up by the spectacular modern industrialisation of South Africa as a historical opening to incorporate Africa and its dark-skinned peoples into what Hegel (2001) termed ‘world history’.<sup>123</sup> Tiyo Soga, Solomon T Plaatje, Henry Selby Msimang, John Tengo Jabavu, Herbert Isaac Dhlomo, Richard Selope Thema, William Wellington Gqoba, FZS Peregrino and others, were determined to repurpose the gifts of industrialisation to hasten Africa’s journey towards westernised modernity (Masilela 2013). This cohort of writers, lawyers, priests, and teachers, became the architects of the New Africa Movement. This intellectual and socio-political force championed the socioeconomic and political emancipation of black South Africans. The hopes and dreams of the New Africans were best articulated by Pixley Ka Isaka Seme (c. 1881–1951), South Africa’s first Black lawyer. During his time as a student at Columbia University in the United States, Seme wrote an essay titled ‘The regeneration of Africa’, which also won him the 1906 Curtis gold medal “for excellence in public speaking” (Ngquluna 2017:27). This address would become the manifesto for the New African Movement (Masilela 2013). The much-quoted address was published in the *African Affairs* journal in 1906, and I have annexed a portion of it here:

Yes, the regeneration of Africa belongs to this new and powerful period! By this term, regeneration, I wish to be understood to mean the entrance into *a new life, embracing the diverse phases of a higher, complex existence*. The basic factor, which assures their regeneration, resides in the awakened race-consciousness. This gives them a clear perception of their elemental needs and of their

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<sup>122</sup> The Nazareth Baptist Church, also known as *Ibandla lamaNazaretha*, was started by Isaiah Shembe in 1910. Unlike the ZCC, which cuts across all black cultural groupings, Shembe is mainly a Zulu and Nguni orientated church. Although Shembe worshippers can be found in Swaziland, Lesotho, and Mozambique, its domination remains distinctly Zulu.

<sup>123</sup> Hegel’s (2001) notion of a ‘geist’, or collective human spirit, generated the grand narrative of progress and influenced western imperialists, who regarded the west as at the forefront of this ‘progress’. Note also that Hegel regarded Africans as ‘without history’ because of the apparent lack of written language in Africa. He saw slavery as a way of ‘bringing Africans into history’.

undeveloped powers. *It therefore must lead them to the attainment of that higher and advanced standard of life...* The regeneration of Africa means that a *new and unique civilisation* is soon to be added to the world (my emphasis) (Seme 1906).

Even though racism loomed large over newly urbanised blacks, they nevertheless approached urban industrialisation with a desire to master this new modernity. A common plea by black urban dwellers was the need for recognition and the attainment of legal status. This desire was encapsulated in a statement by a contributor to the *Ilanga Lase Natal* newspaper who wrote, “[w]e are a part of the great Empire and are as loyal to the king as white subjects” (What has the black man done 1905:4). The notion that emancipation and status could only be gained via incorporation into western imperialist modernity was not unfounded given the rapidly growing industrial sector and black experience of urban capitalism as a new life world. This position was entrenched in the philosophy of the New African Movement during the 1900s. The commanders of the movement summoned every available cultural and artistic resource to drive these objectives, which were unfortunately countered by very powerful racist forces that ultimately hindered the realisation of a new Africa for black Africans.

Via the press, the New African Movement played a central role in the formation of a new national imaginary for the first generation of black urban dwellers. Masilela’s (2007; 2013 & 2014) monographs on the genealogy of the New Africans are the most exhaustive and perceptive accounts of the soul of the movement. Masilela (2013) identifies the formation by John Tengo Jabavu of newspapers such as the *Imvo Zabantsundu* (African Opinion) in 1884 as a significant spark in the making of the New African Movement into a major intellectual engine for black South Africans. In 1901, FZS Peregrino, originally from Ghana, established the *South African Spectator* that built on the work started by *Imvo Zabantsundu*, and sought to galvanise a Pan-African fervour within the New African Movement. Jabavu and Peregrino’s newspapers were followed by other prominent publications such as *Ilanga la se Natal* in 1903, *Umteteli wa Bantu* in the 1920s and *The Bantu World*<sup>124</sup> in the 1930s. These forums, among others, provided the growing cohort of western educated and urbanised black Africans during that critical transitional phase with cultural and intellectual insight “that would give guidance and be synchronous with this new historical experience” (Masilela 2013:175). Using these media outlets, the New African Movement became the dominant ideological compass for the increasingly urbanised black populace.

Attwell (2005:3) stresses that more than any other means, newly urbanised black intellectuals used the print and publication platforms to assert themselves as “modern subjects”. These

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<sup>124</sup> At the end of 1932, *The Bantu World* took stock of what it had achieved during its first few months in circulation, stating, “We feel, therefore, that by cultivating the habit of reading we are aiding Bantu progress and that our progress is also your progress” (Drawing up the balance sheet of progress 1932:1).

assertions of modernity can be seen in the issues of the *Ilanga Lase Natal* newspaper, established by Dr John Langa Dube in 1903, which became a critical ambassador and point of reference for urbanised black readers in Natal. The newspaper was not merely targeted to the isiZulu reader, as there were regular inserts of articles dealing with matters related to Sotho, Xhosa, and white (English and Afrikaans) readers. *Ilanga Lase Natal* carried educative and constructive content for the urban-based blacks. For example, at the outbreak of the bubonic plague in the Transvaal region in 1904, an article appeared in the paper warning the black urbanite to “keep yourself clean” (*Wangenwa ufuba* 1904b:3). Many issues of the paper provided well-intentioned reads that sought to smooth the transition of blacks into the highly intolerant urban space. Advertisements of job and educational opportunities were flanked by photographers seeking to tap into the vast market of black urbanites. Some of these adverts would include testimonials by sometimes-prominent black persons, such as chiefs, professionals, clergymen, and even John L Dube himself, who benefited from using such products. An undeniable attitude within the various texts in the early versions of *Ilanga Lase Natal* (1903–1915) was optimism that equality and integration would result from the increased modernisation and urbanisation of blacks. Indeed, while being specifically aimed at the black reader, part of the mantra of the newspaper (and many like it) was to prove to the white establishment that blacks could assimilate and master the same tools of western modernity that the whites controlled.<sup>125</sup>

As stated above, the rise of the New African Movement paralleled the explosion of industrialised modernity in South Africa through European imperialist networks. This reality necessitated a cultural and political engagement between black Africans seeking their share of the newfound riches of capitalist modernity and white European industrialists bent on the maximum exploitation of minerals and black labour. According to Callinicos (quoted in Eloff & Sevenhuysen 2011b:25), by the mid-1930s the urban black population stood at over 1.5 million with close to 90% residing in the Rand region (Johannesburg<sup>126</sup> and surrounds), due to the gold boom in that area. These urbanised Africans leaned on the leadership provided by the New Africans because they were “viewed by the masses as having political skills, and as being capable of challenging the white man successfully” (Bradford 1986:50). In order to address the grievances of the blacks, the educated intermediaries formed political organisations such as the African National Congress. The ANC was established in 1912 as the South African

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<sup>125</sup> The *Ilanga Lase Natal* newspaper also contained articles that sought to appease white audiences. For example, in a eulogy for the departed Boer leader Paul Kruger, the paper dubbed him “one of South Africa’s greatest sons” (The late President Kruger 1904:4).

<sup>126</sup> At this juncture it is worth highlighting that Johannesburg was not the catalyst of African modernity, but, through platforms such as *Drum* magazine and *The Bantu World* newspaper, the city became the torch bearer (Masilela 2013:27). It was the rural-based mission-churches in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal regions where the ideas of New African modernity were birthed.

Native National Congress and evolved into a more pan-African organisation in 1923. The ANC was set up to confront the racist strategies deployed by the Union of South Africa government that had stripped blacks of their civil and property rights. The theft of agricultural land contributed towards largescale black urbanisation. At the formation of the Union of South Africa government in 1910, blacks had been effectively relegated to the status of expendable labour that participated at the periphery of the capitalist modernisation of the country. Thus, the ANC was a crucial “platform to articulate black grievances and channel black concerns” (Ngcukaitobi 2018:58). Through the unintended but subversive efforts of the Christian missionaries who laid the foundation for the emergence of a modernised black class, the New African Movement intellectuals advocated for the socio-economic emancipation of black South Africans. However, their success in this regard was mixed.

The first New Africans were conservative modernisers who believed that change would arise without the horrors of revolution (Masilela 2013:4). The suspension of the planned campaign against the Land Act of 1913 by the ANC is a prime illustration of the New Africans’ non-revolutionary ethos. Acting on behalf of powerful mining and agriculture interests, the Union of South Africa government had instituted the law to limit and reverse black ownership of land, especially urban-based land. In 1914, the leadership of the ANC strategically, but as history would reveal, foolishly, suspended their Anti-Land Act Campaign to support the Union of South Africa government with black soldiers for World War I (Gleeson 1994). Influential figures like Walter Rubusana had first gone to London in 1914 to plead with the British parliament to suspend the Land Act. However, their efforts were futile. Upon their return to South Africa, the ANC deputation, led by Rubusana, pledged to help the Union of South Africa government with 5,000 black soldiers for the war and to “declare a moratorium on mass agitation” against the Land Act (Jordan 1984:12).<sup>127</sup> Jordan (1984:12) retells how the ANC misjudged the colonial psyche:

Having thrown away a tactical advantage, the ANC was unable to pick up the threads of the campaign when the war ended. Rubusana and his colleagues in the ANC leadership viewed the war as an opportunity to demonstrate in practice their loyalty to the institutions of the empire. Loyal service during the empire’s hours of crisis, they thought, would not go unrewarded when better times returned. What happened after the war ended was an object lesson in the realities of imperialist politics.

The ANC’s conservative attitude was predicated on a sincere and perhaps naive assumption that helping the British would win blacks citizenry status and equality with white South Africans.

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<sup>127</sup> The Union government rejected the offer from the ANC. Providing black soldiers with military training and arms was seen as too much of a security risk.

They were sadly misled. The New Africans appealed to the morals of an amoral western logic (Ekpo 1996).<sup>128</sup> Nielsen (1922:139), an apologist for the racialisation of South Africa, diagnosed the naivety of New African leaders as follows:

Territorial separation of the home-life of the two races is the only way by which parallel development can take place. Some of the Native leaders who have opposed this policy have done so in the belief that their people might eventually be able to prove and enforce their claim to full racial equality, but they have not realised that this claim will always be denied on physical grounds, and not on considerations of moral worth. These leaders mean well, but they do not see well. Smarting under the pain of their treatment, they do not perceive that the real issue is one of unalterable physical disparity.

Here, Nielsen argues that equality among the races was improbable because of the supposed natural differences that existed between Europeans and Africans. No amount of moral campaigning could change this position. The situation for urban blacks worsened post-WWI. White soldiers who survived the war received housing and land subsidies, but urban blacks were left destitute (Ngcukaitobi 2018). Besides the ANC, urban blacks had limited options for political representation, since the South African Communist Party was only concerned with the interests of the white proletariat until 1927. Other New Africans like Sol T Plaatje chose to demonstrate against the Land Act via his book, *Native Life in South Africa*, published in London in 1916. In this sweeping reading of the political history of black South African's, Plaatje critiques the Land Act as a strategy of reinstating servitude for blacks (Breckenridge 2016:182). Of further value is how *Native Life in South Africa* focuses on the devastating impact the Land Act would have of on the urban-based blacks. Plaatje went as far as predicting that the law would be followed by other iterations that would specifically discriminate against urban-based blacks: "it will only be a matter of time before we have a Natives' Urban Act enforced throughout South Africa. Then we will have the banner of slavery fully unfurled (of course, under another name) throughout the length and breadth of the land" (Plaatje 1916:s.n.). Plaatje foresaw that restricting individual land ownership for blacks, especially within the urban areas, would essentially result in a modern and urban form of slavery, where

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<sup>128</sup> In one of the most perceptive interpretations of Postcolonial theory and its limitations, Ekpo (1996), in an article curiously titled 'How Africa misunderstood the west' explains that African intellectuals and leaders have, for the most part, failed to decode Europe's colonial and neo-colonial DNA. Using the ideas of Frederick Nietzsche, Ekpo (1996:6) reminds us that, "Europe's historical essence, her reason in history, is captured in her endless drive to increase her power by overcoming or seeking to overcome the rest of the world. Essentially, Europe is therefore nothing but the will to world-power". He further notes that colonisation and conquest "strictly speaking (on Europe's terms) lies outside the reach of any moral discourse – they are beyond good and evil, above blame and praise" (Ekpo 1996:7). The ANC failed to appreciate that Europe – although a Christian civilisation – was inherently amoral when it came to advancing its political and economic interests. The Christianised New Africans of the early twentieth century thought they could appeal to the morality of the imperialists by collaborating with them and aiding the industrialisation project. To the Europeans, this naïve and blinkered hope made the colonial project much smoother than they had anticipated.

blacks would be compelled to sell themselves as expendable labour to belong within the urban areas, with no possibilities for accruing generational wealth. However, like other New Africans, Plaatje also adopted a tone that sought to appeal to the liberal values of the British polity. As Celarent (2014:631) reveals, “[m]ore broadly, [*Native life in South Africa*] is a hymn to conscientious political activity in a liberal society: to due process, law, civil society, reasonability, and the universal dignity of all people”. Ngcukaitobi’s (2018) examination of the first black lawyers in South Africa who emerged during the twentieth century, confirms that the attempts of these New Africans to achieve legal parity among the races through constitutional avenues was both exemplary, but also counter-intuitive.

Ultimately, the efforts by this educated and Christianised black vanguard to assimilate into and master western modernity did not weaken the racist and oppressive mind-set of the imperialists. Their naïve optimism of equality was transmitted to the formative generation of ‘modern’ black artists. Among others, George Milwa Pemba also harboured hopes that his art would “bridge the gap between coloniser and colonised” on the same terms as the failed politicking of the ANC (van Robbroeck 2008:219). However, instead of being overly critical of this generation of New Africans, Macamo (2005b:3) diagnoses such efforts as being “marked by a kind of instrumental action by Africans, which consists in seeking to take advantage of the chances and opportunities opened up by the continent’s contacts with the rest of the world”. In other words, although the New African intellectuals hated and sought to depose the oppressive inconsistencies of the very western modernity they coveted, they had a liberal outlook that wanted to assimilate into the capitalist industrial complex. This situation led to a rupture in the movement. Masilela (2013) reorganises the rupture into two generations. The first being the ‘old New Africans’ of the late nineteenth century, namely, Tiyo Soga, Solomon T Plaatje, Elijah Makiwane, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, and others, and the second being the ‘new New Africans’ of the early-to-mid-twentieth century, such as Henry Selby Msimang, Richard V Selope Thema, and HIE Dhlomo. While both factions operated under a singular banner that advocated for a purposeful exchange between black Africans and their white colonial antagonists (who also doubled as the transmitters of capitalist modernity in Africa), there were tensions in how the ‘old’ and ‘new’ factions imagined this exchange was to unravel. Like Seme, the ‘old New Africans’ were conservative modernisers who believed that change would arise without the horrors of violent revolution (Masilela 2013:4). Expectedly, more militant and radical voices during the mid to late twentieth century challenged and dislodged the moderate politics of the New African Movement (Lodge 1983).

### 4.3.3 Imaging the first Afropolitans through printmaking

While this study's parameters focus on black artists from the 1920s onwards, in this subsection I explore representations of the first Afropolitans or New Africans by looking at print images from the early decades of the twentieth century for two reasons. Firstly, I want to align the emergence of the New African Movement to the artistic revolution that started among black creatives during the early 1900s. Secondly, I want to propose that some of the certainties regarding the history of black modern art in South Africa require extensive revision to account for the untold narratives that remain hidden in assumptions and speculations that were generated by white scholars.

The case I make here is that before the invention of the category of modern black artists during the 1920s and 1930s, the process of visualising the modern Afropolitan black had already commenced in the few black press houses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The unknown creatives who fashioned these first renderings of the urban black were, for the most part, motivated and influenced by the leaders of the New African Movement. They owned the various newspapers that disseminated the pictures in question. As introduced before, these New Africans used the limited black presses to visualise and popularise the emergent urbanised African personhood. Uppermost in the goals of the movement was a near obsession to show that blacks could also master the western form of modernity that had come to dominate South African urban life. By many measures, the efforts of the New African Movement predate those by like-minded organisations such as the Broederbond which was only established in 1918 with the similar aim of assisting white Afrikaner farmers and peasants in assimilating into the urban environment without contaminating their Calvinist morality.

By promoting the representation of a westernised and cosmopolitan version of black modernity, the New Africanists were seeking to circumvent colonial archetypes of Africans as backward and primitive. According to Jeppie, one unlikely source of the type of imagery they were opposing was the Cape Carnival that was first established in 1907 to commemorate the New Year among the coloured community in Cape Town. The historical roots of the Cape Carnival are of course complicated because the carnival was inspired by multiple and converging celebrations from the freed slaves, the American Minstrel tradition, and New Year celebrations by the Dutch. However, by the start of the twentieth century, the Cape Carnival had evolved, paradigmatically, into "a sign of working-class, though 'coloured', culture" (Jeppie 1990:10). Blacks could not participate in the festivities because they did not have the prerequisite working-class status, a privilege only extended to the mixed-races of the Cape. Jeppie tells us that to small educated black class, that is, the New Africans, the Cape Carnival as a whole and "the coons" specifically "were despicable representatives and representations



of the ‘coloured people’” (Jeppie 1990:11). The New Africans detested the idea of performers replicating the regressive and othered caricatures of Africans. The detested caricatures were an added motivation for the principals of the black newspapers to almost exclusively publish images of a westernised and overtly cosmopolitan black urbanity.

Although largely unacknowledged, the printmaking medium was among the first westernised artistic modes used by black creatives of the early twentieth century to translate the urban black experience into images. Hobbs and Rankin (1997; 2003) and Hecker (2011) have traced the history of printmaking as a creative endeavour among black artists in South Africa to the 1950s and 1960s. While these genealogies are valuable, they exclude the deep history of printing as both an artistic and trade skill among blacks. There is substantive anecdotal evidence showing that black printmakers existed and flourished within the publishing domain from as early as the 1900s. The establishment of black presses throughout South Africa enabled the coming into being of printmaking as a profession among blacks. For example, when *Imvo Zabantsundu* (*The African opinion*) and *Ilanga Lase Natal* were formed in 1884 and 1903, respectively, they created a platform for the printing praxis to emerge among blacks. Captains of the New African Movement like Jabavu, editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu*, used the Lovedale Mission Press to produce his paper (Cagé & Rueda 2016:74). At the same time, Dube rented the International Printing Press<sup>129</sup> on Grey Street in Durban for the initial print runs of *Ilanga Lase Natal* (Matsha 2014:247). However, from October 1903 *Ilanga Lase Natal* was produced at Dube’s Ohlange Institute (initially known as the Zulu Christian Industrial School) after a press had been imported from America (South African History Online 2019). Several adverts appeared in the *Ilanga Lase Natal* paper from 1903 detailing the personnel who served at the school, and under the Industrial department was the printing unit overseen by A Ncamu.<sup>130</sup>

The existence of a press fully owned and operated by black individuals meant that the careers of black professionals, including artisan printmakers like Ncamu, were advanced within these publishing houses.<sup>131</sup> At the dawn of the twentieth century, printing technology had advanced to the degree that photographs were mass reproduced in newspapers and periodicals in Europe and America. However, for the fledgling black press in Africa who relied on older model

<sup>129</sup> The International Printing Press was a multi-lingual press established in 1898 as a merchant offshoot of the Natal Indian Congress. But as Hofmeyr (2013) puts, it was effectively ‘Ghandi’s printing press’, referring to the influential Mohandas K Ghandi who had arrived in South Africa from India in 1893. Ghandi used this press to advance the political and civic interests of Indians through publications like *Indian Opinion* established in 1903.

<sup>130</sup> In 1904, his name was expanded to Mr A JNO Ncamu. Due to the scope of this study, I could investigate further into the Ncamu’s career as a printer. This is an opening for future study wherein the history of printmaking among black creatives can be reorganised to match the development of printmaking within the black-owned presses.

<sup>131</sup> Cagé and Rueda (2016:97) show how the introduction of printing presses among blacks in Africa during the colonial era resulted in “higher social capital leading to higher economic activity and higher well-being”.

presses, pictures of people were inserted into their newspapers through wood engraving and later half-tone photographic exposure (Illustrated Newspaper Analytics 2019). Therefore, when non-photographic images of black individuals appeared in *Ilanga Lase Natal* from 1904 onwards, it is safe to speculate that they were created by a black printmaker who had made engravings or etchings based on photographic originals. Since Ncamu was recorded as the expert in the printing section of the Industrial Department at Dube's school where the *Ilanga Lase Natal* printing press was housed, it is not farfetched to ascribe to Ncamu the status of being among the earliest black printmakers in South Africa.

Thus, the actual legacy of printmaking among blacks in South Africa extends to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when black presses used the skills of black printmakers to produce images for their papers and books. Unfortunately, the rapid advancements in the mass reproduction of photographic images in newspapers rendered these antiquated processes obsolete within the newspaper publishing industry by the 1910s. Although the vocation of printing<sup>132</sup> continued within the various black presses throughout the 1920s up until the 1940s, printmaking as an artistic endeavour surfaced in the art schools set up during the 1950s and 1960s where black students were introduced to the craft of printing as an artistic endeavour, with an emphasis on concept, narratology, authorship, and ownership as part of the creative process. That said, the key point here is that the history of printmaking among blacks predates schools like the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre and Polly Street Art Centre.

What then were the images created by this first generation of unacknowledged black printmakers? In short, they were concerned with imaging and imagining the urbanised New African. However, more than this, these early portrayals of the urbanised New African was systemically communicated to a mass black audience throughout the country who saw these visuals at the archetype of the transcendental modern African. For example, the image of Andrew Dithlake which appeared within a 1904 advert of Dr Williams pills in *Ilanga Lase Natal* reveals the artistic impulses of the printmaker who translated this image from photograph to etching (Figure 4.3). Dithlake is cited as being from Marabastad in Pretoria and is presented as a sophisticated urban black dressed in a suit, collar shirt, and bow tie. These etchings of the educated, Christianised, and most importantly, urbanised neo-African appeared in almost every edition of *Ilanga Lase Natal* and other black newspapers from the early twentieth century (Figure 4.4 and 4.5). These pictures were most probably produced by a black master printmaker or team of printmakers within the various black operated presses.

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<sup>132</sup> For example, in August 1932 an article in *The Bantu World* weekly highlighted the need for printers in the native printing offices (Printers in demand 1932:2).



Figure 4.3. Artist unknown, *Mr Andrew Dithlake*, 1904. Engraving for newspaper. (Wangenwa Ufuba 1904a:3)



Figure 4.4. Artist unknown, *Mr A. Tyalana*, 1904. Engraving for newspaper. (Amapills aka Dr Williams Abomvana Asindisa 1904a:3)



Figure 4.5. Artist unknown, *Rev E.T. Mpila*, 1904. Engraving for newspaper. (Amapills aka Dr Williams Abomvana Asindisa 1904b:3)

Although the images produced by these first black printers were highly mimetic insofar as they sought to capture the likeness of the person being depicted, the idiosyncratic imprint of the artist(s) who etched the plates for *Ilanga Lase Natal* from 1903 onwards was without question palpable in the style of the various images that were produced by these newspapers.<sup>133</sup> Reporting on nineteenth-century newspaper image printing processes in the western world, the Illustrated Newspaper Analytics (2019) research project at the North Carolina State University corroborate that “while many periodicals represented their illustrations as visual facts, they were subject to a chain of interpretation, adaptation, and image adjustment all along their production path”. The point here is that although these printmakers operated outside the field of art, and their work could hence not be appreciated as bespoke creations attributable to an individual artist, they were nevertheless the first black printmakers in South Africa.

It is critical to remember, as Magaziner (2017b) points out, that the status of being a professional black artist did not exist during the early twentieth century. Therefore, the printmakers who created these images could not be acknowledged as such. It was only during the 1920s and 1930s with the emergence of Simon Mnguni, Moses Tladi, George Pemba and Ernest Mancoba who worked several jobs to sustain themselves, that black creatives were acknowledged for the first time as virtuoso artists. As Magaziner (2017a) puts it, these artists literally “invented the idea that you could be an artist” as a black person.

This brief explication of the newspaper based prints produced by what I propose to be the first black printmakers of the twentieth century, demands further investigation. As stated above, this study focusses on the artworks of urbanisation that emerged from the 1920s onwards. The less than a handful of images I discussed here are but the tip of a mountain of artistic visuals produced in the black presses in what is considered a modern artistic idiom – printmaking – from the 1900s. Finally, these prints need to be analysed alongside a much larger body of images from the early twentieth century that showcased a modern and urban black subjectivity.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> The idiosyncratic process of creating a wood engraved image for newspaper reproduction is crudely explained as follows: “A typical illustration might start with a sketch or photograph, taken by an artist-reporter at a news event, or even a written description which adapts an idea (whether it was actually seen or not) to visual form” (Illustrated Newspaper Analytics 2019).

<sup>134</sup> The amazing book of photographs from the period put together by Santu Mofokeng (2013) comes to mind here. His *Black photo album / Look at me: 1890-1950* catalogued the carefully choreographed studio pictures taken by middle-class urban-based black families and individuals during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. The existence of such photos is not surprising especially because many adverts appeared in black newspapers like *Ilanga Lase Natal* in the 1900s inviting urban families to take studio photos.

#### 4.3.4 The emergence of an urban-based black middle class

The emergence of the New African Movement was in effect the development of an educated petit bourgeoisie of black professionals who separated themselves from traditionalists and the proletariat as the ‘talented tenth’.<sup>135</sup> However, the ‘talented tenth’ was celebrated by many urbanised black inhabitants who looked to these elite individuals as their preferred political interlocutors. Furthermore, the rise of this small but highly influential educated black middle class during the early twentieth century must be appreciated against the backdrop of limited educational opportunities for blacks at the time. For example, by the early 1930s, only 5% of black children attended school beyond Standard 2. This situation led to a massive chasm between the educated blacks and those with no education, be they based in urban or rural areas. During the first half of the twentieth century, the education of blacks was administered by the four provincial authorities and was also dominated by missionary organisations. The University of Fort Hare, which was the only black university where black candidates could receive post-secondary training, owes its heritage to the St. George’s Presbyterian Church Lovedale mission. In 1916 the institution was rebranded as the South African Native College<sup>136</sup> when it obtained subsidies from the Union of South Africa government as “a new college for African and other non-European people in South Africa” (Kerr 1968:3). The institution became a magnet for the brightest black minds from South Africa and the rest of the continent (Duncan 2015).<sup>137</sup>

During the early twentieth century, blacks, especially those in industrialised cities, pursued colonial-style schooling because they “perceived education to be an alternative source of economic security in a time of land dispossession”. Blacks actively “demanded academic and industrial skills that could provide for the successful entry into the labour market” (Paterson 2005:382). Therefore, those who were fortunate enough to obtain advanced training (some at international universities) became the new captains and leaders of the black masses. In many respects, this new educationally mobile middle class was the latest challenger to the rural-based traditional authorities that had lorded over black lives in the previous epoch.

Also, being educated was linked to the ability or lack thereof of blacks to integrate into urban life seamlessly. An article in *The Bantu World* newspaper highlighted how black cyclists

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<sup>135</sup> The ‘talented tenth’ moniker was first developed by WEB Du Bois (1903) to categorise the “exceptional men” within the black community in America. For Du Bois, the advancement of the black race was the responsibility of these elite individuals. Commenting on this, Chrisman (2005:6) highlights that the elite considered as member of the talented tenth “is not only an individual of intellectual and educational achievement, but he is also predicated as a social and political leader, and presumed to have some financial power as well”.

<sup>136</sup> In 1952 the mission college was renamed the University College of Fort Hare.

<sup>137</sup> In Gatsha Buthelezi’s biography, Temkin (1976:30) describes how Buthelezi was delighted to be admitted as a student at Fort Hare, further stating that “Fort Hare was, in many ways, a reflection of South Africa at large. What happened on the campus often mirrored in microcosm what was happening elsewhere in the country”.

violated the road signs and traffic lights (robots) in Johannesburg because they were presumably not adequately schooled enough in how to navigate the city. However, the article goes on the claim that: “[t]he root of the whole evil, however, lies with our educational system, which allows so many illiterate Bantu to continue to live their lives even in the towns. As long as the bulk of the masses cannot read and write, so long will they be a menace to the welfare of the community” (Uneducated Bantu and robots 1932:4). Two interrelated positions about the urbanised black individual of the 1930s are evident from this stanza. The first is that being educated was seen as the unofficial visa that blacks needed to fit into the urban space. It was also assumed that being urbanised meant a significant progression in the teleological shift from tradition to modernity. Of course, this ascension to modernity was linked to the acquisition of westernised education. From newspaper articles such as the one quoted above, one can infer that those uneducated blacks who were being ‘allowed’ to continue life and work in the urban zones were classified as being a ‘menace’ because they did not possess the knowledge and literacy to navigate the modern, urban sphere successfully. While the article makes a general case for education to be accorded to every black person, it smacks of an elitist and exclusionary tone unexpected in a black newspaper that was purportedly established to advance black interests. In addition, the article is a reflection of how powerful the New African Movement ideals of African progress had become. The educated black elites of the 1930s felt that they had earned the right to see themselves as ‘better’ than the rest of the uneducated masses.

Even though the state actively frustrated the growth of an economically mobile black middle class between 1915 and 1936, the number of black landowners increased twofold in spaces like Natal, due to the cohort of teachers, preachers, and lawyers who had successfully transitioned into becoming “progressive farmers and landowners” (Bradford 1986:54). According to Moguerane (2016:264), pockets of “black landlordism over a white tenantry” also prevailed in the northern regions of South Africa during the early twentieth century.<sup>138</sup> Education had aided these new black elites to attain some financial growth, which further increased the gap between themselves and the rest of the black population. Notwithstanding their fledgling economic mobility, the prowess of the new urbanised black elite was best expressed in the more playful aspects of urbanity. For example, the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in Johannesburg (est. 1924), facilitated various cultural activities such as, chess, a European game played by those with perceived high levels of intellect. The performance of these westernised social activities was held in high regard by the first generation of urban-based

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<sup>138</sup> Moguerane (2014) investigates the complexities of black land ownership before and after the establishment of the Natives Land Act of 1913 by looking at the life of Silas Molema and his descendants. The Molemas lived in the Mafikeng region north of British Bechuanaland (part of the Cape colony in 1895) and were Christianised (Methodists), educated notables who held title deeds for the Molopo Reserve during the early twentieth century.

black elites. Countless articles appeared in *The Bantu World* newspaper throughout the 1930s promoting, reporting about, and ultimately extolling recreational activities like dancing, celebrations of birthdays and weddings, and tea parties. While it might come across as a banal gathering, the tea party was seen as a grand occasion, not in size but because of its symbolic and cultured appeal. For purposes of highlighting the social currency of the tea party, I have re-scribed, verbatim, a report that appeared in *The Bantu World* newspaper in 1937 about a tea party that took place in the suburb of Lady Selbourne in Pretoria:

A successful tea party was given at house no. 258 Second Street by Mr and Mrs Jan Boshelo of Lady Selbourne at which Mr Charlie Monageng acted as Chairman, Mr Stephen Mokgatle was Secretary. Misses Lobisa Moloto and Isbel Mogalanyane acted as waitresses (Activities and brevities 1937b:4).

Besides announcing the tea party, the article names all the participants of this notable happening and the various roles they fulfilled. The attention to detail is both touching and slightly bemusing. The very appearance of such stories in *The Bantu World*, the foremost national newspaper for blacks at the time, speaks to the aspirational gravitas of urbanisation and the lifestyles it cultivated. The British etiquette of hosting a tea party was a token of social ascendancy and a sort of rite of passage into middle-class-hood for the emergent black urban elites, and in many ways also a performance of distinctly modern African urbanity. The spaces wherein these gatherings took place were also significant. Although the Land Act of 1913 and the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 had stifled blacks from owning or renting a city-based property, there were still pockets of urban land where blacks could own and lease houses. Among others, District Six in Cape Town, the Warwick Avenue Triangle in Durban, Lady Selbourne in Pretoria, and most famously, and Sophiatown<sup>139</sup> in Johannesburg, were reservoirs of multicultural cohabitation for all the peoples who were deemed non-white, namely blacks, coloureds, Indians, Cape Malay, and Chinese. Samuelson (2008:63) describes Sophiatown and its people as being representative of “transnational stylisations” that were unparalleled by the concurrent white suburbs. The picture of early twentieth to mid-century urban spaces inhabitable by blacks was that of creole societies that oozed with cosmopolitanism. A testimonial from Mojapelo (2009:6), a resident of the Pretoria suburb Lady Selbourne formed in the 1900s where blacks “owned both their land and the structures on it”, praises the pluralistic qualities of the area:

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<sup>139</sup> Sophiatown was originally founded in 1887 by Herman Tobiansky, an entrepreneur who saw the potential of developing “a pleasant white suburb” close to the Johannesburg CBD (Mojapelo 2009:17). The area received its name from Tobiansky’s wife, Sophia, and the streets were named after his children. The suburb was initially targeted for white habitation, but by the 1920s whites had exited the area because the Johannesburg City Council had established a waste disposal site near the area, and so Sophiatown became overrun by black, Indian, and coloured homeowners.

The Lady Selbourne population was mixed – mostly urbane and sophisticated. There were no inhibitions about different backgrounds, skin colour, culture or upbringing. We were polyglot, we communicated with each with consummate ease. As a familial example, my mother was monolingual, speaking pure Sepedi. Her best life-long friend was, however, a Sangaan-speaking woman. Some Indians, coloureds and Chinese spoke fluent Sesotho – the dominant language in the township. Some Africans were at home with Chinese and Indian languages too.

This account underscores the diverse subjectivities that meshed into a cosmopolitan concoction typical of contemporary African urbanisms. Of course, notably absent from this cultural mix were white people. Although some white families initially lived among these multi-ethnic and multi-racial communities, the state prohibited and criminalised cross-racial mixing and repeated attempts by the white authorities to reassert racial, ethnic, and linguistic divisions eventually excluded all whites from these spaces of diversity.

Another contributor to the cosmopolitan flavour of early twentieth-century South African cities was the presence of black migrants from the diaspora. By the 1920s, the number of blacks returning from the diaspora had increased in African cities due to calls from the likes of the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie who beseeched African Americans and those based in the Caribbean Islands to “come ‘Home to Africa’ where they could serve their highest purpose” (Niaah 2005:20). After the abolition of slavery in America in 1865, freed slaves from American plantations made their way to countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone seeking a fresh start. However, Veney (2005:60) points out that these returnees “believed they were culturally superior to Africans because they had arrived in Africa as free people, had a level of literacy, were able to own property, and embraced Christian Western values”. The blacks who came from the west inadvertently reinforced the divide between the educated, multi-lingual middle-class who indulged in tea parties, and the mostly uneducated black masses.

The influx of blacks from the diaspora is exemplified by Henry Sylvester Williams. He was born in Trinidad (or the British West Indies as the British Empire called it at the time) and relocated at the turn of the twentieth century to Cape Town with scores of other educated and skilled black immigrants from the Caribbean. After staging the first Pan-African Conference<sup>140</sup> in 1900 in London, Williams decided to ply the legal trade in South Africa after interacting with Alice Kinloch who had lived in Kimberly during the boom years. Kinloch exposed Williams to the plight of black South Africans. She argued that the plight was caused by “the greed of the

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<sup>140</sup> At the closing of the Pan-African Conference in 1900, a memo delivered to the Queen beseeched her to intervene in colonies and “South Africa received a special place in the final resolutions of the conference” (Ngcukaitobi 2018:51). Issues like pass laws, inability to own land, the slave and indenture systems, the urban bylaws and curfews, which were peculiar to South Africa at the time, were specifically highlighted.



mining bosses and the duplicity of the missionaries” (Ngcukaitobi 2018:44). In 1903, Williams arrived in Cape Town and was swiftly inserted into the Cape Bar as its first black lawyer, followed by a stint in the Supreme Court of the Cape. Williams could access these opportunities because, “unlike local blacks, West Indians and African Americans were regarded as ‘honorary whites’” (Ngcukaitobi 2018:42). Professionals like Andrew Jackson, the first black doctor who “ran the most successful medical practice in Cape Town”, became prominent figures in Cape politics (Ngcukaitobi 2018:42).

However, education and migrant status were not guarantors of economic and social mobility. Racism still endured as seen in the stories of black scientists who were condemned to live in the dockyards as riggers (Bradford 1986:62). The intolerable paradox embodied within the urbanised black middle-class during the first half of the twentieth century was the reality of being black and thus being marginalised based on skin colour, both legally and symbolically. However, similarly, as members of the educated middle-class, these ‘talented tenth’ possessed a degree of economic and class leverage over the majority of their own people, and in some cases also over sections of the white community. Goodhew (2000:246) recounts how in 1934, Andries Maletsani, a wealthy landowner in Sophiatown, tried to use his financial clout to eschew a pass law offence. However, his social standing did not supersede his blackness, and he was eventually arrested.

These highly educated individuals blazed trails for generations of black men and women. However, they left an uncomfortable and largely unresolved legacy. On the one hand, the middle-class blacks are praised for displaying the capabilities and potentialities of the black intelligentsia. However, their assimilationist and moderate strategies are seen as self-serving actions that prolonged the disenfranchisement of blacks throughout the twentieth century (Modiri 2016). While arguments can be made for both positions, what is lost in these analyses is the bewildering and ambivalent promise of power and benefits offered by urban life. It was near impossible for these individuals to resist the allure of urban life, for they saw it as the very means upon which their fellow Africans could be freed from the bondage of colonisation.

Bradford (1986:58) admonishes not to overestimate the influence of western education in the choices and political strategies developed by the black middle class of the early twentieth century: “the theory that mission education included submission is clearly somewhat threadbare”. Plainly put, colonial education did not brainwash the New Africans into becoming subservient, even if racial and supremacist teachings were dished out to black students. Undeniably, the African intellect and will for self-actualisation were able to resist and filter those teachings appropriately. When some of these elite blacks became ‘honorary whites’ within the urban confines, they had “a direct interest in securing their professional power and

in protecting the established moral order of South African society, which guaranteed them full equality with regard to economic opportunities and life chances” (Mathebe 2016:82). For example, Goodhew (2000:264) chronicles the tension that developed between the black establishment transforming the system from within, namely the New Africans through “respectable values – those with a stress on practices such as religion, education, law and order”, and the radical, mainly youthful dissenters who hated every facet of the system, including the existence of a black petit bourgeois class. Fortescue (1991:512) corroborates this by noting that during the early twentieth century, the black workers’ “consciousness developed in a non-revolutionary manner, within the system, and that it was often individualistic or ethnically based, and when frequently unified Africanist in outlook”. That is, the actions of the middle-class blacks were confined to getting themselves into the system and not necessarily to uprooting the system.

Mathebe (2016) sees the forced removals from Sophiatown during the 1950s as the death knell for the aspirations and vanity of the mid-twentieth-century black middle-class because they were compelled to accept that they would never be equal to whites, in lifestyle or legal standing. These erstwhile urban elites were now forced to move from their relatively comfortable homes into the ‘matchbox’ clusters of Orlando alongside their factory worker brothers and sisters, and the multitude of unemployed blacks. Gone was their tea drinking and American-style existence. Exile and delinquency were the only alternatives to what they saw as a coerced and subhuman urban existence within the ‘black city’ of Soweto. When the urban black middle classes were forced to stay near their less educated, mostly unemployed kin, the hierarchies that had endured from the 1920s were challenged and partially dissolved.

#### **4.3.5 Imaging the emergent Afropolitan bourgeoisie**

As noted in my discussion of the New African Movement, the urban space represented an opportunity for Africans to articulate new identities and create a new Africa (Seme 1906). To this end, the city was a site of black aspiration, and these aspirations found form and expression through the implements of western modernity. Thus, the emergence of a highly educated and westernised African middle-class was not the mere ‘aping’ of European modernity, but instead the physical manifestation of New African modernity. After all, the New African Movement could only express this yet unseen ‘new Africa’ through the existing tools and modalities that the western cultural universe had brought to Africa. It is worth highlighting here that the European cultural universe was itself thoroughly internationalised and creole. Thomas Sowell (2017:70) explains how British customs, for example, were shaped by a broader cultural universe the British had encountered through their naval explorations. Thus,

when urban-based blacks adopted Victorian cultural appetites like tea drinking, they adopted a kind of planetary etiquette of consuming hot drinks, which had been transnationalised by British explorers and merchants who first encountered this habit in Asia. However, the classed structure of the city and of African society meant that New African subjectivities were not accorded to every black person who aspired to achieve this positionality. It was only the educated and Christianised elite who could truly become New Africans.

The first celebrated modern black artists to emerge during the 1920s and 1930s were recognised as part of this elite and an emergent class of Afropolitans who aspired to a cosmopolitan brand of being urban. Therefore, they represent a cohort of artists who were Afropolitan in the more elitist cosmopolitan understanding of the term. These artists were not only part of this Afropolitan bourgeoisie, but through their art, they were instrumental in producing and maintaining the mystique of this emergent black middle-class. However, their inclusion in the elite circles of the black intelligentsia only accorded these artists a marginal standing within the art world at large (van Robbroeck 2008).

Using the tools of western high art like oil painting, black artists produced enduring portraits of the captains of the New African Movement and other prominent black individuals within black urbanisms. Pemba's portrait of *Professor D.D.T. Jabavu* (1951), the son of John Tengo Jabavu, is among the most iconic portraits of a particularly cosmopolitan black subjectivity to emerge from the era (Figure 4.6). Born in 1885, Jabavu junior "lived an extraordinary" Afropolitan life; he was educated in South Africa and the United Kingdom, and also travelled to America, India, and the Middle East (Higgs 2001:100). Upon his return to South Africa, Jabavu became the first black professor at University of Fort Hare and went on to be its most distinguished scholar during his three-decade long career at the institution until his retirement in 1944. Pemba's portrait was produced a few years before the conferment of an honorary doctoral degree on Jabavu by Rhodes University in 1954. Van Robbroeck (2008:221) records how the black petit-bourgeoisie was different from their white counterparts because of their daily encounters with "the deprivations and poverty of the townships" where they resided, realities with white people rarely if ever witnessed.

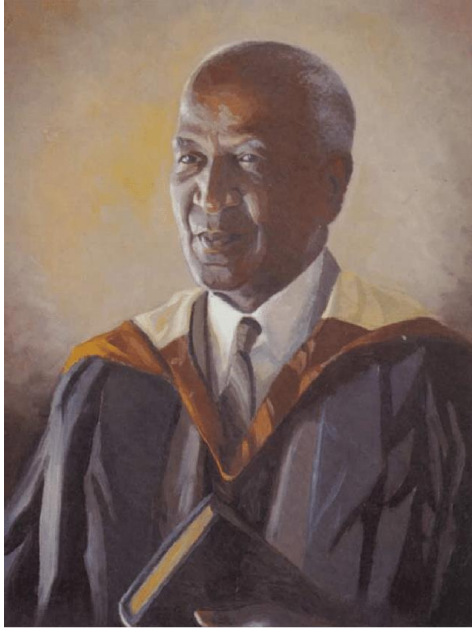


Figure 4.6. George Pemba, *Professor D.D.T. Jabavu*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 75 x 60.5 cm. (De Jager 1992:12)



Figure 4.7. Ephraim Ngatane, *Reading a Newspaper*, 1969. Oil and enamel on Board, 40.5 x 30.5 cm. Bongzi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

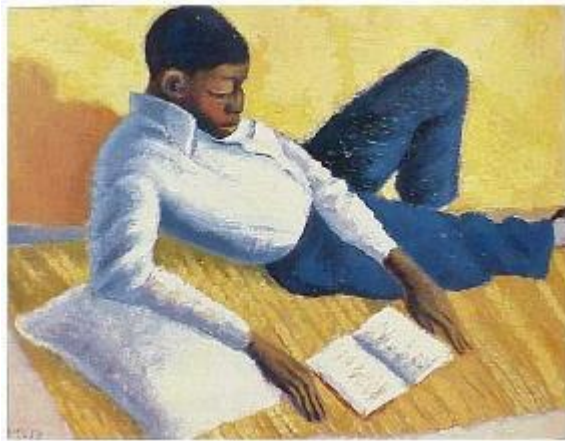


Figure 4.8. Gerard Sekoto, *Portrait of a young man reading*, 1946-1947. Oil on canvas. (Lindop 1995:54)

The Afropolitan middle class of the mid-twentieth century made much of their literacy, as evidenced in Gerard Sekoto's *Portrait of a young man reading* (1946-1947) and Ephraim Ngatane's *Reading a newspaper* (1969). As already stated, before the massification of basic education for blacks via the introduction of the Bantu Education system in the 1950s, only a small percentage of blacks continued with school beyond Standard 2. Thus, the ability to read and write, particularly in English, took on a special significance linked to career opportunities, class, and self-actualisation into modernity. In their analysis of depictions of black workers holding newspapers in artworks produced by black artists, Eloff and Sevenhuysen (2011b:35)

trivialised the reading of newspapers in black urbanisms as “a viable leisure time activity”. While certain forms of reading can be seen as a leisure pastime, this act took on a more intentioned, political, and transformative function for urban-based blacks. To read a newspaper, magazine or book was to be connected with the modern world. Reading meant you were educated, sophisticated, well-spoken – in English that is – and, but not always, economically mobile. The ability to read did not automatically equate to financial success, but it certainly projected a sense of educated personhood that indicated upward mobility. The performativity of reading, as seen in these paintings (Figures 4.7 and 4.8), therefore went beyond the act of information consumption, it symbolised intellectual ascendancy and social status within the urban imaginary.



Figure 4.9. George Pemba, *Daughter of the Shebeen Queen*, 1957. Oil on Canvas, 54 x 38 cm. (Hobbs 2006:28)

Middle-class subjectivities within black urbanisms of the 1940s and 1950s were not only the preserve of the educated elite. A small band of black entrepreneurs were beginning to flourish, against the steepest odds, by operating businesses such as general dealers and shebeens within black urbanisms. Shebeens, particularly, were ventures that enabled women’s agency within urban settings. Shebeens were township homes converted into liquor stores and pubs, where all manner of urban blacks congregated. Although outlawed by white authorities, shebeens were nevertheless valued businesses within the township. Nat Nakasa (quoted in Patel 2005:16) poetically coined the shebeen a “noble institution”, going on to describe them as “hospitable homes, often run by solid housewives and respectable men”. This near romanticisation of the shebeen provides a poignant illustration of how those who ran these institutions were themselves part of the petit-bourgeoisie in black urbanisms. Nakasa (quoted in Patel 2005:16) concludes his evaluation of the uniqueness of shebeens by writing that “we

drank our drink the shebeen way – a way outside the normal human experience of drinking in bars, hotel lounges and clubs”. Pemba’s *Daughter of the Shebeen Queen* (1957) showcases an unexpected and unlikely component of this infamous social establishment – a young girl, who in many respects espouses the nobility of the institution noted by Nakasa (Figure 4.9). The innocent girl, who is identified as the daughter of the matriarch shebeen owner, is delicately crafted by Pemba via layers of brushwork that radiate a shy calmness and decorum. It is the ‘hospitable’ side of the shebeen as home that Pemba explores through the lens of a young girl who is the ultimate insignia of the existence of a family unit within the notorious shebeen.

Unseen in this painting is the progressive, emancipated, and middle-class urban-based female entrepreneur. While the artwork is focussed on the daughter, it is also a surrogate rendering of the mother, who is characterised as ‘the queen’ of the shebeen in the painting’s title, which in turn points to the class, resilience, and industriousness of black female entrepreneurs. As discussed in the previous chapter, female beer brewers and shebeen entrepreneurs were central to the performance of an Afropolitan lifestyle in black urbanisms by creating the space for black music, dance, and fashion culture to bloom. Kotzen (2014:2) takes this significance further by recognising township-based “informal entrepreneurs” like shebeen owners as “important actors who shape the nature of urban economies, politics, social life and spaces in urban Africa”. Finally, both of these paintings by Pemba of Prof Jabavu and the young girl used a representational style that was identified with classical western portrait paintings, through how both sitters were gazing at the artist and the overall composition of the artwork.

Another artwork that celebrates the performance of urban sophistication and class among blacks was Tommy Motswai’s *The tea party* (1987). Motswai was a master of showing black suburban affluence and occasional excess, using vivid colours and bold outlines. Mdanda (2011:27) summarises Motswai’s oeuvre as follows: “he uses humour, depicting happy and satisfied people, showing life in townships to be fun”. In *The tea party*, Motswai caricatures a tea drinking session within an affluent black family (Figure 4.10). Younge (1988:50) mistook the pale and “jaundiced colour scheme” of the figures in the drawing to portray whites, concluding that “white South African viewers should squirm with embarrassment” at his parody of white urbanity. However, the reality is that Motswai was depicting two affluent black couples engaged in small talk over tea. The black and brown curled hair of the women is the clearest indicator of their blackness. Furthermore, the woman bringing the tea is not a maid, as suggested by Younge, but most probably the host of the get-together. As noted in the previous chapter, tea drinking among urban black communities was a marker of wealth, success, and showed affinity to Victorian dandiness.



Figure 4.10. Tommy Motswai, *The tea party*, 1987. Pastel on paper, 66.5 x103.5 cm. (<http://www.art.co.za/tommymotswai/a49.htm>)

It is worth pointing out again here that the New African Movement harboured an assimilationist and conciliatory idealism, where the freedom of blacks did not mean opposition to western modernity (Masilela 2013). For the New Africanists, capitalism and industrialism were not the problem. Rather, it was racism that needed to be alleviated. If cured, then all South Africans, black, white, Indian, coloured, and otherwise would share equally – that is, in a way which is proportional to their population density – in the riches of the country. Simply put, the emergent black Afropolitan elite of the early twentieth century wanted to enjoy the same middle-class status and privileges experienced by white society.

#### 4.3.6 Racialised urban inequality

Besides the slippery and unstable distinctions that racialised urban inequality set up between the educated black elites and the non-educated masses, the urban boundary also became a clear marker of inequality between black and white residents. White administrators designed the urban landscape in a manner that favoured whites to the detriment of black interests. In Chapter 2, I introduced the notion of the *swart gevaar*, which characterised the fear harboured by urban-based white communities towards blacks, and black men in particular. Here I drill into the implications of this fear and the racial inequality it created within the urban spaces. As Memmi (2000:183) alluded to in his landmark book on racism, racist “opinions serve instead to justify attitudes and actions that are in turn motivated by fear of others and a desire to attack them”. Racism was at the heart of the black urban experience from the formation of the first westernised South African town during the seventeenth century. Interestingly, the VOC did not necessarily have the initial impetus nor capacity to police race relations in the Cape, which meant that the norms of racial interaction were left to individual white masters who were free

to enact a sort of “private violence” on those who were seen as being ‘other’ (Glaser 2001:61). The British-controlled cities introduced institutional mechanisms for dealing with the black ‘problem’ during the nineteenth century. The institutional mechanisms deployed engineered distinctions between black and white, European and African, were foregrounded on a racialised and racist colonial logic. MacDonald (2006:7) explains the similarities between racism and racialism: “Racists require inequality to manifest the superiority of one race over inferior races; racialists, on the other hand, require distinct – but not, they claim, necessarily unequal – representation for the various races”. MacDonald views the colonial and apartheid systems in South Africa as an expression of both.

The racialised order resulted in what became an ‘ambivalent’ relationship between blacks and capitalist modernity, wherein white society developed a mix of often-contradictory ideas, attitudes, and ways of engaging with the *swart gevaar* within the urban paradigm (Macamo 2005b:1). Glaser (2001:65) explains that modernist ideas “include both pluralistic and repressive tendencies, and also that, on occasion, apparently ‘enlightened’ doctrines can have a repressive side”. This racialised logic accorded whites the burden of transforming backward Africans into modern subjects. However, the racism within white supremacist ideology relegated blacks to a non-human status and therefore not worthy of partaking fully in the fruits of industrialisation. Using the case of migrant labourers from Mozambique who worked on South African mines and farms during the early twentieth century, Macamo (2005a:67) ponders how colonisation was “an important factor in denying modernity in Africa”.

The colonial project intentionally frustrated and regressed the rapid industrialisation and modernisation of Africans to maintain its racist hierarchy. However, conversely, as Macamo (2005a:70) further reveals: “Slavery and forced labour were instruments, so the argument went, of a civilising project to initiate Africans into the rational and emancipatory habits of working hard for one’s living”. Thus, black men were bombarded from all sides by the calls to become semi-modern subjects by offering themselves as migrant labourers, which as Macamo (2005a:74) puts it, become a “moral crusade against male Africans”.<sup>141</sup> Of interest here, is that the labour practices of the colonial enterprises did not fully promote the modernisation project in Africa. While the white administrators and capitalists encouraged and at times coerced black men to work in the newly developed industries, they simultaneously did not want “to see the migrant labour develop into a proletariat” akin to what was happening in Europe and America at the time (Macamo 2005a:81). As confirmed by Manganyi (1973:10)

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<sup>141</sup> Macamo (2005a:76) expands on the moral crusade against Africans men further to suggest that Tsonga men proved their manhood by going to work in the South African ‘death’ mines, and by surviving the dangers of being a migrant labourer. Mating and marriage opportunities were favourable for the migrant labourer who returned safely after a stint in the mines. In many ways, the whole society was restructured through the introduction of new labour practices.



in his evaluation of the workplace treatment of blacks, white-owned companies were “not geared towards the growth and self-fulfilment” of black employees. To the contrary, black employees lives were seen as expendable. For example, over 81,000 black men from Mozambique died in South African mines between the 1900s and the 1940s (Macamo 2005a:75).

The inequality between the white bosses and the black labourers is encapsulated in the tragic story of Johannes Mokone, who unearthed the famous Jonker Diamond, one of the largest diamonds ever discovered. Mokone was under the employ of the Jonker family who had not paid him for three years before he found the gemstone. The Jonker family sold the diamond to Ernest Oppenheimer<sup>142</sup> for £70,000 (equivalent to about R70 million in today’s money) and only paid Mokone £10 (roughly R10,000 today) for his efforts, after not giving him a promised a farm, wagon, and oxen. When *The Bantu World* reported his story in 1936, they described Mokone as a “most unhappy man” who was in “tatters” (Discoverer of the Jonker Diamond found in tatters 1936:1). Although the Jonker family pocketed a net amount of £50,000 after the state had taken tax, what Mokone received was 0.02% of the amount the Jonker’s profited from this phenomenal transaction. The cruelty of this story is that such forms of exploitation were legally permissible, and Mokone could not turn to the courts for remedial intervention. This story is paradigmatic of the plight of black workers during the early twentieth century.

Beyond the punishing labour practices, unemployment was a major problem for urbanised blacks during the early twentieth century, which further increased the income gap between themselves and whites. In the third annual SAIRR report in 1933, the think tank highlighted that urban unemployment was becoming worse among black residents of the major cities. The response of the Union of South Africa government at that point was to send those who were city-based and unemployed back to the Native reserves that were established by the Natives Land Act in 1913. A 1936 survey of black workers in Johannesburg revealed that a staggering 90% were not originally from the area (Bonner 1995:117). The Union of South Africa government wanted to leverage that the black workers were not from the Johannesburg area and force these local-locals back to their Native reserves. The black intelligentsia were extremely critical of this policy, noting that “unemployment is a disaster from which they cannot retreat” (Joint Councils tackle problem of unemployment 1933:1). Sending the unemployed back to the villages was not a panacea to the crisis of unemployment, since the very economic structure of village life had already been destroyed.

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<sup>142</sup> Oppenheimer subsequently sold the diamond to Harry Winston, a New York diamond trader, for £145,000.

Added to this failed strategy, blacks could not alleviate their own unemployment through entrepreneurship. Black businesses within the urban spaces were in a double bind. They were not only disallowed to trade in white spaces against white businesses but had to compete with white entrepreneurs in black residential areas. Aspirant business owners within urban black communities found it unfair that trading licenses were only issued to white entrepreneurs. An article that appeared in *The Bantu World* expressed this discomfort:

While one does not want to say Europeans should not be allowed to trade in the Native reserves yet one cannot see the reason why they should have a monopoly in areas that are purely Native. The restrictions which make it impossible for Natives to carry on business in their own areas should be removed (Trading rights for the Bantu 1932:1).

However, those black-owned businesses that were located in black locations also found it difficult to compete with white businesses due to lack of support from black consumers. Malepe (1937:16) lamented this anomaly in a letter to *The Bantu World* newspaper. In his concluding remarks, Malepe (1937:16) notes:

I am aware that there are Bantu stores in locations [townships] today most of which are feebly struggling to keep on their feet. Many of these stores are always on the verge of insolvency because although there may be thousands of people in the location little support can be realised from them. These people prefer to for several miles to the nearest European shop to get a pound of sugar, which they could just as well get from the Bantu shop in the location [township] only a few yards from their homes. *Our people seem to forget that beyond getting his money the European shopkeeper may not care a scrap for them.* I therefore strongly appeal to the Bantu to give more consideration to commerce, mutual support and a realisation that they have to determine and work-out their own salvation (my emphasis).

In this letter, Malepe makes an impassioned case for blacks to support black enterprises. Malepe finds it odd that black consumers would travel longer distances to purchase goods that the local black-owned shop had. Such bizarre trends also contributed to the rise of black unemployment, as black entrepreneurs struggled to compete with white enterprise.

#### **4.3.7 Urbanisation as dystopia: The underbelly of Afropolitanism**

The totality of black peoples' urban experience tended to be precarious and frightening. One of the most authoritative texts related to urban-based black suffering was written by Miriam Tlali. Published in 1984, *Mihloti* (meaning tears in Xitsonga) is a personal history of black women's pain and trauma during apartheid. In the preface of the book, Tlali (1984:xv) utters the following moving words regarding the tears she has shed:

Very often, I have *had* to shed tears. As a child, I had to shed them for my grandmother who had to till soil with me on her back: to scrape the earth with her bare hands and build a mud-house in which to cook for us. For my father who died when I was an infant... I shed tears for my beautiful mother who had to struggle alone... Now that I am a mother, I shed tears for my children when I realised that I would never be able to live with them and know fully the joys of motherhood... I have often shed tears for the fate of all black children. For those we love so much who have left our land and cannot return. For our denigrated humanity which we must retrieve.

Naturally, artists represented these tears and sufferings of black society in their visualisation of Afropolitanism, here expressed by Tlali. It is not a stretch to suggest that every black artist at some stage of their creative endeavour produced an artwork that reflected on the torment of blacks within the urban context. The artists themselves were products of the dire conditions that affected their kin. Artists like Gerard Sekoto, though celebrated as one of the foremost international black artists of his generation, experienced the urban space as a liminal zone of non-being. After moving to Paris in 1947 with the hope that he would escape the racism and discrimination he experienced in South Africa, Lindop (1988a:10) reports that Sekoto arrived in Paris only to encounter “a certain alienation created by barriers which the French seemed to construct around themselves”. Sekoto admitted that life in Paris was not easy, which had a regressive impact on his art-making, writing that “life was not fluent: I was mentally uneasy” (quoted in Lindop 1988a:11). Although Sekoto was part of the black *petit-bourgeoisie* – the New Africanists or transnationally mobile Afropolitans – his middle-class status did not make life in the cities of South Africa or France any easier because he was still a black man. Eyene (2011) explores the aesthetics of exile in the work of black artists who fled the country seeking a better existence in the so-called enlightened metropole and shows how their art reflected a nostalgic longing for home.

Louis Maqhubela’s *Exiled king* (undated) is prototypical of the sense of loss and despair the black elite like Sekoto experienced (Figure 4.11). Regardless of their advanced education or level of westernisation, they were still below the lowliest whites within South Africa’s legal and social stratum. Maqhubela’s drawing exposes the nakedness of the monarch who is forced into exile in an attempt to escape persecution. Within the context of this study, this artwork is spine-chilling in that it points to how urban-based blacks, even those with royal lineage, were not exempt from racism, for they too were stripped of legal, economic, and social authority. Maqhubela himself left South Africa in 1973 searching for a better existence, first moving to Spain, before settling to London in 1978.

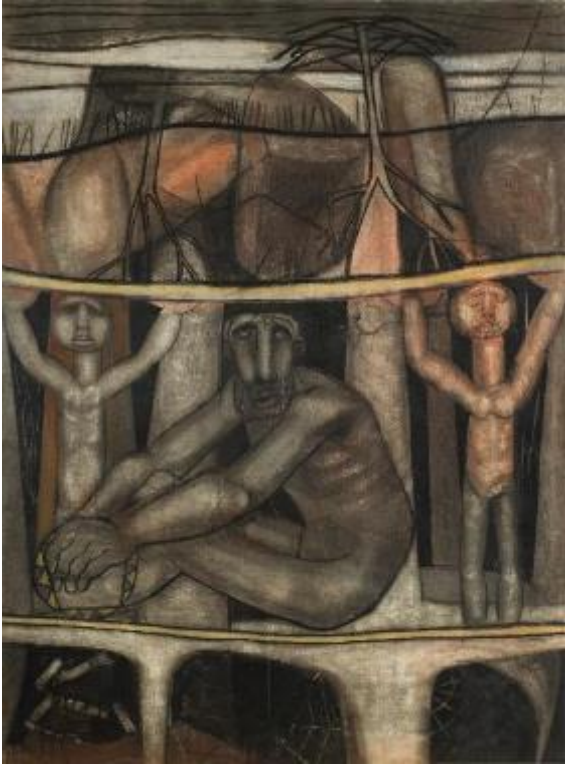


Figure 4.11. Louis Khehla Maqhubela, *Exiled King*, undated. Conte on Paper, 130.5 x 95 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)



Figure 4.12. Winston Saoli, *Melancholy*, 1983. Ink, watercolour and crayon on paper, 70 x 50 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

Another artist whose life embodies the dilemma of the disenfranchised urban-based black person was Wiston Saoli. Saoli was an extraordinary artist who enjoyed moderate success throughout his career but sadly was beset with sorrow throughout his life. Rankin (1990:27) noted Saoli's propensity to "exaggerate picturesque poverty" through images that "generate a rather superficial sense of self-pity in a decorative and sentimental style". While there is an undeniable element of bathos in Saoli's art, the 'superficial sense of self-pity' which Rankin diagnoses as the product of real traumatic experiences the artist encountered throughout his life in the urban space. After a promising start to his art career, where he staged a solo exhibition in 1969,<sup>143</sup> Saoli was detained without trial in 1972 on account of his political associations with the ANC and was placed in solitary confinement for nine months (Proud 2015a). Also, Saoli was diagnosed with cancer a few years before his death. Homeless and

<sup>143</sup> According to Proud (2015a) this solo was held at the *Goodman Gallery* and was a sold-out event. However, de Beer (1995:13) records Saoli's first solo as having taken place at the Jubilee Art Centre, which was based in the Johannesburg CBD at the time. These confusing historical recordings are common among writings about black art produced by white writers who were lax in verifying factual accurateness.

penniless for much of his life, Saoli died tragically in a bar fight in 1995 and was only celebrated as an artist when Absa Art Gallery held a major retrospective of his work in 1998.

The pressures of not making it in the city forced Saoli into the life of a social recluse. According to Bloomberg (quoted in *The lonely last years of gifted artist and sculptor* 1995:4), who ran the Arts & Picture Framers shop in Johannesburg where many black artists sent their work for framing and possible sale, Saoli “didn’t want anything to do with the materialistic world”. Proud (2015a) concluded that Saoli was “a victim of the political, social and market forces that have blighted and exploited so many promising artistic careers in this country”. This victimisation is stitched into his self-portraits. Thus, Saoli’s *Melancholy* (1983), a delicate mixed media drawing of a tormented man created by a tormented artist, should not only be seen as a visualisation of an artist’s personal anguish but as an artistic representation of the agony encountered by millions of black bodies in the urban context throughout the twentieth century (Figure 4.12). Sadly, Saoli’s tragic life was symbolic of what most black artists experienced within the urban space.

Outside of their usefulness as cheap labour, blacks were unwanted intruders in white urban areas. This feeling of being an outcast and cancer to urbanisation is palpable in George Pemba’s *The outcast* (1945), which was “apparently a portrait of a lunatic with whom the artist was familiar” (Hudleston 1996:100). If taken as a creative snapshot of how blacks were treated in the urban space, we recognise the loneliness, distress, and sense of abjection embodied by the painting’s sitter (Figure 4.13). To quote Biko (2004:30) this artwork expressed a dangerous form of “spiritual poverty” which was coupled by a material lack since blacks were rendered aliens in the land of their birth. Pemba again depicts a similar kind of abject alienation in *No work* (1948) which, according to van Robbroeck (2008:222), displayed “Pemba’s acute awareness of and sympathy with the predicament of the rapidly growing urban proletariat” (Figure 4.14). Like Saoli’s drawing, both these paintings by Pemba and his other melancholic renditions of the urban malaise have to be appreciated from the artist’s own ambivalence towards urbanisation and the hardships he experienced throughout his life.

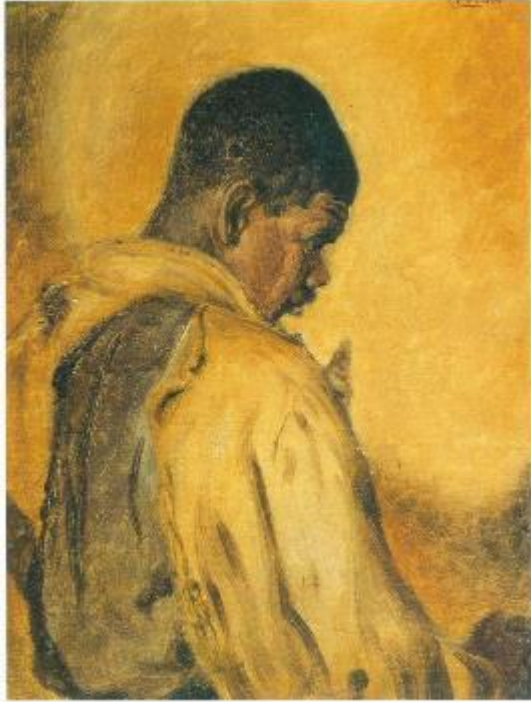


Figure 4.13. George Pemba, *The outcast*, 1945. Oil on board, 28.5 x 21 cm. Collection of the Kellie Campbell Africans Library, University of KwaZulu Natal. (Hudleston 1996:100)

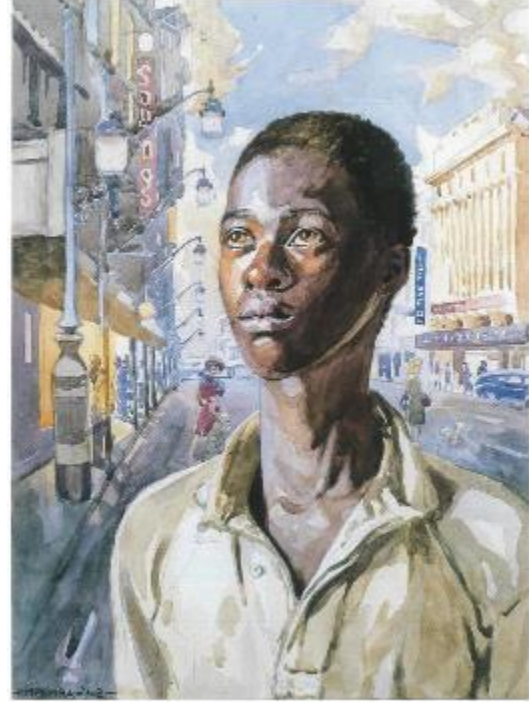


Figure 4.14. George Pemba, *No work*, 1948. Watercolour, 33.4 x 24.8 cm. (Hudleston 1996:107)

The urban environment was the cause of great pain and suffering for Pemba and his family. His father was tragically killed in a motorbike accident in 1928 after receiving it as a birthday gift to ease his daily commute to work (Hudleston 1996:23). In 1930, Pemba produced a retrospective watercolour painting of his father's *Funeral procession* (1930). The composition accentuates the deep sorrow and anguish of a man bemoaning his father's death (Figure 4.15). While death impacts everyone, its regularity among urbanised blacks certainly compounded the misery that follows urban black life. Tens if not hundreds of thousands of black men from all over southern Africa lost their lives in the mines during the early twentieth century (Maloka 2004). In 1944 Pemba obtained funds from the Bantu Welfare Trust to embark on a 'grand tour' of South Africa. This tour aimed to enrich his knowledge of native life in South Africa so that he could contribute towards a complete picture of black South Africans and their cultures. Speaking of Johannesburg Pemba wrote: "Here I saw for the first time the reverse side of that impressive picture called Johannesburg. These young and well-built fellows were digging for the yellow metal, which runs the world, and living a fast life in the town, built on the golden underground... I felt that there was something wrong about all this" (quoted in Hudleston 1996:41). Pemba was disturbed by what he saw among the blacks in Johannesburg. He noticed their state of limbo, wherein they were not full citizens of the great city of gold, on account of the racist laws. Pemba concluded: "I think there is nothing

connecting them with the town in which they live. There is not the love of the homeland, no pride of tradition. There is only the ardent wish to make money, to gamble, to be thrilled at the thought of getting rich” (quoted in Hudleston 1996:41).



Figure 4.15. George Pemba, *Funeral procession*, 1930.  
Watercolour. (Hudleston 1996:16)

Unfortunately, this dream of getting rich in the bright lights of Johannesburg was an impossibility for the vast majority of blacks who lived there. This resulted in broken homes, shattered lives, and unrealised futures. Pemba himself struggled with alcohol addiction as an attempt to escape the harsh realities of urban life. In 1966, Pemba reflected on his troubles with alcoholism and the distress it had brought him: “I was miserable. I had no money, and I was terribly broke. I was hunted as a deer is hunted by my creditors” (quoted in Hudleston 1996:60). Part of his anguish was because, during the early 1950s, Pemba harboured a wish to live in cities like Paris and London and sought to emulate the self-exiled artists Gerard Sekoto and Ernst Mancoba, hoping that he would have a better life outside South Africa.

In a review of Ephraim Ngatane’s retrospective at the Standard Bank Gallery titled *Symphony of Soweto*, Sassen (2010) notes that “like his Sowetan peers, Ngatane was imbued with the hope and horror of the township, which they ambivalently hated but called home”. Ngatane,<sup>144</sup> who died aged only 32 in 1971, was a colourist and expressionist of the urban malaise. Many of the artworks reflecting on the urbanisation of blacks, like Ngatane’s images, reverberate with rhythm and dynamism, but also reveal the despair, fear, and anguish of blacks and the artists themselves. Mutumba (2016:15) reiterates this point when commenting on twentieth-

<sup>144</sup> Ngatane grew up in an informal settlement camp in Orlando during the 1940s and saw first-hand the harshness and socio-political possibilities of urban black life.

century South African black art: “[e]ach of them has their own language to express their own love of art, their love of life, just as much as their anger, sadness and powerlessness”.



Figure 4.16. Dumile Feni, *Kwa-Mashu township*, 1966. Crayon, 189 x 153 cm. (de Jager 1973)



Figure 4.17. Welcome Koboka, *Men building*, 1971. Pencil & ink on paper, 56.5 x 72.5 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

Another prominent artist whose life is an allegory of the pain, disappointment, and unfulfilled aspirations of blacks is Dumile Feni. Feni, who achieved international recognition before his passing due to heart failure, remained relatively impoverished throughout his life. According to van den Berg (2009:70) Feni’s “art is not only a commentary on the experience of pain and suffering of blacks under apartheid rule but points to universal human suffering and a common humanity”. This tendency to claim Feni’s art as universal as opposed to dealing with specific issues of the urban black experience in South Africa betrays the essence and spiritual potency of the images that emerged from oppression and discrimination. As correctly signalled by de Jager (1973:26), Feni’s “drawings bear witness to the urgency, vitality and tension that went into their creation”, that is the urban crises that urban blacks encountered daily. During a brief stay with his friend Omar Badsha in Durban, Feni sketched the *Kwa-Mashu Township* (1966), one of the first sites where black Durbanites were relocated to as part of the Group Areas Act (Figure 4.16). What is striking about the image is the deformed figure that lies in the foreground of the composition. The entangled body oozes with pain and sheer agony, which was of course a result of the forced removals. Another one of the great tragedies of black labour during the twentieth century, as catalogued in Welcome Koboka’s *Men building* (1971), is that black workers were seldom allowed to build infrastructure that benefited and served their own people



(Figure 4.17). Black labour was responsible for building first-world schools, hospitals, housing, roads for white beneficiaries. Nevertheless, blacks could not access or benefit from the very institutions and spaces they had helped to build. Furthermore, segregation was responsible for destroying black excellence, especially in the sphere of business.



Figure 4.18. Johannes Maswanganyi, *Tall Businessman*, c.1986, Painted wood. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation.  
(Photograph by Thania Louw)

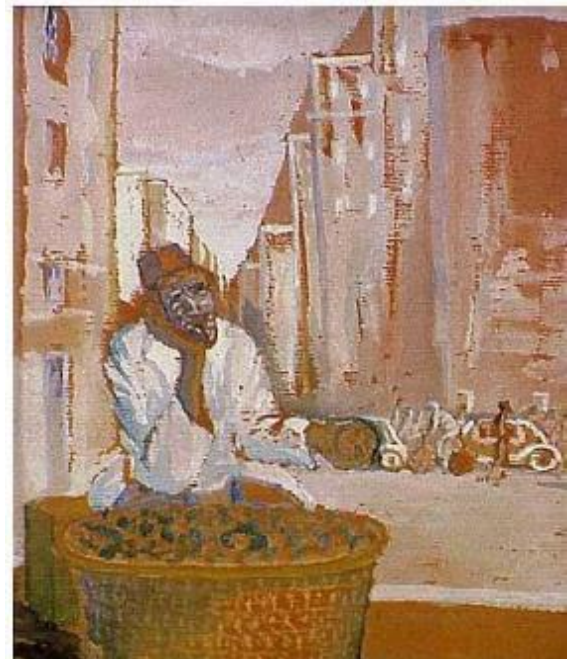


Figure 4.19. Gerard Sekoto, *Poverty in the midst of plenty*, 1939. Paint on paper. (Lindop 1995:31)

In Johannes Maswanganyi's sculpture, *Tall businessman* (c.1986), the sleek looking black entrepreneur has the gaze of a dismayed and hopeless individual (Figure 4.18). The disenchantment in the eyes of the man in this and many of Maswanganyi's portrayals of black subjects should be seen in the light of the unfair context in which these individuals toiled. Throughout colonial and apartheid South Africa, black entrepreneurs, no matter how industrious, were denied the opportunity to establish and sustain legacy enterprises in the same terms that their white counterparts could. This inequality is also captured in Sekoto's *Poverty in the midst of plenty* (1939), where an African trader sits despondently trying to sell one of his fruits or vegetables (Figure 4.19). His right arm balances his head in a posture that communicates utter dejection. Black traders in urban spaces, such as the one painted by Sekoto, were at the tail-end of the economic value chain.

Another impressive depiction of the urban angst felt by blacks, especially black men, was created by Mzwakhe Nhlabati for the *Staffrider*<sup>145</sup> magazine in 1979 (Figure 4.20). Nhlabati's drawing titled *Towards limbo* (1979) accompanied Mtutuzeli Matshoba's short story with the same title, which poetically catalogued the experiences of black men caught without a passbook in the city of Johannesburg. As confirmed by an article in the *New Age* publication in May 1955, "living in the cities has become a nightmare for all Africans of pass-bearing age" (quoted in Tambo 2014:76). The black male body had been criminalised by its very presence in the city. As Baderoon (2018) argues, "to be African in South Africa was to be criminal". Nhlabati's image was a graphic narrative of the confusion and uncertainty that the black 'illegal alien' faced if he stayed in Johannesburg without a pass and imprisonment in some of the harshest prison conditions.<sup>146</sup> The alternative is the misfortune of being deported to the outskirts of the city in settlements designated for blacks, void of adequate housing, schools, hospitals, and basic municipal services like water, roads or electricity. Matshoba (1979:45) concludes the sombre story with these words: "but after some time the constant danger of arrest drove him to a place where at least he could be as near as possible to the industrial 'white areas', and at the same time be free of the threat of arrest. He went to a limbo known as Winterveld on the 'border'".<sup>147</sup> This feeling of limbo was experienced by many black artists who travelled to the city. Linda Givon recalls how several artists were apprehended outside her gallery because they possessed a pass for Johannesburg CBD, whereas the Goodman Gallery was zoned under the northern suburbs. Speaking specifically of Julian Motau, who lodged at Givon's residence and preferred to work and travel in the evening, Givon explains that "you must remember without a pass, Julian was almost like a rat scurrying around at night in the townships under cover of darkness, and this was the horror of his life, not being allowed to move freely literally made him feel subhuman" (quoted in Siebrits 2003a:s.n.). In short, Motau was a *de facto* fugitive of the city.

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<sup>145</sup> From 1978 until 1993, *Staffrider* was the premier publication of the fusion between image and text. Writers from around the country submitted poems, short stories, reviews and essays, and these writings would then be complimented by illustrations that gave the words a pictorial life. Mzwakhe Nhlabati was one of the main contributors of such drawings.

<sup>146</sup> During a guided tour of the Robben Island Museum, a former prisoner noted that being arrested at the John Vorster Square Prison in Johannesburg for a week was worse than spending five years in Robben Island. He joked that Robben Island was like a holiday retreat when compared to the horror of John Vorster Square Prison and other prisons like it in the major cities of South Africa.

<sup>147</sup> Matshoba's referral to Winterveld as being on the border was both literal and symbolic. Winterveld was located on the border between South Africa and the Bophutatswana homeland. In a metaphorical sense, Winterveld as a 'liminal border' because residents of the area did not belong to Bophutatswana and nor were they fully accepted in South Africa.



Figure 4.20. Mzwakhe Nhlabati, *Towards Limbo*, 1979. Pen and ink drawing. (Matshoba 1979:44)

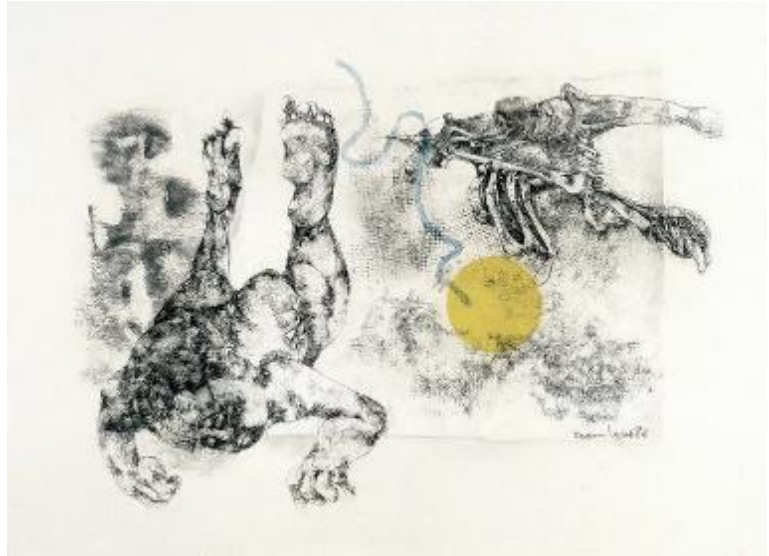


Figure 4.21. Ezrom Legae, *Death of Steve Biko*, 1983. Pencil, watercolour, printer's ink on paper, 34 x 46.5 cm. (Death of Steve Biko 2015)

The feeling of being subhuman in the prison of the city and also in the prison system was captured in Ezrom Legae's drawing, *Death of Steve Biko* (1983). This mixed media work portrayed the great Black Consciousness Movement leader as a hapless, tortured, and defeated man (Figure 4.21). His nakedness is not just a personal nakedness but is metaphoric of how the apartheid system denied black society as a whole a sense of dignity and humanity within the urban paradigm. The carcass of a rotting bird that lies alongside Biko is testament to the toxic and life-sapping urban prisons, both the prison cells where thousands of blacks were taken for contravening urban laws and the prison of the city streets, where blacks lived. Nakasa (quoted in Patel 2005:5) once summarised the angst of blacks in the city of Johannesburg in these sincere words:

By day, the city became a depressing mess. There were too many Africans sweating away on company bicycles or lingering on pavements in search of work. More depressing would be the newly recruited 'mine boys', scores of black men from all over Africa. They walked through town with blankets on their shoulders and loaves of bread under their armpits, to be housed in the hostels of the gold mines. They looked like prisoners to me. Some had blank, innocent faces and gazed openly, longingly at women passing by. Most of them, if not all, were illiterate and doomed to stay that way for the rest of their lives. I resented them because I felt a responsibility towards them and I was doing nothing about it. They spoiled my image of Johannesburg as the throbbing giant which threw up sophisticated gangsters, brave politicians and intellectuals who challenged white authority.

This moving account of the hierarchy of suffering among black men and women within urban spaces is visible in each of the aforementioned artworks and countless others. Speaking on the responsibility of acknowledging black suffering and of black artists engaging with this suffering in their work, Sharpe (2016) writes:

What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the black dead and dying: to tend to the black person, to blacks, always living in the push toward our death? It means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living.

Some influential black intellectuals like Matsemela Manaka, however, resisted these types of images as self-defeating. While extolling the artists who had themselves persevered under the most demanding contexts, his unapologetic final assessment of such images was to call it “self-pity art” (Manaka 1987:15).

#### **4.3.8 Migrant labour mobility**

Economic imperatives were another major impetus for an increase in black urbanisation. Blacks were coerced into the capitalist cash economy by being dispossessed of land and the requirement that they service taxes such as the hut tax. French (1983:1) shows that many of the first black men who worked at the mines during the 1900s “only went to earn enough to pay their taxes then returned to their families on the land”. Blacks (initially only men) had to find work to pay the taxes and had to become migrant labour, which in turn caused the disintegration of traditional economies. For the lucky few, access to schooling within the missionary establishments, which meant being Christianised, offered the prospect of white-collar work and upward mobility. For black men, working in the city was not attractive because of the lower wages they received as compared to their white counterparts, and because of difficult working conditions. Thus, these early black urbanites were used to the migrant labourer practice and went into the city and mining towns for short stints and seasonal work, taking the proceeds back to their non-urban homes. The best example of this process was the decisive and visionary leadership of the Bafokeng during the late nineteenth century, who sent their men to work at the diamond mines in Kimberly and beseeched them to sacrifice their earnings “to buy more farms” for the Bafokeng (Royal Bafokeng Administration 2010:39).<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bafokeng owned 23 farms that constituted 1/5 of all land acquired by blacks in the Transvaal. In other words, the Royal Bafokeng leveraged the miniscule wages received by the labourers to purchase land. The purchase of the farmland through the proceeds derived from the migrant labour system meant that the Bafokeng people were not as devastated by the Land Act of 1913 because they had legal agreements that secured their land. In time, that very same land became highly valuable after the discovery of platinum. Today the self-titled and rebranded Royal Bafokeng Nation is among the wealthiest monarchies in Africa, largely thanks to the sacrifices of those valiant migrant labourers over a century ago.

Bonner (1995:115) endorses that the migrant labour system was “in many instances deliberately” preferred by male workers who left their families behind and lodged themselves in the non-settled urban communities in and around the cities.

The real boom in the urbanisation of black persons in Johannesburg was based on the need for “millions of tons of food and mining equipment” (French 1983:2), and other services such as housework. Before the laying of a vast network of railway lines that connected Johannesburg to the port cities and beyond, entrepreneurial blacks who could transport the food and material from the countryside and ports, benefited immensely from the urban explosion at the start of the twentieth century. Black entrepreneurs who owned horses and carts were properly positioned to benefit from the need for agricultural produce in the Witwatersrand region. Following the Motor Carrier Transport Act of 1930 “competition was stifled and transport monopolies were created” (Khosa 1992:234). This act essentially terminated the participation of black business in the transport sector through unfair restrictions<sup>149</sup> and legal impediments. The state controlled all forms of logistical services, including the flow of humans across the country and within the urban environments.

The growth of the service sectors necessitated mass urban migration and mobility. Of course, migration and mobility are the most defining and prominent drivers of urbanisation (Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015:6). The black workers of the early twentieth century were comfortable with their fluid mobility between their rural-based homes and the industrialised workspaces. As Freund (2006:110) highlights, before 1910, “it was possible in many instances for individuals to live better in settlements that were less controlled by the state”. Unlike the common perception of an absolute rural/urban split, these persons were not conflicted, displaced, nor estranged between the two realms. Bonner (1995:122) calls the notion of a permanent dislocation between the urban and rural spaces ‘misleading’ rhetoric that sought to alienate blacks from white society.

The improvement also aided the migrant labour system in transportation networks. Post-1910, the Union of South Africa government invested in a vast transportation system of bus and train routes that were unrivalled on the continent in terms of scale and saturation. Throughout the early 1900s, black commuters of the newly built train networks devised various fraudulent and evasive measures for boarding trains without paying or for accessing white coaches from which they were prohibited. Ellsworth (1986:82) cautions that: “The temptation to apply moral strictures condemnatory of the petty frauds committed by Africans travelling on the railways should be tempered by a recognition of the callous exploitation of African workers perpetrated

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<sup>149</sup> Another example of control by the Motor Carrier Transport Act of 1930 is that black taxi owners could not have more than five passengers in their vehicle for fear of political mobilisation.

by capital and sponsored by the state". Ellsworth (1986:88) arrives at a more redemptive and celebratory conclusion where he sees the various acts of 'petty fraud' by black commuters as highly "rational and intelligent" responses to a system that pressed them on all angles.

Bonner (1995:118) sees the first wave of mass black urbanisation during the 1920s as 'conditional' because of the relative insecurity of work and housing in the city, and workers' familial ties with their birthplaces. The double-standards also amplified the migrant labour situation within white society. On the one hand, whites despised the shack dwellers who, in their eyes, exacerbated the housing and growing political crises in the urban centres. Conversely, white employers, both industrial (large corporates and small traders) and domestic (individuals and families), preferred to hire the less literate, new-to-the-city rural migrant – as opposed to the urbanised, street-smart, educated youth – as the white employers perceived the newbie migrant to be more productive and less demanding (Bonner 1988:398). These city newbies, who eventually became despised shack dwellers, were more exposed to the opportunities and vulgarities of the migrant labour continuum, as it was difficult for them to settle long-term in one area.

A further influencer of the migrant labour regime was the remuneration packages offered to blacks working in large cities. There were differences in the payment arrangements between black workers in the mines who were issued monthly cheques, as opposed to the city-based black workers who were issued fortnightly remuneration (Bonner 1995:119). The weekly stipends provided city dwellers with the flexibility to be more nomadic than workers stationed in small mining towns.

To conclude this point, it is crucial to recognise that the increase in urban migration by blacks was not only motivated by the need for employment, but by a more holistic search for an alternative existence. Cherry (1992:10) confirms that the "lack of access to employment in industry did not deter the process of African urbanisation" because the urban experience represented a historical opportunity for Africans to enter into "*a new life, embracing the diverse phases of a higher, complex existence*" (my emphasis) and a re-echo of Ka Isaka Seme (1906).

#### **4.3.9 Housing urban black people**

In this subsection, I examine the history of urban housing for blacks during the first half of the twentieth century. This reading is limited to developments in Johannesburg, which had the greatest concentration of urban blacks in South Africa. Much of this story looks into the situations that culminated in the creation of the black townships of Orlando and Soweto, the

biggest black urbanism in the country. This history is particularly important in that it highlights how urban-based black residents were victims of racialised urban policy and equally highlights how they residents used their limited freedom to force the hand of the urban masters into making unplanned decisions. Without doubt, the cumulative experiences of urban blacks are immortalised in the nature of the housing accorded to them throughout the twentieth century. It can be argued that being black in the urban environment was centred around the phenomenology of housing. Therefore, in many respects, the urban home is a transcendental crystallisation of the personhood or subjectivity of urban blacks. Thus a reading of urban housing for blacks is a reading of the history of the black person as a modern subject.

Many of the first permanent black residents of Johannesburg preferred to settle in Sophiatown, as opposed to Klipspruit, where blacks had been resettled in 1905 on account of the bubonic plague.<sup>150</sup> Sophiatown was significantly closer to their workspaces and generally a much nicer neighbourhood. While Sophiatown was initially set aside for white occupation, the sewerage and dumping site adjacent to it made it undesirable for white residents who could relocate to cleaner areas. Black residents flooded the area when it was exempted from the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 that barred blacks from owning or leasing land in the urban areas (Samuelson 2008:63).

Before the enactment of the Group Areas Act in the 1950s and the various forms of separation that preceded it, blacks throughout South Africa's urban capitals resided near whites. There were even rare instances of multiracial residential spaces such as Newlands and Eastwood (east of Pretoria), which provided an egalitarian urban experience among the various races. These multiracial suburbs did not endure because the state and its allied municipalities strategically reduced the number of houses available to black residents in a failed ploy to sabotage the growth of urbanised black families.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the numbers of blacks entering cities, especially Johannesburg, increased year on year and the housing market for blacks was squeezed. In a bid to frustrate black urban dwellers, the state and municipal housing department(s) slowed, and in some cases, halted construction of new housing meant for black families in favour of same-sex hostels that were better suited for temporary migrant labourers (Hindson 1985:405). As pictured in Gerard Sekoto's *Workers on a Saturday* (c.1941), these same-sex hostels were

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<sup>150</sup> During the 1910s and 1920s, black and white workers were required to undergo medical testing before contracts could be finalised. If a worker was found to have a potentially infectious disease, they would be quarantined for risk of the infection spreading. From the 1920s, black urban dwellers who had signs of a sexually transmitted Infection were condemned to the slums and prison hospitals. The situation improved in the 1940s when urban black residents were offered appropriate drugs (Glaser 2005:319).

cramped and not conducive for modern urban life (Figure 4.22). They lacked the characteristics that turn a structure into a home, such as the separation of rooms that serve different functions – a kitchen, a bedroom, a lounge, a bathroom and others. Within these claustrophobic spaces, black men were expected to sleep, cook, bath, and relax. The lack of multi-room housing meant that black families had to lodge and squat in already occupied small houses exclusively set aside for black occupation.

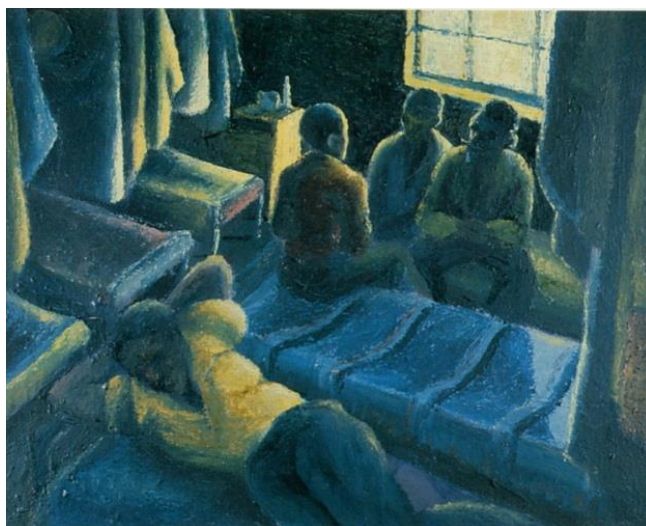


Figure 4.22. Gerard Sekoto, *Workers on a Saturday*, c.1941. Oil on Board, 41 x 51.5 cm. (Proud 2006:106)

Figure 4.23. reveals the inhumanity of the living conditions in black homes in Johannesburg due to the adverse shortage of proper housing during the 1930s. Houses for blacks had on average of 6.5 occupants (and Alexandra had more than double this number) occupying three-roomed, two-roomed, and in some instances, single-room dwellings (Stadler 1979:119).

Location	Estimated population	Housing units or stands	Average occupancy or housing unit per stand
Eastern Native Township	4,300	616	6.98
Western Native Township	15,000	2,227	6.46
Orlando	35,000	5,891	5.94
Pimville	12,000	2,312	6.27
Alexandra	35,000	2,500	14.00

Figure 4.23. Occupancy levels in urban houses/stands for black people in 1939. (Stadler 1979:119)

In 1928, the Locations Advisory Board Congress, a white-run Johannesburg municipal organ devoid of any influence from the black inhabitants it was meant to serve, was established to improve the urban dwellings for black residents. The Native (Urban) Areas Act of 1923 had



cascaded the responsibility of the provision of housing onto municipal authorities. At the time, other urban centres like Cape Town had already created locations (townships) for black residents, such as Ndabeni (est. 1890s). Coetzer (2009:2) recounts the reasons behind the establishment of Ndabeni: “The dominant rationale for its establishment was that ‘natives’, who were finding rental accommodation in places such as District Six, were being tainted by ‘civilisation’ and *were best isolated from the bad influences of the city*” (my emphasis). Learning from the Ndabeni experiment, the Johannesburg council developed the Orlando location (township) (est. 1931) that would solely accommodate black residents. In keeping with the desire to sanitise the city of blackness, townships like Orlando were established “to house the black population” a safe distance away from the white neighbourhoods of Johannesburg (Blokland 2014:179). The state-sponsored construction of Orlando<sup>151</sup> on a farm south-west of Johannesburg was envisioned as the benchmark for future developments in ways that did not upset white privilege of permanently housing urbanised blacks. In this sense, as a house, the township in its entirety was a communal domestic scene. The white authorities marketed the area as the grandest and most idyllic, never-seen-before, space where black Africans could naturally integrate into the modern western industrial complex.

An enthusiastic view of Orlando captured in one of the leading newspapers, *The Bantu World*, for urbanised blacks at the time (Taabe 1932:4), read:

This will undoubtedly be somewhat a paradise and to a greater extent, enhance the status of the Bantu within the ambit of progress and civilisation. It manifests the growing co-operation between the two dominant races domiciled in this Southern part of the African continent and shows clearly that some of our rulers have now realised that closer co-operation and brotherhood are the keys of harmony and peace... This will enable them to create a civilisation that will be the envy of other nations.

Written by Emmanuel Taabe, a black reader of *The Bantu World*, this article is revealing in its embrace of the teleological notion of progression from the rural ‘uncivilised’ peasantry towards a modern ‘civilised’ subject as a result of exposure to the urban milieu. However, even though Orlando was branded as a space that would define the black experience of the urban in positive terms, its reception among its target audience was ambivalent. The realities of living in Orlando were far from the glossy vision presented by Taabe. By 1933, half of the houses built in Orlando were unoccupied. Orlando was built as part of the government’s plan to contain black urbanisation. To that end, the houses in the township were owned by the municipality

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<sup>151</sup> The name Orlando was derived from the first Chairman of the Native Affairs Committee, Edwin Orlando Leake (French 1983:28). This ill-conceived settlement became the blueprint for the massification of ‘black cities’ across South Africa. The development of Orlando during the early 1930s also marked the first phase of the forced removals campaign within Johannesburg. In 1935, the pass laws were introduced as an influx-control tool.

and black residents were compelled to pay rent without any guarantee of future ownership. Aspirant tenants had to secure two months' rent upfront before occupation. In addition, the houses did not have flooring, and the walls were not plastered (French 1983:51). Unlike Taabe's claim in *The Bantu World* article, the houses in Orlando were not desirable, and the first cohort of families that occupied the homes did so because they had limited alternatives.

At the opening of Orlando, there were also attempts by opportunistic white entrepreneurs who sought to benefit from the shortage of housing for blacks. In 1932, an advert from the Southern Cross Building Society appeared in *The Bantu World* newspaper. This agency branded itself as "the only Bantu building society in South Africa", and promised the black readers of *The Bantu World* an opportunity to "own your home" at the cost of £200 (Own your home 1932:9). Architect William James Sloan, who had worked for the Johannesburg Municipality as a draughtsman in 1904 before joining the Public Works Department, designed the house design shown in the advert (Artefacts 2019). Sloan and others sought to take advantage of the need for adequate housing among Johannesburg's urban black population by setting up the Southern Cross Building Society to facilitate homeownership for blacks. The box unit design that appeared in *The Bantu World* advert in 1932 was uncannily identical to the format used in the first wave of homes built in Orlando, which would eventually be adopted by Douglas Calderwood in later years. The home contained two small bedrooms, a kitchen, and a lounge. Several things about the advert are amiss, firstly the promise that blacks could 'own' a home was inconsistent with the restrictive land acquisition and ownership laws that were passed by the Johannesburg Municipality and the South African government. Secondly, it is unclear as to where blacks could own these homes. Was it in the Native reserves where blacks were allowed to live freely, or around the cities where they wanted to live freely but could not buy the property? In any event, the venture did not gain traction as Sloan relocated to Nigel in 1934, and there is no further evidence that the building society endured (Artefacts 2019).

By 1938, Orlando had more than 6,000 houses with another 3,000 in the pipeline. The area had street lighting and a police force of only 18 officials, both black and white (French 1983:57). In 1941, more than 4,500 blacks were waiting for accommodation to be provided by the Johannesburg City Council (French 1983:57). Besides the hopelessly inadequate sizes of the homes, the major drawback was the travelling time that made transportation into and out of Orlando problematic. The train line was always full and made its users late for work. White bosses were completely indifferent to the transportation inadequacies and failings, which caused further job insecurity for black workers whose employment security was already precarious due to labour laws. Also, double the number of schools were needed and cultural, and sports amenities were virtually non-existent.

These infrastructure issues and a host of other deficiencies led the inhabitants of Orlando to form their own “independent forum for the residents' demands” known as ‘vigilance committees’ that would interface with the top-down Advisory Councils that were designed by the Johannesburg City Council (French 1983:33). These vigilance committees were an attempt to insert the voice of black residents into the housing decision-making platforms, as they had been systematically excluded and made into bystanders in the urban planning and development of housing projects aimed for them. The orthodox hierarchy of human needs, namely sport, cultural, and other self-actualisation amenities. Nonetheless, cultural and sporting activities did occur.<sup>152</sup> However, the undisputed number one need was the provision of decent housing.

The residents of Orlando were given a raw deal as compared to urbanised blacks in other cities around the country. Rent was £1 per month for a two-roomed house, in comparison to 14 shillings in Port Elizabeth (French 1983:59). Due to the state’s ambivalence towards black urbanisation and the fiscal constraints that characterised post-World War II South Africa, the Johannesburg Municipality halted construction of new houses in 1940, and between 1942 and 1944 only 200 houses were added in Orlando (French 1983:65). By the late 1940s, there was a reported deficit of 154,000 houses for urbanised blacks (Bremner 2010:12). Because of the insufficient housing delivery, blacks who already had homes saw an opportunity to make an additional income by renting out a portion of their property or a back room at “inflated rents” to fellow desperate black tenants, which worsened the density of the occupancy shown in Figure 4.23. (Bonner 1995:119). The cries for new homes were ignored. The people-run ‘vigilance committees’ entered the scene in an attempt to ameliorate the plight of urban blacks. Until that point in the 1930s, the urbanised black worker had been poorly represented by the black political vanguard, the ANC, and no major political victory had been achieved for the benefit of urban blacks.

#### **4.3.10 Forced removals: The liminality of urban black life**

Perhaps the most traumatic experience of urbanisation that many black families encountered throughout the twentieth century was that of forced removals. Many of the artists cited in this study were themselves by-products of forced removals. Many of them were born or grew up in multi-racial suburbs before they were forcefully relocated to ‘black cities’.<sup>153</sup> An example is

<sup>152</sup> An example of sporting activities in Orlando at the time were horse races. Senior leader James Mpanza, owned several horses and would engage in races administered by the Orlando Horse Owner’s Association (French 1983:144).

<sup>153</sup> There exists a disturbing and deceptive use of language wherein certain texts infer that the blacks intentionally ‘moved’ from multi-racial suburbs to the townships. For example, Brougham-Cook (1984:286) writes that Geoff Mphakati, one of the leading cultural activists of his generation from Pretoria, who was born in Highlands Garsfontein (Pretoria east), “*moved* to Mamelodi with his family in 1958” (my emphasis). Speaking of Eric Lubisi

a Pretoria-based artist, Eric Lubisi, who was raised in Eastwood,<sup>154</sup> a multiracial community where the likes of Gerard Sekoto stayed during the 1940s. However, in 1958, aged only 12, Lubisi and his family were bamboozled into Mamelodi. Lubisi's forced move to Mamelodi in 1958 was meta-transformational not only for his life but also on the trajectory of his art-making. The devastating translocation and rezoning of Africans as part of a state-led mission to purify and 'whitify' the urban space was a traumatic and generation-defining moment. Lubisi crystallises the psychological and physical cost of the forced removals in a brief but moving statement: "We moved from a seven roomed house to a two-room" (Lubisi 2018). For Lubisi and many black artists of his era, this inhumane spatial restriction would, for many years, be synonymous with a creative limitation that resulted from living and working in segregated urban environments.



Figure 4.24. Peter Clarke, *Sunset at Windermere (Afrika Mayibuye)*, 1957. Gouache on paper, 24 x 30 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)



Figure 4.25. George Pemba, *Clean-up*, 1960. Oil on board. (Feinberg 2000:47)

Forced removals were commonplace in all of South Africa's major urban centres. The painting by Peter Clarke, *Sunset at Windermere*<sup>155</sup> (*Afrika Mayibuye*) (1957), is a rendition of the former Windermere settlement in Cape Town from the perspective of an insider (Figure 4.24). While Clarke was not a resident of Windermere, he possessed a lived connection with his compatriots from such spaces who, like himself, were ravaged by apartheid's spatial practices. Many years after making this specific image of Windermere, Clarke experienced first-hand the

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who also grew up in Highlands Pretoria east, Hugo similarly, almost verbatim, states that "in 1958 the family *moved* to Mamelodi East" (my emphasis). The use of the word 'moved' suggests that this was a voluntary act, a considered exchange of address from one part of the city to another, which is grossly misleading.

<sup>154</sup> Today, Eastwood is part of the affluent eastern suburbs of Pretoria.

<sup>155</sup> Windermere was incorrectly spelt as Windemere when the artwork was titled.

trauma of forced removals when his family was taken away from Simon's Town (Hobbs & Rankin 2011). Furthermore, Clarke probably had personal networks and acquaintances with some of the residents of Windermere since he had visited the area with journalist friend, James Matthews (Hobbs & Rankin 2011). This intimate and highly illustrative painting – similar in style to the work he produced for the book illustration commissions – of three men engaged in the very private act of relieving themselves, is, to echo Joja (2018) a “journalistic” picture of “the monotony of racial oppression”. However, conversely, it is an aesthetic reminder of the liveliness and beauty that existed in the rabble of racist oppression. This painting is a rare illustration of the forever lost Windermere by an artist who was immersed and profoundly impacted – although not directly in this instance – by the destruction of and forced removals of people in Windermere and other spaces like it. It was by no mistake that Clarke decided to paint the sunset of Windermere in the manner he did. Even though a sunset marks an ending, the forced removals did not mean the ultimate end of the people of Windermere, this was not their Armageddon.



Figure 4.26. George Msimang, *Bulldozing*, 1986. Ink on paper, 32.5 x 21 cm. Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt (Mutumba & Ngcobo 2016:207)

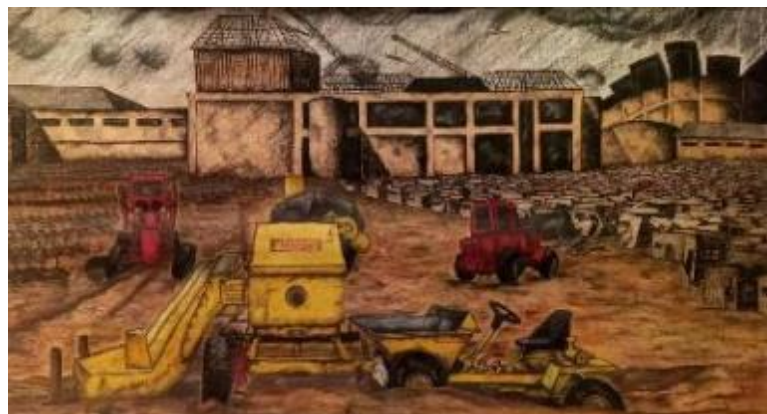


Figure 4.27. Shadrack Maloka, *Machine and building, death and destruction*, undated, Pastel on paper. Pretoria Art Museum Permanent Collection. (Photograph by author)

While the forced removals were not an apocalypse for the urban-based blacks, they nevertheless represented the ending of a golden generation of formative black urbanity. The magic of multi-racial suburbs located close to the heart of the city were flattened and lost for the rest of the twentieth century. Also, forced removals were the most vigorous expression of colonial and apartheid brutality in the urban domain and reasserting white dominion over the

black body. As seen in Pemba's *Clean-up* (1960) painting, which shows white authority, embodied by the gun-bearing white policeman, seeking to impose its will on the defiant black residents (Figure 4.25). The towering presence of the police officer in the foreground evokes the feeling of a "powerful and threatening", almost unchallengeable force (Feinberg 2000:47).

Although black residents tried, through various strategies, to resist the forced removals, the military might of the government succeeded in literally bulldozing blacks out of what would become white-only suburbs, and subsequently sending them to the 'black cities' as illustrated by George Msimang in his drawing fittingly titled *Bulldozing* (1986). Msimang's fine ink sketch is a chilling pictorial narrative of the inhumanity of the forced removals, wherein people and their belongings were mere rubble that needed to be removed (Figure 4.26). *Machine and building, death and destruction* (undated) by Shadrack Maloka is another graphic illustration of the brutal presence of the earth moving equipment (Figure 4.27). On the one hand, the drawing speaks to the magnificence of the modern machinery and the awe-inspiring structures these machines can help bring to life. However, similarly, it shows the dark and near demonic devastation, the very same machines can rain on those considered expendable. Maloka shows how the livelihoods of urban-based blacks were uprooted to make way for industrialist expansion. Hall (1997a:3) uses the metaphor of dirt in the bedroom to illustrate how those considered 'other' are distanced from of the centre: "[a]nd what you do with dirt in the bedroom is you cleanse it, you sweep it out, you restore the order, you police the boundaries, you know the hard and fixed boundaries between what belongs and what does not. Inside/outside. Cultured/uncivilised. Barbarous and cultivated, and so on". Forced removals were an attempt to purify the city-based suburbs of the so-called dirt that was blacks.

Blacks paid the ultimate price for such a misguided ideology. Several artists reflected on the incalculable human cost of the forced removals, among them Bongi Dhlomo. However, Dhlomo was specifically concerned with how black women and their children were affected by forced relocations. Schmahmann outlines that Dhlomo's (2015:32) "works tended to show the hardships faced by black communities through the laws and actions of the apartheid state rather than being oriented to raise concerns about gender inequality specifically". To support this position, Schmahmann references two linocuts titled *Removals III: Resettlement* (1982) and *Removals VII: People are Living There* (1983). While Schmahmann is correct in pointing out that Dhlomo's art from the 1980s onwards increasingly depicted the plight of urban-based blacks, she misses the subtlety of Dhlomo's exposition of the women's experience within those broader 'hardships'. Upon closer inspection of the two prints cited by Schmahmann, the motif that jumps out is that of black female figures going about their daily existence within these soon to be demolished urban spaces. In the foreground of *Removals III: Resettlement* (Figure

4.28) is a silhouette of a woman with what appears to be a baby on her back. In the distant vanishing point of the same composition is another female figure balancing an object on her head as she walks through the settlement. These two figures focus the viewer's gaze on the human element within the scene, or more specifically, the plight of the black woman within this ominous moment. In *Removals VII: People are Living There* (Figure 4.29), a black woman holds a child on the one hand while balancing a large bucket on her head. While Dhlomo was commenting on the wider challenges of black urban dwellers in this forced removals series, there was a clear and unmissable interest in the difficulties faced by black women within these urban milieus.



Figure 4.28. Bongki Dhlomo, *Removals III: Resettlement*, 1982. Linocut, 19 x 24 cm. Wits Art Museum Collection, Johannesburg. (Schmahmann 2015:32)

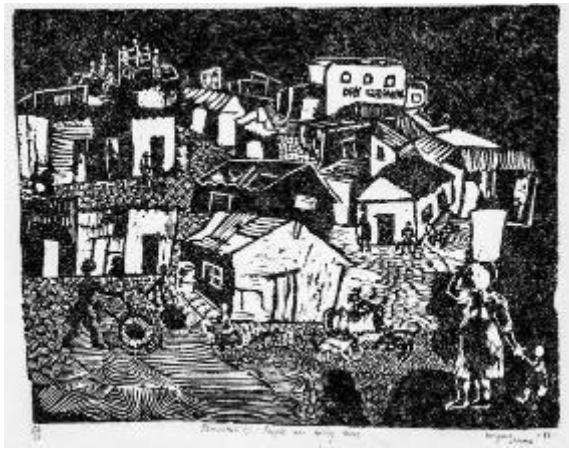


Figure 4.29. Bongki Dhlomo, *Removals VII: People are Living There*, 1983, linocut, 20.3 x 27.3 cm. Wits Art Museum Collection, Johannesburg. (Schmahmann 2015:32)

#### 4.3.11 The first Squatter Movement

In this subsection, I elucidate the emergence of the Squatter Movement in Orlando during the 1940s. The agency shown by the squatters has largely been unacknowledged in historical readings of South African urbanisation. However, their actions altered the trajectory of black urbanisation for the rest of the twentieth century, and the legacy of their agency is still palpable in contemporary South Africa. Of significance, their dissident and valiant moves forced the Johannesburg Municipality and the central government into re-altering the initial plans they had with regard to housing urbanised blacks. Also, the Squatter Movement is responsible for

the coming into being of Soweto (short for South Western Township),<sup>156</sup> arguably the most important site of black subjectivity and political agency in South Africa's modern history. A key protagonist who remastered the layout of Orlando and facilitated the insertion of blackness into the making of the urban space was James Sofasonke Mpanza.<sup>157</sup> Mpanza moved to Orlando in 1933 when he was removed from a back room in the Bertrams suburb as part of the purge by the Johannesburg City Council of blacks in mixed-race suburbs (French 1983:37). Mpanza initially served as a member of the Orlando Vigilance Committee<sup>158</sup> and branched out to form his own Sofasonke Party in 1935. In 1936, he was elected for the first of many terms onto the municipally ordained Orlando Advisory Board.<sup>159</sup> During his tenure, his singular aim "was to press the city council to provide accommodation for the numerous sub-tenants in Orlando" (French 1983:50). In 1944, after numerous failed attempts to elicit a response from the council to reasoned pleas, through his Sofasonke Party, Mpanza masterminded and coordinated mass squatting in vacant municipal land adjacent to Orlando that would later be known as Soweto. In a statement explaining the squatting campaign that he almost single-handedly inspired, Mpanza (quoted in French 1983:75) expressed the following:

The segregation provisions of the Urban Areas Act prevent the Natives from acquiring land and from buying, building, or hiring houses except in the locations [townships], where, in the case of Johannesburg, no land or houses are made available for us except houses built and owned by the Municipality. By applying the segregation provisions and not setting aside any land on which we may build ourselves, the Municipality has taken on itself the duty of providing us with houses. But it has not carried out that duty; there are no houses for us. Very well, then, we shall go and sit down on municipal land and wait for the Municipality to come and put a roof over our heads.

Mpanza's undertakings had no precedence, and there was fear among the squatters that the authorities would deploy the military to handle the dissent. Since the notion of squatting

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<sup>156</sup> See Philip Bonner's and Lauren Segal's *Soweto: A history* (1998), for a more thorough account of how Soweto came into existence.

<sup>157</sup> James Sofasonke Mpanza's life story is near fantastical. In school, he was a bright learner who was only held back by his poverty. However, after impressing the white community in Natal through his exceptional communication skills, charm, and productivity in the workplace, he was legally exempted from Native Law in 1908 to become an "honorary white" (French 1983:8). However, this promise came to naught as he would become a thief and hardened criminal, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering an Indian shopkeeper. In jail, Mpanza underwent a religious conversion and was released early from the life sentence. After his release from prison, Mpanza relocated to Johannesburg and worked as a pastor, hawker, and later a teacher. His political life began when he was forcibly taken to Orlando.

<sup>158</sup> Vigilance committees were established by disgruntled Johannesburg-based black dwellers who were frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the municipal agencies tasked with offering services to black residents. Therefore, the vigilance committees were the strongest defenders of the interests of the urban-based black populace.

<sup>159</sup> The advisory boards were developed by the municipality to act as a conduit between the white administrators and black residents. Baines (1990:1) acknowledges that these committees were materially ineffective, but also stresses that they were "an important channel of mobilisation in urban African communities" especially before World War II.



connotes both legal and illegal forms of settlement (Sapire 1992:673), Mpanza capitalised on this ambiguity by methodically engineering the occupation of land that was not set aside for use by black inhabitants, but lay vacant while thousands of black residents in Johannesburg lived in overcrowded and inhuman conditions.<sup>160</sup> Commenting on the actions of Mpanza, French (1983:75) maintains that: “[f]ar from spontaneous it was a well measured and calculated step spearheaded by a leader with a very shrewd understanding of his constituency, of the significance of the issue at hand and a confident assessment of his following”. Those interested in squatting on the land that Mpanza and his followers occupied had to pay a once-off nominal fee of six shillings to the Sofasonke Party, a further amount to access the site, and a weekly fee “for the running and policing of the village” (French 1983:78). Relying on his refined knowledge of the law, Mpanza knew that the Johannesburg City Council would be unable to prosecute the squatters. He also banked on the value of the inhabitants to the economy of Johannesburg (and indeed South Africa), as another deterrent against possible violent retribution from the authorities. After six days of occupation, the Sofasonke Party had registered 1,500 families in the camp, a number that peaked to 4,000 (French 1983:83, 88). Mpanza carefully managed all aspects of the camp. Coal, milk, sanitary goods for women, and building material were rationed to dwellers.<sup>161</sup> Traders and entrepreneurs organised cooperatives where food and necessities were sold, at even lower prices than the government-sanctioned stores in Orlando. Mpanza had opened several shops within the camp and levied a fee as high as £25 towards businesses that sought to trade within the squatting area (Stadler 1979:102). This internal tax, which was immediately suffocated by the municipality, led to the Sofasonke Party amassing over £500 within its bank account<sup>162</sup> (French 1983:92). The Squatter Movement took advantage of the policy inconsistencies between the central government and local housing administrators. The Johannesburg City Council wanted to respond swiftly and harshly. However, the Union of South Africa government “insisted that no order for ejection could be made unless alternative accommodation was provided, even if it were the barest minimum” (Stadler 1979:98).

Bonner (1988:418) emphasises how “women were at the centre of squatter politics” on account of their hands-on involvement in the revolution. When men went to work, they continued erecting the makeshift dwellings and organised themselves to participate in the daily protest rallies. The other fascinating attribute about this ‘urban village’ is that everyone

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<sup>160</sup> The official number of people waiting for accommodation in Johannesburg stood at 16,000, while there were many more who also needed housing and who were not registered with the municipality (French 1983:70)

<sup>161</sup> French (1983:79) describes the first shanties as follows: “Most of the shanties were made of wooden poles with roofs and walls of hessian while some were just mealie stalks covered with leaves. A few were able to get corrugated iron sheets for theirs”.

<sup>162</sup> The party’s income was further bolstered by a security force linked to the Native Affairs Department that earned £6 per month with benefits.

assisted in the building of the site, especially when bricks were being laid for the permanent residences. Furthermore, because people who migrated there were well intentioned, and in most instances, working folk, there was hardly any crimes reported during the first several weeks of the camp's existence. As noted before, policing within black urbanisms only concerned itself with offences against the state. Law enforcement rarely bothered with domestic disputes, crime, and violence among blacks (Bonner 1995:126). As a retort, the Squatter Movement introduced community policing, which was later recognised and subsidised by the municipality.

According to French (1983:94), "the success of the Shantytown squatters gave a new sense of pride and self-respect to Johannesburg blacks". Importantly, although riddled with poverty and disease, the squatter camps "were self-administered and totally out of the control of the authorities" (Bonner 1995:121). The self-administration of urban settlements by blacks was a historical first, as they had never been in a position to dictate the terms of urban developments. As stated before, even black political overlords such as the ANC had failed to make any meaningful political gains against the racist state. Therefore, the Squatter Movement was emblematic of black determinism and showed the state the potential power of an urban-based people-centred revolution. With a keen sense of the historical significance of the Squatter Movement, Mpanza demanded that the area be referred to as Sofasonke Township and not Shantytown. Mpanza was a man steeped in symbolism and ritual, his elaborate gowns were more than just fashion, but as Stadler (1979:107) puts it, were a visual strategy "to clothe his power in prophetic authority".

When the Johannesburg City Council began providing temporary shelter to the squatters, many were leaning towards long-term solutions wherein they sought to build their own houses. The municipality had reluctantly agreed to build temporary housing constructed without cement so that bricks would be used in more permanent dwellings. However, those temporary "unmortared rooms remained until the sixties" and beyond (Stadler 1979:97). Mpanza was also mindful of how the squatter revolution was shaking the hegemony of repressive land tenure and ownership laws. In a statement about the needs of the black squatters, Mpanza (quoted in French 1983:186) noted that:

I asked the Native Commissioner to give us some trust farms together with tractors and necessary implements so that those who cared to, could go out and live there. They would then be away from town, free from pass raids and be able to till the soil voluntarily for a living.

While the central government was sympathetic to the Squatter Movement, the threat the movement posed to the broader political and economic climate was unacceptable. From the

time that residents began to move into the temporary shelter provided by the council, a covert political offensive was launched against Mpanza and his party, who had shown up the mighty Johannesburg. The municipality tried to vilify Mpanza by subverting his charismatic “arrogation of power” into a dictatorial character that was out to enrich himself (Stadler 1979:105). However, more decisively, “by discrediting Mpanza’s committee, the council was also lending weight to the argument that blacks were incapable of running their own affairs” (French 1983:98).

One of the main strategies in the council’s counter-offensive against the Squatter Movement was reclaiming the commercial and business components by issuing trading licenses within the camps. However, only three licences were provided to service the entire settlement (Stadler 1979:102). Progressively free and unregulated black businesses were mercilessly thwarted. The ‘licensed’ shops were openly attacked by the residents, who saw these enterprises as another system of control by the municipality. The municipality also instituted rents for stands within the camp at 15 shillings per month, which was higher than the 13 shillings charged to occupants of the two-roomed houses in Orlando, a move that Stadler (1979:103) calls “tortured logic and parsimonious calculations”. The municipality hoped that the unreasonably high rent within the camps would deter future movements of similar persuasion. Instead, the high rent merely resulted in the first mass rent boycotts.<sup>163</sup>

Laws were passed in late 1944 to remove squatters. Unemployed squatters in Alberton were relocated to tents in Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria. However, those in Sofasonke remained protected because of their economic value (French 1983:110). In 1946, the council plotted to banish Mpanza to Ixopo in Natal, but residents of Orlando protested against his deportation. Mpanza was arrested, and the council was bent on blaming him for the crisis. However, the authorities “seemed unable to see the cause of the problem as being genuine grassroots grievances, a problem of basic necessities for the masses” (French 1983:151). The problem that was further exacerbated by the council failing to provide new housing between 1946 and 1947. After back and forth court cases, Mpanza was acquitted and thus free to live wherever he desired but became less active in grassroots politics. Edward Kumalo would emerge as the new leader of the next phase of the Squatter Movement in Orlando. A second wave of the movement happened in 1946 when further squatter camps sprung up around the Rand region. The ANC’s youth league and its mother body were impressed by the effectiveness of the supra-legal tactics deployed by Mpanza and adopted them as part of their political strategy from 1949 onwards. While the ANC expanded and intensified the use of non-legal tussles with

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<sup>163</sup> Led by Abel Ntoi, the rent boycotts resulted in only 43 tenants out of 1,750 paying rent in May 1947. By 1948 only one in six households honoured their rent obligation. The response from the authorities was swift, snuffing out the boycott on account of its potential long-term political ramifications (Stadler 1979:104).

the state, it was, undoubtedly, Mpanza and the Sofasonke Party who pioneered these strategies.

In 1947, there were over 70,000 squatters across various locations, a fifth of the black population in Johannesburg. When the National Party assumed political control in 1948, it was aware of the political and economic damage the squatters could cause. The National Party immediately accelerated the building of houses from 1947 to 1951, and 5,233 houses were erected on the site Mpanza had first occupied (French 1983:190). This new area would become Soweto, the largest so-called 'black city' in South Africa.

The development of mass housing in townships drastically altered black family structures. Although critical of the systematic separatist logic of South African urbanisms, Scargill (1979:239) nevertheless saw the detribalised 'melting pot' of spaces like Soweto, more so than any other city in Africa, as fertile ground for the emergence of a truly borderless 'urban African'. After the 1950s, the state stopped the building of hostels, and those who desired to take occupancy of the new 'match-box' homes in Soweto had to do so as a family. Men would either bring their existing wives from their rural homes or start new relationships on a whim to satisfy the authorities (Bonner 1995:122). In many respects, the squatters had forced the white administrators into undesired action. For the first time and against all possible odds, the squatters had shaped how the future urbanisation for blacks would unfold. A leader of the squatter revolution during the 1940s, Oriel Monongoaha (quoted in Stadler 1979:93), once remarked:

The government is beaten, because even the Government of England could not stop the people from squatting. The government was like a man who has a cornfield which is invaded by birds. He chases the birds from one part of the field and they alight in another part of the field... *We squatters are the birds*. The government sends its policemen to chase us away and we move off and occupy another spot. We shall see whether it is the farmer or the birds who get tired first... (my emphasis).

This valiant and near poetic affirmation of the movement's character by a representative of the squatters is a testament to the spirit of agency that motivated many of the defiant actions of urban blacks. Destitute, landless, homeless, poor, and vulnerable to the military might of the state and its security agencies, the squatters still saw themselves akin to birds, free to nest where necessary to survive, free to move defiantly across lands that were legally not theirs. The quote also reverberates with the fervour of victory, 'the government is beaten'. This euphoric statement speaks of potentiality, freedom, and possibility.

The Squatter Movement had achieved something other political organisations had failed to achieve in almost half a century of opposition to and activism against the repressive urban laws targeted towards blacks. In many ways, the Squatter Movement had managed to redesign the urban landscape to the degree that the highly educated petit bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century could not boast. Perhaps the most emphatic part of this history is that it was James Mpanza, an ex-convict (and not a member of the ANC's political sainthood) who was "the most engaging and notorious of the squatter leaders" (Freund 2006:116).

#### **4.3.12 The paradox of urban criminality**

Urban existence for black South Africans during the twentieth century was characterised by opportunity, hope, and newness on the one end, and exclusion, dislocation, exploitation, violence, and above all, criminality on the other. Outside of the activism of the Squatter Movement, historians like Magaziner (2017) view the youth gangs and 'pantsula' or 'tsotsi' culture of twentieth-century South African cities as key protagonists in the counter-action by black urbanites to the state-controlled urban planning. In other words, the criminal culture that became part of black urbanisms was a performance of resistance and freedom from white governmentality.

Kynoch (2008:630) insists that any analysis of twentieth-century urban-based crime among blacks must first consider "the structural forces that influenced the prevalence and forms of violence". There has to be an appreciation of the system that enabled, and in many ways, encouraged black-on-black criminality. As noted in the previous chapter, how the British authorities handled the Afrikaner and black prisoners of war within the concentration camps became a blueprint of how to handle blacks within segregated urbanisms. While the state did not pursue genocidal strategies, the forces of violence, poverty, overcrowding, alcohol, and drug addiction destroyed black lives in the townships just as disease and malnutrition killed women and children in the concentration camps. Thus, the white urban planners and officials could wash their hands of the devastating outcomes of state-sanctioned and intentional neglect of black urban areas and the consequences of the high levels of crime.

Perhaps the first thing to consider about urban criminality among blacks is that colonial rhetoric had always branded blacks as criminals. From the days of the scuffles between the Boers and the Xhosa or Zulus, when blacks stole white livestock, their actions were branded as criminal and barbaric. Whereas when the Boers or British soldiers raided Xhosa or Zulu cattle farms, these raids were recorded as strategies of war and the stolen livestock was then justifiably kept as spoils of war. Thus, by the twentieth century, any action by blacks who sought to reclaim what had been taken from them or to take what was not their theirs, regardless of the

circumstances, was automatically branded as criminality. Furthermore, urban-based black men “were more likely to receive harsher sentences where the complainants were white” (Ngcukaitobi 2018:58). As early as the 1900s, legal statutes were drawn up to deal with crimes perpetrated specifically by black men on white women. An article in *Ilanga Lase Natal* (Natives and crime 1904:4) diagnosed this as “an endeavour to secure class legislation, directed especially against the native”. What such laws effectively created was a situation wherein crimes perpetrated on the white body were duly punished, and those perpetrated on the black body went unnoticed. Thus, the black body, and by extension, black urban spaces, were sites upon which violence and crime were allowed to flourish. Of course, the lack of law enforcement intensified the rape dilemma within black urbanisms, among other horrors.

Gqola (2015) traces the institutionalisation of rape to the colonial contact between the Dutch and slave women in the Cape during the seventeenth century. As she argues, “the register of rape was introduced by slavery and entrenched by colonial conquest” (Gqola 2015:50). According to Gqola (2015:14), “rape is an exercise of patriarchal violent power against those who are safe to violate”. For the most part, rape is a product of a situation where the rapist is assured of getting away with their crime. During the early twentieth century, black women were the easiest targets of rape for two reasons. Firstly, black women were targets because the white colonial gaze had hyper-sexualised the black female body.<sup>164</sup> As Gqola (2015:43) recounts: “The stereotype held that slave women could not be raped since like all Africans they were excessively sexual and impossible to satiate”. Secondly, there was no punitive consequence for white or black men who violated black women. Black men in Sophiatown and other black urban residents who tried to apprehend criminals and protect their wives, daughters, or sisters from the rape scourge, were themselves criminalised by the white authorities for taking the law into their own hands.

The urban criminality that emerged during the 1920s was propelled by a deep resentment towards oppressive state laws that limited the life opportunities and stagnated the abilities of the urbanised blacks. Urban gangs were both exemplars of a self-defined agency enacted by its members, and concomitantly the result of the overbearing segregationist politics and social engineering of the white government. Drawing on Foucault, Mbembe (2003:11) argues that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die”. While it had always been the preserve of the colonial government to preside over life and death, the audacity of urban gangs to reclaim this

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<sup>164</sup> A well-known exemplar of this hyper-sexualisation of the black female body is the story of Sara Baartman who had had a body characteristic of Khoi women. Baartman was forcibly displayed in the human zoos in London and Paris during the early nineteenth century (Lindfors 1999).

sovereignty, albeit at the expense of their kin, was a way of expressing their 'will to power' that had been systematically denied to the urban-based youths.

Another factor that is often understated is the way people grouped themselves according to ethnic affiliation on account of the hardships and "prevailing anarchy" within black urbanisms (Bonner 1995:126). It stands to reason that people gravitate to linguistically and culturally familiar others. These familiar bonds of ethnicity and language were particularly expedient in acclimatising newcomers to the harsh urban space. These groupings resulted in a "highly heterogeneous and fragmented" urban ecosystem, and even across political persuasions (Bonner 1995:128).

Other social organisations are complicit in reasserting these fixed and exclusive identity formations were churches, migrant links, and of course, criminal gangs. Interestingly, ethnic and rural persuasions were carried over into the mob criminal culture. Bonner (1995:127) argues that "rural socialisation" (specifically learning to fight as herd boys), played a defining role in how youth gangs conducted themselves. An example would be the Russians gang, which mainly consisted of Sotho-speaking men. Glaser (2005:323) corroborates by noting how these gangs performed a dangerous and "particularly aggressive form of masculinity" and how this resulted in the rape<sup>165</sup> and exploitation of black women within the urban space. The violence enacted by black youths on their own kin was ill-directed outbursts against the colonial government that had deprived them of a decent education, fair-paying jobs, and most significantly, their sense of being within the urban environment. Also, these acts of violence against law-abiding members of the black community were seen as just retribution and a wakeup call to blacks who had conformed and thus tacitly contributed to an inherently violent and racist regime. The South African Police (SAP) at the time responded with "considerable brutality" towards pass law and liquor felonies and were almost unmoved by the rampant gang-related killings, assault, and rape of black urban dwellers (Goodhew 1993:453). Sapire (1992:696) explains how violence became the norm in urban settings dominated by blacks, stressing that violence "attained legitimacy in an environment characterised by the absence of both credible sources of law and order and mechanisms for redress".

The wealth divide within these urban areas also contributed to a generational chasm that heightened the crime levels because the youth were uneducated and jobless. At the same time, some among the older generation were part of the petit bourgeoisie (Goodhew 1993:451). Guy and Thabane (quoted in Goodhew 1993:464) write that the Russians gang had a "disdain for Africans who valued education and literacy and for places like Sophiatown

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<sup>165</sup> According to Glaser (2005:324) "gang rape and sexual harassment hit crisis proportions in the 1950s". The prevalence of gangs was augmented by the lack of proper policing within black settlements at the time.

where Africans were seen as simply living like whites". Because of excessive crime incidents, black-run community policing forums were established from the 1920s. The persistence of violent crime within the slums of Johannesburg led community leaders and churches to constitute various community-based anti-violence campaigns<sup>166</sup> and to refrain from congregating during the evening when most of the crimes occurred. During the 1930s, civic guards became a prominent feature in most black urban locations, such as Benoni, Alexandra, and Pimville where informal courts were set up by the local Advisory Board (Goodhew 1993:455). When the South African Police became weakened by the enlistment of police officers during World War II, the need for a coordinated community policing unit was further strengthened. Once again, the community-based and black-run policing forums posed an unwanted challenge to the hegemony of state-based law enforcement, regardless of the good work these forums were doing. In 1952, there were several cases of civic guards being arrested by the white-run South African Police for assault and possession of deadly ordnances. However, women protested against the arrests of the civic guards and would bail out these men (Goodhew 1993:461).

Goodhew (1993:459) suggests that the authorities (the South African Police) were at "best, incidental to, and at worst, a contributory factor towards, violent crime" in urban areas where blacks resided.<sup>167</sup> Gqola (2015:13), referring to the plight of urban-based black women. She notes that "nothing about apartheid made black women feel valued or taken seriously". In the eyes of the black residents, the police were double villains who enforced the harsh laws that rendered blacks as sub-human non-citizens on the one hand, and on the other hand, stood by as hardened criminal gangs ravaged the lives of innocent black urban dwellers. Thus, criminal gangs in black locations were both protagonists and antagonists. On the one end, they were purveyors of anti-law black agency, while on the other they were the chief terrorisers, only surpassed by the state, of the same black inhabitants they embodied.

As already highlighted, another point to consider is how the rampant black-on-black criminality of the twentieth century unsettles the notion of Ubuntu, which is a uniquely African worldview. The Ubuntu philosophy, as Muvangua and Cornell (2012:10) put it, "encapsulates the moral relations demanded by human beings who must live together". Thus, in many respects, the validity of Ubuntu is best tested in a scenario where many people live together, which in the modern world is the densely populated urban city. Muvangua and Cornell (2012:10) go on to emphasise that Ubuntu points to "a fundamental moralisation of social relations" and ask how

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<sup>166</sup> An example of church initiated anti-violence campaigns was the Urban Juvenile Native Delinquency Conference (1938).

<sup>167</sup> In 1952 the authorities banished the Civic Guard patrols from the Western Native Township. The Civic Guard patrols, AKA *bangalalas* (they that shalt not sleep) had been instituted a year prior on account of the unbearable crime (Goodhew 1993:460).



Ubuntu featured, if at all, within the intensely bigoted South African cities of the previous century? Was it even possible for an Ubuntu sensibility to exist in manufactured black urbanisms where crime, rape, alcoholism, and poverty prevailed? Could Ubuntu survive within the livelihoods of blacks who had to lie, cheat, and steal to navigate the urban maze? To make sense of this anomaly, I go back to Manganyi (1973:11) who made the profound claim that “there is no such thing as African nature” within urban spaces. Here, Manganyi dispels the existence of a unique African personality/African-ness, stressing instead that urban-based blacks had developed transgressive, sophisticated, and highly ‘adaptational lifestyles’. Twentieth-century blacks were compelled to do whatever was necessary to survive or thrive in the complicated urban spaces of the modern world – like impoverished city-dwellers across the world.

Finally, it is worth adding that the urban sphere is conducive to crime because it is densely populated and less socially cohesive than rural communities. The urban sphere’s propensity towards crime makes urban environments inherently more depersonalised. In addition, there is an inevitable loosening of traditional norms and values – a by-product of urban life everywhere and part of what Karl Marx (1909) calls the alienation that modern capitalism imposes.

## **4.4 Urban black life, 1950s to 1990s**

### **4.4.1 The intensification of black urbanisation**

This section explores the urban transformations that took place during the second half of the twentieth century and their impact on black South African urbanites. By the 1950s, it was clear that the capitalist modernisation of South Africa could not be reversed to an idyllic pre-colonial condition, as unfair and inhuman as it was to the black inhabitants. The emergence of the Afrikaner-managed apartheid regime in 1948 brought a strange paradox with regard to the evolution of industrialised modernity in South Africa. On the one end, the Afrikaner Nationalist politics, education, and economy essentially eliminated or reversed any form of black progress that had materialised against the odds during the first half of the twentieth century. As du Toit (2019:59) reminds us, the early twentieth century had been hostile to Afrikaners for the most part, so the Afrikaners used their ascendancy to power as an opportunity to advance their interests with no regard for black aspirations. Concurrently, the apartheid state accelerated the industrialisation of South Africa by building on the foundations laid by the British-linked English-speaking capitalists before them. As the rest of Africa was unbundling itself from colonial domination (starting with Ghana in 1957), South Africa entered a stage of economic

growth as the gains from mineral mining were recycled and reinvested back into the country. Unlike the rest of decolonised Africa, where the colonial-style extraction of the resources remained the mainstay of the economy, South Africa intensified its industrial modernisation by developing localised manufacturing, laying expansive rail and road networks, expanding the urban metropolises, and investing in higher education. Of course, these gains were underpinned by a racist exclusiveness that prevented blacks from partaking in the fruits of this development.

After World War II, South Africa was in some respects on par with the modern industrial urban world. However, the permanent black workers were still not permanently accommodated in the urban sphere (Bonner 1995:119). According to French (1983:120), “the war had hastened the rise of a black middle class of traders and professional men in the black townships and in Johannesburg itself”, yet these traders and professionals had limited opportunity to settle indefinitely within the urban locale. At this point, it is worth emphasising that the apartheid legislation that sought to reverse black urbanisation was not unique to the new government. Mabin (1992:429) shows that the litany of laws that emerged after 1950 “hardly a pure product of a grand apartheid plan”. They were a refinement of already existing legislation that needed tightening. Even though the ‘white hand’, which was now dominated by Afrikaner politicians, tried to halt the flow and movements of blacks within the urban space, they could not arrest the influx of blacks completely. Though the government and provincial administrators instituted tough influx-control laws, the shack settlements surrounding the major South African cities continued to grow well into the 1980s and 1990s due to the “liberalisation of the urban regime” (Sapire 1992:672). For example, by 1989 there were almost 50,000 shacks littered across various squatter camps around the cities of Johannesburg, Kempton Park, and Pretoria. While the lifting of influx-control mechanisms during the 1980s is often seen as the prime enabler for this sustained but dramatic increase of urban migrants in informal settlements, it was the unpredictability with regard to strategic responses on the part of the municipal authorities “rather than total withdrawal of control” that paved the way for the influx (Sapire 1992:672). Also, due to the migrant labour system, during the 1960s and 1970s 70% of Zulu men were outside of KwaZulu-Natal in search for work, and 67% of men from the Venda area (Khapoya 1980:33, 38). The dependency of white society on black labour resulted in the state investing sizeable amounts of public funds in creating transport networks that funnelled black labourers daily into and out of the city. These influx-control laws and the establishment of the homelands

also created peri-urban “commuter settlements” from where black residents travelled great distances to access their employment (Hindson 1987:587).<sup>168</sup>

As already noted, the assumption that the increase in squatter camp settlements during the second half of the twentieth century was because of new migrants flowing into the cities is also not fully accurate. The ‘squatter tradition’ also brought about unrestrained movement and mobility among its dwellers. A study commissioned by the Natal Town Regional and Planning Commission found that 87% of residents in the Umlazi informal settlement in 1992 did not pay any rent, which was a result of the unclear ownership patterns and irregular job opportunities (Cross *et al.* 1993:50). The prime motivations for infinite mobility between the informal settlements were overcrowding, no independence, violence, and the prospect of “free land” in new squatter areas (Cross *et al.* 1993:64-65). The overcrowding of spaces such as Soweto and Alexandra<sup>169</sup> led the Johannesburg Municipality to consider building new residential sites, predicated on the demolishing in the late 1980s of squatter areas such as Mshenguville<sup>170</sup> and in Chicken Farm in Soweto. The new residential areas resulted in the most spectacular growth of Soweto into one of the largest and most densely populated cities in Africa. In 1980, Louis Rive was appointed to draw up the expansion plan for Soweto. As part of the package, the municipality was offering would-be black residents a 99-year lease, electrification and improved municipal services (Davenport & Saunders 2000:464). Although not ideal, these conditions were more favourable than the situation in Orlando during the 1930s and 1940s.

Racist sentiments guided the construction of Soweto’s housing. During an address to Parliament in 1950, the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr EG Jansen, unashamedly stated that a black person must never be “provided with a house which to him resembles a palace and with conveniences which he cannot appreciate and which he will not require for many years to come” (South African History Online 2011). For Jansen, the ‘primitive’ disposition of blacks did not accord them the luxury of living in a modern and comfortable home. In 1953 Douglas Calderwood<sup>171</sup> published a thesis titled *Native Housing in South Africa* that embodied this ethos of paucity. Calderwood completed house designs in collaboration with Barrie Biermann at the National Building Research Institute. The houses were the iconic ‘matchbox’ home that would become synonymous with black urbanisation. For Calderwood, as Bremner (2010:13)

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<sup>168</sup> An example of the scale of commuting from the townships is that by 1985 20,000 workers were commuting from KwaNdebele to Pretoria, with a further 70,000 moving from other townships to Pretoria (de Villiers Graaff 1986).

<sup>169</sup> Refer to Bonner’s and Nieftagodien’s *Alexandra: A history* (2008), for a detailed analysis of the Alexandra township and its peculiar urban dynamics.

<sup>170</sup> The Sofasonke Party had resuscitated itself through businessman ET Tshabalala, who allowed residents to build shacks behind his shops in exchange of membership fees and monthly service payments. The settlement was named Mshenguville, following Tshabalala’s clan name, Mshengu (Sapire 1992:691).

<sup>171</sup> Douglas Calderwood, a graduate with the University of Witwatersrand, later became manager of the architecture division at the National Building Research Institute.

argues, the functionality and living ergonomics of the house were superseded by “questions of cost in relation to quantities of houses to be built”. How black users experienced the house was not as important as providing a stopgap to squash growing urban-based political activism. Upon his arrival to Soweto during the late 1950s, the journalist Nat Nakasa (quoted in Patel 2005:36) was astonished by the scale of the Soweto project and observed that: “Almost all the houses are built to the same pattern – thousands upon thousands of small ‘matchbox’ cottages separated from each other by wire fencing”.<sup>172</sup> Molobi (2014:8) provides an account of how these closely packed houses created searing tensions between neighbours, tensions that were heightened by the proliferation of shacks:

Homes were constructed in such a way that sections of next-door neighbours were overlapping to the other family. When revamping the house, they built by adding single or two rooms to make the whole family comfortable, raising tensions with next-door neighbours because they will feel that a portion of their space is stolen.

Although the apartheid government expanded cites like Soweto at a phenomenal rate, many urban-based black families lived in informal housing. By the early 1990s, statistics showed that one in five South African households were living in informal dwellings, which translated to 46% of the urban black population in Gauteng (Sapire 1992:697). Pieterse (2005:142) notes that “cities can be understood spatially in terms of densities, proximities, intensities and their effects”. The spatial density of urban reserves had deleterious consequences for black city dwellers. The claustrophobic nature of the matchbox dwellings created for black families, coupled with the overcrowding in these residential areas, resulted in the expansion of informal settlements. These ‘squatter camps’ became the norm on the outskirts of South African cities. Blacks who sought to access the opportunities offered by urbanisation after the 1950s could only do so from these settlements. Newly emergent informal settlements such as Orange Farm and Rietfontein near Johannesburg were populated by people who moved to these areas willingly on account of the potential long-term security of tenure.

Interestingly, the entry of an ever-increasing number of blacks into the urban environments during the 1980s and 1990s accentuated the divisions among the urban-based black communities. The already resident urban black families felt that squatter camps were destroying and compromising the township fabric. Dlamini (2009) records the ambivalence of Mrs Nkabinde, an elderly township dweller who saw both the strictures of influx control and the chaos that came when it was rescinded. According to Mrs Nkabinde, “*Izihambi*

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<sup>172</sup> Before relocating to America in the 1960s, Nat Nakasa cogently branded Soweto as a ‘bleak’ and ‘depressing’ territory. Cooke (2011:1) laments how these small impractical units are still used as the blueprint for post-apartheid public housing programmes that continue to mark existing and emergent townships as “soulless and dangerous” spaces.

*seziziningikakhulu*. There are too many outsiders. I don't even know where they come from" (quoted in Dlamini 2009:4). Mrs Nkabinde complained about the unchecked multiplication of shacks and squatter camps and the strain that placed on the already limited urban infrastructure within the townships. She also clearly distinguishes herself as an insider and the new arrivals as outsiders, thus reinforcing the differences between the various grades of urbanised blacks.<sup>173</sup> However, more decisively, Mrs Nkabinde's views are a confirmation of the heterogeneous nature and incoherence of black urbanisms, dispelling the erroneous idea of black cultural unity and solidarity.

For many African scholars, this incoherence is ascribed not to an inherent (ethnic) divisionism, or economic competitiveness or innate human tendencies, but to colonial and imperialist legacies. For Cheikh Anta Diop and his followers, such as Ifi Amadiume, for example, the deceptive heterogeneity within African societies is a result of the contamination of African civilisation by foreign influence. Amadiume notes that "these differences are externally imposed. They derive from colonial heritage" (quoted in Diop 1989:x). Seminal post-apartheid cultural institutions in South Africa went as far as blaming apartheid for tensions within townships that led to widespread violence during the early 1990s, saying "apartheid used the notions of 'tradition' and 'culture' in a deliberately exclusivist manner, which sought to entrench division among blacks" (Freedom Park 2011:211).<sup>174</sup> Even though there is some truth to these arguments, such rhetoric of blame is counterproductive because it shifts the discussion away from issues such as the inevitable chasm between incoming shack dwellers and existing residents, and how these dissimilarities have to be effectively negotiated within a multicultural, urban setting.

#### **4.4.2 Representations of Afropolitan ghettos: The ubiquity of informal settlements**

Without question, the most pervasive image throughout South African's urban landscape during the second half of the twentieth century was the informal settlement or squatter camp. Comprised of innumerable box-shaped structures made from corrugated iron, poles, and various discarded materials, the informal settlement is a feature in all of South Africa's major cities. The squatter camp was an invention of the white colonial government in their attempt to establish a temporary shelter for urban-based blacks displaced by their own racialised and draconian policies. Throughout the twentieth century, the squatter camp would be emblematic

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<sup>173</sup> In Dlamini's (2009:4) view, Mrs Nkabinde was not only irritable about the disordered present, but was also reaching back, in rather ironic terms, to a period when influx control brought about some normalcy within black urbanisms.

<sup>174</sup> The urban violence of the early 1990s was simmering on civil war, and was waged along political and ethnic lines. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was predominantly supported by isiZulu speakers and the ANC was mostly supported by isiXhosa speakers.

of urban black life as more and more blacks were denied the opportunity to own and build property within the cities. According to Smith (1992:1), although squatter settlements were constructs of successive segregationist regimes, throughout the twentieth century, these racialised sites took “on a life of their own, rebounding on the system to its discomfort and ultimate demise”. The best example of the transgressive temperament of the informal settlement communities is that of the first Squatter Movement revolution in Orlando.

Of interest here is how throughout the twentieth-century black artists have restored the dignity of the informal settlement as a place, and the dignity and humanity of those who occupied these sites of non-being through their art. Middle-class whites and blacks have looked upon squatter settlements with contempt,<sup>175</sup> for they see the squatters as unwanted invaders, aliens contaminating the orderliness of the city. At least 50% of residents in the informal settlements around the Gauteng area in 1990 were not new to the region (Sapire 1992:677). The majority of blacks who took up residence in the sprawling informal settlements did so because they had to move from the backyards they were renting, or in many instances were descendants and children of urban-based families that could no longer absorb them as adults. The point is, whether or not the informal settlement dwellers had any legitimacy to the land they occupied, they were nevertheless urban citizens who needed accommodation within the city.

One of the earliest representations of informal settlement communities was Pemba’s watercolour painting *The birth of site and service* (1930) (Figure 4.30). In it, Pemba portrays the expansive informal settlements that germinated outside Port Elizabeth during the 1920s and 1930s as more and more blacks entered the cities but were subsequently denied access to land and property. Since Pemba’s formative painting, many black artists have explored the subjectivities of squatter communities, like Selby Mvusi in *City II* (1960), a poetic and slightly abstracted image that, according to Miles (2015:93) “conjures up the sprawling informal habitation on the outskirts of urban areas” (Figure 4.31).

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<sup>175</sup> Dlamini (2009) cites the words of a black woman who saw the squatter shacks and their dwellers in a negative light. For her, informal settlement dwellers had destroyed the innocence and peace of her township. She laments: “It [the township] was a quiet place with no violence... There are too many outsiders. I don’t even know where they come from” (Dlamini 2009:4).



Figure 4.30. George Pemba, *The birth of site and service*, 1930. Watercolour, 21.8 x 35 cm. (Hudleston 1996:95)



Figure 4.31. Selby Mvusi, *City II*, c.1960. Oil on board, 108.8 x 81.6. Estate of Selby Mvusi, Johannesburg. (Miles 2015:89)

However, very few have dedicated their entire creative career towards cataloguing the texture and most importantly, people of informal settlements. Eric Lubisi does this through his representations of the Winterveld community. By his own estimation, Lubisi produced over 2,000 artworks focussed on or inspired by Winterveld. This constitutes the bulk of his net output of art. Throughout the 1970s Lubisi made image upon image of the Winterveld community, extolling, as he phrases it in his own tongue, “humanity – its hopes, joys and sorrows” (Motale 2000:29). Hugo (1980:125) was generally dismissive of Lubisi’s Winterveld body of images suggesting that the artist worked in a “commercialised style” so that he could increase his sales. Despite the obvious desire to sell his artworks, Lubisi’s paintings from this epoch were distinctly naturalistic and conveyed a literal pictorial history of Winterveld, but more significantly, the paintings were marked by a lived connection the artist had with the residents of Winterveld.<sup>176</sup>

Akin to many of his forebears and contemporaries, Lubisi was engaged in the trope of social realism that endeavoured to archive the experiences and ordinary practices of those living on the periphery of the industrialised cities. His use of colour in many of the paintings was naturalistic, but also intensely dramatic. Lubisi used a dual strategy. Firstly, he created quick and automatic sketches *in situ*, a process made famous among black South African artists by Durant Sihlali’s swift capturing of Sophiatown’s destruction during the 1950s (Mdanda 2011). Secondly, he processed these sketches in studio-based painting to the sounds of a carefully orchestrated playlist of world music ranging from jazz to classical European sounds (Lubisi

<sup>176</sup> Lubisi resided in Ga-Rankuwa, which used to be part of the Bophuthatswana homeland. Ga-Rankuwa was very close to Winterveld and Lubisi had many personal associations with people who lived there.

2018). Even though Lubisi was recreating real-world moments, these realistic depictions were marinated in the artist's imaginative spirit. This imaginative dimension radiated the most in the way he applied paint onto the canvas. With the aid of a palette knife, Lubisi would generously smear pigment onto the surface in an additive process that resulted in layers of conjoined colours.



Figure 4.32. Eric Lubisi, *Winterveld*, c.1978, Oil on canvas. (Photograph by author)

This technique is visible in *Winterveld* (c.1978) where the textured colours combine to form discernible shelters, which themselves were built through the mixture of sand and soil to fashion steady but friable walls and corrugated roofs held down by large rocks and/or old tyres (Figure 4.32). The fragility and temporality of their DIY structures – temporal in that the residents of Winterveld were falsely promised permanent housing – is further emphasised by how he merged the houses with the environment in the painting. The cladded walls and the ground in which they are planted gradually dissipate into the fuzzy atmosphere, which has also been treated in the same earthy tones used for the houses, trees, grass, and terrain. The ephemeral quality in which Lubisi painted this scene further underscores the state of non-being that characterised the Winterveld residents, and Winterveld as a place, which as noted before, was neither fully urban nor completely rural. The painting is almost flat through this monotonous application of the same colour on the various components. However, there are distinctive fore, middle, and background planes that achieve the illusion of three-dimensionality. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Lubisi evolved and tweaked this semi-representational approach, which was rooted in the desire of recreating the likeliness of what he saw.

Another artist who dedicated much of their creative energy towards illustrating squatter camps was Vusimuzi Khumalo. In *Phumalong*<sup>177</sup> *Informal Settlement* (1997), Khumalo explores this

<sup>177</sup> The name of the settlement is incorrectly spelt as Phumalong instead of Phomolong in various catalogues and write ups about this artwork.



largely unknown squatter community based in Mamelodi in Pretoria (Figure 4.33). Using his distinctive collaged painting style, Khumalo recreated, in high definition, the mostly ignored inside world of a squatter community. Khumalo also takes the viewer through a journey of discovery into the individual personas of the people depicted in his compositions. The exceptional detail with which he paints each character renders them human, and although they remain anonymous, we can speculate about their personhood via their clothing, poses, and colourful radiance. Khumalo invites the viewer to sympathise with these people. The care with which he treats the shacks enables the viewer to appreciate that while these are precarious and non-permanent structures, they are nevertheless spaces where people and families congregate and take refuge daily.

Furthermore, Khumalo's depiction of children at play reminds us that innocence can survive in sites where violent and criminal elements often inflict havoc on the weak and defenceless. Throughout his many explorations of informal settlements around South Africa, such as *Soweto at sea* (c.1998), Khumalo domesticates the squatter camp to audiences who only see it from afar (Figure 4.34). Ultimately, his images transport the viewer where they "might otherwise fear to tread and reminds us that human beings live there under trying circumstances" (Hannover Expo 2000:9).



Figure 4.33. Vusimuzi Khumalo, *Phumalong Informal Settlement (sic)*, 1997. Mixed media painting, 37.5 x 60.5 cm. (Strauss & co 2015).



Figure 4.34. Vusimuzi Khumalo, *Soweto at sea*, c.1998. Mixed media. (Lisbon Expo 1998:8)

Another artist who attempted to domesticate the squatter camp was Kagiso Pat Mautloa. In 1995, Mautloa co-created an ambitious installation titled *Mkuku*, which re-created a life-size shack in the conventional white-cube gallery space (Figure 4.35).<sup>178</sup> The room was furnished with items found in most shacks to give viewers, who were almost exclusively white, the tactile feeling and phenomenological experience of being black in urban South Africa. However, Powell (1995b:39), while impressed by the overall gravitas of the work was wary of the fact

<sup>178</sup> The artwork was shown at a gallery in London as part of the *On the road* exhibition which featured 10 artists from Southern Africa. The exhibition was curated by Linda Givon, owner of *Goodman Gallery* at the time.

that this “familiar strategy of bringing the real world of life into the gallery” was a continuation of the sanitisation and mystification of the black urban experience through art. Powell was critical of the fact that almost all artworks created by urban-based blacks were made in “the ways that whites, as the market for such art, wanted to see the lives of black projected”. As he so eloquently deduced:

Township art styles, in which nearly all black artists worked until the mid-1980s, sustained a rigorous fiction of black life which, while it often dwelt on a sort of causeless and sentimental pathos, never showed the realities of forced removals, police brutality, squatter camps, the litany of South African abuses. Many if not most whites had never so much been inside a township. All of that history is somewhere to be read in the confrontation with the rusted scrap of corrugated iron... At every level the world that is evoked has been excluded (Powell 1995b:39).

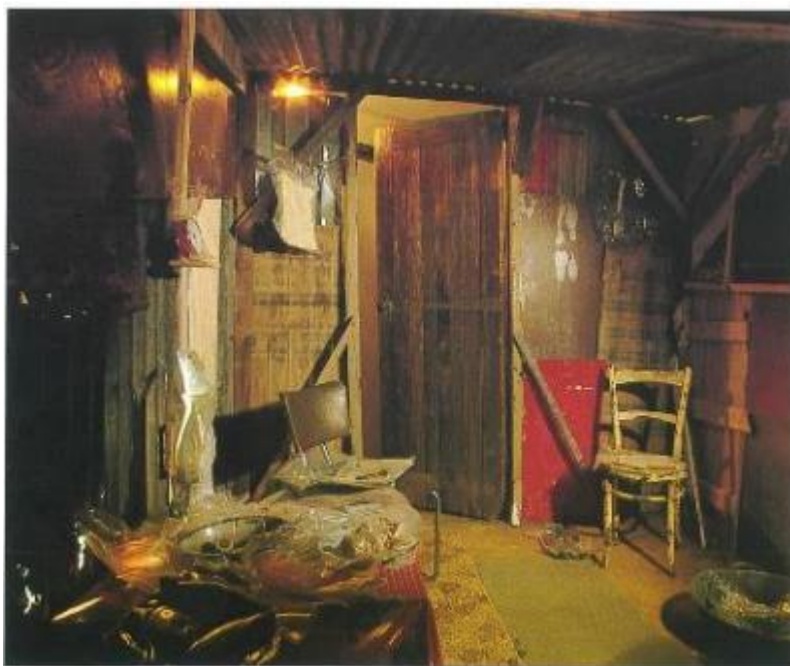


Figure 4.35. Kagiso Pat Mautloa, *Mkuku*, 1995. Shack installation.  
(Powell 1995:28)

Although Mautloa’s installation was a genuine attempt to make real and tangible the domestic living conditions within informal settlements, it was rendered impotent because it was consumed in a world completely indifferent to the interests of urban blacks. By several measures, many of the stakeholders in South Africa’s art world were directly and/or indirectly complicit in perpetuating the tyrannies that beset the urban black. Powell concluded, “what is at stake here, though in oblique and meditative form, is whole sensibilities, whole worlds” (1995b:39). In other words, the installation was more than an artistic reinterpretation of a

shack, and it was a politicised recreation of the injustices urban blacks had to endure. Mautloa (quoted in Powell 1995b:28) noted that the installation was an attempt to show the innermost recesses of black subjectivity: “I use the wall as a metaphor. The walls can reflect life inside and outside as a skin which covers the inside of the souls. I use colour to reflect the hope that has vanished in the people”.

When white creatives visit informal settlements and shacks, they tend to idealise or misrepresent them. The best example of this propensity is Craig Fraser’s *Shack Chic* (2003), a collection of photographs in which the realities of shack life are elided by the aestheticisation of the interiors, with happy, beaming occupants posing for the white man holding the camera. While these beautiful interiors were curated by black inhabitants who sought to brighten up their otherwise deplorable living spaces, the sublimation of these interiors as ‘chic’ by a white creative speaks to the misrepresentation of the urban black experience through the traditional white ‘male’ gaze.

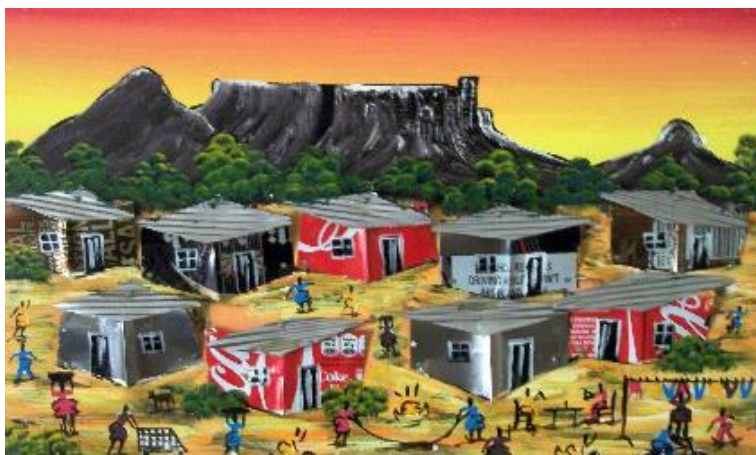


Figure 4.36. Artist unknown, title unknown, date unknown. Oil on canvas. (African Township Art 2020)

Additionally, Mautloa’s installation is stylistically and materially different from the images created by many nameless black artists who made township scenes (collaged or painted) that were sold to tourists or at flea markets throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While the formal art market should be lauded, to a degree, for documenting, cataloguing, and facilitating the institutionalisation of artworks produced by many of the black artists I have cited in this study, there are countless more who also visualised the city, but remain unknown and are written out of history. The type of images they produced was stylistically similar to the artworks generated during the 1950s and 1960s but lacked the narrative and pictorial qualities of the artists they were imitating. Essentially, the artworks created by these nameless black artists were factory-like images, made using the least possible paint (to save costs) and in the quickest possible

time. Due to limited access to art materials, these 'street artists' also collaged found material onto their paintings, to fashion mixed-media illustrations of urban black life. This is evident in Figure 4.36, which depicts an informal settlement in Cape Town, overshadowed by Table Mountain.<sup>179</sup> This *untitled* artwork, like many of the tourist-marketed pictures, romanticised the poverty in squatter camps, and are easily distinguishable from artworks layered with more serious social concerns, such as Mautloa's.

Mdanda cautions that the influence of the white art market should not be forgotten when appraising idyllic aestheticisations of the 'black city', especially the mass-produced pictures that were targeted for the tourist and curio markets. As he puts it: "the white-dominated art market had an appetite for picturesque images of township life, resulting in a plethora of images of dubious artistic and political merit" (Mdanda 2011:25). The beautiful, ordered, clean, and safe aestheticisations of squatter camps are what white audiences wanted to see because such images were non-confrontational, largely apolitical, and most importantly, eased the white conscience. Unlike the forward-looking renderings of the 'black city', as such Henry Nxumalo's drawings (see Chapter 3), these idealised expressions of black urbanisms lacked originality and a vision of how black society should be (Ndebele 1986).

#### 4.4.3 The remaking of urban black classism

Apartheid further complicated the distinctions between the various classes among urban blacks. Wale (2013:37) confirms that from the 1950s apartheid "brought with it new kinds of class compression among urban Africans". Previously, I showed how the emergence of the mission-educated New Africans, in effect, was the rise of an elite black upper class. The class distinctions brought about a hierarchy of blackness. However, the hierarchies were compromised by the racialised colonial code "that did not care to distinguish between a black doctor, and a black domestic" (Dlamini 2009:77) and the white authorities treated all blacks, regardless of social standing or level of education with the same degree of non-deference. In addition, the destruction of urban spaces where blacks could own land and build properties during the 1960s and 1970s meant that those blacks who could build bigger homes no longer could do so in sites like Orlando and Soweto where the state provided the monotonous matchbox dwellings. Towering entrepreneurs who lived in Soweto during the late twentieth century, like Richard Maponya and Dr Nthato Motlana, were unable to invest their

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<sup>179</sup> I must confess that I am uncertain if this artwork was created by a black artist and whether or not it was produced before the 2000s (the delimitations of this study). I have included it here as an example of the ubiquity of scenes showcasing informal settlements that were geared for the tourist market that can be found on Google and Pinterest. Ironically, many of these types of uncritical and picturesque representations of black urbanisms are being increasingly created by white artists, who also desire to cash in on the demand for such art from European, American, and Asians tourists.

considerable income in things like property or the stock market because of legal impediments. These elite business owners and professionals grouped themselves into areas like Dube in Soweto and were commonly referred to as ‘Dubenheimers’ (Wale 2013:40). Economically mobile blacks, who were in the minority, could only spend their money on consumables like cars and designer clothing. In a coffee-table book cheekily titled *The racist’s guide to the people of South Africa*, Kilpatrick (2010:27) provides a tongue-in-cheek analysis of urban black men:

The most important things to a black man are his two sets of wheels – one set being his car and the other being his shoes. If you go to a fancy bar, the black men are always wearing the nicest shoes. In general, black men dress very well. They love expensive brand-name clothes. If you go to the townships you’ll see men walking along the side of the road dressed in suits and shiny black shoes.

Urban-based black men and women who had disposable income could only direct the income into fashion and automobiles. They did not have access to the same wealth havens, where whites re-invested their surplus cash. Class differences within black urbanisms were almost palpable through dress and cars. A resident of Soweto during the 1970s, Joyce Siwane, confirms, “because people didn’t have investment opportunities, they used to dress very expensively because that was the only way of self-expression” (quoted in Wale 2013:42). Dlamini (2009:77) adds that teachers in black schools were also instrumental in defining the class hierarchies and goes as far as calling them “the most ardent defenders of such class distinctions”.

The social and economic advantage that black entrepreneurs, teachers, nurses, and other professionals had over the majority of unemployed urban blacks was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the social and economic advantage gave them an elevated social status among black communities. However, on the other hand, the advantage did nothing to earn respect from white society. Mathebe (2016:92) sketches how this “psychological conflict... between class and racial identity” expressed by the *Drum* writers during the 1950s and 1960s had a devastating impact on their psyche and ultimately led to their tragic deaths.<sup>180</sup> *Drum* magazine (initially *African Drum* when it was established in 1951), was perhaps the most iconic transmitter of information, style, and the aspirations of the educated middle-class urban blacks. The very existence of publications like *Ilanga Lase Natal* and *The Bantu World*, and later *Drum* confirmed the advent of an urbanised black middle-class and intellectual elite. Although owned by a white patron – a trend that was common in twentieth-century publications

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<sup>180</sup> Mathebe (2016:92) surmises the abrupt deaths of some of the brightest writers of the *Drum* heydays, such as Henry Nxumalo who was bludgeoned to death while in drunken state, Nat Nakasa who committed suicide, and Bloke Modisane, who died in exile on account of alcohol abuse, were due to this frustrated upward mobility.

in South Africa – *Drum*'s target market was unequivocally black.<sup>181</sup> For a time *Drum* enjoyed a multiracial<sup>182</sup> readership, but when its content reflected a sustained political stance against apartheid, white readership dissipated, together with precious sales revenues.

Johnson (2009:38) cautions against both undermining *Drum* by representing it as a mere “mirror” of urbanisation for blacks and conversely overstating its contribution. *Drum* shaped perception, and at the same time was a space for open contestation about certain urban practices. *Drum* distributed over 470,000 copies throughout South Africa by 1969 and had a distinct “self-conscious urbanity” (Johnson 2009:38). While its grounding was in Sophiatown (before its destruction) and urban South African, it became the mouthpiece “of a future continental African community” through its transnational footprint (Odhiambo 2006:170). Newbury (2007:589) identifies two humanising achievements of the *Drum* photographic heritage, the first being its emphasis on the “individual in society” (urban blacks) who were the subjects of the *Drum* photographers. The second being, the provision of black photographers with the platform and tools to be creative beyond the ambit of being mere visual ethnographers (Newbury 2007:589). The point here is that publications like *Drum* attempted to showcase urban black sophistication and modernity.

Urban black elitism and modernity were also performed through various sporting codes. When the journalist Nat Nakasa moved from Durban to Johannesburg in the late 1950s, many Johannesburgers were surprised that he arrived with a tennis racket as part of his luggage (Djata 2008:59). Nakasa had been introduced to tennis when he was in Durban, where the sport flourished, especially among the Indian communities.<sup>183</sup> Djata (2008:54) notes that “Despite racism and the expensive nature of tennis, more blacks engaged in tennis than in cricket, golf, or swimming”. Thus blacks who played tennis were regarded as *amarespectables* (the respectable ones). However, this respectability counted for nought, as Mark Mathabane (a talented tennis prodigy who moved to America in 1978 to advance his dreams of playing professional tennis) once remarked that “blacks with athletic hopes were burned in the fires of apartheid oppression” (Djata 2008:75). Talent did not provide black athletes access to white-dominated sports such as rugby and cricket. Even so-called ‘open’ sporting events like the Comrades Marathon that has been staged annually between Durban and Pietermaritzburg since 1921, only started allowing runners of colour to participate in the run in 1975.<sup>184</sup> The

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<sup>181</sup> See Rauwerda (2007:395) for an insightful account of the visual and often ‘insidious’ strategies used by advertisers who sought to tap into the vast black market reading the publications targeted at the black elite.

<sup>182</sup> For an example of the multiracial readership of *Drum*, see Naidoo (2008) who traces the Indian presence in *Drum* during the 1950s.

<sup>183</sup> An example of how tennis flourished among Indians in Durban is that Hoosen Jajbhay held multiple tennis championships during the 1930s, including the South African Open (Remarkable record of H Jajbhay 1936:17).

<sup>184</sup> Prior to 1975 when runners of colour were first allowed participate in the Comrades Marathon, only Robert Mtshali in 1935 and John Mkwanyana in 1961 had run the marathon unofficially and their participation was only

testimony of the first black winner of the Comrades Marathon in 1989, Sam Tshabalala, highlights how blacks who attained a bit of fame and success were still subject to urban inequalities that rendered them landless, homeless, and essentially deprived. In an interview commemorating 30 years since his famous win, Tshabalala (quoted in Mamabolo 2019:82) recounts how he was determined to obtain a house with the race prizes:

They were giving me about R30,000 and a car – a combi – as a prize for winning. But I told them I do not want a car. In any case, I did not even have a licence. I said to them I do not care what you do with the car, all I want is a house. I've got this house we are in now, thanks to that race. So how can I forget the Comrades Marathon? If I did not have this house, maybe I would have forgotten. But now I have a proper home, thanks to Comrades Marathon.

Tshabalala was intent on escaping the noose of poverty and above all, urban-based homelessness. Ultimately, sporting achievement among urban blacks was a way of transitioning into the comforts of middle-class status. As noted above, the New African intellectuals who were initially hopeful that their conservative ideals would result in wholesale transformation benefitting black Africans were slowly replaced by more revolutionary thinkers who sought to oppose the classism that had developed within black communities. Paradigmatic of the failure of the New African Movement's idealism that permeated thinking among educated blacks was Nelson Mandela's own transition from championing non-violence and negotiation as strategies of political engagement with the apartheid government, to his picking up arms and the adoption of guerrilla tactics. The political failures of the ANC were also critical in erasing the confidence the black masses had in the educated elite, whom they hoped would fight for their emancipation.

#### **4.4.4 Urban-based black leisure**

Equally important to the urban black psyche was the indulgence in leisure activities like sport and gambling. While these activities often took on a competitive edge, especially when money was involved, the activities nevertheless represented a space where blacks could engage in social and recreational activities even within uncondusive contexts. As noted in the previous chapter, sport also gave blacks the opportunity to transcend their daily distresses, and allowed the talented athletes to display black excellence in the sporting realm. Throughout the twentieth century, soccer was the most popular sport in black urbanisms. A large part of the soccer's popularity was because, "football enabled African workers, community leaders, and entrepreneurs to compete, forge collective identities and networks, build alternative

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accepted on the basis that they "didn't interfere with any legal competitors" (Thomas 2019:110). In other words, they could run if they did not compete for the winning honours with the white male competitors.

institutions, and enjoy temporary relief from the hardships of institutional racism, police pass checks, and low-paying work” as Alegi (2002:18) captured so succinctly. While the colonial and apartheid governments tried to segregate professional soccer by creating separate leagues for black clubs to participate in, the sheer popularity of the sport and its commercial clout turned soccer into one of the few multiracial activities during the latter half of the twentieth century. Competitive soccer matches were an occasion for whites to venture into the townships, either as players or supporters. Conversely, soccer matches afforded black players access to white-only amenities like hotels and restaurants when clubs like Orlando Pirates played white teams based in the city.

As seen in Gerard Sekoto’s *The soccer game* (1939-1940), soccer was universal in all ‘black cities’ throughout the country (Figure 4.37). Besides capturing a live game, Sekoto’s painting is significant in that the composition mimics the story of the establishment of one of the biggest soccer clubs in South Africa and Africa today, Orlando Pirates Football Club. Founded in 1937, in the newly formed ‘black city’ of Orlando at the time, Orlando Pirates was branded as the ‘People’s Club’ on account of the community-based efforts that sustained the club. Like the young boys represented in Sekoto’s painting, Orlando Pirates began as an assortment of barefoot amateur players who broke away from the Orlando Boys Club (founded in 1934) to form their own team in 1937. The boys became a club through the help of their first patron, Bethuel Mokgosinyana, a social worker who built a makeshift clubhouse and provided the boys with kits (Orlando Pirates FC 2019).



Figure 4.37. Gerard Sekoto, *The soccer game*, 1939-40. Watercolour on paper. (Lindop 1995:33)



Figure 4.38. Ephraim Ngatane, *Boxing match*, c.1960s. Oil on board. (South African Heritage Resource Agency 2018)

Prominent in the foreground of Sekoto’s painting is a woman walking beside the field with a baby on her back and items on her head. The growth of Orlando Pirates into the ‘People’s Club’ was significantly impacted by women’s agency and initiative. Richard Maguire (1991:90)



reports that the club's women's supporter camp that emerged during the 1960s was "reputed to wield great authority behind the scenes":

Clad in black and white uniforms, they became renowned for their fierce loyalty and inspirational singing and sloganeering at matches. They held fundraising events such as parties and braais (where they did the catering) and beauty competitions (in which they participated) in order to aid the Development Committee (Maguire 1991:90).

Headed by Betty Nkosi and known as the 'apron government', the female supporters were central to the club's management when it became increasingly professionalised. However, as Maguire concludes, the involvement of black women in the front and back office of the biggest sports club in South Africa at the time accorded them "the opportunity to involve themselves in an organisation and to have some influence over the passage of events in public life" (Maguire 1991:90).

While soccer was overwhelmingly dominant, other sports also flourished in black urbanisms, most notably boxing. Ephraim Ngatane's *Boxing Match* (c.1960s) is an illustration of two black boxers battling it out (Figure 4.38). Following the likes of Nelson Mandela, Ngatane was an avid boxer who practised the sport semi-professionally, competing as 'Kid' Ngatane in the Natal Province after obtaining his Boxer's Registration Certificate in 1962 (Bester *et al.* 2009:8). Ultimately, the sight of children and adults kicking a makeshift ball, evident in Pemba's *New Brighton* (1977), which Hudleston (1996:128) considers to be "Pemba's most accomplished 'township' painting" (Figure 4.39), were common occurrences in 'black cities' throughout the country where sporting and cultural facilities were virtually non-existent (Cobley 1994). As highlighted in the previous chapter, apartheid town planners did the absolute minimum to make the urban experience comfortable for blacks. The town planners' strategy only changed after the 1976 riots when the 'black problem' became uncontrollable. During the 1980s, there was a rush to build community centres and sports complexes, with the hope of appeasing urban blacks to halt the violence and destruction of property that had become the norm post-1976. To this end, concessions provided by the apartheid government on leisure and sporting activities in black urbanisms were highly politicised.



Figure 4.39. George Pemba, *New Brighton*, 1977. Oil on board, 56 x 80 cm. University of Fort Hare Collection. (Hudleston 1996:128)



Figure 4.40. Selby Mvusi, *Card players*, 1955. Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 98 cm. (Miles 2015:74)

Additionally, betting on soccer matches, boxing bouts or card games, as seen in Selby Mvusi's *Card players* (1955), where men and women openly gambled outside their homes or on the lawns of white suburbia (Figure 4.40), created flows of money outside the white-controlled markets. Scott and Barr (2013:719) note how "Township Dice and cards were perceived as being 'fairer' and as allowing punters to be more in control than casino gambling". Like the stokvel savings societies, gamblers in black urbanisms determined the rules of engagement – as opposed to the gaming regulations imposed by the state – and more significantly, the earnings circulated within black communities. Although card and dice games were a commonplace and an almost daily activity that helped players to "balance their budgets" (Scott & Barr 2013:719), such informal gambling had negative connotations with the theft and gang culture that beset black urbanisms from the 1950s onwards. Yet, despite the criminal element that circled these activities, gambling was ubiquitous in the 'black city'. The likes of Ephraim Ngatane were intrigued by how religiously black women played the game Fah Fee<sup>185</sup> (Figure 4.41). As Bester *et al.* (2009:11) explain, Ngatane portrayed the "everyday rituals such as Fah Fee, which to some township women is what bingo is to English working-class housewives". Like Ngatane and Mvusi, Andrew Tshidiso Motjuoadi's, *Study for Township Life* (1965) shows a group of young men playing dice (Figure 4.42). The drawing was probably made in Mamelodi, where the artist lived until his untimely death. Motjuoadi's characterisation of dice gambling as being central to urban black life is evident in the title of his drawing.

<sup>185</sup> Fah Fee is a Chinese inspired game that was played in black urbanisms throughout the twentieth century and was imported into the country by Chinese migrants during the late nineteenth century. In the game, players stake money on numbers that are represented by a symbol. The game, like all forms of gambling in black urbanisms, was considered illegal.



Figure 4.41. Ephraim Ngatane, *Fah Fee*, 1969.  
Oil on board, 53 x 71 cm. (Bester 2009)

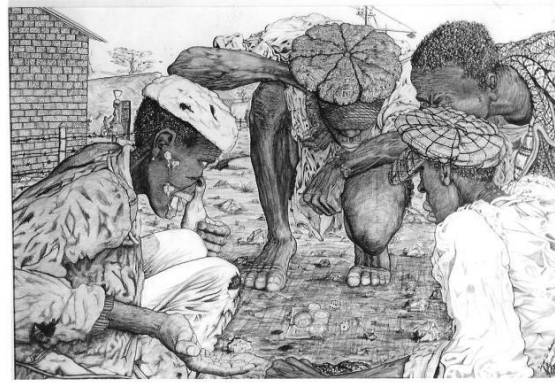


Figure 4.42. Andrew Tshidiso Motjuoadi, *Study for Township Life*, 1965. Pencil on paper.  
(Photograph by author)

Fundamentally, the existence of black leisure within urban South Africa also confirms an often-underestimated reality of twentieth-century urbanisation, which is that blacks did not necessarily want to escape urbanisation and rather purposefully pursued it. The author Richard Rive (1981:23) once stated that “I am urban South Africa”, a bold pronouncement symbolising the attachment of blacks to South Africa’s urban environment. Commenting on this audacious declaration of self, Viljoen (2007:117) paraphrases Rive as follows: “you see me and pigeonhole me as a black man, inferior, primitive, but I defy you – I am not your 'black'; I am cultured, locally rooted, yet cosmopolitan, modern, urban and urbane, and, as his accent would testify, have the best education in the world”.<sup>186</sup> Ephraim Ngatane’s *The bridal ceremony* (undated) and Sam Nhlengethwa’s *The party* (1992) are a hallmark of artworks that celebrate and extol black urbanity (Figures 4.43 and 4.44). Ngatane’s watercolour displays a group of uniformly dressed women and men dancing alongside a bride wearing a white wedding dress. The African ‘white wedding’ was a unique blend of western marriage traditions and African celebration practices that have since become an almost weekly event in every ‘black city’. During weddings, whole streets and sections of the township were often blocked off to enable the outdoor festivities and dancing to happen safely. Unlike Ngatane’s outdoor procession, Nhlengethwa’s collaged composition was set in a confined township room, adorned with trendy interior decoration, and includes collaged partygoers dressed in fashionable clothes as the focal point. In the artwork, these chic urbanites enjoy what looks like exclusive wine and alcohol. This image is a portrayal of how blacks embraced the trappings, excesses, and conveniences of Afropolitan life.

<sup>186</sup> Richard Rive did indeed possess the best education in the world for he obtained a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Cape Town, a Masters Degree from Columbia University and a Doctoral Degree from the University of Oxford.



Figure 4.43. Ephraim Ngatane, *The bridal ceremony*, undated. Watercolour on paper, 48.5 x 66.5 cm. (Bester 2009:24)



Figure 4.44. Sam Nhlengethwa, *The party*, 1992. Watercolour, wax crayon, pencil, collage and photo collage on paper, 26.4 x 36.2 cm. Johannesburg, MTN Art Collection. (Hobbs 2006:s.n.)

Weddings, parties and other leisure gatherings within black urbanisms were an opportunity for blacks to flaunt the latest and top-end fashion trends. Kilpatrick (2010:27) is complimentary of the flashy and sophisticated way urban-based people dress, stating that: “[i]n general, black men dress very well. They love expensive brand-name clothes. If you go to the townships, you’ll see men walking along the side of the road dressed in suits and shiny black shoes. And even the maids dress well when they go out”. This affinity to designer clothing and consumables among blacks in urban spaces was made notorious – but not pioneered – by the gangsters and celebrity class in Sophiatown during the 1950s. Subsequently, the act of dressing as beautifully as possible, especially on weekends when congregating with others regardless of the event or occasion, was referred to as *bloming*,<sup>187</sup> which means dressing in a manner that showed the best version of yourself – to bloom, like flower does, through your clothing. *Panstulas*, *Swenkas* (derived from the word ‘swank’, which refers to someone fashionable and elegant), and more recently, *Izikhothane* are urban-based cliques personified and defined by their expensive and stylish fashion sense.

The expression of Afropolitan joy and self-worth through consuming and adorning high-end goods from the west is often vilified and blamed for the criminal culture in black urbanisms, where it is believed that young black men get into crime so that they can buy fancy and expensive clothes and cultural products (Patta 2012). However, as Ngcobo (2016:16) highlights, contrary to the popular belief of whites especially, *Pantsulas*, *Swenkas*, and *Izikhothane* are characterised by the values of “dignity, cleanliness and the rejection of any form of criminality”. Elsewhere I argue that the tradition of dressing fashionably and blooming

<sup>187</sup> *Bloming* is derived from (and pronounced like) the Afrikaans word for flower, *blom*. To *blom* meant to blossom through your attire, akin to flower when it blooms. But it also meant to relax or ‘chill’, because one does not always need an excuse or occasion in order to dress well within black urbanisms.

within urban black culture, as seen in Izikhothane, for example, was “the realisation of a radical imagination that defies the normative and often dehumanising state of black urbanisms” (Sidogi 2017:55). Ultimately, even in the absence of sport, cultural, and recreational amenities in black urbanisms, space was created for activities that celebrated an unashamedly proud and joyous urban subjectivity.

#### **4.4.5 Education for urban black people**

Within urban-based black communities, education was the single biggest contributor to the creation of class hierarchies, and as such, was also a key aspiration of black society. Even though education was experienced as central, schooling for urbanised blacks was relegated to a peripheral concern within the white-controlled government. For example, in 1953, £7.8 million was spent on education for blacks, which was seven times below the amount allocated towards schooling for whites (Birley 1968:152). Mission schools constituted over 70% of all schools offering education to blacks before 1950 and were predicated on a colonial and modernising mandate that sought to “‘raise’ blacks to ‘European’ standards” (Christie & Collins 1982:60). However, this seemingly noble desire to modernise the black populace was driven by the labour demands of the ever-growing capitalist industrialisation of South Africa. Christie and Collins (1982:65) propose that the education of blacks during apartheid was above all else purposed to transition them as seamlessly as possible into their pre-set positions as proletariat within exclusionary economic and social structures:

Not only would blacks learn the skills necessary for participation in the capitalist mode of production; they would also acquire, through the particular form of schooling provided for blacks, an ideological orientation geared towards appropriate work attitudes such as diligence and punctuality, the operation of the colour-caste system, and their subordinate position in the social relations of dominance and subordination in South Africa.

Thus, the overriding ideology in educating the black population, especially those based in the urban centres, was not based on unlocking their ultimate human potential. Instead, schooling had to be “an integral part of a carefully planned policy of segregated socio-economic development” (Christie & Collins 1982:59). This segregated education policy was taken to its extreme with the introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1953 by the Afrikaner nationalist government. The act made education “both separate and unequal” (Weeks 1967:12). In defence of the act, Hendrik Verwoerd, a key figure within the apartheid cabinet and head of the Department of Native Affairs, famously stated: “What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics, when it cannot use it in practice? Education must train and teach people in

accordance with their opportunities in life – according to the sphere in which they live (quoted in Birley 1968:153).

Oddly enough, the Bantu education system increased the number of black students in urban schools. However, investment in schools decreased substantially and had a severe impact on the overall quality of education.<sup>188</sup> Problems of high teacher/learner ratios, poverty (the need for learners to find employment early), and as Bonner (1988:403) terms it, “sheer boredom”, discouraged many black children from progressing further within the new system. The sheer boredom and displeasure felt by black students who were forced to participate in an educational system that was designed to short-change their futures, is captured in Julian Motau’s *Classroom* (1968) drawing (Figure 4.45). Motau’s composition exudes the overcrowded and claustrophobic nature of black schools, and the disdain and disillusionment felt by blacks towards Bantu Education is palpable in the facial expressions of the children.



Figure 4.45. Julian Motau, *Classroom*, 1968. Charcoal on paper, 91 x 91 cm. (de Jager 1992:66)

However, Rebusoajoang (1979:229) emphasises that Bantu Education failed in producing the apolitical law-abiding black populace it hoped for and “it created instead a revolutionary class”. With the introduction of the Bantu Education Act, mother-tongue education was favoured over English and Afrikaans (introduced during the eighth year of schooling), a practice that resulted in “a catastrophic fall in the standard of English” (Birley 1968:154). However, in 1968, the Afrikaner Broederbond published a circular titled ‘Afrikaans as a Second Language for the Bantu’, which highlighted that “most right-thinking Afrikaans-speakers today concentrate on

<sup>188</sup> In 1953, the state spent \$26 on every black pupil and the number went down to \$17 by 1963 (Weeks 1967:13). According to Christie (quoted in Letsie 2003:284), by 1970 the ratio had widened to 17:1 in favour of white pupils.

addressing Bantu in Afrikaans” (Wilkins & Strydom 2012:230). The circular was the first signal that the Afrikaner government wanted to install Afrikaans as the primary language of communication between Afrikaans-speakers and blacks, whether in personal or professional situations. The result was the attempted implementation of Afrikaans as the primary language of instruction within black schools. Throughout the century, urban-based blacks had displayed a particular affinity to English and resisted the imposition of Afrikaans. For the most part, the Soweto student revolution of 1976 was fuelled by the revolt against the state’s decision to introduce Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction in black schools. As Jansen (1990:23) points out, urban black students identified with English not as a colonial language, but as an empowering dialect “that would assure their future participation in the political and social life of the nation”. In other words, black students and their teachers loathed Afrikaans especially because it represented subjugation to apartheid and Afrikanerism, whereas English was seen as a more global and empowering language.

The Afrikaner government’s control of education for blacks also extended to higher education. The Extension of Universities Education Act of 1959 provided the legal framework and seed funding for the creation of four universities that would cater to blacks, coloureds, and Indians. The new institutions were the University of the North in Pietersburg (now Polokwane), the University of Durban-Westville in Durban, and the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. The fourth was the University of Fort Hare that had already been in existence and was merely reconfigured.<sup>189</sup> Interestingly, no black university was earmarked for Soweto, which had the greatest concentration of urbanised blacks in the country. These institutions were also tagged as ‘bush colleges’, a derogatory term that relegated them to mediocrity. Once again, even though these universities provided much-needed access to higher education for black students, they were tainted with the racialised logic that had demoted blacks to second-class citizens. The taint also applied to education.

Beale (1994:4) asserts that the motives for demoting blacks’ education were political:

[The Extension of Universities Education Act of 1959] increased the access of Black students to university education, but lowered the quality of education provided. It aimed to suppress and divert political opposition and shatter the threat of unified African opposition by fostering ethnic identification.

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<sup>189</sup> The University of Fort Hare was initially known as the South African Native College when it was established in 1916 as an affiliate of the University of South Africa. The university is one of the most significant black universities in sub-Saharan Africa. Since its inception, the university enabled blacks to obtain higher education during the colonial and apartheid regimes. In 1959, it was rechristened as University of Fort Hare, as part of a wider restructuring of higher education institutions by the apartheid government.

Blacks received late-twentieth-century urban education with ambivalence. There was a justified belief that it corrupted black minds into subservience and served to bolster the apartheid project (Setiloane 1986; Johnson 1982). However, there was also an awareness that education presented the only chance for blacks to advance their lot, especially those who had aspirations of living in the cities. Thus, blacks were invested in making the best of an otherwise problematic education system. Johnson (1982:221) details how black communities throughout South Africa attempted to improve the system themselves: “During 1967-1968, African parents and local school boards raised R1,500,000 toward the erection, maintenance, and running costs of schools, and in 1968 more than 15% of the teachers in African schools were paid privately”. Further to the financial contribution of African parents to education, and of particular significance for this thesis, various state and privately funded (mostly white, liberal) projects and programmes were introduced that sought to improve the prospects of urban-based black children outside of the formal schooling system.<sup>190</sup>

Es'kia Mphahlele's life is an allegory of the hopes, disappointments, and triumphs of the black pursuit of education during the twentieth century. Mphahlele's humble upbringing resembled the lives of many black rural peasants in the early to mid-twentieth century. Mphahlele was fired as a teacher because he protested against the Bantu education system. He then tried to open a private school in 1953 that had moderate success before it was forced to close (Manganyi 1984:25). Against the odds, Mphahlele was the first black graduate to obtain a Master of Arts Degree (with distinction) at the University of South Africa in 1957 and left the country the same year to seek greener pastures as he was 'unemployable' in South Africa (South African History Online 2011).

When probed as to why Mphahlele (quoted in Manganyi 1984:31) persevered academically in a country that discouraged black progress, he retorted:

The reason is simply that I'm black, and the determination seized me when, at the age of 14, I found myself only then in Std II and quite illiterate – had been looking after cattle and goats at the will of a brutal father. Behind all this – imagine such life, poverty crawling up to the roots of your hair... There you have the reason.

For Mphahlele, blacks could confront the racist regime by empowering themselves through education. The very fact that he was black necessitated that he persevered within the racialised education system. Mphahlele went on to gain international recognition as one of the

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<sup>190</sup> Within the context of the visual arts, some of the most notable projects largely funded by white liberals were the Polly Street Art Centre (est. 1949) (later renamed Mofolo Art Centre), African Art Centre (est. 1959), Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre (est. 1963), Katlehong Art Centre (est. 1977), Community Arts Project (est. 1977), Federated Union of Black Artists (est. 1978), Mmabana Cultural Centre (est. 1983), and Funda Community College (est. 1984) (Sidogi 2013).



foremost scholars of African literature. However, upon his return to the country in 1977, and despite his impressive curriculum vitae, Mphahlele was unable to secure a position at a university immediately.<sup>191</sup> Like millions of blacks throughout the century, education had elevated Mphahlele from obscure poverty. However, there was a definite ceiling to the type of opportunities he was accorded in South Africa.

#### 4.4.6 Urban mobility for blacks

Black urbanisation was accompanied by the creation of modern and sophisticated (though not in terms of the user experience) transportation networks across South Africa's cities. These logistical networks were central to the emergence of an Afropolitan subjectivity among blacks because they enabled ease of movement between the rural and the urban, and within the city itself (this point was introduced in Chapter 3). Before the introduction of automated transport, blacks relied on mules and carts to travel to the city. For those located great distances away from the major urban centres like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, the journey was daunting and long. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, black entrepreneurs who owned horses and carriages flourished due to the demand for transport services between distant villages and the cities. For a vast majority of blacks, their mobility involved walking the city or a second normative urban mobility in the form a mule and cart. Like bicycles, the donkey cart was pervasive in all black urbanisms. Depicted in Ephraim Ngatane's *Township scene with donkey cart* (1968), as a mode of transportation, the donkey cart was central to the movement of goods and people within the 'black city' (Figure 4.46). By several measures, the donkey cart was a precursor to the mini-bus taxi that would flood black urbanisms during the late 1970s and became the symbol of urban transport for the black working class in the city.



Figure 4.46. Ephraim Ngatane, *Township scene with donkey cart*, 1968. Oil on board, 60.5 x 76 cm. (Johans Borman Fine Art [s.a.]

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<sup>191</sup> It is worth acknowledging here that Mphahlele did eventually secure an appointment at the University of Witwatersrand in 1979 as Senior Research Fellow and then Professor of African Literature, making him the first black Professor at the institution.

The increase of black workers in the Witwatersrand mines and the need to transport goods various goods into the city (especially agricultural produce), made transportation a lucrative business (French 1983). However, by the early the twentieth century, the state had positioned itself as the primary provider of urban transport for both black and white commuters, and, of course, there were major disparities between the quality and efficiency of transport services provided. The establishment of an extensive road and rail network by the Union of South Africa government during the 1910s and 1920s had an ambivalent impact on black society. On the one hand, the road and rail network enabled greater numbers of blacks to access the city but killed off the logistical networks and routes developed by black transport providers.

Transport (above schooling, housing, and healthcare) was seen as the most urgently needed service and a priority because the state needed well-functioning transportation networks to funnel workers into and out of the city daily (Khosa 1990:253). However, while the white city planners prioritised urban transport for blacks, the actual treatment of the commuters and services provided were appalling. For example, by the 1940s, there were regular bus boycotts in Alexandra by black commuters who were overburdened by high transport costs and low income (Stadler 1979:114). These boycotts<sup>192</sup> led to the establishment of bus subsidies in 1944 and 1945, and black workers were assisted using the rubric of “wage levels and residential locality” (Khosa 1990:252). The Native Services Levy Act of 1952 enabled the state to retrieve monies from employers and industry to subsidise essential services to urban blacks. The absolute importance of transportation for urban blacks was further underscored by the introduction of the Black Transport Services Act of 1957 and was a revamp of the subsidy policy. The Black Transport Services Act of 1957 compelled employers to pay levies for their black male employees, an injunction that was changed in 1972 when coloured and Indian workers were included (Khosa 1990:254, 256). It was clear that the state had recognised that the urban-based industries depended on black male labour to run and so the state tailored transport policy to target the flow of black male workers from the townships to factories and mines.

Mindful of the gaps and opportunities that existed in the transport sector, black service providers tried to enter the market. However, state authorities frustrated this by issuing limited permits to aspirant black transport entrepreneurs. Throughout the twentieth century, the taxi industry represented one of the few legitimate and realistic opportunities for urban blacks to participate in the formal economy. While the state kept tight controls over the issuing of permits, the late 1980s saw the lifting of the strict transport relegations with a dramatic

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<sup>192</sup> As Khosa (1990:258) concludes the establishment of the bus levies was not “a social programme” but a political response to the protest movement that called for a boycott of the transport and presented an uncomfortable political problem.

increase in the number of licences issued as compared to prior years.<sup>193</sup> The reasons for this spike are contested, but broadly speaking there were three. Firstly, there was progressive disinvestment by the state in urban transport for blacks. Secondly, the state was unable to keep up with using the influx-control laws to curb the rapid urbanisation that took place from the 1970s onwards. Thirdly, there was an increase in the number of illegal transport providers.

Even after the licenses had been issued during the 1980s, it was estimated that a further 30% to 60% of taxis were doing business illegally and the authorities unable to curtail “this burgeoning and sophisticated operation” (Khosa 1992:237). By issuing an excessive amount of permits, the apartheid government had essentially left the taxi industry to become a law unto itself. Taxi associations were the final authority in determining which routes could be accessed by whom. Of course, some routes were more profitable than others. Khosa (1992:233) mentions that “the 'drawing of boundaries' plays a pivotal role in taxi feuds as it gives some taxi operators exclusive rights to operate in certain territories”. Unfortunately, Khosa (1992:233) also noted that those desiring to partake in the commercial fruits of these contested routes resorted to violence rather than mediation, especially in the absence of proper government regulation. The government’s transport authority was severely criticised for their lack of oversight in the taxi wars that erupted during the State of Emergency in the 1980s. The fact that they issued thousands of permits to already ‘saturated’ markets displayed a level of mismanagement that borders on sabotage (Khosa 1992:248). Besides the uncertainty of the industry, taxi owners tried to accommodate their customers, by providing free rides to the elderly and vulnerable, among other incentives. Of further significance was the political clout the taxi industry possessed. Taxis were pivotal to the success of mass action campaigns and boycotts against the state because they provided transport for blacks to enter the city.

When the number of taxis increased during the late 1980s, there was an inverse decrease in the number of people using the trains.<sup>194</sup> Black commuters had long bemoaned the extremely inhuman, overcrowded, and constantly delayed train service operated by the state-owned Transnet. However, in the absence of a viable and cheaper alternative, state-sponsored trains and buses had endured as the primary means of transporting workers from urban black settlements along the city’s economic arteries. Although not perfect, the expansion of the taxi industry was a welcome alternative to government-funded public transport.<sup>195</sup> Like the donkey cart before it, owning a mini-bus taxi was the most pragmatic way for black entrepreneurs in

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<sup>193</sup> The amount of taxi licenses rose from 7,093 in 1986 to 34,378 in 1987 (Khosa 1992:235).

<sup>194</sup> There was an increase in the number of people in Soweto who used taxis from 18% in 1984 to 29% 1990, and in the same time period there was a decrease from 50% to 41% in the number of train users (Khosa 1992:242).

<sup>195</sup> Khosa (1992:250) lists some of the negative aspects of taxi travel: “overloading of passengers, increased accident rates, exorbitant fares, intolerant taxi drivers, and taxi feuding between rival associations”.

the city to start a business. Taxis were relatively affordable, and the market – the black workforce that needed to be ferried to and from work – was vast and growing.

The symbolic and commercial significance of taxis was a major drawcard for black commuters. Furthermore, the flexible reach and regularity of taxis could not be matched by the state-run services, since the taxi routes penetrated virtually every corner of the city blacks needed to access. Also, a certain mystique developed around the metaphorical value of the minibus taxi within the psyche of the urbanised black commuter and resident. During the 1980s, songs by famous pop-stars immortalised the taxi in popular culture and urban folklore, such as Brenda Fassie's *Zola Budd*, where the Nissan E20 minibus taxi was likened to the South African/British athlete Zola Budd who ran barefoot at the Olympics in 1984 (Ramalapa 2012).



Figure 4.47. Dumile Feni, *Man on bicycle*, undated. Black ink on paper, 30 x 21 cm. (Man on bicycle [s.a.]



Figure 4.48. Ephraim Ngatane, *Figures beside a car*, 1963. Mixed media on paper, 55 x 75 cm. (Bester, Knight & Koloane 2009:18)

Because of the hopelessly inadequate and overcrowded public transportation network, black city dwellers, especially men, resorted to cycling as a method of moving within the city. The sight of men riding their bicycles to and from work was all too common within black urbanisms and the white city centre. Scenes like Dumile Feni's *Man on bicycle* (undated) were a recurring subject matter in the works of urban-based black artists, some of whom depended on bicycles to get around the city (Figure 4.47). Bicycles were relatively inexpensive, easy and cheap to maintain, and were often safer than the trains. However, as highlighted before, black cyclists in the city, especially during the 1930s and 1940s, were viewed as a nuisance because they failed to adhere to the road regulations and were thus an embarrassment to the more

cosmopolitan, cultured, and educated black middle-class. Some of the members of this more cosmopolitan middle-class had enough money to afford cars, and to own a car as a black person during the early twentieth century spoke of absolute privilege. As portrayed in Ephraim Ngatane's *Figures beside a car* (1963), the sight of a car in the 'black city', especially one owned by a black person, was a spectacle (Figure 4.48). Those who owned cars also used them as taxis.

The efficiency by which blacks could navigate the colonial and apartheid city streets and suburbs was unparalleled. Besides car owners, a lucky few also enjoyed transnational mobility, initially through ships (1910s to 1930s) and later through air travel (1950s onwards). Like most people, black artists were fascinated by the rapid technological advancements that occurred throughout the twentieth century. For city dwellers, the sound and view of an aeroplane flying above them became a regular feature as the century progressed. Artists like Tito Zungu (during the 1960s) and Titus Matiyane (during the 1980s) were fixated on jets, sketching and creating models of them. In Matiyane vast renderings of the metropolitan-scape, such as *New York-City of USA* (undated), he always indexed a jet flying above the buildings (Figure 4.49). In his interpretation of cityness, the aeroplane and the city were inseparable. Speaking on the awe-inspiring impact of western technology on the African imagination, Nettleton, Charlton and Rankin-Smith (2003:82) outline how "[a]eroplanes are particularly potent symbols because of the indelible aura of modernity and unattainability attached to them". Air travel remains a form of Afropolitan mobility that many urban-based blacks do not enjoy. Ultimately, the mode of mobility within the city was a class signifier, with those who could travel using cars and planes at the apex of the social imaginary.



Figure 4.49. Titus Matiyane, *New York-City of USA*, undated. Mixed media on paper, 18.4 x 26.5. (Lille Métropole Museum of Modern, Contemporary and Outsider Art [s.a.]

#### 4.4.7 Black women's agency in the urban space

The history of black women within the urban space is obviously intertwined with the history of the black men, yet, in some ways, quite distinct. Being a black man in the city was 'emasculating' (Manganyi 1973:11), but being a black woman was equally precarious, with the added danger of being vulnerable to the misdemeanours of the emasculated black man. While black men have suffered their share of trauma due to racism, hooks (1984) suggests that black women have to endure a triple trauma. Firstly, black women have to struggle against sexism from both white and black men. Secondly, black women have to confront classism. And thirdly, they have to deal with racism. For hooks (1984) the freedom of black women represents the freedom of the entire race. If black women obtain justice, it is a victory for the black race. In the twentieth century, urban-based black women could not articulate a discourse of freedom other than to challenge the dominant racial inequalities. As Maerten (2004:2) confirms, "the African women's movement has been strongly influenced and shaped by the activism against colonial rule and racist ideologies".

Another critical point is that women's agency was interconnected with urbanisation. The urban space enabled the emergence of modern, educated, and free black women – free from rampant colonial exploitation that is. It was hoped that the city would give black women an opportunity to become equal participants in Africa's industrialisation project, instead of being rural-based bystanders. Although the initial inclusion of black women into the urban paradigm did not yield these lofty hopes, Casaburri (1988:140) cautions against claims that capitalism had been the primary exploiter of black women, rather she notes, "oppression [of women] preceded the development of capitalist relations". That is, the urban environment had not manufactured the subjugation of black women, but it had merely recycled it. However, black women performed a form of transgressive agency that defied the norms of apartheid urban segregation.

During the early parts of the twentieth century, women constituted a small percentage of the urbanised black population, as they were not encouraged to settle in urban spaces. The prevailing sentiment was that black women belonged in the rural villages where they could tend to the families of black men who worked in the city. This relegation to the rural areas was strengthened by the wages urban-based black men received that were adjusted to be consistent with the *lobola* (bride price) they were expected to pay for a potential wife. It could be argued that this was an indirect commodification of black women and a way of keeping black women captive in the rural areas as wives of the migrant husbands (Goebel 2015:31). Despite these attempts, increasingly educated and working-class black women proliferated in the city throughout the 1930s. In 1945, *The Bantu World* trumpeted that: "For the first time in

history, young African women are soaring high on the ladder of promotion to plum posts” (Pretoria Hospital 1945:10). However, the actual numbers of working-class black women in professional vocations were scant. Ironically, the emergence of modern cosmopolitan black women “generated both admiration and condemnation” among the highly Christianised tier of urban-based black men (Thomas 2006:467).

During the 1940s, more men migrated to the cities with their families, especially because houses in Orlando were offered to families and not individuals. However, the number of families that migrated was low. The ratio of urban black men and women gradually equalised in the 1950s when more women were required within the various urban service industries. For example, a 1970 census revealed that 77% of domestic servants in Johannesburg and Pretoria were black women (Casaburri 1988:148). Besides domestic work, beer brewing was one of the few outlets for urban black women to generate income. Black women also obtained some form of economic and social mobility through their appointment as nurses in city-based hospitals. By the 1980s, black women dominated the textile and manufacturing industry workforce. Casaburri (1988:150) reminds us that their inclusion in this sector was “closely related to the low wages paid”. It was erroneously believed that women in general, and black women in particular, only worked because they wanted ‘pocket money’ since their husbands supported the family. Regardless of these racist and sexist attitudes, black women contributed significantly to the industrialisation project in South Africa. However, despite these contributions, there were regular attempts from both the state and tribal leaders to stem the tide of women going into the cities independently as this would result in the permanent settlement of black families in the urban terrain (Glaser 2005:306). For the most part, these women relocated to the urban areas of their own volition.

An ambitious and quite comprehensive study of the ‘needs’ of urban-based black women during the 1950s confirms the agency they used to achieve political and social gains. The report recognised that: “African women's organisations are sometimes rather ephemeral. It is literally so that sometimes they ‘exist’, and sometimes they do not exist” (SAIRR 1955:4). These organisations developed organically based on need, which made them difficult to track by the state security agencies determined to diffuse any form of urban-based black solidarity. Besides citing the need for crèches and other platforms to free women to access urban opportunities, above all, black women wanted: “jobs, any jobs, any earning possibility” (SAIRR 1955:7). Simply put, black women wanted the means to dictate their own destinies.

Although the SAIRR report (1955:10) makes several problematic claims, such as overstating the rural/urban split, the report also made some perceptive remarks about the personhood of urban-based black women and how they evolved identities within the urban quagmire:

In reality, Africans, by reason of the operation of the colour bar, are prevented from adjusting to the total so-called Western environment, but are in reality adjusting themselves to a progressively restrictive legislation. There is, for instance, the growing indifference to jail sentences. Here the Africans adjust their sense of shame to an unbearable but unalterable situation. The women's illicit beer-brewing is such an adjustment: it is the way in which they have accommodated their needs to restrictive conditions. The fact that so many respectable Africans are buyers (not sellers) of stolen clothes is an adjustment between their desire for European dress and non-European wages. The acceptance of illegitimacy among broad layers of the women is such an adjustment: their ancient abhorrence of illegitimate babies had to be adjusted to the facts of their present existence. Such 'adjustments' are naturally constantly affected by the people. They couldn't live otherwise. These 'adjustments' may seem to the European (moral) sense, 'maladjustments', nevertheless, they are 'technically' adjustments: an impossible situation is made bearable, a painful experience ceases to hurt.

This reading of the complexities presented by urbanisation is relevant to both women and men. The reading suggests that black women had to transform to adjust to the realities they encountered in the townships. Activities and actions that would have been completely taboo in a different context were now acceptable as a basic means of survival. The economist Galbraith (1979) famously advanced the theory that people adjust and accommodate to their milieus, regardless of how unbearable those situations may seem. Galbraith explains that in the absence of tangible signs of positive change, people are prone to accepting and accommodating extreme manifestations of human suffering, such as mass poverty. Regrettably, European commentators diagnosed blacks' (men and women) adaptability to the abnormal urban circumstances as a sign of delinquency and pagan immorality (Longmore 1959). Of course, such analyses were misguided and fraught with racism.

At this point, it is worth drawing parallels between the advances and pushbacks experienced by black women within urban South Africa, and those that were being experienced by their western contemporaries during the 1960s. In Europe and America, the feminist project had kicked into its more revolutionary and radical phase for two reasons. Firstly, because of the slow pace of reform several decades after the triumphant suffragettes of the early twentieth century. And secondly, the liberating effects of the Second World War that saw women incorporated into industries previously reserved for men. Like women from the global North, young black and white South African women used the urban space to challenge and upset the conventional ideas of womanhood. However, the victories of these battles were differentiated according to the colour and social standing of the women.



Nonetheless, the women forged new feminine identities. Platforms like *Drum* magazine were central to these subjective transformations. For example, representations of the ‘modern Miss’ – the young, available, and economically empowered young women – in magazines like *Drum*, presented the urban young women as “both modern and progressive, *and* morally threatening” (Johnson 2009:48). Empowered urban women were considered progressive in that they challenged normative ideals about the makings of an African woman. However, these women were also threatening because they questioned and disregarded classical values. Urban-based black women were determined to circumvent the oppressive state laws by whatever means necessary and were courageous enough to break by-laws, for example, that prohibited the brewing and selling of traditional African beer.

Among further examples of the transgressive acts of black and coloured women, as early as 1913, in the Orange Free State women successfully overturned a law that required them to carry passbooks when they were in the city (Wells 1991). By strategically refusing to carry their passes and not paying fines, the women filled the prisons, where they would engage in passive resistance by not eating. As Wells (1983:57) recounts, these tenacious women “repeatedly expressed their willingness to go to jail and even die there for the cause if necessary”. Similar defiance was evident in 1952 when women in Benoni challenged the municipality’s decision to institute a head tax for all blacks in urban households, which “was a direct threat to the family, the main responsibility for which ultimately lay with women” (Bonner 1988:419). Through a series of boycotts and marches to the municipality’s administrative offices, women managed to get the law altered to exempt children under 16 years, and those who were still at school regardless of age were exempted from the tax. This spirit of insubordination climaxed in the famed August 1956 protest against the introduction of pass laws that demanded that women should carry passbooks like their black male contemporaries. Samuelson (2008:72) contends that the 1956 march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria (which included women of all races and classes) to protest the pass laws “produced a legacy of female political activity that far exceeded the domestic roles by which they sanctioned their actions”.

While urban black women enjoyed various concessions during apartheid, the system was harsh and volatile towards women. From 1964, attempts to curb the influx, made it illegal for more migrant black women to enter the cities, but this did not dry up the flow of women who sought to escape the tyrannies of single motherhood and its attendant complications within a rural setting. Ultimately, the explosion of black urbanisation in South African cities during the latter part of the twentieth century was made possible by the tenacity of black women to make the city their home.

#### 4.4.8 Imaging female urbanites

The gendered nature of black representations of urbanisation cannot be ignored. Thus, it is regrettable that in this section, I mainly focus on male portrayals of women's experiences, rather than women's own depictions because there is a paucity of such depictions. Essentially, artistic recordings of female subjectivities were produced through a male gaze, and it is significant that most depictions of women's experiences of urban life were made by black men. In this regard, the first critical point to make is that this is consistent with the general non-acknowledgement of black women's creativity within the history of modern black art in South Africa. This blind spot requires urgent redress because it perpetuates the erroneous idea that black female artists were either not active as professionals in the urban areas or not as prolific and professionalised as their male counterparts. While the evidence is scant, some anecdotes point to the existence of black female artists during the 1940s in spaces like Sophiatown in Johannesburg. A 1944 article in *The Bantu World* newspaper that reviewed John Mohl's studio at his Sophiatown home before its destruction, noted that Mohl had at least one female pupil at the time, Elizabeth McAlister, who was a nurse by training and "had a marked flair for drawing landscapes" (Africans taught the art of painting 1944:10). The main question that arises is why such female talent was not promoted and nurtured with the same zeal and gusto that black male artists were. It is conceivable that throughout his lifetime, Mohl mentored and trained many more female artists. Nevertheless, the question remains why they were never accorded the same attention as their male counterparts. One exception to this rule is Helen Sibidi. Before his passing in January 1985, Mohl had mentored Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, who went on to become one of the most revered black female artists of her generation. Sebidi (2019) credits Mohl as being her most significant inspiration and guide during the formative years of her career.

Part of the neglect of urban-based black female artists during the twentieth century was due to their othered status. Both black and white society are implicated in this othering. Even the highly progressive New Africans who imagined new and fluid African subjectivities that were emancipated from colonial and customary notions of being black in the world were not exempt from postulating archaic positions on femininity. Commenting on the treatment of women in Sol T. Plaatje's writings – and especially women's treatment in Plaatje's acclaimed novel *Mhudi* – du Preez (2017:41) points to how Plaatje was forward-looking in advocating "women's inclusion in the public sphere". However, Plaatje was equally anti-feminist when maintaining "certain problematic views on their ideal place and role" (du Preez 2017:41). I have already cited the feminist criticism levelled against Afropolitan spaces that objectify and subjugate the black female body (Matsipa 2014; Gqola 2015). For example, the othering of urban-based

black women by black men was most palpable in the *Drum* magazine, especially during the 1950s. According to Driver (1996:228), “*Drum* reshaped and in other ways adjusted women’s bodies to conform in the eye of the beholder to the modern ‘male gaze’”. Driver (1996:228) goes on to show how “*Drum*’s domestic ideal bore virtually no relation to material reality”. The magazine communicated a fantastical and ideal modern black family, anchored by the stay-at-home mother. *Drum*’s depiction was inconsistent with the actual job demands of black men and women, who were over-worked and underpaid. Driver (1996:229) concludes that *Drum* played a problematic role in the representation of urban-based black women:

The magazine was part of a signifying system whereby patriarchy manfully reasserted itself in the face of the destabilization of its traditional rural form, but it also necessarily acknowledged women’s increasing power, even as it tried to exploit and contain this power.

On the one hand, *Drum* magazine facilitated the emergence of a modern black female subjectivity. However, and on the other hand, *Drum* magazine defined women in ways that benefited male interests and satisfied the male gaze. Black men took on the self-appointed task of representing what this ideal ‘modern Miss’ needed to look and act like, evidenced in the eye-catching covers where perfectly slim and young-looking models were featured a majority of the times (Figure 4.50). The cover girls were partly on account of the reality that up until the 1950s, the ratio of black men to black men women in the urban context was overwhelmingly in favour of the black male. These unbalanced demographics translated to an equally unbalanced representation of black female urban subjectivities by male artists. Like the images of stereotypical ‘black Barbies’ in *Drum* magazine, Owen Ndou’s *Dancing Lady* (1994/5) also depicts the modern urbanised black woman as a youthful, sexually ripe seductress who captivated men in the city (Figure 4.51). His life-size sculpture of a model-like woman, dressed in a pencil skirt and high heels was a fabrication of the ideal woman from the perspective of the urban black male. In essence, both artworks show the black woman as romantically available and sexually receptive to the advances of the male.



Figure 4.50. *Drum* cover, May 1956. (Baileys African History Archive 2020)



Figure 4.51. Owen Ndou, *Dancing lady*, 1994/5. Painting wood, h. 180 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

While such overtly sexualised visual characterisations of women did not create the rape pandemic that spread throughout black urbanisms during the twentieth century, the images certainly solidified the archetype figure of black women as sexually exploitable. This point is palpable in the *Drum* magazine cover from 1956 (Figure 4.50), where the men, who were identified as *Drum* employees, drool over the young lady, as they measure and visually dissect her. Also, these images institutionalised the young, slender, light-skinned, and tall woman as the beauty ideal with whom the urban black men aspired to have romantic relations. The ultimate ill-luck of the picturesque ‘black Barbies’ was that they were also desired by the white male. In her semi-autobiographical recollection of black modelling during the twentieth century, Ribane (2006:53) recounts that many beautiful black women were courted by white men, which was unsurprising since the beauty industry in the country was controlled by them. Generally, black women were susceptible to the often veiled advances of white men because of the economic, legal, and political authority they wielded. A final point worth making here is that although urban-based black men often referred to the ‘English figure’ as the gold standard of how an urbane black woman should look, this beauty ideal was not ‘only’ motivated by western beauty norms. The beauty ideal was a realisation of a New African idealism, which transcended western tastes and styles. Sadly, New African aesthetics were almost exclusively generated exclusively by highly Christianised black men, which marks these images of black femininity as products of patriarchal fantasies.

The harmful results of the overt sexualisation of black women's bodies are seen the disturbing prevalence of rape in black urbanisms. As introduced in the previous chapter, rape culture was a deleterious expression of the general disregard of black women's bodies. To be a black woman in the city throughout the twentieth century was a precarious and haunting positionality. Ephraim Ngatane's *The approach* (1964) captures the fear, angst, and uncertainty felt by black women, especially young adults when they were approached by an (often older) man in the city streets (Figure 4.52). Ngatane paints the ominous occasion when an imposing male figure dressed in a long jacket and formal hat and holding a cigarette, walks towards a visibly distressed and discomforted young woman, with her hands clasped behind her. The overbearing power of the man is displayed through his size, which looms large over the fragile and vulnerable female figure. While this unnerving encounter takes place in public, the other figures that recede into the background seem disinterested in this event. Ngatane captures the subtlety of violent encounters between men and women in the city, violence often justified by the foul belief that women's bodies are the playground of men, as seen the images of 'black Barbies'.



Figure 4.52. Ephraim Ngatane, *The approach*, 1964. Oil on board, 58 x 72 cm. (Bester 2009:35)



Figure 4.53. George Pemba, Illustrations from Henry Masila Ndawo's novel *U-Nolishwa*, 1931. Pencil on paper. (Hudleston 1996:24)

In reality, the complex nature of urbanised black women did not match such formulaic representations. At the very least, black women in the urban space throughout the twentieth century were torchbearers of an Afropolitan subjectivity that unsettled and recreated notions of gender normalcy for black women within an urban and domestic setting. Commenting on the Spring Queen beauty pageant that began in Cape Town's clothing factories in 1980, Alegi (2008:32) notes how this festival enabled working-class black, coloured, and Indian women the space to perform multiple femininities as "worker", 'mother', 'wife', 'trade unionist', and beauty queen". While some black women played the role of the prototypical 'beauty queen', this role did not diminish their often transgressive subjectivities that did not always conform to

the patriarchal expectations of womanhood. Throughout the twentieth century, black men tried to comprehend the 'disobedient' nature of urban-based, and especially working-class black women, with mixed results. For example, in 1931, Pemba created some illustrations for a book by Henry Masila Ndawo, which was published by Lovedale Press, titled *U-Nolishwa*. Ndawo's novel (his fourth monograph) dealt with the experiences of a black woman named Nolishwa, which means 'misfortunate' in isiXhosa. In the novel, Nolishwa is presented as having a complicated urban and rural positionality. She was raised in an urban context and lives in a rural setting, which results in "difficulties among her people and between the races" (Sparg 2013). Pemba's drawings of Nolishwa and the other role-players reflect the urban subjectivities of these characters through their dress code, which shows them as modern, sophisticated, and progressive individuals (Figure 4.53). More to the point, Pemba, and indeed Ndawo portray Nolishwa as a non-conformist and transgressive personality who is not prepared to massage white or black male egos. In Pemba's drawing, Nolishwa is flanked by two men, who look like her bodyguards or assistants. Although there is an imposing third male figure to the right, it is Nolishwa who is shown as the definitive focal point of this composition.

Nolishwa is a proto-Black Consciousness character in that she performs her modern urban self-hood without fear of judgement, even though she performed self-hood results in unwanted misfortune, as her name predestined, both for herself and her community. Interestingly, the notion of the woman as enchantress or *femme fatale* is consistent with how the urban space was perceived in general. Dreyer (2005:8) decodes how, historically, and especially from a western perspective, the urban has been read "as female seductress and *passante* mesmerising the male stroller or *passant* roving the city". That is, women are considered as threatening, complex, and untameable as the city with its maze of streets and buildings. When placed on black women in South Africa, this comparison is not far-fetched, especially when juxtaposed with the 'black city', black women are just as ill-treated, negated, and overtly otherised. Modern black women are feared as being dangerous and unpredictable (akin to the 'black city'), and men (black or white) take the liberty to self-justify their desire to police and control women's bodies and subjectivities.

However, black women persevered against these patriarchal systems. One of the unlikely activities that provided urban black women with an Afropolitan agency was domestic work. During the latter half of the twentieth century, a majority of black women in the city were employed as domestic workers in white homes. Within the domestic setting of either black or white homes, black women were expected to tend to household duties like cooking, cleaning, ironing, and caring for the children. As seen in Gerard Sekoto's *Interior Sophiatown* (1939), the domesticity represented in the composition where the women are preparing a meal, ironing

clothes, and nurturing a toddler, while a young boy sits in a relaxed pose, reinforced what Maguire (2015:585) defines as “strict heteronormative gender roles” (Figure 4.54). Produced in 1939 during a formative period for the urban black family unit when city-based gender roles were still being negotiated, this image reveals how existing patriarchal notions of womanhood were seamlessly transferred from African villages into the urban home. Casaburri (1988) argues that urbanisation did not produce the imbalances between black men and women, but rather amplified them – while simultaneously destabilising them. However, the need for individuals who could do these basic and subservient household tasks within white homes created a “reciprocal dependency” between black domestic workers and their white employers (Mbembe 2004:387). Eli Kobeli’s *Preparing for Christmas Pudding* (1972) portrays two black women in a kitchen and making a dessert for a white family (Figure 4.55). It was common for black domestic workers to spend Christmas and New Year’s Day at their employer’s houses preparing meals and cleaning up after the holiday festivities.



Figure 4.54. Gerard Sekoto, *Interior Sophiatown*, 1939. Watercolour on paper. (Lindop 1995:32)



Figure 4.55. Eli Kobeli, *Preparing for Christmas Pudding*, 1972. Charcoal, pastel, watercolour on paper, 49 x 33.5 cm. (Photograph by author)

Ironically the interdependence between black women and white families, which was often not acknowledged by whites, gave urban-based black women advantages that were not enjoyed by black men. Firstly, one such advantage is that while apartheid urban planning created hard and highly policed boundaries between the ‘black’ and ‘white’ cities and black women who worked as domestic workers transcended segregation with relative ease. Secondly, black women who worked as domestic workers and who lived on the properties of their employers were accorded living conditions that surpassed those in township homes or the hostels where

black men lodged. Speaking about the back rooms where these black women lived, Ginsburg (2000:91) notes that “these rooms were about as comfortable a home that a working-class African man could hope to secure in the city”. Ginsburg (2000:91) further explains that the desire for black men to lodge in these back rooms secretly accorded women control over the relationship dynamics in ways that black women without this ‘carrot’ could not achieve. As Ginsburg (2000:92) puts it, “[w]omen's positions for negotiating new terms of romantic relationships rested on the power they held over back room arrangements”.

Female domestic workers had a transformational significance that goes beyond their rudimentary and banal form of labour. They were not illiterate, lazy, and unsophisticated, as many white employers believed. A vast majority settled on domestic work purely as a means of survival. Jansen (2019:37) shows her amazement at how Johannesburg-based domestic workers during the late 1980s “were also exceptionally fluent in English”. Being confined to domestic spaces for much of their working lives did not stop black women from developing highly progressive subjectivities. Mckee (2005:xxi) reveals that the domestic setting is a ‘private’ space that provides its inhabitants, domestic workers included, the latitude to create alternate realities that go beyond the ‘public’ cultural attitudes. A house is a walled enclave that is semi-autonomous from the environment that surrounds it and gives its occupiers the opportunity to create new standards of human interaction that are either better or worse than the pre-existing conventions. While apartheid laws attempted to regulate and segregate every aspect of social life, including the personal sphere, racial relations within the domestic space were often complicated by the simple yet far-reaching acts of female domestic workers who dismantled the barriers of racism.

#### **4.4.9 The urban black family**

According to Bonner (1988:395), urban black family life of the twentieth century was characterised by a perpetual state of ‘instability’. At the core of this instability was the housing crisis that confronted all urban-based black families. Hostel accommodation was unsuited for childrearing. As pointed out before, the minuscule municipal housing that was available for black habitation was only issued to families that comprised a man married to a woman (with children). This law resulted in many relationships and families being in flux. The anthropologist Laura Longmore<sup>196</sup> (1959:51) was extremely critical of the urban black men at the time, blaming them for the crisis of the urban black family by not having “the inclination to cultivate an intimate attachment to places or persons or to indulge in early marriage or family life”.

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<sup>196</sup> Longmore’s research was conducted between 1950 and 1957 in the Eastern Native Township outside Johannesburg. Bonner (1988:396) appreciates Longmore’s study as being one of the rare ‘sensitive’ examinations of the urban black family.



Longmore (1959:23) also judged modern black women, stating that “the most popular type of girl in modern urban African society is one who has inviting ways and who has been in love with a large number of men”. Longmore’s mistaken assumption here is that promiscuous women were held in high regard within urban black communities.

In a rebuttal to Longmore’s book which was a seminal text on urban-based black family units, Vilakazi (1963:949-950) viewed these “near-pathological” generalisations as “absurd” and “mischievous”. Vilakazi called for more comparative examinations of urban spaces in Africa within the global context of urbanisation. He proposed that examinations made in the global context would reveal that social tendencies within black urban spaces would not be substantively different from those from other parts of the world with similar socio-economic conditions. In 1949, the percentage of babies born were born out of wedlock was 73% in Benoni and 40% in Germiston (Bonner 1988:395). Besides other factors, premarital pregnancy was an offshoot of the high levels of rape brought about by *tsotsidom* (young criminal men in the townships) (Goodhew 1993:467). Urban women who lived alone “were highly vulnerable” to sexual crimes (Bonner 1988:397). It was only in the 1960s that the government implemented strategies for birth control among the urbanised black population.<sup>197</sup> Previously, mission-based organisations like the Bridgman Memorial Hospital (closed in 1963) had offered contraceptives and pregnancy services to black women in the Johannesburg region (Glaser 2005:326). However, as Glaser (2005:327) concludes, “the mass provision of contraceptive pills and injections was well suited to the dehumanised management style of ‘racial modernism’”.

Managing the size of urban families was a major concern for the state and its faith-based partners with the advent of mass urbanisation during the 1900s. The government was specifically concerned about both poor whites<sup>198</sup> and blacks who lived in the urban slums, as they increased the state’s social spending. Black women were placed at the centre of the family crisis in urban spaces. Glaser (2005:303) outlines how “the chief ‘culprits’ were recently urbanised independent women who appeared to defy patriarchal family structures” in the eyes of the white government. It was the conventional wisdom of the day that women’s promiscuity was the main cause for immorality and unregulated sexual practices in the urban spaces.

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<sup>197</sup> It is worth noting here that the British-led government of the early twentieth century created the Race Welfare Society (RWS) (that had three clinics during the 1930s) to curtail the numbers of poor people based in the cities. However, these initial campaigns were mostly directed towards Afrikaners. This mandate resulted in some tensions between the Royal Welfare Society and the Afrikaner nationalists who encouraged the “multiplication of the *volk*” (Glaser 2005:317).

<sup>198</sup> After the National Party assumed power in 1948, the state’s focus turned to poor whites, who were almost exclusively Afrikaner, and how to improve their socio-economic standing.

Among urbanised black women, those from Basotholand (Lesotho) were specifically targeted and stereotyped as being ‘family-breakers’ (Glaser 2005:307).

The response from the state was strange and slightly deluded attempts at controlling the sexual potency of urban women, initially among all the races and from the 1950s onwards among black women primarily.<sup>199</sup> The state’s efforts were centred on the consumption of liquor as it was deduced that the unregulated supply of alcohol created the conditions for women to tempt men into illicit sex.<sup>200</sup> On the other hand, the response from the church sought a return to the cult of domesticity where, under the frame of marriage, women would be the homemaker, and her sexual prowess would be directed to her husband only. More systematic strategies were established, for example, by Girl Guides,<sup>201</sup> Wayfarers, and various prayer vigils aimed at praying for the sexual “purity of their daughters” (Glaser 2005:312).

However, despite the best attempts of the colonial and apartheid governments, black families were devastated by urbanisation. Cyprian Shilakoe’s<sup>202</sup> blurred and eerie images of urban black life are distinctive presentations of the suffering black families endured. Shilakoe’s artistic analyses of black families living in the industrial age are dark, macabre, and an indictment of urbanisation and its impact on blacks. In perhaps the most exhaustive essay on Shilakoe’s iconography, Nel (1990:6) explains that the ghost-like compositions collapse the walls between the subject and context, thus “smudging the relationship between inner experiences and outer reality”. Nel (1990:8) reads much of Shilakoe’s work as renderings of “the tragedy of the migrant labour system”. In Nel’s (1990:8) estimation, the black workers depicted by Shilakoe “often feel rootless as they no longer belong at home or within the city. They often become vagabonds, having lost any hope of a meaningful and secure existence”. Here Nel articulates the uncomfortable liminality experienced by black workers. For example, *The lovers* (1971) is an etching that looks at the circumstantial impact of apartheid on romantic relationships among blacks (Figure 4.56). Lovers and families were torn apart by the multi-local living arrangements that resulted in black men having multiple families, one in the rural homestead and another in the urban area. On the other hand, *The Widow* (1969) expresses the pain and hollowness felt by wives and children who lost their husbands and fathers to the

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<sup>199</sup> The Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 prevented inter-racial relationship and was followed by the Immorality Act of 1950 that criminalised any form of sexual activity between the races.

<sup>200</sup> Glaser (2005:304) goes on to reveal that “sex was linked to the urban juvenile delinquency crisis” of the era (1930s to 1950s).

<sup>201</sup> However, Glaser (2005:314) criticises the misogyny implicit in these strategies: “Whereas the Wayfarers and Girl Guides encouraged sexual purity and homemaking, the equivalent boy’s organisations, Pathfinders and Boy Scouts, lacked a sexually specific message”.

<sup>202</sup> Shilakoe’s life is an allegory of how black talent was laid to waste in South African cities. Born in 1946, Shilakoe died aged 26 in 1972 in a car accident that he apparently foresaw. Like Shilakoe’s tragic death, the promising futures of many youthful black women and men in the urban areas were stunted or never matured due to segregation.

deadly mines on Johannesburg's Rand gold reef and beyond (Figure 4.57). By many measures, *The Widow* conjures the description of the distress endured by black women and children catalogued by Miriam Tlali (1984).

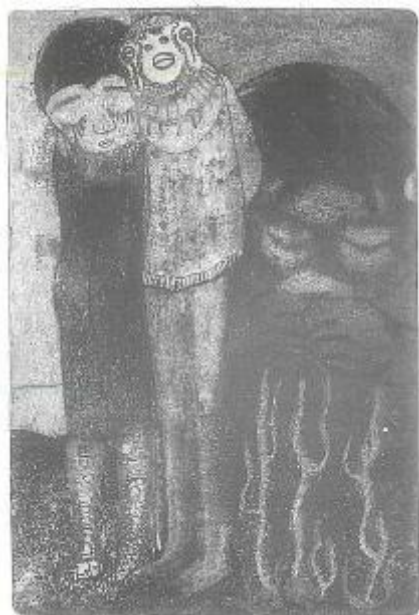


Figure 4.56. Cyprian Shilakoe, *The lovers*, 1971. Etching, 31 x 21 cm. (Nel 1990:16)



Figure 4.57. Cyprian Shilakoe, *The Widow*, 1969. Etching, 30.5 x 30 cm. (Nel 1990:9)

When thinking of the modern manifestation of Ubuntu within a family context, black women, especially in the urban environment, are its ultimate personification. Without a doubt, the most intrinsic performances of Ubuntu among black communities in South Africa involve women's agency and care. To this end, black women of the twentieth century must be accorded due recognition for the strength and grace they displayed in holding black families and whole communities together, especially in urban spaces. *Untitled* (1969) by Durant Sihlali is another sombre reminder of the precarious and often lonely nights that urban-based black women and their children endured together (Figure 4.58). The candle at the centre of the composition, which illuminates the thick impasto painting, and signifies the hope that lit black households during recurring moments of strife. Here, Sihlali produced what Richards and Klopper (2006:64) termed "a type of history painting" wherein he crystallised into a single frame the complexities of everyday urban existence for black women during the difficult 1960s and 1970s. However, more than this, Sihlali's painting is a sincere illustration of how Ubuntu – the creation of an environment of care – played out in the daily lives of women and children who had no access to basic urban services such as electricity, tarred roads and running water. Sihlali was also lauded by Rankin (1990:27) for his combination of "careful observation with a thoroughly professional approach" within much of his art production.



Figure 4.58. Durant Sihlali, *Untitled*, 1969. Oil on board. Bongsi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)



Figure 4.59. Julian Motau, *A Mother's Comfort*, 1967. Charcoal on Paper, 50 x 70 cm. Bongsi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

The supremely talented Julian Motau spent most of his short stint as an artist portraying the eternal bond between mother and child. In *A mother's comfort* (1967), Motau uses his signature dark and bold lines to exude the compassion and care black mothers provided for their children, even in the most difficult circumstances (Figure 4.59). Commenting on the connection between mother and child, Gobodo-Madikizela (2011:547) evokes the isiXhosa term *Inimba*, which “can be interpreted to mean the feeling of motherhood... to describe the bodily sign of empathy”. In a similar vein, the thick lines that move along the contours of the mother and baby in Motau’s drawing is an artistic rendering of *Inimba*, which visually conjoins the mother to her offspring and vice-versa. Thus, the artwork becomes the embodiment of the link between the *Seriti* of the mother and that of the child, which is the archetypal realisation of Ubuntu at a micro level. Gobodo-Madikizela (2011:548) poetically characterises such intimate forms of Ubuntu “as the expression of empathy through the body”.



Figure 4.60. George Msimang, *The agony of a mother*, undated. Conte crayon on paper, 83 x 50 cm. (Proud 2015b)



Figure 4.61. Eric Mbatha, *Family*, 1989, Pastel on paper, 26 x 25 cm. Bongi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

The same can be said of George Msimang's drawing, *The agony of a mother* (undated), which has the same stylistic features as Motau's art (Figure 4.60). Like Motau, Msimang depicts a mother flanked by at least five toddlers who overpower her as each seeks to take their share of the mother's attention and care. Urban-based black mothers often sacrificed all they had to nurture their offspring. Eric Mbatha's colourful and expressive pastel drawing titled *Family* (1989) also shows a black household comprised of multiple (three) children, of a similar age, being embraced by their mother (Figure 4.61). The fact that this artwork is titled 'family', but is void of the patriarch, underscores how the family unit among many black communities, urban or rural, was anchored by the mother. As noted in the previous chapter, it was not taboo to find fatherless family units within rural and urban black societies throughout the twentieth century. If anything, fatherless families became the norm. These artworks also reveal what Chant (2008) terms the 'feminisation of responsibility and/or obligation' or the 'feminisation of survival'. She finds it more instructive to define the experiences of women using 'obligation' and 'survival', as opposed to the conventional 'feminisation of poverty'. Chant especially refers to urban-based women in the developing world.

The limitation with the 'feminisation of poverty' notion is its over-reliance on income disparity between men and women as the primary measure of deprivation among women. While a vast majority of urban-based black women made some form of income either as domestic workers,

factory workers, or entrepreneurs, it was the added social and family responsibilities that left women with no choice but to hold the knife on its sharp end – to evoke a widely known African idiom. According to Chant (2008:191), “[t]he ‘feminisation of responsibility’ is intended to convey the idea that women are assuming greater liability for dealing with poverty and the ‘feminisation of obligation’, and that women have progressively less choice other than to do so”. This was certainly the case for an overwhelming number of urban-based black women throughout the twentieth century who did not always have the option to “resist the roles and activities imposed on them structurally (for example through legal contracts or moral norms), or situationally (through the absence of spouses or male assistance)” (Chant 2008:191).

However, while acknowledging this disproportionate burden that women often bore daily, it would be too reductive to paint black men with the same brush of being irresponsible fathers and abusive partners. As noted in the previous chapter, various studies conducted by white anthropologists demonised urban-based black men – and women at times – as unsuitable for family life and sex-crazy (Longmore 1959). However, there are salient and endearing depictions of black men nurturing and caring for their families. Among the earliest renderings of this reality is Gerard Sekoto’s *The Proud Father, Manakedi Naky on Bernard Sekoto’s Knee* (1947). Painted on the eve of his move to Paris, this artwork captures Sekoto’s brother embracing his infant daughter in a neatly curated urban interior that communicates settledness and relative comfort (Figure 4.62). Such visual adaptations of males caring for their families, while not the norm, remind us of the complicated nature of urban black families during the previous century.



Figure 4.62. Gerard Sekoto, *The Proud Father, Manakedi Naky on Bernard Sekoto's Knee*, 1947. Oil painting. (Lindop 1995:49)



Figure 4.63. Sydney Selepe, *Women in the Struggle*, 1989. Linocut on Paper. Bongzi Dhlomo Collection, Javett Foundation. (Photograph by Thania Louw)

Urban-based black women were feminist trailblazers in the way they balanced the demands of childrearing and advanced the political and economic interests of blacks as a whole. Sydney Malefo Selepe's one-off print titled *Women in the struggle* (1989) is a multi-narrative collage of similes that reveal the nurturing qualities of mothers, juxtaposed against the same woman, so it seems, also engaged in political activism (Figure 4.63). Urban black women were the quintessential womanists; motherly, culturally dexterous, politically active, and economically progressive, which were not mutually exclusive roles. Like their male contemporaries, black women were alive to the intellectual culture of Black Consciousness and in many respects became the manifestation of a Black Consciousness femininity.

#### 4.4.10 Homeland urbanisation

As stated in the previous chapter, the establishment of the homelands legalised and exacerbated existing ethnic divisions within South African communities, yet the black leaders, planners, economists, and educationalists who collaborated with the apartheid state, were determined to make the segregation project a success. These new self-governing states scrambled to entice foreign investors to establish industries that would generate economic activity and create much-needed employment. For example, in 1978, Transkei's Chief Kaizer Matanzima let a negotiation to establish a \$200 million investments from Arab nations. It was proposed that the investments would be "channelled through American interests" to kick-start Transkei's industrialisation (Khapola 1980:42). However, even with the best rhetoric, these 'fictional' countries confirmed to the international community that apartheid's decentralisation strategy was a foible. There were popularised descriptions of the homelands that characterised spaces like the Ciskei as nothing more than a 'rural ghetto' (Coker 1983:233). In its assessment of the homeland system, the Study Commission on United States Policy toward Southern Africa (1981:147) listed that firstly and most significantly, the semi-autonomous countries were commercially<sup>203</sup> "irrelevant backwaters" that depended on the industrialised centres in South Africa, secondly. Secondly, the homelands were viewed as being politically lacklustre. Thirdly and lastly, "sophisticated urban Africans tended to look disdainfully on the homelands". Indeed, the leading anti-apartheid reactionaries unapologetically denounced the divide-and-conquer and segregationist rhetoric in the homelands' establishment. During the 1970s, Biko (2004:90) and other prominent black intellectuals (especially those within the African National Congress), famously rejected the homelands as "a solution given to us [blacks] by the same people who have created the

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<sup>203</sup> At the occasion of their formation, economists openly referred to the homelands as being "economically backward" entities (Khapoya 1980:29).

problem". Citizens of the homelands did not possess any citizenry rights in South Africa. The black intelligentsia rejected the homelands as a bad and regressive idea.

In a passionate attack on the concept of homelands, Biko (2004:92, 95) wrote:

Politically, the Bantustans are the greatest single fraud ever invented by white politicians... Bantustan leaders are subconsciously aiding and abetting in the total subjugation of the black people of this country... These tribal cocoons called 'homelands' are nothing but sophisticated concentration camps where black people are allowed to 'suffer peacefully'.

Biko confirmed what was already raised by the SAIRR in a report on the Native reserves established during the late nineteenth century as precursors to the homelands. According to the SAIRR report (1946:4):

The motive forces behind the 'chessboard' pattern of reserves were, firstly, the attainment of more secure control against combinations of tribes and Native uprisings generally, and, secondly, the ensuring of an adequate labour supply to the European farmers between whose farms the Reserves were situated.

The homelands were strategically designed to secure black labour by locking the labour up in these areas and releasing it when and as needed. In the eyes of many sceptics of the homelands project, blacks who accepted the concept were sell-out cowards.

Some readings saw the homelands more positively. In an appraisal of the relative achievements attained by the Bophuthatswana<sup>204</sup> government during the 1980s (symbolised by the iconic Sun City resort), Cowley and Lemon (1986:255) concluded that the leaders of the homeland circumvented their dependency on South Africa by transforming necessity into a virtue. The citizens of Bophuthatswana rallied together to manage co-operative farming initiatives that multiplied agricultural output tenfold by 1982, where 3.5 tonnes were being produced per hectare as opposed to 0.6 pre-independence (Coker 1983:231). Despite accusations that they were puppet leaders, homeland presidents were determined to show that they could oversee a modern, industrialised, and educated urban population. There was a supra-colonial sensibility among the homeland-educated class that the 'full exploitation' of the system was a historic opportunity to advance the economic and political interests of urban blacks both within the homelands and for those who worked in the industrial confines of South Africa (Blausten 1976:208). This ideal of economic and political success had not fully materialised within South Africa's urban ecosystem. During a 1975 meeting between

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<sup>204</sup> While the government had serious political challenges not helped by its leader, Lucas Mangope, Bophuthatswana was still seen as the "model state" for the other homelands to emulate (Coker 1983:232).



homeland leaders and John Vorster, leader of the National Party, Chief Matanzima spoke out against the housing shortage for blacks living in the urban areas, and Lucas Mangope openly advocated for the accreditation of labour unions representing black interests (Blausten 1976:211)

The human cost of the homelands project could not be understated. Overpopulation in the ratio of people per square kilometre, lack of health services and facilities,<sup>205</sup> shortage in schools, and extreme levels of deprivation, were malignant problems across all the homelands. Although poorer than their South Africa-based kin, blacks in the homelands could enjoy far greater self-autonomy and had access to land for farming and lodging. JP Mutsila (s.n.) from Venda delivered an impassioned speech at the Helping Hand Club in Johannesburg in front of key politicians (black and white) and commenced his presentation by explaining that the Venda region had failed to progress:

[B]ecause we have not been given a fair amount of those essentialities that contribute to a fostering of real progress... And more-over, practically all of us here are mere, workers who will sooner or later return home to our families. The views that you get from us then, are not Johannesburg views, but home views. We have come, therefore, Mrs Jones, to ask you to get the Government to build Venda National Schools. We are aware that the Government does not provide money for building Primary schools, but we ask you to get it to build Secondary and Industrial schools. The Parliament has voted more money for the development of Native education and we ask you to get a share for the Vhavenda who are in great need for educational facilities.

Over and above the underinvestment in education, the territories offered to the homeland governments were not expansive enough. The territories were fragmented and dispersed and modelled on the racist articulations of the Bantu Trust and Land Act of 1936. White interests within the homelands were still prioritised over black interests. For example, in the town of Sibasa in the Republic of Venda homeland, there was a residential area known as 'white area'<sup>206</sup> where the white population of the region resided along with the black elites in Venda.

The homeland system was sustained from within through the growing bureaucratic class of college-educated civil servants who had benefited considerably from the homeland governments. In the absence of a commerce-linked professional working class, government

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<sup>205</sup> Mukonoweshuro (1991:181) bemoans how in some homeland areas there was one doctor for every 40,000 people and 1.6 hospital beds for every 1,000 people, as compared to 4.8 beds for the same number of white South Africans.

<sup>206</sup> Only whites and important government and traditional leaders were permitted to live there. Furthermore, most of the houses were painted in a white pigment. This specific suburb is still known as 'white area' to this day even though there isn't any visible white presence and the houses have taken on alternative designs and colouring.

administrators, lawyers, clerks, nurses, and teachers, among others, were the epitome of success and modernity within the homeland social imaginary. The existence of this governmental vanguard was fundamental to the viability of the homelands project because they could “both support these structures ideologically and also provide the means for their operation” (Christie & Collins 1982:67). These workers, who were by all accounts semi-urban subjects, dictated the politics and social mood within the homelands. During the 1980s, when the salaries of this homeland-based middle class started to depress, the homeland leaders retaliated by increasing the salary budget to “maintain the co-optation/repression equation” (Mukonoweshuro 1991:174).<sup>207</sup> The increased salary budget led to economic crises within the homelands treasuries that could not generate the requisite balance sheet from the economy nor through taxes, culminating in their bankruptcy by the beginning of the 1990s when a political change was brewing.

The reintegration of the homeland bureaucrats into urban South Africa during the 1990s presented several complications. The black bureaucratic middle-class from the various homelands emerged from far more advantageous socio-economic situations than the majority of blacks who resided in the outskirts of the major cities of South Africa. This chasm was further augmented when many of the homeland officials cashed in and reinvested their pension monies, which were unlocked during the unbundling of the homeland pension funds.<sup>208</sup> In a strange twist, the blacks from the backward homelands were, in many tangible respects, ahead of the urban-based blacks who lived on the margins of South Africa’s cities.

People who enjoyed homeland associations were also cushioned by these links. Speaking of black urbanites in Durban, Freund (2000:150) writes: “[w]hile the exclusion of Africans from the civic culture that was propagated caused poverty and squalor, their continued tie to rural culture with deep historical roots was to some extent a source of strength and a bargaining chip for them in social contestation”. In other words, tough urban conditions were offset by the

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<sup>207</sup> The salaries of government officials from the homelands provided them with a relatively comfortable existence. For example, a group of nurses, teachers, clerks, police officers, etc., who were employed by the Republic of Venda Homeland government, started the Gooldville Touring Club in the mid-1980s with the aim of travelling the world. Members of the club made monthly contributions to a trust account and when the money had accumulated, they undertook transnational holiday getaways. During the late 1980s, the group went to Cape Town (which was considered an international destination because South Africa was a separate country from the Venda Republic at the time), Swaziland, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. In 1993, at the dawn of democracy the club travelled to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, and Thailand. Although made up of mid-level public servants, the Gooldville Touring Club explored the world for leisure during a time when blacks in South Africa fled the country because of political pressures. Thus, ironically, the homelands were extremely kind and enabling to the political and bureaucratic class, and to those connected to the royal families.

<sup>208</sup> I offer an anecdote from my own life to highlight the advantage homeland-based black professionals had over those in South Africa. When my father, Tshimangadzo Sidogi, formerly a clerk in the erstwhile Republic of Venda government, permanently relocated to Pretoria in the mid-1990s, he was in the privileged position of purchasing property within the CBD alongside existing white inhabitants, something that a majority of black people residing in the townships that surrounded Pretoria could not easily attain.

rural havens. Blacks with homeland links could relocate to those spaces when trouble erupted in the urban areas.

#### 4.4.11 Reclaiming the white city

One of my areas of interest when I originally embarked on this research project was a curiosity about how black artists represented the parts of the city they were barred from possessing as their own or accessing if they did not possess a pass. Blacks were barred from the cities' central business districts and white suburbia. I was soon struck by the rarity of visual recordings of white-owned urban infrastructure within urban black art, especially before the 1980s. Several factors contributed to this absence. Chief among them were the restrictive laws that controlled the movement of black bodies in the city. For example, Siebrits (2003a:s.n.) informs us that Gerard Sekoto confined himself to depictions of black urbanisms because of "his fear to travel to the cities due to the strict enforcement of the pass laws, fearing that his papers were out of order". The forced removals of the 1950s resulted in a creative limitation for displaced black artists. The chief limitation I was pointing to was their inability to access white spaces and white subject matter due to the spatial segregation that had been enforced. However, these restrictions did not stop black artists from expressing aspects of the white city and its tall buildings, suburbia homes, cars, and trains.

Some of the earliest examples of depictions of white infrastructure are Moses Tladi's paintings of white suburbia and white industry. Tladi, a multi-local artist, toiled as a gardener for Herbert Read (an executive at Crown Mines who lived in Parktown in Johannesburg during the 1920s). While working for the Read family, Tladi created enduring figurations of the Read residence affectionately called Lokshoek. In *Lokshoek, Johannesburg – front façade of house* (c.1920s) Tladi painted the front of the Read residence in an impressionist style (Figure 4.64). Although Read Lloyd (2009:14) describes the painting as showing Tladi's "formal, slightly naïve style", it no doubt remains a quintessentially modernist artwork that achieves all the stylistics the Impressionists in Europe were exploring during the late nineteenth century. This form of Impressionism was imported into the country during the early twentieth century by white artists. Tladi also painted *Crown mines I* (undated), a depiction of one of the most infamous mines in Johannesburg (Figure 4.65). Tladi had access to the site through Herbert Read (Read Lloyd 2009:23). The detail and microscopic engagement with the subject matter in both these paintings show how Tladi had access to the inner recesses of white privilege and wealth. Blacks like Tladi, who fulfilled the roles of domestic workers and gardeners, could see white

urban living from the inside. Very few black artists before the 1950s were granted the privilege of representing 'white urbanity' in the way Tladi did.<sup>209</sup>



Figure 4.64. Moses Tladi, *Lokshoek, Johannesburg – front façade of house, c.1920s*. Oil on canvas, 25 x 35 cm. (Read Lloyd 2009:14)



Figure 4.65. Moses Tladi, *No. 1 Crown Mines, undated*. Oil on Masonite, 37.5 x 77 cm. (Read Lloyd 2009:23)

However, from the 1970s onwards, more images of colonial and apartheid urban architecture emerged in the imaginaries of black artists. Interestingly, in depicting these symbols of capitalist and imperialist exploitation, these artists adopted a gaze that seemed to venerate and extol the buildings and the associated implements of modern transports that lined the city streets. This veneration gaze can be seen in Pemba's paintings of *Russel Road, Port Elizabeth* (1979), which depicts the city as an ordered and humanless zone, where the streets are clean, without like a trace of human activity or infliction (Figure 4.66). Only two figures (or what seems to be their shadows) are discernible in the painting. The exaltation of urban industrialisation is also visible in Ephraim Ngatane's *Carlton Centre* (1969), which depicts a skyscraper during its construction (Figure 4.67). Although Ngatane includes and thereby acknowledges the army of black labour that built this magnificent tower – and all the other grand architectural projects that proliferate South African cities – the focus of his composition is squarely on the building and its grandeur. This Carlton Centre skyscraper was constructed between 1967 and 1973 and was the tallest structure in Africa and the southern hemisphere when it was officially completed in 1974. The Carlton Centre became an iconic beacon of Afrikaner capitalist expansion after South Africa pulled out of the British Commonwealth in 1961.<sup>210</sup> This painting

<sup>209</sup> It is worth noting here that although Tladi was cherished by the family and encouraged to paint, he was not in any way regarded as an equal. He was still seen as a gardener and not necessarily an artist. Read Lloyd is a descendent of the Read family who wrote a biography of Tladi titled *The artist in the garden* (2012). The title speaks to the way that Tladi was seen by both the Read family and the broader white art market – as a gardener who happened to paint.

<sup>210</sup> The Carlton Centre was funded by the Anglo American mining group's property division and was constructed by Murray & Roberts. Although this was a private sector initiative, the Afrikaner-led apartheid government

conveys the magnitude of this transcendental steel and concrete shrine of white capitalism through the representation of cranes and hordes of black labourers that service this rising concrete structure.



Figure 4.66. George Pemba, *Russel Road, Port Elizabeth*, 1979. Watercolour painting, 35 x 20 cm. (Hudleston 1996:131)



Figure 4.67. Ephraim Ngatane, *Carlton Centre*, 1969. Oil on board, 59 x 89 cm. (Bester 2009:57)

Like Ngatane, the Pretoria-based Michael Mmutle<sup>211</sup> included the human presence, and specifically the black presence, in his paintings of the 'white city'. However, like in Pemba's work, the same aura of a perfect, modernist city can be deciphered in Mmutle's various portrayals of streets in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Mmutle painted during the late 1980s and early 1990s when blacks were more visible within the CBDs of all major cities in South Africa. Mmutle's recordings of significant buildings, such as *Untitled* (undated), and major streets in Pretoria, such as *Pretorius Street, Pretoria* (undated), were a kind of visual homage to the capital city (Figures 4.68 and 4.69). By illuminating these street scenes with a distinctive use of bright sunlight, Mmutle creates picture-perfect postcard snapshots of the city. Many of the buildings he painted were probably the birthplace of the racialised ideals and laws that limited blacks' movements and property ownership within the city. This racialised history of the buildings is completely forgotten in these picturesque illustrations of white urban infrastructure. These paintings were visual studies of Pretoria's architectural character and its urban landscape.

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celebrated the Carlton Centre as an example of the intensification of industrialisation their administration had achieved since decoupling from the British Commonwealth.

<sup>211</sup> I would like to thank David Phoshoko for the amazing data he accorded me regarding the life and work of Michael Mmutle. Phoshoko, himself an accomplished artist, introduced me to the Mmutle family (who happen to be his in-laws, since Mmutle had wedded his sister).



Figure 4.68. Michael Mmutle, *Untitled*, undated. Oil on canvas. (Photograph by author)



Figure 4.69. Michael Mmutle, *Pretorius street, Pretoria*, undated. Oil on canvas. (Photograph by author)

However, in Mmutle's painting of the *Johannesburg Biennale* (1995), he captures a more complicated and textured account of urban life within and outside the fancy buildings of Johannesburg (Figure 4.70). Unlike his more analytical and thoroughly observed images of Pretoria's architecture, Mmutle distorts the Johannesburg skyline. All the iconic buildings, like the Ponte City Apartments, Telkom Tower,<sup>212</sup> and Carlton Centre, are compressed into a single vanishing point. Painted as a response to the craze and mood of optimism that surrounded the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995, Mmutle shows a host of well-dressed elites (comprised of local and international art tourists) walking in the streets of Johannesburg with the nightlife of prostitution and petty crime in full blossom. Painted in the mid-1990s, the artwork was a creative response to the opening up of Johannesburg during the late 1980s and early 1990s after the total loosening of influx control measures. Many of the buildings in Hillbrow and Braamfontein inhabited by whites were increasingly flooded by black residents from all over the continent. Also, there was a lifting of the cultural boycott against South Africa, which enabled international events like the 1995 Biennale to be hosted in Johannesburg. Mmutle, himself not a resident of Johannesburg, represents the city in the way many of the cultural tourists first encountered it, as eclectic, vibrant, and a place of enticing vice. Ultimately, there is no sense of Johannesburg as a dangerous space, and the city-goers seem unfazed by the happenings on the streets. The nightlife is captured as an appropriate and exotic foreground for the urban backdrop of concrete skyscrapers and colonial architecture.

A similar exoticisation of urban industrialisation is also found in Thomas Nkuna's painting of a train named *Lynette, Krugersdorp* (undated). Although executed using a palette knife and expressive in its feel, Nkuna's accurate and vivid rendition of a train's front end and a few

<sup>212</sup> Also known as the Hillbrow Tower, the Telkom Joburg Tower was constructed in between 1968 and 1971. It was initially named after JG Strijdom, Prime Minister of South Africa from 1954 to 1958.

carriages in the background is a kind of visual shrine to Lynette (Figure 4.71). It is a celebration of the tools of urban modernity.



Figure 4.70. Michael Mmutle, *Johannesburg Biennale*, 1995. Oil on canvas. (Photograph by author)



Figure 4.71. Thomas Nkuna, *Lynette, Krugersdorp*, Undated. Acrylic on board. (Photograph by author)

Nkuna was born in 1959 in the Venda region of the Limpopo Province and died tragically and suddenly in late 1992. His body was thrown off a moving train with a label 'sell-out' tied to his neck. It is unknown whether his murder was linked to the political killings that were rampant at the time. However, either his work (that represents cultural affiliations) and/or political allegiances contributed to his death.<sup>213</sup> Nkuna endured a difficult but sadly common experience of homelessness when he moved to Johannesburg. While still a student at the Federated Union of Black Artists<sup>214</sup> academy between 1988 and 1989, Nkuna slept at train stations, which fuelled his affinity to trains. His desire to belong to the city filtered into his art where he romanticised modernity and preferred homelessness in the city to going back to his rural homeland. In depicting white infrastructure, Nkuna and the previous artists discussed, were motivated by the artistic impulse of mirroring what they desired. As Nkuna professed in a rare artist's statement submitted to the Vita Art Now<sup>215</sup> competition in 1991: "[m]y aim was to (record) document everything around me. I didn't want to add or reduce what I saw on the

<sup>213</sup> During early 1990s political killings were rife within the Gauteng region. Thousands of blacks were killed on account of their ethnicity and/or political affiliations during a period of uncertainty after Nelson Mandela's release from prison and the unbanning of anti-apartheid political parties that had conflicting political positions.

<sup>214</sup> The Federated Union of Black Artists was established in 1978 by Johannesburg-based black musicians, visual artists, actors, writers, and scholars, to advance and safeguard the interests of black cultural workers (Thema 1980). FUBA established an academy that was located in Newtown in Johannesburg and had satellite classes in Soweto and Alexandra, where courses in drama, music, creative writing and fine arts were offered.

<sup>215</sup> Art Vita Now was one of the keynote competitions on the South African arts calendar during the 1990s. Artists must have exhibited work at a solo or group exhibition within Johannesburg during the calendar year to be eligible for the Vita Art Now competition (Danby & Charlton 1991:4). Artists had to submit a selection of works that best represented their output for that year and were then selected by a judging panel that included curators from the Johannesburg Art Gallery. To this end, the Vita Art Now was essentially an award for city-based artists, and therefore it is not surprising that black artists were both underrepresented and virtually non-existent within the winners' circle.

spot” (quoted in Danby & Charlton 1991:34). While the artists simply recorded what they saw, it is undeniable that the cosmopolitan gaze of the city as an ordered space dominated their praxis. As Dreyer (2005:8) reminds us: “[w]ithin the urban context, the gaze can be interpreted as embodying Utopia since the establishment of cities, and their architecture was related to the ideas of progress and advancement from the beginning”. The artists’ view of the modernist city within their art was itself an artistic performance of the utopian ideals of the city as the site of progress, purity, and civilisation.



Figure 4.72. David Koloane, *Sunset*, 1999.  
Eight colour lithograph, 38 x 51 cm.  
(The Artists’ Press [s.a.]



Figure 4.73. David Koloane, *A la Ponte*, 1999.  
Eight colour lithograph, 38 x 51 cm.  
(The Artists’ Press [s.a.]

Art also provides the possibility of unsettling these prevailing ideas of the city as the prime embodiment of western enlightenment. If the traditional representation of the empty land in European painting signalled that the seemingly unoccupied land could be possessed (Darian-Smith *et al.*1996:4), then it can be equally argued that the representation of empty streets, buildings, cars, and trains by black artists was a symbolic reclamation of those symbols of imperialist domination. That is, by intentionally removing the human subject in their compositions – although Ngatane and Mmutle include blacks – these black artists were appropriating and repossessing the white city and its implements as their own. This appropriation would especially be represented after 1994 when blacks started to possess the ‘white city’. This reclamation of the city is most evident in David Koloane’s impressions of the Johannesburg cityscape. In *Sunset* (1999) and *A la Ponte* (1999), Koloane flattens Johannesburg’s iconic towers, its suburbia, and the innumerable taxis that roam its streets into a unitary composition (Figures 4.72 and 4.73). The artwork meshes these various layers of the city into a two-dimensional surface that renders the city into a menacing urban jungle set on fire through the expressionistic use of colour and line. Visions of the city on fire is what white society feared would occur when blacks were allowed to live and move freely in the ‘white cities’ after the 1994 democratic elections. The rough lines and textured colour reminds



the viewer of the chaotic and fluid nature of the city as a frantic and anxious space. Finally, it is also telling that many of these images that reclaim the city were created during a moment when blacks could start laying claim to the Johannesburg CBD as home.



Figure 4.74. Fanlo 'Chickenman' Mkhize, *Trucks crossing*, c.1980s. Painted wood and wire. (Photograph by author)



Figure 4.75. Fanlo 'Chickenman' Mkhize, *NAPAC NARUK*, 1980s. Painted wood and wire. (Photograph by author)

Fanlo 'Chickenman' Mkhize is another artist whose unconventional art challenged the idea of the ordered modern city and reconstructed it after his own subjectivity. Mkhize obtained his Chickenman nickname after working with chickens as a labourer for Clover Dairies. When he lost his job he started making sculptures and street signs. Mkhize's extraordinary signs, such as *Trucks crossing* (c.1980s), engage with very complex and problematic themes related to development, industrialisation, and urbanisation (Figure 4.74).<sup>216</sup> Vorster and Del Castello (2015:43) argue that the lettering and words in Mkhize's compositions "seem considered for

<sup>216</sup> I must also thank Marion Gebhardt for graciously allowing me to view these and other artworks by Mkhize, Dr Phuthuma Seoka, Johannes Maswanganyi, and others. Gebhardt also gave me invaluable information about these artists stemming from personal encounters she had with them during the 1980s and early 1990s when she and Russell Wenman, her husband at the time, collected and traded these artworks locally and internationally (specifically in Australia where the couple had migrated to in 1989).

their visual form rather than as a means to express a message or meaning”, their rudimentary character and interrupted text conveyed the complexity of city living. For example, the *NAPAC NARUK* (c.1980s) artwork was the acronym for the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) and its Afrikaans derivative, die Natalse Raad vir Uitvoerende Kunste (NARUK) (Figure 4.75). This mixed media sculpture points to the confusion, anxiety, and bewilderment that large metropolitan cities present to residents and visitors, where signs and communications systems meant to provide clarity and guidance about how to navigate the city are themselves complex, unknowable, and a source of uneasiness. By creating these unconventional signs, Mkhize was coding his own communication and guidance systems of how to interact with the city.

It is worth noting here that unlike Koloane and Pemba who were professionalised, well-educated, and qualified artists, Mkhize was barely literate and worked as a manual labourer (but was later unemployed). Mkhize’s literacy is reflected in the disjointed words and phrases on his signs, especially of his earlier work, before he was promoted and guided by the likes of Lorna Ferguson, who was chief curator at Tatham Gallery in Pietermaritzburg during the late 1980s (Comber 1989). Like many urban-based black artists who did not have immediate access to the formal art market, Mkhize sold his street signs at very reasonable prices on the Durban boulevards.<sup>217</sup> Thus, his artistic interpretation of the city was inflicted by his relationship with it. While every black artist was rendered a non-citizen in the ‘white city’, artists like Mkhize had a worse disposition because they lacked the grammar, networks, and sheer luck to navigate and circumvent urban segregation in the ways, for example, that Koloane was able to achieve throughout his career. This ill-luck is exemplified by Mkhize’s death aged 36 in 1995, whereas Koloane lived into his eighties.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to unpack the nature of twentieth-century urbanisation in South Africa and how blacks engaged with it. The chapter aimed to weave together the various intersecting and fluid contexts in which blacks lived, and more importantly, to provide a sketch of the complex urban milieu black artists responded to and depicted in their art. Throughout the twentieth century, black artists in South Africa had to navigate the landmines of bigotry, discrimination, and scant opportunity through an irrepressible urban subjectivity that transcended the racism of urban life. Acknowledging the difficulties and contradictions of modern urban life, Magee

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<sup>217</sup> It is said that Mkhize benchmarked the price of his signs with the going rate of a bouquet of flowers. This makes sense since his most immediate competitors were fellow entrepreneurs who were selling flowers alongside the road with him.

(2007:110) introduces the notion of selective belonging, wherein “one chooses to stay, one elects to belong” even in the most oppressive milieus. Magee further posits that this sense of elective belonging can be performed through visual representations of the city. Even though blacks were denied their humanity within pre-apartheid and apartheid-era South African cities, their artworks nevertheless displayed an Afropolitan subjectivity, wherein blacks wilfully pursued and developed a complex paradox of urban identities and positionalities. The urbanisation was an inescapable noose around the lives and creative exploits of black artists because they had a profound love for it. However, the love for urbanisation was a love that was countered by the anger they harboured toward the segregation and racism that controlled life in the city.



Figure 4.76. Selby Mvusi, *Measure of the city*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 106 cm. Johannesburg Art Gallery Collection. (Miles 2015:90)

There are many examples of artworks discussed in this chapter that point to the paradox of amity between blacks and urbanisation. Selby Mvusi's, *Measure of the city* (1962) is one such artwork. Miles (2015:93) interprets that the artwork is “concerned with harmony between man and his urban surroundings” (Figure 4.76). Ultimately, the discriminatory attributes of the urban space is an enabler for the most vibrant and abundant artistic output by black artists. Importantly, these artworks help us understand the urban in more interpretive and non-linear modalities by portraying “black urban existence from the perspective of its inhabitants (Lammas 1993:48).

The black persons' process of becoming urban was complicated and eventful. The colonial interests that controlled the key instruments that made up the urban environment were bent on excluding blackness from the modes and means of urbanisation. Through political and legal

devices, urbanised blacks were systematically denied the rights and privileges accorded their white contemporaries who flourished in unprecedented ways. As shallow justification, the white intellectual elite reinforced the racists' colonial binaries that condemned blacks to a primitive caste that was epistemologically and geographically unable to transition into westernised modernity. Thus, blacks were infinite outsiders to white-controlled and overtly westernised urban spaces. In legal etymology, black persons within the urban spaces during the twentieth century were *personae non grata*.

The apartheid state's legislated disregard for the personhood of blacks resulted in a century-long struggle for recognition and fair treatment on political, economic, and social fronts. The struggle found fervent expression within the highly contested urban centres of South Africa. As Stadler (1979:114) articulates: "[s]quatting, bus boycotts, and rent strikes may all be seen as collective efforts by the black working class to change or hold the central components of subsistence existence in an industrial setting". The *axis mundi* of these collective efforts against the repressive regime was the fight for decent housing for urbanised blacks. The house or home was weaponised by both the state and the urban-based liberation movements that capitalised on the legitimate cries for housing.

The urban space was essentially a battleground between the segregationist white state and blacks. The struggle also laid bare the tensions that existed among various black groups. There is a false assumption that black solidarity is a natural predisposition among the various African ethnicities and that this 'cultural unity' was upset by the colonial encounter (Diop 1989). However, the fragmentation that emerged from the urban spaces dominated by blacks was pounced upon by the white agitators. Among the fragmented black communities, there were displays of inherent individualism, economic competitiveness, and divisive tendencies primarily based on class differences. Goodhew (1993:469) asserts this point when he reveals how the violent conflicts between the young gangs and the civic protection forums "reinforce the divide between 'respectable' settled and 'unrespectable' migrant cultures, which cut across divisions between working and middle class".

These internal generational and class chasms are often ignored for essentialist readings that only consider the urban environment as being a war between blacks and a racist system. However, above all else, and in defiance of the bigoted actions by the white imperialists, the urban space represented a fresh historical moment for black Africans who wanted to reinvent themselves through the dominant cultural and economic means of the twentieth century. While blacks were denied the opportunity to explore and exploit the gifts of capitalist modernisation fully, they nevertheless, defied history by operating on the boundaries and in the cracks of the

system, amassing the educational, cultural (and more rarely economic) currency to perform urban life in its richest expressions.

## CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

The central aim of this study was to rethink past interpretations of urbanisation in South Africa by black artists. In this concluding chapter, I provide closing arguments that call for the revision and suspension of the rural-urban binary as the prevailing and primary lens to rationalise twentieth-century black urbanisation in South Africa and the artworks the urbanisation inspired. Throughout the study (especially in Chapter 2) I have shown how racist colonial ideas were central to the segregation agenda of successive white governments who sought to create untenable urban divides based on race and ethnicity.

As I showed, the design of the South African city during the twentieth century was influenced by the race philosophies that determined how Europeans and Africans were allowed to interact when the first westernised African city (Cape Town) was established during the seventeenth century. Throughout the twentieth century, white colonial and apartheid city planners attempted to build and order the city using racial markers. The city planners used overtly western design principles and systems to compartmentalise and segregate the city. Harshly criticising the modernist architectural and urban design doctrines used by South African urban architects, Hobbs (quoted in O'Toole 2010:86) writes that “[i]t’s like trying to be a god on earth, and I think that that’s a fantastically pathetic reality to inhabit”. Speaking in a similar tone about how the ideal ‘city-state’ was sublimated in rarified texts like Plato’s *The Republic* as the “science of order”, Rancière (2004:280) discerns that the modernist architectural and urban design doctrines are “a science of the lie”.

As I demonstrated in this thesis, the ‘white hand’ tried to affirm and rationalise this ‘science of order’ and employed false colonial binaries that relegated blacks to the literal and figurative periphery of urbanisation. The false idea that urban modernity exposed the “irrationality and stupidity” (Ellsworth 1986:75) of black people and the notion that African modernity was mere mimicry, were common in the representation of black urbanisation in anthropological, economic, historical, popular and art historical discourses. It was concluded that black Africans were incapable of fully embracing the modern urban environment, as they were, as products of ‘nature’ rather than ‘culture’, fundamentally suited to the rural (‘natural’) sphere. Being urbanised was seen as a necessary development in a teleological progression towards modernity and westernisation, where blacks in the city were presumably progressively more advanced and more modern than those who resided in rural areas.

These notions were an elaborate justificatory discourse for white hegemony, and major international (or rather western) psychological studies attempted to confirm these erroneous

positions. One such study that captured the imagination was conducted by Ian Michael Kendall (1980) at the then Rand Afrikaans University (now University of Johannesburg) titled 'A comparative study of the structure of the intellect of rural and urban adult Pedi'.<sup>218</sup> Kendall's (1980) ambitious investigation sought to measure the 'general practical intelligence' of uneducated Pedi adults living in the rural areas versus those who were educated and lodged in the city to test "the role which urbanisation and education play in the cognitive adaptability of non-westerners to an essentially western way of life" (Kendall 1980:4). After analysing the data from various tests administered to 156 rural-based and 209 urban-based participants,<sup>219</sup> Kendall's (1980:216) final judgement read as follows:

It was concluded that the urban subjects performed at a significantly higher level than the rural subjects on nearly all the tests in the battery. This was true of both educated and uneducated subjects at each of the age levels investigated. The urban-rural differences in test performance were ascribed, in the main, to factors such as current employment status, the nature and amount of previous work experience and personal initiative.

Kendall's conclusions affirmed that urban-based Pedi men were progressively more intelligent than their rural counterparts because they 'performed at a significantly higher level'. In addition, urban-based employment was seen as a major determinant in the improved intelligence of black workers. That is to say, employed in white industries, earning peanuts, and exploited by capitalists, made blacks feel they were better than their rural kin. Of course, such conclusions are scandalous, especially because the tools used in this evaluation were biased and unsound. Studies like this, with such obvious confirmation bias, played the role of confirming and legitimising commonplace misunderstandings, by mobilising 'objective science'. The rural-urban dichotomy was thus further entrenched by these kinds of experiments.

In this study, I looked only at South Africa, and foregrounded settler colonial urban practices, hence I omitted consideration of other African urban practices, both pre- and post-colonial. In this regard, it must be remembered that mass co-habitation was not foreign to Africa. Ndongko and Ndongko (1975) note how urban environments had always existed before western interference and the emergence of industrialised cities in Africa (also see Kusimba *et al.* 2006). This is significant because it discredits the commonly held misconception that urbanisation

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<sup>218</sup> Kendall's investigation into cognitive adaptability was part of South Africa's contribution, through the National Institute of Personal Research, to the International Biological Programme world-wide research project which was "concerned with the biological bases of productivity and human welfare" (Kendall 1980:3). Kendall studied the Pedi adult population, while another study looked the Vhavenda people.

<sup>219</sup> Of interest regarding the Pedi participants is that 50% of them on both sides of the rural-urban divide had no formal schooling, and those that had education had only progressed until standard eight, the equivalent of grade ten in today's National Qualifications Framework.

was an intrinsically western or non-African form of collective existence. The key difference was that the twentieth century brand of urbanisation was predicated on western paradigms, rapid industrialisation, and “the capitalist world-system”<sup>220</sup> (Munslow Ong 2018:7). In other words, the capitalist-driven version of urbanisation that emerged from the seventeenth century onwards was unfamiliar to Africa. Nevertheless, despite urbanisation’s alien western flavour, blacks Africans responded to urbanisation in the same diverse ways that western subjects did. Some embraced urbanisation, some were ambivalent to it, and some shunned it. The complexity in Africa in general, and South Africa in particular, was that blacks were denied the opportunity of fully integrating into the capitalist urban paradigm.

Mashau (1981:111) was born in Marabastad in Pretoria where blacks were displaced to make way for segregated urban developments. He was a member of the Atteridgeville Community Council during the 1980s and emphatically professed, “I am a *black man of the city*” (my emphasis). This pronouncement revealed an optimistic worldview towards urbanisation, a view that existed among the majority of blacks during the twentieth century. This optimism was best expressed by the coloured scholar and author of international repute, Richard Rive, in his seminal book *Writing black* (1981:23):

I cannot be what the propounders of negritude or the African Personality cult would have me be. I am Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. I am Langa, Chatsworth and Bonteheuwel. I am discussion, argument and debate. I cannot recognise palm-fronds and nights filled with the throb of the primitive. I am buses, trains and taxis. I am prejudice, bigotry and discrimination. *I am urban South Africa* (my emphasis).

Rive’s confident and assured position on urbanisation was a pushback against white attitudes that saw him as an incomplete being within the urban space. As one of the few mouthpieces for the disenfranchised coloured and black communities, Rive was determined to insert these peoples into the urbanisation imaginary, in revolt against the expectation that they had to be useful but invisible. Moreover, Rive challenged the ‘white hand’ and its urban governmentality as the only legitimate custodians of the city. As noted in Chapter 4, all forms of governmentality can be undermined and ultimately usurped. Fainstein and Campbell (2011:6) stress this point when they describe the urban changes that emerged at the end of the twentieth century as a “new logic of production, employment, and distribution” that “caused a reordering of the urban hierarchy and of the economic and political links between places”.

The urban paradigm was instrumental in both ordering and reordering South African society. The utopian modernist cities ruled by white principals were counter-shaped by the agency of

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<sup>220</sup> Ndongko and Ndongko (1975:65) confirm that modern commerce linked “industrialisation is one of the main supportive processes” that accelerated urbanisation in Africa.



the black populace across the social tiers of the emergent intellectual and professional class who permanently resided in and around the large cities, the migrant labourers or multi-locals who were seasonal city-dwellers, and the rural peasantry who interacted with the urban space from afar.

This idealism is seen in Trevor Makhoba's *Sharing mood of the future* (1991). Although created almost a century after the New African Manifesto was written by Seme in 1906, this artwork is a poignant visual re-articulation of the hopes harboured by the New Africanists when they first entered the white-dominated urban paradigm. In Makhoba's painting, we see two rodents, one black and one white – as metaphoric portraits of white and black subjectivities – eating on a large cheese block shaped as South Africa's territorial map, with a gift bow ribbon stuck on the cheese (Figure 5.1). The two rats are positioned in a distinctly dystopian setting, with discarded newspapers on the wooden floor, rat poison, and general signs of decay surrounding them, which resonates with the uncertainty and angst of South African socio-politics throughout the twentieth century. However, the focal point is on the black and white rats' equal access to prosperity as symbolised by the cheese – which is presented to them as a beribboned gift. It is critical to note that cheese is a significant signifier of class within the urban black lexicon where those who are living the good life or considered well-off are referred to as 'cheese-boys' or 'cheese-girls' (Phadi & Ceruti 2013). Therefore, eating cheese is a marker of affluence and success. Thus, for Makhoba to depict a black rat eating cheese alongside a white rat was to suggest that blacks could be equal sharers of South Africa's wealth with white society, the very ethos and idealism that drove the New Africanists.<sup>221</sup>

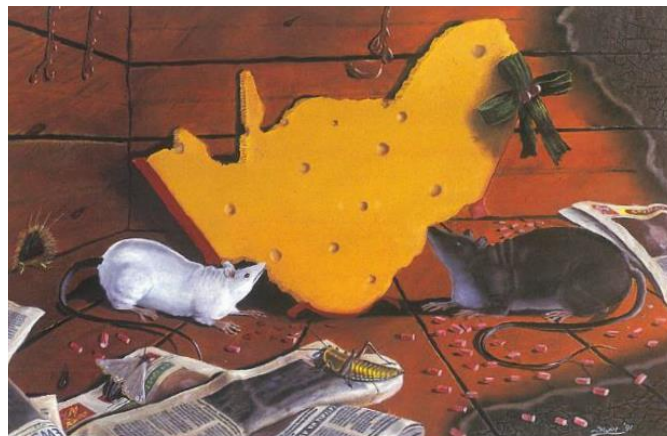


Figure 5.1. Trevor Makhoba, *Sharing mood of the future*, 1991. Oil on paper, 41.3 x 61.9 cm. (Incroci del Sud: Affinities: Contemporary South African art 1993:43)

<sup>221</sup> It is also worth noting here that Makhoba embodied the optimism of de-segregation black people had after the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC during the early 1990s.

Primarily, what this thesis shows is that black experience of the twentieth century South African city was fundamentally multifarious, as one should expect. Macamo (2005a:83) argues that the urban environment and its wage labour system “made personal biographies possible in the sense that individuals were able to pursue individual projects of self-fulfilment within the framework of the political economy of modern consumption”. Thus, industrialisation and urbanisation were critical enablers of modern black intellectualism, while, on the other hand, the city was also a dangerous terrain for black dwellers, whose battle for survival exposed them not only to structural white violence, but also to depression and alienation.

Manganyi makes several observations that help us appreciate the complexity of the urban experience for blacks during the last century. As the first black professional psychologist in South Africa, Manganyi was primarily interested in the psychological architecture of the urban blacks. One of his most significant observations was that very little attention had been paid to the “mental health problems associated with these areas of social disengagement” (Manganyi 1973:10). By ‘social disengagement’, Manganyi was pointing to the alienation that a lot of black city-dwellers experienced due to the hostile and neglectful nature of white apartheid urban design. But primarily, Manganyi (1973:11) makes the profound claim that, within urban spaces especially, “there is no such thing as African nature”. Manganyi dispels the existence of a unique African personality or Africanness, instead stressing that urban-based black individuals had, throughout the twentieth century, developed transgressive, sophisticated, and highly ‘adaptational lifestyles’. For Manganyi the notion of an ‘African nature’ was a myth created by white colonial interests seeking to exclude black people from the centre of modern urban industrialisation. Throughout the twentieth century, black people opposed, bargained against, and paid the ultimate sacrifice of death in order to correct this racist dichotomy. Although published almost five decades ago, Manganyi’s arguments provide a cautionary backdrop on how to read the moves and counter-moves of black people who were against the urban injustices of twentieth century South Africa.

Gabriel Setiloane, an academic of distinction who penned one of the foundational texts on African Theology by a black intellectual, also scrutinised the psychological harm urban-based blacks faced. Setiloane suggested that black subjects who moved to cities, either in South Africa or the diaspora, were often confronted with extreme loneliness that ultimately led to mental distress. For Setiloane, the individualism inherent within westernised urban societies was the main culprit for the ‘social disengagement’ diagnosed by Manganyi. According to Setiloane (1986:10), “the privacy of life which western man has come to almost make a religion of, to them [blacks] becomes a hurdle, resulting in depression, mental disturbances and often

even suicide". In Chapter 4, I touched on how this mental crisis impacted the black petit bourgeoisie.<sup>222</sup>

As this thesis made clear, black urban experience was primarily recounted by men, in both literary and visual form. According to Manganyi (1973:11), "if we were to formulate his psychic status in a phenomenological way, we could say that his subjective experience is one of feeling emasculated". For Manganyi, urban-based blacks, or in this specific context, the urban-based black man,<sup>223</sup> was mutilated, both physically and mentally, by the bigoted, white-dominated urban environment. The denial of citizenry rights and privileges, the forced removals, the exploitative labour practices, the overcrowded townships, among other factors, were part of the urban-based trauma that blacks in the city encountered.

However, while Manganyi was deliberate in highlighting the pain and shame that city-based blacks carried with them, his research also focussed on the tenacity and power of black subjects who endured and even thrived within this debilitating context. Manganyi shows that black society could still be self-respecting and spirited, even though the urban landscape sought to transform them into inhumane objects of capitalist exploitation. For this, he credits the development of socio-political movements like Black Consciousness, stating that its true value was the awakening of the "consciousness of our experience of suffering" that by extension cultivated "the 'mutual knowledge' of wanting to escape from this suffering" (Manganyi 1973:19). Magaziner's (2009:239) study of the Black Consciousness Movement thinkers reveals a similar sentiment: "It [Black Consciousness] was about self-awareness and the rejection of inferiority complexes; it was measured in individual selves accepting that their blackness was an existential reality and that consciousness demanded that they move towards the future". Black Consciousness – and other efforts of detailing the challenges blacks sustained in the urban spaces – fostered the will and drive to take the necessary measures to resolve problems and create resilient communities. At this point, it is also worth acknowledging the influence that black thinkers from America had on black South Africans. Among others, WEB Du Bois' *The soul of black folks* (2014), first published in 1903, and Carter G Woodson's *The miseducation of the Negro* (2010), first published in 1933, were pivotal in feeding black minds in South Africa and the rest of Africa with theoretical and discursive arguments related to being black in the urban world. In fact, a close reading of Biko's (2004) writings that were posthumously merged into the now-famous book *I write what I like* (1978), reveals the

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<sup>222</sup> Although I focussed specifically on the psychological distress of the black middle class, I do not dismiss or belittle the mental trauma the majority of black society suffered during the twentieth century due to segregation. I privilege the black middle class because their experiences and mental health condition were recorded in limited, but revealing, historical accounts.

<sup>223</sup> Manganyi's focus on the male experience takes into account the fact that, for at least the first half of the twentieth century, the migrant labour system mainly attracted work-seeking men to the cities.

similarities of argumentation between Biko and African Americans thinkers such as Woodson on the subjects of education, religion, and what it meant to be a conscious black citizen of the world.

Like Biko and other African American thinkers, Manganyi was critical of conceptions of blackness generated by white voices, be they liberal sympathisers or hardcore white supremacists. These colonial ideas tended to characterise blacks in essentialised overtones:

As I see it, the first and most important requirement is a demand for a dramatic change of attitude away from the prescriptions of the 'African nature' type of explanations to the more valid position that the cultural and genetic heritage of the African does not deprive him of the essential humanity that characterises mankind. To achieve this goal, South African society will have to explode all the racial myths which have been so dear to it (Manganyi 1973:13).

Here Manganyi goes to the heart of the problem between black and white relations within the city. The centre of the political, economic, educational, religious, and social inequalities between blacks and whites were the 'racial myths' that predetermined how blacks were treated by white society, especially within the cities. Racialised binaries – such as modern-traditional, rural-urban, and individual-collectivist – had to be suspended for the lives of blacks to improve.

While Manganyi correctly reviewed the urban-based black subjectivities that evolved throughout the twentieth century as inherently 'adaptational', there were other problematic characterisations of urban-based blackness. In 1971, two years before Manganyi's *Being black in the world* was published, a white American psychologist, William E Cross, released a seminal text reviewing the state of black subjectivity in America. Cross developed what became the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), a contentious model that provides a systematised evaluation of blackness (Cross 1971 & 1991). In short, the CRIS is a codification of the hierarchy of black subjectivities, especially urban-based blacks. The carefully articulated scale has six successive measures of being black, namely, assimilation, miseducation, self-hatred, anti-whiteness, Afrocentricity, and multiculturalist inclusivity (Sullivan *et al.* 2018:10).

Cross clusters the first three sensibilities – assimilation, miseducation, and self-hatred – into what he terms a 'pre-encounter' phase, which "characterises individuals who despise blacks and being black" (Sullivan *et al.* 2018:10). For Cross, blacks stuck in the 'pre-counter' stage probably had not experienced the injustices brought about by the 'white hand', which meant they inadvertently worshipped things that represented white progress, often to the detriment of themselves and their own race. For example, Chief Ndansi Kumalo (1936:79) of the Ndebele (Matabele) people in Zimbabwe visited England during the 1920s. During his tour,

he laments European progress and also venerates it: “All the ways of the whites are marvellous to us. They are too much for us. They asked me to speak a few words in English, but I realised from the beginning that it was beyond me: my tongue is twisted and no light has entered my dark head”. Such internalisation of the racist colonial logic that Africans were dumb primitives is startling. However, in many ways, the internalisation is also emblematic of the bewildering power of the colonial/western logic during the early twentieth century. Sadly, such anecdotes, such as Chief Kumalo’s veneration of European modernity, were misrepresented as evidence to support the existence of this ‘pre-encounter’ subjectivity among blacks.

This ‘pre-encounter’ phase mutates into the ‘encounter’ where blacks experience discrimination or witness the violation of another black person. The ‘encounter’ phase causes strong passions of hatred against whiteness and all it represents. This inevitable encounter triggers the ‘immersion-emersion’ process, where the individual fully identifies with black culture and history. Finally, the apex of black personhood (arguably similar to what Biko popularised in South Africa as ‘Black Consciousness’) is the ‘Afrocentric’ and ‘multiculturalist inclusive’ level, which Cross groups as ‘internalisation identities’. According to the CRIS, ‘Afrocentricity’ “is actualised through social and political activism in empowering the black community” (Sullivan *et al.* 2018:10). At the same time, ‘multiculturalist inclusivity’ speaks of an identity that is both self-assured and has a ‘healthy interrelation’ with the whole of society. At this level, the supposedly self-actualised black individual promotes universal human rights and not just their own interests.

The problem with Cross’s scale is its hierarchal conception of blackness and how that progression is tied to whiteness, beginning with the so-called ‘assimilation’ phase. According to the CRIS model, some blacks are ‘blacker’ than others simply because they display certain psychological and social traits deemed appropriate and more disturbingly, aspirational. Therefore, it is curious that the height of ‘blackness’ within the CRIS worldview is a kind of liberalised and middle-class sensibility, where blacks live in harmony with and not against, whiteness.

Being black, especially in the urban sphere, should not be seen as a teleological progression from one stage of blackness to another, as per the CRIS model. Rather, these organic subjectivities are interconnected and entangled with one another, and their manifestation is dependent on the desired outcomes of the person that wields them. Thinking of these subjectivities as organic, malleable, and interchangeable redirects the power and agency back to the black subject. This black subject is not beholden to the psychological forces of blackness, but instead appropriates and uses them to achieve her or his own interests. Especially within the context of South Africa, urban-based blacks developed their identities as

a response to the contexts they encountered. Like chameleons, blacks in the urban domain had to be shape-shifters who operated according to pragmatic considerations and not preferred niceties.

One of the most important black scholars of the twentieth century, Archie Mafeje, co-authored the celebrated and careful anthropological analysis of the Langa Township in Cape Town titled *Langa*<sup>224</sup> in 1963. Mafeje interrogated the meaning of the notion of 'assimilation' for black South Africans. Over a decade after the publication of *Langa*, Mafeje (1975:184) asked a profound question that spoke to the urban subjectivities that blacks had developed during the twentieth century that were automatically linked to notions of westernisation and modernity: "Does 'social change' or 'being civilised' mean, unambiguously, being assimilated into the white middle-class cosmic view? What will it take for that view to transcend itself?" Mafeje was essentially questioning why progress and modernity in Africa were measured in terms of blacks becoming more westernised. For Mafeje, it was double-speak to describe the willful appropriation of white culture by blacks as assimilation, while not speaking in the same terms when whites appropriate black culture. As Mafeje concluded, blacks have to transcend these artificial and paternalistic theorisations of blackness, such as the CRIS, to appreciate the nuance and texture of urban-based black subjectivities from the twentieth century.

The key contribution of this study to discourses on the history of black urbanisation in South Africa is that artistic representations provide insight into the nuance and texture of urban-based blackness from the previous century. In Chapters 3 and 4, I presented a sample of artworks selected from a much larger creative legacy that displayed the peculiarities of the urban black experience and what it meant to be black in the segregated city. Due to the complex and almost incomprehensible nature of the modern city, the readability of artistic symbols is a good place to start processing the meaning and character of modern urbanisation. As Magee (2007:111) argues:

Because cities exist along varying continuums between public and private, commercial and domestic, chaotic and orderly, and disjunctive and connective, among others, there is a constant coming together, moving apart, and juxtaposition of their different aspects in visual expressions of them.

In many ways, visual embodiments of cityness capture the grey areas and blind spots of urban life that are often unnoticed or underappreciated. Although a visible and real presence in twentieth-century segregated cities, blacks were rendered as non-citizens and illegal aliens.

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<sup>224</sup> *Langa* was authored by Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje (1963), and as Sharp (2008:162) reviews, "one could certainly read into the text of *Langa* a very straightforward story about the sequence of steps by which the urban encounter was 'schooling' black South Africans in Christianity in particular, and 'civilisation' in general".

Nevertheless, despite the best attempts by the colonial and apartheid authorities, city-based blacks still performed a degree of agency that was irrepressible. Samuelson's (2007:50) reading of select novels by African writers inspired by the defiance of the urban-based black populace notes how these novels speak "to the cracks in which Africans inscribe their presence into the city, and through which they move across its segregated worlds". As reflected in art, music, literature, theatre, and poetry, blacks and the artists they inspired, navigated the tightly policed spaces and colonial norms of the apartheid city with consistency and precision (see Masilela 1997 & 2019). For example, Mongane Wally Serote's<sup>225</sup> (1972:4-5) acclaimed poem *City Johannesburg* compresses into verse the unbreakable and abusive bond blacks felt to Johannesburg and to urbanisation generally:

Jo'burg City, I salute you;  
 When I run out, or roar in a bus to you,  
 I leave behind me, my love,  
 My comic houses and people, my dongas and my ever whirling dust,  
 My death  
 That's so related to me as a wink to the eye.  
 Jo'burg City  
 I travel on your black and white and roboted roads  
 Through your thick iron breath that you inhale  
 At six in the morning and exhale from five noon.  
 Jo'burg City  
 That is the time when I come to you,  
 When your neon flowers flaunt from your electrical wind,  
 That is the time when I leave you,  
 When your neon flowers flaunt their way through the falling darkness  
 On your cement trees.  
 And as I go back, to my love,  
 My dongas, my dust, my people, my death,  
 Where death lurks in the dark like a blade in the flesh.

Commenting on this iconic poem, Wilkinson (1990:485) reveals how "the city is no longer inscribed within a geometric form. It appears as a viscous, mobile, octopus-like monster, drawing the surrounding territory into its omnipotent and all-devouring net". Thus, creatives like Serote and the visual artists discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 were important recorders, interpreters, and translators of the black urban experience.

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<sup>225</sup> Serote was born in Sophiatown before its demolition in 1944 and grew up in Alexandra. He was arrested in 1969 for participating in what the apartheid government deemed terrorism, but only spent nine months in prison. He went on to receive the Ingrid Jonker Prize for poetry. Through a Fulbright scholarship, he obtained a master's degree in Fine Arts from Columbia University in New York in 1979 (Patel 1990).

A large part of black urbanisation was performed in the 'black cities' that were invented by the colonial and apartheid government to house blacks. In his famed, *The wretched of the earth*, Frantz Fanon (1963:39) provided a vivid description of the state of the 'black city' the world over:

It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire.

Black urbanisms were sites of squalor, poverty, crime, and overcrowding. As residents of these spaces, black artists were compelled to capture these realities in their work. The trope of social realism was popular because it allowed the artists to observe, record, and process the difficulties and vulgarities of their immediate urban surroundings. In the concluding paragraph of his essay to the catalogue for the *Art and urbanisation* exhibition, Siebrits (2003a:s.n.) expressed that through the artworks "[t]he sub-economic conditions of the townships and slums are frozen in time allowing us to ponder the great hardships faced socially, economically and politically by the African people in their struggle for self-determination".

However, urban-based black artists were not only concerned with mirroring the urban segregated the artists lived through. Rather, the artists were themselves creating alternate urban realities. As Marback (2004:253) argues, "[w]hile urban environments do provide a context for rhetorical practices and while rhetorical practices do influence the shape of urban environments, neither environments nor practices are reducible each to the influence of the other". The urban subjectivities developed by blacks in segregated cities were whole in and of themselves. Similarly, the urban subjectivities represented in the artworks produced by black artists were also unique and complete outside of their original referent that necessitated their creation. Bremner (2010:44) captures the autonomy of the urban experiences and the artworks they inspired by highlighting that modern cities "are unparaphrasable" and that "they produce their inhabitants as modern citizens in unique ways". The unparaphrasable nature of the city meant that black artists were producing new visions of black urbanisation in their attempt to depict it.

Unsurprisingly, these new visions of the urban black – which were based on but not held down by the realities of colonisation and apartheid – were the fruits of the aspirations of the New African Movement and Afropolitanism that demanded the creation of a new cosmopolitan African personality. Mbembe (quoted in Shipley *et al.* 2010:660) is one of the champions of Afropolitanism and argues that the duty of "[r]ethinking Africa is at once a political, an ethico-



moral, and an intellectual project”. That is, the work produced by the black artists transcended the field of art and were all-encompassing affirmations that Africans were co-heirs of modernity. Also, by defining the African as a member of planetary urban modernity, the New African Movement and Afropolitanism inspired visualisations of blackness sought to discredit the rural-urban split that condemned blacks to the periphery of modernity.

The first and longest-serving editor of the influential periodical, *The Bantu World*, Richard Selope Thema (2018:161) describes the ‘black city’ of Orlando in Johannesburg as “a city within a city” in the last article published in 1955. Drawing comparisons between Harlem in New York, Selope Thema (2018:167) saw Orlando, despite its segregated nature, as a “golden opportunity” for the urbanised black masses to facilitate their own “self-improvement socially, educationally, spiritually and economically”. He added that residents of the ‘black city’ “should create something that can make men and women of the other races change their minds about them and their attitude towards the African people’s position in the world” (Selope Thema 2018:167). Thus, within black urbanisms, blacks could perform and articulate their own brand of modernity, through art especially, and “a new life of their own which might provoke the admiration and envy of other races” (Selope Thema 2018:168).

Robinson (2006:x) laments that “theories of modernity, just like South African urbanism, have often reserved experiences of dynamism and innovation for a privileged few”, namely, white Europeans. However, black artists like Derrick Nxumalo, Tito Zungu, and Titus Matiyane rejected such dismissals of black progress and visualised how blacks partook in and fantasised about technology, innovation, and science within the urban paradigm. As Phalafala (2017:313) argues, “[t]he mapped evolution of black expressive cultures attest to the complex, nonlinear, and bi-directional nature of the makings of black modernity”. It is critical to remember always that “cities in Africa belong to the world”<sup>226</sup> (Myers 2011:191). Therefore, citizens of African cities, even citizens systematically excluded from the urbanisation agenda, are part of the global theatre of urban geopolitics. However, even though Myers (2018:231) affirms that African cities are global, he insists that the nuances of urbanisation in Africa “are better understood from outside a Eurocentric framework”.

Throughout this study, I have used a balanced set of theories that transcend the Eurocentric worldview of cityness. These theoretical frameworks of New Africanism, Afropolitanism, and multi-locality, which have ontological links of European notions of cosmopolitanism, are nevertheless useful as tools to dismantle and unsettle the rural-urban binaries. Meskimmon

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<sup>226</sup> While Myers (2011:197) asserts that African cities are global, he adds the distinction that South African cities have more similarities with cities from the global North, stating that “Johannesburg probably shares as many themes of urban theory and practice with New York as it does with Dar es Salaam”.

(2011:93) shows us that “the cosmopolitan imagination necessitates an attitude of affirmative criticality”. I have relied on this affirmative criticality to reframe and re-theorise the visualisation of black urbanisation.

According to Lefebvre (1991, 2003), the invention of urban space is an endless game wherein the city is constantly produced and reproduced according to people’s impulses and aspirations. However, the finite nature of urban space means that at any given city there is always a boundary between insiders and outsiders, inhabitants and visitors, and locals and foreigners. While this practical reality cannot be avoided, it presents challenges of possible exclusion and denial of the right to the city, where the outsiders or foreigners are almost always politically, socially, and economically at a disadvantage when trying to access the metropole. Njoh (2008:596) thinks of this conundrum in the following terms: “visitors or strangers have access to outside areas, whereas the interior of the space is reserved for inhabitants. The inhabitants have an investment in power and are the controllers of everything within and the immediate surroundings of, the delimited space”.

While post-1994 South African cities were opened to blacks from all over the continent, the distinction between outsider and insider still persists, although not in overtly racialised ways. While the proportion of black residents in the former apartheid cities has continued to increase, millions more remain outside the realm of the urban space. Since I have slain the rural-urban divide throughout this study, I am interested in how people who exist outside of the metropolitan city continue to express their relationship and encounters with the urban jungle. If urban modernity is not the preserve of a select few and if people based in the rural villages and the countryside are co-participations in shaping and advancing industrialisation, then it is necessary to consider the ongoing representations of cityness produced by artists living outside the metropole.

To this end, I am captivated by the work of young creatives like Mulalo Negondeni. Born in 1995,<sup>227</sup> Negondeni’s family home is in the village of Mukula in the Vhembe district of the Limpopo Province (part of the former Republic of Venda homeland). Between 2008 and 2016, Negondeni created his own *Nego City* (2019) installation in the backyard of his home. Inspired by the FNB Stadium in Soweto, Johannesburg – also known as ‘ Soccer City’ – Negondeni’s *Nego City* is a mini-city that has roads, bridges, highways, high-rise buildings, a mall, and the iconic FNB Stadium (Figure 5.2). The city was built using sand, cement, and stones that are painted and capped off with printed logos of prominent retailers and restaurants. While artists have created models of cities since the early twentieth century, *Nego City* is unique because

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<sup>227</sup> Negondeni is part of a generation of South Africans known as the ‘born-frees’ because they were born after the official end of apartheid in 1994.

the artist had never physically visited the stadium nor Johannesburg before making this work.<sup>228</sup> Nego City was a purely fictional and original construction of the stadium and its surrounds.



Figure 5.2. Mulalo Negondeni, *Nego City*, 2019. Sculptural installation, Mukula, Limpopo Province. (Dzimbili 2019)

Another unique attribute of Negondeni's artwork is that it is a permanent installation located in his backyard. Unlike other models of cities that are portable and moveable from one region to the next, Nego City is fixed at its location in the village of Mukula. The artist invites the public to experience his fantastical city by walking through the mini-streets and mini-buildings.<sup>229</sup> Thus, Negondeni built a city within a village, and the urban space was compressed and tamed into what the artist terms his home-based museum (Dzimbili 2019).

<sup>228</sup> Negondeni's dream of seeing the stadium was realised when Stadium Management South Africa (SMSA), the company that oversees FNB Stadium on behalf of the Johannesburg Municipality, invited the artist and his family to watch a game between Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs that took place on 9 February 2019. So impressed were SMSA that they gave Negondeni a bursary to continue his studies in civil engineering at the Vhembe Technical and Vocational Education and Training College (Selisho 2019).

<sup>229</sup> I have had the opportunity to visit FNB Stadium in Soweto and the Nego City installation in Mukula. Both spaces are exceptional in their own right. The awe-inspiring appeal the one possesses is independent from the other. However, Nego City is unique in that the city and FNB Stadium specifically is shrunk to a size that gives the viewer a bird's eye perspective of the infrastructure. Walking through the installation, I felt figuratively and literally above the city and its miniature streets. One rarely gets this feeling of being empowered or bigger than the city. The closest experience I can compare my aesthetic encounter with Nego City to is that of being in an aeroplane as it flies above the cityscape, especially during take-off and landing when the buildings, houses, streets, and cars are discernible to the naked eye.



Figure 5.3. Dzulani Sidogi, *Moses Mabhida Stadium*, 2019. Sculptural installation, Tshipako, Limpopo Province. (Photograph taken by Dzulani Sidogi)

Other young artists from the region inspired by Negondeni's work, like Dzulani Sidogi, have created their own urban architecture in these remote villages. Sidogi sculpted a model of the Durban-based Moses Mabhida Stadium in the mountain-based community of Tshipako in Vhembe. Like Negondeni, Sidogi had never been to Durban or Moses Mabhida Stadium before constructing this sculptural installation using sand, cement, sticks, and various found materials (Figure 5.3). Sidogi's imaginative recreation of Moses Mabhida Stadium is paradigmatic of the yearnings and aspirations young people who exist outside the metropole have for the city and its architectural modernity. This yearning is expressed in the plea Sidogi placed on his Twitter timeline in July 2019: "I am a self-made artist from Venda, Limpopo. I wish to see Moses Mabhida Stadium for the first time in my life. I'll be the happiest man" (quoted in Ngenyane 2019).<sup>230</sup> This desire to experience and interact with the structures produced through modern industrialisation was palpable in the writings of the New African Movement intellectuals during the early twentieth century, and it remains true today.

In many respects, by reproducing these grand and iconic structural and engineering symbols of urban modernity, rural-based artists reclaim the city for themselves and their fellow villagers. These multi-local artists have domesticated the city into shrunken models that make the

<sup>230</sup> Sidogi's dream to see Moses Mabhida Stadium was realised when Dj Oskido, a highly successful disc jockey, music producer, and entrepreneur, flew Sidogi from his rural village in Tshipako to Durban in July 2019. Due to Oskido's influence, Sidogi received a special guided tour of the stadium that was organised by the Durban Tourism Agency. While Sidogi had long imagined what it would feel like to see the stadium, he recounts that "[w]hen I got there, I cried in disbelief" (quoted in Ngenyane 2019).

metropole theirs too. They are no longer outsiders to the city. They have literally and artistically brought the city to their homes and villages. These young dissident artists – dissident insofar as they have transcended the perceived limitations of their rural disposition –, without any professional fine art tutoring, have reimagined South Africa's urban landscape in progressive and redemptive ways. Before their first sojourns to the city, both Negondenani and Sidogi could only experience urban modernity from the periphery, gaining marginal access to cityness through technology. City life was mediated by television, online platforms, and oral accounts. However, their engagement with the city through these secondary modes enabled these artists to recreate the urban space after their own image and aspirations. These bespoke sculptural installations confirm that rural-based artists are also capable of fashioning new Afropolitan urbanisms through their visionary creativity.

The most modest estimations project that urbanisation in Africa will jump to at least 60% by 2050, and in southern Africa to an even higher 74% (UN-Habitat 2014). Urbanisation is irreversible and requires redemptive and non-binary frameworks to theorise how artists respond to and aestheticise the urban experiences of Africans, both now and into the future. My hope is that this study will inspire alternative conceptual pathways on how the representation of cityness and urbanisation by black artists, especially those who are located outside of the metropolitan centres, should be approached and adequately theorised.

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