

Essay

Soweto: History, Geography, Society

Introduction: Soweto—Founding of a Township

The stories were set in Soweto, although they neither began nor ended there.

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Johannesburg.



Braamfontein.

Soweto lies 15 kilometers southwest of Johannesburg. By car, it is most easily reached from the M1 highway, which curves around the edges of the inner city of Johannesburg, past Braamfontein on the left. The highway passes over office buildings vaguely reminiscent of the 1960s, with their green and blue aluminum siding. Its lofty, monumental



Johannesburg.



Braamfontein.

concrete overpasses throw black shadows over hard steel train tracks and across city streets that look overexposed in the glaring sun. The red tin roofs of the old market buildings and the gold cupolas of the Oriental Plaza just beyond stand testimony to an earlier time of downtown commerce. Bustling Indian entrepreneurs and traders and their wares used to burst

ramshackle out of shop fronts and onto the streets in the traditional Indian area of Pageview. But the neighborhood had been declared a white group area by the Johannesburg city council in the 1970s and the traders were moved to a regular, more tractable shopping center. The highway takes a gentle curve to the west. Until their removal in the early 1980s,¹ pale-yellow mine-sludge dumps loomed on either side, and the industrial and manufacturing character of these



Braamfontein.

fringes of the city is still apparent in the gritty aspects of the buildings.



Mines.



Mining Tower.

The occasional black framework of a winding tower against the high blue sky stands in mute testimony to the mining industry on which this city was built in the 1880s. Another shopping center and then a sign that the highway is about to end.



Power Station.

Eucalyptus trees along the sides of the road. Baragwanath hospital on the left, Orlando Power Station on the right, and the first pedestrian overpass. The tarmac of the street seems suddenly to lose all definition and widens into a dusty and stony shoulder of taxi ranks and informal markets four times the width of Old Potchefstroom Road. Soweto, "sprawled to

the horizon like a reposing giant."²



Soweto Landscape.

Alongside the Old Potchefstroom Road into Soweto a sign, double the height of a man and dwarfed only by unruly Eucalyptus trees, declared the "entrance to Soweto" a "private road." "Non-Bantu entering this area must have a permit," the sign stipulated, "which may be applied for at room 230, 80 Albert Street,

Johannesburg—M. P. Wilsnach, Director Housing."³ On the left half of the sign, in



Police

accordance with the laws of a land with two "official" languages,⁴ the same text appeared in Afrikaans.⁵ The letters *W.R.A.* (West Rand Administration), writ large at the top of the sign on either side, overwhelmed all of the rest of the lettering except for the word *SOWETO*. The irony was that, although it was true that whites officially needed a permit to enter Soweto, the township itself was designed and

created precisely to keep the black urban population out of the "white" city, except when they were needed there, temporarily, to work. It was in fact those living in Soweto who had to make sure they carried at all times evidence of their legal status permitting them to reside in Soweto and move beyond its boundaries into the commercial, industrial, and residential areas of Johannesburg. Permits were needed for everything: the *dompass* (identity document or pass that all Africans over the age of 16 were required to carry at all times, also known as the reference book or, later, as the Book of Life; from the Afrikaans "*dom*" or stupid pass) to prove that a person was legally registered to work; a house permit, which listed, under the male tenant's name, all of his dependents (wife, daughters, sons, brothers, and sisters) considered "desirable" in the urban area of metropolitan Johannesburg; and a visitor's permit for relatives and friends who were put up because there never was enough housing. Confrontations, searches, and nighttime raids for "illegals" by both municipal police and members of the South African Police (see below) were a constant of life in Soweto.

When pouncing on his victim the policeman will say "*Hy'ta, pass jong*"—meaning "Hey, pass, man." Without a murmur [sic] the African quickly produces the "stinker." Failure to produce immediately on demand means instant arrest with a charge of "obstructing the police while performing his duty." Having taken out the pass from your pocket, the policeman snatches it from your hand. He takes his time paging through it. First he looks at the polaroid photograph and then looks at your face menacingly to make certain it is your profile on the pass, he then reads the domicile stamp, the labour registration stamp and the month-end signature of your employer. The domicile stamp certifies that you are allowed by law to reside in the particular location, the labour registration stamp complements the first in that you are allowed to reside in the urban area whilst employed, and the month-end signature of your employer in fact testifies that you are in regular employment. Failure to produce the pass or to meet any of the above requirements means on-the-spot arrest. Then follows the hands-up order. The policeman conducts a quick body frisk, and empties your pockets in search of "dangerous weapons."⁶

History

Soweto was a gradual creation, almost a collage of African residential areas

created at different times and in different places in response to different needs. Beginning with the establishment of Klipspruit in 1904, the process of Soweto's creation ended only with the final removal of all Africans from the Western Areas (the freehold townships of Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare) in 1955-58.

In the years of and following the destruction of Sophiatown (1954-60), the site and service schemes⁷ of Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, then the minister of Native Affairs, resulted in the establishment of 33,000 plots on which temporary shacks were erected while their owners waited for the construction of permanent houses by the city. In 1954 the city's housing division built 1,421 houses; in 1955, 3,020. From 1954 to 1969, 49,146 houses, "88 schools, 3 hostels, 7 administrative blocks, a public library, 9 TB centres, 8 clinics, 3 beer halls, 8 beer gardens and a bank." 5

Name

By 1959, the patchwork of townships—Moroka, Pimville, Klipspruit, Orlando East, Dube, Mofolo North and South, Central Western Jabavu, Molapo, and Moletsane—still had no name and the manager of the city council's Non-European Affairs Department, W. J. P. Carr, advanced £10 toward the search. Journalist Marshall Lee provided one of the most comprehensive lists:

There was '*Goldella*'; '*Sothuni*,' a portmanteau word deriving from Sotho and Nguni (the two largest Bantu language groups in South Africa); '*Dumezweni*,' meaning famous the world around; '*Ikwezi*,' the morning star; '*Umuzikazi*,' a very big village.

[...]

'*Mbone*' (gold nugget), '*Phaladi*' (the trek), '*Thinavhuyo*' (we have nowhere to go)

[...]

'*Hendrik Verwoerdstad*,' '*Carrvill*' and '*Maitiso*.' But the preferences were aiming at '*Toweso*' and '*Sowesko*,' two concoctions from South Western Townships. 'They are short, easily pronounceable and do not favour one of the main language groups over that of another,' it was argued. Into 1963 a special committee toyed with a list including '*Partheid Townships*,' '*Kwa Ophamayo*' (after Sir Ernest Oppenheimer [whose loan of £3 million to the City Council had contributed to the construction of 14,000 houses in Soweto]), '*Pambeli*' (look forward to the future), '*Khethollo*' (segregation), '*King Kong*,' '*Kwela*' and '*Darkest Africa*.' Exclamation mark. Still the plea went out: 'Help us find a name.' So in came '*Kwa-dudu*' (a place to sleep), '*Methromangpres*' (a portmanteau word for Methodist, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian). Then there was '*Anderstan*.' It was almost beyond a joke.⁹

As this list illustrated, there was much in a name: political criticism ("*Partheid Townships*" and "*Khethollo*"), description ("*Umuzikazi*"), dreams ("*Ikwezi*" and

"Pambeli"), monstrosity ("King Kong"), despair ("Thinavhuyo), and a good deal of irony and humor ("Kwa-dudu").

In the end, the name for the townships southwest of Johannesburg was somewhat of a composite. In April 1963, the *Rand Daily Mail* announced that "South Africa's largest city within a city has at last got a name":¹⁰ Soweto. Perhaps it was the pragmatism of not favoring language groups that won out. But this concoction of the opening letters, *South West Townships*, also marked a perspective bias that characterized the township more by its geographic location *as seen from* (in relationship to white) Johannesburg than by a sense of its own place. For the white residents of the city, Soweto lay somewhere beyond Uncle Charlie's,¹¹ an intersection that was a veritable landmark and point of orientation because of all of the highways that met there. Uncle Charlie's was a roadhouse and petrol station on Booyens Road and, from the white perspective, as convenient a meeting place for a trip south along the "Golden Highway" (to Vanderbyl, Sasolburg, Bloemfontein, and Kimberley) or left on the Rifle Range Road (to Germiston and Alberton) as it was a guidepost for the junction to Soweto along the Old Potchefstroom Road. Only gradually, with the building of the highway that links the downtown and Soweto in the 1970s, did it fade as a geographic marker of Soweto in the consciousness of whites.

"So-where-to" was what Sowetans themselves jokingly called the place they lived **10** in.¹² But Soweto was neither a joke nor simply a "city within a city," with all that implied in terms of status and condition. It had merely acquired a name for an identity long in the making—sprawling, notorious, provocative:

[T]aking the "Soweto highway," I felt as if I were leaving my dear location, dear old Mzimhlope forever. I thought with a weight on my diaphragm: they say it is rough in there. They fear to go there. They call it '*Slagpan*' [slaughtering place¹³]. Yet I do not see what they fear—to me it is home, and no place is better than home. There have been stabbings, tragic 'factions,' *inkuzi* (muggings) and rape, I concede. But where else, in a land of hate, haven't these things happened.¹⁴

Two features in concert steered the history of Soweto: the segregation of black from white people and the presumed impermanence of black people in white urban areas. These features of urban policy directed at Africans found their beginnings in efforts to set aside separate areas of residence for different races in the early history of the development of Johannesburg. Until 1922, these efforts had been sporadic at best and largely in response to outbreaks of disease. When bubonic plague broke out in the Coolie Location in 1904, the slum was burnt to the ground and people from there and other overcrowded slum areas were moved to Klipspruit, the first municipally established township. In 1918, the outbreak of a series of influenza epidemics compelled the city to establish Western Native

Township. But in 1922 the Transvaal Local Government Commission (more notoriously known as the Stallard Commission) recommended:

[T]he 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 so to minister.¹⁵

With this, the principle of the impermanence of Johannesburg's African population was declared. It was one that sociologist Ellen Hellmann would later condemn as "the fiction that an urban Black population as such did not exist."¹⁶ But it was a fiction with grave consequences. The creation of Soweto was alternately stalked and prodded by urban housing shortages as more and more Africans flooded into the cities, drawn first by the labor demands of the First World War and again by the Second World War and pushed by the poverty of the African reserves (later the Homelands). The fiction that Africans were merely migrants, and that therefore housing problems were as transitory as they, accounts for some of the official inertia about providing the necessary accommodation required by the processes of urbanization. The awful slum conditions produced by overcrowding were compounded by the city government's indifference to the general quality of life for Africans.

The original municipal township of Klipspruit (later Pimville) and Western Native Townships were gradually extended to accommodate the growth of the urban population. In 1930, the city council purchased the farm Klipspruit No. 8—15 kilometers to the southwest of Johannesburg—to establish a township called Orlando East, now part of modern Soweto. By 1935, 2,625 houses had been built in the older municipal townships, and 3,000 in Orlando. But expansion did not always remain in the hands of the authorities. There still existed several immediately suburban neighborhoods—Sophiatown, Newclare, and Martindale—where Africans could own and rent land and houses. Many Africans took things into their own hands, providing for themselves in thousands of not-so-temporary shacks in the backyards of the landowners of these freehold townships, or as legal and illegal subtenants in existing municipal locations. By the end of the Second World War, 370,972 Africans lived in Johannesburg, roughly 150,000 more than in 1939.¹⁷ By this time, conditions had become unbearable—sometimes 100 people lived on a single stand (a plot of land measuring 150 x 150 feet)¹⁸—and, in March of 1944, James Sofasonke Mpanza led a group of these subtenants from Orlando East, Newclare, and Kliptown to an open field in Orlando where they set up a squatter camp made up of wooden poles, Hessian cloth, and tin. The city government eventually provided shelters for this first group of about 20,000 squatters. As subsequent waves of squatter movements (1946) moved into open municipal land in Orlando, Pimville, and Dube (in 1947 the count stood somewhere between 60 and 90,000), it provided first

basic water and sanitary services and later established the Moroka emergency camp with 11,200 housing sites, "pit privies, stand pipes, refuse removal services and an emergency medical service."¹⁹ The people had made evident they were not "temporary sojourners."

African Population in Johannesburg, 1946

Location	African Population
Municipal locations	89,249
Freehold townships: Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare	52,879
Municipal compounds	11,150
Employer's premises (licensed compounds)	37,611
Domestic workers	69,000
Mine workers in mining compounds	42,000
	Total
	301,889
Squatters and subtenants	69,000
	Total
	370,972

Source: Adapted from 1946 census data cited in Pauline Morris, *Soweto: A Review of Existing Conditions and Some Guidelines for Change* (Johannesburg: Urban Foundation, 1980), 10-11.

In 1923, the Native (Urban Areas) Act gave legal force to the findings of the Stallard Commission and to the process of the residential segregation of white and black. Giving power to town municipalities to provide housing for African workers and at the same time legislating that "Natives" not qualified by birth or length of residence could stay in urban areas only for 72 hours without a permit, the act laid the groundwork for the prevention of the further urbanization of Africans—the beginning of influx control and the first official distinction, between migrant and townsman, that took the form of residential rights recorded in pass books (later "reference books").

What might at first glance be overlooked as the habitual elision of women in the common usage of gendered language—"the Native should only be allowed to enter into the urban areas, ... when *he* is willing to ... administer to the needs of the White man" (see quote above, emphasis added)—took on more-disturbing meanings as the act was amended and its power became clear. In 1930, an amendment provided for the removal of all Africans residing, but not employed, in the urban areas. This paved the way for local authorities to exclude women from the cities unless they could document that they had accommodation, and it made it more difficult to bring families into the urban areas.

For a brief moment, shortly after the end of the Second World War, it seemed as if the Union government was prepared to acknowledge the irreversibility of rapid industrialization and urbanization. The government-appointed Native Laws Commission (the Fagan Commission, so named after its chairman, Justice H. A.

Fagan) found that the migration of Africans into the towns was a phenomenon normal (essential?) to economic development. As such it could not be reversed. The Fagan Commission recommended that migration be systematized and coordinated, that the urban working population be stabilized, and that the absolute segregation of the races was completely impracticable.

But in 1948, the Nationalist Party government came to power. In its hands the policies of separate development were taken to the extreme. In order to achieve this, all Africans—even those several generations in the city who no longer had any connections to their original rural roots—were assumed to have a "tribal" or ethnic identity, largely determined by the African language they spoke, and were gradually to be transformed into migrant labor, temporary sojourners whose true citizenship would be inscribed in the homelands. This was impermanence taken to its ultimate conclusion. The townships were to become dormitories, families actively obstructed, and the "illegals" endorsed out. To achieve this, the new government took a two-pronged approach: It tightened influx-control measures and intensified the physical segregation of the different races in all urban areas **20**

The gendered nature of these policies was clear. First, the Native (Urban Areas) Act was amended in 1952 to severely limit the qualifications for residence to those who either had been born in the white urban areas and had lived there always or who had worked continuously for the same employer for 10 years or for more than one employer—in the same town—for 15 years. Such eligibility could not be transferred to a wife. Then, also in 1952, the Black (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act No. 67 extended all influx control measures to women. Finally, an official circular in 1967 prohibited black women from registering for family housing in urban areas. This meant that widows with dependent children could lose their residence and housing rights with the loss of their husbands and that a divorced woman could forfeit her home if she was found the guilty party or lost custody of her children. There are many accounts of the way such regulations limited people's choices and threatened them, often precisely at times of deep personal turmoil, such as death or divorce—constant reminders of impermanence and insecurity, even in educated or middle-class households, such as that of Joyce Sikakane's parents:

It so happened that at that time [1966] my parents had decided to divorce. This decision was the most agonising for the family in terms of the requirements of Section 10 of the Bantu Urban Areas Act, which forbade "single" persons to be registered tenants of a house. My parents had been on judicial separation for a long time so as to avoid turning each member of the family in[to] single-sex hostel dwellers. My father "illegally" moved out of the house and was an "illegal" sub-tenant in various houses in Soweto. He was tired of being caught up in the blackjack raids and had also met a woman who he wanted to marry. He was at this time a lecturer at Witwatersrand University.

This was the most excruciating time for all of us. My mother was not

thinking of remarrying, she wanted to continue living with her children. Both my youngest brothers were pupils at local schools. Eventually, in 1968 my parents took the risk and got divorced. My mother and we remained in the house under constant threat of eviction. Even today, my mother, two brothers and two children still live under the same threat. I do not need to add that there were times when my mother would be summoned to the superintendent's office where such a possibility of being evicted was put to her. In Soweto it is common practice to bribe the Authorities for such matters as house permits.²⁰

Women domestic workers could no longer share their private "servant's quarters" with other Africans, thus prohibiting the presence of husbands and children. The relevant Black Laws Amendment Act of 1963 in addition paved the way for the minister of Native Affairs to declare any accommodation of domestic servants in the white neighborhoods illegal. Where applied, this would have particularly troubled single black women, who, according to the new regulations of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, and despite their qualification for residence and housing by virtue of their employment (as domestic workers), would have had to find housing as lodgers with registered households unless they had family in the black townships, or "locations."

As the legal arsenal of the central government grew and was fine-tuned, the options for all urban Africans were reduced, and one by one the spaces they had found and claimed for themselves—literally on the fringes of white society—were identified and closed. The construction of such "single-sex" accommodations as Dube Hostel (1955), Nancefield Hostel (1956), and Jabulani Hostel (1958) heralded the end of the "locations in the sky," servants' quarters (sometimes merely storerooms) located in small clusters on the roofs of flats (high-rises or apartment buildings) and office buildings everywhere that had until then provided an expedient, if spartan, alternative to the municipal locations far outside of town. 25



Dube Hostel with People

The last such space to go was Sophiatown,²¹ a township just seven kilometers from the city center of Johannesburg. Most directly resembling a true suburban neighborhood, Sophiatown was the deepest African thorn in the white city's side. In the eyes of the apartheid government newly elected in 1948, it was too close and too dilapidated but, most of all, too free. Slums did exist in Sophiatown, but it was also a prosperous, stable, educated, middle-class community of *different* racial groups,²² alive with commerce and its own distinctive culture. In addition, through freehold rights Africans were permitted to own land and houses, which, in the words of Black South African journalist Joyce Sikakane, "symbolized a permanency that was incompatible with the concept of urban Africans being

temporary sojourners. Black spots in white areas had to be done away with."²³ The new government finally undertook to carry out the policy of removing Africans from the Western Areas; the policy had been provided for by a decision of the city council in 1944, but it had never been moved on. In this way, the destruction of Sophiatown literally and figuratively led to the creation of Soweto. Soweto was thus symbolically built on the ruins of Sophiatown and other freehold areas. The physical relocation of Sophiatown's African residents to the townships that became Soweto foreshadowed a pattern of removals that were to characterize the urban segregation policies of the apartheid government.

Confronted by the new Group Areas Act of 1950, the rhetoric of slum clearance, army trucks, bulldozers, and black and white policemen carrying rifles, revolvers, *assegais* (spears), and Sten guns, the people were moved and their houses leveled. "Something in me died, a piece of me died, with the dying of Sophiatown," wrote Bloke Modisane.²⁴

I stood over the ruins of the house where I was born in Bertha Street, and I knew that I would never say to my children: this is the house where I was born, that when I was a boy Sophiatown was a bare veld; that there once was a tree here, perhaps the only one in the location, round and about and into which we played, dreamt a little and built a fairy location with parks and gardens beautiful with flowers; a location with playgrounds like the ones white children played in; that the dreams we weaved [sic] were bold.²⁵

The destruction of Sophiatown loomed large in the memories the people carried with them to Soweto and elsewhere in the country and into exile.²⁶ It took four years, but in 1959 the authorities declared the operation complete. On top of the dreams, the debris and the dust, the city built a new white suburb, which they named *Triomf* (Afrikaans for triumph).

Most of those Africans who were forcibly removed from the Western Areas of Sophiatown, Newclare, and Martindale were resettled in the new locations of Meadowlands and Diepkloof, now suburbs of Soweto. An old colonial principle, the *cordón sanitaire*, originally thrown up to prevent the spread of diseases from slum areas, had come full circle. Not only were the races separated in different residential areas, but a broad strip of industrial districts, mines, and empty wasteland southwest of the city formed a natural buffer zone between white Johannesburg and the black locations, conveniently and physically separating the

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city from the townships. A highway and the railways provided the easily controlled link. Father Trevor Huddleston called it "a no-man's land" that physically and symbolically marked "that tremendous and vital distinction between civilisation and barbarism upon which the doctrine of white supremacy rests."²⁷ In addition, this space made it easy to contain and control activities in the townships and made it—almost—impossible for unrest to spill over into Johannesburg.



Maponya Rail Crossing

Resistance

Africans did not passively accept all these changes. Through the years, they had found ways to organize themselves, to mount many small, often unseen protests, and even outright resistance was nothing new. The notable moments along this path of resistance are familiar—the Defiance Campaign, the Women's March, Sharpeville (1960)—and had become part of the lore of the township and the consciousness of the people. Almost 43,000 Africans from inner-city residential areas had become "illegals" in 1933 after Johannesburg had been declared white in accordance with the 1923 Native (Urban) Areas Act and, even beyond organized acts of resistance, many of them resisted resettlement. Instead of moving to the relatively distant new locations, they stayed, their numbers swelling by 17,000, the number of people living in Sophiatown, Newclare, and Martindale. During this period, the approximately 600 empty houses of the new Western Native Township were spurned. As the story of the Hessian squatter camps in 1944-47 showed, Africans, under the guidance of James Sofasonke Mpanza and others, organized themselves and moved onto municipal lands as squatters, thus proving themselves entirely capable of forcing the hand both of the Johannesburg City Council and of the central government in the form of the then Native Affairs Department. Africans had always disregarded attempts to keep them away from the cities, especially during the war years, and formerly migrant workers were bringing their families to town increasingly. Because of manpower shortages, the construction of housing during this time slowed: 750 new homes were built in 1941 and 1941, and then new construction finally stopped in 1943 and 1944. By the mid-1940s the numbers of new urban residents had grown so large that the housing situation was critical. Legal and illegal subtenancy had mushroomed and produced awful conditions everywhere.

In 1957, residents of Dube Hostel reacted to their deteriorating circumstances and attacked a funeral procession on its way to Doornkop Cemetery. Although this was a particularly catastrophic response, the city council's investigating commission found among other reasons for the unrest that the men who made the attack were those who had been removed from Johannesburg under the "locations in the sky" legislation two years earlier. At Dube they endured longer

travel times and austere facilities and were deprived of their ability to supplement their income with services rendered to their old flat employers. In the case of the old freehold townships, opposition had come not only from the Johannesburg City Council, which dragged its feet over the removal, but also from landowners themselves, from Margaret Ballinger (a black representative in parliament at the time), the African National Congress (ANC), and other institutions such as the South African Institute of Race Relations, as well as churches. In the end it took a considerable show of force to undertake the removals. Despite these outbursts, though, resistance was sporadic and often in direct response to specific circumstances. None gave rise to a sustained movement although all, in one way or another, contributed to the remembering of notable political and social action and to a rich tradition of struggle.

Soweto in the 1970s Administration



Intersection.



Zondi WRA Yard.

Two processes that answered to the central government's commitment to the policy of separate development accompanied the gradual expansion of Soweto. First, the Nationalist government, increasingly impatient with the city council's failure to implement removal and segregationist policies, was more and more willing to intervene directly in the control of the African townships.²⁸ In 1973, in order to centralize control over Africans, the government transferred administrative and financial authority over the townships from the city council to the newly established (Bantu) Administration Boards.²⁹ Secondly, efforts to further stem the influx of Africans into the cities and to reinforce the doctrine of the temporary status of those who already lived there resulted in the gradual erosion of African land rights and African ownership rights.

Freehold rights had disappeared with Sophiatown. They were replaced in 1949 by a 30-year leasehold plan, according to which Africans who qualified for housing permits were allowed to own homes for the duration of the lease.

In 1968, the Department of Bantu Administration and Development rescinded even these meager rights, ruling that houses could henceforth only be rented and that those already owned could no longer be handed down to heirs. In 1975, it seemed as if the government was prepared to ease these limitations when it reintroduced the 30-year leasehold scheme for certain areas. However, the cynical

implications of its munificence became clear when it tied such leases to the possession or acquisition of a Homeland citizenship certificate—in keeping with the larger project of legislating black South Africans out of their citizenship and into the homelands.³⁰

The newly established *West Rand (Bantu) Administration Board* took over the 35 reins to Soweto from the Johannesburg City Council and its Non-European Affairs Department. All urban African matters henceforth fell under its control. The Boards were all-white institutions, appointed by and directly responsible to the minister of Bantu Administration and Development—M. C. Botha in 1976—and his department. Hurried into existence, the boards faced serious organizational and financial problems, inexperienced staff, and a lack of resources. In a personal memorandum, the commissioner of Bantu Affairs for the Witwatersrand, F. B. du Randt, admitted that his organization had experienced gross corruption.³¹ (See: Du Randt) Similarly, the commissioner of Bantu Affairs for the Orange Free State wrote under the heading "Unsympathetic and Injudicious Conduct of Officials (Clerks):"

Many of the civil servants of the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards, especially in district offices, are still young and inexperienced, many of them former constables of the South African Police that are not yet well familiarized with Bantu legislation and also do not have the background of officials of our Department. Complaints were therefore often received in this office about rude or uncontrolled conduct especially by junior clerks toward some Bantu that came there appealing for help. The Bantu declare that no-one listens to their grievances, that they are told to leave the offices and that indecent language is sometimes used towards them. The reason for that kind of behavior by some clerks may lie in the fact that they are perhaps not yet fully equal to the special responsibility of their task.³²

These problems were further compounded by centralization and the lack of local knowledge at the highest policymaking levels. The boards were expected to be financially self-sufficient and to furnish all the services and infrastructure earlier provided by the city councils. Until then and despite protests of a Nationalist minority in the city council, the Johannesburg City Council had subsidized Soweto. In 1972, its last year of responsibility, that subsidy amounted to a little more than R2 million. From then on the West Rand Administration Board depended on the income from beer and liquor sales, over which they had a virtual monopoly, and

on rentals and utility rates paid by the residents of the township. In 1976-77, 20.75 percent of the board's budget was derived from beer and liquor sales, 48.06 percent from rents and utility rates, and 22.59 percent from the composite levy on employers, who had to pay R1.80 a month per industrial worker, R1.00 per domestic worker, and R0.40 per farm worker housed in the board's area.³³



Orlando West Bottle Store

Among the original functions of the West Rand Administration Board were the management of labor and coordination of its supply and distribution; provision of housing, welfare services, and recreational services; control and administration of townships; and the supply and sale of sorghum beer and liquor in its beer halls and beer gardens. Urban Africans considered the boards direct agents of government policy.

Housing

Soweto covers an area of 85 square kilometers. According to the 1970 census it had a population of 597,390, although this number is probably grossly underestimated, since so many people lived in Soweto "illegally." In 1978, the Urban Foundation estimated a population of around 1 million in Soweto, based on a median of 10 people per house and on the assumption that 30 percent of the population was illegal.³⁴ In 1976 the West Rand Administration Board registered 648,237 legal residents, of which 604,562 lived in houses and 43,675 in hostels.³⁵ At the time there were 100,662 housing units in greater Soweto. As a result, in Soweto alone, 9,892 families who were legally permitted to live in the area were on the waiting list for a house.³⁶

Another source corroborated the existence of this housing shortfall. In 1977, the minister of Bantu Administration, in response to a question in Parliament, described a building campaign according to which 1,530 houses were built in 1973-74, 545 in 1974-75, and 162 in 1975-76. The number of new houses to be built in Soweto in 1976-77 was 834. He submitted the following table stating the shortfall of housing that persisted nevertheless:

Shortage of Family Housing		40
Location	Shortfall of Houses	
Cape Town	1,400	
Port Elizabeth	11,402	
Durban	4,000	
Pietermaritzburg	2,000	
Bloemfontein	5,104	
Germiston	4,621	
Springs	3,500	
Benoni	1,300	
Vaal Triangle	4,825	

Johannesburg/Roodepoort

10,235

Source: House of Assembly, Questions and Replies, Hansard vol. 70 (21 January-24 June 1977), 360.

Although not broken down specifically for Soweto, the following numbers made the shortage of housing quite clear. The numbers for Johannesburg/Roodepoort were in and of themselves revealing. But for a more accurate picture of the broader urban areas of the Witwatersrand (of which Johannesburg and Roodepoort were only two cities) they needed in fact to include the numbers for Germiston, Springs, Benoni, and the Vaal Triangle, bringing the total to 24,481. The figures did not include the many unregistered residents of the townships. At this rate, the housing shortages in Soweto—and everywhere—would not be eliminated. In some cases, as in Alexandra, the problem was simply and cynically defined away. The township had been designated for single accommodation only, despite the many families that lived there, and the government no longer built or planned to build any houses nor grant any applications for 30-year leases.

The housing shortage for those who were legally permitted to live in Soweto and the large number of those living there illegally meant that there was a great demand for subletting and a large potential for abuse. People who could not pay their rents (between R8.00 and R17.00 a month) could be evicted and sent back to the homelands. In "My Friend, the Outcast," South African author Mtutuzeli Matshoba reconstructed how a person with money could go to the (white) superintendent of the township and tell him that he needed a house badly. If there was enough money to make it worth his while,³⁷ the superintendent would then target a house (usually that of a widow or an old person), concoct a wild story about the rent being in arrears, and name an impossibly large amount to be paid back in a given time. When the money was not forthcoming, the inhabitants would be summarily evicted and no questions would be asked about their fate. In Matshoba's story, the old lady in whose name the house was registered lived with her sons and daughters and their small children. One of the sons paid the rent regularly.

The stranger stood at the corner of the house, taking in everything slowly.

[...]

Where would these people go if he took their home from them? It had been stupid of him to think that he would be given a vacant house. There simply was not a single vacant house in the whole of Soweto.

[...]

The thought that a whole family would be thrown out to make way for him had never entered his mind. It was immoral and he would not be a

willing party to it. He wanted his money back and he would add to it to build himself two small rooms in the backyard of his [parents'] home and wait there for eternity. They were still childless and by the time they were really forced by circumstances to leave home something might have cropped up for him or he might have saved enough to have a room built for him on the new thirty-year lease system.³⁸

What houses there were at all were "matchboxes,"³⁹ built in monotonous simplicity. The average three- or four-room house had two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room, most often shared by six to seven people, four of them adults.



Soweto Houses.



House, 901A Zola.



Letladi's House Mofolo.



House No. 8070, Orlando West.



Soweto Street

In 1979 a survey revealed that only 5.8 percent of the houses had bathrooms and 12.9 percent had inside toilets. The 1951 prototype had ash floors or smooth earth instead of floors, no ceilings, and a roof made from asbestos sheeting with no gutters. In later years, these were no longer built by the board and all new houses were of the type 51/9, which included inside bathrooms, ceilings, and

floors.⁴⁰ Endless rows of these houses lined the dusty streets that ran thick with mud when the rain came.



Soweto street.



Orlando East, boy.



Soweto street lamps.

The installation of electricity was slow—in the 1970s, only 15 percent of houses had electricity—and, when street lighting finally came, it was in the shape of towering spotlights disconcertingly reminiscent of labor camps. At night, people lit candles and paraffin lamps. They cooked on coal fires, which also produced the heat on cold winter nights when the temperature on the Highveld sometimes dropped to freezing. Only a quarter of the houses had running water. Those that did usually had a tap attached to one of the walls of the outdoor toilet. Four manual telephone exchanges served the entire Soweto area: Iketlo, Kwa-Xuma, Orlando, and Tshiawelo. By the end of 1976 there were 71 public and 1,171 private telephones. On the waiting list, 2,338 families had applied for private telephones. Fire was to destroy the Iketlo exchange on June 18, 1976, and construction and installation work for new telephones was suspended because of danger to the workmen and property.⁴¹



Damaged building and telephone booth, Orlando West.



Dube street with truck and

Although the new houses were certainly an **45** improvement over the squatter shacks of "Hessian Town," it soon became clear that the government intended to provide only the barest minimum. Ordinary streets were not named and, because of the restrictions on commerce and trade, the common features of

houses. urban areas elsewhere—town centers of trade, entertainment, and services—were nowhere to be found. The monotony seemed deliberate, although some effort was made by the administration to beautify the townships, sometimes with extraordinary consequences. After an inspection of Soweto immediately after the beginning of the unrest, Advocate *Percy Yutar* pointed out that everywhere:



Soweto trees and fence.



Soweto sidewalk.

[T]rees planted, including fruit trees, planted in the grounds of the houses, ... were well looked after and well cared for, ... whereas trees that were planted by the authorities in the streets to beautify the streets, these were cut down maliciously and used either as weapons or fuel for fire.⁴²

This did not surprise Credo Mutwa, by profession a *sangoma*⁴³ and writer. Some kinds of trees, he said, were "taboo" to African people:

Mutwa: There are some trees of which our people are very superstitious. Trees like the *Seringa* which is a poisonous tree which they definitely do not like in some places...

[...]

For instance, it will be an unfortunate day, much as I love it, to see *Jacaranda* trees planted in Soweto; they would cease to exist. Our people have a very strange superstition regarding them.

[...]

Some of our people, when they want to spoil a wedding, they will throw a *Syringa* branch in front of the bride and this is supposed to cause a miscarriage and to make her very, very frigid, unfortunately for the husband.

Yutar: And you say the Black people do not like the *Jacaranda* trees and yet that is the tree that beautifies Pretoria and attracts so many tourists to this town of ours.

Mutwa: Yes, but it certainly would not attract Zulu tourists.⁴⁴

A humorous exchange, although its references revealed much about the collaborative mindset of Mutwa on the one hand and the oblivious worldview of Yutar on the other. His comments appear utterly unmindful of the vast symbolic power of the city of Pretoria, seat of government and focus of political control. Mutwa himself, though eager to please his questioner, revealed a stronger sense of the power of symbolic meanings, even of trees, in South Africa:

[O]ne mistake that the municipality and the West Rand authorities have made repeatedly is that [...] they send labour gangs to plant these trees and then after planting the trees, they are surprised why the trees have been deliberately destroyed. This again shows the lack of understanding between Black and White. Because when you beautify a place in a Black community, you must not do for the people, but with the people.⁴⁵

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At first glance Mutwa's explanation seems overly simplified: People had little regard for these things because they felt no sense of ownership. But the second part of his explanation was more significant and a clear allusion to the fearful destruction to be wrought everywhere in Soweto against targets that symbolized the might of the boards because, "when the White man is struck at, these objects also, his doing, should also be destroyed."



Soweto walls.

People *did* try to improve their surroundings themselves. Despite restrictions and the fact that only 10 percent of the houses were owned (rather than rented) by their occupants, people built extensions, planted small fruit trees, hung curtains, and painted walls. External improvements such as new front doors, fences, and painting and plastering

reflected a "desire to escape the extremely monotonous character of the environment and to create some individual identity."⁴⁶ Others, such as adding a bedroom, sitting room, verandah, or outside rooms, more clearly reflected the extreme shortage of accommodation and the need to expand what one had to accommodate growing families and those friends or family who were less fortunate. Improvements such as ceilings, carpeting and floors, tiling, and adding bigger windows, a kitchen, or a bathroom were aimed at improving the comfort of an existing houses where there were few choices. Finally, burglar-proofing reflected a reaction to rising crime rates, as the extreme poverty of the townships made those who had nothing covet the very little that those around them had. Where there was money, as in Dube, Soweto's rich middle class built costly and sometimes palatial homes.



Meadowlands Hostel.



Meadowlands Hostel.

In stark contrast to all of this, and perhaps most evidently in Dube, stood the several "hostels" for "single" men and women, separated from the township world around them by barbed wire and strict rules whereby no visitors were allowed. Government laws required that dormitories be shared by members of the same ethnic group. "Home," and the only private space, was a steel or concrete bed and an iron-bar locker. Hostel inhabitants shared a communal coal stove and a cold-water shower. There were few communal spaces. A description of Diepkloof Hostel and its surroundings in 1976 provides a clearer image:

It consists of 12 rows of single storeyed [sic] bunk barracks, divided into 10 separate blocks, numbered A to J. Each block has one entrance which can be closed by means of a high gate. Within each block are single rooms, 16-bed dormitories, public lavatories, an ablution room, a boiler room and taps (hot and cold) set above concrete wash tubs outside the lavatories and ablution room. In total there are 176 single rooms and 328 dormitory beds in each block of the hostel. The single rooms measure 3m x 3m and comprise a bed, a locker, a small single plate coal stove and a window. Each dormitory consists of two sleeping areas separated by a kitchen-cum-living-dining room. The sleeping areas, each containing eight bunks, are subdivided by means of half walls into two sections of four beds each. Either within the boundary of each hostel or immediately outside are located a number of privately owned shops. Non-hostel dwellers are allowed to enter the hostel grounds as far as these shops. Hawking of goods also takes place near the hostels and merchants include hostel dwellers. Recreation facilities including football [soccer] fields, a number of halls and film areas are provided for hostel dwellers. Beerhalls are often located near to hostels.⁴⁷

A world of experiences lay behind the word *single*. Most of those designated by it were migrant workers, respectable men driven into the city by the poverty in the homelands but forbidden, by the harsh influx-control laws, to bring their families. Some were divorced men or widowers driven from their houses because they no longer had a wife. Others were bachelors, either from the countryside or from Soweto itself, who no longer qualified to live with their parents because they were of a working age but forbidden by law to rent a house in Soweto. "Single" women—representing 2.2 percent of all hostel dwellers, 794 of whom lived in Mzimhlope Hostel—were mostly domestic workers, factory workers, and those who held menial office jobs; some were widows and divorcees, others orphans

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and unmarried mothers. Many were women who were found without spouses during the massive urban removals and resettlements, or so-called "push-outs," young girls over 16 who no longer went to school and therefore should be working. No children were allowed in the hostels.

Each hostel was administered by a white manager with full authority to expel residents for violating hostel laws and regulations, such as the prohibition against brewing alcohol or bringing a woman onto the premises. Those who lost their legal accommodation automatically lost their jobs and were expelled from the city.⁴⁸ The vast majority of hostel dwellers were between 18 and 44 years old. Because so many of the residents were migrant workers, clustered together by ethnic group, they necessarily considered their time in Johannesburg temporary—a way of life forced on them by the economic necessity to earn money to support families in the countryside and because other options were denied them according to the segregationist trajectory of the central government. As a result, many migrant workers identified with the rural areas they came from rather than with the community in which they worked, and they associated mostly with other residents from the same region and ethnic group. Most migrants were unskilled workers. Although judgments about their "irresponsibility and apathy," about their lack of interest and commitment to their work, must be made with caution, their impermanence and the many social problems—"high rates of crime and violence, alcoholism, homosexuality and prostitution"—they faced set them off from the rest of the community.⁴⁹

Some argued that the South African government meant to "degrade the urban African psychologically."⁵⁰ Visitors described the township as "torpid, numb and sullen."⁵¹ Jordan K. Ngubane, an African commentator, saw the new township as the monstrous product of the government's cynical creation of labor reservoirs designed to systematically crush individuality so that "the hut in which the university lecturer lives is like that of his neighbour, the grave-digger."⁵²

Overcrowding and poverty contributed to high crime rates in Soweto. In the period from July 1, 1995, to June 30, 1976, 557 cases of murder, 1,336 cases of rape, 320 cases of culpable homicide, and 8,239 assaults with intent to do grievous bodily harm were reported for Soweto alone.⁵³ "On Saturday and Sunday mornings," Mtutuzeli Matshoba wrote, "there was always a corpse covered by wind-blown papers in Mohale Street, which passes my home on its way from the station to the hostel for migrant workers."⁵⁴ The numbers in and of themselves suggested the frightening conditions in Soweto. There were without a doubt many cases that went unreported—especially when the perpetrators had the authority of the Bantu Administration Board behind them and the victims were especially vulnerable.

Infractions against the endless number of laws governing the lives and movements of Africans were so numerous that they artificially inflated the number of total arrests. Kane-Berman estimated in 1978 that one in four adult Africans was arrested every year for "technical" breaches of pass and influx offenses. The South African Institute of Race Relations showed in 1976 that 386,414 cases were sent for trial for such pass and influx offenses as curfew violations, failure to register, and failure to present documents. Such offenses represented 28.3 percent of *all* cases before the courts that year.⁵⁵ In 1976, 216,112 men and 33,918 women were arrested for offenses relating to reference books and influx control.⁵⁶ In the Witwatersrand area, which includes Soweto, this meant that an average of 160 people a day were arrested for offenses under influx-control and pass laws in 1976.⁵⁷ But beyond the actual numbers were the humiliation and anger that were generated by these encounters and that accounted for much of the antipathy, toward the police and security forces, that would find such violent expression in the events that were to engulf the township in 1976. F. B. du Randt, commissioner for Bantu Affairs for the Witwatersrand during the time of the Soweto uprising, acknowledged in a memorandum dated September 18, 1976, that the disaffection provoked by the laws that forced Africans to carry identity (reference) books was a result of the "humiliating" and "discriminatory" situations they created and that often involved, for example, repeated arrests and the taking of fingerprints. It came as no surprise to him that the "reference book system contributed to increased insubordination and resistance" and that it had allowed "resentment to build against those instruments of government charged with the task of seeing to it that the legal provisions are met, specifically the Bantu Administration Boards."⁵⁸ (See: F. B. Du Randt.)

Policing

Soweto was policed by two official forces. The roughly 900 officers of the **60** municipal West Rand Board were known to Sowetans as "Blackjacks" because of their black uniforms.

At night their complexion blends with that of the uniform. Walking in the streets at dusk, you can only figure them out by the click-crunch sound of their heavy black boots. The jackets of their uniforms are double-breasted, fastened with shiny copper-coloured buttons. On their heads are black caps, the brims cover the forehead leaving room for the ferocious looking eyes, as if they were the eyes of blood-thirsty hunting hounds.

[...]

[T]he "blackjacks" seem to enjoy the night chase and that of the snug hours of two to five a.m.⁵⁹



Orlando Police Station, car with damaged windshield.

Subordinate to the office of the township manager, they collected rents and executed evictions and assisted with the township's administration. The West Rand Board police worked closely with the South African Police, most of whom were black, although a few commissioned officers were white. The SAP, as it was commonly referred to, enforced influx-control laws and prevented crime. There

were six SAP police stations in Soweto proper—one at Moroka, one in Protea, one near Jabulani Hostel, one in Dobsonville, one in Orlando East, and one right on the edge of Chiawelo and Pimville. The West Rand Board police station was located in the heart of Klipspruit, at Dube. In the case of unrest, all available members of the police force could be mobilized for "riot control duties" and reinforcements could be brought in from elsewhere to assist the local police.⁶⁰



Orlando Police Station.



View from Orlando Police Station.

The experience of harassment and arrest was commonplace to the people of Soweto. Nighttime raids for "illegals" and political activists—either by the SAP or by "blackjacks"—were so commonplace that accounts have found their way into the iconography and metaphor of South African literature.⁶¹ Shakedowns, also, were commonplace. The cost of such assaults went beyond physical pain and left an indelible mark on the psyche of black people everywhere.

I was diminished. My father was calm, the gentleness in his face was unruffled, only a hardness came in his eyes; he pulled out his wallet and showed his documents, an Exemption Pass certificate and a tax receipt for the current year. My hero image disintegrated, crumbling into an inch high heap of ashes; I could not face it, could not understand it, I hated the young constable for destroying my father; questions flashed through my mind, I wanted to know why, and I think I resented my father, questioned his integrity as a man. I turned my face away and disappeared into the bedroom, searching for a parting in the earth that I could crawl into and huddle up into a ball of shame.

In my little prejudiced world of absolutes my judgment was cruel, imposing upon him the standards of my own world of fancy; we lost

each other from that moment, and in his own way he tried to recover his son, but I was hard and monstrously unjust, and so he again became the harsh hand of authority, the authority I could no longer respect. I began to fear him, keeping out of his way and in the end I saw only the cruelty, never the man.⁶²

Beyond the threat implicit in any encounter with the authorities, the indignity of these confrontations remained etched in peoples' memories even if they came through them physically unscathed. This kind of fundamental disruption of parent-child relationships held unknown but perilous consequences for systems of authority and guidance within the family and for the relationship to police and other white (or African) people in authority. A township police force preoccupied with pass law and influx-control infractions and arrests could not effectively combat the high crime rates in the townships. A father cowed by the frequent predawn police raids in the townships was not looked to for advice or guidance. Black policemen were considered collaborators, "sellouts," and accessories to the system. The effect that such disruptions had on authority relationships would be taken to a deadly conclusion in the confrontations that

Social Differentiation



**Alexandra hostel inmates
armed with sticks.**



**Alexandra men armed With
sticks.**

Soweto is a place of differences, despite the uniformity of the endless rows of matchbox houses, and notwithstanding deliberate efforts by the government to homogenize "the Blacks." The mean numbers, average income, average family, average wage, average expenses listed in official statistics give the appearance of little social or cultural difference, but the streets of the township tell a different story. Perhaps one of the most marked divisions among the people of Soweto—as in other townships such as Alexandra—was between temporary migrant workers and permanent residents. Residents of Soweto spoke in pejorative language about hostel dwellers and set themselves apart socially. "They were kidnapping girls ... the girls were full that hostel," one mother told me, "when they got in your house, they found the boys, they killed the boys, and then they took the girls."⁶³ The hostels loomed menacingly over other residential areas and few walked too close alone or at night. Since the 1957 riots at Dube Hostel, there had always been friction between hostel residents, permanent residents, and the police. It was to shape one of the major confrontations during the Soweto uprising. Most of the residents of the hostels were Zulu male migrant workers. When students called for

a work stay-away to expand their protest movement to adults and workers, hostel workers refused their solidarity call and armed themselves with sticks and other weapons:

[T]here were many stay aways. So they [hostel dwellers] were going to work, they didn't stay away at [from] work. The children went and burned the ... hostel while they were away. When they came back, oooh, it was enough. They said they are going to kill all those youths in Soweto.

We were shivering. We didn't sleep that day. Because I heard somebody knocking the door. When I opened the door I saw the young men with the white doek [cloth], they were ... they were not hostel dwellers, they were Soweto youth. They were saying you must boil water, and put sugar in. So I ... it was about eleven o'clock. I started to make fire, and then I put the water with big pot, so that, when they come, we must pour them with this water. Mhmhmmh.⁶⁴

There were several violent clashes between students and hostel residents that came to an end only when Chief Mangosutho Gatsha Buthelezi, a prominent Zulu leader, intervened and "came here to make peace with them and Soweto people."⁶⁵ **70**

Other divisions were artificially imposed by the central government. Intent on its policy of separate development, the Department of Bantu Administration and Development in 1954 issued directives to segregate neighborhoods in the township according to ethnic groups. Official rhetoric had it that Africans liked to live with their own kind, but it was revealing that those townships established prior to the policy showed a clear mixture of languages and ethnic identities. In addition to their own language and English, most people in Soweto spoke or understood either Zulu or Sotho, the two most widespread African languages in the township (Zulu, 64 percent; Sotho, 52 percent; Tswana, 25 percent; Xhosa, 19 percent; Tsonga, 10 percent; Pedi, 9 percent; Venda, 6 percent; Swazi, 3 percent). English was the language spoken or read by the largest majority in Soweto. About 41 percent of the population spoke, slightly fewer read, Afrikaans. This means that, although about 12 percent of the population was illiterate, most residents were at least bilingual, and many spoke three or more languages. Many young people spoke *tsotsi taal* (Afrikaans for tsotsi language), a mixture of Zulu, Sotho, English, and Afrikaans. This language was (and is) peculiar and specific to Soweto and clearly confirmed the genesis of a culture unique to Soweto.

Economic differences were, to a certain extent, artificially leveled by certain laws enacted between 1962 and 1974: Traders were forbidden to own or build shops, commercial and industrial development and the establishment of companies and partnerships were restricted, and obstacles were created for professionals such as doctors and lawyers looking to find or set up consulting rooms and offices. By January 1977 trading licenses had been granted for 165 wood and coal dealers; 9

petrol stations or garages; 119 restaurants, cafes, and eating houses; 226 greengrocers; 394 general dealers; 35 plumbers; 46 dry cleaners; and 299 general trading stores. There were still no pharmacies, bakers, supermarkets in Soweto, and no attorneys practiced there. Nineteen doctors served the entire community, although many sought medical services at the various clinics and the large Baragwanath Hospital.⁶⁶



Shops Near Madibane High School

In 1977 the average income for a household in Soweto consisting of a family, boarders, and resident relations living together in one house and sharing the same cooking facilities (average household size, 5.93 persons) was R2,920 a year, compared to R9,088 for a white family (average family size, 3.07 persons). Behind these numbers, which tended to obscure the extremes of poverty and wealth at either end of the economic spectrum, lay the stark reality of poverty and hunger.



Playground by Elka Stadium, Rockville.

The average number of wage earners for a Soweto household was 1.98 (compared to 1.31 for whites), reflecting as much the larger household size as the economic necessity to have more than one wage earner—i.e., a high proportion of mothers worked—per household.⁶⁷ Regardless, the vast majority of these workers—96 percent of the economically active population—had to leave the township

every morning to go to their jobs in the commercial and industrial parts of the white city. This reflected that the physical separation of Soweto from the metropolitan area was absolute, though its administrative and financial separation was artificial. The images of the overcrowded commuter trains moving heavily through Soweto's stations—New Canada, Mzimhlope, Phomolong, Phefeni, Dube, Ikwezi, Inhlazane, Merafi, Naledi, Mlamlankunzi, Orlando, Nancefield, Kliptown, Tshiawelo—from 4 a.m. to midnight, "regurgitating their infinite human cargo"⁶⁸ in the evening, come readily to mind as do the pre-dawn commuters and "staffriders," young men who of necessity or bravado flirt with death by clinging to the outside of the rushing overcrowded trains. What comes to mind less readily is the township that was left behind. At an early age children were left alone to look after each other and make their way to school. Those who had no schools to go to had little adult supervision and no places to go for work or play.

Notes:

Note 1: The mine dumps that have surrounded Johannesburg since the early mining days of the 1880s have largely disappeared because of the residual gold

they contained. In 1975 a South African research team brought back from the United States a new recovery method for gold, a method used by the Homestead Mine in South Dakota. The process was developed further in South Africa and applied to the recovery of gold in the South African mining industry, where it was used for the recovery of gold from old mine dumps and slime dams. The rising gold price of the early 1980s made the recovery of the small amounts of gold still contained in the dumps (typically 0.6 to 0.9 grams/ton) economically viable and created a valuable source of income. In addition, after the extraction of residual gold, the new residues could be pumped onto new slime dams far removed from the city, thereby releasing valuable land situated close to it. In CIP (carbon-in-pulp) gold recovery, granulated carbon was used to absorb dissolved gold from a cyanide solution. The process involves the use of huge water guns to loosen the sand from the dump. The resultant mixture of sand and water was pumped to a plant, where cyanide and carbon were added. The carbon loaded with gold was separated and the gold eluted and recovered. Because of the slump in the gold price, the removal of mine dumps has now slowed down. My thanks to Tina Pohlandt-Watson, Council of Mineral Technology, for her explanation of this process and its history.

Note 2: Mtutuzeli Matshoba, "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana," in *Call Me Not a Man and Other Stories* (London: Longman, 1979), 100.

Note 3: A photograph of this sign, taken by photographer Peter Magubane, was published in the book *Soweto*, photographed by Peter Magubane, text by Marshall Lee, edited by Dawn Lindberg (Cape Town: Don Nelson, 1978). Such signs were removed after 1976.

Note 4: Afrikaans and English (both languages introduced by and, in the case of Afrikaans, emerging from the white colonizers of South Africa) are the two official languages of government and administration, although either one of them, sometimes both, are commonly spoken in white communities and in the Coloured community of the Cape. One or both are also spoken as a second language by black South Africans. The various African languages—Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, etc.—spoken by the majority of black South Africans, and now recognized by the new South African constitution, were not recognized as official languages in the 1970s, but were instead considered as ethnic characteristics.

Note 5: "W.R.A.—Privaat Pad—Ingang Na—Soweto—Persone wat Nie-Bantoes is wat hierdie gebied binne gaan moet in besit wees van 'n permit waarvoor aansoek gedoen mag word by kamer 230, 80 Albertstraat, Johannesburg, M. P. Wilsnach, Direkteur Behuising." Text in photograph, Magubane and Lee, *Soweto*, 10-11.

Note 6: Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1977), 26.

Note 7: Parcels of land measuring 40 x 70 ft. (12 x 12 meters) were laid out and provided with essential services such as sewage, roads, refuse removal, and water pipes (at intervals of 457 meters). These lots were rented to those squatters and subtenants who could legally prove their right to residence in Johannesburg. See Pauline Morris, *Soweto: A Review of Existing Conditions and Some Guidelines for Change* (Johannesburg: Urban Foundation, 1980), 13.

Note 8: *Ibid.*, 14.

Note 9: Magubane and Lee, *Soweto*, 19.

Note 10: Quoted in Magubane and Lee, *Soweto*, 19.

Note 11: "Uncle Charlie's" was a landmark familiar to most who lived in Soweto and Johannesburg, including myself. See also Magubane and Lee, *Soweto*, 19: "... somewhere the other side of Uncle Charlie's Roadhouse."

Note 12: Sikakane, *Window*, 8.

Note 13: Another word for *slaughtering-place* is the Afrikaans word *slagplek*, which would seem the more likely word to use here. Matshoba, I think, is saying that people use the word *slagpan* deliberately with some reference to the Afrikaans colloquial phrase, *in die pan hak*, which means cut to pieces, butcher to the last man, according to *Groot Woordeboek*, ed. L. C. Eksteen (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1986).

Note 14: Matshoba, "A Pilgrimage," 95.

Note 15: Stallard Commission, quoted in Morris, *Soweto*, 8.

Note 16: Ellen Hellmann, *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).

Note 17: See Magubane and Lee, *Soweto*, 18, and Morris, *Soweto*, 10.

Note 18: Magubane and Lee, *Soweto*, 18.

Note 19: Morris, *Soweto*, 11.

Note 20: Sikakane, *Window*, 46. The today refers to the time of writing: 1977.

Note 21: Sophiatown was the center of a cluster of interlocking townships, collectively known as the "Western Areas," consisting of Sophiatown, Western Native Township, Martindale, Newclare, and Pageview.

Note 22: Joyce Sikakane wrote of a Black community "composed of Africans, Indians, Chinese, Coloureds, Japanese, Malaysians and Pakistanis." See *Window*, 13-14.

Note 23: Sikakane, *Window*, 21.

Note 24: Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 5.

Note 25: Modisane, *Blame Me on History*, 10.

Note 26: William "Bloke" Modisane died in exile in Germany in 1986. He was a playwright, actor and activist, and as a journalist, helped create *Drum Magazine*. *Blame Me on History* was published in South Africa in 1963 and banned until 1986.

Note 27: Trevor Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1977), 94-95.

Note 28: Trevor Huddleston, in his description of the razing of Sophiatown, commented that a "car, containing the Commissioner of Police and a mobile wireless unit ... was in hourly contact with the Minister in Cape Town." In *Naught for Your Comfort*, 135.

Note 29: Formerly the Department of Native Affairs, and later renamed the Department of Co-operation and Development.

Note 30: It was only in September 1976, after Black protests had begun to shake the country, that the Department withdrew the homeland citizenship requirement and extended the right of occupation from 30 years to an "indefinite" period. In 1979, a 99-year leasehold replaced this leasehold proposal.

Note 31: F. B. du Randt, personal memorandum, "*Faktore of Gebeure wat Moontlik Verband hou met die Onluste*" (factors or chain of events that may be relevant to the riots), Johannesburg, 18 August 1976, State Archives, Central Archives Depot, (hereafter SAB), Archives of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots in Soweto and Elsewhere, 1976-1978 (hereafter K345), vol. 3, file 2/2/1/2.

Note 32: Memorandum by the regional labor commissioner in Bloemfontein, Bantu Administration and Development of the Orange Free State, undated, SAB K345, vol. 3, file 2/2/1/2.

Note 33: South African Institute of Race Relations (hereafter SAIRR), *Survey* 1976, 191.

Note 34: Morris, *Soweto*, 36.

Note 35: SAIRR, *Survey* 1976, 189. For the following numbers for residents in Soweto—210,116 men, 188,302 women, 247,815 children under age eighteen, 646,233 total—see House of Assembly, Questions and Replies, Hansard vol. 70 (21 January-24 June 1977), 1005. See also Morris, *Soweto*, 147, where she cites 38,095 hostel dwellers, a figure based on the WRAB Statistical Report of 1977-78.

Note 36: SAIRR, *Survey* 1976, 189. These numbers are misleadingly low. Gorodnov, citing the *Financial Mail* (Johannesburg), 11 November 1977, and the *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg), 12 August 1977, gives the following figures: 17,225 in 1975, 22,000 in 1977, and 25,000 in 1978. See Valentin Gorodnov, *Soweto: Life and Struggles of a South African Township* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), tr. from the Russian by David Skvirsky, 66.

Note 37: Joyce Sikakane also commented on the "common practice" of bribing those in authority for housing permits, see *Window*, 46.

Note 38: "My Friend, the Outcast," in Matshoba, *Call Me Not A Man*, 14-15.

Note 39: The term matchbox with respect to houses appears everywhere in the literature, alluding both to their size and their uniformity. See also Gorodnov, *Soweto*, 66; Matshoba, *Call Me Not A Man*, vii; "Talk of mushrooms? The matchbox houses seemed to have been simply planted amidst rock and debris," in Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, "The Day of the Riots," in *Hungry Flames and Other Black South African Short Stories*, ed. Mbulelo Mzamane (London: Longman, 1986), 147.

Note 40: Morris, *Soweto*, 142-55. There also exist several other types of housing. Brick houses with a small covered porch, three large rooms, and a kitchen were built in Orlando East and West during the 1930s. Precast-concrete-block houses, called "elephants," were built immediately after the First World War, mainly in Central West Jabavu. They are small, impossible to make alterations to, and badly insulated against heat, cold, and rain. There are also about 2,000 owner-built houses, mostly in the wealthier suburbs of Dube, Moroka, and Beverley Hills.

Note 41: House of Assembly, *Questions and Replies*, Hansard vol. 70 (21 January-24 June 1977), 454-55.

Note 42: Percy Yutar, advocate, comment, SAB K345, vol. 12.

Note 43: *Sangoma*: African practitioner of magic, medicine, and witchcraft; herbalist.

Note 44: Vusamazulu Credo Pumelelo Mutwa, testimony, 23 September 1976, SAB K345, vol. 139, file 2/3, part 1, Commission Testimony vol. 12. By profession a Sangoma and writer (author of *Indaba My Children*, published in October 1964, and *Africa Is My Witness* in 1966), Credo Mutwa was one of the few African residents who volunteered to give evidence before the Cillie Commission of

Inquiry. He was deeply criticized for betraying the schoolchildren of Soweto and the cause of the uprising, as a "sellout" and collaborator, and his house was set on fire under mysterious circumstances.

Note 45: Vusamazulu Credo Pumelelo Mutwa, testimony, 23 September 1976, SAB K345, vol. 139, file 2/3, part 1, Commission Testimony vol. 12.

Note 46: Morris, *Soweto*, 145.

Note 47: Morris, *Soweto*, 147, quoting a survey by Meyer (1976).

Note 48: Ibid.

Note 49: Ibid.

Note 50: Gorodnov, *Soweto*, 63.

Note 51: James Morris, *South African Winter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 34.

Note 52: Jordan K. Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1963), 124.

Note 53: House of Assembly, *Questions and Replies*, Hansard vol. 70 (21 January-24 June 1977), 925-26.

Note 54: Matshoba, *Call Me Not a Man*, viii. Sikakane used almost the same words: "It is very rare for any worker to board a bus, a taxi or a train without having stumbled across a corpse lying in a street" (*Windows*, 6). See also Casey Motsisi, "Mita," in *Hungry Flames*, 54-59.

Note 55: SAIRR, *Survey* 1976.

Note 56: House of Assembly, *Questions and Replies*, Hansard vol. 70 (21 January-24 June 1977), 570.

Note 57: Ibid., 400.

Note 58: F. B. du Randt, personal memorandum, Johannesburg, 18 August 1976, SAB K345, file 3:2/2/1/2-1.

Note 59: Sikakane, *Window*, 25.

Note 60: House of Assembly, *Questions and Replies*, Hansard vol. 70 (21 January-24 June 1977), 372.

Note 61: "My Friend the Outcast," in Matshoba, *Call Me Not a Man*, 1-4; Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy Running*; Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto*, 25; Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History*, 24.

Note 62: Modisane, *Blame Me on History*, 24-25.

Note 63: Helen Lekganyane, interview by Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, tape recording Johannesburg, November 1994.

Note 64: Patience Tshetlo, interview by Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, tape recording, Johannesburg, June 1995.

Note 65: Ibid.

Note 66: Morris, *Soweto*.

Note 67: Ibid.

Note 68: Matshoba, "Call Me Not a Man," 19.