

## The "Vuka Africa" Store

### African shopkeepers and urban cultural practices in South Africa under segregation and apartheid, 1880s-1960s

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## Abstract

Rapid urban growth on the Witwatersrand in South Africa from the late nineteenth century onwards opened up opportunities for a growing class of African hawkers and pedlars, and for "Native" shopkeepers who sought to establish themselves as fixed traders in the urban Native Locations. This article argues that this incipient African business class made a critical contribution to the emergence of a vibrant urban black culture as they fought to establish viable businesses and subvert racist efforts at black exclusion or marginalisation in towns and cities under segregation and apartheid. In the process, they were prominent participants in the development of new and distinctive urban black cultural practices in South Africa, especially with respect to consumption.

**Keywords:** urban black culture; food; trade; shopkeepers; segregation; apartheid; consumption



Johannesburg and other towns along the Witwatersrand expanded rapidly after 1886 due to the development of gold mining and related industries. This gave rise to a multi-racial urban population divided between a settled and growing core of permanent urban dwellers and tens of thousands of transient migrant workers. Among those pursuing the new opportunities thus created were an eclectic mix of African hawkers and pedlars, as well as "Native" or African shopkeepers who established themselves as "fixed traders" in urban "Native Locations" during the first half of the twentieth century. These areas were formally called "*Native locations*" or "*Locations*" until the 1950s, then "*black townships*".<sup>1</sup>

The major piece of segregationist legislation for the management of African in towns in South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century was the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, and its numerous amendments.<sup>2</sup> The Act empowered municipal authorities to clear Africans from residential areas designated "white" through a process of "slum clearance", to establish "Native Locations" to house the permanent African population which was thus displaced, and to provide a framework for their administration. The conditions under which Africans could own businesses and conduct trade in urban locations were set out in Section 22 of the 1923 Act.

Through their struggles to establish viable black businesses in the city, African traders became a formative part of the new emerging, albeit embattled, urban black culture in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. In the first place, the sites of their stores became physical reference points and meeting places for members of the urban communities that they served. Secondly, they served as examples of, and role models for, successful engagement with the forces of modernity in the city. Thirdly, their businesses depended on a close symbiotic relationship with the community, while their mode of operation and the goods that they sold both reflected and shaped the changing consumption patterns associated with urban living.

African traders have received relatively little attention in the historiography of urban South Africa, since much of this literature is focused on the struggles of the black working class in the city, and on associated crises of consumption (in housing, transport, water supply and sanitation, health and recreation). Where African traders do appear in early studies of urban African communities, such as those conducted by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), they are seldom the main focus.<sup>3</sup> Leo Kuper's seminal sociological work, *An African Bourgeoisie*, published in 1965, was one of the earliest works to provide an extended analysis of African traders in South Africa. However, this work considered traders in terms of their class position, rather than their role in cultural production.<sup>4</sup> Also, as Deborah Posel points out, "South Africa's history of consumption remains largely unwritten... this leaves significant gaps in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on the African segment of the urban black (African, Indian, "Coloured") population in South Africa, since this category had a distinctive history in urban areas under segregation and apartheid. "Fixed traders" were traders who operated from rented premises provided for the purpose by the municipal authorities in the urban Native Locations. These Locations were later referred to generically under apartheid as "black townships". Throughout the article, the term *location* refers to this meaning.

<sup>2</sup> The Act was amended in 1930, 1937, 1944, consolidated in 1945, and further amended in 1945, 1946, 1947, 1952, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1963 and 1964: Davenport Rodney (1969), "African Townsmen? South African Natives (Urban Areas) Legislation through the Years", *African Affairs*, 68(271), pp. 95-109.

<sup>3</sup> The otherwise comprehensive volume by Hellmann Ellen (ed.) (1949), *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa*, Johannesburg, SAIRR, contains virtually no reference to African traders in urban areas.

<sup>4</sup> Kuper Leo (1965), *An African Bourgeoisie. Race, Class and Politics in South Africa*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

history of race, racial regulation and its articulation with the 'capacity to aspire'.<sup>5</sup> Part of the reason for this, as Timothy Burke explains, is that "the production and reproduction of commodity culture (is) a process that covers its own tracks": "It is difficult to investigate how and when a commodity became 'needed' when everyone in a society seems to agree that it has always been needed."<sup>6</sup> This article seeks to address these two considerable gaps in the historiography on urban black culture in South Africa.

## The "Vuka Africa" Store

On the evening of 9 June 1955, the owner of the "Vuka Africa" ("Arise Africa") Store in Eastern Native Township, John Carlie Phillip Mavimbela, died in an accident while driving his Chevrolet sedan motor car on the road from Johannesburg to Vanderbijlpark<sup>7</sup>. He was returning home to the freehold African township of Evaton after closing his store for the night. Born in Johannesburg on 1 May 1905, the son of a washerwoman and a labourer, Mavimbela was one of the first generation of Africans to be born and bred in the city. Details about his early life are sketchy, but from the late 1920s until 1940 he worked as a teacher at the Eastern Native Township School. During these years, he earned a Bachelor degree by correspondence and supplemented his income at night by playing alto saxophone with the Merry Blackbirds, the premier black dance band in Johannesburg of the day. He travelled to England with the band around 1930 to record for the Singer label.<sup>8</sup> Among many memorable performances, the Merry Blackbirds played at the wedding reception of Walter and Albertina Sisulu at the Bantu Men's Social Centre (BMSC) in 1944: Nelson Mandela was the "best man".<sup>9</sup>

During the Second World War, Mavimbela left teaching to work as an organizer among black recruits for the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Toc-H in the army camps on the Witwatersrand. He was issued with a certificate exempting him from curfew restrictions to facilitate his work.<sup>10</sup> After the war ended, Mavimbela acquired a trading and general dealer's licence and became the tenant of shop No.5 at James Street, Eastern Native Township, at a rental of £9.10 a month. He quickly built his store into a successful enterprise and in 1947 also acquired an Eating House licence - spending £80 to convert part of the building into a

<sup>5</sup> Posel Deborah (2010), "Races to consume: revisiting South Africa's history of race, consumption and the struggle for freedom", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33(2), pp. 157-175.

<sup>6</sup> Burke Timothy (1996), *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women. Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, pp. 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Mavimbela died of a fractured skull. The other driver, Leon Booyens, was said to have been driving at high speed on the wrong side of the road when the collision occurred. He denied causing the accident, but his insurance company paid £600 to Mavimbela's widow, Julia, in settlement of the case, rather than go to court. National Archives of South Africa (NASA), TAB WLD Illiquid 1957 2124/57, "Julia Tompi Mavimbela vs Aetna Insurance Company Limited". Mavimbela's eldest son died in an accident on the same road in 1964.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Historical Papers (UW), A1618, T.D.M. Skota Papers, File 12; "Notes on conversation between Mr Wilson Silgee and Alan Cobley, Soweto, 1.11.83", "[Biography of] J.C.P. Mavimbela" by T.D. Mweli Skota: copy in the University of the Witwatersrand. Recordings of The Merry Blackbirds are attached to Ballantine Chris (1993), *Marabi Nights. Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg.

<sup>9</sup> Odendaal Andre (2003), *The Story of an African Game. Black Cricketers and the Unmasking of One of South Africa's Greatest Myths, 1850 – 2003*, Cape Town, David Philip, p. 94. Other prominent African leaders present included the ANC President-General, Dr A.B. Xuma, Oliver Tambo and Anton Lembede.

<sup>10</sup> "[Biography of] J.C.P. Mavimbela". The main organiser for the "Non-European" YMCA in this period was J.R. Rathebe, who had been seconded from his post as Secretary of the BMSC for the duration of the war: Cobley Alan (1997), *The Rules of the Game, Struggle in Black Recreation and Social Welfare Policy in South Africa*, Westport, Greenwood, pp. 147 and 160 note 86; NASA, SAB URU 1890 32208 File 2167/2243, "Letters of Exemption" for JCP Mavimbela issued 26.1.40.

restaurant.<sup>11</sup> He had married a young teacher named Julia Tompi Ngubeni in 1946, and the couple soon started a family. Around 1950, they moved from the cramped and impoverished conditions of Eastern Native Township to a house built on a lot he owned at 1381, Mikado Road, in the freehold township of Evaton (on the same road where the African Methodist Episcopal Church training school, called Wilberforce Institute, was located). The house was spacious and well appointed. It was built of brick and had a floor area of 1,485 square feet, plus a veranda. It had six living rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and pantry, and had electricity throughout. There was also a garage and a storeroom on the property. At the time of his death, it was valued at £2,425.

Mavimbela was active in local community politics, serving as a member of the Advisory Board in Eastern Native Township on numerous occasions from 1935.<sup>12</sup> He also represented Eastern Native Township at the Locations Advisory Boards Congress established by R.H. Godlo (a trader from East London) from 1935 to 1937. He chaired the organising committee for the Annual Children's Picnic in Eastern Native Township and hosted the event every year from 1940 until his death in 1955.<sup>13</sup> At the time of his death, he was working with two other leading businessmen, Paul Mosaka and S.J.J. Lesolang, to establish a new organisation for African businessmen in Johannesburg, called the African Chamber of Commerce.<sup>14</sup> It was the forerunner of the first major national organisation for African businessmen in South Africa founded in 1964, called the National African Federated Chambers of Commerce (NAFCOC).<sup>15</sup>

The "Vuka Africa Store" was in a healthy financial state at the time of Mavimbela's death. Detailed accounts on the business, which were kept for him by his wife, Julia, indicated that in the four years prior to his death it had generated an annual gross profit of around £2,000 per year, with net profits of between £500 and £600 per year. In 1952, the recorded costs included: rent £138, wages £1140, transport £180, sundry expenses £24.

An inventory of the contents of the store provides a revealing snapshot of the stock-in-trade of a successful shopkeeper in the townships in these years:

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<sup>11</sup> "Report of the Native Affairs Committee 25.3.47" in "Minutes of the Meetings of the Johannesburg City Council, January – June 1947".

<sup>12</sup> Advisory Boards had been established under the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 as a consultative mechanism between the Location residents and the municipal authorities.

<sup>13</sup> UW, AD843/R, J.D. Rheinallt Jones – South African Institute of Race Relations Papers, file: "Organisations": "J.C.P. Mavimbela to Secretary, SAIRR, 11.11.40".

<sup>14</sup> Mavimbela was one of the convenors of the initial meeting held in the Community Hall at Eastern Native Township on 7 May 1955: "African Traders Meeting at E.N.T.", *Bantu World*, 7 May 1955. The Association was formally launched shortly after his death.

<sup>15</sup> Lesolang was a former teacher who operated the largest general dealership in Orlando; Mosaka had completed a bachelor's degree, and, among other business interests, established the first funeral parlour in the townships at Pimville.

**Table 1: Inventory of the “Vuka Africa” shop<sup>16</sup>**

Quantity	Item	Value
2 c/s [cartons]	S[un]L[ight] soap	£3.1.10
6 doz	Lux Flakes	£3.2.1
3 doz	Vim	£1.11.0
1 doz	Milo	£1.7.6
4 doz	Corned Beef	£3.15.0
4 ½ doz	Baked beans	£1.13.9
21	candles	£1.2.9
44	cups and saucers	£3.13.4
10 doz	Floor Polish	£10.8.4
4 bags	mealie meal	£1.14.0
17 pkts	Players*	£0.19.8
10 pkts	Filter Tip Commando <sup>17</sup>	£2.2.8
	<b>Total stock valued at</b>	<b>£245.16.2</b>

The tinned food items and cleaning products included in the stock are indicative of the changing eating habits and consumption patterns of Africans in the city, while the packets of cigarettes reflected the near ubiquitous smoking habit developed by African men in towns by this date.<sup>18</sup> The inventory also listed the shop’s fixtures and fittings -including a butcher’s saw, showcases, three tables, fifteen chairs and a refrigerator - valued at £240.15. No doubt the furniture was used in the eating house adjoining the main shop, while the butcher’s saw and refrigerator allowed him to supply fresh meat to his customers. As Ellen Hellmann explained in an article on ‘Urban Native Food’ in 1936, meat was a much more frequent item in urban than in rural diets:

The Native has always shown a marked predilection for meat, and many women carefully explained to me that one of the advantages of urban residence is the facilities which it offers for the daily purchase of small quantities of meat.<sup>19</sup>

In his will, Mavimbela left the store and the bulk of his estate, valued at £4,700.8.2, to his wife, Julia. It included two properties in Evaton and one in Claremont, Durban, and an account holding £600 in cash at Barclays Bank in Jeppestown. This was a remarkable accumulation of

<sup>16</sup> NASA, TAB MHG 4256/55, “Estate of the late John Carlie Phillip Mavimbela. Surviving Spouse Julia Nompj”.

<sup>17</sup> Brands of cigarettes.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the establishment and widespread adoption of soaps such as Sunlight and Lux as a basic commodity among Africans in Southern Africa see Burke T., *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-99 and 153-155. Though historical data on cigarette smoking is limited, a survey found that by 1975-76, 70 % of African men in South Africa were cigarette smokers.

<sup>19</sup> Hellmann Ellen (1936), “Urban Native Food in Johannesburg”, *Africa*, 9(2), pp. 277-290.

wealth when considered against the context of unremitting poverty in the black townships. However, the peculiar difficulty of running a business in the townships is revealed in a comment by the bookkeeper who assessed the value of Mavimbela's estate:

[I]n my opinion the value of the goodwill of the business of the late JCP Mavimbela carried on under the style of Vuka Africa Store at 5 James Avenue, Eastern Native Township, is nil. I am of this opinion as I find that there is no security of tenure whatsoever as the premises are situated in the Eastern Native Township and are held under a monthly tenancy... Furthermore, in the event of the business being sold as a going concern the tenant is unable to pass any rights of tenancy on to the purchaser who would have to apply in competition with other possible applicants to the City Council of Johannesburg for permission to carry on the business and for a monthly tenancy of the shop.<sup>20</sup>

This pessimistic valuation did not take into account the determination and resourcefulness of Mavimbela's widow, Julia, or the loyalty of their customers. She persuaded the municipal authorities to allow her to take over the store and her husband's licence to trade, and quickly emerged as a successful businesswoman in her own right, despite having their five young children to care for. In January 1956, the *World* reported that she had replaced the annual picnic hosted by her husband with a New Year's Day party for the "township kiddies" at the store, complete with presents from the Christmas tree and refreshments served in the butcher's shop next door. The article commented:

Mrs Mavimbela is running three businesses which her husband left. They are a restaurant, a grocery and a butcher's shop. She is the bookkeeper, does the orders and supervises workers ...Very few of us would be able to carry such responsibility as Mrs Mavimbela does. She is indeed a good example to us all.<sup>21</sup>

A profile of Mrs Mavimbela published six months later reported that her philosophy was "take things as they come and make the best of them".<sup>22</sup> After an early career teaching at farm schools, she had graduated from Kilnerton Institution in 1937 and taught at Springs Methodist School, before receiving a bursary to complete a certificate in Higher Primary and Kindergarten education. She then started a kindergarten class at the Methodist school at Albert Street in Johannesburg. She was appointed to the post of principal of the Boksburg Junior Primary school in 1946, the same year she married John Mavimbela. However, "[w]hen she saw her husband giving in to business worries she gave up her post to give him her moral support". She told the newspaper: "I am so grateful I ever did, because at this time I became more business consciousness."<sup>23</sup>

African shopkeepers lived in constant fear of pilfering from underpaid assistants, often preferring to shut up shop whenever they were away from the premises, so that shop opening

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<sup>20</sup> Certificate signed by Krishna Govinda Samy Moodley (bookkeeper), dated 2.7.56, enclosed in "Estate of the late John Carlie Phillip Mavimbela. Surviving Spouse Julia NOMPI".

<sup>21</sup> "Women's World: Brave Wife Carries on Husband's Good Work", *The World*, 11.1.56.

<sup>22</sup> "Africans Can Do It. Mrs Mavimbela Continues the Work of Her Husband", *The World*, 6.6.56.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

hours could be erratic and unpredictable. B.J. Mabuza told *The World* that “a businessman could trust no-one”:

Tickey for me and sixpence for you, sixpence for me and shilling for you, is the policy of most African shop assistants. And there seems to be no way you can check this. In this matter a businessman cannot even trust his own wife.<sup>24</sup>

Evidently, Mabuza had not been as fortunate as John Mavimbela in his choice of spouse: Julia’s decision to work fulltime in the store had clearly contributed to its success.

With their business prospering, the Mavimbelas were able to generate sufficient profits to make donations towards several causes in the township, including church organizations and children’s clubs. They were also patrons of the “George Goch Eastern Brothers Football Club” and Ramokgopa’s “Lo-Six” singing troupe.<sup>25</sup> These investments in the social and cultural life of the township were not mere acts of philanthropy: they helped to build community spirit and paid dividends in the form of repeat custom for the store.<sup>26</sup>

The story of the “Vuka Africa” Store illustrates the efforts of African shopkeepers to create and sustain successful businesses as an integral part of urban black communities in South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century. It also suggests the role such businesses played in shaping emergent urban black cultural life and cultural production under segregation and apartheid. This article now considers the role of African shopkeepers in South Africa and in black urban cultural production in a wider historical context.

## The origins of African business in urban areas

In the space of just forty years the urban African population in South Africa quadrupled, from just over half a million in 1911 to 2.24 million by 1951. The number of Africans in urban areas exceeded the number of whites in urban areas for the first time in 1946.<sup>27</sup> As the urban African population grew, African businesses proliferated to cater to the passing foot traffic of Africans working in town, as well as to the constant flow of African migrant workers. Many were itinerant hawkers and pedlars who operated on a very small scale, selling fresh produce, trinkets, matches, tobacco and sundry other goods from hand carts, or self-employed “Native artisans” offering services such as barbering and shoe repair on street corners. Until the 1930s, some artisans such as carpenters, tailors and cobblers also lived and worked from rooms in the slum yards. According to Rogerson, “café-de-move-ons” or “coffee carts” had begun to appear on the streets of Johannesburg by the late 1920s, initially selling tea or coffee and penny buns. By 1933, 155 pedlars were reported to be selling food on the streets in Johannesburg: the number peaked in 1955 at about 1,000. In 1964, the *Rand Daily Mail* remarked on the “thousands of

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<sup>24</sup> “Never, Never Trust a Soul! – Businessman”, *The World*, 2.5.56: B.J. Mabuza, began business as a “grocer and fruiterer” on Market Street in Johannesburg in 1924. In 1927 he became the first African to get a restaurant licence in Sophiatown but sold his business to a white man in 1951 “when talk of sending African businessmen to the locations became too common”.

<sup>25</sup> Eastern Native Township was also known as “George Goch” to residents, which was the name of a former mayor of Johannesburg and of the nearby railway station.

<sup>26</sup> “Africans Can Do It. Mrs Mavimbela Continues the Work of Her Husband”, *The World*, 6.6.56.

<sup>27</sup> South Africa, Bureau of Census and Statistics (1960), *Union Statistics for Fifty Years*, Pretoria, Bureau of Census and Statistics.



Africans lunching on the pavements and in the gutters" of the city each day.<sup>28</sup> By the mid-1950s, the menu offered by a typical Johannesburg coffee-cart included the following:

**Table 2: Commodities in a "coffee cart"<sup>29</sup>**

Tea or Coffee	3d. per mug
Bread, dry	1d. per slice
Bread, buttered	3d. per slice
Vetkoek	1d. each
Maheu [Marewu]	3d. per 1lb jam tin
Sour milk	9d. (and 1s. per bowl)
Meat Stew	1s. per plate
Mealie meal porridge	1 shilling per plate

A few more substantial African-owned businesses had also begun to appear in the city. Among them were "Kaffir" or "Native Eating Houses", which dated back to the earliest diggings on the Rand in the 1880s and quickly became a common feature of urban life for Africans. By 1904, there were 52 "Native Eating Houses" in Johannesburg. This number rose to 174 by 1936, of which 144 were owned by whites, 17 by "Asians" (mostly Chinese) and 17 by Africans.<sup>30</sup> Peter Abrahams recalled eating at a "Native Eating House" called "The Burning Meat" in Vrededorp in the 1930s:

The market boys went there whenever they had the price of a meal. For three pennies one got a piece of meat swilling in a thin oily soup, and a large hunk of bread. The place itself belonged to the flies. Almost we, the humans, were there on sufferance. Flies walked over the resin covered floor, copulated on the long benches and tables where the humans sat, blackened the ceiling, and made the window opaque.<sup>31</sup>

According to Ellen Hellmann, by the 1930s there were three types of "Native Eating Houses" in Johannesburg. The most basic were those attached to mine concession stores for the use of "mine natives", but in the city itself two types of eating houses were patronised by non-mine Africans: "a rude and crude type" as described by Peter Abrahams, and "a more refined type where the table appointments are better and the prices higher".<sup>32</sup> Among the more refined type was the restaurant operated between the 1920s and 1950s by E.P. Moretsele at

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Rogerson C. M. (1986), "Feeding the Common People of Johannesburg, 1930-1962", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12(1), pp. 56-73.

<sup>29</sup> Information compiled by the Johannesburg Public Health Department, cited by *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57, cites the *Government Gazette* of 4 March 1904 as follows: "The term 'Kaffir-eating house' shall mean any premises or place where any article of food or drink is sold or offered for sale to Natives and accommodation is provided for the consumption of such food or drink"; Hellmann E., "Urban Native Food in Johannesburg...", art. cited, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Abrahams Peter (1954), *Tell Freedom*, London, Faber and Faber, pp. 185-186.

<sup>32</sup> Hellmann E., "Urban Native Food in Johannesburg...", art. cited, p. 286.



Market Square. This offered what might be termed a form of conspicuous consumption for a more “middle class” black clientele and was a popular meeting place for members of the African National Congress in the city.<sup>33</sup> On the issue of “conspicuous consumption”, Deborah Posel notes, “people’s modes of consumption are integral to their senses of self and sociality – and therefore a critical site for the exercise of power”.<sup>34</sup>

## White, Indian and Chinese Traders and the “Native Trade”

In the early twentieth century most of the shops that catered for the “Native trade” in cities such as Johannesburg were owned by Jewish, Indian or Lebanese businessmen.<sup>35</sup> These immigrant groups had established themselves on the margins between “white” South Africa and the majority African population on the Witwatersrand in the years before the First World War. They were not wholly accepted or integrated into either community, and graduated naturally towards the intermediary social and economic spaces offered by the “Native Trade”. They sold a wide range of items such as blankets, clothing, boots and pots and pans, as well fresh produce, mealie meal and tinned goods. Their shops could be found clustered around the gates of the mine compounds and of the early urban “Native Locations”, or along the roads leading from the central business district to the mixed-race slum areas.

A report reproduced in the first issue of *Ilanga lase Natal* (*The Sun of Natal*) in April 1903 gives this account of the “kafir store”<sup>36</sup> in the compound at the City and Suburban Mine in Johannesburg:

This trade is now rapidly developing, as, for the first time, the kafir is earning good wages, and spending them. The goods supplied to these stores are mostly of American and German make. They are such as Blue Print cottons – German prints are preferred, as the pattern goes right through, or the back of the cloth is dark. The trunks and boxes are now being made by America, and are preferred, the locks being much stronger, and generally two on a box instead of one only. Print shawls, – the German make them much softer than the English; the German is more expensive, but so little that the kafir will pay the difference. Scents, snuff boxes and fancy articles mostly from Germany – the kafir has money to spare on trifles now. Kafir suits of thick gingham material – an enormous trade is done in these and all from America.... Cotton blankets, the kafir likes these very thick, almost like felt; at present they are obtained from Germany.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Elias Moretsele was originally from the Northeastern Transvaal. He established his business after moving to Johannesburg as a young man. He joined Congress in 1917, served as provincial Treasurer in the 1940s, and succeeded Nelson Mandela as President of the Transvaal ANC in the 1950s: Karis Thomas and Carter Gwendolyn (1977), *from Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964*; 4, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> Posel D., “Races to Consume...”, art. cited, p. 162.

<sup>35</sup> Askenazi Jews migrated from Eastern Europe to South Africa in significant numbers from the 1880s until 1914, and again between 1920 and 1930. In this period, “Few villages in the Cape, the Orange Free State, and later in the Transvaal, were without their Jewish peddlers or storekeepers, who were usually joined in time by their families and kinsmen from overseas”, online. URL: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/south-africa> (last accessed 30.07.21). Syrian Lebanese immigrants arrived during the same period: “Upon arrival, most of worked in mining first, then moved to the fresh produce business, and also became hawkers of goods”. Hourani Guita (2015), “The Struggle of the Christian Lebanese for Land Ownership in South Africa”, online. URL: [http://maroniteinstitute.org/MARI/JMS/july00/The\\_Struggle.htm](http://maroniteinstitute.org/MARI/JMS/july00/The_Struggle.htm) (last accessed 30.10.20).

<sup>36</sup> The term “kafir” or “kaffir” was widely used by whites to refer to Africans in South Africa until the early twentieth century, but was gradually replaced with the term “Native”, which was considered less offensive.

<sup>37</sup> “Trade with the Kafirs”, article reproduced from the *Natal Mercury* in *Ilanga Lase Natal* (*The Sun of Natal*), 1(1), 10.4.03.

This description provides invaluable insight into the range of goods Africans were purchasing and the discernment they showed in selecting them. An un-named African writer in *Ilanga* – almost certainly John L. Dube (the newspaper's editor and future founding President of the ANC) commented:

We natives have often wondered why Europeans do not make more of Native trade. The Arabs [Lebanese] are mainly supported by Natives and they do all they can to induce them to buy. Usually, Natives are afraid to go into a white man's store because the clerks are not often kind to them. Self-respecting Native women usually receive insults which they cannot bear. The storeman calls them Mary, Jane or any other name associating them with bad women.<sup>38</sup>

He urged white shopkeepers to seize the opportunities to exploit the growing "Native Trade" by advertising their businesses in African newspapers such as *Ilanga*, and by "treating African customers with more respect".<sup>39</sup>

Though competition between traders of all races was fierce, competition between non-Africans and Africans was compounded by discrimination from the authorities. By 1931 on the Rand, the only Location with no trading facilities for Africans was at Randfontein. According to a member of the Advisory Board: "This is due to the Jewish traders who influence the Council to refuse such rights. The Natives have been fighting for these rights for the last 16 or 17 years, but in vain."<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Cronje Bynight Mbolokwe, a butcher from Marabastad (a location in Pretoria), told the Native Economic Commission (NEC):

Natives are not allowed to build up as much as they like, but Indians and Chinese are allowed to build big brick buildings. The Indian and Chinese give no chance to Native traders, because they are well organized. They sell very cheaply in order to keep the native down.<sup>41</sup>

Ezekiel Mphahlele recalled these Chinese and Indian stores in Marabastad:

The three Chinese shops along Barber Street were poor corrugated-iron structures, including those of the rich Fung Prak opposite us. These were purely grocery shops, and they were untidy. The five Indian shops were bigger buildings, of brick. They were tidy, and each shop had a grocery and drapery department. On the verandas of all the shops was a carpet of monkey-nut shells. Abdool's was one of these five. One large window displayed bananas, oranges, granadillas, kujavas – as we called guavas. The other window displayed dust-covered articles of crockery and paper masks and tiny toys.<sup>42</sup>

Africans who patronised Indian and Chinese businesses were often suspicious of them and resentful of their success - built, as it was, on the backs of the black community. Mphahlele recalled an episode in which a fight broke out between his Aunt Dora and the Indian

<sup>38</sup> Editorial comment on "Trade with the Kafirs".

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Evidence of Meshach Nolisa Padi, in *Minutes of Oral Evidence Before the Native Economic Commission. Renumbered Volume 11, "Johannesburg, Pretoria", 1931*, p. 9220.

<sup>41</sup> Evidence of Cronje Bynight Mbolokwe in *Minutes of Oral Evidence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8156. Mbolokwe was one of two representatives of the Pretoria branch of the ANC to appear before the Commission. He was accompanied by Simon Petros Matseke, a cobbler, who later served as ANC president in the Transvaal.

<sup>42</sup> Mphahlele Ezekiel (1959), *Down Second Avenue*, London, Faber and Faber, p. 53.

shopkeeper, Abdool, over his refusal to stamp her "Christmas book" (a rudimentary "loyalty card", for which, when full, the holder received a cup and saucer or other small gift) for purchases totalling ten shillings: "'No-no-no, a-a-a!'" Abdool cried, as if the idea was unthinkable. 'Ten bob too-much-too-much'. [Aunt Dora replied]: 'Stamp that book I say, coolie! You come from India to make money out of us, eh!'"<sup>43</sup>

Mphahlele's account of the tension between location residents and Indian shopkeepers is recalled in comical style, but the tensions were real, and never far from the surface. In Durban, riots in January 1949 were sparked by an assault on an African boy by an Indian shopkeeper and his assistant: 142 died and 1,087 were injured.<sup>44</sup> The Commission of Inquiry listed "exploitation of Natives by Indian shopkeepers", and "economic competition between Natives and Indians" among the root causes.<sup>45</sup> Tensions were highest in Durban, because there were many more Indian traders there than elsewhere in the country, but a sense of general grievance towards Indian shopkeepers is evident in remarks made by Robert Sobukwe at the inaugural meeting of the Pan-Africanist Congress in April, 1959. Although he considered Indian South Africans as a group, an oppressed minority, he asserted that "the Indian merchant class ... identifies itself by and large with the oppressor".<sup>46</sup> A generation later, Mark Mathabane witnessed attacks on Indian and Chinese shops by angry black youth in Alexandra during the Soweto Rising:

One morning I followed a mob that was going about the ghetto, burning and looting stores and butcher shops belonging to Indian and Chinese, whom everyone thought had become rich through cheating and overcharging black peasants. One such Chinese family, (the same I had worked for) owned several stores and butcher shops on Twelfth Avenue. The family had fled the first day the riots broke out... For an instant I became aware of the senselessness of what we were doing. But those misgivings gave way to euphoria as I saw black peasants making off with plundered goods. I joined in.<sup>47</sup>

### **"Sales Mount by Pennies": African Traders, Poverty and Consumption Patterns in Urban Black Communities**

Fixed trading by Africans had been permitted in Johannesburg under municipal byelaws following the establishment of the city's first urban native location at Klipspruit in 1904: subsequently, the city's Native Location Regulations were modelled on the provisions of the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 with respect to trading.<sup>48</sup> One of the first traders to establish a business at Klipspruit was Thomas Ntlebi from the Eastern Cape. He had completed Standard III (equivalent to five years of training at Elementary level) at local mission schools, before passing the Pupil Teachers' Examination at the Healdtown Native Training Institution. In 1896 he was employed as manager of a white-owned store serving a mainly African clientele in

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>44</sup> South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Riots in Durban*, Pretoria, Government Printer, UG36- 1949, p. 5: "Immediate Cause of the Riots".

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>46</sup> Online. URL: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/robert-sobukwe-inaugural-speech-april-1959> (last accessed 02.08.21).

<sup>47</sup> Mathabane Mark (1986), *Kaffir Boy. The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa*, New York, Free Press, pp. 264-265.

<sup>48</sup> Johannesburg, *Native Location Regulations [Framed under section twenty-three (3) of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923]*, 1925. Johannesburg: Locations Department: March 6 [copy in the University of the Witwatersrand Library], pp. 8-9 and 13.

Fordsburg, then set up his own store in Vrededorp. In 1905 he established a business at Klipspruit: he was still operating there twenty-five years later. In the meantime, he had acquired several properties in Kliptown and Evaton and was also a prominent member of the Anglican "Order of Ethiopia". According to Skota he was "one of the pioneers among Africans in commercial business in the Transvaal"<sup>49</sup>. Ntlebi's father-in-law was a Minister in the Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Church, while his brother-in-law, J Gqosho, served as "postmaster" and ran a grocery store at Klipspruit.<sup>50</sup> These family connections suggest that fixed trading among Africans was considered an "elite" occupation among Africans in locations such as Klipspruit.

The benefits of "elite" status were evident in the family of Phillip Merafe, another prominent trader of a slightly later generation at Pimville (the new name for Klipspruit after 1934). A graduate of Healdtown and Lovedale, Merafe operated a general dealership close to the Pimville train station. He also served for many years as chief "Sisunda" (chief Councillor) on the Pimville location Advisory Board. When his daughter, Ellen, moved to Orlando to take up a teaching post in 1947, she was assisted in establishing herself in the township by the network of local shopkeepers. She recalled:

Through this new network of contacts I was able to put myself on a par with my colleagues in my dress, and so gained self-confidence and dignity and became independent in my own right as a person.<sup>51</sup>

According to evidence cited by the NEC, by 1932 there were some 500 "Native shops" in locations on the Rand, "the highest numbers being at Klipspruit (Nancefield) 40, Germiston 28, and Benoni 22. At the Alexandra Township there are approximately 45".<sup>52</sup> However, a local administrator told the NEC that while most African traders were making a living, "I know of none who can be regarded as prosperous".<sup>53</sup> One problem was securing supplies from wholesalers, as Cronje Mbolokwe from Pretoria explained in an exchange with the Commissioners:

Native traders are not doing well. They are not protected against unduly high purchases. No system is arranged between wholesalers and native traders. A Native is not trusted and is told to pay cash in whatever he purchases...

*Dr Roberts: Who prevents you from having credit? Do you mean the merchants here will not give you credit?* – That is so sir.

*All I can say is that they must be funny people?* – Well sir, they do not trust the Native at all.<sup>54</sup>

Another problem for African traders was that they could not afford to buy goods in bulk, and so had to pay higher prices than white and Indian traders – often for goods of inferior quality. As Jeremiah Marupe, representing traders at Alexandra, explained:

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<sup>49</sup> Skota Trevor Dan Mveli (ed. and comp.) (c1930), *The African Yearly Register. Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa*, Johannesburg, R.L. Esson and Co. Ltd, p. 228.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>51</sup> Kuzwayo Ellen (1985), *Call Me Woman*, London, The Women's Press, p. 138.

<sup>52</sup> South Africa, *Report of the Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932*, Pretoria, Government Printer UG22-1932, 1932, para. 951.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 951.

<sup>54</sup> Evidence of Cronje Bynight Mbolokwe, in *Minutes of Oral Evidence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 2157.

The intrinsic value of these things is much less than we are compelled to pay in buying... If you go to a European or an Indian store and buy these articles there, you pay less for them than I can possibly sell them for.<sup>55</sup>

To illustrate his point, he brought several items to show to the Commissioners:

[A] trader has to buy goods that are inferior. I have a number of articles here which I should like to show the Commission. (Witness produces articles of groceries, etc). A loaf of bread, which is consumed by a person - that is, a loaf made from this flour, does not benefit the person as much as the loaf made from a better flour.<sup>56</sup>

Marupe explained that African traders in Alexandra bought the inferior bread from white bakers in Johannesburg at two shillings for a dozen 1lb loaves, but had no choice but to sell it at cost, at 2d per loaf, since better quality bread was being sold in town for the same price. By offering staple goods such as bread at cost, African traders in the locations hoped to attract members of the location community into their stores, rather than losing their custom to stores in town. One strategy used to make a profit was to split the goods they bought from wholesalers into smaller packages for resale. For example, sacks of tea, coffee or sugar could be divided into smaller packages for sale at sixpence each, while bread could be sold at a penny a slice. A penny could also buy a candle or a single cigarette, some buttons or a length of ribbon. This approach allowed them to generate sales and to make a profit on very narrow margins, and was a practical response to the general poverty of location residents, who could only afford to buy in very small quantities. But opportunities to build up the business and boost profits over time were limited: as the author of a survey of African traders observed almost thirty years later, "[m]uch of the household buying is done by children so there is little chance to exploit the customer's discernment or sell an alternative product when the article wanted is not available. Sales mount by pennies rather than by pounds".<sup>57</sup>

Some evidence of the income of African fixed traders relative to other occupations emerges from a survey conducted in 1940 of Income and Expenditure of 987 African families living in Johannesburg's four black townships (Pimville, Western Native Township, Eastern Native Township and Orlando).<sup>58</sup> The six shopkeepers identified in the survey had an average monthly income of £9.7s, compared to an average monthly wage for men of £4.2s, while the average monthly income for families (including money earned by women from washing and other activities), was £5.6.8. The survey found that monthly expenditure for a family often exceeded their monthly income, plunging them ever deeper into debt: arrears in rent ranged from 40 per cent of residents of Eastern Native Township to 83 per cent of residents in Orlando.

Despite higher-than-average income, African shopkeepers were often no more prosperous than their neighbours. Apart from paying wholesalers in cash at premium prices,

<sup>55</sup> Evidence of Jeremiah Klein Marupe in *Minutes of Oral Evidence*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8290-8291.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8291.

<sup>57</sup> UW, AD1974/5.1.1, Records of the SAIRR, Part III, memorandum RR/ 52/60, 2.3.60, "African Trading Rights. Correspondence", Reyburn Lawrence, "Training for African Traders".

<sup>58</sup> Janisch Miriam (1941), *A Survey of African Income and Expenditure in 987 Families in Johannesburg 1940*, (pamphlet) Johannesburg, Non-European and Native Affairs Department.

they had significant other overheads which cut into any profits they might have made. As the wife of one of the shopkeepers explained:

My husband pays £4 per month in rent for his shop, and £6 per annum for his licence. As we have five children, all at school, he could not pay until February, and then the licence cost him £6.10s. We have to spend every shilling when we see it. We cannot save. The rent for the shop and this house leaves us nothing. My husband paid the rent yesterday when Mrs H. (the employer) paid me. I do washing for two days a week because it means more money, but you know my health is bad and I cannot do more.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, the most striking theme to emerge from the survey in 1940 was the extreme poverty of most township residents: over 90 per cent of family income "was spent on the bare necessities for subsistence".<sup>60</sup>

**Table 3: Distribution of expenditure of a township household<sup>61</sup>**

Item	% of income spent
Food	49.2
Rent	18.4
Clothes	5.3
Fuel and light	13.1
Transport	6.0
School fees	0.6
Church fees	0.8
Other expenses <sup>62</sup>	6.2.

The survey found that the main food items purchased from local shops were mealie meal, meat, bread, rice, sugar and milk, with small amounts of items such as sardines, jam, potatoes, cabbage, dried onions, tomatoes, tea and coffee.<sup>63</sup> This list demonstrates that there had been significant changes from the traditional diet of Africans in rural areas as compared to those in urban areas. According to Ellen Hellmann, the staple food in the rural diet had been "kaffir corn" served with "a savoury or relish" and supplemented by fresh milk, "amasi" (sour milk) and "marewu" (a thin porridge of mealie meal): meat was a rare treat in the rural diet, reserved for

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Includes taxation, insurance such as burial societies, hire-purchase, pleasure.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Table 2, p. 30. An analysis by Dr F.W. Fox of the South African Institute for Medical Research found major nutritional deficiencies in this diet, with the average daily calories consumed at 1,827, compared to an "optimal" requirement for an adult of 3,500.

festive occasions. By contrast, the staples in urban diets included mealie meal, bread, meat stew (with potato and onions added), tea or coffee. As Hellmann explains:

The outstanding contrast between urban Native diet and their rural diet is that the former is characterized by a predominance of meat, a lack of green vegetable foods, the practically total omission of fruit, and the paucity of fresh milk.<sup>64</sup>

While tea, coffee, sugar and bread were considered essential parts of the urban diet, items such as jam and sardines were coveted as “rare luxuries”. Fresh milk had been replaced in urban diets with condensed milk, which was cheaper, sweeter and kept longer, while rice was used “to an increasing extent”.<sup>65</sup>

Hellmann also noted a dramatic shift in eating patterns associated with urban living, from two meals a day in rural areas, eaten in mid-morning and late afternoon, to three meals a day on the European pattern in urban areas, with breakfast, lunch and a late evening meal. Mealtimes were largely dictated by working hours in urban areas: Africans ate in the location before departing for work in the early morning, took lunch in town in the middle of the working day, and ate after returning at night. It became the norm for families in the urban locations to eat their meals together, whereas traditionally in rural areas, women and men ate their meals separately<sup>66</sup>.

## **African Traders and the Changing Profiles of Urban Black Communities under Apartheid**

After the onset of the apartheid in 1948, the municipal authorities in Johannesburg decided to apply the principle of ethnic grouping in the allocation of trading sites in the townships in 1954 –though an investigation of African traders in 1960 found this policy had not yet been implemented.<sup>67</sup> Another decision taken in 1954, which was ratified by the Non-European Affairs and Housing Committee in August 1959, was “to allocate trading sites in the townships on the basis of a quota determined by the number of families to be served by the business”. The quotas were:

- One general dealer for approximately 250 families
- One butcher for approximately 400 families
- One greengrocer for approximately 1,000 families
- One fish frier for approximately 1,000 families
- One dairy for approximately 1,000 families.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Hellmann E., “Urban Native Food in Johannesburg”, pp. 280-281.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.280.

<sup>67</sup> Reyburn Lawrence (1960), *African Traders. Their Position and Problems in Johannesburg's South Western Townships. A Fact Paper*, Johannesburg, South African Institute for Race Relations, 6, Annexure III, pp. 42-43.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*



As Lawrence Reyburn pointed out, the distribution of businesses across the townships in 1960 remained haphazard:

Only in Meadowlands and Diepkloof of the south-western townships are there trading areas per se where all the common household requirements can be obtained from a cluster of shops in a conveniently central area. The comparison with the municipal townships is striking, for shops in the latter are widely scattered and a shopper in some areas is obliged to cover much ground in order to obtain all the household purchases.<sup>69</sup>

In November 1955, the Secretary of Native Affairs, William Eiselen, issued an instruction that African ("Bantu") traders would no longer be permitted to occupy trading premises in urban areas outside the black townships. Numerous African traders in the centre of Johannesburg, as well as those renting premises from mainly Coloured, Indian and Chinese landlords in the Western Area townships of Sophiatown and Newclare, were served notice to quit.<sup>70</sup> This was a devastating blow for those African traders who had operated in these areas for decades. *The Bantu World* cited the example of Andries Phaloane, who had operated a fish frier business in Sophiatown since 1938. His investment in electrical equipment, including two coolers and an electric frier stove, worth several hundred pounds, would be useless in the township where he was required to move, because it had no electricity.<sup>71</sup> The SAIRR estimated that approximately 35 to 40 licensed African traders in Johannesburg would be displaced, three-quarters of whom were operating "native eating houses" or restaurants, while a further 157 African businesses operating in the city without licences would be required to close down.<sup>72</sup> The policy would also deny African businesses access to a large proportion of their customers, as an Editorial in *The World* explained:

The Africans working in the town will still need food at lunch time, will still need to have a haircut, have a picture taken and get concert cards printed. They will not find it convenient to leave the city for the locations and have this done. Is the removal of African businessmen not just another way of giving their business to those allowed to trade in town?<sup>73</sup>

In response, Eiselen insisted that the move was in the interest of successful African traders, since they would receive "preferential treatment in the allocation of business sites" in the black townships:

I submit that this has opened up to them a field of unlimited opportunity, very much more valuable than the few isolated opportunities which they may ultimately lose as a result of the curtailment of their activities in areas set aside for other racial groups.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> "Most Bantu Traders will have to get out by 1956. Only those in African premises can stay", *Bantu World*, 3.12.55; "Bombshell for Pretoria Traders: told to get out by January", *The World*, 11.1.56.

<sup>71</sup> "Most Bantu Traders will have to get out by 1956".

<sup>72</sup> UW, AD1947 Records of the SAIRR, Part III: "African Trading Rights. Correspondence", Southern Transvaal Regional Office, SAIRR to Quintin Whyte, Director, SAIRR, 22.11.55.

<sup>73</sup> "Editorial", *The World*, 4.01.1956.

<sup>74</sup> UW, AD1947 Records of the SAIRR, Part III: "African Trading Rights. Correspondence": W.W.M. Eiselen to Quintin Whyte, 6.1.56.

However, following the passage of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959, the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development declared that “Non-White businessmen in locations would have to move to Bantu areas as soon as they had accumulated enough capital to establish large businesses”.<sup>75</sup> This was followed by a circular from the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development in February 1963, which made it clear that the government intended to limit the future development of African business in urban areas as far as possible:

[I]t must always be borne in mind that trading rights by Bantu in White areas is not an inherent primary opportunity for them, but should be allowed only where necessary, within the urban Bantu residential area for the benefit of the Bantu.<sup>76</sup>

While it did not advocate the closing down of existing African businesses in urban areas, the Circular called for “moneyed Bantu, Bantu traders and other trained Bantu” to be “encouraged and assisted” to establish businesses and to settle in the “Bantu Homelands”.<sup>77</sup> As Quintin White of the SAIRR observed in a letter to the *Cape Times*:

The government has broken promises given in 1955 that Africans could develop fully in urban locations and is now promising Africans the fullest opportunities in the “Bantu homelands”. Except for daily necessities, it is ensuring the White traders a monopoly of the big urban African market. South Africa is thus not a “free enterprise economy” for Africans.<sup>78</sup>

One of the victims of this change in policy was the “Vuka Africa” Store. It was closed down when Eastern Native Township became the last of the old “Native Locations” in Johannesburg to be removed, following the recommendation of a government committee in October 1962. The area was redesignated for hostel accommodation only, while the permanent residents were moved to Emdeni, Senaoane and Zola (the newest of the South Western Townships) or accommodated in a part of Pimville location still referred to today by residents as “George Goch”.<sup>79</sup>

As the first decade of apartheid drew to a close, Lawrence Reyburn conducted a comprehensive survey of African Traders in Johannesburg’s South Western Townships (renamed “Soweto” in 1963).<sup>80</sup> Reyburn’s investigation identified 1190 businesses operating in the townships, distributed as follows:

<sup>75</sup> Speech at Vereeniging, reported in *Rand Daily Mail*, 26.10.59.

<sup>76</sup> UW, AD1947 Records of the SAIRR, Part III: “African Trading Rights. Correspondence”: Circular Minute No. A12/1-A8/1 dated 14 February 1963, from the Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development. Although areas such as Soweto were referred to generically as “black townships”, they were designated in the official language of apartheid as “urban Bantu areas”.

<sup>77</sup> UW, AD1947 Records of the SAIRR, Part III: “African Trading Rights. Correspondence”, Circular Minute No. A12/1-A8/1.

<sup>78</sup> UW, AD1947 Records of the SAIRR, Part III: “African Trading Rights. Correspondence”, Copy of a letter from Quintin Whyte to the Editor, *Cape Times*, 11 April 1963.

<sup>79</sup> UW A1132, C39 001 “Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future Planning of Eastern Native Township”, 9 October 1962. Copy in the Patrick Lewis Papers 1949-1987, “A History of Soweto” at *South African History Online*, Online. URL: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-soweto> (last accessed 1.12.20).

<sup>80</sup> Reyburn L., *African Traders*, *op. cit.*, Annexure III, pp. 41-44.

**Table 4: Distribution of shops in Soweto township<sup>81</sup>**

Type of Business	Number
General Dealer	400
Butchery	243
Fresh Produce	176
Restaurant & Fish & Chips	136
Wood & Coal	95
Dairy	46
Herbalist	38
Dry Cleaner	15
Draper and Outfitter	14
Garage	11
Undertaker	7
Builder	3
Timber Merchant	1
Hotel	1
News Agent	1
Burglar Proofing	1
Snuff Dealer	1
Ice Cream	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1190</b>

The largest concentrations of businesses were found in the oldest sections of the South Western Townships. 318 businesses were located in the sprawling township of Orlando and the neighbouring Orlando extension. Pimville (formerly "Klipspruit"), had the second largest concentration of businesses, at 98. Reyburn found that shops varied "from a few flourishing concerns with a monthly turnover of several thousand pounds to those where a monthly turnover of £20 was exceptional": the vast majority were of "the one-man type in which the owner attends to buying stock, banking, etc., and supervises assistants". Only eleven of the 47 traders interviewed had electricity. This was a particular problem for butchers, who faced a struggle to keep meat fresh:

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, Annexure I, p. 37. The Ministry of Bantu Administration and Development reported that there were 1682 African traders of all types in the African areas of Johannesburg in 1959.

The necessity to sell stocks immediately, coupled with the poverty of customers and their inability to distinguish between different cuts, leads butchers to sell all meat at a flat rate... None of the butchers interviewed differentiated in price between grades or cuts of meat.<sup>82</sup>

Reyburn's survey also demonstrated the effects of the removal of African businesses from the city centre under apartheid. He found that only 47.2 per cent of food, 33 per cent of medicines, 58.1 per cent of household goods, and 31.8 per cent of clothing consumed by residents was bought in the townships. On this basis he estimated "probably less than a third of the earnings of African workers are spent in the townships, so that African traders as a group are not the big earners they are sometimes alleged to be".<sup>83</sup>

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For much of the first half of the twentieth century, the development of an entrepreneurial class of fixed traders among Africans in Johannesburg was circumscribed and stunted by legal restrictions imposed by the white municipal authorities, who tried to exclude them from the business opportunities available in urban areas. As the permanently settled urban black population in South Africa grew, African shopkeepers faced competition from white, Indian and Chinese businessmen for control of the "Native trade". Although they were assisted somewhat by the passage of the Native Urban Areas Act in 1923 in their efforts to monopolise the "Native trade" in the urban locations and black townships, ultimately it was at the price of being forced out of the town and city centres where urban Africans spent most of their day.

This aspect of their struggle was finally lost as a result of the ruthless application of the apartheid policy to urban areas during the 1950s. Nevertheless, during these years, innumerable African businesses were established in urban areas on the Rand, and a small but growing cohort of successful African shopkeepers emerged in the black townships as part of the fabric of urban black life. Many were leaders in their local communities and sponsored local social and cultural activities. At the same time, their stores became landmarks and gathering spots in otherwise drab, featureless, and poverty-stricken urban black communities.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps their greatest impact on urban black cultural production was in shaping urban black consumption patterns with respect to the supply of food, cigarettes and other basic consumer goods.

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12.

<sup>84</sup> For example, on 21 March 1960, the leader of the Pan Africanist Congress, Robert Sobukwe, chose Ephraim Tshabalala's store in Mofolo as the assembly point for his followers before they marched to Orlando police station to volunteer for arrest as part of that day's fateful anti-pass demonstration.

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