From Plough to Entrepreneurship: A History of African Entrepreneurs in Evaton 1905-1960s

By

Vusumuzi ‘Vusi’ Rodney Khumalo

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Supervisor Prof. Noor Nieftagodien
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted as a dissertation or thesis at any other university.

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, July 2013
Abstract

Evaton was distinct from other African freehold settlements in the Reef. There were several aspects that made it unique; these were its economic history and expression that delayed local incorporation into wage labour, self-sufficiency, demography, and geographical location. Physically, the area had big yards which enabled residents to be relatively successful subsistence farmers for the first three decades of its development. Subsistence farming facilitated economic independence and allowed local residents to refrain from working for white industrialists.

This study is motivated largely by the fact that Africans were deprived of economic and political autonomy by white governments. This marginalisation lies in the complex and interconnected processes of displacement and dispossession by which Africans were first dispossessed of their own land; then deprived of independent productive opportunities. The increasing scarcity of land as scarce commodity and African land ownership in Evaton—best explains the history of African local economic independence. For the local residents, land possession in Evaton provided a space where moral economy that fostered racial pride and solidarity was forged. It is where Africans created educational, religious and economic institutions that served as the base of challenging white political humiliation. These institutions provided ways to assert African dignity in the face of racial segregation. This work develops the logic explanation that stick together all forces that constrained Africans to give up labour to industrial economy in Evaton.

It provide us with the understanding on how local Africans struggled for economic independence and how independence changed over time in Evaton. It demonstrates how local residents resisted the forces of proletarianisation by adapting into different economic transformation that threatened their economic autonomy. The nature of these changes is represented by the shift from agricultural economic production to entrepreneurship. This progression has revealed how local entrepreneurs, particularly former sharecroppers, the educated residents, and independent farmers prioritised economic independence.
I would firstly like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Nieftagodien who has been with me through thick and thin during the writing of this thesis. His input, scholarly guidance and supervision contributed significantly in shaping this dissertation into a scholarly acceptable piece of work. He was the source of inspiration and the pillar of strength particularly with his academic and financial support. I would also like to acknowledge the Ford Foundation for financial support. This thesis is also indebted to 2011, 2012 participants in the NFR Local Histories and Present Realities seminars for their comments on this work, not forgetting Dineo Skosana who has been supportive throughout the whole project. She dedicated her time in shaping up this work through constructive criticism. She also assisted in editing in the later stage of writing. As my study partner, we spent sleepless nights working together in our Richards Ward Office, and thanks to that office space for accommodating us.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the people of Evaton whom this study represents. Without their contribution, particularly Dwight Seremi who passed away while the project was in progress, Paul Seshabela and many others, this work would have not succeeded. Thanks to Tladi Kekane who inspired me to write this topic. His passion and attachment to the history of Evaton stimulated my academic interest. It would be unfair not to acknowledge Maisela Kekane who offered me accommodation and food during my fieldwork. He also spent time during the early stage of the project discussing interesting themes. Besides, he introduced me to many informants. To both Tladi and Maisela this thesis really owes its genesis. I would also like to pay homage to the late Alf Kumalo for showing interest in my work. His door was always open for me to ask any Evaton related questions. Thanks to Prof Bob Edgar for reading and commenting on the draft of this work

I would also like to thank Zahn Gower and Tsepo Moloi who supported me morally during hard times that I experienced during the later stage of the project. Not forgetting Gabisile, my wife and my son Sphiwe for their support.
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<tr>
<td>AME Church</td>
<td>African Methodist Episcopal Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFCOC</td>
<td>National African Federation Chamber of Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan African Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUATA</td>
<td>Transvaal United African Teachers Association</td>
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Photos/Plates

Fig. 1 The ruins of Wilberforce Institute

Fig. 2 Fanny Coppin Hall, Wilberforce Institute Practicing School built in 1909 in 1914 built by Albert Johnson

Fig. 3 Dr Nhlapo House, Nhlapo was the principal of Wilberforce

Fig. 4 Eliza Gregg Hall built by Bishop Gregg

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Fig. 8 The facade of the old Evaton Court

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Fig. 12 The House of the former sharecropper

Fig. 13 Christina Nku’s church

Fig. 14 Mrs Adams grave, the owner of Evaton

Fig. 15 Mrs Christina Nku’s house the founder of the

Fig. 16 An extract from the internet picture

Apostolic Faith Church
Wilberforce photos extracted from Dr Nhlapo’s publication

Maps extracted from the Evaton Development Project document