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Youth Politics: The Political Role of AZANYU in the Struggle for Liberation: The Case of AZANYU Thembisa branch, 1980s to 1996.

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2006-11-16T11:18:44Z
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Chapter Two

Tembisa: The establishment of a model township

> I was among the first people to live here. My family and I started living here in 1957. We arrived from a farm called Tikkie-line. Then life was good. We paid no rent at all. Today Tembisa is indeed a big township. I don't remember any uprising here except in 1976. Maybe it means that the people are peace-loving.[1]

According to Lodge "understanding popular political responses depends on a detailed knowledge of particular communities and social groups".[2] This chapter concerns itself with the historical background of Tembisa Township. Its history, like that of many other townships which were established in the late 1950s, is rooted in the National Party government's efforts to control the influx of Africans into the urban areas and to segregate Africans from the white areas. Marks notes that "in the 1950s, the government was determined to remove blacks from backyards and from multiracial areas to ensure separate residential areas for different population groupings". This, she adds, "involved massive resettlement of people (mostly blacks) to new areas of residence in accordance with the Group Areas Act".[3]

This chapter will argue that Tembisa prior to the 1976 student uprisings was a quiescent township. From the time it was established to 1976 the township did not experience any political protests or mobilization, except for the formation of the PAC's cells which existed for a brief period in the early 1960s. There are three reasons for this. First, at this stage the local authorities controlling the township managed to provide essential services for the residents, albeit minimal. In the process they were able to retain rent charges as low as possible. Second, the 1960s was a period when wage earning families experienced a small increase in available income.[4] Third, the 1960s was characterized by an unprecedented state repression, which

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[1] Founder resident of Tembisa, Mr. Doctor Shile. *Sowetan,* 7 February 1983

[2] Lodge, *Black Politics,* p. 91

[3] Marks, *Young Warriors,* p. 20

[4] See Bonner, P. and Nieftagodien, N. *Kathorus: A History,* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 2001), pp. 63-64

instilled fear in people, and caused the township's residents to avoid politics. The chapter will also show that it was only after the community council, and later the town council had taken control of the township that the residents began to mobilize in order to wage protests against them for increasing rent and service charges.

2.1 The Origins of Tembisa

Tembisa is an East Rand township, which in English means Promise. The township is located north of Kempton Park, and was established in 1957. Siyotula notes that "a four-man committee was appointed to oversee the establishment of Tembisa. It recommended that the proposed township be sited in the vicinity of Kalfontein Station where land was available immediately west of the Pretoria-Germiston railway line". "2 575 ha of land", she continues, "was zoned for appropriation". She writes "this land was originally a farm owned by a Mr. J.H.M. Meyer and Mrs M.W.Z. van Wyk, [and] after negotiations between the purchasing committee [and the owners] … an agreement was reached in which the land would be purchased at R3, 52 per ha with funding from the National Housing Commission and government loans".[5]

Recalling the initial stages of the township, Figo Madlala remarks:

> My dad and my mom worked around Kempton Park for years. And they stayed in Phelandaba Kempton Park where Spartan is [today]. They were [removed] from Phelandaba by the then powers that be, and they were amongst the first residents of Tembisa in 1957, which is the same year I was born. This was before Tembisa Station was built. And the first name of Tembisa before it became Tembisa it used to be Vuk'uzenzele (Wake up and do it yourself). That's the history that people wouldn't know. Well, I don't know when it changed because I know initially when we were there we were saying we are staying in Vuk'uzenzele. But the statutory name which was probably registered became Tembisa because the first station was Tembisa Station and the first school was Tsepisa (Promise). I think the name came as a result of people saying that they were promised by Van Rooyen, who was the superintendent at the time that they were going to have a place of their own where they were not going to be disturbed and so forth and so on. So it was Tsepiso or Sthembiso – Promise. And that's how the name probably came about. But the initial name that people used to call the place with was Vuk'uzenzele.[6]

[5] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', pp.7-8

[6] Interview with Figo Madlala, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Tembisa, 7 September 2004. SADET Oral History Project

Simon Ramogale, describing the area where the township was established before 1957, remarks:

> I was born in Pietersburg. I left Pietersburg when I was coming to a boarding school in Middelburg. But then my uncle was staying in Olifanstfontein. So by the time I was staying [with him my friends and I] would go to where Tembisa is now. [There were] lots of fields. We used to go there and buy mielies (i.e. Maize) for cooking. There were farms there. That is why you could see in Tembisa [the sections] have those kind of farming names. You see where they call Sedibeng and Tsepo sections that's where there were lots of wells for the boreholes for the farmers; you cross slightly up they say [it is] Mashimong section. That's actually where the fields were. Then you go to Sethokga section. You see Sethokga means lots of forests. [In] Moriting section there were shades [because of the many trees there]. We could sit under the tress. That's where all these names come from.[7]

Siyotula cites three factors as the primary reasons for the foundation of Tembisa. Firstly, it was founded to resettle employees of various municipalities close to the township. These municipalities included Kempton Park, Edenvale, Modderfontein, Clayville, Verwoerdburg, Bedfordview and Germiston. As Seekings remarks "[Tembisa] was developed to provide accommodation for Africans drawn in to the area … during the massive industrial and residential expansion in the 1950s".[8] Secondly, the government also hoped that Tembisa would provide a solution to the problem of squatting. This followed the growth of squatting settlements known as Tikkie-line, Pennyville, Mazambane, Plantation and Brickworks, which were dotted around the Edenvale and Kempton Park areas. Thirdly, Tembisa was also seen as a solution to the problem of overcrowding and housing shortages in Alexandra, which was believed to be a contributing factor to the escalating crime rate as well as the general instability in the township.[9]

In dealing with the third factor, Carter notes that, "in 1961 an ad hoc committee consisting of senior officials from the Department of Native Affairs, the Resettlement Board, the Peri Urban Board, and the Johannesburg and Randburg Municipalities was

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[7] Interview with Simon Ramogale, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Johannesburg, 7 April; 18 August 2004

[8] Seekings, J. 'Quiescence and the transition to confrontation in South African townships, 1978-84', Ph.D. Thesis, (Oxford University, 1990), p. 160

[9] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 9

convened to consider legislative measures deemed necessary for the enhanced control of Alexandra". "Their report", he continues, "… called for the abolition of family housing in Alexandra and the erection of hostels to house single African men and women workers". The committee concluded that "families would be resettled in Tembisa… and Diepkloof and Meadowlands in Soweto, while single workers serving Johannesburg's northern suburbs and Randburg would remain in Alexandra".[10] Marks estimates that "some 44 700 people were removed from the township to Tembisa …. and to Diepkloof and Meadowlands between 1963 and 1966".[11]

Although it is difficult to state with certainty the number of people who were resettled in Tembisa from Alexandra, it is likely there were many. Hence the Deputy Minister of Bantu Affairs was able to report to parliament in 1963 that the population of Alexandra had been reduced to approximately 52, 000 people, and that since 1959 the number of murders had decreased by 50 percent, armed robberies by 90 percent and assault by 30 percent.[12]

Reflecting on how his family was removed from Alexandra, Mongezi Maphuthi remarks:

> I remember the time we were moved from Alexandra in 1971 in those trucks – pick up trucks. [They came] and took us to Tembisa. And for most of us it was the first time that we landed in Tembisa. We came to a house at Nxuweni [section] in Tembisa there were no windows for the whole weekend and it was very, very cold.[13]

Similarly, describing how the removals affected his family, Lot Thobejane recalls:

> I remember very well how we were informed, eh, around 7 o'clock at night, Peri-Urban guys (at the time it was Peri-Urban) came knocking at our doors, literally from one door to the other. My father opened, and we were shocked that they were looking for permit at night - but they were not.…They first asked for permit and then my father produced the permit and that

[10] Carter, 'Comrades', p.60

[11] Marks, *Young Warriors,* p. 21

[12] Carter, 'Comrades' , pp.59-60

[13] Interview with Mongezi Maphuthi, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Tembisa, 28 September 2004. SADET Oral History Project

> was not enough. They said, 'ok, fine, here's a letter you have to move from here'. And my father asked 'but where to?' They said 'you have to move from here, and you'd see'. And the whole block, I think it was about two or three blocks. That whole block was identified, and all of them were approached the same night, given those letters of notice to move out. And they were given nothing less than two weeks to move out. We were to move out by the end of the month - I mean it was in the middle of the month. And my father was very dejected, I must say. When he came to tell us that ... tell my mother …Actually I overheard them speaking that we have to move. The next day he was told to come to Peri-Urban [and was] … told you must move. They'd find them a place somewhere. … Two weeks [later] I saw us moving to this new room. From one room in Alex to another one room. We were lucky. My other family... [was] moved out either to Tembisa or Pimville... That whole block [at 2nd Avenue] area they either moved to Pimville or Tembisa. And that's how, actually, my family was split between the three places. I've got my cousins in Pimville and I've got my other cousins in Tembisa. So that was the first group of forceful removals.[14]

The decision to remove people from Alexandra in order to deal with overcrowding might have had a stabilizing effect in the township, but conversely it led to a rapid increase in Tembisa's population. Siyotula estimates that by 1957 at least 200 families had been resettled under the site and service scheme which was subsequently overtaken by the new 'match box' brick houses built by various housing schemes.[15] Bonner and Segal note with regard to Soweto that: "From 1954 all homeless African families … were required to move to sites measuring 12 metres by 22 metres and serviced by bucket latrines on every plot, with water outlet every 500 metres. Families were expected to build their own shanties until such time as proper housing … could be provided".[16]

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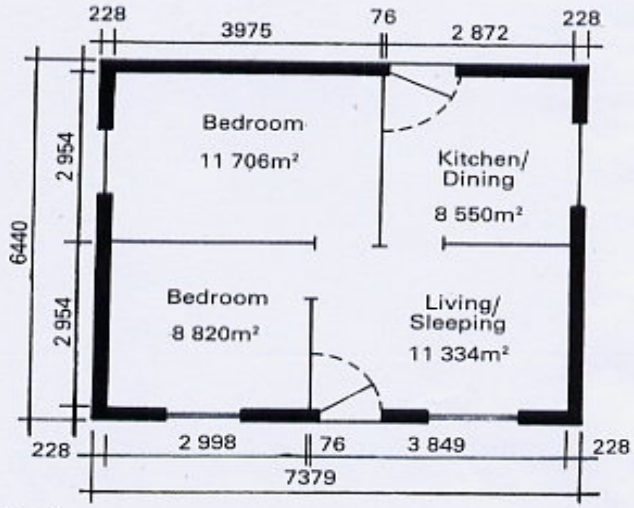
[14] Interview with Lot Thobejane, conducted by Tshepo Moloi and Freddie Pine, Alexandra Township, 14 June 2003. Alexandra Social History Project. Interview transcripts are with the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand

[15] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 9

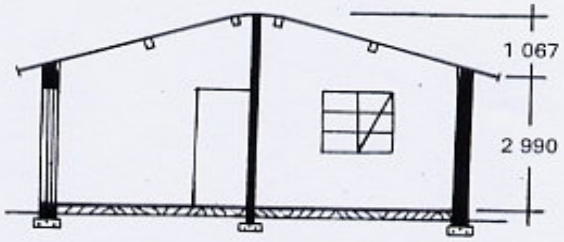
[16] Bonner, P. and Segal, L. *Soweto: A History,* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1998), p. 29

THE STANDARD 51/6 HOUSE

7



Total area 40,4m²



Dimensions in mm.

The same thing happened in Tembisa. Shile observes:

> After our arrival in 1957… we were [living] in zink shacks. Towards the end of 1958 the government brought more families and gave them plots. Our section was called Ecaleni (at the beginning) … I don't know where most of the people came from, but the number of zink shacks grew steadily. In 1959 the first houses were built.[17]

As the years went by the township's population grew tremendously, notwithstanding Tembisa's initial status "as a temporary residential township to accommodate workers and their families".[18] Already by 1969 the township's population was estimated to be about 66 214.[19] The population's breakdown was as follows:

Adults:	
Men	12 752
Women	14 752
Total:	**27 504**
Children:	
Boys	19 610
Girls	19 100
Total:	**38 710**
Grand Total:	**66 214**

Brooks and Brickhill estimate that Tembisa's population in 1976 was about 139 000, followed by Katlehong with 114 000.[20] Seekings, on the other hand, asserts on the basis of the 1980 population census that in that year Tembisa had a population of about 172 000.[21] Mashabela notes that the local black authority estimated the number

[17] *Sowetan,* 7 February 1983

[18] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 8

[19] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers, East Rand Administration Board A1934/C12.2 Tembisa, April 1969, *Statistics submitted for the information of the committee in January 1969*

[20] Brooks, A. and Brickhill, J. *Whirlwind before the storm: The Origins and development of the uprising in Soweto and the rest of South Africa from June to December 1976*, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980),p. 176

[21] Seekings, 'Quiescence', p.42

of people living in Tembisa in 1987 to be 200 000.[22] And yet the Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, Chris Heunis, put the township's population in 1987 over 300 000.[23]

If these estimates are to be accepted they confirm that Tembisa had a huge population in comparison with the other east Rand townships at this stage. The second more highly populated township in the east Rand in 1980 was Katlehong with 159 000 people.[24] This incapacitated the local authorities in the township regarding the provision of the basic social services for the residents and the development of the township in general. This subsequently caused many disagreements between the local authorities and the residents, which finally resulted in the residents boycotting the payment of the ever-increasing rent and service charges, as will be shown below.

Siyotula notes that "in terms of the memorandum agreement adopted in 1957 by the Kempton Park, Edenvale, Modderfontein, Clayville, Verwoerdburg, Bedfordview and Germiston municipalities, the Germiston City Council was designated the controlling authority for Tembisa". This was because none of the municipalities close to the township were willing to take control of it since it "was not an off-shoot of any white town, and it [lay] outside the boundaries of most municipalities".[25] "The Germiston City Council (GCC)", Siyotula writes, "was made responsible for the planning, development and administration of the regional township".[26] However, Tembisa was administered under a separate account from that of its controlling municipality – this was the Tembisa Revenue Account.

According to Siyotula, this account was established on the premise that white employers had a responsibility towards meeting the costs of providing certain services to the township. To administer the development of Tembisa, the GCC generated its revenue from levies contributed to the Tembisa Revenue Account by the seven

[22] Mashabela, H. *Townships of the PWV: South African Institute of Race Relations,* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1988), p.153

[23] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p.19

[24] Seekings, 'Quiescence', p.42

[25] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 16

[26] ibid. p. 10

municipalities. This was further complemented by the contribution of R 100 000 from the GCC per annum for a period of five years – after which the contribution would be reviewed. In addition, the GCC derived its revenue from the sale of sorghum beer and from rental and service charges and miscellaneous fines.[27]

Siyotula notes that during the GCC's period of control (1957-1973) at least 17 sorghum beer outlets were set up along with two bottlestores and one lounge bar operating in Tembisa under the monopoly of the municipalities.[28] However, not all the revenue generated from the sale of sorghum beer in the township was used in the development of the township. Brooks and Brickhill point out that "in terms of the Liquor Amendment Acts of 1961 and 1962 local authorities and employers were permitted to spend 20 percent of their liquor profits on social, welfare or recreation services for Africans in the townships, and obliged to give the remaining 80 percent to the government".[29] They estimate that "over a five-year period 1966/7 to 1970/1 the government received over R7 million from this source, and a further R3, 2 million from local authorities from surpluses in their Bantu beer accounts".[30]

Notwithstanding this it appears that from the 20 percent allocated for use by the GCC, it managed to subsidize the costs for the administration and development of the township. By extension it could retain the rent and service charges at reasonable levels, which were affordable to the residents.[31] Karis and Gerhart contend that, "until the 1970s, revenue from these sources … had made housing subsidies possible since most Africans could not afford an economic rent".[32] Shile remembers that after moving into his house with his two wives in 1959 he was paying "something like R2,

[27] ibid. pp. 12-13

[28] ibid. p.13

[29] Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind,* p.174

[30] ibid

[31] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 13

[32] Karis, G. and Gerhart, G. *From protest to challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1990*, Vol.5, (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1997), p. 233

25 for rent".[33] And Thandi Swakamisa recalls that when she arrived in Tembisa in 1972 rent charges were R6, 25.[34]

The economic boom of the 1960s also contributed to the township's political inactivity during the GCC's control. Bonner and Nieftagodien note that "huge amounts of foreign investment flooded into the country propelling an annual growth of 9.3%". "The growth of the industrial manufacturing, they continue, "lay in the heart of these developments … [and] much of this centred on the East Rand". According to Hyslop "the 1960s saw phenomenal increases in employment. In manufacturing, the number of employees of all races soared from 653 000 in 1960 to 1 069 000 in 1970". And Bonner and Nieftagodien indicate that "between 1960 and 1969 then number of Africans employed in Germiston alone arose from 44 089 to 84 945".[35]

A significant number of these employees resided in Tembisa. Mashabela notes that "Tembisa residents work[ed] mainly in and around Kempton Park, Germiston, Johannesburg, Midrand and Verwoerdburg".[36] As with Mashabela, I could not uncover employment and an average family monthly earnings during this period. However, Mashabela estimates that the household subsistence level for a family of six in Germiston and Johannesburg was R496,96 and R506,02 respectively, out of which R78,43 for rent (R37,90) and transport (R30,53) was paid by those working in Germiston and R85,23 for rent (R54,05) and transport (R31,18) was paid by those working in Johannesburg".[37]

Because of the increase in employment, wages also increased for those entering employment as semi-skilled labourers. But for the unskilled labourers they "remained dismally low…"[38] Against this background it appears that Africans employed in the East Rand and living in Tembisa, during this period, were in a position to find work to

[33] *Sowetan,* 7 February 1983

[34] Interview with Thandi Swakamisa, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Tembisa, 23 July 2004. SADET Oral History Project

[35] Bonner and Nieftagodien, *Kathorus,* p. 63

[36] Mashabela, *Townships,* p.155

[37] ibid, p.156

[38] ibid

sustain themselves and their families. And because of this, and the GCC's decision to retain rent prices as low as possible, the Tembisa residents were not strained with having to pay more for social services. This partly explains why at this stage there were no protests against the local authorities. Protests only began after the East Rand Administration Board (ERAB) had taken over control of Tembisa.

2.2 Tembisa under ERAB

Following the promulgation of the Bantu Affairs Administration Act of 1969, the responsibility of administering black townships devolved upon the Administration Boards. From April 1973 Tembisa fell under the control of ERAB. It took over most of the duties which were performed by the GCC. These included the provision of both large scale ("hard") services like water and electricity and small scale ("soft") services such as refuse removal.

In addition, it was responsible for the provision of housing stock and enforcing influx control regulation.[39] ERAB, as it was the case during the GCC's control, was also to manage Tembisa through the principle of financial self-sufficiency. This was because the central government "sought to withdraw from the responsibility of providing for the collective consumption needs of urban blacks".[40] To generate funds for the township's revenue account, ERAB continued to derive revenue from rents and service levies, employer levies, sorghum beer and liquor profits.[41]

Local authorities received large profits from the sale of liquor and sorghum beer, but very little development appeared to have taken place and this became the source of contention between the residents and the authorities. The volume of liquor production had grown in the sixties from 87.4 million gallons between 1963-64 to 168.7 million gallons in 1967-70 period.[42] It is likely that this volume may have increased further in ERAB's period of control.

[39] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 14

[40] ibid.

[41] ibid.

[42] ibid. pp. 13 -15

To illustrate this point, Seekings notes that between 1974 and 1977 ERAB accumulated R10.8 million; and between 1980 and 1983 R15.8 million from liquor profits.[43] Although Seekings' estimates include other East Rand townships under ERAB's control, they, nevertheless illustrate that ERAB had accumulated sufficient revenue to meet the peoples' social needs in the whole of the east Rand. The Tembisa residents had hoped that ERAB would provide essential social services in the township. Alas! This was not to be.

One of the reasons why there was so little development in Tembisa was because a large part of the revenue accumulated for the Tembisa Revenue Account was not used for the development of the township, instead was channeled to promote the development of the homelands. "By 1976", Unterhalter notes that, "the East and West Rand Administration Boards had built 80 000 houses in the Bantustans of the Northern Transvaal".[44] Through this the government intended to curb the massive influx of Africans from permanently residing in the urban areas.

ERAB's economic position was seriously jeopardized by the government's privatization of liquor and beer outlets after 1976 and, the non-increment of the employer levies, which the Riekert Commission of Inquiry recommended should be abolished altogether. In addition, in the mid-1970s the South African economy stalled. Seekings writes that "this was broadly the result of a combination of an international economic downswing following oil price increases and the chronic weaknesses specific to South Africa's economy". "This period", he contends, "was characterized by sharply declining investment, price inflation, rising unemployment, high interests rates, balance of payment difficulties, and a falling exchange".[45]

This compelled ERAB, and other Administration Boards around the country, to develop new ways of generating revenue. Seekings points out that "the Boards had to choose between either, (a) running deficits, financed through depleting their reserves or arranging loans or grants from the central state, and (b) paring down expenditure,

[43] Seekings, 'Quiescence', p. 61

[44] Unterhalter, E. *Forced Removal: The Division, Segregation and Control of the People of South Africa*, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1987), p. 78

[45] Seekings, 'Quiescence', p. 47

and (c) increasing rents to meet the rising expenditure".[46] The third choice was in accordance with the Riekert Commission's recommendation that urban Africans be made to bear a greater share of the financial burden of their own administration. The Boards opted for this choice and increased rent and service charges. However, this decision was resisted by residents by refusing to pay the increased rents. For instance, the Tembisa residents began their resistance against rent increases in 1976 and, in 1986 were engaged in the most protracted and confrontational rent boycott ever witnessed in the township.

The failure by ERAB to develop Tembisa, coupled with the growing resistance by the residents, persuaded the government to devolve control of the township upon the locally elected councillors. The Riekert Commission had commended that "… control and revenue generation in townships be decentralized with local township councils elected and tasked with duties hitherto performed by white apartheid officials".[47] In Marais' view this meant that "the central state retreated from the day-to-day management of African's lived realities". The intention, he continues was, "in part aimed at diffusing township discontent".[48]

At the beginning of the 1960s the government passed the Urban Bantu Council's Act. The Act empowered local authorities to create the Urban Bantu Councils (UBC's) – which came to be derogatorily called the Useless Boys Club.[49] The UBC's system was a departure from the Advisory Board system that had operated in the early 1940s and 1950s. According Bonner and Nieftagodien "the main reasons behind their creation was the government's intention to link official township politics to the Bantustans and consequently politicize the ethnic divisions imposed on the new townships".[50]

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[46] ibid. p. 61

[47] Marais, H. *South Africa Limits to Change: The political Economy of Transition*, (London, Zed Books, 2001). P.43

[48] ibid

[49] See, Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind* ,pp. 275-303; Bonner, and Nieftagodien*, Kathorus*, pp. 59-62

[50] Bonner and Nieftagodien*, Kathorus*, p. 58

Despite the legislation a UBC was never established in Tembisa. The reason is not clear. However, it is possible that because Tembisa in the 1960s was a comparatively new township and people were still settling in; in the 1970s there were people still being removed from other areas to be settled in Tembisa, to establish such a body was not a priority. Swakamisa recalls: "when we arrived here [Tembisa in 1972] there were many other people who were arriving as well so we didn't know each other and there was this thing of saying if you didn't pay the R6, 25 [for rent] then the police would arrive at night to arrest you".[51]

According to Brooks and Brickhill three obstacles generally prevented the implementation of the UBC's Act in the early sixties. Firstly, the liberation struggle was then at a peak, making insistent demands for a National Convention to settle the country's future on a democratic basis. This, they believe, made it impossible to find sufficient elements within the black community to make such [a body] to work in practice. Secondly, the machinery linking urban councils with the Bantustans was not sufficiently developed. And thirdly, the Bantustans authorities were not themselves yet developed and Bantu Authorities were being fiercely fought in many parts of the countryside. These obstacles, they assert, rendered the legislation, "inoperable for several years, and by 1967 only four UBC's had been established in Welkom, Benoni, Kroonstad and Parys".[52]

In Tembisa, in place of the UBC, a cultural committee comprising church ministers, school principals, traders, sports bodies and homeland representatives was formed to represent the interests of the township's residents. Siyotula points out that this body was a voluntary organization, which concerned itself more with cultural and recreational activities. This, she notes, resulted in its being attacked by various groups in the community who felt that there were more pressing issues to address such as housing, general township development and provision of services. These groups, according to her, felt that the cultural committee had failed to come to [terms] with

[51] Interview with Thandi Swakamisa

[52] Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind,* pp. 275-277

these realities of urban environment. This resulted in the dissolution of this committee.[53]

Siyotula claims that following the dissolution of this committee "no structure of urban black representation was established in Tembisa until in the mid-1970s when community councils were formed".[54] The government passed the Community Councils Act in July 1977. The Tembisa Community Council (TCC) was established in 1978 after the Tembisa Board had unanimously resolved at a meeting held on 18 October of the same year that a community council be established in the township.[55] Some of the people who were elected to the council included, Mr. Siyotula, Mr. Mothiba and Mr. Mahori.[56]

Just like other local authorities before, its powers were circumscribed. Seekings writes that community councils had powers "to allocate and administer accommodation; to approve building plans for private dwellings and to prevent the illegal occupation and building of dwellings; and to allocate trading sites and to maintain essential services such as water supply, refuse removal and sewerage and roads within the townships".[57] To meet their mandate the community councils would need sufficient funds. However, since the government did not fund the councils, they had to generate their own funding by imposing "rents, rates, licences and fines" on the residents; and also depend on "any financial assistance the Ministry may donate".[58] This method of generating funds seems to have financially directed the TCC to increasing rent and service charges in order to carry out its mandate. And this marked the beginning of protests against rent and services charge increases in the township. Swakamisa observes:

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[53] See, Siyotula, 'Tembisa', Pp.11-12

[54] ibid

[55] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers, East Rand Administration Board, A1934/C12.2. Tembisa. Administration Item 1299/78 *Establishment of a Community Council: Tembisa.*

[56] Interview with Thandi Swakamisa.

[57] Seekings, 'Quiescence', pp. 57-58

[58] Seidman, J. *Facelift Apartheid: South Africa after Soweto*, (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), pp. 16-19

> No, [the rent] was increased in 1975 or 1976. They increased the rent. But it happened that people couldn't afford to pay the increased rent. People ignored it, but continued to pay the R6, 25 … At that time nothing happened. It was just quiet. But everyone was talking about it.[59]

Similarly, Siyotula notes:

> … This increase was implemented amidst widespread resistance from the residents and some of the members of the council who strongly recommended that this increase be rescinded because the council had not properly consulted the residents.[60]

However, according to Seekings, "the sharpest and most controversial increase occurred in April 1981, when rents were increased by R5, 00 to about R23, 00 (and to about R15, 00 in the main hostel)". These increases, he notes, "were to finance development announced the previous year, including the installation of a sewerage system in the areas still using bucket system"[61] In March 1982 another R1, 00 in site rent was announced, which was to come into effect in April of the same year.

Siyotula notes that "although these rent increases were resisted, they were nevertheless implemented by the council". She observes that the council managed to do this because in the mid-1970s "most of the objections to the increases appeared to be individualized, coming mostly from members of the opposing group within the council and from some residents".[62] It was from the late 1970s that resistance against rent increases in the township was co-coordinated. Seekings notes that "between 1979 and 1983 the Tembisa Action Committee co-operated with the branch of Inkatha *Ya Sizwe* in rent protests … but their approach was gradualist and non-confrontational".[63] This was a curious alliance. A significant component of the Tembisa Action Committee was constituted by AZAPO.

Frans Pale recalls:

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[59] Interview with Thandi Swakamisa

[60] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 28

[61] Seekings, 'Quiescence', p. 161

[62] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', pp. 28-29

[63] ibid, p.159. Inkatha was formed in 1975 as a Zulu Cultural Liberation Movement and on 14 July 1990 was renamed Inkatha Freedom Party in an attempt to build a national profile. See, Bonner and Segal, *Soweto,* p. 147

> I remember in 1981 – that was the height of the rent boycott here in Tembisa which was led by the branch of AZAPO and it was done so in conjunction with what we called the Tembisa Action Committee. This Tembisa Action Committee was brought about by the executive committee of AZAPO at branch level and it composed of people who belonged to different organizations in the community. I remember especially Goba Ndlovu, who stayed here in Tembisa. He was one of the people who took the lead in leading the Tembisa Action Committee.[64]

It appears that the residents of Tembisa abandoned their gradualist and non-confrontational approach after the enactment of the Black Local Authorities (BLA) Act No. 102 of 1982, which in Tembisa resulted in the upgrading of the TCC to the Tembisa Town Council (TTC) on September 13, 1983. The Mayor of Tembisa at the time, Mr. Lucas Mothiba, hailed this as "a step we have long being waiting for".[65] Siyotula writes that "[from] 1984 protests were transformed into intense, extended and bloody confrontations".[66] Now resistance against rental and services charge increases under the control of the TTC took a new form. First, it was organized and led by the Tembisa Civic Association (TCA), then later by the United Democratic Front-affiliated Tembisa Residents Association (TRA).[67]

It should be noted that the Tembisa residents were not protesting against rent increases in themselves but to the uses to which they were put. Seekings argues that on the East Rand, compared to the West Rand, rents were generally lower. He notes that in Tembisa in late 1980 rents were under R20, 00, compared to R26, 00 in Soweto. By late 1982 they still remained under R25, 00, in contrast to about R40, 00 in the West Rand.[68] This suggests that the Tembisa residents' protests were not solely against the rent increases. They were equally directed against lack of development and alleged corruption perpetrated by the councillors. To underline this view a Tembisa resident remarked:

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[64] Interview with Frans Pale conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Tembisa, 6 June 2004; Seekings, 'Quiescence',p. 160

[65] ibid.

[66] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 29

[67] For a detailed account about the rent boycotts in Tembisa, see Siyotula, 'Tembisa', pp. 37 -51

[68] Seekings, 'Quiescence', p. 160

> In Tembisa people were also concerned about where their rents went. On checking what was happening … and not seeing any improvement in the township I became aware of the people in charge of the township progressing in life, in fact, becoming business owners. Most of the senior Tembisa councilors owned businesses, and reportedly restricted competition through a careful zoning of shopping centres.[69]

"This suspicion", Seekings writes, "was further fuelled when the Administration Boards sold liquor and beerhalls in 1983-1984 councillors secured some remarkable deals"[70] It is possibly one of the reasons why when students' uprisings broke out in 1984 beerhalls were among the primary targets.

Some of the residents resisted paying the ever-increasing rents because they could not afford them. Swakamisa recalls:

> R40, 00 came after the black councillors had taken over. Ja, after they became councillors they introduced the R40, 00 rent increase. That's when the conflict started. You must remember that then I was working, not at the hospital, but I was working at a clinic in Mqanca section. We were not paid that much. I still remember that I used to earn about hundred and something rands a month. I was working as a clerk. Now you'd find that my salary would be finished even before I could pay rent. But the council would insist that I should pay the R40, 00 rent increase. So I became a victim because they'd always arrest me. Every time they'd come to take me and I'd sleep at the offices of the municipality and in the morning I'd have to appear in their "court" to make a commitment. … It wasn't a court as such but there would be a policeman and I had to commit myself that I was going to pay rent and when. So in the end what happened was that because I was working for the municipality they'd just withdraw their rent directly from my salary.[71]

The rent boycotts continued unabated. They ended in 1991 following an agreement between the residents' civic association, TRA, and the council. It was agreed that residents with electricity and living in four-roomed houses should pay R75, 00 a month, while those living in four-roomed houses without electricity should pay a R25, 00 flat rates.[72] This was, however, after the council had lost millions in rent arrears and the TTC had collapsed. Thus in August 1986 the council's town clerk, P. L.

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[69] ibid. p. 82

[70] ibid

[71] Interview with Thandi Swakamisa

[72] *Sowetan,* 2 July 1991

Harmse, declared that the Tembisa residents owed the council R2, 9 million for site rents, service charges, and electricity and water services.[73] And Mashabela notes that "the inhabitants of Tembisa owed the BLA R12 million in rent and service arrears as at the end of 1987, mainly as a result of the rent boycotts, but also because of inability to pay".[74] It is likely that with continuing rent boycott the council incurred further losses. The TTC collapsed in 1986 and in August of the same year the Mayor, Lucas Mothiba, resigned from the council. In an interview with the *Weekly Mail,* he remarked, "I resigned because of the realization that the BLA's were politically and economically non-viable".[75]

2.3 Housing

The growing number of Africans in the urban areas created a dire housing shortage for the government. Tembisa was not immune to this problem. According to the Progress Report: Tembisa Housing Section, February 1969, "a total of 161 houses had been completed during the course of that month".[76] Kitching et al, cited by Siyotula point out that in the early 1980s less than 20 000 houses had been built in Tembisa.[77] More generally the Viljoen Committee of 1981 calculated that the shortage of African housing in urban areas outside the Bantustans was 168 000.[78] In 1967 Blacks living in the urban areas were debarred from purchasing houses as they were regarded as temporary sojourners. If they wished to purchase a house they could do so in their homeland. This only changed in the late 1970s during the 'reform era'. Simon Mashishi, describing how his parents were forced to purchase a house outside of the urban areas, remarks:

> … I think it was in 1975. I did my standard one here at Tlamatlama Lower Primary School [in Tembisa]. And at the end of that year my father decided that, well he has bought a place in Brits. And we have to go and stay there. You must remember that at that time these houses were not regarded as our permanent homes; we were regarded as temporary citizens to an

[73] *The Star,* 14 August 1986

[74] Mashabela, *Townships*, p.155

[75] *Weekly Mail,* 22 August 1986

[76] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers, *East Rand Administration Board,* A1934/C12.2, Tembisa, April 1969

[77] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 18

[78] See, Unterhalter, *Forced Removal,* p. 75

> extent that parents would come only to work and then go back to the homelands, you see. But unfortunately my parents did not have such, because my mother is a Zulu by origin, but grew up in Brakpan. And my father came from Mapela, in Pietersburg. So it became a problem to say actually which place we can call home, whether my mother's place or my father's place. So it became a question of say 'well, we've got to find a place'. Finally that's when they [bought] a place in Brits. But by then it was under Bophuthatswana.[79]

Following the municipalities' failure to provide adequate housing for the townships' residents, and the 1976-77 students' uprisings which, according to Brooks and Brickhill "… blew the lid off the pot which had been slowly coming to the boil for over a decade"[80] the government, under the premiership of P.W. Botha, began a process of reforming apartheid. The government's intention was to regain control and eliminate the growing discontent among the Africans. According to David Welsh "… this was encapsulated in the [Botha's] famous 'adapt or die' speech delivered at an NP meeting at Upington on 28 July 1979".[81]

Central to the government's reform initiative, writes Bonner and Segal, "was the reintroduction of 99-year leaseholds". They note that Africans living in the urban areas "were allowed once again to buy, rather than rent, newly built houses as well as the older matchbox houses".[82] Similarly, Seidman writes that "the 99-year leasehold granted that the homeowner could buy leasehold rights to the land thus making his house title valid".[83] Although the government regarded this as a necessary step it was, nevertheless, cautious that its policy of separate development was not muddied. Because to do so, the government believed, "would contradict all the deepest laid tenets of Grand Apartheid: Africans must never have rights to land outside the Bantustans".[84]

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[79] Interview with Simon Mashishi, Tembisa, 8 June 2003

[80] Brooks, and Brickhill, *Whirlwind,* p. 274

[81] Welsh, D. (1994) 'The Executive and the African Population, 1948 to the present' in Robert Schrire et al. (eds.), *Leadership in the Apartheid State: From Malan to De Klerk,* (Cape Town, University of the Oxford, 1994), p. 180

[82] Bonner, and Segal, *Soweto,* p. 104

[83] Seidman, *Facelift Apartheid,* p. 20

[84] ibid

Therefore to uphold this policy, the government ruled that not every black person living in the urban areas would be allowed to buy a house – the government strictly regulated who could buy and who could not. Minister of Cooperation and Development, Dr. Piet Koornhoof, stated in 1979 that "…people would only be eligible for the 99-year leasehold scheme if they qualified to be in urban areas by virtue of birth or period of residence".[85] Unterhalter adds that "people could only occupy township houses if they had a permit; and permits for family housing were only granted to men with section 10(1) (a) or (b) rights who had both work and dependents". "All other people who settled in the townships", she concludes, "had to find accommodation in the single-sex hostels, or as lodgers".[86]

Section 10(1) (a) conferred residential rights to all the Africans who had been born and permanently resided in an urban area; and section 10(1) (b) applied to Africans who had continuously worked in an urban area for one employer for a period of not less than ten years or had lawfully resided in an urban area [and worked for different employers] for a period not less than fifteen years.[87]

Proceeding from this logic the government began in the late 1970s to sell state-owned houses under the homeownership scheme. This scheme was funded through the loans provided by the Urban Foundation. The Foundation had been formed by a group of black and white businessmen. According to Seidman "the Urban Foundation made available R30 million for homeownership loans at an interest rate of 8.75 percent (as against the South African interest rate of 10.5 percent).[88] Siyotula notes that in Tembisa the great housing sale started with the council offering 7500 rented houses for sale. These, she observes, were sold on a "special offer of R1600 per house".[89] According to her these houses were sold "despite the residents' organizations argument that most of these houses had been built cheaply and had in reality been bought by their occupants [with the money that they have been paying over the years

[85] ibid. p. 21

[86] Unterhalter, *Forced Removal,* p. 75

[87] See, Posel, D. *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise,* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 102-3

[88] Seidman*, Facelift Apartheid,* p. 21

[89] Siyotula, 'Tembisa'*,* p. 84

for rent and services charges]". The residents, she concludes, "seem to have concurred with their organizations because of the 7500 houses on sale only 3000 were sold".[90]

The Tembisa residents' stance against the sale of government-owned houses suggests that at this stage in the township there was a gradual move to mobilize and organize the people round civic matters. Unterhalter points out that, "although the townships might have been designed to break down local unity, the conditions there bred a fellowship amongst the people. Local associations began to develop in the mid-1970s. They constantly raised issues of the appalling conditions within townships, and became powerful mobilizing organizations able to raise broader political demands on behalf of the community".[91]

Any limited interest of the residents in buying the government-built houses appear to have been dashed by the then Minister of Bantu Affairs, Dr. Connie Mulder's, expression in March 1978, that "children of Africans who are 'citizens of independent Bantustans' could not inherit under the 99-year leasehold scheme".[92] The government further stipulated that should a buyer miss the monthly installment he (or she) could loose the house; and he (or she) could also be endorsed out if he (or she) failed to meet any of the usual residence requirements. Seidman notes that the predictable happened in 1978 "when a Tembisa widow was evicted from a house which she had paid all but R43 of the purchasing price because she was a Botswana national".[93]

Following the failure to sell government-built houses, and with the re-emergence of resistance in the black townships, the government decided to apply the divide-and-rule tactic by creating a black middle class. According to Aggrey Klaaste (then editor of *Sowetan),* cited by Bonner and Segal, "the government hoped that this class of black people would have too much to lose to help the masses in the struggle for liberation".[94] Seidman similarly notes that, "the government's policy [was] aimed at

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[90] ibid

[91] Unterhalter, *Forced Removal,* p. 76

[92] Seidman, *Facelift Apartheid,* p. 20

[93] ibid

[94] Bonner, and Segal, *Soweto,* p. 104

enabling a small number of Africans to prosper; this group would then have reason to ally [itself] with the white government against the aspirations of the black majority".[95]

To achieve its objective the government, firstly, relaxed the trading laws for Africans. According to Seidman "until [the reforms] black businessmen operated under severe restrictions. They were unable to own more than one type of business; unable to own business in an area they themselves were not resident in; unable to employ people of a different race and so on".[96] In addition, Bonner and Segal remark that "traders in the township were prohibited from building or owning their own premises, and could not open more than one shop or do business for any purpose other than that of providing for the essential domestic requirements of the Bantu residents".[97] This in many occasions caused black people to trade illegally – in order to make a living which resulted in many arrests. According to the South African Police Report in February 1969, sixty nine people were arrested in Tembisa for trading without a license.[98]

When the government removed restrictions on black traders many emerged in Tembisa. For example, in 1986 there were 2 concrete wall manufacturers, 4 brick manufacturers, 1 memorial stonemaker, 1 meat wholesale, 2 tailors, and 17 coal merchants (this suggests that many sections in Tembisa were still without electricity). Among the most notable business people in Tembisa was Lucas Mothiba, who was a councillor, from the time of the TCC to the time of the TTC. Some of the businesses that he owned included a night club, bottlestore, butchery, supermarket, restaurant and a dry cleaning depot.[99]

Secondly, the government encouraged private developers to build expensive houses in the townships. In Tembisa seventeen private developers took part in the development of the township. Siyotula points out that "in Tembisa approximately 3000 sites [were

[95] Seidman, *Facelift Apartheid,* p. 10

[96] ibid. p. 23

[97] Bonner, and Segal, *Soweto,* p. 71

[98] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers, *East Rand Administration Board,* A1934/C12.2, Tembisa, April 1969

[99] *Weekly Mail,* 22 August 1986

created] for housing development since 1986".[100] Private developers like Family Housing Association were allocated 1050 stands to erect houses for the low-middle income groups. Prices for these houses ranged from R25 000 – R50 000. 1700 stands were set aside for Goldstein Homes. Other developers like Bilhard Construction Company played a role in developing the elite suburb of Hospital View in the township. These houses were in the range of R20 000 – R50 000 and more.[101] Other middle class sections which were built in the township at this stage included Emkhathini, Ebazelo, Elidinga, Liliba and Enhlanzeni.

It appears that the government's strategy did not yield the expected results because the black middle class that it had hoped to lure to its side played an active role in campaigns to protest against the town councils' maladministration. It is true that this class had material interests to defend, but most significantly it was also part of a community that was struggling against an unjust system. Some of the members of this class therefore actively participated in civic politics in the township. They may not have been as radical as members of the working class but they supported campaigns against the council. To illustrate this point, in Tembisa in 1984 a protest was mounted against the R4, 00 rent and services charge increase by the town council, and the Hospital View Residents Committee was one of the groups that supported the protests. This committee was made up of people residing in one of the most opulent suburbs in the township.[102]

2.4 Township Life

Life in the new townships starkly differed to the life that people lived before in, for instance, freehold Townships like Alexandra. In Alexandra, people of different ethnic groups lived side by side; shared similar experiences as a community; and assisted each other whenever called to do so – as a community! Nelson Mandela in his autobiography writing about his experiences in Alexandra in the 1940s, observes:

> In spite of the hellish aspects of Alexandra, the township was also a kind of heaven. As one of the few areas of the country where Africans could acquire freehold property and run their

[100] Siyotula, 'Tembisa', p. 85

[101] ibid. pp.85-86

[102] See, Siyotula, 'Tembisa', pp.31-3

> own affairs, where people did not have to kowtow to the tyranny of white municipal authorities, Alexandra was an urban Promised Land, evidence that a section of our people had broken ties with the rural areas and become permanent city-dwellers. Urban life tended to abrade tribal and ethnic distinctions, and instead of being Xhosas, or Sothos, or Zulus, or Shangaans, we were Alexandrans. This created a sense of solidarity, which caused great concern among the white authorities. The government had always utilized divide-and-rule tactics when dealing with Africans and depended on the strength of ethnic divisions between the people. But in places like Alexandra, these differences were being erased.[103]

In contrast, the new townships were divided into different ethnic sections (or zones), pupils attended schools specifically designated for their mother tongue. Justifying this ruling the then Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, argued that "those who belong together naturally want to live near one another, and the policy of ethnic groupings will lead to the development of an intensified community spirit".[104] In reality this policy eradicated the community spirit that the residents once enjoyed. Residents now perceived themselves as different from each other by virtue of belonging to different ethnic groupings. This in many occasions caused clashes between township residents. Tembisa was likewise divided into different ethnic sections. Tsepo, Kopanong, Makhulong, Maokeng, Moriting, Mashimong were all allotted to the South Sotho, North Sotho and Setswana speaking people; whereas, Esangweni, Endayeni, Umthambeka, Wel'mlambo, Ecaleni, Emoyeni, Mqantsa were set aside for the Nguni speaking residents. However, in Tembisa not all sections were ethnically divided. There was a section which accommodated different ethnic groups. This section was called eXubeni (Mixture). Madlala recalls:

> eXubeni section. They used to call it *Tshamahantsi* (Sit Down) because the majority of people who were staying there were Shangaans (xiTsonga speaking people). But it was called eXubeni because, you know, at the time they used to separate people in terms of their tribes. The Sothos would stay this side, Shangaans this side, the Zulus this side, the Pedis this side, and so forth. So eXubeni was a combined section – that is why it was called eXubeni. It was amongst the first sections that we had in Tembisa.[105]

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[103] Mandela, N. *Long Walk to Freedom,* (Randburg, Macdonald Purnell, South Africa, 1994), pp.71-72

[104] Bonner and Segal, *Soweto,* p. 43

[105] Interview with Figo Madlala

Ethnic division went beyond the sections it was further enforced on schools. Pupils were obliged to attend schools of their ethnic origin (or school which taught in their mother tongue). For instance, in Bojeng, Mashimong and Tsepisa Lower Primary Schools only pupils whose mother tongue was North Sothos (i.e. Sepedi) were allowed to attend, whereas pupils whose mother tongue was Isizulu could attend at Ecaleni, Thuthuka, Endulwini, Umthambeka and Welam'lambo Lower Primary and Higher Primary Schools. Some schools, however, made provision for two mother tongue languages. For example, Sedibeng Lower Primary admitted pupils whose mother tongues were South Sotho and North Sotho. Similarly at Isithame Lower Primary pupils whose mother tongues were Venda and IsiZulu were allowed to attend.[106]

Momentarily this division led to clashes between different ethnic groups in the township. Madlala observes:

> You must remember, as well, at that time people were divided also on the basis of tribes. There used to be fights between the Bacas and Zulus, and Zulus and Sothos, or Shoeshoes and all that. And they used to have a whole lot of those fights. Because that's what apartheid was all about: dividing people for you to rule them. It was their grand strategy. And people used to be divided on the basis of their [tribes]. As to whether these were genuine tribal fights or they were perpetrated somewhere else I cannot know. But that seems to be, you know, from the powers that be that we had that type of violence.[107]

Ethnic divisions affected everyone including children. Madlala recalls:

> I remember I was very small, you know, if you were going to Jan Lubbe … It was not Jan Lubbe at that time it was Ground Number One – that's what we used to call it. If you were going there passing through Mashimong [section] they would say, '"here comes *lekwapa'* (i.e. foreigner) and they would chase you. I used to study in the Shangaans' section, so when schools were closing they'd [chase] us … And the same applies to a Sotho person who'd be found around there would be chased … So it was like that. Whether people were consciously

[106] University of the Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers, *East Rand Administration Board*, A1934/C12.2, Tembisa, April 1969

[107] Interview with Figo Madlala

> thinking about those things or not, but they were there. So that was the nature of how things used to be. When I grew up I witnessed some of those things.[108]

The new townships were also divided between township dwellers and the migrants. According to Bonner and Segal this was enforced with the "building of hostels". "The pace of hostel construction", they observe, "accelerated in the late 1950s and 1960s". And "each hostel", they note, "was reserved largely for a particular ethnic group". This, they argue "was in line with the NP government's policy of entrenching tribal differences".[109] Proceeding from this view the government built a number of hostels in Tembisa such as, Vus'muzi, Ethafeni, Sethokga, Temong and Leralla. It is important to note that Tembisa's hostels, except for Sethokga, were not hostels in the usual sense of setting – row upon row of barrack-like structures. They were rather four-roomed units. And of all the hostels in the township, Sethokga was the largest. The Bureau of Market Research estimates that it housed almost 78 per cent of hostel inmates.[110]

In Tembisa, initially mixed ethnic groups resided in a single hostel. No individual hostel was allocated to one ethnic group, possibly because they were not large enough to accommodate individual ethnic groups. However, in certain cases one ethnic group would be dominant. For instance, Mashishi told me that all ethnic groups lived in Sethokga hostel but the Sotho-speaking group was dominant, whereas the Zulu-speaking group largely occupied Vus'muzi hostel.[111] This explains why Vus'muzi hostel in the early 1990s was seen as an Inkatha Freedom Party stronghold in the township.

Through the massive construction of hostels the government intended to curb the influx of Africans to the urban areas. Hostels were to accommodate migrants, who would come to the urban areas only to work and, on retiring they would return to their homelands. Indeed, some of the ex-migrants, Bonner and Nieftagodien note, "…set

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[108] ibid

[109] Bonner, and Segal, *Soweto,* p. 39

[110] University of South Africa, Profile Study of Spaza Retailers in Tembisa in *Bureau of Market Research. Research report* No. 249, 1998

[111] Interview with Simon Mashishi, 13 March 2004. Telephonically

on retiring to their homesteads in the countryside which they did invariably … [because] of their distaste for urban living…"[112] However, not all migrants returned to their homelands. Describing how he, first, lived in a hostel before permanently becoming a resident of Tembisa, Simon Ramogale remarks:

> Remember that after I was release [from Robben Island in 1969] I was banished to Pietersburg. Then we made an application through the chief that I cannot stay there because I was studying. I had already got a bursary from SACHED (South African Council for Higher Education) that I must continue with my BSc Economics, which I couldn't complete when I was on Robben Island because of the ruling that no more studying through universities from overseas. So the only place I could study at was at Wits. And the whole thing was handled by the Commissioner in Pietersburg and the Labour Commissioner in Kempton Park. … They called me and told me that I got a job at the South African Breweries. And they said 'you can go and work at the SAB and that you must stay at Leralla hostel'. … I found that there were so many other guys who were also coming to work here … When we alighted from the train in Kempton Park we found a truck waiting for us … and they took us to Isando that's where the breweries was. From there we were allocated beds, and incidentally I was put in what was called Block C. It was one of the elite sections of the hostel. [But] after the police noticed that [I] was having too many visitors from the hostel [inmates] they feared that [I] might politicize them they removed me from the hostel and got [me] a two-roomed house at Mqanca section. After sometime I moved to Mashimong with my cousin. And [I have] since resided in Tembisa until 1994.[113]

Drawing from the limited documentation about Tembisa there is no evidence to suggest that there were conflicts between the township dwellers and the hostel inmates after the hostels were erected in the township in the 1970s – unlike Soweto.[114] It was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that conflicts arose between the two in Tembisa. In 1989 a conflict arose between the hostel dwellers and some homeless families who had been sharing accommodation in the hostel with them. The conflict started when the hostel inmates tried to forcefully evict the homeless families from Ethafeni hostel. According to a newspaper report "Tembisa hostel inmates went on the rampage … attacking families living there. When the battle was eventually stopped by police using teargas, several residents had to be rushed to hospital, but no

[112] Bonner and Niefatagodien, *Kathorus,* pp. 55-56

[113] Interview with Simon Ramogale

[114] See Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, pp.198-238

inmates of the Ethafeni hostel were injured".[115] However, at this stage the conflict was not politically motivated, as was the case in the early 1990s. Instead, it centred on housing shortages.

In the early 1990s a renewed violence flared up between the township dwellers and hostel inmates in what came to be referred to nationally as 'black-on-black violence' between the ANC and IFP supporters.

2.5 Tsotsis[116] and Crime

Lack of recreational facilities, together with other socio-economic constraints, which the government blamed on the rapid large scale urbanization, drew many of the young people in the townships into crime. These young people came to be referred to as *tsotsis*.[117] The rapid increase of *tsotsis* in the townships was caused as, Brooks and Brickhill write, "by the relative paucity of police in the townships, and their lack of interest in the well-being and safety of the inhabitants, and [that] allowed crime to be rampant".[118] Bonner and Segal observe otherwise and note that "most employers were reluctant to employ urban youth whom they believed to be lazy and undisciplined, [instead they preferred to employ youth from the rural areas because they believed that they were docile, hardworking and they did not choose jobs]".[119] Because of this many of the youth in the townships were left without work. Thus, for them the only option to survive was to engage in crime.

Tembisa had its fair share of *tsotsis.* Shile, recalling one of the brutal murders that took place in the township remarks, 'a few weeks after our arrival [in Tembisa in 1957] … a young man called Aaron was hacked to death with an axe. Everybody was

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[115] *City Press,* 19 November 1989; *New Nation,* 17 November 1989

[116] *Tsotsi* is a term used in black communities to describe persons who consistently engage in anti-social behaviour including theft, gangsterism, intimidation and harassment of the community. See Straker, G. *Faces in the revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in the South Africa,* (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1992)„ p.73

[117] For a detailed account about the *Tsotsi* sub-culture, see Glaser, C. 'Anti-social bandits: Juvenile Delinquency and Tsotsi Youth Gang Subculture on the Witwatersrand, 1935-1960' MA Dissertation, (University of the Witwatersrand, 1990); Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness'

[118] Brooks, and Brickhill, *Whirlwind,* p. 286

[119] Bonner and Segal, *Soweto,* p. 42

shocked, they called our area Khalambazo (where the axe rules)'.[120] In the same vein, Ramogale recounts that in Tembisa initially there were no gangsters but individuals who terrorized the community:

> In Tembisa we used to say there are areas that were 'no-go areas' [because] they were full of *tsotsis.* And it is funny most of these places were in the Nguni areas. There is a place we called Khalambazo. In fact Khalambazo is a nickname [because] those people in Khalambazo used to chop each other with *imbazo* (axe). That's how that place got that name. Then you go to Emangweni, you'd hear of some notorious guys – but not gangsters. Then there was Wel'mlambo. Even there there were *tsotsis.* It is not like there were organized gangsters. But you would get some few guys who [were] known in that area, and those guys could easily attack you. But there was never a known time when it would be said that you were attacked by a gangster.[121]

However, as time went by gangsters emerged in Tembisa. They operated differently from the individual *tsotsis.* Their activities were focused more on material gains rather than killing and maiming. Mashishi observes that:

> In the 1970s gangs such as the Top 7s and X5s had emerged [and] engaged in criminal activities such as mugging and pick-pocketing. They targeted especially commuters in the trains to and from work, and harassed residents. These gangsters would also fight over territories and women in the township.[122]

Debora Marakalala echoes Mashishi recalls:

> The other thing was that there were gangsters. I know for a fact that [my] brother belong[ed] to a gangster. There were the Kwaitos, Top 7 …For instance the Top 7s many of them were Bapedi and Basotho. And Makwaitos were Amazulu. Ja, the nguni-speaking people. So they would fight each other.[123]

Recounting how he was robbed off his belongings, Ramogale remarks:

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[120] *Sowetan*, 7 February 1983

[121] Interview with Simon Ramogale

[122] Interview with Simon Mashishi, 7 April 2004

[123] Interview with Debora Marakalala and Greg Thulare, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, Midrand, 19 November 2004. SADET Oral History Project

> After the police had removed me from the hostel they gave me a two-roomed house in Mqanca section. [Before] I went there I went to my uncle [and] I took an old bed to put there because I was going to move in there. Well I put the bed today but when I came back from work the bed was gone – the place was broken into. Then I said 'look, I can't stay here'. I had a cousin of mine at a section called Mashimong. Then I wrote a letter to the Commissioner to say that this man was prepared to stay with me. And that's how I happened to go and stay at Mashimong section.[124]

In Tembisa *tsotsis* and gangsters, as in many other townships, were gradually eliminated. It appears that they were eliminated following the government's 'crackdown on crime' which began in April 1978. According to Seidman, the government's wave of "crime prevention blitzes, which started in Soweto, Alexandra and Hillbrow, and probably spread to other areas, resulted in about 5000 arrests by mid-May [of that year]". "These arrests", she adds, "continued, becoming a nearly daily occurrence by June, to the extent that an article summarizing arrests in the week ending June 14 mentioned several raids not reported elsewhere and listed about 1000 arrests".[125]

However, communities in Black townships did not only rely on the government to deal with *tsotsis* and gangsters. Some used unconventional methods to curb the problem of *tsotsi-ism* and gangsterism. Brooks and Brickhill write that "in 1975 a UBC member Mr Siegfried Manthata, described as the founder of the Naledi tribal court, told the press that tribal courts already existed in three townships within the Soweto complex (Mapetla, Molapo and Central Western Jabavu), that residents of Diepkloof and Alexandra were considering the idea, and that he and other UBC members had visited the East Rand township of Tembisa to spread the message".[126] Having grown tired of *tsotsis,* the community in Tembisa appears to have welcomed the message and set up their own *makgotla* (tribal courts), which would deal with the *tsotsis.* This was evident when "a member of the Tembisa *legkotla* was convicted of assault in July after five youths and a woman were flogged and later admitted to hospital for allegedly breaking school windows".[127]

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[124] Interview with Simon Ramogale

[125] Seidman, *Facelift Apartheid,* pp. 45-46

[126] Brooks, and Brickhill, *Whirlwind,* p. 288

[127] ibid

It appears that *tsotsis* and gangsters in Tembisa in the 1970s were either restricted or eliminated following the police and community crackdowns. However, they resurfaced again in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. In the mid-1980s the two most notorious and ruthless gangs, the Toasters and 21 Jump Street, were eliminated by members of the Tembisa Youth Congress (TEYCO). These gangs were so named because the Toasters burnt their victims, and after a crime related series then broadcasted on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Others were called 21 Jump Street.[128] In the early 1990s the problem of gangsterism was so rampant in the township that TEYCO called for the reintroduction of the 'peoples' courts' to deal with it.[129]

2.6 Political Resistance

Tembisa was not only a haven for criminals, but was a home to political activists as well dating from the late 1950s. This period was when African resistance was at its peak. Firstly, the ANC, together with the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) embarked in a defiance campaign in 1952 against the 'unjust laws'.[130] Secondly, in 1955 these organizations, together with the Congress of the Democrats, organized a 'Peoples' Congress' where the Freedom Charter was adopted.[131] Thirdly, on 9 August 1956 women marched against the pass laws. In 1959 the Africanist faction within the ANC broke away to form the PAC and this directly affected politics in Tembisa. In its brief period of legal existence inside the country, PAC managed to recruit members who were tasked with the formation of cells in various parts of the country. It was at this stage that PAC cells were formed in Tembisa.

Prior to this there is no evidence that suggests that there was any political mobilization in the township. This was mainly because Tembisa only began to be constructed in 1957. In addition, as Lodge remarks "civil disobedience would only be encouraged again by ANC leaders in 1958 with the women's pass protests in

[128] Interview with Simon Mashishi

[129] *The Argus,* 11 April 1990

[130] For a detailed account about the defiance campaign, see Lodge, *Black Politics,* pp 33-62

[131] ibid, pp. 67-88

Johannesburg, and even here there was disagreement over this within the leadership of the ANC".[132]

Notwithstanding the government's repression, the PAC branch in Tembisa managed to form cells. Recalling how the PAC cell was launched in Tembisa, Ramogale observes:

> As many people know Kilnerton was the hotbed of students' politics. And because of that I could not even finish a year in Kilnerton I was expelled with other students. In December 1961we met, that was myself, Mokofane, Korasi, we had this guy who had since skipped the country and never came back again, Banda, and there was teacher Kgositsile. We met under the trees where it's now Hospital View. That's where we formally launched the PAC branch in Tembisa. We were forming an underground PAC branch. And incidentally our guest speaker at that meeting was Johnson Mlambo. He came there to introduce the PAC and address our branch formally.[133]

After the Sharpeville massacre the political mood changed dramatically. African political organizations were no longer in the mood to continue engaging the government through peaceful protests; instead they were preparing to confront it militarily. This marked the beginning of the armed struggle.[134] After the PAC and ANC were proscribed on April 8, 1960 they went into exile where they directed the armed struggle. Inside the country, as observed, the PAC had already formed cells which, it would appear were, initially, intended to conscientize the recruits and to keep the momentum of the struggle internally. Ramogale remarks:

> You know, the organizations were banned so the only way to have the organizations continuing we [formed cells because we] couldn't have rallies. And through an instruction from Lesotho when PK (Potlako Leballo) was in Lesotho – he advised that we shouldn't have big cells because if one got arrested that man can mention about ten names. So in a cell we were not supposed to be more than ten. [And] only one person on top could be a co-ordinator between these cells. We would get a visitor to come and address us but we didn't know where [that] guy would be coming from. All we knew was that he was a member of the PAC and he's from another cell.[135]

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[132] ibid. p. 68

[133] Interview with Simon Ramogale

[134] For a more detailed account about military resistance, see Lodge, *Black Politics,* pp.231-255

[135] Interview with Simon Ramogale

However, it was not long before the PAC's cells were radicalized, and their activities changed and focused on the armed struggle. Mathabatha notes with regard to PAC's cells in Pretoria that they "… underwent radical change …" after their leaders returned from a meeting with PK Leballo, PAC's secretary general, in Basotholand (now Lesotho) in December 1962. At that meeting, he writes, emphasis was placed on recruitment and war.[136] And this was the message which was passed on to the members of the cells.

From the activities of the Tembisa PAC's cells it is possible to surmise that PAC leaders from Tembisa also attended that meeting because of the radicalization of the political lessons offered to the members. Describing the activities of their cells, Ramogale remarks:

> There were two cells in Tembisa that were responsible for reconnaissance and holding meetings in which members would be taught how to make explosives to be used in sabotage activities. The local meetings were not so much about political teachings, they were more on the preparation for the massive launch; the fight against the whites.[137]

Despite this there is no evidence to suggest that the PAC's cells in Tembisa had ever implemented what they had learned in their meetings. Instead their activities appear to have been limited to political (or war) lessons. One way of explaining this is that they lacked experience (and experienced personnel) in military activity. Ramogale admits that they were amateurish, but knew that something had to be done. To illustrate this point he told me of a time when they had sent one of their members, Korasi, to the Voortrekkerhoogte in Pretoria to look around so that he could come back and report to them how they could move in and out of that place (with the intention of stealing weapons) without raising suspicions. But Korasi was not trained in reconnaissance. The reason he was chosen to carry out this plan was because his father was a chef at

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[136] Mathabatha, S. 'The PAC and POQO in Pretoria, 1958-1964' in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa,* Vol. 1, 1960-1970, South African Democracy Education Trust, (Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004), pp. 313

[137] ibid. According to Ramogale the other cell was based in the South part of Tembisa led by John Maleka. For a more detailed account about the activities of the PAC's cells, see Mathabatha, 'The PAC' in *The Road to Democracy,* pp.312 -317

the Voortrekkerhoogte.[138] It is possible that this could have contributed to their inactivity.

The government, on the other hand, was in no mood to tolerate further resistance. In 1963 it embarked in an all out campaign to crack down on any political activism in the country. This resulted in many activists skipping the country into exile, while others were forced to operate underground, and, still more being arrested and sentenced to long term imprisonment. Members of the Tembisa PAC's cells were not spared. According to Ramogale their cell dissolved after some of its members left the township. He remembers that Korasi moved to Potchefstroom where he was arrested. Ramogale, himself, went to Hebron in early 1963 to continue with his studies and on 23 April of the same year he was arrested in Lady Selborne while sleeping in Ntloedibe's house. He was sentenced to six on Robben Island – from 1963 to 1969.[139]

This marked the end of resistance in Tembisa until the early 1970s when the Black Consciousness Movement (or its adherents) began to conscientize and mobilize people again in the township. However, prior to this, Ramogale remembers that many people in Tembisa feared to involve themselves in politics. This, he believes, was because of the fear that the state had instilled in people through its brutal repressive measures. He recalls that in 1969 after he had been released from Robben Island there were people in the township who did not want to associate themselves with him. He recalls:

> "Like I said that was the time when people were scared. When I came back from prison there were few people who were actually prepared to talk to me. That was the height of the security police. They would come to you – we've learnt about that now – and say 'that is a communist, you keep an eye on him'. You can't say, 'no', because if you say no then you are a target. So only a few people came to me and said 'Ramogale, tell us man, what's wrong? These guys say we must keep an eye on you. What is it that you did?' Then I would tell them the story. I mean my neighbours were approached by the security police and told to 'keep an

[138] Interview with Simon Ramogale

[139] Interview with Simon Ramogale and Sadik Isaacs, Robben Island, 27 October 2000. I am indebted to the Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives for allowing me to use this interview. The interview is part of the *Robben Island Museum Ex-Political Prisoners Memories Project*; Interview with Simon Ramogale, 7 April; 18 August 2004; see, Mathabatha, 'The PAC' in *The Road to Democracy*, p. 315

> eye on me' and they should give them a report. My uncle, who was a priest, was scared of staying with me".[140]

The advent of the BCM revived the politics of resistance in the township, and this culminated in the 1976 students' uprisings. This issue will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The chapter has shown that Tembisa, from its establishment in the mid-1950s to 1976, did not experience incidents of political resistance, as in other townships during this period[141] This, of course, excludes the brief existence of the PAC's cells which had been formed in the township in the beginning of the 1960s.

This chapter has argued that the political quiescence that prevailed in the township during this period should be attributed to the GCC's control of the township. The township, when it was established, did not fall under any municipality's control. In similar vein, none of the surrounding municipalities wanted to assume control of it. In addition, the government was not prepared to finance its development because it felt that it was not its responsibility, but that of the surrounding municipalities because the residents of the township were their employees. Consequently the township was placed under the control of the GCC, with the surrounding municipalities contributing to the financing of the township's development.

Because of this financial assistance and the sale of sorghum beer, the GCC managed to provide social services in the township, albeit minimal one. By extension, it was able to keep the rent payments as low as possible. During the GCC's control rents in Tembisa were never increased. This only changed when ERAB took over the control of the township.

The sixties economic boom played a significant role in diverting the urban Africans' focus on politics. This period was characterized by an increase in employment and family earnings, especially amongst the semi-skilled workers. This had a profound

[140] Interview with Simon Ramogale

[141] See Lodge, *Black Politics,* pp. 153-182

impact on the residents of the East Rand townships because of the growing manufacturing sector, which was centred in that area. Because of this a significant number of the residents of Tembisa were employed, and in turn, avoided politics and focused their attention on their work and sustaining their families.

The political inactivity gripping the township was caused by the severe repressive measures exerted by the state during this period. This period was characterized by massive arrests, detentions without trial, torture, and an effective government's network of spies. This instilled fear in people. The residents of Tembisa, as observed already, tried by all means to avoid involvement in politics or to associate themselves with political activists. This changed in the mid-1970s.

The National Party government's intention to curb the influx of Blacks in the urban areas resulted in it creating homelands where Blacks could reside and govern themselves. It made provision that Blacks could come to the urban areas only to work. Because of this the central government shifted the responsibility of administering black townships to the local black authorities. These were left to their own devices on how to raise funds to administer the townships. Flowing from this the local authorities relied, initially, on rents and the sale of sorghum beer. However, after 1976 to accumulate revenue for the development of the townships local municipalities resorted to increasing rents. This marked the beginning of political resistance in the townships.

In Tembisa, ERAB went through a similar experience. Its situation, however, was further worsened when the country's economy took a downswing in the early 1970s. Because of this, and ERAB's decision to increase rent charges, the residents mobilized themselves to protests against this decision. These protests were further fuelled when the residents realized that the money accrued through rents was not used to develop the township, but the homelands.

In the 1980s Tembisa residents' protests were directed against the BLA's, which had replaced ERAB. To curb the increasing protests in the Black townships, the government enacted an Act that shifted the responsibility of controlling the townships to the Black elected councillors. However, they, like their predecessors, did not

receive any financial assistance from the government. They, too, relied solely on rent increases. With the formation of the UDF in the early 1980s, Tembisa residents embarked on rent protests, which later turned into protracted boycotts. Political mobilization and protests in the township against rent increases and lack of services delivery continued until the early 1990s.