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The making of Krugersdorp, 1887-1923

Dugmore, Charles Frederick

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ABSTRACT

This thesis constitutes a social history of Krugersdorp that examines how the town was made during a formative period of profound and rapid change from 1887 to 1923. This thesis will argue that the making of Krugersdorp was a complex process where society shaped the built environment and where changes in the built environment, in turn, influenced society. Ideological, political and economic rivalries caused changes in Krugersdorp's urban society and these changes were, in turn, reflected in the built environment. The consequent changes in the town's architecture, the layout and the distribution of buildings, influenced, in turn, how social groups interacted with one another. Thus, the residents and the built environment, the 'flesh' and the 'stone', were mutually influential.

In the course of competing and co-operating with one another, certain interest groups, during specific periods, obtained the upper hand over the town and used this domination to shape Krugersdorp in their own interests. During the late 1880s and early 1890s, the town was made largely by white, English-speaking 'pioneer' miners who hailed from places as diverse as Cornwall and Australia as well as various South African mining towns such as Kimberley and Pilgrim's Rest. These men formed part of a 'crew culture' of itinerant workers moving between mining centres across the British Empire, Southern Africa and United States. They were transient roughnecks who made Krugersdorp a fragile, temporary structure one-step ahead of a ghost town as well as a 'Devil's *Dorp*' which was one of the most violent places in the Transvaal.

The late 1890s were increasingly dominated by a white, English-speaking middle class whose members were determined to impose order and morality on the disorderly and immoral miners. A professional and commercial elite fraction from within this class dominated local political bodies, societies, sports clubs, charity organisations and the business community of Krugersdorp. They used their leadership positions in the local churches to build large stone structures in order to inspire the transient white miners to settle and raise families. They also employed their political and social dominance over the town, as well as their control over the local media, shortly after the turn of the century, to shape Krugersdorp, slowly but surely, into a stable town that was safe and pleasant to live in.

During the 1890s, this same group became increasingly patriotic as expatriate Britons who openly clashed with the local Dutch-speaking white elite, that, in turn, became national chauvinist Transvaal Republicans. As ideological tensions increased after the Jameson Raid of 1896 and in the months leading up to the South African War of 1899-1902, this ideological tension between the white political elites was reflected semiotically in the built environment. These changes, in turn, influenced its residents by increasing the levels of hostility among them. After the War, the expatriate 'British' elite turned Krugersdorp into a 'British

Imperial' town where Union Jacks, bunting and evergreens decorated the town on patriotic holidays and 'jingo' structures like the 'Coronation Park' were established. Within a few years, however, the town settled into a state of relative social harmony and co-operation that was reflected in the built environment in the form of new buildings that 'spoke' of co-operation such as the Wanderers Sports Grounds. These Sports Grounds - where people from both cultural groups would join the same sports teams - were laid out between the 'jingoistic' Coronation Park and the 'Transvaal Republican' Paardekraal Monument.

As the white population settled down after the South African War and as ideological tensions lessened, so many miners settled down with their families or married and raised children. Large numbers of children changed the town's demographical profile and began to shape the town in new ways. The presence of children required many changes in the built environment, especially in the form of new schools. Under Milner's Anglicisation policy, Krugersdorp's children were supposed to be indoctrinated into loyal British subjects by the schooling system and associated activities like the Boys' Cadets and the Scouts. Over time, however, this 'imperial project' was challenged by a variety of interest groups, not least by parents and the children themselves. By the period 1905-6, a nascent 'South Africanism' arose instead and was reflected in changes in the school curriculum and the relative failure of the cadet and scouting movements.

Indian residents who had made their way to the town as traders and hawkers since the late 1880s, also began to exercise an influence over the town by the turn of the century. White, English-speaking shopkeepers from the commercial elite attempted to isolate or 'quarantine' Indian shopkeepers and hawkers by associating them with disease. This tactic failed and a scheme to remove Indians to an 'Asiatic Bazaar' was thwarted by the determined resistance of the Indian residents. This was led by Mohandas Gandhi, who defied the Town Council that was dominated by their white commercial rivals. So effective was Indian resistance that by 1914 Indian businesses were entrenched in the central business district of the town.

Krugersdorp during the period 1910 to 1920 was also shaped by African and Coloured residents, particularly women, who resisted attempts by the white Town Council to close down the Old Location and move them to a distant New Location or 'Munsieville', established in 1912. They did so because this would make it difficult for them to earn a living by working for white residents as domestic workers or by taking in laundry. Many of these women also made money by brewing and selling liquor illicitly to black miners and they would have found it difficult to do so in the New Location.

The white elite built a 'Model Location' at Munsieville in order to attract black middle-class allies in their struggle against an increasingly radicalized black working class and lumpenproletariat. This plan was thwarted as most residents refused to move out of the Old Location. Apparently vengeful, the Town Council

abandoned these plans and, in 1914, designed a new location at Randfontein that was meant to be a harsh, fenced-in ‘ghetto’. Surprisingly, many Old Location residents moved there despite its harsh features and continued to avoid the supposedly more attractive New Location. They apparently did so because the Randfontein Location was close to a railway station that linked the location residents to white residents and the black miners on nearby mines.

The Town Council clashed with black women in the location throughout the year 1917, leading to the appointment of an Inquiry. At this Inquiry, the local black middle class openly sided with black working class women who tried to make a living selling liquor illicitly to black miners. Apparently learning from its mistakes, the Town Council then adopted a new form of location at Lewisham in 1920 that was less harsh than the Randfontein Location ‘ghetto’ but which also avoided the features of the ‘Model Location’ at Munsieville. This concession can be interpreted as a victory of African women who resisted the municipality’s plans for them and forced these changes.

White female social reformers and activists also shaped Krugersdorp in the period after 1905 and particularly during the First World War. Their reformist activities reached a peak in 1916 where they dominated life in the town to the point where it was fast developing into a ‘gynopia’ or ‘women’s town’. These relatively young, mostly English-speaking, white females achieved reforms that promoted ‘social purity’ and temperance. They transformed the social life of the town in important ways by restricting white male expressions of sexuality and access to liquor. They also fought and won a struggle for the female municipal franchise and the right of women to stand as municipal candidates.

All these reforms had important implications for Krugersdorp and influenced its built environment in certain ways. For example, female activists ensured that no liquor outlets were established in Burghershoop during the First World War. After 1916, however, a conservative backlash inspired by the need for a ‘War Effort’ had driven most of these women literally back into their homes and female social activism rapidly faded from public view. Their failure to sustain their reforms also had an influence upon Krugersdorp. For example, many new liquor outlets were established throughout Krugersdorp after 1916 and many reforms envisaged by female municipal candidates were not carried out until much later.

White labourite political mobilization followed a remarkably similar trajectory and shaped the town of Krugersdorp in important ways, particularly during the First World War, reaching a peak in the years 1914-1916. Local white trade union and labourite leaders, particularly those from the South African Labour Party which was formed in 1909, began to shape Krugersdorp in terms of a vision of a white, working-class town. These changes included municipal socialist schemes that employed substantial numbers of white workers and policies such as site value taxation, Saturday Half-Holiday and free, secondary education. These policies were, however, never fully realized during the period under study. By 1917-8,

labourite local politicians were on the retreat as the white commercial and professional elite, who organised themselves politically into a pro-business coterie of ‘Independents’, regained ascendancy. While labourites fought a vigorous rearguard action, their vision of a white, working-class town was never fully realized.

Finally the white commercial and professional elite attempted to impose their vision of a legal town on the residents, particularly over the Indian residents and, in the process, isolate or drive out Indian shopkeepers from the town. A number of court cases were fought vigorously by the white and Indian commercial rivals which the latter won in most instances, including the famous *Dadoo Limited v Krugersdorp Municipal Council, 1920*. The white Town Council, dominated by white commercial and professional interests, nonetheless, regained some degree of control by the late 1920s and, after the 1922 Rand Revolt, had largely achieved their vision of a legal town, leading to a period of political quiescence and economic prosperity.

Each of these struggles were ‘inscribed’, in turn, into the built environment, shaping its architecture, town planning, the position of its buildings and the nature of its monuments. Thus, this thesis contends that the making of Krugersdorp can be illuminated through an exploration of spatiality, an examination of the meaning of place and an investigation of the local, regional, national and the international influences on urban spaces. Krugersdorp was, in the end, made by all of its residents, through their interaction with one another, and with their built environment.

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