

## Patriarchalism and Paternalism in South African “Native Administration” in the 1950s

Doreen Atkinson\*

### Introduction

During the 1950s, township officials in South Africa began to experience unprecedented anxieties about township conditions. Rapid urbanisation and extreme urban poverty contributed to these officials’ growing sense of social disintegration in black townships. These concerns formed a constant backdrop to debates in official circles about township policy.

Numerous revisionist historians<sup>1</sup> have shown how white rule in South African urban areas promoted the creation and maintenance of a subjugated black working class. In this context, the work of Saul Dubow<sup>2</sup> was instructive in that it revealed the normative underpinnings of the subjugation in terms of white paternalist thinking. Dubow’s work is particularly important, as he is one of the few urban studies scholars who has attempted to understand the normative meaning systems of white officials under apartheid, and to uncover how those officials explained their situation to themselves.

In order to take the argument further, this article will show how, under the patriarchal ethos, the web of control in the cities was not nearly as systematic, or as confident, as revisionist authors tend to claim. This was not simply attributable to the impracticalities of urban segregation, but also due to the complex and competing strands of officials’ normative thinking during the 1950s.

In this article we will outline officials’ responses to social problems in terms of two concepts, namely “ethical life” and “morality”. “Ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*) is an Hegelian concept referring to individuals’ normative definitions of their identity, subjectivity, reciprocal rights and obligations.<sup>3</sup> Township officials subscribed to a specific conception of “ethical life” which may be characterised as “patriarchalism”. This involved a system of established norms, community values, and normative ways in which the officials defined black urban city-dwellers’ status as persons.

---

\* Doreen Atkinson is Visiting Professor at the Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State

1 P Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1984); H Sapire, “African settlement and segregation in Brakpan, 1900-1927”, in P Bonner, I Hofmeyr, D James and T Lodge (eds), *Holding their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1989), pp 141-176; N Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994); C H Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), Chapter 7

2 S Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-1936* (Macmillan, London, 1989)

3 D Atkinson, “Cities and Citizenship: Towards a normative analysis of the urban order in South Africa, with special reference to East London, 1950-1986” PhD thesis, University of Natal, 1991, pp 16-17

In contrast to the ethical life of a community, “morality” is a question of individual conscience. People have moral obligations to “do the right thing”. Such obligations exist, not only by virtue of being part of a larger community, but because people have individual rational wills.<sup>4</sup> Against the backdrop of “patriarchal” social relations, officials often developed a specific conception of moral conduct, which we will term “paternalism”.

The paper analyses the proceedings of the Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs (IANA), which served as the main debating forum of township managers in the 1950s. IANA hosted conferences where municipal township managers could reflect on their functions and problems. Significantly, opinion within IANA was often divided, particularly between those who supported National Party policies on macro-apartheid, influx control and urban segregation, and those from United Party-controlled councils.<sup>5</sup> In this article, we will consider various manifestations of paternalism, as these found expression in an environment of “fuzzy” ethical principles and community boundaries. It will be argued that this lack of clarity gave rise to ongoing moral quandaries and debates which led, in their turn, to an inability on the part of the “city fathers” to impose modern discipline, in the Foucauldian sense,<sup>6</sup> on the black sector of the cities.

### **Ethical life: Patriarchalism in urban black administration**

If the ethical life of a community consists of myriad patterns of social obligations and conventions, based on people’s conception of themselves and others as specific kinds of persons, then the sphere of ethical life is never the subject of individual choice. It forms the backdrop of individual action, and consists of the normative inter-subjective processes whereby individuals recognise and “constitute” one another. Through mutual recognition, people in effect create each other by recognising their social status, rights and responsibilities.

Patriarchalism is one way in which individuals may constitute one another. According to Donald VanDeVeer:

The term “patriarch” in ancient times referred to a male ruler, typically a venerated elder. A community hierarchically organized with such persons having supreme *de facto* authority is called “patriarchal”.<sup>7</sup> Such “authorities” control others. Whether for their own good is a further question.<sup>7</sup>

Patriarchalism is a moral order in which normative concepts such as “the person”, “authority”, “responsibility”, and “rights” are given meaning within the parameters of a constant and pervasive hierarchy of status and responsibility. The patriarch is in some sense a more complete and more responsible moral agent, with more rights and obligations than his children. He is constituted as such by the

---

4 C Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979), p 83

5 S Bekker and R Humphries, *From Control to Confusion: The Changing Role of Administration Boards in South Africa, 1971-1983* (Shuter and Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1985), p 4

6 M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Vintage Books, New York, 1979)

7 D VanDeVeer, *Paternalistic Intervention: The Moral Bounds on Benevolence* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986), p 23

recognition accorded him by the rest of the family, and he recognises them in turn as persons with fewer rights, but more needs than himself.

Patriarchalism is not a morally irrational order. The analogy of patriarchalism in families serves to highlight certain dimensions of organic societies. Some people prefer hierarchical, organic societies to highly individualistic ones, since the former may meet important emotional needs.

In most family systems, little attention is paid to abstract rights.<sup>8</sup> In Hegel’s terms, the family is the sphere of “particularity”, as opposed to “universality”. Individual worth is assessed in terms of the specific characteristics and needs of individuals’ roles.

Hegel contrasts the sphere of the family with that of civil society. In the latter, the formal equality of persons is recognised, and social interaction is regulated by fixed and impartial rules. Civil society is the sphere of individualism – a sphere in which there is little forbearance of individuals’ specific needs and frailties.<sup>9</sup>

In the cities of South Africa during the 1950s, the different ways of visualising public life can be described with reference to the concepts of the “patriarchal family” and “individualistic civil society”. For many city councillors and municipal officials, the relationship between the white urban authorities and black residents resembled that of the patriarchal family; for others, however, it was beginning to resemble that of modern, individualistic civil society. Hence we will use these two governing metaphors to consider the various ambivalences and permutations of the ethical life which constituted white and black urban residents alike.

### **Patriarchalism and the urban “family”**

Within the family context, parents have a moral duty to teach their children about moral conduct and the relationships that constitute ethical life. This education process invariably has a coercive dimension. Although children cannot always be reasoned with, they must be made to act reasonably. They need firm guidance by their mentors.<sup>10</sup> In the traditional conception of the family, the *pater familias* is often a strict, distant figure, for whom children generally have a high regard, almost bordering on fear. These hierarchical relationships often continue to exist, even after children have grown up and established their own families.<sup>11</sup>

The response by children to such moral training may be complex. Since patriarchalism is a form of ethical life, the patriarch’s status would be regarded as incontestable and “normal” by individuals within the family, even if they should resent certain actions taken by the patriarch. While the subordinate members of the family may be riled by specific commands, they will acknowledge the patriarch’s unassailable right to issue commands.

---

8 W V Doniela, “Hegel and the Organic State”, in D Muschamp (ed), *Political Thinkers* (Macmillan, London, 1986), p 166

9 J Plamenatz, *Man and Society* II (Longman, London, 1963), p 234

10 Plamenatz, *Man and Society* II, p 244

11 G Cronje en J D Venter, *Die Patriargale Familie* (HAUM, Kaapstad, 1973), pp 35-36

It will be claimed in this discussion that some of the typical ethical characteristics of families are useful in understanding the patriarchal dimension of black-white relations as obtained in South African cities in the 1950s. Patriarchalism approximated many white officials' attitudes to the black residents in their charge. As will become evident, they regarded the relationship as an intimate one, involving affection, moral education, coercion, and lack of privacy – and the relative unimportance of individual rights.

Whether the black residents saw the relationship in these patriarchal terms, is a more problematic issue. The utterances of black community leaders sometimes implied that they did; but political currents in black townships were very diverse, and there were most certainly many blacks that rejected the trappings of patriarchalism. Suffice it to say that white officials often got the impression that black leaders subscribed to the patriarchal ethos.<sup>12</sup>

As the forces of modernisation, urbanisation and social change gained momentum, however, the patriarchal order came under increasing pressure, creating ambiguities and confusions. The city fathers found themselves anxiously trying to consolidate a coherent sense of community in the face of intractable social problems. The next section will outline their understanding of these problems.

### **Urban black administration during the 1950s: The prospect of impending chaos**

Debates about township administration during the 1950s invariably took place against a backdrop of social disintegration. This sense of threat had been a growing part of white officials' consciousness since the 1920s, and had been fanned by General J.B.M. Hertzog's tendency to equate social trends, such as black urbanisation and education, with miscegenation and the "swamping" of whites at the polls. This was consonant with the prevailing mood of the time, "with its paranoia about civilisation's retrogressive tendencies and its vulnerability in the face of the 'virile' mass of 'barbarians' who were 'flooding' into the cities".<sup>13</sup>

During the 1950s, increasing social dislocation in the cities caused similar anxieties for white city councillors and municipal officials. Local white officials were the government's front line in dealing with widespread urbanisation. Whereas the vast majority of white people never saw for themselves where their black employees lived, slept or socialised, the township managers were in constant close contact with the residents of the townships.

Kathy Eales, for example, has described the Johannesburg City Council's anxiety about the effects of detribalisation:

---

12 Atkinson, "Cities and Citizenship", pp 153-198

13 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 17

More serious than the horrors of urban women brewing liquor, prostituting their bodies, tempting respectable men and contributing to vice and crime, was the spectre of their “detrribalised” children who, through improper socialisation and early exposure to vice and crime, would make poor workers<sup>14</sup>

In due course these anxieties became chronic, and they were constantly reflected in the debates of the Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs (IANA) in the 1950s and 1960s. The sense of impending urban chaos was clearly evident in the remarks of Doctor Language, Manager of Non-European Affairs in Brakpan:

The fact is that urban locations became more and more overcrowded, and consequently it became more difficult to control them; squatters’ camps suddenly sprang up in and around urban areas and even at places where they were not expected; amenities for maintaining the health of the communities were lacking, and in many instances the Natives lived under conditions which threatened their own health and that of the European community<sup>15</sup>

In his presidential address to IANA in 1957, Bourquin of Durban presented a picture of urban dislocation and moral decay:

The morals of the urban Bantu have deteriorated under these undesirable conditions and statistics point towards an alarming increase of illegitimate births; in the meantime there emerged a young generation of irresponsible Bantu who refused either to attend school or to work, who preferred to pass their time in idleness, gambling and mischief to the detriment of the community; crime, especially burglary, increased and in many instances Europeans were the victims<sup>16</sup>

According to Mathewson, Township Manager of Benoni, the “Bantu in the cities” experienced a complete lack of family cohesion and control; moral standards no longer existed. “There is no anchor, whilst he cannot invest in land ...”.<sup>17</sup> Professor J.H. Coetzee of Potchefstroom University felt that

The tendency on the part of members of the urban Bantu communities to cheat and rob their raw countrymen, and sometimes even members of their own tribe, [is] one of the most disturbing symptoms of social and moral decline<sup>18</sup>

The whole question of the nature of the urban community was very problematic. It was a time of great social change and widespread anxiety about urban disorder. The impulse to develop a new form of social order, based on modernity and “discipline”<sup>19</sup> had become an overriding need. As inexorable social forces rapidly altered social conditions in the townships, the need to establish more durable forms of social organisation became urgently evident to the beleaguered administrators.

---

14 K Eales, “Patriarchs, passes and privilege”, in P Bonner, I Hofmeyr, D James and T Lodge (eds), *Holding their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1989), pp 105-139

15 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1954, pp 179-180

16 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, p 32

17 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1953, p 42

18 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1953, p 87

19 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

### Responding to social disintegration: The ambiguous doctrine of segregation

The boundaries of the urban community remained controversial. What was the proper place of blacks in society? What did “citizenship” mean, in the context of urban “locations”? Were black residents welcome but temporary guests in the cities, or unwelcome but permanent citizens? If urban blacks had to administer their own affairs in the locations, what would their relation be with urban whites? Would they exist as separate cities, or would they eventually become full citizens within a shared urban polity?

The ethical problem was intensified by the ambiguities in the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, which formed the basis of government policy towards urban blacks. The Act contained two distinct philosophical strands. On the one hand, its “liberal” incorporationist component was based on the 1919 Godley Commission, which acknowledged that suitable accommodation had to be provided for a permanent and growing urban black population. On the other hand, the 1923 Act also bore the imprint of the 1921 Stallard Commission, which regarded black urbanisation as fundamentally undesirable, and claimed that blacks had no right to be in urban areas other than to minister to the needs of whites.<sup>20</sup> The first view contained a notion of the development of an inclusive urban community, while the second involved an endorsement of traditional, “tribal” forms of authority as practised in the rural areas. Each of these options drew the boundaries of the urban community in different ways.

These unresolved issues had important practical consequences in the design of urban policy. Should blacks live in close geographical proximity to whites or not? Should their standard of living be comparable to that of whites? What were the financial responsibilities of whites in the light of dire black poverty? Were township officials primarily responsible to their black charges, or were they beholden to the demands of the white community? White officials constantly grappled with the question whether blacks could be part of the wider community. Were they indeed “our natives”?

It was one thing to recognise that the traditional communal bonds were disintegrating. It was quite another to devise an adequate substitute. Although the problem was rarely clearly articulated by ordinary officials, a notable exception was Doctor Language:

One of the many reasons for the social decay of our urban Bantu is to be found in the process of detribalisation and urbanisation as a consequence of which their sense of tribal and community discipline has been lost with nothing to take its place. What have we done about this? I think we must admit that a substitute for the lost community pride and discipline for which the traditional Bantu were so renowned still has to be found.<sup>21</sup>

While patriarchalism certainly formed a large part of township social dynamics, there was an inherent ambiguity in the application of these principles

---

20 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 123

21 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, p 32

within the confusing and changing social context. Officials were confronted with an urgent need to consolidate and expand disciplinary forms of social order. This process was, however, inhibited by the fundamental lack of clarity about the appropriate normative categories and distinctions which should be applied to the population. The policy of segregation had emerged as a possible response to this problem. The ambiguity concerning patriarchy as a suitable moral order in the cities must be considered against the backdrop of important debates since the 1920s about segregationism as a practical policy.<sup>22</sup>

Segregationist doctrines were usually seen by their proponents as progressive. Segregationists did not portray their views as a return to a pre-industrial past. Instead, segregationism was seen as a modernising ideology which sought to defuse the intensity of the social conflicts accompanying industrialisation.<sup>23</sup> The segregationists eschewed the Victorian notion of progress, which was based on the value of identity and assimilation. The concepts of “civilisation”, “progress” and “individualism” were increasingly replaced by the concepts of “culture” and “racial groups”.<sup>24</sup>

This involved a decisive shift in people’s conception of their own (and others’) subjectivity. Many segregationists did not justify segregation as a matter of control alone. There was also concern for blacks’ moral situation in the urban environment.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the historian, Edgar Brookes, argued for moral as well as disciplinary imperatives in government policy. The duty of the white man was “to civilise as well as control, to develop as well as protect”.<sup>26</sup> A prevalent notion at the time was that segregation was morally justified, because it represented a golden mean between the “Scylla of identity and the Charybdis of subordination”, or between the unacceptable extremes of total integration and permanent inequality.<sup>27</sup>

According to the segregationists, the distinction between white and black was an important social boundary with great moral significance. It was a boundary which constituted the proper subjectivity of whites and blacks, and hence, in Foucault’s terms, could form the basis of an appropriate disciplinary grid. An important part of this vision was the informal anthropological knowledge which most white officials intuitively adopted. This anthropological bent can be seen as the confluence of three intellectual currents.

The first was a growing interest in anthropology at the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town since the 1920s. Anthropology was increasingly seen as a discipline that was useful to administrators.<sup>28</sup> In 1925, an ethnological section was formed in the Department of Native Affairs. During the 1930s and early 1940s, an enthusiasm developed for the theory that black social structures could be used for

---

22 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 3

23 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 7

24 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 34

25 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 25

26 Quoted in: Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 29

27 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 28

28 Rich, *White Power*, p 54

sound administrative purposes.<sup>29</sup> These notions were taken up by the Smuts government, in an approach which can be termed “liberal segregation”, for it retained a fairly tolerant and undogmatic character. It was characterised by strongly protective elements, and made explicit reference to the patriarchal idiom of “trusteeship”.<sup>30</sup>

This approach emphasised the cultural differences between Western civilisation and black society. It also reflected intellectuals’ anxieties about the social atomisation associated with Western individualism, and emphasised the value of organic social communities and cultures which give meaning and coherence to people’s lives.<sup>31</sup> Segregationists also explored the continuing links of first-generation black city dwellers with their pastoral and rural background.<sup>32</sup>

A second segregationist current was provided by the political platform of General Hertzog after the late 1920s. Hertzogite segregationism was “strident [and] racist in character, and it emphasised the economic and political exclusion of Africans from a common society”.<sup>33</sup> It found expression in specific policies, such as the abolition of the Cape franchise and in the white “civilised labour” policy.

However, despite these enthusiasms, segregation was not ruthlessly applied before 1948. Under the United Party it was seen as “a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance”.<sup>34</sup> Doctor Smit, the last United Party Secretary of Native Affairs, often compromised on the principles of segregationism. For example, the Native Affairs Department (NAD) was aware that enforcing the pass laws tarnished its image as the protector of blacks.<sup>35</sup>

In 1942, Prime Minister Smuts admitted that “... there is very great disappointment at the results which have been achieved [in implementing segregation]”.<sup>36</sup> By the 1940s, there was a growing appreciation by English intellectuals of the role of blacks in economic development and industrialisation.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, a third intellectual tradition had emerged, which kept alive the vision of territorial segregation and cultural differentiation. This was the discipline of *Volkekunde*, which took root at various Afrikaans universities.<sup>38</sup> Many of the

---

29 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 113

30 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 44

31 Rich, *White Power*, p 68

32 Rich, *White Power*, p 55

33 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 44

34 M M S Bell, “The Politics of Administration: A study of the career of Dr D L Smit, with special reference to his work in the Department of Native Affairs, 1934-1945” MA thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1978, p 132

35 D Duncan, “Farm labour and the South African state”, in H Jeeves and J Crush (eds), *White Farms, Black Labour: The State and Agrarian Change in Southern Africa, 1910-1950* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1997), p 33

36 Bell, “The Politics of Administration”, p 158

37 Rich, *White Power*, pp 70-71

38 R Gordon, “Serving the *volk* with *volkekunde*.” Unpublished paper presented at an Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) seminar, May 1986, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, pp 1-3

*Volkekundige* intellectuals had roots in Afrikaans political and cultural organisations, such as the Afrikaner Broederbond, the National Party, the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (FAK), and the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs (SABRA). These intellectual strands were readily taken up in “native administration” once the National Party came to power in 1948.

The SABRA theorists included the influential Doctor W. Eiselen, as well as Doctor Language (who became the Township Manager of Brakpan). They shared the earlier anthropologists’ anxieties about the dangers of urbanisation and modernisation. They maintained that social problems were caused by the dislocation of the social structure, with a consequent weakening of binding values.<sup>39</sup> They argued for the resurrection of the original tribal order, by bolstering the power of the chiefs and working through youth organisations. In the words of Doctor Eiselen, “the duty of the native ... [is] not to become a black European, but to become a better native, with ideals and a culture of his own”.<sup>40</sup>

When the National Party came to power, segregationism was applied with renewed vigour and lukewarm segregationists, such as Doctor Smit, lost their positions in official bodies.<sup>41</sup> Ironically, however, it was not a case of applying a new policy - rather, the new government was for the first time carrying out existing segregationist policy in earnest.<sup>42</sup> In the field of urban black administration, the local city fathers drew on both the “liberal” and the “Afrikaner nationalist” versions of segregationism. These two intellectual strands informed the IANA debates which featured city officials and councillors, as well as academics from both the English and the Afrikaans universities.

The segregationists subscribed to a vision of stable and well-integrated traditional systems from which the blacks had originated. For example, Professor Coetzee of Potchefstroom University dwelt on the new and disorientating life which blacks encountered in the cities. Whereas traditional life was built on the “cohesion of an ever present family complex, chieftaincy and age groups”, the “Bantu” now had to venture into a world built on individual responsibility and decision-making.<sup>43</sup>

For most municipal officials, the view of black residents advancing to political maturity within white structures, was unthinkable. Nobody proposed that blacks be incorporated into white electoral systems. Some kind of separate authority structure was taken as a given, but the apparent clarity of segregationism masked serious conceptual confusions and there was deep disagreement about its content. The segregationist platform was always an amalgam of differing policies:

A natural sense of caution as shown by native administrators towards radical policy changes, the persistence of residual traces of the civilisation ideal, as well as differences of approach within regional administrations, all combined to render the process of retribalisation replete with inconsistencies and discontinuities.<sup>44</sup>

---

39 Gordon, “Serving the *volk*”, p 6

40 Quoted in Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 37

41 Bell, “The Politics of Administration”, p 130

42 Bell, “The Politics of Administration”, p 132

43 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, p 87

44 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 115

The most extreme form of segregation was espoused by the Stallardists, who regarded the black presence in cities as an extended form of traditional patriarchalism. From this perspective, the “location” was in effect a tribal enclave in the city. It was not an appendage of the white town, nor even a twin town; it was an urban component of a fundamentally different social order located in the rural areas. Stallardists regarded blacks as *in* but not *of* the towns.

The ambiguities in the segregationist stance would bedevil officials’ attempts to deal with the symptoms of the urban social crisis. As a result, the confusions regarding urban policy were never clarified, practical problems remained unresolved, and the problems in the cities worsened – until the 1960s, when the Verwoerdiens took the matter in hand and imposed a policy that at least had the merit of conceptual clarity.

Until the Verwoerdiens took control, it was the flexibility of the segregationist programme which added to its attraction.<sup>45</sup> As Dubow noted, the elusive quality with which Hertzog imbued the policy of segregation during the 1920s, was its very strength, “for it drew differing groups into its discourse ...”.<sup>46</sup>

In this article, we treat the three segregationist perspectives outlined above as different forms of patriarchalism. Before exploring them in more detail, however, it is necessary to consider the specific form of moral conduct produced by segregationism, namely the phenomenon of “paternalism”. After a brief analysis of the concept of paternalist moral action, we will return to the theme of patriarchal ethical life, in order to examine the various forms of paternalistic reasoning employed by patriarchalists.

### **Paternalism and moral conduct**

In asking themselves difficult questions regarding blacks’ membership of the urban polity, township officials felt themselves to be social pioneers. As Mathewson of Benoni reflected on the predicament of township officials:

We are a small body of Europeans groping, so often at cross purposes with each other, to solve a problem which is worldwide, and of which our country happens to be one of the focal points, and of which I am convinced the urban Native is one of the most important testing grounds.<sup>47</sup>

A key question, which municipal officials asked themselves, was who had been responsible for letting the problems get out of hand? At the IANA Annual Meeting of 1954, Doctor Language critically examined the contribution of local authorities to the situation. He maintained that

Where previous legislation did actually contain effective provision to meet certain contingencies, those measures were never applied properly, and in many instances, not applied at all. In this connection local authorities must to a large extent take the blame for the state of relative chaos which followed.<sup>48</sup>

---

45 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 9

46 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 43

47 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1953, p 47

48 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1954, p 180

Professor Coetzee observed that

It seems as if the parties responsible (and by that I do not mean only the local, provincial and central authorities, but also the body of voters and employers) have not succeeded in bringing about a gradual transition in accordance with the new demands of space, hygiene and protection<sup>49</sup>

It was clear that municipal luminaries still saw officialdom as responsible for the moral development of black residents and many lesser officials shared this view. This paved the way for local authorities’ feeling morally obliged to control black residents, and “improve” them for their own good. This paternalistic approach was nothing new. The Native Affairs Department had, since its re-organisation in 1910, prided itself on its benign, sympathetic attitude towards the needs of blacks.<sup>50</sup> This approach had evolved from early forms of colonial administration, and it flourished where administration involved personal contact between rulers and ruled.<sup>51</sup> In 1923, E. Barrett, the Secretary of Native Affairs, had referred to the NAD as:

A body of carefully selected and trained officers, of high character, knowing the people, speaking their language, acquainted with their needs and shortcomings, in sympathy with their legitimate aspirations and thus best able to hold a just balance between white and black<sup>52</sup>

According to Dubow, “The administrator’s role was portrayed in terms reminiscent at once of a chief in traditional society, and a Victorian patriarch”.<sup>53</sup> An ethic of fatherly solicitude and “sympathetic contact” often featured in “native administration” before 1950 – most notably in the “native reserves”. This ethic was strongest in the Transkei, and to a lesser extent, in the Ciskei, and probably animated township administration in those areas to a greater extent than in other parts of the country.<sup>54</sup>

This element of benign paternalism also informed the administration of Doctor Smit, Secretary of the NAD from 1934 to 1945. Smit had a sense of historical mission and responsibility towards blacks, and this sense was probably representative of sentiment at the higher levels of the department. The department was criticised for being “too prone to mollicoddle the native”.<sup>55</sup>

The IANA debates during the 1950s often contained the same paternalistic sentiments as those that Smit had articulated. The legacy of personalised administration lived on in many towns and cities. Local authorities, according to some officials, were obliged to help urban blacks to develop socially and politically. Councillor Potgieter of Germiston said: “I think it will do us a lot of good to give the Bantu more responsibilities. We should let them do things for themselves, and so try

---

49 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, p 88

50 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 11

51 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 12

52 Quoted in: Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 85

53 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 101

54 Dubow *Racial Segregation*, p 104

55 Oswald Pirow quoted in: Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 91

to develop their sense of responsibility”.<sup>56</sup> This appears to have been a genuine expression of concern. As Doctor Language put it:

The emphasis in the performance of our duties should not only be laid on the control and administration of natives as such, but also on the protection of the spiritual values and the planning of their social welfare and development.<sup>57</sup>

### **Segregation and patriarchalism in urban black administration**

Segregationists shared the assumption that patriarchalism justified a significant degree of paternalistic intervention in the lives of their black charges. Even the legacy of “liberal” segregationism was seen as compatible with a significant degree of paternalistic control. However, whereas the Stallardists wanted to develop “tribal” authority systems for blacks, other segregationists recognised their permanence in the cities. White municipal officials felt responsible for the training of suitable black leadership figures and never wanted to remove black authority structures completely.

In this regard, the future of the Native Advisory Boards, instituted in terms of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 to represent “native opinion”, assumed great significance. They were regarded by the city fathers as an instrument of moral and practical education in the locations. According to Boshoff, a Native Administrator in Southern Rhodesia,

these Boards serve a very useful purpose indeed. It certainly teaches the Native to think for himself and helps him to get confidence. I always try to impress upon them that they must learn to help themselves, instead of always just saying to the white man, “Give me”.<sup>58</sup>

The real problems arose with defining Native Advisory Boards. According to Mathewson, “... the problem would seem to be one of *degree* of responsibility for them which would be acceptable throughout the country”.<sup>59</sup> His hesitation was not surprising, as the different options involved far-reaching social changes.

What, exactly, was the nature of black subordination to white authority? Desirable patriarchal authority patterns between black residents and white officials could be construed in any number of ways. In their interactions with Native Advisory Boards, as well as their debates amongst themselves, the white city fathers endlessly worked through the various possibilities and modes of patriarchy. Three distinct strains of patriarchy can be distinguished in these debates.

### **Dual and equal patriarchy**

One vision of the future for the urban black community entailed the development of black urban authorities to the point where these structures would become final sources of authority in the locations. This option would therefore produce two separate and fully-fledged urban polities. We will refer to this system as “dual and equal patriarchy”.

---

56 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1953, p 49

57 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, p 32

58 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1954, p 133

59 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1953, p 39

Using the analogy of the patriarchal family, the relationship between white city fathers and black urban authorities would ultimately resemble the relationship between two discrete families, who interact with one another on an equal footing. Each would have their own sphere of jurisdiction and moral authority; and each would represent a coherent, well-integrated, racially-defined moral community.

The vision of dual and equal patriarchy was advanced largely by Afrikaans officials and theorists. Professor Coetzee advocated the provision of land (and services) to black people, on which they could build their own housing, and the extension of freehold. According to Boshoff, “... it is a very excellent thing that these Natives should learn to think for themselves ... for certainly a time will come when they will take over, to rule their own affairs in their own areas”.<sup>60</sup> Coetzee acknowledged that genuine autonomy for black authority structures would mean a withdrawal of white control:

Whether we like it or not, the Bantu is evolving a new kind of leader ... We will have to realise that we will not always be able to choose the Bantu’s leaders for him; they must develop their own leaders, and it will largely depend on us whether we will be able to co-operate with them in a friendly, beneficial and responsible way.<sup>61</sup>

There was a fundamental problem, however. Tredoux of Boksburg put it plainly enough:

Although we are looking for leaders to lead these people, how many developed natives are there today who have suitable leadership qualities? And how many developed natives are there who will follow those leaders?<sup>62</sup>

### **Dual and unequal patriarchy**

A second position postulated two interlocking systems of authority – the one white and the other black – with the latter permanently subservient to the former. We will term this “dual and unequal patriarchy”. In this scenario, urban black leaders could merely offer advice to white officials.

This form of patriarchy is analogous to the relationship between a patriarch and his adult son, who has established his own family. In this case, a high degree of mutual respect would exist alongside a permanent relationship of inequality.<sup>63</sup> The patriarch does not need to satisfy the wishes of his son, or even consult with him. In such a situation, the members of the son’s family face a permanent split-level authority structure. They owe obedience to the head of their own family, as well as to the elder patriarch.

According to this model of patriarchal authority, black township residents in South African cities would find themselves immediately responsible to urban black leaders, but ultimately governed by urban white patriarchs. Mathewson, for example,

---

60 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1954, p 133

61 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, pp 121-122

62 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, p 113

63 Cronje & Venter, *Die Patriargale Familie*, p 35

did not consider a transfer of power as crucial for a successful Native Advisory Board. He believed that board members simply wanted to be respected and consulted. They should therefore be accorded some prestige and respectability. They should also accumulate specialist knowledge about local affairs. For Mathewson, Advisory Boards did not need power, because a decent white council would look after black residents' interests, once the board had articulated its opinion on such matters. In his view, it would not be an intrinsically conflictual relationship, even though it was unequal. He believed that the Advisory Boards would, in a spirit of reasonableness, consent to this permanently unequal dual patriarchy. It was just a question of finding the right mechanisms and attitudes to make the relationship work.<sup>64</sup>

In practice, however, dual but unequal patriarchy gave little guidance on specific administrative questions. Such a form of patriarchy may exist anywhere along an extensive continuum of control. On the one hand, the system could be construed as resembling the familial systems of China and ancient Rome, in which the father retained all kinds of economic and material controls over the adult son.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, the relationship between patriarch and adult son could be one of great mutual respect, thus leaving significant scope for freedom to the son to conduct his affairs within his own "mini-patriarchy".

### **Dual and temporary patriarchy**

Finally, it was suggested that blacks' subordination to whites was a temporary affair, and was only justified if it enabled black people to learn Western norms and standards. In this view, blacks could ultimately be integrated into the broader multi-racial urban community. We will call this position "dual and temporary patriarchy".

In this case, black residents were portrayed as travelling on a road towards Westernisation and multi-racialism. This position can also be termed "proto-liberalism". On this account, black people would not enjoy equal rights immediately, but had the intellectual and moral capacities to be recognised as equal citizens in the future. According to this view, patriarchalism would eventually be transformed into a modern civil society, characterised by formally equal rights and obligations. It was a perspective which had its roots in the writings of prominent liberals, who had, during the course of the 1920s, steadily lost their enthusiasm for segregationism, and begun arguing for equal political rights. Howard Pim became a supporter of common citizenship, under the banner of "equal rights for all civilised men"; and W.M. Macmillan was coming to realise that the plight of poor whites was essentially the same as that of poor blacks.<sup>66</sup> In 1920, Chief Magistrate Welsh had argued that "the native people as a whole have advanced beyond the stage of absolute subordination to their chiefs and headmen".<sup>67</sup>

In central governmental circles, the argument for proto-liberalism was strengthened by the aforementioned Doctor Smit, the Secretary of NAD. In 1942, Smit declared segregation to be unworkable, and maintained that no solution to

---

64 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1953, p 40

65 Cronje & Venter, *Die Patriargale Familie*, p 38

66 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 49

67 Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 116

South Africa’s “racial problem” was to be found through repressive measures. He believed in cooperating with the “educated natives”, and in drawing them into the administration of native affairs, rather than alienating them.<sup>68</sup> Smit’s position was significantly liberal: once blacks reached the standard of civilisation of whites, he maintained, they could not be denied the rights of civilised men.<sup>69</sup> However, this would not be a rapid or radical transition and he did not foresee it coming to fruition in his lifetime.<sup>70</sup>

Similar sentiments were articulated by Bourquin of Durban. He raised doubts about the legitimacy of paternalistic coercion:

I do wish to sound a note of warning against any smug and self-satisfied sense of complacency which might spring from the honest belief that ... so-called “protective” legislation only brings advantages to the protected people

He recognised that “some legislation is discriminatory and does hurt”.<sup>71</sup> In this sentiment, Bourquin came very close to a proto-liberal understanding of patriarchy. He recognised the fundamental shared humanity of white and black members of the urban community. Furthermore, he recognised that blacks were beginning to see themselves as equal to whites, and hence that they resented differential treatment.

To return to the analogy of the family: as black residents were introduced to Christianity, Westernisation and literacy, they were gradually “growing up” to adulthood – that is, they were developing a conception of themselves as full citizens with appropriate rights and obligations. The existence of a well-educated, articulate Western sector in black townships, posed numerous moral dilemmas for township officials.

Some officials had a sense that proper relationships between the black community and white authorities were breaking down. The white officials expected to be trusted by black residents, and that their motives be recognised as benign. This, however, was evidently not always the case any more:

The urban Bantu harboured many grievances for a variety of reasons; a feeling of desperation, of no trust in the white man and of utter frustration was evident among the educated, and in some instances the Bantu demonstrated against the European and force had to be used to quell disturbances<sup>72</sup>

With established authority structures breaking down, new patterns of leadership were emerging:

Leaders and champions of communism enjoyed absolute freedom of movement and action and abused this privilege by inciting the Bantu to agitate against the European, the law of the land and the Government; the Bantu agitated for the repeal of all so-called discrimination legislation and demanded equal rights with the European; location

---

68 Bell, “The Politics of Administration”, pp 25-26

69 Bell, “The Politics of Administration”, p 132

70 Bell “The Politics of Administration”, p 82

71 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1957, p 45

72 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1954, p 180

advisory boards ceased to perform the functions for which they were created, and in many instances these bodies encouraged agitation against the Europeans<sup>73</sup>

Old-style paternalism did not always seem appropriate when dealing with educated black residents. This suggested an awareness on the part of white councillors and officials that (some) blacks had claims to rights and to treatment as formal equals. It was also the beginning of an appreciation for the notion of “civil society”, constituted by a polity of free individuals and equal citizens. In the 1940s and 1950s, segregationist thought began to break down as the number of blacks moving permanently to the cities grew and as calls were increasingly made for their integration into South Africa outside the reserves.<sup>74</sup>

It also indicated a situation in flux, in which the rights of blacks were very unclear. In terms of the family analogy, the crucial question was: if blacks were evolving towards full citizenship, what kind of citizens were they going to become? Would they be citizens, but still belong to a different cultural sphere? Would they join the universalistic civil society, where they would be recognised as adults with full individual rights? Would they be the equals of the white patriarchs? Or would they, like the grown-up children of patriarchs, still remain subject to the moral authority of their parents? It was not clear to officials and councillors in what direction the urban black community should develop, and whether they should gradually share the freedoms of the white community.

#### **Patriarchalism and paternalism in practice: The consequences of ambiguity**

As far as the future of urban blacks was concerned, the white city fathers tended to address issues on the basis of an intuitive, but confused sense of what was appropriate. Opinions oscillated between one version of patriarchalism and another, depending on the issue at stake.

The elements of paternalist welfare and control in urban “native administration” were never explicitly articulated as a coherent doctrine or discipline.<sup>75</sup> Municipal administrators were usually busy, practical men; they were not philosophers. Paternalism and patriarchalism were basic tacit assumptions that occasionally surfaced in discourse, enveloped by preoccupations about administration, housing, or the eternal worry about finance. For the local officials, paternalism was not an explicit doctrine or one that postulated specific end-states. It was, instead, a rather muddled guiding ethos, partly coercive, partly humane, often contradictory, which at least allowed its proponents some sense of moral decency, while fighting a hopeless battle to improve the increasingly squalid township conditions. In this sense, the paternalist moral order in the cities reflected Stuart Hampshire’s characterisation of moral systems, as a loose combination of “absolute prohibitions, elementary decencies, [and] the recognition of a plurality of prohibitions which do not all serve a single purpose”.<sup>76</sup>

---

73 IANA Annual Conference Proceedings 1954, p 181

74 Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, p 79

75 Atkinson, “Cities and Citizenship”

76 S Hampshire, *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978), p 15

Secondly, the cities' experiences of patriarchalism and paternalism show that a particular notion of individual moral conduct may be justified in terms of very different underlying conceptions of the ethical order. Paternalism proved compatible with very different versions of patriarchal moral order. This often had the effect of obscuring the very real philosophical conundrums which lurked in local officials' debates on urban black administration. It also meant that officials could continue to administer black townships, even while caught up in profound cognitive muddles. Specific paternalistic acts could be justified by a variety of different, and latently conflicting, beliefs about the future of the urban moral order.

Thirdly, the phenomenon of patriarchalism in South African cities shows that political actors' moral beliefs can be altogether inconsistent. For example, Verwoerdian officials of the NAD often seemed to take the "dual and equal patriarchy" vision quite seriously. It was the Verwoerdiens' self-appointed task to restore the pride and moral integrity of "the Bantu". However, on other occasions, departmental officials were content to go along with a "dual but unequal" patriarchy. For example, they maintained that there were limits to the responsibility which could be conferred on advisory boards. According to Verwoerd, these councils always had to remain subordinate to white local authorities.<sup>77</sup>

Municipal officials also often displayed similar contradictions in their beliefs. Examples of such inconsistencies provide historians with the means with which to evaluate moral conduct. They allow us, simultaneously, to empathise with political actors' fears and dilemmas; as well as to criticise the shortcomings of their political perspectives.

In the fourth place, the pervasive moral muddle usually led to a confusion between means and ends. On some occasions, officials felt called upon to advocate the broader welfare of the black residents – whether the latter agreed with these conceptions or not. On other occasions, officials resorted to a meticulous application of rules, while losing sight of the broader philosophical issues. In the process, the rules often assumed an overriding symbolic importance in the minds of the white city fathers.

In the fifth place, recourse to paternalism was sometimes accompanied by the temptation to employ tough methods. The urgency of social improvements was always to the fore. As a last resort, officials might have employed unpalatable methods, such as coercion and deception. Such devices then tended to stir white consciences to life in one or the other sector of the extensive municipal bureaucracy – which resulted in new debates and delays in implementing policy.

In the sixth place, as has already been noted, ethical systems entail the mutual normative constitution of individuals within a shared conception of ethical life. Ethical systems are not unilaterally imposed ideologies. They are shared conceptions of the appropriate allocation of rights and obligations.

In the cities during the 1950s, some black community leaders shared the patriarchal vision of the white city fathers. On occasion, this had the paradoxical effect of empowering black leaders in relation to white officials. The white city fathers were frequently disarmed by black residents who well understood the dynamics of patriarchy and paternalism, and who deployed better arguments and had longer memories than the white officials. It was not very difficult to ensnare white officials and councillors in the contradictions of their own paternalism.<sup>78</sup> As a result, township regulations became embedded in township residents' own implicit notions of appropriate moral conduct, and township officials felt obliged to recognise specific limits on their room to manoeuvre. The unsystematic nature of paternalistic administration tended in practice to legitimise the recognition of some form of rights of black residents.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to delineate the profound confusion in local government administrations in the 1950s that contending modes of patriarchy gave rise to. At the heart of the problem was the fundamental lack of clarity about the destiny of the white and black populations in South Africa, and the political and moral relationships which should prevail between them. At least three conceptions of patriarchy informed the actions of white local officials; and these resulted in differing interpretations of appropriate paternalistic moral conduct.

Because of these, it is not surprising that township administration in each town developed its own particular ethos and character. The local bureaucratic ethos was often a product of informally and intuitively held moral notions. The diverse and ambiguous demands of patriarchy and paternalism were, in general, not conducive to universalist bureaucratic principles, dictated from a remote centre of government. In this way, South African towns were characterised by the principles of locality and particularity which characterise the family, according to Hegel.

Patriarchy was an attempt to apply a modernising disciplinary spirit to a fundamentally ambiguous situation. In the end, patriarchy could only deal with some of the symptoms of modernisation. It is this inherent contradictoriness that differentiated patriarchal control and its style of paternalism from the more totalitarian approach of the Verwoerders, who were as yet, during the 1950s, still only gathering their strength.

## Abstract

This article analyses the normative dimensions of urban administration in South Africa in the 1950s, focusing particularly on the administration of urban blacks. It argues that an "ethical life" or ethos of patriarchy prevailed, and that this formed the normative backdrop for widespread paternalism on the part of white officials. However, the ethos of patriarchy was fraught with ambiguities, because the political future of urban blacks within "white cities" remained unclear. Some officials

---

78 Atkinson, "Cities and Citizenship", pp 199-246

believed that urban blacks would remain permanently subordinate in the cities, while others believed that they would eventually achieve full status as equals within a modern civil society. This ambiguity bedevilled the design of urban policies, and led to constant confusion and debates about appropriate urban management systems.

### **Opsomming**

#### **Patriargisme en Paternalisme in Suid-Afrikaanse “Naturelle-Administrasie” in die 1950’s**

Hierdie artikel bespreek die normatiewe aspekte van stedelike administrasie in Suid-Afrika in die 1950’s, met spesifieke verwysing na die administrasie van die stedelike swart bevolking. Dit bewys dat ’n patriargale etiek bestaan het, en dat dit die normatiewe konteks vir blanke amptenare se paternalistiese houding was. Nogtans was die patriargale etos baie dubbelsinnig, omdat die politieke toekoms van stedelike swartes onduidelik was. Sekere amptenare het geglo dat stedelike swartes altyd onderdanig sal bly, terwyl ander geglo het dat swartes mettertyd gelyke politieke status binne ’n moderne samelewing sou bereik. Hierdie teenstrydighede was problematies vir die ontwerp van stedelike beleid, en het gelei tot voortdurende verwarring en debattering oor die mees geskikte administratiewe stelsels.

#### **Key words**

1950s; apartheid; black administration; Doctor Language; ethical life; IANA; inequality; locations; municipal government; municipal officials; native administration; Native Advisory Boards; Native Affairs Department; paternalism; patriarchalism; patriarchy; rights; segregation; townships; urban government.

#### **Sleutelwoorde**

1950’s; apartheid; swart administrasie; Doktor Language; *sittlichkeit*; IANA; ongelykheid; lokasies; munisipale administrasie; munisipale amptenare; naturelle-administrasie; Naturelle Adviesrade; Departement Naturelle Administrasie; paternalisme; patriargie; regte; segregasie; swart woonbuurte; stedelike regering.