

THE DUBE STORY

Dube is the name of a popular township in Soweto, but also a well-known Nguni surname. However, in the zoo and game reserves the name belongs to an animal, **e-dube** - a lovely, cheeky one with bold black and white stripes, called the **zebra**.

Here follows a journey of exploration into the story of the **Dube Township**, Soweto's own zebra. It is bound to reveal a few secrets and highlights how the Dube history differs from that of other Soweto townships. There are, however, similarities and a common apartheid past.

The Dube journey begins in **1946**, the year in which the **Johannesburg City Council (JCC)** had a dream to create a **middle class African village**. For this reason a portion of land adjacent to the first townships like Orlando West on the Klipspruit farm, was identified. Since 1946 was the year in which John Langalibalele Dube – a remarkable South African leader – died, his memory was honoured by naming this "hope for a better living dispensation" after him. However, the dream turned out to be a nightmare. When Dube eventually became a township in 1954, it was not exactly the idealised "better living dispensation" as an integral and special part of Soweto.

Background history

Of course, in 1946 and 1954 the name **Soweto** was not yet in existence and areas for black residents were referred to as *native settlements* or *locations*. Soweto was only officially adopted as a name in 1963, following a competition. The JCC was in charge of the *native settlements* which became Soweto; (and for the ultimate Soweto, JCC had to buy a few more farms adjacent to Klipspruit).

The history of the JCC/Soweto relationship was highlighted in a paper presented in 1963 by Councillor Patrick Lewis at the Wits University: '**A city within a city – the creation of Soweto**'. He admitted an initial indifference and neglect by the mother city, which he claimed "had passed, and the city accepted full responsibility for the development of Soweto and its people." He also outlined visions of leadership promotion, improvement of living conditions and the like. During this period, the JCC was ruled by the **United Party**, while the country was governed by the **National Party** (apartheid policy). The JCC's grand ideas may have been affected by paternalism on local level and harsh dictates and laws from Government's side.¹

The *native settlements*/Soweto's story goes back to the **Klipspruit Settlement of 1904** on the Klipspruit farm. The major portion of this settlement became Pimville in 1934. This initial settlement resulted from the first forceful removal of black people from the Johannesburg area - mainly compounds and 'locations' - due to the bubonic plague scare (a contagious lung condition). Compounds were burnt to the ground as a health precaution where the Water and Sanitation Board took charge. (At that time, the city and country was under British colonial rule since May 1900.) There was an unwillingness to accommodate the residents in any of the

¹ In 1972 the Government cut all JCC/Soweto ties by placing the West Rand Administration Board – WRAB – in charge of the Greater Soweto, still with black representation through Advisory Boards/Community Councils. This paved the way for the councillors elected – with less than 10% Soweto votes – under the Black Local Authorities Act (BLA) of 1982. On 13 January 1993, the BLA reign ended in Soweto when the city was put under administration until the new dispensation kicked in, following the first national democratic election of 1994.

Johannesburg suburbs and they were taken to the Klipspruit farm, which was purchased in 1903 for the city's sewerage and water works. This settlement was more than 10 miles/16 kilometres from Johannesburg - some distance from places of work. Nancefield, the first railway station, and the railway line was only opened in 1906.

In 1910 the country changed politically to a more democratic dispensation with the introduction of the **Union of South Africa**. (Though, still under reign of British colonialism.) Only white males had voting rights at that stage - also on local government level. The JCC established the department of Non-European Affairs (**NEAD**) in **1926** to manage the *native settlements*. In the mentioned area, there was only the Klipspruit settlement. In 1932, Orlando East's development commenced. It was the first planned settlement – an attempt to improve the accommodation type, therefore "some effort of change" as claimed by Lewis.²

There were two other settlements outside these boundaries and closer to Johannesburg, which were established in 1918, e.g. Western Township where Cyril Ramaphosa's parents stayed and where he was born, before they moved to Chiawelo, after it was developed in 1956/7. (Those townships were demolished after the residents were resettled in later years.)

Settlements increased and there were the following in 1946, albeit in their infant stages: Orlando East and -West, Klipspruit, Pimville, Mofolo, Jabavu (White City). Furthermore, a number of people lived in poor conditions on the Moroka site and a large group of squatters were in Shanty Town. (All Shanty- and Moroka-residents were accommodated in various townships in almost 15 000 formal houses as from 1956. These were funded by the Mining Loan, negotiated by Harry Oppenheimer.)

The Zebra and the law

It needs to be noted that the NEAD (Non-European Affairs Department) – like all black urban areas – had to comply with a battery of **government laws** and regulations **controlling black citizens**, which Lewis called "a compass of legislation"³ (e.g. influx control, male pass books, liquor laws, housing provision and more). This legislation and many amendments, dated back to 1923. It was all consolidated by the United Party Government into the **Native Areas Consolidation Act (Act 25 of 1945)**.

Bringing back focus to the Dube story, it reveals how the JCC hoped for a more upmarket '**native village**' to accommodate '**elite African people**' with '**fair education**' who could afford **middle class houses** with **freehold rights** on stands of 464m². This mind set resulted from a report from the central Government's Fagan Commission, which highlighted, *inter alia*, "an urban housing need for the middle class/educated/urbanised black citizens".⁴

Implementation of the plan, however, met with the first obstacle when freehold ownership was not possible due to the **Native Land Act of 1913** (not permitting black land ownership) and related legal issues. Therefore, a **99-year Leasehold** scheme – popular in Europe at the time – was suggested, but this also failed eventually.

In **1948** the Nationalist Party took over national government from the United Party and promoted the **apartheid policy**. The new rulers utilised and amended the existing Native Areas Consolidation Act of 1945 for harsher measures and more oppressing regulations, e.g.

² Patrick Lewis's Paper delivered at the Wits University: '**A city within a city – the creation of Soweto**', 1963.

³ *ibid*

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fagan_Commission consulted on 22/06/2018

the Group Areas Act of 1950 and pass laws for females. The NEAD had to toe the line, but hope and planning for the **upmarket village** remained.

However, **Dr Hendrik Verwoerd** became Minister for Native Affairs in 1952 and developing the dream, met with new challenges. In the end, only a **30 Year Leasehold** scheme was permitted for the middle class (i.e. ownership of improvements/structures on an Erf which was Government property and a lease of 30 years had to be signed). The message from many however was: '**if no land tenure, we rent houses.**' On record however, there are a number of residents who did make use of the 30 Year Leasehold option. The plan for low density housing in Dube failed further, since Verwoerd instructed a decrease of stands to a size of **247 m²** each. (Some residents did however manage to negotiate double stands from the JCC, which probably escaped the central Government's knowledge.) The concession of a 30 Year Leasehold was also available in other townships.

The town planning (e.g. residential, recreation, sport, education, trade) and servicing of the Dube Township (roads, water reticulation, sewerage services, etc.) already commenced in 1951, and was adjusted as changes were enforced. The idea of keeping it exclusive had to be abolished and the majority of houses in Dube fall into the smaller rented (Regulation 7) category – which compacted handsomely on the density. Nevertheless, in **1954 Dube** became a **township** of the south-western areas with residents moving in. The town got its identity – match box houses and handsome 30 Year Lease dwellings in an area known as 'Dube Village' – a variety, reminding one of Zebra stripes.

The exclusiveness of Dube was furthermore affected in 1955 when authorities erected Soweto's first single-sex hostel (men only) for migrant labourers in this township.

The Nationalist policy also separated townships along ethnic lines and Dube was reserved for **Nguni** residents. This was not enforced and Dube residents are a good mixture of all South Africa's African ethnic variety. Remarkable people from different ethnic groups have had or are still having properties in this area, e.g. Dr R Gugushe, Dr Richard Maponya, Andrew Mlangeni, Gibson Kente, the Mabuze family, the family of Dr Vilakazi, the family of Dr Xuma – to mention only a small number and an ethnic cross-section. The Mabuze, Vilakazi and Xuma families graced the area with their presence in houses of the 30 Year Lease Scheme after forceful removal from Sophiatown. (Removals started in 1955 and not every family was forced to Meadowlands, like popular history claims).

The legacy of Dube Ma-Soleng

A most important characteristic of Dube – call it some prominent zebra stripe – is the 200 houses built for and occupied by **soldiers** of World War II. After their return from the war, which ended in 1945, the soldiers settled in Shanty Town and called the area they lived in, **Tobruk** (a famous battlefield of WW II). JCC/Government/SA League negotiations regarding accommodation for these war veterans resulted in permission for the JCC to build Regulation 7-houses for the soldiers in the Dube Village area, funded by the SA League.

Property ownership – The Dube Ma-Soleng houses and other Regulation 7-houses, including self-built or purchased dwellings (Regulation 6 & 8 respectively), have eventually been transferred into ownership – full **Title Deed**. The Government's promotion of home-ownership resulted from the wake-up call from the Youth Revolution in 1976, and Government accepting the permanency of the urban blacks.

Initially, houses were **transferred** to registered tenants free of charge with a modest payment for the Erf. In terms of the **Conversion Act of 1988** (amended) self-built houses/properties could be transferred with a Title Deed completely free of charge. It did however not happen automatically, since applications are subject to a process of claim with supporting documents. Also, rented houses (Regulation 7) are transferred with the Erf, free of charge since the 1990's.

The majority of the housing properties in Dube are therefore currently privately owned. Old business properties have been and can be transferred in the same way, and this is promoted.⁵

Ownership of properties has greatly contributed to the stabilisation of the Dube Township; or shall we call it "achieving a substantial honour to the big zebra, John L Dube." And the **soldiers' families** with their memory is still treasured. On SS Mendi Day, **21 February 2018**, the first **Frank Sexwale Memorial** lecture is delivered by Colonel Johnny Sexwale (son of the late Frank) in the Dube Soldier's Chapel. It is an important salute to honour the contribution of the soldiers and their leaders towards the character and stability of the Dube Township, apart from their contribution as soldiers to the victory of WW II.

The rendition above has been an **exploration of the story of Dube's journey** and how it developed into a township with a unique character and produced many achievers, in spite of set-backs – a true honour to all Dube's achievers.

For this Dube journey a great deal of research was executed – books, official documents, on internet, utilising personal contacts, and more – over many years. This is part of my expression of dedication to Soweto and its people.⁶

Long live the zebra!

Estelle Bester

⁵ NOTE from the author: *Should residents be issued with Leasehold Certificates since the Sales Campaign commenced, it is NO cause for alarm - it is still full ownership. As soon as Township Registers are finalised "Leasehold Certificates" automatically converts to "Title Deeds" in Deeds Registers.*

⁶ NOTE: Estelle Bester worked for 25 years in Local Authorities (Pretoria/Johannesburg/East Rand/Soweto) and many years as departmental head of large municipal departments, including three terms as acting Town Clerk of Soweto Administration. She participated in negotiations re the new local government dispensation with Dr. Van Zyl Slabbert. She is fluent and well acquainted with the Sotho languages.