

# THE ROLE OF T.M. MAPIKELA IN THE MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION OF BLACK AFFAIRS IN BLOEMFONTEIN 1902-1945

C.J.P. le Roux  
*Department of History*  
*University of Vista: Bloemfontein Campus*  
*P. O. Box 380*  
*9300 Bloemfontein*

**Die rol van T.M. Mapikela in die munisipale administrasie van swart aangeleenthede in Bloemfontein, 1902-1945**

Mapikela het in die afwesigheid van munisipale stemreg vir swartmense in 'n adviserende hoedanigheid 'n konstruktiewe rol in die sosiaal-ekonomiese opheffing van die swart gemeenskap in Bloemfontein gespeel. Sy advies het gesteun op sy skool- en ambagsopleiding, 'n suksesvolle loopbaan as bou-aannemer, sy politieke loopbaan van ongeveer 30 jaar in swart organisasies soos die African National Congress en sy lidmaatskap van verskeie kerk-, skool- en sportkomitees. Sy volhardende rol in die munisipale Naturelle Adviesraad en die nasionale Naturelle Verteenwoordigende Raad, het die volgende sosiaal-ekonomiese vrugte afgewerp: handelsreg aan swartmense en die tydelike finansiering van noodlenigingswerk aan werklose swartes deur die stadsraad; ouderdoms- en ongeskiktheidsvoordele vir swartmense landwyd en voorkeur vir swart onderwysers in swart regeringskole deur die Unieregering. Mapikela se pleidooi vir beter gesondheids- en behuisingsgeriewe in die swart buurte van Bloemfontein het op die stadsraad se partydigheid vir sy blanke kiesersbelange gestrand. Sy strewe na 'n demokratiese, nie-rassige gemeenskap het gesteun op 'n vreedsame samewerkingstrategie met die owerhede en was gebaseer op Christelike en Westerse demokratiese (konstitusionele) waardes.

In the absence of the municipal franchise for blacks, Mapikela played in an advisory capacity a constructive role in the socio-economic upliftment of the black community of Bloemfontein. His advice was founded upon his school career and training as artisan, his successful career as building-contractor, his political career of about 30 years in black organisations such as the African National Congress and his membership of various church, school and sports committees. His persevering role in the municipal Natives Advisory Board and the national Natives Representative Council produced the following fruits in the socio-economic field: trading rights for blacks and the temporary financing of relief work for unemployed blacks by the City Council; old age and disability pensions for black people country-wide, including preference for black teachers in black government schools by the Union government. Mapikela's plea for better health and housing facilities in the black townships of Bloemfontein stranded upon the City Council's partiality for the interests of his white electorate. His ideal for a democratic, non-racial society rested on a peaceful co-operative strategy with the authorities, and was based on Christian and Western democratic (constitutional) values.

## *Introduction*

The role of black individuals in the management of their interests at municipal level in South

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Africa received very little attention from researchers in the past. The reason for such negligence was probably the fact that blacks had no political powers. They exercised merely advisory powers, as was illustrated by the Native Advisory Boards which came into existence by law in 1923.<sup>1</sup> It rested with the relevant municipal authorities to establish such Advisory Boards. Avenues to participate constructively in their own affairs were thus very much limited and discouraged researchers from investigation.

The fact that blacks were without political power is no bar to the study of particular black individuals and their contribution to the shaping of a local community. A better understanding of a local community obviously requires a "view from below", which deals with individuals as well as with the economic, social and ideological forces these individuals have to rub shoulders with.<sup>2</sup> One such outstanding individual was Thomas Mtobi Mapikela, who lived in the black township of Bloemfontein from 1892 until 1945.

This article aims to indicate that black individuals such as Mapikela did play a constructive role in the municipal affairs of their communities. To be limited to advisory powers only, by the law and the ideological convictions of the white ruled local and central authorities of the country, did not prevent this politically wise black man from implementing certain avenues to play a constructive role in his community's welfare. In the course of events these avenues will be portrayed.

Mapikela is probably better known for his role at national level in the African National Congress (ANC) and as an active member of the Natives Representative Council (NRC) from 1937 to 1945. He acted as speaker of the ANC for 28 years. He was known as a moderate leader who, with great determination, strove to obtain the franchise for blacks at local and national level, and to uplift them economically by petitioning the authorities for better municipal wage structures and land allocations nationally. In the course of his political duties he thus gained wide organisational and administrative experience.<sup>3</sup> Obviously this article cannot ignore the influence his experiences at national level exercised on his local position.

Mapikela's educational background shaped him for his future political role at local and national level. Born in Basutoland (Lesotho) in 1867 as a member of the Hlubi tribe, which is related to the Zulu people, he moved with his parents at an early stage to Queenstown in the eastern Cape where he grew up as a Xhosa speaker. In Queenstown he attended school for seven years, whereafter he trained as a cabinet maker (carpenter) at the Grahamstown Natives College. He became established in Waaihoek, one of the black townships of Bloemfontein in 1892.<sup>4</sup>

The colour restrictions imposed by law on work opportunities for black people in the Republic of the Orange Free State, instigated Mapikela to appear on the public stage after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). At this stage there was a critical need for black leadership in their political, economic and social expectations which were raised by Britain's victory

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M. de Jongh, *A study of conciliatory behaviour in a black South African township* (D.Phil. Thesis, Rhodes University, 1979), pp. 3-8; C.J.P. le Roux, "Rol van die Naturelle-adviesraad op plaaslike bestuursvlak in Bloemfontein, 1923-1948," *Contree* 25, April 1989, p. 11.

A. de V. Minnaar, "Local history: a multifaceted and diverse discipline," *Contree* 25, April 1989, p. 4.

J. Mancoe, *First edition of the Bloemfontein bantu and coloured people's directory* (Bloemfontein, 1934), pp. 57, 72.

4. J. Mancoe, *Bloemfontein* ....., pp. 57, 72; E.J. Verwey (ed.), *New Dictionary of South African Biography* I (Pretoria, 1995), pp. 155-157.

over the republican Boer people. Mapikela's mastery of the Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, English and Dutch languages made him a natural choice for such a leadership position. Under British colonial rule he was able to progress from his pre-war position as wage-earner to that of independent carpenter and building contractor in the Orange River Colony (ORC), as the Orange Free State was proclaimed after the war. His prosperous financial position and educational background made him quite influential in his community, paving his way towards the Native Vigilance Association (Committee), of which he was a founding member (1903) and secretary-general.

### The aims of Mapikela

The political career of Mapikela at local level commenced with the Native Vigilance Association. It initially operated in the black townships of Bloemfontein, having as its general aim the welfare of black residents. The organisation was renamed the ORC Native Congress in 1909, thus outgrowing its local character. Its expanded character was due to the imminent unification of the South African colonies and the vexed question of equal rights for blacks, particularly the franchise question which was debated country-wide by black organisations. Mapikela identified himself with the aims of the ORC Native Congress. These were to promote the political, material, social and religious interests of blacks in the ORC. More specifically Mapikela strove to fulfil his own political ideal of equal franchise rights for blacks at local (municipal) and national level. Materially his aim was the economic upliftment of his community by raising workers' wages in Bloemfontein. Socially he strove for better living conditions in the townships, which included household water supplied by pipe-line, sanitation, electricity and the promotion of black education.<sup>5</sup>

### The municipal franchise question

Notable of Mapikela's public appearances was his moderate, non-violent approach to the colonial and municipal authorities and succeeding Union government. As secretary-general of the ORC Native Congress he gentlemanly reflected the general attitude of black political behaviour. The belief was in the pen being mightier than the sword. Therefor Mapikela, as a founder-member of the newspaper *Tsala ea Becoana*, operating in the Bloemfontein and Kimberley regions, actively assisted efforts by the African press to propagate their political cause. In this spirit the franchise was the first issue to be debated by him as early as 1906.<sup>6</sup> He was one of the five petitioners who requested the king of England on behalf of the ORC Native Congress to grant black people the vote at municipal and central government levels. On recommendation of the Colonial Government and the majority of municipal councils,

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5. Archive Native Affairs Branch in Free State Archives, Bloemfontein (further on referred to as NAB), NAB 1, 79/a/05, P.H. Gresson - Advisor Native Affairs, 09-09-1905; Archive Colonial Secretary in Free State Archives, Bloemfontein (further on referred to as CO), CO 886, 667/1908-1910, Revised Constitution ORC Native Association 22-10-1907, pp. 1-5.

6. B. Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography* (Johannesburg, 1984), pp. 143-144. Organisations such as the ORC Native Congress were established in the other colonies to debate the franchise issue on a country-wide basis. Compare A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu: The beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912* (Cape Town, 1984), Chapters 3 and 4.

their request was refused, mainly on the ground that the black vote was not practical politics yet.<sup>7</sup>

At municipal level in Bloemfontein the franchise issue developed in to an advisory function in which Mapikela played a constructive role. A number of prominent black local leaders met with the mayor in Waaihoek in October 1908 to discuss closer involvement of black leaders in the administration of the black townships. The names of the blacks attending those meetings with the municipal authority were not minuted. Mapikela was probably also present because he was already a prominent resident then.<sup>8</sup>

At their meeting with the mayor, these black leaders proposed that the system of block leaders, constituting an advisory committee, which functioned before the Anglo-Boer War, should be reconstituted in the management of the black townships. This proposal was in pursuance of similar systems functioning at Thaba Nchu and in the Cape Colony, and propagated by the press as early as January 1907. The press was convinced that such a system could alleviate the worsening health problems in the black townships. The reason for such a proposal was ostensibly the realisation by Mapikela and his colleagues that their only option to make good Britain's empty Anglo-Boer War promises for black political rights, was to become co-operatively more closely involved in the municipal management of their townships. It was only in 1913 that the City Council decided to give effect to their proposal. Practicalities such as a black population increase from approximately 1400 people in 1896 to 12 000 in 1913 with accompanying socio-economic problems, decided the question for the Council. It realised the necessity of a special body to look after the complex management of a township which was expanding almost daily by a growing birthrate and migration from the devastated rural areas after the war.<sup>9</sup>

Mapikela and 33 local leaders supported the black leader system which the City Council established in 1913. Whether Mapikela acted as one of the seven block leaders chosen then, is unknown as their names were not reported by the Council. They were chosen by the registered black occupiers of stands, and constituted the Natives Advisory Committee, which paved the way for the Natives Advisory Board, proclaimed by law in 1923. This Committee supposedly did not completely satisfy Mapikela's ideal for black municipal representation, because it rendered them only a limited voice in their own affairs. It soon proved to be not even advisory in nature, but at most a forum to vent their grievances and wishes. Their limited voice was accentuated by their complete absence of control over the appointment of the chairman of the Committee. He was the white manager of the municipal Department of Native Affairs, also acting as location superintendent, and appointed *ex officio* in the post of chairman by the City Council.<sup>10</sup>

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7. NAB 3, 180/06, Advisor Native Affairs - E. Tshongwane (Petition of loyal Native Subjects of His Majesty...), 15-06-1906; CO 666, 2899/06, Goold-Adams - Under-Colonial Secretary, 28-11-1906, pp. 1-3, and Elgin - Selborne, 01-02-1907; CO 715, 4077/06, J. Lategan - Colonial Secretary, 14-01-1907 and Colonial Secretary - Lieutenant-Governor, 21-02-1907.
  8. Minutes Municipality Bloemfontein in Free State Archives, Bloemfontein (further on referred to as MBL), MBL 1/1/1/14, Ordinary Meeting City Council, 01-10-1908, p. 344; J. Mancoe, *Bloemfontein ...*, p. 72.
  9. MBL 1/1/2/1, Ordinary Meeting City Council, 05-06-1913, pp. 16-18. Also compare W.B. Worsfold, *The reconstruction of the new colonies under Lord Milner* (2 Volumes) (London, 1913); *The Friend*, 18-01-1907 (Leader), 08-07-1908 (Leader) and 02-10-1908.
  10. MBL 1/2/4/1/3, S.P. Cook - J.P. Logan, 16-05-1918; Monthly Report Department Native Administration, August 1918, pp. 5-6; MBL 1/1/1/21, Ordinary Meeting City Council, 10-02-1919, pp. 42-46.

Surprisingly, objections to the appointment of a white municipal official instead of a local black leader, and to the ignoring of their say in such a matter, did not come from Mapikela or the Committee members, probably out of fear that the Committee could be disbanded, depriving them from any say in their own affairs. Indeed criticism against such appointment and the Committee generally, came from the ANC ten years later, and will be discussed shortly.<sup>11</sup>

An interesting secondary development which strengthened the limited voice of the Advisory Committee was Mapikela's appointment as head block leader by the City Council in 1925. His appointment was exceptional because the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 made no provision for such a position. The act legalised Natives Advisory Committees country-wide to place the management of the fast-growing black townships on a more sure footing. These Natives Advisory Boards, as they were to be known in future, consisted of 15 members. Like their predecessors they were paid, part-time officials of the local authority, who met on a monthly basis in an advisory capacity to the City Council. They performed specific functions such as reporting the presence of strangers in the townships, serious diseases (such as small pox and tuberculosis) and grievances (trading, wages, sanitation). They advised Council on the making, amending or suspending of municipal regulations for the black townships.<sup>12</sup>

Mapikela's position as head block leader placed him in an excellent position to make most of the advising function of the Native Advisory Board. In 1925 the Bloemfontein Department of Native Administration had to cope with the administration of seven black townships consisting of approximately 25 000 residents. Deteriorating health and living conditions, and increasing dissatisfaction with low wages necessitated the services of an influential local black leader to motivate his fellow block leaders to curb these degrading circumstances, which were also present in other urban centres. The head block leader furthermore had to render impartial and sympathetic assistance with the solving of disputes between the black residents mutually and with the municipality. Naturally such a person had to be of impeccable character, who enjoyed the trust and respect of his community, the City Council and the Department of Native Administration.<sup>13</sup>

Mapikela was a natural choice for the position of head block leader for various reasons. His language proficiency and influential position in the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later called the ANC, had been noted. He was a member of various deputations to Britain and the Union Government to protest against the exclusion of blacks from the franchise and the Natives Land Act of 1913, which discriminated against black farmers. Circumstances locally which were less sensitive in government circles and therefore carrying perhaps more weight in the City Council's opinion of Mapikela, were his financially well-off position as building contractor and businessman, and his active participation in various church and school committees, including sporting activities. At the time of his appointment as head block leader, he was also acting as treasurer of the South

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11. See footnote 19 and 20.

12. MBL 1/2/4/1/7, Monthly Report Department Native Administration, June 1924; MBL 1/2/4/1/26, Monthly Report Department Native Administration, 03-04-1936, p. 3. For more detailed information on the Native Advisory Board in the Bloemfontein municipal government, compare C.J.P. le Roux, "Rol van die Naturelle-adviesraad op plaaslike bestuursvlak in Bloemfontein, 1923-1948," *Contree* 25, April 1989.

13. MBL 1/2/4/1/8, Monthly Report Department Native Administration, June-July 1925, Annexure B, p. 7.

African Congress of Location Advisory Boards which convened annually.<sup>14</sup>

J.R. Cooper, an esteemed Superintendent of Bloemfontein's black townships, with whom Mapikela had worked for more than 20 years, regarded Mapikela's appointment as a wise decision. He testified to Mapikela's moderate and restrained actions, both at local and national political levels.<sup>15</sup>

Mapikela's political craftsmanship was underlined by his ready acceptance of the Native Advisory Board as a constitutional *quid pro quo* for the forbidden franchise at local level and the fact that he never disappointed the City Council's expectations of him. Surely his ideal was equal rights for blacks and whites at all levels. However, after at least six failed franchise and land deputations by the SANNC (and himself intimately involved) to South African and British authorities up to 1919, he realised the only option remaining was acceptance of the *status quo* and to make the best of the means available. Indeed, the ANC executive (including Mapikela) realised after 1919 that the blacks were actually on their own in their struggle against racial domination. Never again would they attempt to persuade Britain to intervene in South Africa on their behalf.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding these disconcerting developments, Mapikela never lost sight of his ideal to obtain the franchise for his people, albeit if only at local level. Pursuing this line of thought, he emphasized the successful functioning of the Native Advisory Board system at the Natives Conference of the Union government in Pretoria in 1930. He actually wanted to bring home to the authorities that the Board members were gaining the necessary administrative experience and coupled responsibilities which would justify their gaining municipal franchise in the near future.<sup>17</sup>

True to his leadership qualities he continuously endeavoured to preserve the unity and co-operation of his fellow block leaders. A divided Advisory Board would only erode its already limited influence in municipal affairs, and convince the City Council of their political irresponsibility. He therefore stood for maintaining good relationships mutually and with the municipal organs. As far as could be ascertained the Advisory Board members, including himself as head block leader, were never in open confrontation with Location Superintendent Cooper or any of the relevant municipal departments. The cohesive role he displayed here, corresponded with his role at two occasions at national level: the first was his leading action in the ANC executive to remove the ANC president, J.T. Gumede, from office because of his divisive communistic influence and secondly, Mapikela's call for unity in African ranks during the All African Convention's meeting in Bloemfontein in 1935.<sup>18</sup>

The members of the Advisory Board consolidated behind Mapikela to exert on the City Council all the influence they could muster and, if necessary, to protect themselves from malicious and envious criticism by black counterparts. The latter indeed happened in 1933

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14. MBL 1/2/3/1/26, Monthly Report Department Native Administration, 03-04-1936, p. 3; MBL 1/2/4/1/9, Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 26-04-1926, Annexure C, p.1. Also compare footnote 3.
  15. MBL 1/2/4/1/14, Annexure to Monthly Report Department Native Administration, March 1928, p. 6.
  16. P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress, 1912-1952* (London, 1970), pp. 63-66; Publications of the Union Government (UG), UG 54-'39, *Report of the Native Affairs Commission, 1937-1938*, p. 23.
  17. MBL 1/2/4/1/39, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 18-04-1945, p. 5; MBL 1/2/4/1/26, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, 03-04-1936, p. 3.
  18. For more detail on these two occasions, consult J. Grober, *A Decisive Clash? A short history of Black protest politics in South Africa 1875-1976* (Pretoria, 1988), Chapters 8-10.

when the ANC president, P. ka I. Seme and the local branch representative, S. Leshoai, criticised Mapikela for being nominated in his position by the City Council, calling him a paid puppet of the Council. He was blamed for not serving the interests of his community, because he, like the white chairman, Cooper, was not democratically elected by the Board's members.<sup>19</sup>

These criticisms put Mapikela's declared trust in the administrative responsibility of the Board and its loyalty towards him and the community to the test. The following considerations raised the question whether Leshoai did not act out of jealousy of Mapikela's prominent political position, locally and nationally: the inspector of urban black townships in South Africa, F. Rodseth, visiting Bloemfontein in 1936 for instance, contradicted these criticisms. His conclusion was that Mapikela in particular and "the Board generally has the confidence of the location residents", which meant that they were indeed looking after the interests of the residents. To this end Mapikela acted sporadically as chairman or as member of the Executive Committee of the Board from 1926 until his death in 1945, a time-span of approximately 20 years. The function of the Executive Committee was to report directly to the community about the outcome of issues which had been discussed with the local authority. In support of their trust in Mapikela, the Board decided by majority vote to delegate him to Pretoria in 1935 to attend the conference on the two bills relating to the representation of blacks in Parliament and the so-called natives trust and land. At national level in Government circles and as ANC executive member Mapikela was well-known for his debates on the franchise and the limited land allocations for black farmers.<sup>20</sup>

Rodseth's conclusion that the Natives Advisory Board enjoyed the confidence of the black residents, was probably no surprise to Mapikela, because the Board's members were indeed regularly engaged in meetings with the relevant municipal organs about living conditions. Mapikela himself, attending these meetings on a regular basis, went beyond it by putting his words into action, as will be indicated under the heading of economic achievements.

Mapikela could of course have made an issue of the chairmanship of the Native Advisory Board in an effort to make up somewhat for the absence of the franchise. Article 10 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 stipulated that the chairman could be either white or black. As chairman Mapikela (or any other black person for that matter) could then by virtue of the Natives Amendment Act of 1944 utilize the greater leniency in respect of financial and legislative powers for Advisory Boards to the benefit of the black townships. But then he also knew about the aversion the City Council and its white electorate had for such revolutionary innovations in the municipal administration of black affairs. The City Council's preference for a white chairman was not so much a token of distrust in Mapikela's administrative abilities, but rather a means to ensure a direct hold on the course of events in

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19. MBL 1/2/4/1/22, Report Manager Native Administration Department, 04-06-1933 (Letter from President-General, ANC, 20-04-1933; MBL 1/2/4/1/22, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 08-05-1933, p. 2. Also compare MBL 1/2/4/1/7, Monthly Report Department Native Administration, June 1924, and Quarterly Report, March 1925, p. 3.
  20. MBL 1/2/3/1/27, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 14-05-1936 (Report on Bloemfontein Location), 21-22 April 1936, p. 2; MBL 1/2/4/1/22, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 07-01-1933, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/26, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 22-08-1935, p. 2; J. Mancoe, *Bloemfontein* ..., pp. 57, 72.

the administration of the black townships.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, despite the fact that Mapikela himself once stated that he strove to live in harmony with the City Council, he endeavoured until the end of his political career to gain the municipal franchise for blacks. To this end he in vain participated in debates in the country-wide Congress of Location Advisory Boards in 1941 and the NRC (1937-1945). As he experienced in 1906, the local authorities generally, including their white electorate, refused such innovation out of racial prejudice and the revolutionary changes it would bring about in local government.<sup>22</sup>

### Economic achievements

Mapikela counteracted the absence of the franchise by gaining some substantial economic benefits for his community. Trading rights was one of the first issues in the economic sphere which occupied his attention for the greater part of his political career.

The Republican law *Over Kleurlingen in Dorpen en Steden* (Number 8 of 1893) which stipulated municipal control over black people in the Free State urban centres, limited trading rights for blacks to hawking, eating-houses and the selling of meat and other products on the market in the black townships. This law, just like its successor, the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, left the decision for the granting of trading licences and premises to the City Council. City Councils in the Free State refused to allow blacks such trading rights. Their excuse was that the townships were only for residential purposes (serving indirectly as labour resources for the white residents). Trading rights could also lead to higher rentals on premises and large-scale migration to the townships which were already seriously overcrowded and afflicted by social problems such as health, crime and poverty.<sup>23</sup>

Mapikela, with the unanimous support of his Advisory Board and the ANC, rejected the excuses of the Council. He expressed himself very strongly against the disadvantageous and unjust implementation of the law by the Bloemfontein City Council at a joint sitting of the Natives Advisory Board and the Natives Affairs Committee (which consisted of representatives from the City Council and the other municipal departments). He emphasized that the urban blacks in the other provinces did receive trading rights. He petitioned the Minister of Native Affairs, P.G.W. Grobler, to compel the City Council to grant trading

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21. T.R.H. Davenport, "Africans and Urban Local Government after 1910" (Unpublished manuscript, Grahamstown, no date), pp. 4-6, 10-11, 15-16, 23-24; MBL 1/2/4/1/24, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 21-08-1934, p. 2; MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, 07-09-1934, p. 26; MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's Annual Report, 1928-1929, p. 16; MBL 1/2/4/1/7, Monthly Report Department Native Administration, January 1924, and Quarterly Report, March 1925, p. 3. Also compare L. Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie, race, class and politics in South Africa* (New Haven, 1965), p. 342.
  22. MBL 1/2/4/1/27, Minutes Special Meeting Natures Advisory Board, 21-04-1936, pp. 3-4; UG 13-'42, *Report Fifth Meeting Natives Representative Council*, Pretoria, 1941, p. 9; MBL 1/2/4/1/35, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Natives Advisory Board, 27-01-1942 (Resolutions 14th Annual Session Location Advisory Boards Congress, Nigel, 18-20 December 1941, p. 4; T.R.H. Davenport, "Africans and Urban Local Government after 1910", pp. 15-16.
  23. CO 1004, 1200/2/1908-10, Acting Under-Secretary Interior Affairs - Acting Secretary Native Affairs, 23-10-1910; MBL 1/2/4/1/21 Annual Report Native Administration Department, 01-05-1932, p. 12; MBL 1/2/4/1/12, Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 15-03-1927, p. 4; MBL 1/2/4/1/10, Minutes Joint Council Native Affairs Committee, Native Advisory Board and Black Committees (Annexure B), 24-09-1926, pp. 4-5; *The Friend*, 30-01-1930, "Native Trading in Location."



rights to blacks. The Minister, though not against such rights, refused to interfere in the affairs of Free State local authorities, who were supported in their refusal by the Bloemfontein Chamber of Commerce and the Free State Municipal Association. Mapikela, not discouraged, decided to keep the City Council informed about the white hawkers who traded contrary to municipal regulations in the black townships.<sup>24</sup>

The economic depression of the early 1930's resulted in increasing unemployment of urban blacks. Mapikela draw the attention of the City Council to the 1090 blacks who became unemployed from February to October 1931. The depression forced employers like the City Council to discharge their employees, or replace their black employees with white employees. Mapikela was very upset about this habit, which indicated to him that the white employers and the authorities were completely indifferent and unsympathetic towards the unemployment dilemma of the blacks. He realised that in the absence of a solution to the ongoing trading rights question, an interim solution for the economic plight of the urban black community had to be found.<sup>25</sup>

Mapikela blamed the so-called "civilized labour policy" of Premier J.B.M. Hertzog, and the Mines and Works Amendment Act (Colour Bar Act) of 1926, for the indifferent attitude of the employers and authorities. He termed these racial measures as cruel and unjust because they protected the white worker at the cost of great numbers of black workers who were deprived of their work. Mapikela concluded that these policies deprived the black worker from his inherent right to work and live according to his own ability.<sup>26</sup>

Deeply under the impression of the serious economic plight of his community, Mapikela in 1931 came up with one of his major contributions to uplift the poor. As chairman of the Executive Committee of the Natives Advisory Board, he called a public meeting of black employees where he proposed the establishment of a relief fund to pay wages to unemployed black workers who were to be employed on a relief work programme. Mapikela chaired the Work Committee which selected applicants for relief work. The relief workers were paid with money from the relief fund, consisting of the voluntary contributions of at least one shilling (ten cents) by black employees. This enterprise was a success. Within one month 285 men were provided with work. The City Council was so impressed that an amount of £300 was budgeted for relief work in 1933.<sup>27</sup>

The Second World War (1939-1945) worsened the economic plight of the black community of Bloemfontein. The War curbed employment opportunities, preventing black

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24. MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Minutes Joint Meeting Native Affairs Committee and Native Advisory Board, 27-03-1935, p. 13; MBL 1/2/4/1/26, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Natives Advisory Board, 08-07-1935, p. 2; MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Minutes Joint Meeting Native Affairs Committee and Native Advisory Board, 10-05-1932, p 5; MBL 1/2/4/1/31, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 13-04-1939, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/32, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, June 1939, p.8; MBL 1/2/4/1/28, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, May 1937, p. 7.
  25. MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Minutes Joint Meeting Native Affairs Committee and Native Advisory Board, 10-05-1932, pp. 2-3; MBL 1/2/4/1/22, Report Interview between Mayor, Chairman Finance and Native Affairs Committees, Members of Advisory Board, 03-04-1933, pp. 1-2; MBL 1/2/4/1/20, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 24-11-1931, pp. 4-5.
  26. T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge I* (Johannesburg, 1982), p. 278.
  27. MBL 1/2/4/1/20, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 24-11-1931, pp. 4-5; MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Minutes Joint Meeting Native Affairs Committee and Native Advisory Board, 10-05-1932, pp. 2-3; MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, 13-07-1932, p. 3; MBL 1/2/4/1/22, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 07-02-1933, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/22, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 09-05-1933, p.1.

employees from contributing to the relief fund. A petition signed by Mapikela and two other block leaders of the Advisory Board did not convince the City Council to contribute to the exhausted relief fund. He consequently called for a public meeting to brief the 30 000 residents of the black townships on the social implications of unemployment in 1941. At this occasion he referred to the approximately 1000 vagrants who were legally liable to banishment from the townships [in terms of Article 17, Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 1923].<sup>28</sup>

Mapikela lamented the absence of a labour bureau to supply work opportunities to those people who wanted to work. To fill this gap in the black labour field at such critical times, he promoted possibilities for black education and old age pensions and renewed his request for trading rights. He played a leading role in establishing government schools for blacks in the Orange Free State and where possible the appointment of black teachers instead of white teachers. To further stimulate employment opportunities, Mapikela propagated in the NRC facilities for medical training for blacks in South Africa, an ideal which was only realised after the Second World War. His interest in education as a means to curb poverty and unemployment refer back to his own educational background, and his involvement as a founder-member in the establishment of the first South African Native College at Fort Hare in the eastern Cape in 1916. In the last instance he succeeded, with the unanimous support of the NRC, to convince the Government to pay the indigent elder black people in the country old age and disability pensions after the Second World War. He participated as a member of the Control Board of the Bantu Benevolent Fund in the administration of these pension allowances.<sup>29</sup>

The war-years, accompanied by unemployment and indigency, urged Mapikela to renew the request for trading rights. As head block leader and president of the Bloemfontein Bantu Traders Association, he realised that this was the one option left over which, if exploited successfully, could render a permanent material contribution to the socio-economic upliftment of his community. During the war-years he devoted his energies almost exclusively to the question of trading rights. To this end he fully utilized his membership of the NRC to exercise pressure on Central Government and the City Council of Bloemfontein. However, to support the NRC proposal for the cancellation of the Native Legislation Amendment Act, which strictly controlled black migration to urban centres, was probably not such a wise decision. The prospect of an accelerated black migration to the urban centres, where local authorities country-wide already had to grapple with serious socio-economic problems caused by overcrowding, would certainly not convince city councils to give in on black trading rights.<sup>30</sup>

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28. MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Minutes Joint Meeting Native Affairs Committee and Native Advisory Board, 27-03-1935 (Petition, 21-01-1935), pp. 16-17; MBL 1/2/4/1/26, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 09-09-1935; MBL 1/2/4/1/35, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 16-09-1941, pp. 2-3; MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, December 1942, p. 5.
  29. UG 26-'32, *Report Native Affairs Commission, 1927-1931*, p. 29; UG 7-'35, *Report Proceedings of Native Representative Council, Pretoria 6-13 December 1937*, p. 24; *The Friend*, 31-12-1923, "Native Affairs"; UG 12-'41, *Report Proceedings Fourth Session Native Representative Council, Pretoria, November-December 1940*, pp. 6, 17; UG 11-'40, *Report Proceedings Third Session of Native Representative Council, Pretoria, November-December 1939*, p. 7; Archive of the Governor in State Archives, Bloemfontein, G 51, 103, T.M. Mapikela - J.Q. Dickson, 08-08-1907; CO 941, 1193, T.M. Mapikela - Under Colonial Secretary, 28-01-1909; *The Friend*, 27-02-1909; Mancoe, *Bloemfontein ...*, pp. 44, 72-73, 104, 118; UG 44-'46, *Report Department Native Affairs, 1944-45*, p. 97.
  30. UG 7-'38, *Report Proceedings Natives Representative Council, Pretoria, 6-13 December 1937*, p. 22.

Mapikela nonetheless intensified his petitioning of the authorities for trading rights, deeply under the impression of the urgency of the matter. "Popular feeling would sooner or later compel the Board (Natives Advisory Board) to petition the Government on the matter, much as they wished to avoid such action."<sup>31</sup> This indeed happened in 1943, after Mapikela was turned down on two occasions by the Bloemfontein City Council, first as head block leader and secondly as a member of a delegation of the Bloemfontein Bantu Traders Association in 1938. As a member of an ANC delegation, Mapikela pointed out to the Minister of Native Affairs that the Natives (Urban Areas) Act unambiguously allowed blacks to trade with their own people. In perhaps the strongest language ever used by him, Mapikela stated that the confidence of the black people in Central Government was shattered by its conspicuous acceptance of the local authorities' obstinate refusal of black trading rights. He detected an increasing resentment under blacks over the trading question, as they felt their right to earn a lawful living was unjustly suppressed. In conclusion he called upon the Minister to convince the Free State municipal councils of the necessity for black trading rights.<sup>32</sup>

It is not far-fetched to state that Mapikela's words contained a certain note of warning to local and central government that urban blacks would not remain docile for ever as they had a legal grievance which was overridden by the self-interest of the authorities. At no previous occasion, whether as member of the ANC executive at national level or at local level as head block leader did Mapikela use any stronger language. His words, which deviated from his traditional moderate and co-operative vocabulary, were a forewarning that urban black opinion was becoming aggressive. Such a conclusion is supported by the suggestion of the Orange Free State African Traders Association to boycott all white businesses in the province in order to add weight to Mapikela's words.<sup>33</sup>

The Minister of Native Affairs obviously heeded Mapikela's warning because he referred the trading issue to the local authorities of the Orange Free State province for comment. However, he refused to abolish the Native Laws Amendment Act or its prohibitive migration stipulations as the law formed an integral part of the Government's national black policy. The City Council of Bloemfontein, on recommendation of its Natives Affairs Committee and the Bloemfontein Chamber of Commerce, decided to allow black trading rights after the War, when the economic climate would be more favourable. (Blacks indeed received trading rights in 1948).<sup>34</sup>

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31. MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Minutes Joint Meeting Native Affairs Committee and Native Advisory Board, 27-03-1935, p. 13.
  32. MBL 1/2/4/1/30, Minutes Meeting Representatives from Traders Association and Native Affairs Committee, 26-07-1938, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/29, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 04-02-1938, p. 5; MBL 1/2/4/1/32, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, June 1939, p. 8; UG 7-'38, *Report Proceedings Natives Representative Council, Pretoria, 6-13 December 1937*, p. 22; UG 11-'40, *Report Third Session Natives Representative Council, Pretoria, November-December 1939*, p. 13; MBL 1/2/4/1/32, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 11-10-1939, p. 4.
  33. MBL 1/2/4/1/32, Monthly Report Manager Native Administration Department, June 1939, p. 9.
  34. MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 11-01-1943, p. 3; UG 54-'39, *Report Native Affairs Commission, 1937-38*, pp. 7-9; Karis and Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge II*, p. 145; MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 11-01-1943, p. 3; MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes Special Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 13-07-1943, p. 3. The City Council published trading regulations by virtue of the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945, and as proclaimed under the Administrator's Notice, No 5/1948.

To Mapikela the decision of the Bloemfontein City Council in favour of black trading rights meant the end of a struggle of more than 20 years. It was a giant step forward for the socio-economic position of the black people in Bloemfontein. Three considerations turned the City Council around to a more open-minded approach to the trading question: Mapikela's perseverance undoubtedly played a certain role. Secondly the City Council admitted that the idea of black townships only serving as temporary labour resources, was outmoded. Lastly the Chamber of Commerce overcame its fear of white business being overpowered by black business.<sup>35</sup>

### Living conditions

In his endeavours to uplift his community economically, Mapikela included the upgrading of their living conditions. The abnormally high death-rate, especially among children under five years of age, were directly attributed to poor housing, to the absence of water-borne sanitation and of household water supplied by pipe-line and to the filthy, untraversable gravel streets.<sup>36</sup> Mapikela's close involvement with church affairs and his position as head block leader made him acutely aware of the dire need in the black townships of Bloemfontein for improved facilities. He petitioned the colonial government for proper housing facilities as early as 1909, during his term as secretary-general of the ORC Native Congress. This was only the start of a campaign which was in vain. His request of 1909 stranded on the promise of a bill to cater for black urban housing. With unification coming up then, the promised bill realised only in 1923 with the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, which made the local authorities responsible for the improvement of black urban living conditions. Mapikela tabled his concern about the living conditions in his community on different occasions between 1923 and 1940. It involved interviews with the Minister of Native Affairs, meetings between the Native Advisory Board and the City Council, and the NRC. He even proposed in the NRC in 1940 that the white residents of towns throughout the country should contribute through a municipal tax to the upgrading of the living conditions of their black counterparts, seeing that it was a country-wide problem and that urban blacks were the poorest section of the South African community.<sup>37</sup> On each occasion the standard reply to Mapikela's request for infra-structural improvements to black living conditions was that Central Government was not inclined to intervene with the authority of local councils, despite the prescriptions of the 1923 legislation, and more importantly: city councils generally, Bloemfontein included, were unwilling to levy additional taxes on their white tax payers, keeping in mind these tax payers were their electorate as well. Loans which were available by law for improvements to living conditions in black townships were counteracted by the argument that the treasuries of the respective municipal "native" departments were too poor to repay these loans.<sup>38</sup>

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35. MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes Special Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 13-07-1943, pp. 2-3; MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Affairs Committee, 13-08-1943, p. 2.
  36. MBL 1/2/4/1/36, Minutes Ordinary Meeting Native Advisory Board, 19-07-1943, pp. 1-3. Also compare MBL 1/2/4/1/9, 18-03-1926; MBL 1/2/4/1/36, 13-07-1943; MBL 1/2/4/1/26, 25-09-1935.
  37. UG 12-'41, *Report Fourth Session Natives Representative Council, Pretoria, November-December 1940*, p. 12.
  38. UG 42-'41, *Report Native Affairs Commission, 1939-1940*, p. 7.

## Conclusion

Mapikela identified himself with a democratic and non-racial society. He realised however that the local and central authorities were not going to grant the black people equal rights as early as the 1920's. To counteract this setback his political strategy utilized two avenues to exercise pressure and to gain some redress locally for political, social and economic inequalities. In the first place he made the utmost use of constitutional means such as the advisory powers of the Native Advisory Board and the NRC, which functioned locally and nationally respectively. His executive membership of black political organisations such as the ANC and its local provincial branch in the Free State, the Bloemfontein Bantu Trading Association and various church and school committees constituted the second avenue of his strategy.

In the context of white suspicion and resulting fear for black empowerment, the ANC was not so useful to Mapikela than the NRC and Native Advisory Board which stood under the thumbs of white authority. His active membership of the latter two organs was therefore perhaps the most effective in exercising some pressure on the City Council (for example regarding trading rights). The NRC (and the ANC) enabled him to gain entrance to the office of the Minister of Native Affairs for petitioning. Though he failed to achieve his franchise goal at local level, his economic and social aims were more successful in so far that he gained the co-operation of the City Council of Bloemfontein for relief work for destitute blacks, trading rights and, at national level, government schools, including the appointment of black teachers.

Two features characterised Mapikela's public actions locally. In the face of practically unsurmountable white governing opposition, he never explicitly considered violence as an option, though such an option was probably not excluded from his mind when he warned the Bloemfontein City Council about the local black people becoming aggressive and considering boycott action for the refusal of trading rights. Secondly his perseverance in achieving his goals could be ascribed to his moderate political strategies which were based on the value system of the pre-industrial black community. This value system was influenced by the Christian (missionary school) and Western democratic values (constitutional decency).

Mapikela died on 19 March 1945 at the age of 76 years. J.R. Cooper's obituary of him explained why he was regarded as one of the most respected members of his community: "The late Thomas Mapikela was one of Nature's gentlemen. He was a wise Councillor in all matters concerning the welfare of his fellow citizens. Amongst his own people he would be remembered for his untiring devotion to the cause for their social and economic upliftment."<sup>39</sup>

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39. MBL 1/2/4/1/39, Minutes Special Meeting Native Advisory Board, 22-03-1945, p.