

“We cannot carry our own poverty”

*Native Affairs, welfare reform and the
development of an ‘inclusive’ social
pension system in South Africa, 1936 -
1959*



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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Magister Artium in the Department of History,
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For my grandmother, Daphne Dorothy Valerie Gevers; who would have cherished the privilege and opportunity to pursue her education further than standard eight, who has lived her life in resolute defiance of the structures of patriarchy and whose resilience I truly admire.



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Abstract

“We cannot carry our own poverty”: Native Affairs, welfare reform and the development of an ‘inclusive’ social pension system in South Africa, 1936 – 1959

An ‘inclusive’ system of state social pensions was introduced by the United Party-led government in 1944 and remained intact throughout apartheid. Scholars have argued that the delivery infrastructure of the old age pension system in South Africa – which pervaded National Party rule – became crucial to the rapid distribution of state social grants in the 1990s. This research focuses on the construction of a bureaucratic system of control that developed in the 1940s for the purpose of administering social pensions to black South Africans. Extant studies on the history of the old age pension system in South Africa have paid little attention to the politics of administration and the particular ways in which bureaucrats shaped old age pension policy. In this thesis, I historicise its development by paying attention to the system’s internal structures and administration. By focusing on the administration of these pensions in the initial years of old age pension policy implementation in the Native Affairs Department (NAD), this thesis examines the position of the old age pension system as one thread in the reticulation of policies and practices that came together to form the apartheid state. It elucidates the conjuncture of social assistance, modernising technologies and centralised registration and administration in the 1950s, outside of any grand plan, as a factor in what became one of the apartheid state’s insidious projects of social engineering and control: separate development. I argue that the shift in administrative practice that occurred toward the end of the 1940s (but before National Party rule) from a decentralised, manual system of administration to a centralised, mechanised one reined in the authority of local authorising officers and limited their previously-held ability to act as mediators in the administration and development of the system, shifting their roles from active mediators to passive intermediaries. The technologies introduced with the project of mechanisation enabled the National Party led-NAD to embark on a campaign to systematically review and limit the award of pensions to black South African while keeping intact a system that was politically, socially and economically expedient. In this thesis, I contend that the system of old age pensions bolstered the dominant economic and political structures in South Africa and suggest that this system played a significant role in enabling the persistence of these structures.

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MA full thesis, Department of History, University of the Western Cape.



August 2017

Declaration

I declare that *“We cannot carry our own poverty”*: *Native Affairs, welfare reform and the development of an ‘inclusive’ social pension system in South Africa, 1936 – 1959* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Liezl Sarah Gevers

August 2017

Signed:



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¹ For more on this see the acknowledgements in Giselle Lara Gevers, “The Prevalence of and Risk Factors for Neck Pain in First Year Faculty of Health Sciences Students at the Durban University of Technology” (Durban University of Technology, 2017).

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	viii
List of Figures	xii
Chapter One - Introduction	1
Introduction.....	1
Archival Logics: Reading the Archives of the NAD	7
A Note on Methodology.....	9
Materiality in the Archives, and the Problematics of (Re)Constructing Archived Systems.....	14
Conceptual Framework.....	19
Social Citizenship	19
Registration and Access	25
Pensioner Registration in the 1940s	27
Thesis Structure	29
Chapter Two - The Centrality of Social Welfare to Segregationist Rule	31
Introduction.....	31
Segregation and the ‘Native Reserves’	35
The Interrelationship Between Poor Whiteism, Segregation and the ‘Native Question’	41
The 1928 Old Age Pensions Act	42
Changing Economies and Inklings of Welfare Reform: the 1930s and 1940s	45
Ideations of ‘Native Welfare’ in the 1930s	46

“We Cannot Carry Our Own Poverty”: A Universal Call for State Intervention	48
De Facto Old Age Pensions? The Ex-gratia Blind Grant	51
The Second World War: Reliance on Black Labour and Growing Unrest ...	52
Rumblings of a Universal Pension Scheme?.....	53
Conclusion	55
Chapter Three - Articulating ‘Inclusive’ Social Pension Policy in the Context of a Racist, Segregationist State	58
Introduction.....	58
Implementation of Social Pension Policy in the NAD	61
Avoiding Dependency: The Weight of Work in Articulating Social Policy ..	63
Mapping Out Pension Administration: Imaginations of the Urban and Rural	68
The Urbanisation Test.....	71
Differentiated Pension Rates and the Means Test.....	72
The Manual Paperwork System of Pension Administration	76
The Old Age Pension System and Questions of ‘Social Citizenship’: Synchronous’ Access and Attempts to Force ‘Recognition’	86
Conclusion	88
Chapter Four - The Materiality of Centralisation: Mechanisation and the Rationalisation of Old Age Pension Administration in the NAD	91
Introduction.....	91
Moving from Manual to Machine Labour	93
Mechanising the NAD Pension Administration	94
Efficiency: an Expedient Trope.....	94
Efficiency Embodied: The Role of Material Objects in Pension Administration	100

Implementing Mechanisation.....	102
Cataloguing Identities: Developing Practices of Pensioner Identification ...	104
Local and Global Networks of Identification	104
Situating NAD Pensioner Identification within Older Networks of Identification Practices in South Africa.....	105
Early Pensioner Identification: Bringing ‘Order’ to the ‘Chaos’	107
Centralising Pension Administration in the NAD	115
Materiality in NAD Pension Administration	118
Conclusion	121
Chapter Five - Review Trumps Repeal: The Political Expediency of Keeping Intact Black Pensions Under National Party-Rule.....	123
Introduction.....	123
Tracking Subjects: A Nationwide Campaign to Review Black Pensions in the Union.....	131
The Mechanics of the Review Process	135
The “Decidedly Unsavoury” Nature of Pension Review Work: Reading (Against the Grain) Pensioner Experience of the Review Process Through Official Reports.....	138
From Mediators to Intermediaries: The Consequence of Centralisation for the Role of Lower Level NAD Bureaucrats	139
The Role of Pensions in Establishing Apartheid.....	141
Considerations of Gender and ‘Social Citizenship’	144
The Widows of Louis Trichardt.....	145
Conclusion	149
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	151
Bibliography	159
Primary Sources	159

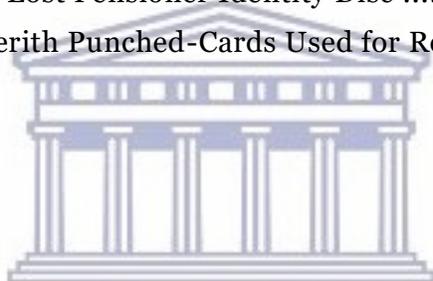
Published	159
Unpublished Archival Documents	160
Literature.....	160
Published – Books	160
Published – Book Sections	164
Published – Journal Articles	167
Unpublished – Conference Papers	172
Unpublished - Theses.....	173



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List of Figures

Figure 1: Decaying Documents	16
Figure 2: Hollerith Punched Cards Used by the NAD	93
Figure 3: Hollerith Punched-Card	94
Figure 4: Native Tax Receipt and Document of Identification	112
Figure 5: A pass issued in the district of Tabankulu	112
Figure 6: Description of Localised ID Card System	114
Figure 7: Specimen Pension Identity Card Proposed Prototype by one Native Commissioner at the NC Conference 1945	114
Figure 8: Native Commissioner at Lydenburg's Description of Proposed Standardised Pensioner Identity Card (Specimen Absent).....	115
Figure 9: Affidavit for Lost Pensioner Identity Disc	119
Figure 10: Blank Hollerith Punched-Cards Used for Reviews	137



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Chapter One - Introduction

Introduction

A universal system of old age pensions was first introduced in South Africa in 1944, when the Old Age Pensions Act of 1928 was revised to include persons who were officially classified 'Native' and 'Indian'. This research concerns the history of South African state old age pensions as administered to black South African recipients. It investigates the continuities and discontinuities between the 1940s, often identified as a period when liberal ideas of social inclusion were gaining relative traction, and the 1950s when apartheid racial policies were being established and implemented. How was this change in policy implemented, at first by the United Party-led (UP) government during World War Two, and subsequently by the apartheid state from 1948 onward? I set out to examine these questions drawing on both extant literature and through the analysis of the archived bureaucratic correspondence between Native Affairs Department (NAD) officials who were concerned with the specificities of setting up and administering the pension scheme to black South Africans. The purpose of this thesis is two-fold. First, it seeks to add to the growing literature that has as its focus the development of state social welfare in South Africa. Second, through the detailed analysis of South African Union and apartheid National state archival documents, I pay close attention to the changes in the way old age pensions were administered by the NAD between 1944 and 1959. I do this in order to develop a better understanding of to what extent the old age pension system functioned as part of the biopolitics of the South African state's segregationist, and later apartheid, order.

To say that there is a lacuna of historical research on the subject of the old age pension system in South Africa would be an exaggeration - indeed, there exists a significant if small body of work that has traced the origins and development of this system. However, given that this pension system was in place for the whole of the second half of this century, very few historians have sought to analyse its development - both political and administrative - throughout the twentieth century. Hence this contribution of focused historical, and specifically

archival, research on old age pensions that examines the construction and design of the methods of pension administration in the NAD. Much of the historiography on old age pensions in South Africa focuses on the socio-political and economic conditions that engendered South Africa's version of a welfare state. Andreas Sagner's study on the history of old age pension policy in South Africa held a dual purpose. It analysed the conditions that led to the introduction of old age pensions in 1928 and those surrounding the later extension of old age pensions to black South Africans in 1944. Arguing that older work on social policy had produced an age-blind analysis of the concepts of race and class, Sagner also set out to explore in historical perspective the social consequences of old age social policy for the lives of both young and old black South Africans. In this regard Sagner drew on empirical data from the former Ciskei and Transkei regions of present day Eastern Cape to examine the relationship between social policy and old age.² While he drew, in part, on the archive of the NAD, Sagner's work does not constitute a detailed analysis of the construction of a system of pension administration in the NAD, nor does his methodology comprise a critical appraisal of the archive with which he works.

Jeremy Seekings has written prolifically on different aspects of the history of social welfare and the old age pension system in South Africa. His paper *Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa* analysed the development of 'social citizenship' in South Africa, situating the roots of South African social citizenship in the welfare reforms of the 1940s, which laid the foundations for a "multi-racial welfare system".³ Seekings argued that the historiography on South African liberalism – as produced by both radical and liberal historians - has mostly ignored the heterogeneous nature of South African liberalism, choosing to focus only on the most conservative strains of liberalism and ignoring its more radical forms. Thus, with the premise that the "origins of social citizenship in South Africa constitute a neglected and important chapter in

² Andreas Sagner, "The 1944 Pension Laws Amendment Bill: Old Age Security Policy in South Africa in Historical Perspective, ca. 1920-1960," *Southern African Journal of Gerontology* 7, no. 1 (1998): 10-14; Andreas Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 523-53.

³ Jeremy Seekings, "The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 4 (2000): 388.

the history of South African political thought”, the paper contextualised the British origins of the concept and argued that proponents of New Liberalism, which marked a divergence from classic liberalism, significantly influenced the development of ideas of social citizenship (and consequently reforms in social policy) that emerged in South Africa in the context of the second world war.⁴ Seekings’ more recent work focused on the origins of the welfare state in South Africa. *‘Not a Single White Person Should be Allowed to Go Under’: Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa’s Welfare State, 1924-1929* argued that previous scholarship on the origins of the welfare state in South Africa had misplaced its roots in the 1930s when, rather, the welfare state emerged from the policy developments of the Pact government in the 1920s. Here, Seekings examined the conditions that led to the policy shifts that saw the state assuming “substantial responsibility for the ‘deserving’ [white] poor in the 1920s”, and maintained that these developments in social policy together with the ‘civilised labour policies’ of the Pact government were greatly instrumental in segregationist state building and the restoration and maintenance of white supremacy.⁵ In his article, *The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937*, Seekings surveyed the introduction of the Old Age Pension Act of 1928 and the Carnegie Commission’s views on white old age pensions in order to develop his argument for a reassessment of the “character and the impact” of the Commission. He argued that previous interpretations that see the Commission as integral to “modern” welfare “statecraft” are misguided; the Commission was strongly against the programmatic state welfare that developed as part of the Pact government’s response to white poverty and instead advocated for the reallocation of the administrative responsibility for ‘social care’ of poor citizens to the Church.⁶

Writing more broadly on the history of social pensions in Southern Africa (with a focus on South Africa, Botswana and Namibia), Stephen Devereux’s work

⁴ Seekings, 388.

⁵ Jeremy Seekings, “‘Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under’: Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa’s Welfare State, 1924-1929,” *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 3 (2007): 378.

⁶ Jeremy Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (2008): 515-537.

constitutes a survey of the political and administrative history of social protection in South Africa and Namibia. Arguing that contemporary programmes of social protection stand to benefit from the technical and political insights these histories provide, he considered the introduction and developments of the social pension in these states in order to think through the “future sustainability of the social pension - fiscal, administrative and political - in all three countries”.⁷

Alan Rycroft's unpublished work on social pensions in South Africa linked social pensions and welfare to tactics of social control. His discussion of social pensions in South Africa covered the period from their inception in 1928 through to the 1980s, and argued that various forms of state control, such as “repression, exploitation, co-optation, integration, paternalism, conformity and self-determination”, have been evident and exercised through poor relief and the administration of state social pensions at different times in the history of these welfare practices.⁸

Although these studies have made an important contribution to what had previously been a largely ignored area of South African historiography, they have focused very little on the actual construction of an extensive system of pension administration in the NAD that took place in the wake of the Pension Laws Amendment Act of 1944. Nor have they paid enough attention to the implications of this system for state formation in the Union. Thus, whilst the existing historiography focuses mainly on a broader and more general political history of social pensions in South Africa, the purpose of this research is a predominantly archival analysis of the implementation of old age pensions for black South Africans, and the broader implications of the rapid administrative developments that occurred during the period between 1944, when the United Party-led government made the decision to extend the pension scheme to include all South Africans, and 1948, when the National Party (NP) achieved a narrow victory in the elections.⁹ Furthermore, most of the extant literature on the history of the

⁷ Stephen Devereux, “Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33, no. 3 (2007): 540, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070701475542>.

⁸ Alan Rycroft, “Social Pensions and Poor Relief in South Africa: An Exercise in Social Control” (Unpublished, 1987).

⁹ Previous work on the history of the old age pension in South Africa eschews a detailed study of the correspondence between officials in the NAD, which deals with the construction and administration of the system within the

South African pension system draws on published documents to the neglect of archival documents. Where archival documents have been used, scholars have paid little attention to the constructed nature of these colonial archives in their analyses.

I thus aim to contribute to our understanding of the historical links between welfare and social control in South Africa. I do this through an examination of the system, which the NAD developed to administer old age, blind, and disability pensions from 1944, as well as the implications of the swift changes that took place within this system between 1944 and 1948. It was during the first decade of apartheid rule that a national system of official race-identification was designed, utilising the latest technology as part of this ambitious project. This thesis attempts to problematise the extent to which the state social welfare system, which rapidly developed in the latter half of the 1940s, contributed to the broader goals of apartheid state-making and biopolitical rule. I do this through a study of the interface between efforts to mechanise the national system of pension pay-outs and to accurately identify recipients with the latest technologies, and the apartheid state's determination to systematically review and to limit the number of pensions awarded to black South Africans. I examine the significance and lingering reach of this bureaucratic paper system built, ostensibly, in order to streamline the administration and payout of social grants. The system of documentation that NAD officials constructed for the administration of state social grants allocated to black South Africans crucially involved identifying and tracking the circumstances of its black subjects. Very soon after its inception, this system became instrumental in facilitating the systematic campaign to review and limit the number of pensions being awarded to black South Africans.

Given the NP's sustained ideological opposition to the provision of social benefits to black South Africans, a cursory reading might suggest that choosing not to abolish the provision of these social benefits when the party came to power in 1948 was somewhat anomalous. I argue that the process of mechanisation

department. However, Marijke du Toit is currently working on a similar and complementary study, which focuses on another aspect of the history of social welfare administration in South Africa. Her work constitutes a detailed archival study of the administration of child maintenance grants in South Africa in the early and mid-twentieth century.

engendered the construction of a detailed documentary system, which was devised specifically for the administration of certain social grants and allowed the central government greater control over the functioning of the system. I argue that this benefitted the state insofar as it allowed greater documented registration, cataloguing of the personal details of its black subjects, and subsequent access to them. I investigate state officials' interaction with the technology of mechanisation, identification, and registration during the development of the state social welfare system of the mid-century; a system that simultaneously produced and was produced by various machines and material objects beyond the written document.¹⁰ The detailed correspondence that dealt with its construction, the punched-cards and pieces of paper and metal used as rudimentary forms of identification constitute the material remains of this system. These artefacts culminated into something more than just a system developed to make the administration of pensions to black South Africans more efficient. Indeed, I examine the way in which biopolitics¹¹ intersected with the materiality of the pension system and analyse the extent to which the NAD harnessed material objects to discipline, order, and monitor pensioners. The centrally catalogued data generated by this system and increased access to black pensioners in the countryside allowed for greater regulation and, arguably, this system, along with other historical prototypes, acted as an entryway or blueprint for the insidious social control that became so characteristic of the apartheid state.

In this study, I am more interested in the logic of this system than whether its practical applications were efficacious. As Keith Breckenridge has demonstrated in his book Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present (and elsewhere), the

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (University of Chicago Press, 1991); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell, Michel Foucault's Lectures at the Collège de France (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

apartheid state was no stranger to failure in its grand administrative ambitions.¹² One significant example of this was the administrative failure of the greater goals of the Bewysburo project and the Dompas. Earlier research of mine also explored a particular aspect of the administrative failures of the pension system in KwaZulu and Natal during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, when the authority to administer pensions in KwaZulu was handed over to the homeland government. And yet it has been argued that it is in these failures that the nature of the apartheid state was delimited.¹³ Thus this project - nestled in a number of influential studies that have preceded it - is in many ways a study of state formation; in particular the way in which different arms of the matrix of institutions that constitute the state¹⁴ interact with people, discourses, and technologies to create and develop systems that become distinctively characteristic of a particular state.

Archival Logics: Reading the Archives of the NAD

Attempting to understand the administration of the old age pension system and certain other state social benefits that developed in the 1930s and 1940s in South Africa, requires situating these developments in the wider socio-political context of South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. The administration of old age pensions to black South Africans drew on and incorporated the structures of 'native administration', and with it the logics of segregation and paternalism. The primary research for this thesis draws on the analysis of correspondence between state officials at different levels in the NAD, as well as those between top officials in the NAD and the Treasury. Given the reliance of this project on documents and materials housed in the National Archives of South Africa, I realise the importance of taking cognisance of the loaded nature of colonial archives. Specifically the understanding that the colonial archive is not simply a reservoir of facts but a complex structure housing

¹² Keith Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, Kindle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹³ Breckenridge; Liezl Gevers, "'Black Sash and Red Tape': The Plight of the African Aged in KwaZulu and Natal, 1979-1990" (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2011).

¹⁴ Linzi Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History," *The Journal of African History* 33, no. 03 (1992): 455.

materials that betray subjectivities that shaped, constructed and produced the systems, identities, and knowledge they speak to as much as they reflect them. An appreciation of the complex nature of the documentary and other associated material remnants that we engage with is essential, particularly the understanding that they cannot be reduced to simple vessels of facts but represent the continuums of fact and fiction, memory and invention, falsification and accurate representation, and perceptions and realities, much like photographs and other material objects do.

The archival sources examined for this thesis are drawn predominantly from the National Archives Repository in Pretoria, which houses the public records of central government since 1910. I make use of a number of collections of files, the majority of which come from the archive of the NAD. I also make use of some archived Treasury documents that deal with the administration of social pensions¹⁵ for black and Indian South Africans. This collection, entitled *Native Affairs: Blind, Invalidity and Old Age Pensions for Natives and Indians*,¹⁶ is predominantly made up of correspondence between the Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) and the Secretary for Finance (SF) concerning the administration of grants. However, it also includes draft circulars detailing the administrative regulations for old age, blind, and disability pensions that the SNA sent to the Treasury for perusal and comment before publishing and circulating to local authorising officers of the NAD.

A NAD file entitled *Old Age Pensions Act*¹⁷ comprises correspondence between various Magistrates and Native Commissioners (NC) and the SNA concerning queries and comments by the former about their interpretation of the legislation. The collection also contains other papers and circulars produced by the NAD about various aspects of the law as well as some letters of appeal and petition sent by pensioners to the head office of the NAD.

¹⁵ I interchangeably use the terms 'social pensions', 'social grants' and 'social benefits' to refer only to the non-contributory state pensions that were legislatively extended to black South Africans in the 1940s and administered by the NAD (I.e. old age pensions, blind pensions and disability pensions).

¹⁶ "Native Affairs: Blind, Invalidity and Old Age Pensions for Natives and Indians" (Union Treasury Department, n.d.), SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

¹⁷ *Notes on the Native Commissioners Conference* (Native Affairs Department, 1945).

*Mechanisation of Social Benefits*¹⁸ parts 1, 2 & 3 are archived NAD files that are concerned with the move to mechanize social pension administration. The files include, inter alia, correspondence between the SNA and the companies that tendered for the project, personal correspondences between the SNA and local NAD bureaucrats (Magistrates and NCs), as well as correspondences between members in the upper echelons of the NAD and other state departments, all of which are concerned with debating, planning, and designing a centralised system of pension administration.

Files entitled *Departmentale Komitee - Ondesoek na Sociale Hulpskemas/ Hersiening van Bantoeipensioene*,¹⁹ volumes one and two contain documents that predominantly deal with the construction and implementation of an ongoing review system for black pensions in the Union between 1949 and 1960.

A Note on Methodology

The archive I work with is rich in detail and provides an interesting glimpse into the multiplicity of ideas, temperaments, logics, emotions, and subjectivities at play amongst the officials who were charged with the role of administering 'Native Affairs' in the 1940s and 1950s. It is possible to read in these files all the complexities one would expect to find in a collection of texts penned by different authors commonly stationed in government offices that formed a bureaucratic network across the diverse regions of the Union. There are patterns of common thought, but also diverging opinions, varying political ideologies, and temperaments as wide in range as the signatures transcribed on the papers collated and archived in the dusty boxes now interred within the walls of the National Archives of South Africa. The differing personalities extant in these files were bound by a certain common thread - that of being a white, middle class man working in the service of the NAD. Many scholars have elucidated and discussed the tensions, differences, and complexities of white government

¹⁸ "Mechanisation of Social Benefits" (Native Affairs Department, n.d.), SAB NTS 2358 620/283 Part 1, 2 & 3, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

¹⁹ "Departmentale Komitee - Ondesoek Na Sociale Hulpskemas/ Hersiening van Bantoeipensioene" (Native Affairs Department, n.d.), SAB NTS 8320 A86/349 volumes 1 & 2, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

officials at all levels both within and outside of the NAD.²⁰ Yet, these officials also shared a significant positional identity within the structures of patriarchal, segregationist (and later apartheid) South Africa. Thus for all the diversity of opinion, approach, and personality the authors of the correspondence analysed here were simultaneously operating within and moulding the bounds of particular imbibed and overarching logics of segregation and, often, racist paternalism. Moreover, these documents and correspondence were integral actors in the process of making, shaping, and executing policy within the NAD. As such delineating these structures, as well as the modes of operation of this archive, becomes essential if one is to, as Stoler incites us, read these sources along their grain as well as against their grain.²¹

In her essay *Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance* Stoler urges historians to approach these archives with self-awareness, and argues for the movement away from the conceptualisation of ‘archive as source’ toward ‘archive as subject’.²² As such the archive is not merely a well to be used as a source of information retrieval, whose purpose is to replenish and sustain pre-existing ideas or theories, but rather a space whose structures simultaneously commemorate the systems and ideologies of those in power and accommodate documents steeped in the subjectivities of the very agents and systems that produced them. In her words, colonial archives are “monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography”.²³ Stoler argues that in order to enhance our analytic possibilities when dealing with archival documents, we need to first read the archives ‘along the grain’ before attempting to read ‘against the grain’.²⁴ Although the latter is important in the efforts of historians to write histories that

²⁰ See, for example: Ann Laura Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (1989): 134–161; Deborah Posel, “Whiteness and Power in the South African Civil Service: Paradoxes of the Apartheid State,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25, no. 1 (March 1999): 99–119; Marijke du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor: The Racialised Provision of Child Maintenance Grants, 1921–1940,” in *Paper Presented at the South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar* (University of the Western Cape, 2016).

²¹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

²² Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 93.

²³ Stoler, 90.

²⁴ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance.”

de-emphasise official histories and bring to the fore the agency of the colonised, our analysis is confined if we attempt to read between the lines before venturing an understanding of the inner workings, processes, and modes of production of the archive. Indeed, we must assume an engagement with state archival documents that reads “for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake.”²⁵

That certain discourses present in this archive were situated firmly in the logic of paternalism is hardly surprising: the pervasive nature of state paternalism has been well documented by numerous scholars of the twentieth century South African state. In her book *Starving on a Full Stomach*, Diana Wylie described the NAD as “the most paternalistic of all South African government agencies”.²⁶ Although, perhaps, exemplified in the NAD, paternalism toward black South Africans was an intricate part of the very fabric of South African society; entrenched in segregationist policy and ideas of trusteeship and widely practised across civil society.²⁷ Moreover Wylie, whose work historicises and complicates the notion of ‘paternalism’ in the Union, highlights that it was in the 1940s that archival records begin to demonstrate the shifting attitudes of administrators in the NAD towards “the needy” - notably, increasing impatience and a growing will to discipline their black subjects.²⁸ Examining old age pension administration also contributes to more complex understandings of paternalism within the NAD. The analysis of the implementation of the 1944 Pension Laws Amendment Act offers further opportunity to disaggregate and historicise state paternalistic practices and their links to segregationist policy in the first half of the twentieth century. Before the NAD embarked on the project of mechanised pension administration in 1947, procedures for administering pensions were largely decentralised. In the earlier years of implementation, Magistrates and Native Commissioners (NCs) thus had the freedom to develop their own localised

²⁵ Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” 100.

²⁶ Diana Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa* (Rutgers University Press, 2001), 60.

²⁷ Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*.

²⁸ Wylie, 60–61.

systems of old age pension administration. Tracing the varied ways in which different NAD officials in the Union conceptualised their work and the extent to which they viewed themselves (and had the freedom to act) as mediators between the interests of the state and those of their subjects enables us to complicate the notion of the old age pension ‘system’ as it existed for black South Africans. Because of the decentralised methods of pension administration extant in the early years of implementation, the same cash grant was administered in a multitude of different ways, and it was the local bureaucrats - the Native Commissioners and Magistrates - who in the first few years of implementation devised and shaped the differing methods of administration. The archive I work with reflects a distinct shift from 1948 onward toward the bureaucratized and often explicitly racist approach of NAD officials; a shift that has been highlighted already by several scholars of the apartheid state.²⁹ This thesis contends that the conversion to a centralised, mechanised system of pension administration (spearheaded by Smuts’ officials) catalysed this shift insofar as the administration of old age pensions was concerned.

Considering discourses of paternalism also brings to the fore the concept of ‘reciprocity’ and the search for “traces of marginalised lives” in official archives.³⁰ The performance of ‘state (and by extension its officials) as father’ was not merely one of a top-down practice from state to subject. Wylie notes that there existed a shared rhetoric between state paternalism and that of the patriarchy of headmen; both “used the language of fatherhood, labelling subordinates as ‘children’ whose welfare would be looked after by a benign father”.³¹ Of course, as Wylie notes, the shared rhetoric and common threads of patriarchy, which no doubt to some extent eased the interactions between state officials and headmen, should not be mistaken for an uncritical acceptance of the legitimacy of state structures of white trusteeship by rural black leaders.³² However, it does

²⁹ Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, Oxford Studies in African Affairs (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1991); Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*.

³⁰ Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, and Graeme Reid, “Introduction,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2002), 12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-0570-8>.

³¹ Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, 62.

³² Wylie, 62.

encourage cognisance of the way the language of paternalism was utilised not only by the state, but also by its subjects. Marijke du Toit has shown that certain NAD officials were well aware of the potentially problematic financial implications for the state, should the metaphor of colonial state as father to the natives be harnessed as part of arguing for more racially inclusive social policy.³³ For example, concerned about the increased fiscal expenditure that inclusive maintenance grants would bring, Harry Lugg, Chief Native Commissioner of Natal during the late 1930s, maintained that “‘the natives’ regarded ‘Government as their ‘father’ and as ‘his children’ their claims for help will become more clamorous and insistent as time goes on’”.³⁴ Indeed, several documents in the NAD files I make use of constitute letters written by pensioners, which invoke the language of paternalism and demonstrate a conceptualisation of the state as parent in an effort to implore the government to intervene in their poverty. This points to another important consideration in thinking through our use of official archives in constructing narratives of the past: how do we read for traces of “marginalised lives”? The editors of *Refiguring the Archive* argue that these traces are in no way absent from official archives, thus we must engage in “a sensitive and informed rereading of existing archival material” and “read creatively, against the grain” to elucidate such traces, even amidst archives whose existences are intimately linked to specific state functions.³⁵

Lastly, it is impossible to ignore, when embarking on the journey of historical writing, the problematic of the representation of our historical subjects. How do we approach our sources (and our analysis thereof) in a way that ensures the subjects we write about will not be silenced? How do we handle our sources and write in a way that chips away at the sediment obscuring the complexity of

³³ du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 18. Jeff Guy’s scholarship discussed extensively the way in which colonial articulations of the policy of indirect rule in South Africa specifically developed the metaphor of “Government as father” as a tool in the segregationist project; Jeff Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal: African Autonomy and Settler Colonialism in the Making of Traditional Authority* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013); Jeff Guy, *An Accommodation of Patriarchs: Theophilus Shepstone and the Foundations of the System of Native Administration in Natal* (Durban: University of Natal, 1997).

³⁴ Quoted in du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 18; Harry Lugg, “Note” (Cape Town, March 16, 1939), SAB NTS 8865 110/362/Volume 2, Children’s Act 31/37 (Maintenance Grants), National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³⁵ Hamilton, Harris, and Reid, “Introduction,” 12.

our subjects and does not further obscure it? How do we approach the disruption of dominant narratives and avoid contributing towards them?³⁶ This, in part, requires a critical recognition of our own positionality in relation to our historical subjects and constant self-reflexivity as we produce histories from the traces of the lives and systems archived by the state.

Materiality in the Archives, and the Problematics of (Re)Constructing Archived Systems

This thesis, in part, explores as its object a bureaucratic system that was built upon and relied heavily on the involved and often invasive documentation of its recipients. As has been suggested in the foregoing discussion, the old age pension system of the mid-twentieth century attempted the registration of pensioners on a large scale and was one in which a combination of paper and material objects were constructed to identify and track its recipients. At first, pieces of paper were used to identify pensioners at payouts. Later metallic identity discs, which were kept by the pensioners as proof of their identity, were used in combination with individual punched-cards. These punched-cards were produced bimonthly at the head office of the NAD from filed master cards which specified each pensioner's details, including their unique pensioner number. The remnants of these forms, discs, and punched-cards – some housed in the National archives – are fragments both of the lives and histories of the actual people they crudely represent as well as the broader system they formed (a part of).³⁷

The archival files that I deal with in this chapter comprise upward of 800 documents collated and archived by the Native Affairs Department that are concerned with, at first, the implementation of the Pension Laws Amendment Act by the NAD, and later the construction of a mechanised system of pension

³⁶ In formulating these questions I am drawn to and reminded of Santu Mofokeng's exhibition "The Black Photo Album". In this work Mofokeng invites us to heed a warning about representation of historical subjects. The exhibition centres on black South African private portraits, produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, that were problematically in danger of being cast aside and overlooked as products of a small or elite group and not representative of the feelings, perceptions, ideas and ideals of black South Africans. Santu Mofokeng, James T. Campbell, and Walther Collection, eds., *The Black Photo Album: Look at Me, 1890 - 1950* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013).

³⁷ Achille Mbembe describes the archive, in part, as a cemetery: "in the sense that fragments of lives and pieces of time are interred there" Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2002), 19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-0570-8>.

administration between the years 1946 and 1948. The majority of the documents, collated in various folders, constitute official correspondences between several different actors³⁸ together with official circulars and “identical minutes” circularised from the NAD head office to its regional and local offices. While the documents in these files are undoubtedly voluminous, I consider them fragmentary for several reasons. Firstly, the documents were collected and compiled at NAD head office. This has the consequence of presenting the developments in the system through the lens of the head office, which in large part obscures the particular perspectives of the local bureaucrats in the NAD. Crucially, too, this archive largely obscures the subjectivities of the pensioners themselves. Any glimpse into the subjectivities of the local bureaucrats and the pensioners (through the medium of letters written by pensioners to government officials in an archive overwhelmingly comprised of official correspondence) is necessarily mediated by their situation in the archive of the NAD’s central office, and thus fragmentary. Moreover, unlike other categories of social grants this archive contains no ‘case files’ of individual pensioners.³⁹ Secondly, while this archive is concerned with the construction of a system that relied on the use of machines to produce material objects central to the running of the system, the files I deal with contain very few of the material products of this system. Thirdly, there are several occasions in the correspondence where reference is made to a specimen or prototype object (for example an identity document developed by a Magistrate or NC), yet the specimen is absent from the archival record.⁴⁰ Instances like these drive home the presence of absence in the archives and their

³⁸ These include correspondence between the Secretary for Native Affairs and the Treasury, personal correspondences between the Secretary for Native Affairs and the local NAD bureaucrats [magistrates and native commissioners], as well as correspondences between members of the upper echelons of the NAD and other state departments, all of which are concerned with debating, planning and designing systems of pension administration.

³⁹ For example, du Toit makes use of case files in her work on child maintenance grants. du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor.”

⁴⁰ One can imagine multiple possible reasons for this: was it actively not included, has it been lost or not considered necessary for the archival record? Mbembe argues that the archive is in essence a status and archival production is a process of active judgement - which documents make it in to the archive is a “result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded. The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged ‘unarchivable’.” (Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” 20.)

fragmentary nature (or their constitution as “slivers” of the past).⁴¹ One is also struck at times by the fragile materiality of certain of the archived documents, the obvious decay of which can lead to a simultaneously unsettling and frustrating experience.

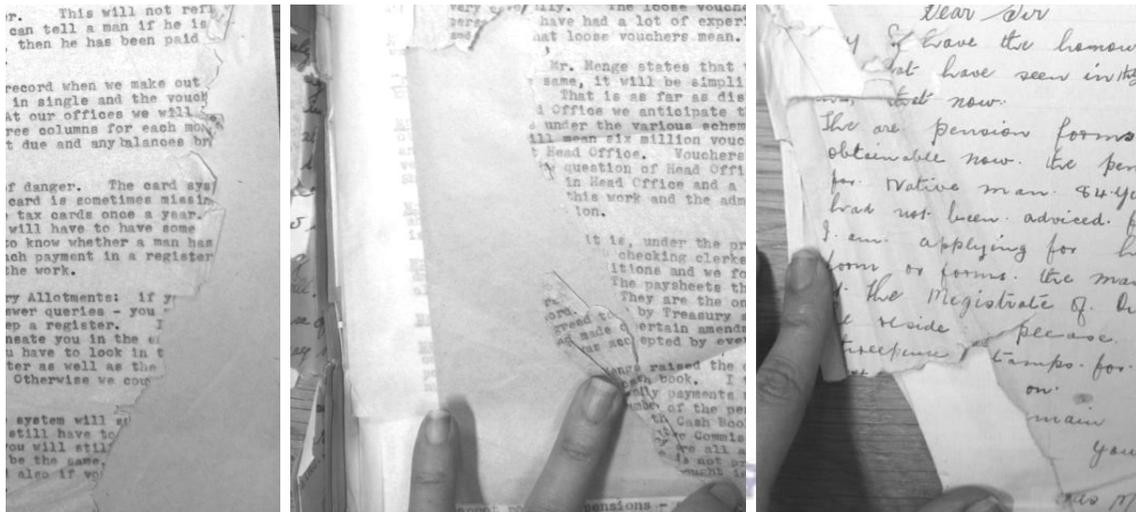


Figure 1: Decaying Documents

In such a project, which explores a documentary system that now lives - or is buried - in the files in a state archive, it is imperative to be mindful of the extent to which these remnants possess the ability to offer insight to the system they constituted. Indeed, the literature concerned with the study of photographs and material objects as historical subject provides apt machinery with which to think through challenges involved in conducting detailed, archival research. Much like nineteenth century anthropologists' assumptions about the photograph's ability to present scientific or measured realities came under scrutiny during the twentieth century (as did their confidence in the idea that the camera could produce “the perfect analogon of reality”, which paired with their certainty that the photographic image could hold inherent meaning), so too has the assumption that the written record is, or is able to be, a ‘true’ index of reality.⁴² Scholars now place emphasis on the image's ability to produce rather than to reproduce. As such, meaning is not inherent in the images. Rather, meaning is

⁴¹ Hamilton, Harris, and Reid, “Introduction,” 10.

⁴² Christopher Pinney, “The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography,” in *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 78.

determined by the practitioners who work with and produce photographic images. Photographs, their composition and construction can only ever be traces of the actual subjects and scenes they represent. Their structure, form, and content represent not only the perspective that the photographer wishes or chooses to depict but also, in many cases, the imagining of self that the subject chooses to reveal.⁴³ Similarly, like many others, I see the documents and materials that reside in state archives as traces of the systems and individual lives they represent. Holding in mind the curation of these documents and materials, the contributors of *Refiguring the Archive* note, is essential to any meaningful analysis thereof.⁴⁴

What was the significance and lingering reach of this bureaucratic mechanised system seemingly built with the purpose of streamlining the administration and payouts of social grants? The fragmentary nature of the remnants in the archive has important implications for the craft of historians too; for we harness archived traces of the past to actively produce what can only ever be partial narratives of the past. Mbembe emphasises the composition - the constructedness of archives - and the “pieces of time” that archival documents present us with “to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order... in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end”.⁴⁵ Archival documents are thus subjected to multiple constructions and reconstructions. First by the states or organisations and individuals who decide which documents are preserved and, importantly, how they are preserved; the way in which they are coded, classified and ordered. And, second, by the practitioners who choose to work with them and interpret them to “reassemble” a narrative of the past.⁴⁶ Florence Bernault argues

⁴³ See Patricia Hayes, “Northern Exposures: The Photography of C. H. L. Hahn, Native Commissioner of Ovamboland 1915-1946,” in *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, ed. Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester, and Patricia Hayes (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), 171–87; Jeremy Silvester, Patricia Hayes, and Wolfram Hartmann, “‘This Ideal Conquest’: Photography and Colonialism in Namibian History,” in *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, ed. Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester, and Patricia Hayes (Juta and Company Ltd, 1998), 10–19.

⁴⁴ Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2002).

⁴⁵ Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” 21.

⁴⁶ Mbembe, 20–22.

that “academic history is a labor of incomplete archives and partial interpretation... Our talent is to be able, from piecemeal traces, to narrate a fleshed-out, elucidatory story. Our paradox is to use incomplete and fragmentary traces to understand broad patterns and timelines in a past that remains, by definition, unreachable”.⁴⁷ Hamilton et al have thought about the incompleteness of archives, problematising the idea of ‘gaps’ in the archives and suggesting that we think about archives not as a whole that is missing some parts but rather as a “sliver”.⁴⁸

It is clear that temporality is important here, as is an awareness of our desire to order the past to make sense as a linear progression of events. Often times we embark on this process to understand the continued ruination of people’s lives across multiple temporalities, including - but not limited to - the *future of the past* as well the present.⁴⁹ In discussing imperial effects - the left overs or “aftershocks” of empire, Stoler invokes the notion of “multiple historical tenses” to think through the way “imperial remains” exist across multiple temporalities. They are simultaneously outputs of a past that is never quite complete and which contaminates the present, and agents of hypothetical and ambivalent futures. Stoler discusses how “imperial formations” as a concept in opposition to ‘empire’ registers “the ongoing quality of processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation...” and shifts the emphasis from “fixed forms of sovereignty to gradated forms of sovereignty”.⁵⁰ Latour’s concept of the “syntagmatic line” is also productive in conceptualising the ways in which systems exist as part of networks, influencing and replacing each other without predetermining the directions of their future trajectories.⁵¹ This study, in part, considers the continuities between the segregationist era state and what became

⁴⁷ Florence Bernault, “Suitcases and the Poetics of Oddities: Writing History from Disorderly Archives,” *History in Africa* 42 (June 2015): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2015.5>.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, Harris, and Reid, “Introduction,” 10.

⁴⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, “Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 194. Stoler defines ruination as “a corrosive process that weighs on the future and shapes the present”.

⁵⁰ Stoler goes on to explain that “imperial formations are defined by racialized relations of allocations and appropriations. Unlike empires, they are processes of becoming, not fixed things. Not least they are states of deferral that mete out promissory notes that are not exceptions to their operation but constitutive of them”. (Stoler, 193.)

⁵¹ Bruno Latour, “Technology Is Society Made Durable,” *The Sociological Review* 38, no. Special Issue: A Sociology of Monsters. Essays on power, technology and domination (1990): 103–31.

known as the apartheid state. The mechanisation of the pension system began before the National Party came to power, yet many of the logics and discourses present in the NAD files dealing with the process as well as the technologies themselves overlap both the earlier segregationist years and the apartheid years. Thus, rather than imagining the processes of mechanisation teleologically with the year 1948 as an important marker or turning point I am attempting to think through these developments as one ‘substitutionary’ or ‘associative’ part of the unfolding formation of the South African state.⁵²

Conceptual Framework

Social Citizenship

Several key concepts frame my analysis of the implementation and administration of old age pensions to black South Africans. In 1944, while black South Africans in the Union remained subjects in most respects, the groundwork was laid for what has been called their precarious and partial ‘social citizenship’. It would remain intact throughout the rule of the NP, although it was compromised from the 1960s when the apartheid government elaborated the system of ‘homeland’ rule. This partial social citizenship was brought about by means of several legislative amendments that entitled all black South Africans who fit specified eligibility criteria to a range of state social pensions, which included the Old Age Pension, the Blind Person’s Pension, the Invalidity Grant (ex-gratia until 1946), the Grant to needy ex-members of the Native Labour Contingent and Native Military Corps, and Pauper Relief. What precisely the concept of ‘social citizenship’ denotes warrants pause for further consideration. I use the term social citizenship harnessed by previous scholars of social welfare in South Africa, with some reservation, in order to unpack or problematise the kind of status the state conferred on its subjects in the 1940s through the provision of limited legislated state entitlements. Seekings maintains that “social citizenship in South Africa has its origins in the period immediately prior to the National Party’s electoral victory in 1948”.⁵³ Shireen Hassim has argued that through state

⁵² Latour.

⁵³ Seekings, “The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa,” 388.

pensions “most South Africans achieved a level of social citizenship before being formally recognised as citizens”.⁵⁴ This in contrast to sociologist T. H. Marshall’s mid-twentieth century disquisition on different forms of citizenship which argued that social citizenship is necessarily preceded by political and civil citizenship.⁵⁵ Seekings highlights Marshall’s classical formulation of social citizenship in his assessment of its origins in South Africa.⁵⁶ In his influential essay on the subject, Marshall disaggregated the notion of citizenship into three parts: civil, political and social. He conceptualised civil rights as those that were a necessary condition for individual freedom (freedom of speech, property rights, freedom of thought and faith as well as the right to justice). Political citizenship constituted enfranchisement; or, the “right to participate in the exercise of political power”.⁵⁷ Marshall understood social citizenship to constitute possessing the full range of rights “from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society”.⁵⁸ Speaking specifically about the evolution of national citizenship in England, Marshall argues that civil rights developed first in the early 19th century and predated political rights, citing “their extension as one of the main features of the nineteenth century”.⁵⁹ Marshall argued that social rights, examples of which could be found in Medieval towns, had disappeared during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and it was really only in the twentieth century that “they attained equal partnership with the other two elements in citizenship”.⁶⁰ Seekings highlights that the concept of social

⁵⁴ Shireen Hassim, “Turning Gender Rights into Entitlements: Women and Welfare Provision in Postapartheid South Africa,” *Social Research* 72, no. 3 (2005): 624, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40971784>.

⁵⁵ Francie Lund, “Children, Citizenship & Child Support: The Child Support Grant in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” in *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History*, ed. Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter, 2012, 491–92, http://wiser.wits.ac.za/sites/default/files/SzreterAndBreckenridge_InfrastructureOfPersonhood_2012.pdf.

⁵⁶ Seekings, “The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa,” 386.

⁵⁷ Seekings, 386–87.

⁵⁸ Cited in: Seekings, 386–87.

⁵⁹ T. H. Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class,” in *Inequality and Society: Social Science Perspectives on Social Stratification*, ed. Jeff Manza and Michael Sauder, 1st ed (New York, NY: Norton, 2009), 148–54.

The universal principle of political citizenship was only recognised in Britain in 1918 (with the Representation of the People Act - which, in fact initially only enfranchised some women).

⁶⁰ Marshall.

citizenship is inherently indeterminate. Insofar as the notion of citizenship implies a base level of equality between citizens, the concepts of political and civil citizenship are theoretically clear cut relative to social citizenship: citizens enjoy equal voting rights and equal rights to justice before the law. By contrast, the notion of social citizenship is slippery as “what it means to require equality of treatment” in social terms is unclear.⁶¹ In Marshall’s estimation there is a fundamental difference between “equality of opportunity” and “equality of outcome”.⁶² The former would necessarily be followed by inequalities of outcome, but if equality of opportunity exists amongst citizens, regardless of socio-economic circumstances, there would exist no injustice in the unequal outcomes. Thus in some part, social citizenship would require state intervention to ensure the conditions which allow individuals in a population equal opportunity access to, inter alia, basic healthcare, education, housing, and economic security.

The reform in social welfare of the 1940s cannot be conceptualised as a state recognition of social citizenship as understood by Marshall - an idea situated specifically within the context of the development of citizenship in Britain. Marshall’s ideation of social citizenship as constituting the entitlement to the full range of social rights, including a prescribed level of economic security as well as access to the means necessary to live life to a ‘civilised’ standard set by contemporary society, took on a narrow and specific form in South Africa in the early twentieth century.⁶³ Indeed, social citizenship as it developed in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s, Seekings argues, distorted Marshall’s ideation in that it was framed within and mediated by prevailing ideologies of segregation and white supremacy.⁶⁴ Not only was the right to live a so-called ‘civilised’ life restricted to white (and to a lesser extent coloured) South Africans, but in the pervading logic of the state there was no desire to set one prevailing standard on what constituted “a modicum of economic” security. According to the state’s logic, black South Africans did not deserve and/or need the same level of economic

⁶¹ Seekings, “The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa,” 386.

⁶² Seekings, 387.

⁶³ Seekings, 391.

⁶⁴ Seekings, 391.

security as white South Africans. In fact, any hint of decreasing inequality between black and white was, and always had been, a threat to the white hegemony⁶⁵ which the South African state consistently attempted to cultivate and sustain throughout the twentieth century.

Scholars argue that the growth of state social welfare in South Africa was systematically shaped by the state's determined policies of segregation. Discussing the administration of maintenance grants in the first half of the twentieth century, du Toit maintains that the question of "whether the 'social community' recognised as the South African state's responsibility included its 'native subjects'" was at the forefront of state and civil society discussions and debates about "the terms of exclusion of Africans from citizenship and state resources" during the 1930s and early 1940s.⁶⁶ Following Mamdani, du Toit argues that state and civil society considerations about who should receive state child maintenance grants were strongly arbitrated by the dichotomy of who the state (and to some extent civil organisations) recognised as citizen (civilised) and subject (uncivilised). Indeed, state efforts to avoid undermining the segregationist policy of indirect rule in 'native administration', which deferred responsibility for "'native' familial relationships to patriarchal authority" and judicially to 'native courts' mediated the bounds of inclusion.⁶⁷ While notions of citizenship were strongly racialised, the white, settler state-produced civilised/uncivilised dualism was increasingly challenged by the growing permanent urbanisation of black South Africans. One elucidation of this is the tension in the 1930s between certain members of the state and civic organisations

⁶⁵ I use hegemony as Bill Freund has framed the concept: "not merely dominance, not merely state control, but pervasive and internalised dominance that flows through nationally based and structured institutions and civil society. In other words... the construction of a society based on shared assumptions and mediated conflicts contained in a legal and political order that could endure." Bill Freund, "South Africa: The Union Years, 1910-1948 - Political and Economic Foundations," in *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume 2, 1885-1994*, ed. Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 211.]

⁶⁶ du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor," 6.

⁶⁷ du Toit, 9; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Martin Chanock, "Customary Law, Courts and Code after 1927," in *The Making of South African Legal Culture 1902-1936: Fear, Favour and Prejudice* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 328. Du Toit also highlights the fact that the Act left open the possibility that Magistrates and Native Commissioners could decide on a case by case basis whether to make use of Customary Law or Roman Dutch Law. (12) Chanock maintains that, in practice, this is what happened in the Union: exactly which cases were tried under Customary Law and which were tried under Roman Dutch Law varied across regions in the Union (328-329).

who advocated for the payment of maintenance grants to ‘native’ widowed mothers and grandmothers and the consequent backlash and concern of central government officials to narrow availability of grants to “only children of parents who were ‘thoroughly detribalised’”.⁶⁸ Unlike the Old Age Pensions Act, which explicitly excluded black and Indian South Africans from the provisions of the Act,⁶⁹ the various Children’s Acts in the Union in early twentieth century made no mention of race.⁷⁰ This created a dilemma for central government officials who, charged with upholding policies of segregation, were eager to exclude black South Africans from state social assistance as far as possible so as to avoid undermining the place of customary law in adjudicating issues of welfare amongst black South Africans.⁷¹ Thus the criteria of narrowly and specifically defined ‘detribalisation’ became central in assigning whether families or individuals would, for the purpose of administering social assistance, assume partial ‘citizen status’ (and be administered according to Union civil law) or ‘subject status’ (and be administered according to so-called customary law).⁷²

It is clear that the notion of the bounds of citizenship is especially complicated by its ‘social’ dimension and as du Toit elucidates, the concept is neither fixed nor agreed upon at any given time: different actors in the state and civil society in the 1930s disputed, negotiated, and produced “the terms of exclusion of Africans from citizenship and state resources”.⁷³ The Pension Laws Amendment Act of 1944, with its specific extension of old age pensions and certain other social grants to black South Africans, complicated notions of

⁶⁸ du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 12–15. du Toit notes a distinct policy shift that occurred during the latter half of the 1930s in the Department of Social Welfare/Native Affairs Department - spearheaded by higher level officials - concerning the award of maintenance grants to black South Africans, which culminated in the instruction that “no new child maintenance grants should be approved for ‘Natives’” and the phasing out of existing maintenance grants. (16)

⁶⁹ The Old Age Pensions Act of 1928 stipulated that ‘Subject to the provisions of this Act, every white person and every coloured person shall be entitled to receive an old age pension under this Act’ provided the person met specific eligibility criteria. Cited in: Devereux, “Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century,” 541; Union of South Africa, “To Provide for Old Age Pensions,” Pub. L. No. 22, Statutes of the Union of South Africa (1928).

⁷⁰ du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 9. du Toit suggests that this was likely due to the earlier Acts’ “strong reliance on England’s Child Protection Act of 1908”. (9)

⁷¹ du Toit, 15–16.

⁷² du Toit, 16; Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 109, 137.

⁷³ du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 6.

citizenship further in its unambiguous inclusion of both rural and urban black South Africans. While the broad strokes denoted by the term ‘social citizenship’ are contested here⁷⁴ and the idea of a social citizenship for black South Africans throughout the majority of the twentieth century is somewhat of a misnomer, the term still has limited use as a concept.

This is true, particularly, in terms of considering the ways in which these cash grants facilitated the performance of, albeit extremely restricted, citizenship to some small degree. It would be a mistake to assume that these amendments signified the onset of a truly universal, unconditional system of social welfare. Indeed, the social pension schemes that existed for the different state-classified race groups in South Africa remained separate and discriminatory in almost every aspect of their functioning until the demise of the apartheid state in the late twentieth century. Yet, as Seekings argues, the welfare reforms of the 1940s mark the point at which the South African state “first accepted some responsibility for the welfare... of the African population”.⁷⁵ The acknowledgement of responsibility for some level of minimum economic security for black South Africans implied in the passing of the Act did open up new channels through which, together with the exploitation of the language and principles of paternalism, black South Africans could exercise some legitimate (from the perspective of the state) claims to a “modicum of economic welfare”.⁷⁶ That the old age pension, blind persons’ pension, and disability grant constituted some state recognition of a level of citizenship for black South Africans was explicitly expressed in Parliament. Posel reveals Parliament’s ideation of the grants: “the amounts involved are not large, but they have a greater value than mere money, in that they are a recognition of the citizenship of the African, bringing with it the right to share in the General Revenue of the Union, for his uplift and old age”.⁷⁷ Understanding the structures

⁷⁴ As will be discussed in the following chapters the entitlements prescribed by the pension laws were often narrowly and specifically interpreted so as to limit as far as possible the number of people who could access them.

⁷⁵ Seekings, “The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa,” 388.

⁷⁶ Seekings, 387; Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class,” 149.

⁷⁷ Cited in Deborah Posel, “The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty and the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s,” in *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*, ed. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005), 80; Original source Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates* (Union Government, 1944) Emphasis is mine.

and systems⁷⁸ that began to be articulated and constructed during the mid-1940s and which evolved throughout the second half of the twentieth century therefore remains important, not least because it enables the further unpacking of how different actors understood the implication of a legislated cash grant for the status of black South Africans in the Union.

Registration and Access

Thinking through ideas of citizenship and specifically the ‘recognition of citizenship’ that legislated cash grants may have afforded induces a further consideration of the machineries of state recognition, which facilitate the dynamics of access between the state and its subjects/citizens. Drawing on Breckenridge and Szretzer’s edited volume Registration and Recognition, this thesis, in part, examines the registration practices that embodied the state’s recognition of its subjects, made explicit through the extension of certain social grants. Registration has recently come back into scholarly focus as an increasingly important category of analysis in the historical study of societies. Breckenridge and Szretzer advocate the foregrounding of the “politics of registration” as an analytical point of departure for historians and social scientists, along the same vein as the notions of gender, class, the state, and community have generated rich historiographies of scholarship in recent decades.⁷⁹ Registration undoubtedly plays an important role in the expansion of social grants in South Africa during the 1940s. The implementation of old age pension administration in the NAD engendered the creation and adoption of systems of registration for ‘native subjects’ both urban and rural. Chapter Four of this thesis explores the implications for statecraft of changing registration practices in NAD pension administration.

⁷⁸ I hesitate to refer to the early years of pension administration as a ‘system’; there was certainly not a central, cohesive system of pension administration in the first few years after the extension of specific and limited social grants to black South Africans. As will be discussed in this chapter, Magistrates and Native Commissioners initially exercised a fair amount of creative license in interpreting the regulations, although this practice quickly began to shift as the methods for administering old age pension rapidly developed within two years of the implementation of the Pension Laws Amendment Act.

⁷⁹ Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter, “Editors’ Introduction: Recognition and Registration: The Infrastructure of Personhood in World History,” in *Recognition and Registration: Documenting the Person in the World*, ed. Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter (Oxford University Press, 2012), 3, 31, <http://econpapers.repec.org/bookchap/oxpobooks/9780197265314.htm>.

In the editorial introduction, Breckenridge and Szretzer challenge certain scholars' overstatement of the state's "will to know" or the "bureaucratic enthusiasm for information gathering" that has followed an alleged (Eurocentric) overemphasis on Foucault's articulation of the interrelatedness of knowledge and power.⁸⁰ They argue that compelling evidence demonstrates that states have in fact managed to sustain their power and authority even as they've embarked on efforts to "restrict, abandon or devolve registration... because registration... is often more valuable, or at least as useful, to individual citizens, as to the state."⁸¹ In this estimation the knowledge-producing value in registration for the state is not necessarily a given; registration can serve to empower citizens without providing the state with useful knowledge of its citizens or population. Indeed, Breckenridge and Szretzer argue that there may be pernicious (if unintended) consequences to approaches that view registration "as intrinsically coercive". Venerating "escape and marginality for the poor while the wealthy in the industrial democracies... scramble to secure access for their families to state-supported schools, well-policed neighbourhoods, properties, hospitals and universities (all of which function on the basis of civil registration systems)", they maintain, is somewhat paradoxical.⁸² Indeed, recently historians writing about registration practices – even coercive ones – have begun to consider the ways in which certain 'conferred rights' coincide with being registered.⁸³

Cognisant of the problems that accompany a theoretical framework that views registration in ontologically binary terms, this project attempts to avoid this binary and seeks to understand the concurrent consequences of systems of black pensioner registration as they played out at a particular moment in the history of the South African state. The extension of old age pensions to black South Africans in 1944 occurred during a period which scholars of social welfare

⁸⁰ Breckenridge and Szretzer, 7; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Penguin Social Sciences (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 27.

⁸¹ Breckenridge and Szretzer, "Editors' Introduction: Recognition and Registration: The Infrastructure of Personhood in World History," 7.

⁸² Breckenridge and Szretzer, 10.

⁸³ See, for example: Karen L. Harris, "Paper Trail: Chasing the Chinese in the Cape (1204-1933)," *Kronos*, Paper Regimes, 40, no. Special issue: Paper Regimes (2014): 133–53.

in South Africa have argued signifies a “radical moment in welfare reform”.⁸⁴ The timing of this, just four years before the National Party’s unexpected victory, is important. The shift to apartheid rule happened at a moment when the pension system in the NAD was still being articulated by Smuts’s officials, who had recently embarked on the process of centralising the registration and administration of pensions. The technologies of registration adopted during this process were the same as those adopted for the purpose of centralised population registration,⁸⁵ which Breckenridge argues “was the bureaucratic cornerstone of the Apartheid State, the lynch-pin of the Group Areas Act, and of the Dompas”.⁸⁶ The overlaps in the state logics, for example efficiency and uniformity,⁸⁷ which underpinned the different uses for these significant modernising technologies of central registration complicate a binary conception of the nature of registration even further, supporting an understanding of registration that points to its heteromorphic qualities.

Pensioner Registration in the 1940s

The analysis of specific registration and identification practices that this research engages with, aware of the multiple hues and meanings that are encased in the concept of registration, points to the synchronous access that registration for old age pensions enabled in the 1940s and into the 1950s. I use the term synchronous to describe the dynamic, multidirectional flow of access that registration of pensioners created. On the one hand, for pensioners, registration facilitated access to different arms of the state and state resources previously unavailable to them and to some extent this access constituted a limited ‘inclusion’ in social citizenship for black South Africans. Szretzer and Breckenridge speak about registration in this sense as something that confers

⁸⁴ Jeremy Seekings, “Visions, Hopes and Views about the Future: The Radical Moment of South African Welfare Reform,” in *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*, ed. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005); Posel, “The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty and the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s.”

⁸⁵ Legislatively provided for by the 1950 Population Registration Act.

⁸⁶ Keith Breckenridge, “The Book of Life: The South African Population Register and the Invention of Racial Descent, 1950-1980,” *Kronos* 40, no. Special issue: Paper Regimes (2014): 225.

⁸⁷ Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 93–94.

“public recognition” of individuals’ “legal personhood and status” and “confers acknowledged rights and obligations in relation to other members of the community of mutual recognition.”⁸⁸ By this kind of access I mean not only the rights and entitlements that citizens and subjects are able to harness to access resources through the recognition and visibility that comes from engaging in the act of registration, but, in the case of legislated social welfare, the ‘legitimate’ channels that are opened up through which recipients or potential recipients can perform a kind of citizenship through acts of appeal and petition.

On the other hand, the same registration enabled the state to catalogue and track its subjects - many of whom by virtue of their countryside location had previously remained outside of the central government’s focus - especially as the administration of social grants in the Union was rationalised and shifted from decentralised modes of registration to a centralised one. In Chapters Four and Five I suggest the material objects of identification (discussed earlier) that were integral elements in this registration were agents in a system of ‘mechanised documentation’ that sought to identify and track its black subjects; one that, very soon after its inception, was instrumental in facilitating the systematic campaign to review and limit the number of pensions being awarded to black South Africans. The process of mechanisation and along with it the beginnings of the construction of a detailed card cataloguing system, which allowed the central government greater central control over the functioning of the system, benefitted the state insofar as it allowed greater documented registration, access to and cataloguing of its black subjects. This cataloguing, which can be thought of as something similar to the ‘serialisation’ that Patricia Hayes has discussed in another context of southern African colonial rule,⁸⁹ and increased access in turn would allow for greater regulation. Arguably, this system, along with other historical prototypes, acted as “assemblies of associations” in the insidious

⁸⁸ Breckenridge and Szepter, “Editors’ Introduction: Recognition and Registration: The Infrastructure of Personhood in World History,” 30.

⁸⁹ Patricia Hayes, “Taxing Subjects, Colonial Systems and African Publics in the Union of South Africa & Northern Namibia, 1929-46,” in *Indexing the Human: From Classification to a Critical Politics of Transformation* (University of Stellenbosch, 2015), 6–11.

technological systems of social control that became so characteristic of the apartheid state.⁹⁰

Thesis Structure

Chapter Two sets the scene. Drawing on extant literature on the history of social welfare policy in South Africa, it provides an overview of the history of old age pension policy in South Africa between 1910 and 1944. It examines the relationship between the emergence of social welfare policy in the Union more generally and the government's broader efforts to consolidate segregationist rule in the first half of the twentieth century. Highlighting the role of the so-called 'native reserves' as crucial to both of these efforts, I contend that in order to understand the functioning and features of the NAD-developed old age pension system one, must consider the way in which developments in social policy were interwoven with the state's continued project of segregation throughout the twentieth century.

Chapter Three serves to introduce the general features of old age pensions as they existed for black South Africans in the 1940s and situates this specific form of state social assistance in the broader social, political and economic milieu of segregationist South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. It considers the process by which head office sought to articulate and construct a system of pension administration that cohered with the government's established project of segregation and contemporary discourses on the role of state social assistance amidst the government's macroeconomic policies. In this chapter I seek to delineate the role played by different arms of the state as the NAD began to iron out the details of an extensive system of pension administration and discuss the early modes of NAD pension administration between 1944 and 1947. I maintain that during these years the methods of pension administration varied across the Union as district officials developed administrative procedures that suited their local context. Lastly, the chapter considers the further-reaching

⁹⁰ Latour, "Technology Is Society Made Durable," 133 I discuss this concept more fully in Chapter Four.

implications of legislated social assistance for the Union's subjects; in particular, the kind of access that pension registration opened up for pensioners themselves.

Towards the end of 1946 the NAD began its efforts to articulate and set up a rationalised system of pension administration, which culminated in a mechanised documentary system of pension registration and identification. Chapter Four examines this process and discusses the specific features of mechanised pensioner registration and administration. It also considers the implications of the consequent shift toward centralisation that accompanied mechanisation and marked a departure from the previously decentralised praxis of pension administration. Here I argue that the NAD's project of mechanising the pension system provided significant experience with information processing technologies which enabled the state to gather centralised data on all pension subjects, including those in the countryside. The chapter also analyses the centrality and significance of material artefacts in pension administration in the mid-twentieth century. I contend that these objects held an integral role as agents in the system, shaping it as much as they were shaped by it.

Chapter Five examines the implications and reach of a registration practice that was ostensibly benign and whose reach included black men and women in the countryside. It considers the specific ways in which after 1948 the NAD – with the NP at the helm - harnessed the centralised data engendered by the mechanisation project for less benign purposes. Focusing on the department's project to systematically review and limit the number of pensions awarded to black South Africans, it explores the ramifications of the centralisation of the system that accompanied mechanisation and which saw power concentrated at NAD head office. It also analyses the position of the old age pension system amidst the NP broader plans for separate development and argues that the review project functioned as a placeholder to keep intact a system that would be essential to the NP's plan for the entrenchment of 'Bantu Authorities', which emerged at the end of the 1950s. Finally, this chapter considers the people the old age pension system reached; specifically the significance of its inclusion of rural 'widows' in limited 'social citizenship'.

Chapter Two - The Centrality of Social Welfare to Segregationist Rule

Introduction

This chapter serves to provide an overview of the history of old age pension policy in South Africa between 1910 and 1944. It thus draws on extant literature to consider the confluence of conditions and contestations out of which emerged, in the 1940s, a racially 'inclusive' system of social pensions. This chapter contends that the initial exclusion of black South Africans from the Old Age Pensions Act cohered with the biopolitics of the segregationist state, which sought to simultaneously preserve white hegemony and absolve white society of responsibility for the health, welfare, and survival of the Union's black subjects. The Old Age Pension Act formed part of several policies that were legislated in the 1920s to ensure the continued production and maintenance of white settler colonial hegemony in the Union. Indeed, the Pact government's battery of social and 'civilised' labour policies, which were aimed only at white (and sometimes coloured) South Africans, sought to uplift poor whites while suppressing the emergence of a black middle class.

Throughout this thesis I argue that the workings of the pension system as it developed for black South Africans in the 1940s hinged on (and were often in tension with) the white government's longstanding policy of segregation and entwined policies of influx control and indirect rule. Indeed, in order to understand the pension policy changes that took place in the 1940s and 1950s, these legislative amendments must be contextualised both within the existing system of social welfare and the broader structures of the segregationist state. By the 1940s, several factors converged to contribute significantly to ideas that social welfare reform aimed at black South Africans was both necessary and politically expedient. These included the increasing deterioration of the socio-economic conditions in the reserves in the 1920s and 1930s - a festering symptom of the desires for white hegemony - as well as the resulting increased urbanisation, fragmented representation by various civic and political groups, and the ramifications of the Second World War. The 'native reserves' were a crucial

component to the discussions on shifts in social policy throughout the twentieth century. From the mid-twentieth century, social welfare spending and particularly the old age pension scheme began to be crucial to the establishment and institution of 'Bantu Authorities'.⁹¹

Seekings and Nattrass have argued that the development of welfare states in western industrialised societies during the twentieth century was largely influenced and catalysed by the industrial working class. In these societies, enfranchised workers used the weight of their vote as well as their role as pivotal players in the industrial economy to ensure and expand their "social citizenship", which encompassed the right to economic security, participation in the social heritage of society, and to a quality of life deemed 'civilised' by the existing standards of society at the time.⁹² In Great Britain the state's role was re-imagined during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century to extend beyond solely protecting private property and regulating contracts. State actors began to conceptualise the state as having a duty to fulfil the role of providing the basic means and conditions necessary to allow citizens to fully engage in social citizenship. Seekings asserts that New Liberalism, born of the philosophy of the British Idealists, "sought to reconcile the claims of individuality with those of community" and encourage the idea that the state should "provide minimal conditions... necessary for individuals to exercise will and reason in ways that improved their moral character".⁹³

Posel maintains that globally, increased state focuses on social unity and the role of the family in society were at the heart of the ideology of state welfare

⁹¹ Several scholars have highlighted the instrumentality of social welfare and the old age pension system in establishing the apartheid system of 'homeland' government. See Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, 175; Lungisile Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of the Land in South Africa* (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2006), 179–80; Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 540–540; Martin Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1, no. 1 (1974): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057077408707921>. I elaborate on this point in Chapter Five where I argue that the NP realised early on the value of old age pensions in implementing their policy of separate development and this was one of the main reasons the NAD chose to keep intact this system even while it embarked on an expansive campaign to severely review and limit the old age pensions to individuals.

⁹² Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass, "South African Society on the Eve of Apartheid," in *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 77.

⁹³ Seekings, "The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa," 389.

intercession. Particularly in Europe and the USA, the well-being and stability of the (normative) family was seen as essential to the weal of society and at the crux of the motivation for state social assistance.⁹⁴ The idea of an interdependency between state and citizen as necessitous for the 'healthy' functioning of society and the consequent development of state welfare measures, brought with it a growing state interest in and regulation of the smaller details of the private lives of individuals. Posel argues that,

as a range of previously 'private' facets of domestic life were increasingly subject to the expert interventions of professionals such as social workers, educationists and psychologists, the state 'was meddling in the most intimate matters of private life, offering – it is true – a range of new benefits, but demanding in return an increasingly explicit model of sexual behavior.'⁹⁵

In colonial Africa, too, societal regulation was at the heart of developments in social welfare. Welfare initiatives which developed in Africa during the late colonial period, Seekings posits, generally demonstrate the way in which colonial governments, in times of political, economic and social change, sought to carry out new notions of colonial order by using social welfare as a form of control. Previous studies show that colonial governments in Africa endeavoured to implement welfare policy in an effort to "stabilise' the urban African working class, and also as an attempt to sort out problems of 'juvenile delinquency' and the demobilisation of troops, as well as to strengthen the economic conditions of people living in both urban and rural areas.⁹⁶

The extant historiography on the origins of welfare policy in South Africa similarly points toward an attempt to control some of the social repercussions of economic change during the early part of the twentieth century. Duncan argues that social welfare in South Africa developed in response to the mounting socio-economic pressures of the 1930s and 1940s⁹⁷ and alongside shifting debates about

⁹⁴ Posel, "The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty and the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s," 66–68.

⁹⁵ Posel, 67.

⁹⁶ Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under': Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 375–76.

⁹⁷ He specifically mentions rapid industrialisation and the proliferation of townward migration.

the function of the state but, particularly for black South Africans, consistently took the form of lukewarm measures.⁹⁸ Welfare legislation, in Duncan's analysis, grew out of the combination of a number of external pressures placed on the government and increasing exposure to international developments in social security legislation. While white liberals sought better treatment for black workers, Afrikaner nationalists and poor Afrikaners rallied around the declining health standards of white workers and the apparent threat of "native townships" and the "spread of slum conditions, malnutrition, and disease amongst blacks" to white public health.⁹⁹ Andreas Sagner, whose work delineates the major developments in social policy pertaining to old age that took place from 1910 – 1960, similarly argues that old age pension policies emerged out of the confluence of three interlinking external factors: industrialisation along capitalist lines, changes in culture and ideology, and class politics. All of these contributed to developing ideas about the need for the state to accept increasing responsibility in the provision of social assistance.¹⁰⁰

A review of the literature on the development of social policy in South Africa suggests that fundamental to the analysis of pension policy changes in the first half of the twentieth century is the relationship between social welfare policy more generally, and the Union government's broader efforts to consolidate segregationist rule. At the heart of the project of "segregationist state formation", du Toit highlights, was the goal of consolidating "indirect rule of African subjects under customary law that 'separated civil from uncivil society... the civilized from uncivilized'".¹⁰¹ The Native Affairs Act of 1927 constituted the lynchpin in this goal. The Act marked a significant move toward the spurious 'preservation' of African society through its recognition (and simultaneous construction) of African custom and law, and gave rise to, amongst other things, the Union's first

⁹⁸ David Duncan, "The Origins of the Welfare State in Pre-Apartheid South Africa," *Collected Seminar Papers: Institute of Commonwealth Studies* 45 (1993): 106–119.

⁹⁹ Duncan, 107.

¹⁰⁰ Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape"; Sagner, "The 1944 Pension Laws Amendment Bill: Old Age Security Policy in South Africa in Historical Perspective, ca. 1920-1960."

¹⁰¹ du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor," 6–7; du Toit is quoting Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 70.

Native Commissioner courts and “a separate court system” for black South Africans.¹⁰²

Inter alia, the Native Administration Act worked to maintain white political supremacy by (re)constructing spurious ‘customary’ modes of rule and clamping down on black political organisation and participation in the public sphere.¹⁰³ This Act was closely followed in 1928 by the institution of explicitly race-specific state old age pensions that included only white and coloured South Africans. In order to understand the functioning of the NAD-developed old age pension system, one must consider the way in which developments in social policy were interwoven with the state’s continued project of segregation in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The ‘native reserves’ were essential to both the segregationist project and the articulation of social policy in the Union. Throughout the twentieth century, contemporary, official discussions about the welfare of black South Africans and issues of poverty included explicit consideration of the function of the reserves. In the first few decades of the twentieth century many white political commentators imagined the reserves as spaces that would function to maintain and preserve ‘traditional’ social and political structures and which would, expediently for the white state, relegate responsibility for the economic security of indigent black South Africans to ‘customary’ social structures.

Segregation and the ‘Native Reserves’

During the first few decades of the twentieth century policy makers debated the value of the reserves for the entrenchment of white rule in the Union. While some interlocutors believed that black South Africans should be relocated from the reserves to peri-industrial centre ‘locations’, many policy makers argued for the potential of the reserves to function as crucial spaces for the maintenance

¹⁰² Chanock, “Customary Law, Courts and Code after 1927,” 328. The Act granted Magistrates in the native courts the authority to decide (within certain parameters) whether ‘native customary law’ should be applied or not - this was a continuation of the Transkei mode of rule; Chanock, 328; du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 12.

¹⁰³ Keith Breckenridge, “‘We Must Speak for Ourselves’: The Rise and Fall of a Public Sphere on the South African Gold Mines, 1920-1931,” in *Paper Presented at African Studies Seminar Series* (WISER, 1996), <https://core.ac.uk/display/39667391/tab/similar-list>.

and production of 'traditional' African social structures (the so-called kinship ties and distributive economies) that would enable the state to, inter alia, absolve itself of responsibility for the survival or economic security of indigent black South Africans.¹⁰⁴ Specific pieces of legislation, for example the 1913 Natives Land Act and the 1927 Native Administration Act, laid the legal framework for a national system of segregationist, indirect rule in the Union. The Natives Land Act, Wolpe argued, served to enforce territorial segregation and also, importantly, entrench the racial distribution of land extant at the time by preventing white South Africans from purchasing land in the reserves. Curbing white ownership of land in the scheduled areas was essential to the project of securing cheap migrant labour: a landless class would make impossible the low wage rates paid to migrant labourers precisely because a crucial condition for these wages was the ability of the redistributive economies in the reserves to subsidise them. Put differently, the profits of the capitalists in the mining industry could be best maximised by paying migrant labourers subsistence wages, below the cost of living in urban areas, that relied on supplementation of the agricultural produce of family members of the migrant workers who resided in the reserves.¹⁰⁵ The migrant labour system could only be secured, he argued, if family in the reserves not only subsidised the low wages (by contributing to the subsistence needs of the workers using the products of their own labour), but were also able to absorb responsibility in all areas of so-called 'social security' including child care and care for the elderly.

While earlier revisionist historians sought to forefront class over race in their analyses of the segregationist state, more recently scholars have argued that the political development of segregation (and its successor apartheid) was a product of a complex, contested and dynamic process that unravelled amidst the confluence of multiple compounding and competing socio-political and economic interests. Dubow's work on racial segregation and the origins of apartheid argues

¹⁰⁴ Saul Dubow, "The Elaboration of Segregation Ideology," in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, ed. William Beinart and Saul Dubow (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 149.

¹⁰⁵ Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labour in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid," in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, ed. William Beinart and Saul Dubow (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

that the white polity used segregation as a “generalised” strategy to deal with the effects of industrialisation.¹⁰⁶ He maintains that “it was intended to cope with the ecological and social collapse of the reserves, and the political threat posed by an uncontrolled and potentially uncontrollable African proletariat in the cities”.¹⁰⁷ Posel highlighted the need to take a more holistic analytical approach which neither sidelined (nor overemphasised) class nor race. She also argued that scholars seeking to understand the nature of the South African state should take cognisance of the force of political and ideological subjectivities and the complexity that exists in the entanglement of politics, economics and ideology.¹⁰⁸

Importantly, scholars writing in the late twentieth century also exposed historians’ general failure to take issues of gender seriously in their writing on segregationist state formation in South Africa. Du Toit has recently argued that extant studies of state social welfare in South Africa have continued to sideline “questions about ‘state formation as a gendered and gendering process’”.¹⁰⁹ In the early 1990s Manicom argued that progressive South African state historiography had brought to the fore the ways in which the apartheid state was structured by race and class without giving due consideration to gender as an agent of state formation.¹¹⁰ Thus these studies neglected to consider the ways in which the “fundamental categories of state and politics – like citizen, worker, the modern state itself – are shot through with gender”.¹¹¹ Manicom argued that “the historical development of apartheid was predicated on state-enforced gender subordination”.¹¹² The driving forces of segregation policy in the Union were indeed complex and in the first few decades of Union there existed no clear or unified articulation of segregation.¹¹³ Inter alia, industrial development and

¹⁰⁶ Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36*, 52.

¹⁰⁷ Dubow, 52.

¹⁰⁸ Deborah Posel, “Rethinking the ‘Race- class Debate’ in South African Historiography,” *Social Dynamics* 9, no. 1 (June 1, 1983): 63–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533958308458333>.

¹⁰⁹ du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 5; original source: Manicom, “Ruling Relations,” 451.

¹¹⁰ Manicom, “Ruling Relations,” 444.

¹¹¹ Manicom, 444.

¹¹² Manicom, 444.

¹¹³ William Beinart and Saul Dubow, eds., *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2013); Dubow, “The Elaboration of Segregation Ideology.”

capital interests no doubt provided key impetuses for the entrenchment of segregationist policy across the Union,¹¹⁴ yet the politics of segregationist state formation were also specifically gendered. Indeed, segregationist state formation relied on the (re)production of patriarchal (and paternalistic) structures of rule. These entrenched black women's status as permanent minors as well as their rural position as reproducers and subsidisers of cheap migrant labour.¹¹⁵

Notwithstanding the divergent opinions about how to solve the 'native problem' and the specificities of segregationist policy, the principle of racial segregation was generally agreed upon among the political elite in the Union.¹¹⁶ Racial segregation, historians argue, presented a gamut of imagined benefits to white political commentators¹¹⁷ in the Union, including the mediation of some of the less desirable effects of capitalist expansion. Inter alia, several scholars argue that industrial capitalism's erosive effects on agrarian society in Southern Africa in the nineteenth century and the accompanying increasing proletarianisation of white Afrikaners gave rise to the production of the 'poor white phenomenon'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ For example, Grace Davie's recent work has highlighted the particular ways mining capital sought to shape segregationist policy to assuage shortages of labour as well as the dynamic way concepts such as 'poverty', 'need' and 'want' were conceptualised and measured in the early twentieth century. Grace Davie has shown that white mine owners, in their performance as "lay-experts" of social conditions in the Union, drew on and revitalised racist imaginaries of black South Africans as lazy and idle in order to encourage the Union government to regulate wage labour and restrict and mediate the conditions in the countryside that obviated the need for sustained wage earning. Evoking images of the South African countryside as constituting over abundant spaces fully able to meet the needs of black South Africans, "profit conscious theorists", as Davie calls them, complained that "it was too easy for African migrants to earn a living... because their material needs were so rudimentary". By propelling such notions white capitalists presented a case for regulated and disciplined wage-labour while simultaneously depicting African life as existing outside of 'modern' conceptions of poverty: instead of being shown to be 'poor' black South Africans in the countryside were painted as primitive. Grace Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 23-36.

¹¹⁵ See du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor"; Manicom, "Ruling Relations"; Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies," in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, ed. William Beinart and Saul Dubow (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 118-44.

¹¹⁶ This position was not the preserve of the white political elite. Indeed, many black political commentators also accepted the key principles of segregation in the early twentieth century.

¹¹⁷ I am referring here to the diverse range of figures who sought to influence segregationist policy in the Union. Proponents of segregation constituted a mix of individuals in the public sphere including state officials, academic intellectuals, social scientists, religious leaders, mine owners etc., and policy-making reflected the interdependence of the spread of ideas amongst these different components of the public sphere [See for instance, Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36*, 21-50].

¹¹⁸ Freund, "South Africa: The Union Years, 1910-1948 - Political and Economic Foundations," 212; Sagner argues the poor white phenomenon was "caused by the force of the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century capitalism and accelerated by drought, disease, depression and calamitous warfare". Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 526.

Concerns about growing poverty amongst whites had earlier roots, but it is generally accepted that ‘poor white’ as a “distinct social category” surfaced in the 1890s.¹¹⁹ Considered a social scourge by the political elite in early twentieth century South Africa, ‘poor whiteism’ presented a dual blow to white Afrikaner and English sensibilities alike, especially in the context of pervasive scientific racism.¹²⁰ At its core, poor whiteism posed a threat to the structures of white segregationist rule across all levels. Judged by white authorities as being the root of moral as well as racial retrogression, Bonner maintains the city slums¹²¹ during this time became racially integrated spaces that led the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church to fear that “many Afrikaners would sink below the level of ‘the natives’” if something was not done to halt their alleged moral degeneration.¹²² Davie elucidates further the depth of these sentiments highlighting one Cape newspaper editor’s emotive commentary on the depravity he perceived amongst the ‘mixed race’ poor in the Cape Town slums: “they were ‘wasteful, indifferent, and, worst of all, filthy.’ If the poor whites were not rescued, they would continue ‘sinking, sinking, sinking into the snuff-and-butter coloured population’”.¹²³

Indeed, anxieties about miscegenation, and relatedly, the degeneration of western civilisation that would come from an unbridled growth of both a black and white proletariat class in the urban centres were prevalent in the political discourse of the time; a discourse that, Dubow argues, was embedded in tacit

¹¹⁹ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 40; Colin Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism,” *Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, 13 (1984): 12; Johan Fourie, “The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today” (University of Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers, 2006), <http://www.ekon.sun.ac.za/wpapers/2006/wp142006/wp-14-2006.pdf>; John Iliffe, “Poverty in South Africa, 1886 - 1948,” in *The African Poor: A History*, African Studies Series 58 (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹²⁰ Dubow, “The Elaboration of Segregation Ideology,” 155.

¹²¹ John Iliffe asserts that in the early twentieth century most urban areas had designated ‘locations’ to which “permanent African townsmen” were reconfined. It is these areas that have been referred to as ‘slums’ in much of the literature and, as Iliffe shows, were often sites of multiracial poverty (and thus also the target of segregation advocates) Iliffe, “Poverty in South Africa, 1886 - 1948,” 115–16.

¹²² Phillip Bonner, “South African Society and Culture: 1910-1948,” in *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume 2, 1885-1994*, ed. Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson, vol. 2 (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 261.

¹²³ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 41; original source Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1875-1902* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 118–19.

scientific racism.¹²⁴ He asserts that “the phenomenon of ‘poor whiteism’ was frequently held up as a perfect illustration of the tendency of civilization to decline”.¹²⁵ Eugenicist thinking in South Africa, Davie notes, was not entirely cohesive and followed a number of strains, often conflating biological determinism with environmental determinism, yet both were implicated in the imagined devolution of whites.¹²⁶ Poor whiteism concerned all levels of white elite society. Indeed, white English and Afrikaner civil society and religious groups were deeply concerned about the implications of both racial integration and growing poverty amongst whites.¹²⁷ As one example, some branches of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging¹²⁸ (ACVV), du Toit argued, worked zealously to support the mission of racial segregation and exclusivity. From the first decade of the twentieth century the philanthropy of the ACSVV consciously pushed an Afrikaner Nationalist agenda; excluding black and coloured people from their charity and, in some cases, avidly accepting “the righteous task of demarcating racial borders”.¹²⁹ Rescuing whites from the apparent scourge of racial, social and moral ‘degeneration’ thus also became an important political focus in the early decades of the Union, contributing significantly to segregationist policy and providing the impetus for the specifically exclusionary social welfare policy that developed in the late 1920s.¹³⁰

Freund argues that white worker unrest during the first two decades of the 20th century played a significant role in the support for and victory of the Pact

¹²⁴ Dubow, “The Elaboration of Segregation Ideology,” 155.

¹²⁵ Dubow, 155.

¹²⁶ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 42.

¹²⁷ See, for example Marijke du Toit, “The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACSVV, 1904-1929,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 1 (2003): 161, <https://doi.org/10.1080/030570703200060485>.

¹²⁸ Afrikaans Christian Women’s Society.

¹²⁹ du Toit, “The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism,” 161. Notably, du Toit highlights a particular effort in which ACSVV women took it upon themselves to move “onze arme blanken, die in de locatie tussen de gekleurde woonden’ (our poor whites, who were living in the location amongst the coloureds), to more appropriate lodgings.”

¹³⁰ For an example of the way in which political parties used this fear mongering about miscegenation as a campaign tool in the 1930s see Jonathan Hyslop, “White Working-Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid: ‘Purified’ Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against ‘Mixed’ Marriages, 1934–9,” *The Journal of African History* 36, no. 1 (1995): 57–81.

government in 1924.¹³¹ This unrest, culminating in the Rand Revolt of 1922, was in large part underpinned by the perception amongst white labour of a growing threat to the structures that ensured their standard of living would remain higher than that of black South Africans. Seekings argues that the focus of the 1924 election campaigns highlighted the heightened alarm surrounding the issue of growing white poverty.¹³² He elaborates that Botha and Smuts' South African Party, in power during the first 14 years of union, became increasingly unpopular amongst the white Afrikaans and English working class; in large part due to state policies that favoured the interests of mining capital and worked to secure a steady flow of cheap black labour into the mines. The National and Labour parties exploited the spectres of white unemployment and poverty during their election campaigns to highlight the perceived threat of African workers to the "white man" in South Africa. In the build up to the 1924 election, the National Party - led by Hertzog - drew on the persuasive rhetoric of the alleged threat of the so-called 'swartgevaar'¹³³ to white supremacy in the Union to bolster its election campaign and, together with the Labour Party, capitalised on the heightened anxiety amongst whites about unemployment and threats of poverty.¹³⁴

The Interrelationship Between Poor Whiteism, Segregation and the 'Native Question'

Thus, the white polity's focus on the 'poor white' predicament was inextricable from the ever-mounting political pressure to solve the so-called 'native question'. The notion of 'swartgevaar' sat at the intersection of multiple white anxieties (social, demographic, political and economic) borne out of the perceived economic insecurity which was emerging in consequence to a rapidly changing economy. Dubow argues that the 1920s saw a mushrooming of certain

¹³¹ Freund, "South Africa: The Union Years, 1910-1948 - Political and Economic Foundations," 225-26; See also Jeremy Krikler, *White Rising: The 1922 Insurrection and Racial Killing in South Africa* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2005).

¹³² Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under': Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 380, 382.

¹³³ Seekings elaborates that this refers to: "the mix of demographic, political, sexual, social and economic threats posed by African people".

¹³⁴ Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under': Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 380, 382.

evocative slogans; in particular the notion of ‘swamping’ and the ‘rising tide of colour’, which acted to bolster segregationist ideology.¹³⁵ The proliferation of such notions is simultaneously suggestive of the extent to which white society feared the growing black working class and the use of these slogans as rhetorical tools to suit specific political agendas.

Exacerbated by the First World War, Dubow argues that efforts to develop a cohesive set of policies for ‘native administration’ and segregation had stagnated during the first decade of Union.¹³⁶ However, in the wake of the growing ferment about white poverty and the rise of a black proletariat, the white polity sought solutions to the ‘native question’ in the 1920s with renewed fervour.¹³⁷ Seekings argues that the South African Party government made strides in developing segregationist policy and influx control measures to target the poor white problem and white worker unrest in the early 1920s by restricting the competition of black workers with white workers.¹³⁸ Key amongst these measures was the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 which, inter alia, placed limits on the locations in urban areas in which black South Africans could live and work and required them to carry valid passes. Further, the 1927 Native Administration Act, crucially, served several political agendas which I discuss throughout this thesis.¹³⁹ Especially significant here is the role its “hostility clause” played in quashing the black political activity that had been mounting throughout the decade.¹⁴⁰

The 1928 Old Age Pensions Act

Seekings argues that definitive developments towards establishing racialised social assistance in South Africa happened in the late 1920s, not as was

¹³⁵ Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36*, 69.

¹³⁶ Dubow, “The Elaboration of Segregation Ideology,” 164.

¹³⁷ Dubow, 164.

¹³⁸ Seekings, “‘Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under’: Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa’s Welfare State, 1924-1929,” 380.

¹³⁹ Seekings, 380; Breckenridge, “We Must Speak for Ourselves,” 4.

¹⁴⁰ See Breckenridge, “We Must Speak for Ourselves,” 23 for an analysis of the function of this Act as part of the NAD’s legislative strategy to suppress particularly ICU political activity.

assumed by various scholars, in the 1930s.¹⁴¹ It was the passage of the Old Age Pensions Act in 1928, he maintains, that provided the legal grounding for the development of a welfare state in South Africa.¹⁴² The initial implementation of this racially exclusive Act served the purpose of ensuring that whites remained in positions of economic and social privilege.¹⁴³ It stipulated that “every white person and every coloured person shall be entitled to receive an old age pension”, thus specifically excluding black South Africans and people classified by the state as ‘Indian’. The Act emerged from the conjuncture of different social, ideological and political factors all of which centred on the so-called ‘poor white problem’.

Old age pensions formed part of the social and economic policies that were promised by the Pact parties for the protection of the so-called ‘civilised races’. Scholars argue that the policies of the Pact government were entrenched in discourses of white civilisation and the pension scheme constituted one arm in the arsenal of government initiatives developed by the Pact government to provide economic opportunities to poor whites, which included “relief schemes, irrigation works, land-settlement schemes, railway and road development, and maintenance schemes”, in order to lift them out of poverty.¹⁴⁴ Essential to these so-called ‘civilised labour’ policies, Seekings argues, was the goal of raising “all white people to ‘civilized’ standards of living, above rather than below or alongside the ‘native’ (African) population”.¹⁴⁵ These policies focused on reserving semi-skilled and skilled jobs for whites and increasing the wage rates paid to unskilled white workers to the rate offered by skilled and semi-skilled

¹⁴¹ In his 1993 article Duncan, “The Origins of the Welfare State in Pre-Apartheid South Africa” which focuses on social welfare more generally (public health, housing initiatives and both contributory and non-contributory pensions) David Duncan argued that the first steps toward the development of (what he refers to as) a “welfare state” in South Africa were taken in 1930s. In addition, previously, scholars had attributed the development of South Africa’s welfare state to certain steps taken to address the ‘poor white problem’ in 1930s and 40s. Notable amongst these steps was the Carnegie Poor White Commission.

¹⁴² Seekings, “‘Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under’: Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa’s Welfare State, 1924-1929,” 377.

¹⁴³ Devereux, “Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century,” 541; Original source “Statutes of the Union of South Africa: 1928” (Cape Town: Government Printer, 1928), 382.

¹⁴⁴ Bonner, “South African Society and Culture: 1910-1948,” 262; Seekings, “‘Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under’: Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa’s Welfare State, 1924-1929.”

¹⁴⁵ Seekings, “‘Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under’: Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa’s Welfare State, 1924-1929,” 378.

jobs. Additionally, policies that engendered favourable tax rates and the award of government tenders provided incentives to companies which employed higher percentages of 'civilised', and thus white, workers. However, this only formed part of the Pact government's plan to tackle poor whiteism; a social condition which had been shown by two commissions - the Economic and Wage Commission and the Pienaar Commission - to be predominantly linked to whites who were physically unable to work.¹⁴⁶ A system of social grants that targeted what the state perceived as a particularly vulnerable and ostensibly deserving section of the white population, the elderly, thus became an imperative of the Pact administration.¹⁴⁷ One of the parties constituting the Pact government had long been a proponent of an Old Age Pension scheme; the Labour Party advocated for it in Parliament in 1922 and, identifying the political benefit of supporting its establishment, included it as one of the planks defining its platform in the 1924 elections.¹⁴⁸ Citing the weak position held by older workers in the labour force and increased pressure on the already somewhat dysfunctional provincial system of poor relief, Sagner states that "the 1928 state pension scheme tended to be seen as a method of income-maintenance which saved the 'deserving' elderly poor from the stigmatisation of poor relief without adding too greatly to state expenditure".¹⁴⁹

Thus, as Seekings argues, old-age pensions constituted one cornerstone of the 'civilised labour' policies by which the Pact government sought to raise all white people to 'civilised' standards of living, above rather than below or alongside the so-called 'native population'.¹⁵⁰ It is clear that welfare policy at this time was steeped in racial hierarchy and segregation. Indeed, in the Union of South Africa, ideas of social unity and interdependency between state and citizen/subject, which were important for the development of the welfare state in

¹⁴⁶ Seekings, 383–84.

¹⁴⁷ Seekings, 383–84.

¹⁴⁸ Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 526.

¹⁴⁹ Sagner, 525–26.

¹⁵⁰ Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under': Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 378.

western industrial countries, were complicated by the project of racial segregation. The upliftment and privileging of white South Africans relied in large part on the availability of cheap black labour, the hampering of black elites, and the suppression of black political activity.¹⁵¹ In the 1920s the white state explicitly harnessed the logics underpinning so-called 'customary law' to exclude black South Africans from old age pension policy. Seekings and others argue that the Pact government touted the essentialist (and segregationist) notion that black South Africans belonged in the reserves as well as the mythical rarity of individual poverty amongst black South Africans as the rationale for their exclusion from state social welfare.¹⁵² Significantly, buttressing this rationale was both the fear that the provision of social assistance would beget further 'detrribalisation' coupled with the state's unwillingness to take on the financial burden of providing social assistance to elderly black South Africans.

Changing Economies and Inklings of Welfare Reform: the 1930s and 1940s

From the 1920s, deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the reserves made it increasingly impossible for the Union government to continue to tout the myth that the homogeneous and untouched social structures of black South African communities could adequately provide for the subsistence of people living in the scheduled and released 'native areas'. Posel notes that "since the 1920s successive government commissions and committees had documented appalling conditions in the reserves: malnutrition, stark poverty, overstocking, denuding of the land".¹⁵³ Indeed, the 1932 Native Economic Commission report documented the rising levels of poverty, risks of irreparable effects of soil erosion on the land, and low agricultural output faced by people living in the reserves; all

¹⁵¹ Posel, "The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty and the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s," 67.

¹⁵² Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under': Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 390; Rycroft, "Social Pensions and Poor Relief in South Africa: An Exercise in Social Control," 3.

¹⁵³ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 27; Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 155; Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Natrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 54; See also Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 542.

factors which made the subsidisation of migrant labour through reserve economies increasingly impossible.¹⁵⁴ Numerous scholars have documented the rapid increase in black migration from the reserves to the towns and cities during this period. Poverty amongst black South Africans, however, was not limited to the countryside. Davie maintains that during this period white liberals and liberal organisations such as the SAIRR became increasingly concerned with the dangers of ignoring black urban poverty.¹⁵⁵ In 1933 Ellen Hellman, the first social anthropologist to study urban black poverty and future leader of the South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR), embarked on an in depth analysis of life and poverty in a Johannesburg “urban native slum yard”.¹⁵⁶ Sagner argues that during the 1930s the impoverishment of elderly black South Africans in urban areas proliferated as increasingly more black South Africans became urbanised. Exacerbated by “inadequate housing, increasing segregation and tightening influx control regulations” in urban areas, the financial security of urban black families worsened as they increasingly shouldered the responsibility for the care of their elderly family members.¹⁵⁷

Ideations of ‘Native Welfare’ in the 1930s

Scholars argue that the 1930s were dynamic years for developments in social welfare marked by contesting ideas amongst civil society and the state

¹⁵⁴ Wolpe, “Capitalism and Cheap Labour in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid,” 75; Seekings and Natrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa*, 54; Rycroft, “Social Pensions and Poor Relief in South Africa: An Exercise in Social Control,” 4; Charles Simkins, “Agricultural Production in the African Reserves of South Africa, 1918–1969,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 7, no. 2 (1981): 256–283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057078108708028>.

¹⁵⁵ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855–2005*, 113–18.

¹⁵⁶ Davie, 116; Marijke Du Toit, “The General View and Beyond: From Slum-Yard to Township in Ellen Hellmann’s Photographs of Women and the African Familial in the 1930s,” *Gender & History* 17, no. 3 (2005): 593–626, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0953-5233.2005.00398.x>; E. Hellmann, *Rooyard: A Sociological Survey of an Urban Native Slum Yard*, The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1948).

¹⁵⁷ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 533 Sagner notes that increasing levels of poverties amongst elderly black South Africans in the city had little to do with changing demographic patterns. Although urban areas were diproportionally affected by the aging process (compared to rural areas) between 1911 and 1936 the percentage of black South Africans living in the cities over the age of 65 only increased by 0.5% from 1.09% to 1.59%. See also du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor”; Marijke du Toit, “The Gender Politics of ‘Native Child Welfare’ in Durban, 1930–1939,” in *Paper Presented at the Southern African Historical Society Biennial Conference* (University of Botswana, 2013); Posel, “The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty and the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s.”

about both the form and targets of social assistance.¹⁵⁸ Davie and others argue that questions of white poverty and state social assistance continued to dominate myopic social welfare discourses in the state and white civil society in the early 1930s even amidst declines in white poverty and isolated calls for the urgent need to focus on the conditions of poverty faced by black South Africans.¹⁵⁹ Although the definition of welfare for black South Africans developed throughout the decade, during the inter-war years, 'welfare' for black South Africans was often narrowly and specifically defined. Vahed and Du Toit argue that at the level of the local state welfare for state-classified adult 'Natives' was largely conceptualised as providing for (and regulating) the leisure needs of black South African men living and working as migrant labourers in urban areas.¹⁶⁰ Municipal 'native welfare' programmes seeking to regulate hostel dwellers' leisure activities dated back to the 1920s in Johannesburg and the early 1930s in Durban, as did the Bantu Men's Social Centres that targeted mission-educated black South Africans living in town with their families.¹⁶¹

The problem of 'Native juvenile delinquency', apparently unique to urban areas moved civil organisations like the Joint Councils and the SAIRR to actively concern themselves with the so-called 'breakdown' of the urban family and the "poor black problem".¹⁶² Du Toit, for example, asserts that from the mid-1930s certain lower level NAD bureaucrats together with increasing numbers of mission educated African women and Child Welfare Societies advocated for the inclusion of black South Africans in the provision of maintenance grants.¹⁶³ From the late 1930s and during World War Two, Posel argues, segregationist discourses

¹⁵⁸ See du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor," 6; Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 61-100; Jeremy Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (2008): 515-37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070802259688>.

¹⁵⁹ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 61-100; Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937."

¹⁶⁰ du Toit, "The Gender Politics of 'Native Child Welfare' in Durban, 1930-1939," 7; Goolam Vahed, "Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 18, no. 1 (1998): 67-123.

¹⁶¹ du Toit, "The Gender Politics of 'Native Child Welfare' in Durban, 1930-1939," 6.

¹⁶² Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 101; du Toit, "The Gender Politics of 'Native Child Welfare' in Durban, 1930-1939," 18.

¹⁶³ du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor."

articulated by South African government commissions and committees began to include an ideological shift away from thinking about the state's regulation of urban African lives "merely for the reproduction of a reservoir of labour" towards state regulation of "the urban African way of life in its entirety"; ideas that were heavily influenced by the realisation of black South Africans permanently residing in urban areas.¹⁶⁴ This also included discussions about the possible inclusion of black South Africans in social welfare reform.

"We Cannot Carry Our Own Poverty": A Universal Call for State Intervention

The central government was for the most part reluctant to take on the financial responsibility that would accompany the inclusion of rural black South Africans in existing structures of social assistance and continuously leaned on the logics of the segregationist state to eschew this responsibility.¹⁶⁵ du Toit argues that white liberal organisations expressed concern at the state's lack of interest or will in taking seriously the inclusion of black South Africans in state social welfare.¹⁶⁶ Notwithstanding, throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, individuals and organisations across multiple levels of South African society engaged in fragmented representations for the inclusion of black South Africans in state social assistance. Certain civic organisations lobbied for the extension of the old age grant to include all South Africans. For example, as du Toit notes, in November 1936 the Locations Advisory Boards' Congress of South Africa wrote to the Secretary for Finance to petition for the inclusion of black South Africans in the Old Age Pensions Act along the same lines that had recently seen Indians included. In the early 1930s the Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society had also raised the issue of an inclusive pension system asserting the idea that, in addition

¹⁶⁴ Posel, "The Case for a Welfare State: Poverty and the Politics of the Urban African Family in the 1930s and 1940s," 68.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example: du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor"; Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape."

¹⁶⁶ du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor," 20–21.

to providing children with education, it was the state's duty to provide support for "indigent Natives who are too old or infirm to work".¹⁶⁷

Black political figures and African nationalists too articulated their position that black South Africans deserved to receive their share of social benefits. The report of a deputation from the ANC and Congress of Urban Advisory Boards to the Minister of Native Affairs expressed this conviction and the sentiment that black families and communities should no longer be expected to be solely responsible for bearing the burden of providing for the elderly, indigent and vulnerable members in their communities. The report cited the decrease in land that black South Africans had access to and the low wages that were paid in the towns – wages that were insufficient in their ability to support extended families. The ANC strongly asserted their stance that black South Africans should be entitled to receive aid from the government and that this aid should be viewed by the state as something more than charitable provision. Pointing to the fact that the economic prosperity of the Union had been built upon the exploitation of black South Africans, Councillor A. J. Sililo, of the Congress of Advisory boards stressed

We have contributed to the wealth of the country... and this country is now prosperous through taxation and low wages. None of the wages we get goes out of the country. We think we should share in the social services, instead of being forced to go to the magistrate and Native Affairs Department for charity. Our people have worked hard and have earned a restful old age.¹⁶⁸

African Nationalists viewed social security not only as a basic entitlement but, in some instances, a service that was owed by the state especially in the case of many people who had "lost their health through working in damp places" and who had "been deformed through their work".¹⁶⁹ Whilst lip service was given to their gratitude for the blind grants that had been implemented in 1937, black political elites were dissatisfied that these grants were ex gratia and did not fall under the

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in du Toit, "The Gender Politics of 'Native Child Welfare' in Durban, 1930-1939," 25.

¹⁶⁸ Thomas Karis, ed., "Document 17: Report of Deputation from the ANC and Congress of Urban Advisory Boards to the Minister of Native Affairs, May 15-17, 1939," in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882 - 1964. 2: Hope and Challenge, 1935 - 1952*, 4. Dr., Hoover Institution Publications 122 (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Inst. Pr, 1990), 905-6.

¹⁶⁹ Karis, 905-6.

benefits laid out in the Blind Persons Act. Councillor Sililo summed up the wishes of the deputation in terms of state social benefits, appealing to the idea that a ‘civilised’ state should take responsibility for its inhabitants, stating that

We ask... that our people be not shut out from social services provided in every civilised country. We cannot carry our own poverty. We will carry our share but we cannot carry the whole.¹⁷⁰

The Minister for Native Affairs’ reply to these petitions was a vague and condescending appeal to the deputation to “take up a reasonable attitude” and understand the ostensible difference between the different race groups. He contended that the government had to take careful action when helping black South Africans -“in a way which will not cause political upheavals in South Africa in which the white and Native people are made the football...”¹⁷¹

In the presidential address at the ANC Annual Conference of 14-16 December 1941, Dr A.B. Xuma highlighted black South African inclusion in Social Welfare as an issue that the ANC should fight for, citing the low wages and poor economic conditions and prospects as the root cause that precluded people from being able to save for old age or times of unemployment.¹⁷² At the time, although also excluded from the Old Age Pensions Act, Indian South Africans had access to ex-gratia grants if they were unable to earn a living due to old age or disability. On 16 April 1941 the Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) sent a letter to the Secretary for Finance (SF) detailing a resolution that had been passed by the Natives Representative Council regarding old age pensions. The resolution stated:

That this Council records its opinion that the time has come to provide old age pensions to Africans, that the economic position of our people now makes it impossible to continue the traditional practice of each family caring for its own unit and that the increasing number of the evictions of old people from the farms is also increasing the burden of poverty upon our people in the towns.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Karis, 905–6.

¹⁷¹ Karis, 926.

¹⁷² Thomas Karis, ed., “Document 25a: Presidential Address by A.B. Xuma,” in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882 - 1964. 2: Hope and Challenge, 1935 - 1952*, 4. Dr., Hoover Institution Publications 122 (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Inst. Pr, 1990).

¹⁷³ “Native Affairs: Blind, Invalidity and Old Age Pensions for Natives and Indians.”

The Treasury responded to the Council's representation via the Secretary for Native Affairs who stated that the issue of black old age pensions was a matter for government decision. However, the Secretary for Finance at the time expressed the opinion that it would be impossible to extend old age pensions to black recipients because the cost would be too high and it would bring about 'problems' of detribalisation and urbanisation.¹⁷⁴

De Facto Old Age Pensions? The Ex-gratia Blind Grant

Although formally excluded from most of the social policy reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, the state made provided limited social assistance to black South Africans. One type of assistance available was poor relief rations¹⁷⁵ that were intended as temporary assistance to indigent people who had no other means to provide for themselves. Poor relief mainly took the form of food rations but in rare circumstances constituted a cash grant. However, in 1937, the Union government - with the United Party at the helm - established hitherto the most significant form of relief available to black South Africans; officially named the ex-gratia blind grant.¹⁷⁶ This grant arguably, if unwittingly, laid the foundations for the provisions of an established state grant for black South Africans. It emerged in the wake of the introduction of The Blind Persons Act of 1936 which, reminiscent of the 1928 Old Age Pension legislation, excluded black and Indian South Africans from state social assistance. The grant was ex-gratia insofar as it was not formally legislated for, yet it resembled the state social grants already available to white and coloured citizens of the Union.

The ex-gratia blind grant was initially limited in its reach: insufficient funds meant that the NAD only awarded grants to a restricted number of

¹⁷⁴ du Toit notes that similar concerns underpinned the central government's refusal to extend child maintenance grants to rural black South Africans. du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor," 25.

¹⁷⁵ Diana Wylie writes extensively on NAD responses to hunger and the forms of famine directed relief. Diana Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa*, Reconsiderations in Southern African History (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

¹⁷⁶ Liezl Gevers, "'We Cannot Carry Our Own Poverty': The Development and Evolution of the Old Age and Social Pension Scheme for Africans in the Union of South Africa, 1937-1947.," in *Paper Presented at the Workshop on Social Protection, Centre for Social Science Research* (University of Cape Town, 2014). Few - if any - scholars writing about the history of the development of social policy in the first half of the twentieth century have considered the role that the NAD's experience administering the blind ex-gratia grant to black South Africans from 1937 onwards played in the extension of old age pensions to black South Africans in 1944. This is part of an ongoing research project of mine.

applicants. Part of the reason for the limited funds was the vast underestimation of the number of blind black South Africans in the Union. The NAD readily admitted to this underestimation and ascribed it to the fact that “the Natives are generally speaking unwilling to furnish information of any nature to Government officials”.¹⁷⁷ It was predicted that the extent of the underestimation would become clear when knowledge of the ex-gratia blind grant became more widely known. Indeed, by 1939, top officials in the NAD were expressing growing alarm about the high incidence of blindness amongst black South Africans and the growing expenditure of the NAD in assisting the blind.¹⁷⁸ The fluidity in the definition of blindness meant that this ex-gratia grant sometimes ended up assisting those who weren’t technically blind and often constituted an informal old-age grant in instances where a recipient’s eye-sight had deteriorated due to ageing. The ex-gratia blind grant may have also contributed to the growing realisation amongst the white polity that the state could no longer ignore the explicit conditions of poverty in which many black South Africans lived.¹⁷⁹

The Second World War: Reliance on Black Labour and Growing Unrest

Existing literature on welfare reform in South Africa points heavily toward the Second World War as a catalyst for the significant social policy developments of the 1940s. Duncan argues that the social, political and economic conditions engendered by the Second World War provided further impetus for the articulation of social policy across the board. The withdrawal of white labour from industry during the war and the increasing reliance on black labour to maintain the economy, Sagner suggests, in some part engendered the conditions in which social welfare could be introduced for black South Africans as the government attempted to “expedite national integration by constructing a collective framework for identity”.¹⁸⁰ Coupled with a growing militancy amongst the black

¹⁷⁷ D. L. Smit, “General Circular ‘Assistance to Blind Natives’” (Native Affairs Department, 1937), SAB NTS 8320 86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

¹⁷⁸ Gevers, “‘We Cannot Carry Our Own Poverty’: The Development and Evolution of the Old Age and Social Pension Scheme for Africans in the Union of South Africa, 1937-1947.”

¹⁷⁹ Gevers.

¹⁸⁰ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 533.

working class, which included spontaneous grassroots “campaigns and protests in all the major cities”, it is likely that these mounting pressures were significant contributing factors to welfare reform.¹⁸¹

Local efforts to bring to the centre the need for better social planning would have been fruitless, Duncan maintains, without global precedents.¹⁸² Indeed, Seekings argues that the ideology of British New Liberalism and the Beveridge report strongly influenced shifting discourses about the state’s role in providing social security to its citizens.¹⁸³ The various commissions appointed by Smuts’ government during the second world war functioned as tools to give the appearance of a greater commitment to social welfare than actually existed in order to demonstrate the Union’s alignment with its allies as well as to give (on the tide of the international social reform movement) the impression of its commitment to a better life for all after the war.¹⁸⁴

Rumblings of a Universal Pension Scheme?

The issue of an extensive and inclusive system of social welfare in the Union was continuously raised and debated during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Seekings highlights the acceleration in the demands for a reformed inclusive system of social welfare in South Africa between 1941 and 1943; a movement fronted by academics and liberal politicians in the Labour Party and United Party and dubbed ‘the social security movement’.¹⁸⁵ At this moment a number of members of the Union government, academics and civil society organisations were, at least at a public level, invested in the notion of social

¹⁸¹ Cited in Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 35; original source Cherry Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, Second edition (Cape Town Johannesburg New York: Philip, 1991), 74.

¹⁸² Duncan, “The Origins of the Welfare State in Pre-Apartheid South Africa,” 106–19. He cites the Social Security Act passed in the United States in 1935 (and which was strongly influenced by welfare legislation passed Germany, Denmark and Austria) and particularly Britain’s 1942 Beveridge Commission on Social Services.

¹⁸³ Seekings, “The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa.”

¹⁸⁴ Saul Dubow, “Introduction,” in *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities*, ed. Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005), 1–19.

¹⁸⁵ Seekings, “Visions, Hopes and Views about the Future: The Radical Moment of South African Welfare Reform,” 45.

security. The rhetoric of universal welfare, situated in a broader “international movement to achieve ‘freedom from want’”, was used during the war years to envisage a post-war South Africa that would see the subsistence needs of its population met.¹⁸⁶ Seekings maintains that Smuts’ government publicly sanctioned the idealistic notion of ensuring inclusive economic security. In his parliamentary speech in January 1943 he proclaimed that “it is accepted that the restoration after the war of the status quo ante is neither possible nor desirable, and that everything practicable must be done to ensure a better life for all sections of the population”, further stating that both rural and urban Africans were to be included in this improved standard of living.¹⁸⁷

The Social and Economic Planning Council (SECP) assigned with the task of rationalising and leaning out state administration, was given the duty of “investigating the whole range of economic and social policy reforms” in the Union.¹⁸⁸ The SEPC recommended that a committee be established to look into the social security reforms. Smuts pursued this recommendation in his appointment of the Committee on Social Security in 1943, which was headed by the Minister for Social Welfare, Jan Hofmeyr, and included the Secretary for Public Health, P Allan; Secretary for Social Welfare G A C Kuschke; the Undersecretary for Native Affairs, W J G Mears and the Secretary for Labour, I L Walker.¹⁸⁹

According to Wylie, the SECP addressed social security in South Africa in its report in 1944. The report made mention of a number of important acknowledgements including the fact that the amount of land provided for black South Africans was inadequate and that black income levels were too low (this being recognised as the prevailing source of malnutrition and not ignorance on

¹⁸⁶ Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, 210.

¹⁸⁷ Seekings, “The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa,” 391.

¹⁸⁸ Seekings, “Visions, Hopes and Views about the Future: The Radical Moment of South African Welfare Reform,” 47.

¹⁸⁹ Seekings, 47; Devereux, “Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century,” 543 Devereux highlights that “Hofmeyr found it intolerable that any social welfare scheme should apply to white people only”; Original source: John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History*, African Studies Series 58 (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 141.

the part of Africans, as was often believed).¹⁹⁰ The solution offered by the Council was income redistribution from the economically privileged to those in need. These romantic ideals of social security were not met with enthusiasm by various politically active groups in the Union. Sagner argues that members of the National Party viewed the proposed provision of old age pensions to black South Africans as a threat to poor whites while African Nationalists were conscious of the fact that promises of social security did nothing to address the real, crippling economic and social factors that oppressed black South Africans, namely racial discrimination, the pass laws and disenfranchisement.¹⁹¹

Seekings argues that at a public level, the oratory of Smuts and other higher members of the Union government during the war years embraced the ideal of universal social security and freedom from need (even while in private Smuts' sentiments towards welfare reforms were critical; he was expressly wary of "all this preoccupation with the post-war paradise on earth which makes us all concentrate less on the war and more on schemes which confuse and divide us").¹⁹² A number of members of the NAD made representations to the Treasury about the extension of social pension provisions to Africans in the years leading up to 1944. During the same period, frequent representations for the inclusion of black people in state social services were made by the African National Congress and the Joint Councils. The provision of state social assistance was eventually legislated for black and Indian South Africans in 1944 with the amendment of Old Age Pensions Act of 1928.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on extant literature to argue that the social welfare policy, which developed in the Union in the first half of the twentieth century,

¹⁹⁰ Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, 211.

¹⁹¹ Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape."

¹⁹² Seekings, "The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa," 392; For a more detailed discussion of Smuts' politics in the 1940s and one that seeks to understand his national politics in transnational perspective see Jonathan Hyslop, "'Segregation Has Fallen on Evil Days': Smuts' South Africa, Global War, and Transnational Politics, 1939–46," *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 03 (2012): 438–60, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022812000277>.

was integral to the white polity's ongoing project of patriarchal, segregationist rule. The construction of the 'native reserves' as spaces that would fulfil the function of the social reproduction of labour, bolster patriarchal rule and absolve the Union government of responsibility for elderly and indigent black South Africans was not only essential to the project of segregation. It also provided the rationale for early, race-specific articulations of social welfare policy in the 1920s and 1930s. As such, exclusive old age pension provision for white and coloured South Africans emerged as part of a battery of policies, the goal of which was to entrench 'white' hegemonic structures and construct enclaves of 'white' privilege. However, by the 1940s the convergence of specific social, political and economic conditions (locally and globally) made it increasingly impossible for the United Party government to continue to exclude black South Africans from state social assistance. In a moment of "radical" welfare reform, strongly influenced by international social welfare discourses and driven by socially liberal politicians in the Smuts administration, the Old Age Pensions Act was amended in 1944 to include black and Indian South Africans.

In her work on the history of child maintenance grants in the Union, du Toit demonstrates that the central state went to significant (and callous) lengths in the implementation of previous state social assistance to ensure the coherence of social policy with the maintenance of segregation and the institution of indirect rule.¹⁹³ Specific dichotomies emerged in the NAD's efforts to implement a 'progressive' and inclusive social policy in the Union amidst the larger project of segregation. In the next chapter I argue that, in the initial years of implementation (1944-1947), reconciling the implementation of explicitly inclusive statutory old age pensions with this agenda proved to be a byzantine task. Yet, as later chapters argue, the old age pension system became an important actor in the implementation of the NP's segregationist policies. Indeed, in the mid-twentieth century the central government utilised social welfare

¹⁹³ du Toit, for example, discusses the tensions and contestations that arose between different state bureaucrats as well as civic organisations in the administration of child maintenance grants in the 1930s and 1940s, which emerged from legislation that made no mention of race. du Toit, "Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor"; The Blind Person's Act, which constituted another significant development in social policy in the 1930s, like the Old Age Pensions Act explicitly excluded "Natives" and "Indians" from its provisions, Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 141; Gevers, "We Cannot Carry Our Own Poverty': The Development and Evolution of the Old Age and Social Pension Scheme for Africans in the Union of South Africa, 1937-1947."

spending and the old age pension scheme as a tool to legitimise its apartheid system of 'homeland' government.



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Chapter Three - Articulating 'Inclusive' Social Pension Policy in the Context of a Racist, Segregationist State

Introduction

As the previous chapter elucidated, at its inception, what has been referred to as the South African 'welfare state' was founded upon racist, discriminatory, exclusionary principles and had as its cornerstone one clear aim: the economic and social uplifting of the white poor. Yet, in 1944 the United Party government amended this Act to include black and Indian South Africans in the limited provision of social grants – a shift in policy that arguably laid the groundwork for the partial and precarious social citizenship of the Union's black subjects. This chapter serves to introduce the general features of old age pensions as they existed for black South Africans in the 1940s and situates this specific form of state social assistance in the broader social, political, and economic milieu of segregationist South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. It considers the pervading ethos and discourses which underwrote the design of social policy in the Union and flags the way in which articulations of state social assistance were strongly influenced by contemporary ideas about employability and desert. Discussing the Native Affairs Department's (NAD) initial implementation of the new social pension policies, it analyses the process by which head office sought to articulate and construct a system of pension administration that cohered with the government's established project of segregation. It seeks to delineate the hierarchical structures that governed policy implementation in the NAD as well as the role played by different arms of the state as the NAD began to iron out the administrative details of an extensive system of pension administration. This chapter also discusses the early modes of NAD pension administration. It argues that, between 1944-1947 - the initial years of implementation - no one cohesive system of pension administration existed. Rather, the methods of pension administration varied across the Union as district officials developed administrative procedures that suited their local context. Lastly, the chapter considers the further-reaching implications of legislated social assistance for the Union's subjects; in particular, the kind of access that pension registration

opened up for pensioners themselves. It does this through a reading of one of several letters found in the archive that were written by pensioners and sent directly to the Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA).

With the Pension Laws Amendment Act of 1944, black South Africans became entitled to receive both old age pensions and legislated blind persons pensions on the condition that they satisfied certain eligibility criteria, which included a means test, age restrictions and - in the case of urban resident applicants - an urbanisation test. The significance of the means test and the ways in which state actors conceived of these legislative entitlements warrants some unpacking. Although written into law, the concept of pension as 'entitlement' - something to which elderly people had the right to claim provided they satisfied certain eligibility criteria, had long been somewhat opaque. This aligned with the longer history of the way old age pensions had been conceptualised in the Union. Scholars contend that social policy discourses in the first half of the twentieth century, constructed the legislated entitlement to old age pensions as a privilege rather than a right. Seekings highlights that in the context of old age pensions the means test was the arbitrating factor in deciding whether a non-contributory pension constituted a right or not. He states that

The discourse of rights was more often reserved, however, for use with reference to welfare systems that were universal in the sense of not being means-tested. The 1943 Social Security Committee proposed means-tested old-age pensions for all South Africans, and so did not describe these as a 'right'. A parliamentary select committee proposed that means-testing should be abolished to save administrative costs, making pensions a 'right'. But a subsequent committee said that the extra cost of providing pensions as a 'right' were too high, so pensions should be means-tested and not become a 'right' for the time being.¹⁹⁴

Sagner argues that in the 1920s and 1930s Union policy-makers thought of old age pensions as both *conditional* entitlements and functional in maintaining social order.¹⁹⁵ As a means of social control, the old age pension was conceptualised as a policy tool meant to re-affirm the role of the family in the care

¹⁹⁴ Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under": Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 399.

¹⁹⁵ Sagner, "The 1944 Pension Laws Amendment Bill: Old Age Security Policy in South Africa in Historical Perspective, ca. 1920-1960," 11.

of the elderly. By providing direct cash transfers, policy-makers envisioned that old age pensions would function to re-establish the status of elderly people as contributing members in poorer families and also act as incentives to encourage people to take on dependent family members. The deterioration of white family structures formed part of the basis for the anxiety that underpinned this conception of the cash transfer. The First Commission on Old Age Pensions and National Insurance reported in 1927 that “in the case of a parent living with one of his children, who himself may be necessitous, it [the pension] will go far towards meeting the additional expense incurred for food and accommodation and will materially assist in the recognition of the aged parents as a welcome and paying guest rather than as a burden on limited resources”.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, Seekings notes that the 1928 Old Age Pension legislation empowered the Minister of Finance and Governor-General “to suspend payments if, for example, ‘a pensioner has, by reason of his misconduct, ceased to deserve his pension’”, thus specifically making provision (which could be broadly interpreted) for the termination of pensions on the basis of the subjective judgements of authorising officials.¹⁹⁷

To what extent the implementation of pension administration in the NAD was also an effort in state formation is a central thread of the next three chapters. Seekings highlights the relationship between social welfare programmes and state-building in his analysis of the inception of the old age pension scheme in South Africa, stating that “these programmes... entailed unambiguous state-building”. The legislation that governed the implementation of the old age pension scheme for whites and coloureds from 1929 empowered the Minister of Finance to appoint in each of the magisterial districts pension officers who would be responsible for administering new pension applications and making recommendations to the Commissioner of Pensions, with whom the actual authority to make the awards rested.¹⁹⁸ This system placed central government at the helm of the administration of social pensions (and “created new cadres of

¹⁹⁶ Sagner, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937,” 519.

¹⁹⁸ Seekings, 519.

semi-official welfare-monitoring agents”),¹⁹⁹ obviating the provincial administrations’ responsibility for poor relief.

Implementation of Social Pension Policy in the NAD

Policy implementation is seldom a static or cohesive process. In discussing the formation of the South African state and policies of influx control in the 1940s and 1950s, Deborah Posel argues that “the issue of how to regulate the flow of African labour into the cities had become the source of deep conflict within the Afrikaner nationalist alliance”.²⁰⁰ Challenging the notion of apartheid as a grand design (or well-articulated policy that is imposed from the top down and implemented coherently), Posel’s influential study maintains that the product of policy - the way it plays out in reality - seldom resembles its blueprint in any meaningful form. She argues that the way influx control was implemented in the early decades of apartheid rule was the result of a balancing act on the part of the National Party (NP). The NP managed the precarity of maintaining their position as the ruling party by remaining sensitive to the various capitalist sector interests as well as white class interests and those of the internal bureaucracy.²⁰¹ Hence, when attempting to decipher the inner workings of policy implementation it becomes important to consider the dynamic processes that go into shaping the actual methods or interventions that come to constitute the realisation of specific policy. Moreover, as Posel’s work suggests, disaggregating the roles and interests of the various actors involved in policy implementation and the subsequent reshaping or (d)evolution of policy is important for unpacking and delineating the “nature of the state”.²⁰²

This analysis of the implementation of old age pension policy in the 1940s, although a microcosm, attempts a further delineation of the way state policy was implemented in the NAD during this period. Analysing the implementation of the Old Age Pensions Act in the NAD facilitates a dislocation of the various arms of

¹⁹⁹ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 57; Devereux, “Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century,” 542.

²⁰⁰ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 261.

²⁰¹ Posel, 269–71.

²⁰² Posel, 269.

the state and provides useful insight into the convergences and divergences in methods of pension administration across the Union. While the broad plans and structures of pension administration were governed and regulated by the Pension Laws Amendment Acts of 1944, the details and particularities of how old age and blind pensions would be administered to black South Africans were oftentimes ironed out and devised along the way - in many instances when the regulations, circularised and distributed by head office to the local authorising officers of the NAD, proved somewhat unworkable. The regulations guiding the implementation of the Act were outlined and detailed in numbered 'General Circulars' drafted by the Native Affairs Department in collaboration with the Treasury. The SNA circulated them to all authorising officers of the NAD in the Union.²⁰³

The Old Age Pension Act of 1928, as amended by the Pension Laws Amendment Act of 1944, legislated the laws pertaining to old age pensions for all South Africans and placed central government in control of pension administration across the board. However, whereas the Commissioner of Pensions' Office administered pensions for white, coloured and Indian South Africans and came under the ultimate authority of the Minister of Finance, black pensions were administered the NAD and fell under the authority of the Minister of Native Affairs.²⁰⁴ From the outset, the experience gained in the Commissioner of Pensions' Office informed the ironing out of administrative procedures in the NAD and in the early phases (1944-1947) of administering social pensions to black South Africans the Treasury relied heavily on the opinions and remarks of the Commissioner of Pensions. Indeed, in practice, changes and developments to the practical workings of the system in the NAD followed a specific structure of decision-making which saw power concentrated in the Treasury, but heavily influenced by the Commissioner of Pensions. The latter drew on his experience

²⁰³ The documents encased in Native Affairs: Blind, Invalidity and Old Age Pensions for Natives and Indians - an archived Treasury file - provide some insight into the processes that went into drafting the General Circulars that concerned the administration of the old age pension system. The correspondence suggests that the Secretary for Native Affairs drafted the circulars and then sent them to the Treasury for perusal and the approval of the Minister of finance. The secretary for the Treasury then conveyed approval subject to any revisions (mainly regarding wording) before the SNA disseminated the circulars to all the NAD authorising officers in the Union. (c/f D. L Smit, "Letter from Secretary for Native Affairs to Secretary for Finance," August 9, 1944, SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria).

²⁰⁴ See section 46 (1) and (2) of the Pension Laws Amendment Act No 48 of 1944. Union of South Africa, "Pension Laws Amendment Act, 1944," Pub. L. No. 48 (1944).

administering old age pensions to white, coloured and Indian South Africans to influence and inform the Minister of Finance's decisions about whether to authorise certain requests made by the NAD. As such, in the early years, whilst members of the NAD constantly sought to shape the way in which black pensions were administered, the authority and power to effect practical changes rested in other state departments who were not directly responsible for carrying out pension administration to black South Africans. Nevertheless the systems of pension administration as developed by each department, although related, varied in their specificities. In the early years of NAD pension administration the SNA, who insofar as black pensions were concerned (legislatively) held the same powers as the Commissioner of Pensions, delegated much of his authority to local district pension officers (Magistrate and NCs).²⁰⁵

Avoiding Dependency: The Weight of Work in Articulating Social Policy

The Native Affairs Department General Circular No. 14 of 1944 laid out the regulations to be followed by Native Commissioners and Magistrates when awarding and administering old age pensions. It drew the authorising officers' particular attention to subsection (2) of section six of the Act which stipulated that when awarding old age pensions the nominated officers must take into account "the ability and opportunities of an applicant or pensioner to support himself or contribute towards his support by his own exertions". The intent of this stipulation was "to enable a claim by a native who is capable of working, but does not work, being rejected". At the suggestion of the Secretary for the Treasury, this wording reflected an amendment of an earlier draft of the circular which had articulated that the intent was to "prevent a native who is capable of working, giving up work to obtain a pension".²⁰⁶ Both iterations signal the logic that underpinned ideations in the Union during the first half of the twentieth century about the place of state social assistance in society. The wording of this section of the circular tacitly urged parsimony on the part of the awarding

²⁰⁵ The Pensions Office, head by the Commissioner of Pensions was responsible for the administration of white, coloured and Indian pensions.

²⁰⁶ D. L. Smit, "Circular No. 14 of 1944: Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives" (Department of Native Affairs, August 30, 1944), SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

officers. Thus, before the process of rolling out pensions had even begun, top officials in the Native Affairs Department and Treasury wrote into the regulations provisions that set the tone for the suspicion and hostility with which pension applicants would often be met throughout the course of the next decade.

The emphasis in the circular on the relationship between social assistance and labour aligned neatly with the prevailing social policy of preceding decades which, Sagner argues, placed the main burden of responsibility for the poor on the family and enabled the state to depend on non-subsidised familial care, charities and municipalities for the care of the elderly. This social policy - articulated most clearly until that point in the Old Age Pension laws - drew strongly on the conception of the “deserving poor” who due to unavoidable circumstances “could not be expected to earn a minimal living”, thereby upholding the “emphasis on the value of work in gaining social security”.²⁰⁷ Sagner maintains that even for white South Africans, public assistance was restricted to groups who the state viewed as particularly deserving; with the intent to only provide for the relief of poverty amongst elderly white South Africans that was specifically engendered by a loss of labour power. Indeed, he argues that the foundations for the construction of social pensions as “de facto... privileges rather than as a social right” lay in the 1931 Pension Laws Amendment Act, which introduced provisions that empowered the Commissioner of Pensions to decide, “unencumbered by any legal schedule” whether applicants demonstrated an appropriate level of desert to pensions as well as what pension rate each individual would receive.²⁰⁸ The 1931 Amendment introduced a clause that stated “in determining whether any person should be granted a pension, the ability and opportunities of applicants to support themselves or contribute towards their support by their own exertions is to be taken into consideration”.²⁰⁹ Clauses such as these effectively added opaque and subjective layers to the eligibility criteria outlined in the legislation. As Sagner notes, and as will be

²⁰⁷ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 529.

²⁰⁸ Sagner, 529.

²⁰⁹ Sagner, 529.

discussed in Chapter Four, this clause became especially important in curtailing the award of pensions to black South Africans under the apartheid regime.

Seekings, too, argues that state social assistance in South Africa, from its inception, was conceptualised as a measure to ensure economic security for the so-called 'deserving poor'. In the late 1920s this category was restricted to white and coloured people who, due to ageing or other causes, were physically unable to work.²¹⁰ He highlights that the Pienaar 'Commission on Old Age Pensions and National Insurance', appointed in 1926 to investigate pension schemes, "noted that some 'poor whites' might be 'unemployable', but the implication was that this was a small group".²¹¹ Whilst the parameters encompassing who exactly constituted the 'deserving poor' expanded throughout the 1930s and 1940s to include certain sections of the black and Indian populations in the Union, the assessment of this status continued to hinge on a person's employability. The reasons for this were as much ideological or moral as they were fiscal.²¹²

The interdependence between labour and state social assistance was, at least in part, the product of a confluence of contemporary discourses in the 1920s and 1930s on the root causes of poverty. Davie and others argue that the early twentieth century saw shifting ideations about the cause of and responsibility for indigence, linked in part to late nineteenth century changes in British ideologies about the nature of poverty.²¹³ At least where whites were concerned, ideas developed from situating the origin of poverty within the individual as a direct result of his or her own doing and nature, toward a willingness to entertain the

²¹⁰ Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under": Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 384.

²¹¹ Seekings, 519.

²¹² Davie demonstrates the longer history of the belief in the centrality of labour for the rehabilitation of 'poor' people in her discussion of the Kakamas Labour Colony - a "public works project" that emerged out of the furore over poor whites descending on towns and villages around the turn of the twentieth century and the call of the Dutch Reformed Church ministers for the formation of labour colonies (and compulsory education). Davie argues that the Dutch Reformed Church administered Kakamas Labour Colony, which was funded by the Cape government, "illustrates the ascendance of pro-work approaches to poverty relief". Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 43.

²¹³ Davie, 44; Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 528; Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937," 518.

notion that individual poverty was partially rooted in external structures.²¹⁴ This new conceptualisation of poverty went hand in glove with changing ideas about responsibility for the poor. Expectations that poverty should be tackled by the state became increasingly apparent amongst white political actors thus signalling a shift from an emphasis on charity work as the appropriate way to tackle poverty.²¹⁵ Davie argues that protest action amongst white unemployed workers in the first decade of the twentieth century also contributed significantly to changing perceptions about the structural dimensions of poverty, foregrounding the state as a primary institution responsible for tackling indigence.²¹⁶

However, whilst contemporary public opinion began to demonstrate an acceptance (to some extent) of the structural roots of poverty, Seekings maintains that the solutions meant to target white poverty rested on the creation of structures that would facilitate privileged conditions and opportunity for employment. These solutions included infrastructural developments that would increase opportunities for poor whites to find employment and, in the case of low wage work, raising wages to enable white people to live according to a 'civilised' standard.²¹⁷ With shifting ideologies about the nature of poverty came shifting perspectives on the problems with charity itself. Davie notes that by the beginning of the twentieth century "several observers were blaming indiscriminate charity for creating 'dependency' and idleness among poor whites... increasingly work's salutary effects were held up as a necessary antidote".²¹⁸ Seekings argues that this same conceptualisation of charity was expressed by the Carnegie Commission in the 1930s who strongly pushed back against the increasing level of state responsibility for social assistance (and specifically the state old age pension

²¹⁴ Davie and others show that these shifting ideologies had already begun by the turn of the century. "The 1906-08 Transvaal Indigency Commission urged policymakers to see white poverty as a structural problem but only after raucous demonstrations by jobless white workers on the Witwatersrand forced officials to take action." Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 44.

²¹⁵ Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism," 18.

²¹⁶ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 44.

²¹⁷ Seekings, "'Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under': Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929," 519.

²¹⁸ Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, 43.

programme).²¹⁹ According to Seekings, the Commission expressed explicit concern that state pensions not only reduced family responsibility for the elderly, but obviated a person's responsibility to support himself. He argues that the commission "did not deny that the state had some duties to its citizens, or that the elderly were often deserving, but he insisted that, in general, 'in the long run charity completely undermines the recipient's thriftiness, industry and enterprise'".²²⁰ Seekings maintains that this backlash in part contributed to the reforms to the old age pension in the 1930s, reflected in the Pension Laws Amendment Act of 1931.²²¹

Hence, from the beginning of the twentieth century welfare measures were increasingly framed in terms of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, with 'the undeserving' classified as people who were deemed able but unwilling to work and 'the deserving' deemed to be those who showed a willingness to pull themselves out of their poverty, or alternatively people who were otherwise willing to support themselves but physically incapable. Seekings maintains that in the 1940s social welfare in South Africa, in all its formulations,²²² was conceptualised on the basis of the assumption of full employment. Thus, in this way social policy was intended - at most- as supplementary to super-ordinate policies that focused on achieving minimal rates of unemployment.²²³ A 1945 White Paper on social security articulated this sentiment when it stated that

to achieve Social Security in its real sense, it would be necessary to create favourable conditions of employment under which a minimum number of people would find themselves in need of direct assistance from the State... These arrangements... must not, however, be taken as derogating from the

²¹⁹ Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937," 522.

²²⁰ Quoted in Seekings, 522; original source: R. W. Wilcocks, *Psychological Report: The Poor White, Part II of The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Report of the Carnegie Commission* (Stellenbosch, Ecclesia, 1932), 97–98.

²²¹ Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937," 529.

²²² Including contributory and non-contributory pension schemes.

²²³ Seekings, "The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa," 396–97; The Old Age Pensions Act of 1928 was passed alongside a battery of other 'civilised labour' policies that sought alleviate unemployment amongst poor whites in the 1920s. Seekings, "Not a Single White Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under": Swartgevaar and the Origins of South Africa's Welfare State, 1924-1929."

Government's over-all policy of large-scale employment, which is the only real and lasting basis of social security.²²⁴

While the supplementary nature of state social assistance was a policy that applied to pensioners across all race groups in the Union, for black South Africans the policy of defining eligibility as narrowly as possible was compounded in particular ways given its embeddedness in broader policies of segregation and influx control, and the interests of various sectors of the economy. From the outset, the department was not only anxious to ensure that the award of pensions did not encourage dependency on the state when an applicant was deemed fit for work, but also that the award of pensions did not undermine established segregationist policies of influx control.

Mapping Out Pension Administration: Imaginations of the Urban and Rural

The workings of the pension system as it developed for black South Africans hinged on (and were often in tension with) the white government's longstanding policy of segregation and entwined policies of 'influx control' and indirect rule. Although, as Posel argued, interlocutors disagreed on its precise form, from the time of Union the white state had agreed on the necessity of passing legislation that would restrict and control the migration of black South Africans to urban centres. This policy, which later became known as 'influx control' amongst apartheid officials, was officially enacted in the 1920s, with the passage of the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act.²²⁵ Inter alia, this legislation tightened the state's administrative control over population movement and officially relegated black South Africans to the status of permanent sojourners in urban areas. Indeed, it empowered municipalities to demarcate and establish certain peri-urban areas, known as 'native' locations, as designated spaces for black residence and ruled out the possibility of further freehold land tenure

²²⁴ Cited in Seekings, "The Origins of Social Citizenship in Pre-Apartheid South Africa," 396; original source Union of South Africa, *Memorandum on the Government's Proposals Regarding Some Aspects of Social Security*, 1945, 3.

²²⁵ See Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 39-48.

being granted to black South Africans in these urban locations²²⁶ The Act rested firmly on Colonel Stallard's doctrine on the restricting the permanent urbanisation of black South Africans, which held to the belief that the "Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister".²²⁷ However, as Posel argues, the Act constituted somewhat of a lukewarm measure in that it did not strictly enforce tighter controls over black migration into towns: "local authorities could elect to have their areas of jurisdiction proclaimed in terms of the Act, or not."²²⁸ She posits that the 1937 reforms to this Act (the Native Laws Amendment Act) took a far more stringent approach on paper, however, the NAD failed to effectively control or limit the urbanisation of black South Africans in any meaningful way throughout the 1930s and 1940s.²²⁹

The continual project of segregationist state formation significantly mediated the administration of social pensions. Devereux argues that even before the NP came to power the implementation of the "social pension... served an instrumental purpose in bolstering a policy, later articulated as influx control" and that it "was exploited as a policy tool in this 'de-urbanisation strategy'".²³⁰ While on paper the regulations governing the implementation of old age and blind pensions were cognisant of the principles of influx control, evident most specifically in the so-called 'urbanisation test', Devereux may be somewhat overstating the social pension's value in this regard prior to the 1950s. Indeed, certain aspects of the scheme also implicitly undermined this policy. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, from the 1950s the provision of social pensions to black South Africans did prove valuable to the NP as part of their strategy to legitimise 'Bantu Authorities'.

²²⁶ Martin Chanock, *The Making of South African Legal Culture, 1902-1936: Fear, Favour and Prejudice* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²²⁷ Quoted in Devereux, "Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century," 543; originally quoted in Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 40.

²²⁸ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 41.

²²⁹ Posel, 46.

²³⁰ Devereux, "Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century," 543-44.

For the purpose of pension administration, the Pension Laws Amendment Act categorised black pensioners as residents into three area classes: rural, town and city.²³¹ Administratively, the NAD further divided the rural category into ‘rural’ and ‘reserves’. Area classifications and race were inextricably linked; for the purpose of administering pensions an area was considered to be a ‘town’ if its ‘European’ population exceeded 2000. This meant that practically some areas, officially classified as towns, were relegated to ‘rural’ status. ‘City areas’ were confined to “the municipal boundaries of the nine principal cities with a slight variation in the case of Cape Town”.²³² The municipal boundaries incorporated a whole host of suburbs of the nine cities. And the category ‘rural’ was essentially defined as an absence - and included all areas that were not deemed to be cities or towns according to the aforementioned criteria (“places NOT mentioned on this list are to be regarded as rural areas”).²³³

Complex dynamics, rooted in the (il)logics of segregation policy and the racial hierarchy, underpinned area classification for the purpose of pension administration. Indeed, it was possible for areas to be redefined upon representation by the NAD, but this was dependent, inter alia, on whether the area was a majority ‘native area’ and only insofar as the reclassification would not “cause embarrassment” for the Pensions Office. Effectively, then, following the white hegemonic logics of the time, certain very similar areas (in terms of geography and cost of living) were bestowed diametric definitions for the purpose of pension administration, while in other areas it was deemed reasonable to relax the area distinctions.

²³¹ Devereux, 543 Devereux actually states that “the native population was subdivided into three categories: city residents, town residents and rural residents”. However, it is important to make the distinction between reserve and rural for the early administration of pensions as the scheme was rolled out in phases, with reserve areas only included in the final phase of roll-out.

²³² Commissioner of Pensions, “Handwritten Note to the Secretary for Finance,” December 27, 1944, SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²³³ D. L. Smit, “Circular No. 14 of 1944 (Draft): Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives” (Department of Native Affairs, undated), SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

The Urbanisation Test

The NAD rolled out the pension scheme to the different areas in stages throughout 1944 and 1945, starting with urban areas, followed by the larger towns, then rural areas and finally the so-called “native areas”.²³⁴ Conscious of the possibility that higher pension rates in cities and towns might encourage potential pensioners to migrate to urban areas, the Native Affairs Department developed a set of regulations to curb such movement. General Circular No. 14 of 1944 laid out additional criteria to be applied for applicants resident in cities or towns and, in this way, the state took careful measures (at least in practice) to subdue the potential movement from rural areas to towns or cities on the basis of seeking a higher rate of pension. Applications from potential recipients living in these areas had to pass, what the Native Affairs Department termed, an ‘urbanisation test’.²³⁵ The circular stated that in order “to determine whether a native is permanently urbanised to qualify for a pension applicable to a ‘city’ or ‘town’” awarding officers must ensure the applicant in question had resided in the urban area²³⁶ for at least “five years out of the seven years preceding the date of application for registration”. In addition to this restriction, to qualify for a city or town pension rate, an applicant was not permitted to possess an allotment of land in the reserves. Some of the criteria applied were specifically gendered; married black men had to satisfy further criteria still. Over and above the general requirements of the so-called urbanisation test, a black married man was required to demonstrate that his wife (or “principal wife if he has more than one wife”) had resided in an urban area for at least three years out of the five prior to the date of application for registration, or since the date of marriage - whichever period was shorter - and would continue to reside in an urban area in the future.²³⁷

²³⁴ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 546; Smit, “Circular No. 14 of 1944: Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives” The circular defined native areas as “all scheduled Native areas, released areas, as defined in the Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, and such other areas as may be deemed by the Department to be Native areas for the purposes of this Circular.” Native areas were specifically excluded from the system in the August 1944 circular with the instruction that “no application from natives in native areas should be considered until further notice”.

²³⁵ Devereux briefly summarises some of the criteria underpinning this test. Devereux, “Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century,” 543.

²³⁶ The circular defined an urban area as any area that was listed as a city or town in the appendix of the circular.

²³⁷ Smit, “Circular No. 14 of 1944: Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives.”

Further, the Union required “urbanised” pensioners who relocated from a town to a city to reside in the city for five continuous years before they could qualify to receive a pension at the city rate. Conversely, if a pensioner relocated from an area in which a higher rate of pension was applicable to an area in which a lower rate of pension was applicable, the state required that the recipient’s pension should be immediately reduced to the lower rate.

While the urbanisation test was designed specifically to prevent migration to urban areas for the higher urban rates, it perhaps goes too far to suggest that the “social pension was exploited as a policy tool” in the “de-urbanisation’ strategy” when social pensions were universalised. Instead, it appears that the regulations mirrored the NAD’s ambivalence toward influx control at the time. While the urbanisation test may have prevented migration of existing elderly people, the differentiated rates, theoretically, would have perhaps enhanced the long-term benefits of urbanisation.

Differentiated Pension Rates and the Means Test

Provision of £12 per annum was made for pensioners living in the main cities and certain urban areas, £9 per annum for those residing in towns and £6 annum for pensioners who lived in rural areas (the ‘native areas’ or ‘reserves’ would later be included in this grouping).²³⁸ The means test stipulated that a person’s total means (i.e., his external income²³⁹ plus the pension) could not exceed £18 per annum for city dwellers, £13.10.0 per annum for pensioners residing in certain towns and £9 for rural or reserve pensioners.²⁴⁰ Thus in order to receive the maximum pension rate pensioners’ annual personal means could not exceed £6, £4.10.0 and £3 for people residing in cities, towns and rural areas respectively. The circular instructed pension officers to use their discretion, within the bounds outlined above, when deciding on the monetary value of each

²³⁸ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 545.

²³⁹ Devereux highlights that the means test “took into consideration the applicant’s earnings from employment, farming and business, as well as spouse’s income, other pensions and the value of the applicant’s property and investments”. Devereux, “Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century,” 542.

²⁴⁰ Rates were differentiated according to area across the board. For coloured and indian South Africans, however, only ‘city’ and ‘rural’ rates were applicable.

pension, taking into account “the circumstances of the native”.²⁴¹ This meant that, in practice, there was little standardisation in terms of the amounts awarded by authorising officers.

Indeed, the criteria applied in assessing means of applicants were often quite opaque. Numerous documents suggest that even with the regulations laid out in the Act and the General Circular, authorising officers required clarification as to how to apply the means test in different cases. Oftentimes, even when the Secretary for Native Affairs clarified the calculations, there was still room for more subjective interpretations. For example, in July 1945 the Special Justice of the Peace in Balfour in the Transvaal wrote to the SNA to enquire whether an applicant’s husband’s house, apparently valued at £250, should be taken into consideration in assessing her old age pension application.²⁴² The SNA responded with a formula for calculating whether the house would be included, which computed that the house should be considered as a means of £8.10.0 per annum for the couple.²⁴³ Generally, in the case of married couples, the total joint income of the couple was halved to determine each individual’s income (in Maria Radebe’s case this meant her means from her husband’s house was effectively £4.05.0). However, the SNA left open room for manoeuvring when, in the last paragraph of the letter, he stated that “dit berus natuurlik by die beampte... om te besluit of hy die waarde van die huis wel so hoog as £250 beskou” (“Of course, it is up to the official... to decide whether he considers the value of the house to be as high as £250”).²⁴⁴ Other documents illustrate the creative interpretation of means test criteria by certain sympathetic authorising officers. An outstanding example comes from correspondence between the Magistrate at Paulpietersburg and the SNA, in which the Magistrate sought the Secretary’s advice about what might be a fair pension for a man who was unable to work and who was supported by his wife, who earned an income of £18 per annum. The woman also supported

²⁴¹ Smit, “Circular No. 14 of 1944: Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives.”

²⁴² Balfour Special Justice of the Peace, “Aansoek Om Ouderdomspensioen: Maria Radebe,” July 24, 1945, SAB NTS 8293 24/349/A, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁴³ The formula was 3% of the value of the property up to £200 (£6) plus 5% of the value of the property above £200 (£2.10.0).

²⁴⁴ Paulpietersburg Magistrate, “Native Pensions: Old Age: Precedents,” June 21, 1945, SAB NTS 8293 24/349/A, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

her two children and so the magistrate reasoned that “if one regards the two children as being equal to one adult, then one may regard the family as consisting of three persons” thus enabling her earnings to be considered as divisible by three, which would effectively reduce the applicant’s income to be £6 per annum. The secretary’s response pointed out that for the purpose of the means test the applicant’s income should be regarded as £9, thus disqualifying him from a pension. Still other administrative motives led some authorising officers to disregard a strict application of the means test. Sagner maintains that in the Ciskei and Transkei magistrates were generally lax in their application of the means test. He states that

this stemmed as much from humane reasons as from an administrative realisation that ‘the granting [of a smaller] amount involves as much work as granting the full amount of the pension, and it is hardly worth while dealing with these small matters [as the] same people will come back and make representations that their income no longer amounts to £4 or £5 per annum, and these cases have to be reviewed again’.²⁴⁵

While local authorising officers appear to have shaped the workings of the system within the bounds of the imposed regulations, the hierarchy that governed the terms of racial discrimination mediated most aspects of the NAD head office’s involvement in pension administration. It also significantly inhibited the department’s ability to act on behalf of ‘native interests’ insofar as broader social policy issues were concerned, even when the desire seemed to be present at head office. On 26 October 1945, G. Mears, the Secretary for Native Affairs, wrote to the Treasury requesting an increase in the city and town rates applicable to black old age and blind pensions, ex gratia invalidity grants and ex-gratia military grants. Mears was seemingly taking advantage of an earlier Treasury ruling, which authorised the extension of pauper relief to “deserving cases” for the explicit purpose of supplementing the “low benefits”.²⁴⁶ Perhaps interpreting this as a concession that the pension rates were in fact too low, he wrote

I beg to inform you that this Department is of the opinion that the pensions paid to Natives in respect [sic] of old age and blindness, and the ex gratia

²⁴⁵ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 546; Magistrate Smuts (Ciskeian General Council, 1946), 68.

²⁴⁶ G. Mears, “Letter from Secretary for Native Affairs to Secretary for Finance,” October 26, 1945, SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

allowance of the Native Military Corps are too low in so far as city and town areas are concerned. In order to augment these low benefits the Treasury has... already agreed that pauper relief may be extended to deserving cases.

In the circumstance it is recommended that the rates prescribed... be amended...²⁴⁷

Mears also suggested an increase in the means test threshold applicable in both areas. While he excluded pensioners and ex-gratia disability grant recipients residing in rural and native areas from the petition for an increase in pension rates, Mears suggested an increase in the means test threshold for these areas as well. In considering the matter, the Secretary to the Treasury, as was his common practice, solicited the advice of the Commissioner of Pensions - W. H. Hoffman. Hoffman's response illuminates the reality of the ripple effect that such an authorisation would cause, as well as the potential disruption to the racial hierarchy. He argued that an increase in black pension rates would pose a quandary for the government insofar as "European, Coloured and Indian Old Age pensions" rates were concerned. Indeed, he stated his opinion

that if [the Secretary's proposals] are agreed to the Government would find it very difficult to refuse a corresponding increase in European and Coloured and Indian Old Age pensions...

In certain instances too a very anomalous position would arise if the proposals are adopted. For instance in the case of Coloured and Indian old age pensioners only a "city" and a "rural" rate are applicable. The rural rate is usually £6 per annum plus £9 per annum cost of living allowance, I.e. a total of £15 per annum. Coloureds and Indians living in certain "rural" areas, which have however specially been classified as "city areas" for the purpose of Native old age pensions would then be receiving less than the proposed "city" rate of £18 per annum for natives.²⁴⁸

The Secretary for Finance, having raised the matter with the Minister for Finance and upon his instruction, responded to Mears stating that his request for an increase had been premature, citing the fact that the recommendation for pension rate increases for "Europeans, Coloureds and Asiatics" made by the 1944 Select Committee of the House of Assembly had not yet come into effect.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Commissioner of Pensions, "Letter from the Commissioner of Pensions to the Secretary to the Treasury," November 16, 1945, SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

Although the regulations theoretically should have standardised most aspects of the administration of the scheme, this seldom was the case in reality. The means test was just one aspect in which regulations were applied and interpreted (and sometimes completely misinterpreted) differently by authorising officers across the Union. In practice in the early years of pension administration the decentralised procedures engendered a diverse range of 'micro' pension systems across the regions of the Union.

The Manual Paperwork System of Pension Administration

Between 1944 and 1947, there existed no uniform method of pension payout. Magistrates and Native Commissioners developed their own systems to administer pensions in their districts. While the Native Affairs Department provided general guidelines for the administration of pensions, in the first few years of implementation, it was often the case that individual Magistrates and Native Commissioners decided how to practically go about administering the pension payouts. As such, the methods of administration varied from office to office, and were dependent on factors such as the number of pensioners residing in the district and the number of staff employed by the office. This sometimes gave rise to contestations between local and head office officials and authorising officers had some influence in shaping the system between 1944 - 1946. General Circular No. 14 of 1944 laid out the general regulations for administering the grants. According to D. L. Smit, the SNA at the time, sub-section one of section forty-six of the Old Age Pensions Act as amended by Act 48 of 1944 made provisions for the powers vested in the Secretary for Native Affairs to be delegated to certain lower level officials on his behalf.²⁴⁹ The Commissioner of Pensions, having been sent a copy of the draft circular by the Treasury for comment, expressed his doubt as to "whether the delegation of power in this manner conforms to the provisions of the Act."²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the Treasury concurred with the circular, provided that Smit satisfied himself "that delegation of power

²⁴⁹ Smit, "Circular No. 14 of 1944 (Draft): Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives."

²⁵⁰ Commissioner of Pensions, "Letter from the Commissioner of Pensions to the Secretary for Finance," August 21, 1944, SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

in the manner proposed is in conformity with the provisions” of the Act.²⁵¹ Indeed, the legislation was in line with Smit’s interpretation; sub-section one of section forty-six of the Pension Laws Amendment Act stated that

The Commissioner of Pensions is hereby divested of the powers vested in him by the Old Age Pensions Act, 1928, and the Blind Persons Act, 1936, as respectively amended by this Act, in so far as those Acts relate to Natives, and the said powers are hereby vested in the Secretary for Native Affairs who may, with the approval of the Minister of Native Affairs, authorise any person to exercise those powers on his behalf.²⁵²

With the proviso that “any matter arising out of the administration of the Act which cannot be suitably disposed of” must be forwarded to the SNA, the final version of the circular thus officially delegated said powers to Native Commissioners and Additional Native Commissioners throughout the Union as well as Magistrates in areas where there were no Native Commissioners.²⁵³ Thus, the structures of governance that were set up in the early phases of the roll-out of pensions to black South Africans in the Union were largely decentralised. The circular tasked authorising officers with the power to award pensions to applicants deemed eligible in terms of the Act and placed them in control of all general aspects of pension administration. Authorising officers were required to maintain a register which documented all applications for old age pensions in their district, investigate all applications, file all received pension applications, carry out the payment of pensions, and maintain a permanent record of all payments made. The register included all information deemed vital, including the applicant’s full name, address, sex, age, the result of the application, and, if applicable, the annual pension amount awarded, identification number assigned and any relevant remarks. The circular laid out specific requirements that implied some kind of standardisation of the old age and blind pension system. However, as it played out in reality the regulations in the circular and in the Act became

²⁵¹ Secretary for Finance, “Letter from the Secretary for Finance to the Secretary for Native Affairs,” August 26, 1944, SAB TES 2901 F11/222, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁵² Union of South Africa, Pension Laws Amendment Act, 1944 Subsection two of the same section made provisions for the Commissioner of Pensions to similarly delegate power to those in his charge.

²⁵³ Smit, “Circular No. 14 of 1944: Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives.”

subject to the interpretations of individual authorising officers, in the first few years of implementation.

In general, authorising officers were critical of the way the head office of the NAD approached the design of the system of pension administration, with many taking issue with the fact that the system had been imposed upon them. At the Native Commissioners' Conference Mr Menge expressed his sense that the system had been "pushed on us".²⁵⁴ The 1944-1945 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand, observed that "the overall volume [of work] has grown immensely as the result of the duty of paying military allotments, Old Age Pensions, Blind Pensions and Invalidity Grants being imposed upon the Native commissioners and their staffs". He elaborated that these new duties not only increased the accounting work "but each case requires to be carefully investigated before being decided - a most laborious undertaking as compared with investigations necessary in the case of Europeans".²⁵⁵ In his report for the years 1945-1947, the Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories commented that the "main drawback attached to these benefits is the cumbersome system of payment to grantees and it is hoped that a mechanised system will soon be introduced".²⁵⁶

Indeed, the initial procedures utilised for payouts under the decentralised system of pension administration for old age pensions, blind pensions and disability grants were laborious. Native Commissioners and Magistrates were authorised to process applications and award pensions in the District Offices, where these applications were stored. It was the responsibility of the District Offices to compile paysheets and administer the pension payouts. The accounting system for the pension scheme was thus a 'manual' one. The District Offices were required to prepare paysheets each month in duplicate and the duplicate copy would be retained by the office as part of a permanent record of payments. The process was long and unwieldy, especially in districts in which a large number of

²⁵⁴ *Notes on the Native Commissioners Conference.*

²⁵⁵ NAD, *Report of the Department of Native Affairs for the Year 1944-1945* (Union of South Africa, 1946).

²⁵⁶ M. L. C Liefeldt, "Report of the Chief Magistrate Transkeian Territories," Report of the Department of Native Affairs for the Year 1944-1945 (Union of South Africa, 1948), UCT Government Publications.

pension recipients resided. The SNA described the ‘manual’ process as follows: “each succeeding month new paysheets are prepared by transcribing the entries from the previous month’s duplicate copy and including new cases, adjustments etc.” Some districts had as many as 6000 pensioners. This meant that such district offices would have to compile more than 100 paysheets monthly, a task which required a clerk to work full-time for a week or more in order to complete. Moreover, the process left a lot of room for human error.²⁵⁷ The paysheets constituted the only permanent pension record held at the head office of the NAD. Under the manual system, the head office of the Native Affairs Department only became involved in the process once payments had been administered. At this stage District Offices would send paysheets to the head office, where they were checked for arithmetical accuracy and payments were checked against previous months’ paysheets, a job reserved for some 28 “female clerks” - the majority of whom were employed in a temporary capacity. The Secretary for Native Affairs described this work as a “laborious and cumbersome process”, one that was “far from infallible as many errors might be overlooked due to the monotony of the work” and the alleged “poor standard of the female clerks”.²⁵⁸

The newly implemented system of pension administration was discussed at the 1945 Native Commissioners’ conference. As already noted, several authorising officers were irked by the top-heavy approach taken by officials at head office in their efforts to devise a coherent administrative system and consequently sought to shape the development of the system by drawing on their local experiences. Among other insights, the minutes from the conference highlight many of the impractical aspects of the early system.

Mr. Menge: I am afraid I have to take the liberty to criticise the system that has been pushed on to us in connection with the payment of old age pensions, blind and invalidity grants. Speaking for myself, I must say I appreciate the difficulty of the Accounts Branch. Their Circulars on these subjects are real master-pieces, upon which they may be congratulated, but there are mistakes in the best of systems and one mistake is the necessity of having to place grantees in numerical order - that cannot continue. I said just now that if a Native wants an Exemption Certificate,

²⁵⁷ SNA, “Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Secretary to the Treasury Concerning the Mechanisation of Social Benefits.,” May 17, 1947, SAB NTS 2358 620/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁵⁸ SNA.

he must walk 50 miles if necessary but when it comes to paying out pensions of only 10/- they must be paid in the field. You cannot ask a man to come in 50 miles - which may cost him 5/- transport, to collect 10/- pension.

Now in connection with this wicked system of getting them into numerical order - what happens is this. Say pensioner No. 1 comes and the next person is number 1, 999 then the unfortunate Clerk has to search through the books for that number. Thereafter number 23 may turn up and the poor Clerk cannot page backwards and forwards in his huge registers. What they usually do now is this - at 9 o'clock the old age pensioners assemble on the particular day set aside for payment. Nobody takes any notice of them until say 12 o'clock when most of them have arrived. Then we get the constables to put them all into numerical order. But it is a shame to treat old people like that but there is no other way. The result is that the old age pensioner can be glad if he gets away from the office by 3 o'clock.

I have a little scheme to submit. I hope that Mr Rhodes will not deal with it too harshly. I have taken it from the Military scheme which seems to be an excellent one. We have managed with it despite the shortage of staff. You have a bunch of vouchers and you take the numbers as they come and you receipt them. I do not know whether the Accounts Branch will agree if we had a little scheme like that. (You take them in order of arrival). I have drawn up a specimen form and voucher to be used and the paper cost will be approximately the same as at present...

Mr Carinus: I don't know whether I am doing the thing wrong in my district but no matter in what order a man comes, we just page him up in [sic] the register and the paysheet is made out at the end of the month in numerical order. The man just makes his mark in the register or merely touches the pen. I don't know whether it is wrong.

Mr Potgieter: The paysheet varies from 10 to 15 pages. I have a small staff and the clerk in charge of the Accounts Branch types that list out. He is naturally slow on the job but it is a permanent record and I insist that it be typewritten in duplicate. It takes him three days to type the list with all the interruptions...

Mr Rhodes: I would like to say something about Mr. Carinus's [illegible due to torn page]... His method at present is quite irregular. The recipient of a pension is required to sign the paysheet. As a matter of fact we find that a number of officers get their Typist to type in the Native's mark - he must make his own mark. Natives must sign themselves.

Mr Menge talks about the paysheets having to be spread out all over the place but it seems simple enough to get these paysheets placed in binders. Probably most of the Native Commissioners here pay the majority of their pensions out in the veld. I think it would be best for the numbers to be called out consecutively and let each Native step forward. At Sibasa the paying time has been reduced by about six hours as a result of the adoption of this suggestion...

...The system introduced was thought out very carefully. The loose voucher system was considered. I personally have had a lot of experience in the Pensions Office and... [illegible due to torn page]... what loose vouchers mean.

Mr Menge states that whilst the amount of work will... [illegible due to torn page]... same, it will be simplified as far as checking is concerned. That is as far as district offices are concerned. At Head Office we anticipate that we will have half a million... [pensioners]... under the various schemes, and to pay these people... [illegible due to torn page]... will mean six million vouchers a year which will have to [be prepared] in Head Office. Vouchers get lost and apart from all that... [illegible due to torn page]... the question of Head Office records. Records will have to be [kept] in Head Office and a big staff will have to be [illegible due to torn page] this work and the administrative expenditure would be [illegible due to torn page].²⁵⁹

[Native Commissioners' Conference 1945]

The varying descriptions of district pension administration given by Mr Menge, Mr Carinus and Mr Potgieter signal a number of important insights into the inner workings of pension administration during the early years of implementation. Mr Menge's comments elucidate the extent to which officials at head office neglected to consider the practical functioning of their proposed system as well as their remiss in considering the experience of the elderly people who would have little choice but to interact with this administrative system in order to receive their much needed social assistance. From the outset, the procedures at payouts were inherently hostile to pensioners – especially in larger districts. Perhaps these conditions arose from a greater, bureaucratic emphasis at head office on the necessity to iron out regulatory details that would emphasize and ensure adherence to the ideological principles which underpinned the newly formulated social policy. It is possible that this, together with the necessity of diverting administrative responsibility from head office to local district offices and the disjuncture between the knowledge and experience of district officials and that of head office officials, contributed to the implementation of a cumbersome and impractical manual system of pension administration.

²⁵⁹ *Notes on the Native Commissioners Conference.*

It is perhaps unsurprising then that the approach of lower level bureaucrats – the Native Commissioners and Magistrates – toward pension administration varied across districts. Between 1944 and 1947 the impracticality of many aspects of the head office-imposed system resulted in significant deviations from the regulations outlined in the NAD's circulars. Some of these arose from general misinterpretations of certain sections of the circulars, while others emerged from the initiative of Magistrates and NCs who sought to make administration and payout of old age pensions more workable in their specific local contexts. For example, there existed significant variance across the Union insofar as the processing of applications and the period of payouts were concerned. Some authorising officials accepted applications as and when they came in, while others made annual field trips to receive new applications. Pensions were paid out monthly in certain districts and bimonthly or even quarterly in others.

It is possible to glean from the archive I work with the way in which administrative procedures were shaped, not necessarily only by the practical experience of administering pension payouts, but by the attitudes and subjectivities of the white men responsible for devising the procedures. The motivations underlying the different approaches often arose from a complex cocktail of personal and structural subjectivities. Certainly, some officials sought to shape the systems for mainly practical reasons; to make the procedures in their districts more efficient with the effect that the interests of pensioners were often sidelined. However, in their correspondence with head office, others demonstrated sympathetic leanings towards the interests of the pensioners in their charge and sought to mediate the system designed at head office. Indeed, from the outset pension administration in the NAD paid little attention to the practical hardships that, especially rural elderly, disabled and blind pensioners would face in collecting their pensions. As such some sympathetic Native Commissioners and Magistrates made attempts to mediate the more inconsiderate aspects of the bureaucratic system by using their limited influence to drive home the actual experiences of the pensioners they interacted with. For example, the Native Commissioner in Mahlabatini petitioned to get additional payout points authorised in order to decrease the hardship experienced by

pensioners who had to walk excessive distances to receive their pension payouts. He wrote in a letter to the SNA, “it is pathetic to see many of these people who have to walk as much as 30 miles to this office to collect their money”.²⁶⁰ This appears to have been the norm in rural areas; pensioners were made to travel long distances and sometimes navigate difficult terrains to collect their money. In motivating for bimonthly instead of monthly payouts as a rule, the Magistrate at Tabankulu revealed that “because of the hilly nature of the country it is not possible to select centres which would be within easy reach of all concerned. Some of the pensioners have to negotiate mountains in order to reach the paying centres”.²⁶¹

Mr Menge’s critique in the above extract demonstrates the way in which the subjectivities of even the most sympathetic officials were strongly shaped by the racist-paternalist, segregationist system in which Magistrates and Native Commissioners functioned as both conduits and producers. The logic of this system made it possible for this particular NC to opine, without irony, that a black subject’s ability to easily access legislated state services should be relative. That he compared people seeking exemption certificates with people seeking old age pensions is telling; this relativity appears to have been determined by the degree of congruence of different state services with the prevailing political structures. Whereas, from Mr Menge’s perspective, authorising officers should not have been duty-bound to ease the conditions of access faced by exemption certificate-seeking black subjects, facilitating easier access of pensioners to state pensions was seen to be a moral imperative. It is possible to read, beyond his sympathetic stance, the implicit understanding that unlike exemption certificates, old age pensions cohered structurally with the wider project of segregation.

While the paternalism of authorising officials may have played some part in cutting through the more hostile, bureaucratic elements of the system and added a human voice in the development of the system, it was hardly ever free from cultural racism. For example, in 1947 when, as part of discussions that were

²⁶⁰ Native Commissioner Mahlabatini, “Letter to Secretary for Native Affairs,” n.d., SAB NTS 2358 626/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁶¹ Magistrate Tabankulu, “Mechanisation of Social Benefit Scheme,” Letter to SNA, January 29, 1947, SAB NTS 2358 626/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

underway to standardise administrative procedures across the Union, head office proposed the introduction of the uniform practice of bi-monthly payouts, the Magistrate at Tarkastad wrote to the Secretary for Native Affairs to petition to keep the payments at his office a monthly occurrence. Although he stated that “a number of natives requested me to not have the two-monthly payments enforced”, seemingly indicating that he was advocating for the will of the pensioners to be considered, he also situated the hardship that would be incurred not in the actions of the Department or in the socioeconomic conditions that left many pensioners living in chronic poverty, but in his culturally racist beliefs about the behaviour of the pensioners themselves. He explained in his letter that “most natives do not think about tomorrow and have not the necessary discretion to make an amount of money last for a certain period”.²⁶²

In spite of such baseless claims, which rested strongly on individual and structural prejudices, the opinions of authorising officers were more often than not afforded the privilege of rationality. Many officials held strongly to notions that recipients of government funds should behave in certain ways. Indeed, the confluence of pension recipients failing to ‘perform’ their poverty in ways deemed acceptable by the men shaping the procedures, and official and structural racism often led to moral judgements, which shaped and informed decisions about ‘improvements’ to the administrative system. Two particularly revealing comments arose from a discussion about whether implementing streamlined bimonthly payout periods in districts across the Union would inflict hardship on pensioners who were used to receiving their money every month, as laid out in pension legislation. Mr Wilkin, a Native Commissioner in the Transkei region, stated his opinion that beneficiaries were “not in such dire need that they cannot afford to wait two months for their money”.²⁶³ After one particular payday, Wilkin, who administered pension payouts at a certain store in his district decided to ‘check up’ on his pension recipients. His findings informed his callous opinion. Much to his disapproval, “he found that they [pensioners] were

²⁶² Magistrate Tarkastad, “Mechanisation of Social Benefit Schemes,” Letter to Secretary for Native Affairs, April 13, 1948, SAB NTS 2358 626/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁶³ “Notes on the Native Commissioners’ Conference on the Mechanisation of Social Benefits” (Pretoria, South Africa, September 18, 1947), SAB NTS 2358 628/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

purchasing all sorts of unnecessary articles, such as hair oil, hair cream, combs, doeks, etc.”²⁶⁴ Indeed, the conference attendees, seemingly unanimously, made the decision to recommend the extension of the payment period to every two months. The author of the minutes reflected that the men agreed that this “might cause some dissatisfaction but it was felt that the pensioners would soon get used to it”.²⁶⁵ “There was no doubt that a lump sum of, say, £1 would be more useful than two payments of 10/- each,” he continued. His assumption appears to have been unsubstantiated by any meaningful interactions with pension recipients and based on little more than the opinions of the white men whose job it was to inform a decision on the matter. He pressed on: “a Native is apt to squander the smaller amount but might do something useful, such as purchasing a bag of mealie meal, with the larger amount.” Discussions such as these often formed the basis upon which decisions and recommendations about procedural practice were made, at least under head office officials in the Smuts administration. In any event, bi-monthly payments would also go a long way toward easing the work load of both the head office and district offices. In a more formal communication to the Secretary for Native Affairs, the Principal Accountant reiterated the opinion of the conference attendees, stating that “there is no doubt that that many Natives squander their small monthly pensions which they merely regard as ‘tobacco’ money.”²⁶⁶ Such opinions and attitudes – structurally privileged as rational – were ultimately used as tools to back up procedures that, first and foremost, suited the NAD and add weight to the specious argument that such changes were “in the interests of everybody concerned”.²⁶⁷ Moreover, these discourses served to produce the kind of ammunition that would be needed if, as the Principal Accountant anticipated, the “Parliamentary representatives of the Natives” were to “advance some criticism”.

²⁶⁴ “Notes on the Native Commissioners’ Conference on the Mechanisation of Social Benefits.”

²⁶⁵ “Notes on the Native Commissioners’ Conference on the Mechanisation of Social Benefits.”

²⁶⁶ Principal Accountant, “Mechanisation of Social Benefits Payments,” Letter to Secretary for Native Affairs, October 31, 1947, SAB NTS 2358 628/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁶⁷ Principal Accountant.

The Old Age Pension System and Questions of ‘Social Citizenship’: Synchronous’ Access and Attempts to Force ‘Recognition’

Dear zinkosi zami,

pilani apa nami ndiya pila apa ke ninga ndinwa ndim lento ndipinda yo uku bala impendulo andikazifundani endandi mbalele yama zinkosi zami / ngoxolo bahlekazi umntana ulilela kuyizo nomina xalombileyo ke / zinkosi zami xandi tshoyo kuku lila kuba ndilu sizi ipango nobuye buya ndiqiba oko ndohlu a ukutya zini ngamdinwa ndim /zinkosi zami ndisapila andiku y eke ukukala andikuni yeka ndingeka si kuba uncedo lukumi

(Dear Sirs,

I hope you will not get tired of me, I write again because I did not receive a reply to my previous correspondence, my chiefs.

Sirs, a child cries to its father or mother when it hungers. I suffer from poverty and starvation since you deprived me of food because of being tired of me. My chiefs I am still alive and I will not cease writing... before I die because assistance comes from you.)

The above words were penned on 13 June 1945 by Mr M. C. Momo; an 82-year old pensioner living in Oudtshoorn who, at the time, was in receipt of a pension of £9 per annum - the maximum rate for towns (paid out in instalments of 15 shillings per month). At the time of writing Mr Momo was too old to find employment (he was considered unemployable by “Europeans”), had no children who could offer him support and was struggling to survive on the pension money he received from the state. He wrote to the Native Affairs Department, in essence, to assert that the 15 shillings he received each month was insufficient to sustain him (“the 15/. is all spent on the house rent not [leaving] anything over for me to buy food”) and to implore the department to assist him further.²⁶⁸

This letter – a fragment – offers us a glimpse into the subjectivity of one of the Union’s subjects; details that can be too easily obscured when discussing pension recipients only as a collective. As such, it is valuable to think with when considering the kinds of access and recognition registration for pensions

²⁶⁸ M. C. Momo, “Letter to SNA,” June 13, 1945, SAB NTS 8293 24/349/A, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

unsealed. In his letter, Mr Momo carefully and directly placed the burden of responsibility for his survival and livelihood on the state (“zinkosi zami xandi tshoyo kuku lila kuba ndilu sizi ipango nobuye buya ndiqiba oko ndohlu a ukutya zini ngamdinwa ndim /My chiefs, I suffer from poverty and starvation since you deprived me of food because of being tired of me”), and exploited the state’s own language of paternalism to fight to secure a better lot for himself (“ngoxolo bahlekazi umntana ulilela kuyizo nomina xalombileyo ke/ Sir, a child cries to its father or mother when it hungers”).

The expectation of recognition illuminated in Mr Momo’s act hints at what it meant for him to be recognised. Mr Momo’s letter might be read as an effort, or perhaps a demand, to be known; to have his existence and struggle consistently acknowledged until something was done about it. His pension engendered a new channel of ‘legitimate’ access to the state and the opportunity to perform a sense of citizenship. Whether or not the state responded is not particularly important here. What is significant is that manifest in Mr Momo’s letter is the sense of the right to *ask for more*. It was a rejection of the state’s recognition on its own terms and it was a promise of persistence: “zinkosi zami ndisapila andiku y eke ukukala andikuni yeka ndingeka si kuba uncedo lukuni /My chiefs I am still alive and I will not cease writing... before I die because assistance comes from you).

Indeed, the access engendered by social pension registration was synchronous. The roll-out of social pensions brought with it a new and ‘legitimate’ channel through which black South Africans could (and did) petition different arms of the state to make themselves visible. The records reveal that many pensioners seized this opportunity by approaching the Magistrates and Native Commissioners, and some, like Mr Momo instrumentalised this access to contact officials higher up in the Native Affairs Department. Perhaps interesting, also, is that while the state worked to construct legislated pensions as privileges there was a pervasive sense amongst pensioners, at this time, that old age pensions were a right.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 536 African Nationalists, as Sagner argues, held a different perspective and saw the extension of social pensions in 1944 as little more than government charity which was no substitute for actual citizenship. During his presidential address at the annual ANC conference in 1944 Xuma stated that “the Africans have no rights to claim

Conclusion

From its inception, the administration of old age pensions to black South Africans was shot through with the biopolitics of the segregationist state. In discussing the early construction of a system for pension administration in the NAD, this chapter has provided some insight into how certain arms of the state approached developing a system of pension administration that was rooted in racist structures and segregationist ideologies. In this chapter, I have argued that it is important to delineate the role of the Native Affairs Department in the changes and developments that took place within the policy and administration of social benefits for black South Africans, in order to understand its influence and role as an arm of the state, and the extent to which the department, and those who worked for it, conceptualised themselves as mediators between black South Africans and the state, or the "protector [s] of African interests".²⁷⁰ Local officials contributed significantly to the development of the system for pension payouts. It is thus important to pay attention to how developments in social policy were shaped and influenced by officials, from the bottom up, in order to better understand the system and motivation behind the decisions and actions of those figures involved. Following Deborah Posel's suggestion about the importance of bureaucrats in the crafting and implementation of apartheid state policy, of interest is the idea that state policy is not necessarily designed and implemented with a 'top-down' approach, but that administrators on the ground – the Magistrates and Native Commissioners – and their experiences and direct interactions with the Union's subjects influenced and shaped policy making

but are only objects of pity to receive whatever the Government or their agents might deem sufficient to maintain the existence of the African as a reasonable asset for labour and employment by various European interests". Z. K. Matthews, addressing Hofmeyr, similarly argued that "the (social) benefits to which the Minister has made such detailed reference do not affect the fundamentals of the policy of white domination in a country the population of which is 80 per cent non-European... This is charity, but it cannot take the place of citizenship. We want equal civic rights with the Europeans". See *Ibid.*, 535; original sources: Xuma Papers, "Presidential Address Delivered by Xuma at the Annual Conference of the ANC at Kimberley," December 14, 1944, 441214, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown; Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates* (Union Government, 1947).

²⁷⁰ Saul Dubow, "Holding 'a Just Balance between White and Black': The Native Affairs Department in South Africa c.1920-33," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986): 237.

during this time.²⁷¹ Highlighting the “power struggle between the executive and state bureaucracy”, Posel argues that

the bureaucracies bid for supremacy within the state stems partly from bureaucrat’s control of information, and their technical expertise. The complexity and breadth of the executive’s task is such that political decision-makers may have to draw heavily on the specialised knowledge and accumulated experience of state administrators. This gives bureaucrats considerable leverage in advising policy-makers, and in defining and weighting the options between which the policy-makers choose.²⁷²

The files that document the early administrative developments in social benefits for black South Africans in the Union seem to suggest that policy and administrative systems in the mid-twentieth century were shaped through complex network of actions and interactions. When the early rumblings of the establishment of some sort of institutionalised social benefit program for black South Africans began in the mid-1930s, it appears that efforts to drive policy with regards to the blind ex-gratia grant were spearheaded by civil society organisations and, within the state, by higher level state bureaucrats (in this case the Secretary for Native Affairs) who did appear to view themselves as mediators between state and its subjects. When social benefits were legislated for in 1944, the higher-level officials in the Native Affairs Department had some influence in drawing up the regulations governing the implementation of the Act, but the reigns were ultimately held by the Treasury, who was strongly influenced by the recommendations of the Commissioner of Pensions.

However, in spite of the top heavy design of the NAD’s administrative system, in the early years local authorising officers took it upon themselves to adapt and shape the workings of the system in their local contexts. This chapter argues that authorising officers’ varying interpretations of the regulations engendered an absence of uniformity in pension administration across the Union in the early years of implementation. Although skeletally the same across districts, the manual system was fleshed out and administered in varying ways across the districts of the Union. Furthermore, a confluence of factors influenced

²⁷¹ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 21.

²⁷² Posel, 21.

individual authorising officers' procedural designs. Thus, exploring the construction of the pension system in the Union in the 1940s highlights further the disaggregation of 'the state'; in the contestations, the temperaments, paternalisms, and personalities, and in the differing ideologies and motivations driving the actions of individual state actors.

During this period, interventions that advocated for the rights of pensioners came from a number of levels of society. There is evidence that certain members of parliament took it upon themselves to ensure that the NAD administered the social pensions according to the law. Moreover, civil society groups as well as individuals who personally knew pensioners wrote to the NAD with complaints and to advocate for the rights of a group of pensioners or individual pensioners. Significantly, many pensioners themselves seized the new channels of access accompanied a legislated 'inclusive' pension system to write to the head office of the NAD with complaints, requests and petitions for interventions. Through a reading of one of several letters found in the archive, which were written by pensioners and sent directly to the SNA, this chapter also examined the kind of access that pension registration opened up for pensioners themselves. This discussion highlighted the way in which pensioners used the channels opened up to them through the extension of state pensions to access the state in order to make themselves known. This contrasted with the impersonal organising data gathered by the state during the registration process that was concerned with *cataloguing* rather than *knowing* its subjects, a process analysed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four - The Materiality of Centralisation: Mechanisation and the Rationalisation of Old Age Pension Administration in the NAD

Introduction

In the latter half of 1946, two years after the Old Age Pension scheme had been extended to include black South Africans, the Native Affairs Department began its efforts to articulate and set up a rationalised system of pension administration, which culminated in a mechanised documentary system of pension registration and identification. At the time, the Native Affairs Department was administering a grand total of 154 000 social grants per month in approximately 300 districts in the Union.²⁷³ Top officials in the department expected that the figure in the coming years would rise to approximately 520 000 pensions per month.²⁷⁴ So it came to be that on 17 October 1946, the Secretary for Native Affairs wrote to Mathieson & Ashley, a firm of “systems specialists” registered in the Union, to set up a meeting to discuss the mechanisation of pension payments to black South Africans.²⁷⁵ A month earlier, the Native Affairs Department had contacted the sales manager at Hollerith Machines Limited to enquire about the use of Hollerith equipment in the calculation of social pension payments for natives in the Union.²⁷⁶ The main motivation for mechanisation was to make the system of pension administration and payouts more efficient and reduce the work of district offices. The proposed mechanisation would replace the decentralised, manual system of payouts that had been utilised since the inception of social pension payments to black recipients in 1944, with a centralised system spearheaded by the head office of the NAD. Many aspects of the proposed centralised system resembled suggestions and designs put forward

²⁷³ “Mechanisation of Social Benefits.”

²⁷⁴ “Mechanisation of Social Benefits.”

²⁷⁵ SNA, “Reply to Magistrate Port Alfred,” November 12, 1947, SAB NTS 2358 620/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁷⁶ Plans to mechanise the payment of “Cape Coloured Old Age” pensions using Hollerith machines were, at the time, afoot in the Pensions Office

by various authorising officers across the Union during the early years of pension administration.

In this chapter I examine this process, discussing the specific features of mechanised pensioner registration and administration. I also consider the implications of the consequent shift toward centralisation that went hand in glove with mechanisation and marked a departure from the previously decentralised praxis of administration, in which Native Commissioners and Magistrates authorised grants and significantly influenced the way social policy was implemented in their districts. The earlier methods of grant administration were replaced by streamlined, centralised procedures that allowed the central government to exercise greater control over all aspects of the system. These changes in administrative processes signalled a shift in policy at head office as top officials moved quickly from a position of relative disinterest in the inner workings of the system to one that betrayed a desire to enforce top-heavy administration of the system through the centralisation of beneficiaries' personal data.

Aside from efficiency, the interdepartmental committee appointed to investigate mechanisation in the NAD predicted that mechanisation would yield a further advantage for the department; it would “make it possible for the Department to undertake a lot of useful and necessary analysis and statistical work which under the present manual system is not possible”.²⁷⁷ Thus mechanisation (and centralised registration) was, in part, imagined as possessing the ability to expand the NAD's data-gathering capacities. The NAD's project of mechanising the pension system provided significant experience with information processing technologies which enabled the state to gather centralised data on all pension subjects – including those in the countryside. The state's goal in gathering this data had less to do with generating generalised knowledge about its population – in the Foucauldian sense – and more to do with creating the mechanisms through which its population could be identified, tracked and managed. When the NP came to power the state used this centralised data and

²⁷⁷ Union of South Africa, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Certain Proposals to Mechanise the Social Benefit Payments of Native Affairs.*, 1947.

system for the explicit purpose of reducing to an absolute minimum 'native' inclusion in social assistance, whilst also harnessing this data to bolster systems of segregationist control.

Moving from Manual to Machine Labour

Rationalisation and efficiency were the ostensible driving forces behind the move to mechanise. In a circular sent out by the Secretary for Native Affairs to all officers of the Native Affairs Department, all Magistrates and "Wholetime Special Justices of the Peace" in the Union, the proposed scheme was introduced to the pension officers as one devised "with a view to reducing to a minimum the work involved in both this and in the district offices".²⁷⁸ The manual system of accounting for the pension scheme gave rise to numerous errors in payments, which in turn resulted in large volumes of correspondence between the head office and district offices in attempts to rectify the payment errors. Furthermore, a Public Service Inspectors' investigation had led to the estimation that, under the manual scheme of payments, one employee was required for every 8000 pensioners in order to check the paysheets for errors at head office.²⁷⁹ The rapidly increasing number of social pensioners in the Union provided the impetus for the NAD to switch over to mechanisation. With the expectation that the number of pension recipients would continue to increase exponentially, top level NAD officials eventually made moves to streamline the system.

The mechanisation involved converting to a master card and voucher system. Master cards were produced for each pensioner and retained at the head office of the NAD. The production of the master card involved an operator mechanically punching blank Hollerith cards using a key punch. The perforations on the cards constituted bits of data comprising all the relevant details of the pensioner, as supplied by the district offices. To complete the creation of the

²⁷⁸ SNA, "Identical Minute from the Secretary for Native Affairs to All Offices of the Native Affairs Department, Magistrates and Wholetime Special Justices of the Peace throughout the Union.," November 4, 1946, SAB NTS 2358 620/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

²⁷⁹ SNA, "Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Secretary to the Treasury Concerning the Mechanisation of Social Benefits."

master card the operator repeated the punching process with a verifier to ensure the cards were accurately punched. Payment vouchers (also in the form of a punched-card) were produced mechanically and bimonthly from the master cards and issued to the district offices, along with covering schedules. These vouchers replaced the paysheets that had previously been used to record payments. The payment vouchers reflected all the same data furnished on the master cards, were prepared in numerical order in the pensioners' number sequence and sent every second month to the district offices, where local officials used them to effect the grant payments. Conversion to the punched-card system would open up a range of mechanised efficiencies – inter alia, punched-cards could be mechanically sorted according to their perforated data, reproduced, calculated and tabulated.²⁸⁰

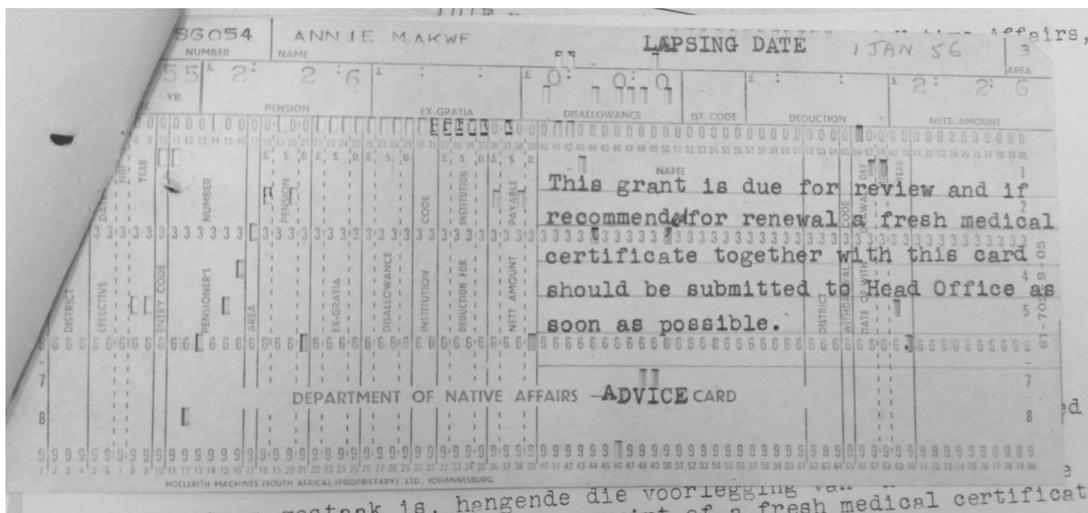


Figure 3: Hollerith Punched-Card

Mechanising the NAD Pension Administration

Efficiency: an Expedient Trope

It is not unjustified to be wary of the trope of ‘efficiency’ as the self-proclaimed impetus for the projects embarked on by the NAD. Many scholars of the state have demonstrated how oftentimes deleterious social realities emerge

²⁸⁰ Arthur L. Norberg, “High-Technology Calculation in the Early 20th Century: Punched Card Machinery in Business and Government,” *Technology and Culture* 31, no. 4 (1990): 756, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3105906>.

as products of the drive for efficiencies – even in the most ostensibly benign cases. While the pernicious effects of centralisation are easy to imagine when discussing the apartheid state, what Dubow has called the “self-serving language of legitimisation” of the NAD, can be traced to the restructuring of the department in the late 1920s at which time technicism became a central tenet of the (desired) *modus operandi* of the NAD.²⁸¹ Dubow argues that the NAD’s technicist doctrine diverged from the earlier tradition of ‘native administration’ and control – exemplified by the Transkei model – which emphasised “personalising relations of authority” and placed value in local administrators’ substantial knowledge of the local context and their good judgment.²⁸² Dubow argues that the 1920s saw a significant shift in the ideological underpinnings of those in the higher echelons of the NAD; crudely, from an investment in individualist sympathetic paternalism to a harsher bureaucratised approach to the control of black South Africans.²⁸³ Indeed, the Native Administration Act of 1927 marked a turning point between the earlier loosely configured system of Native Affairs, which, he posits, was characterised by a highly decentralised, weak and fragmented praxis of ‘native administration’, and the move to develop a modern system of Native Affairs that saw the administration centralised at the head office of the NAD.²⁸⁴ While in general, Dubow argues, state actors believed the rejuvenation and strengthening of the NAD in the late 1920s to be crucial to the implementation of Hertzog’s proposals for segregation, it was members within the NAD itself that drove the revamping of the department. The NAD desired tighter control and to consolidate its authority over all aspects of governance that dealt with the administration of black South Africans. The department “sought to redefine the legitimate scope of its jurisdiction so as to encompass virtually everything concerning ‘native affairs’”.²⁸⁵ Thus, the Native Administration Act, in theory, placed tremendous

²⁸¹ Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36*.

²⁸² This was based on the administrative ideal of ‘continuity’: the concept that frequent changes in administrators eroded the principles of good administration through the inevitable loss of local knowledge that would result from the transfers and the ensuing breakdown in trust between the administrator (the ruler) and his black subjects (the ruled). Dubow.

²⁸³ Dubow.

²⁸⁴ Dubow.

²⁸⁵ Dubow, 87.

powers in the hands of the NAD, enabling the department to unreservedly govern the reserves by proclamation.²⁸⁶ It also constituted a significant move toward the spurious ‘preservation’ of African society through its ‘recognition’ and production of African custom and law, giving rise to the Union’s first Native Commissioner Courts and “a separate court system” for black South Africans.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Act empowered the NAD to “curb sedition and dissent, and to control the free movement of Africans”.²⁸⁸ It thus became one of the founding legislative bases for the NAD’s future growth as an integral artery of first the segregationist and later the apartheid state.

Dubow perhaps overstated the actual impact of the Act, especially in the first decade of its implementation. As Wylie notes, aside from increased volumes of paperwork, the Act engendered little practical change initially in the governing methods of the NAD.²⁸⁹ Similarly, Evans suggests that the Act had little consequence in altering the actual status of the NAD within the wider state body during the 1930s.²⁹⁰ However, the changes in the NAD in the late 1920s also coincided with the technocratic turn in the department’s approach to administration, as it leveraged slogans such as ‘uniformity’, ‘elasticity’ and ‘efficiency’ to justify its efforts to streamline and centralise the administrative systems of its regional offices under standardised administrative systems headed by the NAD’s central office in Pretoria.²⁹¹ This technocratic turn signalled somewhat of a disjuncture from previous approaches to Native Affairs administration. The oft revered Transkeian administration (out of which the NAD

²⁸⁶ Thus overriding parliamentary rule in the scheduled areas.

²⁸⁷ Chanock, “Customary Law, Courts and Code after 1927,” 328. The Act granted magistrates in the native courts the authority to decide (within certain parameters) whether ‘native customary law’ should be applied or not - this was a continuation of the Transkei mode of rule. ; Chanock, 328; du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 12.

²⁸⁸ Dubow argues that although politically expedient, the construction of this Act must also be viewed in light of the power struggle (for both resources and power) between the NAD and the Department of Justice that had ensued in the early 1920s. As such, it must be seen as a culmination of the NAD’s “attempts to reclaim and extend the jurisdiction which it had lost to the Department of Justice” after 1922 as a result of the cuts to the NAD administered by the Public Service Commission. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36*, 91.

²⁸⁹ Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, 63.

²⁹⁰ Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 14, 28.

²⁹¹ Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36*, 87–97.

grew),²⁹² which based its administrative practices on principles of benevolent paternalism was held up as the pinnacle of sound ‘native administration’. It was the supposedly organic nature of the Transkeian system and the “methods, goodwill and sympathy on which the administration was built” that made it especially commendable as a model of ‘native administration’ to the white polity.²⁹³ Dubow posits that the Transkei tradition encapsulated a system whose longevity and persistence was lauded “because they [the officials] dealt with the native on native lines and preserved his customs and social structure”.²⁹⁴ Transkeian officials prided themselves on their tradition of benevolent paternalism; a tradition that was fostered, in part, through familial ties and legacies of administration passed down through sons assuming their father’s administrative position. Dubow asserts that theirs was a “conscious paternalism, whereby the function of the native administrator was gradually to wean his subjects over to ‘civilisation’”.²⁹⁵ Infrequent changes in administrative officials – or ‘continuity’ – formed the cornerstone of an administrative practice that appraised the fostering of trust between administrative officials and their black subjects as fundamental to effective ‘native administration’. However, this idealised conception of the so-called Transkei tradition, Dubow maintains, should not be taken at face value but must be read in light of its political value. Such an idealisation of this model of administration was a useful tool for officials in the mid-1920s who opposed the standardisation and centralisation of the system of native administration that would see emphasis shift from the value of specialised local knowledge (and with it the autonomy previously enjoyed by Magistrates in the Transkei) to that of scientific knowledge and expert opinion.²⁹⁶ Indeed, the restructuring of the NAD in the late 1920s and the coinciding technocratic developments in methods of administration introduced changing

²⁹² The Transkeian administration consisted of twenty seven magisterial districts. A magistrate presided over (administratively and judicially) each of the districts. The magistrates fell under the authority of the Chief Magistrate of Umtata, who in turn came under the authority of the NAD. This administration diverged from the administration in other provinces, in which the majority of magistrates were linked to the Department of Justice.

²⁹³ Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa*, 1919–36, 100.

²⁹⁴ Dubow, 100–101.

²⁹⁵ Dubow, 101.

²⁹⁶ Dubow, 101.

processes for appointment and promotion, which undermined mechanisms that had previously enabled the model of continuity to be enacted.

Dubow argues that the celebrated goals of uniformity and efficiency – always presented as the optimal way to consolidate and nurture the “best aspects of the Union’s diverse regional administrative systems” – enabled the NAD to develop “a dispassionate mask behind which it quietly pursued policies of bureaucratic aggrandisement”.²⁹⁷ The increasingly technocratic approach to the act of administration taken by the NAD in the 1920s and which became more firmly rooted in the 1930s was situated in a global context in which technicist solutions were increasingly sought to remedy political problems. The inter-war years saw a growth, globally and locally, in the veneration of both the ‘expert’ and positivist thinking. In South Africa, science - with its celebrated ability to provide “objective valid solutions to social and political problems” - was harnessed as a panacea for the so-called ‘native question’, a sentiment perhaps exemplified in Smuts’ Native Affairs Commission, but also recognisable in other directives such as, inter alia, the development of the Department’s ethnological section in the mid-1920s and the bonus paid to officials of the NAD who received a diploma in “Bantu studies”.²⁹⁸

Framing administrative developments in technicist logic allowed the more contentious or even insidious effects of rationalising to be disguised as purely rational. Indeed, in its efforts to increase the scope of its power in the 1920s and 1930s, Dubow argues, the NAD frequently invoked buzzwords like ‘uniformity’ to warrant the streamlining of regional administrative systems at head office in Pretoria. In his words

the goal of administrative uniformity was often presented as a self-evident good. When coupled with the notion of ‘compromise’, which was a central motif in segregationist ideology, such supposedly neutral formulations made important political changes appear less contentious than they actually were.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Dubow, 93–94.

²⁹⁸ Dubow, 94.

²⁹⁹ Dubow, 95.

As such, it is against this backdrop that I argue the NAD's stated reasons for the mechanisation of the pension system, as well as the arguments made to justify the 'standardisation' of the method of administration should be read and problematised.

The steps taken in 1946 to begin mechanising and rationalising NAD pension administration did not represent policy initiatives unique to this Department. Indeed this effort arrived in a moment in which policies to centralise state administration were afoot in many sectors. Evans maintains that a drive to rationalise urban administration, "principally through the establishment of a centralized system of labour bureaus" was one of the key concerns underpinning the recommendations in the report of the Fagan Commission of 1948.³⁰⁰ He highlights that a pragmatic call for efficiency buttressed the liberal commission's recommendation that either the NAD or the Department of Labour should be at the helm of the centralised pass system.³⁰¹ While the Fagan Commission's recommendations for centralisation rested on laissez-faire liberal principles of restrained state intervention in the economy, Evans argues the report nevertheless "provided fodder for Verwoerd's strategies in the 1950s".³⁰² In his recent work on the South African state, Keith Breckenridge maintains that in the first decade of National Party rule key advocates for a centralised identity registration punted the ostensible virtues of simplification and standardisation as some of the main benefits of centralised registration. A.J. Turton – a long time NAD official and the architect behind the Central Reference Bureau – cited, amongst other gains, the "great saving of staff" that would result from centralisation of the some 28 extant documents that black South Africans were required to carry into one, central bewysboek.³⁰³ Breckenridge argues that "by framing his proposal around the cost-efficiency of a central registration system,

³⁰⁰ Also known as the "Native Laws Commission"; Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, 58.

³⁰¹ Evans, 58 The Fagan Commission motivated for a more temperate form of state intervention with respect to the proposed labour bureaus that would function to "guide" rather than "direct" black labour where the bureau deemed it to be most needed.

³⁰² Evans, 59.

³⁰³ Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, 140.

Turton put together a devastatingly persuasive argument for a panoptic mechanism of identification, taxation and policing”.³⁰⁴

Efficiency Embodied: The Role of Material Objects in Pension Administration

Throughout the twentieth century (and, indeed, into the present),³⁰⁵ ‘efficiency’ has therefore acted as a Trojan horse to usher in technological innovations whose ripples proved to be more deleterious than the implementers initially imagined. But a desire for efficiency on its own is impotent without the technologies that work and interact to make systems more efficient. While an extensive analysis of the developments in studies of materiality is beyond the scope of this project,³⁰⁶ it is important to situate the discussion of these materials in the broader conceptual framework that has guided my thinking.

Scholars in the social sciences have long been interested in theorising the nature of objects. Indeed, as Hoskins demonstrates, there is ongoing contestation between scholars with regards to the degree of agentive power granted to ‘things’.³⁰⁷ This has often resulted in dialectical approaches to the study of material things, with certain scholars privileging humans as subject and thus relegating non-humans to the passive object position,³⁰⁸ while others have been

³⁰⁴ Breckenridge, 140.

³⁰⁵ For one related example of this in post-apartheid South Africa see, Natasha Thandiwe Vally, “South African Social Assistance and the 2012 Privatised National Payment System: An Examination of Insecurities and Technopolitics in Social Grant Administration and Payment” (University of Witwatersrand, 2016).

³⁰⁶ There is a proliferation of scholarship that deals extensively with the analysis of material objects, including but by no means limited to: Rosemary A. Joyce, “History and Materiality,” in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*, ed. Robert A. Scott, Stephen Michael Kosslyn, and Marlis Buchmann, 2015, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9781118900772>; Latour, “Technology Is Society Made Durable”; Bruno Latour, “How to Write ‘The Prince’ for Machines as Well as for Machinations,” in *Technology and Social Change*, ed. Brian Elliot (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 20–43; Bruno Latour, “The Berlin Key Or How to Do Words with Things,” in *Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture*, ed. Paul Graves-Brown (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 10–21; Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*; Christopher Pinney, “Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?,” in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 256–72; Frank Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics,” *The Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 02 (2009): 283–307; Paul Graves-Brown, *Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture* (Psychology Press, 2000); Daniel Miller, ed., *Materiality* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2005); Christopher Tilley, ed., *Handbook of Material Culture*, Repr (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010).

³⁰⁷ Janet Hoskin, “Agency, Biography and Objects,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley, Repr (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 75.

³⁰⁸ Joyce argues that classical social theory has been guilty of this, with the consequence of obscuring the “material nature” of things and their ability to “resist or exceed human intentions”. Rosemary A. Joyce, “History and

accused of overemphasising the subject position of ‘things’.³⁰⁹ In attempting to move beyond dualistic approaches that focus too heavily on the separation of subject and object, Latour (and others) argues for the abandonment of the “divide between material infrastructure on the one hand and social superstructure on the other” when analysing technological innovation; asserting that society and scientific/technical content have been arbitrarily extricated when actually our analysis can be more fruitful if we see them as continually co-producing each other.³¹⁰ While not disputing the “dialectical process” that sees “subjects making objects making subjects”, Pinney has critiqued the tendency of such an understanding to afford an unwarranted “smoothness” or circularity to the process. He argues, instead, that “it may be more appropriate to envisage images and objects as densely compressed performances unfolding in unpredictable ways and characterized by what...look like disjunctions”.³¹¹

Vally, drawing on the methodology of Actor Network Theory and the theoretical assumptions of Science and Technology Studies, highlights the importance of conceptualising machines as dynamic *agents* in technological systems and not static or docile *things*. In her words, “this involves a move away from thinking of humans and the state as the only ordering agents” and thus considering the agentic properties of objects.³¹² Following Thomas Park Hughes, Hecht and Allen argue that technological systems (and the material objects that constitute them) are “material manifestations of human choices” that “embody,

Materiality,” in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*, ed. Robert A Scott, Stephen Michael Kosslyn, and Marlis Buchmann, 2015, 1.

³⁰⁹ Kafka, for example, has explicitly expressed his enduring skepticism about the ability of “things” to possess the same kind of agency that people do. He argues that the primacy of unconscious processes in human action is the what fundamentally separates them from ‘even the most “agentic” things’. Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 14.

³¹⁰ Latour, “Technology Is Society Made Durable”; See also, Thomas P. Hughes, “The Evolution of Large Technological Systems,” in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, 12. pr (Cambridge [Massachusetts]: MIT Press, 2005), 51–82; and Latour, “How to Write ‘The Prince’ for Machines as Well as for Machinations”; Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics,” 305.

³¹¹ Pinney, “Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?,” 269.

³¹² Natasha Thandiwe Vally, “Technopolitics and the Enrolment and Payment of South African Social Grants,” in *Paper Presented at the South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar* (University of the Western Cape, 2017), 3.

reinforce, and enact social and political power”.³¹³ The “physical artifacts”³¹⁴ of mechanised pension administration in the late 1940s and 1950s comprised specific materials which embodied the official *desire for efficiency*: punching machines (and their products – punched-cards), tabulators, interpreters, sorters and metal discs. These objects formed an integral part of pension administration; mediating and shaping the system while simultaneously being shaped and transformed by the people who interacted with them.

Implementing Mechanisation

The Native Affairs Department approached two firms to tender for the job of providing the machines that would mechanise the process: Hollerith Machines Limited and Powers Samas, and embarked on a determined investigation into the offerings of both, one which included delving into the longer history of the invention of the machines. The Hollerith machines were invented by an employee in the Census Office of the Federal Government of the United States of America. Dr Hollerith had devised the machine to aid in the work of the Census Office and the earliest machines were produced to be used in the 1890 US population census.³¹⁵ The alternative machines, supplied by Powers Samas, had originally been produced as an improvement on the initial Hollerith machines. The Union government had previously favoured the installation of Hollerith machines, but both types of machines were in use in government and private corporations at the time of the NAD’s investigation. Indeed, the punched-card system was in wide use throughout the world. At the time, both types were utilised for army payrolls in New Zealand, the Middle East, Great Britain and the United States, and the machines were also used for census work in a number of other countries.

³¹³ Michael Thad Allen and Gabrielle Hecht, “Introduction: Authority, Political Machines, and Technology’s History,” in *Technologies of Power: Essays in Honor of Thomas Parke Hughes and Agatha Chipley Hughes*, ed. Thomas Parke Hughes et al. (Cambridge [Massachusetts]: MIT Press, 2001), 3.

³¹⁴ Hughes, “The Evolution of Large Technological Systems,” 51; Tilley argues that the presence of people in the past is objectified through the artefacts they leave behind. Christopher Tilley, “Objectification,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley, Repr (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 61.

³¹⁵ Martin Scheele, *Punch-Card Methods in Research and Documentation: With Special Reference to Biology, Library Science and Documentation 2* (University of Michigan: Interscience Publishers, 1961), 4–5 Whereas the data from the 1880 US census took seven years to process, the introduction of Hollerith’s punch-card method in 1890 meant that the data from that census was processed in just one year.

In May 1947, Mears sent a proposal for the scheme to the Treasury, which laid out the estimated annual costs provided by the two firms, with the request that the Treasury give the matter its soonest attention.³¹⁶ A similar scheme to the one proposed by the NAD had recently been implemented in the Pensions Office; payments to “Cape Coloured Old Age Pensioners” were rolled out under the mechanised scheme in December 1946.³¹⁷ The Treasury in turn ordered the referral of the proposal to an interdepartmental committee constituting representatives from the Native Affairs Department, the Pensions Office, the Treasury Equipment Committee and the Audit Office. The committee reported in favour of the proposed system, stating its satisfaction that

the scheme of mechanisation proposed is a sound one, that compared with the present manual system it will ensure economies in staff at Head Office and of work at the District Offices, that the work will be completed with greater speed, neatness and accuracy and generally that it will result in improved efficiency.³¹⁸

The Native Affairs Department officially implemented the mechanised system for the payment of Old Age Pensions, Blind Persons Pension, Disability Grants and Needy Ex-Soldier Grants in 1948 and introduced the scheme in a staggered manner involving about 20 000 pensioners at a time with only a certain number of districts converting to the new system in each phase of implementation. The first districts rolled out the new system on 1 March 1948. G. Mears, the Secretary for Native Affairs sent out the official notification of the conversion to mechanisation in the form of a general circular, dispatched on the 10 February 1948.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ SNA, “Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Secretary to the Treasury Concerning the Mechanisation of Social Benefits.”

³¹⁷ Hollerith Machines Sales Manager, “Hollerith Machines & Methods,” Letter to the Accountant at the NAD, September 17, 1946, SAB NTS 2358 626/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³¹⁸ “Report of the Inter-Departmental Certain Proposals to Mechanise the Social Benefit Payments of Native Affairs,” 1947, SAB NTS 2358 620/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³¹⁹ G. Mears, “General Circular No. 2 of 1948: Mechanisation of Social Benefits Schemes” (Native Affairs Department, February 9, 1948), SAB NTS 2358 626/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

Cataloguing Identities: Developing Practices of Pensioner Identification

While NAD head office spearheaded the incorporation of accounting machines to make the system more efficient, many of the new processes and features that concurred with the mechanised system were proposed by and borrowed from local authorising officers, who from the outset developed their own paper systems to deal with the voluminous work that pension administration brought to district offices. Significant amongst these was the development of a uniform method of pensioner identification. In the early phases of the implementation of the Pension Laws Amendment Act, accurately identifying old age pensioners was low on the Native Affairs Department's list of concerns with the pension system and it was officials on the ground who, interested in streamlining a laborious process of pension payouts, advocated for standardised procedures of identification. While Magistrates and Native Commissioners produced rudimentary identity documents to identify and order pensioners at payouts and prevent fraudulent activity, one common proposition from local authorising officers was that the head office introduces standardised identity documents for pensioners. In practice, with mechanisation the NAD opted for the establishment of a national pensioner identity number that would be used in combination with metal identity discs, signatures and thumbprints.

Local and Global Networks of Identification

The history of identifying individuals is embedded in the history of registration. The 'history of identification' is a rich and continuously developing field of academic research.³²⁰ Importantly, recent scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which identification practices and procedures have overlapped, travelled and been disseminated transnationally and 'transcolonially' for centuries.³²¹ Scholars argue that at the heart of systems of identification

³²⁰ For analyses of identification practices in transnational perspective see Jane Caplan and John C. Torpey, *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton University Press, 2001); Ilse About, James Brown, and Gayle Lonergan, *Identification and Registration Practices in Transnational Perspective: People, Papers and Practices* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³²¹ Mercedes Garcia Ferrari, "Dissemination of the Argentine Dactyloscopy System in the Early Twentieth Century: Local, Regional and International Dimensions," in *Identification and Registration Practices in Transnational*

(whether inherently coercive or not) is the need to fix the physical identity (through documenting or extracting unique characteristics) of people; “to establish the continuousness of an individual through time and space”.³²² Globally, governments – both central and local, developed written and paper methods of identification to fulfil a variety of purposes. Many of the identification procedures and systems that developed across the globe in the eighteenth century onwards embodied official anxiety about how to restrict, regulate, and control the mobility of specific populations.³²³ Scholars posit that in colonial societies of the European empires these anxieties were directed specifically toward regulating the movement of ‘native’ labour and specific populations deemed “undesirable”.³²⁴

Situating NAD Pensioner Identification within Older Networks of Identification Practices in South Africa

Indeed, how to tie unique identities to Black subjects was a dilemma consistently faced, at first, by the colonial administration and later the Union government in South Africa.³²⁵ Many scholars have elucidated the ways in which, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the colonial governments and

Perspective People, Papers and Practices, ed. Ilse About, James Brown, and Gayle Lonergan (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 44; Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*. I am borrowing the term “transcolonial” from a recent conference paper delivered by Patricia Hayes.

³²² Vincent Denis, “Individual Identity and Identification in Eighteenth Century France,” in *Identification and Registration Practices in Transnational Perspective People, Papers and Practices*, ed. Ilse About, James Brown, and Gayle Lonergan (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 17.

³²³ John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Society (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); These included “beggars”, “vagrants”, people infected with the plague and rogue soldiers in 18th century France: Denis, “Individual Identity and Identification in Eighteenth Century France.”

³²⁴ These included, for example, Indian immigrants to Southern Africa in the 19th & 20th centuries: Andrew MacDonald, “Strangers in a Strange Land: Undesirables and Border Control in Colonial Durban 1897-1910” (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2007); Andrew MacDonald, “The Identity Thieves of the Indian Ocean: Forgery, Fraud and the Origins of South African Immigration Control, 1890-1920s,” in *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History*, ed. Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter (Oxford University Press, 2012); Uma Dhupeelia-Mesthrie, “False Fathers and False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minor Sons from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” *Kronos* 40, no. Special issue: Paper Regimes (2014): 99–132; Chinese immigrants in South Africa in the 20th century: Harris, “Paper Trail: Chasing the Chinese in the Cape (1204-1933).”

³²⁵ Lance Van Sittert, “Writing on Skin: The Entangled Embodied Histories of Black Labour and Livestock Registration in the Cape Colony, c. 1860-1909,” *Kronos* 40, no. Special issue: Paper Regimes (2014): 76. I use the capitalised term “Black” here to refer to the broader range of people oppressed under the various white regimes in South Africa. When I use the lowercase signifier “black”, I am referring only to people previously classified by the colonial, Union and apartheid governments as ‘Native’/ ‘African’/ ‘Bantu’.

later Union government experimented with several methods of identification in efforts to effectively fix in time and space individual bodies to officially documented identities. And the longer history of identity documenting in South Africa – as Breckenridge and others argue – points to official efforts to circumvent the frailty and inefficiency of paper and writing to identify and monitor en masse.³²⁶

The histories of identification practices in South Africa have largely focused on the multitude of coercive pass and immigration laws that infested the lives of Black workers and immigrants in South Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Focusing predominantly on analyses of the policies and legislation that governed the regulation of labour migration and immigration in Southern Africa, the earlier literature on passes in South Africa paid little attention to the actual processes of identification.³²⁷ More recently scholars have cast a wider net to expand and develop the historiography in a number of important ways. Historians of Southern Africa whose work is situated within the historiography of the Indian Ocean World, for example, have called for a sharper focus on the “moment of ‘collision’ between migrants and immigration bureaucracy”.³²⁸ This has led to important work that pays close attention to both the ways in which colonial and Union immigration practices were racially exclusive as well as the creative ways in which individuals interacted with these systems. Indeed, Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Macdonald, and Adams – to highlight a few – have sought to draw attention to the creative ways in which people, when

³²⁶ Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*; Van Sittert, “Writing on Skin.”

³²⁷ See, for example: Alan Jeeves, “The Control of Migratory Labour on the South African Gold Mines in the Era of Kruger and Milner,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 2, no. 1 (1975): 3–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057077508707940>; Michael Savage, “The Imposition of Pass Laws on the African Population in South Africa 1916-1984,” *African Affairs* 85, no. 339 (1986): 181–205; Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910* (Pearson Education Ltd, 1994); Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*; Dhupelia-Mesthrie highlights this trend in focus in earlier scholarship on immigration in the Union Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “False Fathers and False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minor Sons from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” 101; As does Macdonald in MacDonald, “The Identity Thieves of the Indian Ocean: Forgery, Fraud and the Origins of South African Immigration Control, 1890-1920s.”

³²⁸ Quoted in Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “False Fathers and False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minor Sons from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” 101; original source: Andrew MacDonald, “Colonial Trespassers in the Making of South Africa’s International Borders, 1900 to c. 1950” (University of Cambridge, 2012), 44.

confronted with draconian registration practices, interacted with, subverted, evaded or exploited these systems.³²⁹ Moreover, as many scholars have pointed out, materials – mostly in the form of paper passes/certificates and accompanying registers – were at the heart of these systems.³³⁰ The foregrounding of the materiality of registration and identification practices – paying close and detailed attention to the paperwork and documents that constitute these processes – signals a turn that takes seriously the integral role played by material objects in these histories.³³¹

Early Pensioner Identification: Bringing ‘Order’ to the ‘Chaos’

On the 30 October 1947 the Magistrate at Port Alfred penned the following in a letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs:

On the 1st September last I assumed duty at this station, on the 4th of the month I found 400 natives gathered outside my office, on enquiring [sic] from my staff what the natives wanted I was informed that they had come to draw Old Age Pension [sic].

At 10 a.m. two members of my staff commenced paying, the pensioners entering at one door in the courtroom and going out at another door after having been paid, each had a piece of dirty paper on which his name and number was written, this was checked with paysheet and if in order, his money was handed to him.

While this paying was going on there was absolutely no control over the natives, they were all trying to get to the paying clerk at the same time, how the clerks still managed to carry on was beyond my understanding.

I endeavoured to bring some order out of this chaos, but as a large majority of them are very old and deaf and some blind and lame, I found

³²⁹ Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “False Fathers and False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minor Sons from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century”; Andrew MacDonald, “Forging the Frontiers: Travellers and Documents on the South Africa-Mozambique Border, 1890s-1940s,” *Kronos* 40, no. Special issue: Paper Regimes (2014): 154–77; Zuleiga Adams, “Demitrios Tsafendas and the Subversion of Apartheid’s Paper Regime,” *Kronos* 40, no. Special issue: Paper Regimes (2014): 198–224; MacDonald, “The Identity Thieves of the Indian Ocean: Forgery, Fraud and the Origins of South African Immigration Control, 1890-1920s.”

³³⁰ Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “Paper Regimes,” *Kronos* 40, no. Special issue: Paper Regimes (2014): 11–22 devotes a whole issue to the various paper regimes in Southern Africa.

³³¹ Kafka, *The Demon of Writing*; Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “Paper Regimes,” 19; For some examples of this see: Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Lily Saint, “Reading Subjects: Passbooks, Literature and Apartheid,” *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 1 (2012): 117–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2012.700178>; Lorena Rizzo, “Visual Impersonation—Population Registration, Reference Books and Identification in the Eastern Cape, 1950s–1960s,” *History in Africa* 41 (2014): 221–248, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.2>; Lorena Rizzo, “Gender and Visuality: Identification Photographs, Respectability and Personhood in Colonial Southern Africa in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Gender & History* 26, no. 3 (2014): 688–708, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12092/full>; Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “False Fathers and False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minor Sons from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century”; Breckenridge, “The Book of Life”; Harris, “Paper Trail: Chasing the Chinese in the Cape (1204-1933).”

it impossible to restore order. The clerks continued paying the best part of the day under those conditions.

On the 2nd instant they were again paid, but I had then take steps to avoid the crowding and pushing I saw on the first occasion [sic], with the result that payments had been made by 12.30 p.m.³³²

The above description of the “conditions” the new Magistrate at Port Alfred found during his first experience of pension payouts was a preamble to a greater issue that was revealed to him that day – that of the inadequate identification procedures. He stated: “it stands to reason that very few, if any, of the payees are known to the paying officer, with the result that any native presenting a piece of paper with the name and number of one of the pensioners on it will immediately be paid the amount due to that particular pensioner”.³³³ The Magistrate was concerned that the current procedures at payout could neither obviate dishonest behaviour by the pension recipients, nor by corrupt officials and he stated that there had been several instances in which pensioners handed over their slips of paper to find that their pension had already been paid out. While flagging the opportunities for fraud that present procedures opened up to both pensioners and paying clerk, his worry was twofold:

There is nothing to prevent a dishonest paying officer marking every pensioner who does not call for his pension on payday, as having paid them and putting the money in his own pocket, on the other hand there is nothing to prevent any pensioner endeavouring to defraud the paying officer by claiming that he has not been paid.³³⁴

The Magistrate’s anxieties about fraud were rooted in the lack of accurate forms of identifying pension recipients, and accordingly he put forward a proposal for the implementation throughout the Union of a system he had developed to counter this problem in his own district:

I have now brought the following system into practice in this office and I venture to suggest that it should be brought into practice right through the Union and that steps be taken to supply offices with the necessary card.

³³² Magistrate Port Alfred, “Mechanisation of Social Benefit Schemes,” Letter to Secretary for Native Affairs, October 30, 1947, SAB NTS 2358 626/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³³³ Magistrate Port Alfred.

³³⁴ Magistrate Port Alfred.

Each pensioner is provided with a new card on which his name, number and address is provided as [sic] also whether a Power of Attorney has been issued, if so, the name and address of the holder, on the reverse side, provision is made to indicate the month for which he was last paid and if necessary the amount paid. This card must be handed to the paying officer, whose duty it will be to write in the month for which paid and the amount, no payment to be made without presentation of the card.

It will therefore [sic] be seen that no dishonest paying officer can mark the paysheet as paid unless he has also had the card in question and no person can present a card for double payment.

The Secretary for Native Affairs, who was in the throes of finalising the arrangements for the new mechanised system, rejected this proposal stating that his office was “well aware of the opportunities for fraud that exist under the present system”.³³⁵ He continued:

Whatever system is devised, however, there will always be dishonest person who will endeavour to find some means of obtaining payment fraudulently, and it is considered that no scheme can be 100 percent foolproof. What can be done, however, is to devise a system that will reduce the risk of fraud, and this the Department feels will be accomplished by the mechanisation scheme which it has been decided to introduce early next year.

You are already aware of the main principles of the scheme. Acquittances on the pay vouchers will have to be made either by means of full signatures or thumb prints and no X-marks will be permitted.

This extract introduces an important theme: the way in which material objects of identification interacted with official desire, on the one hand, to maintain ‘order’ and ‘control’ over black pensioners, and on the other hand, to control against real or imagined acts of fraud. In the NAD files that deal with the implementation and then the mechanisation of the pension system there is evidence of a particular dissonance: the desire across all levels of bureaucrats to develop foolproof panoptic systems (that went hand in hand with a glorifying trust in technological advances) diluted by insecurities or anxieties about their ability to effectively remain in control of ‘native’ pensioners.

The early procedures for administering old age and blind pensions were fairly lax in terms of the emphasis they placed on the standardised identification

³³⁵ SNA, “Reply to Magistrate Port Alfred,” November 12, 1947, SAB NTS 2358 628/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

of pensioners. In the early stages of the implementation of the Pension Laws Amendment Act the mechanisms set up for identification were unsophisticated. Upon the award of a pension, each pensioner was allocated a fixed number that was specific to the district in which the pensioner resided. There existed a separate series of numbers for old age and blind pensioners: old age pensioners' identity numbers were prefixed by the letter 'A' and followed by the pensioner's unique number (allocated in numerical order as applications were received and processed), while blind pension numbers were prefixed by the letter 'B' followed by a number. If pensioners relocated permanently to another district then their pension numbers would be invalidated and they would be allocated new numbers specific to their new district. Pension officers were instructed to make use of these identity numbers on all records and documents relative to pensioners. The circular stressed that "in order to avoid confusion it is essential that there should be no variation in the number allotted to a pensioner or in the spelling of his name after it has been placed on record".³³⁶ For this identification system to work, it was imperative that the paysheets and other documents and records relating to the pensioners in each district adhered strictly to the above command. Pension officers were instructed to take "great care" in order to prevent the impersonation of pension recipients.³³⁷ How officials were to go about preventing this was thus up to their own discretion and no clear instruction was provided in the circular as to how precisely to ensure that the person receiving the grant was the registered pensioner or that, in the case of a power of attorney being granted, the pension money reached the pensioner entitled to it.

Several Native Commissioners and Magistrates raised the issue of the accurate identification of pensioners at payouts and there was a frequent call for the introduction of identification cards and for the implementation of a system that would allow authorising officers to check proof of identity of pensioners at payouts. Writing to the Secretary for Native Affairs on 4 August 1945, the Native Commissioner at Lydenburg put forward a suggestion that the "Department

³³⁶ Smit, "Circular No. 14 of 1944: Old Age Pensions and Blind Persons Pensions for Natives."

³³⁷ Smit.

consider the printing of identity cards for issue to the beneficiaries”.³³⁸
Expounding on his motivation for the suggestion he wrote:

That a type of identity card is necessary for each individual where a large number of payments are made seems obvious. Otherwise it is necessary to ascertain from a special register what the number of each individual claiming payment is. Besides serving as a means of identifying claimants, the system facilitates rapid and accurate calculation of the amount required on each day payments are effected and the denomination in which the money is required, and further serves as a check on the amount spent.

As the Department may not have considered the details involved in effecting payments I will describe shortly the system evolved at this office. At the inception of the schemes, cards, differing in colour and size for the three types of pension, were issued to successful applicants. On the days set aside for payment the pensioners hand their cards to a native constable who sorts the cards numerically in their classes. The clerk then checks them against the paysheet, sorts them according to the amounts due in each case, and records the number. From this he calculates the amount and denomination of money required. Whilst the money is being fetched the native constable lines the pensioners up in the desired order, e.g. Old Age Pensioners first, those due to receive 5/- each numerically in a group, then those to receive 10/- and so on. The liability to make errors is thus reduced to a minimum.³³⁹

One can read in these localised identification documents the intersection between efforts to identify pensioners and other practices of identifying black subjects that had long been in place. The development of these systems also somewhat ‘interrupts’ – to borrow Hayes’ concept³⁴⁰ – existing narratives of registration by situating this system of registration for entitlements as one component in the much larger (and coercive) network of tax and labour registration that had been forming and transforming for decades. It is likely that the documents produced to identify pensioners in local districts were modelled (or at least borrowed features from) the multitude of passes and tax certificates already in circulation in the Union.

³³⁸ NC Lydenburg, “Payment of Social Pensions’: Letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs,” August 4, 1945, SAB NTS 8293 24/349/A, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³³⁹ NC Lydenburg.

³⁴⁰ Hayes, “Taxing Subjects, Colonial Systems and African Publics in the Union of South Africa & Northern Namibia, 1929-46,” 1 Hayes uses the concept of interruption to make a case for the possibilities that are opened up to see established notions (in her case ‘indirect rule’) in history in a different light when we allow different media (textual, oral, visual and material) “to interrupt each other now and again.”

1322

G.P.-S.5438-1944-5-2,500-200. B. Revenue/Inkomste 401.

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.—UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.

Department of Native Affairs.—Departement van Naturellesake.

Tax Identity No. 113/79/91
 Belastingaangiftenommer

Last Tax Receipt No. and Year 190.703/45/30
 Laaste Belastingkwitansie No. en Jaar

Tax Liability:—
 Belasting-aanspreeklikheid:—

General Tax £	Year	<u>46</u>
Algemene Belasting	Jaar	
Local Tax £	Year	<u>46</u>
Plaaslike Belasting	Jaar	
Quitrent £	Year	
Rekomsie	Jaar	

F209271

Date Stamp.—Datumstempel.

NATIVE ADMINISTRATION ACT, No. 33 of 1927.
 NATURELLE-ADMINISTRASIE WET, No. 33 van 1927.

PASS.—PAS.

(Proclamation No. 150 of 1934.—Proklamasie No. 150 van 1934.)

Granted to:—
 Uitgereik aan:—

Name (native name) Eddie
 Naam (naturellenama)

Name known by Bonana
 Naam waaronder bekend

Tax registration no. and district 113/79/91 Tabankulu
 Belasting-registrasie No. en distrik

Location or place of residence Leibindeni
 Lokaasie of woonplek

Tribe or nationality Bando
 Stam of nasionaliteit

Travelling to Glencoe
 Reisende na

By way of Rail
 Langs (Route—Roete.)

For the purpose of Job as under the Contract
 Vir die doel om

Has in his possession 30 days
 In besit van (Stock or property.—Vee of eienom.)

District/Distrik Tabankulu Lusung O'Boor.—Uitroikingaanspreek.

Designation.—Ampatitel.

N.B.—This pass confers no authority to move stock.
 N.B.—Hierdie pas verleen geen reg om vee saam te neem nie.
 FREE AREAS.—The Province of the Transvaal and the Province of the Orange Free State, excluding the native areas scheduled under Act No. 27 of 1913, or any amendment thereof.
 VREESTREKE.—Die Provinsie Transvaal en die Provinsie Oranje-Vrystaat behalwe die ingelyste natuurelgebiede ingelyste van Wet No. 27 van 1913, of enige wysiging daarvan.

Figure 4: Native Tax Receipt and Document of Identification
 Figure 5: A Pass Issued in the District of Tabankulu

G.P.-S.5430-1944-5-2,500-150. S. Revenue/Inkomste 311.

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.—UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.

COLLECTION ON BEHALF OF OTHER DISTRICTS.—INVORDERING TEN BELANG VAN 'N ANDER DISTRIKTE.

NATIVE TAX RECEIPT under Act No. 41 of 1925. M/OD 849186
 and DOCUMENT OF IDENTIFICATION under Act No. 24 of 1923. 1945

Previous Year's Receipt.—Kwitansie van vorige jaar

No. _____ Date/Datum _____ Service Contract No. _____
 Waar uitgereik _____ Dienskontrakno _____

Employer's name _____ Tax Identity No. 163/2/2627
 Wêrekgewer se naam _____ Belastingidentifikaasieno. _____

Holder's name and surname _____ Holder's thumb or
 Houer se voornaam en van _____ vinger-impresie _____

Father's name _____ Chief's name _____
 Vader se naam _____ Kaptein se naam _____

Headman's name _____ Tribe or race _____
 Hoofman se naam _____ Stam of volk _____

Domicile. On private land/in a location. _____ Name of Farm or Location _____
 Domsille. Op private grond/in 'n lokaasie. _____ Naam van plaas of lokaasie _____
 (Deixte words inapplicable.—Skraap woorde wat nie van toepassing is nie.)

DISTRICT of Domicile _____
 DISTRIK van domsille _____

Annual liability: Local Tax _____ Quitrent _____
 Jaarlikse laste: Plaaslike belasting £ _____ Erfpag £ _____
 Still owing: Local Tax _____ Quitrent _____
 Nog onbetaald: Plaaslike belasting £ _____ Erfpag £ _____

Received from holder ONE POUND TEN SHILLINGS for GENERAL AND LOCAL TAXES for 1945
 Van houer ontvang EEN POND TIEN SHELINGS vir ALGEMENE EN PLAASLIKE BELASTINGS vir 1945

Holder's signature _____ Receiver: Issuing Officer _____
 Houer se handtekening _____ Ontvanger: Uitroekende Beampte _____

NOTE.—General and Local Taxes fall due on 1st January in every year. Failure to pay before 31st March is an offence punishable with fine or imprisonment.
 NOOT.—Algemene en Plaaslike belasting is op 1 Januarie van elke jaar verskuldig. Versuim om voor 31 Maart te betaal is 'n oortreding strafbaar met boete of gevangenisstraf.

Early methods of identifying pensioners were developed for a number of specific purposes. Initially it was left to local authorising officers to decide how to handle this. The Native Commissioner at Lydenburg's suggestion stemmed as much out of the desire to lighten the administrative burden on the payout officers as from any apparent fears of impersonation or fraud. He argued that "besides serving as a means of identifying claimants, the system facilitates rapid and accurate calculation of the amount required on each day payments are effected and the denomination in which the money is required, and further serves as a check on the amount spent."³⁴¹ At a conference for Native Commissioners held in 1945, at which officials discussed a number of issues emerging from the practical application of the pension laws, the subject of identification cards was raised – for many of the same reasons as had been raised by the Native Commissioner at Lydenburg. However, the matter was dismissed as not being of major concern at head office.

Mr Rhodes, who had been instrumental in devising the initial system as laid out in General Circular No. 14 of 1944, was opposed to the cards. He drew on the experience of a similar system that had been discussed when the Military Allotments came in. He explained that at the time "it was suggested that a little disc should be made by the Mint and handed to each Native." In fact, this system had been instituted for Military Allotments to Coloured South Africans but dismissed when it came to black South Africans as "it was felt that it was open to fraud - if a Native loses his disc another can pick it up".³⁴² Although Rhodes acknowledged that the practice by certain Native Commissioners of handing out "little slips of paper" for identification purposes was working quite well, there was no strong desire amongst those in the upper echelons of the NAD at this stage to implement a common system of identification for pensioners. He added further that "we had thought of giving the Native an identification card or letter of authority with a thumb print on it, but that idea was discarded too". Ultimately, the department decided the best course of action would be for the Native Commissioners to devise their own systems as they saw fit. Somewhat

³⁴¹ NC Lydenburg, "Payment of Social Pensions": Letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs."

³⁴² *Notes on the Native Commissioners Conference.*

contradictorily, Rhodes noted that it seemed that there was less chance of fraud in “the Reserves” than in the larger towns.

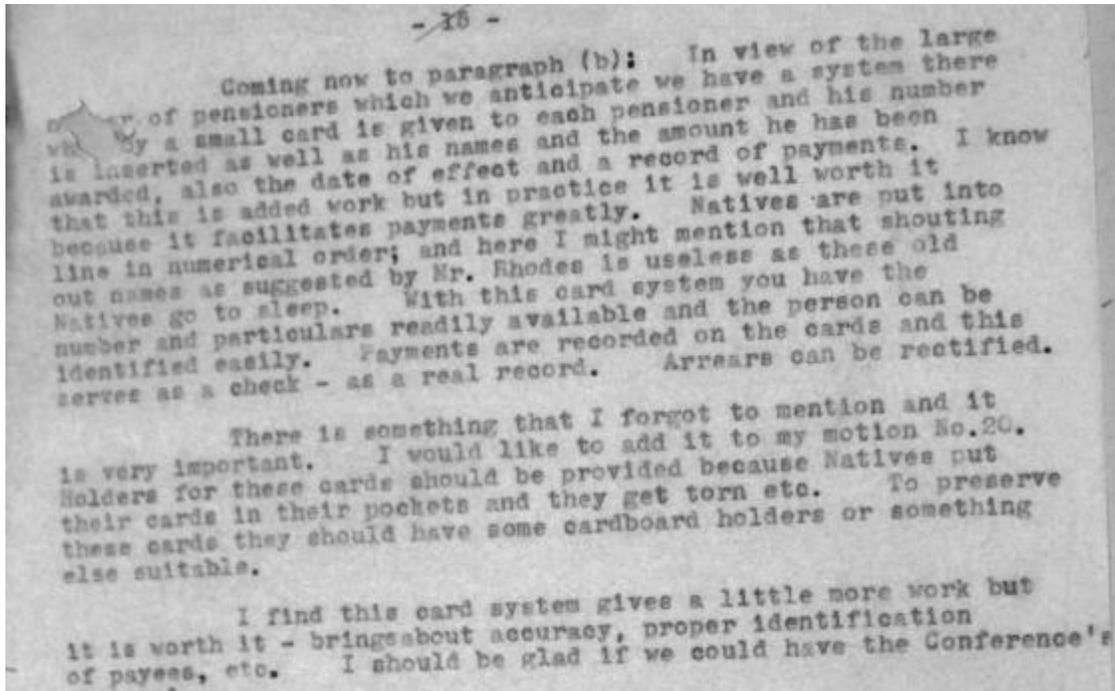


Figure 6: Description of Localised ID Card System

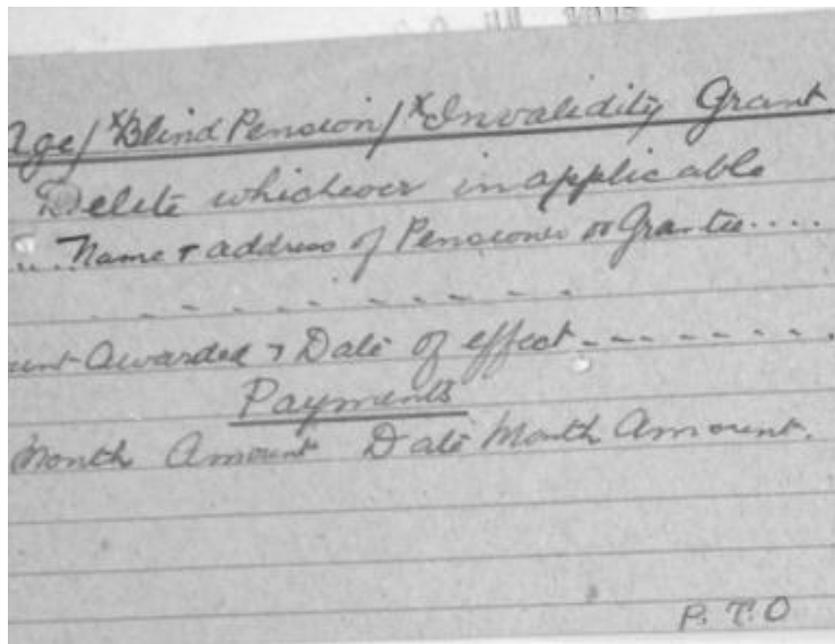


Figure 7: Specimen Pension Identity Card Proposed Prototype by one Native Commissioner at the NC Conference 1945

Another attendee at the conference, who was involved in the devising of the Military Allotment identification system, contributed a further concern with the proposed identity cards: the limits and frailty of paper. “The trouble,” Mr Tweedie explained, “is that the cards get so mutilated and destroyed that you cannot read them.”³⁴³ In fact, he was a proponent of this identification system – also for reasons of efficiency – but felt that “some kind of container” was essential to prevent damage to the cards. Thus, in the early phases of the implementation of the Pension Laws Amendment Act accurately identifying old age pensioners was low on the Native Affairs Department’s list of concerns with regards to the pension system. It was officials on the ground who, interested in streamlining a laborious process of pension payouts, advocated for standardised objects of identification.

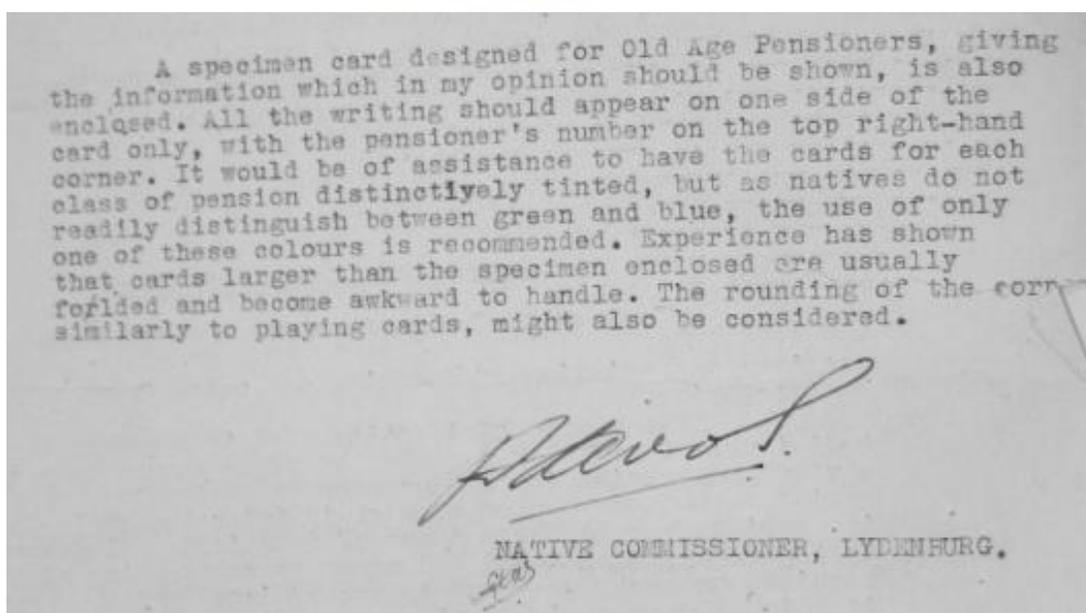


Figure 8: Native Commissioner at Lydenburg's Description of Proposed Standardised Pensioner Identity Card (Specimen Absent)

Centralising Pension Administration in the NAD

The conversion to mechanisation begot a centralisation of all aspects of the system. With its onset, head office required district authorising officers to

³⁴³ “Notes on the Native Commissioners’ Conference on the Mechanisation of Social Benefits.”

complete applications for new awards in duplicate in order to submit the duplicate-original to Pretoria, where they would be checked and granted final approval. The control of the award pensions was thus restored to head office.

The head office of the NAD renumbered all pensioners, assigning each pensioner a unique national pensioner identity number – “to be retained for life irrespective of any change in paying office”.³⁴⁴ Metal identity discs, each punched with a hole to facilitate their stringing, accompanied the initial schedule of pensioners (mechanically prepared using the master cards), which contained the newly assigned pension numbers. Only pensioners were permitted to use their identity disc, and in cases in which a pensioner was too frail to make the trip to the payouts and thus needed a power of attorney, pensioners had to register their power of attorney with the Native Affairs Department.³⁴⁵ Powers of Attorney were provided a separate identity card which bore the name and number of the pensioner, the type of pension, the name of the nominee and the signature or thumbprint of the nominee. The latter were to be extracted on all pension applications forms (an ordinary office stamp pad was used to procure thumbprints and not proper fingerprinting materials) as well as registration forms for power of attorneys for comparison purposes, should the need ever arise in the future to check the identity of the individuals. From the time of conversion, the Native Affairs Department no longer permitted ‘X’ marks of any kind, an apparently ineffectual practice which had been used widely across the districts to signify the presence of an individual pensioner at payouts and proof that the money had been received.

The mechanisation scheme also centralised the procedure to be followed at pension payouts across the Union. The circular contained the following instructions:

³⁴⁴ Mears, “General Circular No. 2 of 1948.”

³⁴⁵ The formalising of the registration of Powers of Attorney would have caused some level of hardship for certain pensioners, especially those who had previously relied on children or adolescents to collect their payments who, by virtue of this arrangement, would constantly change. The formalising would require the pensioner to make the trip to the district office every time her power of attorney changed, in order to register the new one. Although powers of attorney were previously required to be registered with the district office, it appears that there was some laxity in enforcing this under the decentralised scheme - as evidenced by the Native Commissioner who pointed out the above arrangement in a letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs.

As pensioners will have identity discs it will simplify the paying process if they are lined up in numerical order. Each pensioner should be required to produce his disc and state his name. The relative voucher or vouchers should be extracted from the pack and the name given should then be compared with that printed on the voucher. The pensioner should then be required to thumbprint or sign the voucher and will receive the amount due to him.³⁴⁶

Here, one can begin to see how the material objects were integral mediators in ensuring the efficient functioning of the payout process. Indeed, the very integrity of the mechanised system rested on the preservation of the materials that embodied it. A failure to protect their fragility would result in a breakdown of the system; a thwarting of efficiency. For example, even the slightest mutilation – such as a pinhole – could make it impossible for the punched-card voucher to pass through the accounting machine.³⁴⁷ Thus, a paragraph in the circular, written in all uppercase letters urged that the utmost care be taken by paying officers when handling the vouchers.³⁴⁸ Furthermore the small, coin-like nature of the identity discs meant that they were prone to be lost easily. Indeed, no sooner had the mechanised scheme been rolled out, the Secretary for Native Affairs began to receive letters and affidavits from Magistrates and Native Commissioners requesting duplicate identity discs for pensioners whose original discs had been lost or stolen.

With mechanisation the NAD introduced a centralised and uniform system to identify pensioners. Aside from efficiency and the opening up of statistical possibilities, those at the head office saw another major benefit to the identification system that would be introduced hand-in-hand with the centralised punched-card system: it was believed the system would go a considerable way to reducing the “risk of fraud”.³⁴⁹ Possibly to circumvent the weaknesses of paper, the NAD decided to do away with paper identification cards altogether and opted, instead, for identification objects made of more durable substance: hexagonal

³⁴⁶ Mears, “General Circular No. 2 of 1948.”

³⁴⁷ See Steven Lubar, “Do Not Fold, Spindle or Mutilate’: A Cultural History of the Punch Card,” *The Journal of American Culture* 15, no. 4 (1992): 43–55, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1992.1504_43.x/full.

³⁴⁸ Mears, “General Circular No. 2 of 1948.”

³⁴⁹ SNA, “Reply to Magistrate Port Alfred,” November 12, 1947.

metal identity discs. The secretary for Native Affairs placed the order for the creation of 500 000 of these tags with the director of the South African Mint on 23 September 1947.³⁵⁰ The Mint was instructed to punch the letters “N.A.D.” on each of the discs, and number 490 000 discs 1 – 490 000 in consecutive numerical order. Each number would eventually correspond to a pension recipient under the new system. The discs would work in concert with the new regulation that required pensioners to either sign their full signatures or provide their thumbprints, and from that point onwards no “X marks” were permitted.

Indeed, the committee believed that mechanisation when paired with the “finger print receipt scheme which it is proposed to introduce concurrently” would be effective in reducing the peculation of government money.³⁵¹ It is difficult to know whether the newfound interest in preventing fraud was based on actual attempts to impersonate. Two years earlier, representatives from the higher echelons of the Native Affairs department had dismissed as unnecessary a centralised system of identification and the accurate identification of pensioners at payouts, especially in reserves where the possibility of fraud or impersonation was judged to be so low as to be of little concern. Thus, over the course of a relatively short period of time impersonation, fraud and centralised identification went from being sidelined issues to central issues in pension administration at the head office of the Native Affairs Department.

Materiality in NAD Pension Administration

It should be clear by now that to examine the administrative history of the NAD pension system in the mid-twentieth century requires a simultaneous consideration of the role of the material objects embedded in the systems. These included both the earlier paper systems and the subsequent machines and materials used in the mechanised system. As is evident in this chapter’s

³⁵⁰ SNA, “Letter to the Director of the South African Mint,” September 23, 1947, SAB NTS 2358 626/283, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³⁵¹ Union of South Africa, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Certain Proposals to Mechanise the Social Benefit Payments of Native Affairs*.

discussion, I consider these objects to be integral actors in the shaping of the system.

The material objects that constituted an integral part of the NAD pension system indeed support a conceptualisation that envisages them in all their theorised complexity, dynamism, and unpredictability. The machines, punched-cards, metal identity discs, signatures, and fingerprints both shaped pension administration and were shaped by the various human actors who interacted with them; state officials and pensioners alike. The various officials who devised, produced or enlisted these objects imagined them as disciplining

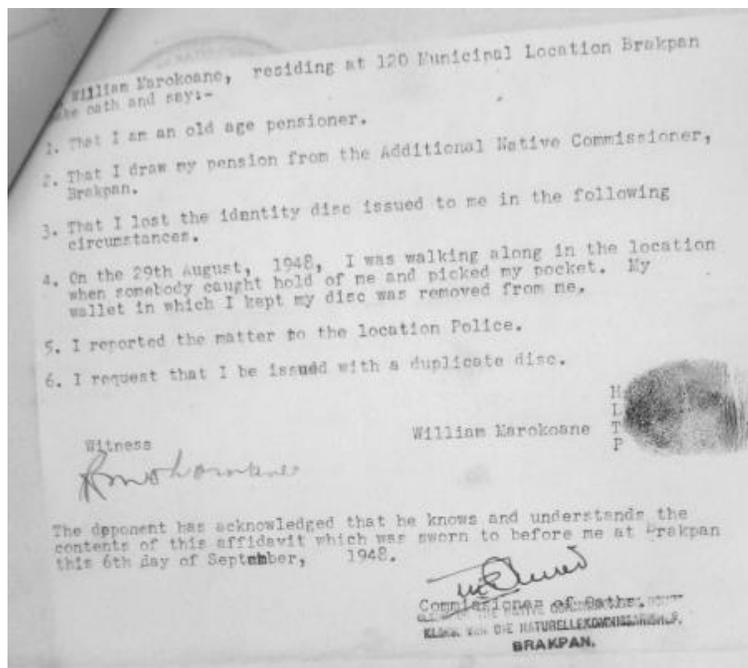


Figure 9: Affidavit for Lost Pensioner Identity Disc

tools of order and control whose function was to produce efficient administration at payouts and in subsequent accounting. Following Hoskins (who draws on Gell), the machines, punched-cards, and identity discs can be said to have been “invested with some of the intentionality of their creators”,³⁵² but constituting something more than mere conductors of these intentions they, to draw on Latour, acted as “mediators”.³⁵³ In other words they went further than merely

³⁵² Hoskins, “Agency, Biography and Objects,” 75.

³⁵³ Latour, “The Berlin Key Or How to Do Words with Things,” 19.

representing, symbolising or transporting the meaning of the desired social relations (to order and control) and instead actively produced and performed them and sometimes caused them to malfunction. Yet their inherent ‘malleability’³⁵⁴ also became quickly evident as certain actors instrumentalised some of the objects to their own end.

The objects embedded in the mechanised system were by no means original. While they comprised products of new technologies introduced at NAD head office in the late 1940s, the materials resembled and shared actors with other paperwork regimes of the twentieth century. Moreover, later registration systems shared features and actors with the earlier one under examination.³⁵⁵ It is perhaps useful, then, to conceptualise the material objects of this system as constituting segments in what Latour has termed a “syntagmatic line”. The “syntagmatic line” encapsulates an understanding of histories of technologies that moves away from conceptual binaries that categorise our thinking into distinct and opposing sets of “two repertoires”, and instead imagines it as a chain linked together by “assemblies of associations and substitutions” – both human and non-human – that are continuously in flux and whose interactions determine the specific “socio-technical” path specific innovations take.³⁵⁶ The flux signifies their simultaneous state of shaping and being shaped by the various actors that constitute a system in a way that renders the socio-technical inextricable, and elucidates the elastic rather than lineal nature of the history of technological systems.³⁵⁷ Power and domination, in this framework, are end products of the interplay between various assemblages of human and non-human agents and not a fundamental component of any one part of the whole.³⁵⁸ Importantly, at any given point in time there is no certainty about which direction the “socio-

³⁵⁴ Hoskin, “Agency, Biography and Objects,” 75.

³⁵⁵ See Breckenridge, “The Book of Life”; Keith Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: The Apartheid Bewysburo and the End of Documentary Government,” in *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³⁵⁶ Latour, “Technology Is Society Made Durable,” 113.

³⁵⁷ Latour, 113.

³⁵⁸ Latour, 110–14; Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 64.

technical path” will take.³⁵⁹ One might, then, think of the non-human and human actors that constituted innovations in the registration practices of the pension system in the NAD in the 1940s as *assemblages of substitutions and associations* that comprised links in the chain of both the smaller network of pension registration practice and in the larger networks of registration and identification practices in South Africa. The punched-cards, identity discs and machines might be conceptualised as substitutions in smaller networks, as well as associations in the wider network of systems of registration – the deleterious nature of which were not always necessarily obvious in the moment.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the NAD’s project of mechanising pension administration in the late 1940s and examined the specific features of mechanised pensioner registration and administrations. It has argued that the conversion from manual to mechanised administration signalled a shift in policy at head office as top officials began to enforce top-heavy administration of the system through the centralisation of beneficiaries’ personal data. I have argued that this project provided NAD officials with significant experience in information processing technologies which enabled the state to gather centralised data on all pension subjects – including those in the countryside. The state’s goal in gathering this data had less to do with generating generalised knowledge about its population – in the Foucauldian sense – and more to do with creating the mechanisms through which its population could be identified, tracked and managed.

I have also made a case for the centrality and significance of material artefacts in pension administration in the mid-twentieth century. These objects mediated and shaped the system while they were simultaneously shaped and transformed by the people who interacted with them. The objects embedded in the mechanised system were not original and functioned as both substitutions in the smaller network of pension administration and associations in wider systems of registration. While many of them were products of new technologies

³⁵⁹ Latour, “Technology Is Society Made Durable,” 113.

introduced at NAD head office in the late 1940s, the materials resembled and shared actors with other paperwork regimes of the twentieth century. This chapter has contended that desire for efficiency across all levels of the NAD underpinned the mechanisation project. In all the systems devised to manage and control 'native' pensioners – whether it was for the purpose of bringing pensioners into 'order' during payouts or controlling for acts of impersonation and double claims – materials were central. However, the materials accompanying mechanisation carried with them the promise of efficiency and uniformity that would obviate the failures of the previous manual, paper systems.

At one level these objects worked to physically control and order pensioners. The Secretary for Native Affairs imagined that at payouts the metal identity discs, bearing only the pensioner's number, would make it "a comparatively simple matter to line them up in numerical order" when it came time to pay out pensions. That the disc contained only the pension number was an important detail and would add a further check of identity – "each pensioner will be required to produce his disc and state his name when his turn comes for payment".³⁶⁰ Hence these objects embodied official desire to, not only, secure the system but also to discipline and enforce a level of 'civility' in the procedural practices of pension payouts at their stations across the Union. At another level, the punched-cards – with their ability to store data and generate tabulated information – offered promises of greater surveillance and centralised control of the system. The next chapter thus considers, in part, the broader effects of these objects on the future developments of the system.

³⁶⁰ SNA, "Reply to Magistrate Port Alfred," November 12, 1947.

Chapter Five - Review Trumps Repeal: The Political Expediency of Keeping Intact Black Pensions Under National Party-Rule

Introduction

Social pension registration implemented by the NAD in the 1940s signalled the onset of a large-scale 'inclusive' registration system for the Union's subjects. This registration system might be thought of as somewhat of a disjuncture³⁶¹ amidst other registration systems in the Union. Firstly, unlike the multitude of extant systems of registration for black South Africans it was neither an inherently coercive system nor did it seek to extract taxes. Breckenridge notes that "South Africa, in comparison with other societies, has been profoundly shaped over the course of the twentieth century by coercive regimes of racialised documentary registration".³⁶² Many historians of Southern Africa have demonstrated that registration – and with it – identification practices in South Africa developed specifically for the purpose of surveillance of population groups whom the white polity needed to control and/or deemed problematic.³⁶³ Indeed, efforts to register and assign unique identities amongst individuals in various populations in South Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century centred on registration and identification practices that had as their focus the specific goals of policing, regulating and controlling 'native' labour and (especially what the white citizenry determined to be 'undesirable') immigrants.³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ Pinney, "Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?," 269.

³⁶² Breckenridge, "The Book of Life," 226.

³⁶³ See, for example Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*; Van Sittert, "Writing on Skin"; MacDonald, "Forging the Frontiers: Travellers and Documents on the South Africa-Mozambique Border, 1890s-1940s"; Harris, "Paper Trail: Chasing the Chinese in the Cape (1204-1933)"; Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "False Fathers and False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minor Sons from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century."

³⁶⁴ See, for example, Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "Cat and Mouse Games: The State, Indians in the Cape and the Permit System, 1900s-1920s," in *Identification and Registration Practices in Transnational Perspective People, Papers and Practices*, ed. Ilsen About, James Brown, and Gayle Lonergan (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 187-88; Harris, "Paper Trail: Chasing the Chinese in the Cape (1204-1933)"; Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "Paper Regimes"; MacDonald, "Forging the Frontiers: Travellers and Documents on the South Africa-Mozambique Border, 1890s-1940s."

Secondly, its reach was extensive; it was the first registration system to catalogue and centralise the identification data of individual black South African men and women resident in both urban and rural areas across the Union. For black South Africans for much of the first half of the twentieth century, most registration practices focused on the registration and identification of men in urban areas. Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie argues that “the position of African males in South Africa’s urban spaces was aptly summed up by a migrant labourer in Peter Abrahams’ novel: ‘Man’s life is controlled by pieces of paper’”.³⁶⁵ Many scholars have argued that such registration practices served the state in allowing it to collect and produce knowledge about its citizens. In 1998, Scott argued that “legibility... the administrative ordering of nature and society” constitutes one of four crucial elements that work quietly and dangerously together to produce fertile ground for insidious state social engineering.³⁶⁶ He maintained that “the legibility of a society provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering, high modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the levelled social terrain on which to build”.³⁶⁷ In Scott’s Foucauldian articulation, the state desires to render its population ‘legible’ in order to make society knowable and thus controllable and “manipulable”.³⁶⁸ However, Breckenridge has compellingly argued that when it came to knowledge about its population, the South African state was highly selective, and its approach to registering rural black South Africans was torpid at best – exemplified in the absence of a coherent system of civil registration in the countryside.³⁶⁹ Moreover,

³⁶⁵ Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “Paper Regimes,” 11.

³⁶⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4–5.

³⁶⁷ Scott, 5.

³⁶⁸ Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “Paper Regimes,” 12; Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, 2.

³⁶⁹ Keith Breckenridge, “No Will to Know: The Rise and Fall of African Civil Registration in Twentieth-Century South Africa,” in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 182, 2012, 357–383, <http://wiser.wits.ac.za/sites/default/files/Breckenridge%20-%202012%20-%20No%20will%20to%20know%20the%20rise%20and%20fall%20of%20African%20civi.pdf>; Keith Breckenridge, “No Will to Know: Biometric Registration and the Limited Curiosity of the Gatekeeper State,” in *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 115–37.

he argues that, at its core, the South African state of the twentieth century was a gatekeeper state whose efforts to 'know' its population developed for very specific purposes; namely, "to control the labour districts, the policing of work-seekers as they entered the cities, careful biographical registration of white... citizens, but comprehensive disregard for Africans in the countryside".³⁷⁰ Davie, taking issue with the flattening effect of Foucault's concept of governmentality, argues against the 'all-knowing' motivation of the South African state and highlights the dynamic ways in which multiple actors define the limits of knowledge-driven power.³⁷¹ She argues that when knowledge production is considered through the conceptual framework of co-production,³⁷² the actual powers of experts and the state are significantly constrained by intermediary actors and the limits of 'governmentality' (or the state's failure to manage its population) are revealed. Davie asserts that while "officials in the 1950s and 1960s dreamed of achieving total control over all population groups" in actuality "the government displayed a quixotic interest in monitoring society".³⁷³

Thus, recent scholarship maintains that the South African state did not, per se, resemble in its governance Foucauldian governmentality,³⁷⁴ in which

³⁷⁰ Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, 214.

³⁷¹ Grace Davie's recent book *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa* examines the longer history of the production of knowledge about poverty in South Africa, demonstrating that a multiplicity of actors have harnessed the concept of poverty and sought to produce and shape understandings of poverty for a number of different (often contrasting and conflicting) political ends. She elucidates how poverty knowledge production has never been apolitical or unbiased, nor has it emerged from dispassionate motives. Rather "the poverty question grew out of the messy, often violent process of capitalist transformation that structured Southern African society in the wake of the mineral revolution". (37). Moreover, Davie argues that the "expert" knowledge produced by social/human scientists throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century was constantly mediated, hedged and even contaminated by the norms, conventional wisdoms, ideologies, practices, politics and idioms of the time. Even before "poverty" was reconstructed as an "object of scientific enquiry" in the early decades of the twentieth century writers, intellectuals and capitalists alike generated "lay knowledge" on the issue. (36); Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*.

³⁷² For a fuller delineation of the concept of co-production see Davie, 11.

³⁷³ Grace Davie, "Rethinking Governmentality: Urban Planning, Rural Betterment, and the Apartheid State," in *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143.

³⁷⁴ Foucault describes 'governmentality' as the complex set of power relations that became characteristic of the state in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which was enabled by the merging of multiple processes and directed its energies toward the 'problem of population'. This mode of power produced 'government' and became the overarching power form, replacing (in status) earlier types of power (sovereignty and discipline). Governmentality is also, importantly, "the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into

gathering knowledge about its population – in the form of reliable vital statistics in order to better provide for its health – forms an essential part of a tripartite mode of power.³⁷⁵ Foucault argues that as predominant modes of rule developed in the West and shifted from sovereignty, to discipline, to governance, earlier modes of power were not eliminated but rather subsumed by later ones. He states, “we need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangulated, sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security”.³⁷⁶ Out of governmentality, in Foucauldian terms, emerges a set of bounded and interrelated “savoirs”³⁷⁷ about its population. These facilitate the enactment of biopower: the control of populations through the “administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” in order to confront the problems of population, including “birth rate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration”.³⁷⁸ Foucault asserts that the rise of biopower is inextricably linked to the development of industrial capitalism, which would not have been possible without a new political economy which linked the regulation of the population to economic processes.

Inter alia, Davie argues that far from adopting a proactive stance in its production of knowledge about its population the South African state took a far more haphazardly curative approach, embarking on investigations only as a result of external pressure, when facing the threat of unrest or when such investigations were undertaken to delay the production of legislation.³⁷⁹ Breckenridge, too,

the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes ‘governmentalised’”. Foucault, “Governmentality,” 104.

³⁷⁵ Foucault, 102.

³⁷⁶ Foucault, 102.

³⁷⁷ Foucault uses *savoir* to refer to knowledge in general as opposed to ‘*connaissance*’; which denotes disciplinary or scientific knowledge. In his own words, “*Savoir* refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to *connaissance* and for this or that enunciation to be for-mulated”. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London; New York: Routledge Classics, 1989), 15.

³⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power Over Life,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 262.

³⁷⁹ Davie, “Rethinking Governmentality: Urban Planning, Rural Betterment, and the Apartheid State,” 143; Others have made similar similar regarding state commissions of inquiry. See, for instance Dubow, “Introduction,” 10; and Duncan, “The Origins of the Welfare State in Pre-Apartheid South Africa,” 114.

maintains that even at the height of its social engineering project the apartheid state was not interested in ‘knowing’ its black subjects. Rather, it was interested in using biometric data to *index* its subjects in order to better control their movement.³⁸⁰

This chapter considers the implications of a registration practice that was ostensibly benign, in that it was borne of policy that sought to include and confer – albeit limited – “acknowledged rights” on certain individuals³⁸¹ and whose reach included black men and women in the countryside. What kind of information did state officials attempt to generate about the Union’s subjects? I argue that the centralised data generated as a result of the mechanisation project was also harnessed for specific, less benign, purposes after 1948. The previous chapter discussed the significant shifts in administrative practice that occurred in the first few years of the implementation of the Pension Laws Amendment Act of 1944 in the NAD. Here, I explore the implications of the centralisation of the system that accompanied mechanisation, focusing specifically on the department’s introduction of a project to systematically review and limit the number of pensions awarded to black South Africans shortly after the National Party came to power in the Union. This chapter argues that the adoption of mechanised technologies, a project initiated by NAD officials in the Smuts administration pre-1948, enabled the NAD head office to catalogue centralised registration data on pension recipients. This, in turn, facilitated in tracking pensioners and keeping a check on (and reining in the authority of) local authorising officers during the first decade of apartheid. Indeed, while explicitly the motivation for mechanisation was to simplify and reduce the workload in all the offices involved, implicitly it had the effect of streamlining a centralised system of registration and administration that saw power concentrated at NAD head office. Head office’s newfound bird’s eye view of the system, engendered by the central organisation of pensioners’ personal details, facilitated a marked shift in black pension policy that accompanied the National Party’s victory.

³⁸⁰ Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: The Apartheid Bewysburo and the End of Documentary Government.”

³⁸¹ Breckenridge and Szepter, “Editors’ Introduction: Recognition and Registration: The Infrastructure of Personhood in World History,” 30.

NAD officials in Pretoria – apparently consumed by the “utilitarian cost-saving” that would become distinctive of Verwoerd’s era³⁸² – naively imagined a seamless rationalisation of the pension system. The impressive efficiencies engendered by the mechanised system perhaps contributed to head office’s overestimation of their abilities to monitor the changing circumstances of pension recipients in order to limit as far as possible the number of social benefits awarded to black South Africans. In a letter to, presumably, the Secretary of the Treasury the NAD’s Principal Accountant boasted that “die pensioenbewysstukke vir die hele Unie se pensioentrekkers naamlik 254,908, verlede maand, in 7½ werksdae voltooi is” (the pension vouchers for all the pensioners in the Union, namely 254 908, were completed in 7½ working days last month).³⁸³ He continued that the work under the mechanised system was “baie vereenvoudig, dit is baie meer akuraat en netjies wat in die algemeen groter doeltreffendheid in die hand werk” (greatly simplified, it is more accurate and neat which in general drives greater efficiencies).³⁸⁴ Notwithstanding the overestimation of its own capabilities – a characteristic that, Breckenridge argues, plagued the NAD throughout the 1950s³⁸⁵ – mechanisation made it possible for the NAD head office to keep tabs on the activities of local authorising officers, thereby significantly reducing their authority and with it their ability to act as mediators³⁸⁶ and shape the workings of the system in their districts.³⁸⁷ Moreover, centralised data allowed head office to home in on ‘problem areas’ and, later, to more easily organise and trace pensioners for review.

Seekings and Natrass describe the fact that the National Party did not abolish pensions for black South Africans as “curious” in light of the fact that after

³⁸² Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: The Apartheid Bewysburo and the End of Documentary Government,” 140; Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, 62–73.

³⁸³ Eerste Rekenmeester, “Natuurlike Pensioene,” May 1950, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria .

³⁸⁴ Eerste Rekenmeester.

³⁸⁵ Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: The Apartheid Bewysburo and the End of Documentary Government.”

³⁸⁶ Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 39.

³⁸⁷ Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: The Apartheid Bewysburo and the End of Documentary Government”; K. Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid,” *History Workshop Journal* 59, no. 1 (2005): 83–108, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbio08>.

1948 it reversed most of the progressive welfare reforms that had occurred in the early 1940s.³⁸⁸ While they acknowledge the need for more research to explain the persistence of the pension scheme, they propose a number of possible reasons. One of these is that, unlike unemployment insurance, old age pensions posed no real threat to the supply of cheap labour. Another suggestion is that “a perceived incapacity among the Bantu Authorities contributed to the inertia on the government’s part” or that Bantu Authorities were opposed to the abolition of pensions on account of political costs.³⁸⁹ On the former point, the archive I work with suggests that certain members of society were worried specifically about the impact of old age pensions on the supply of cheap labour and petitioned the NAD on this matter. The Secretary of the Holme Park Farmers Association wrote to the NAD on 28 May 1955 in the hope of encouraging “some such drastic action... in the near future” as the members of this body were of the opinion that “the acute shortage of labour offered by the adjoining Native Reserves is due to the fact that old age pensioners are supporting themselves and their families from this source of income”.³⁹⁰

Some scholars suggest that the National Party kept intact the old age pension system because it was expedient for the growing crisis of the social reproduction of labour in the reserves.³⁹¹ However, by attributing the persistence of this scheme solely to propping up subsistence economies in the reserves the fundamental role of pensions in consolidating the National Party’s project of separate development through the scheme’s legitimating of ‘tribal authorities’ is obscured. Moreover, the instrumentalist assessment does little to explain why the pension scheme was never abolished – even in the face of wide-scale unemployment in the later decades of the twentieth century.³⁹² Indeed, in 1973

³⁸⁸ Seekings and Natrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa*, 132.

³⁸⁹ Seekings and Natrass, 133.

³⁹⁰ Harvery E. Reed, “Re: Shortage of Labour Due to Old Age Pensions,” Letter from the Secretary of the Holme Park Farmers Association to the NAD, May 28, 1955, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³⁹¹ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 552; Rycroft, “Social Pensions and Poor Relief in South Africa: An Exercise in Social Control,” 11; This argument draws on Legassick and later Wolpe’s cheap labour thesis Legassick, “Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa”; Wolpe, “Capitalism and Cheap Labour in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid.”

³⁹² Seekings and Natrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa*, 165–87.

the government explicitly reiterated black South African's "legal right to a social pension" with the passage of the Social Pensions Act 57 of 1973.³⁹³ Sagner argues that the persistence of the system after 1948 could largely be attributed to its "propagandistic value" as well its alignment with "apartheid policy objective to reinforce the patriarchal family and the control of the elderly over the young generation".³⁹⁴ However, he also suggests a link between the pension scheme and the system of 'tribal authorities', positing that it "might have been used by the Nationalist Government to prop up the system of Bantu Authorities".³⁹⁵ Building on this suggestion I contend that the systematic project to review and limit black pensions acted as a placeholder to keep intact, although minimally, a system that would be essential to the NP's plan for 'Bantu Authorities' that emerged at the end of the 1950s.

By attempting to read for the "traces of lives" that punctuate the bureaucratic archive I work with this chapter sets out to consider, in a number of senses, the reach of the old age pension system.³⁹⁶ In the first sense, this chapter examines the significance of its reach as a system that stretched across changing administrations in the Union and considers, inter alia, its function in legitimating Bantu Authorities. It also considers the people it reached. As mentioned before, this system of registration was the first to systematically include both men and women across all areas of the Union. While this aspect of the pension system calls for more in depth research, this chapter begins to consider, especially, the implication of its inclusion of rural 'widows' in limited 'social citizenship'. Arguably, the old age pensions system worked to buttress patriarchal segregation and the rural 'customary' rule that underpinned first segregation and then apartheid. However, it can also be argued that this system also undermined familial patriarchal social relations with the provision of direct cash payments to women.

³⁹³ Rycroft, "Social Pensions and Poor Relief in South Africa: An Exercise in Social Control," 12.

³⁹⁴ Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 540.

³⁹⁵ Sagner, 552.

³⁹⁶ Hamilton, Harris, and Reid, "Introduction."

Tracking Subjects: A Nationwide Campaign to Review Black Pensions in the Union

The Department is deeply concerned at the apparent laxity with which social pensions are awarded to Natives in many districts. Numerous instances have come to notice where Natives have been awarded benefits, particularly Old Age Pensions, when they were not entitled thereto for one or more reasons, such as being under age, having sufficient income in terms of the means test, and being able to work, but reluctant to do so.³⁹⁷

On the 8 April 1949 the Native Affairs Department circulated General Circular No. 5 of 1949, introducing the department's plan to embark on a systematic campaign to review all 'native' social pensions in the Union.³⁹⁸ The circular introduced the initial phase in what would develop into a systematic project to pare down the number of pensions awarded to black South Africans in the 1950s. Implementing a regular system of reviews signified an explicit move to begin enacting centralised control and monitoring of the pension system.

I ... regard old age pensions as a wrong system of dealing with the Native. We want to evolve a system whereby we want to reinstitute the natural obligations of Bantu authorities and Bantu children in regard to their old people, with the support of an equal amount of money to that which we now spend wrongly in caring for them.³⁹⁹

Sagner and others argue that the above statement made by Verwoerd in 1955 marked a policy shift in old age pensions administered to black South Africans.⁴⁰⁰ While Verwoerd's statement indeed elucidates the National Party's plan for state pensions, which involved redirecting the state's spending on social welfare for black South Africans toward establishing the legitimacy of Bantu Authorities, a distinct policy shift occurred a number of years earlier. Shortly after the National Party won the 1948 election the NAD appointed a committee

³⁹⁷ G. Mears, "General Circular No. 5 of 1949: Social Benefits Schemes for Natives" (Native Affairs Department, April 8, 1949), SAB NTS 8320 86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

³⁹⁸ Sagner has discussed this campaign as part of a broader overview of the development of old age pensions in South Africa. However, as this was not the only focus of his work he did not discuss in depth the administrative processes behind the review project nor the role of mechanisation and centralisation in achieving it. Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 538–39.

³⁹⁹ Sagner, 540.

⁴⁰⁰ Sagner, 540; Rycroft, "Social Pensions and Poor Relief in South Africa: An Exercise in Social Control," 10.

to investigate the issue of the payment of pensions to ‘natives’.⁴⁰¹ Sagner argues that the National Party had always taken an openly hostile stance towards black state pensions and continued to do so after its assumed control of the government.⁴⁰² Upon completion of its investigation the committee speculated, in a departmental memo, that authorising officers were not exercising the means test rigidly enough.⁴⁰³ “It may be possible,” the memo stated, “that officers charged with the administration of the Act regard the privilege, conferred thereunder in the form of a pension, as one that should be enjoyed by all old people, without the need of having to apply too rigidly the actual tests which have been laid down.”⁴⁰⁴ The committee identified the following sections of the Act as areas in which authorising officers were being too lenient:

- (a) the ability of the spouse of an applicant or pensioner to support him or to contribute towards his support; and
- (b) the ability and opportunities of an applicant or pensioner to support himself or contribute towards his support by his own exertions.⁴⁰⁵

Admitting that it was “a difficult matter to apply these tests, particularly in so far as Natives are concerned” the committee tackled the issue by reframing old age pensions to be conceptualised as disability grants in order to encourage district officers to apply the means test more stringently.⁴⁰⁶ The committee opined

...from perusal of the provisions of the law, that the pensions payable under the Act amount to nothing more than disability and invalidity grants to persons who have reached, in the case of males, the age of 65 and, in the case of females, the age of 60 years. I say this because persons who reach the ages mentioned do not automatically receive pensions. If an applicant, no matter what his age is, can through his own exertions or

⁴⁰¹ “Pensioene Ens. Betaalbaar Aan Naturelle,” Instruction to Under-Secretary for Native Affairs, March 26, 1949, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

⁴⁰² Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 538.

⁴⁰³ “Memo: Social Benefits Paid to Natives” (Native Affairs Department, n.d.), SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

⁴⁰⁴ “Memo: Social Benefits Paid to Natives.”

⁴⁰⁵ Mears, “General Circular No. 5 of 1949.”

⁴⁰⁶ “Memo: Social Benefits Paid to Natives.”

through those of his spouse, earn a minimum amount... such applicant is not entitled to any assistance.⁴⁰⁷

Viewing the old age pension as a disability grant specifically provided for older people, the committee surmised, would make it easier for officials to determine whether applicants were really eligible for a state grant.⁴⁰⁸ This was a somewhat deceptive and manipulative interpretation of the Act; the existence of a separately legislated disability pension indicates that policy makers viewed old age pensions as constituting something separate to disability pensions. Nevertheless, the department decided that all existing pensions would be retained, while each grant would be revised “so spoedig moontlik (as speedily as possible) by the official responsible for its payment. Head office instructed authorising officers that future pensions should only be awarded if the pensioner could provide compelling evidence that he was entitled to it.⁴⁰⁹

Certain district officials who expressed a generalised suspicion and hostility toward black pensioners held similar positions to head office. The Committee memo included comments from the Chief Native Commissioner in Natal who concurred that too many pensions were being awarded. According to him this was due to inadequate staff numbers and the deceitfulness of “the Native race”. He concurred that “there are many names on pension registers which should not be there, but this cannot be avoided for want of adequate staff”, bolstering his perspective with the opinion that “misrepresentation of circumstance and exaggeration of the extremity of need is not peculiar to the Native race”.⁴¹⁰ The memo noted that certain local authorities proposed appointing permanent inspectors: the Natal Chief Native Commissioner offered the suggestion that a “roving inspector” from the Department of Social Welfare should conduct a “searching test” and the NC at Ndwedwe recommended that the department should appoint in each district or group of districts a permanent

⁴⁰⁷ “Memo: Social Benefits Paid to Natives.”

⁴⁰⁸ The committee also advocated, per a suggestion from the Principal Accountant, that the District Surgeon be enlisted to assist in assessing eligibility for old age pensioners.

⁴⁰⁹ “Pensioene Ens. Betaalbaar Aan Naturelle.”

⁴¹⁰ “Memo: Social Benefits Paid to Natives.”

“Social Welfare officer... to thoroughly investigate each case”.⁴¹¹ Moreover, the NCs at Babanango, Msinga and Nongoma suggested that the means test should be amended to consider the circumstances of an applicant’s entire family. It is difficult to assess whether these views were representative of the greater body of pension officials but it is possible that they were not: out of all the officials called on to comment on the issue of “social benefits paid to Natives”, these were the only suggestions that the committee felt had “a bearing on the question under investigation”.⁴¹²

The departmental circular No. 5 of 1949 thus instructed all authorising officers to immediately begin a process of review in which all existing awards would be scrutinised in order to determine whether the pensioners were “actually entitled to their pensions in terms of the relative Acts and the departmental instructions which were issued from time to time”.⁴¹³ The subtext was clear: interpret the Acts and regulations as restrictively as possible in order to cut down the number of pensions paid out.⁴¹⁴ The instruction specifically placed the onus on the applicants to provide proof of their age and financial circumstances, stipulating that “if he cannot produce such satisfactory proof or if the authorising officer has any doubts about the case, the application must be rejected”. This requirement would prove especially difficult for the many black pensioners who held no documentary record of their births.

Acknowledging the significant size of the task at hand, the department instructed that the reviews be carried out as and when the district offices were able but emphasised that the process should begin immediately and that every effort should be made to complete the review by the end of the financial year 1949/50. Authorising officers were expected to submit half-yearly progress reports until the review of their district was completed. The progress reports detailed the total number of pensioners in receipt of each type of pension, the

⁴¹¹ “Memo: Social Benefits Paid to Natives.”

⁴¹² “Memo: Social Benefits Paid to Natives.”

⁴¹³ Mears, “General Circular No. 5 of 1949.”

⁴¹⁴ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 538.

number of pensions reviewed to date, the number of pensions still to be reviewed and the total reduction in pensions made as a result of the review process with a schedule reflecting the pensioner names and numbers as well as the reasons for reduction and the amounts overpaid. The review plan devised at head office was naively ambitious and reflected little prior engagement on the matter with district officials. It became quickly apparent that the job could not be completed adequately by the district officials – by the end of 1951 many districts had yet to complete their reviews. Numerous correspondences between head office and district officials revealed that the district offices lacked the capacity to cope with systematically reviewing pensions.⁴¹⁵

While inspectors were sent to some of the larger districts to assist with reviews and report on the function of the district offices, it was in 1953 that the NAD “institutionalised a system of regular control visits by pension inspectors”, who reported directly to the central government.⁴¹⁶ On 30 August 1953 an identical minute notified the district officers that

in order to assist district offices with the important function of periodical review of Native pensions... a temporary Inspectorate of 8 officers... has been created for the purpose of reviewing all Native pensions and grants throughout the Union.⁴¹⁷

This move effectively removed any remaining discretionary power from the local pension officers, not legislatively but procedurally.

The Mechanics of the Review Process

Along with conversion to the mechanised scheme, head office instructed district officials to establish more decentralised payout points in the districts. The Department instructed Native Commissioners and Magistrates to establish decentralised paying centres as far as possible so that the majority of pension beneficiaries could be paid personally in cash. This was especially important in

⁴¹⁵ See “Departementale Komitee - Ondersoek Na Sociale Hulpskemas/ Hersiening van Bantoeipensioene,” n.d., SAB NTS 8320 A86/349 Volume 1 & 2, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

⁴¹⁶ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 539.

⁴¹⁷ SNA, “Identical Minute No. A86/349: Review of Native Pensions and Grants,” Identical Minute, August 30, 1953, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

areas with larger populations, where there was a heavy reliance on the use of warrant vouchers in designated stores to pay beneficiaries. The establishment of more payout points throughout the Union was fundamental to the efficacy of the extensive program of pension reviews

In teams of two, the inspectors travelled to each district and advised on the cancellation or reduction of pensions. The department estimated that it would take three years to complete the reviews of the whole Union, and intended that such reviews would occur periodically to keep the pension awards under control thus institutionalising a system of perpetual social insecurity. The department harnessed a number of tools and controls to ensure that the review system would function as planned. Pensioners were required to attend the review or face the suspension of their grant (this included pensioners who were bedridden). In order to insure maximum turnout at the reviews head office instructed authorising officers to enlist the assistance of “Chiefs, Headmen and Indunas” to “stress the fact that in so far as practicable each and every pensioner must appear personally” at reviews “for control and consultation”.⁴¹⁸ While chiefs and headmen had assisted in pension administration since 1944, they were now integral to the efficacy of the review process – both for control purposes and verifying information – and were sorely missed in urban areas.

During the review process inspectors interviewed each pensioner. When no documentary evidence was available as proof of a pensioner’s age, inspectors made use of a list of “outstanding historical and district events since 1880 common to the particular district” – along with a physical examination – to guess a pensioner’s age and decide on the fate of his/her continuing pension. With the generalised, quotidian suspicion toward black subjects so characteristic of the South African bureaucracy, the right thumbprint of each pensioner was taken during the review to ensure that any appeals made by pensioners upon cancellation were attended by the same person whose pension was originally reviewed. Allegedly, the minute elucidated, “the department has had the

⁴¹⁸ SNA, “Identical Minute No. A86/349: Review of Native Pensions and Grants,” Identical Minute, August 30, 1953, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

experience that cancelled pensioners send older people to appeal in their stead”.⁴¹⁹

The mechanisation of the pension system facilitated and arguably made possible the extensive project of reviews. Inspectors used Hollerith punched-cards produced from pensioners master cards to record their recommendations for changes to individual pensions. The punched-cards were then used to compile lists and draw master cards that required adjustments or cancellations.

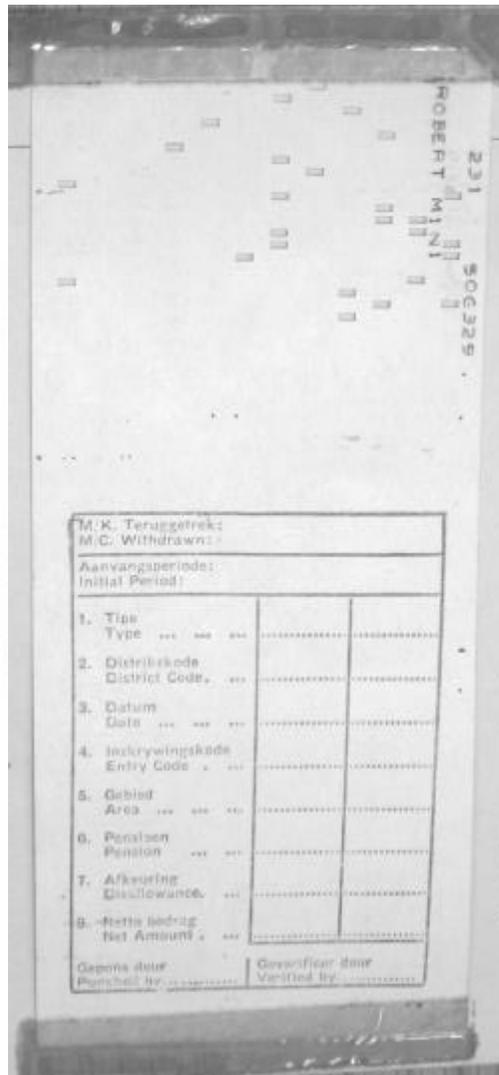


Figure 10: Blank Hollerith Punched-Cards Used for Reviews

⁴¹⁹ SNA; Breckenridge elucidates the longer history of fingerprinting in South Africa as a means of identifying illiterate subjects and controlling against impersonation; see Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*.

The “Decidedly Unsavory” Nature of Pension Review Work: Reading (Against the Grain) Pensioner Experience of the Review Process Through Official Reports

Concerning the work itself and the conditions under which it has to be performed, I can state without fear of contradiction that it is decidedly unsavory. The tendency of the natives to crowd up to the tables at which one is working is most unpleasant. The native’s way of speaking also seems to be resultant of more spittle flying around than is the case with the normal European. This can constitute a real threat to one’s health when Tuberculosis cases are being dealt with. Very often too one is exposed to the wind and rain when doing revision at outlying points in the district, and this could also have a deleterious effect on one’s health.⁴²⁰

The above extract from the Field Inspection Report on Native Pensions Revision in Natal begins to highlight the kind of tedious conditions black pensioners appear to have faced at pension reviews. Not only did pensioners have to contend with a review process which itself implied the precarious nature of their access to social security (evidently they queued in all kinds of weather conditions). They also experienced the explicit racism of inspectors who had the power to remove their livelihood on the basis of subjective opinion. Indeed, the SNA shed light on the ‘age assessment’ procedures in place in a letter to the Controller and Auditor-General:

In regard to cases where the reviewing officer considers applicants to have been under age at the time of their awards, it must be pointed out that such ages are estimated by authorising officers and are merely a matter of opinion. While the opinions of different authorising officers may vary in this connection, it does not necessarily mean that any of them are wrong.⁴²¹

T. J. Louw was the official responsible for the field inspection of review process in Natal. While conducting his inspection he personally conducted several reviews in order to get a “feel” for (in his words) the “interrogations”.⁴²² His report reveals, amongst other things, his open suspicion toward the pensioners

⁴²⁰ T. J. Louw, “Report: Field Inspection, Native Pensions Revision, Natal,” October 23, 1953, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

⁴²¹ SNA, “Review of Pensions and Grants Awarded to Natives,” Letter to the Controller and Auditor-General, February 24, 1950, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

⁴²² Louw, “Report: Field Inspection, Native Pensions Revision, Natal.”

he reviewed. During the reviews he “concentrated on following the answers to the questions, with a view to detecting any ‘pattern’”. He elucidated:

Very often, the questions regarding income evoked no more than a blank stare, or a blunt “ca” (No). Only repeated questioning, or the use of “catch” questions brought results.⁴²³

Pensioners who, in his opinion, provided “obviously false or misleading” answers were effectively punished by being sent to the back of the queue – an action which “appeared to have a salutary effect”. In assessing the accuracy of answers he celebrated the aid of headmen, highlighting that their presence was especially useful – and missed in urban centres where urbanisation had had the “effect of making them [pensioners] more sly and secretive”. While he noted that assessing the ages of men was relatively simple (“every Zulu male having been enrolled in his particular ‘regiment’ on reaching maturity”), women were much more difficult to assess – he argued – and were thus subjected to a more rigorous cross examination which sometimes included physical examination. The following extracts provide some insight into what the latter involved:

One native woman I personally questioned gave answers indicating that she was +- 73, whereas I finally established that she could be no more than 53 years of age, as a result of tripping her up with unexpected questions, and *physical appearance*. As the method of assessing age and the questions used become more well known, this type of fraud will become widespread.

It is induced to some extent by the collapse of the tribal system, under which widows had to be maintained by their guardians after the death of their husbands. Quite a usual answer when *young-looking* widows were asked why they were drawing a pension was “because I’m a widow”. Intensive questioning and experience in assessing age by *physical appearance, i.e. condition of hair skin, feet and physique generally*, are the only counters to fraud of this nature.⁴²⁴

From Mediators to Intermediaries: The Consequence of Centralisation for the Role of Lower Level NAD Bureaucrats

An intermediary... is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. For all practical purposes, an intermediary can be taken not only as a black box,

⁴²³ Louw.

⁴²⁴ Louw Emphases are mine.

but also as a black box counting for one, even if it is internally made of many parts. Mediators, on the other hand, cannot be counted as just one; they might count for one, for nothing, for several, or for infinity. Their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. Mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry. No matter how complicated an intermediary is, it may, for all practical purposes, count for just one—or even for nothing at all because it can be easily forgotten. No matter how apparently simple a mediator may look, it may become complex; it may lead in multiple directions which will modify all the contradictory accounts attributed to its role.⁴²⁵

(Bruno Latour – Reassembling the Social)

The centralisation of pension administration brought with it far-reaching consequences. With rationalisation the authority of Native Commissioners and Magistrates was eroded. Indeed, the tighter, centralised procedures engendered by rationalisation diminished the local officials' decision-making power. Significantly, following Latour's conceptualisation, it removed the ability of Magistrates and Native Commissioners to act as *mediators* between pensioners and the central state and relegated them to mere *intermediaries*. While even in the first few years of pension administration the approach of lower level bureaucrats varied across districts, many authorising officers appear to have taken seriously their role as "protector[s] of African interests".⁴²⁶ This paternalism was hardly ever free from cultural racism; however, under the decentralised system it was able to play some part in mitigating the more hostile elements of the system.

There is no doubt that pensioners were treated with increasing hostility by NAD officials during the 1950s. Suspicion towards pensioners was both systemic and subjective, reflecting the pattern of changing administrative behaviour. Wylie argues that "especially in the 1940s, the NAD records show a marked increase in administrators' impatience with the needy, and the enhanced intent and effort to discipline them".⁴²⁷ The archive I work with certainly reflects a distinct shift from

⁴²⁵ Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 39.

⁴²⁶ Dubow, "Holding 'a Just Balance between White and Black,'" 237.

⁴²⁷ Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, 60–61.

1948 onward toward the clinical and often explicitly racist approach of NAD officials that several scholars of the apartheid state have highlighted.⁴²⁸ The centralisation of pension administration and subsequent process of reviews played a significant part in enabling this shift to take place.

The centralisation of the pension system allowed the NAD head office to keep a tighter check on the administration of pensions in the districts. Indeed several documents attest to the fact that following mechanisation the NAD scrutinised the pension data coming in from the pension offices to ensure district offices upheld the new rationalised pension policy.⁴²⁹ During the first few years of the review project Native Commissioners or Magistrates were expected to thoroughly account for instances where head office felt their districts' pension awards or review results were relatively aberrant. After 1953, while inspectors had no legislative authority to cancel or reduce pensions their recommendations were submitted to the local authorising officers and reported to head office and the Treasury. As Sagner argues, even when the suggestions of pension inspectors were legally dubious district officers were hesitant to pushback for fear of negatively affecting their careers. In addition, any disagreement on the part of Magistrates and Native Commissioners on the basis of age would have to be reviewed by head office, a regulation which likely acted to ensure compliance.⁴³⁰ Aside from the ostensible fiscal savings, the department celebrated the review system as an agent of uniformity and standardisation in district office procedures as the inspectors disseminated head offices' vision for uniform administrative procedures.

The Role of Pensions in Establishing Apartheid

The changes that took place administratively within the NAD during the 1950s have been well documented. It was during this decade that the government made its initial moves to overhaul governance in the reserves; instituting a

⁴²⁸ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*; Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*.

⁴²⁹ "Departementale Komitee - Ondersoek Na Sociale Hulpskemas/ Hersiening van Bantoeipensioene," n.d.

⁴³⁰ Sagner, "Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape," 539; SNA, "Identical Minute No. A86/349: Review of Native Pensions and Grants."

centrally-imposed 'tribal system' that would see appointed chiefs and headmen working as arms of the apartheid state to maintain control in the reserves.⁴³¹ The apartheid government passed the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951 but it would be a few years before the NAD made more serious moves to implement it.⁴³² Ntsebeza argues that the "Act gave chiefs and headmen uncontested powers at the local Tribal Authority area to execute government policies"⁴³³ through its abolition of the Native Representative Council and recognition of "tribal authorities as the chief governing system".⁴³⁴ While the consolidation of Tribal Authorities was deeply contested in the rural areas from the outset,⁴³⁵ the Act constituted the bedrock of the National Party's plan for separate development.⁴³⁶ As is now well known, the National Party's policy of separate development had been laid out in the Sauer Commission Report which upheld the system of labour migrancy and proposed the consolidation of the reserves and with it the establishment of "a separate political system for Africans".⁴³⁷ The National Party began implementing the Act with fervour in 1956 when, Ntsebeza argues, chiefs and headmen were formally incorporated into the apartheid government and "given greater administrative powers than during the segregation period".⁴³⁸ The Bantu Authorities Act constituted the cornerstone of the apartheid government's social engineering project of 're-tribalisation', which sought to control black South Africans in the countryside through the imposition of a widely contested system

⁴³¹ See: Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised*; Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*.

⁴³² Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*.

⁴³³ Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of the Land in South Africa*, 131–32.

⁴³⁴ Brian H. King, "Spaces of Change: Tribal Authorities in the Former KaNgwane Homeland, South Africa," *Area* 37, no. 1 (2005): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2005.00602.x/full>.

⁴³⁵ Ntsebeza argues the "the 'school people' and landholders, in particular, consistently rejected rule under chiefs". Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of the Land in South Africa*, 135.

⁴³⁶ John L. Comaroff, "Chiefship in a South African Homeland: A Case Study of the Tshidi Chiefdom of Bophuthatswana," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1, no. 1 (1974): 42–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057077408707922>; Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of the Land in South Africa*, 137.

⁴³⁷ Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of the Land in South Africa*, 137; see also: Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*; Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*.

⁴³⁸ Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of the Land in South Africa*, 138 Through his case study of the Xhalinga district in the Transkei, Ntsebeza argues that rural black South Africans, especially "powerful landholders" vehemently opposed the imposition of this system.

of spurious ‘traditional’ leaders.⁴³⁹ Posel argues that from 1959, with the promulgation of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, Verwoerd’s government sought with vigour to implement the NP’s plan of separate development. Both ideological and instrumental reasons underpinned this policy shift as it harnessed the “language of ethnicity” to reverse the more pragmatic approach to segregation it had taken in the 1950s, which accepted some level of black urbanisation.⁴⁴⁰ Breckenridge attributes Verwoerd’s new emphasis on the importance of Bantustans from 1959 to the failure of his centralised Bewysburo project, which had hitherto dominated the NAD’s plans for the control of black South Africans. He argues that in the wake of this failure Verwoerd looked to the Bantustans in “a conscious effort to break the administrative unity of the South African state” and to “subcontract problems of control to weakly regulated African subordinates in fictionally independent states, whilst paying little regard to their actual administrative performance”.⁴⁴¹ Social welfare spending, and especially the old age pension scheme, was crucial to this effort.

Indeed, despite earlier resistance on the part of its more conservative branch to the extension of state pensions in 1944,⁴⁴² the National Party recognised the centrality of social welfare to its project of separate development from the outset. The ongoing project of pension reviews aimed to reduce and curb the number of individual black pensioners in receipt of state grants. However, it appears that in spite of claims made by NAD head officials, “effecting savings” was a dubious motivation for this project. Sagner maintains that between 1950 and 1960 state spending on pensions more than doubled – “in real terms... an increase of *ca* 53 per cent”.⁴⁴³ He points out that while the total number of

⁴³⁹ Ntsebeza, 173.

⁴⁴⁰ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, 231.

⁴⁴¹ Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, 160.

⁴⁴² See Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 536.

⁴⁴³ He notes that in 1950 the state was spending £1,209,500 and in 1960 the figure was £2,619,000 Sagner, 540.

individual pensioners was reduced from 1951, expenditure per pensioner was increased through the award of special bonuses.⁴⁴⁴

Die Regering het reeds in beginsel aanvaar dat welsynsdienste 'n saak van fundamentele belang is vir die Bantoeowerhede, wat egter nog eers die geleentheid gegee moet word om wortel te skiet, alvorens sodanige dienste aan die Bantoeowerhed oorgedra kan word.⁴⁴⁵

(The Government has already accepted in principle that social welfare services are of crucial importance to Bantu Authorities, the latter however must be given the opportunity to become better established, before such services can be transferred to Bantu Authorities.)

It is likely then, as the above excerpt suggests, that the ongoing reviews, and with them the retention of the old age pension system, were part of the National Party's larger plan to establish the legitimacy of Bantu Authorities. That the review process itself occurred as an alternative to the abolition of the old age pension system altogether is suggestive of the value the National Party placed in the pension scheme in effecting separate development. Arguably, this severely limited system of social pensions was kept in place as one strategy to bolster apartheid state authority and as part of planning towards 'self-governing' Bantustans. Social pensions may have also been a useful and relatively cheap way to shore up fragile subsistence economies in the reserves. In the first decade of apartheid, the NAD recognised that universal old age pensions were fundamental to the very legitimacy of the system of 'traditional authorities' upon which the Bantustan project was being elaborated.

Considerations of Gender and 'Social Citizenship'

Segregationist state policies and rule were central actors in the construction, maintenance, and reproduction of gender in South Africa.⁴⁴⁶ In her discussion on the implementation of maintenance grants, du Toit argues that state officials harnessed the logics of the gendered segregationist state (asserting "the fiction that 'institutions of Native customary law' provided for 'widows and

⁴⁴⁴ Sagner, 539.

⁴⁴⁵ NAD, "Beskrywingspunte Wat Sy Edele Die Minister Uit Die Oranje Vrystaat Bereik Het," ca 1957, SAB NTS 8320 A86/349, National Archives Repository in Pretoria.

⁴⁴⁶ Manicom, "Ruling Relations," 452.

children' and that state assistance would damage the tribal social structure") to avoid taking on in the 1940s the purportedly crippling fiscal responsibility that would coincide with racially inclusive child maintenance grants.⁴⁴⁷ However, old age pensions appear to have been at least partly in tension with the logics of patriarchal segregation policies.⁴⁴⁸ As this section will demonstrate, while functioning as a tool in the National Party's segregationist social engineering project, the availability of old age pensions simultaneously undermined the state's professed commitment to customary law in its reach throughout the latter half of the twentieth century of so-called 'widows'. Indeed, in the South African countryside, old age pensions appear to have worked to bolster patriarchal, segregationist structures and affirm the gendered logics that underpinned the rural subsidisation of the migrant labour system even as it simultaneously undermined private patriarchal social relations in the way it functioned to improve the status of women in rural communities.

The Widows of Louis Trichardt

In 1949, Mr Marx – head of the NAD Pensions Section (a new division at head office, the creation of which coincided with mechanisation and the change in government), became concerned that something was amiss in the area of Louis Trichardt. Having perused a recent influx of successful applications forwarded from the Native Commissioner, officials at head office were struck “by a number of peculiarities in these awards”.⁴⁴⁹ The first was that the newly awarded pensioners were “practically all widows”. The second was that all appeared to have been born in the same place: Zoutpansberg. And third, was the fact that many of the applicants' answers to questions in the application were practically identical. Indeed, head office feared foul play on the part of the pensioners. “The foregoing leads us to believe”, Marx wrote,

...that the Natives applying for pensions come forearmed with all the answers and that the possibility exists that a number of them may in reality

⁴⁴⁷ du Toit, “Mothers' Pensions and the 'Civilised' Black Poor,” 25.

⁴⁴⁸ Sagner argues that for “widows” especially the introduction of old age pensions improved their social status in rural communities. Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 548.

⁴⁴⁹ J. A. Marx, “Letter to the Native Commissioner at Louis Trichardt,” November 4, 1949.

not be entitled to pensions at all. Our experience shows that in other large Native areas applications vary considerably... Another point is that the pensions schemes have now been in operation for a number of years during which they must have received considerable publicity amongst the Natives. Why the spate of applications from widows during recent months when they had ample time and opportunity since 1945 to apply for pensions?⁴⁵⁰

Mr Smithers, the Native Commissioner at Louis Trichardt, responded with a lengthy explanation intent on providing head office with “full facts” with the hope that these would supply both the head of the Pensions Section and the Principal Accountant with a better “picture of the district conditions and problems”.⁴⁵¹ On the volume of applications submitted to head office he offered the administrative explanation that he had instituted a policy that field applications (those in more remote areas) would only take place once a year. The issue of the widows, however, had been on his mind for a while and he had undertaken his own investigations to understand the phenomenon. He noted that he had previously reported to the Chief Native Commissioner that:

At a conservative estimate over 80% of the [old age] pensioners are women, and one outstanding result has been that this section of the population has become more independent...
In my opinion the native mentality inclines as a general rule to the practise of divesting themselves of all sources of income, cattle, crops, or employment, in order to qualify for a pension. Every attempt is made to hide assets, all enquiries are met with evasion, and the general opinion is that the pension is a right, whatever the circumstances or means of the applicant might be...⁴⁵²

The women old age pensioners, Smithers went on to explain, referred to themselves as widows and in his district the pension was “regarded as a widows [sic] pension”.⁴⁵³ He argued that patriarchal relations and custom, coupled with gendered perceptions of state old age pensions had contributed to the proliferation of pension applications by women in his district. The Native

⁴⁵⁰ Marx.

⁴⁵¹ Native Commissioner Louis Trichardt, “Letter to J. A. Marx,” November 8, 1949.

⁴⁵² Native Commissioner Louis Trichardt.

⁴⁵³ Native Commissioner Louis Trichardt.

Commissioner explained that once the women in the district reached the required age they qualified for a pension

with ease... they have no spouse, no means or income, sometimes a land, and never reap a crop exceeding the means test value. Any means test in their case is in fact futile, because they are never owners of stock, although almost without exception are entitled under native custom to maintenance from some kraal; to ascertain the latter and the value thereof is a practical impossibility... The thousands of old women would never... of their own initiative go out to work in order to maintain themselves, being bound by custom to remain at home.⁴⁵⁴

Aside from patriarchal social relations, demography and polygamy were other reasons he cited for the high incidence of widowhood in his district. Old women greatly outnumbered men in Louis Trichardt, the reason for which was “obvious if conditions amongst the Bavenda are considered”. He opined that “the men lead a disgraceful life of ‘wine, women and song’, are degenerating physically, and rarely live to a very old age” – an opinion he defended with the aside that “more competent opinion than mine has voiced the view that the Bavenda are a dying race”.⁴⁵⁵

The allegedly peculiar nature of the spate of applications from the district of Louis Trichardt turned out to be far more ordinary than the officials at head office imagined, in fact, the case sheds light on the ways in which both gender, race and the ‘native pensioner’ were constructed and conceptualised in the old age pension system and by various NAD actors during the twentieth century. The correspondence between Marx and Smithers elucidates the incongruence between *who* NAD pension policy ideologically conjured as constituting ‘native pensioners’ and who actually received the majority of pensions.⁴⁵⁶ The head office of the NAD was apparently blindsided by the widows of Louis Trichardt precisely because they contradicted the “gender category” of ‘native pensioner’. Administrators of the old age pension system, in general, discursively constructed

⁴⁵⁴ Native Commissioner Louis Trichardt.

⁴⁵⁵ Native Commissioner Louis Trichardt.

⁴⁵⁶ Manicom, “Ruling Relations,” 444 Manicom has discussed the way in which certain fundamental political categories have been discursively constituted as masculine, for example “citizen” and “worker”. She also notes that “The Native” as a category of rule was a masculine one. African women were always distinctively designated when addressed within urban administration discourse... “the Native woman”, a sexualized construct and one that was framed as a social problem.’ (456).

‘native pensioners’ as male and implicitly assumed them to be part of the wage-labour economy.⁴⁵⁷ But it also highlights the way in which the universal provision of old age pensions implicitly undermined the logics of customary law.

The case of Louis Trichardt highlights the apparently complex and contradictory workings of the old age pension in the rural-urban dichotomy produced by the segregationist state that incidentally acknowledged as ‘social citizens’ rural black women, whose “status as perpetual minors”, du Toit argues, had been formally and centrally established with the passage of the 1927 Native Administration Act.⁴⁵⁸ Crucially, the national consolidation of customary law engendered by the Act constructed, bolstered and legitimised patriarchal rule and familial relations in an effort to entrench segregation.⁴⁵⁹ When fiscally or politically expedient, the central government used the logics of customary law to avoid taking on responsibility for the welfare of its black subjects.⁴⁶⁰ However, insofar as social policy was concerned the state practiced a fickle commitment to upholding customary law. Indeed, it continually undermined these same logics with the inclusion of black South Africans in the provision of old age pensions, the majority of which went to ‘widows’ in the rural areas of the Union.⁴⁶¹ Sagner suggests that the old age pension greatly improved the lives of elderly women in rural areas by improving their status as ‘earners’.⁴⁶² He argues that “considering the life-course experiences of elderly women in the 1940s and 1950s, for many if not most, pension money was their first ‘self-earned’ cash income”.⁴⁶³ The documentary evidence is suggestive of the ways in which many women in the 1940s and 1950s used their status as ‘widows’ as a claim to some kind of ‘social citizenship’.

⁴⁵⁷ Manicom, “Ruling Relations.”

⁴⁵⁸ du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor,” 8; Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 117.

⁴⁵⁹ Manicom, “Ruling Relations,” 447–48.

⁴⁶⁰ See du Toit, “Mothers’ Pensions and the ‘Civilised’ Black Poor.”

⁴⁶¹ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 547.

⁴⁶² Sagner, 547.

⁴⁶³ Sagner, 548.

Conclusion

The systemic changes to pension administration that took place in the first few years of pension administration (spearheaded by Smuts government officials) set in place structures and technologies that greatly facilitated the ‘rationalising’ project of reviews in the first decade of apartheid. This chapter has argued that the technologies introduced alongside the mechanisation of the pension system and which enabled the NAD head office to catalogue centralised registration data on pension recipients, worked to facilitate the tracking of pensioners in the 1950s. The central organisation of pensioners’ personal details aided the implementation of a marked shift in black pension policy that accompanied the National Party’s victory. The streamlined and centralised system of registration and administration saw power concentrated at NAD head office and reigned in the authority of local authorising officers, thus limiting their ability to act as mediators in the system. Instead, these officials began to function more as intermediaries; carrying out the instructions and policies imposed by the NAD head office while impotent in their ability to transform the system.

Sagner argues that social grants comprised an essential source of income for many of the Union’s poorest families, especially in rural areas.⁴⁶⁴ The pensioners whose livelihoods were subjected to the callous and apparently explicitly racist review system were often desperately poor. Indeed, in discussing what should be done in terms of recovering overpayments from pensioners whose reviews were cancelled due to ‘incorrect’ assessment of age, the SNA explained that

Even if it were possible to do so, it would serve no useful purpose as very little, if any, of the apparent overpayments would be recoverable. The Natives are usually in very poor circumstances and what little means they have is merely enough to keep body and soul together.⁴⁶⁵

The discussion in this chapter suggests that the systematic project to review and limit black pensions in the Union had little to do with the ostensible laxity with which authorising officers awarded pensions or the ‘opportunism’ of

⁴⁶⁴ Sagner, 546.

⁴⁶⁵ SNA, “Review of Pensions and Grants Awarded to Natives.”

elderly individuals. The review campaign reflected a marked shift in pension policy compared to that which underpinned the NAD pension administration under Smuts' government. However, this chapter argued that it also acted as a placeholder to keep intact, although minimally, a system that would be essential to the NP's plan for 'Bantu Authorities' that emerged at the end of the 1950s. As such, the rhetoric of fraud and opportunism that punctuates the documents and which was implicitly reflected in the institutionalised review campaign provided convenient justification for limiting individual social assistance to black South Africans to the bare minimum without having to abolish a system that was, arguably, politically, socially, and economically expedient.



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Chapter Six: Conclusion

An 'inclusive' system of state social pensions was introduced by the United Party-led government in 1944 and remained intact throughout apartheid. Extant studies on the history of the old age pension system in South Africa have paid little attention to the politics of administration and the particular ways in which bureaucrats shaped old age pension policy. Scholars have argued that the delivery infrastructure of the old age pension system in South Africa - which pervaded National Party rule - became crucial to the rapid distribution of state social grants in the 1990s.⁴⁶⁶ Hence the importance of historicising its development and paying attention to the system's internal structures and administration. This study set out to examine the construction and design of the methods of pension administration in the NAD between 1944 and 1949 through the detailed analysis of Union and apartheid archival documents. In doing so it sought, inter alia, to develop a better understanding of the extent to which the 'inclusive' system of old age pensions functioned as part of the biopolitics of the South African state's segregationist, and later apartheid, order. By focusing on the administration of these pensions in the initial years of old age policy implementation in the NAD, this thesis has examined the position of the old age pension system as one thread in the reticulation of policies and practices that came together to form the apartheid state. In part, this study has elucidated the conjuncture of social assistance, modernising technologies and centralised registration and administration in the 1950s, outside of any grand plan, as a factor in what became one of the apartheid state's insidious projects of social engineering and control.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ See Lund, "Children, Citizenship & Child Support," 478.

⁴⁶⁷ As discussed in the introduction, this thesis focuses on state logics behind the implementation and administrative development of pension policy in the NAD. Thus, it is beyond the scope of this project to analyse the nuances and broader implications of the Bantustan project. However, recent scholarship has moved beyond analyses that focus purely on the coercive logics of homeland policy to consider other dimensions of life and society in rural South Africa during apartheid. It has also begun to think about the kinds of histories that can be written if one looks further than the common narratives of corruption and maladministration that dominate histories of the Bantustans and also consider analyses of the Bantustan alongside the broader historiography of decolonisation in Africa. See, for example Shireen Ally and Arianna Lissoni, *New Histories of South Africa's Apartheid-Era Bantustans*, Kindle (Routledge, 2017); and specifically: William Beinart, "Beyond 'Homelands': Some Ideas about the History of African Rural Areas in South Africa," *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 1 (2012): 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2012.642225>; Elizabeth Hull, "The Renewal of Community Health under the KwaZulu 'Homeland' Government," *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 1 (2012): 22–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2012.640830>; Laura Evans, "South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of

Extant literature suggests that the relationship between social welfare policy more generally and the Union government's broader efforts to consolidate segregationist rule is a fundamental factor in the analysis of pension policy changes in the first half of the twentieth century. As scholars have argued was the case in the emergence of state social welfare transnationally, the existing historiography on the origins of welfare policy in South Africa points toward an attempt to control some of the social repercussions of economic change during the early part of the twentieth century. Indeed, the initial exclusion of black South Africans from the Old Age Pension Act cohered with the biopolitics of the segregationist state, which sought to simultaneously preserve white hegemony and absolve white society of responsibility for the health, welfare and survival of the Union's black subjects. Chapter Two argued that in order to understand the functioning of the NAD-administered old age pension system, one must consider the way in which developments in social policy were interwoven with the state's continued project of segregation in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Rescuing whites from the apparent scourge of racial, social and moral 'degeneration' became an important political focus in the early decades of the Union, contributing significantly to segregationist policy and providing the impetus for the specifically exclusionary social welfare policy that developed in the late 1920s. The white polity's focus on the 'poor white' problem was inextricable from the ever-mounting political pressure to solve the so-called 'native question'. The native reserves would become essential to both the segregationist project and the articulation of social policy in the union. The construction of the 'native reserves' as spaces that would fulfil the function of the social reproduction of labour, bolster patriarchal rule and absolve the Union government of responsibility for elderly and indigent black South Africans was interconnected with the articulation of racially exclusive social welfare policy in the 1920s and 1930s, and the project of segregation. However, by the 1940s the convergence of specific social, political and economic conditions (locally and globally) made it increasingly impossible for the United Party government to continue to exclude black South Africans from state social assistance. The

'Decolonisation': Reflections on Writing Histories of the Homelands," *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 1 (2012): 117–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2012.655941>.

workings of the pension system as it developed for black South Africans in the 1940s, thus, hinged on (and were often in tension with) the white government's longstanding policy of segregation and entwined policies of influx control and indirect rule.

Chapter Three introduced the general features of old age pensions as administered to black South Africans in the 1940s. It maintained that from the outset the regulations directing pension administration in the NAD, drawn up by senior members in the NAD head office in collaboration with senior members of the Treasury and the Commissioner of Pensions, urged parsimony in the award of black pensions. Indeed, the Old Age Pensions Act's emphasis on the relationship between the award of state social assistance and a person's ability to work – highlighted in the NAD's General Circular on 'Old Age Pensions for Natives', cohered with the state's prevailing logic that underpinned social policy. The NP would later exploit these clauses as part of their effort to pare down and limit the number of pensions awarded to black South Africans during the 1950s. The notion that state pensions should be supplementary measures to provide economic security to the so-called 'deserving poor' was pervasive in the functioning of social policy across the state-designated race groups in the Union. Yet, for black South Africans, the policy of defining eligibility as narrowly as possible was compounded in particular ways given, inter alia, its embeddedness in broader policies of segregation and influx control. Indeed, the officials in the head office of the NAD went to lengths to ensure that the NAD's pension system – at least on paper - cohered with the broader goals of the segregationist state. As such, the continual project of segregationist state formation significantly mediated the administration of social pensions. However, the SNA's delegation of authority to local authorising officers meant that between 1944 and 1947 - the initial years of pension policy implementation – pensions were not administered as part of one cohesive system. The initial design of pension administration in the NAD gave rise to an unwieldy and cumbersome manual paperwork system. As a result, the methods of pension administration varied across the Union as district officials developed administrative procedures that suited their local context. During these initial years the decentralised nature of pension administration meant that sympathetic Magistrates and NPs had the ability to mediate the more

hostile elements of the bureaucratic system. However, the paternalism of even the most sympathetic officials was laced with culturally racist beliefs and ideologies, which shaped the subjectivities of the local NAD officials and thus also mediated the system. Notwithstanding, Chapter Three argued that the extension of legislated pensions to black South Africans engendered a synchronous form of access; opening up new channels of access for both state and subject. There is evidence that some pensioners seized these channels, often exploiting the language of paternalism, to petition officials at all levels of the NAD in attempts to make themselves visible and demand recognition.

Towards the end of 1946 the NAD began its efforts to articulate and set up a rationalised system of pension administration, which culminated in a mechanised documentary system of pension registration and identification. Chapter Four examined this process and discussed the specific features of mechanised pensioner registration and administration. The conversion from manual to mechanised pension registration centralised all aspects of pension administration and signalled a shift in policy as head office officials sought to enforce top-heavy administration. Mechanisation provided the NAD with significant experience using the latest information processing technologies, which facilitated the registration and compilation of centralised individual pensioner data. It also comprised the introduction of new technologies which enabled the NAD head office to catalogue centralised registration data on pension recipients. The materials used to administer pensions were central to this process and functioned as co-producers of the pension system. The machines, punched-cards, metal identity discs, signatures and fingerprints embodied the desire for efficiency and worked to control and order pensioners. In this chapter I drew on Latour to conceptualise the material objects that were integral to pension registration and administration both before and after mechanisation as constituting segments in Latour's 'syntagmatic line'. Indeed, both the human and non-human agents of this system functioned as 'assemblages of substitutions and associations' in the wider network of registration systems in the Union.

Chapter Five analysed the implications of the conversion to mechanised pension administration in the NAD and the reach of an ostensibly benign

registration system, which included black men and women in the countryside. Centralised control of the pension system had the effect of reigning in the authority of local authorising officers and consequently limited their ability to act as mediators in the administration and development of the system. Following Latour's conceptualisation of the distinction between a mediator and intermediary, I argued that from the late 1940s, these officials increasingly began to fulfil an intermediary function insofar as administering pensions was concerned. The structures and technologies ushered in with the project of mechanisation also enabled the NP's campaign to systematically review and limit the award of pensions to black South Africans. This chapter argued that the review campaign functioned to review and severely limit the award of new pensions to black South Africans while it kept intact a system that was politically, socially and economically expedient. It thus contends that the system of old age pensions bolstered the dominant economic and political structures in South Africa and, perhaps, even enabled their persistence.

It is undeniable that these grants constituted a crucial source of income for many black families and, while they worked to uphold illegitimate political structures, they also provided access and opportunities to engage in some level of 'social citizenship'. Indeed, while further research is needed, this thesis has highlighted the opportunities for participation in limited 'social citizenship' that old age pensions opened up in the Union during the 1940s and 1950s, and continued to provide throughout the twentieth century. Thus, this thesis has also emphasised the complex politics of access and reach engendered by the extension of old age pensions to black South Africans in the mid-1940s. Indeed, old age pensions held a multifarious position in the dense network linking racialised governance, technocratic mania, capitalist accumulation and contested notions of citizenship in the twentieth century.

While old age pensions in the first half of the twentieth century were technically unconditional,⁴⁶⁸ the preceding chapters have highlighted the

⁴⁶⁸ Lund describes unconditional grants as those in which recipients "did not have to fulfil any behavioural requirements... in order to receive the benefit". Lund, "Children, Citizenship & Child Support," 476; Section 10 (1) of the Old Age Pensions Act empowered the Minister of Finance to suspend a pension or provide for its administration "under such conditions as he may determine" if the Minister was of the opinion that "a pensioner has, by reason of

biopolitics at work in administrative pension procedures and the ways in which racialised bureaucratic practices sought to coerce pension recipients into specific ways of being. As Chapter Three highlighted, the notion that recipients must behave in particular ways and satisfactorily ‘perform’ their poverty was embedded in the workings of the old age pension system from the time of its inception in 1944 and often used as a tool in the justification of certain administrative developments. There I argue, in part, that this attitude laced the subjectivities of many authorising officers. In some cases, baseless moral judgements about the spending behaviours of pensioners combined with racial prejudices informed decisions about administrative changes that had real effects on the lives and livelihoods of pension recipients. Furthermore, in Chapter Five I presented evidence that suggests the prejudices of certain white officials made for explicitly hostile payout and review processes, in which pensioners who ‘misbehaved’ were ‘punished’ in order to invoke specific behavioural outcomes. Underpinning this attitude is the implicit assumption that applicants and recipients start off as undeserving of state aid and thus the onus is on them to jump through hoops to prove their worthiness. Crucially, too, the implications of the white state’s lack of desire to really ‘know’ its black subjects, highlighted by Breckenridge, seeped into the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the NAD-administered old age pension system. In particular, the absence of birth certificates within older South African paperwork regimes, meant that NAD officials had the power to include or exclude based on little more than bureaucratic age assessments that were made on a whim. Cumulatively, these practices engendered a pension system that was both conditional and conditioning in ways that went beyond the policing of grant money spending.

Chapter Four and Five, especially, considered the agentive role played by and the resulting objects that assisted officials in ordering, controlling and subduing black old age pensioners. Technopolitics⁴⁶⁹ played a significant part in

his misconduct, ceased to deserve his pension”. However, the wording is vague and there were no explicit conditions attached to the receipt of an old age pension. Union of South Africa, To Provide for Old Age Pensions.

⁴⁶⁹ Gabrielle Hecht uses this term “to refer to the strategic practice of designing or using technology to constitute, embody, or enact political goals”. Gabrielle Hecht, “Introduction,” in *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II*, Inside Technology (Cambridge [Massachusetts]: MIT Press, 2009), 15.

this. The language of efficiency accompanied the technological advances to the administration of the old age pension system in the 1940s. There is thus fecundity in examining the implications of the various ‘modern’ technologies that have punctuated state social grant administration and which surf the wave of rhetorical efficiency, uniformity and standardisation. Doing so not only illuminates the historical mediating role of machines⁴⁷⁰ in social assistance but also, as Vally argues, the “rationality of political actors and forms of governmentality associated with their implementation”.⁴⁷¹ Moreover, it serves to unpack the ways in which technological advances in social grant administration have historically paved multiple paths to any number of possible and uncertain political ends, further confirming the now well developed anti-deterministic understanding of the mutual constitution of politics, technology and culture.⁴⁷²

As many scholars have pointed out, the so-called ‘radical’ moment of welfare reform of the 1940s that incorporated black South Africans in a range of social welfare policies was short-lived.⁴⁷³ Indeed, what little ‘security’ was provided by the extension of old age pensions in the mid-1940s became increasingly uncertain and precarious after the National Party came to power.⁴⁷⁴ The analysis in this thesis suggests that the extension of old age pensions to black South Africans was not as radical a move as it may appear at the surface. While the advent and continued existence of old age pensions did open up crucial forms of state social assistance to black South Africans and may have eroded some of the ideological, patriarchal structures favoured by both the segregationist and apartheid state, the system was hardly aberrant (and in fact arguably quite compatible) with the broader racialised economic and political structures of the twentieth century. The system of grant administration in South Africa (especially for rural black South Africans) was fundamentally and tightly woven into the

⁴⁷⁰ Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*; Latour, “The Berlin Key Or How to Do Words with Things”; Latour, “Technology Is Society Made Durable.”

⁴⁷¹ Vally, “South African Social Assistance and the 2012 Privatised National Payment System: An Examination of Insecurities and Technopolitics in Social Grant Administration and Payment,” 139.

⁴⁷² Hecht, “Introduction,” 9.

⁴⁷³ Seekings, “Visions, Hopes and Views about the Future: The Radical Moment of South African Welfare Reform.”

⁴⁷⁴ Sagner, “Ageing and Social Policy in South Africa: Historical Perspectives with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape,” 546.

broader tapestry of a coercive, bifurcated state-form which, Mamdani argues, rested firmly on the structures of customary law and indirect rule.⁴⁷⁵ Focusing on the politics of administration in the historical old age pension system, which included new technologies harnessed to facilitate administrative processes, has thus provided insight into the particular ways in which this form of social assistance worked to assist and to keep in place exploitative and unequal structures and, in so doing, one could argue that it played a part in suppressing more radical societal change.⁴⁷⁶



⁴⁷⁵ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 27–29.

⁴⁷⁶ Vally, “South African Social Assistance and the 2012 Privatised National Payment System: An Examination of Insecurities and Technopolitics in Social Grant Administration and Payment,” 18; Gevers, “‘We Cannot Carry Our Own Poverty’: The Development and Evolution of the Old Age and Social Pension Scheme for Africans in the Union of South Africa, 1937-1947.”

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