

# **“Anginayo ngisho indibilishi!” (I don’t have a penny!) The gender politics of “Native Welfare” in Durban, 1930-1939.<sup>1</sup>**

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Work in Progress. Please do not quote without permission<sup>2</sup>

## ***Abstract***

*This paper examines how the Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society (DBCWS) came to be established as part of a wider context of burgeoning public activities by African women in Durban, particularly from the 1930s. I consider kholwa women’s interaction with the local state and also with white liberal segregationists who were participating in a national turn towards the establishment of ‘Non-European’ child welfare societies in South Africa. Durban’s African elite and particularly mission-educated women also vocally opposed the Durban Town Council’s efforts to enforce and to extend urban segregation. The DBCWS began its work in this context of fierce opposition to the promulgation of new pass law regulations aimed at controlling African women’s movements into Durban and that sought to stipulate application for certificates of exemption as the only alternative to a stringent process of seeking permission for every visit to the city. In inter-war Durban ‘Native Welfare’ first referred to control of African male leisure time and focused primarily on migrant labourers. By the end of the 1930s the DBCWS worked with officials of the DTC and with the Durban Children’s Court reluctant and limited concession by state officials to the fast-growing number of urban-based African families and to the fact of African poverty. At the same time functionaries of the NAD (at the level of the municipality, in the office of Durban’s Native Commissioner and the Union Department in Pretoria) continued to enforce the rule of segregation. Isabel Sililo of the DBCWS articulated pointed criticism of race-inflected state social welfare policies that denied rightful care to “Bantu children as future citizens” of South Africa.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Anginayo ngisho indibilishi!” (I don’t have a penny). Rhoda Dhludhla, *Ilanga lase Natal*, ‘Amadodakazi AseAfrika Nabadingayo’, 27 August 1939. I quote more extensively from this letter of praise to the combined activities of the Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society and Daughters of Africa towards the end of this paper. I would like to thank Mwelela Cele for correcting and improving my own translation from isiZulu to English. All mistakes that remain are mine.

<sup>2</sup> An earlier version of this paper, presented in June 2013 at the 24<sup>th</sup> biennial conference of the Southern African Historical Society at the University of Botswana, Gaborone, included a detailed account of opposition to the Durban Town Council’s attempt to impose restrictions on African women’s movement into the Borough in the mid-1930s. This revised version of the paper only contains a compressed account. A separate paper now discusses “Durban Town Council and Native Women” (as *Ilanga lase Natal* termed the dispute), also detailing debate that unfolded in the newspaper regarding African women’s public politics and growing their presence in the city during the 1930s. .

## Introduction

In 1932, wives and widows were the subject of prolonged and often heated discussion in the Durban Municipality's Native Advisory Board (NAB). Economic depression was adding to the daily struggle for survival of families living in the Native Married Quarters in Somtseu Road, about three kilometres from the city's industrial harbour. Some of the worst affected were the widows of city council employees. According to the municipality's rules, they had no right to remain in residence and they depended on the goodwill of municipal managers for permission to extend their lease. Arthur J Sililo, the representative for residents of the Married Quarters who brought the plight of a few widows to the Board's attention, made a personal example to emphasise his feelings as a loyal Corporation employee.<sup>3</sup> He "felt very strongly on this matter for fear that perhaps his own wife should be treated in a similar manner should he pass away while in the service of the Department".<sup>4</sup> The structure of the NAB reflected race and gender hierarchies: the chairman and his deputy were city councillors (and therefore white) and all members but one were male, the lone exception being the representative for the Native Women's Hostel in Grey Street. NAB members intermittently articulated patriarchal concerns. As one example, Reverend Abner Mtimkulu, minister in the Wesleyan Methodist Church and representative for the Natal Native Congress on the NAB, chose to greet mention in 1935 that Durban Corporation officials had met with African women interested to start a child welfare society by confirming Town Councillors' ample expectations of Native patriarchal values:

Rev Mtimkulu pointed out that it had been drawn to his notice that certain European and Indian gentlemen were present at this meeting but no Native male had been invited and that he would like to have some explanation as with Natives it was the custom that their womenfolk should not be permitted to do anything without the consent of their husbands.<sup>5</sup>

Somewhat ironically for Arthur Sililo's sketch of vulnerable womanhood in 1932, his wife Isabel was present at that meeting and would shortly become secretary of the newly constituted Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society (DBCWS), a body also concerned for the welfare of vulnerable women. Expectations of local patriarchs were presumably satisfied by the fact that the Reverend was an honorary member of the executive. By 1936 already,

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<sup>3</sup> In this paper I am occasionally calling the Durban Town Council the Durban Corporation, one of its official names for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or indeed the Kopoletsheni, as it was locally known in isiZulu.

<sup>4</sup> Durban Archives Repository (hereafter TBD), **Town Clerk Correspondence (hereafter 3DBN)**, Native Advisory Board Minutes 1/2/12/1/1, 9 November 1932. Sililo had recently been appointed as clerk in the Native Welfare Office. By 'Department' he could have meant this office but more likely referred to the Native Affairs Department. Either way Sililo was reminding the DTC of its duties towards a loyal employee.

<sup>5</sup> TBD, 3DBN, Native Advisory Board Minutes (1/2/12/1/3), 19 June 1935.

Isabel Sililo's appointment as representative on the NAB also reflected her public status and claim to speak for African women.<sup>6</sup> Africans lacked any real power in this narrow space. But Sililo's voice was also heard in various newspapers, as president of Amadodakazi aseAfrika (also known as Daughters of Africa), as Honourary Secretary of the DBCWS and as an executive member of the Durban National Council of Bantu Women – its express interest in matters of social welfare included “child welfare” and a “widow's fund”.<sup>7</sup>

This paper examines how the DBCWS came to be established as part of a wider context of burgeoning public activities by kholwa women in Durban.<sup>8</sup> Today, documentary evidence of the DBCWS' activities occupy several boxes of the quite substantial “Bantu Welfare Department” section in the Durban Archival Repository's collection of Town Clerk's Correspondence – many more boxes on these shelves document municipal administration of soccer and other sports activities involving African men. The majority of documents in a collection donated by Mildred Lavoipierre (who became a leading figure in DBCWS from the early 1940s) to the Killie Campbell Collections also concern this Society. I consider the relationship of the DBCWS to municipal bureaucracy and its early history in the context of a national turn towards the establishment of ‘Non-European’ child welfare societies. I also discuss how this Child Welfare Society was established amidst fierce kholwa opposition to the promulgation of new regulations aimed at controlling African women's movements between the Borough, outlying districts and the reserves. Isabel Sililo was a founding member of the Durban Bantu Women's Society in 1930. Two years later she helped establish the DOA.<sup>9</sup> She was part of a network of women who combined their effort to extract assistance for impoverished Africans from the Durban Corporation even as they mounted an assertive defence of African women's rights to reside in the city.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Another member appointed at that time was Bertha Mkhize of the Bantu Girls' Friendly Society. Mkhize was not involved with the DBWS but as will become apparent in this paper Sililo and Mkhize both belonged to the same African women's welfare societies and were both prominent in the protests against the municipality's efforts to regulate African women's movement in and out of Durban.

<sup>7</sup> The Durban Bantu Women's Society was renamed the Durban National Council Bantu Women sometime after 1935. Mabel Palmer Collection File 24, KCM 17674, ‘Bantu Child Welfare Society Correspondence’ Constitution of the Durban National Council of Bantu Women’. Sililo's name is penciled onto this undated document, sent to Mabel Palmer.

<sup>8</sup> In colonial Natal, Africans who converted to Christianity came to be known as “amakholwa” (believers). See for example H. Mokoena for a discussion of articulations of this identity in her book *Makema Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Meghan Healy-Clancy, “The Self, the Nation, and the World: The Scale of Clubwomen's Work, 1912-1943”, Southern African Historical Society Conference, June 2013. M. D. Koffie, Mrs I Sililo's Crowded Life. Mrs Isabel Arthur Sililo, *Bantu World*, 7 November 1936. I would like to thank Meghan Healy-Clancy for alerting me to this article and *Bantu World*'s series on African women and social welfare.

As Meghan Healy-Clancy has recently argued, South African historians of African nationalism have often employed a definition of politics that made for myopia towards the civic and social assistance efforts of African women who were in fact intent on building a sisterhood for their 'race' and for 'the nation'.<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps surprising that South African historians have been fairly slow to explore the range of maternalist activities by black women in South Africa – given the critique that some of us made in the 1990s, of assumptions that Afrikaner women were 'man-made'.<sup>11</sup> My own belated research suggests how the simultaneous involvement by 'elite' African women in projects of poverty relief and in efforts to secure social assistance from the local and national state – this as they waged their own struggle for economic survival and to protect families from an invasive segregationist state - complicates efforts to understand the politics of race, class and nation. On the one hand, the DBCWS' efforts added to, or interfaced with local practices of municipal 'Native' welfare and efforts by kholwa men to extract assistance from the municipality, established during the years of Great Depression. On the other, the DBCWS also meshed its efforts to assist orphaned or neglected children and impoverished families with the activities of mutual assistance practised by Amadodakazi aseAfrika as they worked for 'indlu emnyama'.<sup>12</sup> How this involved a politics of family, of patriarchies and of an African maternalism that meshed with modern ideas of social welfare even as it drew on African practices of social assistance under the rule of segregation is something that this paper begins to consider.

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<sup>10</sup> M. Healy-Clancy, 'Women and the Problem of Family in Early African Nationalist History and Historiography', *South African Historical Journal*, 64, 3, (2012), 450- 471.

<sup>11</sup> M. du Toit, 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-c.1929', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28, 1 (2003), 155-176. The literature about gender and African nationalism that interrogates ideas of motherhood in African women's politics includes C. Walker, 'Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2, 3 (1995) and N. Erlank, 'Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912-1950', *Feminist Studies*, 29, 3 (2003), 653-671. See also Nomboniso Gasa, 'Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies and Women's Voices in the 1950s, in Gasa (ed), *Women in Southern African History: They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers* (HSRC Press, 2009) .

<sup>12</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 'Umhlangano Wamadodakazi AseAfrica', 2 January 1937. Indlu Emnyama (also sometimes Indlu Entsundu) could be said to mean 'Black House', but as with many direct translations that ignore metaphorical play, this falls too awkwardly on the ear. The phrase may have invoked the House of Assembly and therefore to signal claims of political rights as citizens of South Africa, and to speak for black civil society but African polities/clans/royal lines were also referred to as 'house of...'. The phrase was used at least from the 1890s in *Imvo Zabantsundu*, and in *Ilanga lase Natal*, from 1909. Both newspapers also referred to Umuzi Omnyama on occasion, invoking the African/isiZulu/isiXhosa homestead as metaphor.

### **Social Welfare and Durban's African population of the early 1930s**

In South Africa of the inter-war period, the meaning of 'social welfare' and particularly ideas of 'Native' welfare were in transition. The 1920s saw the rapid growth of initiatives for child welfare in civil society, often closely tied in with anxieties to counter 'white' poverty. By 1921 already, the creation of a state social grant popularly known as the 'mother's pension' reflected the growing conviction that impoverished and troubled children should only be removed from their families as a last resort. The grant provided an alternative to the options of institutionalised care stipulated in the Children's Protection Act of 1913. Officials immediately proceeded to administer child maintenance grants in line with the prevalent practice that "European" (and marginally, "Non-European" or persons of mixed racial descent) merited state social assistance – not Africans or persons classified as "Indian" or "Asiatic" by the state.<sup>13</sup>

By the early 1930s, ideas already implemented for some time on the Rand were given administrative shape in Durban – that 'native welfare' primarily conceptualised as organised leisure for migrant, African men should also be accepted as part of municipal responsibility. Worker strikes on the Rand was the main impetus behind the Joint Council Movement's establishment in the early 1920s – prominent figures of Johannesburg's Joint Council were involved starting urban, municipal welfare projects and efforts to encourage a moderate politics amongst members of the urban African elite.<sup>14</sup> A Durban branch held its first meeting in 1922.<sup>15</sup> An early report attributed its founding to the "Native Affairs Reform Association, one of the earliest of the Native Welfare Societies in South Africa" and explained the system of electing an approximately equal number of "Europeans" and "Natives" to the Council.<sup>16</sup> Few records seem to exist of its earliest years although Durban's Joint Council did make recommendations to the Urban Areas Act of 1923, in line with the general thrust of this legislation, and apparently without any consultation of black members.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> NAB, UOD, 1970, E201, file 'Children's Protection Act 1913, Maintenance Grants: General Questions'. The file contains a list of children who received the grants in Natal during the 1920s.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience, Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921-1961*. Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. 10-20.

<sup>15</sup> Historical Papers Research Archives (HP), William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, South African Institute of Race Relations Collection, AD 1433 Cd 3.2, Durban Joint Council Annual Reports, 1925-1949. *Ilanga Lase Natal*, "The NARA criticised", letter to the editors from Lawrence Kanyile. Kanyile criticised the Native Affairs Reform Association for announcing that a debate about the Native Urban Areas Act would take place in the new Joint Council, when it had in fact already written the report.

<sup>16</sup> HP, AD 1433 (Records of the Joint Council of Europeans and Africans), Cd 3.2 (Annual Reports of the Durban Joint Council for Europeans and Natives, 1925-1949), 'Report of the Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Natives, from its foundation to November 3, 1925'.

<sup>17</sup> More diligent newspaper research will probably reveal more about Joint Council activities in Durban. The Annual reports seem to have been sporadically written in the 1930s and also the early 1930s.

By the early 1930s, reports and meetings focused on problems regarding “(h)ousing of natives in Durban and the peri-urban areas”. The executive included the sociologist Mabel Palmer, who was critical of migrant labour policies and Stallardist hostility against the growth of a permanent, urbanised African community.<sup>18</sup>

In the aftermath of popular protest fuelled by the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union in the late 1920s and particularly the municipal beer hall boycotts of 1929, the DTC established a Native Advisory Board, aimed at drawing African political leaders away from perceived radicalism into structures of accommodation.<sup>19</sup> The DTC’s disinterest in any strategy of substantial political inclusivity was all too clear to participating ‘Natives’ who intermittently conveyed their dissatisfaction with the Board’s ad hoc status and its lack of decision-making powers which (so they explained) prompted fellow Africans to question their legitimacy and trustworthiness as elected representatives.<sup>20</sup> While they articulated such concerns to the ‘European’ chair and vice-chair they also continued to participate. The NAB’s activities added a certain status and structure to the public political activities of the city’s African elite, on the periphery of Corporation politics, quite remote from the centres of power and at first, with some deluded hope for meaningful political incorporation.<sup>21</sup>

A municipal Native Welfare Office was also established in 1930, first as a separate unit from the NAD. Urban ‘Native’ welfare was largely defined as the regulation of migrant men’s leisure time through such organised activities as Ngoma dancing and soccer.<sup>22</sup> Arthur

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<sup>18</sup> HP, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, AD1433 Cd 3.2, ‘Joint Council of Europeans and Natives Report on the Housing of Natives in Durban and the Peri-urban areas’, 4 September 1930. Henry Cotton was Chairman in 1930, and Mabel Palmer was Honorary Secretary. For a biography of Mabel Palmer, see Vanessa Noble, ‘Ruffled feathers: the lives of five difficult women in Durban in the 20th century : a study of the lives and contributions of Mabel Palmer, Killie Campbell, Sibusisiwe Makanya, Dr Goonam and Phyllis Naidoo’, unpublished MA thesis, University of Natal, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Goolam Vahed, ‘Control of African Leisure Time in Durban of the 1930s’, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* 18, 1998, 67-123. See the detailed account of politics in Durban of the late 1920s by Paul La Hausse, ‘The message of warriors: the ICU, the labouring poor and the making of a popular political culture in Durban 1925-30. In *Collected Seminar Papers. Institute of Commonwealth Studies* (No. 38, pp. 105-127). Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1990. The paper includes discussion of the ICU’s militant ‘Women’s Auxiliary’s role in 1929 and is interesting to compare to Helen Bradford’s analysis of rural protests by women, “We Are Now the Men: Women’s Beer Protests in the Natal Countryside, 1929.” *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives* (1987): 292-298.

<sup>20</sup> The ‘Natives’ were repeatedly reminded that they had no real decision making power. As one example, according to the minutes, on 29 October 1930 Rev. Msimang enquired about a delay in Mr Sililo’s appointment as clerk in the Welfare office. “...Further discussion ensued, during the course of which the Chairman ruled that the Board was not entitled to discuss any question of appointment”. The Chair would even insist on apologies if African board members expressed their sense of frustration and betrayal when they discovered that important policy matters had been decided without any consultation.

<sup>21</sup> Goolam Vahed discusses the initial optimism from Champion and others which waned by the late 1930s in his paper ‘Control of African leisure time in Durban of the 1930s’, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 1998, 18 (98), pp. 71 and 122. Also, TBD, 3DBN, 4/1/2/1147 (Native Advisory Board correspondence), A.W.G. Champion to the Town Clerk, 27 December 1929.

<sup>22</sup> Goolam Vahed, ‘Control of African leisure time in Durban of the 1930s’. *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*,

Sililo had joined Durban's Native Administration in 1928. He soon accepted a transfer to the office of the newly established Native Welfare Officer J. T. Rawlings, who argued that only Sililo answered his need for "a competent and intelligent Native clerk... very interested and good in all kinds of sport".<sup>23</sup> As the first Chief Native Clerk of the Native Welfare Office, Arthur Sililo was also involved in the establishment of the Bantu Men's Social Centre, which opened in 1933.<sup>24</sup> In 1932 he became representative on the NAB for the Native Married Quarters. It was particularly in this role but also to an extent through his work as clerk in the Native Welfare Office that Sililo, together with various entrepreneurs and ministers of religion, became involved in efforts to assist Africans struggling to survive tough economic times.

The Somtseu Road Eastern Vlei Native Married Quarters had been built in 1916-1919 and extended in the late 1920s (other nearby accommodation were barracks for African migrant labourers, in Somtseu Road itself and at the Point right next to Durban's harbour). It comprised 120 two bedroom cottages without ceilings and on dusty streets that were often water-logged during the summer rains.<sup>25</sup> Lists of rent defaulters drawn up by the location manager in the early 1930s show that if some men who had managed to secure a cottage were municipal clerks, those particularly vulnerable to tough economic depression worked at local factories and businesses.<sup>26</sup> The opportunity to work in the Native Welfare Office must in fact have held particular interest or prospect of prestige for Sililo, who was transferred at 5/- less than the £5.5.0 per month that he had previously received. In May 1931, Rawlings approached the municipality's Native Administration Committee about this problem, explaining that Arthur Sililo had "been also engaged as a night teacher at the American Zulu mission Native School by which means he has been able to support his family". However, long hours as organiser of "Native Sports" were now preventing him from continuing his part-time employment. The NAC did not respond favourably.<sup>27</sup> Two years later it also refused Sililo's application to "attend" the Bantu Men's Social Centre during lunch times and in the evenings, stipulating that municipal employees could not take outside employment. Sililo was on the executive of the Centre which was in fact a municipal venture, and his salary would

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1998, 18 (98), pp. 67-123.

<sup>23</sup> TBD, 3DBN, 4/1/2/1147, Volume 1, letter from J.T. Rawlings to Town Clerk, dated 29 October 1930. See also Rawling's letter of 11 December 1930, in which he confirms that Sililo had been transferred to his office. He was recommended to Rawlings by Rev Msimang.

<sup>24</sup> TBD, 3DBN, W40 YMCA, Volume 1. Minutes of the executive, 20 March 1933.

<sup>25</sup> TBD, 3DBN, 4/1/2/232 File: Native Locations 1930-1932, Volume 6. Report, 15 August 1932.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, List of Rent Defaulters, 5 January 1934.

<sup>27</sup> TBD, 3DBN, 4/1/2/1147, letter from J. T. Rawlings, 5 May 1931.

have doubled had this been granted.<sup>28</sup>

The Sililos' economic circumstances and social position of respectability and public visibility, as part of the local circles of the literate African elite, in forums presided over by white liberal segregationists and in the narrow confines of the NAB probably reflected typical pressures experienced by Durban's amakholwa in a decade of narrowing opportunities.<sup>29</sup> Racist job reservation and other segregationist legislation continued to shut doors of opportunity to the African educated class. Isabel and probably Arthur had attended John Dube's Ohlange Institute. Born Isabel Pewa, she went on to graduate with distinction from Inanda Seminary in 1909 and taught in her home district of Ndwendwe until she married Arthur in 1916.<sup>30</sup> As young people (Arthur's father was Reverend Matheus Sililo) their activities merited several mentions in the social pages of *Ilanga lase Natal*. As a young teacher and graduate from the Ohlange Institute and Inanda Seminary, Isabel Pewa already participated in networks of support associated with the Natal Native Congres. When *Ilanga lase Natal* reported that Mafukuzela (John L Dube) had returned from a tour which included countryside schools, she was one of several young women listed amongst "imihlobo yetu" (our kinspeople/friends) and thanked for the kindness and support that they had provided to "our work for our race on our travels" (ngomusa wazo nangokusekela kwazo okuhle emsebenzini wohlanga ebesihambe ngawo).<sup>31</sup> The newspapers' columns of "Izindatyana Ngezinto Nabantu" (bits and pieces about people) was an important aspect of its efforts to harness print culture for the creation of an African elite. As distributor for *Ilanga lase Natal* in Pietermaritzburg, Arthur helped spread the news that A.J. Sililo played several games of mixed double tennis (Rosebuds vs. New Scotland) in Pietermaritzburg shortly before his engagement with Isabel was announced. Her shopping expeditions to Durban also merited attention in the newspaper.<sup>32</sup> Arthur Sililo soon became prominent in local politics as part of

<sup>28</sup> TBD, 3DBN, W40, YMCA, Volume 1. Extract from the minutes of the Native Administration Committee, 8 September 1933.

<sup>29</sup> I have chosen to use the phrase 'liberal segregationist' because their opposition to the Stallardist version of urban segregation did not, for the most part, entail insistence on the integration of social and cultural spaces of the city.

<sup>30</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 'Abapumelele kuTeachers Examinations', 5 February 1909. She may have grown up in Inanda, if not in nearby Ndwendwe. Isabel's mother was from Bishop Colenzo's Ekukhanyeni mission station (*Bantu World*, 7 November 1936). For a history of Inanda Seminary, see Meghan Healy-Clancy, *A World of their Own A History of South African Women's Education* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 19 January 1915, Libuyile Ibandla likaMafukuzela. Note that this and other quotes from *Ilanga Lase Natal* reflect the original orthography. See also 8 January 1915, 'Lapho Kuhamba Khona uMafukuzela neBandhla Lakhe'

<sup>32</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 'Izindatyana ngezinto nabantu', 25 February and 19 May 1916.



the Natal Native Teacher's Union.<sup>33</sup> After teaching for several years in his hometown (during which time Isabel still merited sporadic mention in *Ilanga lase Natal*, not only at the birth of a daughter but also when she participated in a competition of competence in isiZulu orthography)<sup>34</sup> the couple moved to a country district in northern Natal in 1925.<sup>35</sup>

Three years later, apparently in order to secure better educational opportunities for their children, Arthur Sililo left his successful career as a teacher and probably accepted a somewhat lower salary. His meagre earnings as municipal Native clerk must have made the Sililos' elite status precarious and appearances difficult to maintain. Indeed, as a Durban Joint Council Report explained in 1930, "(e)xempted natives" within the borough were "persons of some education anxious to live in civilised fashion. Their usual wage is from £5 to £7 per month, the lower figure being probably more frequent".<sup>36</sup>

It was likely in the milieu of Durban Joint Council meetings that Isabel Sililo first came to the attention of liberal and municipal politics in Durban. This was certainly one of the few spaces for public discussion of political and social issues open to African women. In 1932, the Town Clerk insisted that its present system with "one native woman appointed by the residents of the Native Women's Hostel" represented the "interests of Native women" fully. He was replying to a letter from Mabel Palmer who wrote as Honorary Secretary of the National Council of Women and urged "in view of the large number of native women and children in Durban, that a European Woman should be appointed to serve on the municipal native administration board".<sup>37</sup> If Palmer did not consider that African women should represent themselves, they had in fact already launched the Durban Bantu Women's Society (DBWS). The municipal files recording the establishment of the Durban Bantu Men's Social Club – which explicitly excluded women from its membership – contain a newspaper cutting

<sup>33</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 'Umdhlalo weTennis', 16 July 1915, 'EzaseMgun'dhlovu', 7 January 1916, 'Izindatyana ngezinto nabantu' (mention that Rev Sililo had gone to visit the Pewa family in Inanda "Sike Sabona enyatela eNanda –Mzinyati. "uRev m Sililo izwa songathi ubezekuhlanganisa isihlobo nakwaPewa". Announcement of the couple's engagement followed shortly after, on January 14. AJ Sililo is listed as Ilanga's Pietermaritzburg distributor, for example, on 29 October 1918. There are a number of references to his evidently successful public career as head teacher. For example 'Natal United Teacher's Conference', 11 October 1918, 'The Educated Native. Viscount Buxton Receives Native Teachers', 2 August 1918; 'Natal Education Committee. Evidence of Native Teachers', 16 December 1921.

<sup>34</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 'Ngempikisano yeZulu Orthography', 2 March 1917. This was a letter signed "The Zulu Orthography". It reported competition results that listed 'Mrs Isabel Sililo (Pietermaritzburg)' as third, having achieved 73 per cent for her 'umsebenzi omuhle'.

<sup>35</sup> M. D. Koffie, Mrs I Sililo's Crowded Life. Mrs Isabel Arthur Sililo', *Bantu World*, 7 November 1936.

<sup>36</sup> Historical Papers Research Archives, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, South African Institute of Race Relations Collection, AD 1433 Cd 3.2, Durban Joint Council Annual Reports, 1925-1949. 4 September 1930, 'Report on the Housing of natives in Durban and the Peri-urban areas'. Arthur Sililo applied for exemption from the Natal Native Code in 1910 and Isabel Pewa is also listed as applying for exemption in 1912. NAB, CNC, vol 1/1/457, ref. 694/1910, v 117; vol. 94, ref 2028/1912.

<sup>37</sup> TBD, 3DBN, 4/1/2/1147 Native Advisory Board Correspondence.

reporting on a speech by Isabel Sililo on “the position of native women in towns”. It is likely that her role in the DBWS had prompted the invitation to address the Durban Joint Council on this topic. In fact, Isabel Sililo also became “research secretary” to Palmer’s sub-committee on African wage levels at this time. She presented oral evidence to the Native Economics Commission in 1931, in support of a council resolution that “educated Natives in Durban” earned inadequate wages.<sup>38</sup> Evidently, the DJC considered heads of households to be specifically male, as its resolution mentioned that wages “had to be supplemented by the work of the wife, by liquor brewing and selling...”.<sup>39</sup> Sililo spoke as one who herself belonged to “(t)he class of native” who had “no other means of livelihood except what they get as wages, as they have made their homes in Durban”. In her explanation, families had two breadwinners and she pre-empted her husband’s worries, soon to be expressed to the NAB, as to dire circumstances that could result from a partner’s death:

the budget that we have collected shews that, at the end of every month, our families are in debt ... It is very difficult to pay for the needs of the homes and the education of the children... You will note, honourable gentlemen, that no mention is made in the budgets of saving anything for the future, as the present conditions do not allow. As the mother of five children, the future seems dark and I shudder to think of a day when one of the breadwinners will be taken away.<sup>40</sup>

Sililo articulated the frustration of her generation of well-educated amakholwa: “(o)ur parents were able to bring us up better men and women, but on account of economic pressure, we are unable to do the same for our children”. Her submission focused strongly on the cost of education. “A Native” of her “class” was not considered for scholarships and bursaries. Her own monthly family budget included £1.2.6 in school fees for each of her five children.<sup>41</sup>

Selby Ngcobo’s case studies of the household budgets and expenditure of a number of African families resident in Durban likely involved Isabel Sililo’s help for at least the Married Quarter, given her formal involvement in this project.<sup>42</sup> The budgets provide vivid specifics about the living circumstances of residents at the Married Quarters and insight into the straightened circumstances of African municipal clerks. Ngcobo’s first example was of a

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<sup>38</sup> South Africa: Native Economic Commission Verbal Evidence, Volume 9 Submission by Isabel Sililo on behalf of the Durban Joint Council, 4 April 1931, p.6372.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 6373.

<sup>42</sup> Selby Ngcobo’s work and politics during the 1930s and 40s merit more research. He was teacher at Adams College at this time, and is also referred to as principal of the Loral Secondary School (where many of the children of Married Quarter residents were educated) in the 1940s. He would become professor at the University of Botswana and at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. J. Cabrita, *Journal of Religion in Africa*,

family who lived at the Somtseu Road Married Quarters. The husband was a garage attendant who earned £4.10 per month and whose wife added perhaps £1.10 with irregular laundry work. Food cost £3.15 a month municipal rent of £1 included ‘lights’ and a further eight shillings a month was spent on firewood. Clothing, dressing materials and shoe repairs, furniture, school and church expenditures cost £15.2/- per year. Two teenage boys and a younger girl slept in the kitchen/living room of the cottage. The family stretched their budget by way of some home sewing and by buying second-hand clothing, sometimes at jumble sales. The husband’s suits, which cost £1-2, had to last at least three years. Ngcobo concluded that the family was at least £10 in debt every year. A second family included four girls and one boy living at home. The husband managed a hotel kitchen, earning £10 per month. The eldest son was studying at Fort Hare, and had a bursary that did not cover full expenses or the railway fare. A teenage daughter also studied “at Amazimtoti” – her annual school fees came to £10. The family’s annual expenses were calculated at £138.<sup>43</sup>

Other heads of household earned as much as £16 per month.<sup>44</sup> A head teacher earned £8.50, supplemented by half-yearly allowances of £10.5. His monthly expenditure came to £7.6.9<sup>45</sup>. Arthur Sililo’s income was only marginally better than those of garage attendants and were lower than that of some semi-skilled labourers. As J. T. Campbell has argued, the African ‘elite’ of the early twentieth century was “in a simultaneous process of creation and collapse”.<sup>46</sup> In Natal, those of the amakholwa who lived in town and did not have access to privately owned homes or land in Inanda were particularly vulnerable to economic hardship, not least because of the race-differentiated salary scales, urban segregation, exclusionary property laws and colour-bar legislation. Even so, in 1939 *Ilanga lase Natal* would congratulate “Master Edmond Sililo, the youngest son of Mr and Mrs A J Sililo of Durban in his success in the piano-forte playing examination conducted by the Trinity College of Music, London”.<sup>47</sup>

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40 (1), 2010, p.74.

<sup>43</sup> HP, AD1433, Cd3.5, ‘Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Natives, Budgets collected by Mr Selby Ngcobo, with notes by Mrs Mabel Palmer’.

<sup>44</sup> It was only later that this accommodation was given the name of Baumanville, and at this time, even in the course of one document, a variety of descriptives were often used. The new township that came to be known as Lamontville but was first referred to as Umlazi Native Village was not yet planned or approved at this time. It would be built in 1934.

<sup>45</sup> HP, University of the Witwatersrand, AD1433, Cd3.5, ‘Durban Joint Council of Europeans and Natives, Budgets collected by Mr Selby Ngcobo, with notes by Mrs Mabel Palmer’.

<sup>46</sup> J. T. Campbell, ‘T.D. Mveli Skota and the Making and Unmaking of a Black elite’, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop Series, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 10 June 1939. The Sililos’ children became a nurse, a doctor and may also have been counted amongst Durban’s musicians of later years.

Economic depression brought new hardships to the community at the Married Quarters in the early 1930s. At NAB meetings Arthur Sililo called attention to growing unemployment amongst residents and criticized the Town Treasurer for not taking “the economic position of the Natives” into account, when reporting on revenue and expenditure pertaining to the Married Quarters. He called on the Council to honour its paternal duties - “that the Natives looked upon the Council as their guardians and that the Council was not out to make a profit on these quarters but to provide accommodation suitable for Natives...”.<sup>48</sup> The Council insisted that rentals were already subsidised by the municipality, but undertook to investigate necessitous cases through the Native Administration Department. In subsequent months Arthur Sililo continued to appeal for leniency towards unemployed tenants – in April 1933 he reported that “a considerable number had been out of work and were experiencing very hard times”. This was also the context for calling attention to the plight of widows who lived at the Married Quarters.

If Reverend Mtimkulu bolstered his appeal for reduced rentals by pointing out “that the Natives had no charitable institutions to which they could appeal for assistance”, the context of the depression did prompt an African welfare initiative. Mr James M. Ngcobo, who represented the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union on the NAB and who often defended the interests of stall-holders at the Municipal Native Market in Victoria Street, started a soup kitchen for “indigent natives” in 1931. This prompted disagreement between Board members. Some thought that “natives... would prefer to receive meals at the hands of their own people” and others that given extent of taxes and revenue from beer collected, this should be a municipal responsibility. In 1933 the ICU’s Natal Worker’s Club was still feeding some 200 “Natives, unemployed and destitute”.<sup>49</sup> In fact, a municipal soup kitchen had also been established. However, while the ICU’s venture provided free meals for unemployed “natives”, the Corporation Soup Kitchen required recipients to work for their breakfast, doing tasks at municipal recreational grounds early in the morning and supervised by Arthur Sililo in his capacity as Native Clerk in the municipal welfare office. For Reverend Mtimkulu this meant that “Natives... unable to return to their homes... were being placed in the position of being told that their wages was porridge”.<sup>50</sup> Requests by Mtimkulu and Ngcobo that the “Corporation should open up relief works with a view to relieving the extent of unemployment among the Native Community”, given that relief works had been “opened

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<sup>48</sup> TBD, 3DBN, 1/2/12/1/1. Minutes of the Native Advisory Board, 14 September 1932.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 12 April 1933.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 14 September 1932, 11 January 1933, 13 September 1933.

up... for Europeans and also Indians” and which would mean that African would also be “paid an amount for their services” were in vain.<sup>51</sup>

By 1934 the monthly report of the Native Welfare Officer, at first entirely focused on matters of sport and recreation, also included mentions of “indigent natives” and “native cripples”.<sup>52</sup> The municipality was also considering a scheme for a “native washhouse” at the municipal Married Quarters, although this idea was never realized and women continued their washing without facilities.<sup>53</sup> This was the terrain of uneasy incorporation into local government - of careful, determined appeals to Durban Town Council as a father to its Native wards made on behalf of the city’s legitimate, kholwa African households - that the women of the DBCWS would soon enter.

### **‘Non-European’ child welfare initiatives and the effort to curb ‘native juvenile delinquency’ in Durban**

The Durban Bantu Women’s Society was quick to use the NAB as conduit for its concerns. Launched in 1930, this Society soon prompted African representatives on the NAB to request that the Municipality establish a clinic for African mothers and children. In 1932 Reverend Mtimkulu reported on a meeting with the DBWS and that the women called for “a medical clinic for Native women and children”.<sup>54</sup> The Society had been urging its necessity “for some time... they were anxious to know how far the scheme had progressed”.<sup>55</sup> They wanted a “Child Welfare and Maternity Clinic” with a nurse who would provide “advice about child rearing” and remarked that the DTC was lagging behind “practically all other large centres and even mission stations”. Following similar requests in 1933 the DTC arranged for medical advice on this issue, possibly with involvement from provincial government departments. A “Child Welfare Clinic for Natives” opened in May 1933. Its premises were “at the rear of the Native Meat Market” in the centre of the city. The Brook Street Clinic’s success was mentioned in subsequent months.<sup>56</sup>

This initiative was in line with contemporary, widely circulating ideas of public health. Ideas

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 8 November 1933. The municipality’s discriminatory policy regarding relief works is interesting to consider in the context of NAD policies that sanctioned relief employment for Africans in the reserves.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 10 October 1934.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 15 July 1931.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 15 June 1933.

of “mothercraft” and maternity care by professional nurses had become a key element of child welfare campaigns. In the 1920s these were variously mounted by Afrikaner nationalist women’s societies, Pact government officials or white English-speakers of liberal segregationist political persuasion. The DBWS’s activities show that by at least the early 1930s members of the African elite articulated similar concerns. Its constitution also mentioned “welfare” as an explicit aim. One context for this was that prominent liberal segregationists had recently called for the extension of child welfare activities into African communities. This turn towards “Non-European” and “Native” child welfare was sporadically discernible from the 1920s and on a more co-ordinated basis from around 1928. Countrywide, the establishment of a loose network of Child Welfare and Benevolent Societies with a lay membership of volunteers, dotted across South Africa had gathered momentum during the First World War. One early impetus was anxiety about infant mortality precipitated by the huge death toll of the British Empire’s young men in the war and the need for more “white babies”. By far the majority of Child Welfare Societies targeted ‘European’ poor. In many towns and villages they would have been regarded as the English equivalent of the fast-growing Afrikaner-nationalist women’s welfare societies focused on ‘rescuing’ *armblankes*.<sup>57</sup>

A self-styled “Child Welfare Movement” gained momentum in 1924 with the formation of a South African National Council of Child Welfare. It aimed to co-ordinate the work of local societies and to co-ordinate liaison with state officials.<sup>58</sup> In 1927 it accepted a “Children’s Charter of South Africa” which declared general principles of children’s rights “irrespective of race or class, of politics or creed”.<sup>59</sup> At its national conference in 1928, the SANCCW passed a resolution to “encourage the establishment of Non-European Child

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<sup>57</sup> The decision by Grahamstown’s Benevolent Society (its name was as below in the 1920s) to also address high rates of infant mortality in the local African location by establishing a ‘baby clinic’ that employed an African midwife in 1921 was unusual. Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown Child Welfare Society Collection, Minute book, 1917-1926. Society for the Protection of Child Life, Fifth Annual Report, 1922. (Accession number etc?)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, SANCCW, 50 Jubilee publication. This publication suggests that persons involved in Child Welfare Societies and/or the SANCCW referred to their activities as constituting such a “Child Welfare Movement”.

<sup>59</sup> ‘A Children’s Charter for South Africa’, *Child Welfare* (Published by the SANCCW), June 1927, 8. This Charter was based on the “Save the Children’s Fund” Charter. I aim to do more research on connections between the S A “Child Welfare Movement” and children’s rights/welfare initiatives associated with the League of Nations, such as the International Save the Children’s Union and the broader context of a movement of international citizenship. See for example Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, C. 1918-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

Welfare Societies”.<sup>60</sup> It is possible that child welfare initiatives by African and Indian members of the Joint Councils and similar structures such as the Indo-European Council helped to prompt white liberal segregationist’s growing concern about ‘Non-European’ poverty. Two years previously prominent Durbanites of Indian descent had brokered a relationship with the Durban Child Welfare Society (which dealt mainly with ‘European’ but also with ‘Coloured’ families) in order to start a committee of the DCWS – in actual fact it had an independent executive.

That the SANCCW’s resolution was intended to encourage child welfare assistance for African communities (and also envisaged a focus in the Reserves) was evident from their decision to ask not only “the Non-European Community” but also “the Native Affairs Department, the Native Affairs Commission and the Transkei Central Council, etc” for financial support.<sup>61</sup> The SANCCW also resolved to communicate its recommendation to the Joint Councils of European and Non-Europeans. Indeed, conferences organised as part of the liberal segregationist Joint Council initiative (and aimed at encouraging a moderate approach in African politics) now began to discuss the need for child welfare initiatives focusing on ‘non-European’ children. At the “National European-Bantu Conference” of February 1929 which was opened by John D. Rheinalt-Jones (co-founder of the Joint Council Movement together with the Natal-based educationist Charles Loram) the SANCCW resolution was endorsed. Local Joint Councils were encouraged to assist in the formation of child welfare societies “concerned with non-European children”. The conference’s list of recommended projects emphasised one aspect only of the work of existing Child Welfare Societies. Public health education and mothercraft was envisaged rather than poverty relief. Possibly, one factor that helped shaped this emphasis was the persistent “sanitation syndrome” that cast Africans as vectors of disease.<sup>62</sup> Examples included the involvement of municipalities in public health campaigns, promotion of hygiene instruction at schools and holding “baby shows”.<sup>63</sup>

The immediate catalyst for the formation of the Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society

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<sup>60</sup> Campbell Collections, KCM 89/18/19/1. Extract from the minutes of the SANCCW, Executive meeting, April 1928. These were proposals of a sub-committee put forward by Handel-Thompson, who was an inspector of Schools on the Rand in the late 1910s, and involved in initiatives to care for African elderly and destitute African children by the mid-1920s. He was also chairman of the SANCCW.

<sup>61</sup> Campbell Collections, KCM 89/18/19/1. Extract from the minutes of the SANCCW, Executive meeting, April 1928.

<sup>62</sup> M W Swanson, The sanitation syndrome: bubonic plague and urban native policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909’. *Journal of African History*, 18 (3), 1977, pp 387-410.

<sup>63</sup> *South African Outlook*, March 1, 1929, p .56.

was, however, white liberal segregationist anxiety about a specifically urban problem posed by the growing population of homeless African children who lived on Durban's streets, particularly in the city centre. Already in the 1920s, Joint Councils based in South Africa's larger cities had identified "native juvenile delinquency" as an issue of some urgency.<sup>64</sup> If such black participants as Charlotte Maxeke of the Bantu Women's League articulated this as a problem of justice (in the 1920s 'native' children were excluded from juvenile courts), her white counterparts more often saw this as a problem of order and discipline and of how to efficiently manage urban segregation. This was certainly central to public discussion in Durban during 1934, when the Juvenile Court Magistrate M G Fannin started debate about possible changes to the probationary system.<sup>65</sup>

Fannin articulated ideas for reform of the state justice system widely popular in the 1930s - the conviction that first offenders were not necessarily "a danger to the community", that "owing to the social and economic conditions under which certain classes of the community were forced to live" offences were "relative rather than absolute" and that "prison sentences should only be resorted to "under exceptional circumstances".<sup>66</sup> Speaking at a conference on Mental Hygiene held in Durban in 1934, he called for volunteer probation officers to help supervise "first offenders" with suspended sentences. Soon, he also addressed specific anxieties about the need for organised intervention to take African juvenile offenders off the streets and the lack of such institutions as "road camps... in Durban where Native first

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<sup>64</sup> See also Paul La Hausse, 'The Cows of Nongoloza: Youth, Crime and Amalaita Gangs in Durban', 1900-1936. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 16 (1) which suggests an interesting continuum of discourse about crime.

<sup>65</sup> The history of Juvenile and of Children's Courts has, according to my present knowledge, not been researched in any detail – extant histories of child welfare in South Africa by scholars such as Linda Chisholm have focused on reformatories with a strongly Foucaultian approach that emphasize state power rather than civil society organisations. I still have to confirm when and how Children's Courts were established in South Africa's major cities, and dealt with all children, strongly structured by segregationist and race-differentiated ideas of juvenile delinquency. Juvenile Courts operated throughout the 1920s but African children were dealt with in a 'Native' Juvenile Court. The change of name indicated new policy specifying that magistrates with specialized knowledge must preside in court cases involving aspects of the Children's Protection Act. Auckland Park's Children's Court was the first (1929), then Durban (1934) and Cape Town (1938). Durban followed in 1934 and Cape Town in 1938. Apartheid state excluded African children from this system with the Children's Act of 1960. My initial research suggests that amongst the bodies that campaigned for this system were Child Welfare Societies and the SANCCW together with the Joint Councils. See L Chisholm, 'Gender and deviance in South African industrial schools and reformatories for girls, 1911-1934' in C. Walker (ed), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (David Philip Publishers, 1990) and Also Azeem Badroodien, 'From Boys to Men: The Education and Institutional Care of Coloured Boys in the Early Twentieth Century'. *South African Review of Education*, Vol.17, No.1, 2011, pp. 1-20.

<sup>66</sup> *The Natal Mercury*, July 14 1934.



offenders could be sent”.<sup>67</sup> Fannin “stressed the needs of the Native, Indian, Coloured and European...”<sup>68</sup>. The Natal Mercury soon reported on another meeting convened by Durban’s Senior Magistrate, W A Rowan, involving a range of local officials from Justice, police departments, the Native Welfare Office and the municipality’s Native Affairs Department. The topic was “the position of Native vagrants in the town, Native beggars who seemed to have drifted into Durban and were reported to have become public nuisances and the general question of Natives in Durban”.<sup>69</sup> This expansive interest in urban segregation included discussion of how “slum” and “economic conditions” caused vagrancy and a drifting population of “Native juveniles” in Durban. Endorsement out of the city was not working as they simply tended to “return after having been sent away”. The meeting discussed possible solutions, including “a place situated in or near Durban as a correctional home of some sort” and the formation of a “Native branch of the Probation Association”.<sup>70</sup>

A change in national policy was partly responsible for the sudden attention to this “problem” in 1934, in line with current ideas as to how the state should interact with young offenders. The care of young persons who came in conflict with the law was no longer the responsibility of the Union Department of Justice but delegated to the Education Department. Apparently in response to this development, local police in Durban temporarily disclaimed responsibility for the detention of black children and youth, who had hitherto been kept in the cells of the Central City police station. One result of this conundrum of where to detain these children was a series of meetings between local judiciary, the SAIRR and municipal officers. Maurice Webb of the SAIRR also corresponded with Union government officials on behalf of the newly constituted Durban Native Juvenile Delinquency Committee, detailing the problem that some “four hundred Native boys” lived on the street, most of them without homes, employment or “tribal connections”.<sup>71</sup> Webb identified the ‘problem’ as one of poverty, lack of proper housing and loss of “tribal” and “parental” control. Boys drifted in from their “breeding-ground”, the newly incorporated peri-urban areas to the South of old Borough boundaries where thousands of city employees were forced to live “under the most

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<sup>67</sup> In the 1920s already the SANCC evinced a strong interest in questions of “mental hygiene” and publicized the efforts of the eugenicist “Mental Hygiene Movement of South Africa”. (For example, *Child Welfare*, June 1927, 16-20). I have yet to research this inter-connectio. At this time, South African Mental Hygiene Societies were largely concerned with ‘poor white’ deficiencies.

<sup>68</sup> *The Natal Mercury*, July 14, 1934.

<sup>69</sup> *The Natal Mercury*, September 3, 1934.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> HP, SAIRR collection, AD843, B23.3.1, Committee on Native Juvenile Delinquency, M Webb to Dr L van Schalkwyk, Secr of Ed, Union Department, 17 September 1934.

distressing conditions”.<sup>72</sup> They wandered around town “under no control whatsoever, living in the Corporation hayricks”, living in “passages and alley-ways of the lower quarters of the town” or wherever they could “hope to escape the surveillance and vigilance of the Police.”<sup>73</sup>

Fannin was the main speaker at the annual general meeting of the Durban Child Welfare Society in the Mayor’s Parlour at the City Hall, where he again emphasised that “the great problem of this town is the Native Juvenile Delinquent” and told stories of how attempts to place young African children in the custody of white farmers and suburban heads of household simply resulted in repeated efforts to abscond. Evidently, “kind treatment”, repeated arrests and “whippings” did not have the desired effect, and even efforts to compel relatives of the children (under Native Law) to take in “orphans” failed to prevent them from running “wild”. For Fannin this was “Durban’s business!” Such children could not be “sent back to their locations, because they have no locations. They have been born and bred in Durban. It is a huge question, involving not only Court work but slum clearance and Child Welfare work.”<sup>74</sup>

Fannin was implicitly referring to the rapidly growing country-wide system in which non- governmental Child Welfare societies worked together with court officials, largely to attempt the rehabilitation of poor white families. Durban’s Joint Council Committee likewise believed that the presence of “active social agencies” would help resolve a situation largely caused by low wages and the municipality’s failure to provide proper housing. While the local Child Welfare Society was not prepared to extend its own activities to include the local African community, it suggested the formation of a “Native” child welfare society with organized African women.

Isabel Sililo recalled that a large meeting was organised by the Durban National Council of African Women, at the Bantu Social Centre.<sup>75</sup> The Magistrate reported that he had convened a meeting attended by 350 women. *Ilanga lase Natal* certainly reported a “well attended meeting”, addressed by Child Welfare Society president and city councilor Edith Benson and by Fannin, at which the former spoke about plans to establish a women’s Bantu

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<sup>72</sup> Van Schalkwyk, Secretary of the Union Department of Education, explained to Maurice Webb that the Children’s Act of 1913 could only be invoked to commit ‘juveniles under 16 years of age’”, and that the Prisons and Reformatories Act differentiated between “Juveniles under 16 and Juvenile adults – 16-21”.

<sup>73</sup> HP, SAIRR collection, AD843, B23.3.1, Committee on Native Juvenile Delinquency, M Webb to Dr L van Schalkwyk, Sec of Ed, Union Department, 17 September 1934.

<sup>74</sup> The Natal Mercury, September 27, 1934.

<sup>75</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, Alex Maphalala, ‘iDurban Bantu Child Welfare, Umsebenzi Otusekayo’, August 28, 1965.

Social Centre where they could learn house-keeping skills , and the Magistrate ““preached” (wa shumayela) about homeless and vagrant African youth. Besides Isabel Sililo (according to *Ilanga lase Natal* she represented Daughters of Africa) other “leading women of the town and suburbs” who attended included “Miss V.S. Makhanya of the Bantu Youth League, Imbumbulu, Mrs F. M. Caluza the translator of Amabutho ka Kristu”, “Mrs J. L. Dube of Ohlange Institute; Mrs N. Lutuli Proprietess of the Prince Edward Bantu Tearoom... and Mrs R. Caluza teaching at Sydenham”.<sup>76</sup>

This initiative co-incided with escalating tensions about the DTC’s policy of urban segregation and its plans for control over the movement African women. Large meetings of African women would soon become a more frequent aspect of public politics in Durban – and these would not be called by Durban’s white elite. In August 1935 Magistrate Fannin of the Children’s Court once again publicised the problem of homeless “native umfaans” and announced that “at last a Native Welfare Society had been started with a dozen Native women to assist” He commended Mrs Benson of the Child Welfare Society for her efforts in this regard. It would soon become clear that Isabel Sililo was central to this group. Exactly at this time, she was also one of several women speaking out about urban policies of segregation.

Parliament was considering revision of the Natives Urban Areas Act, and the Durban Bantu Women’s Society gave evidence at a public hearing held at the City Hall. According to *The Natal Mercury* the Society submitted “one of the most interesting memoranda”, claiming “to represent the opinion of the Bantu Women in the City of Durban, as it has interested itself in the Social Welfare of the Native community from its inception”.<sup>77</sup> The memorandum, signed by Sibusisiwe Makhanya, Isabel Sililo, Bertha Mkhize and Rev Mtimkulu’s wife Constance, opposed the rigid enforcement of the Urban Areas Act, stating that “Durban and other Natal towns had locations and reserves in their immediate neighbourhood and that there was an interdependence between them”. The DBWS also argued that “the Native townships which are springing up” had to provide for “normal family life for Natives”, offering houses at reasonable rentals (the DTC had recently bowed to pressure and conceded to build Lamontville). Problems of parental control and lack of supervision were caused by “the low wages paid to the Natives”, which forced wives as well

<sup>76</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 30 November 1934. Reports in English and also isiZulu sections of the newspaper.

<sup>77</sup> *The Natal Mercury*, August 30, ‘Native villages in Reserves. Yesterday’s evidence before urban areas committee’. The newspaper described this as a ““Government Committee investigating Native conditions in

as husbands to search for work. The Society also called for state social welfare policy more inclusive of Africans. The “duty of government” included not only provision of children’s education but also support for “indigent Natives who are too old or infirm to work” and efforts to combat “unemployment by relief works, as it does for the other sections of the community.”<sup>78</sup>

The memorandum was probably “interesting” to the *Natal Mercury* because African women did the submission. With the important exception of their explicit call for state social welfare policies that also assisted Africans, their viewpoints as reported by the *Natal Mercury* matched those articulated by Arthur Sililo, Rev Mtimkulu and Champion on behalf of the Native Advisory Board. Maurice Webb and D G Shepstone, giving evidence on behalf of the Durban Joint Council, likewise argued against “further restrictions on the movement of natives”. They rejected “alarmist views” of rapid urban migration and attempts at management by “compulsion and restriction”. Factors of “social and economic attraction” would ensure an appropriate balance between rural and urban populations. Congested living conditions in Durban were the “accumulated result of long neglect of adequate housing provision, and of social and health services.”<sup>79</sup>

Durban’s Joint Council also articulated its opposition to Stallardist ideas of urban control, explicitly supporting the right of educated Africans to live in the city, expressing its “alarm” that the Native Urban Areas Act could be “amended in such a way” as to compel “many of our members, teachers, ministers, clerks, social workers and others ... to leave town and to discontinue their valuable work in the interest of their own people upon which they are engaged...”. There was a strong degree of consensus and a conscious political alliance between leading kholwa and those of Durban’s white elite who shared a liberal framework of political ideas that included rejection of the colour bar and assertion that African families had a right to live in South Africa’s towns and cities.<sup>80</sup>

The DJC’s comment about a possible threat to the good works of mission-educated Africans most likely concerned plans that emerged in 1935 to restrict African’s women’s movement into Durban. *Ilanga lase Natal* reported rumours of that “abelungu” (whites)

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urban areas... comprised of Mess J M Young (chairman) and A L Barrett”.

<sup>78</sup> *The Natal Mercury*, 30 August 1935. Isabel Sililo apparently sent a copy of the memorandum to Killie Campbell ““With Compliments”. KCAL Manuscripts Collection, File 51 (Killie Campbell. Further Correspondence), KCM8872. “Memorandum to Be Submitted to the Special Government Commission on Natives in Urban Areas,” August 30, 1935.

<sup>79</sup> *The Natal Mercury*, 30 August 1935.

<sup>80</sup> *The Natal Mercury*, August 31 and September 3, 1935.

were discussing the problem of unregulated women early in the year and arguing that “akusizi lutho ukuthi kunga qoqwa isilisa sabantu kube isifazana sakubo si ngumhlambi ka Z’alusile” (it does not help to regulate African men while their women have no one to guide them). Plans were afoot “ukubeka kuso icala lokufa lokhu osekwandile kwamadolopha kanye nokudayisa ugologo” (to take serious action against the growth of the towns and the sale of liquor).

One response to the growth of an African urban presence was evidently to try deal with the ‘problem’ of homeless children on Durban’s streets and to turn to kholwa women for their help. At the very same time however, powerful officials in the national and local state were putting legislative strategy in place, aimed at closing the city precincts to a further influx of African women.<sup>81</sup> Hostile to the presence of a growing population of African families living on the city’s periphery and especially to women who escaped the control of their legal guardians (as spelled out by customary law), Durban’s Town Council now moved to control the movements of African women, regardless of their education. The DTC responded enthusiastically to directives from the national Department of Native Affairs that “Native females” should be treated “as a class” and that the Native Urban Area Regulations should specifically regulate their entry into an area proclaimed ‘European’. At this time, only men were subject to pass law regulations. When the DTC adopted amendments in March 1935 the only dissenting voice was Edith Benson of the Durban Child Welfare Society.<sup>82</sup>

The new policy prompted a series of confrontations between African political organisations, including the NAB, the Natal Native Congress, the DBWS and DOA. As an article in *Ilanga lase Natal* explained, the kopoletsheni now required that women apply for permission by post should they wish to enter the borough. Girls under 18 would only be able to enter town with permission of their parent or guardian. Those with permits would have to stay at the Women’s Hostel (for years already a very overcrowded establishment) or obtain explicit permission to stay elsewhere. They would have a week to find work and if unsuccessful, would have to return to the countryside for a year.<sup>83</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal* reported that women who attended the combined meetings of the NAC and women’s organisations in 1935 “almost lost control of themselves and acted in a manner not conducive to a peaceful

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<sup>81</sup> While official statistics put the male to female ratio of Durban’s African population at 6.6 to 1 in 1921, it was 3.6 to 1 in 1936. Census statistics give the population of 1936 as 64,023 Africans, 86,684 whites, 97,217 Indians, 7,040 Coloureds and a total population of 236,964. Goolam Vahed (1998). See also Paul Maylham, ‘The Black Belt: African Squatters in Durban, 1936-1950’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 17(3), 1983.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

settlement”.<sup>84</sup>

A delegation to the NAC, representing African men on the NAB, the DOA and the DBWS, resulted in a year’s delay and introduction of modified regulations, while the kholwa community thought that the plan had been withdrawn. In 1936 the DTC reintroduced the regulations, also announcing that African women could supply proof of that they were legitimately in the city in order to apply for “exemption certificates”. Presented as a concession by the DTC, this led to intensified opposition. *Ilanga lase Natal*’s account of a 2000 strong meeting at the Durban Social Centre explained outrage at this insult to women in what could be interpreted as patriarchal terms, given its specific objection to the plan for “our women” to ask permission to travel from male municipal officials:

Maningi lamapasi athwelwe yithi, ngokuba loMthetho uhlose ukuthunaza abesifazana nabantwana bethu ukuba bayoqula namadoda ezinthangamini zakwa Kopoletsheni.<sup>85</sup>

(We are burdened by many passes, and now this law intends to lower the dignity of our women and children, forcing them to account to men of the Corporation).

By late 1936 the gender politics of resistance against the regulations involved independent action by kholwa women, in response to harassment by police of women on the street and in their homes. Large and volatile “women’s meetings” were now being held at the Bantu Social Centre – once planned as social space for African men. Early in 1937 several hundred women marched to the offices of Durban’s Native Commissioner where they staged a sit-in, forcing the city to abandon the policy. Isabel Sililo, together with Bertha Mkhize (also active in the DOA) were spokeswomen.<sup>86</sup> If this was an ambiguous victory – the DTC was confident that its national legislation would soon assist its efforts – harassment of Durban’s mission-educated women, including night time raids on their homes were halted. From 1936 Sililo and Mkhize served on the Native Advisory Board, where they questioned aspects of urban segregation and plans to curtail African settlement in Durban’s peri-urban areas. Women also opened up new space in print media through their militant action. *Ilanga lase Natal* launched page for women,

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<sup>83</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, “Umthetho Omusha Wesifazana sabantu eThekwini”, 15 March 1935.

<sup>84</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, “Durban Town Council and Native Women”, 12 April 1935.

<sup>85</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 11 July 1936.

<sup>86</sup> 3DBN, 4/1/3/1635, File 359c, V1 (Proposed Compulsory Registration of Women. January 1936 to May 1946).

... reserved for your exclusive articles on home economics, problems, advices, health notes etc., and all matters of interest to the African Woman and her home. Nurses, Welfare and Social Workers, Teachers and leaders of Women (sic) Associations and Unions are particularly invited to contribute. You are all invited to make your contributions through these columns for the upliftment of the African Race.<sup>87</sup>

Throughout, local Justice officials and the Native Welfare Officer continued to make plans to work with kholwa women. Meetings of the DOA discussed the range of public activities pertaining to women's defence of their families in the city: "uMrs Ndlovu wabika nenhlangano yaoMame nowukubhekel'izingane, nemithetho yamapasi, etc" (Mrs Ndlovu reported on the meeting of the Mothers about the welfare of children, and the pass laws, etc).<sup>88</sup>

As president of the DOA in 1937, Isabel Sililo insisted that the woman "passionately proud of her race" could not "shut herself up and stop there while the world is moving on". As "wives and mothers" women were called to "cultivate the soil" and provide "food for the family". But there was "NO LIMIT TO THE GOOD FOR AFRICA" that the DOA could do.<sup>89</sup> The leading item of the "programme of work for Bantu women" outlined by Sililo was "Infant and child welfare", followed by "education, various health services, better housing and home conditions, better cooperation amongst our people, recreation for boys and girls..." Women of the various welfare societies were claiming public spaces for themselves in the name of 'race' and *indlu emnyama*.

### **The Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society and state social assistance by in the late 1930s**

The DBCWS formed part of the network of child welfare societies largely concerned with the poverty of white South Africans and made up of often well-to-do and middle-class whites. An early public meeting of the DBCWS was dominated by powerful officials of the DTC and local courts: Edith Benson (now also the DBCWS's president) "welcomed the Chief

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<sup>87</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 16 January 1937. The first women's page appeared on 5 December 1936, although for the first few months, the selection of articles that appeared on this page was random. By 1 January 1937 the page had acquired "Beauty Notes" and it soon had the requisite recipes. On 20 February 1937, the page also reported on the first meeting of the Bantu Women's Civic Society's "first 'Tea'". The page was variously called "Page for the Ladies", "Elamakhosikazi" and "Ikhasi lamakhosikazi". Other pages had the banner "Izinthombi Zakithi Nezazo (Our young women and their concerns).

<sup>88</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 January 1937.

<sup>89</sup> *Bantu World*, 'Mrs I Sililo's Presidential Address', 20 February 1937. I would like to thank Meghan Healy-Clancy for sending me this article.

Magistrate of Durban, Mr Piers, and the new Juvenile Court Magistrate, Mr S Olivier”.<sup>90</sup> Officials who were on the executive included the Probation Officer, the Native Welfare Officer and Magistrate Fannin. Native Congress politicians were honorary vice presidents (John L. Dube and Abner Mtimkulu). The Society’s first chairwoman was Mrs Mpanza (her husband was a church minister and served on the NAB). Isabel Sililo was Honorary Secretary. In fact, the majority of executive members were African. In contrast to the NAB, this was a structure in which Africans had substantial control.

Monthly meetings, the daily administration and activities of the Society were run by Sililo and other women, all from prominent local families. Sililo’s position as Secretary and therefore scribe for the Society made her the archived voice of the early DBCWS and more careful research may yet uncover how her colleagues helped shape the Society as it began its work. It is nevertheless clear that Sililo was central to the Society’s activities.

In her earliest surviving annual report (1936-1937) Sililo emphasised that “the Bantu people” were “the poorest section of the community”. The DBCWS acted as intermediaries between impoverished state officials and workers oppressed by state policy:

until the wage and housing problem, together with proper and regular employment in this City is solved, the children the children of the poorly paid Bantu worker will naturally seep lower into degeneracy and cry for the assistance of a Society [such] as this to approach the Government and authorities on their behalf.<sup>91</sup>

The SANCCW’s first efforts to encourage “Non-European” child welfare had emphasised health education and mother-craft. Sililo focused on the work that also concerned most white-directed child welfare societies – efforts to assist impoverished families whilst honouring the principle “to help people to help themselves”. Extracting poor relief from the state was crucial to its work, and the Society could also not ignore the needs of “the children of widows, and other parents who had been suffering untold hardships”.<sup>92</sup>

For Sililo, it was the Society’s “Investigation Committee” that did its most important and “responsible” work. Its members visited needy families at their homes. Working with the

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<sup>90</sup> *Ilanga lase Natal*, 11 July 1936. I have not found evidence that the DBCW and the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society worked together in the 1930s, but this did happen in the 1940s, particularly through Mildred Lavoipierre, who became its chair in 1943.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Killie Campbell Archives, Mabel Palmer Collection, File 24, KCM17674, Secretary’s second annual report for 1936-1937.



municipality's Native Welfare Office was also important for the provision of basic food relief. That the DBCWS' efforts to procure rations of poor relief from the state on behalf of impoverished families also meshed with the voluntary assistance by the Daughters of Africa is suggested by a letter from one Rhoda Dhludhla to *Ilanga lase Natal* of 1939. She started by praising the work of the DBCWS. Sililo and Ndhlovu had helped her blind son: "ngingeqede konke okuhle abangenzela khona" (it's not possible for me to mention all the beautiful things that they did for me). Her letter focused on assistance from a branch of the DOA, chair was probably the same Mrs Ndhlovu of the DBCWS. Exactly when assistance from the latter Society had run out, three women from the DOA had appeared where she lay ill and told her that they would take her to the hospital:

Ngase ngithi: "Anginayo ngisho indibilishi!" Ase ethi amaDodakazi aseAfrika: "Yamkhela lokhu, uze uhambe uye kuDokotela, futhi udleni umntwana?" Ngaphendula ngathi: "Kuphelile okwaseBantu Social Centre, lapha ngithola khona usizo seleku!"<sup>93</sup>

(Then I said I don't have a penny. Then the Daughters of Africa said: "Take this, go to the doctor. Furthermore what did the child eat?" I answered and I said: "It is finished that which came from the Bantu Social Centre, there where I have found long found help!")

The DOA assisted with money for transport and food. "Ngesaba nokusho ukuthi amaDodakazi aseAfrika azimisele ukuba angithengele konke njengokusho kukaDokotela" (I'm even afraid to say that the Daughters of Africa are keen to buy me everything exactly as said by the doctor). This was assistance of Christian fellowship and community. Mrs Dhludhla addressed *Ilanga lase Natal*'s readers "bazalwane beNkosi" (brethren of God) and asked the editor to support "lomhlangano wamaDodakazi ethu" (this Society of ours, the Daughters) who had extended help to many.

The DBCWS was also increasingly involved in work with Child Commissioners and Probation Officers. By 1936 black children were dealt with by a consolidated Children's Court. The Society assisted with cases involving the Children's Protection Act, particularly as investigators of family circumstances. Although the court now attended to all children it was firmly part of the legal machinery of urban segregation.<sup>94</sup> This was the realm of state authority over African children into which local officials and liberal segregationists such as

<sup>93</sup> Rhoda Dhludhla, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 'Amadodakazi AseAfrika Nabadingayo', 27 August 1939.

<sup>94</sup> TBD, 1DBN, 3/2/1/2/32, 24/4/2/277/36. Case File, Children's Protection Act Committal.3/2/1/2/36, 26/4/2/379/36.

Maurice Webb wanted to draw the DBCWS.

Many boys identified as 'Native' by the court were fourteen years of age or older, arrested for failing to produce a pass and proof of employment and for "wandering" the city or its suburbs "without visible means of subsistence". Others were arrested for petty theft, possession of insangu (dagga) or running errands that transgressed the liquor laws. Court officials would then recommend conversion of the case into an enquiry under the Children's Protection Act. Some homeless children picked up by policemen were placed in the Brandon Bantu Boys Hostel, recently established on the model of 'Lad's Hostels' through the efforts of Maurice Webb and of which Sililo was an executive member. Some stayed there while further efforts were made to find their family. The Court was keen to "repatriate" youngsters to male guardians living in the countryside. Homeless boys were also committed to the Hostel's care.<sup>95</sup>

The DBCWS assisted the court in some cases involving truant and homeless boys but the Children's Court case files suggest that it made no effort to help with efforts to apply pass and employment regulations. Boys arrested for disobeying provisions of the Urban Areas Act were dealt with only by police and court officials. The Society tended to act on behalf of children by drawing on a network of assistance and organisations active in the inner city. This also meant that they became involved in (sometimes unsuccessful) efforts to help children who lived on the street after fleeing parents or relatives because of violence at home, lack of care and hunger. As one example, the ICU's AWG Champion observed an unfamiliar young boy playing with the cook's son at the ICU's social club, ascertained his homeless state and handed him over to Isabel Sililo. The latter then wrote to the Juvenile Court Magistrate, offering to find suitable foster parents for the eight year old Makwebana.<sup>96</sup> The boy was placed at home with a member of the Investigative Committee while the DBCWS tried to find his grandmother's house. But he had told Sililo that his parents had abandoned him and that he had run away from his grandmother because of beatings. Before further arrangements were made he disappeared.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> The Brandon Boy's Hostel itself merits further research. An African headmaster was in charge, and boys elected a representative council and attended local schools. It was traumatically dismantled in the 1959 and apartheid officials escorted the boys to half-established rural youth camps – they possibly ended up on farms. Many escaped their minders during the train journey away from Durban.

<sup>96</sup> I have changed or withheld all surnames of families with case histories the archives of the Children's Court. The Children's Protection Act files in the Durban Archives Repository have 'restricted access' status. While child maintenance grants were made on the basis of economic need, foster care, adoption and criminal charges against children were also the subject of many enquiries.

<sup>97</sup> TBD, 1DBN, 3/2/1/2/41, 26/4/2/113/37. Children's Protection Act Case File. I Sililo to Magistrate, Children's

In fact, the Society became involved in various family matters, in at least some instances taking the side of mothers and widows. Parents sometimes attempted to make use of the Juvenile Court in an effort to control recalcitrant children, also drawing the DBCWS 's investigative committee into disputes between wives and husbands about child rearing. In one instance Sililo interceded on behalf of the mother of a seventeen year old whose father had approached the Juvenile Court. Their son slept at the Somtseu Road migrant labour barracks and roamed Durban with "other ruffians", refusing to come home. The father wanted the boy to be detained in police cells for a few days "to frighten him". Sililo explained that the mother disagreed with this plan of detention with "a few cuts" and wished the boy to be sent "to some very distant school by the court". She supported this idea: "I happen to know the boy, and I do feel that if he could be separated from the other boys with whom he is keeping perhaps he might be rescued".<sup>98</sup> The headmistress of a Catholic school in Redhill outside Durban also approached the Court with Sililo's assistance in order to secure the return of her four young children to her care. They were kept against her wishes at the rural home of her late husband's father, and even though she paid for all necessities. Sililo supported her argument that she was "the right person to bring up her own children" and the Society's letter was included in documents before the Children's Court<sup>99</sup>.

The Society placed much emphasis on its efforts to secure assistance for impoverished black families by way of child maintenance grants. Popularly known as Mothers' Pensions, these grants had become available in 1921 via an amendment to the Children's Protection Act of 1913. The amendment (and the original Act) did not stipulate race as part of the criteria for eligible children, but for the next ten years or so official practice sanctioned only 'European' and 'Coloured' recipients. In the mid-1930s and as part of anxiety about "Native juvenile delinquents", the Union Department of Education began consider inclusion of African women as recipients of child maintenance grants. Although only a handful of families were beneficiaries, this indicated a potentially significant shift in state social welfare policy, soon to erupt into tension between liberals in the SANCCW, kholwa leaders in Child Welfare such as Sililo and officials in the NAD and the Union Department of Social Welfare. In that year and with the help of (as Sililo explained) the Chief Magistrate, twelve "Government

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Court, 7 May and 11 June 1937. Sworn statement by AWG Champion, 21 May 1937.

<sup>98</sup> 1DBN, 3/2/1/2/52, File 26/4/8/62/38, Children's Court Enquiry. Sworn Statement by N. M 6.June 1938. on Sililo to the Probation Officer, Durban, 15 June 1938.

<sup>99</sup> TBD, 1DBN, 3/2/1/2/52, 26/348/87/38. Mrs Sililo to the Commissioner of Child Welfare. Covering letter to Statement by J.M. 26 October 1938.

Maintenance Grants” were secured for families via the Union Department of Education.<sup>100</sup> The Society brought cases of poverty to the attention of Children’s Court officials and presented investigative reports. One of the earliest grants administered by the DBCWS was for a family who had moved to Durban from the Natal midlands in search of better medical care - Mr Hlengwa was disabled, they had eight children and lived in a crowded backyard close to the city centre. The court’s Probation Officer explained that “the family have been living on the charity of other natives in the yard”.<sup>101</sup> According to Nessie Magwaza of the Society’s investigative committee:

... the children have neither food nor clothes... Looking round the little room I saw some old sacks which answered for beds and some ragged blankets. With the exception of the bread that she received from the Child Welfare Society, I saw nothing in the room.<sup>102</sup>

The DBCWS was adding food sourced from the Municipal Welfare Office to the assistance of impoverished fellow backyard dwellers. Sililo also helped the mother to prepare a sworn statement. Mrs Hlengwa described how she had tried “to work to support the family” but that “because we live together with my husband I have had more children born since his accident”. Her youngest child was 4 months old, and she was unable to do even temporary domestic work because her “employer was unable to stand the noise... I lost that little work”.<sup>103</sup> The application process itself took several months, with queries from the Union Department of Education as to the whether parents were “legally married” and whether the children were at school. Attendance was a pre-condition and the DBCWS had to explain compliance was impossible while the children had nothing to wear.<sup>104</sup> Once a grant had been approved, the DBWS was responsible for regular reports in which it advised whether a family’s circumstances still merited support and whether conditions of the grant (for example that older children must work and contribute to the family budget) were being met.

By 1938 the Society’s “Headquarters” at the Bantu Social Centre was open every day - the DBCWS distributed bread, milk and grocery orders and had assisted around 800 families

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> TBD, 1DBN, 3/2/1/2/35, 26/4/2/347/36.

<sup>102</sup> TBD, 1DBN, 3/2/1/2/35, 26/4/2/347/36. Report by N. C. Magwaza on visit, 4 February 1937.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. In this particular case, the Secretary of Education claimed that if the parents were not “legally married”, the children would have to “remain in the care and custody of the Child Welfare Society” instead of being committed to the care of the parents (the Society would bear additional responsibility, as in the case of foster children - they would still live with their parents).

over 12 months. Sililo reported that “Government departments are making use of the Society”, prompting the gratitude of “poor and needy mothers in and around Durban”. An Infant’s Home (for abandoned babies that also functioned as a creche for working mothers) had been opened at the Married Quarters (white members of the executive had proved useful intermediaries with the municipality in this venture). Frequent interviews with those in need of assistance were also held at Isabel Sililo’s own house, mostly at the end of the day and on weekends.<sup>105</sup>

Sililo was now voicing specific criticisms of social welfare policies that discriminated on racial grounds. “The Bantu community” did not benefit from “the Government’s Free Milk and Butter Scheme”, in spite of “the recognised importance in the national life of the problem of Malnutrition and the gloomy reports by the Hospital authorities regarding under-nutrition invariably found among Bantu patient”. She argued for an inclusive policy that honoured that Bantu boys and girls belong to South Africa and can claim no other country”, that they were “therefore future citizens that will help to build or to mar the progressive future of their country”.<sup>106</sup> Sililo called on government to recognise that “the Bantu breadwinner and his dependants” battled “just as much, if not more, for their existence”: “battle... for their existence” of “the Bantu breadwinner and his dependants”:

For the future of our race, I do hope that consideration will be given to our children and that the Society will not cease to point out the needs of our people.<sup>107</sup>

By 1939 Isabel Sililo was also involved in efforts to oppose a new national policy that Africans would henceforth not qualify for child maintenance grants, urging that “the welfare of innocent children should know no Colour-bar”.<sup>108</sup> New reluctance to make the grants available to African mothers soon translated into a policy designed to counter-act the problem (according to officials) of a Children’s Protection Act that did not “provide for racial discrimination”.<sup>109</sup> Senior officials of the Union Native Affairs and Social Welfare Departments saw Child Welfare Societies and sympathetic magistrates were fuelling a worrisome trend. “Since the news of these grants has got abroad, the number of applications

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<sup>105</sup> Campbell Collections, Mabel Palmer Collection, File 24, KCM17660 and 17661.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Campbell Collections, Mabel Palmer Collection, KCM17600, DBCWS Fourth Annual Report 1938-9.

<sup>108</sup> KCM17600, Fourth Annual Report, 1938-9.

from Natives is growing rapidly". Officials claimed that large numbers of applications were now being refused. They urged for a consolidated policy in order to protect state coffers given "that we have a Native population of 6 1/2 million, a considerable portion of which may be described as indigent."<sup>110</sup> In April 1939 the new regulation came into effect, specifying no possibility of grants for African children in rural South Africa and that only basic food rations instead of cash would be available to those living in towns and cities. It also explained its intention to make urban segregation a priority: social welfare policy should not include any incentives for African women to "flock" into towns.<sup>111</sup>

Two years previously African members of the DBCWS had thwarted an attempt by Maurice Webb to impose a restructured executive that would relegate African members to an advisory role.<sup>112</sup> The Society now found that the SANCCW placed restrictions on African women's participation in national protest. Sililo's letter to its chairman Handel-Thomson conveyed her Society's strong protest "against your refusal to receive a Bantu delegation to present our point of view with regard to the future of the Government grants... we feel that none of the European members of the Society are as closely in touch with the real position of the indigent children as are the Bantu officials..."<sup>113</sup>. She went on to spell out in the impact of the new government policy and the denial of monetary grants for families with guardians who could not work:

How are children to be housed if there is no money at all coming in! Even if an order for food is granted how is it to be cooked if there is no money at all. How are fees to be paid for the children attending school! How are they to be clothed! Bantu mothers could give instances of cases in which such problems arise.<sup>114</sup>

If Handel-Thompson was unresponsive to Sililo's rebuke on behalf of her Society she soon established a better working relationship with the Council's organising secretary. A letter to Mackenzie contained the DBCWS' formal resolution against the new regulation: "cases of children in need should be treated without regard to race, colour or creed. The DBCWS protests against differentiation being made between Bantu and other racial groups in this

<sup>109</sup> SAB, VWN, SWC, 2254, 16/7, vol 1, GAC Kuschke, 18 May 1938.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> SAB, VWN, SWC 2254, 16/, vol 1, Circular no. SWC1 of 1939. The circular stated that "the payment of cash incentives to Natives residing in the towns will be an incentive to Native women to flock to the urban areas and thus aggravate a position that has already become acute".

<sup>112</sup> Campbell Collections, Mabel Palmer Collection, KCM 17654, 17658, 17611.

<sup>113</sup> Wits Historical Papers, AD843, B631.1. Isabel Sililo to the Chairman, NACCW, 27 June 1939.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

respect".<sup>115</sup> She indicated that the resolution was also being sent to J.L. Dube, to liberal Senators and MPs. Sililo also provided detailed case studies of recipients who would now be denied the child maintenance grant. Amongst them was that of Rhoda Dhludhla, who had written in praise of Durban's African women's welfare Societies. Her grant had first been reduced on the grounds that her eldest, sickly son should be working (the Union Social Welfare Department had begun to insist that children of fourteen must leave school to work). Monthly amounts had then been reduced to 5/- per child per month and even before the new policy was issued, the grant had been stopped on the grounds that her son should be at work.

This campaign against the new regulation is the subject of another paper. But in 1940 the SANCCW achieved partial success and the grant was once again available, at least in terms of public policy, to African families in towns and cities. The DBCWS continued its work at the Children's Court and to poor relief. In the early 1940s Isabel Sililo would also continue to elaborate her critique of segregationist measures that placed restriction on possible assistance, such as "application of the so-called Native Code" a system that denied "many a Bantu mother... that essential help mainly through the application of a system that is fifty years behind the times".<sup>116</sup>

## Conclusion

Isabel Sililo remained central to the DBCWS until 1944, when Mildred Lavoipierre – an energetic newcomer to child welfare – became chair. Lavoipierre engineered a major programme of restructuring and expansion of the Society's activities. In spite of a period of tension and complex negotiation, these changes were successfully brokered with kholwa members of the DBCWS. Sililo remained in charge of poor relief and involved with the child maintenance grant system, but was relatively peripheral to new initiatives of the Society.

This paper is a first attempt to map out the emergence of practices of social welfare and mutual assistance in South Africa of the 1930s that aimed to alleviate poverty in African communities. In the first years of the DBCWS's existence, Isabel Sililo combined her work for the DOA and for this new Society, attempting to secure at least some help for impoverished African families from local and central state departments. Kholwa women and men worked with their liberal segregationist colleagues in the Durban Joint Council to

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, Isabel Sililo to Mackenzie, 9 January 1940.

<sup>116</sup> KCM 17662, Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society, 8th Annual Report, 1942 – 1943.

oppose the policies of segregation pursued by the DTC and to insist that African women and their families had a right to freedom of movement and to settle in the city. African women's militant opposition effectively prevented the local state from implementing a systematic policy that would keep African women – and their families – out of Durban. Significantly, this involved women's only meetings by 1937, at which time *Ilanga lase Natal* also responded to African women's vocal politics by introducing special pages for its women readers.

In the course of the 1930s, some officials of the local state began to concede that urban-based 'Native welfare' could entail more than a focus on African, migrant men whose families remained in the reserves or elsewhere in the countryside. That African women were invited to start a child welfare society entailed reluctant acceptance that African families, at least those of the *kholwa* community, were part of the city's social fabric. But as the early voice of the DBCWS Isabel Sililo continued to articulate fierce criticism of the state's persistent efforts to deny African mothers and children the social assistance that they deserved in order to enforce policies of urban segregation.