

RECLAIMING HISTORY: THE GINSBERG SOCIAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Ginsberg Township was established at the end of the nineteenth century. The exact date is still not clear but available evidence points to the period between 1891 and 1895. The township as a labour reservoir by a local white councillor and businessman, Franz Ginsberg who owned a soap and candle factory in the white area of town known as King William's Town. He established the reservoir so that his workers, most of who lived in the rural areas, could be closer to his factory. Initially the township consisted of a single row of single-sex rondavels/huts often packed with up to 20 people at any one time. Still under the leadership of councillor Ginsberg the municipality added one-roomed pitches.

Ginsberg further mobilized investment in rudimentary infrastructure such as street lighting and roads as the township expanded. Part of the story of course is that the establishment was part of a larger social process of removing black people from the white part of town, one of the earliest examples of apartheid segregation. Black people had for a long time lived in a missionary station established by John Brownlee. The mission had been a reserve of the London Missionary Society, an organization founded by William Carey in 1794 to spread the message of "civilization" among "the heathens" of the world.

Local Xhosa chief, Dyani Tshatshu, welcomed Reverend John Brownlee to settle among his people. Brownlee established a mission church and schools for the local population. The rules of residence for Brownlee Mission were clearly stipulated in a circular issued on 10 February 1885. The circular stipulated, "no one shall be allowed to reside on the Mission Station who does not seek the benefit of the Mission Institutions viz. church and school. All residents are therefore required to attend church and send their children to school."

The rules also stipulated stated, "No resident shall make or sell kaffir beer of any intoxicating liquor." Those families that refused to live by the new Christian doctrines were ostracized and sent to live in a separate section called kwa-Mnqayi where they could continue brewing traditional beer and observing their cultural rituals. These were early attempts to divide black people by social class. Up until then the people lived in a mixed environment of various races including Chinese, Indian and Coloured communities, the very opposite of the segregated society that the apartheid authorities wanted. And so in 1939 black people from this mixed community were removed to the already labour reservoir established by Franz Ginsberg. And that is how Ginsberg expanded.

However, the social divisions that had already been established in the Brownlee Mission between the converted and the non-converted were

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reproduced when the new arrivals came to Ginsberg. The converted people of the old Brownlee mission moved into an upgraded separate area that they nostalgically called Brownlee. And so the social division of the community was merely replicated within the urban setting of Ginsberg. The working class people of the labour reservoir and the then new educated elites from the mission station. The residents included prominent figures such as Wycliffe Zaula, Gordon Gcilishe, Gushman, Peter Ngesi, and Baldwin Gqaliwe, who became the first generation of local leadership in the 1940's.

These individuals became recruits for the Ginsberg Native Advisory Board, a body set up to advise the government on the community's needs, without any real power of its own, except within the community. Effectively they were headmen, equivalent to councillor although they were merely appointed by the white authorities. As the dominant figures in the community, these individuals named the local streets after themselves. A new crop of even more educated leaders such as Harry Mjamba and George Mayile Mangcu subsequently followed this generation in the 1950's and 1960's.

A graduate of the esteemed University of Fort Hare Mjamba, the same university college that Nelson Mandela attended, Mjamba became the headmaster of the local secondary school. George Mayile Mangcu had received a missionary scholarship to attend Healdtown College in the 1920's. He was subsequently hired to run a Standard Six Class out of the local community hall. He established a jazz club, a choral society, and a community garden, and mobilized for the establishment of the local primary school. He preached a philosophy of self-reliance by establishing a cooperative called Masizakhe. But Brownlee also had women leaders such as Peter Ngesi's wife. Trained as a social worker Mrs Ngesi established the Ginsberg Village Women's Unity Club to foster cooperative projects among local women. That tradition continued under the auspices of the Young Christian's Women's Association (YWCA). By the 1970's the Y had become a permanent feature in the township's life although its members were mostly restricted to teachers and nurses within the community.

The people of the old Ginsberg rather resented the imposed leadership of the Brownlee elites, and this showed itself through youth gang battles. But most importantly this rivalry manifested itself through sports, mainly rugby. As early as 1932 the people of the working class section of the community had established a rugby team that they called Head of Lion. Sports became an important vehicle for the assertion of identity and pride among the people of the poorer working class section. If they could not compete with the Brownlee elites in the classrooms, they could compete with them on the sports field. The upshot of this competition was that Ginsberg became one of the leading sporting communities in the country.

Players from this community dominated provincial rugby and five of them represented played for the national rugby team. This is a remarkable achievement for a community of only a thousand houses. In 2000 these players were honoured by the South African Rugby Football Union and given Springbok blazers. Many of South Africa's leading politicians and sports

administrators played rugby in Ginsberg. South Africa's first Minister of Sports Steve Tshwete played rugby and was head prefect at the local Forbes Grant Secondary School; the nation's first director-general for Sports Mthobi Tyamzashe was long-time secretary for Star of Hope; the head of the ANC Presidency Smuts Ngonyama played for Star of Hope, the president of the National Sports Council Mluleki George lived in Ginsberg and was a member of Head of Lion. The current mayor of Buffalo City Metropolitan Council grew up in Ginsberg and played for Head of Lion. But rugby came to be another outlet for the violent rivalry between the two sections of the community. As early as 1932 the people of Tsolo had established a rugby club known as Head of Lion. Ginsberg also produced three national boxing champions.

Star of Hope also became the site of political organization under the leadership of Khaya Biko, the elder brother to black consciousness leader Steve Biko. Clearly the youth intellectual leader of the times, Khaya Biko recruited the entire Star of Hope squad into politics. Indeed, Khaya Biko became a political role model for his younger brother, Steve. Indeed it is impossible to understand Steve Biko's political leadership without a prior understanding of the social history of Ginsberg, particularly the social history of Brownlee, even though he transcended the social conservatism of the Brownlee elites. Indeed, sports and politics played a big role in transcending the existing social divisions. By the 1980's Ginsberg's political leadership had shifted from the Brownlee elites to the people of the working class section of Ginsberg, especially through their rugby team, Head of Lion.

None of this history has ever been documented, published or disseminated to the people of Ginsberg and South Africa much broadly. And yet development begins with an understanding of one's own achievements, and the achievements of one's own people. People, especially young people, model themselves on the images that they received. If they receive negative images, they play out negative images. The problem of being named in negative terms has long-term consequences, and unless young people intervene, as we have begun to, those negative stereotypes become the basis of self-understanding and distorted identities. This process of historical research may have significance for young people in Indigenous communities here in Australia. Perhaps we ought to start thinking about ways of sharing our experiences among communities facing similar challenges of identity and development. Maybe what is needed is a comparative project on history, culture and development between our communities and Indigenous communities here in Australia.