084. Contesting, re-working and re-representing authoritarian colonial architectures of power.

ECAS 4

Urban Blacks in the Separate Development Propaganda of the South African Government in 1958–1966

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Separate development was a slogan adopted by the South African government in 1958 to improve the crude and racist image of apartheid. Separate development envisaged total political and territorial separation for the different "national groups" of South Africa, with a commonwealth of independent states as its ultimate goal. Whereas the black population was divided into separate national groups along ethnic lines, the white population was seen as a unitary white nation. Separate development can be seen as a full-scale architecture of power: it divided the territory as well as the population of South Africa based on imposed national and racial identities, creating a hierarchical and oppressive political system. Black groups were to develop their own political institutions in their "historical homelands" in the rural areas of South Africa. Nevertheless, white areas still needed cheap black labour. In separate development propaganda, blacks were portrayed as temporary sojourners in white urban areas, working in the cities as migrant workers and eventually returning to their homelands. Women and children were to remain in the homelands, "tilling the soil", which was portrayed as the role of women in the traditional "Bantu culture". The propaganda desperately tried to hold on to the essentially rural nature of blacks as well as their loyalty to their own "nation" and tribal homeland. However, the government could not ignore the large amount of permanently urban blacks, whose numbers were rising despite influx control measures. As urban slums grew, the problem of urban housing needed a solution. Interestingly, urban housing programmes for blacks were given a central place in government propaganda. Pictures of model townships, identical small houses in symmetrical patterns, and urban black family life praised the civilizing effects of government housing schemes. Black residents of the new townships were portrayed enjoying the western way of life: wearing western clothes, engaging in education and commerce in their own separate facilities and learning to appreciate the high achievements of western culture such as classical music. The tribal savage was transformed into a modern man through planned urbanisation.

The two conflicting roles which urban blacks played in the propaganda created constant tensions in the logic of separate development discourse. By promoting urban housing schemes for black population in urban areas and by displaying the achievements of these programmes in its propaganda, the government created a paradox in its official ideology and undermined its own notion of a white South African nation-state.