

**Publication****The NE 51 series frontier: The grand narrative of apartheid planning and the small town****JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)****ID** 3294032**Author(s)** Miescher, Giorgio**Author(s) at UniBasel** [Miescher, Giorgio](#) ;**Year** 2015**Title** The NE 51 series frontier: The grand narrative of apartheid planning and the small town**Journal** Journal of Southern African studies**Volume** 41**Number** 3**Pages / Article-Number** 561-580

The article proposes to bring the urban development of Usakos, a small Namibian town on the fringe of the South African empire, into conversation with the 'grand narrative' of the apartheid city. Narratives of the apartheid city were shaped by contemporary academic architectural discourses sustained by those who pioneered and promoted urban planning in South Africa. It was formulated in texts on architecture and apartheid produced in the 1980s and 1990s, which developed a strong argument about South African architects' involvement in the creation of standardised housing for Africans. Big cities constituted the main reference for both critics and promoters of South African urban planning, and their analyses subscribed to paradigmatic notions of rapidly growing cities and inevitable housing crises, slums and chaos. The analysis of the urban development in Usakos in the 20th century allows for challenging the teleological model of such hegemonic narratives. The case of a small town also integrates otherwise separate discussions on 'white' and 'black' housing. In Usakos, the transformation of urban space was primarily ideologically driven, and part of a general attempt to create a tangible and visible experience of a homogenous imperial South African space. One of the dominant material manifestations of such an imperial space were the iconic NE 51 series houses in standardised neighbourhoods, to which Africans were forcibly removed.

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