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Living For The City:
Drum Magazine's Journalism and the Popular Black Press

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

This study examines *Drum* magazine's journalism from 1951 to 1959. Many studies have primarily examined *Drum* and its role as a vehicle for the "Sophiatown generation" of fiction in the 1950s but this study instead concentrates on *Drum*'s non-fiction reporting. It looks at both *Drum*'s role in the birth of the popular black press and the magazine's complex conceptions of urban life. It argues that *Drum*'s non-fiction promoted a cosmopolitan identity for its urban readers, in direct opposition to the efforts by the apartheid government to "retribalise" black urban residents, but also reflected anxieties about the urban experience. *Drum* was also one of the first non-partisan black publications to make political news accessible to a mass audience and the study argues that *Drum*'s coverage of black politics has been overlooked and sometimes underestimated.

The study begins with an overview of the commercial black press and its connections to the city. *Drum* was at the centre of the transition to a popular black press and the first chapter discusses the publications that preceded and influenced *Drum*, briefly examines the potential audience that these publications were trying to attract, and discusses the social and political context in which the magazine was launched. The second chapter examines the history of *Drum* in the 1950s and also charts the expansion of the Bailey Group publications. It looks at *Drum* with a particular focus on the lives of a few of its writers, whose personal histories are important in understanding how *Drum* was able to connect with its mass audience. The third chapter examines *Drum*'s political reporting and its efforts to promote a cosmopolitan identity for its readers and resist official efforts to retribalise urban Africans. As the magazine strove to connect with a mass audience, it reflected a growing mix of "high" culture—respect for education and professional achievement—and "low"—tsotsis, musicians, films, and an embrace of shebeen culture. The chapter also explores some of the ambiguities and anxieties that the magazine expressed about urban life. The conclusion draws together the discussion and explores *Drum*'s ongoing significance in the popular imagination today.

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Introduction

He was already a war hero and an Oxford graduate, but in 1951, James Richard Abe Bailey was no journalist. Nevertheless, the aspiring young entrepreneur signed on quickly when two men—Bob Crisp, a journalist, former soldier and Springbok cricketer, and Robin Stratford, a famous lawyer—approached him with an idea for a magazine targeted to an African audience.

Bailey had recently moved from England to South Africa to take over his family's sheep farm outside Cape Town. His father, who had died in 1941, was Sir Abe Bailey, a well-connected and wealthy gold mining magnate who had conveniently left his son, as Jim Bailey described it, a "thumping income."¹ Bailey had finished school and survived four years of fierce fighting as a Royal Air Force pilot during World War II, but he had no experience in publishing.

On the face of it, the magazine he and his partners proposed—the *African Drum*—was a risky undertaking. There was a potential audience of millions of Africans living in cities, but they spoke several different languages, many of them could not read, and they came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Few newspapers aimed at black audiences had succeeded commercially, and many black-owned papers had closed down during the Depression in the 1930s. And the Nationalist party, which had been elected three years before, was determined to stem the tide of black people moving to cities. The new government also wanted to make sure that those already living in towns knew their

¹ J. Bailey, "Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle," in A. Caccia (ed.), *The Beat of Drum*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), p. 124. Sir Abe Bailey had wide interests and, in addition to his mining and newspapers holdings, also owned racehorses and the Boschendal wine farm outside Cape Town from 1936 to 1941.

place—as temporary workers in a white man’s city. Anthony Sampson, on the way from England at Bailey’s invitation to join the new magazine’s staff, confided to his diary that the venture had a one-in-four chance of success.²

Bailey, though, felt that the magazine might succeed. The economy was growing, sparked by World War II, and the promise of jobs in manufacturing and mining was attracting millions of Africans to cities, especially Johannesburg. This potential audience included a small, but growing, group that spoke and read English. There were also a few commercial publishing precedents, controlled by white-owned corporations, like the Johannesburg weekly newspaper *Bantu World* and the monthly photo magazine *Zonk*. These publications were addressing black city residents, and were attracting sizable audiences.

But Crisp and Stratford needed more money to get the venture going, which was why they had turned to Jim Bailey. They asked him to invest £5,000, but Bailey decided to contribute only £1,000, “for I knew nothing whatever about publishing.”³ In February 1951, Stratford and Bailey became official shareholders and joined the board, and Crisp began working on the first issue of the magazine.

The *African Drum* faltered badly at first. Its first issues focused on what the founders and their advisors imagined were traditional “African” themes, including features on African art, tribal music, and folklore. The magazine lost readers and money.

² A. Sampson, “The Early *Drum*,” *The Beat of Drum*, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 124. Although Bailey had no experience with publishing, he was well-connected in the media world through his father, who owned the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Times*. Through his role as an executor and administrator in his father’s trust, Bailey was made a director of Bailey’s Nominees and Rhodesian Mining. Those two companies held the Bailey family interest in South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN), the company that owned the *Rand Daily Mail*, *Sunday Times*, and the *Sunday Express*. The Bailey interest could appoint three directors to the Board of SAAN and Jim Bailey served as a director for many years.

But Bailey's strategy quickly shifted and, by 1952, the magazine, now titled simply *Drum*, had largely reinvented itself, and was self-consciously addressing a diverse group of black urban residents and, though it wrote mostly about Johannesburg, it was reaching out to readers throughout the country.

By 1954, the magazine had an average circulation of more than 70,000 copies per issue⁴—far outstripping its competitors—and the risky investigative stories of its star reporter Henry Nxumalo, known as Mr. Drum, had captured the imagination of black people in Johannesburg and across the country. A group of smart, talented black writers was on its staff, and the magazine had become the centre of the Sophiatown literary renaissance that expressed the black experience in Johannesburg. It became the best-known magazine in South African history and, at the same time, redefined black journalism in the country.

While much has been written about the fiction of the Sophiatown literary renaissance that grew up around *Drum* during the 1950s, this study explores *Drum*'s non-fiction journalism and its role in the emerging popular press. Like other publications in the growing popular black press, *Drum* featured human-interest, sports, and other entertainment stories that could attract a range of readers. But its writers were also articulating their vision of a new and “modern” black city-dweller, one who could speak English, wanted to throw off country roots, and admired black American culture. At first glance, it was not controversial content. But in the social and political context of the 1950s, it was defiance. As the government attempted to “retribalise” urban Africans—denying them the right to live permanently in cities by promoting “separate development”

⁴ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol.1, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1964), p. 299.

policies that would return them to tribal structures and officially relegate them as residents of poor, economically stagnant reserves—writing about the experience of black life in the city, acknowledging its permanence and vitality, was resistance. For this reason alone—not even considering its political content—the government would soon consider it “undesirable.” The study argues that each non-fiction article on its pages served a second purpose: it was legitimising black life in the city and contradicting the image of “tribal” Africans that the government was trying to advance.

In addition, the study argues that *Drum*'s coverage of black politics has been overlooked and sometimes underestimated. As part of the burgeoning popular black press, *Drum* was one of the first non-partisan black publications to make political news accessible to a mass audience. In addition to its entertainment and human-interest stories, its journalists provided significant political reporting. And, although the magazine was very sympathetic to the ANC, which was espousing policies of multiracial cooperation with other groups that melded well with *Drum*'s rejection of retribalisation, it was willing to report critically on the organisation as well.

As it wrote about life on the Reef, *Drum* was creating powerful images of the black experience in Johannesburg and the larger audience it reached magnified its significance. When journalist and writer Nat Nakasa moved from Durban to Johannesburg in 1956 to take up a post with *Drum*, he was excited to embrace the cosmopolitan atmosphere of South Africa's biggest city, about which he had read so much. Nakasa, who had also worked at *Ilanga Lase Natal*, the Zulu and English-language newspaper in Durban, found that the city was not quite what he had expected. He described seeing the recently arrived “mine-boys” who continued to flood

Johannesburg. "By day, the city became a depressing mess," he wrote. In addition to the miners, there were also "many Africans sweating away on company bicycles or lingering on pavements in search of work. They spoiled my image of Johannesburg as the throbbing giant which threw up sophisticated gangsters, brave politicians and intellectuals who challenged white authority."⁵ Ironically, it was the magazine that he was coming to work for, *Drum*, which had done so much to popularize this defiant and urbane image of black life in the city.

This study examines the cosmopolitan image for urban Africans that *Drum* helped to create during the 1950s. As the magazine strove to connect with a mass audience, its staff self-consciously wrote about everyday life and embraced the city and all it encompassed, including music, shebeens, politics, and the influence of black American culture. It also encouraged black pride by writing about prominent black leaders in South Africa, the U.S., and throughout English-speaking Africa.

The magazine also reflected some of the anxieties and ambiguities of city life, and the study explores the contradictory representations of city living that appeared in its pages as well. *Drum* was engaged in a larger project of legitimizing black life in the city but, at the same time, also sometimes showed that the transition to city living was not always an easy one. Musicians were celebrated, for example, but the harsh and dangerous realities of making a living as an artist in the city were covered as well.

Drum has long been identified with urban culture, and has already been the subject of several studies, which have primarily looked at *Drum* and its role as a vehicle

⁵ N. Nakasa in E. Patel (ed.), *The World of Nat Nakasa*, (Randburg: Ravan, 1995), p. 5.

for the Sophiatown generation of fiction in the 1950s.⁶ Other works have examined *Drum's* portrayals of gender, its attitudes towards crime and gangsters, and looked at how the magazine showed the influence of Hollywood and African-American culture on black South African popular culture during the 1950s.⁷ Mac Fenwick, for instance, has examined *Drum's* fictional and non-fiction portrayals of gangsters, who drew heavily on Hollywood to create their image, as menacing counter-culture heroes who managed to succeed economically, triumphing over apartheid authority.⁸ Kelwyn Sole has explored the role that the *Drum* writers' status as a middle class, "repressed elite" played in shaping their fiction and autobiographies.⁹ And, more recently, Lindsay Clowes has used the text of *Drum* to examine changing constructions of modern masculinity.¹⁰ But no study has concentrated on *Drum's* non-fiction reporting and its role in the birth of the popular press.

Paul Gready's essay on the Sophiatown generation's fiction and journalism observes the *Drum* writers' articulation of an ambiguous black urban experience.

⁶ See, for example, M. Chapman, *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001); D. Dodson, "The Four Modes of *Drum*: Popular Fiction and Social Control in South Africa," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, September 1974, pp. 317-343; N.W. Visser, "South Africa: The Renaissance that Failed," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1976.

⁷ R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁸ M. Fenwick, "Tough Guy, Eh? The Gangster Figure in *Drum*," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 22, 1996.

⁹ K. Sole, "Class, Continuity, and Change in Black South African Literature 1948-60," in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Labour, Townships and Protest*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979).

¹⁰ L. Clowes, *A Modernised Man?: Changing Constructions of Masculinity in Drum Magazine, 1951-1984*, (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2002). Other scholars have used *Drum* to examine different representations of gender and sexuality. See D. Driver, "Drum Magazine (1951-9) and the Spatial Configuration of Gender," in K. Darien-Smith, L. Gunner, and S. Nuttall (eds.), *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, (London: Routledge, 1996); K. Mutongi, "Dear Dolly's Advice: Representations of Youth, Courtship, and Sexualities in Africa 1960-1980," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2000.

Refusing to “romanticise rural areas” or “condemn the moral degradation of the city,”

their fiction was a symbol of a new urban identity but:

Their break with the past was too self-conscious to succeed completely but as with their use of language it had positive and negative repercussions, and reflected the ambiguity of their position as the vanguard of a new urban generation. Although they failed to supply a coherent alternative to the frame of reference of tradition or Kumalo [the rural African hero of Alan Paton’s 1946 novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*], the Sophiatown writers made an important contribution to a new tradition: of black experience in the South African city.¹¹

This study builds on Gready’s idea that *Drum*’s evolving conceptions of urban identity were indeed significant and, by focusing on *Drum*’s non-fiction, it will look at the world they were trying to create and reflect.

To understand the context in which *Drum* emerged and the journalism its writers practised, the study also examines *Drum*’s role in the emergence of the popular black press which was growing out of the cities, especially Johannesburg. *Drum* was exceptional in many ways but it was also part of a growing mass circulation press, and within this context lay both opportunities and real constraints in articulating a vision of modern black life in the city. While the government was increasing its efforts to divide the country by colour, one experience shared by everyone was an expanding consumer culture. Businesses were realising the powerful potential of tapping into the black consumer market crowded in and around the growing cities.¹² With this came a press that was centred in urban areas and drew on mass audiences. Several new general interest publications sprang up which did not have formal links to political interest groups, and were aimed at urban black readers. One of these publications was *Drum*.

¹¹ P. Gready, “The Sophiatown Writers of the 1950s and the Unreal Reality of Their World,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1990, pp. 139-164.

¹² L. Switzer, “*Bantu World* and Origins of the Captive Commercial Press,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1988, p. 352.

Owned by white-controlled corporations, publications like *Drum* and *Bantu World*—the latter started in the early 1930s—for the first time wrote consistently about everyday life, including articles on leisure activities like sports and sensational crime articles. As the popular press took hold, there was a shift in the view that newspapers and magazines should be educational and uplifting, to one that aimed instead to also entertain readers.¹³ But *Bantu World* still had much in common with the older models of the press, and the study will elaborate on some of these continuities. In its inaugural issue, for example, the paper laid out several of its guiding principles which included “encourag[ing] the development of the Bantu as an agricultural people and to foster the growth of Bantu arts and crafts, literature and music” and “combat[ing] illiteracy and to stimulate education among the Bantu, by catering to the needs of semi-literate as well as to the most highly advanced.”¹⁴

At the centre of the transition in the press, even more than *Bantu World*, was *Drum*. In an effort to attract readers, the traditional educational ideal of old was replaced by a new ethic—that a publication should portray life as it was, and be enjoyable to read as well. In addition to reading about subjects that were relevant to their lives, the new ethic held that the audience also wanted to read about the trivial and the fantastic. Although *Drum* did not aim to “uplift” its readers in the way the missionary press had, it did want to improve them. It instead insisted that its readers should be *modern*, exhibiting a new and particular urban cosmopolitanism in response to social transformations taking place across the country.

¹³ A similar shift occurred in the English press during the 1870s, and in the American press during the 1830s. For more information see, A. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in Britain from 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), and M. Schudson. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*, (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

¹⁴ *Bantu World*, April 2, 1932.

The first chapter looks at the origins of the popular black press and its connections to the country's expanding cities. The overview includes the genesis of publications like *Bantu World* and *Zonk*, a magazine which started publishing in 1949 and influenced *Drum* heavily, and other general interest publications aimed at black urban audiences. To understand the context in which *Drum* developed, it considers the social, political, and economic changes that were happening across South Africa as blacks moved in ever greater numbers to cities.

The second chapter looks at the founding of *Drum* and the expansion of Jim Bailey's other publications during the 1950s. While the story of *Drum* has been told, this study considers its history in light the growth of the city, with a particular focus on the lives of a few of its writers. Through the 1950s, the magazine had one publisher, four different editors, and a small but relatively stable staff, and *Drum* is very much a product of their world-view. The *Drum* writers were not necessarily the "everymen" of urban Africans. They were highly educated, professional men with middle class aspirations—they wanted the opportunity to excel at skilled professions, such as doctors, writers, lawyers, journalists, and professors, and they wanted comfortable homes and good salaries. They did, however, share some common experiences with many first- and second-generation residents of Johannesburg at the time—they were poor, lived in the sprawling black townships, and were subject to the same humiliating pass, liquor, and apartheid laws. When this study refers to their middle class status, it refers to their aspirations rather than their financial situation. Their personal histories are useful in understanding how *Drum* was able to connect with its mass audience.

After considering the men who produced *Drum*, the third chapter then examines *Drum*'s attitudes toward politics and social life from 1951 to 1959. The study uses *Drum*'s non-fiction to explore ways that *Drum* both promoted a particular ideal of cosmopolitan urbanism, taught people how to cope with life in the city, and also reflected the experiences of some of its readers. As *Drum* was reaching out to a mass black urban audience, it also incorporated elements from popular culture, for instance jazz music and an enthusiasm for boxing and sports in general. The chapter also examines some of the ambiguities in *Drum*'s attitude toward life in the city and argues that, although the magazine was embracing urban life, its pages also reflected some of the anxiety that accompanied it. Survival could be precarious and unstable for old and new arrivals to the city alike, and *Drum* also illustrated the contested nature of urban existence.

The third chapter also discusses *Drum*'s political reporting. *Drum* provided significant coverage of the ANC, and offered a platform for ANC leaders to speak directly to a general audience. Yet its reporters also provided critical coverage of black politics to their readers. It was digesting and transmitting news to a large, mainstream audience, which was not necessarily politically conscious, and it was doing it in a way that brought the political theories discussed by black political elites to a mass audience.

The conclusion draws together the discussion. It also explores *Drum*'s ongoing significance in the popular imagination today, and examines how and when the magazine became mythologized. In this, it will attempt to offer a few explanations in response to a question that the magazine's second editor, Anthony Sampson, posed not long ago: "Why does the *Drum* story refuse to go away, over forty years later?"¹⁵

¹⁵ A. Sampson, "Foreword," in S. Stein. *Who Killed Mr. Drum?* (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1999), p. 7.

Chapter One

“Guns, Gals and Greed”: The Rise of the Popular Black Press

In the early 1950s, a commission met to study the contents of a selection of books and magazines. The commissioners, appointed by the government to investigate whether these publications contained “undesirable” messages, were shocked by the content of magazines aimed at both white and black readers. With articles about crime and advertisements that included pictures of scantily clad women they felt that, more than other category of reading material, it was the magazines that most offended moral sensibilities. But they found the trends in magazines aimed at black readers particularly disturbing. The commissioners recognised similarities with the magazines’ white counterparts—and that was a problem. “What is of importance,” the report stated, was “the danger that certain publishers may seek a market for undesirable and inferior literature among the larger group of literate Bantu of today merely for the sake of gain, in the same way as a market for such reading was created among Europeans, especially in the years following WWII.”¹

“But the difference,” their report continued, “is that in the case of the Bantu other motives may be involved, including *inter alia* the stimulation of the Bantu’s urge to become westernized.”² Reading material that “estranges” Africans from tribal traditions, “may cause even greater harm than inferior reading material intended for Europeans. The danger exists, moreover, that false but subtle representations of racial conditions in the

¹ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Undesirable Publications*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1957), pp. 263-264.

² *Ibid.* p. 264.

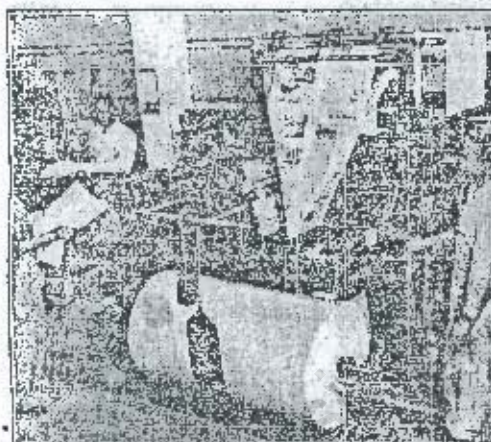
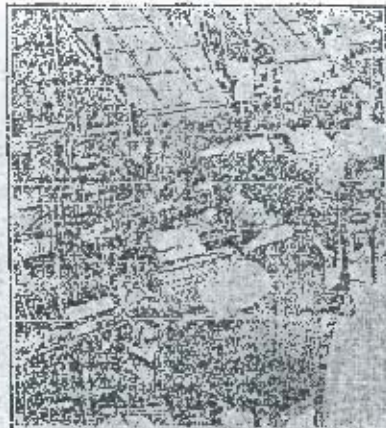
Union may have a detrimental effect on peaceful race relations.” Articles about music, films, and popular culture that seemed simply inferior or smutty in white magazines were more threatening in black magazines like *Drum* because they represented the possibility their readers were becoming permanent city residents.

Although its vision and staff were exceptional in many ways, *Drum* was not the first such publication of its kind, and it is necessary to place the magazine in the context of the development of the black press before and during the 1950s. *Drum*, though, was at the centre of the transformation of the black press from publications that had been missionary-rooted, aiming to educate and uplift readers, into mass circulation newspapers and magazines that tried to connect with their readers in a different way. This chapter traces the origins of the popular black press, discusses the publications that preceded and influenced *Drum*, and briefly examines the potential audience they were trying to attract.

As early as the 1930s, when *Bantu World* was founded, black South Africans were feeling the effects of rapid urbanisation, and so, too, was their press. By the 1950s, cities were home to millions of black South Africans, many of whom were leaving their rural roots behind and saw their futures in towns. In articulating its conceptions of modern black life and identity in the city, *Drum* was intimately linked to Johannesburg. For the black press and many of its readers, as Anthony Sampson succinctly put it, it seemed that “[t]he jungle track was a dead end.”³

³ A. Sampson, *Drum: The Making of a Magazine*, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2005), p. 9. Originally published in 1956.

How Your Newspaper Comes To You



THE STORY BEHIND THE "BANTU WORLD"

During the past few years there has been great progress in Bantu education. Not only have more and more Bantu children been attending schools, but also more and more Bantu children have been attending universities and technical schools. This progress has been made possible by the fact that the Bantu people have been able to get their own newspapers.

The first Bantu newspaper was the "Bantu World" which was started in 1945. It was the first Bantu newspaper to be published in Johannesburg. It was the first Bantu newspaper to be published in the Transvaal. It was the first Bantu newspaper to be published in the Union of South Africa. It was the first Bantu newspaper to be published in the British Empire. It was the first Bantu newspaper to be published in the Commonwealth of Nations. It was the first Bantu newspaper to be published in the world.

The Editor of the "Bantu World" is Richard V. Selope Thema. He is the first Bantu to be Editor of a newspaper in the Union of South Africa. He is the first Bantu to be Editor of a newspaper in the British Empire. He is the first Bantu to be Editor of a newspaper in the Commonwealth of Nations. He is the first Bantu to be Editor of a newspaper in the world.

The "Bantu World" is published every day except on Sundays and public holidays. It is published in Johannesburg. It is published in the Transvaal. It is published in the Union of South Africa. It is published in the British Empire. It is published in the Commonwealth of Nations. It is published in the world.

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The staff of *Bantu World* as depicted in a February 1946 photo spread. Editor Richard V. Selope Thema is top left.

Development of the Popular Press

More than any other city in the country, Johannesburg was leading the way as a modern metropolis in the first half of the twentieth century. It was vast, fast-paced, diverse, full of possibilities and risks. It was also the commercial centre of the country. Not surprisingly, Johannesburg was also at the forefront of many changes in the press. As city-dwellers were redefining themselves, so too was the press.

The history of the popular press and urbanisation are intertwined. As cities across the country expanded, there was an increase in urban newspapers that drew on a mass audience, especially in Johannesburg. In 1911, there was not more than one daily or Sunday newspaper published in any urban centre.⁴ By June 1956, however, there were 24 major urban papers, not including publications aimed at black audiences.⁵ Seventeen of these were daily papers—four of them located on the Witwatersrand—with a combined yearly circulation of 239 million copies.⁶ There was also an expansion in the number of Sunday newspapers throughout the country. Three major Sunday papers were published on the Witwatersrand, and urban papers in the Orange Free State and the Cape Province, where there were restrictions on publishing Sunday newspapers, put out weekend supplements on Fridays and Saturdays.⁷ Outside the major cities, 11 newspapers circulated in peri-urban areas, and there were also 93 “country” newspapers.

⁴ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, p. 104.

⁵ The Commission considered the black press, but mainly focused on the “European Press,” not acknowledging that readers of all races read these papers as well. It separated all its findings according to the audience at which the publications were aimed (Ibid. pp. 67-70).

⁶ Ibid. p. 73. At this time there were three dailies in Cape Town; two in Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Bloemfontein; one each in East London, Kimberley, Pretoria, and Pietermaritzburg. Overall there were 629 newspapers, magazines, and periodicals published in the country, with a total circulation of 372 million copies in 1954.

⁷ Ibid. p. 72.

These country and peri-urban newspapers had a much smaller circulation, however, with a combined reach of just 9.1 million copies yearly.⁸

Not only was the urban press more numerous in terms of circulation, it was also more influential. A government commission investigating the workings of the press, set up in 1950, remarked that urban newspapers and magazines played a particularly important role in public opinion and debate. "They disseminate the largest portion of the news—national and foreign—and comment upon South Africa and foreign happenings as they occur," the commission's report noted with some alarm. "It is the day-to-day service of the dailies with their frequent impact upon the public mind that makes them by far the most influential and important section of the press."⁹

The black press was expanding its circulation as well. A 1911 law allowed registered newspapers to qualify for cheaper postage.¹⁰ The number of registered newspapers aimed at black audiences rose from eight in 1911 to 13 in 1915. That number rose to 18 in 1920 before dropping to 14 in 1925.¹¹ The largest number of African newspapers was 19 in 1930; however, most of these papers did not survive the Depression.¹²

While the actual number of publications decreased after the Depression, the circulation of those in existence was growing and they were increasingly centred in cities, especially Johannesburg. By 1956 there were seven newspapers aimed at black

⁸ Ibid. pp. 70-71.

⁹ Ibid. p. 106.

¹⁰ The law providing for cheaper postage was section 17 of the 1911 Post Office Administration and Shipping Combinations Discouragement Act No 10. Ibid. pp. 20-21.

¹¹ A.J. Friedgut, "The Non-European Press," in E. Hellman (ed.) *Handbook on Race Relations in South Africa*, (Cape Town: SAIRR, 1949), p. 490.

¹² L. Switzer, "Bantu World and Origins of the Captive Commercial Press," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1988, pp. 351-352.

audiences—one bi-weekly, five weekly, and one Sunday—with a combined yearly circulation of 6.8 million copies. Out of the four urban newspapers, three were based in Johannesburg.¹³

In addition, during the 1950s, *Drum* was just one of a group of new general interest magazines aimed at urban black readers to attract large audiences. All of these magazines were headquartered in Johannesburg. The first of these, *Umlindi we Nyanga* (*The Watchman of the Month*), was founded in 1936 by a group of white businessmen who wanted to market their products to Africans. As the first illustrated magazine intended for a black audience nationally, it was groundbreaking.¹⁴ By 1956, six general interest magazines, four for adults and two for children, were specifically targeted towards black readers with a combined annual circulation of 3,746,844.¹⁵ A 1954 government commission charged with investigating books and magazines observed with alarm that magazines aimed at black audiences had been increasing steadily in circulation. The commission's report estimated that the four magazines considered in the investigation, *Zonk*, *Drum*, *Africa!* and *Hi-Note!*, had a combined total of one million readers per issue, and it calculated that the total circulation of general interest magazines had doubled between 1952 to 1956.¹⁶

¹³ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, p. 74.

¹⁴ A.J. Friedgut, "The Non-European Press," p. 497. According to Friedgut, *Umlindi* had mostly educational content. There were a few similarities with *Drum*, including illustrations, biographies of famous Africans, photos, and comics. Otherwise, however, the content was quite different from what *Drum* would come to feature, with stories from the Bible, English lessons, tribal news and music. At first it published only in Xhosa but was suspended in 1940. When it was resurrected in 1946 it published in four languages, including English, but folded in 1952. The Bantu Press also published a short-lived monthly pictorial magazine, published in 7 languages and sponsored by the Tea Bureau, that came out from February to August 1946.

¹⁵ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Undesirable Publications*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1957), pp. 69-70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 77.

This increase in circulation was helped by both improvements in distribution systems and, more importantly, a marked increase in literacy rates. More readers were living in the densely packed cities, and more Africans were becoming literate in English. According to government census figures, in 1911 only 6.8 percent of Africans could read and write in any language. In 1921 that figure had only risen to 9.7 percent. But by 1946, 21.4 percent of Africans could read and write and, of this group, 8 percent were literate in English and 20.8 percent were literate in African languages.¹⁷

By 1951, English speakers outnumbered all others in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and on the Witwatersrand, and by 1956 more than three-quarters of English speakers lived in the nine largest cities. Among whites, English had long been the language of the city, and it dominated the press aimed primarily at white readers.¹⁸ It was quickly becoming a common public language for urban Africans as well. In 1951, 8.8 percent of Africans were literate in English and 23.8 percent were literate in African languages. Literacy rates among adults were higher—among Africans aged 10 years or older throughout the country, 30.9 percent were literate, and 11.7 percent were literate in English.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, most of the new newspapers and magazines were written in English.

In addition to higher rates of literacy in English, modern printing equipment and technological advances facilitated the growth of the press. Nonetheless, while these factors are certainly necessary prerequisites for a mass circulation press, the growth of a popular press was not necessarily caused simply by a having access to a supply of

¹⁷ South Africa Bureau of Census and Statistics, *S.A. Union Stats for 50 Years Jubilee Issue 1910-1960*, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1960), p. A-22.

¹⁸ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, p. 86. The urban exceptions to this rule were Bloemfontein, Pretoria, and Kimberley.

¹⁹ *Union Stats for 50 Years*, p. A-22.

readers. In their studies of the popular press in the United States and Britain, respectively, neither Schudson nor Lee found evidence to show that literacy or technology were solely responsible for the growth of mass circulation newspapers and magazines.²⁰

Instead, as in Britain and the United States, the driving force behind the birth of the mass circulation press was the expanding market economy and the realisation that consumers could be reached through advertising in publications aimed at black audiences. During the 1950s, businesses were quickly realizing the powerful potential of tapping into the audiences crowded in and around the growing cities.²¹ As more Africans were entering the market economy, newspapers and magazines aimed at black audiences began drawing much of their revenue from advertising for consumer goods. A 1949 survey of the black press noted that, “Far-sighted industrialists and men of commerce, including cigarette and patent medicine manufacturers, have come to see the value of exploiting the Non-European consumer market.”²²

Advertising firms began devoting more attention to the African market. In 1957, two advertising firms created dedicated African divisions, and market research firms began surveying African consumer habits.²³ A 1958 article in *Contact*, a Cape Town-based liberal fortnightly magazine, titled “Business is Bad—But There’s Always the Bantu!” described the growing “unscratched market” among Africans. Johannesburg Director of Housing A.J. Archibald observed, “[i]t is noteworthy that a new middle class is being created in the native population—composed of men who on account of their

²⁰ M. Schudson, *Discovering the News* and A. Lee, *The Birth of the Popular Press in Britain from 1855-1914*.

²¹ L. Switzer, “*Bantu World* and Origins of the Captive Commercial Press,” p. 352.

²² A.J. Freidgut, “Non-European Press,” p. 503.

²³ “‘African Divisions’ Trend Has Arrived in S.A.,” *Advertising & Selling*, April 1957, pp. 22-23.

enhanced earning power seek for themselves and their families superior living conditions.”²⁴

Despite widespread poverty, there was some purchasing power in the African community and people were spending money on consumer goods. A 1961 survey of African consumer habits in Pretoria townships found that, across all income groups, Africans spent .9 percent of their income on leisure activities, not including alcohol, and miscellaneous expenses, including reading material and support to rural family members, accounted for a separate 2.3 percent of spending.²⁵ In Orlando, young people who were employed—who may have been more likely to buy magazines like *Drum* and *Zonk*—made slightly more money than older residents.²⁶

By the mid-1950s, white-controlled companies owned every one of the seven newspapers aimed at black audiences in South Africa.²⁷ The same was true of general interest magazines—the four magazines, including *Drum*, aimed at adults were owned by two separate white-controlled companies.²⁸ These companies could provide the sustained financial investment to produce publications for a mass audience. The loss of independence on the business side of publications, however, stifled outspoken voices in

²⁴ *Contact*, June 28, 1958. The article noted that of 13,232 people surveyed in Orlando and Dube townships in 1958, 82 percent made less than £20 per month. It also mentioned that 2,000 families resisted sending in the survey to protest government plans to use the survey to set higher rents.

²⁵ “Income and Expenditure Patterns of Urban Bantu Households,” *Pretoria Survey*, No. 3, Vol. II, (Pretoria: Bureau of Market Research, UNISA, 1961), Table 73.

²⁶ J. Eberhardt, *A Survey of Family Conditions with Special Reference to Housing Needs: Orlando Township, Johannesburg*, (Johannesburg: Non-European Affairs Department, 1955), p. 37. The survey took place from January 1948 to July 1949.

²⁷ L. Switzer, “*Bantu World* and Origins of the Captive Commercial Press,” p. 353.

²⁸ Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex VII, p. 134.

the black press and the limited the range of black political opinions expressed in the commercial press.²⁹

As it expanded and became increasingly commercial, the urban black press as a whole was leaving its missionary roots firmly behind, experiencing shifts in both its motivation for publishing and its content. As Rev. R.H.W. Shepherd, editor of *South African Outlook* and a 31-year veteran of the Lovedale Press, which had spearheaded the early missionary papers, noted in 1958: “250,000 copies of *Drum*, *Zonk*, and *Bona* [a government-funded magazine aimed at Africans started in 1956] ... are sold every month and each copy is read by at least six people. The editorship of these publications is almost all done by Natives and the time had gone when they were satisfied with Biblical subjects.”³⁰

The Lovedale Press, in the Eastern Cape, had founded *Isigidimi Sama Xosa* (*The Xhosa Messenger*), one of the oldest papers in the country. It began as a monthly Xhosa language supplement to the English-language *Kaffir Express*, but the magazine became separate in 1876. The first issue outlined its goal of bringing what it viewed as civilisation to Africans through literacy: “WITHOUT PRINTING THE MASS OF THE PEOPLE MUST REMAIN BARBAROUS,” the paper stated. “But what is aimed at in the *Kaffir Express* is to supply a monthly or weekly sheet, such as will gradually induce the habit of reading, and make it both a taste and necessity and thus serve as an education in the wider sense of the word.”³¹ The early black press, which was mainly connected to mission printing presses, operated on the belief that the press was an educator, bringer of

²⁹ T. Couzens, “The Struggle to be Independent: A History of the Black Press in South Africa 1836-1960,” (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, History Workshop paper, 1990), p. 25-30.

³⁰ *Contact*, May 17, 1958.

³¹ Quoted in T. Couzens, “The Struggle to be Independent,” p. 5.

middle class civilisation to the masses, and a respectable forum to discuss politics and advocate for African interests.³² Les Switzer described the ethic of much of the early African press: “The African *petty-bourgeoisie* and its press would inform the masses of their rights, school them in the principles of personal etiquette and parliamentary democracy, and be their ombudsmen in bringing African interests to the attention of government.”³³

As the black general interest press took hold, however, there was a shift in the perception of what a newspaper should provide. Beginning in the 1930s with *Bantu World*, the view that newspapers and magazines should primarily be educational and uplift readers to a higher standard of civilisation was changing, and the balance was moving further towards the idea that they should be entertaining as well as informative. While the strain of thought that promoted the press as a public servant continued to exist, and still does, the balance was shifting to favour the notion that publications should be entertaining and most of all accessible—writing about not just politics but also the scandalous and extraordinary, as well as the ordinary life that was increasingly taking place in large cities. In addition to publishing many short works of fiction, magazines in particular were for the first time also writing consistently about everyday life in accessible language, including articles on music, sports, and crime, and had a particular focus on human-interest stories.

Although the white press is not the subject of this paper, it is interesting to note that it had been moving towards a more popular tone earlier. In 1935, an advertising trade magazine commented that:

³² L. Switzer, “Captive Commercial Press,” p. 352.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 352.

Overseas this fact has been patent for some time, and has been reflected in the changing character of the popular newspapers. People no longer want their opinions formed for them. Many do not want opinions at all, except on the broadest issues. Rather, they want and demand entertainment, distractions, education... Nothing can satisfy their avid curiosity about the private lives of air aces, track demons, film stars, football captains, and millionaires.³⁴

The development of the popular press in Johannesburg is, in some ways, similar to that in New York. American social historian Michael Schudson has noted that the history of the popular press in the United States in the late nineteenth century is the history of cities, especially New York.³⁵ Like Johannesburg, it was a city that had experienced rapid growth. Much of the city's growth was due to immigration and, by 1890, 40 percent of New Yorkers had been born in another country. Many of the newly arrived immigrants were from Eastern Europe and did not speak English, and they wanted to learn the language.³⁶ The birth of the popular, mass circulation press began in the 1830s, when newspapers like the *New York Sun* and James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* were founded and began selling for a penny. Dubbed the "penny press," they began to redefine the idea of news and the role of newspapers, especially as newspapers began to compete for readers. For the first time, they offered regular, timely local news reporting, claimed independence from political parties, and based their revenue mostly on advertising, rather than subscriptions and subsidies from political parties and interest groups, which had been the norm previously. Articles focused on

³⁴ "S.A. Newspapers and the Human Touch," *South African Advertising*, Vol. 1, No. 2, September 1935.

³⁵ M. Schudson, *Discovering the News*, p. 97. The foreign-born population of New York City swelled from 479,000 in 1880 to 640,000 in 1890.

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 97-98.

crime and courts; churches, sports, high society and “human-interest” stories became a staple of newspaper pages.

By the 1880s, journalism was becoming an established career, attracting people with college degrees who organised professional associations. Individual bylines became more frequent and a few journalists, such as Nelly Bly, became household names, becoming part of their stories and receiving as much attention as the subjects they covered. It was also during this era that tabloids began to crop up in New York, including Joseph Pulitzer’s *World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *Journal*, papers that emphasized entertainment over straight facts, and offered sensational features, bigger headlines, comics and illustrations, and pages specifically for women with advice on social etiquette and housekeeping.

The new papers also spoke to a distinctly urban audience, reflecting and helping them to comprehend their experiences. “Newspaper like the *World*, which sought a wide and general readership, responded to the changing experience, perceptions, and aspirations of urban dwellers. This meant indeed, an enlargement of the ‘entertainment’ function of the newspaper,” Schudson notes, “but it also meant an expansion of what has recently been called the ‘use-paper’ rather than the newspaper, the daily journal as a compendium of tips for urban survival.”³⁷ While there was dismay about the low-brow turn the papers were taking, as Lovedale’s Rev. Shepherd observed almost 100 years later in South Africa, it seemed to serve a purpose for its readers: “They wanted the moral counsel of stories as much as any people did, but the tales of the Bible and the lives of the saints were not suited to the new cities,” Schudson notes.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid. p. 102.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 106.

Urbanisation in Johannesburg

Who made up the audience of potential consumers that *Drum* and the commercial press was trying to target? The release of *Drum*'s first issues in 1951 came on the heels of sweeping changes in both the economy and residential demographics of the country. The process of rapid, mass urbanisation, which had started in the 1920s and 1930s, accelerated in the 1940s, as growth in manufacturing and service industries sparked by World War II attracted hundreds of thousands of Africans to urban areas. Between 1936 and 1946, close to 278,000 Africans moved to the Witwatersrand region.³⁹ During the 1940s, between 60,000 and 90,000 Africans settled in the Johannesburg vicinity alone, and between 1946 and 1951, approximately 131,000 Africans moved to the Rand.⁴⁰

It was not just Africans who were moving to the cities—urbanisation was a process that affected everyone, as towns increasingly attracted all segments of the population. In 1911, for instance, about 60 percent of whites in the Transvaal were living in urban areas but by 1951 that number had increased to 80 percent.⁴¹ In addition to population increases in the country's major cities, smaller towns throughout the Union were rapidly growing in size as well.⁴² In just thirty years, a huge physical transformation had taken place.

Regardless of whether or not they wanted to stay in the city permanently, it was both the promise of jobs and a lack of prospects in poor and overcrowded rural areas that

³⁹ *S.A. Union Stats for 50 Years*, p. A-9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. A-9

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. A-10. In 1911, 24.7 percent of all South Africans lived in cities, and by 1951, 42.6 percent of people lived in urban areas. The main urban areas defined by the census were the Witwatersrand region, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, and Kimberley.

⁴² "Urbanisation of the Smaller Towns," *Selling Age*, October 1958, pp. 17-18. While there were 35 towns with a white population between 2,000 and 20,000 in 1921, by 1956 there were 102.

drew most Africans there. The economy was growing quickly and while the agricultural sector, including both self-employed African farmers and those working on white-owned farms, remained the largest source of employment for African men throughout the country, other industries were flourishing.⁴³ The large urban centres, particularly Johannesburg, offered the best prospects for decent jobs, even if people were trading rural for urban poverty. Long the driving force of the economy, mining remained the second largest source of employment for African men in 1951.⁴⁴ However, it was the fourth largest sector of the economy, after private manufacturing, agriculture, and commerce.⁴⁵ Private manufacturing had overtaken mining by 1943 to become the largest sector of the economy and the country's factories were continuing to boom.⁴⁶

In addition to the promise of employment, for some, the prospect of leading a more cosmopolitan life was also a powerful lure. Like the young writer Nat Nakasa, who had looked forward to the "sophisticated gangsters, brave politicians and intellectuals" in Johannesburg, musician Godfrey Moloï remembers being drawn to the city by the promise of its social freedom and sophisticated urban culture. As a young man in Pietermaritzburg during the late 1940s, he liked to visit the community hall: "This is where the loafers used to show fashion in dress and jive. I wanted to live that free, don't-

⁴³ *S.A. Union Stats for 50 Years*, p. A-35. All figures in this paragraph refer to the population aged 15 years and older, and those who were deemed economically active by government census criteria. While the census figures report that the majority of women throughout the country were employed in the service industries, the employment numbers for women are somewhat suspect. In 1951, only those women who reported themselves as farmers were classified as agricultural workers, and the rest were considered dependents (*Ibid.* p. A-43).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. S-3. The mining industry employed 447,722 people in 1951. In addition, public corporations subsidized by the state, like the Electricity Supply Commission, the Rand Water Board, the S.A. Coal, Oil, and Gas Corporation, and others accounted for 9.1 percent of the national income—a significant share, the fifth largest, of the economy.

⁴⁵ *SA Union Stats for 50 Years*, p. S-3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. S-3. Manufacturing accounted for roughly 22 percent of the national income in 1951, employing 220,611 African men.

care life, to be a man about town, with nobody bossing me.”⁴⁷ The chance to escape what they felt were constraining social networks at home could be a powerful draw for some.⁴⁸ Moloi met unwed mothers in the city who were escaping disapproval in the country: “As you know, town is the one place where one can hide one’s disgraceful past.”⁴⁹

Living in the city could mean the chance to see movies at the Bioscope, go dancing, hear jazz bands, and generally to open up a different set of social opportunities. “Coca Cola had just been introduced to South Africa and it felt good to pose outside a café door with a bottle of Coke and a straw, smoking *Max*, reciting the maxims of Max to a friend, listening to ‘In the Mood’ or ‘Toledo Junction’ from the jukebox inside,” Moloi recalled.⁵⁰

For others, the city was a powerful symbol of the possibility of “making it.” The 1949 film *Jim Comes to Joburg* was perhaps the archetypical story of finding success in Johannesburg, telling a tale in the Horatio Alger mould of a man from the country who moves to the city to find work and struggles to make it there. At first, Jim encounters nothing but difficulties. After much tribulation, he finds work in a night club and, after taking the stage one night, is discovered as a singer, makes a record, finds fortune, and falls in love with a beautiful woman—played by popular Johannesburg singer Dolly Rathebe—who also works at the club.

But this ideal of material success was an illusion for most. Those who came to the city in search of work by and large lived a very precarious existence. Those lucky

⁴⁷ G. Moloi, *My Life. Vol. 1*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), p. 16.

⁴⁸ B. Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), pp. 81-105. Bozzoli’s study of a group of women from Phokeng who migrated to the Johannesburg area makes the point that many women were also attracted to life in the city because of the social and economic freedom it could offer.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

⁵⁰ G. Moloi, *My Life*, p. 26.

enough to find employment had virtually no job security.⁵¹ Wages were low and the work was often dangerous.⁵² The colour bar was rigidly enforced both during the working day, when whites had the pick of skilled jobs and higher pay, and in the evenings, when workers went home to segregated and inadequate locations. Those with an education were hardly better off financially, making little more than unskilled labourers.⁵³ Most people struggled daily to make ends meet, and unemployment rates were high. In 1951, the average wage for employed men in the Western Areas of Johannesburg, which included Sophiatown, Martindale, Western Native Township, Newclare, and Albertville, was just £13 per month.⁵⁴ Two years before, in 1949, the poverty datum line was estimated to be £12. 18s. 6d.⁵⁵

Crime was an ever-present threat as well, and was an unfortunate fact of life that had an impact on nearly everyone. While a high proportion of Africans had criminal records, often resulting from the pervasive pass legislation and alcohol prohibitions that outlawed the traditional brewing which was an economic mainstay for many women, violent crime was also a real problem in areas that were neglected by city authorities and police. In an ironic juxtaposition of the urban ideal versus reality, the photo magazine *Zonk* described the making of the film *Jim Comes to Joburg* in Johannesburg in 1949:

⁵¹ P. Bonner, "African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: its Social Character and Political Consequences," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 1995, p. 118. A survey of African men's pass records showed that, in Johannesburg between 1936 and 1944, 50 percent of men had jobs that lasted less than 12 months, after which they returned to the reserves. Out of this group a full 30 percent had been fired.

⁵² *S.A. Union Stats for 50 Years*, p. G-19. About 15,000 African men were permanently injured in industrial accidents in 1951, and almost 67,000 suffered temporary injuries. Industrial accidents were less of a threat to other workers, but they were still a real danger. In 1951, for instance, 2,578 white workers were permanently injured and almost 56,000 sustained temporary injuries.

⁵³ City of Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department, *Survey of the Western Areas of Johannesburg*, (Johannesburg: Government Printer, 1951), p. 113.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 146.

⁵⁵ "Urban Areas," in E. Hellmann (ed.), *Handbook of Race Relations in South Africa*, (Cape Town: SAIRR, 1949), pp. 271-270.

The story portrayed (sic) by the film is based on the success of a country lad, 'Jim' played by Dan Adnewmah, who comes to the city in search of fame and fortune. In one sequence Dan is beaten up and robbed outside the railway station. A strange coincidence is that Dan actually was beaten up and robbed of his money one night on his way home from the film studio.⁵⁶

In addition, the intricate state bureaucracies that confronted new arrivals and old hands alike compounded the difficult experience of moving to the city. The government was recruiting labour to fill jobs, while at the same time trying to control movement by Africans to the cities. Those who came looking for work had to report to city officials for a pass, valid for just days, to allow them to search for employment. Those who could not find work in a short time essentially risked deportation. Women were discouraged from moving to the city, and municipal officials offered little family housing.

Despite all of these obstacles and the grim living conditions, Africans continued to move to cities. In Johannesburg, as elsewhere, the African community was diverse. In fact, it was the most diverse city in the Union, drawing not only people from all over the country but also from the neighbouring protectorates.⁵⁷ Most Africans living in Johannesburg from 1930 to 1950 were born elsewhere,⁵⁸ but by the early 1950s, a more settled community of residents was beginning to take root.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Zonk, August 1949.

⁵⁷ P. Bonner, "Urbanisation," p. 123.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 117. Eighty-five percent of male workers in from 1936 to 1944 moving from elsewhere, creating the most diverse urban population in South Africa.

⁵⁹ The 1951 government survey of the Western Areas found that while 15 percent of people had moved to the area within the past six years, 31 percent of residents had lived in the Johannesburg area for longer than 10 years, and 34 percent had been born there. Most of the recent arrivals were children, probably mainly young children who had previously been sent to live with relatives in the country and were rejoining their parents or other family members as their urban-dwelling caretakers became more settled in the city. (*Western Areas Sample Survey*, p. 20.)

People working and living in the city had widely varied views of their time there. Some continued to keep ties to home and actively resisted becoming urban residents, others had been born in the city, and others had moved there recently but had come to embrace it. Divisions that had existed in the countryside could endure once migrants and immigrants travelled to town, affecting the way people adapted to the city. In the Xhosa population in East London, Mayer's study found divisions between the so-called "reds," who believed that traditional styles of living, beliefs, and dress were superior and made efforts to maintain them, and the "schools," who had been western educated, were practising Christians, and preferred a western style of dress. The type of education someone received had a great deal of influence on how they adapted to the city by helping to determine their social networks. The self-described "reds" tended to group together and created informal but strong associations, such as the *amakhaya*, as a social safety net and to ensure that people from their home areas maintained traditional activities and adhered to accepted values.⁶⁰

Many of the "reds" tended to view cities with distrust, as potentially corrupting of their ways of life.⁶¹ The image of the city as dangerous resonated deeply in other parts of society as well, existing as a counterpoint to the *Jim Comes to Joburg* ideal. If *Jim* was the archetypical success story, then its opposite counterpart was Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The 1948 book portrays a pastor father's search for his son, who is

⁶⁰ P. Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African City*, (Cape Town: O.U.P., 1961). The discussion of rural arrivals' adaptation to the city is greatly indebted to Mayer's study.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 92.

accused of murder in Johannesburg, and depicted rural tribal life as the stable and healthy ideal, while the city is dark, corrupting, and unnatural.⁶²

Like the “reds,” western-educated city dwellers could view towns as menacing and potentially threatening. Yet, they also saw the city as a place with wider social and economic horizons. Instead of just seeing it as a temporary economic necessity and an unambiguous threat to their identity, they were more likely to see the city as a place to enjoy and where they could succeed. They mixed with other educated people from other parts of the country, forming friendships based on common interests and shared experience in the town, and could break into the social networks of long-time city dwellers with more ease. However, without the strong social networks of the “reds,” Mayer’s study found that the educated and more westernized migrants and immigrants, “have more freedom, but less security” than people who were still very much grounded by their rural ties.⁶³

While perhaps more open to urbanisation, even western-educated people had a range of reactions to city living, keeping some traditions and ties to home and at the same time embracing urban life. Again, musician Godfrey Moloï is a good example. Born in 1934 in Prospect Township outside Johannesburg, he grew up shuttling between the Johannesburg area, Sobantu Village near Pietermaritzburg, and Stoffelton Mission, about sixty miles outside Pietermaritzburg. His father was an Anglican priest and he received a mission education. After completing his Junior Certificate, he was forced to end his studies when Transvaal students were expelled from his school and the experience set

⁶² Although the early *Drum* published the novel in serial form, it was a pet peeve for many of the *Drum* writers, who felt that Paton’s characterisation of tribal Africans as good and passive, and urban Africans as somehow fallen was an irritating and typical white stereotype. (L. Nkosi, “The Fabulous Decade,” *Home and Exile*, (London: Longman, 1965), p. 5.)

⁶³ P. Mayer, *Townsmen*, pp. 206-218.

him on a new path. "I went and stayed at Sobantu in Pietermaritzburg and a different Godfrey was born. Now I was a loafer, and a Senior loafer at that."⁶⁴

He moved to Durban and, "at this time I was lost to my parents."⁶⁵ Moloï played in shows with his band, worked on a Merchant Navy ship, picked pockets for a time, and made a new set of friends. He worried that his parents would find out about his life outside the law, and he cut off contact with them. Despite his embrace of the city and new social circles, however, he continued to feel an obligation to his parents and their rural way of life. He sent them money when he could and, later, he frequently went to stay with them. He eventually allowed his mother to convince him to marry a country girl, who had already given birth to his child, "so she would have a companion while I was away in the cities."⁶⁶

It was people like Moloï who made up the potential audience for the black newspapers and magazines targeting urban readers. And there were a lot of them—by 1946, Africans outnumbered whites in the cities.⁶⁷ But, though media companies wanted stable urban audiences for their products, the government had other ideas. As the Nationalists were formulating and implementing apartheid policies, cities were on the front lines. The government was caught between the need for African labour to fill mining and manufacturing needs, and the desire to make sure those labourers did not regard the cities as home. "It was only when our labour was needed that a deliberate drive was made to haul us from our tribal havens to come out to work. And where tribalism

⁶⁴ G. Moloï, *My Life*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 192.

⁶⁷ L. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 178. Twenty-four percent of Africans lived in or near cities throughout the country, outnumbering the 76 percent of whites who lived in urban areas.

did not help to demonstrate the dignity of labour, tribalism had to be smashed,” observed *Drum* writer Can Themba. “They were so bloody successful that now they fear they have driven too many of us into the fields of urban industry and have sired themselves a problem.”⁶⁸

Influx laws had the effect of slowing migration to Johannesburg, which limited expansion to some extent.⁶⁹ In the early 1950s, the government passed new and even more stringent pass laws in an effort to control urban growth. The 1950 Group Areas Act mandated formal residential segregation. The Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 gave the government powers to remove squatters from public and private land and allowed local authorities to set up resettlement camps for them. The Native Law Amendment Act of 1952 created even more obstacles to moving to urban areas—only those who had been born in a city, worked for the same employer for 10 years, or lived there continuously for 15 years could be permanent residents. Historian Philip Bonner, however, found that these laws also had consequences that their designers did not anticipate. The stricter influx laws helped to form a more cohesive community in Johannesburg, he notes, by breeding “a sense of collective deprivation and common purpose among urban communities along the Reef and particularly among its growing second-generation population, which by the late fifties had begun to manifest itself in bus boycotts and one pound a day campaigns.”⁷⁰

In addition to influx control, the premise of segregation by means of “retribalisation” was at the core of the Nationalist government’s efforts to promote

⁶⁸ C. Themba, “The Bottom of the Bottle,” *The Will to Die*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1982), p. 114.

⁶⁹ P. Bonner, “Urbanisation,” p. 117.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 128.

perfect separateness, and the idea was laid out in simple and stark terms by the Minister of Native Affairs, E. G. Jansen, during the Institute of Race Relations' Annual Meeting in 1950. *Bantu World* reported that:

The minister went on to say that, broadly speaking, there were only two trends of thought worth considering with regard to Native Policy—assimilation and differentiation. The background of the policy of 'apartheid' was based on the view that there was an essential difference between the races and that miscegenation should be avoided... True nationalism was in the first place a growing love of one's own national attributes, which up to the present had been singularly absent on the part of the African. This was the result of upbringing and educational policy.⁷¹

The government would go on to use the idea of separate nationalisms to justify its theories of separate development—specifically that whites, Africans, Coloureds, and Indians belonged to different races that were all “evolving” at different rates and in different directions, and that they should continue on their various paths of development separately. White, western civilisation was something that other groups were not capable of participating in, the government posited, and they could thus expect no political, social, or economic say in the government of South Africa. Cities in particular were seen as the domain of whites and Africans to be only temporary sojourners, fulfilling labour needs.

Africans would instead have separate “countries,” called Bantustans, grouped according to “tribe,” where they could develop on their own and practice “self-government.” Accordingly, the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 abolished the Natives Representative Council and officially established tribal “reserves” in the regions set out for Africans under the Group Areas Act. The economically stagnant reserves were crowded onto just 13 percent of the country's land and were governed by government-

⁷¹ *Bantu World*, January 28, 1950.

installed chiefs. “At least, that is, those chiefs who would keep their noses clean and obey the Government,” as Themba again observed. “And where tribal custom did not suit—for tribal custom chooses its own chiefs in its own way—well, who the hell is running the show, after all?”⁷²

Under these policies of retribalisation, any African integration into “western civilisation” should be avoided and, if necessary, reversed, so that they would not have unrealistic expectations. It treated urban Africans as foreign visitors, whose real leaders were chiefs and whose culture was purely tribal. “Upbringing and educational policy” that contradicted these policies were targeted, most infamously through the 1953 Bantu Education Act. It centralised control of African education in the Department of Native Affairs, encouraged lessons not in English but in African languages, and created new syllabuses that emphasised trade and practical skills to prepare Africans to take their place in society not as doctors, lawyers, and intellectuals but as manual labourers. These were the policies that were coming head to head with the expanding urban-centred black popular press and its audience.

The Bantu Press: “A Bantu Paper in Every Province from the Cape to the Congo”

Although the general interest magazines like *Drum* were leading the way by the 1950s, the transformation in the black press had begun in the early 1930s with the founding of *Bantu World*, the first national, mass circulation paper aimed at black readers.⁷³ *Bantu World*, too, was founded during a period of rapid urbanisation. By

⁷² C. Themba, “The Bottom of the Bottle,” *The Will To Die*, p. 115.

⁷³ L. Switzer, “Captive Commercial Press,” p. 368.

1936, people living in cities accounted for 31 percent of the country's total population.⁷⁴

That same year, the Hertzog Bills had become law, abolishing the Cape African franchise and curtailing their rights to purchase land anywhere outside the small tribal reserve areas.

The country was also suffering from a severe depression and it was thus a particularly risky venture that Bertram F. G. Paver, a failed farmer who was working for an advertising agency, embarked on when he founded the Bantu Press. While he was working for an ad agency, Paver had become interested in targeting advertising to the growing group of urban, black readers. He thought circumstances were ripe for advertisers to develop the black consumer market and felt that the press of the time “lack[ed] the ability to guide the political situation and to exploit the commercial opportunities presented.”⁷⁵

At first, potential advertisers regarded the endeavour with a mixture of curiosity and incredulity. “There was just no reaction whatsoever,” Paver recalled. “It was so unheard of, something so completely out of its time and context that, I mean people thought you were mad.”⁷⁶ Despite this early scepticism, Paver started the Bantu Press in February 1932 with a share capital of £2,000. The main stockholders were Paver, I. J. le Grange, who was the majority stakeholder, and Richard V. Selope Thema, a journalist who would become *Bantu World's* first editor. Grange and Paver were permanent directors. Selope Thema sat on the Board of the company until 1936 and held the post of

⁷⁴ *Union Stats for 50 Years*, p. A-10.

⁷⁵ Quoted in T. Couzens, “The Struggle to be Independent,” p. 25.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 26.

editor from the paper's first issue in 1932 until 1953. When he left the board, he was the company's last black board member, at least through the 1950s.⁷⁷

According to the Bantu Press's submission to the Commission of Inquiry into the Press, *Bantu World* began "for the purpose of providing the Union with a Native newspaper organization whose policy would foster harmony between Europeans and Natives; to keep the Native people informed of, and in step with Government policy and provide the Native people with a platform for fair comment and the presentation of their needs and aspirations."⁷⁸ For Paver, the paper's mission was wider than simply providing a conduit for advertising. An early memo outlined the company's goals and expressed its ambitions of, in part, social control: "Rapidly increasing literacy brings in its train a real need for the development and sane guidance of Bantu opinion as expressed in the native press... their importance in the moulding of native opinion makes their control a matter of the utmost importance to South Africa's future well-being."⁷⁹ However, the memo also acknowledged the primacy of the company's commercial goals: "The keenness of competition is forcing all commercial interest to seek new markets and in the opinion of advertising authorities, a large and increasing amount of advertising is likely to be carried by the native press."⁸⁰ In 1945, the Bantu Press put out a pamphlet called *Black Gold! A New Market and Its Media* to further publicize the advertising possibilities it offered.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex XII, p. 30.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 30.

⁷⁹ Quoted in T. Couzens, "The Struggle to Be Independent," p. 25.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 25. Friedgut quotes portions of the memo as well, which also noted that consolidating several papers for black audiences would allow the company to guide political content, syndicate news, buy newsprint at wholesale prices, supervise printing and layout, and improve the efficiency of circulation departments. (A.J. Friedgut, "Non-European Press," pp. 491-492).

⁸¹ T. Couzens, "Struggle to Be Independent," p. 29.

Yet, in its early years, the paper experienced considerable financial trouble. It was hard to attract enough advertising to keep the paper running.⁸² To alleviate the situation, Paver brought in Charles Maggs Investments in 1933, which bought 27 percent of the company (which he increased to 31 percent by 1937.). Maggs in turn brought in the Argus Company, which bought 51.28 percent of the Bantu Press. The company now had connections to the mining industry through the Argus Company.⁸³

With stable financial backing, the Bantu Press had the secure footing it needed to become both the first and largest black newspaper conglomerate in the country. For the next 20 years, the Bantu Press would be a trailblazer in corporate, white-controlled ownership of black publications⁸⁴ and the company's grand ambitions were reflected in its slogan "A Bantu Paper in Every Province from the Cape to the Congo."⁸⁵ While it did not succeed in creating a publishing empire that stretched much beyond South Africa's borders, by 1954, Bantu Press papers accounted for an astonishing 52.61 percent of the total annual circulation of the black press in South Africa.⁸⁶ However, only *Bantu World*

⁸² Ibid. p. 26. Couzens describes how Paver held a trade exhibition in 1933 to encourage companies to tap the African market. Soon after, he outfitted a travelling van with ad slides that travelled 4,000 miles around the country. *Bantu World* advertisers were given a free slide. Despite his efforts, attracting sufficient advertising revenue remained a constant struggle.

⁸³ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Annex XI, pp. 30-35. In 1935, the Chamber of Mines gave £10,000 to the Argus Printing and Publishing Company to invest in the Bantu Press. The Commission recorded that this money came from "interest on deferred pay—presumably pay due to Native mine workers. For this reason it was felt that this money should be vested in a trust for Bantu development." Between 1937 and 1940, the company bought another 6,354 shares and in 1940, Argus created the Press Trust for Bantu Development, putting all of its shares into the Trust. From 1933 to 1951, the Argus, either by itself or in conjunction with the Press Trust for Bantu Development, held a majority share in the Bantu Press. In 1952, the company doubled its issued share capital and the Anglo American Corporation bought heavily into the company. Charles Maggs increased his stake as well. Each held 28.96 percent, and the other major stakeholder was the UK-based Imperial Tobacco Company.

⁸⁴ T. Couzens, "Struggle to be Independent," pp. 20-25.

⁸⁵ According to Friedgut, this was the company's motto. (A.J. Friedgut, "Non-European Press," p. 493.)

⁸⁶ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Annex XI, pp. 25-30.

was actually started by the parent company—the Bantu Press had bought the rest, steadily incorporating black papers throughout the country and neighbouring protectorates over the previous two decades. By the mid-1950s the Bantu Press owned four of the seven newspapers in the country aimed at black audiences.⁸⁷ The company told the Commission of Inquiry into the Press that most of the publications it took over “were, in the main, in grave financial difficulties.”⁸⁸ It was a testament to the great difficulty faced by black-owned papers in maintaining the capital required to keep their papers running.

As Bantu Press acquired more publications, its collection grew to include some of the oldest African papers in the country, several of which had been started by famous and influential African leaders. One of the company’s first acquisitions was the Xhosa and English language *Imvo Zabantsundu (Native Opinion)*, the weekly paper started by John Tengo Jabuvu in 1884. A Bantu Press subsidiary company bought the paper in 1935 and it became wholly owned in 1952. The paper was transferred to East London in 1953 and finally moved to Johannesburg in 1956, where it was also printed. By 1955, it had a circulation of 14,031.⁸⁹

The company also went on to buy *Ilanga Lase Natal (Guiding Light of Natal)*, the weekly Zulu and English language paper founded by John Dube in 1903 at his Ohlange Institute. H.I.E. Dumbrell, *Ilanga* editorial supervisor, recalled that, “As an independent newspaper it was described as a haphazard affair. The back room at least.” The staff was small and the editor “was everything—reporter, sub-editor, general manager, columnist—the lot.”⁹⁰ With more resources available under its new owner, the paper moved to

⁸⁷ Ibid., Annex VII, p. 124.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Annex VII, p. 45.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Annex VII, pp. 25-36.

⁹⁰ Quoted in T. Couzens, “The Struggle to Be Independent,” pp. 12-13.

Durban where it was printed in the same facilities as the *Natal Mercury*. It also hired a rising young reporter Jordan Ngubane, the ANC Youth League activist who, in addition to later becoming an assistant editor at *Bantu World*, also wrote several pieces for *Drum*. By 1955, *Ilanga Lase Natal*'s circulation was about 30,000 copies per issue.⁹¹

Significantly, in addition to moving both *Imvo* and *Ilanga* to major cities, Bantu Press also appointed white editorial supervisors at each of its South African papers who could exercise editorial control over the papers' black editors.⁹²

Bantu World was at the vanguard of other developments in the mass circulation black press. With more money backing the venture, the paper invested in modern presses, and it had newsboys selling copies of the paper on the street.⁹³ In late nineteenth century Britain, the widespread use of newsboys had produced a public outcry against the use of child labour. In South Africa, papers aimed at both black and white audiences used newsboys to sell to consumers in crowded cities. Peter Abrahams, who published his autobiography in *Drum* in 1954, recalled that during his childhood in Johannesburg, "I knew all the names of the big Johannesburg newspapers because I had sold them."⁹⁴ However, there was little public concern over the treatment of children selling newspapers and other publications on the street until the 1970s.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Annex VII, p. 25-26.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Annex VII, p. 45.

⁹³ "How Your Newspaper Comes to You," *Bantu World*, January 19, 1946.

⁹⁴ P. Abrahams, "Tell Freedom," *Drum*, June 1954. He also recalled his fascination with *Bantu World* the first time he saw it. A customer at a café where he worked, who he remembered as clearly middle class and educated, warned him: "Although it's by and about black people, it's controlled by whites," further reflecting the suspicion that publications like *Drum* and *Bantu World* could encounter from savvy readers.

⁹⁵ B. Baatjes, *Newspaper Vendors as a Category of Child Labour*, (Unpublished honours dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1980), pp. 51-54. Many young boys selling on the street were black, and used the wages to supplement their families' income. In 1977, the Progressive Party asked Parliament to investigate the working condition of child newspaper vendors after 14 were killed in a car crash in the Cape.

The company also helped form the distribution systems that most of the black press would use in the coming decades. In 1939, Bantu Press started a newspaper distributing company, the Bantu News Agency Ltd, as a wholly owned subsidiary to distribute *Bantu World* and *Imvo Zabantsundu*, and the company would grow to handle the distribution of the majority of the black press, including *Drum* and *Zonk*. In 1952, Bantu Press sold 75 percent of the company to the Central News Agency, which handled distribution for most of the major papers aimed primarily at white readers. And, as the company incorporated additional papers into the group, they were able to centralise the selling of advertisements to a greater degree, eventually serving papers owned by other companies as well.⁹⁶

Despite its expansion and ample financial backing, *Bantu World* still struggled to turn a profit for its owners well into the 1950s. While its books showed modest profits after World War II, from 1950 to 1955, the only year when the paper did not lose money was 1952, when it made a profit of just £132.⁹⁷ The papers' losses were somewhat offset by Bantu Press' diverse set of holdings. *Ilanga Lase Natal*, for example, was profitable during the same time period.⁹⁸

Commercially, *Bantu World* was the model for a new generation of the press. Editorially, however, the paper still had much in common with the older ideals of the press as educator, uplifter, and promoter of the public welfare—at least initially. The inaugural issue in April 1932 laid out the paper's guiding principles:

1. To print without prejudice or bias all the news that will be interesting and instructive to the Bantu peoples, in order that its reading public may be fully and truly informed as an aid to clear thinking and logical action.

⁹⁶ A.J. Friedgut, "Non-European Press," p. 484.

⁹⁷ Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex VII, p. 84-85.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, Annex VII, pp. 84-85.

2. To be independent of party politics, supporting men and measures only in the interests of what it conceives to be the public welfare, and unhesitatingly attacking evils and combating evil-doers with frankness and vigour, regardless of race, party or power.
3. To render helpful public service by instilling racial self-help and self-respect, thereby promoting harmonious race relationships and the maintenance of inter-racial goodwill and cooperation.
4. To seek to give every man a chance, as far as law and honest wage and recognition of human brotherhood can make it so—an equal chance.
5. To strive for the economic development of South Africa along lines that will be beneficial to all its inhabitants.
6. To encourage the development of the Bantu as an agricultural people and to foster the growth of Bantu arts and crafts, literature and music.
7. To combat illiteracy and to stimulate education among the Bantu, by catering to the needs of semi-literates as well as to the most highly advanced.⁹⁹

Markedly absent from this list was the idea that the paper should entertain its readers or reflect the social lives of ordinary people. At first, it included substantial foreign coverage and reported on issues affecting urban communities, like housing issues and stories on crime statistics. It called for the repeal of the pass system, better housing, voting rights, and an end to brutal police enforcement of segregation laws.¹⁰⁰ It also covered education news extensively, and continued to stress the importance of education, including a large type page for people learning to read: “You will realise that it is of vital importance for you who wish to become a vital people to pass on the information you gain from your reading to those unable to read for themselves. Everyone must be in this fight!”¹⁰¹ After WWII the paper started a “teach one, reach one” literacy campaign.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Bantu World*, April 2, 1932.

¹⁰⁰ “Cape Native Franchise,” *Bantu World*, December 3, 1932; “42,000 Yearly Victims of the Pass Laws,” *Bantu World*, September 15, 1934; and “Keep the Nigger in His Place,” *Bantu World*, May 7, 1932.

¹⁰¹ *Bantu World*, January 5, 1946.

¹⁰² T. Couzens, “Struggle to be Independent,” p. 30.

Despite the lofty goals spelled out in its guiding principles, though, its coverage soon concentrated increasingly on society and human-interest stories. It wrote about crime and sports, and had pages for women and children. Although it had purported to encourage African “agricultural” heritage, it mainly focused on stories that would interest urban audiences—its largest areas of readership were on the Rand and “heavily industrialised areas in the Transvaal.”¹⁰³ In a study of *Bantu World*’s content from 1932 to 1939, Les Switzer found that the paper, in contrast to the African-owned press, “deemphasized negative news that highlighted the discriminatory policies and activities of those who ruled South Africa. Even less coverage was given to African nationalist pressure groups or to the protest-cum-resistance movement. *Bantu World* focused unabashedly on the cultural concerns and leisure-time activities of the African *petty-bourgeoisie*.”¹⁰⁴ The paper was becoming less of a political advocate and focusing more on entertainment.¹⁰⁵

Despite its shifting focus, *Bantu World* continued to cover domestic news and politically it urged readers to support the ANC throughout the 1940s, which was still dominated by relatively moderate voices. Only through working together, they reiterated, could Africans break the hold of white supremacy. “Unity must be our aim in 1946,” urged a 1946 New Year’s editorial. “This year let the African people rally round the banner of the African National Congress, so that we can build up a strong organisation which will enable us to overcome our difficulties and thus pave the way to a happier and

¹⁰³ A.J. Friedgut, “The Non-European Press,” 494.

¹⁰⁴ L. Switzer, “Captive Commercial Press,” p. 357.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 357.

freer life.”¹⁰⁶ It reminded readers that, “[o]ur nationalism should not be rabid and selfish.”

By 1954, *Bantu World*'s circulation was 33,647 copies per issue.¹⁰⁷ It continued, however, to publish in English, Zulu, South Sotho, and sometimes Afrikaans, Venda and Shangaan up through 1955, occasionally featuring articles in African languages on the front page. Many of the articles in English were generally sober in tone and stolid in form, sometimes admonitory. A 1950 column by “Sjambok,” for example, advised: “You African boys, listen here. Stop idling and help your parents.... What these boys delight in doing is ‘swanking,’ eating, surveying the location, attending concerts and dances, indulging in after lunch naps, and mixing up with the do-nothings.”¹⁰⁸

In 1955, the paper became a bi-weekly, coming out on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and in January 1956 it changed its name to *The World*.

Attitudes Toward the Press

In 1950, the Nationalist government appointed a Commission of Inquiry into the Press to investigate several issues concerning content—from both domestic and foreign sources—as well as the control and structure of the press.¹⁰⁹ The commission mainly targeted the English language press, which had developed into an “outside” opposition to the government,¹¹⁰ and it was the first step in tighter censorship to come, which will be

¹⁰⁶ *Bantu World*, January 5, 1946.

¹⁰⁷ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, p. 119.

¹⁰⁸ Sjambok [pseud.], “Work and Reliability,” *Bantu World*, January 14, 1950.

¹⁰⁹ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, pp. 14-17.

¹¹⁰ E. Potter, *The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), pp. 11, 102.

discussed in the next chapter. Some of its findings, and the observations of others who studied the media, though, show how entrenched the popular press had become.

In June 1951, the commission sent out questionnaires to the owners of every registered newspaper, magazine and periodical in the Union. The first portion of their twelve-volume report was released after significant effort and expense thirteen years later, in 1964, and it showed considerable tension about the role of the press in South Africa. On the one hand, the government-appointed authors of the report felt compelled to recognize the value of the press as both an educator and as evidence of a democratic society, noting that “a free Press is essential to a free democratic country, and... a self-disciplined freedom ultimately constitutes the best safeguard for the maintenance of freedom of the press.”¹¹¹ It acknowledged that the press had the power to influence public opinion, and that the press could be a useful reflection of society.

On the other hand, the commission was clearly very worried about the version of society that the press reflected, and how to control political and social reporting. It had been charged with examining how best to protect the “safety of the state,” including “the dignity of certain organs of state,” and ensuring “peaceful relations between race groups.” While the commission noted that its main function was to examine “the extent to which any findings... militate for or against a free Press in the Union of South Africa and South West Africa and the formation of an informed public opinion on political issues,” the report also reflected a suspicion of the growing popular press. Part of its mission statement was to investigate “the incidence of sensationalism and triviality in the make-up of newspapers” and how the press affected “the protection of good morals.”¹¹²

¹¹¹ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, p. 17.

¹¹² Ibid. pp. 14-17.

They were not alone in their misgivings about the value of the expanding popular press. A 1935 history of the press in South Africa by Theodore Cutten noted that newspapers aimed at white readers were already moving away from their role—in his view—as educators and uplifters. Cutten felt that “country” newspapers did a better job of adhering to the old model of newspaper than their urban counterparts. They were “less sensational than those of the towns; they are devoted largely to local interests, and are little concerned with international affairs. They provide much reading material of an instructive nature for the farming communities,” he wrote, “and provide a link between scattered areas in the same district and contribute in a small measure towards brightening up the dull moments of farm life. They also provide an educational factor of great importance in areas where schools do not exist or where the standard of education is of an elementary nature.”¹¹³

He noted with some optimism, however, that the press seemed likely to assume a more sober and scholarly form in the future:

There is abundant evidence, therefore, to support the claim that graduated men, possessed with a liberal degree of commonsense, knowledge, ability, and a profound sense of their public trust will form the personnel of newspaper staffs in the future. When such a brilliant coterie of men have replaced those who at present fulfil their journalistic functions, some well, other indifferently well, and others not well at all, the ‘talkie’ thrillers such as ‘Scandal Sheet’ and ‘The Front Page’ that are produced in America and portray journalism in a sensational and unfavourable light will become still less appropriate and more ridiculous than they are at present time.¹¹⁴

In 1949, the liberal South African Institute of Race Relations published its annual handbook, including a survey of the black press in the country. It pointed out that, despite its expansion, the black press still faced many challenges, including the

¹¹³ T. Cutten, *A History of the Press in South Africa*, (Cape Town: N.U.S.A.S, 1935), p. 32.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 155.

possibilities of widespread consolidation along the Bantu Press model, distribution that was improving but still difficult, finding black corporate financing that was sufficiently stable, and the poverty of black readers.¹¹⁵ The survey noted with approval, though, that

Whether the Non-European press, which puts great emphasis on political and economic news and views, will go in for the more lurid, the more sensational type of news dealing with such things as crime, scandals, and accidents is another matter that will have to be decided. News of this type, often called 'human-interest stuff' is a feature of many, perhaps most, European dailies. It is entirely absent from existing Non-European papers.¹¹⁶

Later that same year, the Johannesburg monthly photo magazine *Zonk!* released its first issues. From its first edition in August 1949, readers found a host of human-interest and entertainment stories, including such features as "The Blind are Brave" and "The Blind Enjoy a Party," large photographs, and virtually no political news.

***Zonk!*: Forerunner and Competitor**

The template for *Drum*, and also its closest competitor, was the magazine *Zonk!*, "The African People's Pictorial." *Zonk* was the brainchild of Isaac Brooks, a white real estate agent. It was named after a popular black musical revue that had toured the country—later made into a film of the same name—that Brooks had organised. Although it was not the first photo magazine aimed at an African audience, *Zonk* was one of the most successful.

Brooks formed the company in May 1949 with a group of 15 initial shareholders, and the first issue hits the newsstands in August 1949 priced at a shilling per copy. Initial

¹¹⁵ A.J. Friedgut, "The Non-European Press," p. 510.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 510.

sales were beyond the company's expectations. The second issue published an apology to readers who could not find copies of the first issue: "The 20,000 copies we had printed were sold right out within such a very short time that we have printed many thousands more copies of this issue."¹¹⁷

By then, reading newspapers and magazines was becoming a habit for many black urban residents. In 1949, according to the SAIRR survey, there were three main types of black newspaper readers: The first was a small group of western-educated professional elites—such as secondary school teachers, doctors, lawyers, and intellectuals—who also regularly read the white-targeted press. The second was a less highly-educated class of clergy, primary school teachers, office clerks, and urbanised industrial workers. This group included a considerable portion of the Bantu Press readers. The third was a class of semi-literate rural residents and migrant labourers in cities, such as mine workers, who might not even read the press but who might listen to others who had read it to receive their news.¹¹⁸ It was the second and third groups that the commercial press was cultivating in order to expand their circulations.

Despite brisk initial sales, however, *Zonk's* first years were financially difficult. During the first ten months of publishing, *Zonk Publications* lost £5,853. And in the first few months of its existence, monthly circulation remained around the same level, averaging 28,879 copies per issue from August 1949 to June 1950. By 1953, though, the magazine had lowered its cover price to 6d an issue and boasted an average monthly circulation of 53,912 copies. Its profits were quickly increasing. In 1953, *Zonk* made a profit of £416, and by 1955 was £4,651 in the black, with an aggregate profit of £11,523

¹¹⁷ *Zonk*, September 1949.

¹¹⁸ A.J. Friedgut, "Non-European Press," p. 489.

over the previous five years. This was in stark contrast to *Drum*'s balance sheet, which, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, was showing steady losses over the same period. The lion's share of *Zonk*'s profit came from advertising—while circulation revenue had remained steadily around £9,000 from 1953 to 1955, the revenue from advertising increased from £28,052 to £45,689 over the same period.¹¹⁹ *Drum* was also receiving healthy revenue streams from advertising, but its costs were much higher than that of its competitor.

Zonk was the first general interest magazine for black audiences that published solely in English. While the use of English may have represented many things—education, urbanity, and modernity—it was, for the editors of *Zonk* at least, above all utilitarian. In October 1949, a reader asked why the magazine did not publish in African languages. “May I suggest one thing: that it be printed in our own languages,” commented Peter S. M. Qacha from Sophiatown. “I opened the magazine and found “Molimo O Lerato” [God is Love] on a picture. But the rest was in English. Do you think this suggestion worthy or not?” The editor replied:

Printing *Zonk* in English is the result of many questions asked of many Africans of all tongues. They all preferred English because if we use one African tongue, we must use two or three—and that means less space left over for photographs and a variety of features. (ED.)¹²⁰

From nearly the beginning, *Drum* looked to take a page from *Zonk*'s success. Sylvester Stein recalled some of the advice Bailey had received for the struggling *African Drum* when he consulted community members: “‘Make it more like *Zonk* and,’ was one

¹¹⁹ The information in this paragraph concerning *Zonk*'s circulation and finances is drawn from the Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex XII, pp. 105-117.

¹²⁰ *Zonk*, October 1949.

startling comment, 'and you'll sell.'¹²¹ And, in many ways, *Zonk* was the blueprint for *Drum*. The first issue had a cover shot of singer and actress Dolly Rathebe, later the darling of *Drum*'s pages, and several of its features would prefigure those in *Drum*. There were stories on popular jazz bands like the Manhattan Brothers and the Harlem Swingsters, pages for women and children, record reviews, contests, jokes pages, a regular "American Letter" which profiled famous African-Americans like singer Lena Horne and congressman Adam Clayton Powell, and the feature "Zonk interviews an African Personality." The magazine published racy short stories, often set in cities.

The physical look of the magazine was similar to the one later adopted by *Drum* as well. It used colour printing on the cover, frequently with red and yellows undertones. The layout, from the first few pages with short reader letters and occasional editor responses, to large photo spreads throughout, would have been recognizable to any *Drum* reader. In addition to physical appearance and stories about the same stars, *Drum* would overlap with the magazine in other ways as well. *Zonk*'s January 1951 cover featured a black Santa Claus, which was also the subject of an early *Drum* cover that Anthony Sampson would remember fondly, despite the derision it drew from some members of his African board of advisors.¹²²

The magazine used contests to attract readers, advertising cash prizes for those who completed the crossword puzzle and word jumbles correctly. It also polled readers from time to time, and offered cash prizes for the best responses. For instance, the January 1951 issue asked, "Do African Women Lag Behind Their Men?" and offered

¹²¹ S. Stein, *Who Killed Mr. Drum?* p. 36.

¹²² A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 10.

four opinions, two from men and two from women, with pictures, to start the debate.¹²³ That same year it also ran a beauty contest that, like *Drum's*, considered both men and women. The *Zonk* contest, too, was later closed to male contestants. *Zonk* had a music column written by a well-known musician, Sam Maile, who played in a band called the African Inkspots and was one of the stars of the film version of *Jim Comes to Joburg*. Lastly, they had an advice columnist, Aunt Tandi, though the advice was less humorous and more censorious than *Drum's* heartbreak column would be. "If the schoolgirl is a hussy," one column stated, "it's often the parents' fault."¹²⁴ "After the wedding you find that in married life your love is expressed mostly by giving and doing," she told women in another column. "Remember to be the helpless little woman instead of master of all."¹²⁵

Like *Drum*, *Zonk* was clearly speaking to an audience grappling with life in the city. For example, in the second issue, a story called "Elias Advises His Brother: And his words are of value to every young man in town!" tried to offer guidance to new arrivals:

This series of articles are [sic] meant to provide advice for the many young men who come to big cities and do not know how to make a success of themselves. Elias is making a great success of his life, and is willing to pass on his knowledge to others. Elias sighed, remembering that day, two years ago, when he had first tried to find a job in Johannesburg. It had been hard, very hard, and because he knew little English he had spent many weary weeks asking for a job. Always it was "No," or "Come back next week" or at other times they would say they did not understand what he wanted, and would tell him to go away, but always he had been watching and learning, and he saw that other persons who dressed well and spoke well had been successful. It was then that he determined to do as they did and to do much better. He looked at his younger brother. Dirty, he thought, dirty is this Enoch, and careless of how he looks. That is bad.¹²⁶

¹²³ Three of the four thought women did not lag behind men.

¹²⁴ "Aunt Tandi Says," *Zonk*, April 1953.

¹²⁵ "Aunt Tandi Says," *Zonk*, January 1953.

¹²⁶ "Elias Advises His Brother," *Zonk*, September 1949.

“Elias” then goes on to berate his brother for selling his only suit, being impressed with film stars, and for listening to a friend who makes money at card games. The accompanying sidebar, “First Impressions Last Longest,” asked, “Which of these two men would be selected for good employment?” and showed a picture of two men. “Of course you can tell immediately. It would be the smart and confident and tidy looking one. The other inspires no warm feeling as he is dirty-looking and untidy, sloughing about with a cigarette hanging from his unshaven gloomy face. Which of these two men do YOU resemble?”¹²⁷

Its pages also grappled with some of the same issues that occupied *Drum*, including how to adapt rural traditions to an urban lifestyle. For instance, columnist Maud Malaka spelled out the controversy over the custom of lobola, the traditional payment that an African man makes to his bride-to-be’s family. Some wanted the custom abolished because it seemed an undue financial burden and a relic from a rural lifestyle that was ill-suited to city life. Others wanted to keep the tradition. “I shall not take sides in this very debatable subject,” Malaka wrote. But she very clearly felt that the tradition was taking an unfair beating from some quarters, noting that, “All I can say is that Lobola is Lobola, and not ‘buying a wife,’ as many people put it.”¹²⁸

From the beginning, *Zonk* included sensationalised crime features, though it never delved into the issue with the same depth as *Drum*. The first issue had a fictionalised photo spread entitled, “Crime Does Not Pay!” that chronicled an attempted house-breaking and the capture of the offending criminal. The accompanying text commented that:

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ M. Malaka, “Some of Our Customs Old and New,” *Zonk*, February 1951.

The pictures round these two pages illustrate just one of many crimes committed or attempted every night. Maybe **you** will be the next victim of men who lurk in the darkness, waiting to steal, to rob, and to kill.... Those who do escape detection for a while are never sure. They live in fear of the day when the hand of the Law will close on their guilty shoulders and prison gates close on the scenes of their crime.¹²⁹

In February 1951, *Zonk* cut its cover price to half a shilling, and by October 1953 it was weighing in at 48 pages: "Circulation is increasing steadily all the time," the editors' letter proclaimed. "Month after month more Africans are finding that *Zonk* is the authentic mouthpiece of the African people. In these pages you can read about Africans; you can read stories and articles written by Africans," the magazine reminded readers.¹³⁰

Stein remembers *Zonk* as "a vulgar, kitschy, commercial monthly, displaying for the semi-literate black population pictures of their township football players and song-and-dance stars, and their own suburban shanty-town socialites and soft-porn stars."¹³¹ Notwithstanding the former *Drum* editor's disdain for *Zonk*'s contents, *Drum* also covered celebrities, pin-up girls, and sport. One of the key differences, however, was that *Drum* was willing to cover political news.

Zonk, on the other hand, was determined to stay away from political coverage from the beginning. It had succeeded in capturing some of the spirit of urban life for Africans—the music, the sports and some of the personalities that mattered to its audience, but it was not delivering the whole picture. It largely struck the right note for an urban audience from the start, unlike *Drum*'s earliest issues. But though it claimed to

¹²⁹ *Zonk*, August. 1949.

¹³⁰ *Zonk*, October 1953.

¹³¹ S. Stein, *Who Killed*, p. 36. In another example of editorial overlap in the magazine, in March 1951, *Zonk* ran an article about Calvin Lekoane, a 36-year-old man living in Germiston who was forced to do everything with his arms after being struck by a paralyzing illness and losing the use of his legs. *Drum* ran a feature on the same man in January 1955.

be the “authentic mouthpiece of the African people,” it made a conscious decision to ignore a large part of what it meant to be a black South African during the 1950s: the effects of the tightening noose of apartheid.

Clearly, though, *Zonk*'s editors were hearing from some readers who were hungry for political news, and the magazine sought to confront inquiries about its decision to avoid commenting on the government and the effects of its policies. In the second issue, the magazine spelled out its attitudes toward political reporting. “There is a popular saying that ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth.’ Well, as there are so many cooks in the political broth, you will find that *Zonk* Photomagazine keeps right out of the kitchen of politics.”¹³² It went on to explain what role it wanted its readers to see it filling: “On the other hand, up to now, there have been no cooks to prepare a tasty meal for Africans by way of an entirely non-political magazine, devoted to the growing social aspect of African life. So that is where *Zonk* steps into the breach.” And in the same issue, one of its agents was given space to reply to customers who were asking why the magazine was non-political:

Zonk is a social and cultural magazine, clean, educational, and unbiased, with the sole aim of encouraging the reading power of the African and generally catering for the needs of those who find political literature hard and boring. *Zonk* points out to the readers that political weapons are not always effective as they are always likely to fall on ground that is readily prejudiced, and *Zonk* has better ideals for the cultural development of the African without having to tell their rulers what they must or must not do.¹³³

The magazine continued to shy away from political coverage, never mentioning the ANC or other African political leaders and campaigns. A good barometer of the

¹³² *Zonk*, September 1949.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

magazine's toothless political reporting was its coverage of the removals in Sophiatown, the diverse black Johannesburg neighbourhood that meant so much to *Drum* and many of its readers. It ran no stories leading up to the removals but in February 1955, the month of the first forced evictions, ran a largely positive story about the process: "One of the families confirmed the opinion that the majority of the people were happy to have left Sophiatown," the article stated. The story did note that some people objected to having to travel longer distances to work in the city, thus incurring a more expensive commute in addition to the higher rental prices in Meadowlands. But the rest of the story was upbeat and ended with the comment that, "[t]he people at Meadowlands will be faced with the task of adjusting themselves to their new environment, but with good will from the authorities and the people of the neighbouring townships, they should eventually settle down to healthier, happier lives in their new homes."¹³⁴

In general, the staple of its pages remained sports, music, and trivial features. The April 1955 issue, for instance, proudly boasted that, "Only *Zonk* could bring you a picture of a two-headed calf. See this astounding freak of nature on page 25."

It appeared, though, that their audience was responding positively to the entertainment and features found in the magazine's pages. By 1954, *Zonk* had an average circulation of 62,556 copies each month.¹³⁵ In March 1954, the company decided to start another entertainment magazine and formed a subsidiary, which published the first issue of *Hi-Note!* in May 1954. In this respect, they were following Jim Bailey's lead. He had begun publishing a sister publication to *Drum*, called *Africa!* in March 1954. And, in

¹³⁴ *Zonk*, February 1955. While it is certainly reasonable that not all residents of Sophiatown opposed the move, or felt strongly one way or another about it, the article steers clear of mentioning any organised opposition to the removals.

¹³⁵ Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex XII, p. 103.

fact, *Hi-Note!* suffered the same inauspicious fate as *Africa!* While its average monthly circulation for the first six months of 1955 was 24,821, the venture was losing money quickly. The first 14 months of its existence saw it lose nearly £6,000 and by 1957 the magazine had folded.¹³⁶

As *Zonk* found a mass audience, it also served as a training ground for black writers, and particularly photographers. It provided a start to Mabel Cetu, the first trained black woman photo-journalist in the country who would later work for *Drum* and the *Golden City Post*.¹³⁷ Ernest Cole, who became a photojournalist, started as *Zonk*'s floor sweeper and messenger. In its first months it also published a short story by Arthur Maimane, one of *Drum*'s earliest reporters.¹³⁸

It was in the context of the birth of the urban black popular press that the 1954 Commission of Enquiry into Undesirable Publications—charged with investigating and making recommendations about potentially undesirable books and magazines—had sounded its dismay at what it felt were particularly disturbing trends in the magazines' content. Beyond showing pin-up girls and sensational crime stories, these magazines were beginning to speak to black city-dwellers in a way that made the Commissioners very nervous:

Literature which subtly steers the interests of the semi-developed and sometimes culturally confused Bantu into this channel may cause him to fall a prey to inferior literature which estranges him from his own culture and holds up as something attractive to him such inferior things in the way of life and thought of the Europeans as jazz, jive, slang, etc. Certain

¹³⁶ Ibid, Annex XII, pp. 103-116.

¹³⁷ J. Matyu, "Sis May's House Drew Socialites, Journalists," *The Herald*, September 23, 2005.

¹³⁸ A. Maimane, "Death in My Box," *Zonk*. February 1951. The story is about two reporters, one of whom works for a newspaper called the *African Ace* who accidentally picks up the wrong suitcase on a train and fears that it contains a dismembered corpse. Fortunately, it turns out to contain only a dead sheep.

magazines for the Bantu are already sinning very seriously in this respect.¹³⁹

Certain magazines were indeed “sinning” in that respect, and one of the biggest and boldest sinners was *Drum*. There is perhaps no better illustration of the changes that were taking place in the larger press than the founding of *Drum* itself. If *Bantu World* was instrumental in the transition to a mass circulation press, and *Zonk* was the first to emphasize entertaining stories for urban audiences that captured some of the life of the city, *Drum* represented the popular press at its height. After a rocky start and a struggle to find its voice—moving from “Tribal Music” features in 1951 to daring political exposés and crime features like “Guns, Gals, and Greed” by 1958—it connected with readers through articles on social life and politics, while at the same time providing entertainment and diversion.

Drum did not aim to “uplift” its readers in the way the early black press had, yet it did want to improve them, and the magazine came to insist that its readers should be *modern*, exhibiting a new and particular urban cosmopolitanism in response to social transformations—such as urbanisation and retribalisation—taking place across the country. And, as *Drum* was writing about black urban life, it was also redefining the conception of modern by incorporating elements from popular culture. To previous generations, modern living had meant being Christian, educated, and solidly respectable. *Drum* helped to redefine the notions of “high” and “low” culture for urban Africans, by writing about everyday life and embracing the city and all it encompassed, including jazz,

¹³⁹ Commission of Enquiry into Undesirable Publications, pp. 263-264. *Drum* was undoubtedly one of the magazines being referenced. In addition to being one of only four magazines the Commission examined, the Commissioners called Jim Bailey to testify before them and listed Anthony Sampson’s 1956 memoirs about *Drum* in the relatively short bibliography of its report.

shebeens, politics, and the influence of black American culture. These conceptions are covered in later chapters. Before considering the particular identity articulated in *Drum's* non-fiction, however, it is first necessary to examine the origins and evolution of the magazine and its staff.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Two

“*Drum* Comes to Joburg”: The Birth of Mr. Drum

“It was rather slow and rather proper, still geared to the wheel of the ox-wagon. But soon the urges in the country were spinning the wheel faster, faster. *Drum* had come to Jo’burg, but he was Jim no more.”

—Henry Nxumalo, “How *Drum* Beat Them All!” *Drum*, May, 1956.

It was in the midst of the tumult of urbanisation and industrialisation that was redefining life in Johannesburg and other cities, that Bob Crisp and Robin Stratford approached Jim Bailey with the idea of starting a new magazine for Africans. Before the first issue of the *African Drum* had even been written, Crisp thought it had the potential to sell across the continent.¹ But before he could plan that far ahead, he and Stratford needed more money to get the venture going. They had turned to Jim Bailey.

At the outset, the trio envisioned a publication that would both entertain and inform Africans about what the owners perceived as African culture and heritage. And when the first issue came out in March 1951 in Cape Town, it was full of stories on traditional “African” themes—African art, traditional music, and folklore. It also ran features like the “Know Yourselves” column, written by white academics, which detailed the histories of the various tribes with which Africans living in Johannesburg were supposed to feel a connection.

Unlike the founders of *Zonk*, though, they had not done any research of their market beforehand. The group had badly miscalculated. The audience they were trying to reach was more interested in hearing about the latest jazz releases than in reading about traditions that seemed removed from their lives in Johannesburg. As Anthony

¹ J. Bailey, “Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle,” *The Beat of Drum*, p. 124.

Sampson, *Drum* editor from 1951 to 1955, explained: “*Drum* was at cross purposes with its readers. While we were preaching tribal culture and folk-tales, they were clamouring to be let into the Western world. Looking back on it now,” he wrote in 1956, “it seems very odd that we ever could have expected Africans to buy the early *Drum*. But the tribal *Drum* was part of a very general attitude of Europeans towards the African in his tribal state. The laughing Zulu or the fierce Masai was the heir of the ‘noble savage’ of Rousseau, Defoe, or Lord Mombobbo.”² Bailey, as well, later noted that, “It was clear that our readers did not yearn for a diet of improving stories written by so-called white experts.”³ High ideals aside, *Drum* was at heart a commercial venture and the magazine was losing readers. Within four months the magazine’s circulation had dropped from 24,000 to 16,000.⁴ To reach the audience it wanted—and, more importantly, to make money—*Drum* would have to make a change.

This chapter examines the history of *Drum* in the 1950s, with a particular focus on the lives of a few of its writers. Throughout the decade, the magazine had one publisher, four different editors, and a small but relatively stable staff, and *Drum* is very much a product of their world-view. Their personal histories are useful in understanding how *Drum* was able to connect with its mass audience, and in understanding their journalism. Their experiences and frustrations in the city shaped the magazine’s content. The chapter also charts the expansion of the Bailey Group publications during the 1950s.

² A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 21.

³ J. Bailey, “Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle,” p. 124.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 124.

“*Drum* Comes to Jo’burg”

When Stratford decided to move to England and pull out of the business, Bailey took over his shares and began to try to change the magazine’s focus.⁵ He convinced Crisp to hire African journalists, and veteran *Bantu World* reporter Henry Nxumalo was brought in. He also sent a brief cable to Sampson, an old Oxford friend, asking him to join the staff. On the strength of Bailey’s 16-word telegraphed offer, Sampson decided to pack his bags and make the move to South Africa. But he warned Bailey that, “I don’t want to get mixed up in politics.”⁶

In October 1951, shortly after Sampson arrived in the country, *Drum* moved its offices to Johannesburg. Crisp made the move as well, but he and Bailey were already clashing over the direction of the young *African Drum*. Although Bailey had realized that *Drum* would need to reinvent itself, Crisp disagreed and he left in November.

Sampson, at just 25 years old and with no experience in journalism beyond working as *Drum*’s circulation manager for a month, took his place. He would later decide that his lack of experience was probably his “chief qualification” since he had fewer preconceived notions of how black South African life should be covered.⁷

Zonk had avoided the pitfall of focusing on “tribal” themes by talking to potential readers about what they wanted in a magazine before the first issue ever hit the stands.

Drum’s proprietors learned the hard way that their product was not connecting with readers. With the help of Henry Nxumalo, their sole African reporter at the time, Bailey

⁵ Although Bailey recalls that he bought out Stratford’s shares right away, Stratford was contributing some of the funding to *Drum* until 1954, when Bailey formally acquired his shares to become sole owner. (Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Annex VII, p. 90-92.)

⁶ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 2

⁷ A. Sampson, “The Early *Drum*,” *The Beat of Drum*, p. 15.

and Sampson started conducting similar research. Nxumalo took them to visit people in the Johannesburg communities they were covering and Sampson remembered that one man's comments encapsulated all of the early *Drum*'s problems: "Ag, why do you dish that stuff out man? Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don't care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo, and hot dames! Yes brother, anything American. You can cut out the junk about kraals and folk tales and Basutos in blankets—forget it! Tell us what's happening right here, man, on the Reef!"⁸

As they overhauled the magazine, they had to confront the problem of the "white hand," as Sampson described it. First, "to compensate for our own whiteness," Bailey and Sampson set up an African editorial board. The Board met monthly and consisted of prominent and relatively wealthy Johannesburg community leaders such as Joe Rathebe, an undertaker and boxing promoter, Dan Twala, sports broadcaster and manager of the Johannesburg Bantu Sports Club, and Dr. Alfred Xuma, the former ANC president and medical doctor who lived in Sophiatown. They met on a regular basis to provide feedback about the magazine's contents and discuss how it was being received.

As *Drum*'s founders began to change its tone, they started by actively assuring readers that the magazine was authentic—a publication for and by Africans—despite the fact that at that time it was mainly written by white academics. *Drum* began to advertise to its readers that the magazine was produced by Africans, specifically designating the staff box as "African Staff." Eventually this designation disappeared.

Throughout the years, though, the issue of authenticity would resurface. The editors felt the need to periodically remind readers the *Drum* was an African-produced venture, and thus worthy of trust. In January 1955, the editor's note told readers not to

⁸ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 7.

believe rumours that the stories were really written by whites with African pen names: “It must be by non-whites for non-whites because we know what we want. And we don’t want any phony darkies, thank you! So let’s hear no more of this bunk, that Africans can’t produce a magazine—even *Drum*, the finest magazine in Africa. That’s why *Drum* is the finest—and we mean to keep it that way!”⁹

But that was far in the future. Before they could make more changes to the contents of the magazine, and allay suspicions that *Drum* was just a front for white interests, Bailey and Sampson knew they had to hire more black journalists.

The *Drum* Men

While the story of *Drum* during the 1950s is familiar and has been covered in several papers, this study considers its history in light of the birth of the mass circulation press and the growth of the city. Furthermore, *Drum* was largely a product of its writers, who wrote its editorial content and helped to shape its political coverage. For this reason, it is essential to examine the lives and backgrounds of some of the key *Drum* writers who worked there in its early years. As highly educated, professional men, they were not the “everymen” of urban Africans. The vast majority of them had middle class aspirations and were western educated. In fact, Father Trevor Huddleston’s famous St. Peter’s School in Sophiatown was the training ground for seven out of the 20 black staff members during Sampson’s editorship.¹⁰ The experiences of the *Drum* writers did, however, share some similarities with many first- and second-generation residents of

⁹ “Letter from Mr. Drum,” *Drum*, January 1955. See also “Letter from Mr. Drum,” *Drum*, November 1953.

¹⁰ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 139.

Johannesburg at the time. These experiences gave them a perspective distinct, in some ways, from their predecessors in the earlier black press and helped them to connect with their mass audience.

In addition to the industrialisation and upheaval of mass migration to cities described in the previous chapter, the attitudes of many Africans were affected by their service in World War II. South African troops had served in Italy, and North and East Africa, and the relative freedom of working and travelling in the army broadened the horizons and raised the expectations of many of its members. Combat was reserved for white troops, and Coloured and African recruits could only serve in support roles, mainly as labourers and transport drivers.¹¹

Henry Nxumalo, the first African reporter to join the *Drum* staff, was one such soldier. Nxumalo's experiences as a sergeant during the war had led him to return home with raised expectations to a country becoming progressively more repressive. During the war he had been stationed in Cairo, where he socialized freely with Egyptian journalists and intellectuals. He was also stationed in England where, according to Sampson, the South African army was alarmed enough by his wide-ranging social life, particularly his contact with "left-wing intellectuals," to recall him home.¹² As his colleague Can Themba later wrote: "He went up North and made various friends. They world beyond showed him how other people thought and lived, so when he came back he was a frustrated man."¹³

¹¹ L. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, p. 177. Out of the 218,260 troops who served in the war, 135,171 were white men, 12,878 were white women, 27,583 were Coloured men and 42,627 were African men, all of whom were volunteers.

¹² A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 6.

¹³ C. Themba, "Henry Nxumalo," *The World of Can Themba*, p. 215.

As a young man, he had had to struggle to educate himself. Born in Port Shepstone, Natal, Nxumalo was the eldest of seven children born to a Zulu couple. Themba described his paternal grandfather, Gqobo, as “an ordinary tribal Zulu” and his mother, Josephine, as “a transitional Zulu girl.”¹⁴ He completed his Junior certificate at St. Francis in Marianhill, which was a mission school. After his father died, however, he was forced to stop his education and support himself by working first at the school and later in Durban, where he took a job in a kitchen. Unhappy with his job, he moved to Johannesburg and found a job in a boilermaker’s shop for 50 shillings a month.¹⁵

While working at the shop in Johannesburg, he began to write poetry for *Bantu World* on the side. The paper later hired him as a messenger and, three years later, he became the sports editor. Nxumalo cut his teeth as a reporter at *Bantu World*. As the dominant and largest paper aimed at blacks during the 1930s, the paper was an important training ground for a generation of black journalists. Under Richard V. Selope Thema’s editorship, the paper had at one time or another employed Jordan Ngubane, Peter Abrahams, and H.I.E. Dhlomo, among others.¹⁶ He and Abrahams, a novelist who later moved to London, struck up a lifelong friendship.

Unlike some of the later *Drum* writers, who would consider themselves as primarily fiction writers, Nxumalo had extensive experience as a reporter and he considered himself to be a journalist first and foremost. After the war, Nxumalo returned to journalism, resuming work at *Bantu World* for a time. He married a nurse, Florence, and then left the paper to take a job as a sportswriter for a gold mine publication.¹⁷ He

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 214.

¹⁵ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 5.

¹⁶ L. Switzer, “Captive Commercial Press,” p. 360.

¹⁷ S. Stein, *Who Killed*, p. 20.

also joined the Springbok Legion, a liberal organisation for veteran soldiers, where he met one of his future editors at *Drum*, Sylvester Stein. Stein describes how Nxumalo also became a “backdoor” freelancer for the *Rand Daily Mail*, which had an all-white editorial staff: “He would sneak in and hand the sports editor Paul Irwin, an unusually liberal character imported from the British press, a handful of results from township football.”¹⁸ He also sent articles to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a publication aimed at black readers in the United States.¹⁹

Nxumalo joined *Drum* in 1951 as the Sports Editor.²⁰ He was a bit older than the rest of the staff, including both his editor and publisher, and his personality helped set the tone in the office. Arthur Maimane, who had published a short story earlier that year in *Zonk* and was next to join the staff fresh from St. Peter’s in Sophiatown at just 19, described working with him:

The first man I met when I walked into *Drum*’s offices in November 1951 to be interviewed for a job was Henry Nxumalo. Sitting behind his desk in shirt-sleeves, picture of his wife on the partition in front of him; ashtray full of cigarettes with mashed up butts, chewing a cigarette and smiling. I was scared of him. When I started working with him a month later, I found out that this short, fast-talking journalistic dynamo with the heh-heh laugh could be as humane as a mother or as tough and cynical as a drill sergeant.²¹

He was a mentor to his colleagues and editors, and was responsible for bringing several of the *Drum* men to the magazine, including his nephew Bob Gosani, who started as an

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 20.

¹⁹ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 6.

²⁰ There are conflicting accounts about how Nxumalo was originally recruited to work at *Drum*. Bailey would later recall that he brought Nxumalo onto the staff. Sampson thought that Joe Rathebe, a *Drum* advisory board member and boxing promoter, introduced Nxumalo to the magazine. (J. Bailey, *The Beat of Drum*, p. 124; A. Sampson, *Drum*. p. 7)

²¹ *Golden City Post*, January 6, 1957.

errand boy before quickly turning to photography, and the musician and critic Todd Matshikiza. Nxumalo “was always the soul of the magazine,” Sampson felt.²²

Nxumalo saw journalism not as a sideline to political activity but as a vocation in itself. As one of the best and most accomplished journalists in the country, he was interested in seeing the craft of journalism develop among Africans. During a 1955 speech about journalism in Durban, Nxumalo urged thorough training for young African journalists. An *Ilanga Lase Natal* article about the speech reported that Nxumalo felt that, “The standard attained by the American journalists would be his own criterion of the best that any young journalist should seek to reach.” Touching on the challenges confronting black journalists in South Africa, he clearly felt they had a responsibility to advocate for their community:

The non-white newspaperman, if he was going to avoid being one of many, had to aspire to the world standard of journalism, said Mr. Nxumalo. The non-white journalist had a much greater responsibility than any white journalist in the country. Not only had he to influence public opinion in South Africa, which would take a little time to achieve, but he had to make his presence felt to people overseas. That way he could change overseas opinion and attitude towards the African on this side of the ocean.²³

A consummate professional, Nxumalo’s first-hand accounts of abuses and investigative stories would transform the style of the news stories in *Drum*.

Equally, much as Nxumalo would alter the style of the news stories, his colleague Todd Matshikiza would later revolutionize the magazine’s feature writing. Through a combination of talent and luck, Matshikiza seemed, throughout his life, to be always at the centre of the country’s dynamic music world. A musician, and later a critic and writer as well, he was raised in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape. According to

²² A. Sampson, “The Early *Drum*,” *The Beat of Drum*, p. 16.

²³ “Henry Nxumalo on Journalism,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, October 22, 1955.

Matshikiza, his father had a wide-ranging career, having at one time or another been a civil servant, a musician, a court language interpreter, and an English scholar²⁴ and his grandfather was a witch doctor.²⁵ Music, however, was extremely important to the family, and most of its members worked as musicians. His father played piano, and his mother “was a great soprano who sang to the accompaniment of the man who was later to become her lifelong partner.”²⁶ One of his brothers, Meekly “Fingertips” Matshikiza, was a successful pianist in Johannesburg and his sister, Grace, had won several singing competitions in her youth. Another sister, Jane, led an all-woman band in Queenstown’s called the Gay Glamour Girls.²⁷

Although English was not the family’s first language, they spoke it at home and Matshikiza remembers that the ability to speak English well was a sign of progress and upward mobility. The family would play word games and sing songs in English, and Matshikiza recalls visits from Griffiths Motsieloa, “the foremost black South African concert impresario” who had been to England to study elocution and “added prestige for our aspirations for English.” Motsieloa took part in the family competitions and the young Matshikiza watched the elder musician’s successful concert tours with great interest: “We would say, ‘Ah, Africa is coming.’”²⁸

²⁴ T. Matshikiza, *Chocolates for My Wife*, p. 29.

²⁵ A. Sampson, *Drum*, 69.

²⁶ S. Maile, “The Music Box.” *Zonk*, May 1951.

²⁷ T. Matshikiza, *Chocolates*, p. 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 28-29. Motsieloa successfully toured the country with his band, De Pitch Black Follies, in 1937 and was the first African talent scout for Gallo records in South Africa. Coplan observes, though, that he was very much a part of the musical elite, for instance refusing to record any marabi artists. Black artists would later accuse Motsieloa of treating them unfairly though Coplan notes the difficult position he was forced to assume as an agent for a recording company. (D. Coplan, “The African Musician and the Development of the Johannesburg Entertainment Industry, 1900-1960,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, April 1979, pp. 150-151.)

Like Nxumalo, Matshikiza was educated at mission schools, first attending Adams College in Natal and then Lovedale in the Eastern Cape. According to fellow musician and music journalist Sam Maile, he studied at Adams College “during that great era when R.T. Caluza and Mrs. Marie Dube, that great piano teacher from America, were turning out brilliant musicians—artists such as A. “Swanee” Segoe, Faith Caluza, Simon Ngubane, and several others.”²⁹ The influence of American popular culture had been spreading in mission schools since the turn of the century, and R.T. Caluza was an organist, pianist, and choral composer who famously blended American ragtime with traditional Zulu music.³⁰ He organised concerts that were very popular with the African middle class during the 1920s and 1930s. “The popularity of Caluza’s compositions among African choirs throughout the Union was largely due to the topicality of his lyrics,” writes music historian David Coplan. “Songs like *Ingoduso* warned young men about the dangers of Johannesburg, urging them to avoid drink and crime and not to abandon their families at home.”³¹ Caluza’s influence as a composer and performer was widespread and his music was praised by elite figures like writer and journalist R.R.R. Dhlomo and African language professor B.W. Vilikazi, who wanted to hear modern music that was still distinctly African. Ironically, these intellectuals would both later be very critical of jazz, which they felt was a dangerously inferior influence.³²

²⁹ S. Maile, “The Music Box,” *Zonk*, May 1951.

³⁰ D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), pp. 70-71. The discussion of music from the 1920s to the 1950s is indebted to Coplan’s work.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 73.

³² *Ibid.* p. 122. In their early distaste for jazz, they had much in common with black intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance in the United States, who also felt that the burgeoning jazz scene was evidence of cultural degeneration.

Many mission schools had rejected traditional African music in favour of western-style music, viewing African music as uncivilised.³³ As they were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the pace of securing political rights, though, the western-educated African middle class had started to search for music that was distinctly African.³⁴ They began to look away from simply assimilating into white culture as the promises from that community seemed more and more hollow. Both American and British dance music were popular in the interwar period, but black American music, particularly jazz, became more important. It offered a modern model that was not white, and could unify Africans who had very diverse heritages.³⁵ Educated Africans continued to look for music that “resisted the artificial revival of tradition” but offered an alternative to what they considered to be lower class styles like marabi and jazz.³⁶

Matshikiza was influenced by these ideas—although he embraced “lower class” styles like marabi, he felt that music should express an African ethic. He began his music career early, and during school breaks he played piano at the Windsor Hotel in Queenstown, sometimes entertaining men from the Royal Air Force who were stationed in South Africa during the war. In 1942, during visits to Johannesburg, he began playing with the Harlem Swingsters, a jazz band, as a guest artist. When he moved to the city in 1948, he joined the group full time.³⁷ The Swingsters tapped into the growing popularity and influence of American dance and jazz music during the 1940s, and became one of the most successful bands in the city. They played for township audiences that included

³³ T. Matshikiza, “Jazz Comes to Joburg!” *Drum*, July 1957.

³⁴ D. Coplan, *Township*, p. 115.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 115.

³⁷ S. Maile, “The Music Box,” *Zonk*, May 1951.

gangsters and the middle class alike.³⁸ Matshikiza explained why he felt that Harlem Swingsters were musically significant in a 1951 *Zonk* profile: “[B]ecause of the originality which induces them to play music that can be adapted to the African theme. This he regards as an important contribution to modern African music.”³⁹

In his music, as in his writing, he would bridge two intellectual worlds. He was on the syllabus committee of the high-brow Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival (JBMF) and also a talent scout for a Johannesburg recording firm.⁴⁰ Though he was part of the elite music world, however, he embraced marabi and popular performance music,⁴¹ at the same time composing for elite audiences. He wrote the score for the popular musical *King Kong*, which was well-received by both black and white audiences, but also authored a Xhosa cantata—for 70 musicians and 200 singers—that was commissioned by the JBMF.

Matshikiza’s connections to the music world allowed him to move in different circles from his *Drum* colleagues, and allowed him to move easily among white and black musicians. At the same time, he still felt connected to his Xhosa heritage. “More than any other member of our staff, Todd was a man of two worlds,” Sampson remembered. “With his genius for friendship, and his musical talents, he moved easily among Europeans. Yet, unlike many middle class, urban Africans, he had never rejected his tribal roots, and took pride in them.”⁴² When he was 20 and on holiday from school he was circumcised in the traditional Xhosa ceremony: “It gave me a sense of confidence

³⁸ D. Coplan, *Township*, p. 163.

³⁹ S. Maile, “The Music Box,” *Zonk*, May 1951.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ T. Matshikiza, “Jazz Comes to Joburg!” *Drum*, July 1957.

⁴² Quoted in A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 69.

and responsibility, which I would never otherwise have had. I would like my children to have it too.”⁴³

Matshikiza joined the staff of *Drum* as the Music Editor in 1952, when the magazine was struggling to change its style. As it left behind the constraint of catering to the “noble savage” stereotype, *Drum*’s writers had more space to develop their own voice. Matshikiza in particular had helped to pioneer this new style: “He wrote as he spoke, in a brisk tempo with rhythm in every sentence. He attacked the typewriter like a piano. Our readers loved ‘Matshikese,’ as we called it...”⁴⁴ A January 1955 article about singer Dorothy Masuka is a typical example of his rhythmic prose style:

Shoo—Gents this Dorothy Masuka dame is burning hot stuff! She blew into Joh’berg from Rhodesia some two years ago. Now, Joh’burg is a tough joint. It takes a tornado to make Joh’burg go nuts. So two years ago Dorothy was just another canary from afar. Joh’burg couldn’t care less about her. Today, in 1955, Whoo! Joh’burg is raving mad. Raving mad. ABOUT DOROTHY. She stood waiting for a bus at Nancefield station. Boy, the kids went crazy. The men went goofy. The buses stood still. The sun stood still.⁴⁵

Like his music, Matshikiza’s writing in English expressed an African style.

Despite being highly educated, an experienced musician, and a gifted writer, he also felt the relentless financial pressure common among black city residents at the time, regardless of their profession. He worked as a teacher before getting a job at the Vanguard bookstore in Johannesburg, while still playing shows with his band at night. He then worked as a clerk at a construction site before starting at *Drum*.⁴⁶ And Tom Hopkinson, *Drum*’s last editor during the 1950s, recalled that when he tried to hire Matshikiza back to the magazine after he had left to write the musical *King Kong*,

⁴³ Ibid. p. 71.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

⁴⁵ T. Matshikiza, “Everybody’s Dorothy,” *Drum*, January 1955.

⁴⁶ M. Nicol, *A Good Looking Corpse*, (London: Minerva, 1995), p. 82.

Matshikiza claimed that he could make as much money selling knives part-time.

Hopkinson took his argument with a grain of salt, but it is telling nonetheless.⁴⁷

Can Themba joined the staff the year after Matshikiza—in 1953—after winning *Drum*'s first short story contest. Raised in the city, Themba was born in the township of Marabastad, outside Pretoria, in 1924 into a family of four. Like Matshikiza and Nxumalo, he was western educated. He had won a scholarship to study at the University of Fort Hare where he graduated with a first class degree in English and also received a University Education Diploma. He then taught at Madibane High School and the Johannesburg Indian High School before working at *Drum*.⁴⁸

Many of his colleagues recall Themba as the quintessential urban dweller, cosmopolitan, without any discernable tribal background, and wholly a product of the city. There are conflicting accounts of which languages Themba spoke. While Sampson thought he spoke only English, Stein recalls that he could speak English, Zulu, Afrikaans, Fanagalo, and a bit of French.⁴⁹ He could also speak *Tsotsitaal*, a city slang dialect of English, Afrikaans, and various vernacular languages.⁵⁰ In an obituary of Themba, Lewis Nkosi paid tribute to his friend and mentor who he felt had “a mind both vigorous and informed, shaped by the city as few other minds are in the rest of Africa.”⁵¹ Themba felt deeply rooted in Sophiatown, the Johannesburg township, and would later write a moving and perceptive obituary for his home after its destruction.

⁴⁷ T. Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, p. 203.

⁴⁸ E. Patel, *The World of Can Themba*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 49, and S. Stein, *Who Killed*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ D. Mattera in P. Stein and R. Jacobsen (eds.), *Sophiatown Speaks!* (Johannesburg: Junction Avenue Press, 1986), p. 13.

⁵¹ L. Nkosi, “Obituary,” in E. Patel (ed.), *The Will to Die*, p. xi.

Like *Drum* itself, Sophiatown now looms large in the popular imagination.

Writing a complete history of Sophiatown is outside the scope of this study, but the place and the magazine are connected. Although they did not by any means all live there, the *Drum* writers are often referred to as the Sophiatown generation. The community embodied much of urban life that *Drum* held in high regard—and many things that made urban life so difficult. Therefore, a few elements of Sophiatown's history are significant to frame the discussion.⁵²

First, its unique history lent itself to a relatively flexible community. Along with the other Western Areas of Martindale and Newclare, Sophiatown was a “black spot” in Johannesburg, one of the only areas where blacks had owned land since before the Land Act of 1913. Located about four miles west of the city centre and surrounded by white suburbs to the east and west, Sophiatown was exempt from the provisions of the 1923 Urban Areas Act and, while it was included in later legislation, the existing freehold rights were preserved. The possibility of land ownership allowed extreme poverty and relative prosperity to coexist—there was a class of black landlords and subtenants⁵³—and it also, for a time at least, encouraged people to invest and feel invested in their homes.⁵⁴ Intellectuals, doctors, and teachers were neighbours to gangsters, musicians, and factory workers. As Paul Gready in his essay on the “unreal reality” of Sophiatown, observed,

⁵² T. Lodge, “The Destruction of Sophiatown,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 19 No. 1, March 1981. Many points in the following discussion are indebted to Lodge's analysis of the clearing of Sophiatown.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 113. Only two percent of Sophiatown residents were property owners and, in general, the income span between poor and wealthy people living there was not large. Seventy-seven percent of Sophiatown was in fact owned or controlled by whites. (D. Coplan, *Township*, p. 144.)

⁵⁴ Themba described some long-time residents as “house proud,” continually adding to, and improving, their homes. Once the threat of removal was in the air, though, many who had the means to improve their properties stopped because of uncertainty about what would happen to their investment (C. Themba, “Requiem for Sophiatown,” *The Will to Die*, p. 105).

Sophiatown “lacked a geography of class... It was possible to live, or create the illusion of living, in all layers of society at once.”⁵⁵

Those layers of society, however, lived closely packed in what were by-and-large slum conditions. An average of 8.3 families lived on each stand of just 50’ by 100’—with approximately 20 to 40 people living on 40 percent of the stands—compared with 1.2 families per stand in the government-administered Western Native Township.⁵⁶ Most dwellings had no electricity, and there was only one water tap located in each crowded yard.⁵⁷

Secondly, although Sophiatown’s residents were predominately African, because of its history of freehold property rights it was multiracial, even if only nominally so. In 1951, about 65,000 Africans, 3,000 Coloureds, and 3,000 Indians and Asians lived in the Western Areas.⁵⁸ In addition to Sophiatown’s multiracial character, it also had a diverse African society, with old and established residents mixing with new arrivals from a variety of different backgrounds. A story Themba recounted about a woman he had dated illustrates both the opportunities and for people of different backgrounds to mix in the city, and the difficulties they encountered: “I used to have a young Xhosa girl called Baby,” he wrote. “She was not really my class, but in those days for what we called love we Sophiatonians took the high, the middle and the low.”⁵⁹ But this girlfriend ran in a faster crowd and was also seeing tsotsis, who Themba had no interest in confronting. He

⁵⁵ P. Gready. “Unreal Reality,” p. 141. In addition to Themba, at one time or another during the 1950s, Sophiatown was home to *Drum* writers Es’kia Mphahlele, Arthur Maimane, Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, and Casey Motsisi.

⁵⁶ *Report on a Sample Survey of the Western Areas of Johannesburg, 1951*, (Johannesburg: Non-European Affairs Department, 1951), p. 15. The Western Native Township stands, however, were much smaller at just 30’ by 50’ per stand.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁵⁸ *Survey of the Western Areas of Johannesburg*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ C. Themba, “Crepuscle,” *Will to Die*, p. 6.

broke off the relationship and found that she was not entirely comfortable with dating someone of his background either, telling him, “[t]hat-so it is, after all you’re a teacher type and you don’t suit me.” While the social scene was flexible enough for them to meet and date, they still had preconceptions about each other based on her distaste for Themba’s school background and his view of the woman’s relative inferiority because of her traditional background.⁶⁰

Lastly, Sophiatown was home to both a thriving social scene and several active gangs, who also often took their cue from the American movies they saw at the local cinemas. Known for its music and nightlife, the influence of American culture, especially its movies and music, was strong. American jazz music had been popular, particularly during the 1940s, and World War II had only served to increase its popularity—along with dance music like swing—as black performers came into more contact with American music and audiences during their wartime travels.⁶¹ Drinking outside government-mandated beer halls was illegal, and much of the Sophiatown social life was centred around shebeens, where customers could buy illegal home-brewed beer as well as more expensive liquor, and sometimes see live music.

The largest and most notorious of the Sophiatown tsotsis (named after their narrow-legged trousers) were the Americans. The word tsotsi was coined in the 1940s as a version of the American term “zoot suit,” and many took their street names from the hardboiled American crime movies, like *Street With No Name*, shown in Sophiatown’s

⁶⁰ Themba mentioned this story in the course of describing how difficult it was to bring a white woman he was seeing to Sophiatown. While she could come to the neighbourhood and go out with him with little difficulty, this former girlfriend and her tsotsi friends resented their relationship enough to report him to the police for breaking the Immorality Act.

⁶¹ D. Coplan, *Township*, pp. 145-150.

two cinemas.⁶² Many residents of Sophiatown had a love-hate relationship with the tsotsis. They were held in awe because of their money, and some viewed their regular defiance of the police with vicarious satisfaction. Many tsotsis saw themselves, correctly or not, as modern-day Robin Hoods.⁶³ Their notoriety gave them fame and, as Anthony Sampson remarked, “[t]o some extent the tsotsis were the African aristocracy.”⁶⁴ But their activities were a source of terror to many township residents who had to cope with the daily threat of crime. New and old urban residents alike feared gangsters and their random, unpredictable violence.

The vibrant life in Sophiatown, however, was under constant threat. Its proximity to white neighbourhoods and its freehold property rights made it a target for state removal. Despite the inadequate housing conditions for many who lived there, African leaders viewed government claims that the removals would improve living conditions with deep scepticism. “We deny that this is a slum clearance scheme, because to eliminate slum conditions you do not have to shift a whole community, nearly 60,000 people, you do not have to condemn the good with the bad, you do not have to divest people of their property rights.,” wrote Dr. A.B. Xuma, former ANC president and *Drum* advisory board member, in 1953. “When you have an immense problem of homelessness to solve, you do not deliberately magnify that problem by compelling people to move out of good, decent houses.”⁶⁵ In addition, government claims that it was simply enforcing the Group Areas Act were belied by the fact that they left the government-administered

⁶² R. Nixon, *Hollywood*, pp. 30-31.

⁶³ T. Lodge, “The Destruction of Sophiatown,” p. 116.

⁶⁴ A. Sampson, p. 78.

⁶⁵ Dr. A.B. Xuma, “African Reactions,” *The Western Areas Removal Scheme: Facts and Viewpoints*, (Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1953), p. 25.

Western Native Township, which also abutted white suburbs but lacked freehold property rights, intact.⁶⁶

The idea for removing the Western Areas had been investigated long before the Nationalists took power, and discussions of clearing the area occurred periodically in the years after 1932.⁶⁷ But when Sophiatown was finally demolished and its residents relocated in the mid and late-1950s, it was the brutal swiftness with which they were cleared that was so shocking, and in turn hardened the resolve of black activists and politicians. Themba, usually quite wry, was shaken as well. “Long ago I decided to concede, to surrender to the argument that Sophiatown was a slum, after all. I am itchy nagged by the thought that slum clearance should have nothing to do with the theft of freehold rights,” he wrote in 1959. “But the sheer fact of Sophiatown’s removal has intimidated me.”⁶⁸

Although Themba was at home in Sophiatown and rooted in city living, he also acknowledged the difficulties faced by even the most committed urbanites, those who had thrown off their rural past but were denied entry into the Western world:

But I do want to say that those of us who have been detribalized and caught in the characterless world of belonging nowhere, have a bitter sense of loss. The culture that we have shed may not be particularly valuable in a content sense, but it was something that the psyche could attach itself to, and its absence is painfully felt in this whiteman’s world where everything significant is forbidden, or ‘Not for thee!’ Not only the refusal to let us enter so many fields of human experience, but the sheer negation that our spirits should ever assume to themselves identity. Crushing.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 26.

⁶⁷ T. Lodge, “The Destruction of Sophiatown,” p. 116.

⁶⁸ C. Themba, “Requiem for Sophiatown,” *The World of Can Themba*, p. 103.

⁶⁹ C. Themba, “Crepuscule,” *The Will to Die*, p. 8.

There were other, more immediate, pressures, however. Themba, like Nxumalo and Matshikiza, had experienced the financial strains and segregation laws that shaped Johannesburg life, and they were all frustrated with the system. And this frustration manifested itself in their personal lives—all three were prodigious drinkers.

While *Drum*'s top people, the editor and publisher, were white throughout the 1950s, Nxumalo, Matshikiza, and Themba formed the core of the early *Drum* staff. They were all young—Nxumalo was the oldest, just in his early 30s when he joined the staff. They also brought their political sensibilities to a publication that was trying to attract a mass audience. None were formally part of any political movement, though all three were sympathetic to the ANC. Sampson credited Nxumalo with helping to set the magazine's political tone and for starting to include coverage of the ANC. Nxumalo was "the most politically mature," recalled Sampson.⁷⁰ He had several friends who were prominent in the ANC, one of whom was fellow Orlando resident Nelson Mandela. During the 1949 riots that had started in Durban and spread to Johannesburg, he accompanied Ahmed Kathrada to Mandela's house to ask him to support a joint statement from the Indian and African National Congresses.⁷¹ Matshikiza was friendly with Mandela as well,⁷² and was sympathetic to the ANC, but he, too, was not formally a member.⁷³ Themba had little interest in becoming a political activist. He wrote of being approached by ANC members who asked him to help their efforts. But, although he

⁷⁰ A. Sampson in P. Stein and R. Jacobsen (eds.), *Sophiatown Speaks!* (Johannesburg: Junction Avenue Press, 1986), p. 46.

⁷¹ A. Sampson, *Mandela*, p. 53. Mandela did not support the statement.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 58.

⁷³ M. Nicol, *Corpse*, p. 83.

declined, the approach caused him some anxiety because he sympathised with the ANC as well.⁷⁴

These were the men who, along with Bailey and Sampson, were shaping the early *Drum* as it set out to attract a mass audience.



The *Drum* staff in 1955.

⁷⁴ C. Themba, "The Bottom of the Bottle," *The Will to Die*, pp. 111-112.

Transforming *Drum*: “An All Out Assault on the Popular Market”

As *Drum* made a conscious effort to connect with its audience, it shifted from telling readers what they should know, to creating features that sought to entertain them as well. Anthony Sampson described the tone they wanted to take: “*Drum* had, above all, to be human. We had to approach our readers not as a preacher or a teacher but as colleagues.”⁷⁵

In addition to the informal market research that Bailey, Sampson, and Nxumalo were conducting, the June 1951 issue included a reader survey that claimed it would be used to help tailor the magazine “to your own wishes—you can make it YOUR *African Drum*.” The results were published in the December issue and reinforced what the group already suspected—that urban audiences had little interest in reading about “traditional” African themes. The serialization of *Cry, the Beloved Country* was first in popularity, followed by “Masterpieces in Bronze,” with “African Developments,” letters to the editor, and the Competition page rounding out the top five. Bringing up the rear was “Tribal Music,” which finished dead last in popularity, along with regular stories about “Soil Conservation,” “Farming,” “Comics,” and “Folklore.”

Sampson had initially joined the magazine as circulation manager and had a keen understanding of the practical need to reach a wide audience. In August 1951 he wrote:

We’ve got to more than double our circulation if we want to continue on the present scale... I’ve convinced myself that we must make an all out assault on the popular market if we’re to succeed, with first class journalism and an element of sensationalism. And with this end, I’m planning at the moment some articles on Crime on the Rand which I think should be fairly spectacular, seen from the Africans’ viewpoint.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ Quoted in L. Clowes, *A Modernised Man?* p. 26. Letter from Anthony Sampson to his mother, August 19, 1951.

Like Bailey, he had known for some time that the magazine needed to make a change if it was to survive—but even then he was determined that the magazine should include serious content as well. The crime article he was planning appeared in the October 1951 issue, with a lengthy photo spread called “The Birth of a Tsotsi,” and marked the beginning of *Drum*’s extensive and ongoing, if sensationalised, crime coverage.

The makeover continued with the covers. The first cover of the *African Drum* showed two men at a crossroads—a country farmer in a pastoral scene stands to the left as a city man, surrounded by buildings, stands to the right, both contemplating a map of Africa. Subsequent covers, however, had shown images that evoked rural life, like African art. Now they began to feature sports figures, musicians, gangsters, and, most often, attractive women. Sometimes the women were not famous, but members of the community—like February 1952 cover girl Rose Kabane of Orlando. Although not every cover featured a pin-up, reader letters showed that they appreciated the change. One reader from the Cape wrote about the January 1955 issue, “As for cover girl Ms. Mtimkulu, I can only pay her the compliment that she gives me high blood pressure. But if my compliment sounds impetuous, I apologise to the lady!”¹

Many of the strategies used by *Drum* staff were hallmarks of the mass circulation press. Readers could now turn to *Drum* for advice. A “Dear Dolly” heartbreaks column began offering relationship advice to lovelorn readers. Though it was signed Dolly in an attempt to make readers think of the singer and actress Dolly Rathebe, it was written mainly by a “worried syndicate of men” from the staff, none of them particularly eager to tackle the column on a regular basis.² They added a joke page and comic strips. At first

¹ Letter to the editor, *Drum*, January 1955.

² A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 99.

printing only comics from Bible stories or scenes from *Gulliver's Travels*, *Drum* eventually featured a whole page of American comics that showcased the antics of characters like Don Powers, a black boxer.

In February 1952, the name changed from the *African Drum* to simply *Drum*. In January 1952, in what Sampson called a "circulation stunt," the magazine introduced Mr. Drum to its readers.⁷⁹ A large picture of Henry Nxumalo ran, accompanied by the message "The Hunt is On! Recognize Him and Win £5!" *Drum* announced the general area, days, and times when Mr. Drum might appear promised that the first reader to recognise him and state, "You are Mr. Drum, I claim the *African Drum* prize" while holding the magazine, would win. Sampson recalls that the contest was a bit of a debacle. Huge crowds turned out to claim the prize—which represented a significant amount of money to those living in the townships—but they had trouble recognizing Nxumalo. Nonetheless, it helped to spur interest in the magazine from ordinary readers.

Like *Zonk*, they offered a cash prize for the best reader letter each month. The readers' pages feature also allowed readers to claim more ownership in the publication. Occasionally the staff set aside pages to print pictures that readers had sent in of themselves. Among the pictures of nurses and teachers were snapshots of musicians and babies. There was also a version of society pages, entitled "Social and Personal," offering examples of successful community members. There were pages for women and children. And, taking yet another note from *Zonk*, they started a beauty contest, inviting readers to send in their pictures. In its first years the contest, sponsored by a cosmetics company, was open to men and women but, also like *Zonk's* contest, was eventually open only to women.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 92.

In 1953, the magazine introduced the *Drum* Parliament to readers, which periodically posed questions and offered a cash prize for the best response, which would be printed along with the poll's results. Readers could also meet pen pals in other parts of the country and throughout Africa, and serialised stories encouraging readers to buy the next month's issue. The magazine began self-advertising in its own pages, also urging readers to anticipate its coming issues. And, like *Bantu World* before it, *Drum* had young boys selling the magazine to passers-by on the streets and in train stations.⁸⁰

Film stars, musicians, and other personalities from the United States appeared with increasing frequency in its pages, reflected a fascination with, and pride in, the successes of black Americans. The January 1953 issue, for example, included a story about Joe Louis, told from his point of view ("as told to..."), a Masterpiece in Bronze feature on Louis Armstrong, and a profile on Eartha Kitt. All this was in addition to a "News from Hollywood" column.

As they scrambled to increase *Drum*'s circulation, Bailey and Sampson also looked to successes in other countries, especially England and the United States, for ideas on how to make the magazine more marketable. Bailey recalled that, "*Drum*, adapted to our own African circumstances, was designed as a photographic magazine to do for Africa what the great photographic magazines did for Europe and America."⁸¹ During *Drum*'s early days, according to Sampson, the best selling newspaper among Africans was a London tabloid, the *Daily Mirror*, and the most popular author in libraries was Peter Cheyney, who wrote hardboiled detective stories. Sampson was influenced by the English media, which was his main frame of reference. "There was no escaping the

⁸⁰ "They Sell the *African Drum*," *Drum*, 1951.

⁸¹ J. Bailey, "Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle," p. 125.

formula for selling papers,” he noted ““Cheesecake, crime, animals, babies ... The workers of the world were united, at least, in their addiction to cheesecake and crime.”⁸²

Each month, Bailey and Sampson sent issues to Tom Hopkinson, the former *Picture Post* editor in London who would become *Drum*'s editor at the end of the 1950s, for critical feedback. Hopkinson urged them to make *Drum* into a true photo magazine and streamline its look, recommending that they needed to “tidy its layout, to give more space to the good photographs and throw out the bad, to use larger body-type; to cut out the comic headings and splashes of crazy colour; to push the advertisements, which were splattered over almost every page, out of the way; to print on better paper even if it meant fewer pages.”⁸³ And later, editor Sylvester Stein and photographer Jurgen Schadeberg studied *Life*, *Look*, *Paris Match*, and *Picture Post* for inspiration.⁸⁴

Language, however, was a key barrier to expansion. Though literacy rates were increasing, the majority of *Drum*'s target audience was illiterate in African languages, let alone English. “Communication was our basic problem,” said Sampson, “Amusing and educating our readers was only secondary.”⁸⁵ He and Bailey knew that their market was urban dwellers but attracting this incredibly diverse audience was an absorbing challenge. *Drum* promised advertisers that it was reaching “the higher income group of the vast African market”⁸⁶ but it was also trying to reach the man on the street. The staff met monthly to discuss how to attract readers, sometimes even inviting random passers-by to look at potential covers and point out which ones they would be more likely to buy.⁸⁷

⁸² A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 15.

⁸³ T. Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, p. 12.

⁸⁴ S. Stein, *Who Killed*, p. 40.

⁸⁵ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 93.

⁸⁶ *Drum* advertisement, *Advertising & Selling*, August, 1952.

⁸⁷ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 92.

Photographs were important tools for *Drum* as it strove to connect with readers of various levels of literacy. Sampson described visiting places where *Drum* was sold to observe buying behaviour: “One can see someone pick up a copy, stare at the cover for a minute, then stare at the back page for a minute, and then put the magazine down, without realising that it is meant to be opened. For this type of reader, or ‘looker,’ simplicity is essential; simple striking pictures are the first necessity.”⁸⁸ The staff used simple photo stories to attract readers, including a feature that showed six-inch high “little men from the moon” visiting the *Drum* offices.⁸⁹ Flashier covers and photo stories would help bridge the language barrier and helped to attract people who were not fully literate, but basic communication would remain an issue throughout the decade.⁹⁰ Many readers did not know the difference between stories and ad pages.⁹¹ And Sampson found it sometimes difficult to predict which stories would attract the most readers. He was dismayed when one of the magazine’s tongue-in-cheek items, a story about an alleged Tokoloshe that had been found in Johannesburg, attracted more reader interest than their news stories, selling three times quicker than usual.⁹²

Drum’s core readers were men—“they had the spare cash,” recalled Sampson — and the majority lived in Soweto since, “[t]he rural audience had no money, couldn’t read English and distribution was impossible.”⁹³ The magazine’s editorial content was very clearly aimed at men and, in general, had little rural coverage. The news and features in

⁸⁸ “*Drum* Beats an African Note,” *Advertising & Selling*, July 1953, p. 18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 19. While the little men on the moon story generated much interest, Sampson was quick to note that the first two telephone calls inquiring after the whereabouts of the space men were from white readers.

⁹⁰ A. Sampson, *Drum*. p. 94.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 97.

⁹² *Ibid.* p. 99. The tokoloshe, a Zulu mythic imp-like figure, eventually proved to be just an otter.

⁹³ Quoted in L. Clowes, *Modernised Man?* p. 29.

the magazine's first few years of life focused on the Johannesburg area—its tsotsis, music, townships, and on occasion its surrounding farm conditions.

But, while primarily a magazine of Johannesburg, *Drum* was reaching audiences throughout the country. Because the entire country was urbanising, readers in many places could relate to its stories, which also offered them a way to understand their own experiences. Responding to an article about Johannesburg tsotsis and the factors that produced them, a reader from Natal wrote in January 1952: "Well, my people, I see through your article that there are many tsotsis in Johannesburg, which is a bad thing, yet I observe that the South Coast of Natal is inundated with tsotsis too. Tsotsis in Chesterville and Mkhumbane are desperate, just like in Johannesburg."⁹⁴ By the end of 1951, the circulation had risen to 31,300 monthly, and by June 1952 monthly sales were around 50,000 copies.⁹⁵

By 1955, the magazine had correspondents in Durban and Cape Town who were also trying to cover Coloured and Indian urban life, and there were regular gossip columns for both Durban and Cape Town. By reaching out not just to Africans but to a larger black audience, *Drum* was swimming against the official tide of "separate development." Appealing to a wide audience, not as several fragmented groups but as a whole, was both a way to increase market share and a conscious step away from these government policies. Can Themba described what he saw as an emerging cosmopolitanism: "Largely because of the efforts of the African National Congress, but to as large an extent because of the industrial and population changes in the country and the excessive emphasis of white politics on *colour*, Africans were everywhere debunking

⁹⁴ Letter to the editor, *Drum*, January 1952.

⁹⁵ *Advertising & Selling*, September 1952, p. 35.

tribalism and contemplating each other as *Africans*, themselves as a *nation*—whatever the guide-books of the state information office say.”⁹⁶ The magazine had also attracted a number of white readers. Answering a letter from a white reader in September 1953, the editors commented: “Welcome to our fold of white readers—and they’re quite a number!”⁹⁷

As *Drum* attracted readers and began to connect with its urban readership, its mission broadened to include more news and political coverage. It was quite a shift from the original editorial policy under Bob Crisp, which avoided politics in favour of encouraging African literary and artistic achievements. The July/August 1951 issue had elaborated this stance in response to a reader who questioned how the magazine could claim to represent its readers if it did not represent their politics. “Is it not possible that art and literature and cultural development can exert a tremendous pressure on political events?” the magazine replied. “The lesson of history is that they can and do—an infinitely more permanent influence than the rabble-raising oratory of the street corner agitators and their employers.”⁹⁸

As an entertainment magazine, the financially successful and entirely non-political *Zonk* model was open to the *Drum* management and staff—but they did not take that route. Instead, they decided that a truly African magazine could not completely ignore the cruel realities that intruded on nearly every aspect of its readers’ lives. After the first investigative story—suggested by Nxumalo—the editors knew there was no turning back. “We did not want *Drum* to become involved in political agitation, or to develop into a narrow paper of protest,” said Sampson. “But without exposing scandals

⁹⁶ C. Themba, “The Bottom of the Bottle,” *The Will to Die*, p. 235.

⁹⁷ Letters to the Editor, *Drum*, September 1953.

⁹⁸ “Opinion,” *Drum*, July/August 1951.

of such importance to our readers' lives, the paper would be incomplete and meaningless. Mr. Drum was inevitably launched on a perilous and lonely crusade."⁹⁹

"Mr. Drum Finds Out"

Nxumalo's undercover investigative stories as Mr. Drum helped solidify the reader loyalty and attracted fame for himself and the magazine. The magazine had no editorial page and instead of making overt political statements, *Drum's* journalists tried to expose the destructive effects of apartheid policies on the lives of everyday readers, drawing attention to the corruptness of the system as a whole. *Drum's* first investigative story targeted working conditions in Bethal, a farming region in the Eastern Transvaal, in the March 1952 first anniversary issue.

Along with photographer Jurgen Schadeberg, a young German émigré who had joined the staff in September 1951, Nxumalo travelled to Bethal, where farmers were notorious for mistreating their African labourers. Posing as a businessman and his assistant, Schadeberg and Nxumalo interviewed workers and found that they were whipped, not allowed to quit, and were given poor food and prison-like accommodation. They were paid less than they were promised, many of the workers were signing contracts that they did not understand, and were being lured to the farms under false pretences. To prove this, Nxumalo even allowed himself to be picked up by a recruiter sending people to Bethal.¹⁰⁰

Following the first exposé, the magazine began receiving an average of 50 letters a day and many of these admirers regarded Mr. Drum "as being possessed of superhuman

⁹⁹ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ H. Nxumalo, "The Story of Bethal," *Drum*, March 1952.

powers.”¹⁰¹ The Bethal issue sold out, and Sampson credited Mr. Drum’s exposés with pushing up circulation and establishing trust with *Drum*’s readers: “We began to approach a black *Drum*. Readers proposed to our cover girls, workers talked about our crime exposures in the buses and trains, and illiterate letters to the editor showed that we had attracted people who could barely read.”¹⁰² Mr. Drum’s investigative stories became a yearly tradition for the staff, and a legacy of *Drum* journalism.

The next year, Nxumalo investigated the tot system, where black labourers were paid in alcohol, keeping them in a constant state of intoxication. In 1954, Nxumalo investigated prison conditions in Johannesburg, writing a first-hand account of spending a week in jail. He was arrested for a pass violation—a humiliating experience that more than 100,00 other Africans endured each year. The story caused an uproar, particularly Schadeberg’s accompanying photographs of naked prisoners being forced to perform the “tausa” dance for white warders to prove that they were not hiding any outside goods in body cavities. In 1959, the government would pass a law making it illegal to sketch or photograph any prison or prisoners without the written authority of the Commissioner of Prisons.

Three years after the Bethal story, for the magazine’s fourth anniversary in March 1955, Nxumalo once again investigated farm labour conditions, going undercover in Harmonie, a town in Rustenburg in the Western Transvaal. As Mr. Drum, he had often taken personal risks, but this was one of his most dangerous assignments. He got himself hired on a farm where the owners had murdered a worker the year before. When he tried to quit, Nxumalo was beaten by the white farm owner and forced to flee in the middle of

¹⁰¹ “*Drum* beats an African Note,” *Advertising & Selling*, July 1953, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰² A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 36.

the night for fear of worse reprisals. "Whatever it was, it was hell," he said afterward.¹⁰³

The first-hand account that he wrote, though, could not be refuted.

In some respects, Mr. Drum's exposés focused on open secrets. *The Guardian*, for instance, had written about the Bethal region several years before and Nxumalo had visited the area with Rev. Michael Scott during his investigation of abuses in the 1940s. But Nxumalo's ability to report from the "inside" lent his stories authenticity and displayed an access to sources and information that white papers did not, or could not, find. Hard-hitting, his stories were written accessibly, talking directly to the reader, without being oversimplified. Though written in first-person, they were detached, relying on the narration of events and facts to convey the author's attitudes. Their style in many respects predated the literary "new journalism"¹⁰⁴ that would sweep the United States during the 1960s. Schudson describes the American version of this style, which primarily appeared in magazines, as one that acknowledged the journalists' role in the story and included the experience of reporting in an article that "honors the desire to write a good story, not a safe story or an objective story, but one finely crafted and forceful in its emotional impact."¹⁰⁵ Nxumalo combined this style with investigative reporting:

[Snyman] told me that if Jantjie complained about my work tomorrow he would beat me up and then have me arrested. He clapped me on the left cheek with his open right hand and told me to face the wall. Then he kicked me between the legs three times with his hard boot. I shuddered with the pain.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 213.

¹⁰⁴ N.W. Visser, "The Renaissance That Failed," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1976, p. 49.

¹⁰⁵ M. Schudson, *Discovering the News*, pp. 187-188.

¹⁰⁶ H. Nxumalo, "I Worked at Snyman's Farm," *Drum*, March 1955.

Mr. Drum built an emotional bond with readers, but the *Drum* writers' innovative use of English also helped them find a mass audience. The way they spoke to their readers was a large part of the difference between *Drum* and its competitors, *Bantu World* and *Zonk*. Matshikiza had steered the non-fiction writing towards a conversational and colloquial style and—though the fiction, particularly Maimane's work, was more heavily influenced by American detective stories—the writers generally wrote in an easily accessible style. Writer, professor, and former *Drum* reporter Es'kia Mphahlele thought they connected with their audience. Though he commented mainly on their fiction, it applies to the non-fiction as well:

The writers used an English style that was well understood by the township reader. The imaginative writing courted no political confrontation...[but] the writers helped fashion a township culture and give it literary expression: the music and dance that had a distinctive flavour and beat, the rituals of birth and death and church activity, the pass laws, the violence, shebeen life which became such a cult that long after prohibition has gone—since 1960—it still survives. To the extent that black politics was dramatised and indeed displayed a theatrical style, the masses developed an awareness. They had found a political language suited to their own time. Similarly, the writer had found his tongue, a language, and relative freedom of expression that matched the political expression of the decade.¹⁰⁷

By 1954, *Drum*'s circulation averaged 70,403 copies per issue.¹⁰⁸ In 1955, it had risen to 76,657—and when combined with the circulation of its newly launched West African edition it had surpassed the 100,000 mark. “We’ve done it! Yes, *Drum* has become the first non-white paper ever to reach a six figure circulation. This copy of *Drum* of yours is the 100,000th to come off the presses this month. (Our nearest rivals are

¹⁰⁷ E. Mphahlele, “Landmarks of Literary History in South Africa: A Black Perspective,” *Perspectives on South African English Literature*, (Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1992), p. 53. Mphahlele's essay was originally published in 1980.

¹⁰⁸ Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, p. 299.

trailing far, far behind),” *Drum*’s letter from the editor proudly announced in July 1955. “It means that easily half a million people will now be reading *Drum* every month—in South Africa, up the West and East Coasts of the continent and in the Rhodesias.”¹⁰⁹

As the circulation increased, plaudits from admirers of its earlier incarnation turned to dismay. In its early months, the Nationalist government had even sent copies of *Drum* to its offices abroad to illustrate black accomplishments under apartheid.¹¹⁰ But, as *Drum* wrote about film stars, music, and black urban life, it lost some subscriptions, and missionaries and white liberals complained about the shift from writing about tribal heritage to focusing on urban popular culture.¹¹¹

The Business of *Drum*

Jim Bailey was a visionary entrepreneur, but he was not necessarily a businessman. *Drum* was losing money steadily throughout the 1950s. Not surprisingly considering its difficulties connecting with its readership initially, it lost £7,029 from March 1951 to June 1951. But even as its popularity increased and circulation rose, it continued to operate in the red. The books showed losses of £23,747 in 1952 and £20,542 in 1953. Things improved somewhat the next year, and the magazine lost only £6,186. The balance sheets fell deeper into the red in 1955, however, with a loss of £21,092. The company’s expenditures were high. To keep *Drum* afloat Bailey had to

¹⁰⁹ Editor’s Letter, *Drum*, July 1955.

¹¹⁰ M. Nicol, *Corpse*, p. 27.

¹¹¹ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 17.

contribute more of his own capital to the venture. From 1951 to 1955 he invested nearly £80,000 in new capital to the company.¹¹²

Like *Zonk*, *Drum* drew most of its revenue from advertising, which was increasing exponentially. In 1951 its advertising revenue was just £347, compared to its circulation revenue of £962. By 1953 it drew £14,960 from advertising revenue, outpacing its £8,868 in circulation revenue, and by 1955 its advertising revenue was £52,117—more than double its circulation profits of £25,341. *Zonk* was actually turning a profit, but *Drum* had overtaken and passed its competitor in advertising revenue. A *Contact* article by Anthony Clarke noted that “every runner in the same field today has Jim Bailey to thank for the money paid out in the silver ring of advertising agencies and the agencies too, whether they admit it or not, have J.R.A. Bailey to thank for their considerably increased returns. They may belly ache about his politics but they bank the money all the same.”¹¹³

By 1951, publications attempting to target a mass black audience were not a complete anomaly. *Bantu World* and *Zonk* had paved the way for *Drum* in terms of reaching out to advertisers. But even so, Sampson felt that attracting advertisers was a challenge in the early years. Like Paver during the 1930s, he remembered feeling that attracting advertising was an uphill battle: It was a “[h]ell of a struggle... advertisers were just beginning to realise the existence of a fast growing black consumer market... It was considered an odd thing to do, advertising to blacks. But this was changing.”¹¹⁴ The magazine did attract more and more advertisers, and according to Schadeberg, the

¹¹² The information concerning *Drum*'s finances come from its submissions to the Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex XII, pp. 94-96.

¹¹³ A. Clarke, “He is Taking, Not a Country, But a Continent,” *Contact*, August 9, 1958.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in L. Clowes, *Modernised Man?* p. 33.

advertising department sold 40 to 50 percent of the magazine each month, leaving only 30 to 40 pages for actual content—closer to 20 after accounting for regular pages like the table of contents.¹¹⁵ By 1958, *Drum* was filling anywhere from 48 to 54 pages of each issue with ads, compared with 35 to 41 pages for *Zonk* and 41 to 51 pages for *Rooi Rose*, the popular Afrikaans monthly magazine.¹¹⁶ These pages were filled with consumer goods and products that would appeal to all classes of Africans, including new jazz records, gramophones, cigarettes, groceries, cleaning products, and clothes. Many ads promoted health products, while others extolled the virtues of cosmetics like hair straighteners and skin lighteners, another reminder of the standards of beauty that a white-dominated society was setting for the magazine's readers.

Despite *Drum*'s relative success in tapping the advertising market, its managers had a difficult time settling on the cover price. There was a push and pull between setting a price that would help recoup some of the magazine's losses but would not be so high that it would cut too deeply into circulation. When *Drum* hit the newsstands it was priced at 6d, the same price as its competitor *Zonk*. This was decreased to 4d in June 1952, then increased back to 6d in January 1954.¹¹⁷ In an effort to make the South African edition turn a profit, Bailey raised the price to ninepence in 1959, over the objections of then-editor Tom Hopkinson, who felt it would put the magazine out of reach for many readers.¹¹⁸

Money remained a constant and contentious issue at the Bailey Group publications. According to many *Drum* staff members, Bailey was excessively cheap.

¹¹⁵ M. Nicol, *Corpse*, p. 40.

¹¹⁶ "Monthly Advertising Analysis," *Selling Age*, September 1958, p. 53.

¹¹⁷ Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex XII, pp. 94-96.

¹¹⁸ T. Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, p. 351.

Lewis Nkosi recalled that the *Drum* journalists used to laugh at their “monthly mockery” of a salary,¹¹⁹ and Esme Matshikiza remembered that her husband’s salary “was always a matter of grievance to him.”¹²⁰ The company also used the cheapest printing and paper, making it hard to display pictures to their full advantage.¹²¹

University of Cape Town

¹¹⁹ L. Nkosi, “The Fabulous Decade,” p. 11.

¹²⁰ M. Nicol, *Corpse*, 82.

¹²¹ J. Bailey, “Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle,” p. 125.



WHADYA KNOW?

- there are over 1,260,000 literate urban Africans
- over 1,260,000 African children at school
- over 25,000 African teachers

DRUM URBAN READERSHIP 865,000 (S.A. Edition)

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

- Africans earn (and spend) 25% of Union's annual income.
- 60% of African spending power is in urban areas.
- average earnings of semi-skilled urban African = £28.0.0.

GOLDEN CITY POST

URBAN READERSHIP 435,000 (ESTIMATED)

TRADING AGE November, 1958



Urban Africans spend over £400,000,000 a year
IT'S THE FIRST MASS MARKET IN AFRICA—AND
IT'S YOURS, ALL YOURS—FOR THE ADVERTISING

A 1958 pitch to potential advertisers for *Drum* and the *Golden City Post* that appeared in the trade magazine *Selling Age*, urging potential advertisers to consider the growing purchasing power of urban Africans. The estimated circulation rates for *Drum* and the *Post* included "pass on" readership—those who read the magazine after others had purchased it.

The Bailey Group Publications

Despite his financial losses, as circulation increased and Bailey became assured that his formula for appealing to readers was succeeding, he looked to expand. From *Drum's* earliest days, the proprietors had envisioned a publication with a reach spanning English-speaking Africa. It was an ambition that Bailey continued to avidly pursue, despite the loss of his initial partners. Within a few months of the release of *Drum's* first issue, the magazine was being distributed in Rhodesia, and within a year it had expanded to East and West Africa.

In January 1954, Bailey started a separate West African edition. The Johannesburg staff assembled the edition and it continued to contain much of the same content as its South African sibling, but for the first time a local bureau was producing copy for the West African market. It got off to a slow start. Its 1954 circulation averaged 14,782 copies per issue, but circulation was increasing and in 1955 the West African edition averaged 29,099 copies per issue.¹²²

While the South African *Drum* could take advantage of some of the distribution networks pioneered by the Bantu Press, Bailey had to organise and bear the costs of distributing the West African edition, which probably contributed significantly to the company's overall high cost of doing business. After being printed in Johannesburg, the West African edition was sent by train to Cape Town, where the copies were loaded onto a ship bound for Lagos and Accra.¹²³ Once the edition reached West Africa it was sorted,

¹²² Commission of Inquiry Into the Press. Annex VII, p. 96.

¹²³ Like the South African version, the West African edition was printed by South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN) until 1958, when Afrikaanse Pers Beperk began printing both *Drum* and the *Golden City Post* on newly-installed presses.

repacked, and “distributed over vast territories by train, mammy-wagon, bicycle, canoe, or whatever means might be available.”¹²⁴ The distribution logistics were a nightmare for the staff, forcing them to work on the West African issue two months in advance and limiting their inclusion of time-sensitive news copy.

Despite all this, *Drum* continued to extend its reach in the absence of serious competition.¹²⁵ By 1958, *Drum* had offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam, Lagos, and Accra. It had distributors in Kenya, Tanzania, the United States, and Great Britain.

The staff had been expanding as well. Writer and former teacher Es'kia Mphahlele, who had won its fiction contest, became the fiction editor in 1955. Like the colleagues he was joining, Mphahlele was highly educated. Although he was born to a poor family, he attended St. Peters, worked as a teacher prior to joining *Drum*, and completed his masters degree before later going into exile. Other new additions to the staff included photographer Peter Magubane and writer Casey Motsisi. In mid-1955, Sylvester Stein joined the staff as editor. He replacing Sampson, who had decided it was time to return to England. Stein was an experienced journalist, having covered politics at the *Rand Daily Mail*, and was eager to continue the Mr. Drum tradition of muckraking. He came on board, however, at a time when Bailey and many of the *Drum* writers were focusing their attention elsewhere—on starting up a new weekly paper.

¹²⁴ T. Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, p. 53.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 53.

Africa! and the Golden City Post

The company's continuing losses had also not stopped Bailey from trying to expand within South Africa. His first attempt was an English-language magazine called *Africa!* The magazine, started in March 1954, was billed as *Drum's* sister publication. Its release was heralded in *Drum* with advertisements, including promos for "The Chief" detective series by Arthur Maimane that would appear in the pages of the new magazine, and Can Themba was the editor. Unfortunately, the struggling *Africa!* was not helping the company's overall balance sheets either. It had a short life—its last issue came out in July 1955.

Bailey's next venture was more adventurous in breaking the *Drum* mould and, ultimately, more successful. Modelled on the London tabloid the *Daily Mirror* and priced at 4d, the first issues of the Sunday broadsheet newspaper *Golden City Post* hit news stands in March 1955. It was the first newspaper aimed at black audiences that was published solely in English. The *Post* used large headlines and racy stories to attract readers. The first edition's lead story was about the shooting of a Germiston medical student and ran with what they claimed was the "biggest type ever seen on a South African newspaper."¹²⁶ The 16-page paper had three editions, for Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg, and its first editor was Cecil Eprile, who had previously worked on trade magazines at the Caxton Press.¹²⁷

It drew heavily on *Drum's* staff, much to the dismay of editor Sylvester Stein.¹²⁸ Henry Nxumalo was its star reporter and quickly became the news editor. He also wrote a column called "Lowdown," which was similar to the "On the Reef" column that he had

¹²⁶ "The Post Men Are Here To Stay," *Drum*, May 1955.

¹²⁷ J. Bailey, "Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle," p. 144.

¹²⁸ S. Stein, *Who Killed*, p. 35.

penned for *Drum* as “George Magwaza.” Todd Matshikiza wrote the “Social Swing” section, and Can Themba wrote a column until Stein lured him back to *Drum* as its associate editor. To help compensate for some of the talent that *Drum* was losing to its sibling, Stein hired a new group of young writers including Nat Nakasa and Lewis Nkosi, both of whom had written for *Ilanga Lase Natal* in Durban.

Golden City Post's front page was mostly composed of sensational stories, many of them focused on crime and criminals. Page two was reserved for more serious stories, and page three was a mix of short items about crime, sex, divorce, and other items. The staff also used contests to lure readers. In a takeoff of Mr. Drum's first circulation stunt, during the paper's first month the staff handed out £20 in 10s increments to people in pre-announced neighbourhoods who had copies of the *Golden City Post*.¹²⁹

Unlike *Drum*, the *Post* had an editorial column. The paper generally supported the ANC, but it would not shy away from criticism. For instance, an editorial from its second issue followed up on several stories about the Bantu Education Act and reaction to it:

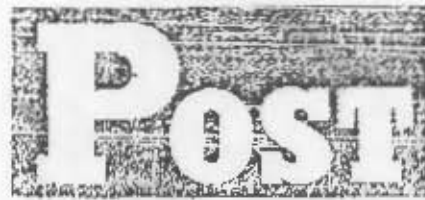
No one who has 'The Cause' at heart would wish to pat Congress on the back for its INACTION. But it takes moral courage of a high order to do the thing you believe is right but know will be unpopular. And we have no doubt at all that in postponing the boycott because a “boycott that fails is more harmful than no boycott,” the ANC acted with sincerity and with good faith. **Congress, however, must prepare to be judged (as we, ourselves, know we will be judged) not on intentions, but on achievement.** It may be that the decision taken by Congress will prove in the end to have been the right one, and that successful, positive action will follow the period of inaction. But if the period of inaction does not turn out to be a time of preparation for great and decisive policies, the verdict will be less complementary. To this extent Congress is on trial. And the people will be the judges. [Emphasis is the *Post*'s.]¹³⁰

¹²⁹ *Golden City Post*, March 27, 1955.

¹³⁰ “Congress on Trial,” *Golden City Post*, April 10, 1955.



FOR SUNDAY READING



WILL BE ON SALE March 12TH

**NEW! BOLD!!
FEARLESS!!!**

... in the BEST and BRIGHTEST
tradition of MODERN Journalism

- **PICTURES** Carefully chosen selection of the best in the world.
- **OPINION** His punches pulled by our Black craftsmen.
- **NITELIFE** The truth about showbiz by a critic who is the talk of the town.
- **CRIME** Inside stories of the gangsters no other paper dare print.
- **COMICS** A GREAT NEW COMIC STRIP HERO.
- **COMPETITIONS** BIG MONEY PRIZES FOR ALL.

THE MOST EXCITING NEWSPAPER
EVENT in the HISTORY of AFRICA



On-the-spot reports by our corps of top newsmen



The brightest and busiest society pages in all Africa!



Best coverage on Boxing, Football, Racing, Tennis, etc.



PLACE YOUR ORDER with a NEWSAGENT NOW!

An advertisement for the new *Golden City Post* which appeared in *Drum* in March 1955.

For the first four months of its existence, the average weekly circulation of the *Golden City Post* was 28,042 copies per issue. It was quickly overtaking its competitors, however. In 1954, the veteran weekly *Bantu World* had a circulation of 31,870. By the time *Golden City Post* was just a year old it had overtaken its competitor with an average weekly circulation of 50,238.¹³¹ Like *Drum*, though, the *Post* was losing money. During its first four months, the paper lost £11,138.¹³²

As both the *Post* and *Drum* gained a wider readership, the value of their content was criticised for abandoning the ideals of educating and uplifting the reader. A 1958 *Contact* article described some of the complaints lodged by the “staid, respectable, and less spectacularly successful press”:

It was vulgar, it was—dreadful thought!—sensational. This latter epithet is the one most often hurled by the long-established press, a press that over the years has been doing its damndest to become sensational while, at the same time, hoping that no one will notice—like a prissy old maid who is not about swearing atrociously to herself among her Victorian bric-a-brac.¹³³

Ironically, Clarke’s enthusiasm for Bailey’s style of popular publishing was tempered by an article by a different journalist in the same *Contact* issue. A favourable review of a collection of Tom Hopkinson’s short stories concluding by expressing the hope that the newly-arrived *Drum* editor would be an “influence for higher standards than the disgusting crime-violence-sex patterns swallowed whole from the worst American pulp papers and regurgitated in a Johannesburg slum.”¹³⁴

Is’kia Mphahlele, the fiction editor and reporter who became a vocal critic of *Drum* after his departure, also felt that the popular press was neglecting its public service

¹³¹ Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Annex VII, p. 115.

¹³² Ibid. Annex VII, p. 93.

¹³³ A. Clarke, “Taking Continent,” *Contact*, August 9, 1958.

¹³⁴ “Reviews,” *Contact*, August 9, 1958.

duties and that its content was too frivolous: "The editorial approach could have gone further and elevated the reader, there was no upward movement. They—the management—used a word, 'uplift,' as in 'we don't want too much uplift stuff here.'"¹³⁵ He also criticised *Drum's* "arbitrary standard of what the urban African wants to read: sex, crime and love stories," as well as its "use of Sophiatown as the yardstick of what the South African non-white should read."¹³⁶ Bailey deflected such criticism by maintaining that *Drum* and the *Post* were writing about everyday life for their readers.¹³⁷ Themba, too, defended the journalism in *Post* as honest: "One of the things that "Post" is achieving just in the course of its objective reporting is to show the population that Non-Europeans are 'people.' All right we do report crimes, there are crimes, but in this issue you will find the story of an Indian and his wife who have been capped [graduated] together."¹³⁸

In addition to criticism of its sensational content, *Drum's* lack of overt politics has drawn criticism over the years for being "self indulgent" and "lacking in political commitment."¹³⁹ It had no editorial page and did not advocate concrete methods or policies that would change the state of apartheid. *Drum*, though, combined the functions of entertainment with more substantial informational journalism, never intending to be "a narrow paper of political protest" as Sampson had termed it. It focused on the flourishing popular culture in urban areas as much as political reporting, which will be examined in the next chapter. Furthermore, because of government intervention, the space for

¹³⁵ Quoted in M. Nicol, *Corpse*, p. 31.

¹³⁶ E. Mphahlele. *Down Second Avenue*, (London: Faber, 1959), pp. 187-188.

¹³⁷ A. Clarke, "Taking Continent," *Contact*, August 9, 1958.

¹³⁸ C. Themba, "Us," *Golden City Post*, April 3, 1955.

¹³⁹ L. Switzer, "South Africa's Alternative Press in Perspective," *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s-1960s*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 42.

independent journalism was shrinking, and contributed to the magazine's restraint. Both the popular and the political press had to navigate increasing government censorship and harassment.

Censorship: A Tightening Grip

Like its forerunners, *Drum* was working within the constraints of its time and the personalities who were running it. Scholar Tim Couzens has observed that the owners of *Bantu World* relied on self-censorship to keep the paper out of official hot water, and that the most effective way to do this was to select staff that would keep within editorial bounds with which the publishers felt comfortable. Paver told Couzens that one reason he selected Selope-Thema as editor was that he felt Selope-Thema was moderate enough to avoid unduly inciting government ire:

I liked Thema's personality. He was frustrated... but he was very earnest and sincere about the development of his people. He was a politician but he was the most balanced of a whole crowd of, well, what one might call the intelligentsia of that day and they were very thin on the ground, you know, there were damned few.¹⁴⁰

Paver also maintained a hands-on policy of informal, but coercive, censorship. "I couldn't presume to put a blue pencil through what was said. It had to be done by my personality," he said. "I had to say to them, 'Well you know you'll have Native Affairs officials who are proficient in your own languages reading this.'¹⁴¹

Jim Bailey, too, felt the weight of protecting *Drum's* staff—and, of course, his investment—and admitted that he used similar coercive measures. He undoubtedly

¹⁴⁰ T. Couzens, "Struggle to be Independent," p. 45.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 45.

allowed the staff to take risks, but he was only willing to go so far. He was particularly irritated, for instance, by what he described as a “silly” clash with Stein that led to the editor’s resignation over the use of a picture of Althea Gibson, the black American Wimbledon champion, receiving a congratulatory kiss from a white colleague and friend.¹⁴² Stein had left instructions for Can Themba to run the picture on the cover while he was on vacation. Bailey pulled rank and compelled Themba to remove the picture from the South African edition, believing it would be too inflammatory to the government:

I believed that we should take risks when there were important social changes to be made but at no time should we trail our coat and invite trouble. I was sensitive to the fact that it was tempting for an editor to invite a clash with the government, have his paper closed down and himself become a seven day hero to the liberal clique of the world. He could walk over the road to land another job; I would be left with the ruin of the paper, the debts, and a fine staff to be sacked. Editorial martyrdom is of a curious order—the editor wears the halo, everybody else goes to the stake.¹⁴³

Furious with the editorial incursion from Bailey, Stein resigned.

Some of *Drum*’s writers have charged that Bailey’s censorship went beyond toning down content that his staff had already put together and extended to actively discouraging them from covering issues surrounding the mines. “There was no doubt about it,” said Es’kfa Mphahlele, “He [Bailey] would not touch the mines. It was a grave omission.”¹⁴⁴ Arthur Maimane also felt that, “We were discouraged from writing about the mines. It was Bailey’s children’s inheritance.”¹⁴⁵

Sampson, though, thought such censorship was not deliberate but rather an unintentional omission stemming from day-to-day pragmatism. “Jim’s motives were too

¹⁴² J. Bailey, “Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle,” p. 131.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 131.

¹⁴⁴ M. Nicol, *Corpse*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 29.

complex to fit into a neat Marxist analysis," he later said, noting that *Drum's* target audience was not the mine workers but the factory and industrial workers in Johannesburg's townships.¹⁴⁶ "If there was any such suppression I was not aware of it. It was true that *Drum* never investigated the gold-mine compounds, where some of the conditions were horrendous; and it probably should have done. But the migrant workers lived in a totally separate world of our readers," he wrote, noting that they spoke little English and that "news from the mines did not flow naturally into the office, as did news about the conditions in farms and jails or about crime in the townships."¹⁴⁷ Bailey, as well, answered his critics by saying that the mine workers were largely illiterate and that mine managers refused to allow him to sell the magazine on the mines.¹⁴⁸ And Mphahlele does remember that Bailey allowed him a free hand with political stories. However, *Drum* steered clear of writing about the mines during the 1950s.

By the time Hopkinson became editor, in 1958, Bailey had clear ideas of what should be in the magazine, and was not afraid of asking his staff to conform to his requirements. His grip on the editorial content was much stronger than it had been earlier in the decade. Feeling that Hopkinson was faltering in his duties—including not socialising with his staff and turning *Drum* into something akin to its early incarnation as "too middle-class respectable"—he sent a memo asking his editor to:

Aim at fourteen important stories every month. They should be made up as follows: 4 good stories from G.R. Naidoo in Durban, 4 good stories from MacKenzie in Cape Town. This is a minimum. Three strong African Reef stories, one of which must be a tough crime story. These are all easily got. A list of all the "fences" in Johannesburg with the manner in which they receive and dispose of stolen goods would go down well.

¹⁴⁶ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 232.

¹⁴⁷ A. Sampson in J. Schadeberg (ed.), *The Finest Photos of the Old Drum*, (Johannesburg: Bailey's African Photo Archives, 1987), p. 129.

¹⁴⁸ M. Nicol, *Corpse*, 29.

Also one Coloured story from the Transvaal, one story from the West African edition, and one up-to-date political news story from another part of Africa should complete the issue. This last should be written from inside the office to avoid expense.¹⁴⁹

Internal censorship at *Drum* and other publications was framed and influenced by a growing emphasis by the government on controlling the press. *Drum* was forced to walk an increasingly fine line throughout the decade because of the repercussions it faced from a heavy-handed censorship laws. In the early part of the 1950s, the Nationalist government had been focused on consolidating its power and legislating other areas of apartheid. It was not long, however, before the state began imposing new constraints on the media.

The Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, which was appointed in 1950 and convened in 1951, was a first step but, like most apartheid legislation, there was historical precedent.¹⁵⁰ The Native Administration Act No. 38 of 1927, for instance, criminalised efforts to “promote ill-will between groups” and could be applied to press reports.¹⁵¹ By the time the commission’s massive two-part report came out, in 1962 and 1964, the government had already passed several broadly-worded laws that limited the press, and the commission detailed the measures “providing for peaceful relations between race groups” and the “safety of the state.” These included the Suppression of Communism

¹⁴⁹ T. Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, p. 115. Hopkinson quotes directly from a memo that Bailey sent him.

¹⁵⁰ The astounding bureaucracy employed, and the extent of the Commission’s study, is a startling example of the attention the government was devoting to the press. The Commission’s report proudly notes that it sent out 1,323 detailed questionnaires and received 1,006 replies which, “together with the Memoranda submitted by the public amount to well over 16,000 foolscrap pages typed in double line spacing.” In addition, the Post Office and State Information Office kept copies of all press reports that it was asked to transmit abroad for a period of six months, amounting to a staggering 35,000 foreign press reports from May 1950 to July 1955. They classified all the cables and turned the “relevant” ones over to the Commission. (Commission of Inquiry into the Press, Vol. 1, p. 21)

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, Vol. 3, p. 895.

Act of 1950, which banned the Communist party and outlawed "any political, industrial, social, or economic change within the Union by the promotion of disturbances or disorder."¹⁵² The Incitement Regulations of 1952 criminalised any person who "does any act or thing calculated to cause natives to resist and contravene any law or to prevail upon them to obstruct the administration of any law." This was followed by the Public Safety Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1953, which made it a serious offence to defy the law or encourage anyone else to defy the law, and mandated tough punishments for incitement or breaching the peace.

The long list of censorship laws continued into the latter half of the decade. Under the 1955 Criminal Procedure and Evidence Amendment Act, individuals, including journalists, could be forced to disclose any information authorities deemed helpful in investigations, and the Act could be used to censor reporting in some court cases.¹⁵³ The Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956 outlawed reporting on banned meetings, noting that, "when feelings of hostility are or may be engendered between Whites and non-Whites the right of free expression through the printed written and spoken word may be temporarily curtailed in order to prevent emotions running riot and to give the moderating element an opportunity to assert itself."¹⁵⁴ The Official Secrets Act of 1956 made it a crime to report on government-defined state secrets.¹⁵⁵

In its report, the commission recommended several additional measures, including the approval of all stories prior to publication, requiring journalists to pay a fee and

¹⁵² Ibid. Vol. 3, pp. 898-900.

¹⁵³ C. Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa*, (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1994), p. 39; See also E. Potter, *The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p. 126.

¹⁵⁴ Commission of Inquiry Into the Press, Vol. 3, p. 893.

¹⁵⁵ C. Merrett, *Censorship*, p. 39.

register yearly with the government, and suggesting the formation of a press council to sanction newspapers, without the possibility of appeal to courts. As Elaine Potter has noted, while not all these recommendations were implemented and no actual legislation resulted from the it, the government used the “extensive and intimidating recommendations of the Commission as a weapon” to instil fear in the press and compel the Newspaper Press Union to set up their own Press Board and induce further self-censorship while still maintaining the appearance of a free press.¹⁵⁶

It was not until 1962 that this Press Board wrote a Code of Conduct for the Press including a crucial clause that would allow grounds for future censoring of papers that challenged apartheid policies: “While the press retains its traditional right of criticism, comment should take cognizance of the complex racial problems of South Africa, the general good and the safety of the country and its people.”¹⁵⁷ At the March 1962 vote by the Press Board, 25 companies voted to approve the Board. Only seven companies voted against the measure, one of them the Bailey Group.¹⁵⁸

There was also the Commission of Enquiry in Regard to Undesirable Publications, discussed in the previous chapter, which had been so alarmed by the “western” content in magazines aimed at black audiences. Its 1957 report had several recommendations as well, including setting up a Publications Board with jurisdiction over books, magazines and newspapers that could ban publications in place of the courts. In 1960, the Undesirable Publications Bill, which proposed pre-publication censorship,

¹⁵⁶ E. Potter, *Press as Opposition*, pp. 108-109.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 110.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 110.

was introduced in Parliament and was met with a huge public outcry.¹⁵⁹ In 1963, the bill was passed as the Publications and Entertainments Act but it excluded the press.

These laws had an undeniable effect on *Drum's* reporters. The Public Safety Act of 1953, for example, presented a troubling conundrum for Nxumalo and Sampson. For *Drum's* March 1954 issue, they had targeted Johannesburg's notorious Central Prison, dubbed "the Fort," and Nxumalo was planning to get himself arrested so that he could investigate and observe the prison for a week from the inside. Yet the Public Safety Act prohibited anyone from encouraging a crime, and it was so broadly written that Sampson was unsure whether he or the magazine would be liable for asking Nxumalo to break a law in order to get inside the prison. In the end, Sampson gave no formal instructions to Nxumalo about the story—but made it clear he should pursue it—which solved that particular problem.¹⁶⁰ There would be many more, however, and by the time Tom Hopkinson was in charge, the editors examined all copy with great care, line by line, with lawyers.¹⁶¹

The banning and shutting down of the socialist paper the *Guardian* under the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act was a particularly chilling incident for *Drum's* management. In a May 1952 letter home Sampson described their anxiety, and admitted that *Drum* dared not be "completely outspoken":

I met the editor a month ago in Cape Town and he said he thought they were safe; but a single simple order from the Minister of Justice has now shut them down. The important thing is not that they are Communist controlled—which is not obvious from reading it—but that they had the biggest sales of any Non-European paper, and that they were the only paper, ourselves not excepted, who dared to be completely outspoken on

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 109.

¹⁶⁰ A. Sampson, *Drum*, pp. 155-156.

¹⁶¹ T. Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, p. 285.

the side of the blacks. The banning of the *Guardian* makes us feel that much less safe and that much more important.¹⁶²

The *Drum* staff also dealt with harassment from the authorities, not all of it related to censorship laws. Photographer Jurgen Schadeberg and Dolly Rathebe, singer, actress, and frequent *Drum* cover girl, were arrested during a photo shoot on a mine sand heap outside the city, which was standing in for a beach. Because Rathebe wore a bathing suit, the police decided they had grounds to detain them under the Immorality Act, which criminalised sexual relations between different races. Johannesburg authorities stalled on giving Nat Nakasa a work pass to move from Durban after Stein and Bailey had hired him.¹⁶³ Later in the decade, when writers like Todd Matshikiza, Es'kia Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, and Nat Nakasa were trying to leave the country, the authorities held emigration rules over their heads, delaying issuing passports, approving only exit visas, and refusing visas altogether. Modisane, for example, was refused a visa from the government because he would not inform on the magazine. The authorities had made it clear that the visa would be granted if he helped them identify which writers had written certain articles.¹⁶⁴ Nakasa was granted only an exit visa—he could leave but could never return. Even performing day-to-day work activities became fraught with difficulty for journalists and photographers. In a 1957 *Golden City Post* article, Jim Bailey complained that police were increasingly harassing reporters and photographers, subjecting them to arrests, beatings, detentions, and on occasion breaking photographers' cameras broken and exposing their film.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² L. Clowes, *Modernised Man?* p. 44.

¹⁶³ S. Stein, *Who Killed?* p. 119.

¹⁶⁴ B. Modisane, *Blame Me on History*, (Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1986), pp. 272-274.

¹⁶⁵ J. Bailey, "Press, Public, and Police," *Golden City Post*, January 27, 1957.

Authorities could also assert control over publications by limiting access to government-controlled newsprint, which was scarce and expensive following World War II.¹⁶⁶ Because of production shortages and increased demand, paper was in short supply around the world and the situation was particularly bad in Britain, where newspapers were increasing prices and cutting the size of newspapers into the early 1950s.¹⁶⁷ In South Africa, newsprint prices had increased as well, doubling in price between 1940 and 1950. The shortages were not as dire as those in Britain, but the government did control the supply of newsprint in the early 1950s. In *Drum*'s third issue, Crisp admitted the dependence that such rationing imposed on the magazine, and seemed to appeal for goodwill from government officials in charge of paper supply:

The very lifeblood of one as we have created by our joint endeavours is PAPER and if the stream of this life-giving substance is cut or interfered with we do not have to describe to you what disastrous results can follow. But *The African Drum* has many well-wishers, not only among its readers but in high places in the land. We do not believe that they will fail us, and we do not believe that they will fail you.¹⁶⁸

It was a weapon the government was willing to use, however, if it suited their purposes. As early as December 1951, after being offended by *Drum* photographs of blacks and whites shaking hands and its coverage of 'anti-discrimination' news in America, Minister of Native Affairs Hendrick Verwoerd threatened to cut newsprint

¹⁶⁶ L. Clowes, *Modernised Man?* pp. 39-40.

¹⁶⁷ "British Newspapers Still Facing Newsprint Crisis," *Selling*, July 1951, pp. 27-29. The editor of Britain's *News Chronicle* complained that newsprint had doubled in price in 1950 and the newspaper, which had regularly been 20 pages in 1939, had been forced to shrink to just 6 pages by 1951. Newsprint prices in South Africa had doubled between 1940 and 1950. (*Union Stats for 50 Years*, p. G-27.)

¹⁶⁸ "Opinion," *Drum*, May 1951.

supplies and, following the Bethal exposé in 1952, he threatened that *Drum*'s paper supply would only be continued "on condition they were non-confrontational."¹⁶⁹

In addition to legislative threats and other coercion from the government, *Drum* staff had to contend with intimidation from gangsters. The threats ranged from the relatively mild to chilling, but some of the reporters who faced such threats were treated by the *Drum* management with more consideration than others. After the magazine's first in-depth article about crime on the Rand appeared in 1951, Henry Nxumalo was threatened by gangsters and Sampson arranged protection for him.¹⁷⁰ Later on, Todd Matshikiza had a similar threatening experience, which resulted in his resignation from the *Golden City Post*. Associates of Ezekiel Dlahmini, a.k.a. King Kong, the boxer whose murder trial he was covering, held him for several hours and burned his reporter's notebook. His editor ignored his fears and he quit. Arthur Maimane left the country altogether because he feared that gangsters would kill him if he stayed.

As bad as these events were, they would only worsen in the coming decades. For example, photojournalist Peter Magubane, who joined *Drum* in 1950s, later worked for the *Rand Daily Mail* and was banned for five years for the work he did there. He was later jailed and spent two years in prison, 586 days of which was in solitary confinement—a record for an imprisoned journalist.¹⁷¹

Drum at the End of the Decade

¹⁶⁹ L. Clowes, *Modernised Man?* pp. 39-40. In addition, to government harassment, Clowes describes the financial difficulties that *Drum* faced as a result of its news reporting, noting that after Mr. Drum's Bethal exposé, insurance underwriters wanted to increase *Drum*'s libel insurance.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 40.

¹⁷¹ C.A. Giffard and W.A. Hatcher, *Total Onslaught: The South African Press Under Attack*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 154.

In 1961, following the conflict with Bailey over raising *Drum's* cover price, Tom Hopkinson, who had succeeded Stein as editor in mid-1958, left the magazine and Bailey turned it over to *Post* editor Cecile Eprile. It was the end of a troubled partnership between Hopkinson and Bailey, who had had never-ending skirmishes over money. They had clashed over expenditures large and small, including Hopkinson's purchase of a new camera for photographer Christian Gbagbo in Ghana. In addition to his efforts to enhance *Drum's* photography, Hopkinson was eager to expand the East Africa division and improve the quality of the magazine's printing. He was disillusioned by Bailey's refusal to invest in either area.¹⁷² Another casualty to marketing and cost-cutting was the fiction section, which was removed in 1957, much to the dismay of fiction editor Es'kia Mphahlele, because Bailey felt it was not selling magazines. In turn, Bailey remembered Hopkinson as rather wasteful with the company till: "Tom was used to the expenditure level of Fleet Street. Because we had a public so scattered—from Cape Town to Zanzibar on the East Coast and to Freetown and Monrovia on the West Coast our costs of distribution were much higher, while our public was vastly poorer and less literate than its equivalent."¹⁷³

Shortly before he left *Drum*, Hopkinson had fired Themba, who was one of the few original staff members still working on the magazine. Drinking had made Themba's work erratic and Hopkinson decided he could no longer tolerate his unpredictability. Matshikiza had moved with his family to London, where his musical *King Kong* was being performed. And Nxumalo had been stabbed to death in 1957—the murderers were

¹⁷² T. Hopkinson, *In the Fiery Continent*, pp. 350-358.

¹⁷³ J. Bailey, "Letting the Genie Out of the Bottle," p. 132.

never identified or caught. As for *Drum*, Bailey closed it down in 1965 and folded it into the *Golden City Post*.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Three "Can We Unite?": The Journalism of *Drum*.

Its prestige and influence have become tremendous, for while it entertains, it challenges.

—Henry Nxumalo, "How *Drum* Beat Them All!" *Drum*, May, 1956.

After living in England for more than a decade, poet and author Peter Abrahams made a visit home to Johannesburg in 1952. During his stay, he wrote an article for *Drum* in which he assessed the state of resistance politics in the country. Not a regular member of the *Drum* staff, Abrahams was a local man who had made good, overcoming a childhood of poverty and publishing his first novel, *Wild Conquest*, to positive reviews. He was a good friend of Henry Nxumalo, who had introduced him to prominent politicians on his return to Johannesburg. His 1952 article looked back on the changes that had occurred since he left the country and it posed a question that the magazine's staff would return to time and again: "Can we unite?"

For myself, I would say that the day of unity has arrived when Coloureds and Indians have enough faith in the Africans and their capacity for leadership as to join, as individuals, the African National Congress and make that the one organisation for all non-Europeans. It would be both National and African. Or are there non-Europeans who object to being called African?¹

His support for multiracial politics in defence of collective interests would set the tone for much of *Drum*'s content, both political and social, throughout the decade.

¹ P. Abrahams, "Can We Unite?" *Drum*, July 1952.

Abrahams was responding in part to an article by R.V. Selope Thema, the ANC leader and editor of *Bantu World*, which Thema had published in May of the same year.² Thema did not represent the majority opinion in the ANC, but he did speak for a small but vocal group that resisted Congress' collaboration with Indian and Coloured groups. In his response, Abrahams denied Thema's contention that the Defiance Campaign would only serve to harden the resolve of the Nationalist government. Conditions were so appalling for most people, he wrote, that they could not deteriorate much more, and he highlighted what he considered to be Thema's faulty logic when he resisted working with other groups: "Is it not extraordinary that those who find themselves opposed to genuine unity find themselves in the end endorsing, implicitly, if not explicitly, the attitude of those who rule?"³

Among black journalists, Abrahams' ideal of unity had long roots. Tim Couzens has observed that most black journalists after the 1930s were middle class, liberal, and nationalistic:

Although it is easy to condemn these men for going overboard for 'European Civilisations,' for frequent imitations of white models, nevertheless the basis of their philosophy contained an element of realism. They perceived that one of the factors which helped the whites conquer the blacks of South Africa was the latter's lack of unity, the fact that the whites had managed each time to isolate 'tribes' and deal with them separately, often with the assistance of black allies or 'collaborators.'⁴

Abrahams, however, was indicating *Drum's* support for not just African unity but black unity—that idea that Africans, Coloureds, and Indians should identify with each other and work together. In the years that followed, *Drum* would consistently promote

² R.V. Selope Thema, "Non-European Political Moves in South Africa: Moderate African Opinion Opposed to Civil Disobedience Campaign," *African World*, May 1952.

³ P. Abrahams, "Can We Unite?" *Drum*, July 1952.

⁴ T. Couzens, "The Struggle to be Independent," p. 33.

multiracial politics and working with whites who were willing to join the ANC's efforts. This was part of its efforts to resist government attempts to divide black South Africans through both retribalisation and increasingly harsh apartheid laws.

This chapter examines *Drum's* efforts to promote a cosmopolitan identity for its city-dwelling readers. Perhaps the most important part of this cosmopolitanism was its advocacy of multi-racial politics that Abraham's article discussed--which rejected what it perceived as inflexible and narrow colour-based politics. It revisited these themes time and again, and they underpin much of *Drum's* political and social content. The magazine included considerable coverage of black politics, which has often been under-rated, for its mainstream audience.

The chapter also explores *Drum's* embrace of popular culture and life in the city, and argues that, in addition to its political reporting, writing about popular culture was one of the most important ways in which the magazine and its staff articulated what it meant to be modern. Though commercially motivated in part, its efforts to reach a broad audience by entertaining them and writing about life in the city legitimized their experiences as the apartheid state increasingly attempted to marginalise them. It also reflected a growing mix of "high" culture—respect for education and middle class professional achievement-- and "low"—tsotsis, musicians, films, and an embrace of shebeen culture—in the dynamic city.

Resisting Retribalisation

After the Nationalist Party took power in 1948, everyday life for black South Africans became increasingly precarious as the new government formulated and implemented apartheid. They passed one restrictive law after another. The Population Registration Act of 1950 required all South Africans to register their ethnic background with the government, the Prohibition of Immorality act of 1949 outlawed interracial marriages, and the Immorality Act of 1950 made sexual relations across the colour line a crime. The Group Areas Act of 1950 zoned residential areas in cities according to colour, and the government established the homelands in 1951. The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 ensured that facilities could be separate and unequal, while the Bantu Education Act reserved control over black education for the government.

As described in the previous chapter, *Drum* was written by young, educated, and urban men who were addressing a large and diverse city audience. Like their audience, however, their existence in the city was being threatened by state efforts to retribalise and separate urban Africans, shutting most of them out of permanent life in towns. By writing about life in the city, *Drum* resisted these pressures and legitimized the experiences of urban residents. Even stories not specifically about politics became tinged with the politics of resistance.

Drum embraced urban life, and in large part defined city living as leaving behind rural identities.⁵ The city represented a modern present and future. The writers resisted retribalisation by distancing themselves from tribal traditions, like the use of “witchdoctors,” lobola payments, and polygamy. For instance, in response to a September 1952 reader who asked, “Is a European doctor better or more advanced than

⁵ D. Driver, “Spatial Configuration of Gender,” p. 234.

an African one?" the editor simply replied, "Yes." It featured people who eschewed traditional clothing and instead "dressed for the west."⁶

Drum also resisted retribalisation by writing in English, which could also serve as a unifying force in a diverse community.⁷ It reflected, to some degree, real changes in the way city residents communicated, as more people became literate in English. Writers like Themba and Matshikiza in particular wrote in a conversational style that reflected the melting pot influences of the city on language. Lewis Nkosi, who famously described Themba as the "supreme intellectual tsotsi," described his writing style as "fus[ing] into the English language the township idiom."⁸ Themba, who loved Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens and Shakespeare, himself described the sense of optimism with which he and fellow writers used English, channelling it into something all their own. "Here Africans are creating out of English a language of their own; a language that thinks in action, using words that dart back and forth on quick-moving feet, virile, earthy, garrulous."⁹

Paul Gready contends that this use of English, while capturing a segment of township life, was lost on a large part of the magazine's audience and represented an escape from reality: "[e]ven as *Drum's* creative English served its main unifying purpose

⁶ L. Clowes, *Modernised Man*, pp. 70-75.

⁷ B. Lindfors, "Popular Literature in English in Black South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Affairs*, Vol. II, no. 1, 1977, p. 121-122. Gready, too, observes that English was a cosmopolitan force: "For the writers, and for some extent the broader community, English was the language in which the outside world was introduced and made available and which opened up new horizons." (P. Gready, "Unreal Reality," 146.)

⁸ L. Nkosi, "Obituary," in E. Patel (ed.), *The Will to Die*, p. viii.

⁹ C. Themba, "Preface," in P. Rutherford (ed.), *Darkness and Light*, p. 5. *Drum* publications published one of the first anthologies of English language writing from Africa, which included stories from Themba and Modisane.

among the middle class, it still estranged large numbers of rural, migrant, and working class blacks who were literate in different vernacular languages, if at all."¹⁰

It is undoubtedly true that they did lose some of their potential audience by rejecting vernacular languages. Like *Zonk*, however, the use of English was also largely pragmatic for a magazine that was trying to attract as many readers as possible—though not mine labourers—from the diverse population in Johannesburg and other towns. In response to one readers' request that the magazine publish in Afrikaans, the editor replied: "We'll carry on in English; that's the language most readers understand."¹¹ Through the use of pictures, however, *Drum*, like its popular magazine peers, was reaching out to those illiterate in English or any other language, though it is impossible to calculate their success.

When the state began articulating apartheid ideology more clearly, *Drum* responded to it more directly. In the September 1956 issue, Z.K. Matthews scathingly reviewed the Tomlinson Commission's report, and articulated the feelings of many urbanised Africans:

But although he did so against his will, the African has now reached the position where the basis of an interdependent existence for him has been undermined to such an extent that he finds himself with no alternative but to follow the way of interdependence. For him to be told in the year 1956 that he must return to the Reserves and endeavour to re-create there a social structure in keeping with a culture which the white man has done so much to undermine if not to destroy, sounds strange in the extreme. In which cheek has the white man got his tongue when he says things like this, the African is forced to ask.¹²

¹⁰ P. Gready, "Unreal Reality," p. 146.

¹¹ Letter to the editor, *Drum*, October 1952.

¹² Z.K. Matthews, "Back to the Desert," *Drum*, September 1956.

As apartheid policies became more and more rigid, the staff viewed the government's plans and policies with some realism. In 1956, after the removals in Sophiatown had started, Nxumalo observed that the Tomlinson Report could be summed up in just a few words. "'Out, brief bundle!' For that is what it says to permanent African settlement in the urban areas—Out! But the question that has been nagging many people is whether they may assume that 'it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.' If only it were!"¹³

The magazine covered legislation that raised the colour bar even higher, highlighting the absurdities of people who were reclassified into different racial categories¹⁴ and writing about people who transcended the colour bar.¹⁵ They expressed their frustration and disaffection with such laws. When Alfred Ford, a Coloured man, was charged under the immorality act for his relationship with Anna Jordaan, a white woman, Nxumalo commented that:

...it appears to me that a suspended sentence hangs over all of us in this matter. This is how it seems to work. I know already that I cannot compromise myself with a white woman, even though we might like to marry. This knowledge hangs over me like any robust suspended sentence. It's just lucky that I don't have any designs, good or evil, on any white woman.¹⁶

In almost every sphere, the magazine promoted multiracialism. In the sports pages, for example, reporter Dan Chocho drafted his ideal all race soccer team¹⁷ and the magazine targeted racist Olympic sports teams for one of its investigative stories—later

¹³ H. Nxumalo, "Talk o' the Rand," *Drum*, June 1956.

¹⁴ For example, "They Once Were Coloureds," *Drum*, October 1955.

¹⁵ "Playblacks," *Drum*, August 1957. The article tells the story of a white couple living in Sophiatown.

¹⁶ H. Nxumalo, "The Talk o' the Rand," *Drum*, January 1956.

¹⁷ D. Chocho, "My All-Race Soccer Team," *Drum*, March 1956.

helping to touch off worldwide boycotts of South African sports teams.¹⁸ And Matshikiza attacked the practice of segregating concert audiences in his music pages: "So if this Union claims to champion the cause of us blacks, why the heck should they go in for segregation and separate audiences and black dates and white dates (angry exclamation and question marks.)"¹⁹ [parenthetical is *Drum's*.]

At the same time, though Themba, Matshikiza and other *Drum* writers embraced western culture, read and admired the works of great English authors, and worked for an English-language magazine, resistance to retribalisation did not necessarily mean simply assimilating to western culture or an absence of black pride. It meant recognizing the reality that living in cities had changed people, and they were not going to change back. As, much later, Can Themba would describe in his obituary for colleague Nat Nakasa: "They don't want to bleach themselves," he observed, "but they want to participate and contribute to the wonder that that country can become. They don't want to be fossilized into tribal inventions that are no more real to them than they would have been to their forefathers."²⁰

The Popular Black Press and the ANC

Unlike *Zonk*, which remained purely an entertainment magazine, *Drum* was making an effort to cover all aspects of its readers' lives. Despite the fact that it was not a news magazine, its coverage of urban life grew to include politics. *Bantu World*, under the editorship of Thema, was the only other mass circulation publication for black

¹⁸ "South Africa's Colour Bar Breaks the Olympic Law," *Drum*, May 1955.

¹⁹ T. Matshikiza, "Township Jazz!" *Drum*, August 1955.

²⁰ C. Themba, *The Will to Die*, p. 101.

audiences that also attempted to cover black politics. Although its circulation was much lower, it was *Drum's* main competition when it came to reporting political news.

In addition to being a journalist and an influential community leader, Thema had long been an active member of the ANC. He had quickly recognized the dangers of government mandated retribalism. As early as 1927, after the first proposals of the Hertzog Bills, he warned that preserving tribal structures was a double-edged sword that could serve to aid state repression and disenfranchisement.²¹ Like fellow journalists H.I.E. Dhlomo and D.D.T. Jabavu, he vigorously opposed the Bills and the framework for "separate development" that they contained.²² In *Bantu World*, he promoted the cause of African national unity, and throughout the 1940s continued to support inter-racial cooperation.²³

But by the early 1950s Thema and *Bantu World* were perceived as actively hostile toward the ANC. Sceptical of multi-racial politics, Thema was leading the conservative National Minded bloc of the ANC and was playing up its significance in the pages of *Bantu World*.²⁴ The group had formed in the early 1950s to protest against Congress cooperation with the South African Indian Congress and what it perceived as the growing influence of ex-Communists within the ANC. Its proponents opposed working with Whites, Indians and Coloureds, and decried the Communist influence within the ANC as a dangerous and foreign intellectual intrusion.

When Thema retired from *Bantu World* in 1952, he was succeeded by Dr. J.M. Nhlapo who, though sympathetic to the Nationalist Bloc, was upset to see divisions in

²¹ T. Couzens, *The New Africa*, p. 137.

²² *Ibid.* p 134, and C. Higgs, *The Ghosts of Equality: The Public Lives of D.D.T. Jabavu 1885-1959*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), p. 102-103.

²³ L. Switzer, "Captive Commercial Press," p. 54.

²⁴ T. Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp. 38-39.

Congress and took a more “conciliatory” approach to writing about the ANC.²⁵ The organisation’s antipathy for the paper remained so strong, however, that in 1955 the ANC took the unusual step of voting to eject a *Bantu World* reporter who was covering its annual conference. Reporters from the black, English, and Afrikaans press, as well as foreign correspondents, walked out of the conference in protest. The ANC’s action also drew criticism from a young Lewis Nkosi, who would join *Drum*’s staff later in the decade, for infringing on freedom of the press. In a letter to *Ilanga Lase Natal* he commented:

Now I had no brief for the ‘*Bantu World*,’ in particular and for the way it has dealt with Congress, whether in its reporting or in its editorials. But I do certainly say that this action by Congress was no less ‘hostile’... Is Congress so immature then; are its policies, ideologies, ideals so weak and lacking in force and might of conviction that they cannot bear criticism, frank appraisals, and unfavourable comment by the Press? If that is so, who is to blame?²⁶

Nkosi concluded that he could not support Congress unless it respected the place of independent journalists and their right to unfettered reporting.

Drum shared some of the ANC’s antipathy for Thema. In May 1953, Nxumalo profiled his former *Bantu World* employer in the Masterpiece in Bronze section, dubbing him the “most controversial man in black politics.”²⁷ And, though the magazine published a Masterpiece in Bronze feature about Dr. Pixley Seme written by Thema in July 1953, the next month a story described the older journalist and his National Minded

²⁵ H. Hughes, “Dr. J.M. Nhlapo and Editorship of the *Bantu World*, 1953-1957,” (University of the Witwatersrand: History Workshop paper, 1978), p. 8.

²⁶ L. Nkosi, “Barring of Section of Press to ANC Conference (Let’s Be Frank),” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, December 31, 1955.

²⁷ H. Nxumalo, “Richard Victor Selope-Thema,” *Drum*, May 1953.

Bloc as "advocat[ing] a purely African Congress, excluding Coloureds within Congress and advocating apartheid between the non-European races."²⁸

Drum's attitude toward Thema and his politics was not so surprising. The magazine was consistently sympathetic to that era's ANC leadership and their support for multi-racial politics. Its writers, for the most part, were not political activists, like the staff of the *Guardian*.²⁹ But, as discussed in the previous chapter, many of them broadly supported the ANC and mainstream Congress leaders. In their lack of formal political membership, they had much in common with many ANC supporters, who often were not formal members of the organisation. The ANC leadership's support for multiracial political alliances was attractive to a publication that rejected retribalisation particularly because, to many of the *Drum* writers, Africanist cries of "Africa for Africans" looked suspiciously like retribalisation in a different guise.

Focusing on the ANC also made sense for a publication that was writing about life in the city---the ANC's base was urban, and it was particularly strong in the Johannesburg area during the 1950s.³⁰ The organisation saw itself as the political expression of the majority of Africans in the country, though it was still very much in the process of attracting a mass base during the 1950s. In 1953, though, the Canadian High Commissioner observed that, "[t]he ANC is a great deal more than a political party. Representing as it does the great majority of articulate Africans in the Union, it is almost the parliament of a nation. A nation without a state, perhaps, but it is as a nation that the

²⁸ "Who's Who in Congress," *Drum*, August 1953.

²⁹ The only two *Drum* writers who were formally members of political organisations were Modisane, who eventually joined the PAC, and Mphahlele, who joined the ANC.

³⁰ T. Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 25.

Africans increasingly think of themselves.”³¹ As a non-partisan publication, *Drum* was providing regular news about the leaders who were trying to represent its readers.

“One Big Front!” *Drum*’s Political Reporting

Historics of the South African press often cite *Drum* as significant, and rightly so, for its mass circulation, daring undercover exposés, and for being at the heart of the literary flowering in Sophiatown.³² Yet, its coverage of black politics is often overlooked. Switzer has observed that *Drum* and other popular publications of the 1950s were “virtually devoid of serious news content.”³³ Choonoo, focusing only on the *Mr. Drum* exposés and the short stories, comments that there was “an absence of political analysis in the stories of the Sophiatown writers” and notes that its journalists seldom “questioned the fundamental structures of apartheid” or spoke to the concerns of working class readers. He contends that:

Such probing analytical reports were the exception, rather than the rule. The reader was exposed to the horrors of apartheid, but there were only a few news exposés in *Drum* during the 1950s. African journalists seldom questioned the fundamental structures of the apartheid system or paid much attention to making African working class readers conscious of these structures. Instead, they protested against racism on moral grounds and called for the cooperation and harmony between white and black.³⁴

³¹ Quoted in A. Sampson, *Mandela*, p. 75.

³² See, for instance, M. Chapman, “The Significance of *Drum*,” *The Drum Decade*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001).

³³ L. Switzer, “Captive Commercial Press,” p. 355. Switzer does note in his dictionary of the black press in South Africa that *Drum*’s early years included some substantial investigative reporting. (L. Switzer, *Dictionary of the Black Press in South African and Lesotho*, (Boston: Hall, 1979), p. 9).

³⁴ N. Choonoo, “The Sophiatown Generation: Black Literary Journalism During the 1950s,” in L. Switzer (ed.), *South Africa’s Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp 259-262.

Yet, if the analysis is extended beyond the exposés and the fiction, *Drum* did in fact include extensive coverage of the effect of apartheid laws, the move toward independence throughout Africa, and black politics, especially the ANC. And it explained, in broad terms, mainstream political news to an audience that was not necessarily buying the magazine for its political coverage. As Anthony Sampson commented, watching the political mood in the 1950s change from optimism to resistance and militancy, “[o]ur view of politics was primarily a shebeen view, but I think no less useful for that; for we saw the new mood breaking into the most resistant areas of all.”³⁵

Its political coverage did have limitations. Written for a general audience, *Drum*'s news coverage was only one aspect of a commercial magazine that aimed to cover urban black life, and it was lacking in many respects. Coming out monthly, it was not always timely. Its space for news was much more limited than the weekly *Bantu World*. It did not cover every black political movement, of which the ANC was only one, or every significant event during the 1950s. And it is certainly true that it rarely covered labour organisations and the mines, and rarely commented on the exploitative labour structures in the country.

But *Drum*'s first article on black politics in February marked the start of consistent and substantial coverage of the ANC and, to a lesser extent, other black political organisations throughout the 1950s. The magazine's coverage of black politics got off to a slow start, and it was in December 1951 that Nxumalo and Sampson first attended a three-day ANC annual conference in a township outside Bloemfontein. They were two of only five journalists to cover the proceedings—the others were Ruth First

³⁵ A. Sampson, “The Early *Drum*,” *The Beat of Drum*, p. 17.

from *New Age* and two journalists from a local paper, *The Friend*. The ANC was unaccustomed to much attention from the popular press. Many of the delegates had not been photographed before and resisted having their pictures taken.³⁶

The Conference approved plans for the Defiance Campaign, and Nxumalo's article presciently announced that, "the 1951 conference may well be looked back on as a turning point in the history of Congress."³⁷ The four-page story also covered the All-African Convention meeting in a nearby hall, and aptly summed up the main debates between and within the two organisations: whether or not to participate in government structures, the role of Communists in the groups, and how broadly nationalism should be defined. The article concluded that "there is no indication of Congress being any less independent," as a result of its Communist members, and was largely positive about the Congress position. Less presciently, it went on to indicate that a major split in the ANC, led by disaffected Africanists, was unlikely.

The magazine was willing to report critically on Congress as well, and its first story set an early precedent for critical coverage. After reporting the events of the convention, Nxumalo went on the analysis, in direct and accessible language, some of the key weaknesses that plagued Congress:

But Congress has many faults yet to overcome. Discipline and planning are still lacking. The valuable 3 days conference is largely wasted in irrelevant interruptions, bickering, and too many long-winded speeches. Talk rather than Action is still the keynote, with too much wind and not enough point. Congress is still not representative of the mass of African people, and the following is very limited. The financial state is perilous and without money no major campaign can be launched.³⁸

³⁶ A. Sampson, *Mandela*, p. 66.

³⁷ "Congress and Convention," *Drum*, February 1952.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Drum's muckraking investigative exposés, described in the previous chapter, were an important part of its news coverage. However, the coverage shifted increasingly from investigative stories to political analyses by the end of the decade—mainly focusing on events in the city. *Drum* provided regular coverage of the annual ANC conferences. It also covered the Defiance Campaign, Bantu Education, attempts to impose passes on women, the bus boycotts, the Sophiatown removals and impending District Six removals, the Treason Trials, and the banning of political leaders.

The magazine gave the ANC leadership the opportunity to communicate directly with its mass readership. In February 1952, for instance, to accompany a story about three months of the Defiance Campaign, Nelson Mandela wrote an article explaining the Campaign's goals and calling for more volunteers to join the protests, which were well underway.³⁹ The same issue included a Q&A session with then ANC-president Moroka. It published several interviews with Albert Luthuli,⁴⁰ and the Masterpiece in Bronze series included several stories written by and about ANC leaders.⁴¹

Drum also covered power struggles within the organisation. In 1952, for instance, it speculated on who would replace James Moroka as ANC president, and later analysed the significance of Luthuli's election. And, after a round of arrests, it profiled sixteen up-and-coming Congress activists who might step in to fill the gaps in leadership.⁴² Such

³⁹ N. Mandela, "We Defy," *Drum*, August 1952.

⁴⁰ "Interview with Luthuli," *Drum*, May 1953 and July 1953; A. Luthuli, "How Red is Congress," January 1955; G.R. Naido, "Luthuli Talks," *Drum*, June 1958; A. Luthuli, "Freedom in the Air," *Drum*, July 1959.

⁴¹ See, for example, A. Xuma, "Masterpiece in Bronze: Dr. Roseberry Bokwe," *Drum*, August 1954; J. Ngubane, "Masterpiece in Bronze: A.W. Champion," *Drum*, October 1952; J. Ngubane, "Masterpiece in Bronze: Albert Luthuli," *Drum*, February 1953; R.V. Sefope Thema, "History of Congress," *Drum*, July 1953.

⁴² "New Faces in Congress," *Drum*, March 1955.

stories about internal politics often included photos and descriptions of Congress leaders, which were written in an accessible style for a mainstream audience.

Drum's reporters were willing to ask these leaders tough questions. Zeroing in again on one of the main political controversies within the ANC, in 1955, the magazine asked Luthuli, "How Red is Congress?" His response acknowledged that there were former Communists in the organisation, but reiterated that they did not control the organisation's agenda:

What in fact South Africa is hearing from the ANC is the voice of African Nationalism rather than communism... In fact our task as leaders is to make this Nationalism a broad Nationalism, rather than the narrow Nationalism of the Nationalist Party... I would be much surprised if ex-Communists formed as much as one percent of Congress membership. I can quite believe that the banning of the Communist Party has led African ex-Communists in Congress to be more active than before within the Congress programme; but that does not mean that Congress is becoming more Communist.⁴³

Shortly after, in May 1955, *Drum* took Oliver Tambo and the ANC to task for the organisation's perceived lack of leadership in several key campaigns, especially their failure to form and communicate a coherent strategy on ways to resist Bantu Education. Eskia Mphahlele had reported on Bantu Education and the Sophiatown removals for *Drum*. "On both occasions," he said in his 1959 autobiography, "the African National Congress was caught with its pants down."⁴⁴ The magazine asked the ANC:

Why has Congress allowed itself to be taken unawares by Government when it could have got its plans ready to meet incidents like the Western Areas removal? How is it such a weighty decision as that on the schools boycott was allowed to pass as a resolution before the machinery was set going to ensue mass action? Why is it that Congress does not give the

⁴³ "How Red is Congress?" *Drum*, January 1955.

⁴⁴ E. Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue*, pp. 190-192.

people a lead on all these important policies? This is asking, in effect: **IS CONGRESS YELLOW?**⁴⁵ [Emphasis is *Drum's*.]

Tambo replied that Congress had not failed because it had put sufficient pressure on the government that it felt it had to implement its policies with force—thus exposing its true nature.

The magazine had covered both the Western Areas removals and the Bantu Education Act extensively. Both events had particular significance for a magazine speaking to an urban audience—the removals undermined permanent city residency by eliminating the vestiges of black land ownership in Johannesburg. And it viewed the government's move to control black education and require lessons in tribal languages with deep suspicion, recognizing it as a significant step toward retribalisation.

In fact, the staff—who had benefited from mission educations—felt so strongly about Bantu Education that, while the magazine had no official position on how to resist the act, it gave implicit—but clear—support to the ANC's attempts to boycott the schools. In July 1955, it introduced a lesson page for the 7,000 children who were barred from attending school because they had boycotted Bantu Education.⁴⁶ The page ran for several months, but petered out as the boycotts lost steam.

They witnessed the closings of the legendary St. Peter's school in Sophiatown and Fort Hare College in the Eastern Cape with anger and dismay. Dubbed the "Eton of South Africa," St. Peter's had educated many *Drum* writers and the institution had a long tradition of "first class passes" of which they were proud. The 1954 story about the school's decision to close rather than submit to Bantu Education pictured many of its famous graduates, including Oliver Tambo, Peter Abrahams, boxer Jake Tuli, and

⁴⁵ "How Yellow is Congress?" *Drum*, May 1955.

⁴⁶ "A Page for the Banned Children," *Drum*, July 1955.

showed a group photo of the six *Drum* staffers who had passed through its doors. They feared the limited and inferior education that was being forced on future generations through Bantu Education.⁴⁷

"They teach people to think here, and there's no docile acceptance of prejudice," wrote Nat Nakasa in a story about the last graduation ceremony at Fort Hare before it was brought under the new laws. "None of the students there are likely to say 'yes Baas' or fall in love with the pass laws."⁴⁸ Like St. Peter's, Fort Hare had educated some of the most successful black South Africans. *Drum* made an unusual official statement on the closing. Fort Hare was being shut down because "it's doing its job too well," the magazine commented. With its impressive list of accomplished alumni—including Nelson Mandela—drawn from an African, Coloured, and Indian student body, it was "making nonsense of the 'philosophical basis' for apartheid." The government wanted to open a tribal college "to prove what it wants to prove," but "the world knows why."⁴⁹

Drum was concerned about the state's threats to black education, but its coverage of black working conditions was very limited. Like the ANC, which Tom Lodge describes as increasingly sensitive to, but not "strongly oriented towards,"⁵⁰ the working class by the mid-1950s, *Drum* wrote little about union activity or factory and mine conditions. Historian Peter Limb has found that the ANC brought more attention—though still scarce—to workers' issues in the press than has previously been recognized during the 1950s.⁵¹ Though rare since most of its readers were urban, *Drum* did

⁴⁷ A. Maimane, "The Death of a School," *Drum*, October 1954.

⁴⁸ N. Nakasa, "The Death of Fort Hare," *Drum*, June 1959.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ T. Lodge, *Black Politics*, p. 74.

⁵¹ P. Limb, "African Workers in the African Nationalist Press, 1900-1960," in L. Switzer (ed.), *South Africa's Resistance Press in Perspective*, p. 109. Limb writes that, "[a]rticles on workers'

sometimes cover working conditions on farms, and Nxumalo's reports on abuses of farm workers resonated with readers. His article on Bethal, and *Drum's* follow up in 1958, challenged the abuses on moral grounds and criticised the government for failing to protect them. But the articles also critiqued the contract and prison labour system with a free-market analysis, arguing that controlling labour—which they called slave labour—fostered such abuses by allowing farmers to “by-pass the normal need to attract men by improved working conditions and higher wages.”⁵² The magazine also investigated working conditions on sugar farms in Natal.⁵³ *Drum* covered worker riots in the provinces, and observed that the largely rural Eastern Cape, where the ANC was very strong, was proving to be a “political time bomb.”⁵⁴

As *Drum* was making efforts to cover developments within the ANC, it also charted the emerging prominence of women, to some extent, within the organisation—almost despite itself. The magazine's marginalisation of women has been well noted. As Choonoo notes, both “*Drum* and the *Golden City Post* were overtly sexist publications that depicted women as sex objects and mindless consumers of cheap household goods.”⁵⁵ The magazine was creating and reflecting an urban male identity for its readers that reinforced and encouraged the expression of masculinity by asserting control, often

grievances by ANC leaders such as Walter Sisulu and Dan Tloome also appeared in Congress Alliance publications such as *Liberation* and *Fighting Talk*, and in union journals such as *Workers Unity*. Left-wing journalists employed *Drum* to expose the harsh treatment of African farmworkers in the press. This was a difficult time for the African press. Yet, without the ANC's principled and programmatic support for African workers' rights, journalists may have been less inclined to take up workers' issues.”

⁵² H. Nxumalo, “The Story of Bethal,” *Drum*, March 1952.

⁵³ “Sugar Farms,” *Drum*, February 1953; “God's Chillun Gotta Work,” *Drum*, May 1957; “Weenen: The Place of Weeping,” *Drum*, March 1958. See also follow up to Nxumalo's Bethal exposé, “We Call it Slavery,” *Drum*, February 1959.

⁵⁴ “Rash of Riots,” *Drum*, June 1956.

⁵⁵ N. Choonoo, “The Sophiatown Generation: Black Literary Journalism During the 1950s,” p. 258.

violent control, over women as possessions.⁵⁶ It dehumanized them and relegated them to the domestic sphere—despite the fact that most women worked and were important sources of income for their families—while often depicting men as separate from their financially burdensome families.⁵⁷

These attitudes were present in its political articles as well. While *Drum* profiled Lillian Ngoyi in the Masterpiece in Bronze section, it pictured the veteran ANC Women's League activist in her home, sewing. A caption to another picture stated: "Latest picture of Lillian Ngoyi shows that at 45 she's still as good-looking as when she was a ballroom dancer."⁵⁸ And though Mphahlele remarked in a story about the 1955 ANC convention that women were playing a more prominent role than ever in Congress, he began this observation by noting not their contributions to the debates, but by critiquing their appearance and making reference to their domestic roles:

And the women were there! In grand style. They had garments on that blended the Congress colours of black, green, and yellow in all conceivable patterns and styles of skirt, frock, blouse, and head-gear... For the laws of the country have now started pots and pans rattling in the kitchen, and a number of things are on the boil.⁵⁹

Yet, as a magazine that wrote about urban life, its staff decided that it could not ignore government attempts to bring women under influx control. It ran several stories about women's fight against passes.⁶⁰ Discussing increasing police raids in

⁵⁶ L. Clowes, *Modernised Man* and D. Driver, "Drum Magazine (1951-1959) and the Spatial Configurations of Gender."

⁵⁷ D. Driver, "Spatial Configurations of Gender," pp. 236-237.

⁵⁸ E. Mphahlele, "Lillian Ngoyi: Guts and Granite!" *Drum*, March 1956.

⁵⁹ E. Mphahlele, "The All In Congress!—But when's it going to go all out?" *Drum*, February 1956.

⁶⁰ "Will Our Women Carry Passes," *Drum*, January 1956; "Target for Women's Passes," *Drum*, May 1956; "Why Women Don't Want Passes," *Drum*, November 1958; "We Don't Want Passes," *Drum*, December 1958; "The Battle of the Women," *Drum*, December 1958.

Johannesburg, and speculating that they were intended to intimidate women into accepting passes, it acknowledged the difficult position urban women, like men, faced:

Selina has never lived outside Newclare. To her Johannesburg is the only home she knows. "Yet," she said, "I was told by a Johannesburg magistrate to quit Newclare. I was given a few months to pack and go. Where will I go? They might as well send me to *Bobbejaan Spanner* (Baviaanspoort)!"⁶¹

Drum's attitude towards women in politics was contradictory. It reflected, to a degree, the important role they were playing and the increasing threats they faced. In the same article where he had earlier been discussing female ANC activists' hairstyles and clothes, for example. Mphahlele admitted that:

On the political plane, too, women have come to the fore. They are making their voice heard in the affairs of the African National Congress... Passes for the women, for instance, and the schooling of their children under Bantu Education, are worrying their minds. "Leave us to handle this as women," some said. "We will not carry passes," said others. "Our daily life is bitter enough, we don't find rest." "Our men are humiliated enough: what should we do when the time comes for us to carry passes?" others asked.⁶²

At the same time, its marginalising attitudes diminished their achievements.

Drum's coverage of government attempts to institute passes for women and their resistance to the moves, like its other reporting, emphasised the importance of multiracial politics. The magazine reported that the ANC Women's League had joined with their Indian and Coloured counterparts to resist the laws, and it ran

⁶¹ "Will Our Women Carry Passes," *Drum*, January 1956.

⁶² E. Mphahlele, "The All In Congress!—But when's it going to go all out?" *Drum*, February 1956.

stories about women's pass protests among Coloureds and Indians in Cape Town and Durban.⁶³

While most of the magazine's political coverage centred on the ANC, it did sporadically cover Coloured and Indian political news. In the fall of 1953, it ran a three-part "who's who" series on the ANC, the SAIC, and Coloured political leaders, which claimed, "the Coloureds are waking up!"⁶⁴ It then moved on to a who's who of politicians in the newly-created Central African Federation and the Gold Coast.⁶⁵ These reports were all short and written in simple language, aimed at a general readership.

As the magazine's writers continued their political coverage, their break with journalists elsewhere in the mass circulation press became greater. In an obituary for Themba after his death, Stan Motjuwadi called the writer a "political virgin."⁶⁶ Ironically, Themba hurled the same accusation at the late *World* editor Jacob Nhlapo in a 1957 obituary. Following the elder journalist's death, Themba charged that he was an "anachronism" and out of touch:

With the vital movements of his time, vital because topicality pressed urgency upon them, Doctor Nhlapo had less than nodding acquaintance. The Defiance Campaign, Bus Boycotts, Pass and Permit Protests and Processions, Riots— these and events of our times that seemed cataclysmic to us, were to the learned doctor antics of the masses. I cannot think of him as a journalist, really. He was of the *World*— but he was not of the world. I cannot see him in the day-to-day hurly-burly, the human dilemmas of court cases, the sparring partnership of domestic life, the rodomontage of parliamentary debate thrice removed from serious concern over the real affairs of state. No, of these things the doctor was absolutely virgin.⁶⁷

⁶³ See "Multi-Race Protest," *Drum*, October 1957 and "Mock Women Talk Back," *Drum*, November 1957.

⁶⁴ R. van der Ross, "What's Cooking in Cape Town?" *Drum*, October 1953.

⁶⁵ E.M. Mtepuka, "Who's Who in Politics in Central Africa," *Drum*, February 1954; "Who's Who in the Gold Coast," *Drum*, August 1954.

⁶⁶ P. Gready, "Unreal Reality," p. 152.

⁶⁷ C. Themba, "Dr. Degrees!" *Drum*, July 1957.

Whether or not this portrait is fair, it indicates how Themba now saw the older generation of black journalists—as removed from mainstream politics and out of touch with popular opinion and culture. It is also an indication of Themba's growing personal political consciousness:

I remember once when he gave me a lift in his car from Evaton to Johannesburg. ... 'Man,' he said to me, 'is God's masterpiece. The potentiality that God has invested in him is just infinite.' I pondered a moment, then asked him, 'But, Doctor, what can we do about the slums of Newclare and Shantytown?' Evenhandedly, he said, 'Yes, but the great thing at this moment is how we can improve the spelling of Sesotho, to make it more logical, more intelligible.' That was the Doctor. Almost like Doctor Faustus, huh?⁶⁸

Drum kept up its efforts to cover the main black political developments. In interviews, many ANC leaders—like Tambo's 1955 discussion of Communist influence in Congress—warned of a growth in what they called “unhealthy nationalism.” The magazine was beginning to take note of these events.

The Africanists

In the mid and late 1950s, the *Drum* reporters devoted more coverage to the emerging group of Africanists in Congress. According to political scientist Tom Lodge, the Africanists were led by “young militants” who rejected multi-racial alliances and thought that white participation, in particular, would undermine both the independence of the movement and its effectiveness in rallying the African base, which was ready to challenge the government: “Ethnic nationalism was a natural predisposition among the masses; all that was needed was an effective ideological articulation of popular

⁶⁸ Ibid.

consciousness by leadership for the masses to rise."⁶⁹ These ideas had old origins in black political thought. Africanists, like Anton Lembede, who formed the ANC Youth League, were an important influence on the more militant generation of young ANC leaders who came out of the League, like Mandela, Sisulu, and Tambo, who later rejected their view of African nationalism in favour of a broader, multi-racial South African nationalism.⁷⁰

In 1954, *Drum* paid tribute to the late Lembede in its Masterpiece in Bronze section. Lembede was worried that Africans suffered from an inferiority complex, the article said, but it portrayed him as a nationalist, "not a racialist."⁷¹ In May 1954, Peter Mda, another Youth League founder and close friend of Lembede's, contributed a Masterpiece in Bronze about Jordan Ngubane. Mda himself was a fierce intellectual who provided much of the Africanists' political philosophy.⁷²

As the decade continued, *Drum* reporters noted the Africanist conflict within Congress. In its summary of the 1955 ANC conference, for instance, Es'kia Mphahlele noted that, "[t]he old, old story of Africanism versus Congress of the People came up again."⁷³ He went on to describe the controversy surrounding a letter Dr. Xuma had written, accusing the ANC of abandoning its 1949 Programme of Action, which in addition to spelling out a new strategy for mass action also rallied people to the cause of African nationalism, though it never defined exactly what that meant.⁷⁴ The letter

⁶⁹ T. Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp. 83-84.

⁷⁰ G. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 116-123.

⁷¹ "Anton Lembede: The Farm Labourer who became a Brilliant Politician," *Drum*, January 1954.

⁷² G. Gerhart, *Black Power*, pp. 125-135.

⁷³ E. Mphahlele, "The All In Congress!—But when's it going to go all out?" *Drum*, February 1956.

⁷⁴ G. Gerhart, *Black Power*, p. 83.

attracted Africanist support, in part because it was embarrassing to the ANC leadership, and Mphahlele noted that it would remain to be seen if the Africanists could use incidents like this to wrestle control of Congress. If they did become a force, they would draw support from young intellectuals, he wrote.⁷⁵

As the division became deeper, however, *Drum* began to write more about the split, with increasing alarm. In early 1958, almost a year before the formal split and the formation of the Pan-Africanist Congress, Can Themba wrote an article, basically an opinion piece, about Potlako Leballo and the Africanists. He called it "Politics Gone Crazy." Themba regarded the group with great distress, viewing their platform as a dangerous reflection of the race extremism that the Nationalists expounded. Though they had always been present in Congress, he wrote, the Africanist influence was growing and they were preparing to force a showdown. He also compared them to Afrikaner nationalists, juxtaposing quotes from both sets of leaders and commenting:

There is this new extremism, this Black Broederbond, which is working along its own particular lines....And even what has been happening to them is similar. For years they were kept in the wilderness—both of them—until they each found a slogan packed with infectious emotionalism. 'Apartheid!' 'Afrika!' It's almost alliteratively the same.⁷⁶

ANC leaders, however, continued to publicly deny the seriousness of the split to *Drum*. Nelson Mandela would later recall that he and other ANC leaders had underestimated the seriousness of the division themselves.⁷⁷ Two months later, an editor's note acknowledged the uproar and criticism caused by Themba's article. The

⁷⁵ E. Mphahlele, "All In Congress," *Drum*, February 1956.

⁷⁶ C. Themba, "Politics Gone Crazy," *Drum*, February 1958.

⁷⁷ Mandela later acknowledged that he "underestimated the threat that Sobukwe represented to the ANC, and the appeal of the PAC's nationalism to young black intellectuals. He was now facing his first serious political challenge; and looking back forty years later, he would recognise Sobukwe as his most formidable rival (A. Sampson, *Mandela*, p. 122)."

magazine also published a letter from S. Segale of the Sophiatown ANC branch, who refuted Themba's charges. "The word 'Africanist' is a dream of the opportunists who are nothing else but trouble-makers in the ANC," he wrote. Themba's response challenged Congress to confront the "problem" rather than attack him for writing facts:

What beats me is that Congress leaders *know* there are Africanists in their midst. They *know* what these Africanists preach. But they shy off from the word, not so much as if it is a swear word but as if Africanists don't exist... Oh-ho, so Africanists don't exist! Well, the other day a group of Congress extremists, calling themselves Africanists, carried out a raid on the ANC offices in West Street, Johannesburg. They scooped off some documents and furniture, and said they were taking over the control of Congress. Previously, they had taken away a new car that Congress had bought and put it in a city garage.⁷⁸

In November 1958, the group broke away from the ANC and formed the Pan Africanist Congress. Themba described the acrimonious final split at the annual conference in the December 1958 issue. In February 1959, Casey Motsisi interviewed Josias Madzunya, the flamboyant spokesman for Africanists in the Transvaal, who would shortly be pushed aside. In the profile he poked fun at Madzunya's country background, saying that he came to Johannesburg in 1931, "like all country bumpkins," thinking that the streets were paved with gold. When he married in 1952, his parents selected his wife, paid the "necessary dowry" and, Motsisi noted, "mailed her to her husband."⁷⁹

But *Drum* soon recognised the newly-formed Pan-Africanist Congress' potential as a significant political force. The organisation's strong populist message and emphasis on psychological freedom by moving away from "white" standards of beauty and culture had a wide appeal. The new organisation found its base among young, urban men, who

⁷⁸ C. Themba, "Who says there are NO Africanists?" *Drum*, April 1958.

⁷⁹ C. Motsisi, "What Makes Him Tick so Loud?" *Drum*, February 1959. The article also questions Madzunya's anti-Coloured comments and pokes fun at his hatred of the press, which he claims, over and over, always "twist his words."

were not necessarily more working class than ANC supporters but were underemployed and frustrated by their inability to “break into the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie.”⁸⁰ The magazine profiled newly-elected PAC president Robert Sobukwe in November 1959, trumpeting his organisation as “the voice of South Africa’s bristling, black nationalism.”⁸¹ The article allowed him a chance to spell out his views and included none of the not-so-subtle jibes of the Madzunya profile.

Just a year after writing about Lembede for *Drum*, Mda criticised the magazine for “reflecting a spineless liberalistic philosophy” and glorifying “the fads and foibles of the most degenerate classes among the Western nations.”⁸² All the same, though *Drum* continued to favour the ANC and its multiracial policies, as a non-affiliated publication it continued to cover PAC activities. In 1960, *Drum* reporters and photographers were the only media present to witness the PAC-organised protest against pass laws which ended in the brutal Sharpeville massacre. The images they captured shocked the world.

And, although Mda had criticised *Drum*’s politics, he recognised that magazines like *Drum* and *Zonk* encouraged black pride:

The introduction of pictorials and monthly journals in which Africans feature prominently [has] revolutionised the entire field of journalism among Africans... [and has] struck deep into the social life of the African people in towns in particular. ... These welcome chances [have] had an immediate impact on the psychological make-up of our people, more especially the youth. The resultant feeling among vast sections of our people [is] that of self-importance... When people begin to realise their own intrinsic importance as human beings, they are on the road to full nationhood. It is only one little step to a consciousness of rights, and to an awareness of the anomalous position under which vast sections of the people are denied elementary democratic rights. No doubt the monthly journals and pictorials have served in no small way to destroy the sense of

⁸⁰ G. Gerhart, *Black Power*, pp. 215-227.

⁸¹ R. Sobukwe, “My Idea of Africa in 1973,” *Drum*, November 1959.

⁸² Quoted in G. Gerhart, *Black Power*, 129.

inferiority and futility which have eaten into the very vitals of our national life.⁸³

Coverage of Africa

For some time, journalists and intellectuals had been looking to the South African past to create a narrative of unity. Tim Couzens charts the evolutions in H.I.E. Dhlomo's writing and worldview in the 1930s and 1940s, which changed profoundly after the Hertzog Bills of 1936 became law. Dhlomo had promoted the ideal of the New African: elite professional men who were detribalised, urbane, progressive, and ready to share in leading a modern South Africa. Increasingly frustrated with the poor prospects for, and pace of, political change, however, Dhlomo's writing became more nationalist later in his life, and drew explicit links to the resistance of older African generations to inspire united resistance in the current generation.⁸⁴

While *Drum's* writers had a perspective distinct from their mission-educated predecessors in the earlier black press, there were continuities as well. Like the "new Africans" who had gone before them, the *Drum* writers, too, frowned on unnecessary tribal divisions, were urban, and were interested in using art and literature to forge a modern identity. References to a shared past appeared occasionally in *Drum's* pages as well, though generally not from its regular writers. Thema's 1953 piece on Seme and the founding of the ANC, for instance, compared the organisation's founding meeting to "a gathering, if I may say so, of the departed spirits of the African race, among whom were such men as Sandile, Tshaka, Moshoeshe, Cetyewayo, Moroka, Khama, Sekhukhume,

⁸³ Ibid. 129.

⁸⁴ T. Couzens, *The New African*, see particularly the conclusion for a nice summary.

Sotshangana, and Rampulana.”⁸⁵ Jordan Ngubane, too, tried to draw links with the past in his *Drum* articles to further the cause of African unity in the present. In a positive review of H.I.E. Dhlomo’s play “Ntsikana,” he paid tribute to the common history that Dhlomo was trying to forge:

To me, our fathers did more than just form a political alliance in 1912 when they brought into being the African National Congress; they created a new nation—the African people.... The history, achievements, failures, virtues and vices of each group became the common property of every African. The Prophet Ntsikana, for example, no longer belonged to the Xhosa; he belonged to all of us. So did Hintsa, Magqoma, Moshoeshoe, Khama, Shaka, Dingane; so did Rubusama, Jabuva, Plaatje, Dube and Seme.⁸⁶

Drum, of course, was not the first to make connections with past South African leaders. But, as by far the widest read publication aimed at a black audience in the country, it presented these ideas to people who may not have been exposed to them before.

More than anything else, though, *Drum*’s writers were looking to other models—located in the present—to inspire modern black unity. One of the first places they looked was the United States, another country that was socially organised around a system of white supremacy. The first issue of *Drum* began with a poem by the black American poet Countee Cullen, who had contributed to that country’s literary Harlem Renaissance. Again, *Drum* certainly was not the first to emphasize the connection between South Africa and the United States, but Rob Nixon has noted that, in its writings about urban life and efforts to resist retribalisation, “much of the ballast for this cosmopolitan dream came from abroad, above all, from the Americans of Harlem and Hollywood.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ R.V. Selope Thema, “How Congress Began,” *Drum*, July 1953.

⁸⁶ J. Ngubane, “Durban Diary,” *Drum*, March 1953.

⁸⁷ R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 41.

An affinity for, and identification with, black, urban Americans, including their leaders, musicians, and writers, would remain strong throughout the 1950s. Many of *Drum's* writers and readers felt a kinship with black Americans who also lived under segregation and were struggling against a repressive white government. A May 1952 feature on Howard University in the U.S. acknowledged this fascination: "Because the Africans are so long interested in the affairs of Americans, particularly Negro Americans, we want to give our readers a little information about a great Negro University."⁸⁸ There was great pride in the achievements of black Americans, and particularly in the early years, several prominent black Americans were profiled.⁸⁹ The writers felt a particular connection with Harlem where a similar black cultural renaissance, also in a post-war and industrialising context, had taken place thirty years earlier, and wrote about life there.⁹⁰ When he arrived in Harlem after leaving South Africa on an exit permit in the 1960s, Nat Nakasa commented on the kinship between the two places: "A lot of Harlem's battles and preoccupations are no different from mine. The people are still fighting for a place in the sun, just like me."⁹¹

Articles about Americans provided cultural models, and *Drum's* interest in how black Americans lived remained important. But, during the 1950s, few *Drum* stories analysed the civil rights struggle in the United States in any detail. As the decade went on, the majority of stories about the U.S. tended to highlight black Americans who were successful in sports—notably a long series on boxer Joe Louis in 1957 and 1958—and

⁸⁸ "Negro University," *Drum*, May 1952.

⁸⁹ See "Masterpiece in Bronze" features about Ralph Bunche, *Drum*, April 1952; Walter White, *Drum*, March 1953; Langston Hughes, *Drum*, September 1953; George Washington Carver *Drum*, July/August 1951.

⁹⁰ "High Life in Harlem," *Drum*, June 1952 and "Mr. Drum Visits Harlem," *Drum*, March 1958.

⁹¹ N. Nakasa, "Mr. Nakasa Goes to Harlem," *The World of Nat Nakasa*, p. 116.

entertainment, such as long features on musicians Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. The regular feature *Negro Notes From the USA* was phased out in early 1952.

Stories about political developments in the rest of Africa were taking their place. This is not entirely surprising, since the “wind of change” were blowing in Africa well before British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan pointed to them in his 1960 speech to parliament in Cape Town. Inspired by the moves for independence to the north, *Drum* began writing about successes and progress towards self-government in Africa. The magazine’s September 1954 editors’ note, in a trumpet blast of self-promotion, alerted readers to the changing focus: “But *Drum* tries to show you as much as possible of your continent. We have correspondents in all the main centres of Africa, who tell us what’s going on, and send us pictures and features. In the next few months, *Drum* will be giving you more and more news from the different parts of Africa.”⁹² They covered the moves toward self-rule in English-speaking Africa and connected South Africa to the burgeoning political empowerment of its neighbours to the north. A July 1955 article proclaimed: “The Gold Coast and Nigeria are on the march to self-government, and we in the south are among the fascinated spectators of the world.”⁹³ It was an acknowledgement of the growing connection that some black South Africans felt with their neighbours.

Even if, in part, the increased emphasis on Africa was connected to Bailey’s desire to expand the geographical reach of his publishing empire, readers seemed pleased with the change. Inside and outside of South Africa, readers were exhilarated by news of self-rule. A March 1955 letter from John Kiganya of Tanzania commented that, “[o]ften

⁹² “Letter from the Editor,” *Drum*, September 1954.

⁹³ “Road to Self-Government,” *Drum*, July 1955.

when I read *Drum* I have found that it deals with happenings in South Africa more than in the rest of Africa; but when I saw pictures of Kibaka of Buganda, I realised that *Drum* is covering the whole of Africa and the world." In September 1955, Toz Mac of Port Elizabeth enthused, "I couldn't believe my eyes when I turned to page 17 of the June *Drum* and found Sudanese beauties and the Prime Minister of Sudan. Go on, Mr. Drum. Keep your cameras and your reporters combing every part of the world in which black people live. We want to see more of that type of feature in your magazine."

Writing about African countries that were moving forward and taking control of their governments was also part of *Drum's* larger efforts to foster a modern and cosmopolitan identity for its black readers. It provided another model—located in the present—to encourage unity. It was also yet another way of resisting the isolation and stagnation of retribalisation. A 1959 feature on meetings in Ghana to explore the idea of a regional union of independent states proclaimed: "The idea of a Union of West African States has thrilled through the whole continent, and every black man, almost, has responded to the first stirrings of the 'African Personality'—every black man right down to the tip of isolated South Africa."⁹⁴ Readers could find a steady stream of stories about moves towards, and struggles for, self rule in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ "Will There Be a United States of Africa?" *Drum*, January 1959.

⁹⁵ See, for a few examples: "Elections in the Gold Coast," *Drum*, April 1951; "Drum Visits Ghana," *Drum*, October 1951; "Masterpiece in Bronze: Kwame Nkrumah," *Drum*, November 1951; "The Exiled Kabaka," *Drum*, November 1954; "Road to Self Government," *Drum*, July 1955; "Kenya's Future," *Drum*, November 1956; "New African Blood Sweeps Kenya Votes," *Drum*, May 1957; "A Man to Watch: Julius Nyerere," *Drum*, December 1957; "Northern Nigeria Hails its Freedom," *Drum*, August 1959.

Closer to home, *Drum's* correspondent in Rhodesia, Stanlake Samkange, wrote about segregation in the neighbour to the north, as well as successful black Rhodesians.⁹⁶

The magazine began looking beyond Africa as well. It was finding connections with other people who had experienced political, economic, or social discrimination, and noted their moves towards independence. In 1955, Es'kia Mphahlele wrote about a meeting between African and Asian leaders that ANC observers had attended: "Africa and Asia have spoken and the rest of the world has heard. It was the voice of more than half the world's population," he wrote. "What the conference achieved was to show the Western world that the East and Africa can stand on their own in international affairs."⁹⁷ And the magazine wrote about the United Nations, and black South Africans' efforts to use the international body to take up their cause.⁹⁸

Drum's growing consciousness of its connection to black people in other countries was reflected not just in the magazine's content but also in its language. Henry Nxumalo described a Jamaican professor's attempts to label the community in a November 1953 column: "We've labelled the fair-skinned races 'white,' she says. Why shouldn't they return the compliment and call us 'black'? ... All black people are not Africans, just as all white people are not English."⁹⁹ Though not consistently, *Drum's* stories began to use the term black to refer to Africans, Indians and Coloureds. Black Consciousness leaders would later demand that the white press use this terminology in

⁹⁶ See, for examples: "H.W. Chitepo: Rhodesia's Only Black Advocate," *Drum*, March 1955; "Turned out of Station Restaurant," *Drum*, January 1957; "Can They Make a Go of it in the North?" *Drum*, June 1958.

⁹⁷ E. Mphahlele, "Afro-Asia Tells The World," *Drum*, June 1955.

⁹⁸ Z.K. Matthews, "U.N.O.," *Drum*, January 1953; "African States Can Sway U.N.," *Drum*, November 1960.

⁹⁹ H. Nxumalo, "Talk o' the Rand," *Drum*, November 1953.

the 1970s.¹⁰⁰ In yet another way, the magazine was suggesting to readers that they should view themselves as both African and black, unique but connected to others who experienced discrimination in their country and the world.

“What We Stand For—And What We Stand Against”

From time to time, *Drum* proclaimed that its investigative stories aimed to improve the living conditions of its readers and other black South Africans. But until 1958 it had never spelt out its editorial policy in detail. This was partly because editorial policy was fluid, depending on its editors and circumstances. Decisions were often ad hoc. “Most of the articles were put down on the typewriter at white heat,” Sampson recalled, “reacting to sudden news or last-minute deadlines.”¹⁰¹

But the magazine was forced to state its aims in more detail in 1958, after being attacked in an Afrikaans newspaper. The newspaper had published an advertisement that reprinted accusations from the full Tomlinson Report:

This magazine carries an anti-White message to the masses and its outstanding features are stirring up a feeling of discontent and reporting on the sensational. The European employer of the Bantu is the scapegoat who is answerable for all the pleasant things that the Bantu lack.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Black Consciousness leaders rejected the term non-white because it implied that there was a standard of whiteness that was not being met, and they lobbied to have it replaced with the term black, which would refer to all people who had been politically, socially, and economically discriminated against. The *Rand Daily Mail* was the first of the white-targeted newspapers to switch to this term after 1972. (M. Vezikhungo and D.R. Howard, “Representing Blackness: Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement,” in M. Adhikari L. Switzer (eds.), *South Africa’s Resistance Press*, pp. 180-186.)

¹⁰¹ A. Sampson, “Foreward,” in D. Woodson, *An Index to Africa’s Leading Magazine*, p. 1.

¹⁰² J. Bailey, T. Hopkinson, and C. Themba, “Drum... Revolution and £3,000,000,” *Drum*, February 1958.

In a statement signed by Jim Bailey, then-editor Tom Hopkinson, and associate editor Can Themba, the magazine decided to take on its critics. The statement was most likely not for regular readers, but rather intended for whites and critics in the government. They defended Mr. Drum's exposés and defined their mission as providing a venue for information, public debate, and protest for black South Africans:

Drum is not, and never has been, in favour of 'revolution' or of violent change. It has never supported Communism, nor advocated Communist policies. *Drum* is not interested in finding 'scapegoats,' and carries on no quest for the 'sensational.' *Drum's* aim is to be the voice of those who have no voice. *Drum's* task is to put forward the views and feelings of those who have no constitutional method to express their views, and often no outlet for their feelings but a cry. *Drum* can only be called 'anti-White' if it is considered 'anti-White' for a Black voice even to be heard.¹⁰³

It affirmed its journalistic independence once again, claiming to be serving the public interest—while making money, of course, though that was left unsaid. And it indicated how it saw its role: as an impartial critic that also aimed to be a public servant in the interest of black readers:

Mr. Drum is the servant of no party. He is pledged to support no organisation. His aim is to voice the hopes and aspirations—and sometimes the fears and anxieties—of his readers and so to be the voice of those who have no voice of their own.¹⁰⁴

Embracing the City: *Drum* and Black Urban Identity

As people were coping with life in the city, *Drum* was writing about everyday life—travelling to work, drinking in shebeens, sports, crime, and music. Just by writing about these subjects, *Drum* legitimized black experiences in the city. And, by writing

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

about everyday life, the magazine incorporated elements from popular culture and helped to redefine the conception of modern. *Drum* wrote about both the “high” and “low” urban culture, broadening the definition of modern life to include jazz, sports, shebeens, and the influence of black American culture.

To previous generations, modern living had meant being solidly respectable, and a large part of that respectability involved being Christian. Although many of them had received mission educations, none of the *Drum* writers were religious. *Drum*, too, had little use for religion, whether it took the form of Christianity or traditional beliefs. An early column on religion was phased out quickly, and from then on the subject of religion rarely made any significant appearance in the magazine. The exceptions were *Drum*'s coverage of emerging separatist black churches later in the decade, occasional letters to the advice column, and a Mr. Drum exposé on the colour bar in Johannesburg's Christian churches.¹⁰⁵ Themba, who wrote the story, was welcomed into a few churches but was coldly received or thrown out of several others, and at one point was intercepted by the police. He noted ironically that the fuss was caused “all because an African wanted to pray!”¹⁰⁶

The magazine also covered everyday life. When one of *Drum*'s first picture features appeared, “Johannesburg Lunch Hour,” in September 1951, readers could see a reflection of lives in the city—job seekers waiting in line, petrol station attendants,

¹⁰⁵ For an analysis of Dear Dolly, and the way it promoted western ideals of relationships, see K. Mutongi, “Dear Dolly's Advice: Representations of Youth, Courtship, and Sexualities in Africa 1960-1980,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2000, and D. Driver, “*Drum Magazine* (1951—9) and the Spatial Configurations of Gender,” in K. Darian-Smith, I. Gunner and S. Nuttall (eds.), *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature, and History in South Africa and Australia*.

¹⁰⁶ “Brothers in Christ: Turned Away at the Church Door,” *Drum*, March 1956.

workers eating at roadside canteens and drinking at municipal beer halls. After that first picture feature, *Drum* continued to write about experiences common to city dwellers.

Social life in Johannesburg, like other cities, revolved around shebeens. "To the white man, Johannesburg is a city of cinemas, hotels, restaurants, and night clubs," recalled Sampson. "To the African, it is a city of shebeens."¹⁰⁷ The exploits of shebeen queens, the generally older women who ran the makeshift bars, and their customers featured frequently in *Drum*. Its writers scorned the hypocritical alcohol laws that allowed Africans to drink only traditionally-brewed beer in mandated city establishments. Themba, a notorious abuser of alcohol, wrote a piece a year later lampooning prohibition. In "Let the People Drink!" he made the point in strong terms that: "THEY'RE DRINKING ANYWAY. Why not make it legal? If Parliament allows liquor rights for all, South Africa's crime rate will drop enormously." The article poked fun at the police—both white and black—who drank at shebeens by night yet enforced drinking laws, and discussed the illegal routes that shebeen owners took to obtain liquor. Readers, too, questioned these laws. A 1955 *Drum* survey asked readers whether Africans should legally be able to drink all types of liquor. The readers voted yes, 185 to 153.¹⁰⁸

Zonk, too, covered social life, occasionally including shebeens, but its writing was not infused with either an undercurrent of politics, or the acceptance—indeed, the embrace—that *Drum* brought to the topic. For instance, a November 1949 photo story on two friends who visit a shebeen, though fictional, describes the shebeen as "a dirty, little shack, alive with cockroaches and reeking of stale cigarettes and home-made liquor." One friend is robbed, the other beaten. The story concludes with the first friend

¹⁰⁷ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ "Drum Parliament," *Drum*, May 1955.

lamenting: "'Oh why did I ever take Sam to that den,' he moans. 'We would have both been better off at the [government-run] Beerhall.'" ¹⁰⁹

The magazine also reflected some of the community's aspirations. The profiles of famous black political leaders, whether they were from South Africa, elsewhere on the continent, or American, were a symbol of pride to its readers. "That was a big story for us—black people succeeding—it was one of the main reasons for publishing *Drum*," said Sylvester Stein, 40 years later. ¹¹⁰ It also featured successful businessmen, profiling the country's richest African and Indian men, ¹¹¹ and provided a model of success for readers. In the case of Israel Alexander, dubbed South Africa's "richest African," it continued to highlight his family as minor celebrities, profiling his young daughter and covering her wedding. This sort of achievement was rare, however.

Serialized autobiographies also told tales of lives in the golden city. Peter Abrahams' autobiography was published, telling the story of his childhood in the Johannesburg slum of Vrededorp. Mopeli-Paulus' life story was included as well, part of which told the story of how he moved to the Reef. ¹¹²

Boxing, cricket, and soccer were popular entertainments in Johannesburg and other cities. And, as in the arts and literature, reading about sports provided not simply entertainment but examples of achievement. Sports in general, and boxing in particular, represented a forum where "Africans could triumph over discrimination" Sampson

¹⁰⁹ "Crime Does Not Pay—Don't Let This Happen to You," *Zonk*, November 1949.

¹¹⁰ S. William, "All men were brothers in Christ but not in South African churches," *The New African*, March 2005, p. 44.

¹¹¹ "South Africa's Richest Indians," *Drum*, December 1953; "South Africa's Richest Indians: More Startling Facts," *Drum*, January 1954; "South Africa's Richest African," *Drum*, December 1954.

¹¹² P. Abrahams, "Tell Freedom," *Drum*, April-November 1954; A.S. Mopeli-Paulus, "The World and Cattle," *Drum*, January-February 1955.

noted.¹¹³ American boxer Joe Louis, who frequented *Drum*'s pages, was a childhood hero of Nelson Mandela's.¹¹⁴ During the 1950s, Soweto residents followed boxers Jerry Moloï and Jake Tuli. *Drum*, and *Zonk* to a lesser extent, followed Tuli almost obsessively. Sports could appeal to all classes of people, and the space that *Drum* devoted to them was certainly part of its embrace of popular culture.

The influence of American culture on this mixing of high and low culture was also important. As Rob Nixon has observed, "if English culture was associated principally with liberal efforts to distil a black middle class, much of the American culture available to Sophiatowners enjoyed a more scattered, cross-class appeal."¹¹⁵ American swing, blues, jazz, as well as gangster movies and the stars of Hollywood films were popular in Sophiatown, and offered a different and populist cultural model to its residents. Can Themba took Anthony Sampson to see the American gangster movie *Street With No Name* in one of Sophiatown's cinemas. Sampson was astonished to that the theatre was packed with local tsotsis who, fascinated with the American gangsters trying to elude the FBI, were reciting lines from the film in the darkened theatre.¹¹⁶

Going to see films was a popular pastime, and profiles of movie stars were popular with readers. The magazine wrote about local film stars—Can Themba wrote a massive four-part series on Dolly Rathebe, the famous film star and singer, in 1957. The magazine also wrote about growing segregation in the cinemas. "And what exactly do they expect us to do on a rainy Saturday afternoon?" commented Cape Town resident

¹¹³ A. Sampson, *Mandela*, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 60.

¹¹⁵ R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood*, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ A. Sampson, *Drum*, p. 81-82.

James Nonyana in a 1959 story. "Sit in our tiny Sea Point rooms and develop along our own lines?"¹¹⁷

Music, too, was popular in the cities, and enjoying jazz was clearly a "modern" pursuit, as Matshikiza's "Music for Moderns" columns reinforced. *Drum* embraced not just American jazz, but also celebrated the lives and music of South Africa's great jazz musicians, themselves products of the city. A 1955 profile of jazz great Wilson Silgee, nicknamed King Force, of the Jazz Maniacs showed this enthusiasm for the musicians and their ties to the city:

Joburg has claimed him now, as it has claimed most of the jazz greats. There's a reason, too. A quarter of a million Blacks spend and end their lives in and around Joburg. And where so much life is found, good jazz is found. King Force is found.¹¹⁸

Jazz's early "low class" origins were looked on with nostalgia. Dubbing the 1920s the marabi "epoch," Matshikiza described it as "a time when everybody was singing and dancing to a type of jazz that flourished in the dives and 'not so classy places'... the not-so-posh entertainment houses and private parties."¹¹⁹ Later, Themba again defended the right to enjoy all forms of music, whether "high" or "low": "If jazz is 'the music of the proletariat,' I'd like to see a little more democratic appreciation of it... I'll throw out on his ear any cat who says I've no business to like Marabi, or even the polka for that matter!"¹²⁰

In addition to profiling some of Johannesburg's most popular jazz bands, Matshikiza chronicled the history of South African jazz for *Drum*'s readers, tracing the

¹¹⁷ "Bioscope Ban! Technicolor films are OK—but not Technicolor audiences," *Drum*, February 1959.

¹¹⁸ T. Matshikiza, "King Force," *Drum*, February 1955.

¹¹⁹ T. Matshikiza, "Music for Moderns," *Drum*, December 1951.

¹²⁰ C. Themba, "More Talk o' the Town," *Drum*, September 1958.

rise of marabi, the influence of American jazz, and the popularity of swing and jive during the 1940s. Acknowledging the important American influence on South African jazz, he also repeatedly stressed jazz's importance as a means of African expression:

Zulu Boy Cele [founder of the Jazz Maniacs] was not an antagonist of American swing, but he saw in the use of more instruments the possibility of developing African jazz... Marabi... into an orchestral form so that music of African origin would find itself side by side with imported dance music. And if he adopted the Western idea, he would at least give vent to the African form of expression. The African idiom. But the continuity of African jazz was swallowed up by American jazz for a few years. In the heydays of the American musical pictures, the big bands were engulfed in the imported product...¹²¹

Yet, some African musicians were looking to make the music theirs, and Matshikiza chronicled this desire: "Yankee jazz came knocking at the door but the jazzmen of Africa wanted their own music."¹²² During the 1940s and 1950s, Matshikiza felt, bands like the Harlem Swingsters (his own band), Miriam Makeba and the Manhattan Brothers, and Lo Six had succeeded. For Matshikiza, the ultimate criteria for good music, whether "high" or "low," was that it express black South African identity:

It wasn't so bad ducking the curfew laws, it was worthwhile going to see the 'Durban C to C' the 'Brakpan Home Tigers' or the 'Durban Letter Stars.' Or you were inspired by the words, 'Today the whole world looks forward to another Africa for fresh and original music works. Africa is ready. It has been for a long time.' Well, Africa was a long way past original music works. She was drunk with American and English music works and quite inevitably, too. The missionaries had taught that the music of Africa was barbarian. Barbaric. Barbarous. Africa had to abandon African music as such. Africa had to learn Western music.¹²³

By writing about music, sports, shebeens, and celebrities, *Drum* was acknowledging that life for their readers did not consist solely of intellectual and political

¹²¹ T. Matshikiza, "Where's Jazz Going Now?" *Drum*, August, 1957.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ T. Matshikiza, "Jazz Comes to Jouburg!" *Drum*, July 1957.

pursuits. Though it was engaged in a larger project of creating unity, it was trying to entertain readers as well. It offered people a space to enjoy life—or live vicariously through others who were enjoying life—and read about the lighter side of day-to-day existence. As C. Themba described his own desire for an escape: “It is a crepuscular, shadow-life in which we wander as spectres, seeking meaning for ourselves. And even the local, little legalities we invent are frowned upon... But leave us some time and experience where we may be true to ourselves. It is so exhausting to have to be in reaction all the time.”¹²⁴

As its circulation increased, both within and outside Johannesburg, *Drum* reflected and encouraged the increasing psychic importance of life on the Reef. “*African Drum* urbanises even the most rural Africans—not urbanising in the nature of ‘tsotsolising’ us, like we read in the October issue: but actually linking us with the fast-moving times,” said L.F. Makhubele from Louis Trichardt in April 1952, when he wrote to thank the magazine for including the *Cry, the Beloved Country* serialization. Another reader letter in the same issue called for a feature that would picture town and country life on the same page, drawing links between the urban and rural lifestyle.

Ambiguity from Readers: The *Drum* Parliaments

Drum's focus on multi-racial cooperation and its conceptions of modernity did not necessarily go unchallenged by readers. In October 1953, it introduced the *Drum* Parliaments, reader surveys that claimed to be a platform for the “voice of the people.” The parliaments asked broad questions about social life, rather than specific questions

¹²⁴ C. Themba, “Crepuscule,” *The Will to Die*, pp. 8-9.

about political strategy or movements. And, while they never attracted a huge response in relation to *Drum's* circulation—the largest number of votes for any single poll was 550—the results capture some of the reactions, and resistance, to the magazine's contents. During the two years that the feature ran, it showed a broad, nuanced range of what modern living meant to a segment of *Drum's* audience.

The first poll posed the question: Should there be intermarriage between Africans, Coloureds and Indians? For a magazine that promoted multi-racial unity and politics, the question was key. In forums where *Drum* staff offered advice to readers, such as the editor's notes and the Dear Dolly column, they consistently defended colour-blind relationships. Two months before the first parliament, for instance, a young African woman from Durban complained to Dolly that she did not like dating African men. She felt they treated her poorly, and was upset by negative reactions from her African friends to her Coloured boyfriend, whom she was "completely mad about." Dolly sternly admonished her not to stereotype all African men, but wished her well in her new relationship: "If you have found happiness with your Coloured boyfriend, good luck to you. Remember it is not because he is Coloured that he is a gentleman. He just happens to be a good man."¹²⁵

The issue of intermarriage, however, was less clear-cut for readers. By just one ballot, readers voted for intermarriage, with 164 for and 163 against. It is likely that most of the voters were black because the magazine specifically told white readers that they

¹²⁵ "Heartbreaks," *Drum*, July 1953. "Dolly" clearly advised that colour—as well as nationality and religion—should not stand in the way of relationships (see, for instance, the October 1954 Dear Dolly column.) She also acknowledged the difficulties that couples could face from a hostile society. In a September 1953 column, Dolly advised a young Coloured woman living in Cape Town that her disapproving mother could not stop her marriage to her African boyfriend, but cautioned her to be honest with her mother and "make sure you realise the difficulties ahead."

could not participate in this particular survey “so that the result will be truly representative of the views of the non-European people.”¹²⁶ Some of the negative comments stressed the practical difficulties that measures like the Group Areas Act could present for couples who could not legally live in the same place. Others expressed fear that intermarriage would lead to a loss of cultural identities. Some simply did not like the idea of different “races” mixing. Those in favour of intermarriage, however, felt it was not common enough, and a good way to strengthen bonds in a society rigidly divided by colour. Nellie Naidoo, a Coloured woman from Fordsburg, wrote that her 25-year marriage to a “Hindu” man had been quite happy and that “it is practicable if the couple looks at it with love, intelligence, and understanding.”¹²⁷

The February 1954 parliament asked another question that struck at the core of *Drum*'s preoccupations: Should tribal customs and culture be retained? By responding, the magazine noted, readers could “help Africa choose the course it must follow towards progress,” thus implying that progress was a process that was still to be completed.¹²⁸ Although “tribal customs and culture” were not specifically defined, the parliament page framed the question with four men giving their opinions, creating a visual shorthand for a clash of cultures. Two suited men in sunglasses who advocated throwing off tribal customs faced down a blanket-clad man and a suited teacher at a blackboard. “I was brought up in the city and know of no other customs or culture practised here than Western civilisation,” noted one of the slick men in sunglasses, Johannesburg businessman Wallie Xakane. Mopeli Paulus, co-author of *Blanket Boy's Moon* and a

¹²⁶ “Drum Parliament,” *Drum*, October 1953. The magazine showed its male-oriented bias once again, noting that prominent *men* in the community would pose the questions. While women did have opinions published from time to time, comments were mainly from men.

¹²⁷ “Drum Parliament,” *Drum*, December 1953.

¹²⁸ “Drum Parliament,” *Drum*, February 1954.

Drum contributor, thought African customs were inferior and that preserving them was unrealistic: "We live in a Westernized world and Western civilisation has a history and tradition of over 2,000 years. African culture and customs have no set standards. What is left of them to keep, anyway?"

The results, published the next month, showed a wide range of ideas on the role that tradition should play in contemporary society. They also showed yet again how the magazine, which was generally suspicious and dismissive of traditional customs, could widely diverge with its own audience. The majority of readers who responded were in favour of retaining "tribal customs and culture," with 96 for and 78 against.¹²⁹ Clearly, *Drum's* fascination with the West was not shared as fervidly by a segment of its readers. Many wanted to preserve the best parts of their traditions. "Customs and culture which do not clash with Western civilisation should be kept; and they are in the majority. For example, even the whites have adopted our old custom of circumcision," commented Theo Marau, principal of Albert Street School. Others thought that pursuing only "western" culture would cripple the nation by robbing it of its identity. "African traditions and customs should be kept if our desire for African Nationalism must be an accomplished fact," wrote F.W.S. Mncube, a language lecturer at University of the Witwatersrand. "For national recognition, a nation needs a stable foundation and this foundation is its culture," noted Z. Nqini from Uitenhage. And James Maruping from Bloemfontein noted that, "[w]e have to sort out the good from our own customs and build our future thereon."

On the flip side, some felt that keeping traditions threatened the country by dividing it. "African nationalism should long have been achieved, but this has not

¹²⁹ "Drum Parliament," *Drum*, March 1954.

happened as different tribal customs have been the main obstacle," wrote M.G. Mosenyi from Johannesburg.¹³⁰ "In order to build a nation it must first be destroyed," said Joseph Mokwena from Pretoria. Others felt that traditions practised in rural areas were of little use in cities. "Our customs, which are essentially the customs of the country with a rural setting, are impossible to continue in the towns because there is such a mixture of races in the towns. This coming together of persons of different racial groups immediately makes urban areas the melting pots from which something comprehensible, to both African and European, must emerge," commented Zali Mbalu of Moroka. "To say 'yes' is to sentimentalise on customs whose rural setting is an abstract concept to us city people." One reader thought it was simply futile to try to engineer culture. "Customs should take care of themselves, for those that could survive the forces of progress have done so," he wrote.

The *Drum* writers themselves could sometimes exhibit contradictions. Though it actively advocated throwing off "old" customs like lobola,¹³¹ the magazine found itself making playful fun of one of its own reporters, Arthur Maimane, who wound up paying lobola himself.

Traditional healers were often dismissed and derided by *Drum's* writers. The first article on witchdoctors in April 1952 focused on cases of ritual killings in Lesotho. Admitting that, "[t]here is no doubt that the part played by the medicine man in society as doctor, psychologist, and advisor is an important one," the story focused on sensational tales of murder and abuse. As time went on, stories became increasingly disdainful.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ "Loḃoḃo! It's a Racket!" *Drum*, December 1956.

Henry Nxumalo's May 1956 *Talk o' the Rand* column provides another example, when he discussed witchdoctors who wanted to professionalize their trade:

But surely the trouble with the whole 'science' is its infernal secrecy. One can understand a man wanting to protect his exclusive techniques, but in medicine surely the knowledge should be available to all. Darn it all, man, I don't want to be caught with epileptic fits and find that the only doctor who can treat it is lazing under a banana tree in Vendale!¹³²

Three months later, Can Themba challenged any witchdoctor to wither away his arm for a cash prize.¹³³ However, in response to the September 1954 question, "Should Witchdoctors Be Banned?" the readers once again diverged with 140 with the magazine's bent, with in favour of keeping them, 133 against.

One of the last surveys, which also dealt with the place of tradition in society, attracted the largest response. The December 1955 poll asked whether polygamy was acceptable, noting that "[m]any non-white nations have practiced the custom for thousands of years, but modern European nations do not allow it... more and more people arriving in the cities and towns find it difficult to keep to the custom—partly because they cannot afford to support more than one wife and partly because they have turned Christian and their religion does not allow polygamy."¹³⁴ The magazine's advice columns and stories generally disapproved of polygamy. In August 1954, Dolly declared outright to a questioning reader that "you cannot have two wives."¹³⁵ This time, the

¹³² H. Nxumalo, "Talk o' the Rand," *Drum*, May 1956.

¹³³ "Mr. Drum Challenges All Witchdoctors," *Drum*, August 1956. The October follow up story reported that the witchdoctors had failed the challenge.

¹³⁴ "Drum Parliament," *Drum*, September 1955.

¹³⁵ "Heartbreaks," *Drum*, August 1954. Another May 1954 Dear Dolly column told a 25-year-old man who wanted to marry a second wife, much to the dismay of his first wife: "You cannot share your love with two women, my dear. For the happiness of your family and for the girl's own future, forget your new love." Although someone on the staff, when discussing whether or not it was possible to love two women at once, joked, "Why not? I can," the magazine generally disapproved of multiple marriages. (A. Sampson, *Drum*, 99.)

Drum readers who responded to the parliament were also very much against polygamy, with 132 votes in favour and 432 against. Some said there was no harm in the practice if a man could support multiple families. Others, however, felt the practice was harmful to women, resulted in jealousy, and was impracticable for city living because of the additional family costs.

Another parliament dealt with the question of whether women should have “equal rights.”¹³⁶ One man arguing in favour of equal rights thought that gender inequities stood in the way of modern life: “If [men and women] work in close collaboration the outcome will be great and many intricate puzzles of the modern world will be solved.” Most respondents disagreed with him however, voting 101 to 58 against gender equality. The majority of *Drum*’s readers were men, and the two prize-winning comments were both from men. The spokesman for the “no” group argued that equal footing was out of the question on religious grounds, concluding, “let us give them courtesy but no rights.”¹³⁷

The parliaments provide an interesting, if anecdotal, look at the thoughts of some of the literate readers who took the trouble to respond to the surveys, and their range of opinions on how to approach modernity. Even those eagerly reading the magazine did not necessarily agree with the way *Drum* defined modernity—embracing unity, multiracialism, and moving away from rural traditions.

¹³⁶ “Drum Parliament,” *Drum*, July 1954. A September 1952 piece reported that a citizen-on-the-street survey found unanimous acceptance of women’s role outside the home. Only four peoples’ opinions were included, however, and there was no indication of how they were chosen to participate.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

“Why Our Living’s So Tough”

Although *Drum* was embracing the urban black experience, it also reflected some of the anxieties that accompanied life in the city. In 1952, as a way to highlight the difficulty for the majority of workers on the Rand, it published the budget of one Johannesburg man. The article, “The Cost of Surviving,” showed his constant struggle to make ends meet, finding that only in the best of circumstances did he end each month with any money to spare—only eight pence.¹³⁸ A follow up report in 1958 by C. Themba revisited the difficult financial straits of most people. In “Why Our Living’s So Tough” he again contrasted the expenses of a typical family with its income, concluding, “...trapped, confused, dazed by the screaming demands of your budget, you gape and groan. There must be a better way for humans to live than this.”¹³⁹ The article recognised that its upwardly-mobile aspirations—though still an ideal to strive for—were far out of grasp for most people.

Crime, as well, was a staple of *Drum*’s pages, and the glamorisation of tsotsis as counter-culture heroes who managed to succeed economically and thus triumph over apartheid rules has been well-documented by several scholars.¹⁴⁰ The exploits of defiant gangsters were an important part of the image of the city that *Drum* projected. Themba exemplified this attitude when he remarked in a 1958 column:

Tsotsis have been much maligned. Far from being hooligans and ruffians they are the sophisticated young men of the new age. Let’s admit it, things have changed so much since our tribal days that there is no point in

¹³⁸ “The Cost of Surviving,” *Drum*, January 1952.

¹³⁹ C. Themba, “Why Our Living’s So Tough,” *Drum*, June 1958.

¹⁴⁰ Mac Fenwick, for example, in his “Tough Guy, Eh? The Gangster Figure in *Drum*,” discusses *Drum*’s fictional and non-fiction portrayals of gangsters, who drew heavily on Hollywood to create their counter-culture personas.

clinging to the outmoded ways of yesterday. It's time people tried to understand these misunderstood members of society.¹⁴¹

Despite *Drum*'s fascination with gangster exploits, however, the insecurity and fear they instilled in the black urban community was profound. The magazine wrote about this side of gang life as well, and often called for police and authorities to "clean up the Reef."¹⁴² Its editors' notes and letters frequently decried the levels of crime and pointed towards the government's abdication of its responsibility to protect Reef inhabitants. As a February 1956 editor's note commented:

...if the mayors and councillors got onto the job of lighting up the dark townships and seeing that they were better policed, perhaps there would be less crime for *Drum* reporters to write about.¹⁴³

Survival could be precarious and unstable for both new and established city dwellers, rich and poor, as discussed previously. *Drum* often profiled prominent musicians, glamourising them as celebrities and reflecting pride in their successes. Yet it also discussed the harsh and dangerous realities of making a living as an artist in the city. In his 1953 essay on "How Musicians Die," Matshikiza, who knew from his own experiences the difficulties that even the most successful black musicians faced, chronicled the tough lives and brutal deaths of some of Johannesburg's famous musicians.

Contrary to the popular belief, the life of a musician is full of hazards. He travels hundreds of miles to entertain you. He never knows perfect rest.

¹⁴¹ C. Themba, "Talk o' the Rand," *Drum*, January 1958.

¹⁴² See, for a few examples, "Inside Johannesburg's Underworld," *Drum*, October 1951; "Behind the Crime War," *Drum*, May 1952; "Clean up the Reef," *Drum*, March 1953; "Terror Township," *Drum*, May 1953; "Organised Gangsterism," *Drum*, December 1955.

¹⁴³ Letter from the Editor, *Drum*, February 1956.

He rehearses through the day and plays for you through the night and even works for a White boss to make rough ends meet.¹⁴⁴

Some died violently, some by the bottle, and some of “chest trouble,” likely tuberculosis: “Then you whisper the word around with a voice full of fear, for you dare not call this disease by any other name!”¹⁴⁵

In addition to anxiety about crime, as stringent apartheid laws took effect and the ANC became weakened by official crackdowns and fractured by internal splits, the writers expressed increasing anxiety about the fate of multiracialism in a society rigorously dividing people by colour. In the context of an increasingly polarised atmosphere, they tackled the question head on in 1958 with a series of articles on whether or not whites and blacks hated each other. As the decade came to a close, *Drum*'s project of multiracialism, which was so fundamental to the urban identity it was projecting, seemed gravely at risk:

Everyone, it seems, has an opinion. Everyone is only too eager to let it out. And all we have done is to lift the lid. What does our enquiry finally add up to? Hate? *HATE*? Well hardly that. Not yet at any rate. *Later* for sure unless a tremendous effort by both sides turns the tide.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ T. Matshikiza, “How Musicians Die,” *Drum*, October 1953.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ “Do Blacks Hate Whites?” *Drum*, November 1958.

Conclusion

It is the indescribable vanity of every generation to believe that its young men and women are somewhat more beautiful, more plausible, certainly more perceptive and courageous than their elders, who are always assumed to have failed their young. Similarly for the older generation there is always the feeling that the young are only slightly less vivid and interesting than these elders imagine themselves to have been during their heyday.

—Lewis Nkosi, “The Fabulous Decade,” *Home and Exile*, 1965.

After three years as a supplement to the *Golden City Post*, *Drum* was resurrected as an independent magazine in 1968. The same year, Can Themba and Todd Matshikiza died in exile. Themba’s prodigious drinking had led to his premature death of a heart attack in Swaziland. He had foretold his own end in an essay on South African politics that he called “The Bottom of the Bottle.” Contemplating a coming clash between competing nationalisms—black and white—that, to him, seemed to be flip sides of the same coin, he wrote, “The dilemma is so complete! As I brood over these things, I, with my insouciant attitude to matters of weight, I feel a sickly despair which the most potent bottle of brandy cannot wash away. What can I do?”¹

Todd Matshikiza died in Zambia of cirrhosis of the liver, also likely alcohol-related.² Many *Drum* staffers, who had lived hard-drinking lives in the 1950s and after, later succumbed to alcoholism, including Modisane, Motsisi, and Gosani.³ Drinking was a symptom of heavy personal and professional pressures, and the deep frustration that

¹ C. Themba. “The Bottom of the Bottle,” *The Will to Die*, p. 115.

² S. Stein, *Who Killed Mr. Drum?* p. 208.

³ Many of their predecessors in journalism, like H.I.E. Dhlomo and R.V. Selope Thema, had also struggled with alcohol abuse.

came from living in apartheid society.⁴ Henry Nxumalo, too, had been frustrated but had “covered it always with laughter and brandy,” remembered Sampson.⁵

Nxumalo, the original Mr. Drum, had been murdered in 1957—the first of the *Drum* writers to meet an untimely end. Investigating a story in the Western Areas, he was stabbed to death late one night on his way to Newclare for an interview. His bloodied body was found early the next morning. His killers were never caught, and their identity remains a mystery.

In 1966, several of the *Drum* writers—including Themba, Matshikiza, Modisane, Nakasa, Nkosi, and Mphahlele—were banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. As a result, academic Nick Visser wrote in 1976, “[p]erhaps never has a movement of such intensity and magnitude been so thoroughly effaced—to the extent that the names of many leading participants are no longer known to South African readers.”⁶ By the time of the bannings, many had already left the country. Mphahlele was the first to leave in 1957, and he would be followed by Matshikiza, Themba, Modisane, Nakasa, Nkosi, and Maimane. In their exile, many wrote books and autobiographies, many of them well-received critically but, because of the banning, their words could not be read or published in South Africa.⁷

Bailey’s publishing empire in the rest of Africa succeeded for a time and in the early 1960s he was publishing editions of *Drum* that circulated in five regions—Ghana, Nigeria, East Africa, Central Africa, and Southern Africa.⁸ But navigating relations with the newly independent governments in East and West Africa was complicated. After

⁴ A. Sampson, “The Early *Drum*,” p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁶ N.W. Visser, “The Renaissance That Failed,” p. 42.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 55.

⁸ J. Bailey, “The Potter and the Pots,” *The Beat of Drum*, p. 148.

1960, when his base in apartheid South Africa became unacceptable to the new governments to the north, he separated the various *Drum* editions into independent companies and moved their printing operation to England.⁹ In 1972 he closed down the Ghanaian *Drum* when a military coup made it too difficult to continue publishing. In 1974, he sold the Nigerian *Drum* to his staff after the government passed an Indigenisation Bill that required media to be locally owned.¹⁰

The golden age of *Drum* was over, though the magazine did not completely change its character until Jim Bailey sold it in 1984 to the Afrikaner-controlled Nasionale Pers media company. One commentator called the new owner “about as remote from the ideals and aspirations of the original *Drum* as Ronald Reagan is from the Russians.”¹¹ But Bailey had no other buyers and, at 65 years old, he was ready to retire.

Drum, though, left a relevant legacy. More than any of its predecessors in the commercial press, as the paper argues, *Drum* became a popular publication, both in its mass circulation and its content. It wrote about subjects that would interest its readers and embraced the city and all it encompassed—the fantastic and the mundane, the high and low, and the aspirations and difficulties of city life. At the same time, by writing about these experiences, it legitimised them. Black South Africans living in cities, many of whom had no intention of turning back history and returning to some sort of mythical tribal state imagined by the Nationalist government, could read stories that resonated with their lives as city-dwellers.

⁹ This separation caused several logistical and financial difficulties for Bailey. Instead of printing all editions of *Drum* in Johannesburg, they were now printed in London and shipped back to Africa. He eventually bought printing presses for a few “key” locations in Africa. (Ibid. pp. 145-146.)

¹⁰ P. Morris, Interview with Jim Bailey, “The Rise and Fall of *Drum*,” *The New African*, October 1984, p. 53.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 52.

At every step, *Drum's* journalism resisted attempts to deny the lives of its urban readers. It self-consciously wrote about music, films, tsotsis, and shebeens, depicted people who dressed in smart western clothes, and embraced the western-influenced life in the city. Its writers used an innovative English that spoke to township readers. The magazine also encouraged black pride—by writing about successful South Africans, African-Americans, and other Africans—but also demanded cosmopolitan multiracialism from its readers. Although its project of multiracialism was increasingly under attack by the end of the decade, it created powerful images of cosmopolitan urban life across the country. And these images provided a model of modern life for its readers.

Its commercial nature was its strength and its weakness. *Drum*, in providing a modern model for its readers, also provided a modern model for their press. In trying to reach a mass audience, it was forced to connect with them by writing about everyday life and finding stories that would actually interest a diverse group of readers. But one of the reasons it succeeded in building such a large audience and is remembered so fondly today—no one talks about the *Zonk* generation—is because it extended this accessibility to serious content. It provided significant political articles and muckraking exposés that spoke to a mainstream audience. And, though it sympathised with the multiracial alliances of the ANC, as a politically independent magazine its articles included a certain valuable detachment, though not objectivity. But its commercial nature meant that its content was susceptible to internal censorship and the whims of the market.

Johannesburg remains the centre of black journalism in the country, with seven major daily papers, nine weeklies, and several zoned community papers that have a

combined circulation of over one million.¹² A mass circulation press that thrives by entertaining its readers is still the rule of the day. Two of the papers aimed at black readers, the *Sowetan* (the descendant of Paver's *World*) and the relatively young *Daily Sun* (owned by Naspers), are now in a circulation war, and the content in their pages would appear, to some extent, familiar to anyone with a knowledge of *Drum*. "In an environment where the circulation of most other papers held steady or declined, the *Daily Sun* proved an instant sensation with its menu of noir crime reporting, sex scandals, and witchcraft tales, leavened by plenty of how-to and self-help articles," wrote American journalism professor Douglas Foster in 2004, noting that the then two-year-old paper's circulation had reached 300,000.¹³ The *Sowetan*, on the other hand, is trying to find the ever-changing middle of the market by appealing to both working class and upper middle class readers.¹⁴ Though black journalists now have a wide range of papers that they can work at, the press itself remains fragmented, with most publications targeting specific demographic groups and income brackets. And there are worries that newsrooms have been slow to change, with too few black journalists in management roles, limited opportunity for quality training in journalism, and papers that are still controlled largely by white-owned corporations.¹⁵

The dream of a publication spanning the continent that Paver had more than 70 years ago, and that Bailey began to pursue more than 50 years ago, is still a goal for South African media companies. The lure of commanding a potential market of 500

¹² D. Foster, "The Trouble With Transformation," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 2004.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ A. Harber, "Can Ailing *Sowetan* Find Way in No Man's Land?" *Business Day*, September 7, 2004.

¹⁵ D. Foster, "The Trouble With Transformation," and M. Nomavenda, "Black Journalism: From Golden Days to Dog Days?" *Business Day*, October 19, 1999.

million consumers remains strong, if elusive. Today, Johnnic Communications, the South African company that owns the *Sunday Times* and the *Sowetan*, is trying to establish itself more permanently in southern, western, and eastern Africa. Other companies are following their lead. Both Primedia and the Nasionale Pers-owned Media24,¹⁶ which prints a very different version of *Drum* and the women's magazine *True Love*, are also expanding outside South Africa. In summer 2004, Media 24 relaunched *Drum* in Nairobi, with plans to sell *Drum* and *True Love* in Tanzania and Uganda as well. They are trying to boost the estimated one percent of magazine readers in East Africa.¹⁷

South African companies seeking to expand north face many of the same practical problems that Bailey confronted 50 years ago—including weak distribution and sales networks, and tricky negotiations with the governments of many different countries. “These countries are moving in the right direction, but it is very slow,” said Media24 Managing Director Salie de Swardt in 2004. “Companies should not underestimate the logistical difficulties of setting up a business further up in the continent.”¹⁸ Although Bailey had been proud of improving the printing capacity in East and West Africa,¹⁹ his inroads were short lived. Media24 flies copies of the Kenyan editions of *Drum* and *True Love* into the country because of its poor printing quality, and they have similar problems with a monthly soccer magazine that they publish in Nigeria.

¹⁶ Naspers also owns DSTV, a satellite TV company that has service throughout most of the continent.

¹⁷ “Excitement As ‘Drum’ Returns to News Stands,” *The Nation*, August 25, 2004.

¹⁸ “Continent Ripe for Media Drive,” *Business Day*, October 27, 2004. The article notes that, at the time, the highest-circulation magazine in Kenya sold only 30,000 copies a month.

¹⁹ P. Morris, “The Rise and Fall of *Drum*,” *The New African*, October 1984.

In addition to technical difficulties, creating publications that appeal to international audiences is difficult, and companies still confront issues of authenticity. “You have to be culturally sensitive, because there is a lot of national pride around the continent, and there is huge concern about a new form of economic hegemony,” said Johnnic Africa CEO Brian Pottinger, who also noted that his company has made market research a priority.²⁰

But, the promise of profits from a fully-exploited African market still draws optimistic entrepreneurs. A 2004 article about media efforts to expand throughout the continent sounds much like reports from 50 years ago, heralding the business opportunities just waiting to be seized:

When one considers that the likes of Standard Bank with operations in 16 countries, SA’s media houses are clearly late starters in the race for Africa. But with a combined population of more than 500-million who are gaining increased exposure to mainstream media through the internet and the cellphone boom, Africa’s response to Johnnic’s initial overtures illustrates that there is a market waiting to be exploited.²¹

The *Drum* Mystique

Today, *Drum* is popular culture icon. A movie about *Drum*’s early years and Henry Nxumalo’s career as Mr. Drum was released in 2004. It won a major film award,²² though it was criticised for factual errors, its use of an American lead actor, and its “crude representations” of the lives and characters of the *Drum* staff.²³ A popular

²⁰ “Continent Ripe for Media Drive,” *Business Day*, October 27, 2004.

²¹ Ibid.

²² In 2005 the movie won the Golden Stallion of Yennenga, which is handed out every other year in Ouagadougou and bills itself as the most prestigious African film award.

²³ B. Huisman, “Film accused of insulting *Drum* icons,” *Sunday Times*, November 28, 2004.

clothing designer markets tee-shirts of classic *Drum* covers in upscale stores.²⁴ And in the past two decades, there has been a voluminous amount of writing about *Drum*, both by the surviving former *Drum* staffers themselves and from academics, journalists, and artists.²⁵ One of the books about *Drum* that came out in the early 1990s addressed this fascination. “After this exposure to the 50s, *Drum* became an obsession, not only with me but with many others. Quite why is difficult to say. Maybe the magic that so captivated readers in the 50s was still as potent as ever. Maybe it was this rediscovered country that lured us,” wrote author Mike Nicol. “Maybe, maybe... Certainly no other magazine in the world has generated as much publicity so long after its heyday as has *Drum*.”²⁶

During the 1980s, after the *Drum* writers were unbanned, a new audience was introduced to their writings through independent publishing houses like Ravan press, which anthologised the writings of Themba and Nakasa. The short stories were republished, as were books about the magazine by three of its four editors during the 1950s—Sampson, Stein, and Hopkinson. Bailey released a book commemorating *Drum* and in 1987 Jurgen Schadeberg released two photographic compilations, *The Finest Photos From the Old Drum* and *The Fifties People of South Africa*, which popularised exuberant photos of the period. One of Themba’s short stories, *The Suit*, was turned into

²⁴ The designer is Stoned Cherie and the line—sold at Woolworth’s—is billed as a collection that celebrates “Afro-urban culture.”

²⁵ For example, novelist Mike Nicol wrote a 1991 book about *Drum* called *A Good Looking Corpse* which reproduced many of the writers’ stories, and a 1997 novel based on Henry Nxumalo’s life called *Bra Henry*. The play *Sophiatown* was first produced in 1986, and a documentary about Sophiatown aired on British television in April 1994.

²⁶ M. Nicol, *Corpse*, p. 4.

a popular play and books and plays about Sophiatown and the *Drum* writers appeared.²⁷

Anthony Sampson's 1956 book about his time as *Drum* editor was reprinted last year. He died shortly before the new edition was released. "The world of *Drum* and Sophiatown became a legend, commemorated by a whole literature of academic theses, reinterpretations, and recollections—all suffused with nostalgia," he wrote in the epilogue. It was quite a change, he said, from the 1950s when *Drum* received little attention, with a few exceptions, from the white-dominated South African media, academics, or writers.²⁸

There are many reasons for the nostalgia that now surrounds *Drum*. Henry Nxumalo's stories as Mr. Drum were both dangerous and powerful. He was the first black South African journalist to risk his life to get a story—though he was not the last. The early deaths of such a talented group of writers also evoke a sense of loss. They seem now to represent a whole generation of writers, artists, and intellectuals whose contributions were never realised and lost—crushed by society and the state. And, to some extent, the *Drum* writers themselves helped to create their own mythic status as a lost generation. "I think the rest of African society looked down on us as an excrescence," wrote Can Themba:

We were not the calm dignified African that the church so admires (and fights for); nor the unspoiled rural African the government admires, for they tell no lies, they do not steal, and above all, they do not try to measure up to the white man. Neither were we tsotsis in the classical sense of the term, though the tsotsis saw us as cousins... We were not 'cats,' either; that sophisticated group of urban Africans who play jazz, live jazz, and speak the township transmigrations of American slang. We

²⁷ A play based on Sylvester Stein's memoir, *Who Killed Mr. Drum?* was produced in London and South Africa in 2004 and continues to run.

²⁸ Sampson also notes that the rediscovery of *Drum* in the 1980s and 1990s found a receptive audience in a "new generation of white South African writers...fascinated by the past black world that its predecessors had shunned." (A. Sampson, *Drum*, 228.)

were the sensitive might-have-beens who had knocked on the door of white civilisation (at the highest levels that South Africa could offer) and had heard a gruff “No” or a “Yes” so shaky and insincere that we withdrew our snail horns at once.²⁹

Drum has also become synonymous with the 1950s, symbolising a whole period.³⁰ The repression that came after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 and the banning of the political groups and leaders who had appeared in the magazine fed the sense of loss.³¹ The 1950s were “an age of optimism and innocence compared with later decades,” Sampson wrote in 2004. The period represented a time of opportunities lost for the whole country, when it seemed the country could be transformed with less suspicion and more ease. Jean Hart, a friend to many of the *Drum* staff who had also had a relationship with Themba, thought *Drum*’s project of multi-racialism was tainted by the brutality that came afterwards: “After the murderous twenty or thirty years that have passed since then I don’t think you can have that innocent, delighted coming-together again,” she said.³² The physical removal of multiracial Sophiatown, too, seemed to represent a fork in the road in history—when the government left the possibility of peaceful reconciliation behind. *Drum* and its projection of cosmopolitan modern life also become conflated with Sophiatown. In 1990, journalist Allister Sparks called Sophiatown in the 1950s a small but multiracial society that offered “a glimpse of what the new industrialised South Africa might become.”³³ Whether or not a change in the course of history during the 1950s would have produced an ideal multiracial South

²⁹ C. Themba, “The Bottom of the Bottle,” *The World of Can Themba*, p. 229.

³⁰ See, for instance, the title of a collection of the magazine’s short stories: M. Chapman (ed.), *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001).

³¹ L. Nkosi, “The Fabulous Decade,” *Home and Exile*, p. 8.

³² Quoted in M. Nicol, *Corpse*, p. 4.

³³ A. Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003) p. 188.

African society is an impossible debate. But it is clear that the period is viewed, on many levels, as an opportunity lost.

The reclaiming of *Drum* has been self-conscious, especially for some black writers who looked to it as part of a heritage that was necessary in order to build a new tradition of writing. “As present-day writers we need to go out in search of the myth and redefine it. In order to do this we need to know our literary heritage,” Es’kia Mphahlele wrote in a 1980 history of black South African literature. “Those nineteenth-century and early twentieth century writers, later writers like Plaatje, Abrahams, the Dhlomo brothers, the *Drum* writers, writers from other parts of Africa—all these can be the self-education writers need to help them reconstruct the myth.”³⁴

Yet, despite the nostalgia that surrounds it, *Drum* has not escaped recent criticism. The more militant black consciousness writers of the 1970s attacked it for its dependence and willingness to work with white liberals.³⁵ And, in 1998, the new ANC-led government convened a commission to examine racism in the media. The commission’s comments on *Drum* and its legacy could have been written by the Africanist A.P. Mda 50 years earlier. John Matshikiza, Todd’s son and a *Mail & Guardian* columnist, quoted the report:

“Throughout the Fifties,” says our movement on our behalf, “these publications consciously cultivated the notion that African news was necessarily about alcohol abuse, sex, crime, rape and corruption. The model African reporter was he/she who reported best on these subjects ... The fact of the matter,” it continues, “is that many contemporary African journalists have not broken with this tradition. They believe that the fact that they are African, with easier access to the African communities, gives them a good possibility (sic) to feed the media with a rich diet of salacious stories which are believed to sell newspapers among African readers. Whatever they gain from their work, they also help to sustain the racist

³⁴ E. Mphahlele, “Landmarks of Literary History in South Africa: A Black Perspective,” p. 57.

³⁵ R. Nixon, *Hollywood*, p. 40.

images that white South Africa has of both themselves and the people from whom they are drawn. Accordingly, they too become part of the media establishment which necessarily must portray the 'new South Africa' in as negative a light as possible because they too have absorbed into their consciousness the white stereotype of the black savage.³⁶

And Matshikiza's outraged response could have been written by the *Drum*'s 1950s editors. Citing Nxumalo's daring exploits and Themba's acerbic writing, he affirmed that:

Drum magazine certainly turned out salacious stories about life in Sophiatown, Alex and the other black townships. But the best commentaries in *Drum* dealt in a sober, wry, mocking, self-mocking, angry, outraged and irrepressible way about the multifarious implications of being black in an African country run by Tarzan and Jane.³⁷

Despite the 1998 press commission's criticism, *Drum* and its writers are most often remembered with benevolent nostalgia today. Lewis Nkosi had recognised the conflict between generations who were living in an oppressed society. Each new generation of black South Africans, he said, was forced to ask—how did we get here and why didn't you succeed in liberating us? "In South Africa, this mutual antipathy and the mutual denigration between the generations are made more painful by the greatly varied nature of the challenges presented by each era, so that when the responses are seen to be different the war between the young and the old is afforded extra emotion," he wrote. Now that the ANC and other black resistance movements have succeeded in changing the government, and another generation has passed, it may have become easier for both black and white South Africans to memorialise the lost generation of the 1950s without invoking the recrimination of a generation still living with political repression (and

³⁶ J. Matshikiza, "ANC Innuendo Rewrites History," *Mail & Guardian*, April 20, 2000.

³⁷ Ibid.

without having to find concrete solutions for its contemporary legacy.) Instead of remembering the harshness of the period, some still look to the hopeful symbols that *Drum* and Sophiatown have become to provide a model for modern life. As Anthony Sampson wrote in 1994, just a week before the country's first democratic election:

Politicians as well as writers are concerned to encourage a new creative surge. "Where are the equivalents to those *Drum* writers?" the ANC leader Ahmed Kathrada asked when I was last in Johannesburg. But the political problems, the violence and uncertainty, still cast a pall over any exuberant hopes. Of course, much of the Sophiatown era came to be sentimentalised and the innocent optimism of the Fifties can never return. The new multiracial South Africa will be a more complicated, materialistic society, without simple conflicts between right and wrong, black and white. But that vitality and resilience may still be a sign that black South Africa has a spirit and hope which can transcend political deadlocks, and make its own contribution to the world.³⁸

³⁸ A. Sampson, "Rise again, Sophiatown," *The Independent*, April 11, 1994.

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