Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner Cape Town, circa. 1939 - 1959

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University of Cape Town

Abstract

This dissertation explores key aspects of the popular culture of inner Cape Town between 1939 and 1959. It is an investigation into the place and meaning of the annual `coon' carnival, local musical activity and cinema-going. These three forms of popular culture have their individual histories in the city but they were not wholly independent of each other. This study looks at some of the ways in which they were intertwined and influenced each other. It also establishes the ways in which these activities came to occupy key places in the cultural experience of working people in Cape Town. Central to this investigation has been the ways in which class and gender identities were both shaped by and shaping forces in these cultural activities. The introduction to the study makes an argument for studying `low culture' and it shows the interrelationship between the three cultural forms. In later chapters each activity is separately analysed.

Central to an understanding of the popular culture of the period is the nature of the material conditions of the city. Thus, some attention is paid to the political economy of Cape Town. While popular culture should not be reduced to its economic context, nevertheless the material circumstances of inner Cape Town common people must be considered. Carnival, music and cinema very often offered `non-political' means whereby inner city residents could express their experiences of unfavourable political and economic conditions. This study also investigates the

relationship between popular culture and organised oppositional politics in Cape Town.

Evidence used in this study range form oral testimonies to diverse documentary sources such as newspapers and government reports. However, the major source was the oral histories of former residents of District Six.

This dissertation is a contribution to South African social and oral history and more specifically, it is an addition to the growing number of studies on the history of Cape Town.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank a number of people in various capacities for their assistance and advice during the research and writing of this thesis. For the initial conception of this topic and for his congenial and patient supervision I want to thank my supervisor, Bill Nasson. I want to thank Colin Bundy for offering a short spell of employment in the History Department, University of the Western Cape, then for providing me with the excellent opportunity to do my research as part of the work of the Western Cape Oral History Project in the History Department, University of Cape Town. I am grateful to Ian Phimister for providing me with opportunities to teach and tutor in the Department of Economic History. Numerous fellow students and colleagues offered encouraging comments and suggestions at seminars and informally, most notably Nazimah Mohamed, and Andrew Merrifield - who will still criticize my work for its `lack of theory'. I am indebted to Gadija Edross for her comradely help and presence, and especially for proof-reading my work. A number of people offered very specific advice, their names appear in appropriate places throughout the body of the thesis. This thesis would not have been possible without the many people who lived in the inner city and were interviewed for the Western Cape Oral History Project, especially Mr Vincent Kolbe, who commented on and constructively criticised my attempts to write about themes he witnessed and experienced; hopefully, this work will ultimately be returned to the people who made the history this thesis is about. Finally, I must acknowledge the support of my mother and father who have always seen the value of my research, not least because they were also residents of District Six. The Human Sciences Research Council provided financial assistance towards completion of the thesis, but the conclusions are my own.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Cape Town, Cultural Studies and Oral History

This thesis is a study of three aspects of the popular culture of the ordinary residents of Cape Town in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. It is a study of the place of three significant expressions of local popular culture in the lived experience of ordinary Capetonians - the annual `coon' carnival, local musical activity and cinema-going. These conspicuous cultural properties of the city constitute the thematic lines of the thesis. And this work also explores the relationship between political organisations and popular culture in Cape Town.

That part of the Cape Peninsula referred to as inner Cape Town is the spatial focus of this study. It refers to the central area of the city in which stood District Six, part of Woodstock, the central business district, and most of the Bo-Kaap. Expressed in terms of the ward system of the Cape Town municipality, this study focuses on wards 4, 6, 7 and 8. The way in which `inner city' is employed, is to reflect the core of these localities, most specifically, the densely populated District Six. The terms `inner Cape Town' and `inner city' are not used in any distinctive sociological fashion; they are descriptive categories which can in fact also be used interchangeably given the great similarity in

the material conditions and social character of these localities at the time. Moreover, in the popular imagery of the landscape the whole area, with the addition of the rest of Woodstock and Salt River, was seen as the inside or inner-core of Cape Town, as opposed to greater Cape Town, or the `outside' - `buite', in the language of ordinary residents - which referred to the Cape Flats and also the southern suburbs. Thus, inner Cape Town is the focus of the study not for reasons of geography or landscape, but because in the period examined here it was the most populous part of the peninsula, populated most densely by working people. And this area, with its rooted inhabitants, produced the most vibrant carnival, generated a unique musical culture and possessed the cheapest and most appealing cinemas.

The temporal parameters of the study - the start of the Second World War to the pre-nineteen sixties era - were times when the cultural forms explored here were in the prime of their individual and collective histories. Moreover, during this period there was a dynamic exchange between the three cultural forms: carnival drew heavily on local musical resources, and even cinema influenced the carnival; cinema-going in-turn can be see as a form of everyday carnivalesque in the way in which some aspects of of the normal order were inverted at the bioscope; furthermore, talented musicans would find a first audience in a variety show at a inner city cinema. In this way the links among the three forms can be seen. But the three activities had some significant differences. Carnival was a seasonal occurrence, and being on the streets it was a thoroughly public event. Cinema-going was a public leisure

activity, but in a paradoxical way it could also mean a private affair, away from parental authority, for instance. Making music could be either a form of public or private leisure. One could sing inside the privacy of the home, or play in a band; and connected with music, was dancing - one could dance at home, or go to a public ballroom dance. By the nineteen forties these distinctions between private and public leisure were well-established. Also, by this time the individual activities had their own, yet connected, histories.

The origins of the `coon' carnival go back into the late nineteenth century, though its formal organisation only reached back to 1906. The peculiarities of local music production have even deeper roots, which can quite plausibly be linked to the history of slavery in Cape Town. Cinemas in the city in the nineteen forties were all already commercial concerns exhibiting `talkies', having undergone the change from silent movies in the late nineteen twenties. This study is not, however, concerned with the complex origins of these forms of popular culture. Instead, it seeks to understand their role in a specific context and during a particular period - the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. Those two decades were, in terms of cultural production, fairly stable years. For if the political and economic conditions in South Africa, and indeed in Cape Town itself, were changing, the local culture of the period, what the late Raymond Williams has termed the `structure of feeling' of the city - that collective experience of the social and

historical situation - was only slowly changing.[1] Thus, the concern here is not with origins but with forms, not so much with dramatic changes, as with continuities and the sense of cultural stability. But as in any historical investigation it does also trace changes.

Those residents of inner Cape Town, who in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties earned the least income, had the least skills, had hardly any formal schooling, and were the biggest numbers in the smallest living spaces, and constituted most of the people in the city are the breathing human subjects of the study. This thesis is therefore concerned with the popular culture of the city's working classes. Their voices are not found in the city council records or city newspapers. Yet they appear more often, in defensive mode, in court records, and can very clearly be heard, in confident tone, in transcripts of oral memories.

`Cape Town Studies'

This thesis is intended as a contribution to the store of historical knowledge on Cape Town. The social and cultural history of the city is still a most underdeveloped field of research. But in recent years there has been a growing interest in the popular culture and history of one part of the city, namely, District Six. While this fascination with the place has yielded a large body of lay accounts - in the form of newspaper articles, student essays,[2] and imaginative

1 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980), p64

2 The History Department at the University of Cape Town has had District Six as a option among research topics for its senior undergraduate students since 1985. Similarly, HDE students in the Faculty of Education were asked to do essays

literature[3] - of what life was like in the now destroyed district, hardly any academic work has been harvested from this popular interest. The forthcoming collection of essays edited by Jeppie and Soudien, *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*[4] will go some way in bringing together the existing academic work on the subject, and combine this with some political perspectives of former residents and political activists in the area. This collection of essays contains work by two historians who have undertaken path-breaking research on the history of Cape Town, Vivian Bickford-Smith and Bill Nasson. It also contains politically-committed reflections by political activists who were active in District Six, Dullah Omar and Richard Dudley. District Six is thus unique for the type of historical reflection and memory it engenders. For Cape Town as a whole the record is remarkably different.

The first attempt to write a local and social history of Cape Town is P.W. Laidler's *The Growth and Government of Cape Town* published in 1939. Laidler's work spans the entire history of the city since white settlement. Already in the late nineteen thirties he suggested the change from the 'political history of the few' to the 'more intimate and absorbing story of the many'.[5] But Laidler's work is largely an antiquarian appreciation of the city's urban and cultural

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on the topic in 1985. At the University of the Western Cape a number of student projects in its People's History Project have been devoted to the history of the area.

3 For example, Richard Rive, *'Buckingham Palace', District Six,* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987)

4 (Cape Town, Buchu Books, forthcoming)

5 (Cape Town, Unie-Volkspers, 1939), pIX

development over three centuries. When Laidler was conducting his research, and for a few decades after, the History Department at the University of Cape Town was still devoted to narrow exercises in elite political history. For Cape Town then, the production of research on its past and present was happening elsewhere, outside of the historical discipline.

From the late nineteen thirties to the nineteen fifties a series of locally-focused sociological studies were undertaken at the University of Cape Town. These studies were produced by post-graduate students in the Department of Sociology and were supervised by Professor Edward Batson. While they are not historical in nature, these studies are today a valuable source of contemporary evidence. Additionally, they illuminate the concerns and methods of South African `liberal' social science at the time. Thoroughly empirical and quantitative, these studies are concerned with the problems of `social control', poverty, and to a lesser extent, deviance. If academic theses are testimonies to the intellectual and social moment in which they were conceived and produced, then these theses are revealing of their context. Many of the studies sketch a picture of an unsavoury urban industrial background in which the worst social problems are bred. The works describe local conditions and then interpret the particular questions of their theses, but then quickly move to issues of social policy. There is the problem of poverty: what would the consequences be if it continues? There is the problem of absenteeism: how could employers solve it? and so forth. Among the theses were V. Pons' Master's thesis which was

A social investigation of female workers and a related study of their absenteeism, submitted in 1949; A.G. Weiss' study on *the Cape Coloured Woman: within an Industrial Community and at Home*, submitted in 1950; and R. Botto's thesis on *Some Aspects of Leisure Occupations of the African Population in Cape Town*, submitted in 1954. Earlier, in 1942, Professor Batson issued the results of the `Social Survey of Cape Town' he had coordinated.[6] This was an intensive investigation into the social conditions of Cape Town, the first of its kind, and never to be repeated. With government censuses these Social Survey reports yield valuable statistical data. Thus, the works under Batson are both sources of data on Cape Town, and representations of mid-twentieth century South African `liberal' academic interests.

By the late nineteen seventies there was a `great leap forward' into a concerted intellectual endeavour to understand the specific history of Cape Town. Future intellectual historians will undoubtedly locate the intellectual and social contexts of this specific entry into urban history; this is not the concern of this chapter. In 1978 the first History of Cape Town Workshop was held. In the following year a regular series of *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, based on workshop research, was launched. Since then, five volumes have been published. With this body of work many facets of the history of the city since the late nineteenth century have became clearer. Much more is now known, for instance, about prostitutes and

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6 The Reports of the Survey are kept in the Manuscripts Library at the University of Cape Town

policemen, about crime and fishermen, and about the history of Africans in the peninsula.[7] Yet, in a recent review essay on South African urban history Christopher Saunders, one of the pioneers of `Cape Town studies' and a founder of the Cape Town History Workshop, points out the lack of methodological rigour in the field.[8] Nevertheless, while the theoretical and methodological terms of Cape Town studies have never been explicitly defined, the cumulative product of the work has meant that we now know much more about the political, economic and social history of the city than ever before. However, there are numerous gaps. Of particular significance here is the dearth of research on the history of leisure and popular culture in Cape Town during any period in its past. This is a marked difference in the local work compared with the research linked to the University of Witwatersrand History Workshop.

The Wits History Workshop held its very first conference in the same year that the Cape Town workshop was held. However, the work from the former group spans a larger variety of issues. Of relevance here are the many studies on the working class cultures of the Witwatersrand. Pioneering work of scholars associated with the Wits History workshop tendency, such as Dave Coplan,[9] Eddie Koch,[10] Tim Couzens[11]

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7 Christopher Saunders et al (eds), *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vols 1-6

8 Christopher Saunders, `Methodological Issues in South African Urban History', (unpublished Report commissioned by the Human Sciences Research Council, 1990)

9 David Coplan, *In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1985)

10 Eddie Koch, `"Without Visible Means of Subsistence": Slumyard Culture in Johannesburg 1918-1940', in Belinda

and preeminently Charles van Onselen[12] have been concerned to show the bold efforts of newly urbanised and urbanising Africans to create meaningful cultural alternatives in a brutalising process of industrialisation. Coplan's work focuses on music, Koch's on slumyard culture, Couzens's on leisure and literary issues and Van Onselen's work with alcohol, labour supply and prostitution. They have all, directly or indirectly, been part of the debate on the relative values historians should attach to economic structure on the one hand, and human agency on the other.[13] This debate is part of the now worn polemic between structuralism and culturalism,[14] where the former posits an ahistorical structure determining human action, and the latter argues for an historically-informed appreciation of individual and collective behaviour. Insofar as this thesis

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Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transval*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), pp151-175

11 Tim Couzens, `An Introduction to the History of Football in South Africa', in Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside*, pp198-215 and his `"Moralising leisure time": the transatlantic connection and black Johannesburg, 1918-1936', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*, (Essex, Longman, 1982), pp314-337

12 Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*, 2vols, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1982)

13 For a recent version of this debate see Mike Morris, `Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside', *Africa Perspective*, (new series) 1(5&6), 1988, and the response by Tim Keegan, `Mike Morris and the Social Historians: A response and critique', *Africa Perpective*, 1(7&8), 1989

14 The broad parameters of the debate can be followed in Tony Bennet et al (eds), *Culture, Ideology and Social Proces: A Reader*, (London, The Open University Press, 1981). See also Richard Johnson, `Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology: Notes on an impasse', in Barret et al (eds), *Ideology and Cultural Production*, (London, Croom Helm, 1979)

has any bearing on the controversy, it cannot but be informed by the culturalist approach.

Cultural Studies

This thesis is both a contribution to studies on the history of Cape Town, and a contribution to South African cultural studies. As an approach to social and cultural phenomena cultural studies developed in Britain as a reaction to the dominant modes of interpreting art and literature, the twins which constituted culture in the perspective of the dominant tradition. The dominant view - which was presented by F.R. Leavis in the nineteen thirties and before that by Matthew Arnold - was that there was a literary tradition which constituted a canon, and which only a select few could really appreciate and evaluate; it was against this canon which all other works should be judged, the best works earning entry into the great tradition. Consequently, in this perspective common people possessed no culture, no literature, no cummulative cultural tradition. Between 1957 and 1961, Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution* were published. These works formed the break into new definitions of culture. Hoggart's sensitive treatment, perhaps even sentimental evocation, of the way of life of ordinary working people, based on his own childhood experiences, extended the prevailing definition of culture. He contributed a social definition of culture, an understanding of culture which went beyond art and literature, and which incorporated common institutions and ordinary behaviour. His book is a sort of `cultural history from below' of England. Hoggart wrote perceptively of

everyday working class experience. The passage below is emblematic of his empathetic style, yet filled with analytic insight, and it has special relevance to the thesis. About the character of working class life Hoggart observes that:

> Other people may live a life of "getting and spending", or a "literary life", or "the life of the spirit", or even "the balanced life", if there is such a thing. If we want to capture something of the essence of working-class life in such a phrase, we must say that it is the "dense and concrete life", a life whose main stress is on the intimate, the sensory, the detailed, and the personal.[15]

Williams' argument in the book referred to and in his magisterial *Culture and Society* also broke down the standard ideas about the meaning of culture. In a more detached manner Williams stressed the importance of coming to grips with *all* elements which go into making a `way of life', or culture - terms so close in Williams that they can be used interchangeably. In his work he stresses the materiality of culture, and consequently he pushes culture to the centre of his social analysis. He was concerned to capture the combination of thought and feeling, individual existence and collective experience, the influence of the past and the role of the present; and with reference to working class culture, Williams emphasised the complex relations between material conditions and consciousness. He writes of working class culture that:

> It is not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of language; it is rather, the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this.[16]

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15 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p104

16 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, (London, The Hogarth Press, 1987), p327

Along with E.P Thompson,[17] Raymond Williams' effect on South African social history is clear, though it is now rarely directly acknowledged,[18] perhaps because his influence has operated more by osmosis than through explicit theoretical borrowing. It is now such an inherent part of our radical intellectual culture that it may seem pedantic to rework his substantial arguments on the links which bind class, culture and experience.

Of older vintage, but one whose work has been used alongside that of Williams' stands the `prison notes' of the Italian Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's influence on social theory comes more from the angle of politics than literature. But the comprehensiveness of his political theory and his emphasis on the cultural and political spaces in civil society have made his concepts relevant to cultural studies and social history. Two central notions in Gramsci's work are `common-sense' and `hegemony',[19] and in these concepts lie his local relevance.[20] The terrain of the ordinary and everyday experience, the common-sense conceptions of the world of the

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17 See especially E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working-Class*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963)

18 Wiliams' later work, especially in *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977) where he refines his idea of `cultural materialism' has been particularly relevant in South Africa.

19 The summary of Gramsci's ideas which follows is derived from, David Forgacs, *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1988)

20 See, for instance, Belinda Bozzoli, `Introduction: History, Experience and Culture', in Bozzoli, (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1983), pp1-47

working class and peasantry, should be grasped, Gramsci argued, if a revolutionary party wants to succeed in winning over the masses. The `common-sense', or folk, understanding of the world is contradictory and fragmentary, holding within it many elements of the ruling class's ideas. However, it should not be thought that these conceptions of the world are merely expressions of `false-consciousness'. They should be taken seriously, for the `elementary passions' of the `popular classes' - with which the party revolutionaries should articulate their ideas - are constituted by these forms of consciousness. A party establishes its dominance, or hegemony - the term which Gramsci prefers - when it exerts `cultural, moral and ideological' leadership over its allies and within civil society. Both Williams and Gramsci stress the historicity of culture, and both insist on the interrelationship between culture and politics.

In many ways this thesis reflects the percolation of Williams' and Gramsci's theoretical insights on culture, experience and hegemony. But cultural studies does not stop with them. For instance, the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, established by Richard Hoggart, has continued the cultural studies approach and has opened new theoretical avenues as well as focusing on contemporary cultural forms and sub-cultures.[21] But there

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21 See the essays by John Clarke et al and Paul Willis in Bennet et al (eds), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, pp53-80 and pp81-110. See also John Clarke and Chas Critcher, *The Devil Makes Work: Leisure in Capitalist Britain*, (London, Macmillan, 1985)

is no unified approach in cultural studies, and even the CCCS reflects a multipicity of strategies.

More recently, as part of the general interdisciplinary direction in which historical studies have been moving, social historians have started to draw on the work of anthropologists.[22] Clifford Geertz is one anthropologist who has most probably had the greatest impact on the work of social, and more specifically cultural, historians.[23] Central to Geertz's anthropology is his notion of `thick description', which refers to the task of `sorting out of structures of significance'. In other words, thick description `involves discovering and reconstructing deep layers of meaning in human interaction'.[24] Culture, according to Geertz, consists of `traffic in...significant symbols', it is `social and public -...its natural habitat is the houseyard, the market-place, and the town square'.[25] In terms of this thesis, carnival would be one `significant symbol' in the local context. A `thick description' of it would involve finding and reconstructing the profound layers of meaning, expressed symbolically through the carnival. In this way carnival can be seen as a text about, and interpretation of, Cape Town society. This perspective on

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22 See Natalie Zemon Davis, `Anthropology and History in the 1980s: the Possibilities of the Past', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 12(2), Autumn 1981

23 Ronald G. Walters, `Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians', *Social Research*, 47, 1980. I have relied closely on this summary of Geertz's arguments.

24 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York, Basic Books, 1973), chapters 1 and 15. I want to thank Patrick Harries for referring me to the work of Geertz.

25 Walters, `Signs of the Times', p542

the event raises it out of the historical neglect from which it suffers. An interdisciplinary approach to social history can thus be enormously enriching to our understanding of the local past.

As must be clear by now, the history of Cape Town is not a classless history. Very clear lines of class, colour and gender can be drawn in the city. In most of the chapters aspects of these demarcations, as they intertwine with leisure practices, are explored. The popular culture dealt with here was very much a class expression, and specifically a working class idiom of popular culture, rather than a trans-class experience. But the conception of class used here is not one which conceives of class in static, economistic terms. That class is relational and social, as much as it is shaped by productive relations, informs the way the idea of class is used here. It is influenced by E.P. Thompson's argument that:

> By class I understand an historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I *emphasize* that it is an *historical* phenomenon. I do not see class as a `structure', or even as a `category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships....Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and in the end, this is its only definition...class is a cultural as much as an economic formation.[26]

Oral History

The prominence given to ordinary human experience in the new social history has gone hand-in-hand with the development of oral history. The obscurity of common people in conventional

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26 Quoted in R.S. Neale, *Writing Marxist Histories*, (London, Basil Blackwell, 1985), p150

historical sources was a grave impediment to any full understanding of the role of workers, peasants, women, blacks and other neglected groups in history. Moreover, oral testimonies have opened-up many areas of experience which have hitherto been impossible to examine, given the silences in the historical record. With oral history, relations between parents and children, husbands and wives, household routine, experiences of childhood, schooling and private leisure activities can be gauged.[27] But oral history also has its pitfalls, not least the danger of antiquarianism, the varying quality of memory and the subjectivity of interviewees. Raphael Samuel points out that:

> The oral historian is just as likely as anybody else to be stuck in the groove of methodological circularities, and a local history based on oral evidence alone runs as much risk of being routinised - and radically incomplete - as one which depends on the parish chest, even though the repetitions would be different.[28]

While this study draws heavily on oral testimonies collected by the Western Cape Oral History Project, this was not the only source examined. The interviews in the WCOHP are all life histories, and none of them focused specifically on leisure and popular culture. To a large extent, testimonies on these matters appear incidentally in the interviews, rather than by the design of this study. The regular and rich occurrence of testimonies on popular culture, particularly on the cultural forms investigated in the thesis, led me to interrogate documentary sources for

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27 The classic introduction to oral history is Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988)

28 Raphael Samuel, 'Local History and Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 1, Spring 1976, p205

verification. As Raphael Samuel argues, `oral evidence should make the historian hungrier for documents, not less, and when he finds them he can use them in a more ample and more varied way than his sedentary colleagues'.[29] Indeed, something like this happened - from oral evidence the road was taken to the archives, and from there back to the interviews, especially after it was discovered how limited the documentary record was when it came to the experience of common people. One example of the way in which the existing oral evidence influenced the thematic shape of my work can be illustrated by a snippet of testimony from a former District Six resident, Mr Kenneth Jackson. He remembered the kinds of entertainment local residents engaged in:

> No, it was always pictures the coons and the coloured people, all the people. The old folk, they got their own music. They make their own music every day and weekends.[30]

`Pictures' - that is, the cinema - carnival and music, emerged as the dominant public leisure activities in inner Cape Town, in this single response; in other interviews, they come through at different points in the testimony. In newspapers of the time these activities appear regularly, and a perceptive journalist of the *New Age* (previously *The Guardian*), Alex La Guma, reported on the youth of District Six in the following terms:

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29 Samuel, `Local History', p204

30 Mr Kenneth Jackson interview, p34. Since all the interviews in this thesis are located in the Western Cape Oral History Project's oral archive at the University of Cape Town no further information will be given. A list of the interviews consulted, with relevant data on the ages, gender, occupational and religious background of interviewees, appears in an adjoining appendix.

> Many of them have talent. On the balcony of a tenement a group of boys went through an impromptu jam session with guitar, bass and maracas that would make any jazz expert wonder....But the only outlet for their talent is through the coon carnival at the beginning of each year, or at contests held at local cinemas.[31]

Music, carnival, cinema. Again they appear in one breath, now in a different source. And so, the process of research and writing was one of moving back and forth between oral and documentary evidence - for comment and annotation, interpretation and colour, by one on the other and vice versa. Yet, there are gaps in the testimonies, and each cultural form could be studied intensively. And for this, more interviews would need to be conducted, specifically interviews with respondents who were deeply engaged in a particular leisure practice. For instance, a search for ushers in District Six cinemas, or a call on `coon' troupe organisers, or more musicians could be located. But, any specialised study on any particular activity will find its greatest resource in oral evidence, not the conventional documents.

Belinda Bozzoli has suggested three ways in which oral testimony, what she called `experiential evidence', could be used: qualitative use, ideological use, and interpretive use. The qualitative use of oral evidence can `convey something of the quality of the lives of people to outsiders who have themselves not experienced that way of living', points out Bozzoli.[32] In this study, the ideological and

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31 *New Age*, 20 September 1956, in Andre Odendaal (ed), *Liberation Chabalala and Other Stories: Alex La Guma's Reports on South Africa, 1956-1962*, (London, Kliptown Books, forthcoming)

32 Bozzoli, `Introduction', p10

interpretive methods of evaluating the oral evidence was not employed, though a great deal of exciting work in oral history is now being done along these lines, internationally and locally.[33] The same oral testimonies used qualitatively here can of course be analysed to grasp the ways in which dominant ideologies percolate in ordinary consciouness, and they can be hermeneutically read to see how common people construct meaning for themselves out of their pasts in the very process of being interviewed. But there is no single correct approach to the use of oral testimonies, as sources they are open to as varied analytic and empirical purposes as any other historical evidence.

The development of oral history in Cape Town is a precious asset in the local and social history enterprise.[34] This thesis is then also a modest contribution to the growth of oral history in Cape Town, and an addition to the developing field of `Cape Town Studies'. The themes and issues outlined in this introduction find fuller expression in the body of the study. Chapter two plots the broad contours of the local political economy. Then follows an examination of the `coon' carnival. The fourth chapter deals with the production of

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33 See, for example, A. Portelli, `The time of my life: functions of time in oral history', *International Journal of Oral History*, 11(2-3), 1981; Luisa Passerini, `Oral History in Italy After the Second World War: From Populism to Subjectivity', *International Journal of Oral History*, 9(2), 1988; Luisa Passaerini, `Oral Memory of Fascism', in David Forgacs (ed), *Rethinking Italian Fascism*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), pp185-196; Isabel Hofmeyer, `"*Nterata*"/"The Wire": Fences, Boundaries and Cultural Resistance in the Potgietersrust District', (unpublished Wits History Workshop paper, University of Witwatersrtand, 1990)

34 See Bill Nasson, `The Oral Historian and the Historical Formation in Cape Town', in Christopher Saunders et al (eds), *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, 6, 1988, pp13-24

local musicians and music, while the fifth chapter focuses on the cinema. Finally, the last chapter explores the relationship between political organisations and popular culture.

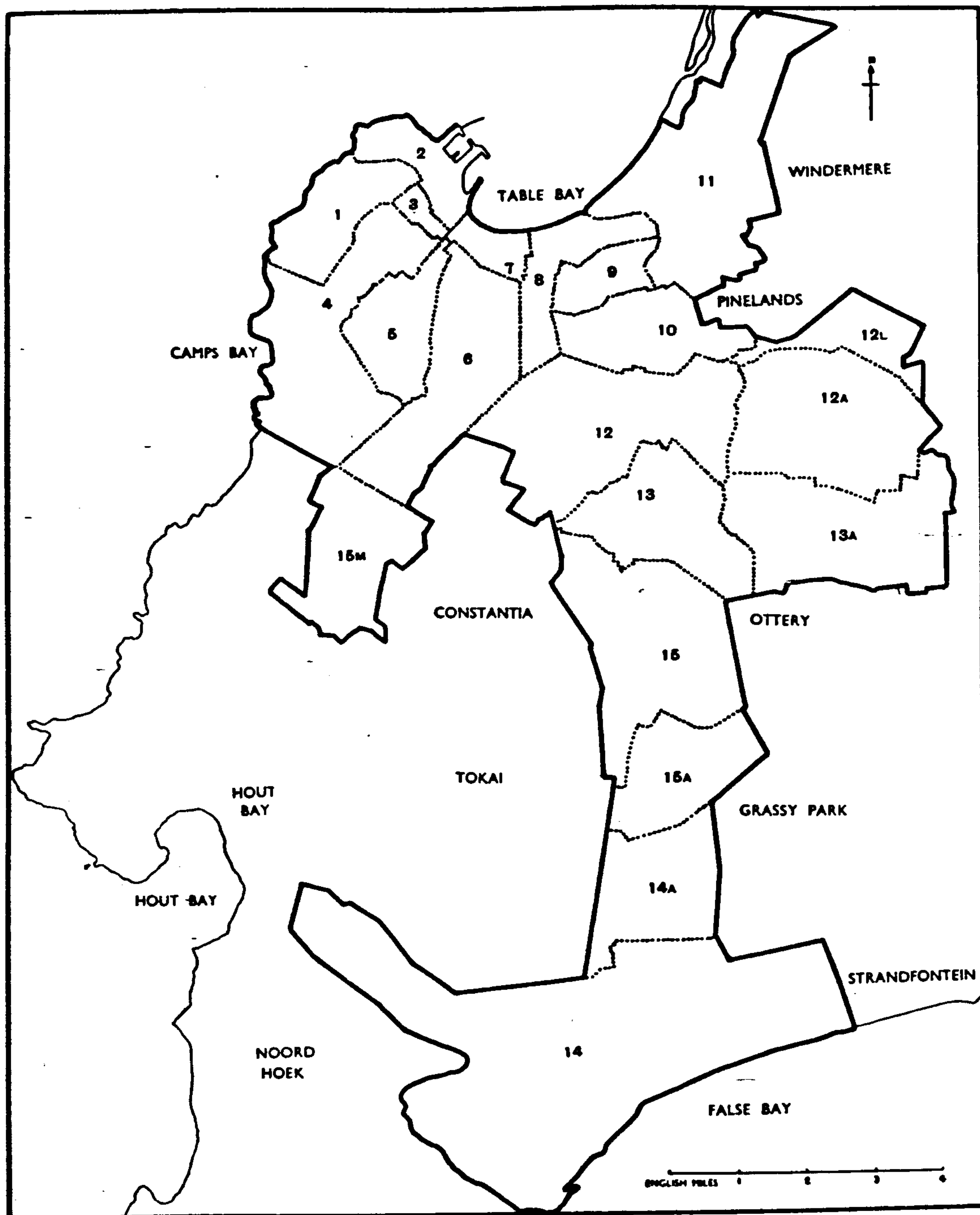

FIG. 1.—Ward Boundaries. Municipality of Cape Town, 1936.

Source: E Batson, 'Notes on the Distribution and Density of Population in Cape Town, 1936', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 21(4), 1947

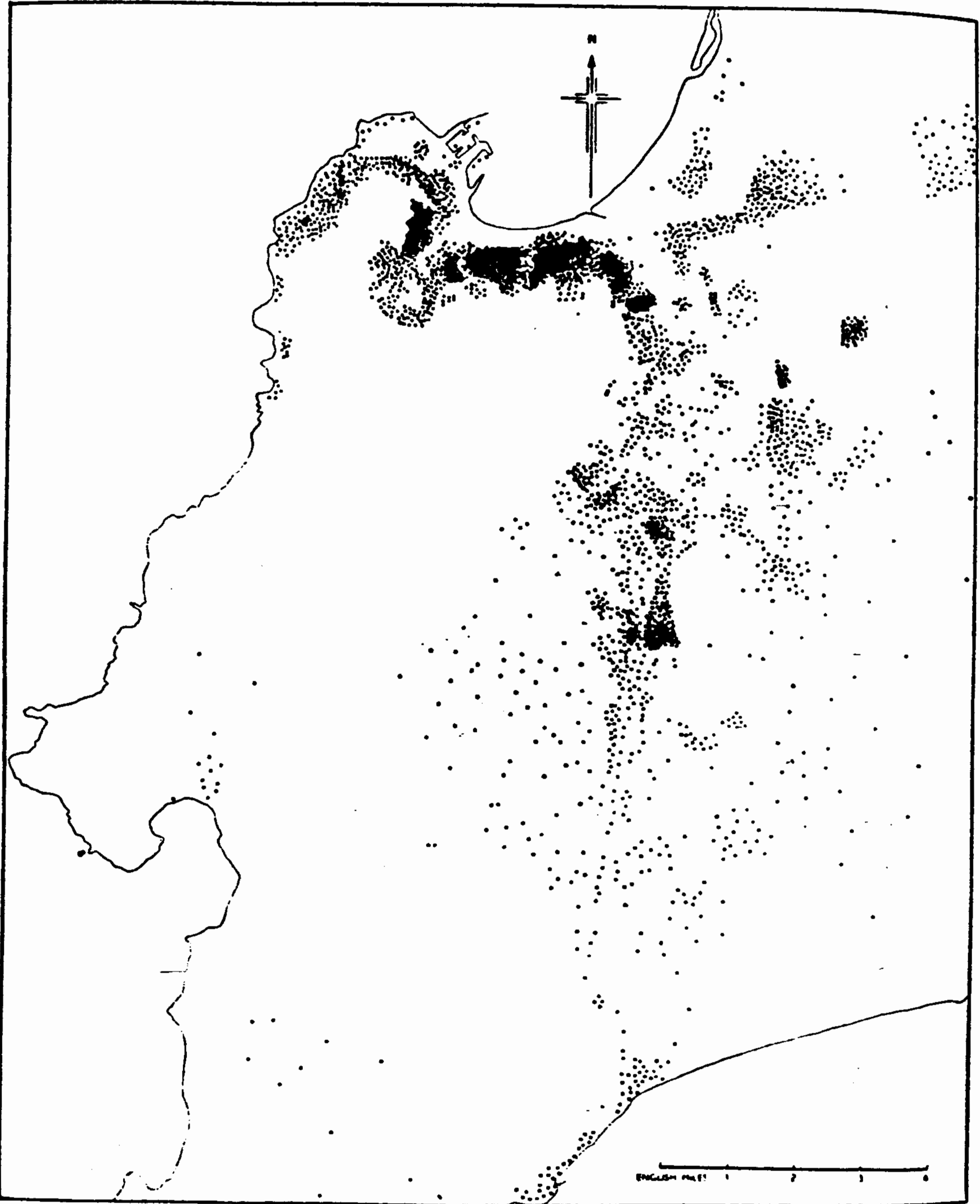

FIG. 2.—Distribution of population. Cape Town and environs, 1936. Each dot represents one hundred persons.

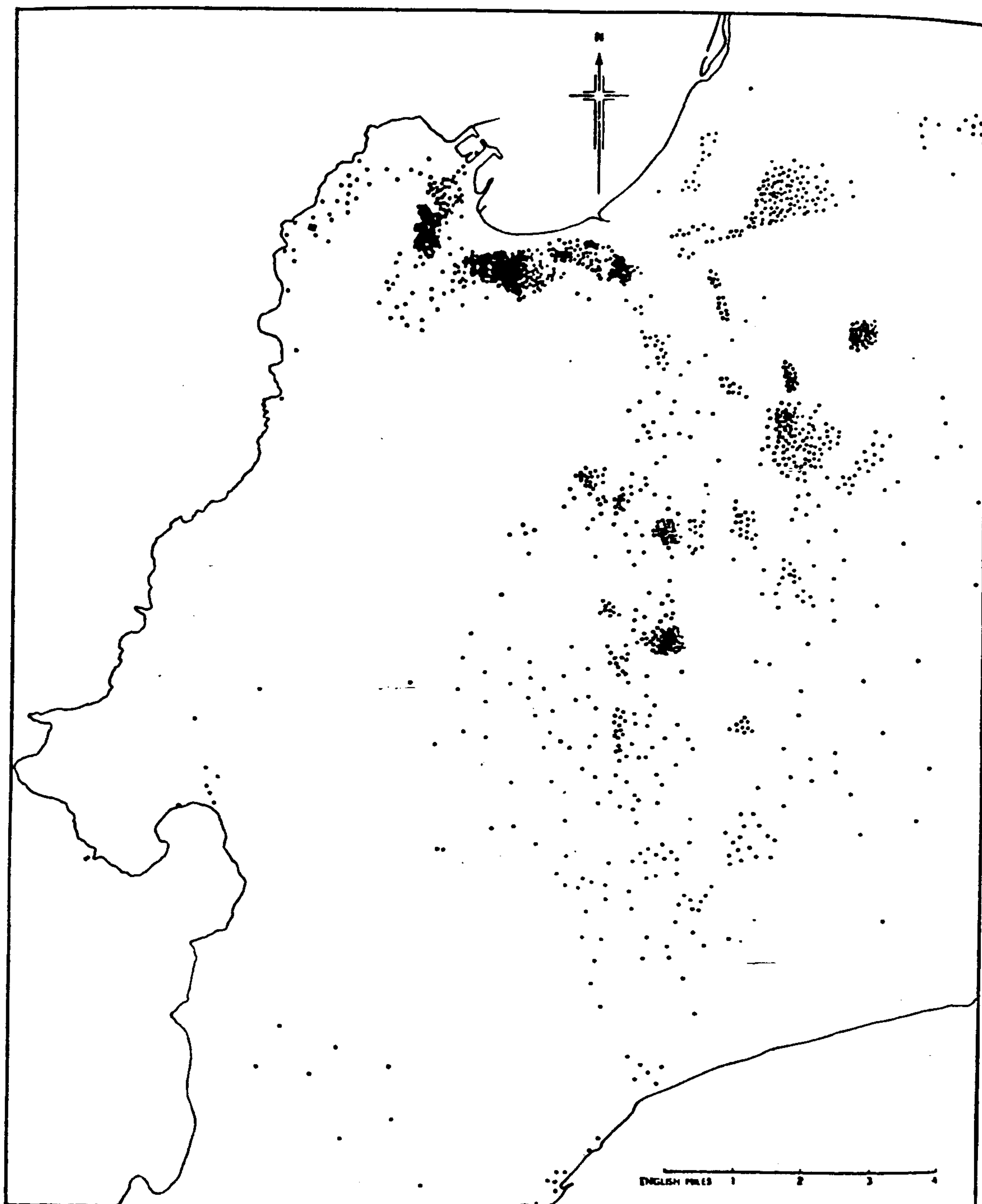

FIG. 3.—Distribution of Non-European population. Cape Town and environs, 1936.
Each dot represents one hundred Non-Europeans.

Chapter Two

Political Economy, Material Conditions and the Production of Popular Culture

This chapter explores the material conditions in which popular and working class culture was produced between 1939 and 1959. It endeavours to provide an overview of the changing political economy of Cape Town and the shifting material base of working class experience from the beginning of the Second World War to the end of the nineteen fifties. For in the economic history of South Africa this period witnessed a series of significant shifts in the nature and forms of capitalist accumulation and class struggle. These changes affected the form of working class culture, without necessarily determining it.

The economic history of the twentieth century Western Cape is not particularly well-served by the existing historiography on the region. The economic historian David Kaplan has shown that almost all historically-grounded studies of the South African economy have neglected the `spatial allocation of economic activity' and regional differences, and have been concerned instead with the economy on a national scale.[1] Studies of the particularities

1 David Kaplan, `Industrial Development in the Western Cape, 1910-1940: Composition, Causes and Consequences', (unpublished `Western Cape: Roots and Realities' Conference paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1986), p1

of the local political economy are few and far between. Recent studies, such as those by Vivian Bickford-Smith and by Alan Mabin, have mainly focused on aspects of the social and economic history of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Cape Town.[2] Yet, there is sufficient secondary literature and unpublished work to venture some generalisations on the economy of mid-twentieth century Cape Town.

The trajectory of economic and social change in Cape Town has always been intertwined with broader economic transformations in South Africa. While the local economy and popular culture of Cape Town had their own inflections, they were also products of a larger and transforming national political economy. This chapter tries to contextualise the regional political economy and focuses particularly on the growth of secondary industry, Coloured Labour Preference policies (which marked the discourse and practice of local state and capital), and the material reality of working class life in Cape Town. Thus, both the nature of productive relations and aspects of working class reproduction are addressed.

The two most momentous developments in the economic history of South Africa from the start of the Second World War to

2 See, for instance, Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Commerce, Class and Ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875 to 1902', (unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1988), Alan Mabin, 'Waiting for Something to Turn Up? The Cape Colony in the Eighteen Eighties' in Alan Mabin (ed), *Organisation and Economic Change*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1989), pp21-47 and Mabin, 'The Underdevelopment of the Western Cape, 1850-1900' in Wilmot James and Mary Simons (eds), *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989), pp82-94

the end of the nineteen fifties were the strengthening of secondary industry and the increasing monopolisation of major sectors of the economy. One historian of South Africa's industrial development, A.J. Norval, writes of the remarkable expansion in manufacturing during the Second World War, commenting:

> A new era had dawned in the industrial progress of South Africa. The country went from a labour-intensive to a capital intensive basis of its manufacturing industries. Over the next 20 years a complete transformation took place in the plant set-up of secondary industry.[3]

During the Second World War, the South African economy benefitted from a temporary falling away of overseas competition; war industries were pushed into full production regardless of costs; local inputs into production were greatly increased; and the colour and gender categories of labour were changed dramatically as more black men and, especially, black women were employed in secondary industry.

The demands on war-time production stimulated the rapid expansion of secondary industry and during the nineteen forties manufacturing surpassed mining and agriculture in its contribution to the country's Gross National Product.[4] Between 1948 and 1958, the number of private manufacturing establishments grew from 13 879 to 16 838, and the value of

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3 A.J. Norval, *A Quarter of a Century of Industrial Progress in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Howard Timmins, 1962), p53

4 This section draws extensively on Graeme Bloch's study of manufacturing industry in South Africa, *The Development and Manufacturing Industry in South Africa, 1939 - 1969*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1980), pp91-208. It also relies on his, 'Monopoly Capitalism and Dependent Industrialisation: The Development of South Africa's Manufacturing Industry 1939 - 1969',(Unpublished MS, no date)

their gross output grew from 610 000 000 pounds to 1 503 000 000 pounds.[5] Manufacturing output grew by more than 80 percent from 1939 to 1944 . In this process, local materials were extensively consumed for manufacturing purposes; from 52 percent of input in 1938 to 60 percent in 1945. Between 1946 and 1957 manufacturing industry contributed 25 percent of South Africa's domestic capital formation, as compared to mining's 18 percent.

It may appear that as a consequence the economy converted decisively from one in which production was concentrated in undermechanised small-scale establishments to a manufacturing economy based on repetitive mechanised processes. But a closer assessment of the situation reveals that while the average value of plant and machinery in the immediate post-war years was 4 500 pounds, nearly 75 percent of establishments had capital assets of under 1 000 pounds. Average gross output was 23 1000 pounds; but 60 percent of industrial establishments had less than 5 000 pounds per annum. Thus, while there was a rapid growth of large establishments, the majority of factories remained small.[6] But the growth in secondary industrialisation was accompanied by a steady concentration and centralisation of capital. Already in 1940, in 15 industrial categories a mere 3.2 percent of the establishments produced 50 percent of gross output. There was further monopolisation in the years after the war when international competition again became a

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5 A.J.Norval, *A Quarter of a Century*, pp2-3

6 Duncan Innes argues that in 1953/4, 65 percent of firms employed fewer than nine workers, and 92 percent fewer than 49 workers. See his *Anglo American and the Rise of Modern South Africa*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p169

major factor in the capacity of local industries to operate successfully; a key reason for this was that small concerns were unable to cope with the changing requirements of the new post-war capitalist era of Fordist mass production. The cost of the new technologies meant different responses to the imperative to mechanise by larger and smaller capitals. In 1945 the Board of Trade and Industries observed that:

> Important technological developments have taken place prior to and during the present war - much of the Union's industrial plants will have to be scrapped and processing radically redesigned if the challenge of a highly competitive post war industrial and commercial world is to be effectively met.[7]

The South African state offered no substantial legal impediment to the growing monopolisation of the economy and in the mid-nineteen fifties smaller firms were slowly being taken over by large corporations like Anglo-American. Iron and steel, sectors of engineering, textiles, chemicals, explosives and rubber-tyres all displayed very high concentration/centralisation indices. By 1954, one observer found that in the country's economy, `rather frequently...the position is one of monopoly or new monopoly.'[8]

Accompanying the growth of monopoly capitalism was the swelling assemblage of workers on the single factory floor. Accordingly, in 1953 the percentage of plants which employed over 300 workers had increased; though it was not a considerable rise its significance becomes clear when it is

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7 Quoted in Bloch, `Monopoly Capitalism and Dependent Industrialisation', p5

8 Quoted in Bloch, `Monopoly Capitalism and Dependent Industrialization', p8

noted that these plants accounted for about 44 percent of total employment.

The modifications in the structure of the economy carried with it the expansion and radicalisation of the black urban working class. The total urban African working class increased from 1,1 million in 1936 to 1,7 million in 1946 and to 2,3 million by 1951.[9] Doug Hindson has shown that `African urbanisation was rapid during the 1940s, and that by the 1950s a substantial proportion of the African population and workforce was already permanently settled in the towns.'[10] This urban migration and settlement was largely due to the labour demands of manufacturing industry.

Forty percent of African workers in industry were unionised in 1945, and in the same year there were 285 000 workers in 119 unions under the Confederation of Non-European Trade Unions. An index of the radicalisation of the working class is the 84 034 African workers on strike in 1946 compared with the 730 African workers on strike in 1940. Although the African mineworkers' strike over wages and union recognition was ruthlessly suppressed in 1946, in the nineteen fifties capital was again hit by African working class militancy, though not of the same magnitude as in the nineteen forties. The state had to deal with popular militancy, such as the Defiance Campaign and the activities of the Congress of the People in the early nineteen fifties, in both urban centres and rural areas of the country. Urban struggles over

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9 Doug Hindson, *Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p53

10 Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p54

reproductive issues such as those around housing and transport proliferated from the late nineteen forties as the examples of transport boycotts in Evaton, Brakpan, Sophiatown and Alexandra in the mid-nineteen fifties testify.[11]

In conditions of rapid industrialisation and mercuric urbanisation, working class lifestyles, leisure and culture underwent dramatic adjustments. The popular culture of the segregated towns and urban squatter settlements was characterised both by continuities with earlier forms and by bold innovations in the changing urban contexts. Popular working class music, for example, blended American and permutations of indigenous music styles such as marabi and kwela, creating sounds like mbaqanga, and in Cape Town vernacular guma strains were redeployed in local jazz alongside Western swing rhythms. The nineteen forties and nineteen fifties have been shown to have been decades of vibrant popular music and cultural production throughout urban South Africa: on the Witswatersrand in centres such as Sophiatown, and in Cape Town inner-city locales such as District Six. The former, `set the pace, giving urban African culture its pulse, rhythm, and style during the 1940s and '50s....A new synthesis of African culture sprang up there, shouting for recognition.'[12] The ensuing chapters of this thesis examine the popular culture of inner-city

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11 Bloch, *The Development of Manufacturing Industry*, p231. See also Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), pp156-171, pp171-181 and p195

12 David B. Coplan, *In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black Music and Theatre* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p144

Cape Town. But first the political economy of the mother city during the nineteen forties and fifties needs to be analysed.

Though Cape Town was the original locus for the transformation of the country into a capitalist social formation, it was overtaken by the late nineteenth century mineral revolution on the Witwatersrand as the commercial and industrial capital of South Africa. The development of diamond mining at Kimberley and gold mining on the Witwatersrand profoundly affected the trajectory of the Cape Town economy. The historical geographer, Alan Mabin, has demonstrated how the economic growth of Cape Town was in the last decades of the nineteenth century linked to `government and long-distance financial activities, not local production'. He argues that the commitment to northern expansion, on the basis of mining activity there, led to a process of economic underdevelopment in the Western Cape.[13] For the period from 1910 to 1940, David Kaplan has shown how the Western Cape economy was in certain respects similar but nevertheless differed significantly in other respects from that of the Witwatersrand. He has argued that for the period, `there is no generalised failure of industrial development in the Western Cape'.[14] The significant difference between the Witwatersrand and the Western Cape economies was that the latter was, according to Kaplan, `a

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13 Mabin, `The Underdevelopment of the Western Cape", p93

14 Kaplan, `Industrial Development in the Western Cape', p7

less diversified and less integrated regional economy marked by a pronounced weakness in capital goods production'.[15]

The economic marrow of the city before the Second World War was commerce and small-scale secondary industry. Industries such as clothing, food and drink, and construction - the most important sectors of the local economy - and transport services served mainly local demand. Like the rest of the country, Cape Town's economy at first benefitted tremendously from the Second World War. By the end of the first year of the war, production in the Western Cape had increased substantially. But between 1942 and 1943 the increase in the nett value of output declined. A short upsurge followed but there was a further decline towards the end of the war.[16] At the end of the war raw materials and machinery were more easily available and production changed from mainly military requirements to consumer goods. Consequently, the economy began to boom. After the war local manufacturers, like their counterparts on the Witwatersrand, began to invest in new capital goods. In many cases new premises were constructed in the post-war years for modern mechanised production, like the clothing factories in Woodstock and Salt River on the edges of central Cape Town. The short stretch from central Cape Town to the near exhausted brickfields at Salt River were both adjacent to a source of labour and a local market, and it grew to become

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15 Kaplan, `Industrial Development in the Western Cape', p3

16 John Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries in Greater Cape Town, 1652 - 1972*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1973), p70

the clothing belt of the Western Cape region. Rex Trueform was started in 1946 in Main Road, Salt River, and from then on a number of clothing concerns were established there; indeed, most of the post-war clothing factories were located in Salt River. An urban geographer noted that by the early nineteen seventies:

> A distinct belt may now be discerned extending from Barrack Street on the western edge of District Six along New Market Street and Sir Lowry Road in Woodstock, Albert and Victoria Roads in Salt River, to the northern edge of Observatory. This contains approximately 41 percent of all clothing factories in Greater Cape Town.[17]

To a lesser extent, there were the reclaimed Paarden Eiland swamps, Kensington, and Ndabeni - all to the north of the city centre - which were sites for the location of industry in the immediate post-war period, though they later developed to become locations for the light metal, engineering and machinery industry of the Western Cape.

In Cape Town, the concentration of workers on the factory floor did not proceed apace with the rest of the country; relatively small-scale establishments continued to predominate in Cape Town manufacturing. Between 1945 and 1950 the number of industrial establishments in the Western Cape increased from 1 446 to 1 928, an increase of 33.3 percent.[18] However, between 1950 and 1955 the number of industrial establishments fell to 1 292. The small establishments which closed down had flourished in the immediate post-war boom, but because of undercapitalisation

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17 Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, pp106-109.

18 Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p113

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17 Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, pp106-109.

18 Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p113

could not compete successfully over the longer term with bigger firms. During the five year boom, between 1955 and 1960, the number of establishments rose again to 1 886.[19]

Whatever the fortunes of individual capitalists and their factories in the modernising economy of the city the working class expanded progressively in the decades from the beginning of the war. In 1938 most of the Cape Town workforce was employed in the service industries, the clothing and textiles sector, the alimentary, and the building and construction industries. Coloured women then already dominated the garment industry.[20] In 1951, forty four and a half percent of the economically active `coloured' population was engaged in secondary industry, while 46.5 percent was active in tertiary activities, particularly as service workers. But by 1951, most workers were employed in secondary industry, and especially in the textile and clothing sector.[21] From the end of the Great Depression, from 1932 until 1940, the total labour force in the Western Cape increased by 42 percent; the `non-white' labour force expanded by nearly 100 percent, from 18 000 to 35 400. During the Second World War there was a rapid increase in employment with the total number of workers increasing by 19 342, an increase of 27.8 percent. In racial

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19 Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p77

20 M. Marshall, *The Growth and Development of Cape Town*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1940), p107

21 Noel B. Murray, *The Economic Position of the Cape Coloureds in the Secondary Industries and the Tertiary Activities of the Western Cape*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1958), Table 12, p20

terms, it was largely the `non-white' working class which expanded since many white men went to the war,[22] but demobilisation later boosted white male employment in industry. The first half of the nineteen fifties witnessed little movement in the overall size of the working class. However, the racial and gender composition of the working class shifted with white male and female numbers dropping and the proportion of `non-whites', male and female, increasing by 10.1 and 22.4 percent respectively.[23]

It is also important to note that from the post-Great Depression period through the war years into the early nineteen fifties, African employment in the Western Cape rose consistently despite attempts to push back a growing permanent urban African presence. A short digression on the role of African labour and attempts at its exclusion from the Western Cape is necessary here. For the period covered in this thesis, Ian Goldin's recent study on Coloured identity and the Coloured Labour Preference policy is of particular relevance. Goldin argues that the Coloured Labour Preference policy was `one side of a dual-pronged attempt to restructure Coloured identity which had as its other prong the political incorporation of Coloured people'.[24] However, it has been shown that the measures to control the influx of Africans had more to them than the

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22 John Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p159

23 Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p75

24 Ian Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Longman, 1987), pXV

restructuring of `coloured identity' and the political accommodation of `coloureds'. Barry Kinkead-Weekes has criticised Goldin's interpretation and has concluded that, `organised employers and the local authority (representing not only employers' but also ratepayers' interests) clearly feared the political consequences of African urbanisation, and had a definite economic interest in the perpetuation of the migrant-labour system'.[25] Nevertheless, the African presence throughout the nineteen forties and most of the nineteen fifties increased in the Western Cape. Their presence was of course beset with strife and struggle, and a low living standard.[26] Noting the continually contested nature of the African presence in Cape Town could partly explain the persistent `coloured' ethnic character of the Western Cape's settled urban popular culture. For ethnically-based labour preference policies had been a feature of the political economy since at least the early nineteen twenties. Thus the specific ethnic texture of local popular culture and popular politics cannot be ascribed to any ahistorical `spirit' or any inherent qualities of the `coloureds' of the city. As a shaping factor, the implicit and later overt Coloured Labour Preference policy must be taken into account. Here it is perhaps also pertinent to recognise one of Gavin Lewis' arguments for the `coloured'

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25 Barry Kinkead-Weekes, `Influx control and Resistance in Cape Town, 1937-47', (Paper prsented to a Work-In-Progress Workshop on the History of Cape Town, November 1989, History Department, University of Cape Town), p6. Kinkead-Weekes' still uncompleted and unpublished work on influx control and the CLPP has some novel insights into the politics and economics of the emergence and development of the CLPP.

26 However, it must be added that on the whole African wages in Cape Town was higher than wages for Africans on the Witwatersrand. See Kaplan, `Industrial Development', p14

character of the African Peoples' Organisation led by Dr Abdullah Abdurahman. Lewis makes the point that the APO was an `organisation based in a city where over 90 percent of the blacks were Coloureds, and in a province where 80 percent of Coloureds lived'.[27]

In 1936, Africans made up 13.9 percent of the total number of employees in private industry in Cape Town. By 1953 they formed 26.8 percent and were the second largest racial group employed. African employment in the public sector was equally spectacular, rising from 2.3 percent of the employment force in 1936 to 16.4 percent in 1953.[28] But between the start of the war and the full implementation of the Coloured Labour Preference policy by the late nineteen fifties, first the war, then the needs of the local post-war labour market and the local state largely determined the insecure presence and experience of Africans in the urban Western Cape.

The black (`coloured' and African) working class in Cape Town suffered both the indignities of underpaid wage labour and the realities of urban poverty. The example of inadequate housing is sufficiently representative evidence of the condition of the working class. In 1940 a letter to the *Cape Standard* noted the dilapidated condition of District Six houses and added,

> on top of this there is the ridiculous high rent. I think that it is high time that the Health Department

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27 Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African `Coloured' Politics*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p202

28 N.J. Murray, *The Economic Position of the Cape Coloureds*, p11

> or the City Council should take a serious view of this matter. Property owners in District Six should be compelled to renovate dilapidated buildings.[29]

In addition to poor housing was the fact of a housing shortage throughout the nineteen forties and fifties. In 1943 a Committee investigating conditions on the Cape Flats reported that, `unless the present rate of building is accelerated and until other local authorities embark on building schemes, there will be no reduction in the basic housing shortage of the Peninsula.'[30] In numerical terms the Cape Town municipality required 12 000 houses representing approximately 60 000 (`Europeans' and `non-Europeans') who needed to be housed. Additionally, another 800 dwellings per annum were required for `non-Europeans' at the current rate of population growth.[31] In October 1943 the conservative `coloured' weekly *The Sun* published figures from the University of Cape Town's *Social Survey of Cape Town*, and titled its article sensationally as the `Evil Housing Deficit'.[32] By 1951 very high percentages of `non-Europeans' were housed in `low grade' houses. The urban geographer Peter Scott, calculated that a `low grade' dwelling had a market value of less than 2 000 pounds. And it was in houses with such low market value that `coloureds' were being housed.[33] By the mid-nineteen fifties inner Cape Town was

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29 *Cape Standard*, 14 May 1940

30 UG 18 - 43, *Report of A Committee of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into Conditions Existing on the Cape Flats and Similarly-Affected Areas in the Cape Division, 1942* paragraph 197

31 UG 18 - 43, Table 4

32 *The Sun*, 22 October 1943

still the area of the most dense settlement of the working class. Scott observed that,

> although the outward drift of population is readily apparent, the progressive deterioration of buildings near the centre and the invasion of the areas by warehouse and factories have been accompanied by far less exodus than the conditions justify or might lead one to expect. Coloured quarters of District Six, Woodstock and Salt River, which carry some of the highest densities in Cape Town, have undergone substantial increases in population, despite considerable industrialization.[34]

This observation also bears out an argument advanced in the following chapter that the inner-city remained the centre of Cape Town's popular leisure right into the late nineteen fifties. But that leisure was played out against a backdrop of poor housing and poverty. Professor Edward Batson found in the late nineteen thirties that in Cape Town `one in every four households was below the Poverty Datum Line'. And, that `of every ten households below the PDL 8 were `coloured', 1 was `native', and 1 `european'.[35] Furthermore, according to the records of the Medical Officer of Health for Cape Town for the ten years between 1936 and 1946, Peter Scott calculated that,`the mean annual tuberculosis death rate for all races was 303 per 100 000 - 73 for Europeans and no less than 530 for non- Europeans'.[36] With such depressing statistics to hand it would appear inconceivable that the inner Cape Town working class had any energy for leisure and imagination for a vibrant popular culture. The

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33 Peter Scott, `Cape Town: A Multi-Racial City', *Geographical Journal*, 121, 1955, p153

34 Scott, `Cape Town: A Multi-Racial City', p156

35 Edward Batson, *an Interim Report on the Social Survey of Cape Town*, 1942, p13

36 Scott, `Cape Town: A Multi-Racial City', p154

late Richard Rive has said that, `it is notoriously easy to romanticise about slum life and sentimentalise it. In truth the slum was damp, dirty and dank'.[37] Yet, the local way of life was filled with meaningful cultural activities.

This chapter has sketched the contours of the political economy of inner Cape Town during the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. It is clear that the manufacturing sector, and particularly the garment industry, was the major area of employment of especially the female workers of Cape Town. The period investigated in this thesis was also the time when manufacturing moved ahead of other sectors such as mining in its contribution to the South African economy. The specific conditions of Cape Town affected the class and colour configuration of the inner Cape Town working class. Thus, the discourse and policy of Coloured Labour Preference affected the racial and ethnic character of local popular culture. And leisure and expressive cultural activities were all generated against a backdrop of inadequate housing and general poverty.

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37 Richard Rive on District Six in Mothobi Mutloatse, *Umhlaba Wethu: A Historical Indictment*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1987)

Living Conditions in District Six.

Source: District Six Collection, UCT Manuscripts Library

Chapter Three

The Class, Colour and Gender of Carnival : A Cultural Form, Popular Culture and Leisure in Cape Town

By the start of the Second World War the inhabitants of Cape Town possessed a well-developed repertoire of public leisure and popular cultural ventures. But, with few exceptions, social divisions of class overlapped with cleavages based on colour in the experience of leisure and in the production of popular culture. While the mostly white middle-class citizens of Cape Town gravitated towards the Municipal Orchestra[1], plush city cinemas and theatres, and the often customarily segregated seasides, members of the predominantly `coloured' working class engaged themselves in private pleasures like household music-making and the public leisure of choral clubs, cheap inner-city cinemas and an underworld of gambling such as `throwing dice' and `fah-fee'.[2] Legal betting at Kenilworth and Milnerton racing

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1 A reading of any of the meeting minutes of the Amenities Committee of the City Council reveals the priority the orchestra received. See for example **Cape Archives**, Minutes of the Amenities Committee of the City Council, January 1947, 1\4\5\5\1\6 for the attention given to the maintenace of the orchestra. See *The Sun* 8 March 1940 for complaints by the `coloured' petty bourgeoisie over the lack of financial support for the `coloured' Spes Bona Orchestra and the selection of music offered by the Municipal Orchestra (the discourse is revealing): `...don't feed us all on "Chopin", otherwise we shall renege and go to the bioscope instead'.

2 `Fah-fee' was a `numbers game' controlled by a few inner-city Chinese who used `coloured' `runners' to collect

grounds and some of the seasides, were sites where class and colour was slightly blurred. About the former an observer noted at the time that,

> the various stands (at Kenilworth) are open to all-comers according to their purse, with the exception of the enclosure reserved for members of the Turf Club. Race-going is a favourite Saturday afternoon pastime for the Cape Town Coloureds, and there are occasions when up to a quarter of the Grand Stand's patrons appear to be Coloured or Malay.[3]

If the sounds of musical performance and the costs of gambling reflected the class and colour configuration of the city in the pre- and post-war years, then organised sport such as football, rugby and cricket compressed the same inequalities and tensions.[4] Of particular note was an event of singular significance on the calendar of working-class culture - the New Year's Carnival - and it expressed in real and symbolic terms the imbalances, aspirations and suspicions of the city and its underclasses. This chapter explores the class, colour and gender character of Cape Town popular culture through an examination of the New Year's Carnival from the start of World War Two to the end of the nineteen fifties.

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bets and distribute `returns'. I thank Mr Vincent Kolbe for his assistance in defining `fah-fee'. See also *Cape Standard*, 22 July 1947

3 Sheila Patterson, *Colour and Culture in South Africa: A Study of the Status of the Cape Coloured people within the Social Structure of the Union of South Africa*, (London, Routledge, 1953), p131.

4 See Sheila Patterson, *Colour and Culture*, p131; ` There are no colour-blind European sports associations, and the European associations show little if any interest in their Non-European opposite numbers'.

In human history and society carnival is both perennial and ubiquitous, and studies of the phenomenon have emerged from nearly all disciplines and perspectives in the social sciences.[5] One anthropologist has recently defined carnival as:

> A periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of co-ordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview.[6]

The New Year's carnival, also generally known as the `coon carnival', displayed nearly all aspects of this definition - it recurred at set intervals, it mobilised a massive popular base, and ethnic and historical links bounded participants during the festival. While the carnival was borne of a local social consensus of sorts between the city bourgeoisie and the ruled, and among the poor themselves, it also possessed an ambiguity and played on meanings of space, time and position. Carnival was many things at the same time. On the one hand it perpetuated certain values of the inner-city

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5 A huge literature on carnival has emerged from within history and anthropology in recent years. Among the works I have used are: Natalie Zemon Davis, `The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth Century France'in *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*, 50, February 1971; John Stewart, `Patronage and Control in the Trinidad Carnival'in V.W.Turner and E.M.Bruner (eds), *The Anthropology of Experience*, (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1983); Alison Raphael, `Samba Schools in Brazil'in *International Journal of Oral History*, 10(3), 1989; and David Birmingham, `Carnival at Luanda' in *Journal of African History*, 29(1), 1988. See also R.C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1974) and Richard Waterhouse, `Minstrel Show and Vaudeville House: The Australian Popular Stage, 1838-1914', *Australian Historical Studies*, 23 (93), October 1989

6 A. Falassi (ed.), *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, (Albuquerque, University of Mexico Press, 1987),p2

community, on the other hand it criticised the prevailing order.[7] Thus, in studying the carnival, a social history narrative should attempt to grasp some of the rich symbolic structures and meanings underlying what was from the late nineteenth century a periodic recurrence - regarded by some of the `coloured' petty bourgeoisie in the nascent left as working-class diversion and an expression of primeval coloured ethnicity.

The New Year's Carnival was an annual celebration incorporating the whole of the inner-city and appropriated variously by different class and social interests in the city. It is precisely because of the lack of fixity in the meaning of the carnival and its openness to diverse interpretations that it was invested with so much attention. Yet, at the same time that there was no control over its meaning the event was itself an interpretation of the community. Carnival, the occasion, was not only interpretable, it was also a metaphor and an interpretation of the society in which it occurred since, in the words of Clifford Geertz, `societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations.'[8] For carnival to have possessed the richness and complexity that it had it could definitely not have been a parade glorifying the status quo.

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7 See Natalie Zemon Davis, `The Reasons of Misrule', p41 and p74

8 Clifford Geertz, `Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' in his *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York, Basic Books, 1973)

It was not an `official carnival' in the sense of being floated by and for the sake of dominant commercial and other ruling class interests, but neither was it completely a `non-official carnival', unfettered by the influence of members of the bourgeoisie. It stood somewhere between the `official' and the `non-official carnival' though leaning more to the `non-official' festival as described by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whereby,

> `carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order: it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions.'[9]

The occupation of public space by the dispossessed, the control of movement in this commercially hallowed space by the crowd, the shift of focus from the powerful onto the powerless, the motley garb and bright colours of troupers, the overt presence of the transvestite, known locally as the `moffie', at the head of nearly every `coon' troupe, the uncontrolled mixing of the sexes, generations and also colours, the near absence and powerlessness of the police, the throng of proletarian music, and the happy but cynical lyrics of carnival songs all bear testimony to the momentary anarchic character of the festival, to the symbolic inversion of the dominant social and moral order. But this was possible precisely because control and domination were central, though not unquestioned, elements in the experience of the Cape Town working-class. As Umberto Eco has observed:

> In a world of absolute permissiveness and complete anomie no carnival is possible, because nobody would remember what is being called (parenthetically) into

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9 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (London, MIT, 1968), p10

> question. Carnival comic, the moment of transgression, can exist only if a background of unquestioned observance exists. Otherwise the comic would not be liberating at all.[10]

Yet, as will become clear in this chapter, carnival was not a mere safety valve for passions and for `deflecting attention from social reality'.[11] Just what were the material conditions from which carnival was a temporary liberation, and on which it was also a commentary?

By 1936 the population of Cape Town was just under 350 000 of whom about 205 000 (sixty seven percent) were classified `non-white'.[12] The `non-white' residents of the city resided mainly in and around the city-centre - in District Six, Bo-Kaap and Woodstock - and the suburbs spread out along the electrified railway lines from the centre of Cape Town to Simonstown and to Bellville.[13] In addition there was the growing settlement of Africans at Langa. Most of the `coloureds' were engaged in the clothing and textile industries. Women outnumbered their male counterparts in the clothing industry by far (562 men compared with 2 267 women) while no women were represented in the official statistics for textiles, tailoring and building sectors of the local economy in the years immediately before the war.[14] At least

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10 Umberto Eco, `The Comic and the Rule', in *Travels in Hyperreality*, (London, Picador, 1987),p275

11 Natalie Zemon Davis, `The Reasons for Misrule', p74 and see Michael Holquist, `Bakhtin and Rabelais: Theory as Praxis' in *Boundary 2*, XI(1) and XI(2), 1982/3, p12

12 M. Marshall, *The Growth and Development of Cape Town*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1940), p81

13 M. Marshall, *The Growth and Development*, p84

until 1921 it was in the amorphous occupational category of `personal service' that most `non-whites' were employed. By the start of the war, however, `personal service' had become a declining employment category. As indicated in the previous chapter, the `non-white' working-class was increasingly located in clothing and textiles, the alimentary industries, the building and allied industries and, to a lesser extent, in `engineering works'.[15] In the pre-War years, and during the immediate post-War period, the centre of Cape Town was still the inner-core around which the major industries were located.[16] Working-class labour activities were in this way located close to their living quarters. Thus, the breadwinners of households in Hanover or Hortsley streets in District Six would walk to the south east corner of the city (Barrack, Commercial, Buitenkant and Roeland streets) if they were employed in the clothing industry or Pontac Street workers to nearby Sir Lowry Road if they were employed by leather, or food and drink concerns.[17] The proximity of factory to habitat meant relatively more `time-off' and `freedom' for leisure after the often excessively hard and alienating experiences of industrial work. Factory work was inflexible but most

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14 M. Marshall, *The Growth and Development*, p107

15 M. Marshall, *The Growth and Development*, p107

16 J. Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries in Greater Cape Town, 1652 - 1972*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1973), p105

17 J. Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p105. A case study of a group of workers in 1949 found that of a group of just over 200 workers fifty percent had a total travelling time to work of less than seventeen minutes. See V. Pons, *A Social Investigation of Female Workers and a Related Study of their Absenteeism*, (unpublished M SocSc thesis, University of Cape Town, 1949)

workers did not have the extra burden of travelling long, tiring and time-consuming distances to work and back home.[18] Unlike later-nineteenth century industrialising Britain where the expansion of leisure experience depended on the growth of mass transport - in the form of the railways[19] - in Cape Town transport was to become a significant factor in working class leisure only well into the twentieth century - from the late nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties, with the development of the sprawling Cape Flats. Inner-city Cape Town was thus the place of work, residence and leisure for the overwhelming majority of the working-classes from the pre-War years through to the late nineteen fifties. And those resident in suburbs such as Athlone, Kensington and Wynberg would migrate the relatively short distance to the inner-city for their public leisure.

What marked the public leisure and popular culture of the Cape Town working-classes was not only the profound continuities between past and present forms of entertainment but also the consistency with which `seasonal' changes were followed. Choral and musical performance of all sorts and day trips to nearby seaside resorts dominated the bulk of the Cape Town summer. The annual worker and school vacations coincided during the heat of the summer months and were a

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18 Maximum hours for work in the clothing industry in Cape Town was 48 hours per week in 1939 and dropped to forty two and a half hours per week in 1945. See *Union Statistics for Fifty Years*, (Bureau for Census and Statistics, Pretoria, 1960), G-24. In the building industry the maximum hours per week in 1939 was 44 hours and dropped to 40 hours per week in 1949. See *Union Statistics for Fifty Years*, G-29.

19 See chapter one of James Walvin's, *Leisure and Society 1830 - 1950*, (London, Longman, 1978)

short period during which an unusual variety of leisure activities were pursued by adults, adolescents and children. New Year's Carnival was performed and celebrated during this period by a compound of old and young, men and women. As an ex-resident remembers:

> Oh, Oh, those were wonderful days. That days I never forget, because that was when we had a lot of pleasure, man. We were so happy. It was in Hanover Street from the start at Castle Bridge right up to the Catholic Church. Now tonight, its Old Year's Eve, then my Auntie would make all ready, food and everything, then she would say we must go down and keep our places.[20]

This memory is characteristic of people who were raised in areas like District Six and Bo-Kaap. Mr Noor Ariefdien's experience corroborates the above testimony. He remembers,

> already two days before New Year's eve then the people place their benches in order. Then grandma makes cornbeef, bakes bread, tart. They make everything. Then you think the people are going to picnic. They just picnic there.[21]

Carnival and the range of musical events around Christmas vacation - from Christmas bands to malay choirs and coon troupes - was the mark of the season. But more than the imprint of the festive season, the Carnival was also the preeminent expression of working-class culture even though it was a seasonal event. From the perspective of dominant class whites and middle class blacks, the Carnival was indeed a sign of working-class, though `coloured', culture.

Indeed, the Carnival was largely a `coloured' affair. This was not because of any inherent love of song and dance by

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20 Mrs Gadija Jacobs, p23

21 Mr Noor Ariefdien, p11 (my translation)

pedestrian Cape Town.[25] A `Visitor from England' is purported to have written home saying:

> Thank goodness for the Coons. They are a real high-spot in the flatness of Cape Town life. With their dancing and songs and their drums and banjoes they are something to be remembered! They make it almost worth remaining in Cape Town for another year.[26]

In 1956 a leading Cape Town newspaper editorialized in similar vein:

> The annual festival, with fancy costumes and music and song, is not only something that belongs of right to the coloured people, and not only a valued part of the traditions of Cape Town, it also adds a vivid touch to the rather pedestrian holidays of South Afirca. It is no more undignified than similar carnivals in which Southern Europeans give expression to the love of life and the joy of living.[27]

Whites mainly patronised the `formal' events of the Carnival in the enclosed stadiums, such as at Green Point Track and Rosebank Showgrounds, occupying reserved seats for `Europeans'.[28] Yet to many aspirant and actual middle-class blacks hankering after `high culture', the coons were despicable representatives and representations of the `coloured people'. After a highly successful Carnival, one `coloured student' wrote to a `coloured' newspaper with an outburst of revulsion at the Carnival. The letter, which filled a page, stated among other things that,

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25 *The Sun*, 12 January 1940. See *Cape Standard*, 6 November 1945 for the reproduction of a perceptive article on the Carnival by a visitor to Cape Town. The piece first appeared in the *Palestine Post*!

26 *The Sun*, 12 January 1940

27 *Argus*, 1 March 1956

28 *Cape Standard*, 29 November 1939; 3 January 1940; 16 January 1940

> If you do not participate in the shows you probably patronise them - you encourage them, you laugh at and with them; you spur them on to "better" and more degrading forms of amusement. Not more degrading to the Coons, but to Coloured people - to You.[29]

Such sentiment was the recurring refrain of some aspiring middle class `coloureds' since the inception of the choirs and coon troupes.[30] But the common people of the city filled the main streets of the inner-city to cheer on their favourite troupes in the long processions on New Year's eve and flocked to the venues where the troupes performed. At two venues in 1942, more than 15 000 people turned up to watch the coon troupes perform.[31] The hardship of the war years did not inhibit the spontaneous participation in and admiration of the troupes. However, the war was not simply a background noise against which the carnival unfolded during the early nineteen forties, for it affected the troupes in various ways. Unlike antagonistic responses to public leisure such as cinema and football during the Great War in countries at the cutting edge of battle (like Britain),[32] the local state and common people remained undeterred by the hardships imposed by a war economy and did not moralise against public leisure and Carnival during the Second World War. The first Carnival of the war years was praised by the *Cape Standard* as inaugurating 1940 with `a rousing reception

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29 *Cape Standard*, 9 January 1940

30 See for instance letter to editor, *Cape Argus*, 5 January 1897

31 *The Sun*, 9 February 1942

32 J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, pp128 - 144 on leisure in Britain during the First World War.

with "all that is madly wild and oddly gay"'.[33] Twelve troupes participated in the Carnival and about 10 000 spectators enjoyed the `monster carnival' of the newly established Western Province Jubilee Carnival Board[34] whose intention it was to work for `the betterment of the coons, to improve its organisation, and to keep it under Coloured control'.[35]

By the end of 1939 the controlling Carnival boards arranged to donate part of the gate-takings to the Governor-General's National War Fund.[36] Before the war, the controlling boards supported Saint Monica's home in Bo-Kaap, Saint Francis' Home in District Six and the Athlone Blind School.[37] The then recently constituted Western Province Jubilee Carnival Board was determined not to lose control over the distribution of proceeds through ceding all monies to the War Fund; instead, it wanted to continue to disburse at least part of the proceeds independently. Though initially prepared to donate monies towards the war effort some of the troupes, perhaps influenced by the stand of the WPJCB, became less than excited at the prospect of losing control over the proceeds as the war continued. Thus, when the `Grand Monster New Year Carnival' was organized for January 1940 under the auspices of the City Council, only some of

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33 *Cape Standard*, 3 January 1940

34 *Cape Standard*, 3 January 1940

35 *Cape Standard*, 12 December 1939

36 *Cape Standard*, 24 December 1940

37 *Cape Standard*, 17 December 1940

Cape Town's coon troupes participated[38] - some troupes dissented but did not rebel, a political strain that was to recur in the early fifties.[39] The following year another `Combined Coon and Malay Carnival' was hosted in aid of `Charities and the Governor General's War Fund'.[40] But whatever the dissatisfaction from some troupes, until the end of the war a substantial portion of the calculable proceeds of the Carnival went to support the `war effort' such as the 900 pounds raised for `War Charities' in 1942.[41] Though appeals to support the `war effort' never went without underclass suspicion, the appeals were grounded in the fact that many Cape Town men had left the city to serve in the war. As a result of this departure many families and household economies were visibly affected. The departure of Cape Town males during the war also influenced the composition of the troupes since `many coons' joined the army to become soldiers.[42] Recruitment to serve in the war, by military officials in charge of `coloured' recruitment, made a mark on the major choral competitions, such as at Green Point Track, during the war years. Moreover, the military often brought its own music: in 1942 for instance, the band of the Indian and Malay Corps featured prominently

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38 *Cape Standard*, 24 December 1940

39 In 1952 a number of `malay choirs' deserted from the Cape Malay Choir Board of I.D.du Plessis after they rejected participation in the Van Riebeeck festival. These choirs then formed a new board. This is taken up in Chapter Six.

40 *The Sun*, 3 January 1941

41 *The Sun*, 9 January 1942

42 *Cape Standard*, 17 December 1940 and *The Sun*, 9 January 1942.

at Green Point stadium.[43] And because of recruitment the number of participants decreased slightly and the age profile of troupes dropped. But the spirit of the Carnival was not markedly affected by these changes. At the start of every wartime Carnival, newspapers would report, with a mixture of surprise and expectation, `Coon Carnival as Usual' or `Coons Again'.[44] For their uninhibited performance during war-time, troupes and choirs compensated by `offering' some of their members to the army and through donating a substantial part of their proceeds to the `war *effort', but they acted much more vividly when they actually* composed patriotic songs[45] and sported Carnival garb in celebration of the allied forces.[46] Thus, in January 1942 the Union Jack, Union Flag and the United States Stars and Stripes were `all worked into decorative motifs' on the satin outfits of some troupes, and cardboard figures of John Bull and Uncle Sam were paraded at Green Point Track.[47] This playful international solidarity of coon troupes was easily incorporated into `coon style', given the consciousness of a broader world, which troupe leaderships at least already possessed. For the better part of their history since the late 1880s', when singing troupes gathered informally, coon troupes preferred appellations drawn from North American minstrelsy,[48] but by the late nineteen thirties and through

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43 *The Sun*, 2 January 1942

44 *Cape Standard*, 29 December 1942 and *The Sun*, 2 January 1942

45 *Cape Standard*, 7 January 1941

46 *Cape Times*, 3 January 1942 and *The Sun*, 9 February 1942

47 *Cape Times*, 3 January 1942

the nineteen forties troupes were blessed with a variety of names from other contexts. In the late nineteen thirties and nineteen forties for instance, the `Warriors of Mahratta', the `London Hawker Jubilee Coons', the `Blue Danube Troubadors', the `Kikuyu Warriors' and the `Young Lousiana Coons' were among the leading troupes.[49] During the war, existing troupes did not invent novel names. While new troupes would certainly have been influenced by the war context, generally they composed songs and donned costumes in colours which reflected the changing context of their performance. `Malay Choirs' also contributed to the `war effort' through their participation in combined competitions with Coon troupes.[50] But these more `respectable' working class choirs drew their designation from a British range of names and were less inclined to easily parade spontaneously in `stars and stripes' or with effigies of John Bull. After the war and during the nineteen fifties new troupes did not deviate from the established pattern in their choice of names; the mixture of American south and, to a lesser

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48 The first organised Carnival was held in January 1907 at the Green Point Track; see *The Argus*, 2 January 1907. A full history of Cape Town popular music is yet to be written. For data on the history of the coon troupes see, David Coplan, *In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p39-40. An informative piece on the first North American minstrel group to tour South Africa is Veit Erlmann, `"A feeling of Prejudice": Orpheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee singers in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14(3), 1988. A perceptive piece on the `coons' in the nineteen sixties in Gerald Stone, `The Coon Carnival', (unpublished MS, Abe Baily Institute, 1968)

49 *Cape Times*, 4 January 1937

50 *The Sun*, 3 January 1941

extent, African images continued to dominate the identities of troupes.[51]

Insofar as choosing a label and colours, troupes and choirs enjoyed nearly unlimited freedom. But in their everyday experience troupers enjoyed very little space and entitlement to rights or choice. The working-class of Cape Town could be creative in certain matters but was constrained by its class position and colour. Paradoxically, it was precisely because of these constraints that the working class made Carnival. Press reports on the Carnival and the performers invariably referred to the poverty-stricken conditions in which troupes practised and performed.[52] But as if to compensate for their burdens, inner-city dwellers gravitated not only towards the Carnival, but also to the shebeen[53] and the gang[54] - and for

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51 *Cape Times*, 28 December 1957

52 *Cape Times*, 29 December 1938; *Argus*, 30 December 1958 and *Argus*, 2 January 1958

53 Liquor consumption amongst `coloureds' was considered a major problem by the local state. In the Cape Town magisterial district `coloureds' on average constituted 69.56 percent of all convictions for drunkeness between 1940 and 1944. See, UG 33-45, *Report of the Cape Coloured Liquor Commisssion of Inquiry*, Table 3.; a central outlet for the sale of liquor were the `off-sale' bottlestores and the shebeens. For statistics on bottlestores and drunkeness in the nineteen fifties see UG 55-1960, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the General Distribution and Selling Prices of Intoxicating Liquor*. See also *The Sun*, 3 November 1939, 4 September 1942 and 19 October 1945. And *The Guardian*, 19 November 1942 and 3 December 1942

54 On gangs in nineteen forties and fifties inner-city Cape Town see, Don Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1984), pp18-42 and Pinnock, `From Argie boys to skolly gangsters: The lumpen-proletarian challenge of the street-corner armies in District Six, 1900 - 1951', (unpublished Centre for African Studies Seminar paper, May 1980, University of Cape Town)

some, these together formed a triad of underclass social protection, while for others folk Islam or the Christian Church[55] integrated with the Carnival for convivial survival and refuge. From all sources, however, it seems that the Carnival was the preeminent `compensatory' activity for and by the working class.

The Cape Town economy was boosted by the war and the employment of `non-whites' increased (by 38 per cent) but the living conditions of the working classes were not thereby improved. This was especially due to soaring prices of consumer goods. By the end of 1940, production in the Western Cape had increased substantially, followed by short cycles of upsurge and decline by the end of the war.[56] For troupers, living conditions in the inner-city remained as decrepit during and after the war as before. A journalist captured the ambience of the situation in which Choirs and troupes were preparing for singing competitions in December 1938. Of the practising session he wrote:

> Nowhere were there electric lights. One or two candles stuck in the neck of a bottle, flickering in a corner, illuminated the stuffy and smelly rooms. Every club must practice in relays, because of the lack of room.[57]

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55 Popular or folk religion, whether expressed through Isam or Christainty, is a completely unexplored area in Cape Town studies. Yet, manifestations of it are numerous and sources for its study, both oral and documentary, are not lacking.

56 See Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p70

57 *Cape Times*, 29 December 1938. See also *Cape Times*, 17 December 1936

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56 See Whittingdale, *The Development and Location of Industries*, p70

57 *Cape Times*, 29 December 1938. See also *Cape Times*, 17 December 1936

In 1940 a letter to the Cape Times said `the Carnivals are serving...to give temporary relief from abysmal misery - to a lesser degree year after year.'[58] Indeed poverty and `abysmal misery' there was, but this never prevented the working-classes from rallying to the Carnival, nor did it deter performers from saving pennies and shillings towards the new outfits for each carnival every new year.[59] While the costlier tailored suits of the `malay choirs' was an instant barrier to membership, the more accessible loosely styled satin costumes of coon troupes allowed wider membership. It is thus not odd that some coon troupes could boast of having anything between 300 to 600 members.[60] The cotton suits of the `malay choirs' and the satin garments of the coon troupes were most often `laid bye' - members contributing small amounts weekly to troupe or choir captains. Elizabeth Weeder recalls that,

> every week you would give a bit of money to the tailor, and when you need your suit for the Carnival it's paid for. The Carnival is how the tailors could live.[61]

Very little changed in the production methods of carnival dress between the start of the war and the end of the nineteen fifties. In 1958 for instance it was reported that, `40 000 yards of satin...will clothe the thousands of coons.' And `for months the troupes have been collecting and

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58 *Cape Times*, 1 February 1940

59 In 1940 the five yards of satin which was needed for a coon outfit could be bought for 1s. 11d. See Don Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods*, p35

60 See transcript of interview with Mr Solly Levy, retired tailor and coon organiser.

61 Quoted in Don Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods*, p36

saving money' for their costumes. Throughout the two decades discussed here only the tailors and troupe `executives' had knowledge of the colours and styles of their respective troupes.[62] Ordinary members had to repeat the ritual of setting money aside and fitting their loosely constructed satin suits often while blind-folded; in addition, `the costumes, which are stitched by tailors behind closed doors, are collected at dead of night, just before they are due to be worn.'[63]

In the harsh setting of inner-city subsistence the `lay-bye' method was the most common way, apart from the possibility of theft,[64] in which the working class could afford the colourful Carnival apparel. These outfits were also worn after the street celebrations. Troupers often wore them afterwards, `as pyjamas, while others are converted into blouses and dresses for the Coons little relatives.'[65] This ingenious use of what was considered scarce fabric by the white middle class, caused slight concern in 1942 when a Concert was planned for March in aid of war funds since,`the costumes will have lost their brightness. Already one sees hawkers and others wearing their coon regalia in the course

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62 *Cape Argus*, 30 December 1958

63 *Cape Times*, 23 December 1959

64 A reading of the selected Magistrate's Court records (1/CT) in the Cape Archives for the period 1939 - 1959 reveals a very high rate of cases for buying selling stolen goods in inner-city Cape Town. But the available records contain no cases for stolen fabric, though it is quite possible that cloth were acquired in ingenious and illegal ways.

65 *Cape Standard*, 24 October 1944

of their work...'[66] It is difficult to quantify precisely the extent of the fabric shortage during the war but it certainly influenced the number of performers, especially in the `malay choirs'. Yet, during the competitions by the end of the war, there was still a mixture of curiosity, suspicion and condescension in ruling class observations about the ability of choirs and troupes to consume so much good fabric. A journalist wrote in January 1945:

> One of the mysteries of the carnival was the skill in procurement shown by participants. Many of those who watched and applauded must have wondered how the men secured the tweeds and flannel for their sports jackets and trousers...and must have longed to ask...`Where did you get that hat?'[67]

Between 1939 and 1945 a world war raged and a number of Cape Town men served, in non-combatant roles, in the segregated South African forces. But a war and a loss of men did not reduce the commitment with which the New Year's carnival was hosted by Choirs and troupes, nor did popular enthusiasm for the carnival suffer during these hard years.

During the nineteen fifties, and with the introduction of Apartheid legislation during those years, the phenomenon of carnival hardly changed in any substantial way. The restraints of war were no longer on the city administrators and commercial elite; consequently there was greater public involvement by certain members of the establishment in what they saw as a potentially lucrative `tourist attraction'. At the same time the uncontrolled presence of carnival in the

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66 *The Sun*, 23 February 1942

67 *Cape Times*, 4 January 1945

main streets of Cape Town such as Adderley Street was causing severe problems to the local authorities. On one occasion, the `crowds mobbed them (the troupes) before they reached Adderley street....(and) The few traffic policemen who were on duty found it impossible to cope with the surging spectators.'[68] After that incident the local state disallowed the use of the city centre for the purposes of festival;[69] then arguments between carnival organisers and the municipal traffic department flared regarding responsibility for the `chaos'.[70] One `Cape Town industrialist' subsequently offered the city council 100 pounds to re-admit the troupes onto the main streets. The `industrialist', a Mr Cecil Marks, saw the broader commercial viability of the carnival when he said, `the coon parade may cost the council 100 pounds, but it means infinitely more than that to the city in terms of a tourist and holiday attraction.'[71] This tension between the carnival organisers and representatives of commerce on one side against a stronger local state must be viewed in terms of broader, national, politics. National Party dominance was being consolidated, yet the discriminatory legislation which was rapidly being passed was not altogether passively accepted. In Cape Town train apartheid was resisted from the late nineteen forties by the Train-Apartheid Resistance

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68 *Cape Argus*, 3 January 1955

69 A Mr East resigned from the Traffic Committee of the City Council in protest against its decision to disallow the carnival parade in the city streets. *Cape Argus*, 1 December 1956

70 *Cape Argus*, 1 May 1955

71 *Cape Argus*, 30 November 1956

Committee, and when it became known that `coloureds' would be struck from the common voters' roll, the Franchise Action Council was formed to mobilise against the impending legislation. In 1951 the FRAC organised a 50 000-strong march on Parliament.[72] Thus, in the nineteen fifties `coon' troupes may have remained unchanged, but the local and national context was changing, and some of the local tensions between troupes and local government officials should be seen in this changing context.73

However inhospitable local officials may have been, the carnival always took place. And some troupes undertook tours of the country more regularly in the nineteen fifties. One troupe enjoyed a warm reception in Johannesburg in 1950 and avoided any brush with racially discriminatory laws in that city.[74] In 1956 a troupe was scheduled to appear in Bloemfontein, but when it became clear that it would perform to a segregated white audience it did not appear at the venue for the show.[75] This act by the troupe can be interpreted as a form of resistance, a way of resisting not unusual for a cultural organisation like the `coon' troupe. Withdrawal was one means of making a statement against Apartheid. Actually mocking the system and its representatives was another way of resisting the dominant

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72 Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and The Wall: A History of South African `Coloured' Politics*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p266

73 I want to thank Colin Bundy for stressing the political context of the nineteen fifties in which carnival occurred, in a reponse to an ealier version of this chapter.

74 *The Sun*, 6 October 1950 and 13 October 1950

75 *Cape Times*, 15 November 1956

ideology. In 1952, a popular `coon' and malay choir song was `*Van Riebeeck se ding is Vim'* (Van Riebeeck's thing is finished) in response to the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary celebrations.[76] In December 1957, Alex La Guma spotted a trouper, `with a picture of Herr Strijdom sewed to the seat of his pants'.[77]

The class composition of troupes remained predominantly working-class in the nineteen fifties. As one report put it in late 1958, `On New Year's Day, butcher boys, garage hands, bricklayers, delivery boys, roadsweepers and many other workers suddenly become the gayest and liveliest people in the city.'[78] These proletarian participants were largely categorised in official terms as coming from the `non-European' population; but unlike the Latin American carnivals, hardly any women participants featured prominently in the processions and performances of the New Year's carnival. The only exception was a marginal troupe in the nineteen forties called the `Bits and Pieces', a troupe which drew on the poorest sections of the local working class.

76 Richard Dudley, `Removals: The Essential Meaning of District Six', in Shamil Jeppie and Crain Soudien (eds), *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, forthcoming)

77 *New Age*, 5 December 1957, in Andre Odendaal, *Liberation Chabalala and other Stories: Alex la Guma's Reports on south Africa, 1956-1962*, (London, Kliptown Books, forthcoming), p89

78 *Cape Argus*, 30 December 1958

In the imagery of the carnival the only prominent non-masculine performer was the effeminate `moffie'[79] - a popular inner-city working class characterisation of the transvestite. In available documentary and oral evidence for the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties the voices of `moffies' are never heard; they are always spoken about (derisively), represented, judged, but never allowed the privilege of discourse. A description of one `moffie' in the mid-nineteen fifties is fairly representative of these performers between the nineteen thirties and nineteen fifties. `Doeltjie' was a leader of the Pennsylvanian Darkies who,

> forsook his customary Carmen Miranda outfit for a Miss Universe get-up. An ill-fitting dress was bolstered with pillows and his head-dress was a flamboyant tea-cosy surmounted by an array of cutlery.[80]

In 1940, a random survey of views on the `coons' appeared in the *Cape Standard*. A `European'`Doctor' is reported to have said that:

> The Coons are a great source of entertainment for the people. As for the `Moffies', well there are as many `Pansies' among the Whites as `Moffies' among the Coloureds. Whilst we laugh and joke about our sexual misfits the Europeans are more secretive on such a delicate question. As for skolly boys, it is a matter of skin or condition, or both.[81]

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79 The word `moffie' is derived from an old Dutch word `mof' used at the Cape to refer to any stranger; thus, it seems that it was a term readily available to label anything which was difficult to domesticate, in other words it could usefully be applied to the transvestite as `the other'. Personal written communication from Prof Roy Pheiffer, professor of Afrikaans en Nederlands, University of Cape Town, January 1990

80 *Cape Times*, 4 January 1955

81 *Cape Standard*, 6 January 1940

`Doctor's' white middle class sentiment about the homosexual and transvestite was shared by the `coloured student' quoted earlier in this paper. Notions of sexual normality were deeply entrenched; and any deviance from the norm was perceived in the worse psycho-pathological terms.[82] In correspondence to the press, `coloured student' wrote with vitriolic bitterness about `sexual deviance'. He argued:

> To think that people (that they are my people makes me more disgusted) could sink so low as to organise these people, who should be in a hospital or some similar place away from public, into a source of entertainment is terrible. They are sexually abnormal - hermaphroditic - in a pitiable condition, physically and mentally; the very thought of them should be repulsive to all but the scientist. I ask you what type of mind has a person who organises these people - who uses this abnormality to furnish amusement for the public?...If these `Moffies' are not really sexually abnormal, then they as imitators, are worse than the genuine hermaphrodites.[83]

The prancing transvestite - or to use the term employed at the time, hermaphrodite - reversed entrenched categories of sex and in the process upset established middle class and traditional working class sensibilities. During carnival the public performance of the transvestite was `permissible' among the inner-city population, at the same time as it inverted the cultural code of the city.[84] Thus this aspect

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82 On the construction of gender and sexual identity see essays in Pat Caplan, (ed.), *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, (London, Tavistock, 1987) especially her introduction and `Questions of Identity' by Jeffrey Weeks. See also Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp, `Sex and History: A Research Note from Social History and Anthropology'in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23, 1981

83 *Cape Standard*, 9 January 1940

84 See James L. Peacock, `Symbolic Reversal and Social History: Transvestites and Clowns'in Barbara Babcock (ed.), *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1978)

of the carnival was open to contradictory readings - by the white middle class, the coloured petite bourgeoisie, the male working class, the underground community of inner-city homosexuals and transvestites, women and so on. But, like the carnival songs, it also said something about the community. It was social commentary. It was an interpretation of inner-city gender relations. Men had all authority invested in them and they defined roles for women and children; there were appropriate roles for men, and set patterns for women. Divergence from these inherited and entrenched models occurred during carnival in its boldest form, and the `moffie' symbolised the most `subversive' aspect of the carnival. The transvestite was neither man nor woman, for it inverted the standard gender and sex classifications.

Similarly the carnival songs, especially the comic songs, the *moppies*, offered commentary on social relations. Extant songs from the nineteen thirties to nineteen fifties deal mainly with men woeing women, with courting styles, with women rejecting men, or with men not satisfying the tastes and needs of women, and also provides popular visions of the `ideal woman'.[85] Songs were generally composed by men and the representation of dejected men and the portrayal of rebellious daughters in songs point to the often contested terrain of the world of gender relations, even if only in the area of courting.[86] The song `Katotjie', for instance,

85 I.D.du Plessis, *Kaapse Moppies*, (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1977) and I.D.du Plessis, Masleise Sangbundel, (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1939)

86 See for instance `Die Oxford', `Langs die waterkant', and `Soesie'in Du Plessis, *Kaapse Moppies*

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represents a sexually adventurous girl disobeying her family, and is filled with generational and gender tension. It has the following structure and lyrics:

Spreek Katotjie se moeder haar aan
`Ja, myne dogter, watter skande't jy gedaan!'
`Ja, my moeder, en laat my tog maar staan,
Al op die dans was my eer ontgaan.'

Spreek Katotjie se tante haar aan:
`Ja, myne dogter, watter skande't jy gedaan!'
`Ja, my tante, en laat my tog maar staan,
Al deur die skuifraam het my eer ontgaan.'

Spreek Katotjie se vader haar aan:
`Ag myne dogter, watter skande't jy gedaan!'
`Ja, my vader, en laat my tog maar staan,
Sien my met n soontjie van nege maande aan.'

Spreek Katotjie se broeder haar aan:
`Ja, my sussie, matter skande't jy gedaan!'
`Ag my broder, dit gaan jou bliksems weining aan,
Die lekkergeid die kry ek van die liewe jonge man.'

`Ek kom vanaand die deur niet in
Ek kom vanaand die deur niet in,
Ek kom vanaand die deur niet in,
Katotjie het die speletjie verbruik.'[87]

(Katotjie's mother says to her:
`Yes my daughter, what shame did you do!'
`Yes my mother, leave me alone,
On the dance-floor my honour was lost.'

Katotjie's aunt addresses her:
`Yes my daughter, what did you do!'
`Yes my aunt, and leave me alone,
Through the trap-door my honour was lost'

Katotjie's father says to her:
`Oh my daughter, what shame did you do!'
Yes my father, and leave me alone,
See me with a kiss of nine months'

Katotjie's brother says to her:
`Yes my little sister, what shame did you do!'
`Oh my brother, it doesn't bother you,
The pleasure I get from the young man.'

`Tonight I'm not coming through the door,
Tonight I'm not coming through the door,
Tonight I'm not coming through the door,
Katotjie used the game')

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87 Du Plessie, *Kaapse Moppies*, p32

In contrast to such songs which portray independent and strong-willed women/girls is a song like `Die nonnie van Waalstraat' which paints a picture of the `traditional woman' - an object of desire and rooted in domestic labour. These types of songs were perhaps most common. Two parts of the song have the following lyrics:

Die nonnie van Waalstraat
Maak worsies en bier
En raai, sy maak moppies
Net vir plesier.

Laat anders se wat hulle wil,
My hart is tog so bly:
Waar sal jy so 'n goosie kry?
Rond en vet en sag en soet
En ligvoet oor die vloer,
Ai, sy is 'n liewelike ding
As sy haar stertljie roer.[88]

(The girl from Wale Street
makes sausage en beer.
And guess, she makes moppies
Just for fun

Let others say what they wish
My heart is so glad:
where will one find such a girl
in the whole wide world?
Round and fat and soft and sweet
and graceful over the floor
Ah, she is a lovely thing
when she moves her backside)

A lack of active participation by women in public Carnival music and song marked the entire period explored in this chapter. Indeed, the role of women in the carnival remains relatively unchanged. Sources on popular leisure between the nineteen thirties and nineteen fifties are largely silent about the gender character of leisure activities. In the case of the musical tradition of Cape Town, the specifically male character of carnival singing may have been so

88 Du Plessis, *Kaapse Moppies*, p28

ingrained in popular historical consciousness since the inception of choral singing among the working classes of Cape Town, that it was unquestionably accepted. Yet, women were part of the broader leisure experience, the carnival and the popular culture of the city. In this respect, they had their specific, separate and unequal share in the festival and local cultural resources.

Between 1939 and 1952 the number of `coloured' women in industry rose from approximately 11 200 to about 34 000. The percentage of `economically active' women among the `coloureds' stabilised in the thirty years between 1921 and 1951 at around 37 per cent of the `coloured' female population.[89] The overwhelming majority of women workers were employed in Cape Town's clothing industry, without significant changes during this period. But most women were engaged in unpaid reproductive labour in the domestic sphere. Working women joined this army of unpaid labour after the day's factory employment in the nearby secondary industries of Cape Town. In their available `time-off', outside the factory but also outside the home, women carved for themselves a place in public leisure but were also allocated `appropriate' roles in popular culture by the men and the dominant discourses of the time.

In this context cinema came to occupy a central place in the public and routine leisure experience of young Cape Town women from the late nineteen thirties. As Jeffrey Richards

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89 See Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, (London, Onyx Press, 1982), p116

has shown in another context but for the same period, `Cinema-going was regular and habitual' in working-class leisure.[90] Gadija Jacobs describes her leisure experience in District Six:

> We could only really go to the bioscope, not out onto the street, or to one another's houses. A girl had to stay in her place. Alright, you get now and again the girl next door to come to you, or you go to her, but not further away.[91]

Asa Jassiem remembers: `But on Saturdays we used to get our bioscope money you know, to go to bioscope, but no pocket money until we started working....' And she reveals a particular social discrimination :`but we liked to go to the National Bioscope. That was a society bioscope.'[92] About the Avalon in Hanover Street a former usher at the cinema recalls, `well, socialites used to come there. That was the first posh bioscope that opened.'[93] Even in the generally overcrowded conditions of inner-city Cape Town working class women could still engage in what was seen as specifically feminine and socially discriminatory forms of private leisure.

In 1939 *The Social Survey* of Cape Town undertaken by Batson found that 36 percent of coloured households were overcrowded, 36 percent crowded and only 28 percent ,

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90 Jeffrey Richards, `The Cinema and cinema-going in Birmingham in the 1930s.' in James Walvin and John K.Walton, *Leisure in Britain, 1780 - 1939* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983)

91 Gadija Jacobs, p35

92 Mrs Asa Jassiem, p43 and p37

93 Mrs Farieda Waghiet, p36

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93 Mrs Farieda Waghiet, p36

uncrowded.[94] By 1950 the situation had not changed. The housing supervisor of the Cape Town municipality reported, `almost every house in the districts where Coloured people live is packed tight.'[95] The upshot of crowded conditions was similar to what occurred in Edwardian England where, as Brian Harrison has shown, `recreational segregation of husband from wife', and we may add of boy from girl, owed `something to crowded and squalid homes.'[96]

Cooking and baking were constituted as agreeable activities for women in the local press. Sewing was promoted as `rational recreation' by the Liberman Institute[97] in District Six through its sewing classes for women, and the proliferation of Marconi and Pilot wirelesses from the late nineteen thirties kept many women (and men) indoors[98]. Often the transference of gender specific social skills - such as cooking and sewing - `coincided' with the private leisure practice of women. But it was precisely this convenient `coincidence' which in effect robbed women of their `time-

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94 See *Social Survey no 24*, (University of Cape Town, Manuscripts Collection)

95 Quoted in John Western, *Outcast Cape Town*, (Cape Town, Human and Rossouw, 1981), p49

96 Brian Harrison, `Class and Gender in Modern British Labour History', *Past and Present: A Journal of Historical Studies*, 124, August 1989, p141. I want to thank Linda Chisholm for referring me to this marvellous paper and for more general comment on an earlier version of this chapter.

97 *The Sun*, 10 September, 1943; See also *Annual Reports* of the Liberman Institute

98 Licenses for radios increased steadily between 1930 and 1958. There is no racial breakdown of these statistics. See *Official Yearbook of the Union of South Africa*, 1960, p373.

off' to engage in what they considered to be pleasurable and enjoyable. To call on the memory of Gadija Jacobs again:

> On winter days (after school) she (my aunt) used to teach me, I sit and knit, and I made little doll dresses. She gave me needles, she gave me a scissor. This was to keep me in the house, instead of playing outside in the rain. Then I would invite my friends, and they would also bring their needles and we would sit and make little dresses for our dolls. That's how we spent our afternoons.[99]

While this evidence may appear specific to childhood it is important to note the extended length of `childhood' in the inner-city and the dominance of patriachal values. But even if women, and especially married women, did not find `leisure' in what was promoted as appropriate for them, many were undoubtedly led to take,

> a pride in household skills, refined them with the aid of women's magazines and social contacts, and acquired a form of self-realization - even, at the last, a sort of unpaid professional status - in adapting to the husbands timetable.[100]

The allocation of appropriate leisure for women was not always passively accepted. The young also rebelled by breaking parental controls, like Farieda Waghiet who would, `delay with washing the dishes. Or my mommy send me to the shop to get something for my daddy's lunch....Now I would find a friend there now I'd delay in coming home. Now my mother would punish me by not giving me supper.' Furthermore,`Mommy was very cross because she reckoned that I had been disobedient and she warned me not to go to keep company with older girls who had boyfriends.'[101]

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99 Gadija Jacobs interview, p50

100 Brian Harrison, `Class and Gender', p127

What was done for leisure by some women was hard work for others, while yet others used these skills to generate extra income. Dressmaking and baking were two common areas in which women were self-employed to increase the household income. Tailoring for the carnival and baking for the tastes of participants were often lucrative activities. Mrs Farieda Waghiet:

> Sewed for the coons. My husband and I. Now we give out pants and jackets. Now the morning they are being dressed at Muir street school.... Now I've done my work, the pants are all on hangers there. Now the lady must come. I was still living in Aspeling street. Now they knock on my door. Mrs Abrahams, my broek is te lank, Mrs Abrahams osse broek is te kort (our trousers are too short). Now I had to go with my machine to the klops kamer'(club room).[102]

Carnival was leisure time for all. Even though women were not the performers their endorsement and availability was essential to the success and vibrancy of the events making up the carnival. What is clear moreover, is that the rules governing the place of women were transgressed during carnival. Women, in large numbers, now occupied public space, contributed to the noise and danced. Farieda Waghiet recalls:

> Our benches were put there in front of the Star bioscope and the people used to sit and wait. We used to dance, guma in Cross street. The band was all round and we used to dance in the middle, guma, guma.[103]

101 Waghiet, p14-15

102 Waghiet, p54.

103 Waghiet, p53

The role of women in the carnival, as supports, present but not equal, there but not leading, is emblematic of the broader leisure practice of women in the inner-city.

Leisure, for women and men, exists because of labour. The rigours of the workplace, essentially the factory and construction site but also the home, determine much of the character and experience of leisure. But the culture outside of the factory has a dynamic and rhythm of its own. Hegemony is not imposed by the capitalist employers and municipal administrators. It is a process and is fought over on the factory floor as well as in the cinema and during the Carnival.[104] A study of the leisure practice and popular culture of the Cape Town working-class reveals the nuances and silences of hegemony not captured in a study of the struggles and politics on the factory floor. Moreover, even the meanings of work and the struggles over production are invested with experiences and values cultivated outside of the workplace.[105] Carnival also allows us into central aspects of the experiences, consciousness and closed world of the Cape Town inner-city. As much as it was and is open to contending meanings it can also be seen as a commentary on the community. However, the primary purpose of this chapter was not to examine the meanings of carnival nor to consider it as a text or work of art, but to disentangle some of the class, colour and gender dimensions of the

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104 See Antonio Gramsci's definition of hegemony in David Frogacs, *The Gramsci Reader*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p249

105 See the introduction in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Historical Meanings of Work*, (Cambridge, Cambrdge University Press, 1987)

festival. The New Year's carnival played a pivotal role in the leisure and social experience of the Cape Town working-class, although after carnival it was back to the discipline of labour; as one report observed:

> As their songs grow fainter and fainter and only the stragglers remain to collect the last few tickies for a solo performance, they will drift back to their work at the factories, in the ships...to begin the new year.[106]

`Back to their work' marked the `real' beginning to a new year for the inner-city working class - after the end of the oppressed's own festival.

Carnival came once a year but it has made a deep and enduring impression on popular consciousness. [It is worth noting that at the 1989 May Day celebrations at Athlone stadium the Cosatu unions marched to the internationale - but the workers anthem was sung (by a Garment Workers Union choir) to guma beat (played by the Musical Action for Peoples Power band) and the unions marched in klops (coon) style.][107] Historically, many interests attempted to appropriate and direct the carnival but it remained in popular control. Like in their subordinate place in other leisure and cultural activities, women were ancillary to the carnival. But carnival was a time to upset some of the discourses over the bodies of women. In the same way carnival subverted some of the dominant discourses of the

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106 *Cape Argus*, 2 January 1958

107 The MayDay '89 performance of the *international* to *guma* beat and *klopse* style marching is an excellent example of the operation of George Rude's notions of inherent and derived ideology. See Rude's, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), pp27-38

bourgeoisie. But it also confirmed the status quo. After the Carnival, in the words of Robert Darnton, `the old order regains its hold on the revelers'.[108] The next chapter we examine a primary form of cultural activity when the `old order' holds sway.

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108 Robert Darnton, `Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose' in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984), p66

A troupe of perfprmers at a stadium during the 1940 carnival.

Source: *Cape Standard*, 9 January 1940

"BITS AND PIECES" LINE UP

"Bits and Pieces," a mixed troupe, raised many a laugh for the quaintness of their dress.

Source: *Cape Standard*, 9 January 1940

Chapter Four

`That Something Extra': The Production of Musicians and Popular Music

A variety of musical forms were popular in inner city Cape Town in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. The musical menu of the city ranged from the sacred to the secular, from choral singing in church halls to local renditions of American hits in tiny city clubs. Means of musical enjoyment ran from the warmth of household singing, the wireless and gramophone to the collective public appreciation of amateur bands; and musical talent found expression in forums ranging from the pervasive `coons', malay choirs and Christmas bands to the emergent modern jazz bands of the mid-nineteen fifties.

The annual carnival compressed diverse elements of inner-city popular culture. The musical score and social composition, of troupes and spectators alike, reflected the texture of a broader class expression. The significance of carnival and the centrality of music in it raises a number of questions about the nature, production and consumption of popular music in the inner city. Carnival came once a year but the production of music knew no temporal barriers. It is for this reason that local urban musical culture must be taken into account in a study of inner Cape Town popular

culture. This will not only illuminate inner city performance culture[1] but also shed light on an important aspect of the social history of Cape Town.

The historiography of South African music has recently been enriched by the work of David Coplan[2], Veit Erlman[3] and Christopher Ballantine[4]. Coplan's *In Township Tonight* is the first full-length materialist study of urban African music and theatre in industrialising South Africa. Given that the dominant orientation in South African musicological research is one which stresses the musical text as autonomous and has yielded mainly `bloodless, dehumanised and uninteresting things about music,'[5] Coplan's work is an original study. But it covers an extremely broad canvas.[6] The work is typical of the social histories of the early nineteen

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1 I borrow this notion from David Coplan who defines it as the `crucial conjunction between performance and everything that immediately supports it - a social crossroads of performers, participants, styles, categories, materials, and occasions of performance.' See his *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), p4

2 David Coplan, *In Township Tonight!*

3 Veit Erlman, `"A Feeling of Prejudice": Orpheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee singers in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14(30, 1988; and his `"Singing brings joy to the distressed": the social history of Zulu migrant workers' choral competitions.'unpublished *Wits History Workshop paper*, 1987

4 Christopher Ballantine, `The Jazzmen', *Leadership*, 8(6), August 1989

5 Charles Hamm, `Review of In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre', *Popular Music*, 6 (3), 1987. For a critical popular history of South African music see Muff Andersson, *Music in the Mix: The Story of South African Popular Music*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1981)

6 See also review of Coplan by Veit Erlman in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14(3), April 1988

eighties which have generalised from the experience of the Witwatersrand. This `Rand-centric' approach allows Coplan to make only passing reference to the role and influence of Cape Town-based musical production. Yet, it is clear from the history of South African jazz, for instance, that a detailed study of the Cape Town music scene is vital for a more comprehensive insight into the country's jazz.

The pioneering Jazz Epistles was formed on the Witwatersrand in 1959 by doyens of national jazz Kiepie Moeketsi (alto sax), Jonas Gwangwa (trombone) and Hugh Masekela (trumpet). But, adds Julian Beinart, it was `when Dollar Brand came up the river from Cape Town to join the Johannesburg trio,' that the basis for Epistle music was laid. Moreover, he adds, `jazz in the north has constantly depended on the waves of musicians that come up from the coast'.[7] For the same period, the late nineteen fifties - early nineteen sixties, others who `went up the river' from Cape Town included pianist Chris McGregor[8] and Chris Columbus (on Baritone). The apparently steady flow of local jazzmen northwards may however say something about the musical preferences of Capetonians at the time. Kiepie Moeketsi recalls what happened to his group in the mid nineteen fifties:

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7 Julian Beinart, `The Beginning of a Tradition', *The Classic*, 1(1), 1963

8 McGregor was rare among musicians of his time in that he received formal training. He studied music at the University of Cape Town. He provides an interesting insight into his formation as a jazz musician in `Personal Background: From an Application for a Cultural Grant', *The Classic*, 1(4), 1965

> But when we went to Cape Town, we found ourselves stranded, though the Manhattans were a big name. We left for Langa location...playing to nearly empty halls. At one juncture, people started throwing stones on the roof of the hall while we were playing inside....The people of Langa said we were playing `nonsense'....They wanted something new.[9]

Moeketsi's group, with a new recruit in the person of Dollar Brand, then left Cape Town and stopped playing what he calls `English music' which The Manhattans realised was the cause of opposition to them.[10] A section of Cape Town's music lovers wanted more `cross-over' and indigenous sounds, while `standard jazz' versions were in demand in other quarters. Cape Town musicians such as Dollar Brand and Chris McGregor did not just appear on the scene, they were nurtured somewhere, were influenced by other performers, struggled for `gigs' and fought over remuneration; and they then realised the need to move on, `up the river', and ultimately across the oceans. Others remained at home. This chapter looks at the ways in which inner Cape Town musical taste and talent were developed, at the formative social experiences of some musicians, and sketches the social context in which these strands were played out.

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9 `Kiepie's Memories', *Staffrider*, 4(3), November 1981

10 `Now we are not going to play English music any more. We are going to play indigenous music - Xhosa, Sesotho and all that....people are bored with it ( `English music')...', `Kieppies Memories'

Music was pervasive in the inner-city. A former resident of District Six, Mr Vincent Kolbe, who was to be infected by the mixture of sounds in the inner city recalls:

> You walk down the street - there was always some practice - a choir practising. If you walk up Hanover street and you walk past the Ochberg Hall - the Eoan Group Hall - practising opera. If you walk further up *daar's n Slaamse Koor* (there's a Malay choir) practising. Then you go past Dougie Erasmus' house - that was the big one - marachas and we used to peep through the windows and say hell these *ouens* - like in the movies you know. Then we also made up a band like that, by the Church Hall.[11]

Vincent Kolbe first discovered the pleasure of making music at the homes of his Italian grandparents and an affluent friend. His friend,

> used to go for music lessons...(he) could read music - he had a piano. Now we were too poor to have a piano. But I had lots of friends like him. I used to go visit (them) - tinkle on the piano, or this one's getting violin lessons or so. ...Thats how I learnt - other people's instruments. And of course my Italian grandparents had a piano....I didn't do the lessons, my family couldn't afford the lessons.[12]

He was perhaps extraordinary in his exposure to friends with musical training and expensive instruments.[13] But his elementary experience where he resided was a common one in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. He says:

> My parents always put on records for me and they always danced. You know, move the table aside and play records and dance. And I was a pikkie and we - my aunt and I -

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11 Mr Vincent Kolbe, p54

12 Kolbe p16

13 Musical instruments such as pianos and saxophones were all imported. In 1955 the annual importation of instruments stood at over 1.2 million pounds (See *Annual Statement of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa, 1955*). The most well-known outlet for the sale of instrum ents in Cape Town was Darters. But it is difficult to estimate the prices of individual pieces of equipment.

> used to do Carmen Miranda things. Put your big hat and panama hat (on) and do things you see in the movies.[14]

In the privacy of the home one's fantasies and imagination could imitate the fashions which were being spread by the mass entertainment technologies - the cinema, gramophone and wireless.

Widely consumed at the time were the `seventy eight speed records. It was not an unbreakable thing. When it falls it breaks', remembers Mr Aziz Salie. He also recalls which international artists had the majority following at the time:`The smaller records had like Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Al Jolson. Those type of records. Those were the stars.'[15] There were those like Mrs Gadija Williams who could only afford one piece of electronic equipment, and she listened to the radio: `I can remember when I got up in the mornings I switch on the wireless....the wireless played whole day, whole day, now there was music, but I never bought, never records, special records of special songs.'[16] Recall of intimate details of the wireless reveals some of the reverence with which this piece of equipment was treated. Mrs Asa Jassiem for instance remembers the radio her family possessed, `it was a Pilot with a little green magic eye that if you switch on then that little eye give you the station without looking for it. When it comes onto the station it states clear and if it's not on the station flickers'[17]

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14 Kolbe, p53

15 Mr Aziz Salie, p15

16 Mrs Gadija Williams, p17 (my translation)

An indication of the growing popularity of radio is the rapid increase in radio licences issued nationally between 1940 and 1958. In 1940 about 280 000 licences were issued, and by 1958 just under 910 000 were issued. These figures do not of course take into account the number of people who evaded purchasing a licence which in the early nineteen fifties cost around one pound.[18] Moreover, an audience was often as big as a household which, in the inner city, was generally over- crowded.[19] However, there were those like Mr Ismail Abrahams' family who had, `just the old gramophone, a wind up. There was no radio.' He also recalls the sheer economic necessity of caring for the equipment: `I remember the spring (of the gramophone) use to break and a new one cost 7 'n 6. And you should know how hard it is to collect up 7 'n 6.'[20]

Immersion in the `pop culture' of the era via the bioscope, `gram' and wireless did not exclude appreciation and imitation of more sophisticated fare. Vincent Kolbe also, `listen(ed) to the symphony orchestra on Thursday nights....We used to listen to the radio and used to conduct you know with a stick and make noises with spoons and

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17 Mrs Asa Jassiem, p37

18 *Official Yearbook of South Africa 1960*, (Pretoria, Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1960), p373

19 UG 53 - 1948, *Social and Economic Planning Council*, Report 13 (The Economic and Social Conditions of the Racial Groups in South Africa). This report noted that 36 percent of households were overcrowded, and only 28 were not crowded in Cape Town at the time the investigation was conducted.

20 Mr Ismail Abrahams, p22

tins.'[21] Like so many other inner city dwellers, Kolbe also once went to a live symphony concert at the city hall. Classical music has no *essential* meaning - its meaning and appreciation are contextually bound.[22] But in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties classical music bore no organic relation to the situation and experience of the inner city populace. A key indication of this is the attendance figures at symphony concerts. A government commission noted in 1945 that:

> Non-Europeans attend some of our musical concerts, though not many. They attend the Thursday and Sunday evening concerts of the City Orchestra in Cape Town, though not in great numbers and they go to the concerts organised by the Progressive Musical Societies...[23]

In 1944 a Progressive Musical Society was established in Cape Town to provide the `musical good things in life for Cape Town's working class.'[24] It organised weekly concerts and lectures for its members who had to pay a monthly membership fee of one shilling.[25] From available evidence it does not appear that the Society was tremendously successful in popularising `high culture' among Cape Town's working class; the City Hall remained the most prominent venue for orchestral concerts, even for the working class. In 1953 about 800 Africans attended the Cape Town Municipal

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21 Kolbe, p53

22 See Christopher Ballantine, *Music and its Social Meaning*, (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1984)

23 UG 35-45, *Adult Education in South Africa: Being a Report by a Committee of Enquiry appointed by the Minister of Education*, p108

24 *The Guardian*, 15 November 1945

25 *The Guardian*, 6 July 1944

Orchestra's performances at the City Hall. These were mainly African men, and most often they went to the Sunday concerts - when free standing space was available.[26]

Kolbe was not a working class neophyte to the Progressive Musical Society's forums. Instead he imagined himself to be a conductor and made noises with the family's cutlery, not unlike Monty Weber, with whom Kolbe was to form a be-bop trio in the late 1950s. Weber recalls his primitive instruments and compositions in the family's kitchen. There he transformed household labour into leisure:

> Every night I would have to clean the dishes. There were so many of us that I would be busy with the dishes until eleven. Somehow, I didn't mind. I would keep the pots for last and arrange them in a half-moon and tap on them with a knife and fork. Drumming came naturally.[27]

Thus, not unlike many other Cape Town musicians, amateurs and professionals alike, Vincent Kolbe and Monty Weber's musical education was not a matter of attending music classes. Working class musical pedagogics consisted essentially of close listening and concentrated watching. Kolbe recalls that, `lots of people learnt like that. So in the working class areas lots of people just picked up instruments by ear.'[28] It was largely in this informal way that there `were lots of people who played.' For example, local jazz pianist Kenneth Japhthah, whom *South* recently

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26 R. Botto, *Some Aspects of the Leisure Occupations of the African Population of Cape Town*, (unpublished MSocSc thesis, University of Cape Town, 1954), p46

27 `Monty, Still Drumming up a Storm', *South*, June 1 - June 7 1989

28 Kolbe interview, p53

called a `guitar maestro', learned by watching intently. He says:

> It was tough for me at the beginning because there was nobody to teach me so I had to watch other musicians closely and see what they were doing. All I had was three basic chords. I was very frustrated because there was so much that I wanted to do with the instrument.[29]

After much struggle, and still with no formal musical training, Japhthah later became a professional jazz guitarist. Similarly, professional jazz pianist Tony Schilder,

> could never read music, so I simply did a lot of listening. I play all the (Charlie) Parker solos on piano, but I'm damned if you put the notes down in front of me. I have an incredible ear. Its a God-given talent.[30]

This casual learning process was widespread.[31] Informal music education - pursued by men and women, young and old - was a salutary means of overcoming the social and cultural disabilities of the inner city. The informal transference of music skills and the skill with which music was learned has an intimate relation to the levels of education and literacy in the inner city. Reading and writing were not entrenched in the everyday lives and leisure of the working class. Formal education was minimal. Just before the war

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29 `Guitar Maestro: From pavement picker to musician's musician', *South,* March 9 - March 15 1989

30 `Piano man: The Tony Schilder Story: Part One', *South,* April 20 - April 26 1989

31 It is worth recalling Ken Worpole's insight about British jazz musicians in the nineteen fifties: `By and large, jazz musicians have had to teach themselves and learn from each other', `Blowing Hot and Cold', *New Socialist,* January 1985. I want to thank Christopher Saunders for pointing me to this article.

about 85 percent of all `coloured' and Indian children and 94 percent of all African children in South Africa were receiving no formal schooling.[32] By 1948 most `coloured' children in Cape Town who were fortunate enough to have any formal education experienced only two years in a classroom; and most often it would be in an overcrowded school.[33] In other words, after sub A and B the percentage of children in Cape Town `coloured' schools dropped drastically.[34] But music was not preeminently educational compensation, for after all only a very few became musicians. Rather, music offered a means to prove the powers of concentration and the skill of composition; and it was both a cultural resource and an edifying leisure activity.

Learning and leisure thus often overlapped. It also means that a common inner city leisure activity was listening to live music and collectively participating in producing music. As Kolbe recalls, `people would come to your house with a guitar and play. If you go to someone's house there's someone singing. There was lots of live music.'[35] Similarly Mrs Savry Naidoo remembers a favourite routine pastime: `We used to sit around and sing, each one would get a turn to sing a song - all the people in the house.'[36] Mrs Naidoo's

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32 UG 35 - 1945, *Adult Education in South Africa: Being a Report by a Committee of Enquiry appointed by the Minister of Education*, p6

33 See `Those Picnic Ditties', *The Sun*, 11 August 1939

34 UG 53 - 1948, *Social and Economic Planning Council - Report no 13: the Economic and Social Conditions of the Racial Groups in South Africa*

35 Kolbe, p53

36 Mrs Savry Naidoo, p13

experience of group involvement in exercising the vocal chords resembles that of Mrs Asa Jassiem. The latter recalls that, `we were very fond of singing these Afrikaans liedjies....and every Sunday my cousin...they used to come there when we were making food and we used to sing and go on. I mean we had really enjoyment at home by doing that.'[37] This type of household music was closely linked to the production of household musical intruments such as the *guma* drum and the *rebanna* (tambourine) - both used widely at picnics and during Carnival time. And for private singing men and women drew on their knowledge of the public performance of the repertoire of Carnival songs such as the *moppie* or *Skemlied* (mocking song) and the *Nederlandseliedtjie* (Dutch songs).[38]

Singing Cape Town vernacular songs was a pastime for many inner-city dwellers. On the other hand there are the exceptional stories of beaming household tenors like Mrs Farieda Waghiet's father who used to sing `what Mario Lanza sang....he was a tenor. And my father used to sing all those songs....All the olden time songs. I remember `Once a World of Jerusalem' my father used to sing.' In her family, `I say there were gatherings and my father would sing and (...), but that night of course we don't go to bed early you see.

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37 Mrs Asa Jassiem, p37

38 See chapter four of Desmond Desai, *An Investigation into the Influence of the `Cape Malay' child's Cultural Heritage Upon His Taste in Appreciating Music; With a Proposed Adoptation of the Music Curricula in South African Schools to Reflect a Possible Application of `Cape Malay' Music Therein*, (unpublished M.Musc thesis, University of Cape Town, 1983)

It was a privilege to be having a little bit of fun.'[39] But Mrs Waghiet, like young Vincent Kolbe's fortunate friend, came from an exceptional musical background. The family possessed both a piano and a violin; and not only was her father a polished singer he also provided his children with a formal education in music. She remembers where she received her first music classes on the piano:

> I was ten years old when I started. I first went to the convent and then my mother sent me (elsewhere) - it was too far from Grey Street to walk up Nile street where the Convent still is today. Then I got a musical teacher, Mrs Kellerman which is near Sheppard street. It was easier for me to come to. And I still remember her name, Mrs Kellerman.[40]

Though formidable efforts were made by individual teachers to promote musical training and performance[41] music education in state and missionary schools was minimal.[42]

Furthermore, even though organisations such as the Eoan Group offered music education from the early nineteen thirties already[43], formal music education was generally pursued under private instructors, as in the case of Mrs Waghiet. However, the Eoan Group did play a pioneering role

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39 Mrs Farieda Waghiet, p17

40 Waghiet, p16

41 See Amelia Lewis, `Reflections on Education in District Six' in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds.), *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, forthcoming)

42 See articles in the Teachers League of South Africa's journal; for example *The Educational Journal*, 20(14), April 1949 has an article which calls for more attention to be given to music in the school curriculum.

43 By 1945 about 11 000 children and adults in the Cape Peninsula had passed through Eoan classes. See *The Sun*, 5 January 1945. See advertisement of Eoan Group classes in *Cape Standard*, 8 February 1944.

in producing talented musicians, dancers and actors. This organization was founded in 1933 by a white businesswoman with a social conscience, Helen Southern-Holt, who believed in the ability of cultural activities to relieve inner-city `coloureds' of their hardship. Her initial aim was to, `teach Speech Training - to give the power of the spoken word to the masses'.[44]

The Group started with a membership of thirty and by 1947 it had a membership of more than 1 800.[45] It was to grow even more rapidly during the nineteen fifties. Its growth was facilitated by the fact that it was under the patronage of leading city capitalists and was on very favourable terms with city council bureaucrats.[46] With adequate funds to support itself[47] the Eoan Group could afford to keep its fees relatively low,[48] employ full-time instructors and office staff[49], and even occasionally send its top students to England.[50] Yet, for all the glamour of its activities it never became a cultural organisation which touched the depths of working class consciousness. The Eoan Group's programme was pitched at the heights of an imagined `high

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44 *Cape Standard*, 15 August 1947

45 *Cape Standard*, 15 August 1947

46 See the list of those present at its 1947 Annual General Meeting. *Cape Standard*, 15 August 1947

47 Indication of financial support from the Department of Welfare and Education, and the City Council, see *The Sun*, 5 January 1945

48 In the mid nineteen forties the monthly fee at Ballroom classes was 10s, see *The Sun*, 22 February 1946

49 *The Sun*, 22 July 1949 and *Cape Standard*, 12 March 1946

50 *The Sun*, 10 February 1939 and 26 November 1948

culture'. Helen Southern-Holt and her group of professionals were intent on giving the Cape Town working classes some civilised cultural fare to compensate for their deprived worldly condition; as she once said: `What is the sense of being politically and economically free if you cannot appreciate the finer arts of life'.[51] But it was mainly the `coloured' elite who aspired after what the Eoan Group offered as professional training and performance.

Non-professional `on site' training was provided by Cape Town's Christmas bands, Church brigades, malay choirs and coon troupes, as well as by the Cape Corps army band. Playing in a swing band presumed musical competence and it was often the case that some band members graduated from a Christmas or Cape Corp band to a swing band.[52] Mr Eddie George is a fine example of a musician who moved through the ranks:

> I was in the brigade, the Church Lads brigade, I played the bugle...they teach you to play....Out of the brigade I left for the army...that's actually how I got into the army, me being very thin, very undernourished I think, they ask what do you want to do in the army, me always going to the bioscope I saw these buglist, all that I say I can play the bugle - I want to be a buglist....And then I joined up.[53]

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51 *The Guardian*, 13 September 1945

52 In this regard Cape Town was no different to London. A 1954 study of British jazz noted, `many of the most well-known contemporary British players got their musical education, not at college but in the RAF'. Quoted in Ken Worpole, `Blowing Hot and Cold',

53 *Western Cape Oral History Project* interview with Eddie George as quoted in Bernadette Leon, `Towards a Social History of Popular Music, 1940 -1960', (History 3, 1988 term paper, University of Cape Town), p8

For many performers the passage from the military and sacred styles of performance - in the army and Christmas band - to the secular beats was usually not reversed. A mixture of factors ensured this movement. As boys grew out of their late teens they often also lost touch with church-based leisure - no more confirmation classes, no need to use religion-related activities to move outside of parental control, and the sports club picnic[54] would replace the Sunday school outing. For instance, Richard Rive remembers his departure from the church choir. He writes:

> I joined a church choir and chanted the responses dressed in cossack surplice and scratchy Eton collar. I left the church Lads Brigade and joined the Second Cape Town Boy Scout Troop, because marching through the street behind a blaring, tiny band could damage the image we tried to create.[55]

For musicians, swing and dance bands offered far more freedom to exercise a greater variety of musical styles than the constraints of the Boys Brigade or Christmas band could ever allow. Certainly, the latter musical styles did not disappear with the inexorable currents of mid-twentieth century industrialisation and `modernisation'. Yet while the styles may not have eroded, the power and appeal of the religious brigades and bands were clearly wearing thin during the post war period. In January 1944, only just over 200 bandsmen participated in, and about 5000 people attended, the Church Lads' Brigade meeting at Hartleyvale.[56]

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54 See *Cape Standard*, 2 April 1940 for a report on a picnics at Pniel arranged by sports and choral clubs attended by `over 2 000 gay Coloured folk'.

55 Richard Rive on District Six in Mothobi Mutloatse (ed), *Umhlaba Wethu: A Historical Indictment*, (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1987), p92

56 *The Sun*, 7 January 1944

Later that year Sir Herbert Stanley addressed the 50th anniversary celebrations of the South African Regiment of the Church Lads Brigade and said that the CLB, 'had survived the ridicule levelled against it and similar movements.'[57] It had survived, but only just. At about the same time the South African Moslem Lads Brigade was also suffering from a lack of interest and participation.[58] As jazz, be-bop and swing groups were taking the cue a dirge was perhaps the fitting piece to be played by the religious bands. It must however be added that secular forms of musical performance did not completely displace sacred forms of musical production. But because so many musicians in Cape Town emerged from the religious bands and malay choirs, the ballroom and jazz music of Cape Town have displayed a measure of that influence. Many compositions, like Dollar Brand's early work Manenberg, were influenced by a childhood diet of church piano music.[59] Dollar Brand (now Abdullah Ibrahim) recalls his early musical fare:

> At the beginning, I did not consider myself a jazz musician. My grandmother was one of the founding members of the American (African) Methodist Episcopal Church in Cape Town. This is a Black church and I grew up with gospel songs, spirituals, hymns.[60]

Eddie George speaks with visible glee and a catholic enthusiasm when he recalls the characteristic fashion in which bands of those days played. He argues:

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57 *The Sun*, 15 September 1944

58 *Cape Standard*, 26 July 1946

59 See his commentary in the documentary film *A Brother with Perfect Timing*.

60 Dollar Brand in Mothobi (ed), *Umhlaba Wethu*, p63

> No, there is something special about a Capetonian playing saxophone - put in that extra twist, make your fingers wiggle. No when they played they played man with their whole heart, with their soul man. Even today when I play, you must see I go like this (swaying from side to side).[61]

George attempts to prove his point through comparison with overseas musicians and by appealing to the informal tradition of learning in Cape Town. He suggests:

> We had that sort of something special. I tell you the overseas musicians they were good, they were learned, they were musically trained, musically minded. Most of our musicians could not read music at the time. They were playing by ear and by playing by ear they could always put in that something extra that made the thing lively you know - the fingering and all that.[62]

A distinctive feature of both the popular bands and the church groups and malay choirs was the near absence of specialisation of band members on a particular instrument; instead an audacious eclecticism prevailed. Eddie George recalls:

> My first band I joined was the Young Eastern Stars, Dave May was the captain; he started me on the sax, but I played the banjo first, a little bit of accordian, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. That was actually my life in Christmas choir. Then I started my own band after a few years.[63]

When Eddie George started his own band it was not the first time that he was to play for money. He remembers that as a child:

> We used to go and sing for pennies, me and my newspaper buddies, we were selling magazines at night - `Everybodys' - outside the old Colosseum, and the Delmonicos, opposite the old Alhambra bioscope - the

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61 Quoted in Leon, `Towards a Social History', p11

62 Quoted in Leon, `Towards a Social History', p10 p

63 Quoted in Leon, `Towards a Social History', p8

> bigbands used to play there. We would go, my friend would play the guitar and I would sing and then they used to give us money.[64]

In the 1940s generating an income through making music on the streets of central Cape Town was not uncommon. Mr Kenneth Jackson recalls the times when,

> we used to go to the Grand Hotel in town...two of us - one for singing and one with the guitar, and the one with the hat, and people throw the money from upstairs for us and when the policeman come we have to run and we watch where he goes - (if he goes) that way we go that way. All the hotels we come, we sing, get money, divide it up and go home.[65]

In 1941 the *Cape Standard* published a photograph of a number of street musicians who were, `very popular in Cape Town, where they parade the streets and play favourite tunes.'[66] Mr Douglas Stevens was one such itinerant street musician in the early 1940s. Local economic conditions - specifically war-time unemployment - forced him onto the street, with saxophone in hand, in an effort to earn a living. He told the *Cape Standard*:

> It was the fact that I was unemployed for several months that made me decide to throw in my lot with these street musicians. We play at various points in the city and suburbs, and very often some one comes along and asks us to play a special tune. Such people generally put a handsome contribution into our collecting box.[67]

Street busking was thus a way of entertaining, an informal way of generating an income and demonstrating musical acumen. However, the commonest way to do all of these things was to play in a properly constituted band. And in the Cape

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64 Quoted in Leon, `Towards a Social History', p8

65 Mr Kenneth Jackson, p34

66 *Cape Standard*, 21 January 1941

67 *Cape Standard*, 29 October 1940

Town of the 1940s and 1950s there were many bands competing for place, prestige and patronage. Douglas Stevens himself was leader of one of Cape Town's `rising dance orchestras', The Manhattan Jazz Band.[68] In 1940 `Cape Town's most popular Band' according to one newspaper was Von Willingh and his Troubadours. This band's members were tradesmen and teachers.[69] The 1940s witnessed such groups as the Follies Dance Band, Willie Max's band and Alf Wylie's band. Their popularity was confirmed by their broadcasting stints at the local SABC studio.[70] A saxophonist in one of the bands of the day recalls that, `the big names were Wille Max, Al Wiley (sic), Ikey Gamba and Wally Ruiters. Everybody was talking about the Philadelphians and the Paramount Dixies.'[71] By the mid fifties five of Cape Town's African jazz bands had started The Western Province African Musicians' Association. The association aimed at `improving the social and cultural standards of the non-Europeans generally.' Consequently, the association planned a music festival in July 1955. The participating bands were the Honolulu Swingsters, the Hop Skippers, Alf Wylies Band, The Tuxedo Slickers, the Philadelphia Rhythms, De City Jazz Kings and the Merry Macs.[72]

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68 *Cape Standard*, 29 October 1940

69 *Cape Standard*, 28 May 1940

70 On the Foolies Dance Band see *Cape Standard*, 1 February 1942. On Alf Wyllie's band see *Cape Standard*, 18 October 1946.

71 `"Saxi": Bertie's brassy brood', *South*, May 18-24, 1989

72 *Cape Times*, 17 June 1955

It is also clear from oral and documentary evidence that the inner city and greater Cape Town had a healthy supply of ballroom and jazz bands catering for the leisure of all classes. By 1954 the inner-city could boast three established ballroom dancing associations[73]; and individual clubs always required bands to play at dances. Band members occasionally earned extra income through playing, but they always gained respect for their musical abilities. Memories of remuneration range from the well paid to the unfortunate. Bertie Matthee remembers that, `For playing the popular venues such as Maitland and Woodstock town halls - even the Drill Hall - the boys picked up seven to ten pounds.'[74] Less fortunate was Kenneth Japhthah who recalls,`receiving a shilling for playing at a dance. It just about covered my busfare to the gig.'[75]

And what were they playing in the late nineteen forties and nineteen fifties? `Everybody was trying to do the Glenn Miller sound', says Berti Matthee.[76] Certainly there was a local market for the big band sounds of the likes of the Glen Miller orchestra. But that music was not genuine jazz, instead `the music of the white big bands grew from earlier jazz traditions, but the emphasis was upon surface excitement rather than feeling.'[77] Whatever the judgement on

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73 R. Botto, *Some Leisure Occupations of the African Population*, p23

74 `"Saxi": Bertie's brassy brood'

75 `Guitar maestro: From pavement picker to musician's musician'

76 `"Saxi": Bertie's brassy brood'

the big band tradition, in the local situation it generated a lively passion and enthusiasm among a substantial section of the popular classes. Cape Town's `langarm' bands were reproducing such sounds; on the other hand an emergent group of young musicians were `very into Ahmad Jamal, Errol Garner, Oscar Peterson and so on....We played Jazz Messengers, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington and all other big names of the time....'[78] Morris Goldberg, a local white saxophonist, remembers, `we played jazz, we were not into any of the local music at that point. We were hearing all this amazing music ...Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman. The American influence was a big thing.'[79] Alex La Guma, the *Guardian* journalist and observant columnist, was distressed by the way local musicians were imitating American trends. He noted sarcastically in his regular column, after a `night out' listening to jazz that,

> the jazz played by combos headed by Messrs George Cussel and Morris Goldberg and assisted by trumpet-man Banzi Bangani was supposed to have been jazz as played in S.A. Instead it sounded just like jazz as it is played `back home' in the U.S.A.[80]

Undoubtedly, the local music market was saturated with American material and influence; while the dance bands were playing slick big band compositions, an emergent *avant garde*

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77 Clive D. Griffin, *Music Matters: Jazz*, (London, Dryad Press Limited, 1988), p38

78 `Monty: Still drumming on.'

79 `"Exiled", yet the African strains come through', *Weekly Mail*, November 10 - November 16 1989

80 Alex La Guma, *New Age*, 29 January 1959 in Andre Odendaal (ed), *Liberation Chabalala and Other Stories: Alex La Guma's Reports on South Africa, 1956 - i962*, (London, Kliptown Books, forthcoming)

was playing the esoteric compositions of Charlie Parker and Miles Davis to small audiences.[81] And from the mid-nineteen fifties, radio was promoting the sounds of Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis.[82] About the latter, evidence from La Guma's `Up My Alley' column is equally rich in descriptive detail and trenchant comment. Early in 1958 La Guma was having tea at a restaurant in Hanover Street, District Six, when a jukebox starting playing Elvis Presley, and `the teenagers immediately went into a frenzy of contortions and wiggles in the available space....When Mr Presley was through I tried to bring the conversation down to the normal tone of voice, but found myself competing with an "artist" by the name of Little Richard'. The proliferation of rock 'n roll led La Guma to lament, `the glory is departed. Are the days (or nights) of the good old Commercials, Kwelas and "tickey-draaie" gone forever?'[83] From available evidence it it clear that new styles of music and dance were replacing the old by the late nineteen fifties.

As noted earlier, `langarm' or ballroom and jazz bands were generally very popular in the nineteen forties and early nineteen fifties. Bands were numerous because inner-city dwellers provided a market for them. Regular dance, particularly ballroom, parties were the lifeblood of these

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81 See Kolbe interview

82 About the last mentioned see `Memories of another day', *South*, August 18 - 24 1988

83 *New Age*, 13 February 1958 in Odendaal (ed), *Liberation Chabalala*

bands.[84] Alex La Guma captured the texture of local dances when he described a typical one:

> Saturday night is dance night. The hall is crowded by nine o' clock and the band has got into its stride....Kwela, Commercial, quadrille: Arm in arm, corner swing, half-way, home James. Sambas all the way from Brazil. The girls are gay, wild, ecstatic. Their brilliant skirts whirl and their hair-dos are awry;...The boys are sharp in their zootsuits, yellow shocks and Tony Curits haircuts....When it is over and the band plays the Queen they scatter reluctantly, perspiring. "See you next week." "Drill Hall." "Philadelphia rhythms".[85]

Dances offered opportunities for band members to earn casual income; and it also allowed ordinary inner Cape Town inhabitants to construct their own system of status distinctions. For instance, the `Three Oaks Waiters' Club' organised dances which were exclusively for the imagined `coloured elite'.[86] An exchange of correspondence in the *Cape Standard* in 1945 on the level of organisation of dances is also revealing of the aspirations and values of sections of the local `coloured' population. The secretary of the `Britannia Dukes', a club which came in for criticism because of the inferior quality of its functions, responded to critics that, `the sole aim of the organisers is to keep admission fees as low as possible, so that every low-paid worker can patronise these functions'.[87] Thus, music and

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84 Ballroom clubs were widespread in District Six. By 1954 there was a thriving `Non-European Ballroom Dancing Board of Control' in District Six in addition to two independent associations and one based in Langa. Many sports clubs and political organisations also hired bands for their dances See R. Botto, *Some Aspects of the Leisure Occupations of the African Population of Cape Town*, p26

85 Alex La Guma in Odendaal (ed), *Liberation Chabalala*, p7

86 The *Cape Standard*, 2 March 1943 titled a report on one of the Clubs dances, `Coloured Aristocracy Makes Merry'

dances were not immune to their class context and to contestation.

Dances were popular but not all were equally well patronised by Cape Town's music and dance public. Mrs Fozia Salie remembers the manner in which she dealt with bands she did not appreciate: `And we knew already that if a band was going to play which we did'nt like then we give our tickets away. We had our special bands we loved and packed (the hall) when we danced.' The Willie Max and Alf Wyllie bands were her favourite groups.[88] Withholding support was one means of making a negative statement, while packing a hall was a positive sign. But sometimes over enthusiastic members of an audience would force performers to continue a show long after its allotted time. Performances to working class audiences were particularly susceptible to crude methods of audience control. Taliep Petersen remembers in his childhood:

> When George Formby, the banjo player, performed at the Star, the audience lapped up every moment. He was made to play a number of encores by a rather unsubtle method. A gangster held his knife at his throat and said:`Play on!'[89]

Tony Schilder recalls being at the receiving end of this type of practice (in a period just beyond the focus of this paper, i.e. the early nineteen sixties): `I used to play at the Star Bioscope from time to time...I'd play rock 'n roll

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87 *Cape Standard*, 10 July 1945 and letter in *Cape Standard*, 3 July 1945 to which this was a response.

88 Mrs Fozia Salie interview, p33, (my translation)

89 `Memories of another day'

for hours and when I wanted to leave the stage they wouldn't let me....Believe me, the threats were serious.'[90]

While these forms of musical activity were proceeding apace a debate on the relative merits of jazz was taking place in the pages of the *Cape Times*. From the mid-nineteen fifties opponents and supporters of jazz argued. By that time Cape Town already had an enterprising Jazz Club to promote the appreciation of jazz.[91] In the pages of *The Guardian* and the *Cape Standard* well crafted articles explained the history, meanings and forms of jazz music.[92] These developments were all an indication that jazz was gaining a wider acceptance in South Africa. Among the supporters of jazz as a legitimate musical form were Dr Erik Chisholm and Mr Gunther Pulvermacher, both of the University of Cape Town's College of Music. Pulvermacher argued that, `like folk music, jazz is chiefly a performer's art, written not by a detached composer but by the player himself - in fact, it could be called the sophisticated folk music of the city.'[93] But such arguments, propounded at public lectures and Jazz Club meetings, had no relation to the struggles and aspirations of Cape Town's mainly black working class performers.

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90 `Part 2: From rock 'n roll and langarm to jazz',*South*, April 27 - May 3 1989

91 *Cape Times*, 8 September 1949

92 Series on jazz in *The Guardian*, 11 October 1945, 18 October 1945, 1 November 1945, 15 November 1945, 22 November 1945. See also `Do you play jazz?', *Cape Standard*, 27 December 1939

93 *Cape Times*, 21 July 1955

Working class and emergent petty bourgeois performers were creating meaning for themselves out of a variety of experiences of performance. 'Langarm', jazz and other forms of popular secular musical production were enjoyed by a cross section of people. Music was used by workers and employers alike, at their separate festive and social gatherings. The local Garment Workers Union often advertised its rallies as combining 'meeting and concert'. In the early 1940s handbills and posters were widely circulated in the inner city advertising, 'A Mass Meeting and Concert of Garment Workers', 'Garment Workers! Come to a Mass Rally and Concert', or simply 'Meeting and Concert for Garment Workers'. And they always appended the phrase, 'Admission Free'.[94] All Cape Town trade unions and political organisations hired dance bands to play at their functions for shop stewards and union members. Music was unequivocally a necessary part of informal and organised working class leisure. But music was also used in the service of capital; in the process of production. Cape Town's clothing workers cut, trimmed and stitched to the ticking of the clock and the rhythm of the radio. What Mrs Gadija Williams recalls is representative of a wider sample of working experience. She recalls:

> There where we worked...the girls had to sing the records which they liked, their favourites. The music played whole day. Since they are in the factory it is a relief that we play the music; then the work goes faster, then we all sing with the music, the music played whole day.[95]

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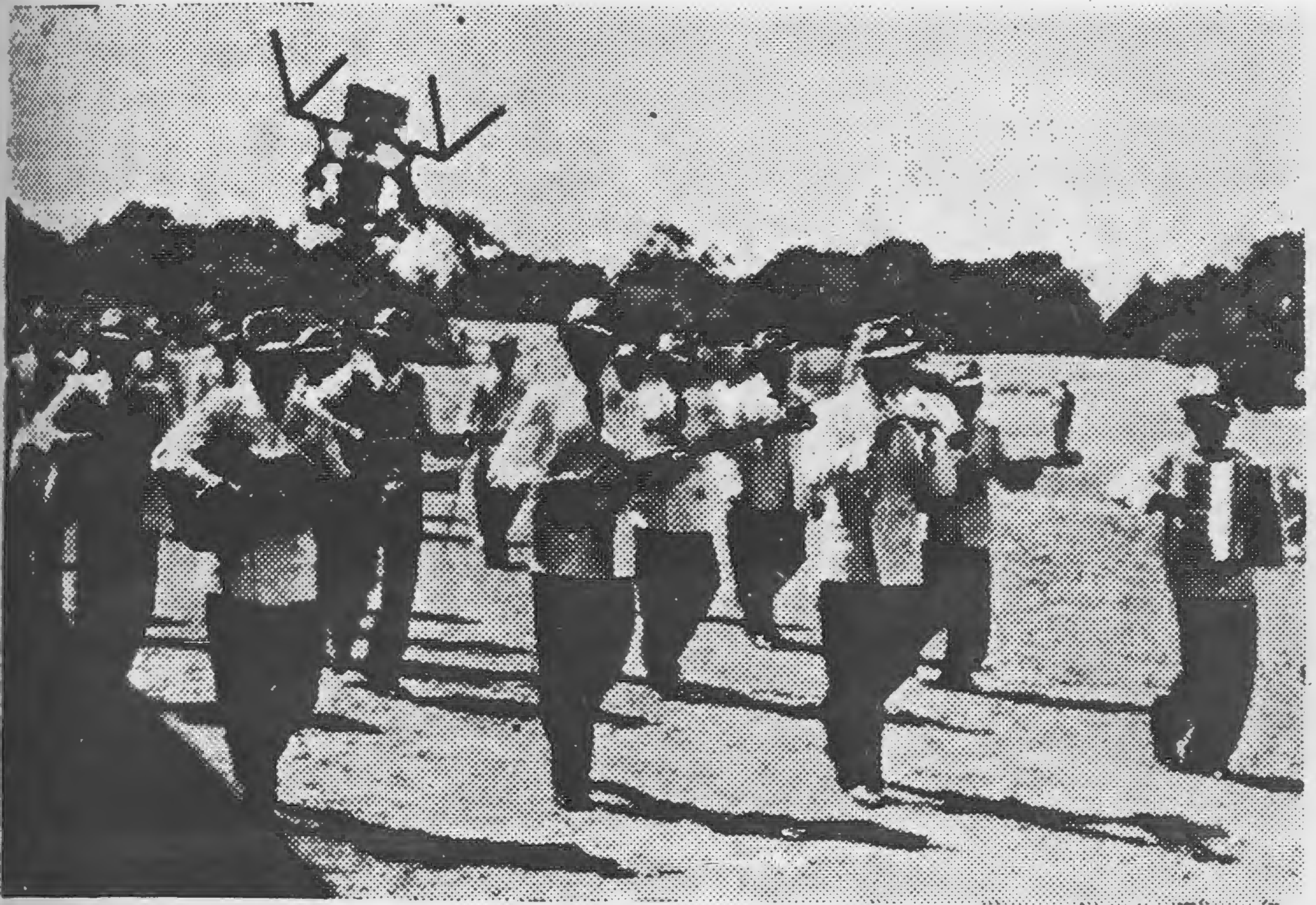
94 See posters and handbills of the Garment Workers' Vigilance Committee in *Garment Workers Union of South Africa Archives*, cba 1.1 -1.2, Department of Historical and Literary Papers, The Library, University of Witswatersrand

95 Mrs Williams, p19, (my translation)

Music offered both a means of expression to the working class and a potential instrument for social control in the struggle for hegemony. The unions sometimes mobilised their workers through song and dance, families secured familial and neighbourly bonds through song, religious organisations propagated their calls to the sound of the drum and trumpet, dance bands produced the context for adult entertainment, and jazz ensembles found existential meaning in music. On the other hand, the radio and record were also available to particularly clothing industry employers for less than leisurely ends - to engineer complacency in labour, and consequently to yield higher rates of production.

This chapter has focused on the informal methods of transferring and developing musical skills as well as the local modes of performing music. Music was a dominant part of the everyday leisure experience of Cape Town's popular classes. Moreover, the city produced a groundswell of highly talented musicians - many still playing locally, others pursuing successful careers overseas. Some of their voices have been reproduced here. Through the study of the forms of music, and the contexts in which they were learned, produced and performed, we have a novel and enormously enriching view into the world of the city's common people. Furthermore, the class, gender and ethnic cleavages of the region can be further illuminated since, in Christopher Ballantine's somewhat reductive terms, `social structures crystallize in musical structures; that in various ways...the musical



One of the prize-winning choirs in the competition organised by the Cape Malay Choir Board, on the Track recently. The choir is the Sweetheart Mays.

Source: *Cape Standard*, 20 January 1942

CRUSADERS' CHRISTMAS CHOIR.

The Crusaders' Christmas Choir which will participate in the proposed competition in aid of the war funds on the Cycle Track.

Source: *Cape Standard*, 4 February 1941

ITINERANT JAZZ BAND

These street musicians are very popular in Cape Town, where they parade the streets and play favourite tunes.

Source: *Cape Standard*, 21 January 1941

Van Willingh and his Troubadours, who are familiar to every dancer, will appear at the National Theatre next week.

Source: *Cape Standard*, 5 March 1940

Chapter Five

Dream worlds, the underworld and the `real world': Cinema in inner Cape Town

By the start of the Second World War the international film trade was already part of a well established entertainment industry. Film-makers in Europe and the United States were by that time producing millions of metres of celluloid of audio-visual moving images for a wide market. The proliferation of motion pictures in the capitalist metropoles engendered the growth of a popular culture around the cinema. `Going to the pictures' became a regular part of working class leisure in Britain for instance. Similarly, in the United States, frequenting `the movies' was a characteristic of American popular culture. Urban South Africans were equally receptive to the cinema. The `bioscope', as it was commonly called in South Africa since the late 1890s[1], became an institution of habitual leisure in the large cities and even country towns during the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. Though the Witwatersrand, and Johannesburg in particular, was the area which saw the most intense competition between theatre entertainment entrepreneurs, Cape Town was never neglected insofar as the establishment and servicing of cinemas were concerned.

1 Thelma Gutsche, `Fifty years of Cinema in South Africa' in *Forum*, 11 May 1946

From available documentary and oral evidence it is clear that in the popular culture of Cape Town, cinema-going was central. During the nineteen forties it stabilised as the dominant routine and public leisure activity of both the working and middle classes. In the words of a veteran of film distribution in Cape Town, `it was almost a habit to go to the movies.' To him it seemed at the time as if it was `the only form of entertainment'.[2] This chapter traces the preeminent place cinema occupied in the popular culture of the ordinary inhabitants of inner Cape Town.

Studies of the South African film industry and cinema have neglected to examine the appropriation of cinema and film medium by working class audiences. Thus Thelma Gutsche's *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895 - 1940*[3] is a detailed but unanalytical chronicle of the film industry. It is filled with narrative about the innovators of local film, emphasises the rise and decline of entertainment-based capitalists and is adorned with the titles of successful productions and the fantastic names of cinemas. The work also has sections on censorship and surveys the non-commercial use of film in the country, but it has very little to say about the social composition of audiences or the place of cinema in popular culture. Furthermore, it classifies films in terms of standard categories such as `musical', `western' and `drama' but it does not attempt to study the films as ideological

2 Notes on interview with Mr Harry Singer of Ster-Kinekor, 16 November 1989.

3 (Cape Town, Howard Timmims, 1972). Thelma Gutsche's work was originally submitted as a PhD thesis to the University of Cape Town in 1946.

representations of the world - as texts generating commentary on the world, most often confirming the dominant social order. By contrast, Keyan Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Cinema*[4], appears more than four decades after Thelma Gutche's study and is radically different in all respects. Tomaselli's study analyzes the South African film industry's role in the perpetuation of the system of racial capitalism. As such its focus is not cinema owners or audiences but the film industry *per se;* it looks at local productions and their discursive purposes and at the system of controls, such as censorship, imposed by the state. In this respect it is a pioneering study. Perhaps it is asking for too much from such a work to have also provided some insight into the world of those who patronized the `cinemas of Apartheid' - to ask what happened at the point of screening, and particularly what blacks and working people made of both the films and the cinemas. Such questions would require a different investigation. The only attempt to take us back to aspects of the cinema's place in working class culture is an engaging essay by Bill Nasson.[5] He conveys a remarkable sense of inner city proletarian culture, and places cinema-going at the centre of local popular culture. While he is not altogether concerned with the nature of the films which were shown, he however describes with rich oral testimonies

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4 (Standton, Radix, 1989)

5 `"She Preferred living in a cave with Harry the snake-catcher": Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town, c.1920s-1950s', *Wits History Workshop* paper, 1987. Published in slightly revised form in Phil Bonner et al (eds), *Holding Their Ground*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1989)

the ways in which cinema, `occupied a very special niche in the recreational life of the community'.[6] This paper extends Nasson's work by drawing on additional oral evidence and through filling in some of the lacunae in that essay. And like Nasson it will be more concerned with `cinema as a popular institution' than with the films shown.

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By 1939 very few of Cape Town's cinemas were independently owned; most of them were part of African Consolidated Theatres Limited. This organization (and its other wing African Consolidated Films Limited) was a 1931 amalgamation of African Theatres and Films Limited and Kinemas Limited. Most of the city's cinemas became part of the ACT&F empire, headed by a pioneer of South African theatre entertainment industry I.W. Schlesinger[7]. Their Cape Town cinemas included the huge 2000 seater Alhambra and the equally big Colosseum, established in 1929 and 1938 respectively, in the city centre. These cinemas aimed at a white middle class market while the Alabama, West-End, United, Star, the British Bioscope and the National all belonged to the ACTF's interests in and around District Six, and catered generally for a `coloured' working class audience. Other cinemas which were largely patronized by a white and middle class audience were Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer's Plaza and Royal in the city; and the Indian-owned Avalon which was opened in District Six in

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6 Nasson, `"She Prefered living with in a cave"',p3

7 For biographical data on Isadore William Schlesinger see, *Stage and Cinema*, 25 March 1949, vol 7(3). See also the *Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol 3., (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1977)

1943 - this was mainly frequented by more `respectable' and affluent `coloureds'. By 1952 greater Cape Town had forty-four cinemas. Indicative of the widespread interest in `the movies' are the 393 performances per week at `white' cinemas, and the 169 shows at cinemas for `non-whites' in Cape Town in 1952.[8]

After the Great Depression (1929 - 1932), the cinema entertainment industry was confronted with only minor commercial setbacks; even during the Second World War cinema was generally still economically viable. In monetary terms, the yearly average importation of `bioscope film' between 1934 and 1939 was over 250 000 pounds, and by 1945 had increased to 385 538 pounds.[9] Hard times for the industry came in the single year of 1940; the impact of men leaving to partake in the war and the erratic arrival of overseas mail impeded especially the regular showing of popular newsreels[10]. Further depressive factors were the psychological depression which accompanied war, and a spiralling cost of living which further adversely affected cinema attendance.[11] But business suffered only marginally and there is no evidence of cinemas closing down in the war

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8 G 68 A 9, *Census of Distribution and Service Establishments, 1952*, Part 2, # 4, Cinemas (Bioscopes), (Department of Statistics, 1952), Table 7a

9 *Official Yearbook of the Union of South Africa, 1946*, (Pretoria, Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1946), p17

10 `The African Mirror' was a popular newsreel sponsored by African Theatres Trust which during the war promoted recruitment. Another documentary was the monthly, `The March of Time'.

11 Thelma Gutsche, *The History and Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, (Cape Town, Howard Timmins, 1976), p262

years; in fact the Avalon was opened during the war. Thelma Gutsche has shown that to keep their cinemas accessible to the public a number of cinemas reduced admission prices in 1940. The reduced prices prevailed even after the economic situation improved.[12] By 1955 the value of film imports was just under 160 000 pounds for blank film and slightly below 250 000 pounds for exposed film.[13]

In concert with the boom in film production in the Hollywood of the nineteen forties,[14] local cinema capitalists certainly had prosperous times by the end of the decade. During the nineteen forties there were about 400 cinemas in South Africa with a total seating capacity of over 250 000. In 1942, over 2.5 million pounds were paid by the public for admission to cinemas and in the same year the State received about one million pounds in revenue from entertainment tax.[15] In the nineteen fifties the ritual of attending bioscope continued to pour hard cash into the coffers of African Consolidated Theatres and other film exhibitors. For instance, in Cape Town in December 1952, just over one hundred thousand `whites' had gone to a cinema while about

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12 Gutsche, *The History and Significance*, p261

13 *Annual Statement of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa, 1955*, Table 2

14 `from 1942-1944 Hollywood produced about 440 films a year, and 1946 was the most commercially successful year in its history. The forties were a time of big stars and big audiences where the studios with their armies of talent and technicians reigned supreme',argue Leonard Quart and Albert Auster in their *American Film and Society since 1945*, (London, Macmillan, 1984), p13

15 UG 35-45, *Adult Education in South Africa: Being a Report by a committee of Enquiry appointed by the Minister of Education*, p111

53 000 `non-whites' went to the movies that same month.[16] Unlike in Britain and the United States television was not a potential threat to cinemas, pulling audiences away from the silver screen[17]; consequently, the country presented a healthy investment opportunity to overseas `film capitalists' who were confronted elsewhere with the possibility of competition from television.

While audience support remained constant during the nineteen fifties international investment in the South African cinema and film industry spiralled. A major British investment of 250 000 pounds in the Schlesinger organization came just after the war. By 1955 the North American organization Twentieth-Century-Fox took virtual control of Schlesinger's African Consolidated Theatres and Films.[18]

Cinema was controlled by multinational and national capitalist interests and subjected to the same legal and political strictures as other public leisure in South Africa. Cinemas were generally segregated along racial lines[19] in Cape Town and there is no evidence to suggest that despite inner city cosmopolitanism and `multi-racialism', cinemas were ever spontaneously desegregated by audiences. Oral testimony suggests that while there was some

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16 G 68 A 9, *Census of Distribution*, table 7b

17 Quart and Auster, *American Film and Society*, p62; and `Cinema' in *Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa*, (Cape Town, Nassou, 1972), vol 3, p237

18 Article on `Cinema' by Thelma Gutsche in *Standard Encyclopedia of Southern African*, vol 3

19 In 1944 the City Council granted the posh Alhambra the use of the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra for its oprea sea provided it was open to all. The African Consolidated Theatres spokesperson had no comment. *The Sun*, 3 March 1944

possibility of mixing at certain cinemas, people from the various localities kept to their `own cinemas'. As Mrs Beatrice Jaftha recalled,

> There was a lot of bioscopes in town. It was only after the (Second World) War that the bioscopes became for Europeans only (on) one side, and for coloured people (on) the other side, and you couldn't enter in the wrong side. But mostly we had our own bioscopes, but the Colosseum and the Alhambra was close for us too.[20]

The `separate amenities' for the various `racial groups' in the nineteen fifties were not simply the creation of the Nationalist Party's victory in 1948; it had a longer history of custom, dating back to before the Second World War.

On the condition of `coloured' cinemas, one contemporary study noted that, `most of the Non-European cinemas in Cape Town are greatly inferior in material facilities, probably because they cater for largely poor and lower-class audiences.'[21] Yet, while the conditions of inner city cinemas were not the same standard as that of the Alhambra or Colosseum they nonetheless offered limitless pleasure to their working class audiences. In contrast to the worn and musty interiors and peeling facades of most `coloured' cinemas (with the exception of the Avalon in Hanover Street) in the nineteen forties, most `white bioscopes' were superior venues. In addition to the better cinemas for whites there were the `atmospheric' theatres for middle class whites.

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20 Mrs Beatrice Jaftha, p11

21 Sheila Patterson, *Colour and Culture in South Africa: A Study of the Status of the Cape Coloured People within the Social Structure of the Union of South Africa*, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul limited, 1953), p128

cinemas for working classes also sometimes had their publicity stunts which would add to their appeal. The dream world of the cinema started with their glittering names and unique structures but included life-size posters and other advertizing paraphernalia.[24]

People create their own meanings from their given circumstances, and cinema is no exception. Inner city cinemas were given names evoking images of splendour and imperial grandeur and attempted to lift the imagination out of a harsh world. For instance, there was the Star, the British Bioscope, the Avalon, the Palace and the Gem. And the Cape Town working class certainly gave cinema its own texture; moreover, it made the bioscope its own leisure space. For cinema-going was certainly regular and habitual; as Mrs Fatima Diedericks recalled, `my hobbies was going to bioscope. That was my hobby.'[25] Seeing cinema-going as a hobby recurs in oral testimonies. Mrs Sarah Savry Naidoo, for instance, responded to the question, `Did you have any hobbies?' with the reply, `just the bioscope, say on a Saturday afternoon.'[26] This persistent conception of cinema-going as a hobby says much for its place in inner-city leisure and popular culture. But it is also revealing of the extent to which the notion of `hobby' was commodified and turned into a consumptive instead of creative activity in the post-war period.

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24 On the inventiveness of cinema advertising see Nasson, `"She preferred living in a cave"',p4-5

25 Mrs Fatima Diedericks, p19

26 Mrs Sarah Savry Naidoo, p 16

From available oral evidence it is clear that the *Star* was the most popular working class bioscope in District Six. Referring to the way respectable `coloureds' saw the Star, Mr Mannie Fagan remembers that, `they call(ed) it that *skollie* bioscope or something like that. (It had) hard benches and all that.'[27] Mr Kenneth Jackson recalls that as a young adult he received eight pennies as pocket money, `two pennies for bioscope'. And which cinema did he frequent? `(In) Hanover Street it's the Metro. They renamed it the Star, but before that it was the Metro.' He was not content with a weekly visit to the bioscope: `Well, sometimes I go whole week, everyday - just to pass time.' For him it seemed quite natural to go that often to the cinema. Indeed, the kind of regular attendance Mr Jackson was familiar with can be ratified by statistics for the early nineteen sixties, and can be projected back at least to the mid-nineteen fifties. It was found in a government survey that Saturday was the most popular day for going to the cinema, followed by Friday and Wednesday, then Monday, and cinemas were relatively quiet on Tuesdays and Thursdays.[28] And whereas a gradient could clearly be discerned in weekly attendance patterns - from a high Saturday to a low Thursday - there was nearly no curve on the graph of monthly attendance trends. Cinemas were patronized as well during winter months as in the summer months. While this evidence is for the early nineteen

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27 Mr Mannie Fagan, p8.

28 *Census of Cinema, Cafe-bioscopes and Drive-In theatres, 1964 - 1965, Report no 04-51-01*, (Department of Statistics, Republic of South Africa, 1965), Table 2.1

sixties it is not likely that the situation was dramatically different in the mid-nineteen fifties.

Mr Jackson remembers the way in which a cinema's week would be arranged. To the question, `did the bioscopes show the same films all week, or how did it work?' he responded, `No, its Mondays and Tuesdays, and then they change over, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and then they change over again (for) Fridays and Saturdays.' However, he added `if it is a play like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, I think that play the whole week.'[29] But whatever showed it appeared to him that `everybody was there', as if `everybody knew each other.'[30]

Cinema, not only the Star, seems to have played a central role in creating a warm communal sense. It was similar to what Jeffrey Richards has shown for the Birmingham of the 1930s, that, `the neighbourhood cinema assumed a place in community life not dissimilar to that of the local pub.'[31] Members of the District Six `community' would meet regularly at cinemas. For very popular movies literally hundreds of people would queue at ticket offices and spill over onto the streets. Mrs `Lady' Farieda talks of her experience at highly rated shows:

> People would rush to get tickets, now they are standing in a queue, first there was one queue and all of a sudden its more than one queue and by the times those

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29 Mr Kenneth Jackson, p33

30 Mr Kenneth Jackson, p10

31 Jeffrey Richards, `The Cinema and cinema-going in Birmingham in the 1930s' in James Walvin and John Walton (eds), *Leisure in Britain, 1780 - 1939*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983), p33

> gates opened the people started climbing over the other gate, just to get there in time you know, and they would open the gate slowly and they can't hold the gate because now they are all pushing because if they don't get a ticket now, and things like that.[32]

Mr Jackson recalls a similar experience outside cinemas:

> The people all walk on top of each others head to get inside. They walk on top of each other to get inside - to get in front by the gate. He can't go through, its too crowded, now he want to be there first. Now he get on top and he walk on top of the people just to get in front.[33]

But the `everybody' Mr Jackson referred to earlier, and the queueing people remembered by both Mrs Farieda and Mr Jackson included gangsters as well as respectable married couples. Mrs Asa Jassiem remembers the Star bioscope as, `one of our popular bioscopes. But sometimes when a drunkard comes in...you watch the film then they start fighting.'[34] While she related no particular incident of explosive gang warfare in the cinema, Mrs Fozia Salie at least once experienced a gang fight. She recalls,

> I was very fond of the Star bioscope. (Once) I was sitting in the Star bioscope and the Globe gang heard that one of their enemies was in the Star bioscope, then they rushed in. Then the people got up. And the people screamed and ran out. Then my husband said to me "sit still. If you run you are going to hurt yourself. If you sit then nothing will happen to you." We sat and we saw the swords and the commotion. But they (the gangsters) were after their enemy. They would never hurt other people.[35]

The intermittent outbursts of violence at the Star did not deter popular working class support for it; as Mr Aziz Salie put it, `the only thing to do was to go to the Star

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32 Mrs `Lady' Farieda, p16

33 Mr Kenneth Jackson, p34

34 Mrs Asa Jassiem, p14

35 Mrs Fozia Salie (translation), p27

bioscope.' While that was indeed the case for many inner city dwellers, ordinary cinema-goers often chose from a range of cinemas; Mr Salie himself went to, `the Star bioscope or the British or the National. Afterwards the Avalon came into being. There was no night clubs or things like that that you could go to you know.'[36]

Cinema was sought after not merely for the films audiences paid to see; a great deal of excitement, especially for women, revolved around dressing up for the movies. Mrs `Lady' Farieda recalls,

> the times when you were looking forward to acting like a teenager. Like preparing for those times. They are going out now to bioscope, they have got to prepare themselves, get their shoes, their dresses, their clothes.[37]

In addition to the pleasure of preparing for the movies, cinema was also a meeting place and a venue for courting couples. The generally overcrowded household space of most District Six residents and the constraints of religious custom impeded the practice of boys `calling' at the homes of girls and hindered easy `dating' for many unmarried youth. Mr Aziz Salie recalls his experience at the home of the girl who was to become his wife:

> We didn't court much. We were only engaged for six months and we got married. I didn't know her for too long before we got engaged because those days you know if you want to take a girl out you got to ask her father first, you know. Now he wants to know who you are and what you are and *vertel jou* (tells you): Jy kommie stoele hier warm sit nie ne! (You don't come here to sit the chairs warm!). And when its about half past nine or ten o clock then the old man: Ha en wanne gan jy huis toe? (And when are you going home?). You know that sort of thing. When you take her to the bioscope then they tell you which nights you can come.

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36 Mr Aziz Salie, p28

37 Mrs `Lady' Farieda, p16

> Even when you're engaged too you can't go as you want to. He tell you okay you can come Monday nights or Wednesday nights and weekends. The rest of the nights you can't come around there.[38]

While cinema was a very public place it nonetheless provided some opportunity for intimate 'dating' experiences. Perhaps because of crowded living conditions, public leisure and entertainment outside the home assumed a special place in local popular culture.[39] Yet parental control was extended to supervise the time of young cinema-goers by prescribing permissible hours of visiting as in the case of Mr Salie, and a 'respectable time' by which to be indoors. Mrs Gadija Jacobs remembers that:

> We wasn't allowed to stay with a boy alone, or so. But in the bioscope it was a whole crowd. So the crowd would see you home safe and your boyfriend too. They would see all the girls home then themselves.
>
> Did you have to be home by a certain time?
>
> Yes, when the bioscope come out, and my Auntie always used to find out if it was that time. But we wasn't allowed night shows, only matinees, and then we had to come straight home. We were all in the same community so it was better.[40]

Cinema provided an opportunity to integrate the leisure spheres of men and women, boys and girls. Many young girls were not allowed to 'stay with a boy alone' but a dark crowded bioscope was often the place to be with a member of the opposite sex. Mrs Gadija Jacobs rebelled at least once against her guardians to go to bioscope with a boy-friend:

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38 Mr Aziz Salie, p59

39 An illuminating short essay which takes into account household space and parental control in youth popular culture is Peter Ling, 'Sex and the Automobile in the Jazz Age', *History Today*, November 1989

40 Mrs Gadija Jacobs, p11 (tape 3)

Sitting in often crowded cinemas and on hard benches was a common experience for many of these cinema-goers. From these packed seats audiences would frequently audibly engage with the film; as one letter to a local newspaper put it:

> I refer mostly to the talking aloud and passing comments on the players, besides reading aloud sub-titles...and the sympathy and advise (sic) given out to players by some persons. Some ladies again, bring their babies to the show in the evening.[44]

Amorous couples, and sporadic fights in the plebeian cinemas added to the texture of the Cape Town bioscope. Moreover, there were the scenes of audiences bringing their snacks with them - from smelly fish and chips to milk chocolates. Mr Noor Ariefdien would use his six-pence pocket money to entertain his girl-friend. He remembers once taking his girl-friend to the cinema and buying her chocolates. In addition to buying two bars of chocolates he could afford to go,

> to the sweeteries to buy two pence worth of broken sweets. Then we got honeycomb - one does'nt get it anymore - half a bag full. Then we sit in the bioscope eating, and tomorrow I'm still eating from those sweets, whole week I can eat from the bag of sweets.[45]

Here was cinema for individual entertainment and for courting couples; cinema where the American underworld was glamourised and where fairytale romances and action-packed Westerns captured audiences; and cinema where even live gang-fights occurred. But which type of movies were inner Cape Town audiences rushing to the cinemas to see in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties?

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44 *The Sun*, 2 January 1948

45 Mr Noor Ariefdien (translation), p5

As the dominant audio-visual medium, films made a powerful impact on audiences. Peter Abrahams' childhood memories of life in the Johannesburg location of Vrededorp have many echoes in District Six. In his autobiography, *Tell Freedom*, Abrahams vividly recalls his first visit to the Vrededorp bioscope. His observation on the impact of the bioscope probably holds true for all similar communities in South Africa. He writes:

> People wept bitterly at screen tragedies; more bitterly than at their own, real-life tragedies. Often, the illusions of the screen became the reality of some frustrated boy's or girl's life: and drab Vrededorp became the illusion.[50]

He comments that, `Illusion and reality often merged at the bioscope'[51] in Vrededorp; a statement which can equally be applied to inner Cape Town's cinemas. The sociologist Sheila Patterson noted crassly in her study on Cape Town that, `The types of films preferred by Coloured film-goers attest to their desire for escape: they like action and thrills (especially Tarzan), horrors, slap-stick, and horse-operas.'[52] Local youth were ardent admirers of the film-stars of these `escapist' films and were adept in imitating these stars from the silver screen. In his column in the *New Age* Alex La Guma frequently observed Hollywood's influence on youth in District Six. In a 1956 piece, for instance, he wrote of the unemployed youth who roam Hanover Street, stand

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50 Peter Abrahams, *Tell Freedom*, (London, Faber and Faber, no date), p112

51 Abrahams, *Tell Freedom*, p112

52 Sheila Patterson, *Colour and Culture*, p333, footnote 113

on street corners and there among other things, `debate the merits of a popular movie star, usually one of the screen toughs. Humphrey Bogart, Burt Lancaster.'[53] He also described with a measure of his characteristic cynicism an occasion when he joined the conversation of some youths in a Hanover Street cafe: `Topic: Hollywood's latest productions. The boys like fast-shooting stuff, guys with stubbly chins and dangling cigarettes and tied-down guns. The conversation was a little blood thirsty, and I'm glad they don't allow tied-down guns in this town.'[54]

But cinema offered more than the big screen; it routinely featured variety concerts and staged talent contests. By late 1939, for instance, the search was on for the `best banjo player' in a competition held at one of African Consolidated Theatres' `coloured' cinemas.[55] At the Avalon there were live shows one Saturday per month which featured a range of celebrities such as the the well-known compere Achmat Adams.[56] At least for a time, competitions of a different order were run by one `coloured' newspaper - the *Cape Standard* - in conjunction with a few cinemas. A newspaper photographer would photograph a section of an audience and select a couple to win free tickets to the

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53 *New Age*, 20 September 1956 in Andre Odendaal (ed), *Liberation Chabalala and other Stories: Alex La Guma's Reports on South Africa, 1956-1962*, (London, Kliptown Books, forthcoming), p7

54 *New Age*, 3 October 1957 in Odendaal (ed), *Liberation Chabalala*, p145

55 *Cape Standard*, 10 october 1939

56 *The Sun*, 30 May 1947

following show.[57] Live shows and competitions were two of the ways in which cinemas engendered loyalty and continuing support from the public. Another means of promoting films was to bring world-renowned actors to South Africa. A few internationally recognized film-stars visited the mother-city, and their visits were always accompanied with fan-fare in the post-war years. For instance, when Tyrone Power came to Cape Town in 1947 considerable press coverage was given to his movements, and the `coloured' newspapers focused on his appearances in District Six.[58]

In addition to the `double features', competitions and cabarets which drew and captured audiences, a regular feature was the ongoing serials which made the devoted, especially the young, return to the cinema for the next instalment the following week. Mrs Aisha Pitt recalls one tactic used to ensure audience return:

> As kids we used to go every Saturday to bioscope. And you know they used to have special things on for the kids then. Very exciting. They would put a woman on a railway line and the train is just going over her, then the picture stops and come and see next week again. That kind of thing. And then next week someone is just going to fall over the wall, we used to go every week and sometimes in the week I used to go with my father.[59]

And the serials drew the committed cinema-goers, as was the case with Mrs Gadija Jacobs, who recalls that, `She (the domestic employer) couln't keep me one minute if there was a matinee, because it wasn't far from her house, I will even

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57 *Cape Standard*, 18 April 1939 and 5 March 1940

58 See *The Sun*, 26 September 1949

59 Mrs Aisha Pitt, p15

go without my food! Because I want to be in matinee bioscope so bad, I follow the serial and I *must* see it!'[60]

In Cape Town, unlike in Britain, it appears from available evidence that there was very little controversy over the impact of films on children generally. Instead attention was focused on the specific effects of films on `Non-Europeans'. Whereas in India and Britain, Indians and black immigrants protested against `Gone with the Wind' for stereotyping Southern blacks as lazy and servile, in South Africa it was banned for `coloured' audiences by the Censor Board in 1940.[61] Later it was unbanned, however, with very little public debate in Cape Town at least. More sustained commentary, however, seems to have been engendered by the effects of violence in movies on `coloureds', particularly `coloured' youth. The exhibition of crime films was cited as a cause for gangsterism in Cape Town by a Commission investigating *skollies* in the city.[62] The Commission claimed that a gang named after a movie the `Clawed Hand' operated in the city. Consequently, at least one newspaper called for stricter censorship of films shown locally.[63] Some local cinema-goers protested against the possible discrimination which would result from such legislation.[64] But censorship was already applied to all movies and a form of control was exercised over which movies were forwarded to `non-white'

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60 Mrs Gadija Jacobs, p13

61 *Cape Standard*, 3 December 1940

62 *The Sun*, 28 January 1944

63 *The Sun*, 7 January 1944

64 *Cape Standard*, 14 March 1944; *The Sun*, 24 April 1942

cinemas.[65] But the local Commission had a possible point when it indicted violent films in encouraging the growth of gangsterism in Cape Town. The oral testimonies on gang fights in the cinema quoted earlier is evidence of the regular presence of gangs at the movies. Thus certain gangs controlled sections of a cinema, such as the Globe gang which virtually `owned' the upstairs seats of the Star. A former caretaker at the Star rememebers something of the spatial allocation of gang power in the Star. He remembers that in the nineteen fifties the Stalag 17 customarily occupied seats near the entrance, the back of the cinema was for the Casbah Kids, in the centre sat the Avalon Rangers and so on.[66] Don Pinnock has shown that gangs in the late nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, and particularly the Globe gang, imitated the dress styles and tactics of North American movie heroes. As Pinnock writes, Globe gang members were `taking in weekly doses of American gangland experience at the cinemas in the District (Six).'[67]

This chapter has traced the place of cinema in the popular culture and leisure practice of inner Cape Town. In the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, bioscope was an habitual leisure activity. `Going to the movies' was a veritable `hobby' for many members of the working class.

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65 Clause 5(2) of the Entertainments (Censorship) Bill of 1931 included the prohibition on showing films which depicted, `passionate love scenes; scenes representing antagonistic relations between capital and labour; brutal fighting; intermingling of Europeans and non-Europeans'.

66 `Boeta Sakkie', no pagination

67 Don Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1984), p28

Carnival came once a year and dances at weekends but the bioscope was open everyday, except Sunday. Cinema was capitalist property but it was appropriated by the working classes for their own ends. The `dream palace' of the cinema was not imposed by capitalists to create false consciousness as a vulgar economistic interpretation of popular culture would argue. While movies did forward stereotypes of blacks, women and workers, the extent of their impact should be seen in the context of a whole complexity of factors which constitute consciousness and subjectivity. Representing more than films on a distant screen, cinemas offered a moment in which to `imagine community', they offered an opportunity to use the dark to subvert something of the local moral consensus. The orderliness and control of behaviour that operated in middle class cinemas were not applicable to cinemas such as the Star and British Bioscope. Yet not all inner-city cinemas were plebeian fantasy houses, for more `respectable' social classes preferred the National and the Avalon. Cinema-going as an institution was classless - most of the films which showed at the better end of the city eventually landed at the poorer venues - but classes, whether defined in economic categories or in terms of status sets rarely mixed at the cinema. Ultimately, in working class culture cinema was indispensable. Perhaps the vivid oral memory of a former resident of District Six best captures the texture and centrality of cinema in the life of the inner-city. Mrs `Lady' Farieda remembers,

> as time went there in the district there came a time when the bioscope was burnt down. They had a fire and then Mrs(name unclear) heard about it and she came and we all went down to the bioscope and she actually went inside. It burnt down and damaged and you could just walk right in and see. Shame, a lot of people came to

> the bioscope, there were lot of memories which were left behind there, and she cried. She said, "On this chair I met this guy" and so on and so on and " on that chair we saw that" and so and so, and she cried. It was memories and you couldn't go to the bioscope again because they never rebuilt it, they just pulled it down and when that came down something of that whole street was lost. It wasn't the same, I mean the people around were the same, it broke a lot of people...[68]

The cinema referred to was the Star; the year, 1959.

68 Mrs `Lady' Farieda, p20

THIS FLASHLIGHT PHOTO was taken by the Cape Standard photographer at the Star Bioscope on Saturday night. Free admission tickets to the Star Bioscope for any night (excepting Fridays and Saturdays) will be given to those people marked with an "X." Ticket winners are asked to call at the Cape Standard Office, 15 Mechau Street, Cape Town. Take the Hanover Street trackless tram to the Bree St. terminus.

Source: *Cape Standard*, 5 March 1940

A scene outside the British Bioscope, District Six, in the 1950s

source: District Six Collection, Hands Off District Six Committee

Chapter 6

Popular Culture and Popular Politics in Inner Cape Town

Studies of popular culture and organized politics have until recently been separate worlds in South African studies. However, the contemporary historiography of industrializing South Africa has spawned many micro-studies on community politics and local cultures. But hardly any detailed work exists on the cultural practices and policies of political organizations. On the other hand, the political character of cultural organisations and more generally the political role of expressive cultural forms have received more attention. Among the studies which are particularly relevant here are Tim Couzens' absorbing study of liberal attempts to `moralise the leisure time' of Africans on the Witwatersrand,[1] A.W. Stadler's examination of squatter movements in Johannesburg in the mid-nineteen forties[2] and Eddie Koch's exploration of `slumyard' culture in Johannesburg in the inter-war years.[3] These studies are

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1 Tim Couzens, `"Moralising leisure time": the transatlantic connection and black Johannesburg, 1918-1939', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1930*, (Essex, Longman, 1982), pp314-337

2 A.W. Stadler, `Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg' 1944-1947', in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979)

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concerned with occurrences on the Witwatersrand, and while they are firmly located in a materialist context, they only partially explore the linkages between local working class cultures and political organisations. However, for the Western Cape no comparable work has been undertaken. Thus, any study of culture and politics in Cape Town starts on a fairly fresh path in its investigation of the dynamics between culture and organized resistance politics.

This chapter examines the links and articulation between popular culture and popular politics in inner Cape Town and necessarily, the contradictions and tensions between them. It explores the ways in which the expressive cultural forms such as the `coon' carnival and Cape Town popular music were received, and how they were registered in the discourse of black political movements in Cape Town. It also looks at the cultural initiatives of local political organisations.

The mid-nineteen thirties inaugurated a period of lively radical political debate and organisation in Cape Town. The most important left organisations in the Cape Town of the nineteen thirties were the National Liberation League (established in 1935), the New Era Fellowship (1937) and the Non-European United Front (1938); the All African Convention, which was established during this time (in 1935), was only propelled along a radical course in the

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Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983). See also his *Doornfontein and Its African Working Class, 1914 to 1935: A Study of Popular Culture in Johannesburg*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1983), chapter 4

early nineteen forties. The Anti-CAD (Anti-Coloured Affairs Department) and the Non-European Unity Movement, established in the early nineteen forties, were the culmination of local resistance politics during this period. The Communist Party of South Africa also played an influential role in Cape Town, while the African National Congress, which had a large presence the Western Cape countryside,[4] had only a small base in the city.

There were tensions between organisations and within them. And even organisations outside the ANC-CPSA axis did not represent a homogeneous movement. For instance, the National Liberation League and the New Era Fellowship had some overlap in membership, and were both beset with factional struggles at leadership level over political policy in the late nineteen thirties and early nineteen forties. In both these organisations Cissy Gool, daughter of Dr Abdurahman and city councillor, led a `pragmatist' group, with support from the Communist Party, against the `purists' such as I.B. Tabata and Ben Kies. The latter were intent, at least at the theoretical level, on pursuing a programme of militant working class mobilisation as against Ms Gool's more `reformist' approach.[5]

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4 On the ANC in Cape Town see Rosalie Kingwill, *The African National Congress in the Western Cape*, (unpublished BA honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1977)

5 See Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African `Coloured' Politics*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1987), Chapter 7

In 1940 Dr Abdullah Abdurahman died, and with his demise the African Peoples' Organization[6] reached the nadir of its decline. The APO's virtual disappearance from the scene of extra-parliamentary politics was a singular loss to `coloured' petty bourgeois political interests. The decline of the APO did not, however, open the way for left-wing organisations. Moderate `coloured' opinion still had tenure in the polarized oppositional political discourse of the city. Yet, local politics was being radicalised. In March 1939, for example, the city was witness to an unusually unified campaign of mass mobilisation and a huge march on Parliament in the struggle against residential segregation.[7] Though this march incorporated diverse political elements, reformists and radicals were in increasing competition for support. A prime example of the tension between reformism and radicalism, and of the growing radicalisation of `coloured' politics in Cape Town is the struggle around the Coloured Advisory Council (CAC), established in 1943. The establishment of this Council produced a groundswell of reaction among a large section of the Western Cape population and left-wing groupings made use of the negative responses to it.

The establishment of the CAC presented an opportunity for oppositional organisations to mobilise grassroot support. In his recent study of `coloured' political movements, Gavin Lewis has argued that, `young radicals found the issue they

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6 The APO was established in 1902 as the African Political Organization. Dr Abdurahman was president of the organization from 1905 until his death.

7 Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp192

had been searching for throughout the 1930s'. Moreover, he says that, `it catapulted them into prominence as they mobilised Coloureds with a policy of black unity, non-compromise, and non-collaboration...'[8]

The ideas of `black unity, non-compromise, and non-collaboration' were the animating themes in the ideological arsenal of the major radical organisations, apart from the CPSA and ANC, in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. The All Africa Convention, and the Anti-CAD and NEUM, and NEUM supporters in the National Liberation League and Non-European United Front articulated a policy of boycott and non-cooperation with all institutions and individuals linked to the segregationist, and later Apartheid, state. Their political practice consisted of popularising their programme of non-collaboration through publications, public meetings and discussions. But unlike the ANC and CPSA before its banning in 1950, they were generally scornful of mass mobilisation around particular repressive and unjust measures. As Neville Alexander has argued:

> In a violently repressive society...the boycott slogan could become (as it did in the Western Cape) the ideal disguise for political abstentionism and more-revolutionary-than-thouism....An almost Calvinist fear of disporting themselves in the streets seems to have seized the leadership of the Anti-CAD Movement and political action was confined to municipal or church halls.[9]

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8 Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p173

9 Neville Alexander, `Aspects of Non-Collaboration in the Western Cape 1943-1963', in *Social Dynamics*, 12(1), 1986, p11

This approach thus placed them in sharp contradiction to the campaigns of the CPSA and ANC. The NEUM, since its establishment in 1943, gave the clearest and most consistent expression to the policy and practice of non-collaboration. This was an organisation which grew out of the AAC and, like the NLL, drew its leadership from the ranks of the `coloured' petty bourgeoisie, particularly the teachers.

Teachers were organised by the conservative Teachers League of South Africa until the organisation was taken over by Anti-CAD radicals in 1944. The latter, like the NEF and the NEUM, consisted largely of teachers and professionals at leadership level; Golaam Gool was a medical practitioner while Solly Edross, Ali Fataar and Ben Kies were all high school teachers. I.B. Tabata was one of the few genuinely working class activists in the NEUM. Kies, together with I.B. Tabata, became leading ideologues behind the policy of non-collaboration. Kies' perception of the place and role of teachers is revealing, and could explain some of the weaknesses of the NEUM strand in making further inroads into Cape Town resistance politics. At the first national conference of the Anti-CAD, Ben Kies analysed the role of imperialism and segregationist policies in the contemporary plight of South African blacks. He also forwarded solutions, which consisted of the formation of a black United Front of workers and peasants. Furthermore, he stressed the role of the black intellectuals. According to Kies, the intellectuals consisted almost entirely of teachers.[10] At the conference he said, `the only persons amongst the non-

10 Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p215

Europeans who have more than a mere smattering of education, are the teachers. They are certainly the only ones to have a certain amount of leisure'.[11] Given the few avenues open to educated `coloureds' many filled teaching posts. And next to medical doctors, of whom there were very few, teachers did occupy a respectable position in the Western Cape. The mantle of cultural and political leadership thus fell upon them.

But it was faulty political logic to expect teachers to assume key roles in political organisations. In most cases, their material interests militated against active political involvement. Writing of the NEUM, Edward Roux has argued that, `African intellectuals, particularly teachers, found that their profession made it impossible for them to participate in mass movements involving physical danger or imprisonment'.[12] In an analysis of `coloured' political organisations Mary Simons reached a similar conclusion:

> The status of the teachers and their skills in communication made them "natural" leaders of the community. Their professions, however, curtailed the content of their political action. Dependent on a monthly salary....They could give vent to their political resentment and frustrations...and abstain from positive action and confrontation with the authorities.[13]

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11 Quoted in Mary Simons, `Organised Coloured Political Movements', in H.W. van der Merwe and C.J. Groenewald (eds), *Occupational and Social Change Among Coloured People in South Africa*, (Cape Town, Juta, 1976), p225

12 Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p405.

13 Simons, `Coloured Political Movements', p225

Those teachers who were committed to the NEUM, the new TLSA and the Anti-CAD constituted a small section of the teaching fraternity. But their intellectual influence was widespread. Through their campaigns, pamphlets, discussions, their newspaper *The Torch*, and journals such as *The Educational Journal* (from 1944) their vision of political struggle and their views on cultural issues were circulated. It is particularly the cultural policies and practices of NEUM-linked groups that will be analysed in this chapter.

Ben Kies developed ideas on the place of culture in a class divided society. In 1943 he wrote derisively of those among the oppressed who deified ruling class cultural values. Instead, he argued, the idea of culture should not be limited to the art and music of the dominant classes:

> The culture of any society means the `way of life' in that society, so that art galleries and shebeens, skollies and parsons, the City Hall and Cape Flats pondokkies, Pickerill and Von Willigh, gold mines and gold-diggers are all an integral part of South African culture.

Moreover, Kies wrote, `the culture of an individual is dependent upon the culture of the society in which he lives and the place which he occupies in that society'.[14] Kies made no distinction between `high' and `low' culture. In his interpretation of the meaning and place of culture in society, cultural production has an intimate relation to existing material conditions. And just as the ruling classes are not praised, so is their culture not accorded a privileged position by Kies. Thus, he sees both the working

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14 *The Cape Standard*, 23 February 1943

classes and the dominant elites active in producing cultural meaning in their separate class categories. In the same article Kies attacked those `coloureds' with working class roots who imitated the cultural practices of the ruling classes. He linked their behaviour to the prevailing political conditions:

> In the absence of any strong revolutionary movement, workers and other oppressed people often have a strong sense of inferiority: they are over-awed by the power of their rulers, and over-impressed by their ideas on morality, dress, manners, speech, thrift, music, film-stars, ballet-dancing and temperance.15

Those who imbibed the `false and usually snobbish sense of cultural values' were not `cultured', as they would wish to be perceived, but are `Kulchah'd' (a phonetic rendering of the local `coloured' working class verbal inflection of the word culture - the type of pronounciation `coloured' elites wanted to distance themselves from).

In Cape Town there were many educated `coloureds' who hankered after an imagined `high' culture, the culture of the dominant class whites. Members of the Coloured Advisory Council like George Golding, the Reverend Gow and Saleh Dollie were well-known in the city for their professional status, and for their `snobbish' cultural preferences. For instance, Golding who was principal of Aspeling Street Primary School, prided himself on the fact that the school produced an annual concert patronised by members of the white elite and the `coloured' `socialites' of the city.[16]

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15 *The Cape Standard*, 23 February 1943

16 *The Sun*, 18 August 1950 and 25 August 1950

To people like Golding, the Italian opera produced by the Eoan Group was culture, classical music performed by the Municipal Orchestra was culture, and going to the posh Avalon was more cultured than, say, going to the older British Bioscope. Kies directed his invective against them. But what were the organisations doing, of which Kies was a leading ideologue, in terms of cultural production?

The New Era Fellowship, which came to serve more as a left-wing debating forum than a political organisation, had a drama group, but from available evidence it appears that it was active for only one year, during 1939.[17] The NEF also had a popular discussion forum which arranged for speakers on political issues and literary topics. In 1939, a young Vrededorp author, Peter Abrahams, delivered one of his first public lectures in Cape Town at a NEF meeting in the Stakesby Lewis hostel in District Six.[18] The latter venue was then well-known as a meeting place for political activists.[19]

A venue which was utilised more widely and was a better known facility among young inner Cape Town intellectuals, however, was the Hyman Liberman Institute in District Six.[20]

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17 See review of its two plays in *The Sun*, 11 August 1939

18 *Cape Standard*, 31 January 1939

19 See I.B. Tabata interview, and Vincent Kolbe interview; and R.O. Dudley, `Removals: The Essential Meaning of District Six', in Shamil Jeppie and Crain Soudien, *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, (Cape Town, Buchu Books, forthcoming)

20 For the range of organisations which used the Hyman Liberman Institute see any of its *Annual Reports*. (The South

In the one year in which the NEF drama society was functioning, it staged its shows at the famous `Liberman'. The Hyman Liberman Institute was established in 1934 from a bequest of a former Mayor of Cape Town, Hyman Liberman. Its aim was to serve as a recreational and cultural centre for District Six youth. It organised a programme of activities, ranging from a nursery school and sewing classes for women through to a boxing club and debating society. The Institute also housed a library - the first and only in District Six.[21] In the early nineteen forties the Institute started an annual series of public lectures.[22] But very soon it was realised by the organisers that the District Six public was not particularly interested in hearing people like University of Cape Town Professors J.S Marais, Schapera, Hutt and Batson or Senator Rheinallt Jones at a small fee.[23] In reaction to these lectures a student wrote to the press: `Prof. Batson tells us that poverty is rife among the Coloureds who cannot afford luxuries and then in order to be able to listen to these startling facts, which we know already, we must pay 6d a time. Poor we!'[24] However, the Liberman Institute library offered a venue for informal meetings of District Six political activists,[25] and its hall

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African Library has reports for the period between 1951-1957)

21 *The Sun*, 13 June 1947

22 *Cape Standard*, 15 August 1939

23 *Cape Standard*, 12 March 1940 and 11 June 1940; *Cape Times*, 20 March 1941 and 23 April 1941

24 *Cape Standard*, 19 November 1940

25 See Kolbe interview, p51. Mr Kolbe served as a librarian at the Liberman Institute's library in the nineteen fifties.

was used regularly for more formal gatherings by political organisations. It seems that District Six intellectuals preferred listening to their own thinkers and activists, instead of professors from the University.

The Liberman Institute's activities were geared towards physical and cerebral edification - it offered no music classes; District Six residents who frequented the Institute had to go elsewhere for music education. The Teachers League of South Africa had a lively interest in promoting music education and choral singing in schools, an interest which in all probability came with its older conservative political tradition. Throughout the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties the pages of *The Educational Journal* carried articles on the merits of `school choral singing' and `how to prepare a school choir for public performances and competitions'.[26] In 1948 the TLSA held its `Musical Festival' in the City Hall and was assisted by the Spes Bona Orchestra.[27] If fetes and bazaars can be considered part of the popular culture of inner Cape Town, then the TLSA contributed its share to this dimension of local popular culture, since for many years it organised an annual fete.[28] Apart from its promotion of school music and its fund-

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26 See *The Educational Journal*, 20(12), August 1948; 20(14), April 1949 and; November-December 1952

27 *The Educational Journal*, August 1948

28 In Cape Town many schools and welfare societies organised `Bazaars' for fund-raising purposes. *The Sun* regularly reported and advertised these events. See Achmat Davids interview (p6), who remembers the political figures who were often invited to `open' the `bazaars'. He recalls that such public appearances contributed to the credibility of political organisations in District Six. See also *The Torch*, 23 January 1950

raising fetes there is no evidence that the TLSA was engaged in any other cultural activity.[29]

At the other end of the spectrum of radical political organisations in Cape Town, the Communist Party arranged cultural programmes through its People's Club in Plein Street (in the early nineteen forties the Club moved to Commercial Street). In many ways the events there were intertwined with the ideological imperatives of the Communist Party. Like the New Era Fellowship's activities, the CP's cultural offerings through its People's Club were linked to its political agenda.

In the late nineteen thirties the writer Harry Bloom organised music concerts at the Club.[30] The Club was also used by the `Friends of the Soviet Union' committee to organise fund-raising activities.[31] Apart from its concerts and occasional choral singing sessions, the Club also arranged a continuing series of public lectures; a programme similar to the Liberman's, but with a radically different orientation. In 1941, Dr H.J. Simons lectured on Lenin in a series of lectures on `The Founders of Socialism'. From 1942 onwards the Club started developing closer ties with local trade unions.[32] But it does not appear that unions actually

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29 A stray article on `The Theatre and Society' did appear in a 1951 issue of *The Educational Journal*, but there is no indication whether the TLSA actually organised a dramatic society.

30 *The Guardian*, 1 September 1939

31 *The Guardian*, 24 February 1939

32 *The Guardian*, 12 February 1942

brought workers to the Club's lectures or concerts. Among the Club's regular activities were the sessions of gramophone music from the Soviet Union often titled, 'International Working Class Music on Records'.[33]

The People's Club was alive to the numerous local struggles, and it did not simply arrange concerts and lectures. In the early nineteen forties the People's Club staged plays by its dramatic wing, the People's Theatre. The theatrical group responded to local issues by presenting satires on the CAC and on university social workers. The play about the latter was called 'The Poverty Datum Line',[34] with obvious reference to the University of Cape Town's investigation into poverty and social conditions in Cape Town. But with the banning of the Communist Party in 1950, and the harassment of *The Guardian*, the People's Club was hard pressed to continue.

It is clear that popular political organisations in Cape Town considered cultural activities to be an integral part of their individual political programmes. However, what needs to be addressed is the ways in which the inherent popular culture of the inner-city was viewed by the leading political organisations of the time. Most working class people were not active in either political organisations or trade unions. Gavin Lewis has observed that, 'wrangles between the various factions in Coloured politics in the Cape had little relevance for most ordinary Coloured

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33 *The Guardian*, 12 July 1945

34 *Cape Standard*, 8 June 1943

people'.[35] Aside from the more dramatic conflicts between organisations, which had no immediate relevance to ordinary people, there was also very little organic and continuous identification between the inner Cape Town working classes and political organisations. About the NEUM, Neville Alexander has argued that, `in practice, it ...made very little connection between the day to day struggles of the urban poor and the medium-to-long-term objectives of the political struggle'.[36] Undoubtedly, specific political campaigns in Cape Town can be pointed to which had large popular participation. For example, the 1939 anti-residential segregation campaign had widespread support, as did the 1946 women's protest against food prices spearheaded by the Cissy Gool of the NLL;[37] in 1948, the Train Apartheid Resistance Committee initiated a mass campaign against train segregation, and in 1951 the Franchise Action Committee mobilised big numbers against the impending removal of `coloureds' from the Common Voters Roll. But politics was not central in the everyday experience and consciousness of the working classes. Most of the transcripts of working class interviewees in Western Cape Oral History Project have few memories of political involvement, and even of general comment on the political organisations of the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties. They remember individual personalities - many recall Cissy Gool, a few the Communist Party councillor Sam Kahn - though they have bitter memories of Apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas

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35 Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p198

36 Alexander, `Aspects of Non-Collaboration', p13

37 *Cape Standard*, 23 May 1946

Act. The argument Richard Hoggart has forwarded about the general political inertia of the working classes in the north of England from the early decades of the twentieth century to the immediate post-war years has resonances in Cape Town:

> As to politics...they have a limited realism which tells them that, as far as they can see, "there's no future" in it for them.... There are, of course, individual exceptions; and there are occasional increases in the intensity of political preoccupation among the majority. But in general most working-people are non-political...in their outlook. The important things, so far as they can see, are other things.[38]

However, it must not be thought that working class people accepted their lot without the tiniest bit of resistance. But political organisations and trade unions were not the only avenues through which they could resist. In their day-to-day existence and in their everyday culture working people had their own forms of personal opposition, their individual defences, to the drudgery of repetitive factory labour, and to the indignities of being at the receiving end of racial segregation. And these elements of defiance were contained in the popular culture of the working classes. Aspects of this type of resistance emerged in the chapter on the `coon' carnival; and the creative ways in which the poor appropriated cinema and made music speak of their tremendous ability to contest difficult conditions and hard times. But how did political organisations articulate with cultural forms such as the carnival, popular music and cinema; how did they view autonomous working class cultural expressions?

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38 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literary*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973)

The attitudes of political organisations to the annual `coon carnival' during the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties is not very easy to establish from documentary evidence. But it does appear that the type of response of an organisation was determined by its general understanding of political mobilisation. Thus, the `pragmatist' faction of the National Liberation League and the Communist Party never dismissed the carnival as an event entrenching working class subservience. In fact, spokepersons for these organisations often came out vociferously on the side of the carnival. Coon troupes came from the constituency from which these organisations aimed to gain most of their support. It is therefore significant that in 1939, Cissy Gool and Harry Snitcher were guests of honour at the Green Point Track carnival events. Both presented the prizes, and Cissy Gool made a speech in which she praised the troupes but also stressed the value of unity among troupes, suggesting that a `United Carnival Board' be formed.[39] In 1940 leading members of the NLL, L. Morley-Turner and Booker Lakay, came out in strong support of the carnival when it was attacked in the press by a `coloured student'. Both Morley-Turner, a `white' member of the NLL, and Lakay responded with lengthy letters to the *Cape Standard*, the latter arguing that, `local coon festivals are akin to the working class festivals in every country on the European continent'.[40] In 1941 the Communist Party newspaper, *The Guardian*, reproduced one of artist John Dronesfield's impressions of carnival performers titled,

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39 *Cape Standard*, 10 January 1939

40 *Cape Standard*, 23 January 1940, and 16 January 1940

'Street Ballet, District Six'.[41] By publishing the painting and through the enthusiastic tone of the caption, which celebrated the carnival as 'indigenous ballet', the newspaper was endorsing the carnival. However, the widespread myth of the naturally colourful coloured is not absent from the caption (the painting and caption are at the end of the chapter). It may have been the case that the newspaper and the Party were in certain ways subject to the dominant codes by which the 'coloureds' were seen, yet they fought for their political rights. A perspective on the coons which can be read as revealing of CP attitudes is Alex La Guma's argument in the *New Age*. La Guma's 1957 article posits a materialist theory of culture reminiscent of Ben Kies' 1943 interpretation of culture but La Guma has a more mechanistic notion of the power of the economy on cultural production. He also sees the coons as an impoverished cultural form but which must be appreciated for the material conditions out of which it emerges. La Guma writes that:

> A people's cultural level can't be divorced from their economic level. One has a bearing on the other. So folks with lots of money and leisure have the opportunities of raising their cultural level, and folks who are poor don't get a chance to develop, so they are only able to appreciate culture of a lower type. The characters who are yelling about getting rid of the coons because it reveals a very low standard of culture and so on, have got hold of the wrong end of the stick, I think. The big job is to raise the economic level of the people, with it their cultural standards will go up, and the coons will die out.[42]

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41 *The Guardian*, 18 September 1941

42 *New Age*, 5 December 1957 in Andre Odendaal, *Liberation Chabalala and Other Stories: Alex La Guma's Reports on South Africa, 1956-1962*, (London, Kliptown Books, forthcoming), p89

At no point in their history was the carnival disparaged by the NLL and CP. However, the same cannot be said unequivocally for the Non-European Unity Movement. While there is no evidence of its outright opposition to the carnival, in its mouthpiece, *The Torch*, NEUM writers ascribed very little autonomy to the `coon' troupes and malay choirs. These cultural groups were always portrayed as virtual inventions of the ruling classes to perpetuate the subordination of the `non-European' working classes. Thus, in the nineteen fifties - when a NEUM discourse on the carnival becomes most apparent - the troupes and choirs emerge mainly in relation to the Coloured Affairs Department (CAD) and Dr I.D du Plessis.

I.D. du Plessis was an Afrikaans poet and folklorist devoted to `preserving' a spurious local `malay' culture.[43] In 1939 he was the leading figure behind the formation of the Cape Malay Choir Board. In 1952 Du Plessis was appointed the first Commissioner for Coloured Affairs, and as such was at the head of the CAD. Thus, he was eminently placed in a state bureaucracy - with its financial and administrative resources - and in a popular cultural organisation - with its organic social linkages - to influence and control the malay choirs. Undoubtedly, the CAD and Du Plessis tried hard to use the malay choirs for their political ends. Already from 1951 he started making arrangements for their participation in the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary celebrations.

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43 On du Plessis see M.S. Jeppie, *Historical Process and the Constitution of Subjects: I.D. du Plessis and the reinvention of the `malay'*, (unpublished BA honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1987)

It was from that point on that the NEUM started to involve itself with the malay choirs, to win them away from involvement in what it termed the `Festival of Hate'. Leading NEUM activists, such as I.B. Tabata, H. Jaffe and Goolam Gool toured District Six and Bo-Kaap promoting the boycott of the Van Riebeeck festival. There were also a few meetings at which NEUM speakers shared platforms with Malay choir speakers whose choirs were not going to participate in the festival.[44] A leading member of the NEUM and the first secretary of the Anti-CAD, Ali Fataar, recalls what he thinks was the general NEUM position on the malay choirs:

> Q: Wasn't it odd for you people to have meetings with the choirs (in 1952)?
>
> A: Oh no! No, no, no, never. In fact, there may have been people who had the idea that choirs were taboo, but it never harmed you. What we were against was when I.D. du Plessis started organising them on the (Green Point) track...and having segregated seats for Whites to come and look at the performance. Then we started, you know to attack. Not the poor choirs, but Du Plessis.[45]

At a joint choir-NEUM meeting in March 1952 in the Fidelity Hall `the vast majority of the audience were members of the Malay choirs' and the meeting resolved:

> We, residents of Cape Town and representatives of Malay Choirs, resolve to carry out the boycott of the Herrenvolk Van Riebeeck Festival of Hate now being conducted on the Foreshore. We further resolve to undertake the spread of the Non-European Unity Movement slogan of `Boycott the Festival'.[46]

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44 *The Torch*, 2 March 1952 and 11 March 1952

45 Ali Fataar interview, p40

46 *The Torch*, 11 March 1952

The effect of NEUM campaigning was a near total boycott by `coloureds' of the festival.[47] Additionally, a majority of the choirs did not participate in the festival, and those choirs which participated were not fully constituted ones. The festival also split the Cape Malay Choir Board, and in defiance of Du Plessis, another Board was formed by dissenting choirs, *Die Suid-Afrikanse Koorraad*. Even songs were composed about the boycott of the festival such as the line referred to in the chapter on carnival, `*Van Riebeeck se ding is VIM!*'[48] (Van Riebeeck's thing is finished!). *The Guardian* also contributed its share to the boycott of the festival, but its perspective was quite different. Edward Roux wrote articles on Van Riebeeck for the paper, and the Franchise Action Council called for a stayaway from all festival- related events, especially because they were to be racially-segregated, was given publicity. But the FrAC's approach to the issue cannot be compared with the NEUM's totally uncompromising line. The FrAC's and *The Guardian*'s attitude is summed-up in the former's statement on the festival that, `so great an occasion requires proper commemoration in a true spirit of racial cooperation and democratic fulfilment'.[49] On the eve of the festival a harder line did eventually emerge, one which stressed the distortions of South African history which the festival would be propagating. Yet, ultimately these groups were not

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47 The *Cape Argus*, 15 March 1952 reported that `there was a notable absence of Coloured people in the festival crowd'.

48 See R.O. Dudley, `Removals: The Essential Meanings of District Six', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien, *The Struggle for District Six*

49 *The Guardian*, 13 September 1951

overly concerned with the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary. The banning of the CPSA in 1950, State pressures on *The Guardian* from 1951, and preparations for the 1952 national Defiance Campaign, even though it had a minor `volunteer' corps in Cape Town, all contributed to their neglect of more energetic mobilisation against the festival.[50] But the tone in which their opposition to the festival was cast sheds light on their different understanding of the South African past from that of the NEUM.

How do we explain the success of the NEUM's boycott campaign among malay choirs, and by extension coon troupe members, as there was some overlap in membership, though the troupes were not the focus of Du Plessis' attempt to involve `coloureds' in the festival? Most fundamentally, the CAD had been discredited even before it was formally established. The struggle against the CAD, led by the Anti-CAD movement, was probably the most consistent and energetic of local struggles from the mid-nineteen forties to the early nineteen fifties. Du Plessis was intimately involved with the CAD, and his attempts to recruit choirs when the ordinary choir members were aware of the struggle against the CAD set him on a course of failure. Popular sentiment against the CAD, and organised NEUM intervention in the recruitment to the festival thus made for the collapse of wide-scale `coloured' and choir participation.

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50 *The Guardian*, 15 November 1951, 27 December 1951, 14 February 1952, 28 February 1952, 6 March 1952, 27 March 1952

However, this setback for Du Plessis did not deter him from continued involvement with the choirs and he remained Life-President of the Cape Malay Choir Board. Throughout the nineteen fifties he was active in promoting the choirs, and more generally the annual carnival.[51] By 1954 he had organised two choral concerts with State finance. These concerts were state functions for the diplomatic corps, cabinet ministers and other dignitaries.[52] It was thus quite possible that they were quietly arranged, without the public attention which the festival arrangements engendered. Aside from Du Plessis' invitations, individual choirs were invited to perform at racially segregated and highly controversial events. For instance, in August 1954 a Malay Choir was scheduled to perform at a function in Durbanville in aid of funds for the Voortrekker Monument.[53]

After its practical involvement with some choirs in 1952, the NEUM was never again actively to concern itself with the choirs and troupes. *The Torch* merely reported, selectively, on the malay choirs and coon troupes. It covered the manner in which certain choirs were serving the ends of the State, but it did not try to mobilise them into more progressive avenues. If the NEUM saw it as opportune to work with choirs during the Van Riebeeck Festival, it was a completely temporary intervention. It pursued no on-going strategy of mobilising malay choirs and coon troupes.

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51 I.D. du Plessis papers, Box no. 2171/81/250, Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum, Bloemfontein

52 UG 12-1954, *Report of the Commissioner for Coloured Affairs for the year ended 31st March 1954*, p7

53 *The Torch*, 17 August 1954

The generally `agnostic' approach of both the NEUM and the CP to the `coon carnival'- an approach which saw the carnival as essentially irrelevant, present but not important, is different to the way in which one Marxist group in Indonesia viewed local working class festive street theatre. In Java, Indonesia, while the nationalists opposed the transvestites and clowns in the *ludruk* street theatre, at least one Marxist leader led a *ludruk* troupe until the early nineteen sixties. While the leader, Sjamsuddin, heavily contested the prominence of the transvestite, and to a lesser extent the clown - for their `unrevolutionary' roles - he nonetheless participated in the troupe, even writing scenarios for the troupe. By actually participating in the *ludruk* he attempted to direct the content of troupe performances into a revolutionary mould.[54] There is no comparable example in Cape Town. The Javanese example of activist involvement with plebeian street culture may appear exceptional. However, there is a theoretical underpinning for such cooperation in the work of Antonio Gramsci, for instance. Gramsci pointed out the importance of understanding popular culture and the ordinary people's `common-sense' conception of the world. He in fact wrote numerous articles on popular culture. In a recent evaluation of Gramsci's writing on culture and politics, Marcia Landy observes that:

> His primary objective in investigating forms of cultural production is to situate the organic

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54 James L. Peacock, `Symbolic Reversal and Social History: Transvestites and Clowns of Java', in B. Babcock (ed), *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, (London, Cornell University Press, 1978), p219

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> intellectual in a critical practice in relation to all forms of social activities.[55]

By `organic intellectuals' is meant those intellectuals who emerge from a class and articulate the world view and aspirations of that class. In terms of this, the `coloured' teachers in the NEUM - whose class origins were with the working classes - were supposed to fulfil the role of the `organic intellectuals' in Cape Town. Gramsci envisaged a role for such people which was at once one of political leadership and as cultural organisers. Popular cultural practices can serve the ruling classes, or at least obstruct the creation of a new order, and for these reasons Gramsci argued that popular culture should be understood by revolutionary parties in their construction of an alternative hegemony.[56] Such ideas, however, were not on the agendas of oppositional groups in Cape Town, and least of all the NEUM.

Either the NEUM viewed the malay choirs and coon troupes as mostly of no real political consequence, or it was itself slowing down as a political organisation, becoming increasingly incapable of engagement in too many political battles at the same time. In other words, it was losing its political momentum. Neville Alexander points out that by approximately 1952 the NEUM and Anti-CAD were not participating in `any mass struggles of the working class'.[57] Equally, throughout the nineteen forties and

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55 Marcia Landy, `Culture and Politics in the Work of Antonio Gramsci', *Boundary* 2,24(3), Spring 1986, p61

56 Landy, `Culture and Politics', p60

57 Alexander, `Aspects of Non-Collaboration', p12

nineteen fifties the NEUM had scant regard for the meaning of the `coon carnival' and all that it entailed.

For political critics, carnival entrenched the notion of a `naturally jovial coloured people'; and it was in fact not really `culture'. If the articles on music and the book reviews in *The Educational Journal* and *The Torch* can be taken as evidence of the broader NEUM cultural orientation, then it is clear that it was not local working class cultural initiatives which were significant to them. In the NEUM's literature, and in the cultural - music, art, drama and literature - preferences of its leading members it is also evident that it attached greatest value to the products of `high' Western culture, even though the more left-wing of Western art and literature was preferred. Its members were taught to understand culture in terms of its literary expressions. An active member of the NEUM and TLSA, and founder member of *The Torch* newspaper was Richard Dudley. His interpretation of District Six's place in national history is illuminating of the intellectualist bias of the NEUM. He recalls District Six as, `the birthplace of the truly national democratic movement, the fountainhead of literature and art that had fed so many streams, and the bridgehead from which the intellectual and ideological development of democratic groups was defended and advanced'.[58] The Cape Town working classes were rooted in a predominantly oral cultural universe - one of songs, riddles, storytelling and radio - with strong performative qualities - such as in carnival - and cinema, with its

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58 Dudley, `Removals: The Essential Meaning'

mixture of oral and visual dimensions. Given that this was the character of local working class culture it is not difficult to understand the inability of the NEUM, with its intellectualist orientation, to even contemplate articulating with working class cultural forms such as the `coon carnival'. This inability of the NEUM to identify with popular cultural initiatives, and its `high culture' bias both in turn flowed from the social character of NEUM leadership. Kies, Dudley, Fataar, Jane Gool and most of the senior activists in the NEUM-linked organisations were teachers. In inner Cape Town, and more generally at the time, teaching was a `respectable' profession. While the NEUM teachers were not climbing the career ladder like other members of the petty bourgeoisie they were still carriers of certain norms of literacy, conscientiousness and `refined' habits. In their different ways of living the masses and the teachers, even to politically-aware ones, were bound to part ways.

It was not uncommon for NEUM-linked organisations, and for groups like the CP and NLL, sometimes to call on local musicians and arrange dances when they needed to raise funds.[59] *The Guardian* once published a photograph of a NLL dance, adding the description `Liberators make Merry' to the picture[60] - a sight which some of the more stoic political activists would have found offensive. In 1949 six Christmas bands `place(d) their services at the disposal of the fight for liberation'. They staged a special show in aid of the

59 *Cape Standard*, 4 July 1944

60 *The Guardian*, 1 December 1939

Train Apartheid Resistance Committee.[61] The CP's tradition of ballroom dances is evident throughout the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, and it was not uncommon to see advertisements or reports on a `Communist Cabaret Ball',[62] or a swing band playing at a Russian Revolution anniversary party.[63]

This chapter has pointed to aspects of the relations between popular political organisations and local popular culture. It has argued that the Communist Party in Cape Town had a deeper appreciation of the `coon carnival' while the Non-European Unity Movement stood at a greater distance from it. However, the NEUM did engage particularly with the malay choirs during the preparations for the Van Riebeeck Festival. But that was momentary. The NEUM was far more interested in educating its membership on its ideological principles and in promoting its policy of non-collaboration. The CP was more concerned with everyday issues around which to mobilise the working classes. But the NEUM outmaneouvred it in the Van Riebeeck Festival, and made political capital out of the event. In the long-term, both the NEUM and the CP did not really attach importance to the popular culture of the ordinary people of the city. It was the petty bourgeois nature of NEUM leadership which limited it from closer identification with the popular culture of ordinary inner Cape Town residents. The occasional inclusion of music and dances on their programmes were not acts of mobilisation.

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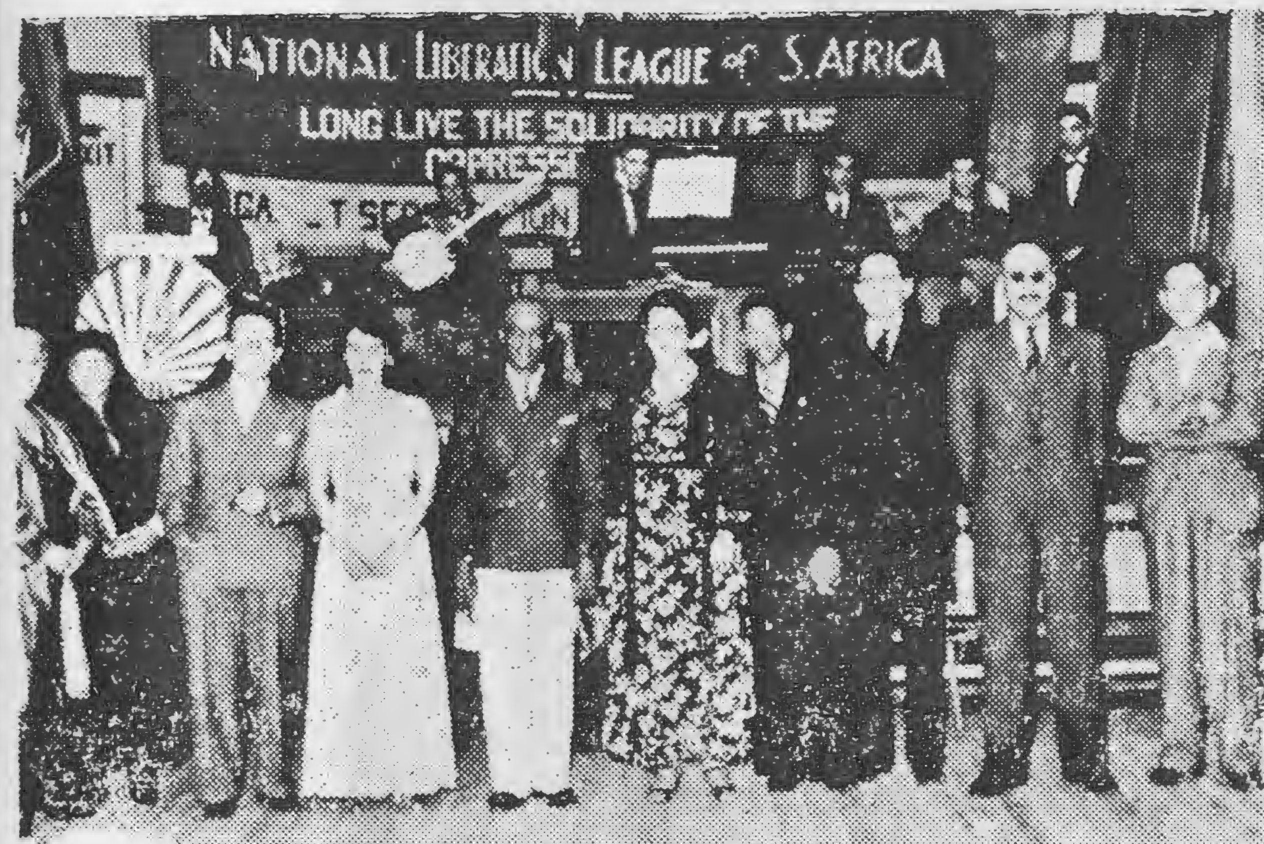
61 *The Torch*, 21 February 1949

62 *The Guardian*, 21 January 1943

63 *The Guardian*, 14 November 1946

the paradox of the NEUM was that while it was committed to the achievement of working class emancipation, in cultural terms this implied a `reform' of working class tastes - an upward leveling to `higher culture'. Leisure and popular culture were not yet political issues on the agendas of local political organisations; moreover, political organisations were only marginally concerned with developing theories or policies on cultural issues. Consequently, the State - in the form of the Coloured Affairs Department, continued to engage certain cultural bodies, such as the malay choirs, for instance. But, on the whole, the conditions of cultural production were not hegemonically controlled by the State. The cultural meanings of carnival and other activities were all the time being negotiated between ordinary people and the forces with greater material and intellectual resources.

LIBERATORS MAKE MERRY



THE ORGANISERS of the National Liberation League Dance at the Railway Institute on Saturday night. Among those in the picture are Adv. H. Snitcher, Dr. W. Abdurahman, Mr. E. Wallington, Mrs. Z. Gool, Mr. Booker Lakey, Mr. Sam Kahn and Mr. Meyer.

Source: *The Guardian,* 1 December 1939

"STREET BALLET, DISTRIC T SIX," by John Dronsfield. One of the exhibits in the bal let and theatre exhibition at Cape Town's Argus Gallery. T his painting by John Dronsfield of New Year Coons, together w ith photographs of the dancers who inspired it, show dancing that is a spontaneous expression of the natural sense of "Theatre" so strong in the Coloured people. Here is indigenous ballet—danced each year in the st reets of Cape Town.

Source: *The Guardian*, 18 September 1941

Conclusion

The history, experience and culture of working people have not as yet been generously covered in the growing historiography on Cape Town. The memories and imagination of ordinary people outside the academy may be invested with compelling images of their own past, but local working class history and experience have little account in the narratives of most historians. One reason for this has been the conventional notion of what should serve as genuine sources of historical evidence. To use an old dictum, the tendency has been to believe, `No documents, no history!' This fallacy no longer holds sway. Oral history offers one cogent means of overcoming the absence of more traditional evidence on the working classes. In this thesis, the richness of oral testimony, used alongside other sources, has hopefully been demonstrated. In the preceding, chapters significant components of popular culture in inner Cape Town have been highlighted.

The `coon' carnival which made its public appearance every new year's eve was the most expressive element in local popular culture. Though it appeared on the streets in January, the event was in fact the culmination of many months of intense preparation. It was more than just plebeian rowdiness, for in troupe songs, performances and processions there was commentary on the local moral and social order. Songs often spoke about gender and

generational issues, performances parodied prevailing notions of personal and collective discipline, and street processions symbolically represented the working class capture of the city. Like all carnivals, these forms of symbolic rebellion were momentary. The hard world of unemployment or low-paid factory and construction labour, and the indignities of segregation and discrimination, returned very soon after the festivity.

If carnival was momentary then a longer term cultural investment was made by the working class in their singing, music and dance. Apart from the contentious Eoan Group, very little existed in Cape Town in the shape of formal programmes in music education. But forms of musical experimentation, composition and production were carried out in diverse settings in inner Cape Town. Singing `those Afrikaans *liedtjies*', as one informant put it, which malay choirs performed, was often a private household activity, just as learning on an old untuned piano would occupy an eager youth. Out of informal family gatherings rose a few skilled musicians who would in their more mature years form their own bands. These bands, such as Von Willigh and his Troubadors and Alf Wylie, contributed tremendously to the popularity of ballroom dancing. But dancing depended on music. And the casual way in which many musicians learned their craft has been the focus of the chapter on music. Carnival would not have been possible without music and song - the latter were integral to the vibrancy of the events which constituted carnival. `Coon' troupes relied on local musicians, though the troupes would compose their own songs.

Musicians in turn, especially those who were still unknown to the inner-city public waited eagerly for contests such as the `talent contests' and `variety shows' staged at the local cinemas.

Cinema was the most prominent form of public leisure which catered for women and men. While ballroom dancing was for both sexes, bands consisted of men only, and occasionally women singers emerged. Similarly, carnival was avidly awaited by women and men of the inner-city but troupes were overwhelmingly male associations. In terms of gender patronage, the cinema was therefore unique. Cinema-going was also an habitual and regular activity. Inner-city cinemas competed for daily audiences, not like troupes which would, during the year - and especially in the weeks before New Year - slowly gather a crowd of supporters for the annual competitions.

Genres of public leisure and popular culture may be generated by ordinary people out of available cultural resources, but they are not made under conditions of their own choosing. Material conditions and the stresses and strains of political and economic change intimately affect the production of popular culture. In Cape Town in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, the peculiar local economy, intertwined with the national political economy, was the external base on which carnivals, cinemas, and musicians offered their performances and shows. The growth of manufacturing industry, the concentration of the garment industry in inner Cape Town and its steady move outwards,

and the attempts to exclude African labour, was the context in which ordinary people made their own expressive culture.

Added to this economic context,and partly borne of it, was the specific politics of the city. But oppositional political organisations made very little impact on popular culture. Organisations linked to the Non-European Unity Movement and the Communist Party organised their own cultural activities, but these initiatives had hardly any organic link with working class culture generally, and even less with the specific activities discussed in this thesis. The petty bourgeois leadership of the NEUM and its cultural orientation towards the `higher' forms of art and literature were impediments to identification with working class cultural production. In such a situation, certain popular cultural activities were promoted by a State bureaucracy which operated from Cape Town, the Coloured Affairs Department.

Whatever the positions of political organisations on working class culture or the impact of state-inspired cultural initiatives, the working classes produced their own popular culture. It remains in conclusion to emphasise that an idealist reading of this culture misses its ambiguities and the suffering and inequalities which it sometimes obscured. Taking this into account, this thesis has hopefully tried to appreciate hitherto unexplored aspects of local working class culture, and to locate them in a broader framework of cultural meaning and production. And it has done so in a key period before the social and physical fragmentation of

intensified nineteen sixties Apartheid - and particularly the destruction of District Six - tilted the balance away from older or `customary' kinds of working class leisure.

Appendix

List of Western Cape Oral History Project interviews consulted

Women

No.	Name	Date of birth	Religion	occupation/s
1.	Abrahams, Margaret	circa. 1899	Christian	Housewife
2.	Adams, Archie	c 1923	Muslim	Nurse
3.	Adams, Tiefa	c 1933	Muslim	Machinist/ Seamstress
4.	Albertyn, Galiema	c 1935	Muslim	Housewife
5.	Ariefdien, Noor	c 1930	Muslim	Tailor
6.	Baradien, Gadija	1918	Muslim	Seamstress
7.	Booley, Zobeida	1903	Muslim	Teacher
8.	Clarke, Annie	1908	Christian	Domestic worker, Machinist
9.	Collison, Clara	1917	Christian (Anglican)	Washerwoman
10.	Daniels, Nettie	1910	Christian	Domestic Worker
11.	Davids, Mariam	1903	Muslim	Washerwoman
12.	Diedericks, Fatiema	1938	Muslim	Shop Assistant
13.	Dollie, Kafoerah	1912	Muslim	Housewife, Washerwoman
14.	Dollie, (Mrs)	1926	/	Factory worker, Machinist
15.	Farieda	c1930	Muslim	Dressmaker,

	(Lady)			Runner, Machinist
16.	Gool, Minnie	1915	Muslim	Housewife

No.	Name	Date of birth	Religion	Occupation/s
17.	Hammond, Blanche	c1906	Christian	Printer, Cleaner, Machinist, Paging machinist
18.	Hendricks, Gloria	c1930	Christian	Shoe-box maker, Box maker
19	Jacobs, Gadija	c1925	Christian/ Muslim	Machinist
20.	Jaftha, Beatrice	1914	Christian (Catholic)	Char worker
21.	Jassiem, Asa	1926	Muslim	Housewife
22.	Jethro, Cecelia	1903	Christian	/
23.	Karriem, Fatiema	1915	Muslim	Domestic worker, Nursemaid
24.	Liebenberg, Edith	c1930	Christian	Embroidery machinist
25.	MAUREEN	c1944	Christian (Anglican)	Machinist
26.	Milano, Phillida	c1915	Christian	Gardener, Factory worker, Cleaner, Machinist, Domestic worker
27.	Norton, Scotty	1938	Christian	Nurse, Midwife, Secretary, Teacher
28.	Naidoo, Sarah Savry	1933	Christian (Anglican)	Factory worker
29.	Noordien, Galiema	c1924	Muslim	Machinist
30.	Pitt, Aisha	1906	Muslim	Nurse, Midwife
31.	Rasool, Biddy	c1930	/	Housewife

No.	Name	Date of birth	Religion	Occupation/s
32.	Salie, Fozia	1927	Muslim	Factory worker
33.	Seale, Hester	1920	Christian	Shop Assistant, Factory worker
34.	Swartz, Anne	c1915	Christian (Anglican)	Housekeeper
35.	Sylvia	c1924	Christian	Factory worker, Printing worker
36.	Waghiet, Farieda	c1910	Christian-Muslim	Factory worker, Machinist, Cashier
37.	Webb, Mariam	1918	Christian-Muslim	Babysitter, Factory worker
38.	Williams, Gadija	c1920	Muslim	Machinist
39.	Zurne, Anne	1907	Christian	Housewife

List of Interviewees: Men

No.	Name	Date of birth	Religion	Occupation/s
1.	Abrahams, Cassiem	1916	Muslim	Stall owner at market
2.	Abrahams, Ismail	1916	Christian	Cleaner, Machinist
3.	Albertyn, Omar	?	Christian/ Muslim	/
4.	Cloete (MR)	?	Christian	/
5.	Collison, (Mr)	1913	Christian (Anglican)	Meat Trade Worker
6.	Daniels, (Mr)	1925	Christian (Anglican)	Teacher & Hawker

No	Name	Date of Birth	Religion	Occupation/s
7.	Davids, Ahmad	c1940	Muslim	Socia Worker
8.	Dollie, (Mr)	1909	Muslim	Waiter, Shop Assistant, Storeman
9.	Dramat, Mughtar	1944	Muslim	Shop Assistant, Portrait-maker
10.	Fagan, Mannie	c1945	Christian-Muslim	Butcher Assistant
11.	Fataar, Ali	1917	Muslim	Teacher
12.	George, Eddie	1925	Christian	Caddy Labourer Checker for City Council
13.	Hendricks, Hadji Hoosain	1914	Muslim	Parcel boy Horsetender, Factory worker, Shop Assistant
14.	Hoffman, Gaiden	c1913	Muslim	Hawker, Shoemaker, Foreman in the Harbour, Builder
15.	Jacobs, Cassiem	1912	Muslim	Tailor
16.	Jackson, Kenneth	1925	Christian	Fruit & Vegetable seller
17.	Kolbe, Vincent	1933	Christian (Catholic)	Librarian
18.	Levy, Hadji Achmat	1909	Muslim	Machinist
19.	Peterson, (Mr)	c1921	Muslim	Laundry Checker, School Caretaker

20. Rensburg, H c1930 Christian

No.	Name	Date of birth	Religion	Occupation/s
21.	Rubane, Cheetah	c1935	/	
22.	Salie, Aziz	1928	Muslim	Factory worker, Cutter
23.	Sadulla, Abdulla	1907	Muslim	Newspaper seller, Tailor
24.	Samaai Mogamat Toyah	1907	Muslim	Builder, Contractor
25.	Suleiman, Christian	c1938	Muslim	Cleaner, Teacher
26.	Schroeder (Mr)	1923	Muslim	Office `boy' Builder
27.	Small (Mr)	1930	/	
28.	Snell, William	1925	/	Teacher
29.	Unknown	1929	Muslim	Building Labourer
30.	Voterson, Abdiel Majiet	1922	Muslim	Painter, Builder, Building Supervisor
31.	Wildschott, (Mr)	1898	Christian	Teacher
32.	Williams, (Mr)	1902	Christian (Anglican)	Shop Assistant, Waiter, Teacher

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