

**History, identity and meaning:  
Cape Town's Coon Carnival in the 1960s and 1970s.**

Lisa Baxter.

Thesis submitted for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
Department of History  
University of Cape Town, South Africa

September 1996.

The University of Cape Town has been given  
the right to reproduce this thesis in whole or  
in part. Copyright is held by the author.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the University of Cape Town. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

## Abstract

Little has been written about the Coon Carnival since its inception in the late nineteenth-century. This thesis helps remedy the general neglect of popular, "Coloured", working-class history during the apartheid years. It attempts to situate Cape Town's New Year Carnival within the international debate surrounding popular festival and identity.

Following a broadly historical line of inquiry, this thesis straddles different disciplines, borrowing from a range of interpretative fields to assess the form and significance of the event during the 1960s and 1970s, a critical period in the Carnival's history. During these years, District Six - the event's symbolic and spiritual home - was declared for "White" residence only under the Group Areas Act. Coloured residents were forcibly removed from this central city suburb to disparate areas on the Cape Flats - the townships surrounding the metropolis. A year later, in 1967, the carnival parade was effectively banned from the city centre's streets; banished to remote and enclosed stadium venues. Thus, in a relatively short space of time the Carnival came under sustained attack.

Due to the relative dearth of critical engagement with, or historical commentary on, the Carnival, this thesis relies heavily on oral sources and on journalistic, visual and tourist-oriented representations. Focussing particularly on the oral testimonies of twenty-four people involved in the event, it explores the notion of continuity and change in the Carnival during this period, through a thorough interrogation of the narratives. My interviewing technique fell somewhere between the set, chronological, life-history, questions advocated

by the English oral historian Paul Thompson<sup>1</sup> and the free-flow of the “open interview” used principally in the fields of clinical psychiatry. As far as possible I let the interviewee speak and direct the agenda yet I had a set of concerns I wanted addressed and if they were not volunteered I would attempt to bring them up.

Interviewees insist that forced removals broke the back of carnival organisation; destroying its spontaneous festive spirit, changing the essence of the event from a joyous celebration of emancipation to a muted lament, mourning dispossession. From a bonding ritual of inner-city community, they relate, it transformed into little more than an opportunity for entrepreneurs and gangsters to make personal profit.

From the late 1960s the event came under attack from many sides of Cape Town’s Coloured population; its religious, political and social elite. In particular, liberation leaders denounced the Coon Carnival as playing up to negative racial stereotypes, so aiding the Nationalist Government in its assertion of innate cultural difference and ultimately assisting its implementation of “separate development”.

This thesis looks at what the Carnival meant to both its champions and antagonists during the 1960s and 1970s, exploring the different discourses influencing participation and power in the event, from gender to religious and occupational identity. It looks also at its wider significance, investigating official, political and establishment attitudes toward the annual festivities.

---

<sup>1</sup> P. Thompson, The Voice of the Past, (OPUS, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988).

The argument questions the extent to which the Coon Carnival was the expression of a specifically local, urban, spatial identity, and looks at the impact of legislated spatial manipulation on the construction and expression of such an identity. Simultaneously, it serves to test the value of contemporary Carnival theories by applying it them a specific social, geographical and historical context.

University of Cape Town

## CONTENTS

Diagrams and Illustrations.	.....	ii
Acknowledgments	.....	iii
Preface	.....	iv
Abbreviations	.....	x
Terminology	.....	xi
Chapter One: Introduction	The “Coon Carnival”: history, space and context	1
Chapter Two	Representing the Coon Carnival	29
Chapter Three	Contesting carnival: an historical discussion of the critical debate surrounding carnival worldwide	61
Chapter Four	Continuity and Change: The 1960s and 1970s.	97
Chapter Five	Women and <i>Participation</i> in Cape Town’s Coon Carnival.	143
Chapter Six: Conclusion	Carnival’s community and social identities.	178
Postscript	.....	198
Appendix I	.....	199
Appendix II	.....	200
Appendix III	.....	206
Appendix IV	.....	209
Bibliography	.....	213

**Diagrams and Illustrations.**

F2.1	Group photograph of young coons, 1963.....	Between pp.35-36
F2.2	Group photograph of coons, 1977.....	Between pp.35-36
F2.3	'Eerste Nuwe Jaar', painting of Coon Carnival by James Yates.....	Between pp.38-39
F2.4	'Black and White Faces, linocut of Coon Carnival by Roderick Sauls.....	Between pp.38-39
F3.1	Diagram illustrating routes of the Carnival road march prior and subsequent to 1967.....	Opposite p.90
F4.1	Photograph of coon troupe in Darling street, 1996.....	Between pp.124-5
F4.2	Photograph revealing troupe hierarchy and costumes, 1996.....	Between pp.124-5
F4.3	Maps showing residence of interviewees prior to Group Areas removals and at time of interview (1995) in relation to the city centre.....	Opposite p. 138
F5.1	Photograph of women sewing troupe uniforms, 1950.....	Between pp.154-5
F5.2	Photograph of <i>moffie</i> , 1996.....	Between pp.154-5
F5.3	Photograph of female coon, 1996.....	Between pp.154-5
F6.1	Photograph of coon troupe dressed in colours of the national flag, 1996.....	Between pp. 197-8
F6.2	Photograph of coon troupe dressed in colours of the national flag, 1996.....	Between pp. 197-8

### Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Vivian Bickford-Smith, for guiding my research and disciplinary transition - forcing me to historicise, alerting me to the irrelevance of my diversions, and asserting the superiority of Chelsea over Arsenal. I am grateful to the Western Cape Oral History Project for providing the facilities and support to conduct my interviews, as well as valuable comment and criticism.

Without the patience and generosity Cape Town's Coon Carnival community; troupe captains, their memberships, families and friends, my research would have amounted to little more than academic speculation. I received inestimable assistance and direction from a vast array of people eager to tell and show me as much about the Carnival as they could. These people are not limited to those listed as interviewees but include the many people I spoke to in the rehearsal venues and at the Coon Carnival in the months preceding the January 1996 celebrations - far too numerous to list individually. I must express my greatest thanks, however, to Melvin Matthews who repeatedly went out of his way to help me, showing me the Carnival sites of the Peninsula, introducing me to all dimensions of the event; practical, historical and interpretative, and also to Vincent Kolbe.

I am particularly grateful for the considerable assistance of the Leverhulme Trust which has provided me with the time and money to indulge the luxury of study. In the context of increasing cuts to the British education system and the near impossibility of securing funds for research in the Arts, I am extremely fortunate to have been sponsored by them for two years.

I am indebted to Sarah for editing when she had much more important things on her mind, Elena, Olive (for 3 pages!), David (for his graphic eye), Maureen and Amy (for their technological support), Catriona (for her impressive secretarial skills), and as always, to Con for painstakingly reading reams of minuscule print.

### Preface.

Standing before a fractious crowd of thousands eager for the competition to begin, Nelson Mandela delivered his lengthy New Year's speech to Cape Town. "Wreathed in smiles and wearing a sequined minstrel style outfit in the colours of the ANC"<sup>1</sup> he addressed the almost exclusively Coloured audience at the opening ceremony of the 1996 Coon Carnival at Green Point Stadium. Hailing the rebirth of Carnival in a new form he declared that "for the first time... the Carnival is organised not by people who want to make money from the Coloureds but by people who want to plough it back into musical development"<sup>2</sup>. Appealing simultaneously to the "private sector" to support the development of "this rich culture", he proclaimed Carnival "as much a part of South Africa as braaivleis<sup>3</sup> and Zulu dance... it is us". In so doing he attempted to carve out a space for the Carnival's near totally Coloured working-class constituency in the South Africa's new "rainbow nation".

Ironically, in a country where the very term "Coloured" was steeped in stigma as an artificial and politically motivated apartheid construct, Mandela recognised the Carnival as a symbol of a distinct Coloured ethnic culture, akin to such expressions of ethnic solidarity and cultural unity as the dance of the Zulus or the braai of the Afrikaners. According the event with such historical and cultural significance, the President departed markedly from the derision and contempt with which the liberation movement had viewed the Carnival in the preceding decades: as bolstering Nationalist efforts to promote the ideological construction of arbitrary and artificial ethnic categories. This switching of sides, the recognition of a celebration previously scorned, served as yet another attempt by an interest group to appeal to a political constituency by seizing upon a "cultural emblem"<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Argus, (2/1/96).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from President Nelson Mandela's address to the Coon Carnival at Green Point Stadium, 1/1/96. Recorded by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Barbecue.

<sup>4</sup> C. Howard, 'The "No-Persons": An Investigation into Secular Popular Music in Cape Town', (M. Mus. Thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1994), p. 8.

Mandela's speech was a bizarre confusion of signs, symbols and messages. The Black President donned the comic garb of a slave minstrel in the colours of the ANC, to address the Coloured audience: a group whom, pundits believe, had voted against him - and for De Klerk's Nationalists - at elections. Lauding the achievements of his Party in government he appealed in Afrikaans for an end to crime in the Coloured community. Yet, where his showy helicopter arrival was met with cheers, and his entrance in the glittery apparel of a coon greeted with whistles of enthusiasm, his speech stirred-up murmurs of ill-ease for he spoke of gangsterism, crime and politics, at the one sacred event when such blights were consciously forgotten. He tainted a community occasion of guilt-free hedonism with talk of society's ills, and he exacerbated his *faux pas* by speaking in the high Afrikaans of Apartheid. Indeed, it was this issue of language that, for many, epitomised the breach between the President and his audience. He professed to recognise the "rich culture" of the Coloureds but he spoke in the language of the oppressor rather than the distinctly different regional dialect of the community. A conflict of signs and metaphors: a conflict of messages. The President's attendance at the Carnival reflected a marked change in political attitudes to the event, yet the confusion of symbols in his speech demonstrated a continued failure to understand its essence and its participant community.

The Coon Carnival has been marked by a relative dearth of historical account or related critical discussion. This is the case not merely for the years under scrutiny here, the nineteen sixties and seventies, but for the event since its inception in the late nineteenth-century and for the forerunning street festivals and singing bands which preceded it around the time of emancipation (the notable few exceptions to this claim are discussed in Chapter Two). The reason for this cannot be attributed solely to South Africa's segregationist and apartheid past; blamed squarely on a White hegemonic devaluation and oversight of the histories of other racial or cultural groups. Histories of many of South Africa's other constituent, non-White groups, exist despite colonial and Nationalist rule.

I suspect the absence of accounts of, and theoretical engagement with, the Coon Carnival to be the product of two factors: firstly, a fairly broad historical oversight of popular working-

class culture in Cape Town<sup>5</sup>, particularly in a non-written form such as Carnival; the prioritisation of *high*, middle-class “culture” over *low* or *popular* forms. Secondly, an unwillingness to address a “Coloured” cultural form in particular due to the politically loaded nature involved in even engaging in the debate. To enter the debate has been to credit the event with some significance, a significance which many anti-apartheid organisations have claimed is entirely unwarranted; recognition only implying acceptance of Nationalist fabricated ethnic categories. Lijphart outlines the dilemma, conveying the difficulty that anti-apartheid academics have faced in discussing notions of race and ethnicity in the South African context:

There are good reasons for the opponents of the South African government both to dislike ethnicity and to think of race and ethnicity as equally objectionable concepts. Race and ethnicity have both been the tools of minority rule and the suppression of the majority.... There are also good *political* reasons for those opposing the government to de-emphasize ethnicity. The National Party government mainly represents a single cohesive minority ethnic group - the Afrikaners - whereas the opposing majority is divided into a large number of ethnic groups. Since unity spells strength and division weakness, it is just as logical for the government to stress ethnicity as for the opposition to play it down.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Studies of working-class culture have tended to focus on strategies of “resistance” particularly within the African community. Events of dubious political credentials, like the Coon Carnival, have as a result, been overlooked. The majority of writing on popular culture has looked to the Rand for inspiration rather than to the Cape. Several notable exceptions however, run counter to this trend. The central concern of Jeppie’s Masters thesis, for instance, is working-class leisure in the 1940s and ‘50s [M. S. Jeppie, ‘Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner Cape Town, c. 1939-1959’, (MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990)]. Nasson’s lively and ground-breaking work on the informal community dwelling on the slopes of Table Mountain is a similar exception [B. Nasson, ‘*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. 1920-1950s*’, (History Workshop paper, “The Making of Class”, University of the Witwatersrand, 9-14/2/87)], as is Grundlingh’s recent book, tackling the link between leisure/sport, and identity and community [A. Grundlingh, A. Odendaal and B. Spies, *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1995)]. In the last six years there has been a considerable pre-occupation, with the pre-Group Areas Act, District Six. A sizable literature, photographic collections, and a District Six Museum now ensure that it’s memory does not fade. Yet in the popular reconstruction of this community as cosmopolitan and mixed, there has been a tendency to eulogise; to gloss over negative aspects of poverty and conflict, instead creating a mythical and nostalgic Golden Age.

<sup>6</sup> S. Bekker, *Ethnicity in Focus: The South African Case*. (The Indicator, South African Issue Focus, 1993), p. 74 quoting A. Lijphart. ‘The ethnic factor and democratic constitution-making in South Africa’, in E. Keller and L. Picard (eds.), *South Africa in Southern Africa: domestic change and international conflict*, (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colorado, 1989), p. 14.

Turner and Jensen similarly explain the scarcity of literature relating to “Coloureds” from the late 1970s as the product of a rising political awareness and rejection of a racially based terminology in academic circles. They attribute it to “a kind of academic boycott”<sup>7</sup>. Expanding this idea of academic neglect or oversight, Bekker asserts that there has been a tendency over the last two decades to stress theories of “race, class, nationalism and state”<sup>8</sup> in explaining modern South African society, and to ignore concepts of “ethnicity”. But this partiality has resulted in the critical neglect of a sizable population group<sup>9</sup>. Though the moral motivation for such a “boycott” may be admirable, a desire to disengage from racist terminology and apartheid ideology, it has left the history of people who define *themselves* in terms of a common “Coloured” identity, unaccounted for.

I must thus declare at the outset that my use of the term *Coloured*, does not imply an uncritical acquiescence to apartheid terminology, the acceptance of a racial or ethnic identity as defined in terms of the Nationalist’s Population Registration Act of 1950. Rather I use *Coloured* to denote a community that defines itself as such, perceiving the Coon Carnival as integral to this core sense of identity. This is not to dismiss the role that Apartheid played in promoting and manipulating such an identity, nor is it to suggest that such a sense of group belonging and oneness is primordial or innate, anything other than an imagined and constructed sense of unity<sup>10</sup>. It is instead, an effort to understand a group in terms of how they describe themselves, whatever historical reasons have led them to such rhetoric.

---

<sup>7</sup> S. Turner, and S. Jensen, ‘A Place called Heideveld: identities and strategies among the coloureds in Cape Town, South Africa’, (MA Thesis, Roskilde University, Institute of Geography and International Development, 1995), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Bekker, *Ethnicity*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> According to figures from the Institute of Race Relations, the percentage of “Coloureds”, defined in terms of the Population Registration Act of 1950, as part of the national population numbered 8.5%, but comprised 58% of the total population of the Western Cape. *Fast Facts*. September Edition, (Institute of Race Relations, Braamfontein, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> For a full discussion of the *imagined* nature of community and group identity see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. (Verso, London, 1991). For an overview of theory and practice relating to the *created* and *fabricated* nature of groups, see L. Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. (Currey Bekeley, London, 1989).

Thus, the *Coloured* community I address does not always include all those individuals whom the Act delineates, those, for example, who reject the term and consciously define themselves as *Black*. It refers primarily to those who see the Carnival as an integral part of their common culture. In this way, rather than an essentially racial category, I see *Coloured* as critically connected to space and an historical sense of geographical belonging, for within the Coon Carnival, the inseparability of an ethnic identity with a specific rootedness in urban Cape Town is overwhelmingly asserted. Enforced removals appeared to fracture this sense of community and challenge the premises of ethnic unity. Integral to being *Coloured* was the notion of being Capetonian, of *home*. It was a notion which could not be transported as easily as the goods on the back of a removal van, from a *home* in District Six to a new *house* on the Cape Flats.

Concurrent with this academic unwillingness to address concepts of ethnicity in South Africa, and the notion of *Coloured* identity in particular, continues Bekker, has been the climate of “scholarship in isolation”<sup>11</sup> within the country. The intellectual isolation of South African scholars during the years of apartheid hegemony has limited opportunities for potentially valuable comparisons with other societies. As a result, he asserts, “the South African phenomenon... has always been seen as a direct consequence of government policy and manipulation... whereas comparisons to other societies may well have elaborated and qualified such explanations”<sup>12</sup>.

The aim of this thesis is threefold. It attempts primarily to fill a gaping absence in the unrecorded history of the Coon Carnival during Apartheid’s heyday - the 1960s and ‘70s. Secondly, it assesses the impact of enforced migration on a cultural event and its community (i.e. the effect of the Group Areas Act on popular expression). Lastly, it explores the very nature of that “community” associated with involvement in the Coon Carnival during this period.

---

<sup>11</sup> Bekker, *Ethnicity*, p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Taking as my point of departure the frequent claim that Carnival was an exclusively *male*, *Coloured*, and *working-class* affair, I interrogate such generalisations, revealing different and conflicting levels of involvement which fracture the notion of a singular, united, and homogenous participant *community*. The investigation illuminates fissures and divisions that arise in the annual theatre of the Carnival but which clearly underlie the dialogues and contests inherent in identity construction throughout the year.

University of Cape Town

### Abbreviations

- ANC - African National Congress
- APO - African Political Organisation
- BC - Black Consciousness
- CAC - Coloured Advisory Council
- CAD - Coloured Affairs Department
- CPSA - Communist Party of South Africa
- NEUM - Non-European Unity Movement
- SABRA - South African Bureau of Racial Affairs
- SAP - South African Police
- TLSA - Teachers' League of South Africa
- WCOH - Western Cape Oral History Project interview transcript.

University of Cape Town

### Terminology

**Coon Carnival** - It is unclear exactly when those in the Carnival started to describe the event as the *Coon Carnival*, and themselves as *coons*. In the sixties and seventies, as today, the terms *coons*, *minstrels*, and *klopse* (Afrikaans for “clubs”), were used interchangeably. Interviewees are dismissive of the negative racial connotations of the word. One informant insisted that the term had “nothing” to do with race but came from the practice of blackening the face and whitening the eyes “like a raccoon”. He failed, however, to speculate on the implications of this “blackening-up”.

**Culture** - My use of *culture* refers to the specific and shared set of activities and values recognised by a particular group as their own. It encompasses both the anthropological use of the term as connected primarily to “material production”, as well as the historical/cultural studies definition as connected to “signifying or symbolic systems”<sup>1</sup>. *Popular culture* in this sense refers both to the material forms of Coloured Capetonian, working-class life and leisure; song, dance, costume and so on - but also to the mindset such manifestations symbolise and represent. I see the forms and impetuses of popular expression as integrally linked in the production and articulation of *cultural forms*.

This *popular culture* is defined in opposition to *High* or elite forms of culture and expression, be they “White” or Coloured bourgeois; *popular* also in the sense of mass participation. Critically, I refer to *culture* not merely<sup>as</sup> a static and finite material product but as a fluid and constant process.

**Community** - “Self-aware social formations, internally divided and differentiated but subsuming their complexity within shared and relatively simple forms for the purposes of interaction with the outside”<sup>2</sup>. Cohen’s definition of *community* as a group perceiving itself as such in relation to others around it seems the most succinct and in keeping with my use

---

<sup>1</sup> See R. Williams, Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society, (Fontana, London, 1987, pp. 90-91).

<sup>2</sup> A. P. Cohen, ‘Belonging. The experience of culture’, in A. P. Cohen (ed.), Belonging: identity and social organisation in British rural cultures, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1982).

of the term throughout this thesis. However I use the term *community* more specifically, primarily in a geographic or spatial sense to indicate a collective sharing a neighbourhood or memory and identification with a particular place. In the context of South Africa however, *race* (and/or *ethnicity*) is invariably conflated with *community* as legislation determined residence according to *racial* categorisation. Thus, *community* in this sense, frequently overlaps with other networks of identity and belonging; race and class also tending to conflate in the South African context.

I also use *community* to describe the temporary collective constituted as, and by, carnival participants. The *community* of carnival refers not just to those who actively take part in the street performance, however, for it encompasses also those individuals involved in related behind-the-scenes activity, as spectators, as well as wives, mothers, and family of active participants.

**Ethnicity** - I use *Ethnicity* to define the notion of a group identity premised on the belief in a common culture, origin, tradition, history, home and belonging, and/or language. It is a collective identity that is sometimes imposed on, and other times asserted by, those it defines. Bickford-Smith provides a lucid and concise working definition of the term, noting that, similar to other types of Group identity, *ethnicity* is “socially constructed and subject to change”.<sup>3</sup> He distinguishes it from the similar term *community*, in which the “spatial dimension” tends to be prioritised.

Due to the heavily contested nature of *ethnicity* in general, *Coloured ethnicity* in particular, and its role within the Coon Carnival, a fuller theoretical discussion of related contemporary debate is contained in Chapter 6 and Appendix IV.

**Identity** - Concerned with self definition as well as imposed definition, *Identity* refers to a person’s sense of who they are and who they are seen to be. An individual can have several

---

<sup>3</sup> V. Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1875-1902*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p. 2-3.

identities during their life or indeed, at any given moment as various different discourses act upon them simultaneously to shape their sense of self. For example, a person can define themselves as part of a collective according to their skin colour, economic position, religion, gender, occupational status, political allegiance, or indeed, sports club membership. At times these different indices may overlap or conflict, one may be prioritised over another depending on the context in which *identity* is being asserted.

**Race** - *Race* refers to the perception of biologically determined identity. Under South Africa's Population Registration Act of 1950<sup>4</sup>, every resident was categorised according to their *race*. The criteria for categorisation were based primarily on physical appearance, skin colour, straightness of hair and other physiological characteristics. The concept of *race* differs to those of *ethnicity*, or *nationality*, in the implication of immutability - the notion that a person's *race* is an incontrovertible fact. It was this notion of *race* which Apartheid uncritically assumed, failing to account for the arbitrariness and socially constructed nature of a classification system based on appearance. This notion of *race* critically implies the existence of pure, finite and static racial identities.

**District Six** - Lying at the foot of Signal Hill, District Six is within easy reach of both Cape Town's city centre and the foreshore. From the nineteenth century it was a suburb renowned for its mixed and cosmopolitan population. Home to many descendants of the freed slaves settling there after emancipation, and to an assortment of European immigrants; from Portuguese and Greeks, to East European Jews, its proximity to the sea meant also that many sailors passed through the District, sometimes deciding to stay permanently. Ridd claims that the censuses of 1891, 1904, and 1921, showed District Six to have had the largest number of Non-White residents in Cape Town, both in real terms and in proportion to the total population in the area with a ratio of 2:1 Non-Whites to Whites<sup>5</sup>. On 11th February 1966 the suburb was proclaimed a "White Group Area" under the terms of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Population Registration Act. No. 30 of 1950, Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1950, (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1950).

<sup>5</sup> R. E. Ridd, Position and Identity in a Divided Community: Colour and Religion in the District Six, Walmer Estate, Woodstock area of Cape Town, (Ph.D Thesis, University of Oxford, 1981) p. 131.

Group Areas Act of 1950<sup>6</sup> and its Coloured residents were evicted to new settlements on the Cape Flats<sup>7</sup>. Over the next fifteen years the District's buildings were bulldozed to make way for new White residents, though these never materialised and, other than a handful of mosques, churches and the modernist monolith of the Cape Technikon and a police barracks, much of the area remains today a derelict wasteland.

---

<sup>6</sup>Group Areas Act. No. 41 of 1950, in Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1950, (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1950).

<sup>7</sup> Turner and Jensen point out that the first instance of legal segregation imposed on the district had been in 1901 when Africans were moved to Ndabeni as part of the panic over the spread of smallpox. S. Turner and S. Jensen, A Place called Heideveld: identities and strategies among the coloureds in Cape Town, South Africa, (MA Thesis, Institute of Geography and International Development, Roskilde University, 1985) p. 90.

## Chapter One:

### Introduction.

#### The “Coon Carnival”: history, space and context.

##### Coon Carnival, January 1996<sup>1</sup> and its historical context:

Yellow and blue rags tied to lengths of string drape the boerewors stands fringing Market Square<sup>2</sup>: a declaration of allegiance to the *Woodstock Starlights*, Cape Town’s largest coon troupe and the reigning Carnival champions. Children hang from scaffolding covering the City Hall and straddle the bronze shoulders of Jan Smuts outside Parliament. Together they peer; the impotent general gazing down Adderley street<sup>3</sup> towards the sea, the children craning for a first glimpse of the procession as it descends into town. Hours behind schedule, in the searing heat of summer’s mid-day, a shimmering mass of satin emerges from the deserted scrub of District Six, enveloping the city to a sixteen beat bar.

Screeching whistles struggle to keep time with the rhythm thumped by ghomma<sup>4</sup> drums. With springbok-skinned tambourines these are the fruits of months of Boeta Achmat’s labour. The sole such craftsman remaining in Cape Town, he produces these instruments from his Heideveld home. Bending pine into shape around old Cape wine-vats to form the

---

<sup>1</sup> This commentary of the 1996 Coon Carnival is based on my own observations of the troupe practice halls in the months leading up to New Year in central Cape Town, the Cape Flats, on the city streets, and at Green Point Stadium, on January 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and the stadium final on January 13<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The city’s central square; framed by the Castle, City Hall, central station and General Post Office.

<sup>3</sup> Cape Town’s main street, connecting the city to the sea. Parliament lies at the top end, shops and head banks line the route to the foreshore where the street once ended in South Africa’s only pier. Older informants tell of the Carnival parade incorporating the pier on its route before it was demolished in 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Many troupe members claim that these drums, carried and played today at the Coon Carnival and by Malay choirs, originated in Indonesia and were brought to the Cape by slaves. Howard however, suggests that “no” instruments accompanied immigrant slaves and that the ghomma drum was a “Cape invention”, originally used to accompany dancing at Malay picnics [Howard, ‘No-Persons’, p. 52]. Whilst in the 19th and early 20th centuries numerous craftsmen were apparently adept at this skill, Boeta Achmat claims to be the city’s sole remaining ghomma-maker. See interview with Achmat Sabera. Western Cape Oral History Project transcript Western Cape Oral History Transcript, 1995, (hereafter these transcripts are referred to by the abbreviation WCOH). A full list of interviewees is contained in the bibliography under the heading, Unpublished Primary Sources, Record of Oral Informants. These transcripts are housed in the Manuscripts section of the Jagger Library, University of Cape Town.

drum, he stretches over animal skins treated in a lime bath in his yard, and leaves them to dry on the tin roof in time for New Year.

In groups of a hundred or more, Cape Town's "coons" gyrate their way into town, hoisting gaudy Taiwanese parasols above their heads, touching, teasing and thrilling the crowd as their captains shout furious instructions in an effort to maintain the procession's frenetic forward momentum. Propping-up veteran revellers who constantly threaten to topple back with fatigue and dehydration against the advancing tide, young men lubricate the movements of their elders with liquor wrapped in brown paper bags. The smell of sweat mingles with the acrid sweetness of pineapple home-brew, fermented secretly in barrels buried in the back-yards of the Cape Flats in preparation for New Year, today fermenting again in the noon-day heat amidst this dense body of movement<sup>5</sup>.

Dancing, singing, and drinking their way through the city's central streets, they make their way to Green Point Stadium<sup>6</sup> on the other side of the town to vie with their rivals for stinkwood trophies. It is the 2nd of January, *Tweede Nuwe Jaar*, a day loaded with historical significance for Cape Town's "Coloured" community. Mythically claimed as the annual day of slave remission in the Cape (for it was never officially recognised as such), the "second of New Year" marked a moment of temporary freedom from servitude.

---

<sup>5</sup> That alcohol is contained in the plastic bottles and paper bags of participants is clearly evident from the resultant demeanour and behaviour of participants, as well as from the overwhelmingly pungent stench. On the way to a troupe rehearsal my guide informed me of our host's covert brewing operations; the fermentation of powerful pineapple wine under his yard, for consumption at New Year. Abe Sheldon similarly relates the brewing of a heady mixture of oats and liquor for the festivities. Sheldon, WCOH, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Whilst the competition has been hosted at a number of venues throughout Cape Town including; Hartleyvale and Athlone stadiums, the Goodwood Showground, Rosebank, and Newlands, Green Point was the first venue used, is today the chief contest site, and remains the mythical home of the Coon Carnival. Discussing the significance of the Green Point venue, Green relates that "Green Point was the Sunday playground of the slaves" and that "long before... 1830" the common was a popular race-course hosting regular meets every year. In marked similarity to the Coon Carnival, these events were characterised by the arrival of fancy "cavalcades", whole families of spectators, and "Coloured bands provid[ing] guitar and concertina music". L. G. Green, *Tavern of the Seas*. (Howard B. Timmins, Cape Town, 1975), p. 128. See Appendix I of this thesis for a chronology of competition venues.

The first vestiges of the “Coon Carnival” states Stone<sup>7</sup>, though his source is unclear and fails to find validation elsewhere, can be found in records of “Coloured” bands parading in Cape Town’s streets in 1823 to welcome in the New Year. “Emancipation Day” (the day of the abolition of slavery in the British dominions), 1st December 1834, was similarly marked with music and parade in the city’s centre<sup>8</sup>. By the 1880s these celebrations had moved to the first two days of New Year, maintaining a dual link in the historical consciousness of many with rejoicing the slave’s annual day of liberty as well as of their permanent release. In his forthcoming discussion of late nineteenth-century Capetonian leisure, Bickford-Smith quotes from the first *Argus* of 1866 as attesting to the 1st and 2nd of January as holidays. He states, “both New Year’s Day and *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* were holidays [when] business was suspended”<sup>9</sup>. Patterson observes that for slaves and their descendants in the Cape there existed a “mythical association between Carnival and remission”<sup>10</sup> attached to the 2nd of January, the day on which Coloured slaves had traditionally been granted a holiday.

Bickford-Smith quotes from the observations of “a Scotsman” in the 1880s who recalls seeing “Coloured people” returning from the Strand to Cape Town as evidence of the conscious link between *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* and Abolition. He relates how these people drank, danced and sang “to the music of an old concertina, or the strains of some ditty sung by themselves... celebrating their emancipation from slavery and serfdom some half-a-century ago”<sup>11</sup>. Significantly here, as early as the end of the nineteenth-century this stranger to Cape Town draws the specific link between “Coloured people”, the celebration of Abolition, and the New Year’s holiday.

---

<sup>7</sup> G. L. Stone, ‘The Coon Carnival’, (Extended Paper, University of Cape Town, 1971), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> V. Bickford-Smith, ‘Meanings of freedom: social positions and identity among ex-slaves and their descendants in Cape Town, 1875-1910’ in N. Worden, and C. Crais, (eds.), Breaking The Chains: Slavery and its Legacy in the Nineteenth Century Cape Colony (University of Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994), p. 298.

<sup>9</sup> V. Bickford-Smith, E. Van Heyningen and N. Worden, Cape Town, (David Philip, Cape Town, Forthcoming), Unpaginated.

<sup>10</sup> Stone, ‘Coon Carnival’, p. 2. quoting S. 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, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1953).

<sup>11</sup> Bickford-Smith, Cape Town, Unpaginated.

The growing popularity of street Carnival and its connotations with freedom and temporary release from servitude at New Year, has historical roots in both the pre and post emancipation eras. Bickford-Smith suggests that New Year's festivities at the end of the nineteenth-century were about the celebration of "freedom" inherently linked to a specific urban geographical area and neighbourhood community and, as such, was able to subsume ethnic and religious difference:

The form and content of Carnival suggests how many Black Capetonians celebrated a shared heritage of bondage that cut across religious divides.<sup>12</sup>

The "big day festivities", he expands, "held the potential to promote broader community consciousness among slave descendants which could comprehend Muslim and Christian alike"<sup>13</sup>; it was a "celebration of freedom... in which people rejoiced in an identity with neighbours and kinfolk"<sup>14</sup>. Essentially then, Bickford-Smith links the Carnival's origins to an acute consciousness of an inclusive, cross-denominational, slave heritage, precisely rooted in a specific urban territory.

It is unclear precisely when the Carnival first displayed the transatlantic influence characteristic of performance in the twentieth-century; its strong American overtones, manifested in the blackened-face "coon"<sup>15</sup> disguise and the frequent use of popular

---

<sup>12</sup> Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, p. 187.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting from D. Birmingham, 'Carnival at Luanda' in *Journal of African History*, No. 28, (1988), p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> The origins of minstrelsy are discussed extensively by Van Deburg. He traces its origins to 1696 with the first dramatic representation of Black slaves in a touring British performance of *Oroonko* in the southern States. These "slaves" however, were White actors "blackened-up". The first US performance of the singing, dancing, Afro-American stereo-type appeared in the 1768 portrayal of "Mungo" in *The Padlock*, but again, Mungo was played by a White actor. By the 1840s there were "full minstrel shows" consisting of "lighthearted" song and dance routines. Van Deburg points out that a limited repertoire of stock characters typified these performances; namely the dandified "Zip Coon" - an overdressed stereotype of the freed Black of the Northern states, grinning under a big hat and in ill-fitting clothes, and "Jim Crow" - his Southern contemporary; addicted to "gin, chicken-coops, and watermelons". After the Civil War ex-slaves started appearing in minstrel shows and Black troupes became more common. McAdoo's Jubilee Singers were one such group. Quoted from W. L. Van Deburg, *Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture*, (University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1984), p. 40.

transatlantic songs. Bickford-Smith points to the appearance of visiting “white performers dressed as black slaves” as an early cultural influence prior to the 1880s:

It first came to Cape Town in the persons of Joe Brown’s Band of Brothers in 1848. But the most successful entertainment of this kind was provided by the Harvey-Leslie Christy Minstrels in 1862 and 1865.<sup>16</sup>

The visit of Orpheus M. McAdoo’s Jubilee Singers in 1887 for Queen Victoria’s Jubilee celebrations (significantly a Black touring group rather than a White one blackened-up) undoubtedly had a marked influence on the form of Cape inner-city festive expression. A number of the touring group settled with a local Malay family, the Dantus (reputedly one of the founding Carnival dynasties) and the appearance of revellers in US minstrel costume in 1888 reflected a significant Black American-Capetonian link that was to characterise the Carnival well into the next century.

“Coon Carnival” in its present form, a mixture of street parade and organised competition between festive troupes at fixed venues, began only in 1907<sup>17</sup>. In this year the city’s *Cape Argus* newspaper reports a Carnival competition and lists trophies awarded to the winning troupes at Green Point Track. Inaugurated by a Carnival committee under the auspices of the Green Point Cricket Club, the *Argus* relates how a crowd of five thousand watched the result of “months of continuous practice” by “Coloured performers”<sup>18</sup>. But whilst the paper correctly predicted the future expansion of the competition, its prophetic vision of the event’s “national” escalation remained unfulfilled:

It is very certain that the brilliant success will result in the Carnival being an annual affair and with the experience gained at this initial venture, will be national in character.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town*, Unpaginated.

<sup>17</sup> Stone, ‘Coon Carnival’, p. 3 and M. S. Jeppie, *Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner Cape Town, circa. 1939-1959*. (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990), p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> *The Cape Argus*, (3/1/ 1907), Front-page article.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Indeed, time served to strengthen the geographically specific essence of the event, stressing its exclusive connection to Cape Town.

It is the memory of Carnival as an event rooted in history and precise urban space (some say a common consciousness) which finds ready articulation amongst the many thousands of individuals who practice three times a week in the months before Christmas for January's "Coon Carnival". In halls, yards, garages and out-rooms throughout Cape Town's former "Coloured Areas"; from the central suburb of Woodstock to the sprawling Cape Flats, unlikely assortments of people gather to rehearse; from young boys to toothless old men, teenagers reeling from the combined effects of Mandrax, *dagga*<sup>20</sup>, and alcohol, to professional musicians. Practicing a repertoire ranging from Malay-inspired ballads<sup>21</sup> to comically adapted Beatles' medleys, and from Afrikaans "sentimentals" to Lloyd Webber's "Memories", they prepare for competition and display.

Rigid discipline is maintained both in rehearsal and on the street, by whistle-wielding troupe captains; the financial and artistic motivators of rival groups. It is these men, and they are invariably men, who design the troupe uniform, choose the musicians and songs, maintain order, and more importantly, choral harmony, amongst an untrained and floating membership often numbering several hundred.

Garbed in brilliant satin suits, rival troupes march to competition venues through streets bedecked with the ribbons and bunting of their opponents. Their route traces the boundaries of communities from which Coloureds were forcibly removed under the Nationalist government's Group Areas Act: Apartheid's legislated consolidation of residential segregation. Though passed in 1950, the first proclamations under the Act in the municipality were not made until 1957, due to the Cape Town City Council's boycott<sup>22</sup>. The Carnival procession's meeting and departure point in District Six is, in 1996, geographically identical to its historical forerunners, yet differing fundamentally today from

---

<sup>20</sup> Marijuana.

<sup>21</sup> Some of the ditties follow the musical arrangements of "traditional" Malay picnic songs.

<sup>22</sup> J. Western, Outcast Cape Town, (Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, 1981), p. 122.

the event before 1966 is that, unlike the focal hub of a vibrant community that it once was, much of this place is now a deserted wasteland.

Thirty years ago coons left their houses for a short walk to the Carnival meeting-place located in the midst of the community. From here the procession wove through a neighbourhood intimately familiar to its participants. Today troupes arrive in buses from the Cape Flats to assemble on a vacant plot. For the houses of District Six have been bulldozed and their inhabitants moved to disparate and peripheral new locations; from Mitchells Plain fifteen miles from the city-centre to Heideveld and Manenberg on the Cape Flats. The very essence of the community from which this event emerged, has been altered. Its coherence, derived from a solidarity structured around notions of shared and parochial spatial identity and an historical consciousness rooted in a slave past has been fractured.

Writing on Coloured working-class culture in the forties and fifties Jeppie comments on significant changes by the sixties, resulting from the impact of Group Areas. He isolates as a major influence on the nature of leisure, the issue of transport. Prior to Group Areas, working-class Coloured residence was concentrated around the central city close to people's work, thus limiting travelling time spent between the two and leaving ample time for leisure pursuits. Relocation to the Cape Flats however, massively lengthened this commuting period. "In Cape Town", Jeppie declares, "transport was to become a significant factor in working-class leisure... [in] the late twentieth-century... with the development of the sprawling Cape Flats"<sup>23</sup>.

Historians, observers, critics and proponents of the event appear unanimous in their insistence that participation in the Carnival has been, and still is, drawn almost exclusively from the "Coloured" working-class. Jeppie calls the event "the pre-eminent expression of working-class culture"<sup>24</sup>, and Weichel states that participants "comprise predominantly the

---

<sup>23</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture', p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

lowest socio-economic section of the Coloured population”<sup>25</sup>. Such comments disguise, among other things, the complicated gender dynamics determining levels of participation in the event. If commentators mention women at all in regard to the Coon Carnival, it is to note their conspicuous absence, yet repeatedly oral informants attest to their integral involvement in behind-the-scenes preparations. Often, it appears, women played facilitative roles; sewing costumes, making adornments like cloth flowers, preparing the food tables for the visiting troupes on New Year’s day. Yet, there is also ample evidence attesting to their active inclusion as participant “coons”. Generally though, the involvement of women has been at relatively unacknowledged, subordinate and passive levels, as members of the audience and in support roles.

It is unclear exactly when commercial sponsorship of the event began (something many participants of the 1960s and ‘70s saw as the insidious involvement of outside business interests). Green<sup>26</sup> and Manuel<sup>27</sup> both trace the interest of commerce to 1894 when a baker by the name of C. J. Cole gave his employees an annual picnic on *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* near Kirstenbosch. Interpreting this occasion as establishing the precedent on which the future Coon Carnival would be based, Green relates that Cole provided his Coloured workers with costumes and top hats to advertise his bread... These minstrels, followed by Mr. Cole himself in a smart trap, set a fashion that has never died”<sup>28</sup>. This instance serves as evidence of an early commercial venture vesting money and interest in the costumes and music of New Year festivities in the vein of the Carnival. Bickford-Smith writes that Cole’s employees had taken part in such activities even earlier. With their faces painted “black, red and every other conceivable colour” the bakers had participated in the 1887 Jubilee procession<sup>29</sup>. He suggests that their wearing of white costumes may have pointed to a symbolic connection with the substance of their work, flour. Thus, from very early days

---

<sup>25</sup> K. Weichel, ‘A Study of Aspects of Folk Cultural Activities Among the Coloured Peoples in the Cape’. (Urban Problems Research Unit Working Paper, University of Cape Town, 1970), p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Green, *Tavern*, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> G. Manuel and D. Hatfield, *District Six*, (Longmans South Africa, Cape Town, 1967), p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Green, *Tavern*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town*, Unpaginated.

there was a link between occupation, commercial sponsorship, and Carnival festivities in Cape Town.

As the Carnival grew so the potential to make money increased (for example, revenue netted as gate-takings at the competition venues) and it became more difficult to see the event as a straightforward celebration of freedom by society's historically downtrodden. Whilst those dancing on Cape Town's streets on the 2nd of New Year may still have been the Coloured "lower class"<sup>30</sup>, the event increasingly served other less overt interests as well.

Such interested parties ranged from the concern of tailoring families, dependent on the sizeable annual contracts for the production of coon costumes, to the more subtle and frequently resented interest of Carnival "promoters". Invariably White, these entrepreneurs held a monopoly on performance venues, kept gate-takings as personal profit, and paid participating troupe captains different performance fees: rates which were limited and insufficient even to cover the troupes' basic costs; transport, band hire, and so on<sup>31</sup>.

Clearly however, since the end of the Second World War and particularly from the ascendance of the National Party to government in 1948, conflict between differing interests over ownership, authority and control of Carnival, was not limited to battles over finances and commercial profit. Claims and counter-claims, advocacy and vitriolic denouncement of the event frequently centred on a contest for its metaphoric significance; the political implications of its artistic performance.

Whilst controversy seems always to have beleaguered the New Year's celebrations, attitudes towards it polarised sharply in the sixties and seventies. Retaining an image amongst the Coloured community as an inherently "working-class" occasion for licentiousness and festive disorder, this group's petit-bourgeoisie had always been quick in

---

<sup>30</sup> Stone, 'Coon Carnival', p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Promoters hired the stadium venues and then invited the participation of selected troupes. In the 1960s and '70s it seems that all promoters were White; a trend halted only in the mid-1990s with the

their rejection and contempt of it as a coarse, vulgar and, most fundamentally, “disreputable” occasion for drinking and marijuana smoking. Such an image endured, attitudes cohering largely according to social-class, yet increasingly the 1960s to ‘70s saw the development of a political<sup>y</sup>-based opposition to the event.

Comprehension of this evolving critique must be based on an awareness of the simultaneous fleshing-out of apartheid policy and its concomitant cultural implications. The success of the Nationalist government’s attempt to separate races residentially, economically and socially, depended upon the convincing assertion and entrenchment of notions of innate cultural difference. More importantly, it was imperative that such difference was psychologically assimilated by those it defined. Franz Fanon, writing on race relations in colonial and post-colonial Africa, outlines the critical psychological dimension to hegemonic domination:

the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: - primarily economic; - subsequently, the internalization... of this inferiority.<sup>32</sup>

For several decades, the Coloured middle-class had resented the way that the Coon Carnival depicted a “Coloured” culture that was alien to them. Many felt closer to their socio-economic contemporaries amongst the White petit-bourgeoisie, and abhorred the annual entrenchment of an ill-fitting, debasing racial stereotype that perpetuated the image of them as drunken, stupid, and disreputable. With the establishment of the Coloured Advisory Council in 1943<sup>33</sup> and the Nationalist’s drive to consolidate and define Coloured identity,

---

establishment of the Carnival Development Board - an amalgam of (predominantly Coloured) troupe captains.

<sup>32</sup> F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (Grove Press, New York, 1967), pp. 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> CAC members declared that their primary concern would be “better nutrition, health services and housing, improved educational facilities, wider scope for employment and improved wages and economic conditions”, in general, “any matter which would tend to benefit the Coloured people”. Denouncing the Council as a separate and segregatory department for “Coloured Affairs”, 25 organisations joined together under an Anti-CAD [anti-Coloured Affairs Department] banner in response. G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A history of South African “Coloured” politics*, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987), pp. 211-213.

many intellectuals saw the Carnival as aiding Apartheid's grand ideological scheme. In particular this was the view of the non-collaborationist Non-European Unity Movement [NEUM] and its successors.

Ashiek Marnie, currently an ANC councillor, explains his past, political-based, rejection of the event: "You have to look at the institutions that were used by the apartheid state in order to practice social control" he insists<sup>34</sup>. "Education,... cultural movements like coons,... ..the homelands system,... those were all ...types of methods [the government] used; all those institutions, political measures. They had other measures like influx control, passes and so on. The Coon Carnival comes in that context".

René du Preez, in an article headed "Coons at the Crossroads" in the *Sunday Times* of February 1992, states that "opposition" to the event only surfaced in the 1970s "when the political situation in South Africa became a high priority... [and] political organisations seem[ed] to steer clear of Coon Carnivals"<sup>35</sup>. He notes however, that "past politicians" including "Cissy Gool and Communist Party advocate Harry Snitcher" recognised the occasion's importance, making speeches at the Coon Carnivals in the 1940s. His claim that the country's political situation only became a "high priority" in the seventies seems somewhat naive, as does his suggestion that politically-based opposition to the Carnival also surfaced only at this late stage. Noteworthy though, is his observation that anti-segregationist politicians like Cissy Gool, and CPSA representatives, at one time readily associated with the event. Significantly, such tacit acceptance was prior to Nationalist rule and the legislated entrenchment of Apartheid.

Increasingly from the late 1940s, a Coloured intellectual and political elite<sup>36</sup> interpreted the event as aiding the formalised entrenchment of a racially defined community: legitimating

---

<sup>34</sup> Marnie, WCOH, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Sunday Times*, (15/2/92).

<sup>36</sup> People represented by minority organisations sympathetic to the sentiments of the NEUM like the TLSA. i.e. comprised of an urban, educated and professional elite.

the separation and subordination of people through fabricated notions of common identity. They saw the Coon Carnival as integral to this negative process. Marnie explains:

They [Apartheid's practitioners] wanted to determine... the culture and how that culture develops... It was in their interests to see the Coloureds separate themselves and see themselves as distinct from Africans, so they were interested in developing a Coloured identity. Now the Coon Carnival is very much part of that... the Coon Carnival was used in order to create separateness, separate identities but subservient identities.<sup>37</sup>

A handful of informants claim that the spread of Black Consciousness [BC] inspired thought from the late sixties (particularly the rejection of the term "Coloured" in the assertion of a common "Black" identity; binding varying shades under the single banner of racially oppressed) restructured attitudes to the Coon Carnival. The permeation of BC ideology, they cautiously volunteer, conscientised many Coloured working-class people who then rejected the event as aiding Apartheid to divide those whom it oppressed, fabricating notions of ethnic exclusivity, and preventing the assertion of a united opposition.

The impact of BC on the actual participants of the Carnival, however, should not be exaggerated. By all accounts, its influence was confined to a narrow educated, middle-class intelligentsia (those to whom Carnival was alien anyway), and its impact amongst the working-class mass of participants remained severely limited. Lodge writes that the conscientising movement was "especially pervasive among university students, school teachers and churchmen"<sup>38</sup>; professions absent from troupe membership. Similarly, Rich traces the immediate sphere of BC awareness to an educated elite far removed from the ranks of Carnival participation:

the appeals of being Black, acting Black and thinking Black gained most support among growing secondary school and university intelligentsia.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Marnie., WCOH, p. 3

<sup>38</sup> T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945. (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983), p. 333.

<sup>39</sup> P. Rich, 'Liberals, Radicals and the Politics of Black Consciousness, 1969-76', (Paper presented to the Department of African Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, 24/7/89), p. 17.

Writing in 1981, at perhaps the heyday of BC, Ridd declares in more direct and unequivocal vein that “it is certainly true that the ...movement found no foothold in the District Six Area, and indeed it was strongly opposed by the vast majority of the community, old and young alike”<sup>40</sup>.

A possible exception to this general rule is indicated in the *Cape Times* annual list of Carnival competition results. Nestled amongst the host of American celluloid inspired troupe names like the *Star Spangles* and *Hollywood Nigger Minstrels* in 1968 are the *Ethiopian Jubilee Jazz Singers*<sup>41</sup>. This troupe finds no further mention or comment yet stands conspicuously apart from the other names, pointing possibly to a looking to Africa as a continent rather than Europe or America for inspiration and perhaps, identity. Alternatively, the stimulus for such a name may well have sprung from another cultural import, Rastafarianism; a return to Africa by way of Jamaica and the music industries of the United States and Great Britain.

For the rank-and-file membership of the coon troupes in the sixties and seventies, Party politics were irrelevant and unconnected to their celebration of New Year. They knew little, and cared less, for the concerns of those such as the predominantly Trotskyite NEUM who bemoaned the ideological manipulation of the event. However, enforced removal of the Coloured participant community to the Cape Flats under Group Areas legislation crystallised opinion around the protection of specific urban space. Repeatedly, oral informants structure their memory of the event around the focal point of dispossession and relocation. They demonstrate a political consciousness rooted in an idea of geographical, communal belonging.

Western refers overtly to the fundamental spatial aspect of the Carnival and the bearing of legislative drives towards segregation and their inevitable impact on popular expression. He notes that only a year after the declaration of District Six as a “White” residential area on

---

<sup>40</sup> R. E. Ridd, ‘Position and Identity in a Divided Community: Colour and Religion in the District Six, Walmer Estate, Woodstock area of Cape Town’, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 1981), p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> *Cape Times*, (8/1/68).

the 11th of February 1966<sup>42</sup>, the Coon Carnival was outlawed from the streets as a “traffic hazard”. The reason for this, he suggests, was “to inhibit the symbolic assertion of Coloured ownership of, and identification with, inner-city Cape Town”<sup>43</sup>. Jeppie too, alludes to an association between Carnival and the expression of spatial possession and geographical belonging. In essence, he asserts, the event was the “occupation of space by the dispossessed”<sup>44</sup>. The years of 1966 to 1968 indeed emerge as a pivotal point in the changing fortunes of the Coon Carnival. The declaration of District Six, spiritual and geographical home of the Carnival, as a “White Group Area” in 1966, coupled with the removal of the road march from the streets the subsequent year, served as a hard-hitting two-pronged attack on the very essence of the event.

The dispossession and enforced removal of participants to the Cape Flats fractured family, friendship, and neighbourhood networks around which the event cohered. Troupe memberships bound by tight allegiance to intimately familiar localities were broken. With former participants dispersed at remote locations, the organisation of regular practices became increasingly problematic, members having to travel significant distances to rehearsals and fund travel costs from wages already reduced by daily commuting bills to work in the city.

On top of this, the dramatic increase in time spent travelling to and from work meant that residents of the Cape Flats had much less free time for leisure activities such as Carnival practices and preparations. Stone emphasises the multiple impact of the move on Carnival organisation, stressing the transport problem Jeppie outlines but pointing also to further ramifications. Whereas prior to removals, notice of practice venues and times could be relayed by word of mouth within geographically concentrated communities, after Group Areas, members were harder to contact and co-ordinate, being so spread apart. Telephones may have offered a solution to this organisational predicament but few people had access to

---

<sup>42</sup> South African Government gazette, no. 1370 (11 February 1966), Notice no. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Western, Outcast, p. 151.

<sup>44</sup> Jeppie, ‘Aspects of Popular Culture’, p. 42.

one. In Lindy Wilson's documentary Last Supper in Horstley Street<sup>45</sup>, a Muslim woman bemoans the fact that there isn't a public-phone in the whole of Belhar (the suburb which they have been moved), and that the only private one in the area belongs to a nurse who needs it for her work.

Removals thus broke the back of Carnival organisation in a practical sense, yet it was the second prong of this dual-headed attack following a year in the wake of District Six's declaration as a "White" area which struck the event's symbolic core. The prohibition of the road march from the city centre's streets and its banishment to the fixed venues of out of town stadia attempted to transform the very heart of the festival [see Appendix I for list of venues].

Much confusion surrounds the purported "banning" of the road march in 1967. Western unhesitatingly relates its removal from the city centre under traffic regulations as incontrovertible fact (though he fails to reference the claim) and oral informants hazily recollect its disappearance some time around then. The full explanation is considerably more complex [see Appendix II].

In an article in *Personality*, February 1973, headed "Funeral March of the Cast-off Coons", William Steenkamp states that in the sixties "the coon spirit began to die, bleeding like Caesar from a dozen gory wounds"<sup>46</sup>. He sees several parties as complicit in this execution stating, "a variety of hands wielded the daggers" but "the hardest blow was struck by officialdom", and in particular, the declaration of Green Point as a "White Group Area". Whilst the Department of Community Development issued the city council with a permit allowing the track to be used for Coloured sporting events, it stipulated that it was "definitely not for Coon Carnivals"<sup>47</sup>.

---

<sup>45</sup> L. Wilson, Last Supper in Horstley Street. (Video in the Centre for African Studies Library, University of Cape Town, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> *Personality*, (23/2/73), pp. 72-76

<sup>47</sup> See Extract from the agenda and minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of Cape Town City Council. (7/12/72), State Archives. File GM. 25/3.

The respective proclamations of District Six and Green Point as White Group Areas in 1966 and 1968<sup>48</sup>, and the specific preclusion of the Carnival from Green Point Track from 1967 fundamentally distorted the spatial aspect of Carnival, altering the start and destination points of the road march.

A central road march was not only frustrated by means of legal restrictions, for the implications of Group Areas removals also fundamentally altered the practicalities of the traditional route and procession. From 1966 many participants no longer lived in District Six, the primary point of the procession's assembly and constitution. Before removals, troupe members had left their houses for neighbouring club-rooms to collect uniforms, and when their entourage was gathered, had exploded onto the streets to parade through their neighbourhoods, to town and Green Point. After relocation troupes had to organise transport just to get to the competition venues on time, let alone the road march with its time constraints made increasingly tight by the Police and municipal authorities. From 1967 the explicit barring of the Coon Carnival from Green Point Track (the destination of the outward stage of the march) struck a similarly heavy blow to the event. The remaining competition venues, Athlone and Hartleyvale in Observatory, were too far from where people lived for most troupes reach by foot. Even if the troupes had wished to traverse the same streets as before, there would have been little point as their audience who had once lined the procession's route, no longer lived there. The *Cape Herald* hinted at this scenario in an article of 8/1/72 entitled "Death of a Grand Tradition":

The coons did not march through the streets of Cape Town in massive procession this year. Nor did they last year and it is unlikely that they ever will again. The city's heritage of spontaneous gaiety has been lost. We mourn it... [for whilst] ...a few troupes still apply and receive permits from the council to march from Woodstock to the Malay Quarter... their numbers are dwindling.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Green Point's final declaration under the Group Areas Act was issued by way of Government Proclamation No. 252 of 1968, in the 30 August, 1968 Government Gazette, declaring the Western Coastal Area from Three Anchor Bay to Chapman's Peak, a "White" Group Area.

<sup>49</sup> *Cape Herald*, (8/1/72).

Uncertainty exists as to exactly when and how the event was restricted from the City's central streets. It is unclear whether ultimate blame for the event's confinement lies with the South African Police, the Traffic Department, City Council, or Ministry of Justice. What is certain however is that the Carnival's spontaneity and free-movement was severely hampered from 1967<sup>50</sup>.

A celebration of urban life, of inner-city community and spatial belonging, the Coon Carnival was characterised by the free and fluid movement of its participants as they revelled in the glory of showing-off long practiced dances and costumes to their neighbourhood. Furthermore this celebration occurred in the area where much of the membership worked throughout the year. New Year was the one time when power was symbolically inverted, Coloureds possessing the city centre where, for the rest of the year they were subject to the tight discipline of capitalist, White controlled, wage-labour.

The confinement of the event attempted to distort a phenomenon characterised essentially by movement, into a static and fixed spectacle there merely for visual consumption. It mutated<sup>from</sup> an expression where boundaries between audience and participants constantly blurred, into a spectacle separated by rigid barriers between performers and onlookers, stadium and street.

Western quotes the Institute of Race Relations' address to the government's Cillie Commission investigating the causes of the unrest of 1976-'77 in stressing unequivocally the impact of Group Areas: "no single Government measure has created greater Coloured resentment, sacrifice and sense of injustice"<sup>51</sup>. Justifying the "space-society dialectic" that provides a theoretical lynch-pin to his work on Coloured identity, Western declares that "the tension and fear that are the concomitants of South African society's structure are

---

<sup>50</sup> This central dilemma is elaborated upon in Chapter Three and Appendix II.

<sup>51</sup> Western, Outcast, p. 310.

reflected in the urban geography of Cape Town and that the manipulation of this urban geography itself has, in turn, created tension and fear in the society”<sup>52</sup>.

Governing the Carnival, both before and after removals, is a fundamental connection between space and identity. Troupes prior to Group Areas drew legitimacy and coherence from a common rootedness in parochial territory. Frequently this consensus overlapped with that of gangs whose members similarly unified around a shared notion of home and belonging in a specific and localised community. Such a “communal identity” however, failed to subsume all members of the neighbourhood uniformly. Other apparatuses of power clearly operated even before the Group Areas Act to structure different individuals’ perceptions of local space and of their positions, roles and identities within the community.

The level and form of female participation in Carnival, for example, differed significantly from its male corollary. The involvement of fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, was markedly different to that of women, though both were born, raised and resident in identical localities. Robert Shell’s work, inspired by Van der Spuy’s earlier ground-breaking look at “Slave Women and the Family in nineteenth-century Cape Town”<sup>53</sup>, offers some illumination to this theoretical double-bind in historicising the social dynamics of slave society and their ramifications on descendant generations. Re-examining the underlying power-bases governing master-slave relations in Cape settler-society, Shell asserts the primacy of the “familial... metaphor”<sup>54</sup> as the dominant form of social control, demonstrating the fundamental gendering of space within it:

...the family, whether nuclear or extended [was] the prime agent of socialization and the source for later concepts of authority, subordination, security, rebellion and identity.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>53</sup> P. Van der Spuy, ‘Slave Women and the Family in nineteenth-century Cape Town’ in South African Historical Journal, 27, (1992).

<sup>54</sup> R. C. H. Shell, Children of Bondage: A social history of the slave society at the Cape of Good Hope, (University of the Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994), p. 212.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.xxvi

To their masters, and in the eyes and precedent of Cape colonial law, the slave was a permanent child; the master, the paternal family head. Through a legitimating discourse binding “adulthood and freedom”<sup>56</sup>, the slave’s perpetual serfdom was justified as simply reflecting his inherent and unalterable infantile status.

Shell and Van der Spuy’s detailed outline of the delineation of social and household space are useful for deconstructing the gendered terrain of Carnival, providing both a conceptual framework and a direct link between the pre-emancipation model and its later, contemporary, variants. Van der Spuy identifies the residential constraints placed on female slaves and the predominantly domestic nature of their work as impeding their access to autonomous social space. She notes that women were:

less likely than men to be able to live independently... and this necessarily had implications for the mother-headed family. These women could not become fully integrated into the urban under-class.<sup>57</sup>

Frequently employed in such positions as wet-nurses and chambermaids, they were constantly on call in the house of their master. In this way, “the work required of women influenced their access to social space and their ability to form relationships independently of their owners”<sup>58</sup>.

Shell similarly considers the occupation and visibility of male and female slaves in public and private space. Crudely summarising him in this respect, a distinction is drawn between the domestic position of female slaves “inside” the master’s house, and the male slave, “outside”<sup>59</sup>. He describes the operations of a “household segregation” which effectively confined slave women to the kitchen; the *hearth* providing a spatial focus to their lives. “Female slaves at the Cape”, he asserts, “were forced by reason of space to be under the

---

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>57</sup> Van der Spuy, ‘Slave Women’, p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> Shell, *Children of Bondage*, p. 262.

broad thumb of their owner and family and to share their domestic culture”<sup>60</sup>. Their male counterparts, conversely, were housed in adjacent, but separate, outbuildings; conditions more conducive to the development of cultural autonomy:

If it is true that a broad range of Cape slave owners kept their female slaves within, and their male slaves outside but close to the “big house”, this finding has implications for the domestic acculturation of all slaves at the Cape.<sup>61</sup>

He depicts simultaneously, public space as a site of contest for hegemony between male slave and master, pointing to a seventeenth-century curfew keeping slaves from the streets at night and to eighteenth-century laws requiring city houses to light an external lamp to combat the darkness that provided cover for them to congregate and plot. He notes too the growing popularity of Greenmarket Square, the city’s outdoor central market, as a social meeting place.

Bank’s analysis of “The Erosion of Urban Slavery at the Cape. 1806 to 1834”, similarly illustrates how the struggle for control of public space and the association between notions of freedom and the *street* are steeped in historical precedent. Suggesting that the urban context of slavery in Cape Town generated problems of social control for slave owners, Bank points to an historically rooted connection between freedom and public space dating to pre-Abolition days. Central urban areas such as Greenmarket Square, he explains, developed into focal hubs of slave leisure and social interaction beyond the influence of masters; the “demographic concentration” of Cape Town “facilitat<sup>at</sup>[ing] extensive and inevitable contact between slaves”<sup>62</sup>.

Bank highlights also, the preponderance of outdoor occupation for many urban slaves engaged in spheres like transport and construction, which “allowed for an enhanced degree

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> A. Bank, ‘The erosion of urban slavery at the Cape, 1806 to 1834’, in Worden, N. and Crais, C. (eds.), Breaking the Chains, (University of Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994), p. 84.

of physical mobility and social space, free from owner surveillance”<sup>63</sup>. Thus, the public, open space of the street developed as the dominant arena for slave recreation; “the city’s subordinate groupings, because of their relative lack of private space, were forced to rely far more heavily on public space... From the point of view of the urban slaves, it was part of life experience that was independent of the owner class and took place beyond the household production unit”<sup>64</sup>.

Bickford-Smith asserts that the origins of the Coon Carnival can “at least in part, be traced back to the era of slavery”<sup>65</sup>. Though there is a manifestly evident link between the celebration of Abolition and the festivities (still evident today in the form and content of Carnival performance and song), his comment seems also tentatively applicable to organisational structures and the spatial aspect of the event. Most strikingly this link is implied in the gendered expression of territorial belonging; in the form and extent of festive participation according to gender. The familial paradigm of slave society and the master/slave contest for public space provides some back-drop to the historical evolution of the Coon Carnival. This is not to say that, for instance, the confinement of women within the private realm of the slave-master explains the lack of public female visibility in the event nearly a century and a half later, but that the Carnival is the product of an on-going cultural dialectic; its form determined in the struggle between a host of vying historical discourses of which slavery is one.

In such a way, the centrality of space and territory to the self-definition of troupes, the parade’s route, the symbolic significance of the Carnival and the identity of its participants, is not just a recent connection resulting from Apartheid’s manipulation of the urban landscape. The link between space, Carnival and identity is rooted in the social dynamics and discourses of power, authority and definition of slave society. Shell shows how the contest for symbolic control of *space* was a central component in struggle for hegemony in

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

pre-emancipation society. It is a war which was still being fought out over a century later, and in which Group Areas provoked one such battle.

Writing on “Sport and the British”, in a continent far-removed from the Coon Carnival, Holt makes a strikingly similar connection between working-class sports clubs, displacement, territoriality, the *street*, and near exclusive masculine community, in Edwardian England<sup>66</sup>. Noting the preponderance of place names in the proliferation of football team names during this period, he asserts that such groups “re-created a sense of intimacy in a community that had been uprooted” in the process of migration “to the new urban environment”. Sports clubs “formalised friendships” in a similar way to the way in which “ancient bands of youth” with their “captains” and “licensed revels had once done”<sup>67</sup>. New fraternities emerged in the form of local teams, consolidated around an intimate and shared experience of a new urban neighbourhood, rooted in parochiality:

to be part of a team was to have friends, to share a sense of loyalty and struggle together, and to represent *your* street or workshop, *your* patch of territory.<sup>68</sup>

Coon Carnival troupes shared an affinity with these blossoming football teams of turn-of-the-century England in several ways. Both team and troupe drew legitimacy and coherence from a claim to specific urban territory often indicated in their names. Holt points to some of the titles of Blackburn clubs in 1879 that had grown from the “formalising of street corner teams”<sup>69</sup> such as the *Red Row Stars*, *Gibraltar Street Rovers*, and the *Cleaver Street Rovers*. Similarly, Cape Town coon troupes frequently alluded to territorial bases with titles like the *Woodstock Starlights* (from the central city suburb of Woodstock), the *Schotsche Kloof Glamour Boys*, and the *Manenberg Serenaders*.

---

<sup>65</sup> V. Bickford-Smith, ‘Slavery, Emancipation and the Question of Coloured Identity with particular attention to Cape Town, 1875-1910’ in The Societies of Southern Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Vol. 19, (University of London Press, London, 1993).

<sup>66</sup>R. Holt, Sport and the British: A Modern History, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

When a troupe did not refer specifically to a geographical area in its title, often such a territorial connection was implied through overlapping gang membership patterns, or indeed overlapping parochial sports team links. Repeatedly informants point to an association between a specific gang and a particular troupe. Territorial ownership was thus, a cornerstone to both gang and troupe solidarity and coherence (a fact attested to by sociologists, criminologists, historians and interviewees alike<sup>70</sup>). Bickford-Smith suggests that the connection between troupe and sports team had a long-established history but that it was a link which frayed with time and, as the two organisations became more remote from one another, so a Coloured middle-class increasingly distanced itself from the less respectable of the two - the coon troupes:

...Carnival troupes had been associated since the 1870s with Coloured "sports and pastimes" clubs, an association which lasted until the late 1920s. By the 1900s these included cricket, rugby, soccer and temperance organisations which were used to participating in organised tournaments which rewarded performances with prizes. In other words they were already associated with sensible recreation.<sup>71</sup>

Bickford-Smith implies that although the correlation between gangs and troupes persisted, the link between sporting groups and coons eroded around the 1920s to '30s. Interviewees, speaking of a period fifty years later, suggest that the sporting connection was maintained in some areas. Abe Sheldon<sup>72</sup> for example, describes the way in which area, coon troupe, gang and sports team, overlapped, remembering that each major street of Harfield Village<sup>73</sup> had its own gang as well as a cricket or rugby team. Though he denies an explicit connection between gang and troupe, a plethora of other oral and written sources attest to such a link. Thus a scenario emerges where local boys, or men, played, socialised and "hunted" together, alternating between team, troupe and gang.

---

<sup>70</sup> Full discussion and evidence for this claim can be found in Chapter Four.

<sup>71</sup> Bickford-Smith, Cape Town, Unpaginated.

<sup>72</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 31.

<sup>73</sup> Formerly an area of mixed residence but with a high Coloured population which was moved out to areas on the Cape Flats as a result of the Group Areas Act.

Emphatically re-affirming the importance of the *street*, Soudien and Meltzer stress the centrality of familiar urban geography to the identity of District Six residents in particular, and Capetonians in general:

The phenomenon of the street is... central in District Six identity narrative. It is the place where people's identities are confirmed and where they affirm their belonging. It is the place where they show themselves as members of the community. Crucially, however, the street is also the place where one announces ones new identity.... The street was a medium through which meaning was offered and negotiated.<sup>74</sup>

The declaration of places such as District Six as "White Group Areas", the dispersal of neighbourhoods to unfamiliar and remote new habitats, and the removal of the Carnival from the streets, was thus to have inevitable repercussions on the processes of identity formation.

Change within the event in the sixties and seventies was not limited to its banishment from the streets, nor to the displacement of its participant constituency to the peripheries of the city. Writing in 1971, Stone attests to the Carnival's growing commercialisation, a tendency continually pointed to by oral informants interviewed about the festivities in this twenty year period. This commercialisation, he asserts, was reflected by the way in which the Coon Carnival became "increasingly.... a medium for the introduction and training of public entertainers"<sup>75</sup>. No longer willing to perform merely for the accolade and glory of winning or the fun of competing, bands and musicians charged rapidly escalating prices to accompany troupes. This factor, combined with the rising cost of fabric needed for troupe uniforms, exacerbated the need for major financial investment by troupe captains.

Increasingly, informants relate a fundamental shift to have occurred, differentiating the Carnival of the early sixties from the event twenty years later. They evoke the image of the

---

<sup>74</sup> C. Soudien and L. Meltzer, District Six: Image and Representation, (South African National Gallery and The District Six Foundation, Cape Town, 1995), pp. 11-12.

<sup>75</sup> Stone, 'Coon Carnival', p. 5.

Coon Carnival as spiraling into a moral, but also literal, decay, with profit taking over from the pleasure of entertaining the community as the primary objective of coon captains. They depict a descent into chaos: the ordered license of Carnival prior to Group Areas previously contained by inherent limits of community consensus, becoming, after 1967, the violent, anarchic, and dangerous terrain of anti-social gangs with no allegiance other than to themselves and their personal pursuit of profit and gain.

**Thesis structure and breakdown of chapters:**

Looking<sup>at</sup> different aspects of the Coon Carnival's *representation* in the sixties and seventies, Chapter Two interrogates the event's academic, journalistic, oral, visual, and tourist-oriented depiction. Assessing the extent to which these sources complement, validate, or contradict one another, this chapter looks also at different influences shaping the form and content of each representation. The relative dearth of academic literature or literary account of the Carnival necessitates that I rely primarily on the few other existing historical sources; namely contemporary newspapers and the oral testimonies of informants who took part in, or lived in the community where the Carnival took place, in the 1960s and 1970s. Such sources are, however, potentially problematic for they rely on the integrity of journalism at a time when there were heavy pressures on the media from the State, and on the accuracy of memories that have had over thirty years to forget and to degenerate; memories that may also have been shaped by the very process of removal. Due to my necessarily heavy dependence on these sources, Chapter Two is dedicated to their interrogation as I examine the various *representations* of the Coon Carnival in the sixties and seventies. Looking at oral representations of the Carnival on whom this study is critically dependent, I assess who the interviewees are, how they were selected and interviewed, and the problems and limitations of using them as historical sources. Such *popular* representations are examined alongside academic, pictorial, and tourist-oriented depictions of the event.

Due to the limited nature of existing critical discussion and analyses of the Coon Carnival, and acutely conscious of Bekker's observations regarding the neglected opportunities for

cultural comparison, I have relied heavily on theories of Carnival world-wide, Europe to South America, in the search for precedents, similarities and differences. The plethora of international and inter-disciplinary material relating to Carnival offer an interpretive framework, or departure point, for my examination of the Coon Carnival, and are discussed in a fairly heavily theoretical Chapter Three. It serves as an attempt to situate the study of one specific and parochial cultural form within the contemporary and international academic debate regarding the essence of popular culture in general and festival in particular.

Chapter Four addresses explicitly the narratives of the oral informants. Looking at how these testimonies convey notions of continuity and change in Carnival during the 1960s and '70s, it focuses particularly on the hierarchies and organisational structures operating within the event. Searching for underlying apparatuses of power determining relations and shaping interactions within the event, this chapter looks at how different hierarchies at times overlap, reinforce, validate, or challenge, one another. It notes, in particular, the influence of masculine gang culture and its essential rootedness in familiar territory and space. Shifts and changes pivoted around Group Areas removals are noted and interrogated. This chapter serves as a practical attempt to test the boundaries and limits of the interviews as sources; their ability to weave a combined and convincing logic and cohesion. It is an effort to see how the testimonies act together and against each other, to develop a narrative through both cohesion and the illumination of difference, fissures and inconsistencies. This chapter tests their inherent validity as historical sources whilst simultaneously locating this twenty year period within a broader and more encompassing historical framework of change and adaption.

Having pinpointed the failure to account for other discourses influencing participation in the Coon Carnival, preventing the notion of a common, uniform, ethnic intent, Chapter Five (in similar vein to the one preceding it) explores the impact of gender. Examining through newspaper reports and the oral histories, the involvement of women, this chapter dissects the very notion of *participation*, highlighting the often low-profile, structurally unrecognised, near invisible, but critically facilitative roles they play at various levels of the

event's preparation and production. It questions also, the repeated refrain asserted unproblematically by Carnival commentators as to the absence of *active* female "coons" in the troupes, looking at patterns of assimilation and involvement and attempting to establish some historical specificity regarding the precise time and nature of female involvement. Central to this chapter is the consideration of space governing social relations both on and off the street in terms of gender. It deconstructs notions of *home* and *street* as essentially gendered terrains, questioning simultaneously the extent to which religion, social class and notions of bourgeois "respectability" exacerbate such distinctions. Essentially then, this chapter takes as its launching point, the implication of those such as Jeppie, Western, Weichel and Stone, that the Coon Carnival was an exclusively masculine affair with women merely peripheral, if present at all.

With preceding chapters having highlighted and dissected some of the different discourses of power and identity at play within the Coon Carnival, Chapter Six attempts to tackle the link between popular culture and Coloured ethnicity. Having problematised the notion of common ethnic consciousness and homogenous intent throughout the thesis (in the criticism of previous theorists for reductionist conflation of vying dialogues and structures of authority), I explore the different *Coloured* identities which the event does articulate. I ask how far the Carnival expresses ready-constituted identities and to what extent the celebrations are themselves a time for the formulation or re-constitution of identities. Though this search assumes an essentially historical line of inquiry - looking at the way in which entrenched forms of order and control, such as the *familial* model with its roots in slavery, find expression in festive organisation over a hundred years later - it simultaneously asserts the primacy of social space in the construction of the self and of community. Thus, it looks at the implications of enforced removal on the Carnival as both an expression and construction of identity.

Whilst focusing on this relatively ethereal realm - the bearing of notions of space and territory on constructions of individual and group identity - this chapter also tackles directly a more concrete question which has beset this thesis throughout. It addresses those claims

by members of an educated, politicised, Coloured elite, that the Coon Carnival of the sixties and seventies fabricated and manipulated a *Coloured ethnicity* that served primarily the interests apartheid ideologues. In so doing, it asks what *Coloured ethnicity* means within the politicised sphere of culture, examining its changing and contextually adaptive nature. Ultimately, this chapter aims to tie in the two central drives of this thesis; to link the spatial dialectic to the ideologically motivated battle for symbolic power and control of Carnival. At no time more than during the late 1960s and '70s, with the implementation of Group Areas, was this politicisation of space more acute in Cape Town. Simultaneously it re-examines generalised Bakhtinian claims about Carnival by applying them to a very specific historical, geographical, and political context.

This thesis differs essentially from those other studies of the Coon Carnival, numerically limited though they are, in three main ways. Firstly, it attempts to establish the historical detail they all too often lack. Secondly, where former studies assert similarity at the expense of difference in an effort to pinpoint homogenous intent and overriding meaning, this study looks for the meaning through exploring differences. It suggests that if such a thing as *Coloured ethnicity* exists, it does so in different forms, for different people, at different times, for it is the ever-changing product of a ceaseless dialogue. Thirdly, it stresses the centrality of space in the constitution of community-belonging. In this task it combines the directions of Western and Shell to establish the notion of a historically rooted territoriality. It outlines a gendered delineation of space that operates both inside and outside, in the realms of *home* and *street*, in the ordering of society and the establishment of community coherence.

## Chapter Two.

### Representing the Coon Carnival.

#### Popular memory, Pictures and Press: a comment on sources:

The gaping absence of historical commentary relating to Cape Town's "Coon Carnival" makes any research on the subject dependent largely on the oral accounts of participants and observers, on pictorial representations, and on contemporary Press coverage. A cursory overview of Cape Town's broadsheets though, proves disappointingly unproductive. Year after year the city's main morning and evening newspapers, the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus*, replicated trite clichés about the annual revelry interspersed with horror stories of disorder and misbehaviour. Accompanying photographs of happy clowning coons appeared with an annual regularity and lack of imagination that suggested the same images were lifted every January from the files of a picture library. A similar portrayal was employed by the Cape Tourist Industry, *CAPTLOUR*, to promote the city; both sources heavily reliant on hackneyed racial stereotypes.

Sensationally distorted though they are, newspaper evidence, tourist brochures and their like, should not be discarded as tainted and worthless historical sources. In order to obtain as clear and comprehensive a picture as possible of the Carnival and its social context in the 1960s and '70s, a comparison of all angles of its representation is imperative; from journalistic portrayal to academic depiction, from pictorial representations to the oral testimonies of participants.

#### Oral representations: popular memory:

Ingrained in the testimonies of informants reminiscing Carnival past is a nostalgic hankering for a lost *Golden Age*: an Eden before the fall. This narrative of mourning is tied inextricably to a grieving over the loss of Carnival's physical and spiritual heartland, District Six. It is a romanticisation obscuring the reality of life before the Group Areas Act; clouding the memory of divisions and rifts that separated different, often conflicting, sections of the community. Richard Rive declares that "today time has sufficiently

romanticised and mythologised the District's past"<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, Ridd isolates an "idealised... pre-demolition...memory"<sup>2</sup> where only the positive aspects of life are remembered and the negative and unpleasant are repressed. For instance, she relates that whilst informants recall the "cosmopolitan" nature of District Six, they "forget the social differences separating ethnic and economic groups". Former residents of the areas, she pronounces, "even speak of crime and violence [prior to removals] in positive terms"<sup>3</sup>.

Nasson reminds us that the reality of pre-removal life was fraught with the social complexities of any other neighbourhood:

Like any other community, the community of District Six was a complex, honey-comb structure. It had many horizontal and vertical walls. Its human building blocks were sometimes drawn together, sometimes pushed apart by the forces of class consciousness, culture and gender-divisions. One important factor to underline, not least because the history of District Six has for so long been subject to gross generalisation, is that this community has not one but many representative voices.<sup>4</sup>

Soudien, in his introduction to the South African National Gallery's exhibition "District Six: Image and Representation" similarly warns that as with other historical sources, we must approach popular narratives (oral testimonies, literature, song, and so on) with caution; alert to the way its "discourses privilege and obscure some meanings" and are inherently "governed by racial, class and cultural prejudices"<sup>5</sup>.

Turner and Jensen, proffering a psycho-analytic assessment of the near mystical elevation of the District Six memory assert that "in Lacanian terms, District Six is the empty space that promised fulfillment"<sup>6</sup>. For those people moved to new areas of the Cape Flats from town,

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Rive, 'District Six: fact and fiction', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds.), The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present, (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1990), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Ridd, 'Position and Identity', p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> B. Nasson, 'Oral history and the reconstruction of District Six', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds.), The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present, (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1990), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> C. Soudien and L. Meltzer, District Six: Image and Representation, (South African National Gallery and The District Six Foundation, Cape Town, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Turner and Jensen, 'A Place called Heideveld', p. 101.

they claim that “in people’s minds, District Six promises everything that Heideveld is not” and that the extent of its strength as an image derives from the fact that it cannot be replaced. It “promise[s] the impossible fulfillment of desire”<sup>7</sup>: the ability to fill many “lacks”. In such a way, they interpret this process of remembering as a coping strategy; nostalgia enabling a fractured and dispossessed community to come to terms with a hostile and alien environment.

It is imperative at the outset of any analysis of these post-traumatic testimonies to be alert to the complicated creative processes of memory and the motivating forces behind them. Soudien writes of popular narrative’s simultaneous “penchant for exaggeration” and power of “reinvention and renewal”<sup>8</sup>. “It matters not therefore that the details of the story are wrong”, he insists, “what matters is the right to remake”.

The concern of this thesis is not to examine the testimonies of informants in an effort to squeeze their narratives into a pre-conceived critical framework. Rather, it is an attempt to explore the form and content of the narratives themselves: to examine the way they collectively and individually, weave their own logic and coherence whilst simultaneously reflecting frictions, divisions and conflict. It is an attempt to look at the way in which a cultural event is remembered. Though this remembering contrasts eras of Carnival polarised around Group Areas, close interrogation of the testimonies reveals an underlying discourse of Carnival as a constant process of historical change and adaptation.<sup>9</sup>

### **Methodology and informants:**

The oral informants on whose testimonies this study is based are, with the exception of Richard Dudley and Ashiek Marnie (NEUM and ANC activists respectively and opposed to the Carnival during the years under question), a random selection of people who participated in the Coon Carnival in the 1960s and ‘70s. “Participation” in this sense includes involvement at all levels of the event from “active” members of coon troupes, to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Soudien, District Six, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> The content of these narratives is assessed in detail in Chapter Four.

seamstresses involved in the production of costumes. Significantly, it also includes those involved in “passive” realms of participation, most notably the largely female audience watching the event in the streets or stadium.

Informants fall loosely into two age categories: those in their forties to fifties and those in their late sixties, the youngest being 44 and the oldest 68. Several of the interviewees are related, even though sometimes recruited for this study via different avenues. For example, Faldiela Isaacse and Fagmiejah Jansen turned out to be cousins. Melvin Matthews is the son of Janet and Eddie, and Ibrahim Ismael, the son of Radifa Thompson. This pattern seems indicative of the way in which Coon Carnival has been passed down through generations as family tradition, and is particularly useful in formulating some historical context for the event. Janet Matthews, for instance, witnessed her grandfather, husband and son’s participation in the event, but also has memories of stories of the Carnival even before that, related to her as a child by her grandfather.

There is however, a notable under-representation in the number of women interviewed. This stems from a reluctance of women to speak on the event deferring instead to their husbands as more qualified to talk on the subject. Women insist that Carnival is a male thing, playing down their own involvement. It is a claim which belies the true extent of their participation at the levels of preparation, as spectators, majorettes, indeed, even as active coons. It also disguises the opportunities afforded by Carnival-related industries like sewing, to earn a little extra money during an annual holiday period when a bonus is very welcome.

My efforts to interview women were in marked contrast to those of Turner and Jensen, and of Ridd. Conducting their research only a year before me, the Danes state that their assumption that women “would be more difficult”<sup>10</sup> to interview than men proved unfounded. In fact, they insist, it was more difficult to interview men, with frequent interruptions by the “sisters, wives and mothers” of informants. Ridd similarly declares of

---

<sup>10</sup> Turner and Jensen, ‘A Place called Heideveld’, p. 123.

her participant observation of the District Six Area in the 1970s, that women were the “more articulate... [and].. dominant members of the community”<sup>11</sup>. My attempts bore little resemblance to those of researchers before me. This is not to contest Ridd’s claim as to the centrality and authority of the matriarch in working-class Coloured families but perhaps indicates rather to an unwillingness to engage or associate with the subject in question - the Coon Carnival.

A further problem beleaguers the interviews in that they were all conducted in English rather than Afrikaans - the first language of many of my informants. I had to decide at the outset of my research whether to use an interpreter for the interviews or to conduct them myself in English - for many informants, a second language. Both options had their advantages and flaws. Using an interpreter would significantly alter the informal, conversational atmosphere I was aiming at and would exacerbate my distance from the interviewee. It would significantly detract from spontaneity for I would have to wait constantly for translation. I was further concerned about the likelihood of the interpreter to inadvertently alter the dialogue of the informant during rendition, and in so doing, soil the authenticity of the narrative. The very act of transcription involved in converting an oral narrative to print, effectively corrupts and distorts the original. To involve interpretation and translation as well, would be to risk increasing such discrepancy.

Conducting the interviews in English, however, was to emphasise the interviewer/interviewee dynamic. I was bringing not only my questions and tape-recorder with which to mine the respondent, but imposing my language. I was critically aware of these implications yet conscious also that the interviewee was far from a powerless object in the interchange; able to refuse an interview in the first place, to terminate the meeting at any time, decline to answer, lie or change the agenda. Indeed, as I brought my own agenda (however consciously I tried not to impose it), so the interviewee inevitably brought theirs.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ridd, ‘Position and Identity’, p. 451.

The pattern, questions, and format of my interviewing was not fixed and constantly adapted according to the interviewee. Though I took an identical set of questions to my initial interviews I never once followed them, realising that in pre-selecting my own thematic concerns I missed other topics which interviewees considered much more central, and after-all, my aim was to record the Carnival of the community involved rather than that of my own fabrication. This is not to say that in letting interviewees pursue their own interests I relinquished complete control of the interaction. That school of technique (preached principally by clinical psychologists) claiming interviews with one opening question followed only by classificatory questions and summaries, allows the interviewee to direct the interview, deceives itself. It claims that by "summarising" the informant's narrative, the interviewer works within the mind-set of the respondent. It conveniently forgets how the summary is itself a selection, prioritising only some of what has been said. The technique was further unsuited to my investigations in that it was imperative for me to ask specific and direct questions at times in order to establish points of historical clarity; dates, times, places, and so on. For instance, to find out the precise route of the road march I had to ask directly, for such intricate information was seldom volunteered.

Undoubtedly such considerations affected the nature and content of the narratives and oral representations conveyed to me. The way I asked questions, the very questions asked, indeed, my presence as a White, English, female, student in a realm characteristically Coloured, working-class and male, inevitably bore on the responses I was given.

### **Visual representations:**

The value of using visual representations in the reconstruction and understanding of history is outlined by Emile Maurice in his discussion of the "District Six: Image and Representation" exhibition of 1995. Describing pictures as an "archaeological site for digging"<sup>12</sup>, he insists that visual representations provide a means of "reconstructing a people's narrative and identity".

---

<sup>12</sup> E. Maurice, 'Introduction', in Soudien and Meltzer, p. 18.

Pictorial sources derived from the newspapers during the 1960s and '70s offer particularly illuminating revelations on the Coon Carnival. Sometimes this evidence is at odds with the written claims accompanying them in the same journals. Indeed, pictorial representations of the Carnival stretching as far back as the 1930s are a post-modern feast, revealing a diverse range of influences and determinants for involvement and display. In a picture of 6/1/31 for instance, a group of masqueraders on horseback, dressed as Mexicans, pose under the British flag. Similarly, a photograph in the same newspaper, dated 7/1/33, shows the *O.K. Napier Coons* beneath the Union Jack; demonstrating both parochial roots (in the street-name "Napier"), local commercial sponsors (O.K. Bazaars founded four years previously), and the influence of Empire.

Another such eclectic hybrid appears in a January edition of the *Cape Times*, 1949, with the *Young Louisiana Coons* exhibiting a British Royal coat-of-arms, and their stand declaring "May God Bless Our Royal Highness Bonny Prince Charles of Edinburgh". Through words, symbols and pictures, they reflect such multiple overseas influences. The preoccupation with Britain provides a clear iconic continuity for much of the twentieth-century Carnival with photographs of the event in the *Cape Times* frequently showing the Union Jack hoisted above troupes on their standards, from the 1930s to the present day. Yet, foreign influence seems not just to have been limited to the United States and Great Britain. Mary Rawkins' 1948 film *The Cape New Year*<sup>13</sup> shows a coon troupe marching under the *Tricolor*.

Newspaper photographs reveal continuities in style and participation in the event that frustrate the assertion of uncontextualised, sweeping generalisations of change. For example, informants are unanimous in their certainty that troupes received no sponsorship until well after the Second World War (many<sup>one</sup> adamant that it did not begin until very recently in the last few decades) but the picture taken for the *Cape Times* in 1933<sup>14</sup> of the *O.K. Napier Coons* (discussed above), suggests otherwise. Archival film footage similarly

<sup>13</sup> M. Rawkins, *The Cape New Year*, (Cape Town Municipal Photographic Society, African Studies Film Archives, University of Cape Town, 196[0s]).

<sup>14</sup> Photograph in "Coon Carnival" Special Collection (Taken for the *Cape Times*, 7/1/33).



Photograph in the *Cape Times* Collection (South African Library, Cape Town) 3/1/63

F21



Picture from *Cape of Good Hope Savings Bank Christmas 1977* In "Cape Town Clans" Collection (South African Library, Cape Town)

F22

points to the involvement of commercial sponsorship. In 1980 a UPITN documentary “Gangs in Cape Town” shows the *Nik Naks Coons* preparing for New Year suggesting that the troupe had the backing of a potato chips company. In a clear extension of this practice, of sponsorship being reflected in the naming of troupes, a photograph in the *Cape Times* of 11/1/64 shows the *Néstle Coons*, seemingly sponsored by the major chocolate-makers.

Oral informants, in their eulogy for the Carnival of pre-removal days, lament a marked change in costume theme and design. Amongst these claims is their insistence that the quest to maximize personal profit by troupe captains after 1967 resulted in the abandonment of more expensive, but smarter, “Top-hats” for cheaper cloth-caps. A comparison of a picture taken on 3/1/63 by a *Cape Times* photographer, with a 1977 image from The Cape of Good Hope Savings Bank Calendar<sup>15</sup> reveals striking continuities over a fourteen year period frequently claimed by informants to have witnessed the most marked change. Both photographs foreground a collection of around seven to nine young, male, troupe members. The costumes in the two pictures are startlingly similar. In both images all members wear top-hats encircled with stars and striped, single-breasted suit-jackets with large lapels, wide bow-ties and white trousers with a dark stripe on each leg. Despite the fourteen year gap, they reveal strong thematic and stylistic continuities, in particular the pervasive American influence. Indeed, the only clear difference between the two in attire is the lack of canes in the later photograph. In the 1963 image, all visible hands hold a stick or cane, but in the 1977 picture, besides the drum major’s stick, only one coon holds a cane. Interviewees relate that during this period, parasols were increasingly favoured in place of the short cane traditionally carried by ordinary members. Though the second photograph fails to evidence the appearance of umbrellas it does attest to the declining popularity of the stick [See F2.1 and F2.2].

Recourse to pictorial sources in establishing the historical development of female participation proves similarly productive. Sweeping generalisations are made regarding the

---

<sup>15</sup> Both photographs are housed in the South African National Reference Library in their Special Collections file on the “Coon Carnival”.

absence of women and as to the character and motivation of participants. A little probing beyond this superficiality, through a close comparison of contemporary broadsheets alongside photographic and pictorial sources exposes a much broader and more complex scenario. In the mid-sixties to seventies, for example, at several conflicting instances different broadsheets reported the first signs of active female involvement with the coons. Photographic sources and various editorial comments however, contradict these reports indicating the much earlier participation of women and girls.

Betty Becker writing on the “coon festivities” in New Year edition of *The Cape Herald* in 1965 (a year before the declaration of District Six as a “White Group Area”) expressed “pity” that “tradition forbids this outlet to the mothers, sisters, daughters and nieces of the family”<sup>16</sup>. A *Herald* reporter on 3/1/70 declares 1970 to be the first year that women had blatantly appeared in the roles of “beauty queens, princesses, drum majorettes” and as “coonettes”, yet the *Argus*, *Cape Times* and *Muslim News* all contain evidence of their much earlier active involvement.

Contradicting such claims that female involvement was a novel phenomenon is conclusive photographic evidence of the active and conspicuous participation of girls in the Carnival as far back as the 1930s. In a picture taken by the *Cape Times* in 1937, a very young girl and boy, dressed as the Carnival King and Queen, sit in a coach regaled in the bunting of a troupe, under the label “special item”, pointing to very early conspicuous female engagement at a competitive level. In another photograph by the same newspaper in December 1957<sup>17</sup>, a young majorette dances at the head of a marching troupe. Significantly her costume is of the same design as the male troupe members accompanying her (apart from her skirt), reflecting the structurally recognised role of the girl in the troupe.

The *Muslim News* also attests to the early appearance of women and girls. Under an editorial headed “Annual Act of Degradation”, appearing on 27/12/63, the paper bemoans

---

<sup>16</sup> *The Cape Herald*, (1/1/65), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *The Cape Times*, (No. G31,477 in “Coon Carnival” Special Collection, South African National Reference Library, Cape Town, December 1957).

the “new and sickening” appearance of young girl coons.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the 2/1/64 *Argus* City Late edition reports that the competition at Goodwood stadium was opened by a *khalifa*<sup>19</sup> display as well as a parade by “majorettes” and dancers<sup>20</sup>.

Photographic representations of Carnival in local newspapers reveal a significant shift in setting that dates to the late 1960s. Prior to this date, images of coons were often taken against the background of Table Mountain and other familiar urban landmarks. Before the late 1960s group shots taken from a distance of coons in street scenes predominated but after this time, photographs either tended to be close-ups (which omitted a background or merely showed the sky behind the figures’ heads) or revealed a stadium setting. From the turn of the decade, distance shots of coons en masse ceased, replaced by close-ups of individuals. Clearly, with participants and the parade removed from District Six and the city-centre, there were no longer the opportunities for such urban images. This change correlates also to that frequent wail of interviewees that individualism came to replace the communalism and community spiritedness previously characterising the event. It is almost as if photographic journalism mirrored this transformation, highlighting static individuals and small groups in place of moving throngs of faceless performers.

Significantly, paintings, prints and other visual portrayals of the event, whether created prior or subsequent to its effective confinement, depict the Coon Carnival on the streets rather than in the stadium. Indeed, the overwhelming characteristic of all such images is the sense of movement and activity, and the rootedness in specific and familiar urban territory. James Yates’ painting “Eerste Nuwe Jaar”<sup>21</sup> is typical of this tendency [See F2.3]. Painted relatively recently in 1990, it depicts a group of six coons in ostentatious pose before the gaze of the viewer and watched by a woman and child in the street. Close inspection reveals that they are in District Six; the Seven Steps behind them a central motif in the

---

<sup>18</sup> *The Muslim News*, (27/12/63).

<sup>19</sup> *Khalifa* is a semi-religious dance display involving self-mutilation performed by some Muslim men. It involves the cutting of the skin, the chest, or the tongue whilst in a trance-like state, claimed to prevent pain and the flow of blood. It is denounced by some sections of the faith and lauded by others.

<sup>20</sup> *The Cape Argus*, (City late edition, 2/1/64).

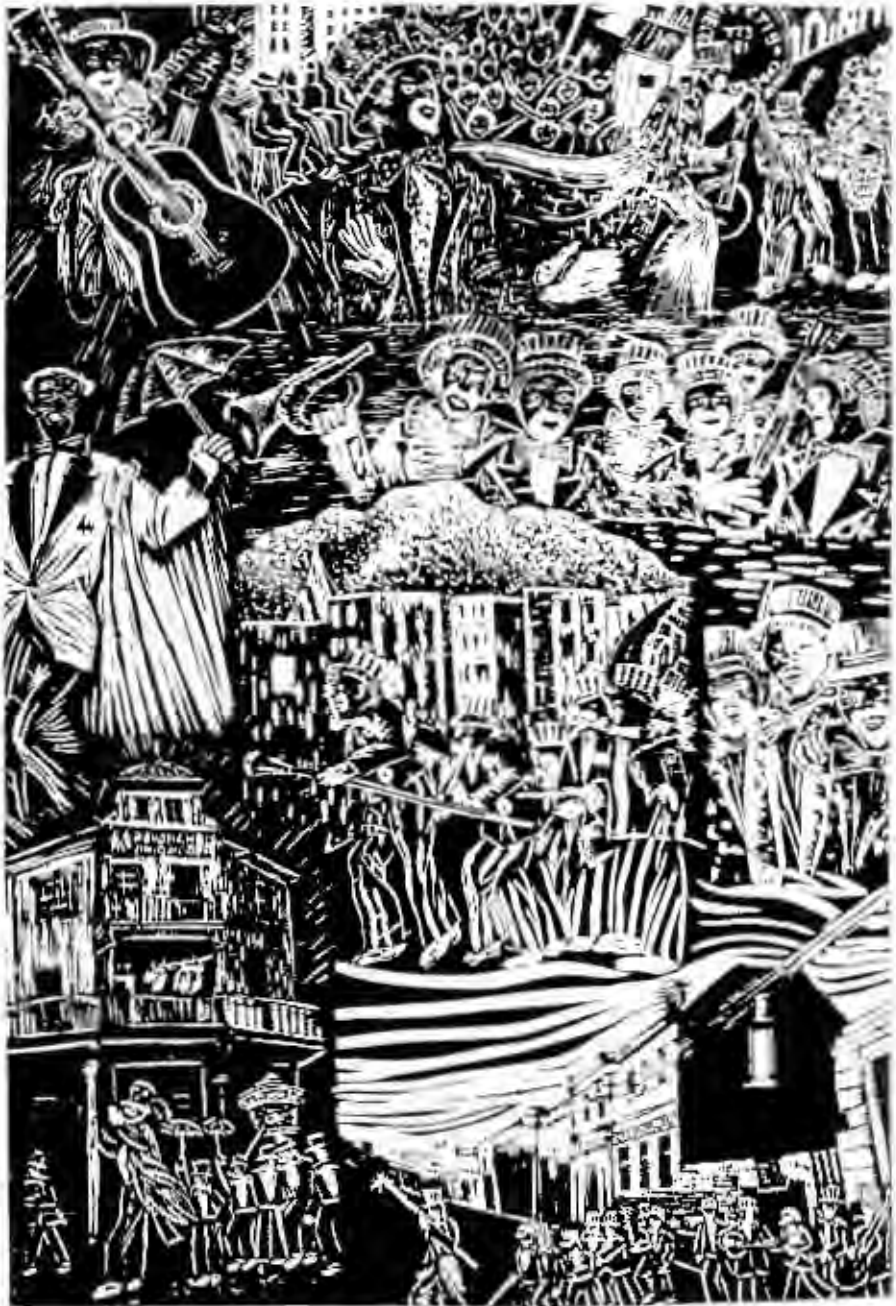
<sup>21</sup> Featured in the *Argus Tonight* supplement, (30/10/90).

173



*Evil's Nests* by James Yates. in *Argus* Tonight supplement 30/10/00

124



*Bliss and Illusion* by Roderick Sault. 1904. in *Southern and Mellor* 1905

area's popular legend and memory. The painting stresses the inextricable link between the performers and their specifically local neighbourhood. The coons fill the small street but simultaneously the neighbourhood expresses its support for the event, displaying coloured ribbons of allegiance to local troupes. Significantly too, the bunting runs from window to window, symbolically binding the homes together.

Yates, though illustrating an event that has for the last twenty years has taken place more in enclosed stadium venues than in the street, chooses District Six as his scenic backdrop. His image of Carnival depicts an urban geography that no longer exists. Thus, he associates the Coon Carnival (as is the tendency of so many informants) with the pre-removal days: with a parochial rootedness and ease in a familiar and welcoming territory.

Roderick Sauls' 1994 linocut echoes Yates' themes. [See F2.4]. Though comprised essentially of nine vignettes, his images flow into one another; the hand of a drum major sweeps into the scene beside him, the tail-coat of a troupe captain brushes into the neighbouring image. The overwhelming sense of movement thus derives not just from images of marching and dance but from the sweeping lines connecting pictures, making individual images difficult to separate. This activity, as with Yates, takes place outside of the competition stadium, in familiar Capetonian settings such as District Six streets, the Central Business District, and with Table Mountain dominating the background. Sauls' Coon Carnival is a Carnival without restrictions or boundaries.

Visual representations in particular then, point to continuities in the Carnival's style and form hitherto unnoted by commentators and frequently at odds with journalistic claims and pronouncements.

**Primary written sources:**

The academic oversight of the Coon Carnival since the Second World War compels us to look beyond the history books for accounts of the Coon Carnival. Tourist literature on Cape Town invariably refers to the New Year festivities but its depiction is characteristically limited and lacking in any substance, depth or analysis.

Tourist brochures and guides have focused on the Carnival as glorious spectacle: part of Cape Town's exotic "culture" and tradition, like its Adderley street flower-sellers and Malay choirs. Depicting the event in terms of well-worn stereotypes, this literature has naturalised music and performance as demonstrative of the innate musicality and naive hedonism of "Cape Coloureds". In his 1948 collection of snippets of lives and images from around the Peninsula for example, Tait insists:

The Cape Coloureds have music in their blood. Their slave ancestors wailed Dutch love songs... whenever the moon was high and rowed crooning from ship to ship in the bay.<sup>22</sup>

The City of Cape Town Official Guide of 1957 describes the New Year celebrations as a "unique two-day festival of Cape Town's Coloured people... singing as only the Coloured people with their inborn feeling for rhythm and harmonising can"<sup>23</sup>. Hanikman in like vein, nine years later in 1966 (significantly the year of District Six's declaration as "White") essentialises Carnival's participants as a fun-loving, carefree, simple folk:

The Coloured people are companionable and cheerful and many have a link with the countryside: on fine Sundays throughout the year they can be seen on their trucks going picnicking.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> B. Tait, Cape Cameos, (Stewart, Cape Town, 1948), p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> City of Good Hope Official Guide, 4th Edition, (1957), p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> A. H. Hanikman, City of Good Hope, (Howard B. Timmins, Cape Town, 1966), p. 203.

It is partly in response to such portrayals as these that middle-class and politically concientised Coloureds have frowned upon the event as entrenching pervasive stereotypes of Coloureds as happy-go-lucky hedonists, obliviously singing in their ignorant servitude.

**A contextualised assessment of journalistic representations of the Coon Carnival in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>25</sup>:**

As with tourist-oriented accounts, the tone of journalistic coverage of the Coon Carnival during the sixties and seventies fluctuated from thrilled incredulity to pious moral censure. The event's Media representation vacillated between awe at its exotic spectacle, and horror at its ugly, violent and anarchic bedlam. Indeed, the Coon Carnival was the "Other" to that invisible "respectable" reader the Media addressed. Depicted as dangerously seductive, it tantalised and teased the sensibilities with its colour and song but this glitter was presented as disguising an evil and threatening core.

A persistent tendency of newspapers was to stress the Carnival's close associations with gang-related crime. This fondness towards sensationalism, exaggeration, scare-mongering and exoticism of the popular Press, in its discussion of the Coon Carnival however, does not detract from its historical worth. Shepherd, arguing for its validity in this respect, pre-empted anticipated criticism of the danger of using the popular Press with its bent towards sensationalism and exaggeration. Justifying the serious study of Victorian journalism and its glorification of imperialism he insists:

it is both senseless and unhistorical simply to dismiss popular newspaper journalism... Sensationalism should not be written off: it should be understood as the vehicle through which many popular perceptions about the world were obtained.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> This study is based on English-language papers. This is due to the inability of the author to speak, write, or understand any Afrikaans, and the time and money that hiring someone to translate 20 years of press coverage would have involved. The statistics quoted in Appendix III however, suggest that English-language papers enjoyed the greatest readership amongst Carnival's participant community. Thus, the papers I have focussed on; the *Cape Times*, *Argus*, *Cape Herald* and *Muslim News*, are likely to have been the ones that the people involved in the Coon Carnival in the sixties and seventies were reading.

<sup>26</sup> B. Shepherd, 'Showbiz imperialism: the case of Peter Lubengula' in J. M. Mackenzie (ed.), Imperialism and Popular Culture, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986), p. 94.

A comparison of reporting and discussion of the event during the 1960s and '70s, particularly in the local *Cape Herald* and *Muslim News*, accompanied by a closer analysis of the readership and editorial practice and policies of the papers, proves particularly illuminating. Not only does it provide a useful means of checking and cross-referencing the claims made in those other scant historical accounts of the Carnival (claims which are all too often unreferenced), but it points to a contest around popular thinking regarding the event. Rival broadsheets, with their differing readerships, editorial policies and ownerships, assumed conflicting positions in their attitude toward the New Year festivities. Increasing infringements on Press freedom by the Government through a combination of restrictive legislation and less overt pressure to self-censor, fundamentally shaped the context of Press coverage during these years.

Though frequently limited both in scope and volume, contemporary Press reportage of the Coon Carnival in the sixties and seventies is of vital importance in offering significant evidential support, or fundamental contradiction, to recent academic analyses of the Carnival. Indeed, the newspapers sometimes chart and illuminate shifts, changes and movements within the event that have hitherto gone unnoticed or uncommented on by social historians.

Interpreting different English-language newspapers' presentation of the Coon Carnival in relation to the context of Press freedom at the time, notable differences emerge between the *Cape Times*, *Argus*, *Cape Herald* and *Muslim News*. The sixties, and particularly the seventies, witnessed increasingly draconian censorship laws affecting not only what was reported but how it was reported, yet these papers were not affected in a common or uniform way. The *Cape Times* and *Argus* featured a marked lack of reporting in general, and critical comment in particular, relating to the Coon Carnival: a neglect most noticeable in the seventies. The *Muslim News* and the *Cape Herald*, conversely, became more overtly political in their content and analysis, for increasingly they not only reported on the Carnival event itself, but on its political significance, its growing commercialisation, the debate

around whether it degraded or positively asserted Coloured identity. Furthermore, as the seventies progressed, the *Cape Herald* ran editorial discussions on the Carnival alongside related political issues, the need for unity in the Coloured community, explanations and debates on Black Consciousness. Indeed, the *Cape Herald* itself attempted to situate the event within some degree of a socio-political context and explanation.

Whilst papers like the *Cape Herald* reported on the Carnival at length and the *Muslim News* annually devoted a considerable deal of print to its denouncement, the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* related comparatively little. Indeed, the latter two papers printed photographs every year and often published a list of stadia competition results but their discussion of the event and related activities was insubstantial. The reason for this is hinted at by the conflicting tone and style of the different publications. Essentially the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* addressed a middle-class readership; implied in the extent of business and financial news and the focus on “highbrow” arts and culture such as opera and theatre. The *Herald* by contrast, directed itself toward a predominantly working-class circulation, featuring film reviews and advertisements for cheaper forms of mass entertainment, a bracket which the Coon Carnival clearly slotted into.<sup>27</sup>

The differing presentations of the Coon Carnival in Cape Town’s broadsheets cannot solely be attributed to the racial composition of their respective readerships; their interests, needs and demands, or to proprietorial pressures. Statistics reveal both the *Times* and *Argus*

---

<sup>27</sup> The argument that the style and extent of Carnival reporting was directly related to the class position of each paper’s Coloured readership cannot be validated through circulation figures as such records categorise only according to race. Efforts to determine the relative socio-economic situations of readerships by locating sales figures of the papers in different residential areas were unproductive as the distribution agency kept no such records. My assertion that, for example, the *Herald’s* Coloured readership was drawn more from the working-class than that of the *Cape Times*, is drawn from the format, style and concerns evident within the papers themselves. e.g. *The Herald* assumes a more popular, tabloid style, littered with many large photographs, sensational and scandalous stories (predominantly local). *The Cape Times* presents itself more as a serious, British-style, broadsheet than a tabloid, containing more international news stories and financial reports. Socio-economic positions of readerships are also implied by the type of advertising and entertainment reported in the respective papers. e.g. the *Herald* features adverts for cheap and local business concerns like *O.K. Bazaars*, and reviews and advertisements for the cinema as a leisure pursuit. *The Cape Times*, in contrast, clearly addresses a readership with a more expendable recreational budget, advertising the theatre, opera and overseas travel.

enjoyed high and expanding Coloured readerships at this time<sup>28</sup>, yet there was a decreasing emphasis on the Carnival, a near exclusively Coloured celebration. The *Herald*, on the other hand, a paper targeted specifically at Coloureds, consistently reported events at and around the Carnival. All the newspapers under discussion here had significant Coloured readerships yet only the *Herald* consciously and deliberately addressed them directly.

Perhaps a more accurate explanation for the omission of discussion relating to the Carnival in some papers, and the protracted and in-depth analysis in others, attributes some responsibility to the concerns and limited freedom of editors and partial responsibility also to the different class composition of the papers' readership. Though racial composition of readership appears not to have been a significant influencing factor (all of the papers enjoying thriving Coloured circulation), differences in class and socio-economic stature of Coloured readership seems a lead too strong to overlook.

In this way, the lack of reporting, discussion and analysis of the Carnival in the *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* becomes not a frustrating hindrance to research on the event, but a significant reflection of the paper's preoccupations and the concerns of its readership, as well as of the interests and fears of its journalists and editors, reflecting the tensions between the Government and the Media.<sup>29</sup>

Charney's claim that the *Cape Herald's* "42% share of the Coloured working-class<sup>readership</sup> was almost twice that attracted by local English-language dailies"<sup>30</sup> fits well with an interpretation of the style and character of the *Herald's* format. Though appearing in the form of a fortnightly broadsheet, the *Cape Herald* assumed the character of sensationalistic British tabloids like the *Sun* and the *Mirror*. In contrast to the *Cape Times* and *Argus* it sported an assortment of lewdly descriptive coverage of transgressions of the Immorality Act, detailed reports of gang-fights, rapes and murders. However, alongside such

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix III for figures.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix III for a discussion of the relationship between Media and State.

<sup>30</sup> C. Charney, 'Black Power, White Press; Literacy, newspapers and the Transformation of Township Political Culture', (African Studies Institute seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 10/5/93), p. 5.

sensationalism developed a tradition of strong editorial comment and political analysis. Furthermore, particularly after the declaration of District Six as a White Group Area in 1966, the *Herald* assumed a self-conscious role as community mouth-piece. In an editorial of 30/12/72 for example, mention is made of “the growing role of the Cape Herald as watchdog of Coloured Affairs”<sup>31</sup>. By 1976, under the newspaper’s front-page title appeared the bold-typed slogan : “The Paper That Cares”.

Priding itself on its community involvement, unlike the *Argus* and *Cape Times*’ pose of detached and non-partisan observer, the *Cape Herald* carved an active niche for itself amongst its readership. Its editorials assumed a self-appointed role of community mouth-piece; an impression the paper continually reinforced through putting itself out to find missing children, re-unite lost ID books with their owners, and other such Samaritan initiatives of social-work. Rather than the *Times* and *Argus*’ tendency to passively reflect (a pattern of watch, record, report), the *Herald* conveyed the impression that it was the legitimate voice of the people that read it; produced by the community, it was the community. In this way, the *Herald* played a self-conscious part in moulding and sustaining a notion of a common Coloured cultural identity.

Assuming a role that sat somewhere between guardianship of its readers and representing the readers themselves, the *Herald* created room for a greater degree of freedom and scope in its editorial comment, openly laying its opinions on the line in its Leaders. In its Leader of 25/9/65, for example, it states:

We believe that the Coloured people should go back on the common roll of voters. We believe that on the roll the qualifications for Coloured people, men and women, should be the same as for White people. WE believe that, in the meantime, nothing should be done to further diminish the political rights of the Coloured people.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> The Cape Herald, (30/12/72), p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> The Cape Herald, (25/9/65), p. 6.

Next to this editorial was an article by Dr. R. E. Van der Ross arguing for community organisation and for open Coloured political discussion; declaring that “Loyalty is founded in Suffering”. This was a strong characteristic of the newspaper where editorial comment ran alongside political commentary and social debate. In this way, it was consistent with the *Herald’s* style to both report the Coon Carnival as a community event, and to attempt to analyse and debate its significance and relevance to the community that produced it. The *Argus* and particularly the *Times’* lack of critical interpretation of the event resulted in nothing being related of the internal dynamics of the Carnival; dynamics which, as the *Herald* and *Muslim News* reflect, were central to the very form and essence of the festivity.

Interestingly, it is in the pages of the *Muslim News* during the 1960s (before the control of the Black Consciousness inspired proprietors in 1973<sup>33</sup>) that the most critical and lengthy comment on the Carnival can be found. Restating its commitment to eradicating the festivities, an editorial in 1970 declared: “*Muslim News* will continuously attack coons and coonery until not a solitary Muslim is a member of a coon troupe”<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, the publication spearheaded a conscious and direct attack on the event throughout the decade, claiming in 1962:

The decline of Muslim figures among the Coons is ascribed to an extensive campaign launched by the youth movements with the co-operation of Sheikhs, Imams and *Muslim News*.<sup>35</sup>

In its edition of 10/1/64, for example, a “Special Article” entitled “BAN ALL COONS” extensively denounces all aspects of the festivities. Although the paper makes no effort to

---

<sup>33</sup> A privately owned newspaper established in 1960, the *Muslim News* set itself up as an Islamic alternative to Cape Town’s existing broadsheets. In 1973, Haron claims, its political positioning shifted from a liberal pro-Muslim Assembly stance to a “semi-radical BC inclined, critical towards Muslim organisations” posture. He attributes this change to the accession of young new BC-inspired editors. [M. Haron, ‘Muslim News: Its Contribution Toward an Alternative Press in Cape Town’, (Paper presented at “A Century of the Resistance Press in South Africa” conference, University of the Western Cape, 6-7/6/91), p. 6]. Ridd also comments on the radical stance of the *Muslim News* from the mid-seventies. She labels those involved with the paper “idealists” who wanted to promote a sense of unity among Muslims as part of the oppressed of South Africa, and to discourage ethnic identification which would distract from this objective [Ridd, ‘Position and Identity’, p. 320].

<sup>34</sup> The Muslim News, (16/1/70).

<sup>35</sup> The Muslim News, (19/1/62).

represent the views of participants, its vitriolic tirade against the event exposes mainstream Muslim Establishment attitudes. Furthermore, it deals deftly and succinctly with various claims surrounding the significance of Carnival, in order to dismiss them. Thus, such commentary is useful not only in articulating the views of the Muslim Judicial Council (which found sympathy with the current proprietors of the paper), but in outlining other contemporary views and claims made around the event. For example, the article addresses the violence often accompanying the Coon Carnival; the sexual assaults, as well as the “vicious level” of rivalry resulting from competition for trophies at the stadia.

*Muslim News* bases its denunciation on two central premises; the notion that participation in the Carnival is irreligious, contributing to an event characterised by promiscuity, intoxication and profiteering, and the idea that it plays up to negative stereotyping by Whites, lumping Muslims and Coloureds together as one cultural group. An unequivocal editorial insists, “it is definitely un-Islamic for a Muslim to be a member of a Coon troupe” and claims that, “not a single Muslim religious leader condones this annual act of debasement”<sup>36</sup>. Describing Carnival involvement as a repulsive perversion, an editorial emblazoned “Annual Degradation” pours:

Let us look at the sick of the picture that is seldom revealed to the public. A large percentage of adult coons are always under the influence of liquor or some intoxicating drug. During this period they are bereft of their sense and a menace to themselves and others... all sorts of crimes are committed, even rape.<sup>37</sup>

Rather than “organised jollification” it states, the Coon Carnival is “Organised Degradation”. The paper’s clear intention is to incite its readership to the sort of vitriolic and poisonous outpourings spewed forth over the letters page of 8/2/63 by S. Solomon:

I think to encourage your child in such ways [as Carnival participation] is worse than inflicting physical pain on him.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> The Muslim News, (10/1/69).

<sup>37</sup> The Muslim News, (28/12/62).

<sup>38</sup> The Muslim News, (8/2/63).

In an effort to lend the weight of moral outrage to its annual hate campaign, the *Muslim News* evokes the spectre of feminine violation, presenting the increasing appearance of girls as an abuse inflicted on the innocent, vulnerable and defenceless:

A new sickening thing has been added to the whole sordid business. Following the lead set by immoral Whites they are now dragging their innocent daughters into the act. These girls are all of a tender age and they are dressed up in skimpy clothes, their limbs displayed to all, and made to march in front of the coon troupes, a sacrifice to lasciviousness.<sup>39</sup>

Outlining the wanton and blasphemous excesses of the event, of “coons... besotted with wine and dagga”, the paper plays on the implicit threat to women. Unconvinced that a plea to pious religious sensibilities is enough of an incentive for Muslim disinvolvement, the paper appeals simultaneously to the dignity and political consciousness of its readership: “the spectacle of coons is pleasing to Whites as it bolsters their distorted sense of superiority”<sup>40</sup>.

Focussing particularly on the commercial dimension of the festivities, the commentary denounces the “vultures” and “bloodsuckers” who profit from the event at the expense of the ordinary troupe member: the “poor coon” who is “robbed all along the line”<sup>41</sup>. Stopping just short of naming those it holds personally responsible for this profiteering, the *Muslim News* accuses Muslim “tailors, hatmakers, and sellers of silk” of neglecting their religion in the pursuit of profit from the event, and of aiding the presentation of “non-Whites.... [as] no better than performing monkeys”.

The editorial’s claim that the majority of Carnival participants, coon-troupe captains, and tailors are Muslim, explains the paper’s lengthy preoccupation with, and analysis of, the event. It dismisses the view that the Carnival “gives them [non-Whites] a chance to blow off steam which would otherwise build up with disastrous results”, yet in rejecting such a notion, it serves simultaneously to highlight it. The *Muslim News* condemns the Coon

---

<sup>39</sup> *The Muslim News*, (27/12/63).

<sup>40</sup> *The Muslim News*, (10/1/64).

Carnival as “annual... degradation”. Its editorial thus demands the non-participation of Muslims on religious grounds as well on those of racial and personal dignity. The *Muslim News* is unambiguous in its insistence that religious observance and Carnival participation are incompatible:

Most of the coon captains are Muslims, and most of the tailors are Muslims and most of the Coon Carnival Board members are Muslims. Has the glitter of gold blinded them so completely that they could reject the tenets of Islam and partake wholeheartedly in this nefarious practice?<sup>42</sup>

Addressing an Islamic readership which it claims is the predominant component of the event, its sense of urgency, in comparison with the detached style of the *Cape Times* and *Argus*, is clearly rooted in a desire to influence the actions of its market.

To demonstrate the extent of differences in presentation and analysis of the Carnival in the variety of English-language Cape papers, it is useful to compare the reporting and comment of a specific year, 1966. On first appearance this seems an average year for the event, without any exceptional violence or unusual incidents. 1966 was of particular significance however, for it was the year of District Six’s proclamation under the Group Areas Act: the year many informants would later relate as ringing the Carnival’s death-knell.

The *Muslim News* continues to display the ruthless antagonism characteristic of its approach since the early sixties but whereas previously it dwelt chiefly on the event’s blasphemy, in 1966 it stressed also the Carnival’s manipulation by the apartheid state:

there is the ruling class, whose agents promote the spectacle for more than one reason - the tourist track as well as to show the world the community that is happy to celebrate slavery.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *The Muslim News*, (27/12/63).

<sup>43</sup> *The Muslim News*, (14-18/1/66).

The *Cape Times* sports photographs of the Carnival, clownish participants, and specific troupes receiving trophies and prizes at the stadia finals. Accompanying these images are small articles commenting on, for example, the drop in attendance figures since the preceding year<sup>44</sup>, or statements like “many people thought that this had been the worst year for the coons”<sup>45</sup>. As it does annually, the *Cape Times* also publishes the full results of the prizes awarded at the “Coon Frolics”<sup>46</sup>. It is noteworthy that the commentary on the event is very limited, photos of the Carnival far outweigh written reports, and all pictures and reports concerning the celebrations are relegated from the first pages of the paper to around pages 8 and 9.

The *Argus* goes into greater detail than the *Cape Times* in reporting events during and related to the Carnival. Significantly too, this commentary is placed much nearer the front of the paper on, for instance, page 5 (on 1/1/66) and page 2 (on 31/12/66). Indeed, on 1/1/66 the Carnival is headline news in the *Argus* as the “Big Tourist Draw”. The front-page article describes how:

It was swagger, smiles and gay music in the sun today as silk-garbed coons paraded in many parts of the Peninsula to the delight of tourists, the Coloured Community and other spectators... A policeman said it was considerably smaller than usual. Maybe due to Ramadan.<sup>47</sup>

Evident here is a dual tendency running throughout commentary on the Carnival in the *Cape Times* and the *Argus*. Repeatedly, throughout the sixties and seventies, these papers depict the event through the eyes of an alien and non-participant observer. The street parade and celebration are described as an entertaining and exotic visual orgy and of primary importance as a tourist fascination. This theme is again reflected with a separate article highlighting German television’s desire to film the Coon Carnival<sup>48</sup>.

---

<sup>44</sup> The Cape Times, (4/1/66).

<sup>45</sup> The Cape Times, (8/1/66).

<sup>46</sup> The Cape Times, (10/1/66).

<sup>47</sup> The Argus, (1/1/66).

<sup>48</sup> The Argus, (3/1/66).

As the *Cape Times* veers towards awed fascination with Carnival as spectacle, so it plays with the image of the event as precariously poised on the edge of anarchic violence. This paper's reportage of Carnival-related crime and disorder differs significantly from that of the *Cape Herald*. The *Times* subtly evokes an image of threat and fear with, for instance, front-page photographs of police restoring order to unelaborated upon instances of misdemeanour<sup>49</sup>. The paper tells of police firing "warning shots" at the Green Point venue after "trouble" had broken out over "trophy allocation", yet fails to make any attempt to investigate the disturbance, dwelling instead on the danger posed to spectators and their property. Rather than reporting on the effect of the shots on the crowd, the paper tells that "parked cars" were damaged by "revellers". Clearly their concern lies with the White or middle-class spectators rather than active performers.

The *Herald* <sup>by</sup> ~~in~~ contrast, tends to dissect related instances of conflict or unrest. For example, in a front-page article of 9/1/71 the paper explains that "special police precautions" at the Athlone competition venue were present in order to counter *Stalag*<sup>50</sup> plans to "wreck the Carnival" in retaliation for the murder of gang leader Archie Noordien. Noordien had kidnapped an 18 year old girl from the stadium days before and had raped her. The girl's family, explains the newspaper, had then stabbed their daughter's assailant to death.

Another characteristic of the *Argus* and *Cape Times* is that of acquiring evidence related to the event from police or official sources. Notably, in the *Times* of 9/1/71<sup>51</sup>, a policeman is quoted as to the reasons influencing participation, rather than an active participant or community leader such as an Imam. The nearest either the *Argus* or *Cape Times* come to articulating or presenting the views of participants is in the indirect quotations of Carnival organisers and promoters. Jimmy Allen, one such promoter, for example, is quoted indirectly from his opening address where he said:

---

<sup>49</sup> *Cape Times*, (4/1/64), Front-page.

<sup>50</sup> A powerful Cape Town gang.

<sup>51</sup> *The Cape Times*, (9/1/71).

He wished to convey a word of cheer to his people not to lose hope. The Carnival spirit was an indication of the fact that the Coloured people were making the most of things no matter what problems faced them.<sup>52</sup>

The views of a promoter with primarily personal financial interest in the event should not however, be misinterpreted as in any way representative of the attitude of participants. It is of interest here too, that the extent of political comment on the significance of the Carnival is an indirect allusion by way of a paraphrased quotation from a promoter.

The whole focus and style of the *Cape Herald's* reporting on the Carnival is in marked contrast to the *Times* and *Argus*. Not only does the commentary feature consistently earlier in the paper than in the pages of its competitors but its articles are more analytical than the often bland and inane glee at the event as exotic spectacle. Related features in the *Herald* of 8/1/66 examine shifts and changes within the event, such as the appearance of two "white coons", and the "singing of popular American tunes instead of traditional New Year *liedjies*"<sup>53</sup> hinting at the cultural adaptation which characterises the historical development of the Carnival.

Unlike the *Argus* and *Cape Times'* tendency to comment and quote police, official and semi-official sources, the *Herald* goes out of its way to examine popular opinion. In a front-page article of 31/12/66 entitled "The Coons Belong to Cape Town: Like Snoek and Patats", H. Arendse describes how the paper has attempted to establish "public" attitudes toward the Coon Carnival. He declares that the findings of this research reveal that most people thought it should be "accepted as part of Cape Town". Interpreting the Carnival as culturally symbolic, the article declares that "through the Coon Carnival, the life, feeling, tragedy and success of the people are expressed". It quotes a selection of Coloured political leaders, sportsmen and a range of other random views on the celebration. Underlying this serious and analytical investigation is a clear line of thinking that situates the event soundly within a specific socio-political context. The view of a "Coloured Leader" seems to fit broadly in with the *Herald's* own scheme of analysis:

---

<sup>52</sup> The Argus, (1/1/66).

the basis of the Coons is giving vent to feelings which for 51 weeks of the year have been repressed.<sup>54</sup>

The nearest that the *Cape Times* comes to analysing the event in any way during this year is in an unusual article for the paper's New Year's reporting entitled "Coloured People Differ on Fate of Coon Carnival"<sup>55</sup>. Here the paper claims to represent Coloured popular opinion of the Carnival but limits its sample, like the *Argus*, to the middle-class and semi-official sources of a businessman, a prominent member of the clergy, and the Secretary of a Ratepayer's Association. Though the article does point to the growing commercialisation of the event and the financial profit incentive of the promoters<sup>56</sup>, its primary focus is clearly evident from its sub-heading "Whites Impression". Under this title the festival is again addressed as an essentially voyeuristic experience: there for the consumption of non-participant White spectators:

I and many people I know have lost interest in the traditional New Year attraction. We do not see the Coon Carnival as an attraction any more.<sup>57</sup>

Whilst the *Herald* contains significantly more features, photographs and related articles on the Coon Carnival than either the *Cape Times* or the *Argus*, these two papers always contain much larger advertisements for the event. This fact reflects again the different intended readerships of the respective papers and their particular concerns. The *Cape Times'* interest with Carnival is limited to the level of spectatorship; concerned with the event in terms of visual and passive consumption. The *Herald* in contrast, addresses those actively involved in the production and staging of the festivities, conveying related stories of in-fighting and internal disputes within the organisational hierarchies and between rival troupes and promoters.

---

<sup>53</sup> The Cape Herald, (8/1/66).

<sup>54</sup> The Cape Herald, (31/12/66).

<sup>55</sup> The Cape Times, (6/1/66).

<sup>56</sup> A theme articulated far more comprehensively by the Cape Herald during the sixties and the seventies.

<sup>57</sup> Quote from a spectator under the heading of "Whites Impression". The Cape Times, (6/1/66).

A significant change in tone, pivoting around 1967-68, characterises journalistic accounts of the event in Cape Town's papers. After these years Carnival-related articles appeared much less often than before. This was probably the combined result of removals; the event's confinement reducing its public profile, but also is likely to have been related to its displacement from its central venue in Green Point to distant Athlone.

Where the *Cape Times* in particular had regularly reported events prior to these years (especially proceedings from Green Point), after 1968 it rarely featured commentary from Athlone. The changing interest of the paper effectively mirrors the event's shift from predominantly White Green Point (where many local White spectators attended) to exclusively Coloured Athlone. As the Carnival moved, so the *Times*' interest waned.

Cape Town's newspapers continued to sport features on the event but their tone and thematic preoccupations had altered. Replacing the lists of competition winners and accounts of the festivities and fun came historical musings on the event's origins and development, alongside lamentations over its demise. This tendency was evident particularly in the *Cape Herald*, but also in the *Argus* and *Times*. Where in 1967 the *Times* stressed the disorder and petty crime of Carnival, and the threat posed by revellers to property, by the early 1970s articles in the vein of Basil Breakey's, mourning the loss of Carnival past, predominated. "Once Cape Town belonged to the Coons at New Year", he states:

They pranced and danced through the street, singing their songs, filling the days with a wit singularly their own. The whole city was infected with their Carnival spirit. This year Coons marched through the streets again after several years absence. The gaiety and Carnival spirit moved with them as before but there was a difference. Cape Town was no longer theirs. They were strangers giving a brave show in a foreign city.<sup>58</sup>

Aside from its maintained pre-occupation with the link between gangster activity and Carnival, Cape Town's broadsheets tempered their portrayal of related disorder in the

---

<sup>58</sup> *Cape Times*, (13/1/73).

seventies. This was not because violence and crime had disappeared from the Carnival however. Smaller articles evidencing the gang/troupe connection reveal that such disturbances never ceased to be regular and significant events, but the *Argus* and *Times* failed to evoke the same discourse of fear and sense of imminent threat which they had before 1968. Again, a likely explanation for this is that such disturbances now occurred in areas beyond the concern of White Cape Town. With the road-march banished and the competition removed from Green Point, the broadsheets could mourn its loss: its threat potential neutralised by its displacement. Indeed, nostalgic reminiscing came to replace paranoia as the dominant tone of the middle-class oriented Press.

In the *Cape Herald* changes in Carnival were conveyed as integrally connected to social change brought about with Group Areas removals. An article of December 1969, for instance, quotes Carnival promoter Jimmy Allen in this vein saying that the event is “a great social movement for good among the Coloured working-class. The virtual absence of Carnival troupes in the fast growing townships on the Cape Flats is a prime cause of hooliganism in these areas”<sup>59</sup>. A complex process operates here. Hooliganism is blamed on the absence of troupes as organised fraternities providing stability and maintaining discipline and social order. The disappearance of troupes is related as a consequence of Group Areas. What is strange though, is that where<sup>as</sup> before removals the Carnival is linked in the broadsheets with youth hooliganism, after removals it is the decline of Carnival which is blamed for the same thing. Carnival then becomes a mere vehicle for conveying contemporary fears and sentiments. It means different things at different times to the same people. The significance of the sign changes.

The *Cape Herald* editorial comment of 8/1/72 exemplifies the tendency to romanticise Carnivals of yesteryear, reformulating a glorious image of an idyllic lost past and a contemporary corrupted authenticity:

---

<sup>59</sup> *Cape Herald*, (20/12/69).

The city's heritage of spontaneous gaiety has been lost. We mourn it.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, the *Argus* of the same month grieves:

...the Carnivals have lost the intimate, almost village manners and atmosphere of the past, and have become extremely commercial [and] competitive.<sup>61</sup>

A parallel process has characterised the discussion of pre-removal Carnival as the narrative relating the loss of District Six. Rive's comment that since removals, "time has ...romanticised and mythologised the District's past"<sup>62</sup> seems pertinent not just to the memories of oral informants but true of journalistic and literary approaches to Carnival as well. Rive remarks on the fascination of lyricists and writers with District Six, and their nostalgic depiction of the area prior to Group Areas<sup>63</sup>. Whilst for the *Herald*, this is a core part of the discourse of loss, mourning the disappearance of urban space and its working-class culture, for middle-class and White oriented papers like the *Argus* and *Times* the reasons seem a little different. With the event removed from the central streets, Carnival has been sufficiently sanitised but its displacement to out of town venues has simultaneously deprived a White audience of an exotic annual spectacle. These papers thus assume an ambiguous position, having achieved the confined and contained Carnival they desired in the early sixties, but having lost the "authentic" festivities to areas alien and inaccessible to them.

The major and significant differences in the reporting of the Coon Carnival in the four papers, the use or neglect of popular working-class, as opposed to semi-official sources, and the differing levels of analysis and degrees of depth in interpretation, suggest one of two conclusions. Either the *Cape Herald* was editorially far more willing to take risks and perhaps provoke Government disfavour and proprietorial ill-ease, than its competitors in its

---

<sup>60</sup> *Cape Herald* (8/1/72).

<sup>61</sup> *Argus*, (2/1/72).

<sup>62</sup> Rive, 'District Six', p. 111.

political analysis of the event, or else the factor determining focus and style of reporting must be related more specifically to patterns of readership and circulation.

If we are to believe Gerald Shaw<sup>64</sup> in his claim that editorial practice reflected almost exclusively the interests of their readerships, then the differences in reporting must be attributed to the specific composition of each paper's buyers. Though all the Cape papers had a large Coloured circulation, it is claimed that only the *Cape Herald's* was predominantly working-class. The frequent insistence of social commentators that the Coon Carnival was a Coloured working-class celebration fits neatly with an interpretation seeing the *Herald* reflecting the interests and concerns of its Coloured working-class readership, and similarly, interprets the *Cape Times'* and *Argus'* neglect of the event in relation to a more middle-class, White and Coloured circulation. The extreme pre-occupation of the *Muslim News* and its frequent and vitriolic denunciations of the Carnival in the sixties must similarly be an indicator of the extent of the Muslim readership's involvement in the event.

Yet, to attribute the differences in the coverage, analysis, and interpretation of the Coon Carnival in the Cape to the differences in readership composition alone, is to ignore other major contributory factors. Whilst the concerns and preoccupations of each broadsheet's specific market undoubtedly shaped the content and style of reporting, editorial differences, the relationship of the editor to the proprietors, and the tension between the State and Media, were also strong influences. Shepherd outlines the different forces playing on journalistic production, alerting the historian dependent on newspaper sources early to the potential pitfalls as well as the dynamic interplay of vying interest groups:

The difficulties in interpreting newspaper evidence are of course colossal, but a way has to be found to accommodate both the forces within newspapers - the interlocking of proprietorial control, commercial pressure

---

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, David Kramer and Taliep Petersen's musical "District Six: The Musical", or Rive's own *Buckingham Palace: District Six*, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1986). Both portray the Coon Carnival as an integral part of pre-removal urban Coloured life.

<sup>64</sup> G. Shaw, Telephone between him and the author, (30/5/95).

and journalistic impulse - and the complex interaction between newspapers and their readers.<sup>65</sup>

Any comparison of newspaper accounts of the Carnival in the sixties and seventies must take careful account of these different determinants, placing Media coverage firmly in its precise historical context. Viewed alongside contemporary photographs, pictorial representations, and archival film-footage, much can be gleaned from the juxtaposition of these sources, revealing in their gaps, contradictions and inconsistencies, something of the hidden but subtle forces working on the event.

### **Academic representations:**

Academic comment and secondary historical accounts relating to the Coon Carnival are as much about representation as oral narratives, postcards, newspapers, photographs and tourist literature and thus necessitate similar interrogation. Whilst the event is featured in virtually every coffee-table picture book on Cape Town, it has attracted little scholarly focus. This seems characteristic of a more general relative inattention to working-class, Coloured culture during the apartheid years. Four studies over the past twenty five years, stand as notable exceptions to Turner and Jensen's<sup>66</sup> claims as to the academic oversight of Coloured culture, in their addressing of the Coon Carnival. Though none are the comparative works Bekker demands<sup>67</sup>, all examine the event as an articulation of some sort of communal identity, though often disagreeing on precisely what this consists of or as to its significance. The earliest of these works is a paper written in 1971 by a White clinical psychologist, Gerald Stone, entitled 'The Coon Carnival'<sup>68</sup>, and is the result of participant research in the preceding decade. Interestingly, as part of his *study*, Stone formed and captained his own troupe one year.

A more recent analysis of the Carnival appears in Shamiel Jeppie's 1990 Masters thesis as part of his investigation into 'Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner

---

<sup>65</sup> Shepherd, 'Showbiz imperialism', p. 95.

<sup>66</sup> See preface to this thesis.

<sup>67</sup> Again, see preface to this thesis.

<sup>68</sup> Stone, 'Coon Carnival'.

Cape Town, circa. 1939-1959'<sup>69</sup>. Jeppie's study relies heavily on Bakhtin's musings on Carnival in Rabelais and his World<sup>70</sup>, similarly on the anthropologist Falassi who allies himself closely with the Russian, and on Gramsci's work on the role of popular culture in hegemonic contest.

Falling between Stone's anthropological approach in the early seventies and Jeppie's historically based work nearly twenty years later, is Kim Weichel's paper for the Urban Problems Research Unit at UCT in 1977, 'A Study of Aspects of Folk Cultural Activities Among the Coloured Peoples in the Cape'<sup>71</sup>, and social geographer John Western's book Outcast Cape Town, published in 1981. Western's work initiates a lucid and convincing argument as to the spatial nature of Cape Coloured identity; pointing to the implications of dispossession and relocation - of spatial manipulation - on constructions of community and self.

It should be pointed out however, that in only one of these four sources, Stone's paper, is the Coon Carnival the central stated concern. Jeppie's discussion of the event is but a chapter in his Masters thesis on popular culture in general in the 1940s and '50s, and Western and Weichel merely mention the event in passing, pausing momentarily to discuss it. These four works are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Such cursory allusion to the event is characteristic of its literary depiction. The Coon Carnival is either mentioned as a comic side-issue warranting little serious or academic attention, or it is glossed over as a relatively minor aspect of other research: dismissed as politically objectionable or an uncomplicated tourist attraction. In addition, the Carnival finds scant analysis in the numerous tourist guides and "cultural" books on the city. Though it is featured in almost all of them as an amusing and entertaining spectacle, it is never discussed in any detail.

---

<sup>69</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture'.

<sup>70</sup> M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1968).

<sup>71</sup> Weichel, 'A Study of Aspects'.

The limited nature of these post-World War II secondary sources necessitates a closer analysis in a search for common critical weaknesses, consistent argument, and points of conflict or departure. Earlier studies relating to the origins of the Carnival in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, can be found in Bickford-Smith, Van Heynigen and Worden's forthcoming book Cape Town<sup>72</sup>. Here, Bickford-Smith draws an important connection between "gangs, sporting-clubs and thereby New Year Carnival troupes" as early as the turn of the century, highlighting a pattern seemingly able to endure and persist towards the next millennium. Significantly too, he notes social divisions in urban leisure practices with participation in events like the Carnival stigmatised by the operation of a discourse of "respectability". In particular he points to the religious roots of such polemic denunciation, describing the "less than successful attempts by Imams to wean their congregations off the practice of drinking "tickey" beer [and]... condemnation of *klopse*"<sup>73</sup>. Thus, he highlights a "widening... cultural gulf between members of the ex-bonded", acting to stigmatise some forms of leisure through a discourse of bourgeois "respectability", coupled at times with the rhetoric of organised religion.

With clear continuities linking the Carnival of the late nineteenth-century to its predecessors, over 100 years later, and with implicit connections with both slavery and Abolition, it is essential to ground any study of the Coon Carnival precisely within its historical context. This task should not, however, be undertaken at the expense of situating the event as part of the global phenomena of popular festival. With this in mind the following chapter attempts to situate the event within its specific local context through understanding its similarities with festivals elsewhere. It looks to contemporary theories of Carnival and popular culture in an effort to extrapolate meaning from Cape Town's Coon Carnival of the sixties and seventies.

---

<sup>72</sup> Bickford-Smith, Cape Town.

<sup>73</sup> *Klopse* literally translated is the Afrikaans for *clubs*. In Afrikaans, coon troupes are referred to as *klopse*.

### Chapter Three.

#### Contesting Carnival: an historical discussion of the critical debate surrounding Carnival worldwide.

Concepts of “Carnival” across the academic disciplines are divided in their interpretation of the permanence and potential of festive anarchy. Indeed, analyses of the political and cultural significance of popular festival conflict greatly even within the same academic fields and philosophical and political schools of thought. Opinions differ as to whether the temporary break from established order Carnival entails, ultimately re-enforces or subverts the status-quo. This inherent conflict, the degree to which Carnival is essentially reactionary or revolutionary, is reflected in the works of historians, cultural critics, anthropologists, and sociologists alike. Whether discussing the significance of festive inversion and reversal, reasons for a general lack of conspicuous female participation, festive hierarchies and structures, or the relevance of processional routes, it is this question of Carnival as threat or bolster to social control which plagues its analysts

In an attempt to situate Cape Town’s Coon Carnival of the 1960s and ‘70s within the broader, global framework of popular festival, this chapter begins with an assessment of major writings on Carnival outside South Africa. Interrogating these works for strengths and flaws in order to establish a firm theoretical basis for the enquiry, it then returns to the specific case of the Coon Carnival. It thus offers a comparative understanding of the event in Cape Town, as well as serving to practically test prevailing Carnival theories.

Zemon Davis neatly sums up the process that is at once both concrete and physical, as well as abstract and metaphoric, that characterises the history of popular festival. Speaking of “Misrule”<sup>1</sup>, the comic inversion of law and order that is a central component of Carnival, she draws a similarity between historical attempts by commercial and political interests to hijack or appropriate this festive practice, and her own academic intentions in interpreting “Misrule”. Indeed, a cursory examination of literature relating to the global history of

---

<sup>1</sup> N. Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1975), p. 121.

Carnival reveals frequent attempts by a range of interests to subvert, profit from, or lay claim to events which are overwhelmingly working-class in composition. It is with this fact acutely in mind that Zemon Davis humorously compares the Catholic establishment's sixteenth-century effort to appropriate the "festive spirit" of "Misrule" for its own religious processions in Paris, with her own attempt to "seize" the concept and relate it to the "history of youth groups" and "social forms among the lower orders"<sup>2</sup>.

It is ironic that Carnival as both an event and theoretical concept has been characterised throughout history by a struggle for appropriation. It is to the nature of these attempts, and their success or failure, that we must return in order to analyse more closely the major components of the event's structure and meaning. In doing so, however, we will be falling into the paradoxical trap that Zemon Davis so wittily highlights: defining, constructing and thus, again laying claim to a "Carnival" of our own making. An awareness of this international battle to seize definitive control of popular festival goes some way to providing an historical context for the contested meanings of the Coon Carnival in the 1960s and '70s.

Docker, in his discussion of the Bakhtinian notion of Carnival, neatly encapsulates the binarism surrounding debate on the significance of the event. The camps are largely divided, he asserts, between those who view Carnival as "populist, idealising the people, constructing them as unified and wholly admirable in their inversionary values"<sup>3</sup> and those who subscribe to the "safety-valve" theory. Such a theory, he outlines, interprets the apparent anarchy of Carnival as "a temporary release of contrary or dissident feelings and passions that, once humorously spent, actually strengthen the social order". Thus, the fundamental point of contention amongst theorists is over the inherent limits and potential of the event to challenge, condemn, or bolster, the established social and political order.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> J.Docker, Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), p. 186.

Docker's binary division, though useful as a guide-line to interpretation of the critics, is reductively simplistic. It fails most critically to account for the important works of those such as Zemon Davis who write of the ambiguous positioning of Carnival; the way in which the event can "on the one hand perpetuate certain values of the community (even guarantee its survival), and on the other hand criticise political order"<sup>4</sup>.

Cohen encapsulates this ambivalence most concisely in his discussion of the significance of London's Notting Hill Carnival. "Every major [festive] event", he asserts, "is precariously poised between the affirmation of the established order and its rejection"<sup>5</sup>. By its very nature, he concludes, it is a "contested event".

Docker's simplification of the scenario, whilst failing to adequately account for the exceptional positioning of the likes of Zemon Davis, does highlight the historical tendency to assert a single, unified meaning for Carnival. It draws attention to the frequent implication of critics that the event is produced by, and representative of, a single, homogeneous, and unified community, with common conscious intentions and beliefs. Similarly, it reflects a continual desire to rule Carnival once and for all, either revolutionary or reactionary.

The anthropologist Falassi falls into this former camp in his definition of festival as "a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which... participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, historical bonds, and sharing a world view"<sup>6</sup>. In similar vein, he continues, "both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognises as essential to its ideology and worldview, to its social identity and historical continuity"<sup>7</sup>. Here Falassi essentialises both Carnival and its participants in the way Docker criticises. He asserts that participants form an homogenous "community"

---

<sup>4</sup> Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> A. Cohen, *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements*, (Berg, Oxford, 1993), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> A. Falassi (ed.), *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987), p.2.

for whom Carnival serves universally as a signifier for conscious shared desires and goals. His claim is dangerously reductive, but representative of much writing on festival, in that it homogenises participants into a single-visioned and artificially fissureless community, whereas the real experience of Carnival around the world shows countless instances of conflict, differing goals, and oppositional meanings amongst the event's actors and spectators. Furthermore, to reduce festival to a symbolic vehicle conveying the expression of conscious desires, an acutely self-aware signifier that plays an agreed "social function", is to overlook the multivalent nature of the event; the diverse and often conflicting political, religious, social, and economic roles that Carnival plays simultaneously.

Let us deal with these two issues separately. First the claim that Carnival acts as a "safety valve": the cathartic annual release of social tensions, that ultimately upholds, or even sanctifies, the established social order. After that we will explore the second camp that Docker isolates: the view of Carnival as the utopian articulation of shared ideological desires by a united community.

Considering the essence of reversal and festival inversion in the bloody Mardi Gras of the French town of Romans in 1580, Le Roy Ladurie allies himself with the view of Carnival as essentially reactionary. "Turning society temporarily upside down implied a knowledge of its normal vertical position, its hierarchy"<sup>8</sup>, he asserts. The recognition and reversal of this order he interprets as a bolster, rather than a threat, to the dominant political structure:

...creating a momentary inversion on feast days, the better to maintain order in the long run, in everyday society outside Carnival. Such inversion was ultimately counter-revolutionary.<sup>9</sup>

He states his theoretical allegiance unequivocally, yet this simplistic claim flies in the face of the more convincing, though complex, argument implied elsewhere in his work. He does, however, provide powerful commentary and analysis of the way in which the "Cockaigne

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans*, (George Braziller Inc., New York, 1979), p. 301.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

reynage”, the patrician’s Carnival parade comprising Romans’ notables and gentlefolk, created an imaginary land of inversion in order to maintain their social superiority and ridicule those appearing to challenge it.

Le Roy Ladurie situates the patricians’ rituals of reversal within the context of festive topsy-turvy characteristic of French Carnival in the Middle Ages, but also within the political context of the peasant challenge to feudal authority. Taking the specific example of the town of Romans, he describes the way in which the pre-Lenten celebration of Mardi Gras involved various social and trades groups organising their own Carnival parades, beginning with the running (hunt) of a symbolic animal - a cockerel in the case of the patricians. This event signified the commencement of feasting and dancing under the week-long comic reign of an elected Carnival monarch.

Humorous decrees were issued every year by the imaginary royal houses, but, claims Le Roy Ladurie, in 1580 Romans comic dictates assumed far more social significance than was customary and were rigorously enforced by the patricians’ “Carnival” army. He highlights as most significant the Partridge King’s (supreme monarch of the “cockaigne reynage) inversion of cheap and costly food prices. He issued a decree “regulat[ing] the prices for foodsellers, publicans and innkeepers, with the humorous injunction that the new prices be heeded”<sup>10</sup>. Not only did the actual implementation of this law hit the town’s poor hard, now forced to pay the price of luxury goods like wine and strawberries for basic and essential foodstuffs such as oats and animal feed, but it operated also on a blatant symbolic level. This “transversion of value”, states Le Roy Ladurie, “mocked the “poor” who wanted to be the patricians’ equals, even change places with them, like rotten herring substituted for strawberries”<sup>11</sup>.

Clearly, in the case of the patricians’ “reynage”, the object of inversion and reversal was a reaffirmation of their social and political dominance. The comic price-list for food was an

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

“absurdity” used to illustrate “an order in which Nature and Society are soundly unchangeable or untouchable”<sup>12</sup>, and to stress the sanctity of the triumvirate of, “order, authority, and royalty”.

However, whilst effectively conveying the reactionary nature of the “cockaigne reynage”, Le Roy Ladurie fails to deal as convincingly with the significance of the trades-based and peasant reynages. Whilst he does point to the implicit threat in the workers’ cannibalistic imagery, and of the political “undertones” of their street drama (in the implication that the rich were rich at the poor’s expense), he fails to complete an examination of the potential or implications of these alternative reynages. Indeed, a great degree of ambiguity and contradiction around this question besets his work.

He suggests that the reynage served as a “social tool” for the lower classes to express themselves, their grievances, and their political tendencies, and that “a dangerous group subconscious found a temporary outward structuring in the solemn and formalised institutions of the reynage”<sup>13</sup>. Yet he fails to elaborate on the nature of this “danger”. He is unable to explain whether it was a “danger” to the established political order, or if it posed some other sort of moral or physical risk to townsfolk. If his suggestion is that it threatened the patricians dominating the socio-economic power of Romans, it is a notion that he later dismisses outright in the claim that “inversion” is “ultimately counter-revolutionary”.

If we are to take Le Roy Ladurie at his own word, we must see him as allied with the “safety-valve” subscribers; maintaining that whatever the form of Carnival inversion or reversal of imagery, law, order, or hierarchy, it can only ultimately maintain the status-quo.

Gluckman similarly aligns himself with this thesis. He suggests that the role-reversal characteristic of Carnival is a “licensed ritual of protest”<sup>14</sup> whereby a limited period of sanctioned and contained rebellion reaffirms and “strengthens” existing power relations.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>14</sup> M. Gluckman, Custom and Conflict in Africa, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1963), p. 130.

Termining such a process “high psychological catharsis”<sup>15</sup>, he outlines how the ritual context permits the public dramatisation of social conflict, which, once aired and released in a contained arena like Carnival, is dissipated and neutralised. Gluckman claims such annual rituals of sanctioned anarchy are ultimately “statements of rebellion, never of revolution”<sup>16</sup>, as long as there is no “querying of the order within which the ritual of protest is set”<sup>17</sup>. Gluckman provides a concise explanation of how, under the “safety-valve’ theory of festive release, it is in the interests of the dominant political establishment to sanction this catharsis. Not only does annual ritualistic inversion act as a psychological “catharsis”, he insists, but permitting people to behave in “normally prohibited ways, [gives] expression, in a reversed form, to the normal rightness of a particular kind of social order”<sup>18</sup>

Dirks, in his study of ritual expression on British West Indian slave plantations articulates a process through which Carnival inversion ritualises conflict, channeling and dissipating aggression and potential unrest. He points, for example, to the powerfully masculine and aggressive figure of the John Canoes<sup>19</sup>, and their ritualised sequence of aggression, following the structure of threat, appeasement, stayed threat. Dirks, however, openly takes issue with Gluckman’s insistence that the mimicking or ritualisation of societal conflicts and norms necessarily strengthens them. Distinguishing his own interpretation of Carnival on the islands from that of Gluckman, he states that “the saturnalia was about behavioural reality, not ideology”<sup>20</sup>. But, though pulling down the “safety-valve” thesis, Dirks fails to erect a complete or water-tight theoretical replacement. He tells us what Carnival is not, yet fails to adequately explain what it is.

Dirks rejects Gluckman’s claim that the ritual involved in Carnival is reactionary in its implications, yet states that on the other hand:

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> R. Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations*, (University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1987), p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

One must question ...the legitimacy of construing as protest the glorified enactment of antagonisms that occurred daily in quite mundane forms on almost every sugar estate in the British West Indies.<sup>21</sup>

Thus he rejects both the assertion that festive inversion fundamentally challenges, as well as dismissing its theoretical counterpart, that it rather affirms the status quo. Festive “rites”, he insists:

featured behavioural reversal that cannot be understood as metaphorical affirmations or denials of the existing order. What the rites reversed... were the ways in which everyday relations were organized... Reversals, then, did not consist of negations. They were the playing out, collectively and conspicuously, of what otherwise went on covertly.<sup>22</sup>

Dirks’ position however, seems unsatisfactorily incomplete. His claim that Carnival reversal enacts “daily... mundane... antagonisms” verges on contradicting an elaboration only sentences later to the effect that they were the acting out of normally “covert” relations. Yet this seems a minor discrepancy, or point of unclarity, in relation to his greater effort to dismantle the two major interpretative frameworks regarding Carnival and replace them with some depoliticised and semi-contextualised alternative.

That Carnival reversal is related to real social and behavioural relations is hardly a point of contention. Where critics and analysts differ is in their interpretation of the political significance of the way culture, in the form of Carnival addresses these dynamics. Dirks’ attempts halt, or at least obstruct, efforts to trace the historical and political significance of Carnival relations and festive inversion. In effect, he semi-contextualises saturnalia in the British West Indies by relating it to its immediate socio-political context, of British colonial plantation structure. But, most critically he fails to assess the larger political potential, meaning or implications of this festive reflection to challenge, subvert, or bolster colonial and plantation authority.

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Ironically, though Dirks tries to limit the significance of reversal to the two-dimensional playing out of social antagonisms, and though he attempts to sever this from any “ideological” implications, throughout his work are clues and allusions to a deeper complexity around why behavioural reality is reflected in this way, and of how it is received and interpreted by its actors and spectators. He mentions, for example, that in Jamaica whilst ordinarily slave assemblies at night were “closely watched or banned”<sup>23</sup>, around the time of the New Year saturnalia this “prohibition disappeared”. In later pages Dirks suggests that the reason for this was that plantation owners realised that “tampering with the celebration.. guaranteed trouble”<sup>24</sup>. Even more revealingly he suggests, those estate owners “were aware of having to deal with an “overheated boiler” and were prepared to bend every effort toward making sure that it did not explode”<sup>25</sup>. This final quote is telling in that it reveals that landlords (if not Dirks himself though interpreting their views), were aware of the subversive potential implicit in Carnivalistic inversion. Ironically, Dirks is unable to follow the leads inherent in his own work, in his stubborn refusal to go beyond his behavioural mirror interpretation of festive relations and trace it to an “ideological”, political, or historical root. That it has such a source is clear from the implications of his own study.

Zemon Davis argues more convincingly against a simplistic conception of Carnival as “safety-valve”. Rather than dismissing the theory outright, she points to the way in which periods of annual ritualised inversion can be ambiguous and unpredictable in their consequences. She concedes, for instance, that “Misrule” in sixteenth-century France played an integral role in community cohesion and stability, helping to “maintain proper order”<sup>26</sup> through the dramatisation of the “difference between different stages of life”. Yet she is quick to point out that festive reversal often had unprecedented and conflicting political and social repercussions depending on the specific historical context in which they

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>26</sup> Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*, p. 107.

took place. Zemon Davis uses the work of Turner<sup>27</sup> to illustrate the ambivalence of Carnival topsy-turvy in the way that rituals of status reversal can simultaneously:

serve to loosen the rigors of a structured society and to “infuse” through the system at least temporarily the values of an egalitarian community.<sup>28</sup>

To demonstrate a specific instance of this ambiguous process in action, she takes the example of the sexual inversion and the image of “woman on top” in sixteenth-century French Carnival. Though women were rarely active participants in Carnival parade, the image of the “unruly woman”<sup>29</sup> (rowdy, overtly sexual, dominant, amoral, full of life, energy and power) frequently appeared in the form of a man dressed as a woman: the transvestite. Zemon Davis claims that whilst on the one hand such inversion reasserted existing sexual power relations, stressing the rightness of natural order through reversal, on the other, it provided space to challenge the status quo through the airing and exhibition of alternatives. Whilst, for instance, the image of “unruly woman” was a source of hilarity, the very fact of her physical depiction embodied an alternative to the dominant traditional model of subservient female:

Play with the unruly woman is partly a chance for temporary release from the traditional and stable hierarchy, but it is also part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power within society.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, states Zemon Davis, sexual reversal played a dual function; temporarily re-asserting existing power relations, but at the same time subverting them through the presentation of alternatives. In this way she problematises the blanket conception of Carnival as “safety-valve”, an inherently reactionary force:

I would say not only that it is present, but that the structure of Carnival form can evolve so that it can act both to reinforce order and to suggest alternatives to the existing order.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: structure and anti-structure*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*, p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

Docker divides subscribers to the “safety-valve” thesis distinctly apart from analysts, such as Falassi, who view Carnival as the expression of a “community” united by a “historical bonds” and a shared “worldview”. Cohen outlines, however, how these two poles are fundamentally interconnected, for the notion of a calendrically predetermined, ritualistic catharsis depends on a shared community consciousness and commonly accepted meaning. He notes this as a problem with the “safety-valve” theory for it assumes an idealistic, spontaneous psychological synthesis amongst community members:

It is not the case that all the hundreds and thousands of people, separately and intersubjectively, suddenly and simultaneously reach the limits of their psychological tension in everyday life, so that they all automatically and spontaneously burst into a frenzy of playfulness and unrestrained lust. The dates, times, conventions and forms of play are fixed eternally by the collectivity.<sup>32</sup>

Yet where Cohen fundamentally differs from other critics who interpret Carnival in terms of community expression, he views this collectivity to be something constructed within the festivities as much as outside them. Carnival and community he sees as an interactive dynamic, constantly in flux, defining and redefining each other.

Both Falassi and Mesril<sup>33</sup> fall into the common trap Docker warns of, in unproblematically interpreting Carnival as “populist”<sup>34</sup> expression; “constructing” its participants as a ready formed and “unified” community which exists primarily outside the limits of festival and is mirrored accordingly within it.

Mesril, for instance, describes Carnival as “community expression”<sup>35</sup> and goes on to outline its function as “oppositional” or “institutional” depending on the relationship between the

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen, *Masquerade Politics*, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> M. Mesril, ‘Place and time in the Carnavalesque festival’, in Falassi, A. (ed.), *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular*, p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> Mesril, ‘Place and time’, p. 186.

“reference group and the global society in power... and whether the festival’s community support is leveled within the power structure or against it”<sup>36</sup>. Here she makes the misleading mistake Docker cautions against, essentialising the participants of Carnival into a community with shared values that exist outside of festival time. However, right at the end of her work on “Place and Time in the Carnavalesque Festival” she appears to notice her error. After defining the function of festival as the enactment of existing and overt structural divisions, she posits a vague “hypothesis” relating to an “informal community” created through participation in “Carnavalesque time”, and producing only “momentary... cohesion”<sup>37</sup>. Yet she fails to adequately define this concept or to assess why such a ‘community’ can only be fleeting.

Docker stresses rather the Bakhtinian notion of Carnival community as something that is neither static nor a simple reflection of relations outside the festive context. His is a complicated position for whilst he asserts that “collective, universal and “cosmic” meanings”<sup>38</sup> are implicit within Carnival, the collectivity he speaks of exists only within the festival’s specific context. The Carnival crowd, he states, is:

the people as a whole, organised in their own way, outside of and contrary to the usual forms of “coercive socioeconomic and political organisation” suspended for the time of the festivity.<sup>39</sup>

Cohen discusses the “collectivity” involved in Carnival and the dynamic interaction of culture and community it involves, perhaps most sensitively. Examining the way different interest groups have attempted to appropriate London’s Notting Hill Carnival for political or commercial interests, he articulates how “discourses of ownership”<sup>40</sup> have been manipulated to lay claim to the event as if it were a “material object”. Such a dialogue of possession and belonging, he suggests, is problematised by the contested and arbitrary constructions of community and its involvement with Carnival. In other words, to claim the

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>38</sup> Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular*, p. 176.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

Carnival as the property of the community, there must be consensus as to what the community is: Cohen asks, “is it Notting Hill or London or Black London?”<sup>41</sup>. His suggestion (and one in keeping with Docker’s reading of Bakhtin), is that the Carnival community is constructed within the confines of the festival, a result of the contest and dialogue between various, regional, political, social and economic communities participating. From these differing forces interacting in a cultural context, a new corporate identity emerges in continually altered form. In this vein, Cohen describes how for diverse Blacks in London, “the Carnival has become a symbol of, as well as a mechanism for, achieving corporate identity, unity and exclusiveness”<sup>42</sup>.

Cohen lucidly articulates the dynamic interaction between culture, in the form of Carnival, and political and economic forces that constantly reshape different communities and collectivities. He highlights the way festival operates both to express and construct identity:

Cultural forms are evolved to express and consolidate the sentiments and identity of people who come together as a result of specific economic and political conditions and at the same time serve to mobilise yet more people who, in turn develop more elaborate cultural forms, which mobilise still more people.<sup>43</sup>

Like Zemon Davis in her discussion of the subversive potential implicit in the figure of the “unruly woman” and the practice of sexual inversion, Cohen relates how “once developed”, such cultural forms “become an intervention, not just an expression”<sup>44</sup> in the politics of community, identity, and belonging. Deviating markedly from Mesril’s “hypothesis” of “momentary... cohesion”, Cohen suggests that identities created through Carnival may, in cases, be sustainable. Sustainable because they are part of the constant negotiation of community: that ceaseless interaction of politics and culture continually reshaping the dynamic of belonging.

---

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, *Masquerade Politics*, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

This notion of “community” participation is a highly complex one, for evidently groups of people do participate in self-conscious and clearly delineated collectivities that exist primarily outside the festive context. Zemon Davis insists that the precise composition of such groups is determined by the economic and social environment in which they surface. Thus, with changes in the mode of production and the social restructuring accompanying it, these developments are mirrored in the groupings found within Carnival organisation. As an example of this development she cites the changes in composition of “Abbeys of Misrule” in sixteenth-century France.

With the economic context transforming from village based, rural, agriculturalism, to the urban world of trade and commerce, so the construction of groups mutated to reflect these developments. In the rural situation, “Abbeys of Misrule” had been comprised predominantly of “unmarried youth”<sup>45</sup>. Such groupings played an important social role directly related to the structure of village life, sexual relations, age and marriage patterns and expectations. However, as Zemon Davis explains, the changed urban environment distorted traditional rites of passage and engendered new forms of collective identity. It was particularly the “mixing of ages at work”, and the redefinition of “rites of passage” in relation to labour patterns rather than age (she cites the example of the progression from apprentice to journeyman), that resulted in the formation of trades-based, rather than age-based, “Abbeys”.

Commenting on the broad organisational structure of Carnival in the British West Indies, Dirks notes the frequent overlap of hierarchy on plantation (the workplace) and in cultural groupings. He observes that “many of the same people who decided punishments at work during the day also determined justice at night”<sup>46</sup>, so correlating labour-based social identity with degree of festive authority.

---

<sup>45</sup> Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*, p. 111.

<sup>46</sup> Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia*, p. 141.

Zemon Davis similarly conveys these links between the economic base, the precise constitution and definition of collectivities in response, and their adaptive involvement in Carnival. Essentially, she points to economics as the primary determinant of cultural involvement, shaping the form and extent of festive expression. Yet the fact of clear “community” participation in Carnival (in the form of self-conscious collectivities) does not negate Cohen’s thesis that festival plays a role in constructing “community”. Instead it produces a more complex notion of what is meant by the term “community”, where belonging and identity are ever-changing products of cultural and political interaction. To do with self-definition as much as externally perceived classification, the “community” he describes is one of continually mutating and adaptive groupings, defined as much by exclusion as by inclusion.

Davis also alludes to such a concept in her discussion of parades in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. She warns against Falassi’s notion of Carnival as the unproblematic reflection of a fissureless community who view the world in a common way. She contends that this misguided analytical tendency stems from a rigid and essentialising conception of what “community” is:

First impressions of public ceremonies are often shaped by the common-sense belief that such events are straightforward reflections of notions shared by all the performers<sup>47</sup>.....[whereas in fact] ...images of social relations [are] filtered through a complex process of inclusion, exclusion, influence and planning, until the parade expresse[s] power and special interest more than unity and consensus<sup>48</sup>.

This theme of inclusion and exclusion, participation and non-participation, in Carnival is fundamental not only to the debate around “community” involvement and expression. Interpretation of the motives and reasons for non-participation, of spectatorship rather than active involvement, are integral also in interrogating the validity of the “safety-valve”

---

<sup>47</sup> S. G. Davis, Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1986), p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

theory. For example, does the often passive, or invisible role of women in Carnivals<sup>49</sup>, represent some feminine rejection of the whole event, its organisation and hierarchy, or does it rather implicitly reaffirm gender relations and uphold prevailing power structures?

Using the examples of various African tribal initiation ceremonies, Gluckman outlines how “prescribed absence”<sup>50</sup> from ritual is often a direct “form of participation in it”, dramatising social conflict in order to “bless... the dominant moral rule and social relationships”<sup>51</sup>. He presents the example of North West Rhodesian [sic] circumcision ceremonies from which women are barred. This absence, insists Gluckman, plays a vital “contribution to the ritual which aimed to help their sons grow up”. Thus, in this case, the exclusion of a specific section of the community (women) serves to sanction, not condemn, the social order; absence playing an active role in the ritual.

Davis offers an alternative interpretation of non-participation, outlining how, in an age when “Respectability was the watchword”<sup>52</sup> (the sensibility of nineteenth-century America), “working people under pressure to differentiate themselves from their rowdy neighbours... could articulate claims to respectable status”<sup>53</sup> through the level of their participation, or non-participation, in the revelry of the street. She warns, however, of the danger of interpreting exclusion/active-involvement in a generalised and binaristic way. It is as problematic to speak of common intention or significance of participants, Davis suggests, as it is to assert shared meanings amongst spectators or those who abstain from the event altogether:

the visibility of parades should not be conflated with an absolute and unproblematic openness of communication. That parades have large and

---

<sup>49</sup> Care should be taken not to essentialise the participation of all women in Carnivals worldwide. For instance, they play a vitally active role in London’s Notting-Hill Carnival and a conspicuous and central part in Rio’s annual festivities.

<sup>50</sup> Gluckman, Custom and Conflict, p. 130.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>52</sup> Davis, Parades and Power, p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

often widely inclusive audiences does not mean that they are open to everyone's influence and participation, or that all participation is equal<sup>54</sup>.

Neither does it mean that the audience interprets the event in a "random" or "uniform" way. Though it may seem trite and simplistic to point out that people participate in Carnival to different degrees and with varying motives, it is an important point to stress for it problematises both a simplistic conception of the "safety-valve" theory and its theoretical antithesis, the notion that Carnival is inherently revolutionary, the anarchic enactment of a populist utopia. Instead an image emerges of popular festival as the articulation of different identities, the expression of desires and antagonisms that sometimes coalesce, and <sup>at</sup> other times conflict. It depicts an arena where exclusion for some may represent the "prescribed absence" that reaffirms the prevailing order, and for others may imply a rejection of all that they see it to stand for.

Participation and non-participation alike, can thus be viewed as the articulation of identity and the construction of an identity. To restate how such an ambivalent process can operate, we look once more at the examples provided by Gluckman and Dirks. Gluckman's Tsonga mother's absence from male circumcision ceremonies ritualistically bolsters the social order, reasserting her sexual identity and position within the community. For Davis, on the other hand, working-class "respectability" is asserted through non-participation: identity is structured in opposition to a conception of what Carnival signifies; rowdiness, anarchy, social inferiority.

This construction and consolidation of an identity defined negatively against "Carnival", insist Stallybrass and White<sup>55</sup>, has played an integral role in constituting the middle-class, or bourgeois, subject. Since the Renaissance onwards, they claim, a "gradual reconstruction of the idea of Carnival as the culture of the Other"<sup>56</sup> has taken place. Carnival has been rejected and "disowned" for it "encoded all that which the proper bourgeois must strive not

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> P. Stallybrass and A. White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, (Methuen, London, 1987).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

to be”<sup>57</sup>. Docker too notes this process, observing the historical shift in Carnival from early modern Europe, where all social classes participated in Carnival, through the gradual disengagement of the rising middle-class. Like to Stallybrass and White, Docker relates how, “with the rise of the bourgeois public sphere, business and professional classes broke their link with the Carnavalesque”<sup>58</sup>. But this detachment has not been complete, for instead the anarchic and orgiastic sentiment embodied in ritualistic street festival “became submerged in the unconscious, as a repressed desire for the low and the other”<sup>59</sup>.

Recurrent in literature and commentary on Carnival is the idea that the middle classes have tried not just to disassociate themselves from the event, but to constrain, repress, or prevent it from occurring at all. Such attempts have relied on the development and manipulation of a discourse of fear. It is a discourse depicting street festivity as violent, subversive, a threat to the moral and physical well-being of the wider community. Davis describes efforts by the Philadelphian authorities of 1840 to outlaw the Christmas and New Year celebrations that “disgraced the city”<sup>60</sup>. The impetus for this containment came from city officials and the rising middle-class who believed that Carnival promoted the annual disorder and ungovernability of Philadelphia’s working-class districts.

It is not just the challenge to bourgeois sensibility (“respectability”), or the threat of drunken disorder that have been the implicit referent in the discourse of fear surrounding Carnival. Both Davis and Zemon Davis highlight how street festivals have been interpreted as seditious and real threats to the social and political order, and have been acted against accordingly. Davis relates how the mock militias of early nineteenth-century Philadelphia were taken so seriously by military authorities as to lead to the court-martial and dismissal of a “poor, ignorant, stupid... ostler”<sup>61</sup>. The 1820s election of the humble John Pluck as

---

<sup>57</sup> It is worth noting however, that Stallybrass and White taking Bakhtin’s lead, see the bourgeois “disowning” of Carnival to have resulted in its sublimation rather than its extinction. They suggest that “a convincing map of the transformation of Carnival involves tracing migrations, concealment, metamorphoses, fragmentation, internalization and neurotic sublimations”. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>58</sup> Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular*, p. 282.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Davis, *Parades and Power*, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

mock Colonel of the 84th Foot Regiment was seen as ridiculing the militia; comic inversion interpreted as a real challenge to military authority. Similarly, Zemon Davis reveals the level of official fear surrounding Carnival that lead to “numerous royal and local edicts against masking and mumming, all intended to protect the cities and the King himself against brawling and fighting, conspiracy and seditious activity”<sup>62</sup>. She notes however, that sometimes such a threat could be endured, if eased by a financial incentive for the local authority concerned. In the town of Orange, for instance, the chivaris of the “Abbeys of Misrule” were tolerated so long as some of the fines collected were turned over to the local council.

Docker, in his discussion of Goethe, picks up too on discourses of threat and fear in relation to Carnival. Goethe’s fear, however, concerns the experience of the individual within the crowd, the loss of free-will in a temporary illusion of democracy. Talking of Goethe, Docker suggests:

Carnival, he feels, is like life itself, unpredictable, unsatisfactory, problematic: the participant struggles in the thick crowd to retain a sense of free-will; a Carnival liberty and equality that are only to be enjoyed in the intoxication of madness, desire only in the presence of danger. He is left feeling very uneasy.<sup>63</sup>

Goethe’s fear seems also to be that of the nature, impermanency, and artificiality of the “community” created in the festive process. He presents the image of a group mentality battling against the individual’s “free-will” in the consolidation of what can only be a momentary and “false consciousness”. “False” in the sense that it cannot last outside the temporary unreality of Carnival.

A discussion of the meaning and significance of “community”, fear, ownership and appropriation of street festival is sorely incomplete without simultaneously addressing the politics of space and territory within which the event takes place. Throughout the literature

---

<sup>62</sup> Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*, p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular*, p. 176.

on Carnival is the suggestion that it is primarily an urban geographically defined identity which finds expression within the event. Davis though points out, how locational identity and economic or social groups invariably overlap, illustrating how economic changes can fundamentally effect the construction of neighbourhood groupings.

The transformation of nineteenth-century Philadelphia, for example, from a centre of commercial exchange to a town based around the transfer of money, along with the creation of textile factories to “better”<sup>64</sup> paupers, directly influenced the geographical composition of the city. Large working-class areas sprung up around the textile mills, becoming overcrowded as rent-racketeers crowded immigrants and labourers on top of each other. Within this “large, dense terrain”, claims Davis, “neighbourhoods acquired separate identities based on industry or ethnicity”<sup>65</sup>. These major economic changes and related urban restructuring, effected not only where people resided. Davis states that the very notions of “work” and “home” assumed altered significance in the new industrial context:

As industrial capitalism transformed the uses of time in the workplace and home, festivities held appealing possibilities for autonomous recreation, something hard-pressed workers desperately needed.<sup>66</sup>

New geographical identities emerged which, though based around neighbourhood, were primarily economically determined. Furthermore, the experience of urban wage-labour (in replacement of rural agriculturalism and self-employed craftsmanship) altered conceptions of “work”, “home”, leisure and free-time. Increasingly the neighbourhood’s streets became the prime location for recreation and socialising. Thus, the annual Carnival assumed extra significance, taking place on the streets, in areas around which people’s identities were constructed. Indeed, “Philadelphia’s festivals became the apotheosis of workers’ autonomy, as men women and children whose lives were constrained by harsh labour abandoned themselves to the temporary liberties of festive recreations”<sup>67</sup>.

---

<sup>64</sup> Davis, *Parades and Power*, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

The annual street Carnival of Philadelphia was representative of many such events in its triple significance; it articulated an urban spatially defined collective identity, it took place on the streets associated with the participants' world of "leisure", it represented a physical and temporal break from the regulated confines of "work". The "streets" then, assumed critical symbolic importance in the cultural articulation of urban groupings. It is in this light that the vehemence of opposition to attempts to move Carnival from the streets to confined spaces, such as parks and stadia, must be understood.

London's Notting Hill Carnival has survived numerous attempts, if not to ban it altogether, at least to move it from the streets. Many white middle-class residents, as well as the local council, have tried to get the event moved to a park or stadium, but Carnival leaders have resisted, arguing that "an essentially mobile spectacle, the character of the Carnival would be altogether changed if it was to be confined within a narrow space"<sup>68</sup>. Their insistence on the "symbolic significance" of Notting Hill, as the nearest thing British West Indians have to "liberated territory"<sup>69</sup> mirrors Davis' claims as to the significance of street and urban territory in Carnival. Stallybrass and White<sup>70</sup> also note as "important" drives by the establishment to "marginalise" Carnival both "temporally" and "spatially", thus reflecting bourgeois recognition of the critical role of specific time and space in Carnival: that to alter either factor is to distort the meaning of the festivity and to neutralise its potential as threat<sup>71</sup>. Similar attempts to marginalise, inhibit, and control festivities in both these respects dogged the Coon Carnival from the late 1960s onwards.

---

<sup>68</sup> Cohen, Masquerade Politics, p. 40.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Stallybrass and White, Politics and Poetics, p. 181.

<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, throughout accounts of Carnivals around the world is evidence of suppression of street festivities, through restrictions declaring the event a "traffic hazard". Stallybrass and White relate that the "cortege du boeuf gras" proceeded around the streets until 1914 when it was suppressed as a "traffic problem". Cape Town's Coon Carnival was similarly restricted in the late 1960's. Such incidences support my earlier claim as to the bourgeois, state and municipal discourse of fear surrounding street festivities. It evidences not only the perception of Carnival as "threat", but also, the manipulation of this fear to contain and suppress it. Stallybrass and White, Politics and Poetics, p. 177.

**Situating the Coon Carnival within the global debate:**

Academic analyses of the Coon Carnival and critical interpretations of its social significance are beset by an impotent desire to define the event's community. Repeatedly, Jeppie, Western, Weichel, and Stone (the four theorists who devote any attention to the event in the late twentieth-century) try to pinpoint the nature and intent of participant involvement but their efforts are frustrated by a gaping lack of historical grounding leading to insubstantial and speculative conclusions. Whilst their interpretations of the festival often seem to coalesce, or at least, lend each other support (in, for example their stress on the event's "working-class" basis), recurrent throughout the works of all four is a tendency of self-contradiction. Whether this self-contradiction is a product of their lack of historical specificity about the Carnival, or whether it is merely a shared critical weakness, is unclear, but the result is that the persuasive arguments of, particularly Western and Jeppie, are frustrated by an element of vagueness. Jeppie, for example, declares that women did not participate but bases this assertion on insufficient, and ultimately inaccurate, evidence. Though this does not invalidate their interpretations of the meaning or significance of the Carnival to the Coloured people of Cape Town, it does necessitate a closer and more meticulous historical investigation of the event.

The greatest lack of clarity and degree of contradiction exists around the central issue of who exactly took part in the Carnival and thus, whose cultural identity it asserted, if indeed it asserted an "identity" at all. Weichel claims that the festival's participants were comprised of "predominantly the lowest socio-economic sector of the Coloured population"<sup>72</sup>, and Stone, adding some historical justification, declares its constituents to have been "lower class...Coloured men"<sup>73</sup> a legacy of the "mythical association" between Carnival and remission from the times when slaves were given a day off at New Year. Similarly, Jeppie declares, "the Carnival was.... the preeminent expression of working-class culture"<sup>74</sup>.

---

<sup>72</sup> Weichel, 'A Study of Aspects', p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Stone, 'Coon Carnival', p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture', p. 73.

Jeppie however, inadvertently complicates such a simple class analysis with his problematic claim that "ethnic and historical links bonded participants during the festival"<sup>75</sup>. Quoting heavily from the anthropologist Falassi, Jeppie finds no difficulties with his definition of Carnival as a "social occasion in which...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". Indeed, far from taking issue with this proposition, he reasserts its legitimacy in relation to the Coon Carnival and in doing so reduces a powerful argument to the contrary, suggested later in the work.

Indeed, taking each of Falassi's claims about the essence of Carnival, all four critics, to different extents, expose the inaccuracy of these assertions in relation to Cape Town's Coon Carnival. They reveal instead; class, religious, sexual and racial tensions which result in the multiplicity of "worldviews" that characterise the event and are borne out in every dimension of the festivities, from the organisational hierarchy, to the judging of the competition and the symbolism of song and costume.

Indeed, Jeppie himself articulates one such instance where both class and religious differences operated to obstruct a common Coloured "ethnic" worldview from uniting Carnival participants. He attributes the larger size of Coon troupes than Malay<sup>76</sup> choirs to the "costlier tailored...suits" of the Malays which served as "an instant barrier to membership, while the more accessible loosely styled satin costumes of the troupes allowed a wider membership"<sup>77</sup>. Here he clearly alludes to a greater complexity in the composition

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Malay* refers essentially to those people so classified under the Population Registration Act of 1950. The term *Cape Malay* is an odd one for, though a sub-set of the Coloured group, it is the only classificatory label premised and defined on grounds of religion - Islam. Like the term *Coloured*, *Cape Malay* is also contested by many as an apartheid fabrication. Bickford-Smith points out that the term was first used to describe Muslims irrespective of origin in the census of 1875. In the 1870s however, he notes that there were examples of people defining themselves as such [Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, pp. 30-35]. Thus, a label that was primarily imposed, was appropriated by those it defined. Malay choirs sum up the arbitrariness of this as a classification for their memberships often comprise of as much as half Christians. These choirs have a smarter dress code than does the Coon Carnival and is viewed as a more "respectable" form of recreation than its anarchic counterpart. Individuals frequently belong to both Malay choir and Coon troupe, however.

<sup>77</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture', P. 78.

and outlook of the Carnival protagonists than the simplistic and reductionist notion with which he introduces his study: of a homogenous "ethnic" community, united in their cultural expression by "religious" and "historical bonds".

Weichel and Stone are eager to point out structural divisions which complicate the notion of a unified Coloured cultural identity and of their implications <sup>for</sup> on the Coon Carnival. Weichel divides the Coloured participants into two subgroups; the Malays and "Cape Coloureds". Whilst the Malays are bound by religion (Islam) and maintain a specific "cultural tradition" through their songs which provide cohesion for their community, the "Cape Coloureds", she declares, have "no specific cultural traits" and no "binding religion"<sup>78</sup>. Though her phrasing is uncomfortable (implying some people maintain a "culture" and others do not), what is interesting about her statements is the suggestion of overt religious differences operating within the Carnival's structure.

Stone too is unambiguous in his implication that participants are not motivated by an identical "worldview". He asserts that an individual's economic position pre-determines the level of his involvement and authority within the Carnival. He states:

each participates in terms of his class status within the Coloured sector...It may therefore be concluded that the organisational hierarchy of the Carnival is homologous with the class-status hierarchy of the Coloured sector.<sup>79</sup>

Not only is economic-status paralleled by hierarchy and power within the Carnival's organisational structure, Stone suggests, it further determines the individual's motives and incentives for involvement. In this way, he distinguishes between the "financial motives"<sup>80</sup> of the Carnival Boards, organisers and promoters<sup>81</sup> (driven by incentives of profit and

---

<sup>78</sup> Weichel, 'A Study of Aspects', pp. 1-20.

<sup>79</sup> Stone, 'Coon Carnival', p. 46.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> It is important to distinguish between different levels of Carnival power and authority. By *organisers*, I refer primarily to powerful troupe captains. The event's *promoters* were those individuals who hired the stadium venues, put on the event, and thus, reaped the financial profit. Sometimes these promoters were organised into promotional *Boards*. Historically the troupe captains have been at loggerheads with the promoters whom they feel overcharge spectators and underpay the troupes. In 1995, after a battle in the

commercial gain), and the symbolic and ritualistic rewards which motivate the rank-and-file working-class participants. Whilst the commercial dimension of the Carnival operates at different levels, from the manufacture and sale of uniforms by tailors and troupe captains to the profit hopes of entrepreneurial promoters, Stone's implication is that spiritual rather than concrete physical or financial desires, motivate a large part of working-class participation.

It is within the ritualistic realm of Carnival, Stone asserts, that the "lower-class Coloured man" can "seek alternative compensation" for his failure to attain the "desirabilia" he strives vainly for in the *real* world; the "goals of whiteness, wealth and respectability" concomitant with success and security<sup>82</sup>. This temporary world of inverted reality fashioned by Carnival, creates the space to achieve success: an avenue to "respectability...through sartorial, histrionic or musical expertise".

Quoting from Bakhtin, Jeppie makes a similar point, suggesting that the world of Carnival offers "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order...mark[ing] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions"<sup>83</sup>. But here again is a fundamental contradiction in Jeppie's analysis for only pages later he points to the religious, sexual and gender differences which are borne out within the Carnival, both at an organisational and a symbolic level. Not only do religious status and economic position determine troupe membership and participation, but furthermore, Jeppie draws attention to the way in which inner-city gender relations are replicated and reinforced even within the symbolic world of Carnival. He notes, for instance, how the comic figure of the transvestite ("moffie") is denied a voice.<sup>84</sup> "Never allowed the privilege of discourse"<sup>85</sup>, he is represented, ridiculed, judged. His suppression even at this ritualistic level, suggests Jeppie, symbolically reasserts the sexual relations of

---

Supreme Court, control was handed from an individual promoter to a joint body of troupe captains under the banner of the "Carnival Development Board". It was this body to which Mandela referred in his 1996 speech [cited in the preface to this thesis].

<sup>82</sup> Stone, 'Coon Carnival', p. 43.

<sup>83</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture', p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> My own unsuccessful attempts to find a *moffie* who participated in the Carnival in the sixties and seventies, and was willing to be interviewed, result in this thesis failing again to articulate their voice.

<sup>85</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture', p. 80.

the *real* world, where "men ha[ve] all the authority invested in them...[and]...define the roles for women...and the appropriate roles for men".

Clearly then, the Bakhtinian quote seems ill-fitting as a blanket interpretation encompassing everyone involved in the Coon Carnival. If we are to accept the observations of Weichel, Stone and Jeppie himself, as to the links between religion, sexuality, class, and status and power within the Carnival, quite the converse seems true; that for many, "hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" were not "suspended", but rather symbolically and literally reinforced, during the New Year festivities. Whilst, as Stone insists, the "lower-class Coloured man" could seek the symbolic "respectability" and "temporary liberation...from established order" which Jeppie speaks of, it seems clear that this avenue for release was conditional and not open to all.

Returning to Jeppie's original assertion that "ethnic and historical links bonded participants during the festivities"<sup>86</sup>, observations of the Carnival by all of the critics suggest rather, that participants represented a multiplicity of different histories, religions and social-classes with conflicting interests and expectations of the event. Consequently, to declare even that "ethnic ...links" bonded them is misleading for the very notion of "ethnicity" remains vague and unclear; denoting neither common historical, religious or cultural identity.

Western posits a potential solution to the question of common identity and its assertion at the Coon Carnival. A social-geographer, Western sees the cohesive fulcrum of "Cape Coloured" identity to be neither race nor social-class but rather "location". Thus, instead of defining "Coloured" identity in terms of "ethnicity", he describes it as a "geographical identity"<sup>87</sup>. "Place of origin... or home", he continues, "has become an essential element of self-definition for Coloured people". This inter-relationship of spatial location, social relations and self-definition, he implies, has been reinforced and exacerbated by segregation

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>87</sup> Western, Outcast, p. 149.

and apartheid legislation, redefining residential areas along racial lines: in effect, the politicisation of space.

Prior to the Group Areas Act, Western asserts<sup>88</sup>, a large proportion (37% in 1936) of Cape Town's residential areas were racially mixed.<sup>89</sup> His implication is that it was the government's practice of "spatial manipulation" as a means of "societal control" which came to instill "geographical identity" as a conscious means of self-identification. In this way, he illustrates a process by which "geographical identity" has assumed racial and "ethnic" connotations. As the concept of "location" has been vested with racial and "ethnic" significance, so it has assumed political significance, becoming a critical arena for struggle and resistance.

As the culmination of this process, Western points to the effective removal of the Coon Carnival procession from the city centre's streets, coming significantly in the immediate wake of the District Six removals in 1966. He suggests that the reason for this injunction was to "inhibit the symbolic assertion of Coloured ownership of, and identity with, inner-city Cape Town"<sup>90</sup>. Western's implication is that for the authorities, and for the (ex)residents of Cape Town, the notion of place had become "ethnicised" and thus, politicised.

However, whilst he alludes to the concept of a homogenous "Coloured" identity constructed around the notion of "home" and geographical belonging, his attention to the

---

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Bickford-Smith urges caution in approaching this figure. Outlining a host of successive moves towards segregation, both legislated and de facto, he conveys a city divided into racial "pockets" of varying degrees of integration before the implementation of the Group Areas Act. He states: "there were not many areas of Cape Town by the late 1940s which it would be possible to describe as racially integrated and involving Whites and Non-Whites. Certainly the older suburbs, from Mowbray to Simonstown, had large numbers of both Coloured and White residents, as well as some Indians and Africans. But on the whole the "Non-White" inhabitants lived in pockets like the Dorp or the Valley in Mowbray, and Belletjebos or the Vlak in Claremont. In some cases a "pocket" might consist of a single street". Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town, Unpaginated*, quoting from Western. *Outcast*, p. 162. and W. Taliép, 'A Study in the History of Claremont and the Impact of the Group Areas Act, c1950-1970', (BA (Hons.) Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1992), pp. 11-13.

<sup>90</sup> Western, *Outcast*, p. 151.

differences and social dynamics within the "Cape Coloured" group again frustrate its assertion as a homogenous, single-visioned community. Looking particularly at Mowbray, Western distinguishes between the often differing outlooks of English and Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds: a difference stemming from the divisions in social and economic status that frequently paralleled language proficiency. He notes that English-speaking often indicated higher economic status, and the increased likelihood of car and home ownership. His implication is that enforced and legislated removals had different psychological implications within the Coloured community depending on residential status. Similarly, he reflects, gender differences further influenced attitudes and responses to removal and resettlement due to the fact that Coloured women frequently spent most of their leisure and work time in the home, and thus felt the "loss of community"<sup>91</sup> more acutely than men.

Western's observations as to the significance of gender, economic and residential status, in relation to the construction of a geographically-based Coloured identity have important connotations for discussing the Coon Carnival. They suggest that, though location was the most significant factor in self-definition for the Coloureds of Cape Town, it meant far more to specific sectors of the community than to others. In this way, it becomes increasingly difficult to view the Carnival as merely a straightforward "symbolic assertion of Coloured ownership" of inner-city Cape Town. For clearly, attitudes to dispossession, claims to, and identification with, urban space, differed so greatly within the Coloured community itself, that it is impossible to assert that Carnival reflected a homogenous ethnically determined intent.

In his perceptive and illuminating work, Marin argues for a critically active and contemporary significance of space and territory in Carnival expression. He reaffirms that all parades manipulate space according to specific rules and norms that construct and contain the procession's movements and at the same time "enhance its value"<sup>92</sup>, but suggests that the choosing of the Carnival parade route is an active intervention in a spatial

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>92</sup> L. Marin, 'Notes on a semiotic approach to parade, cortege and procession', in Falassi, A. (ed.), *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*. (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987), p. 223.

discourse. The process of selection and rejection of places incorporated on the route “manipulates space and ...places that already exist” to construct a relevant, contemporary and “meaningful structure”<sup>93</sup>. He implies a process by which spatial order is constructed by the parade community using the available tools of streets and places which are already imbued with historical significance. This participant parade community is in itself, created by and through the route chosen. It is thus a dynamic and interactive process of spatial manipulation in the construction of community and identity.

Examining the specific differences of routes of parades and processions, Marin isolates three essential categories of movement; one-way processions, round trips, and circular routes. Each category, he asserts implies a fundamentally different narrative. A “one-way route”<sup>94</sup> implies “irreversible movement... the progression of a story ... the end point... represent[ing] a symbolic victory over those ideas or persons defied by the march”.<sup>95</sup> The “round-trip”, emphasises rather, “bi-directional spatialisation”, investing the turning-point and the common point of origin and end with chief significance. The “circular route” however, appears the most dynamic as far as active intervention in the discourse of spatial identity. Circular movement, Marin suggests, “creates a local order”. In enclosing a real space it protects a locality by a “symbolically closed border”<sup>96</sup>. Davis similarly alludes to a connection between circularity of route and expression of neighbourhood identity in the urban context. She notes that “characteristically, the early nineteenth-century line of march repeatedly doubled back on itself as it wound around familiar residential blocks”<sup>97</sup>.

Looking at the route of Cape Town’s Coon Carnival in light of the categories outlined by Marin raises important questions. Before the imposition of the Group Areas Act the Carnival parade followed a more or less circular route. After the Act, with participants moved to far-flung and disparate areas, banned from marching along the precise route of before, and with traffic legislation outlawing their procession from the main central area

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>95</sup> It is interesting to note the procession of political demonstrations in this light.

<sup>96</sup> Marin, ‘Notes on a semiotic’, p. 224.

anyway, the route of the procession was fundamentally altered. Rather than Marin's protective, delineation of local order and sanctity implied by the circular route, the Carnival assumed the form of a one-way trip. Participants walked only a little way in their own neighbourhoods, then caught buses to stadiums where they walked just a short distance to the performance grounds. If we are to accept Marin's interpretation of the symbolic relevance of a procession's route and direction, we must query whether the meaning and significance of the Coon Carnival changed in relation to its shift from a circular to a uni-directional parade. Indeed, it seems the very essence of the festival, its symbolic meaning implicit in the order of the route, must have been disrupted [See F3.1].

From an inclusive, circular route tramping the boundaries of neighbourhood communities and work areas, the road march mutated, distorting into a pre-established, non-negotiable, one-directional affair. French literary theorists writing on African literature allude to the implications of this change. Discussing the preponderance of the "Journey narrative" they stress the significance of a circular route in the metaphoric process of identity constitution:

Returning to the initial point of departure, the travellers rejoin the community they call home. Moreover, the journey outward results in lucidity, in self-understanding. The heroes or heroines return wiser and, as more mature individuals, will assume their position within the community. In traditional society, which emphasizes communal values, the journey is shown to benefit both the individual and the community.<sup>98</sup>

In 1960s Cape Town the fracturing of communities through their enforced displacement, the razing of houses, the obstruction of the road march and its confinement to specific areas, forced a rupture in this metaphoric process. The route of the march was significantly altered and this had serious implications for the annual symbolic bonding of community.

Marin's further musings on the critical significance of the start and end points of parade are also particularly useful in interpreting the trouble, violence, or unrest that has frequently appeared at such sites. He suggests that these points represent places of "danger",

---

<sup>97</sup> Davis, *Parades and Power*, p. 34.

— Rough approximation of the route of the road march prior to 1966-1967.

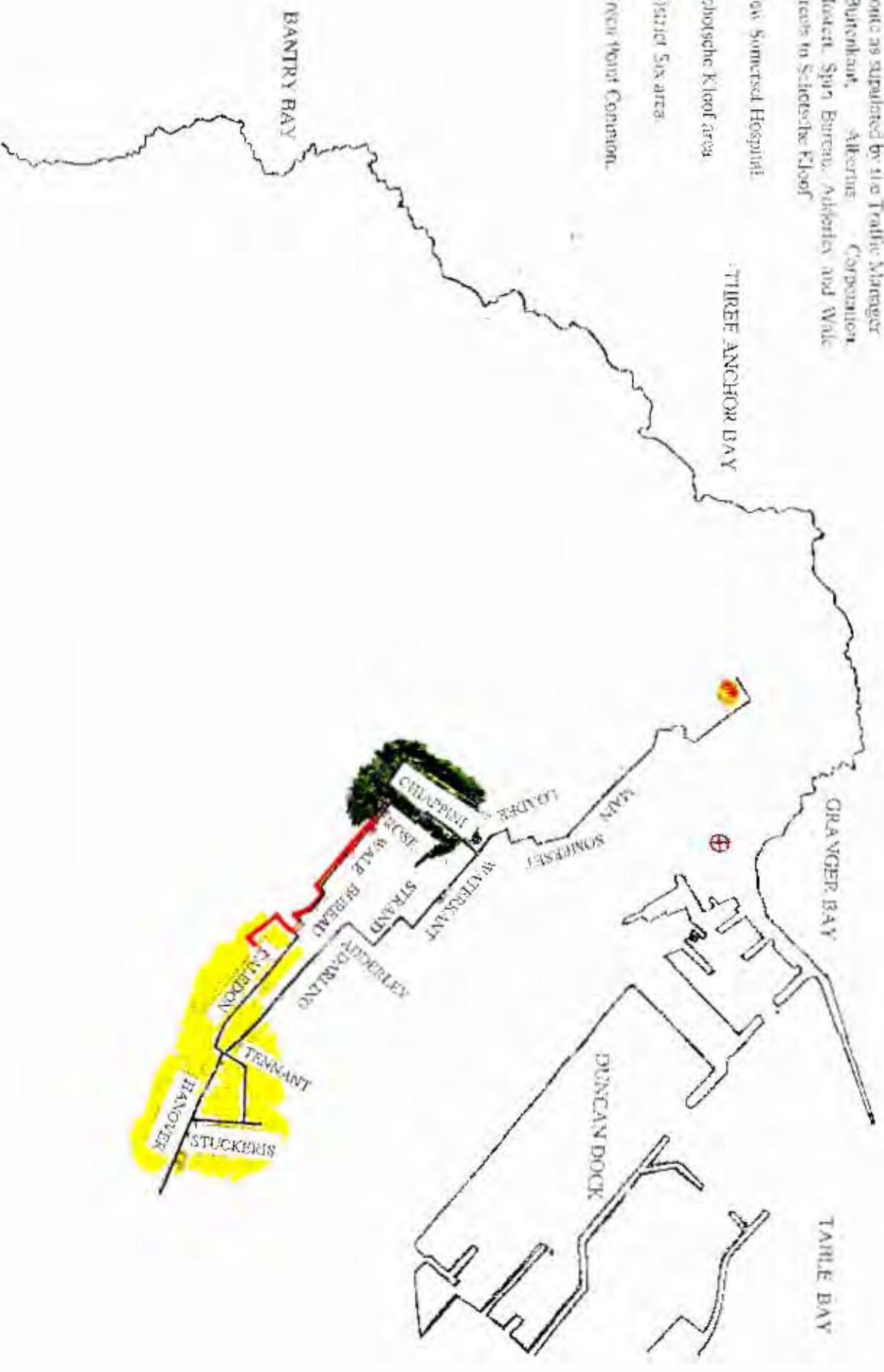
— Zone as stipulated by the Traffic Manager: Butcherant, Albertus Corporation, Moller, Spin Bureau, Andersen and Wale street to Scheiterske Kloof

⊕ New Somerset Hospital

🌳 Scheiterske Kloof area

🟡 District Six area

🟠 Green Point Common



symbolising the “epiphanic plane of the parade” and its “finality”<sup>99</sup>. Not only do these points fall outside the boundaries of either everyday or inverted Carnival order, but furthermore they represent the constitution and dissolution of the temporary Carnival community:

The assembly and dispersion points thus represent borders between the law of “normal” everyday spaces and places and the law of its parade and its route. They can also be thought of as passages from one Law to another; they are themselves outside either law and are therefore dangerous.<sup>100</sup>

In assessing the potential of Carnival to challenge the stability of prevailing power structures, we must look to these places falling outside the jurisdiction of festive or State law. Anarchy, implies Marin, is threatened at these points where identity is reconstituted. Schechner states that “official culture likes its street displays to be orderly, arranged in longitudinal rectangles moving in one direction, and from a known beginning to a known end in terms of time as well as space”<sup>101</sup>. This was certainly true of the attitude of the Police, Department of Justice, and municipal authorities toward the Coon Carnival in the sixties and seventies, in their attempts to confine the parade both temporally and spatially.<sup>102</sup> Dictating the precise boundaries of the road march, these state organs altered the points of departure, arrival, and route of the procession, wrenching significance from some places and vesting others arbitrarily with interest.

The loss of specific points of historically established, ritual significance disrupted the order and metaphoric unity of the narrative. From a circular march, constituted and later, reintegrated, into the neighbourhood communities of District Six, the spatial change of the march to a mono-directional line vested the start and end points with a novel and volatile significance. This fact is evidenced by the frequency of reports of violence at the procession’s destination points subsequent to the altered route. Such incidents occurred

---

<sup>98</sup> M. Mortimer, *Journeys through the French African Novel*, (James Currey, London, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Marin, ‘Notes on a semiotic’, p. 224.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> R. Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, (Routledge, London, 1993), p. 82.

either at the Stadium venues where the parade culminated; Green Point, then Athlone and Hartleyvale (which took over as the prime competition sites after Green Point<sup>103</sup>), as well as on the return of troupes in hired buses to their homes on the Cape Flats. The new routes were characterised by breach and fracture as troupes marched to their buses, drove towards the Stadiums, got out and marched along a short designated route to the venue, then boarded their buses to return home again. All these points of disruption were potential sites of unrest; uncontained by the symbolic unity of the circular parade. The 1970s were characterised by such instances of disorder. The *Herald* reports in 9/1/71 the intention of the *Stalags* gang to raid the Athlone Carnival competition. On 15/1/72 it tells of a particularly unruly contest at the same venue with Police using dogs to control the crowd, keeping tear-gas in reserve in case that was needed too. A report a week earlier in the same paper describes how “thugs dressed as coons terrorise[d] Manenberg”<sup>104</sup>, clearly returning home from a competition.

It is thus, impossible to assert that Carnival per se is inherently reactionary or revolutionary for the history of street festival offers numerous instances to support either, both, and neither such claims. Indeed, at any given moment a single festival may contain vastly different impulses and harbour conflicting potentials. The attempt to categorise the essence of the event is itself founded on the ill-conceived assumption of homogenous “community” participation. The attitudes of State and provincial officials towards the Coon Carnival in sixties and seventies Cape Town reflects this ambivalence. Whilst the District Police Commissioner wanted the event confined as much as possible, the Traffic Manager was anxious not to appear hostile to the road march. The Town clerk publicly professed his backing yet in confidential memoranda displayed antipathy towards the celebrations. In a strange clash of official attitudes the City Mayor appealed to the Chief Magistrate (Carnival’s open antagonist), in defence of the event’s unfettered progression. The city’s officialdom were indeed, unsure of exactly what Carnival represented. On the one hand it played up to Apartheid’s efforts to establish and promote distinct ethnic groups with

---

<sup>102</sup> See Appendix III for details.

<sup>103</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>104</sup> The Cape Herald, (8/1/72).

correspondent cultures and traditions, yet on the other, part of the culture of Carnival was the toying with disorder and misrule. Further still, this anarchic flirtation took place in the heart of the newly declared White “Mother City”.

Ambiguity, vacillation and ambivalence surrounded not merely the attitudes of outsiders and State officials to the event. Numerous critics and analysts outline the complex involvement of differing and adaptive levels of collective involvement in Carnival worldwide. Not only do diverse groups, often with conflicting interests participate to varying degrees and at different hierarchical levels, but furthermore, Carnival acts as site for the competition and reaffirmation of existing identities, as well as the reconstitution of new ones. At any one time Carnival articulates a multiplicity of identities, both of individuals and groups. In this way we cannot assume the pre-removal Carnival community to be identical to its post-1967 successor.

Carnival in Cape Town, subsequent to the removals and restrictions, took place on streets where people no longer lived and under stringent constraints that bore on the style, performance and ultimately, metaphoric significance of the event. A practical manifestation of the precise new limitations placed on the timing of the event, claims Howard, can be seen in the “changing tempi” of the music over the last thirty years<sup>105</sup>. The music today, he asserts, is much faster than it was prior to removals. This, he suggests, is due to the fact that now troupes are bussed into the city there is no need for them to pace their marching over the day. Where tempi used to change with the terrain; to slow down as marchers ascended a hill, after removals there was little marching and so no need to pace themselves in such a way. Howard’s claim serves as an example of how the Group Areas Act and the restrictions placed on the road march have indirectly impacted on the intricacies of style and performance.

It is precisely the ambiguous vacillation, between affirmation, challenge, and reconstitution of order, belonging, and community, that characterises the fundamental ambivalence of

---

<sup>105</sup> Howard, ‘No-Persons’, p. 37.

Carnival: the ability of a single event to both bolster and subvert existing power relations. The overriding implication arising from critical works on street festival throughout history, is that to determine the political or social potential of Carnival, each event must be examined at its different levels of involvement. The reasons and motivation for spectators and non-participants are as integral to this process as those of active participants, absence frequently playing an assigned and deliberate role in ritual. Essential too, is the assessment of the manipulation of space in the constitution of collective identity for it evidences the adaptive nature of belonging characterising Carnival: the role of geographical location in instigating participation and the significance of place within the Carnival in constructing a new Carnival "community".

Attempts to suppress or appropriate the event, as well as the discourse of fear often accompanying them, can only be fully understood once the nature of the specific Carnival has been interrogated. We must establish what Carnival means to its many and diverse actors, abstainers, champions and opponents. This process must be firmly situated as part of a historical dialectic of Carnival, as well as in the immediate context in which it surfaces. The manipulation and relevance of space, for instance, relates directly to contemporary economic, and political factors, thus necessitating such contextualisation.

The paltry academic engagement with the Coon Carnival since the Second World War suffers not just from its unwillingness to contextualise the event historically, or to interpret it alongside the global host of festivals begging comparison. The arguments of Western, Weichel and Jeppie are also sorely hampered by a blinkered quest for an all-encompassing interpretive schema: their goal, to assert a finite and singular meaning. Further still, it is these critics' lack of historical specificity about the participants of the Carnival that continually frustrate and contradict their analyses. For example, they are united in their declaration of the Coon Carnival as a "working-class" event, though all hint at the involvement of conflicting economic concerns; Coloured businessmen and entrepreneurs and even opportunistic White promoters. However, their common fault is the persistent failure to determine the importance or extent of this involvement. Repeatedly,

Jeppie and Western make blanket assertions as to the essential nature and character of the Coon Carnival only to subvert their argument with the exceptions that disprove the rule.

This failure to explore the cleavages and differences within the event: the tendency to paper-over fissures with the illusion of common intent (however it may be constructed), results in the inability to comprehend or adequately explain the Carnival's internal structure or its changing historical significance. Weichel, Western and, to some extent, Jeppie, are again united in their presentation of the Coon Carnival as a static affair. Thus, they approach the event seeming to search for an ultimate determining motive for involvement; to isolate an over-riding symbolic referee. In the process they fail to account for either the changing nature of Coloured society, or the concomitant shifts in the Carnival's meaning and significance. Stone goes some way to resolving this discrepancy, noting the way that "the original elements of the New Year ritual have yielded somewhat to commercialism and competitiveness" reflecting "general structural and cultural changes in the Cape Coloured Urban Community"<sup>106</sup>.

The unwillingness to account for and explain change is particularly evident in the examination of the role and position of women in the Carnival. The critics are quick to point out the absence of women from the Carnival troupes, though some (like Jeppie) note their participation in related activities such as cooking, sewing and audience participation. Stone and Jeppie are adamant in their assertion that organised participation was confined exclusively to men. Whilst Jeppie's position in this matter is difficult to condemn (for he declares his study to end in 1959), Stone's stance is founded on historical inaccuracy. From archival evidence, such as the *Cape Times* and *Cape Herald*, it is clear that women did participate in an organised fashion from 1970. The *Cape Herald* of 3/1/70, for example, states that "for the first time women...will be taking part in the Carnival...in the roles of beauty queens [one to head each troupe], princesses and drum majorettes". This failure to notice and interpret changes in the Coon Carnival, changes which are clearly evident in the

---

<sup>106</sup> Stone, 'Coon Carnival', p. 5.

oral accounts of the event<sup>107</sup> and in the newspapers of the day, result in static and incomplete analyses of the event. The tendency not to note changes in gender participation, changes in organisational hierarchy, gang-participation, sponsorship, publicity, pricing, and so on, means that the subtle shifts in the character and significance of the event have been overlooked by analysts.

Interpretations of the post-Second World War Coon Carnival seem unsatisfactory not only because they lack the empirical analysis necessary to substantiate their theoretical assertions or maintain consistent argument, but further, because they seek to explain events from within limited (and limiting) discourses. The tendency to search for general rules governing participation and significance has obscured the changes and cleavages preventing any such over-riding rule from emerging. For example, in privileging the concept of ethnic identity (though Jeppie's notion links inconsistently with class), these critics fail to see either the adaptive and diffuse nature of "Cape Coloured" identity, or to examine other discourses and determinants operating within the Carnival, such as; gender relations, religious difference, gang membership (an issue hardly mentioned by the critics yet, according to newspaper accounts, a central feature of inter-troupe rivalry and Carnival related violence), kinship allegiances, and so on.

There can be no general rule of Carnival for even within one temporally and geographically specific event like the Coon Carnival, many meanings are contained; meanings which constantly adapt and change. To comprehend what the festivities meant to its diverse actors and antagonists, to expose the many "Carnivals" which the event simultaneously represented during the sixties and seventies, these differences must be interrogated.

---

<sup>107</sup> See Western Cape Oral History Project interviews on District Six.

## **Chapter Four.**

### **Continuity and Change: The 1960s and 1970s.**

Through a close analysis of oral accounts of the “Coon Carnival” this chapter explores the assertion that during the sixties and seventies the form and essence of the event fundamentally altered. It examines the frequent refrain that the enforced removal of its “Coloured” participant community under Group Areas legislation in the late ‘60s and the banning of the Carnival road march from the city’s central streets in 1967 marked a pivotal point in the changing fortunes of the festival, initiating the decline of a unified expression of community into an occasion for immorality, degeneracy, anarchy and violence. Closely interrogating the nature of troupe hierarchy and power structures it explores the connection between Coon troupe and gang, assessing the claim that Group Areas removals precipitated a change in the essence of crime and Carnival alike.

Essentially this chapter explores the processes and structures, both individual and collective, involved in remembering the event. It notes the operation of two underlying central dynamics: a contest over the event’s metaphoric (or political) significance, and a space/identity dialectic determining both attitudes to, and participation, in the Carnival.

### **Rugby, Coons, and Conflict:**

On 25th May 1995 a global television audience of millions watched the opening ceremony of the Rugby World Cup broadcast live from Newlands stadium in Cape Town. This extravagant spectacle attempted to reflect the diverse cultural components of South Africa’s “rainbow nation”; from gum-boot dancers to praise-poets, Zulu “warriors” to modern Black pop musicians. Amongst this array nestled a band of several hundred brightly clad, parasol twirling “coons”, there as representatives of local “Cape Coloured culture”. The painted white smiles on their blackened faces however, disguised a bitter controversy around a Carnival that had been particular to the city for over a century.

Commendation and censure, assertion and denunciation of the “Coon Carnival” have sprung from a central debate over who the event belongs to; i.e. who has the right to take part, and perhaps most contested, whose interests it represents. Richard Dudley, an active member of the Trotskyist, Non-European Unity Movement [NEUM] in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s, describes a fundamental shift in the focus of opposition to the event which highlights these concerns. Whilst in the 1930s there “might have been a kind of inchoate opposition... on grounds of social class”, he states, “fifteen to twenty years later... it became an opposition based on ideology”<sup>1</sup>.

Condemnation of the Carnival, particularly by those within the “Coloured” group (as a racially defined community) has centred on two elements; firstly, the denial that an essentially working-class celebration can be taken as representing “Coloured culture” as a whole (Dudley’s first point about “class”), and secondly, the notion that there exists at all, such a thing as “Coloured culture” as a racially defined phenomenon (Dudley’s point about “ideology”). A degree of incompatibility surrounds these two viewpoints however, for whilst on the one hand Dudley suggests the argument to be over *definition*, on the other he implies that any definition would be inadequate, serving some meta-purpose. Ultimately he is unclear as to whether the Carnival expresses only one (working-class) section of the Coloured people, whether any definition of “Coloured culture” has been politically inspired by totalitarian interests, or whether no definition of Coloured culture is possible at all.

Dudley’s rejection of the Carnival was then, far from unique. Interviewees frequently point out that though they may have been involved in the Carnival, their parents distanced themselves from an event which they saw as irreligious or undignified. Dudley suggests that many politically aware “Coloureds” opposed the Carnival, believing it to epitomise and reinforce a negative and ridiculous stereotype of “Coloured” identity. The event’s support base was drawn almost exclusively from Cape Town’s “Coloured” working-class, and as a result, the “Coloured” petit-bourgeoisie (its intellectual and political elite) rejected claims to the Carnival’s representativeness of their culture. But the issue of whose “culture”, if

---

<sup>1</sup> R. O. Dudley, WCOH, p.6.

anyone's at all, the Carnival symbolised assumed most critical significance with the National Party's ascendance in 1948.

Many politically active members of the community - at least those opposed to the Nationalist government - decried the way in which Carnival played up to the notion of a distinct, homogenous and racially defined culture. Dudley asserts that involvement in the event for a significant interest group was politically motivated. The NEUM's objections were thus, not to the Carnival per se but to the way it was being "exploited...as a kind of icon in the so-called Coloured society that they [the Nationalists] were attempting to invent or re-invent"<sup>2</sup>. Dudley's scepticism was then, founded not on the event itself but on its manipulation by outside interests intent on consolidating a notion of a distinct "Coloured culture": aiding apartheid ideologues in their efforts to bolster the idea of finite, unique and separate ethnic identities with correspondent cultures and practices.

Dudley's misgivings reflect the central dilemma of the struggle for control and, ultimately, symbolic meaning of the Carnival. Whilst agreeing with the likes of Stone as to its working-class base, he feared its manipulation by the Nationalist government in their presentation of racially determined cultures. The contest for control of Carnival exists however, not merely on this abstract and symbolic level, for struggle clearly also occurs on a more concrete and overt plane with arguments over money between stadium promoters and troupe captains abounding.

The Coon Carnival has developed as a site of contest; contest for prizes, contest for profit, contest for metaphoric significance. All these aspects of contestation surfaced around the participation of the "coons" at the opening ceremony of the Rugby World Cup. In addition to historically familiar criticism of the entertainers as degrading and misrepresentative stereotypes of "Coloured culture" a more fiery battle raged over who exactly these "coons" were and who was profiting from their performance. Established troupe captains claimed that they had been approached by Rugby organisers to perform at the opening only to be

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

undercut by a loose amalgam of untrained African township children, enticed with promises of food and clothes in return for participation. In an ironic twist, the next match at Newlands saw many of the same impromptu “coons”, stripped of the bright regalia loaned to them only for the opening ceremony, protesting at the stadium gates. Rugby officials, they claimed, had reneged on their side of the deal. The children had played their part in the extravagant spectacle but had received nothing in return.

This conflict, arising in 1995, epitomised rifts and divisions that had riven the event for decades. Those who participated as “coons” were not those who reaped the financial rewards of their performance. Even more ironically in this case, these ambassadors of “Cape Coloured culture” were not even drawn from amongst the community of historically established troupes but from township recruits with little claim to the Carnival’s history or tradition.

Dudley’s claims regarding the manipulation of the event by political interests eager to foster and develop notions of distinct and racially defined cultural groups, exemplifies the historical debate as to just whose Carnival it is. Claims and denials as to representativeness have abounded since the inception of the event yet appear to have reached their zenith during the consolidation of apartheid ideology and practice in the late sixties and seventies. Though the disharmony surrounding the “coons” participation in the Rugby Opening Ceremony in May 1995 had historical roots stretching back over a century, the heart of the conflict seemed to reflect divisions and discord fostered in the years of Nationalist Government. As a result, in order to attempt to disentangle the web of the Coon Carnival today, the changes and continuities of the event in the sixties and seventies must be assessed.

The concern of this chapter is not to examine the testimonies of informants in an effort to squeeze their narratives into a pre-conceived critical framework. Rather, it is an attempt to explore the form and content of the narratives themselves: to examine the way they collectively and individually, weave their own logic and coherence whilst simultaneously

reflecting frictions, divisions and conflict. It is an attempt to look at the way in which a cultural event is remembered. Though this remembering contrasts eras of Carnival polarised around Group Areas, close interrogation of the testimonies reveals an underlying discourse of Carnival as a constant process of historical change and adaptation.

**Continuity and Change - the 1960s and '70s:**

Deeply ingrained within oral accounts of Coon Carnival participants of the 1960s and 1970s is a nostalgia glorifying the event's past. Without vigorous interrogation this romanticisation threatens to paper over the fissures that clearly divided different interest groups involved at the time. A contrast is repeatedly drawn by interviewees between the tightly disciplined troupe organisation of years gone, and the anarchic disorder of contemporary coon troupes. Such contrasts are validated by frequent reference to changes in gangsterism; from vigilante groups with admirable and unswerving social consciences, fiercely protective of their neighbourhood communities, to lawless gun-toting hoodlums with no allegiances or interests beyond those of their own material gain.

Older informants in particular, lament the death of a Carnival that was both spontaneous and chaotic, and at the same time, controlled and peaceful, implicitly contained within the limits of community consensus. Oral testimonies tend to agree that the change took place towards the end of the 1970s. During this period, it is asserted, gangs metamorphosed from social-heroes to amoral, heartless villains. At the same time, Carnival itself was transformed into an anarchic display, teetering over an abyss of uncontrollable violence. Greed took over from the pleasure of giving something to the community as the primary motive for coon captains' involvement. Repeatedly too, an image of moral decline is suggested by the increasing and undignified participation of women in the seventies; for Carnival in the sixties was seen as the almost exclusive preserve of men.

This romanticisation of Carnival past correlates directly with the nostalgic glamourisation of gangs prior to Coloured removals from Cape Town. In so doing, it reinforces an apparently critical link between coon troupe and gang. Underlying this is the suggestion that the

enforced movement of Coloureds from inner Cape Town to the Cape Flats precipitated a change in the essence of Coloured gangs, and with it, a fundamental shift in the focus of Carnival.

Carnival mutated not just in form and content during these decades, interviewees claim, but also in significance and motivation for involvement. Radifa Thompson echoes the reminiscences of many in her comparison of the event in the sixties with today:

It's a vast difference from what it was years ago than it is today. Today it's just a competition score in the back of their minds... not the enjoyment... before it was the enjoyment... the love of the game<sup>3</sup>

Whilst such contrast is a frequent refrain, it would be short-sighted to interpret it as the simple reflection of a change in the essence of the event. Thompson's stark comparison of the event in the sixties and now, exemplifies the tendency to portray Carnival before Group Areas as unproblematically harmonious. It is revealing too in that it reflects a negativity bound intimately with the escalation of competition: the implication that rivalry has replaced fun.

Though significant changes do seem to have taken place during these years, some of these transformations are subtle rather than violent and unmediated and fit into a longer historical continuum of social and cultural adaptation. Oral narratives blame the adverse effects of dispossession, enforced removal and relocation on the Carnival as primarily responsible for change in the event. Yet it is clear that much of what is cited as negative are the products of factors unrelated to the Act or its implementation. In other words, while the binary opposition set up by the interviewees in their memories of the event (it was fun before the Group Areas Act, afterwards it was not), the reasons that they give for its demise seem frequently the product of other influences.

---

<sup>3</sup> R. Thompson, WCOH, p. 38.

Eddie Matthews, for instance, locates a primary source of change with the introduction of paid, professional musicians. In the sixties, he relates:

All musicians used to be free. They never... got paid... they were only too happy to go with the coons. All you do, well you just supply them with drinks... When you started hiring a full band you see, with blowing instruments... from there on it's paying all the way now.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the move towards paid musicians and bands, and the increasing substitution of stringed instruments with brass had little obvious connection with Group Areas. Matthews however, reinforces a link commonly drawn between the commercialisation of Carnival and its demise as a source of fun. He suggests that where the event essentially changed was in its transformation from an occasion of free, spontaneous and friendly competition, into one of intense rivalry, exacerbated by the involvement of numerous commercial interests.

Maddenie Salie and Kassiem Khan make a similar point, insisting that, in the past participation was:

...just for the fun of it, you know what I mean, for the fun of it... but today it's all about that prize you know.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Radifa Thompson and her husband mourn the predominance of finance and payment as the primary motivating factors replacing enjoyment for musicians in the event:

Radifa: Years ago they never paid these people... it's only today. I think people are just in the way of making money.  
 Karriem: Yes. Nothing else but money.<sup>6</sup>

The commercialisation of the musical sphere of the Coon Carnival cannot be interpreted in isolation however, as merely reflecting the general commercialisation of the event as a whole. Rather, it must be viewed as part of a much wider cultural process, involving the

---

<sup>4</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> M. Salie and K. Khan, WCOH, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> R. Thompson, WCOH, p. 14.

simultaneous, and global, commercialisation of popular music and musicians. Located within this far broader historical context it becomes more difficult to accept claims of the introduction of paid performers, for instance, as symbolising a fundamental shift in the basis of the Carnival. Instead the Carnival is itself contextualised; located within a broad dialectic of cultural adaptation and transition. In similar vein, the increasing use of brass, and then electric, instruments, in place of strings, must not be viewed as the straightforward trashing of tradition, for it too mirrors cultural and musical patterns and trends acting on a much wider scale to influence the event.

Indeed, the Coon Carnival has never taken place in a cultural vacuum but has occurred in critical and symbiotic relation to other cultural forces. The acute influence of American popular culture in particular on the Carnival is reflected in everything from the naming of troupes and the design of costumes, to the songs performed and the assumed identities of *moffies*<sup>7</sup> and clowns. Salie and Khan proudly remember, for instance, Cape Town's "Jerry... the drum major ...from Bonteheuwal", named after "Jerry Lewis... the American comedian"<sup>8</sup>. Abe Sheldon, similarly recalls the beautiful moffie from Claremont, "Piper Laurie", named after the "American... film star"<sup>9</sup>.

It is not difficult to trace the sources of these cultural influences or the roots of an apparent fascination with American style and fashion. Nasson proclaims that "cinema-going was indisputably the most popular form of urban working-class recreation in the later inter-war years, and right through the 1940s and 1950s. Attendance was regular and habitual with the lure of American and British films assuming a dominant role both in working-class leisure... and in the life of the young"<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, he asserts, the cinema "assumed a location in community life not unlike that of the English pub". Furthermore, it differed markedly from other forms of entertainment like street gambling and sports clubs, in that men and

---

<sup>7</sup> The term *moffie* is one applied to both homosexuals and transvestites. In the context of the Coon Carnival I use it to denote the latter; those men who paraded dressed as women. It is clear from the interviews, however, that New Year's transvestites were invariably homosexual. This is an important point to note for a more detailed analysis of sexual and gender inversion and reversal in the ritualised context of festival.

<sup>8</sup> Salie and Khan, WCOH, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 19.

women both participated together. Sheldon stresses that regular visits to the bioscope to see serials such as “Zorro” were often infinitely more attractive than the prospect of attending troupe rehearsals:

...don't forget we also had to go to bioscope, so we can't go bioscope on singing nights because we've got to practice... ..we wanted to go and see a serial the one night, the one on Saturdays...so now the coons come second.<sup>11</sup>

Regular visits to the cinema to see American films evidently acted as significant influences on the thinking of troupe captains in their annual design and planning of costumes and the composition and selection of songs. Sheldon, for instance, remembers the year his troupe sang Al Jolson's “anniversary waltz”<sup>12</sup>. Eddie Matthews too, in explaining the reasons for his choice of troupe name and uniform design in the sixties, refers to the influence of cinema:

Well we just decided to be the Checkers [Cape Town Checkers] that's all. We always used to wear check material. You know those loud checks, those big checks, like they have in the movies.<sup>13</sup>

This overt connection between the direction of American culture and trends within the Carnival serves to demonstrate its situation within a broader framework of cultural influence and adaptation. All this being said, the repeatedly stressed commercialisation of music and competition contained in the event, clearly did have serious implications for many other related aspects of Carnival.

Informants frequently attribute the alleged escalation in violence at the Carnival to a rise in gang-involvement with the troupes, and most critically, to a notion of a growing ferocity and lack of social conscience of gangsters. Radifa Thompson, structuring her conception of change and moral decline of the event around Group Areas and its effect on gang activity,

---

<sup>10</sup> Nasson, ‘Oral history’, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 6.

traces the ills of today's Carnival to the lack of parental presence and discipline on children after the removals. "When people were moved out to the Flats", she insists, "children were left alone" as their parents commuted miles into the city-centre to work. "Children, when they are left alone with nothing to do", she continues:

play naughty... become naughty or delinquents because they don't get the love and attention that a child can have from it's parents.... That is the result... those people who are in the coons today, who are doing all those wrong things... smoking the opium and doing the wrong things... this started when people had to move out of Cape Town.<sup>14</sup>

Thompson is not alone in her perception of Carnival before the removals as relatively peaceful, harmonious and law-abiding. She implies that the onset of the seventies, with the new backdrop of the Cape Flats, brought with it the intensification of rivalry to the point of violent competition. Her attribution of this new and ugly antagonism to a combination of gang-involvement and commercial interests, is similarly a common one. In highlighting Group Areas as the sole cause of these changes however, she simplifies a complex scenario and relies on several problematic assumptions.

The implementation of the Group Areas Act, she asserts, destroyed the fabric of family-life, corrupted children - who then joined gangs - and ultimately disrupted the Carnival. Furthermore, she relates, simultaneously, the desire for financial profit became the prime incentive for a new breed of troupe captains. Her implication is that gangs prior to Group Areas, had little direct involvement with the Carnival, and when they did, there was never much trouble as gangsters in those days were essentially nice "Guys", respectful of their elders and loyal to their neighbourhoods.

Such claims necessitate closer interrogation for oral accounts of the Coon Carnival constantly infer a link between local gang allegiance and troupe membership. Repeatedly informants allude to a relationship between prison, gang and troupe identity, suggesting interconnected and often overlapping organisation<sup>a</sup> structures operating between the three

spheres. In similar vein, Turner and Jensen note that “there is always a close relation and exchange between prison and street”<sup>15</sup>, indeed, that “the prison is part of the street”<sup>16</sup>, and that “ganglife involves both”. It is thus important to determine the extent of these connections; the level to which these arenas were linked and, by extension, the degree to which displacement altered gang ideology and structure, and resonated within Carnival organisation.

Thompson’s insistence on the connection between Group Areas, the proliferation of gangsterism and the disruption of family life is in direct keeping with Pinnock’s claims regarding the impact of Group Areas and the development of gangs on the Cape Flats.

Pinnock identifies as the prime motivation for urban gang formation, the collapse of family life, and more specifically, of the “extended family”, which had hitherto acted as the “catch-net of the urban poor”<sup>17</sup>. Relocation of people to disparate and alien suburbs he claims, disrupted the fabric of social and family control. Furthermore, with many parents away from home for longer hours as they commuted to work in town, children were left without supervision and discipline and turned to gangs as replacement social networks offering “alternative maps of meaning”<sup>18</sup> for the precious collective support of the extended family torn apart by Group Areas removals.

In his discussion of Amalaita<sup>19</sup> youth gangs in Durban, La Hausse quotes from a 1929 Mission report attributing gang activity to the result of “massive social dislocation”<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> R. Thompson, WCOH, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Turner and Jensen, ‘A Place called Heideveld’, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> D. Pinnock, the brotherhoods: street gangs and state control in Cape Town, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1984), p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Argument exists around the definition of exactly what these gangs were. Broadly, La Hausse sums them up as urban youth gangs appearing in Durban around the turn of this century. Comprised of semi-urbanised young men, many of whom were recent migrants from the Rand, La Hausse describes their organisations as negotiating some informal cultural syncretism between rural and city experience. Structured around age, territory and occupational status, he sees the forms of these groups to lie partly with traditional age-group collectives, interacting in the new urban context to articulate a relevant, new, urban identity. Importantly too, in discussing the criminal activity of some Amalaita, he notes the frequent overlap between prison

Similar to Pinnock, La Hausse infers a connection between geographical displacement and gang formation as a technique for urban survival to counter the psychological and physical disruption of the extended family network. Drawing together the organisations of gang and troupe in his phrase “gang troupes”, Pinnock claims the 1970s “decline” in the event’s popularity stemmed from the “illicit activities” and “latent violence”<sup>21</sup> of a displaced youth. The potential violence threatened by the proliferation of increasingly menacing gangs, he expands, precipitated the Carnival’s confinement from the streets to stadiums and fixed, contained venues.

However, whilst for Pinnock the essential cause of gang formation was geographical displacement and the accompanying demise of the extended family, Humphries and Glaser differ considerably from him in identifying the primary motivating factor to be the more general consideration of familiar space and territoriality.

Humphries, writing on the working-class youth gangs of urban England at the turn of the century, claims groups were “defined more in opposition to rival streets than in terms of any distinctive internal structure and identity [and] originated essentially in the overcrowding of families in densely packed neighbourhoods in which the street was the only available play and leisure place for the young”<sup>22</sup>. Contrary to Pinnock, gang coherence here derives from an intense neighbourhood familiarity, the common experience of a known local environment. That space and geography are of central concern to such groups is borne out by the frequency of inter-gang violence centred on territory and territorial possessions, like for example the ownership of local women<sup>23</sup>, as well as by the specific naming of factional

---

socialisation and gang membership. For a full discussion of the Amalaita, see P. La Hausse, ‘*Mayihlome!*: towards an understanding of Amalaita gangs in Durban. c. 1900-1930’, in S. Clingman, S (ed.), Regions and Repertoires: Topics in South African Politics and Culture. South African Studies, Vol. 6. (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> S. Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939. (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981), p. 178.

<sup>23</sup> See M. Brake, Chapter 7, ‘The invisible girl - the culture of femininity versus masculinism’, in his Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subculture in America, Britain and Canada, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985), for a discussion of the structurally peripheral position of women and girls in urban youth subcultures and gangs

groups. Humphries is emphatic in his insistence that conflict was “rooted in street pride and rivalry”. Gangs’ “concern with the aggressive assertion of territorial identity was reflected in the names they adopted, which were often based on the street or neighbourhood where the members lived”<sup>24</sup>.

Pinnock’s claim is the direct inverse for he perceives gang formation to result from the displacement from a known environment to disparate and unfamiliar new areas. Glaser, like Humphries, contradicts the premise of Pinnock’s insistence, rejecting the notion of “gang-troupe” threat and violence as direct consequences of Group Areas removals. Though Glaser’s specific focus is urban gangs on the Rand, he comments on Pinnock’s connection between removals and the formation of gangs on the Cape Flats. His work suggests that it is misconceived to simply attribute the “decline” of Carnival to the violence of “gang-troupes” arising as a result of relocation, for such groups invariably emerge from within a feeling of spatial belonging and familiarity.

As central evidence to his critique, he presents the discrepancy in time between relocation and the emergence of Cape Flats gangs. Pinnock’s claim that gangs emerged in response to the removal, disparate youth cohering around a new and unfamiliar locality to construct a novel and defensive group solidarity, stands in opposition to the delayed growth of such gangs. Pinnock, Glaser insists:

fails to explain why “defensive” youth gangs emerged on the Cape Flats only around 1980, a considerable time lag given that the bulk of relocation took place between the mid 1960s and mid 1970s. If gang formation were indeed a response to dislocation, gangs, according to Pinnock’s model, would have formed in the earliest stages of relocation.<sup>25</sup>

Glaser claims his argument, as to the centrality of an intimately known neighbourhood in establishing gang coherence and legitimacy, as universally applicable. “Territoriality”, he insists, “is common to all youth gang subcultures. Gangs attempt to establish territorial

---

<sup>24</sup> Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels, p. 188.

rights over a particular area in order to secure access to local facilities, women and sources of accumulation”, Glaser goes on. “A gang develops prestige in its turf. It follows that the size of the turf itself determines prestige within the subculture”<sup>26</sup>. While battle for women, economic resources, status and physical space are all characteristic components of gangs, according to Glaser, they derive their legitimacy, energy and coherence essentially from their common locality. Similarly, though Humphries views the “overcrowding of families in densely packed neighbourhoods” as the spur for aggressive urban gang formation, such a factor acted as a catalyst and not to validate, consolidate or legitimate group formation.

This inextricable connection to parochial territory is borne out by the prominence of neighbourhood in the names and membership patterns of Capetonian Coon troupes and gangs. The *Woodstock Starlights* for instance, prioritise their geographic origins in their name. This troupe is invariably associated by informants, with the *Stalags*, a central Cape Town gang. A clear and fundamental perceptual connection between space/neighbourhood and gang and troupe membership and belonging is alluded to repeatedly in the narratives.

Glaser argues for the uncoupling of gangs and crime into separate phenomena, asserting that though crime and delinquency appear as direct and immediate products of dislocation, structured gangs and organised, related crime arose only after a “time-lag”. He emphasises the centrality of neighbourhood and locality: a shared and established conception of familiar territory, in the establishment of urban gang fraternities. Thus, he insists, though dispossession and relocation may indeed be precursors to a rise in crime, organised and structured gang activity will only flourish after potential members have had time to settle, to organise, to form and establish communal links and networks in their new environments.

---

<sup>25</sup> C. L. Glaser, *Urban Youth Culture and Political Mobilisation: A Comparative Perspective*, (Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge University, 1994), p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The conceptual polarisation of pre-removal, innocently playful “gang-troupes”, and their post-removal metamorphosis into ruthless and amoral villains seems somewhat inaccurate.<sup>27</sup> What is interesting, however, is that this polarisation occurs at all and, in the narratives of informants is so often pivoted on the fulcrum of Group Areas. Though Pinnock detracts from the validity of his argument through conflating organised gang activity with disorganised crime and delinquency (failing to account for Glaser’s “time-lag” in gang formation) the same cannot be said of the oral testimonies of informants. It matters less whether “gang-troupes” actually became more violent as a result of displacement and more that interviewees *remember* this to be the case<sup>28</sup>.

Fagmeijah Jansen’s description of gangs in the sixties exemplifies their mythical portrayal as fun-loving, harmless rogues. Such romanticised glorification of a pre-removal “Golden Age”; characterised by harmless gangs, a harmonious and peaceful Carnival, is a frequent tendency of informants regardless of age or gender<sup>29</sup>. Fagmeijah explains her non-attendance of the Carnival today in relation to an escalation in violence at the event, resulting from a change in the nature of gangsterism. In those days, she states:

You weren’t afraid to go into that because... no-one will actually terrorise you... you were very safe. [They] were... there, but they never harmed the people... that was the thing about that time. They never harmed the people. You could be very safe you know, so it was not actually harmful to be with them because they actually were playful, because their faces being black... they came past you, they take their finger onto your face and they put a mark on your face, you know, like that, so it was actually quite exciting.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> It must however, be conceded, that gang activity in 1996 is of a different volume and scale to thirty years ago. A brief comparison of newspapers from then and now reveals a significant shift in the type of weapons used and a vast increase in related deaths. Sophisticated guns and even grenades have come to replace knives. Undoubtedly too, gangster-activity has moved to a much wider and more “professional” level, with claims of strong links within the police force and international drug cartels.

<sup>28</sup> It should be remembered that there *were* territorial gangs prior to removals in central Cape Town, who, according to writings on District Six and the testimonies of informants, had critical territorial connections; drawing legitimacy and membership from specific localities.

<sup>29</sup> Testimonies of those dispossessed and/or relocated as a result of Group Areas invariably assume this pattern of comparison between a pre-removal, mythical, “Golden Age”, free from conflict and social friction, and a post-removal world of moral, social and spiritual decay. See other WCOH transcripts and papers.

<sup>30</sup> Jansen, WCOH, p. 3.

Abe Sheldon<sup>31</sup>, similarly insists that acute social consciences governed the actions of petty-criminals who, on realising that one of their gang had stolen from a local's mother, would return the pickings, shame-faced. Sheldon insists further, that any latent antagonism between rival gangs was suspended for the duration of the Carnival:

Look, when it comes to the Coon Carnival there's no such thing as a gang, it's out, that's out. We are one... There wasn't the animosity of today.<sup>32</sup>

Jansen and Sheldon are far from unique in their depiction of post-removal harmony between gang and community, and of playful and mischievous humour over New Year. However, neither are their testimonies alone in simultaneously subverting their own claims with accounts of intricate gang-troupe connections and overlaps in hierarchy, membership, and related violence operating long before implementation of the Act. Jansen, for example, after insisting emphatically on the harmlessness of gangs prior to removals, explains that her parents never liked her to attend the stadium competitions even then:

At that time our parents never actually liked us to go to the Green Point Track... There were a lot of fighting... between them... It was just part of their gang culture, fighting one another over the cups... especially the final.<sup>33</sup>

Sheldon, formerly both an active gang member and coon participant, outlines a history of interconnection between gang and troupe structures, simultaneously suggesting common power relations and hierarchies of authority in all three. For example, discussing the level of involvement of one renowned and prominent prison gangster in the coons in the 1960s, he declares:

He's a Tough Guy. He's a Big Boy. So he stays a Big Boy... because he wouldn't lower his status... they don't lower their status, they stay up there. They were the Big Boys.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Jansen, WCOH, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 35.

Scharf describes a remarkably similar connection in his discussion of African mapantsula dance troupes in the 1980s in Cape Town. These groups, he suggests, like the coons, “created, rehearsed and performed certain dances and held competitions”<sup>35</sup>. Though his study says little of the comparative hierarchies of African gangs, mapantsula groups and prison fraternities, he notes the interconnectedness of the three spheres of dance troupe, prison and gang, in the frequent route into one through the others. Intense inter-troupe rivalry at competitions, for instance, often assumed territorial connotations very quickly. He states that with “dance groups... usually composed of youths who resided in a particular area, skirmishes became a matter of protecting territory”<sup>36</sup>. In this way, mapantsula groups “came to be seen as street gangs”.

Perhaps the inevitable question arises here as to which came first; dance-group, gang, prison experience, or common territorial allegiance. Such a problem is not only impossible to resolve by anything other than speculation, at least as far as the Coon Carnival goes, but misses the essence of the interactive and adaptive nature or the relationship between the spheres. The nature of this interdeterminancy insists that it is of less relevance or importance that, for example, dance-groups preceded prison fraternities. Indeed, more fundamental to understanding the core of the experience is the way in which prison fraternities were articulated in the dance groups, how dance groups, in turn, quickly assumed territorial connotations and were perceived by observers as territorial gangs. Of primary significance then, is the interchangeability of these spheres, their points of constant overlap at times blurring the notion that they exist as separate spheres at all.

Though Pinnock elaborates little on this overlap he does note the frequency with which coon captains were “shebeen owners or gang leaders”<sup>37</sup> as well as a conspicuous dominance of “tailors” on Carnival boards. The practical advantage of this, he suggests,

---

<sup>35</sup> W. Scharf, ‘The resurgence of urban street gangs and community responses in Cape Town during the late eighties’, in *Towards Justice? Crime and State Control in South Africa*, Hansson, D. and Van Zyl Smit, D. (eds.), (OUP, Cape Town, 1990), p. 241.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

lay in the fact that the captain would have an automatic and ready formed constituency for his troupe: "Around October practices would begin, the captain having a ready troupe of shebeen regulars or gang members".

Sheldon conveys a scenario where, even prior to Group Areas, gang and troupe influence were almost interchangeable. Maddenie Salie lends support to this theory, stating that the position at the pinnacle of the troupe hierarchy, that of "captain", was invariably occupied by an individual who held a parallel position in gang, or illicit, spheres outside the Carnival throughout the rest of the year. Captains in the 1970s, he recalls, were "old men" and mostly "what we'll term as Big Timers"<sup>38</sup>. Though such men were not necessarily gangsters, he claims, "they will do some illegal thing, like say having a shebeen"<sup>39</sup>.

For Adiel Mohammed however, this power was not an abstract force but primarily related to concrete financial investment. Money, he insists, bought position and prestige within troupe hierarchy. Captains, he continues, must have "financial input into the group"<sup>40</sup>. In this way, he draws a critical differentiation between the occupations of those at the top of the organisational structure and the masses beneath them, noting that captains were:

mostly hawkers.. like self-employed, although most of the guys also work for bosses, but the captains are mostly people that's either self-employed through selling fruits and veg and what else.<sup>41</sup>

Significantly though, he notes that neither captains nor ordinary members were ever professional people: "it's never doctors and lawyers, that I can tell you. It's the ordinary people, the bread-earners that is the ones that is normally part of the coons"<sup>42</sup>.

---

<sup>37</sup> Pinnock, *the brotherhoods*, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Salie, WCOH, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Mohammed, WCOH, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

Oral informants thus attest to a fundamental link, indeed an interdependency, between gang and troupe long before Group Areas. Similarly, they imply that profit and commercial gain motivated the involvement of captains well before their removal to the Cape Flats.

This relationship between financial clout, the potential for capital investment, and position in troupe hierarchy is one demanding explanation for it bears too on the connection between occupational status and position in the Carnival hierarchy. Informants are united in their reference to a consistent set of expectations and provisions which it was the responsibility of the captain to fulfill. Primarily the captain had to provide a rehearsal venue in the months preceding the Carnival, and see to the design, provision and sale of the uniforms, the organisation of a musical coach to teach the troupe songs, and a band to accompany them. With capital the sole means to secure these criteria, and due to the fact that the financial outlay preceded (by months) a return that was by no means guaranteed, the captain had to be in a position to take significant financial gambles.

Eddie Matthews, himself a troupe captain in the sixties and seventies defines this role at the pinnacle of the troupe structure as one of chief authority, primarily concerned with the financial running of the operation. Though informants such as he, (those located at the higher levels of involvement and capital investment) frequently allude to the non-profitability of running a troupe and their annual financial shortfall, it is significant that his description utilises the vocabulary of a commercial business:

I'll say I was the, the, the... promoter of that coons, but I had helpers, you've got to have helpers. You've got to have people, you've got to have a book-keeper, you've got to have a coach, you know, train your... because I'm the one that sees to the uniform and all that kind of stuff, to the money spending, that's the main thing.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 8.

Such a pattern explains the predominance of, particularly tailors on Carnival boards and as troupe captains<sup>44</sup>. Tailors, through sewing troupe uniforms as well as being on organisational boards, were effectively able to establish a market, consolidate and harness a demand (in the form of a troupe), which they then filled. It is significant that this market seems never to have been an entirely “free” one for customers’ choice to shop elsewhere was limited. Captains, if they were not tailors themselves, had their own private agreements with people who sewed the costumes. Ordinary members bought their “gear” at the price established by the captain and tailor. The *Muslim News* paper noted that if the “poor coon” was “allowed to make his own costume it would come out to a fraction of the money he has to pay to his captain”<sup>45</sup>.

Money was to be made not just from the sale of uniforms however. Perhaps the most significant financial return was netted in the form of gate-takings at Carnival competition venues like Green Point Track and Hartleyvale stadium. Supporting Pinnock’s observation as to the predominance of tailors on Carnival boards of control, (i.e. the promoters who profited from these ticket sales) Matthews relates that the main two promoters of the sixties and seventies were Sonny Lloyd<sup>46</sup> and Hadji Levy, both tailors<sup>47</sup>.

The *Muslim News* ran editorials viciously condemning the event and re-enforcing the notion that there was significant profit to be made from the Carnival by captains and tailors. Under the headline “Ban All Coons” in 1964, the paper declared:

---

<sup>44</sup> Pinnock notes this predominance of tailors on carnival boards, though he does not posit any possible explanation for it. He observes, however, that the “rise in popularity of the Carnival coincided with the growth of clothing factories in Cape Town, and points out that troupe uniforms offered work to self-employed tailors who were being usurped by white run and owned factory production. Pinnock, *the brotherhoods*, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Muslim News*, (10/1/64).

<sup>46</sup> Matthews points out that Sonny Lloyd, tailor and promoter of the Hartleyvale event was a “Jew man” and a “white guy”. This seems particularly significant in the context of race and its relation to carnival hierarchy. Informants are unanimous in their insistence that whites did not participate as rank-and-file coon members, nor were they captains. White involvement appears to have fallen into three clearly identifiable groups; as an audience, as judges of the competition, and, as exemplified by Lloyd, in the role of financial investment and monetary gain as promoters. E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*.

The Coon Carnival boards are the number one bloodsuckers. They are in direct charge of all the takings at the show grounds. Next in line for a lick at the lolly are the coon captains.... Each coon joining is a prospective banking account for the captain.<sup>48</sup>

This excerpt is of particular interest for it contradicts the frequent lament that it was not until the seventies that anyone other than a few promoters gained financially from the event.

Karriem and Radifa Thompson insist that the Carnival changed only in the late sixties when tailors and captains broke the tradition of only handing out uniforms on New Year's Eve, instead distributing them before to ensure early payment. At the same time, they claim, captains began to "sell wine.. and sell dagga.. at rehearsal times... from a special room"<sup>49</sup>.

The Thomsons echo a familiar refrain in their declaration that:

Our time we never had that, never ever. Nobody sells wine.. or dagga to those guys... because...decent Muslim guys they had those coon troupes at that time, but today you'll find the skollie boy, drug merchants, they have Coon Carnival, they have the coon troupes.<sup>50</sup>

Claims insisting on the fundamental shift in the essence of the event accompanying a change in troupe leaderships and their motives for involvement, are common. Such testimonies evoke the image of a past event sponsored by benevolent, community spirited troupe captains, replaced around the seventies, by drug-lords, gangsters and avaricious entrepreneurs. Whilst there are those, like Matthews, who maintain that there has never been money in the event for anyone other than the promoters at the top, it seems likely that there has always been some potential for capital gain by other interests. Certainly, the insistence of those like the Thomsons, that the gang-troupe connection is a new commercial venture, are far from accurate. What seems more likely is that the need for financial investment has, in recent years, increased, with, for instance, the commercialisation and growing competitiveness of the music industry.

---

<sup>48</sup> Muslim News, (10/1/64).

<sup>49</sup> Thomsons, WCOH, p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Many informants emphasise as fundamental to the changes in Carnival the introduction of brass instruments and electric instruments in the seventies, replacing traditional stringed instruments like the mandolin, guitar, and the ghomma drum. Eddie Matthews explains that the string musicians “used to be free. They never.. got paid”<sup>51</sup> and were “only too happy” just to play for drinks. However, with the introduction of “blowing instruments”, captains had to “hire” a full band and “from there on it’s paying all the way now”. This subtle, but significant, change in musical style, from traditional, untrained<sup>52</sup>, and free musicians, to professional ones, evidences not merely the growing commercialisation of the Carnival but also its cultural adaptability, it’s ability to mutate and adapt to new historical contexts.

The shift from unpaid amateurs to professional performers, highlights an increasing need for large financial outlay by the captains to pay performers. In turn, this emphasises perhaps, the increased necessity of securing a large paying membership (to pay for the band’s hire), and thus the growing emphasis on winning the competition, not just taking part (in order to attract the members). Thus, an alternative view as to reasons for an increase in inter-troupe rivalry and violence surfaces. Rather than factional animosity being attributed only to an escalation in gang violence stemming from relocation under Group Areas, it emerges in relation to economic changes as well. The growing commercialisation and competition of music and musicians, inevitably had serious ramifications on the Coon Carnival, placing added financial concerns on troupe captains. Accusations of greed made regarding captains, and claims that their attitude to finance and profit changed in the seventies, must thus be seen in relation to wider cultural and economic factors, most notably, the commercialisation of popular music.

Undoubtedly, other factors during this period after removals exacerbated the commercial aspect of the Carnival placing increased financial pressures on troupe captains. With

---

<sup>51</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Informants insist that the musicians who played at the Coon Carnival and in the Malay Choirs had no *formal* training but played by ear and were taught by their fathers and grandfathers who had learnt in the same way.

members no longer living close to their club-houses it became risky for captains to rely on all their members turning up on New Year's Eve to pay outstanding debts and collect their uniforms. Captains needed large amounts of expendable cash in advance to secure not only the accompaniment of professional bands, but to hire transport from the Cape Flats to Town and the stadium competition venues. This increased financial burden is clearly reflected a letter from the Secretary of the Athlone and District Coon Carnival Board, Mr. Majiet, to the Town Clerk in December 1975. After securing all the necessary permission required under the stipulations of the 1973 Gatherings Act to stage a road march in Cape Town, he finds his Board is unable to go ahead with it due to finances:

Soon after receiving permission from the Police and Chief Magistrate to stage this march, we wrote and interviewed numerous firms for a sponsorship to defray travelling expenses for our troupes from the various housing schemes to Town and back to Athlone. Unfortunately up to date we have been unsuccessful in getting a sponsorship and in the circumstances have to cancel this year's march. Meanwhile we sincerely thank the City Council for having granted us the necessary permit.<sup>53</sup>

In this light, it is short-sighted to interpret the growing commercialism of the Carnival (reflected in captains' early selling of uniforms or their attempts to secure sponsorship, for example) as indicative of a new breed of avaricious, self-interested captains. Evidently, this period saw new financial burdens resulting from the dislocation of removals, placed on troupe organisers. To combat these contemporary obstacles, particularly the problem of transport, captains had to adapt.

Frequently, captains and tailors held positions of considerable power within Carnival structures. This authority was derived through an amalgam of channels but primarily through financial status, though this capital had to be readily accessible and expendable, so explaining a predominance of self-employed entrepreneurs from the informal sector. Certain employment sectors similarly enhanced potential for festive authority, notably

---

<sup>53</sup> Letter to the Town Clerk from M, J. Majiet. Secretary of Athlone and District Coon Carnival Board. Dated 24/12/75. In Cape Town City Council records, file GM 25/3. Pedestrian Processions, 1968 onwards.

smaller, non-White owned tailoring concerns, as well as gang connections, both of which also provided ready-constituted markets for costumes and membership.

The significance of control by troupe captains and tailors of design, production and sale of Carnival apparel, as well as of the composition and selection of music and song, is critical to an understanding of apparatuses of power and dominance within the event. In his discussion of “fiestas and social control in rural Mexico” Brandes asserts that the issue of “who finances” the celebrations lies at the “core of the organisational process”<sup>54</sup>. Such a claim is particularly pertinent to a discussion of structures of meaning and control within the Coon Carnival, for not only was the captain, through his financial investment, able to exert concrete and physical strength, but his power was borne out further at an aesthetic level. For, in his capacity to select and veto the uniform and song of a troupe, he retained the monopoly of control at a symbolic level too. Thus a pattern emerges whereby status and dominance in one sector, for example, in the gang or informal sector, often influenced control of metaphoric signification in the cultural sphere of Carnival. The two sectors however, by no means directly or consistently mirrored one another, for other factors also influenced power within troupe hierarchies.

Abe Sheldon observes a connection between self-employed occupational status and superior troupe position, with captains frequently men who “had their own businesses like selling fish, and hawkers, they had perhaps three or four little guys working for them”.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to Adiel Mohammed’s assertion that age and money were the primary sources of value commanding the respect needed for the position of captain, Abe Sheldon alludes to a further index of power and status in operation. He claims that older men were more likely to be found at the second level of the troupe power structure than at the pinnacle. Status earned chiefly by age would thus be more likely to locate a man in the position of lieutenant rather than captain:

---

<sup>54</sup> S. Brandes, Power and Persuasion: Fiestas and Social Control in Rural Mexico, (University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 1988), p. 40.

<sup>55</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 5.

You would have a lot of older guys but they would be like his [the captain's] lieutenants, you know, because don't forget, the name of the game was still money, you had to have the money at least you know, and also you must have a bit of... you must be The Guy, you must be The Guy.<sup>56</sup>

Sheldon's repeated stress and emphasis of nouns and definite articles for instance, "The Guy", and "the Big Boys"<sup>57</sup>, alludes to the operation of an index of social value and corresponding power which is not necessarily related to financial or occupational status. Maddenie Salie similarly utilises such a discourse in his discussion of "The Big Timers" running troupes. It is within this more vague and unspecified value sphere that real power within the event appears to be located. Such a category emerges as the product of combination of spheres of influence, power, dominance, and control, culminating in a near mystical elevated status within the festive arena.

Further factors emerge from this repeated mention of "Boys" and "Guys", illuminating other powerful influences<sup>5</sup> bearing on troupe organisational structure. Firstly, such language stresses the fundamentally gendered orientation of participation, in the emphasis of collective masculine nouns. Informants suggest that women did participate increasingly (though Radifa Thompson insists that it was only women not "reared in the proper manner... not polished enough"<sup>58</sup>, and Eddie Matthews, that it was "especially the more lesbian women"<sup>59</sup> who took part) yet it is of critical significance that informants speak of the collective taking part in exclusively masculine terms. Thus, while they claim that a change has taken place, women playing an active and conspicuous role in the Carnival particularly from the end of the 1970s, the event is still discussed as an essentially male domain.

The use of such nouns as "Boys" in describing adult participants hints at an infantilisation of the collective involved in the Carnival. Noting Mason's work on the "Era of Reform.

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> R. Thompson, WCOH, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 23.

c.1825 through emancipation”<sup>60</sup>, it is possible to historicise this tendency. He claims that the overriding ideology governing the thoughts and actions of slave-owners up until the abolition of slavery, was “paternalism”. Such a value-system was perpetuated by way of its own legitimating discourse:

Paternalism legitimated the subordination of slaves and women by infantilizing them; they were permanent minors in the “father’s” household.<sup>61</sup>

Paternalism as a “world-view” governed not just the way slave-owners viewed their charges. Mason asserts that, until the arrival of British liberal thought exemplified by the abolition of slavery in 1838, it was a discourse governing also the way slaves perceived themselves. Shell makes much of these “psychological chains of slavery”<sup>62</sup>, where the “dominant metaphor” of the patriarchal family subjugated slaves through a variety of methods, including language. Slaves were constantly demeaned and infantilised in everyday discourse, addressed only by their first or given name, or as “boy” or “girl” regardless of their age. The effects of this paternalism ran so deep at the Cape, Shell asserts, that “slaves, when referring to one another in the crime dispositions, used the same demeaning language, - or else the court clerks simply transcribed their testimony in that way”<sup>63</sup>. Such conduct was, he concludes, “part of a daily linguistic process of socialising slaves into their status of unending childhood”. Thus, infantilisation became embedded in the psyche of its objects - the slaves themselves.

The history of “paternalism” as a discourse shaping identity and self-perception should be borne acutely in mind in noting the self-infantilisation of Carnival participants. This is not to say that the self-image of coloured participants is necessarily determined by an ancestral heritage of slavery, but that perhaps contemporary identity is influenced by historically constructed discourses and perceptions.

---

<sup>60</sup> J. E. Mason, ‘Paternalism Under Siege: Slavery in Theory and Practice During the Era of Reform. c.1825 Through Emancipation’, in N. Worden and C. Crais (eds.), Breaking the Chains, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>62</sup> Shell, Children of Bondage, p. 212.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

O'Toole however, attempts to refute the consciousness or influence of history or its processes on the Carnival. In his comparison of Watts and Woodstock, he remarks that coon troupes are "not as organised as they appear"<sup>64</sup> and contradicts the very notion of organisational coherence or common, identifiable structure of troupes. Claiming the essence of the Carnival to be a "celebration of... Colouredness", primarily the expression of a racial identity, he declares the organisational structure of troupes to mirror the "organisational instability" of the Coloured group. Such "instability", he insists, stems from an absence of a shared group identity, a subsequent lack of group loyalty, and a lack of a history and "traditions around which to cohere"<sup>65</sup>.

O'Toole's suggestion of a deceptive facade of organisation and stability around troupe organisation is worth investigating, yet, at the same time the central contradiction in his argument should be noted. Whilst on the one hand he makes the abrupt and blatant generalisation that the Carnival is "a celebration, indeed the only celebration of Colouredness", on the other hand he talks of the racially defined community as devoid of "organisational stability". O'Toole tells us that the "primary cultural trait" of the Coloured group is "self-hatred"<sup>66</sup>, yet at the same time, insists that the Carnival celebrates what it means to be Coloured. He homogenises motives and involvement of Carnival participants in his description of the "celebration of Colouredness", whilst simultaneously insisting on the diverse, disparate, and unstable nature of the group stemming from its lack of a common history or tradition. Surely he cannot have it both ways.

Writing in the early seventies, his allusions to the deceptive appearance of the static, disciplined, and organised structures of coon troupes however, are of interest. He claims that only a few troupes were ongoing, most being reformed annually, and that at the onset of practices in September, less than a third of members tended to participate. The oral

---

<sup>64</sup> J. O'Toole, *Watts and Woodstock: Identity and Culture in the United States and South Africa*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973), p. 112.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

testimonies of those people involved in the event, however, add a degree of clarity to this scenario. What emerges is the semblance of organisation within particularly the higher echelons of troupe hierarchy, with a clear structure of captain, lieutenants, monitors, and so on, stylised along military type lines [see F4.2]. The rank-and-file membership, conversely, remains largely unstructured and loosely aligned. The low attendance figures for practices in the earlier part of the year which O'Toole claims as evidence of "organisational instability" thus reflect little more than the casual involvement of the mass of participants. Fagmiejah Jansen outlines how attendance at rehearsals was not obligatory and how it had little bearing on eventual participation in the troupes on the day:

It's not everybody that does practice. They just go for the fun. They just don on the clothes that very day, like my father and my uncle, they just put on their clothes that very day like the 1st of January when the people are going to the track, but it's not as though they having to practice, but then you also get people that's very committed and they are the people that practice for whatever type of song they going to sing on that special day.<sup>67</sup>

Fagmiejah's assertions are reinforced by numerous other informants in that attendance at practices appears more frequent, and discipline stronger, at the higher and more involved levels of participation in the event. For instance, those men who sang in the Combined Chorus or solo songs on the competition days often claim to have attended rehearsals diligently for months. The main body of the troupe, its rank-and-file uniformed contingent amongst whom Fagmiejah's father and uncle would undoubtedly be found, seem to have been less inclined to go to practices for they would have less need, singing fewer songs and probably just marching and "jolling" in the street procession on the day.

Explaining how she would sew extra costumes over and above the paid up number of ordered coon suits to cover the demand of some rank-and-file contingent deciding to participate only on the day, Fagmiejah conveys how her husband's casual involvement mirrored that of her father:

---

<sup>67</sup> Jansen, WCOH, p. 6.



F4-1

Members of the *Penny Pinchers All Stars* taken in Darling Street, January 1996. Visible in the foreground with feathers in his hat is the Drum Major. Note the man with a Union Jack painted on his face, reflecting the persistent iconic link with Britain.



F4-2

Troupe members parading in Darling Street, New Year, 1996. Note the difference in uniforms between the ordinary troupe members (those with yellow jackets), and the vice-captains and marshals (with black jackets, bow-ties, rosettes, and whistles for whistling commands). Author's photograph.

I remember my husband... funny thing is every year he's not in with the troupes, I'm not going, I'm not, then the first of January he just walked down the road, down Chiappini street and when he finally comes back with his Coon Carnival uniform, you know like that, so we allow a bit extra for people that changed their minds on the very last minute.<sup>68</sup>

Maddenie Salie summarises this scenario, in which a significant proportion of the mass participants had little contact with the troupe's organisation prior to New Year's Eve:

You'll get most of the guys that doesn't attend practice at all. They don't attend at all. Now on New Year's Day then you start selling those uniforms. You want a uniform. You want to be part of them.<sup>69</sup>

What is clear however, is that once at the Carnival, and most specifically when in troupe uniform, a rigid internal hierarchy with boldly delineated structures of order and discipline, came into operation. This is not to say that it did not also exist prior to the event, in practices and so on, but the point of interest is that those previously non-aligned, casual troupe members allying themselves to a troupe only on the day, by donning the uniform, also submitted themselves to the established, internal, apparatuses of power.

Throughout the testimonies of the oral informants runs a strong military metaphor in the discussion of the formation and hierarchy troupes. This tendency to use a vocabulary more usually recognised as part of the rhetoric of national armed forces is one that surfaces in the context of Carnivals worldwide. Turner and Jensen note similar militaristic metaphor structuring gang rank and stratification. Pointing to a "tough hierarchy" of prison gangs they relate how one of the two major organisations - the 26's<sup>70</sup> - "are divided into twelve ranks... going from private to general"<sup>71</sup>. Commenting similarly on the rules of the "Book" (the unwritten, orally transmitted code of gang conduct in Cape Town), Sharf notes:

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Salie, WCOH, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> The other main prison gang is the 28's. The 27's exist in between the two but have little power and have largely been sidelined.

<sup>71</sup> Turner and Jensen, 'A Place called Heideveld', p. 142.

One of its basic rules commands the gangsters to adhere to the strict hierarchical stratification of the gang. This implies absolute obedience to superiors, in much the same way as in a military hierarchy, on which gang-structure in the Western Cape is based.<sup>72</sup>

It seems somewhat ironic that such festive events as Carnival, often described as moments of anarchy and total disorder, frequently appear the product of organisations forming themselves along rigidly militaristic lines: an order creating disorder.

In his discussion of the “victory Carnival” of Luanda, for example, Birmingham notes how each group is under the control of a “commander”, and has headquarters called a “cantonments”. Such terms, he states, are “borrowed both from military rank and colonial authority”<sup>73</sup>. Also located in this hierarchy is a President who does not take part in the street dance, and an elected King, who leads it. Marshals are appointed to keep the audience and active participants apart, most of whom consist of a large mass at the rear of the procession: “the rear is brought up by the supporters, jogging on the spot or surging to the front”<sup>74</sup>. He asks the pertinent, though unresolved, question as to how far this mimicry is based on “antagonism and mockery” and how far it is rather “an admiring aspiration to achieve European status and military rank”<sup>75</sup>.

The aping of military styled structures within coon troupe hierarchy has similarly ambiguous roots and connotations. Bickford-Smith highlights the extent of conspicuous military parade, procession, and display in nineteenth-century Cape Town, and points to its possible influence on the popular expression of the watching public. Noting that “two extremely popular events were a grand military review on the Parade and a regatta in Table Bay, each watched by thousands”, he claims that such events served as “public reminders of British military might”<sup>76</sup>. He suggests that the parody of such blatant celebrations of Imperial

---

<sup>72</sup> W. Scharf, ‘Street gangs, survival and political consciousness in the eighties’, (Seminar paper, Joint workshop on the History of Greater Cape Town, Western Cape, University of Cape Town, 5/12/85), p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> D. Birmingham, ‘Carnival at Luanda’ in *Journal of African History*. 28. (Great Britain, 1988), p. 97.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>76</sup> Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town*, Unpaginated.

power and colonial authority may have manifested itself in the “military” structure of emergent coon troupes: a mimicry of the instruments of domination.

Yet, the festive use of martial hierarchy and rank cannot be interpreted simplistically as mimicry and inversion. Though historically a primary point of contact for many Carnival participants with the organised forces of law and order must have been as the objects of their discipline and control, it is also likely that some had a direct experience of personal involvement in South Africa’s armed forces. Grundy, discussing the “long history of military activity”<sup>77</sup> encountered by “various components of the black population”, notes the sizable Cape Corps of Coloured Volunteers. Formed to enlist Coloured volunteers for the First World War, by the end of 1915 the Corps had raised 25, 000 men to fight in East and Central Africa, Palestine and the Western Front. The Corps was mobilised again for the Second World War, disbanded in 1949, and re-established in 1963 (though volunteers were confined to administrative jobs from this point<sup>78</sup>). Indeed, Grundy states:

so close has been... contact... between the Coloured population and White South Africa in security and military affairs ...and so deep that military tradition that one Nationalist MP boasted that “with a few years’ interruption, the Cape Corps can certainly lay claim to seniority as the oldest South African regiment”<sup>79</sup>.

The link between Carnival participants and wartime or military experience is borne out more directly by a *Cape Herald* article of 8/1/72 which reports the “comeback” of a “wartime troupe”, the *Ex-Volunteer Darkies*<sup>80</sup>. Bearing in mind this community’s historical experience of military service, it would be short-sighted to interpret the loose styling of coon troupes along militaristic lines (with its Captains, lieutenants and soldiers) as a straightforward comic mimicry of colonial, state, or apartheid forces of control. Whilst comic inversion may have been in the minds of many, it is likely that for others, their

---

<sup>77</sup> K. W. Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics: Blacks in the South African Armed Forces*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983), p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting P. J. Badenhorst in Republic of South Africa, House of Assembly Debates, *Hansard*, 9 (September 1974), Col. 2531.

<sup>80</sup> *Cape Herald*, (8/1/72).

personal experience of active service in national and colonial units bore on the cultural and festive organisations to which they also belonged.

Tracing further historical influences on Coloured Capetonian participants, a reference to Mason proves illuminating in explaining a possible admiration and glorification of the image of Britain. Mason claims that from the 1820s in the Cape, an ideological contest raged between vying forces of slave-owner paternalism and British liberalism. British liberal ideology, he posits, was personified by its emissaries - colonial officials. He suggests that this presented an alternative avenue to self-perception for slaves, hitherto confined within the psychological limits of paternalism - indeed, it offered emancipation itself. With this in mind, it is possible to see how the symbols of British liberalism, its judicial and military representatives for instance, may have been viewed in a positive light by slaves and slave-descendants. This fascination with Britain is a notion re-enforced in the frequent choice of troupe names, emphasising a British colonial heritage and connection<sup>81</sup> [see also F4.1].

Similarly, where Birmingham remains unsure as to whether or not the military structuring of Carnival organisations in Luanda stems from admiration or mockery, further oral evidence suggests the former to be the case for Cape Town. Fagmiejah Jansen, for example, remembers that organisers would always try to get the Navy to come and judge the Grand March Pass<sup>82</sup>. Such evidence implies a respect and acceptance of the authority and legitimacy of the military, at least as far as those organising the competition are concerned.

Like Carnival structures in Luanda, not only is a clear hierarchy established through the differentiation of graduated levels of military termed position and power, but it is re-enforced through corresponding differences in uniform and in levels of participation in the competition and street performance. Former troupe captain Eddie Matthews, like the "Presidents" of Luanda's Carnival teams, says that he did not sing and dance on the streets with the rest of the members for he had to act as the "guiding line", preventing any trouble

---

<sup>81</sup> Explored later in this paper in the discussion of the naming of troupes.

<sup>82</sup> Jansen, WCOH, p. 12.

in the procession. He outlines also the relation between troupe status and uniform relating how, as captain, he wore “a different suit... from everyone, extra, extra... something different that everyone could see it’s the captain. Yes, for me and my captains...he’s got a special uniform on. He has a velvet uniform on or an extra shininess”<sup>83</sup>.

Manuel, in his 1967 discussion of District Six, points to dress and decoration in the delineation of power and authority within gang structures. “When the adult gangs of District Six were at the height of their infamous power, top men in the gangster hierarchy had a small bow-tie tattooed at the base of their throat”<sup>84</sup>. This pattern is similar to that of troupes in that a visible additional decoration signifies hierarchical position. Furthermore, it is of particular interest that the motif of a bow-tie is used for it is the characteristic decoration of the Coon troupes. This overlapping fashion trend stresses once again the connection between the two organisational structures.

Out of a troupe membership of 500, Matthews outlines, about twenty men would wear this different uniform, ten vice-captains and ten committee members, assisting the captain to “control” the team on the road. Eddie Matthews depicts a rigid and disciplined troupe structure, with an “executive committee... captain... coach... band leader... and ..captain on the road”. He makes a point however, of emphasising that the difference in uniform is primarily a matter of practicality:

In fact it may not sound relevant that usually the case was that I wouldn’t wear a captain’s uniform, I’d just wear the same uniform as the men were, but I found that that is wrong, because you must be identified. Now it’s easier to identify a captain.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, Abe Sheldon again appropriating military metaphor, reveals the extent to which divisions between the mass participants and the troupe hierarchy permeated levels beyond these practicalities of discipline and road safety. He tells of how, at the post-Carnival

---

<sup>83</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Manuel, *District Six*, p. 82.

<sup>85</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 10.

parties attended by members of differing and rival troupes, there would be two tables of drink, one for the captains and committee members and the other for the rank-and-file “soldiers”:

No, we can't go to their table. We get Liverstein<sup>86</sup>, they perhaps get sweet wine or Brandy. We get the Liverstein you see. We get the cheap wine. They get the best. That's the way it was.<sup>87</sup>

Though implicitly accepting this hierarchy and the elevated status of the captain, pointing out that the captain would be deferred to throughout the year and not just at Carnival time, as “Cappie”<sup>88</sup>, Sheldon asserts that it was rank-and-file participants who “made” the event. Comparing the Carnival to a grand race like the Two Oceans marathon, he says it is not the two or three hundred top athletes but the “back pack...[who]..make the race”. It is “the same with the coons”, he insists, “we form the body. Those guys they just want to be sucks up there, they're The Guys, so that's a small amount, but We, the big amount”<sup>89</sup>.

The issue of the naming of troupes is also one of critical centrality in assessing the extent of changes to the Carnival. Humphries points to the process of the naming of gangs as directly reflecting their essential identification with familiar territory. Whilst some groups “attempted to create an awe-inspiring image by borrowing names with violent associations from comics and films”, these were frequently combined with “names derived from their own neighbourhood to produce arrogant and rebellious gang names”<sup>90</sup>. Abe Sheldon alludes to a similar pattern in the processes of naming of Cape Town's coon troupes.

Whilst some troupes adopted names associated with the glamour of the screen (hardly surprising, bearing in mind the popularity of the bioscope which he speaks of), others reflected distinctly local and parochial associations. It appears that this fascination with the glitz and glamour of the screen extended to a more general romanticised fascination with

---

<sup>86</sup> A cheap local wine.

<sup>87</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 12.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

the United States of America. Troupes in inner Cape Town in the sixties, remembers Sheldon, often had “classy... American”<sup>91</sup> names, for example the “Yankees” and the “Star Spangles”. Similarly, Karriem Thompson recalls the “New Orleans” and the “American Starlights”, bedecked in the glittering stars and stripes of the American flag. It seems unlikely that this allusion to America would have been interpreted by its actors as a form of parody, ridicule or derision. Thompson articulates rather, a deep feeling of pride in a troupe and costume which “never ever has any Coon Carnival had a uniform like... no Coon Carnival ever in Cape Town”<sup>92</sup>. Indeed, the psychological connection with the USA extended to the point whereby Thompson, hearing of a “little girly in America that was very, very sick... made her a uniform the same as ours, her size,.. and sent it to America”<sup>93</sup> to her.

In the sixties some troupe titles alluded, whether in mockery or admiration, to a colonial heritage, like the “Corries” or “Coronations” who “came about with the coronation of the Queen”<sup>94</sup>, and the “Britannia Dukes”<sup>95</sup>. In contrast to these and the American styled themes, like the “Star Spangles”, were the distinctly parochial troupe names, like the “Bokomos”, inspired by the local Bokomo porridge factory. These were:

the people from Landsdowne, just over the little bridge there, just past Alicia, it’s a little bridge on the one side, some kind of a video people on the left hand side, on the corner by the bridge next to the fish market you know, by the highway, on the right hand side looking towards Landsdowne, now those people there, they’re called the Bokomos, you get Bokomo porridge.<sup>96</sup>

Maddenie Salie and Kassiem Khan illustrate a critical connection between naming, territorial identity, and troupe and gang membership. They describe how the name “Schotsche Kloof Crooning Minstrels” was consciously and deliberately changed to “Schotsche Kloof

---

<sup>90</sup> Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>91</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> K. Thompson, WCOH, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>94</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 23.

<sup>95</sup> K. Thompson, WCOH, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 24.

Glamour Boys” with the sole intention of deterring the gangster element the troupe seemed to be attracting. Salie and Khan describe the name change as an intentional ploy, aimed at attracting a reformed membership:

M: They changed because you know, the type of guys that really went into this coons wasn't, you know, wasn't decent, from decent families and descent.

K: ....We joined and we find all these youngsters is growing up, you know, they is eager to join the coons so we changed the name from Crooning Minstrels, we changed it to Glamour Boys, you know, in other words to give the name more sort of...

M: Respectability!

Thus, whilst the association between troupe and gang was a close one, indeed often overlapping, Salie and Khan suggest that the connection could be severed by means of dissociation such as a name change. Though both men claim that troupe membership was not necessarily drawn from the same area, participants often travelling distances to rehearse with their favourite troupe, they also invoke a direct correlation between specific troupe and gang. They relate, for example, that the “Mongrel” gang were associated with the *Glamour Boys*, whilst members of “Stalag 17” predominated in the *Woodstock Starlights*. Accepting that such gangs were rooted in clearly delineated and intimately known local territories, the connection between territory, troupe, and gang, resonates once again.

In a front-page article in the *Cape Times* of January 1968 entitled “Petrol-bombs, knives... Gang Battle in District Six”, a reporter tells of a New Year’s weekend of “gang-warfare” between the “Dynamite Kids” and “Stalag 17” (two central city based gangs) which left one man dead and many wounded.. According to a witness to the violence, “the group - dressed in Carnival attire - marched up Hanover street and then down again. Then the Stalag gang began throwing petrol bombs”<sup>97</sup>. The witness relates that the “Dynamite Kids” back-tracked down Hanover street and returned with an enlarged and heavily armed gang. Vicious fighting ensued with someone axed in the head and another stabbed in the neck. The narrative of this informant is of particular interest here for in retelling the story, the

interviewee talks of coon troupe and gang interchangeably, failing to differentiate between their members. As far as he is concerned, the troupe, though disguised in costume, are the “Dynamite Kids” gang. Evidently their rivals, “Stalag 17” similarly identify them as such. Central also to this narrative is the locality of District Six and the marking-out and ownership of territory. The interviewee relates the incident in terms of the rivals’ movement within a precise geographical area as they traverse, backtrack, lay claim to, or retreat from, particular roads and areas.

Fagmiejah Jansen strongly re-iterates the connection between territory and troupe. She relates how troupes tended to draw their membership from the immediate locality, though they operated also through networks of friendship and kin, thus attracting a number of people from more distant areas who had some connection with the troupe:

Normally one group will come in one area... for instance, we have the Schotsche Kloof Glamour Boys being up here, right, they move out because there was not any space for them to practice, but now if they were here then you find a special group of people staying in Athlone, a little group, then they all come.. it’s like friends, if you got a couple of friends then they sort of join one troupe like that, say for instance my cousins now, ...now then ...New Year’s Eve, they want to join the coons then they all go as one group into that other group they merging into the other group like that, you know, that’s how it is.<sup>98</sup>

Fagmiejah’s narrative reveals two other important details regarding troupe composition. In mentioning the movement of the *Glamour Boys* with the closing of their rehearsal venue she illustrates how the practicalities of physical space for practices and meetings must have borne inevitably on troupe structure and identity. Indeed, rehearsal halls are a theme consistently arising in discussion with informants; accessibility and size of venues influencing the ease and frequency of practices. Furthermore, she succinctly outlines the critical, but often understated, way in which troupes were constituted not by individual members but by a collection of various groups; from friendship networks and kinship connections, to work, gang, age, mosque or church based allegiances. Thus, whilst

---

<sup>97</sup> The Cape Times, (8/1/68).

structured fundamentally around locality, other forms of association resulted in the pulling in of sometimes diverse constituent members. Yet, it seems, the territorial essence persisted through the naming of troupes and the involvement of gangs. It was a connection apparently reinforced through the locality of rehearsal venues and the perceived identification of those in the neighbourhood of troupe with area.

With such an integral connection between neighbourhood, locally rooted gang, and troupe, the resonances of Group Areas within Carnival can be extrapolated. To physically alter the neighbourhood will necessarily have fundamental repercussions on the identity of troupes. Ibrahim Ismael, talking of his youth in the sixties, describes how troupe loyalty connected vitally to neighbourhood identification and street pride, in discussing the *Cornwalls* of Woodstock:

Woodstock, yes. Nobody, in that time nobody was allowed to join Star Spangles because they were in the District. There was a feud between the two, a fighting feud. You weren't.. you were allowed but you wouldn't dare going join and you from Woodstock because you the Cornwalls, how can you join the Star Spangles, you a traitor... Nobody was allowed, you were allowed as I say, but you wouldn't go there because you a Cornwall, you're not a Star Spangled or Mississippi or whatever.. you don't belong there.<sup>99</sup>

Birmingham's assertions as to the fundamental significance of Carnival in Luanda seem equally applicable to that of the Cape Town's Coon Carnival in stressing the critical link between troupe organisation and expression, and space and territory. Carnival is, he declares:

...a celebration...It is a celebration of the identity in which people rejoice, not a national identity, or even a city identity, but an identity with their neighbours and kinsfolk in the safest community they know.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Jansen, WCOH, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Ismael, WCOH, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Birmingham, 'Carnival at Luanda', p. 102.

Yet this “community” is not celebrated as a homogenous and equal collective in which all participate to the same degree and with identical position, status and influence. Rather, the level of individual participation, or indeed non-participation, relates directly to apparatuses of power outside the Carnival sphere. Though territoriality and shared locality provides coherence and the primary point of legitimacy for those involved, it is a sphere itself formed and experienced differently by those within it. In this vein, Birmingham talks of the “competitive rivalries of local communities seeking identity and prestige”<sup>101</sup> within the Carnival. He notes that festive “structures continued to use the old ritual patterns of leadership... [and] economic influence continued to be wielded” by the rich fishing families who traditionally invested the most in the event. “Spectators” too, he concludes, “responded at many different levels of appreciation”.

Birmingham’s discussion of the different levels of authority within Carnival in Luanda is similar to O’Toole’s claim that the Coon Carnival mirrors the “organisational instability” of the Coloured community as a whole. However, whilst O’Toole suggests the structures and hierarchy of the event are little more than a deceptive facade, disguising anarchic, ad-hoc, arbitrary and informal participation, close analysis of troupe organisation reveals such a conception to be incomplete and misleading. Clearly evident within the structures of troupes are different levels of formal and informal involvement, and with them, varying degrees of discipline and control.

Positions of power and status within coon troupes appear, more often than not, to overlap with other indexes of power outside the festive arena. Money, age and occupational status, as well as gender and sexuality<sup>102</sup>, bear directly on position and influence within Carnival groups.

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>102</sup> The issue of sexuality and power within the carnival is one of great relevance here. “Moffies” or transvestites appear frequently with troupes yet their affiliation is usually informal. Unlike other significant but minority actors performing with specific troupes (such as drum majors, monitors, captains, musicians, and special artists) they must generally pay for their own costumes. The other actors are subsidised by the troupe. Also, traditionally, moffies do not compete at the event in any formal or recognised way. Thus, the power and status of moffies within coon troupes is a complicated one, for they participate with specific groups but at their own expense and with an undefined, unrecognised status. However, they retain a unique

Clearly though, removals under Group Areas had implications not just within the psychological realm of neighbourhood identity, community, gang and troupe, but also heavily influenced the practicalities of the Coon Carnival. With participants relocated to remote and disparate areas on the Cape Flats, moved from the city's centre - the historical home of the event and route of the road march - troupes had to travel miles into town for the Carnival. Furthermore, Matthews points out that, from the late 1960s the parade was effectively banned from the streets, banished to enclosed stadiums.

Matthews describes how, in these years, troupes would leave the stadium after the competition, get on the bus and "go back home":

That was a damp Carnival... then there was no expression of the culture... the road march is the essence, because... whatever Carnival, whatever competition is going on... that is shit, that's nothing, that's balls, because you can listen to groups singing every day, or you can put on a tape, but the actual road march ... this is something else.<sup>103</sup>

Matthews refers specifically to the "essence" of the event as connected to movement and space: the "road march". By banning the physical progression of the parade and altering the spatial aspect, the significance of the event has been stifled. Arresting the dynamic nature of Carnival, Matthews implies, transformed it into passive spectacle, akin to listening to a tape. Abe Sheldon similarly claims that the removal of the Carnival from the street altered the essence of the event:

It was a disappointment for us because we wanted to be on the street. We wanted to show our clothes. We wanted to show the people how we look. You want to dance.<sup>104</sup>

---

degree of autonomy in their freedom to choose and wear a costume of their own choosing (unlike all other troupe participants), and sometimes, to sell their participation to different troupes.

<sup>103</sup> M. Matthews, WCOH, p. 16.

<sup>104</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 27.

Sheldon also sees Group Areas to have fractured the networks of troupes by breaking-up their neighbourhood constituencies and relocating them to diffuse and disparate areas. Group Areas had a big impact on the Carnival, he declares, because “quite a lot of [people] didn’t know where you actually went, they had to look you up you see”.<sup>105</sup> The consolidation of established troupes was not just problematic during the festive period however. Sheldon depicts the way in which removals disrupted the fabric of cultural life a by creating practical obstacles to organisation and practices. With group and choir members moved to places beyond each other’s easy access, or to places too expensive to travel to regularly, regular rehearsals became more difficult. He states that other cultural activities suffered too. Sunday choir competition bands, for instance, “simmered out with the Group Areas Act. Everything changed because you were staying in Bonteheuwal, you were staying in Retreat, we went to Lavender Hill, they broke us all up, and for us to come down to Harfield costs you a lot of money. The poor people never had cars you see”<sup>106</sup>.

Returning to Bickford-Smith’s earlier assertion that the “New Year festivities were celebration of inner-city community for their participants”<sup>107</sup>, we can see the spatial restructuring of Group Areas as disrupting the very essence of this “community”. It was fundamentally altered in that after people had been moved, the “community” no longer existed in the physical form that it had before - as a neighbourhood, a collective of social networks and allegiances cohering around a common locality. The “community” of Carnival was also altered in the sense that the temporary “community” created by festival participants was inhibited, barred from parading in the city centre’s streets. After Group Areas, it seems, Carnival could no longer “celebrate” community in the sense that it had previously by participants, as a form of neighbourhood belonging, for the neighbourhood had been physically altered. Attempts to maintain or recreate this community, Sheldon and Matthews’ reflections imply, were frustrated by the difficulties of legally restricted movement. The sheer distances of troupe members from each other and from the city

---

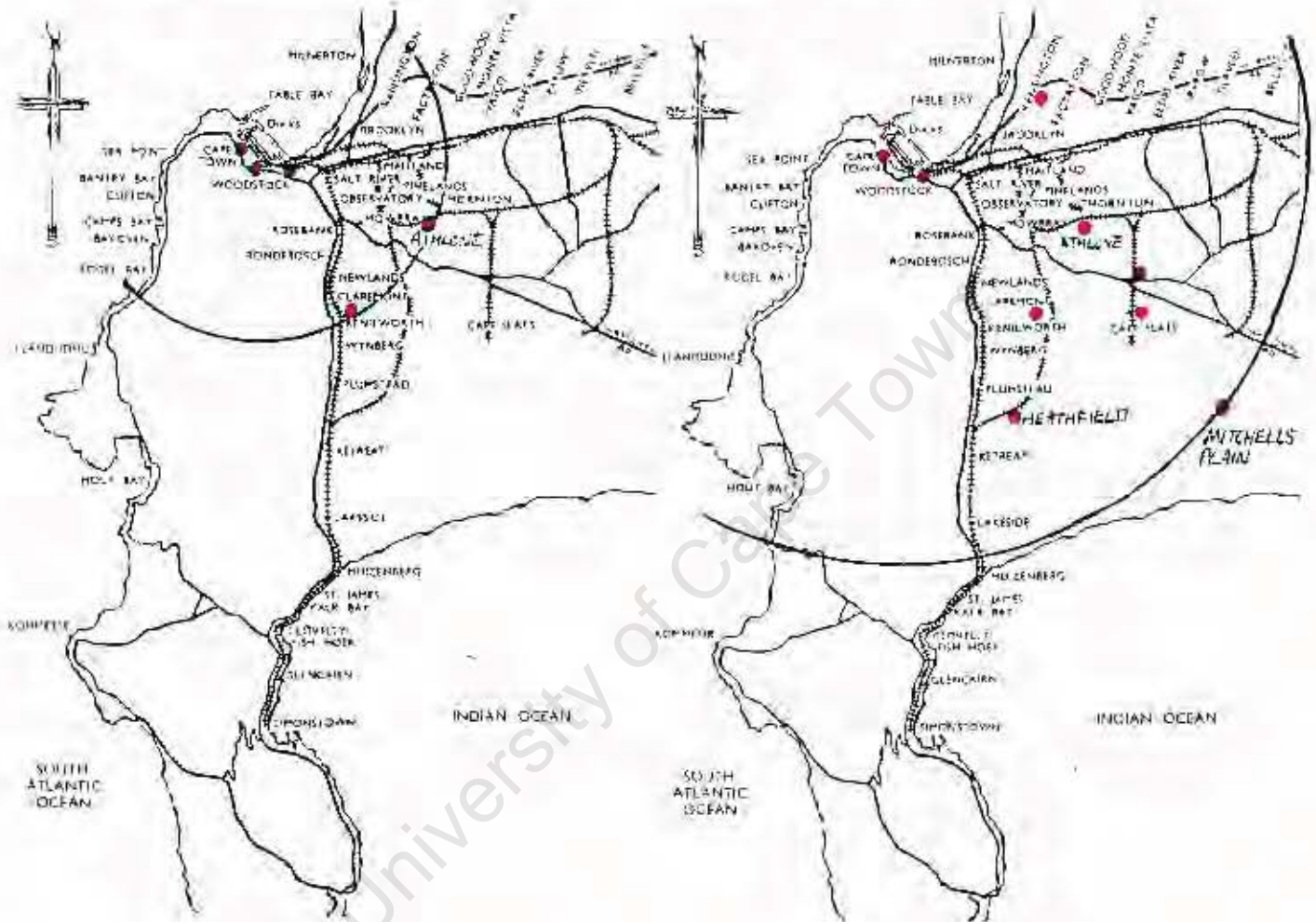
<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> Bickford Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, p. 302.

1(a). Residence of informant prior to Group Areas removals.

1(b). Present residence of informant (1995).



Red dots mark places of residence of oral informants. Loci illustrate the maximum distance of informants from the city centre - Coon Carnival's symbolic core and the location of the pre-1967 road march. The increased locus evident in Map 1(b) reflects significant displacement from the urban centre, pointing to accompanying problems of lengthened commuting time between home and centre, greater transport costs, and increased physical distance from the symbolic heartland of the carnival.

Note the concentration of informants' places of residence around the city centre prior to removals 1(a), in contrast to the disparate locations of their present homes in 1995, stretching out across the Cape Flats 1(b).

centre (in many ways the inspiration and expression of a community's legitimacy), made rehearsals improbable and travel to the event arduous [see F4.3].

Clearly however, neither before nor after the implementation of Group Areas did the "community" involved in Carnival participate to identical degrees. It is invariably claimed, in the few academic accounts of the Carnival that exist, and in most of the newspaper coverage of the event, that participation up until the seventies was an exclusively male affair. Oral accounts significantly contradict this notion. Though women appear not to have participated as a major constituency in the Carnival, particularly prior to the 1970s and certainly not in any of the positions of power and control (as captains, Carnival board executives, monitors, and so on), it is clear that they were fundamentally involved in behind-the-scenes preparation for the event. Both Fagmeijah Jansen and Faldiela Isaacse, for instance, sewed for the troupes, Jansen making buttons for the costumes with her grandmother and other female members of the family since her early childhood. Unarguably then, women have invariably been involved in less recognised, unacknowledged, lower status, or non-formalised roles within the event. Though seldom formally encompassed within the hierarchy of troupe organisation however, they have played a fundamental role in the pre-Carnival preparation, in constituting a large component of the audience, and increasingly, as active participants.

It appears that Carnival related activities offered women various opportunities to earn extra money at a time of year when it was much needed. Though tailors with contracts to sew the costumes were predominantly male, many of their assistants were not. Avenues to make a little "pocket money" also existed for girls who would help, for example, to sew buttons for the costumes. Barty Daniels speaks of the small-scale entrepreneurial efforts of local women: "wives" would sometimes come down to rehearsal venues or appear at club-houses on the day "gears" (costumes) were issued, selling "stripeys" or "flowers"<sup>108</sup> in

---

<sup>108</sup> "Stripeys" were the cloth stripes that could be sewn on to the trouser-leg of costumes as a personal embellishment. Similarly, hand-sewn, cloth "flowers" pinned onto the hat or lapels added an extra element of fancy to the staple uniform.

troupe colours to add an extra element of fancy to the outfits<sup>109</sup>. “Sometimes you bought two”, Daniels remembers, “sometimes you bought four for you and your friend. Two flowers to put in your hair and that. Some people bought four flowers and put both in their hair”<sup>110</sup>. With membership of troupes often running into the hundreds, the opportunity for a substantial cash injection for women in the middle of the festive season is evident.

In contrast to frequent claims regarding the non-participation of women on the streets prior to recent years however: the insistence that this is a contemporary anomaly exemplifying the moral demise of the Carnival, runs a strong counter suggestion. Ismael Ibrahim is representative of many in his claim that “ladies weren’t allowed in the coons... up to about ten years ago”<sup>111</sup>. He asserts that troupe captains only permitted women to join so that they could sell more uniforms and reap greater, personal, financial return. Of note here is Ismael’s implication that captains in the past were fussier about who they sold a uniform to, but from the seventies would sell to anyone for the money. Eddie Matthews, contradicts such an impression, describing how as a troupe captain in the sixties he sold uniforms to:

foreigners, or Germans, or [people] from Worcester that’s on holiday here and wants to go with the coons. If they come here with their full money... here’s my money, here’s your gear. He knows nothing but he’s going there just for the jol.<sup>112</sup>

Matthews’ testimony stands as evidence to counter the claim that captains of the past were magnanimous, loss-taking, providers of community pleasure, upholding the moral and social order, in contrast to the avaricious and unscrupulous profiteers who, from the seventies onwards would sell “gear” to anyone who paid.

Ismael’s musings on the reasons for the recent participation of women, reflect the common tendency to see the Carnival’s history since the sixties, as one of demise; a moral decline related largely to a the growing rapaciousness of captains: a greed that never existed

---

<sup>109</sup> B. Daniels, WCOH, pp. 28-29.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibrahim, WCOH, p. 3.

previously. Yet oral testimonies begin to tear at the fabric of this argument, contradicting its factual premise. Eddie Matthews and Barty Daniels<sup>113</sup>, insist that, though in recent years numbers may have increased, women have always participated as rank-and-file coons.

Empirically then, the claim that the participation of women is a recent phenomena, appears inaccurate, yet the frequency and certainty of the insistence is illuminating. Primarily it reflects a notion that the temporary anarchy and transgression of social boundaries implicit in Carnival is, by nature, a masculine prerogative but that recent historical events have imbalanced this order, blurring gender divisions. Furthermore, it expresses the demise of the Carnival in sexual terms, the active participation of women signifying a loss of dignity and sexual morality. Radifa Thompson states in no uncertain terms that seeing women with the coons in the last fifteen years is “the terrible thing that has ever happened in this world... it’s disgraceful. It’s a sight I don’t even like seeing”<sup>114</sup>. Perhaps most interestingly, an essential connection is made between the increasing materialism of captains and the moral decline (articulated in terms of unrestrained female sexuality. i.e. women coons are lesbians or badly brought up and degraded). The desire of captains for profit, those such as Ismael imply, has loosened the fabric of social order and patriarchal control.

Charting shifts and changes within the Carnival during these years through the oral accounts of informants in the nineties, is a potentially hazardous process. Consistently emerging, both overtly and implicitly, from the interviews is the impression that the time of removals marked a transformation; gangs became lawless, the Carnival violent, coon captains greedy, women undignified in their participation. Whilst clearly some changes did occur, such a strictly periodised notion of transformation, seeing Carnival’s near complete metamorphosis within a matter of years, is highly problematic. This is not to deny that significant shifts in form and meaning of the event did take place during the sixties and seventies, for evidently they did, but neither was Carnival static in meaning, shape and significance before this time. Accounts, generally taking the form of nostalgic and comparative reminiscences, of the

---

<sup>112</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 8.

<sup>113</sup> Daniels, WCOH.

<sup>114</sup> Thompson, WCOH, p. 23.

Carnival tend to view the event's history in a binaristic and polarised way. Yet, mere gentle probing exposes the utopian pre-removal Carnival as riven with many of the same divisions and differences informants claim to have destroyed the event only after Group Areas.

In her discussion of community responses to "dispossession" Bozzoli alerts us to a persistent tendency of those affected:

The form taken by Black and "Coloured" dispossession has more generally predisposed people to developing nostalgic, nationalist or populist forms of ideology more frequently than socialist or class-based ones.<sup>115</sup>

Whilst her allusion relates primarily to politically constituted "responses", it is critically applicable to the deconstruction and historicisation of accounts of gang and Carnival. This is not to suggest that talk of changes and shifts within the two must be dismissed as "populist" or "nostalgic" fabrication, but rather, it goes some way in explaining the division between pre and post-removal Carnival and gang formation which often seems reductively binaristic.

Applying Bozzoli's observation to the assessment of structural changes within coon troupes, the task for the critic is not redirected but extended. The need for an assessment of changes in gang coherence, its relation to troupe hierarchy, and the resonances of enforced removals on both, remains a necessity, but at the same time the critic is alerted to the ideological creativity, or adaptiveness, of the informants' discourse. That oral testimonies separate post-removal Carnival and gang so systematically, perhaps reflects not merely concrete changes to organisation, but more subtle shifts in perception and ideology.

Group Areas is repeatedly cited as initiating the change and demise of the Coon Carnival from a care-free, but respectable and disciplined expression of community harmony, to an anarchic display of gangsterism and commercial greed. Interrogating the testimonies of those who make this claim, however, reveals that much of what they cite as new phenomena

within the event, a close relation of troupe and gang for example, existed well before implementation of the Act in Cape Town. Tales of profiteering captains and commercially sponsored troupes (like the "Virginias" sponsored by Virginia Wines) similarly attest to a heavy financial interest that stretched back to the early 1960s. Other factors, like the wider context of the commercialisation of popular music, emerge as powerful influences, unrelated to Group Areas, determining the shape, form and direction of the event.

Undoubtedly though, Group Areas did fundamentally affect the Carnival during the sixties and seventies, placing practical obstructions and restrictions in the way of organisation. Most significantly perhaps, removals altered the very essence of the community identities the event articulated, by physically disrupting the neighbourhoods around which they were constituted. However, informants also allude to the adaptive and constantly changing nature of the Coon Carnival that existed prior to Group Areas; the abandonment of old instruments and musical styles for new, and the changing fashions of uniforms for example. We must be wary, therefore, of isolating, unreservedly, Group Areas as the sole influence or cause of change to the event. Rather, the Coon Carnival has always existed through its ability to transform and adapt to the historical context in which it is situated at any given time. Group Areas must be seen as one such historical influence, not an indomitable cultural determinant.

---

<sup>115</sup> B. Bozzoli, Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1987), p. 9.

## Chapter Five.

### Women and *Participation* in Cape Town's Coon Carnival.

Dressed identically to the rest of the *Penny Pinchers All Stars* troupe, a toothless woman, beer can in one hand, up-turned umbrella filled with fruit donations and small change in the other, jiggled her way into Green Point stadium. Young majorettes in the troupe's bright pink and blue, accompanied by junior drum majors led the entourage along the street and before the judges. The long plait protruding from beneath the coon-cap in front of me alerted me to a group of young female coons. These instances in the first week of 1996 belied the persistent refrain that "playing coons is a man's game" in which few, if any, women took part.

Written accounts of the event insist that the Coon Carnival is traditionally an entirely male affair. Yet this variety of women and girls participating before me clearly contradicted such a claim, suggesting that the issue of female involvement was more complex than academics outlined. Perhaps their involvement in 1996 was only a recent phenomenon running against the flow of tradition; a radical departure from historical precedent. More likely though, the event had not been exclusively male for some time, if indeed, ever.

Initial comparisons of literature and oral testimonies relating to the involvement of women fail to produce consensus as to the start and extent of their active participation. Newspaper photographs from the 1930s of young girls as majorettes fronting troupes, contradict the argument that female involvement in 1996 was an anachronism. Though female interviewees persist in distancing themselves from the event, there can be no doubt about the central role they played in the Carnival's preparation; making costumes, preparing food, watching the event, and so on.

Bakhtin argues that the normal structures and everyday indices of social control are temporarily overturned and disrupted during carnival time. For a brief period, the order and limits of the established status-quo fail to apply. But as far as women's participation in the

Coon Carnival was concerned, Bakhtin's argument fails to hold. Here, the taboos on women relating to public licentiousness and display, taboos which determined behaviour and gendered social space, operated also in carnival time. Festival topsy-turvy in Cape Town was not as upside-down as Bakhtin would have it.

Examining Cape Coloured recreation in the 1940s and '50s, Jeppie sees the Coon Carnival as the "pre-eminent expression of working-class culture"<sup>1</sup>. Describing the festival as somewhere between an "official"<sup>2</sup> and "non-official" event, he quotes extensively from Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World:

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.<sup>3</sup>

Using Bakhtin, Jeppie evokes the image of an annual working-class jamboree, composed solely from within one social class but during which time status and position were forgotten or inverted. He points out however, that the Carnival had an exclusively "Coloured" ethnic character because of the historical application of Coloured Labour Preference<sup>4</sup> policies which privileged Coloured over black African workers in the Cape. The simultaneous practice of residential segregation according to race banished most blacks to peripheral sites skirting the metropolis whilst Coloureds remained predominantly in the city centre where the Carnival took place<sup>5</sup>. Jeppie observes that even though females remained absent from coon troupes the "rules governing the place of women were transgressed during carnival"<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture', p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Jeppie quoting from M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1968), p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Such legislation stretched back even before the apartheid years. For example the Apprenticeship Act of 1922 permitted Coloureds but not Blacks to enter skilled trades. See R. E. Van der Ross, Myths and Attitudes: An Inside Look at the Coloured People, (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1979), pp. 84 -5.

<sup>5</sup> The foundations of residential segregation were similarly laid decades before the Nationalist's ascension in 1948. The Native Urban Areas Act passed in 1923 was one of many legislative drives among many aimed at segregation in the twenties. This Act established influx control and residential segregation for Blacks but exempted Coloureds. See I. Goldin, Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, (Longman, London, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture', p. 85.

Indeed, summarising his observations on the event in relation to the Bakhtinian theory of power and inversion implicit in Carnival, Jeppie concludes that “in the same way Carnival subverted some of the dominant discourses of the bourgeoisie” it also confirmed the status-quo, and after the event “the old order regain[ed] its hold on the revellers”<sup>7</sup>.

Jeppie’s position is thus slightly unclear. On the one hand he unhesitatingly declares the Carnival the cultural expression of a homogenous class group, yet on the other, he alludes to factors such as ethnicity, race and gender, as also influencing involvement. He repeats Bakhtin’s claim regarding the suspension of rank, status and position inherent in Carnival, depicting the event as a total, though temporary, abandonment of social division. He points out though, that the status-quo which the festival inverts is ultimately restored and reasserted partly as a consequence of the event. What Jeppie neglects to interrogate however, is the degree to which the status-quo is adhered to throughout the event itself. He fails to notice how the dominant order is never fully deviated from as rank and social-standing replicate themselves within the Carnival’s organisation; participation closely mirroring existing social hierarchies and divisions. Indeed, it seems of the Coon Carnival in the 1960s and ‘70s, less that the “older order regains” its grip on revellers after the event, than that it never fully released its grip. in the first place.

His declaration that the rules governing the place of women were “transgressed” during the Coon Carnival sits uneasily with his observations regarding their non-active participation. He remarks, for example, on the “specifically male character of carnival singing”<sup>8</sup> and the marked absence of women from the troupes, yet he fails to see in this the replication of existing and entrenched gender-relations, strangely clinging to the Bakhtinian theory of transgression.

Ridd’s warning not to work from preconceptions about the position of women in the District Six Area during the 1960s and ‘70s must be noted early. She urges caution in

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

assuming women to be inferior and “muted” in relation to “male dominance”. “While *Coloured* people may be described as *muted* in relation to Whites, women in the District Six community are in fact dominant in relation to their own man”<sup>9</sup>, she declares. In her observations, women are indeed the “most articulate members of the community”<sup>10</sup>, the chief decision-makers in the family, in control of the household, income and children. Though this smacks of gross generalisation, it alerts us to the inaccuracy of construing *Coloured* women to be entirely passive objects within all spheres of domestic and community life.

The oppressive social conditions of apartheid South Africa and the specific way in which they work on an intermediate *Coloured* population, Ridd claims, have impacted on the familial structure of the community, producing a “matrifocal” response. “Women’s authority arises”, she asserts, “because men in the community are weak... men feel the discrimination against them as *Coloured* more directly because their frame of reference is more specifically in the public sector controlled by Whites. In consequence, for the *Coloured*, the home has been elevated as a place of refuge and women thrust into the vital endeavour of preserving the dignity of the family against the humiliation of apartheid”<sup>11</sup>. However she concedes that, whilst women’s primary domain is the home, family, and household, “men’s sphere of influence”<sup>12</sup> is the “street”. With the public space of the street inherently associated with “disorder” and the state of “deurmekaar”, the “desire for respectability” harboured by many aspirant and middle-class women (represented by the *home*: the antithesis of the *street*), stands diametrically opposed.

From the outset of this investigation therefore, we must be careful not to assume women to be mute and passive objects in a male world over which they have no control. Their apparent absence or secondary positions in the Carnival cannot be simply interpreted as a reflection of their inferior situation in society for Ridd alerts us to the central position of

---

<sup>9</sup> Ridd, ‘Position and Identity’, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

power and authority they hold in the house and community. Rather, their (dis)involvement in Carnival must be seen as part of a complicated gendered discourse; an effort to retain integrity in an arena where they serve as the guardians or “respectability”. Such a bourgeois watchword, claims Ridd, followed in the immediate wake of the Population Registration Act of 1950<sup>13</sup>, since when “spontaneity and eccentricity have been replaced by an overriding emphasis on respectability, social conformity and correctness of behaviour. Respectability has become particularly vital in response to people’s sense of being denigrated as *Coloured*”<sup>14</sup>.

Desai and Marney’s biography of the radical Cape Imam, Hadji Abdullah Haron, *The Killing of the Imam*, suggests that the position of women in Cape Muslim society was not quite as liberated as Ridd would have it. Here, comments pointing to an acquiescent, secondary, subsidiary position of women in relation to their men abound. For example:

Galiema [the Imam’s wife] knew that protest was useless. The men wanted to talk “men’s business” and, like most women of her faith, she accepted that it was better that she keep out.<sup>15</sup>

Interesting here is the fact that although the “business” is being conducted in the *home* (according to Ridd, the sanctified domain of women), Galiema realises her passive place and colludes with the unspoken demand that she remain silent. Significantly however, the author of this passage is male and his notion of the proper behaviour of women should not be assumed to be shared by all Muslim women of the Cape.

Jeppie is not alone in his depiction of the Carnival as predominantly male and working-class. Gerald Stone, for instance, quotes Patterson in describing participants as “lower class... Coloured men”<sup>16</sup> and Weichel similarly claims involvement stemmed from the “lowest

---

<sup>13</sup> Population Registration Act. No. 30 of 1950, *Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1950*, (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1950).

<sup>14</sup> Ridd, ‘Position and Identity’, p. 176.

<sup>15</sup> D. Desai and C. Marney, *The Killing of the Imam*, (Quartet, London, 1978), p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Stone, ‘Coon Carnival’, p. 2.

socio-economic section of the Coloured population”<sup>17</sup>. Such declarations, demand rigorous interrogation for in unproblematically conflating social class and ethnicity they fail to account for the religious and gender differences bearing critically on carnival participation. Evidently, a variety of factors and discourses of status and identity acted to determine levels of involvement in the event. Claims as to the non-participation of women, for example, abound in the writings on the Coon Carnival yet the oral testimonies of Coloured informants resident in Cape Town during the sixties and seventies expose the total absence of females as an inaccuracy.

An assessment of motives and factors determining levels of female involvement in the Coon Carnival must be prefixed by a thorough historicised investigation of the extent and degrees of their participation. Blanket statements declaring the absence of women from Carnival disguise an evolving process of their active and conspicuous involvement between the late 1950s and the 1990s.

Interviews and newspaper reports concerning the Carnival in the 1960s and ‘70s are riven with contradictions and discrepancies regarding the participation of women. Hadji Levy, a prominent Muslim tailor sewing coon costumes since before the 1950s, for example, declares Carnival “a man’s game”<sup>18</sup> yet remembers female drum majorettes<sup>19</sup> and recalls that women made costumes and shoes for the event<sup>20</sup>. Levy’s contemporary, and another former resident of District Six, Mr. Small remembers women singing as part of the Combined Chorus and in the group singing yet remarks that his own wife “didn’t like coons...[and] never went out to see coons”<sup>21</sup>.

Little consensus exists regarding conspicuous participation of women with the troupes in the 1960s and ‘70s, either in the primary reports and recollections or in secondary literature and discussion of the event. Indeed, individual testimonies by those witnessing or

---

<sup>17</sup>Weichel, ‘Study of Aspects’, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup>Levy, WCOH, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

participating in the festivities of that period are devoid even of internal consistency - they cannot even agree on a rough starting date. Michael Cyster, one of the youngest interviewees born in 1956, is unequivocal in his insistence that there have “Always. Always. Always.” been women in the coons<sup>22</sup>. More than just remembering seeing active female participants, Cyster tells that his own “sisters [and] cousins went with us”. He points out, however, that whilst they paraded with the men during the New Year festivities, dressed identically, women did not attend all of the rehearsals:

When we... start coaching then there will be no females, it's only on a Wednesday night. I make it now say a Monday night, Tuesday night and then a Wednesday night it's just entertaining.... they bring their girlfriends and then all have a gathering for that night. As I said, just for the mere fact that they know where their boyfriends and husbands are and what time they finish.<sup>23</sup>

Cyster outlines several important points here. He maintains emphatically that women have always paraded on the streets as “coons”, yet relates how in his youth (the 1970s), most of the rehearsals were exclusively male; women only attending on Wednesdays, a day of less serious “entertainment”. Implicit too is the suggestion that women condoned the participation of their men as a means of control and surveillance. Secure in the knowledge that their husbands were safely at rehearsals there was little need to worry that they had been out with other women or to query their whereabouts, demanding “where have you been?”<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, Cyster insinuates that men brought their girlfriends along once a week partly to appease them and partly just for fun, the evening being more an occasion for enjoyment and “entertainment” than other practice nights. Cyster differs from older informants in describing a significant female presence at rehearsals in the 1970s. It seems though, that women attended in their capacity as wives, girlfriends and sisters, as partners to their men rather than as individuals in their own right.

---

<sup>21</sup> Small, WCOH, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Cyster, WCOH, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Cyster's assertion that mixed practices have been increasingly common since the seventies stands in opposition to my own observations in the run up to the 1996 Carnival. Visiting numerous rehearsal venues from Woodstock to Heideveld and Mitchell's Plain, in the closing months of 1995 I found nearly all to be exclusively male. In the *Starlight Pool Hall*, the headquarters of one of Cape Town's largest troupes, the *Woodstock Starlights*, out of over a hundred people there were only two women present for the practice: me and the captain's wife who was escorting me. At a rehearsal of the *Pennsylvanias* in Hanover Park I was the only female present inside the practice yard, though the captain's wife and daughter were selling beer and Coke through a hatch in a locked door connecting the yard and the captain's house. There were a few more women in Heideveld, yet they all appeared to be accompanying male partners rather than being there on their own or as a group of women. Mixed rehearsals in the 1990s seem less common than Cyster would have us believe, though his suggestion that those women who do attend rehearsals are there as girlfriends or wives appears quite accurate.

Barty Daniels (born in 1946 ten years before Cyster, his youthful involvement with the coons beginning in the 1950s), depicts a different scenario to his fellow interviewee. Female coons, he declares, are only:

a thing [that] came in now, that women started getting into the troupe. But those days, no. There was a lot of women that dance in front, like the child, dance in front, and they bring in the princesses, every team must have a princess you see. So that's where the women start getting involved with coons.<sup>25</sup>

Though the *Cape Herald* claimed 1970 as the first time women had appeared at the Carnival as princesses and "coonettes", pictorial sources point to a much earlier starting date, revealing their involvement as far back as the 1930s [See Chapter Two, "Visual Representations" section].

---

<sup>25</sup> Daniels, WCOH, p. 10.

The testimonies of Cyster and Daniels demonstrate the difficulty of establishing precise details and accurate dates relating to the participation of women. Oral testimonies constantly contradict each other, the claims of newspaper reports, and even themselves. Daniels' assertion that the participation of female coons is only a recent phenomenon stands in diametric opposition to Cyster's personal experience of his sisters and girl-cousins' involvement. Indeed, there seems to be little consistency within generational groups as to when women coons first appeared or regarding the extent of their active participation. Whilst, for example, Ali Ismael born in 1941 a few years before Daniels, supports his claim that female coons appeared only recently, "four or five years ago"<sup>26</sup>, in total contradiction Achmat Sabera (the same age group), insists that women were present in the sixties but shy away now, due to the threat of violence:

You had little girls, drum majorettes, they were with the coons. If they were with the coons when they were kids what prevents them from joining the troupe when they are big? You see what I mean? It's in their blood... but nowadays it's dangerous for a lady to be in the coons. It's very dangerous now... because they come from the stadiums and it's dark... so that lady is vulnerable, very vulnerable.<sup>27</sup>

Some consensus does exist however, amongst the oldest group of informants, those born in the 1920s and '30s, who are certain in their avowal that there were no female coons in the "early days"; prior to the 1950s. Karriem and Radifa Thompson, both in their sixties proclaim that "women never used to dance... [with the] ..coons"<sup>28</sup> and that this is only a recent development that began ten to fifteen years ago. Sixty-six year old Janet Matthews echoes this sentiment in agreement with the Thompsons:

That time, it's not like today you find some girls with the coons, but at that time there was none, oh no. That was never allowed in those [days].<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Ismael, WCOH, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Sabera, WCOH, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> R and K Thompson, WCOH, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> J. Matthews, WCOH, p. 3.

Thomas Carelse, born in 1926, similarly states that in his youth women were present at the Carnival only as “majorettes” or spectators. “Now”, he laments, “half the team there is women and they are corrupt”<sup>30</sup>. Carelse hints <sup>at</sup> an implicit connection between the increasing participation of women coons and the “corruption”, or lack of order and discipline, of contemporary coon troupes. It is the constant refrain of many informants, regardless of age, who view the appearance of female coons as symptomatic of the growing degeneracy of the Carnival: evidence of its spiral into moral decay. Ali Ismael reflects this feeling, talking with admiration of the current captain of the *Cape Town Hawkers*, “Laughings” Tifflin:

If you go with that troupe... oooh very disciplined. You won't find a woman with that troupe. Walking with a sjambok like... very, very disciplined. I would say he's very staunch for his troupe. He don't want any woman to be with his troupe. He will hit you with a sjambok.<sup>31</sup>

Carelse directly connects the enforcement of discipline with the maintained exclusion of women. Emerging from the jumbled claims and counter-claims of informants is the impression that female coons did not appear before the late 1950s. From that time onwards the picture is more cloudy. What seems likely is that from the late 1950s and early '60s women started to appear actively in the street festivities, sometimes as majorettes, other times as princesses or coons. For some interviewees however, it is of integral importance that an impression of only the very recent appearance of women is conveyed, as part of a discourse deploring event's contemporary immorality.

Eddie Matthews, with over sixty years personal and family involvement with the Coon Carnival behind him, charts an evolving process of female participation. In the days of his grandparents, prior to the Second World War, women were absent from the troupes he contends. By the late 1960s “there was... a couple of women, but not like now”<sup>32</sup>. These few however, were limited to “the more lesbian women” who joined “as men... because ...to

---

<sup>30</sup> Carelse, WCOH, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ismael, WCOH, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> E. Matthews, WCOH, p. 23.

them they are boys”<sup>33</sup>. Matthews displays a fascinating example of his personal construction of the gender dynamics of the event. He sees Carnival as a fundamentally masculine realm. Thus, female participation does not reflect the appeal of the festivities to women, but rather to men in women’s bodies. Sexuality for him, implies gender and access to the active realms of Carnival correlates accordingly.

Ibrahim Ismael, the Muslim son of Radifa Thompson, relates that “ladies weren’t allowed in the coons... up to about ten years ago”<sup>34</sup>. He draws a sharp distinction between the Malay choirs who continue to prevent women from becoming members, and the coon troupes to which entrance is unrestricted. The reason for this, Ismael insists, is to do with “money-making for the owner” of the troupe:

you have to sell your uniform, that’s your main thing, to sell your uniform... so he sells it to the ladies, whoever wants to join.<sup>35</sup>

He depicts a present scene, initiated in the sixties, whereby unscrupulous and avaricious troupe captains anxious to maximise their profits, allow anyone to become coon members - even women! Thomas Carelse (a generation older than Ismael), states that “in [his] time” the only active female participants were young girls as “majorettes” but “now... half the team there is women and they are corrupt”<sup>36</sup>.

Miley Ferris supports the assertion that, by the seventies at least, young females participated, relating that his own twenty-eight year old daughter paraded in front of the troupes as a drum majorette<sup>37</sup>. This fact is of particular interest for Ferris and his family are practicing Muslims and his chief concern has been with the more middle-class, “respectable” Malay choirs, yet he permitted his daughter’s association with the coons. Such an instance

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ismael, WCOH, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Carelse, WCOH, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ferris, WCOH, p. 10.

makes problematic any sweeping generalisations relating the extent of sanctioned conspicuous female participation to religion.

The frequent and overriding assertion in academic accounts of the event insisting on the historical non-participation of women; the declaration that their involvement is only a very recent phenomenon, is at times contradicted and at other times affirmed, by the memories of interviewees. Informants reveal that women have always taken part in the event at some levels, though the extent of their involvement has historically gone unrecognised, played down or under-stressed. It seems however, that women have generally played a less *visible* part in the festival than their husbands, fathers and sons. The critical facilitative roles which they have occupied instead, in preparation for the event as, for example, seamstresses, hosts and cooks, have been overlooked both within the carnival hierarchy and in critical analyses of the event [see F5.1].

Indeed, academic accounts of Carnival and street festival world-wide repeatedly and misleadingly mistake the less overt, conspicuous and structurally unrecognised involvement of women for non-participation. Essentially then, it is the notion of “participation” which needs unravelling for not merely gender but other components of identity and discourses of belonging have determined different levels of involvement within the event. The error of theorists such as Weichel and even Jeppie, is to limit their definition and understanding of “participation” to only *active*, overt, and conspicuous involvement.

Bendix’s examination of the New Year *Silverklause*n in the Swiss town of Urnash (a practice bearing striking resemblance to the Coon Carnival in its use of disguise, song, dance and troupe membership and composition) posits an alternative, and far more useful, definition of *participation*. She points out early in her thesis that the masked street revellers are exclusively male but that whilst these are *active* participants, “passive participants include the wives of Chlaus, the persons visited at their homes and all those who have



F51

Women sewing coon costumes in preparation for the carnival. Note that some of the women appear to be 'White' - contradicting the notion that participation in the event has always been exclusively Coloured. Photograph from Cape Times Collection, 1950. (South African Library, Cape Town).

office at 1996 Coon Carnival, Green Point Stadium.  
Author's photograph

F52

Female coon at Green Point Stadium, January 1996.  
Author's photograph

F53



observed the active participants throughout their lives”<sup>38</sup>. She thus includes in her definition of *participation*, those who take part as observers, hosts to visiting Chlaus couples, and those in supportive and facilitative positions. In so doing, she outlines a far more inclusive but complex understanding of carnival involvement than the plethora of writings on festival which repeatedly overlook the different degrees and modes of female participation.

Carnival is not just what takes place on the street, Bendix insists, but what does not. She illuminates how participation at different levels of the event is directly related to wider socio-economic considerations: how the established gender relations within which the festival takes place necessarily determine levels of involvement within the event. In such a way, she precisely contextualises participation in the *Silverklause*n seeing attitudes towards *active* and conspicuous female involvement, as mirroring the specific politics of gender in Urnasch. Urnasch is situated, Bendix stresses, within one of the few Swiss cantons where women have, until recently been denied the vote. Men and women here remain strongly role-defined with men dominant in local customs<sup>39</sup>. In a similar pattern to pre-interview arrangements regarding the Coon Carnival, Bendix relates that “most” Urnasch wives were less than eager to speak on the subject of *Silverklause*n, seeing both the topic and the celebrations as a male preserve. The level of women’s position in the New Year festivities is, Bendix insists, a direct product and manifestation of gender-relations in the canton. Participation in the event, she implies, cannot be interpreted in isolation for it exists only as a manifestation of the socio-historical context from which it springs.

Interviews with women relating to the Coon Carnival were likewise difficult to organise with constant referrals to husbands, brothers and fathers, deemed infinitely more qualified to speak on the subject. Female family members frequently found the request that they speak on the subject incomprehensible. However, often their vehement disclaiming of involvement in the event veiled a long history of *passive* participation as for instance,

---

<sup>38</sup> R. Bendix, *Progress and Nostalgia: Silverklause*n in Urnasch, Switzerland, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

spectators, or in facilitative roles such as sewing the buttons for costumes or preparing the food that would be used to entertain coon troupes at the evening *tafels*<sup>40</sup>. Thus, in both participation in the festivities in Urnasch and the Carnival in Cape Town, as well as in the discussion and interviews surrounding the events, hierarchies of authority mirror pre-existing gender structures.

Even as young girls in the family home women played important roles in preparing for the Coon Carnival. Barty Daniels relates how wives of troupe members often appeared at rehearsal venues shortly before New Year to peddle their handmade wares or sent along their husbands to sell adornments that would add a little extra glamour to the costumes. “Ribbons” and “stripeys”, he tells, brightened-up suits that might otherwise look “dull”:

sometimes wives make [them] and they come to the meeting and they sell it to you, they sell flowers, some colours, and they sell the stripeys, they sell it to you.... sometimes they give it to the people that gives the gears out. If you come and fetch your gear, “You don’t want to buy stripeys or flowers?”, ya, sometimes you bought two, sometimes you bought four for you and your friend.<sup>41</sup>

Fagmiejah Jansen, a forty year old Muslim woman from the Bo-Kaap’s Dante<sup>42</sup> dynasty, provides a more detailed description of the weeks of preparation by the female family members which preceded the appearance and sale of both costumes and decorative accoutrements:

when I was very young, my grandmother’s sister.. used to do the sewing for the Coon Carnival and being about six or seven years old we were the ones..

---

<sup>40</sup> *Tafels* (‘tables’) refer to the practice of inviting troupes to sing at private houses at New Year. Often such invitations came from individual members of the troupe concerned. The host(ess) provided a table of snacks and drinks to be consumed by troupe members after performing a few choral numbers. Troupes usually had a number of such invitations on each night of performance but after removals it became more difficult to honour them all as members lived miles apart and travel between them was lengthy.

<sup>41</sup> Daniels, WCOH, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> A family with integral and extensive ties to the Coon Carnival. Interviewees across Cape Town frequently cite the “Dante brothers” as “starting” the carnival. Stone writes that some members of the visiting U. S. minstrels, the “American Jubilee Singers” settled with the Bo-Kaap “Dantu” family and their formation of the *Cape of Good Hope’s Sports Club*, was a major landmark in the festival’s development. Stone. ‘Coon Carnival’, p. 3.

doing all the buttons. It's a little cardboard that is actually cut into round circles and then we had to cover this with cloth going over this cardboard and tying it with cotton, around and round.... and that is actually the buttons of the costumes...now that started till we're getting bigger and then we used to do the rosettes... And everybody, especially the last two weeks of the year... or before 31st of December, that was the busiest time of the year.<sup>43</sup>

Such informal economic activity offered many women the opportunity to earn an independent and annual bonus at a time when the extra capital was well needed. In her 1950 study of Coloured women in a Salt River clothing factory, Weiss notes that workers were paid weekly, every Friday<sup>44</sup>, and that over Christmas the industry took an annual three week holiday<sup>45</sup>. As a result of this industrial calendar many women employed in the textile factories probably had some extra time before New Year to produce carnival costumes and adornments. Furthermore, they are likely to have experienced an exacerbated need to generate capital during a period when they were not receiving wages.

Invariably though, women occupied structurally inferior positions to men in the industries associated with carnival-related production. Johnson speaks, for example, of an extreme sexual division of labour; of "gender overconstruction"<sup>46</sup> governing relations and hierarchies within Cape Town's clothing and textile industries. Whilst men occupied higher paid, skilled and technical jobs, women performed the "downgraded... designated female tasks" of cutting, sewing and stitching<sup>47</sup>. Caroline Stone notes too that whilst women numerically dominated the "traditionally female" industries of textiles, clothing and food production, they usually entered these spheres as the least skilled and lowest paid workers, with a far lower likelihood of promotion than men<sup>48</sup>.

---

<sup>43</sup> Jansen, WCOH, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> A. G. Weiss, 'The Cape Coloured Woman - Within an Industrial Community and at Home', (MSc thesis, University of Cape Town, 1950), p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> P. Johnson, 'Talking the Talk and Walking the Walk: The Spring Queen Festival and the Eroding Family Cult in the Western Cape Garment Industry', (Seminar paper presented to the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 7/10/93), p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> C. Stone, 'Industrialisation and Female Labour Force Participation: Coloured Women in the Cape Peninsula', (Centre for Intergroup Studies, 5th Workshop, "Mobility and Social Change in South Africa", 23-25 June 1975), p. 6.

Bickford-Smith's study of late Victorian Cape Town suggests that such labour divisions arose from deeply entrenched historical precedent. Noting a "clear division in women and men's work" - with females involved in "keeping homes clean, making, mending and washing clothes" - he states that "in other words [women were] involved ..in supportive, if always not directly subordinate, roles to men" which were also "generally... lower paid"<sup>49</sup>. In this vein, though often unofficially engaged in industry producing garments for the Carnival during the 1960s and '70s, women were generally situated in inferior, subsidiary roles, as for instance, aids to male tailoring concerns. The *Cape Argus*' Woman's Page of 4/1/77, in an article entitled "Making Coon Fashions", relates how Hadji Levy and his family were responsible for the production of three thousand costumes for that year's Carnival. Whilst the Levy patriarch designed the costumes, it was his "wife and daughters" who did much of the sewing<sup>50</sup>. Janet Matthews, part of another extensive carnival dynasty, her grandfather, husband and son all having served some time as a troupe captain, recalls how male tailors were assisted by numerous female auxiliaries:

Boeta Talip... and his son... sewed for the coons... They were both tailors...  
But Boeta Talip it was just him alone, he sewed everything... we helped him  
a bit, my granny and all of us, we helped him with the buttons you see.<sup>51</sup>

It appears that it was the manufacturing of adornments and accoutrements to embellish carnival gears that proffered the best alternative to earn independent extra capital on a self-employed basis.

The notion of non-participation, the frequent claims by women that the Carnival was a male domain, thus necessitate rigorous analysis for they often obscure the true extent of active, but hidden, involvement. Of critical significance however, is the way in which discourses of "respectability" and sexual morality, at times working with the rhetoric of religion, acted to gender conceptions of social space, determining degrees of

<sup>49</sup> Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> *The Cape Argus*, (4/1/77), p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Matthews, WCOH, p. 4.

“acceptable” participation. This cultural context bears directly on the expectations placed on different groups, demanding their active, passive, or non-involvement in the Carnival - the occupation and manipulation of urban social space.

Carnival, it seems, highlights a critical genderisation - indeed, sexualisation - of urban territory: the centrality of space to the maintenance of social order and control. Pamela Scully explains the “separation of spheres” according to gender as a manifest product of “industrialisation”<sup>52</sup>. Notions of “masculinised public space” and “feminised private space” had, she suggests, “received ideological sanction in the nineteenth-century” Cape through “marriage, inheritance, and labour legislation”<sup>53</sup>.

This goes some way to explaining the vehemence with which the increasingly blatant active participation of female coons is condemned as a transgression of naturalised, even divinely sanctified, boundaries. Women must know their place in the home and under the watchful, secure and proprietorial gaze of their patriarch, and must stick to it. It is noteworthy, however, that such transgression was permitted for children in the conspicuous participation of pre-pubescent girl coons and majorettes, in “feminine attire” of short skirts.

Da Matta’s isolation of the two essential social domains of “House” and “Street” is premised on a similar conception of sexualised urban space in Brazil<sup>54</sup>. Brazilian life, he claims, is divided into these two oppositional poles. The *House* represents harmony and rest and is governed by the “natural” hierarchies of age, sex, and kinship<sup>55</sup>. Critically too, Da Matta notes, space within the *House* and the precise function of individual rooms is clearly defined. Conversely, the *Street* represents an “uncontrollable” world escaping the confines of status and hierarchical structures of control. He asserts that whilst in the *House* “associations” are based on kinship, on the *Street* they are the product of free and open

---

<sup>52</sup> P. Scully, ‘Private and public worlds of emancipation in the rural Western Cape. c. 1830-1842’, in N. Worden and C. Crais (eds.), *Breaking the Chains*, (Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994), p. 218.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> R. Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*, (University of Notre Dame Press, London, 1991), p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

“choice”<sup>56</sup>. Both domains are sexualised but whilst the *Street* is the preserve of men, the *House* cannot be regarded as its feminine equivalent. This binaristic division seems far too simplistic. Though the *House* may indeed be governed by “natural” hierarchies, it does not follow that the arena of the *Street* escapes such entrenched social divisions: is anarchic and free. That women are obstructed from gaining even entrance to the sphere of the *Street* itself reflects a fundamental gender hierarchy governing relations in the public realm.

Ridd outlines, however, the way in which women have been complicit, if not critically active, in maintaining the gendered delineation of social space. Pointing to their situation in Cape Muslim society she presents three case studies to illustrate “women’s role in keeping alive the sense of ethno-religious identity as Malay”<sup>57</sup>. She demonstrates how women are frequently the vociferous bastions of cultural integrity and guardians of authenticity. Discussing Christian criticism of the “hypocrisy” of Muslims who fail to fulfill all the ritualistic practices of Islam, Ridd claims “it is true that few Muslims pray five times daily... though the women in particular often insist that they do”<sup>58</sup>. Similarly, with regard to the use of language and dialect she says, “women in particular (both Christian and Muslim) who set store by their respectability, disassociate themselves from the Dialect [the stigmatised derivative of Standard Afrikaans spoken in the Cape] and sometimes insist that they do not understand it”<sup>59</sup>. In similar vein, she notes how “women in particular strive to improve their social status through judicious marriage, and are careful to control their daughter’s choice of husbands”. She illustrates a society where women are the pious caretakers of religious tradition as well as the prime motivators to social-climbing and bourgeois “respectability”.

Separating notions of Brazilian womanhood into fundamental categories of Virgin/Mother, and Whore, Da Matta explains that the virtuous and prized paragon of femininity must remain at home because that is the space “where men have control over the entrances and

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ridd, ‘Position and Identity’, p. 357.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 395.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

exits”<sup>60</sup> and charge over their movements. Thus, it is not that the *House* is a place of control by women but rather, over them. The Madonna’s antithesis, however, is significantly the woman of the *Street*: a place of anarchy and disorder where the patriarch has no control over her. Social space is precisely sexualised, transgression of the boundaries implies a transgression of moral codes of sexual behaviour threatening the established patriarchal order.<sup>61</sup> Here the discourses of respectability, social-space and gender, blatantly conflate to explode the myth of the *street* as a place of unbounded, free association. The woman of the “street” does not escape the “prohibitions”, “hierarchy” or “established order”<sup>62</sup> which govern gender relations in the home. Rather, she violates them and is “ranked” accordingly.

The link between order and control and the maintenance of precise roles in the Carnival, of limitations placed on participation according to gender, finds frequent echo in the testimonies of many Muslim informants. Ali Ismael of Athlone seems representative of many Muslim men of his generation in drawing a direct correlation between “discipline” and the exclusion of women from active participation.<sup>63</sup>

Central to Da Matta’s discussion of sexualised social space and Brazilian festival is his insistence that Carnival temporarily inverts such divisions. In the “ritual world”, he states, the city streets are “domesticated” as eating, sleeping and sexual relations move from the private space of the house to the public arena of the street. In similar vein, he continues, with this reversal the woman of the street, the prostitute, is “glorified”<sup>64</sup>.

Like Jeppie, relying heavily on Bakhtin for support, Da Matta declares Carnival “a moment without a patron and a master: it belongs to all”<sup>65</sup>, and further that “the law of Carnival is to

<sup>60</sup> Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*, p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> In her 1950 study of “The Cape Coloured Woman”, Weiss notes that in District Six during the nights women remained “inside the house” whilst men socialised mainly “outside”, confirming Da Matta’s observations relating gender to public and private space. Weiss, ‘The Cape Coloured Woman’, p. 73.

<sup>62</sup> Jeppie, ‘Aspects of Popular’, p. 69 quoting from Bakhtin.

<sup>63</sup> See my comments earlier in this chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*, p. 107.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

have no law at all”<sup>66</sup>. His central and repeated insistence is that during Carnival - the inversion of two polarised worlds - all order and hierarchy is temporarily overturned. With the “natural” hierarchies of the house suspended, established gender-relations and their ordering of social space, for a moment, do not apply. For a few days every year the moral code of respectability stays its censure of women on the street, overlooking their forays from the home to the public space of Carnival. Their transgression from the ordered “harmony”<sup>67</sup> of the *house* to the “uncontrollable” chaos of the *street*, for a limited period, ignored if not actually permitted.

Bendix and Scheper-Hughes in their respective studies of festival in Urnasch and Bom-Jesus reject Da Matta’s depiction of Carnival as a time of complete abandonment and anarchic reversal. Taking direct issue with Da Matta’s description of Carnival as a “privileged... space of forgetting”, Scheper-Hughes argues that in Bom-Jesus the event provides “space for remembering and is as much a ritual of intensification as a ritual of reversal”<sup>68</sup>. Indeed, far from the breaching of everyday distinctions between public and private realms which Turner spoke of in his study of Rio’s Carnival, Scheper-Hughes says she witnessed a “highly segregated Carnival where participants knew their place and stuck to it”<sup>69</sup>. At a practical level this was borne out with an absence of women participating actively on the streets as revellers and performers.

Turner claims Woman as the “soul”<sup>70</sup> and “mother” of Carnival, but Scheper-Hughes points out that the mere appearance of the feminine form on the street by no means signifies the reversal of the established sexual or gender order. Though the figure of Woman walks the streets of Bom-Jesus during Carnival in a way she cannot outside of festival time, hers is not an unqualified freedom open to all women. The event, insists Scheper-Hughes, is “designed

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>68</sup> N. Scheper-Hughes, Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992), p. 482.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 484.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491. quoting V. Turner, The Ritual Process: structure and anti-structure, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969), p. 82.

for the pleasure of men and boys”<sup>71</sup>: an occasion when the “*female* is liberated but only in male bodies or for the purpose of titillating male fantasies of sexual abundance or erotic abandon”. Middle-class women in particular did not participate at all, instead viewing the festivities from their verandah (for Da Matta, the verandah represents an “ambiguous space”<sup>72</sup> situated somewhere between the chaos of the *street* and the order of the *house*). Indeed, though Woman blatantly flaunts her sexuality it is woman in the body of man who enjoys such a freedom - the transvestite - whilst the mothers and wives of Bom-Jesus watch the spectacle from the safe space of their homes.

The figure of Woman appears in the Bom-Jesus Carnival in two performing troupes: as a *bloco* comprised of female prostitutes dressed as gypsies and financed by wealthy male sponsors - the “Disgusting Gypsies”, and as a group of working-class men parading as transvestites<sup>73</sup>. The former troupe, states Scheper-Hughes, are paraded in order to be “diminished” and “scorned”. The transvestite blocos, conversely, are the “representation of female gender and sexuality” that are the “projection of male sexual fantasies... offer[ing] only a travesty of female gender and sexuality”<sup>74</sup>. These transvestites are expected to behave as “perfectly docile and receptive sexual objects”<sup>75</sup> who must allow themselves to be touched without complaint and fondled by male spectators.

In neither of these cases, therefore, is the gendered delineation of space really transgressed during Carnival. Women fail to actively participate to anything like the extent of their male counter-parts. The appearance of the feminine form is highly sexualised and seems to reinforce existing notions of respectable and proper gendered behaviour rather than to challenge them. A female sexuality is articulated, indeed performed, but it is neither an expression by, or of, the mass of women who live in the community. The cross-dressing that is so central an aspect of Carnival, claims Scheper-Hughes, represents a “one-sided...

---

<sup>71</sup> Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping*, p. 491.

<sup>72</sup> Da Matta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*, p. 65.

<sup>73</sup> Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping*, p. 492,

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 493.

fantasy”, for women “rarely, if ever, cross-dress in Carnival. If they do, their role is to undress, not cross-dress”<sup>76</sup>.

Scheper-Hughes’ observations appear as fitting to Cape Town’s Coon Carnival as to events in Bom-Jesus. Ironically, though a feminine form fronts each troupe, this figure is never an actual *Woman* but a man dressed as one. Indeed, other than the relatively recently introduced, semi-clad, carnival queens, the only women to appear at the event blatantly *as* women, were men. Barty Daniels relates that besides the women who came as carnival queens “you won’t recognise female coons as women”, for they were dressed identically to the men<sup>77</sup>. This is not to say that women did not participate as coon troupe members but that if they did they dressed in trousers, hats and tackies and were indistinguishable from the men, their heads covered and their faces obscured by paint and boot-polish. Female sexuality was exhibited only in the two ways outlined by Scheper-Hughes; by men dressed as women or by scantily-clad young carnival queens. Significantly both of these roles were predominantly passive. Carnival queens were clearly there for little else than to be looked at. Unlike the other artists and entertainers in the troupes, the carnival queen and the *moffie* (transvestite) had no recognised, prescribed, speaking role [see F5.2].

Yet we should be cautious not to infer from the prescribed silence of the *moffie*, their successful and maintained suppression. Admittedly their role was not formally recognised in that there was no established, listed competition for the parading drag-queens at the stadium as there was for the Drum Major, but quite evidently the *moffie* enjoyed popular non-formalised recognition, commanding both status and respect. Indeed, interviewees relate how individual *moffies* were courted and wooed every year by troupe captains eager for their affiliation. Unlike all of the other active players in the troupe; from clowns to rank-and-file members, to lieutenants and vice-captains, the *moffie* was the only performer with complete autonomy; free to choose their own act, costume and persona. The troupe captain footed the fabric bill for the outfit of their *moffie* affiliate but had no say over what

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>77</sup> Daniels, WCOH, p. 10.

that costume was. The *moffie*'s position in relation to the troupes and the competition was therefore, highly ambiguous, precluded from a recognised and sanctioned speaking-role, yet unofficially fronting the troupe alongside the Drum Major, and retaining artistic autonomy to choose and design their own costume. The *moffie* thus vacillated between popular acceptance and official rejection, or denial

It must be noted that the abuse of Woman as female form, was not limited merely to a symbolic level; the required passivity of the transvestite or *moffie*, for example. Violation and abuse of women at an actual physical level also occurred as Abe Sheldon attests. He relates that during the sixties and seventies there were "a couple of rapes [of] people watching [the coons], ...it was terrible"<sup>78</sup>. Furthermore, counter to the suggestion that the danger for female spectators is a recent phenomenon; the combined product of a transgression of modes of proper female behaviour and of the increasing ruthlessness of gangs, runs the testimony of those such as Janet Matthews. Even as a child in the 1940s, she remembers, girls attended the stadium chaperoned by a male relative for it wasn't considered safe for them to go alone:

My granny she never went, no. She didn't go and neither did my mommy go but we children we all went, but okay, with a chaperone... otherwise we couldn't go.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, the *Muslim News* of the early sixties based part of its denunciation of Carnival on the violence against women often accompanying it. In its first edition of 1964 for example, an editorial entitled "Ban All Coons" stated "Green Point Track in particular, is infamous for the number of sexual assaults during carnival time", but claims, these "rapes" and "near rapes" are seldom reported in the media because the victims are not White.

Jeppie's assertion that there were "no" women in the coon troupes of the 1940s and '50s seems inaccurate in light of claims to the contrary by numerous oral informants, yet what is telling about his comment is the fact that there appeared to be no women. He remarks that

---

<sup>78</sup> Sheldon, WCOH, p. 28.

the only “non-masculine” performer was the effeminate moffie but his voice was never heard. Whilst he was seen, spoken of, represented and judged (though significantly not in any official or recognised sense as were all other items), he was “never allowed the privilege of discourse”<sup>80</sup>. This was, states Jeppie, a reflection and interpretation of inner-city gender-relations where “men had all authority invested in them, they defined roles for women and children”<sup>81</sup>. There were, he continues, “appropriate roles for men, and set patterns for women” but “divergence from these inherited models occurred during Carnival in its boldest form”.

Again Jeppie’s comments contradict one another for whilst on the one hand he implies that the genderisation of Carnival; the prescription or preclusion of roles according to sex, is a mirroring of gender relations specific to Cape Town’s inner-city, on the other hand he suggests that Carnival offered an opportunity to stray from these roles. Jeppie’s vacillation, his inability, or unwillingness, to conclude his argument and state whether existing gender relations are ultimately sanctioned or challenged by the Coon Carnival, is indicative of much writing on festival in general. A constant tension operates not just between different theorists but within the works of individual critics themselves, as to whether carnivalistic inversion (in this case it takes the form of gender-reversal) ultimately reinforces and upholds, or challenges and subverts, the established order and existing hierarchies.

Da Matta insists that Carnival is a “time of forgetting”<sup>82</sup> but this is evidently less than accurate as far as the active and conspicuous street participation of women is concerned in the of the Coon Carnival, for overwhelmingly they neither forget nor stray from the roles and places prescribed to them the rest of the year. Speaking of the New Year festival in Urnasch, Bendix states:

public boundaries between the male and female domain existing throughout the year are then no longer reversed but reinforced. Women are reduced to

---

<sup>79</sup> J. Matthews, WCOH, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Jeppie, ‘Aspects of Popular’, p. 80.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>82</sup> Da Matta, Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes, p. 482.

a passive receptive, background role. Their help in putting together Chlause Groschte [carnival costumes] is not publicly recognised, and credit is taken by the men.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, Da Matta's remark about "forgetting" seems somewhat ironic as far as the participation of women in the Carnival is concerned for whilst their prescribed social roles continue to be adhered to, the level of their involvement and the value of their contributions to the success of the event is seldom *remembered*.

Entrance into the sphere of the *street*, Da Matta's anarchic and boundless free-space, continues to be obstructed for women by a discourse of bourgeois "respectability", frequently coupled with the rhetoric of religion. It is an exclusion which operates differently according to socio-economic class. Weiss notes that "streetlife"<sup>84</sup> is livelier and more visibly vibrant in the predominantly working-class District Six than in nearby, wealthier, Walmer Estate.

The stigmatisation of "streetlife" and out-of-home recreation reaches its critical zenith around the visibility of women in their occupation of public space. Weiss herself, though commenting on the socio-economic determinant of "street-life", employs a rhetoric linking sexual morality and occupation of social space and prescribed gender roles, in her examination of the leisure activities of Coloured women in a Salt River textile factory. She insists on a direct connection between social-class and degrees of "respectability", defined in terms of sexual morality, describing "lower-class Coloured women" as "amateur prostitutes": "the bad element"<sup>85</sup>. Interestingly here Weiss employs the precisely genderised discourse of social space which Da Matta and Scully speak of. Occupation or visibility of women in the street is interpreted according to a hierarchy of "respectability" itself determined by socio-economic class and defined in terms of sexual behaviour.

---

<sup>83</sup> Bendix, *Progress and Nostalgia*, p. 71.

<sup>84</sup> Weiss, 'The Cape Coloured Woman', p72

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Critically however, it is often women themselves who assert this notion most vociferously, acting as the self-appointed caretakers of Carnival's authenticity and the bastions of propriety simultaneously. "Respectable" and "respectability", muses Ridd in her discussion of "position and identity in [the] divided society" of Woodstock/Walmer Estate/District Six, "are words used inordinately in the District Six Area, especially by women. They denote a quality which has become increasingly vital to people's sense of dignity since Apartheid lumped them all together as *Coloured*"<sup>86</sup>. Thus "respectability" becomes a means to retain dignity, indeed identity, in a classificatory system deeming them non-entities. In the District Six Area, she continues, the term is used in opposition to "deuremekaar" (a kind of disorderly, anarchic madness), where people stress their own respectability as a means of "defending themselves against the constant threat of others trying to run them down".

The connection between an impression of wanton sexual abandon, the inverse of bourgeois "respectability", and conspicuous female carnival participation, is reflected in diverse writings on Carnival worldwide and persists also as a dominant refrain in interviews on Cape Town's Coon Carnival in the 1960s and '70s.

Scheper-Hughes relates that the women of Bom-Jesus were "generally dismissive" of the festivities. One female respondent, emphatically condemned "the woman who participates in this madness" as "deida", a term, Scheper-Hughes points out, means both crazy and sex-crazed<sup>87</sup>. Demonstrating a similar connection between female carnival involvement and the transgression of notions of sexual "respectability", Bendix relates how a female Urnasch informant damned the participation of women as a "disgrace"<sup>88</sup>.

Of Cape Town's Carnival, forty year old Faldiela Isaacse of Woodstock (the wife of a major troupe captain and personally responsible for sewing hundreds of coon costumes every year), states: "it's a disgrace... to have women in the Carnival"<sup>89</sup>. She claims though, that

---

<sup>86</sup> Ridd, 'Position and Identity', p. 105.

<sup>87</sup> Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping*, p. 495.

<sup>88</sup> Bendix, *Progress and Nostalgia*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Isaacse, WCOH, p. 18.

whilst those women who participated in the sixties and seventies did so to accompany their spouses, today they go along for the pure personal hedonism of it:

Some women used to because their husbands is with it, now they like the excitement and they also put on the gear and they also go.<sup>90</sup>

This is clearly a change that she does not condone. The increasingly overt and active involvement of women in the Coon Carnival from the late 1950s, as conveyed in the oral testimonies of Coloured informants, is closely accompanied by an image of moral decline. The loss of control, discipline and order is related in terms of the transgression of codes of sexual morality and proper, “respectable” behaviour.

Radifa Thompson reflects a frequent tendency of women to deny personal involvement in the event and to condemn that of other women as undignified, an act of sexual abandon, a deviation from “natural” gendered behaviour. She describes the appearance of female coons as “the terrible thing that has ever happened in this world... It started about ten years, fifteen years that they started running around in the coon troupes and I think it’s disgraceful. It’s a sight that I don’t even like seeing”<sup>91</sup>.

Of critical interest however, is the way in which Thompson implies a link between notions of proper sexual behaviour and active carnival and Malay choir participation, of respectability and precisely delineated social-space, demonstrating the genderisation of space which Da Matta so painstakingly outlines:

...this is the way I see it... there was a choir here in Elsie’s River and they were not Malays, they were all Christian but they had their Malay choir. Now believe me, I do not like to speak of them as class... let me put it... different way of rearing. They were not to me reared in the proper manner, these men too because they had their women dancing with them.... they came from Elsie’s River and to me they were not polished enough.... Girls dressed up, teenagers dressed up, it’s degrading. I don’t believe they

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> R. Thompson, WCOH, p. 23.

should.... How can parents allow their daughters to participate in the coons?<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, Thompson demonstrates how discourses of gender and religion potently intersect, constructing a moral code of “respectability” in terms of occupation of social space which precludes conspicuous female involvement. Her comment is particularly interesting in its implicit process of “othering” in connection to place and territory. The bad element she sees as being an *uncivilised* contingent from Elsie’s River. Thompson asserts her own claim to “respectability” through stressing the lack of social “polish” of those in another neighbourhood. In such a way she articulates her identity in positive relation to a negative “other”: an “other” she significantly associates with an alien and unfamiliar territory - Elsie’s River.

Reading Scully’s musings on the structure of work and family in the nineteenth-century Cape, it becomes clear that these late twentieth-century notions of bourgeois respectability did not exist in a cultural vacuum but stemmed from firmly rooted historical precedents. She relates how British colonists imported to the Cape a “free wage labour ideology” premised on, and legitimised by, a “cult of respectability”, working hand in hand with an established patriarchal code of “gender relations”<sup>93</sup>.

Illuminating the essential socio-economic dimension to these conceptions of “respectability” and “social space” Andrew Bank points to the “rigid class division”<sup>94</sup> structuring Cape recreation in the early nineteenth-century. “The city’s subordinate groupings”, he asserts, due to their “relative lack of private space, were forced to rely far more heavily on public space”. The street represented a free-space beyond the ambit and control of the owner class: a “culture of drinking, gambling, street-brawling and music-making that thrived on the weekends outside the places of work”<sup>95</sup>.

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>93</sup> Scully, ‘Private and public worlds’, p. 218.

<sup>94</sup> Bank, ‘The erosion of urban slavery’, p. 91.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

It should be pointed out however, that this “street-life” was predominantly male. Glaser draws a parallel between the youth of Washington D.C.’s ghettos and that of Soweto: “like the tsotsis, the boys of Winston street received their male socialisation outside of the household, in the street”<sup>96</sup>. Interviewees outline a strong and persistent connection during the 1960s and ‘70s, between neighbourhood based gang and coon troupe, with frequently overlapping memberships (see my Chapter Four). But the overwhelming characteristic of such gangs was their aggressive masculinity. Glaser, talking of similar youth gangs on the Rand at the same time, states:

the tsotsi gangs were an expression of young urban masculinity. Although women were sometimes drawn peripherally into tsotsi gangs as girlfriends, decoys and lookouts, the gang subculture was essentially male. The distinctive clothing style was for males only and women were excluded from the prestige spheres of gang life.<sup>97</sup>

With girls peripheral to gang culture and with gang membership often closely paralleling patterns of troupe affiliation, this marginality of women was often replicated within coon structures. Humphries, however, in his study of working-class London youth between 1889-1939, problematises the notion of complete female passivity and marginality in gang culture. Whilst, he concedes, girls were often marginal to the organisational structures, they were also often the prime instigators of male disinvolvement. He states, “many respondents recalled that girls were often suspicious and disapproving of boyfriends who continued to indulge in street-gang activities and would exert pressure to loosen the bonds of those male-dominated groups”<sup>98</sup>.

If the introduction of women coons in the late fifties to sixties can, in part, be attributed to men bringing along their wives and girlfriends to practices, so its converse - the influence of women on male participation - must be recognised. Fagmiejah Jansen, for example, illustrates how her father’s participation in the sixties and seventies, as that of other men, was influenced by the wishes of his spouse. Her father, she states, “wasn’t in theory in the

---

<sup>96</sup> Glaser, ‘Urban Youth Culture’, p. 15.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

troupes” yet every New Year’s Eve men like him would “steal out of the cupboard their shirt, their tackies shoes and socks... so most of their wives never knew their husbands was in the troupe, and when the troupe came down my mother got such a shock because his face was full of make-up, and she was just sort of stunned because... lot’s of wives didn’t like their husbands to be in the troupe”<sup>99</sup>. The process was thus far from one-directional. As men increasingly brought along their female partners to practices so it eased the way for other women to come along for the sheer fun of it. Yet simultaneously, the involvement of some men was curtailed by the censure of their wives and girlfriends.

The acute association of the urban arena with working-class recreation outside of structural control goes some way to explaining a gender-based rejection of streetlife. Notions of bourgeois “respectability” structured partly by settler patriarchy and nineteenth-century “free wage labour ideology” made social *advancement* dependent on the denial and suppression of the public world. The positioning of Woman assumed central significance within the social stigmatisation of streetlife and the valorisation of the private realm of home. The figure of Woman could potentially represent the bastion of “respectability” or its oppositional epitome, depending on the social arena to which she was permitted access.

Thus, the rejection of the Coon Carnival in the 1960s and ‘70s by women, as “degrading” and immoral, reflects entrenched aspirations to bourgeois “respectability” and social climbing.<sup>100</sup> Class-based condemnation of the event however, was clearly not limited to women, as Dudley articulates in his claim that “the coons were drawn from a certain layer, class layer... and there were other layers in the population that regarded any association with the coons as being *Non You*, so that there was a Berlin Wall between the coons and certain of the social classes amongst the people”<sup>101</sup>.

---

<sup>98</sup> Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels*, p. 179.

<sup>99</sup> Jansen, WCOH, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> Davis outlines how, in an age when “respectability was the watchword... people under pressure to differentiate themselves from their rowdy neighbours... could articulate claims to respectable status” through their participation or non-participation in street-life. Davis, *Parades and Power*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>101</sup> Dudley, WCOH, pp. 3-4.

An article in the *Cape Herald* of 20/12/69 headed: “Coons - For and Against: Who says its Debasing?” takes a similar tone. Here the writer quotes a Bonteheuwel man as declaring: “It is a cruel fact that only the less literate type of Coloured people are party to this type of thing. Indeed those who are more enlightened would rather be seen dead than be a party to this affected frivolity”<sup>102</sup>. Clear class-based differences in perceptions of Carnival thus emerge as having structured attitudes to the event and shaped motives for disinvolvement in the sixties and seventies.

Yet invariably, discourses of “respectability” and sexual propriety overlapped, emphasising the gender dynamic to constructions of social space. Religion was also a determining component in precluding or stigmatising the involvement of women in the Carnival of the ‘60s and ‘70s. Amongst oral informants it was Muslim women who participated far less *conspicuously* than their Christian contemporaries. Whilst they often spoke of sewing and cooking for, or watching the coons, none of the Muslim women interviewed, or the wives, daughters or mothers of the male Muslim informants had actively participated as coons at the Carnival. It appears therefore, that religion and gender, like bourgeois “respectability” and gender, combined in a potent cocktail, mixing a moral code that stigmatised the free and open involvement of women in the event.

Overwhelmingly, even when the event was criticised or rejected by informants, women recall watching the Carnival in the 1960s and ‘70s from their *stoeps*<sup>103</sup>, the street pavements, or from the stands of the competition stadiums. Birmingham, writing on Carnival in Luanda, divides the event between “the witnesses and the actors”<sup>104</sup>, yet points out that “interaction between the two was complex and tenuous”. He outlines how ways and positions of viewing were themselves structured according to pre-existing social divisions with privileged enclosures for the diplomatic corps at one end of the scale, and at

---

<sup>102</sup> *The Cape Herald*, 20/12/69, p12

<sup>103</sup> Verandahs.

<sup>104</sup> Birmingham, ‘Carnival at Luanda’, p. 94.

the other, “crowds” and a mass of “supporters” who almost swamped the carnival procession<sup>105</sup>.

Similar “complex[ities]” structured the audience of the Coon Carnival, dictating where the event was watched from and by whom. Often girls, particularly Muslims, were allowed to watch the procession from the safety of the home - a private window onto the public realm - or the midway position of the local pavements, yet would not be allowed to the stadiums, considered more dangerous.

The removal of the carnival procession from the city centre’s streets in 1967 and its confinement to out-of-town sites coupled with the mass removal under the Group Areas Act of Coloured residents to the Cape Flats, had severe implications for the position of women as carnival audience. Informants recall the vibrant street activity that took place over New Year prior to removals. Karim Thompson tells of how:

from six o’clock in the morning, or you can say from New Year’s Eve night through, from the Malay choirs to the Coon Carnival, right through, the people would sit and enjoy themselves, bring their coffee, bring their lunch or whatever they want to bring along, sit and watch people take part in the Malay choir, people could sit on the floor.<sup>106</sup>

Indeed, it seems that New Year allowed many women to temporarily transgress their prescribed social and spatial positions. Though direct and conspicuous female involvement generally continued to be stigmatised, the fact that wives and daughters were permitted to spend the night picnicking and lining the town’s central pavements on blankets to watch the parade, marked an annual highlight and an exciting, albeit limited, freedom. Radifa Thompson, though at pains to distance herself from current involvement in the Carnival, remembers how before Group Areas “everybody waited and watched”<sup>107</sup> in the streets for the troupes to parade past. It was “especially exciting”, she goes on, for “we.... girls, all girls. We enjoyed music because we were allowed to stay up late, although we had to be on

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>106</sup> K. Thompson, WCOH, p. 9.

the *stoep* over there. But we could watch these things you know. So that's what I say, this is lost. It's a vast difference from what it was years ago than it is today".

The change for Thompson is thus, tied inextricably to the personal effect of Group Areas. Where the Carnival in the past meant staying up late, eating treats on the *stoep* or the road as the family watched the troupes march by, their move to Athlone displaced them from the heart of the activity. Yet the disappearance of the road march from the streets in 1967 meant there was little of a spectacle left to be watched. For women like Radifa Thompson, neither allowed nor inclined to attend the stadium event, the result was that an eagerly anticipated annual period of novelty and freedom was lost.

No longer living in the locality in which the event took place, women and girls were unable to watch the festivities from the security of their homes. With the street parade effectively outlawed, spectators had to view the troupes in the stadium or not at all. As the State legislature manipulated urban space, dismantling and reconstructing geographical communities, so it impacted on social constructions of space and identity. Public and private worlds of *home* and *street*, the boundaries and divisions between the two, were directly reshaped as a result of government policy.

Jeppie and Bakhtin are thus, misguided in their insistence that Carnival necessarily marked the "suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions"<sup>108</sup>, a time of complete, though temporary abandon, for as far as women and Cape Town's Coon Carnival this clearly was not the case. The level and extent of female *participation* was governed by existing gender relations interacting with discourses of social-class, religion, "respectability" and sexual morality. Women's involvement invariably reflected gendered constructions of social space dictating their behaviour both in and outside the event. Frequently obstructed from active carnivalistic display, their conspicuous participation stigmatised, women played vital, though often invisible, facilitative roles in preparation for the annual event. Mothers,

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>108</sup> Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular', p. 69 quoting from Bakhtin, M. Rabelais and His World, (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1968).

wives and daughters of male coons cooked and sewed for the Carnival sometimes as a way of generating a little independent extra income. Furthermore, often their affiliation with a specific troupe was deeply rooted. Reporting a violent incident on the Cape Flats, the *Herald* of 15/1/72 attests to a close identification of, at least some, women with Carnival and particular troupes. "Late on Saturday night", it tells, "police were called to Storms River street in Manenberg, where two women were tearing each other's hair out. They were fighting over whose troupe was the best dressed"<sup>109</sup>.

It would be a mistake then, to see the social geography of the Coon Carnival and its relation to discourses of sexuality and "respectability", as static or uniform. Established notions of public and private, male and female, bore directly on structures and relations within the Carnival, yet these realms were themselves open to manipulation and change. The removal of the procession from central roads, and the implementation of Group Areas as the physical restructuring of social space, most clearly altered all the dynamics, changing the very nature of *home* and *street*.

All this being said, the testimonies of female interviewees reveal a deep nostalgia for a past event which many feel is now lost to them. Whilst claims that the Coon Carnival was a "male" affair (at least as far as overt participation in the spectacle was concerned) characterise their testimonies, they do little to explain the frequent and simultaneous memories of personal enjoyment, freedom and fun. Indeed, the discourse of blood and belonging inextricably connecting "Coloured" identity and Cape Town's Coon Carnival seems non-gender specific, often implicating both men and women. Achmat Sabera, in a justification of female coons uncharacteristic of Muslim respondents, declares of women coons, "it's in their blood"<sup>110</sup>. Janet Matthews similarly reflects how the event's infectious appeal has coursed the veins of both men and women for as long as she can remember:

---

<sup>109</sup> *Cape Herald*, (15/1/72).

<sup>110</sup> Sabera, WCOH, p. 9.

Oh they were so happy, they made you feel happy too... all the fun, all the laughter and all the jokes... just to see the faces, the happy faces, you know, that makes you happy, and that is what I love too.... It gets into you.<sup>111</sup>

The period between the late fifties and 1980 marked a shift from the near total absence of women as coons, to their participation as majorettes, princesses and rank-and-file troupe members. Interviewees remain divided as to the reasons for, and extent of, this conspicuous change. Whilst the participation of wives, mothers and daughters in facilitative and subsidiary, preparatory roles (like cooking, sewing for, and watching the event) is lauded; stigma still shrouds the active spectacle of women coons. It is a stigma frequently bridging boundaries of class, gender and religion in its censure. Within the Coon Carnival during this period, discourses of propriety, respectability and notions of acceptable behaviour continued to influence and structure the level and extent of personal involvement according to gender. Yet such forces were neither omnipotent nor bore on all women uniformly. Whilst entrenched gender-relations found an echo within the event's organisational structure, often mirroring existing patterns of power and control, for many Coloured women the Coon Carnival symbolised an annual highlight of freedom and fun: freedom to stay up late, to occupy the streets at night and watch the road march, and, for some, freedom to participate equally with the men in the anonymous guise of costume and paint.

Patterns of female participation in the Carnival of the sixties and seventies were thus ambiguous and inconsistent. Vacillating between reflection and challenge of established patriarchal order and entrenched gender relations, new alternatives and avenues for women simultaneously emerged from the contest. As Zemon Davis so succinctly concludes, "the structure of carnival form can evolve so that it can act both to reinforce order and to suggest alternatives to the existing order"<sup>112</sup>.

---

<sup>111</sup> J. Matthews, WCOH, p. 14.

<sup>112</sup> Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture*, p. 123.

## Chapter Six:

### Conclusion

#### Carnival's community and social identities.

Guide-books and travel brochures, post-cards and newspapers unproblematically describe the Coon Carnival as the traditional "Coloured" celebration of New Year. Yet it is an event which many of the community so-designated reject with abhorrence. In 1996, in marked contrast to the sixties and seventies, Coloured intellectuals seem unconcerned with the event, its negative political connotations having dissipated with Apartheid's demise. Amongst Cape Town's working-class Coloured community though, there remains concern over how the event is being acted out, in particular, its links with organised gangsterism, violence and drugs. The Coon Carnival today, as it was thirty years ago, is an occasion riven with social division and governed by a diverse range of hierarchies of power and authority; from the structures of the gang and occupational status in the informal sector, to gender, class, and religion. The central question dogging the Carnival is to whom the event belongs: whose identity, if any, does it articulate? Exploration of this dilemma helps to explain the frequent vitriolic denouncement of the festival by many non-participant "Coloured" Capetonians. Furthermore, it highlights the fundamental inadequacies of Bakhtinian generalisations regarding the inherent homogenous intent and common "world view" shared within carnival communities.

Indeed, the Coon Carnival of the sixties and seventies, like its forerunners and those that would follow, was the expression of a "community" but this collective was not homogenous, static or fixed. Rather, it was a community comprised of a diverse host of identities, social positions, and roles, who came together annually for a variety of conflicting reasons. The salient point of commonality justifying their definition as a group derived from an essential shared sense of space. Festivities were rooted in an active and contemporary awareness of a mythologised, precise, urban territory - central Cape Town and District Six. At New Year, celebrations took the form of physically tramping out the boundaries of this space. In this sense, community was created by, and as, its active participants.

Furthermore, performers and spectators were predominantly drawn from a specific urban neighbourhood. Social difference and division evident within the event did not therefore, contradict the notion that Carnival was community expression. Instead, it reflected how the very community was comprised of a range of identities in constant competition and continual renewal.

Conscientised Coloured opponents of the Coon Carnival in the 1960s and 1970s based their denunciation of the event primarily on the grounds that it was being used by Apartheid's practitioners to elaborate their segregationist grand-plan. Presented as the epitome of "Coloured" culture and tradition, anti-Apartheid activists claimed, Carnival played-up to fabricated Nationalist Party notions of distinct, finite and separate racial groups with specific corresponding histories and cultures. Lewis argues that the Nationalist Government justified the imposition of the Group Areas Act and the removal of Coloureds from the city centre to new racially designated areas, on the premise that they formed a "separate and coherent population group"<sup>1</sup>. Quoting heavily from Hugo, Lewis states as evidence of this, SABRA's<sup>2</sup> declaration that Coloureds formed a distinct "volksgemeenskap" but differed from other communities in that they possessed "certain undefined characteristics which are inherently spiritual and traditional by nature, and find expression in attitudes, mental constructs, lifestyles and community forms"<sup>3</sup>. The Government, declares Lewis, sought theoretical justification for treating Coloureds as a specific group. It was an awareness of this design which liberation movements like the NEUM and Black Consciousness reflected in their denouncement of the Coon Carnival: an objection not to the event but to its political manipulation.

Howard talks of the "continuing abuse and exploitation" of the Coon Carnival and Malay choirs "at the hands of academics, politicians, intelligentsia, entrepreneurial promoters,

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> South African Bureau of Racial Affairs - the Nationalist Party's "think-tank".

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, Between the Wire and the Wall, p. 265. quoting from P. Hugo, Quislings or Realists? A Documentary Study of "Coloured" Politics in South Africa, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1978), p. 51 and p. 681.

obstructive local government officials and even the Cape Tourist Board”<sup>4</sup>. The apartheid State’s recognition and symbolic manipulation of the event during the sixties and seventies is implied by the attendance of Provincial and Ministerial representatives at the Coon Carnival, as well as by the nature of allusions and references in government sponsored literature.

In the 1940s anti-segregationists like Cissie Gool<sup>5</sup> had accorded the event significance and a degree of credibility with their attendance (as had her father, APO President Abdurahman thirty years before her)<sup>6</sup>. By the 1970s these figureheads had been replaced by their political antagonists; White representatives of the Nationalist Government and its Coloured collaborators. Tom Swartz for example, Chairperson of the Coloured Representative Council (an organ whose legitimacy was rejected outright by liberationist, anti-Apartheid organisations like the ANC and NEUM) opened the Goodwood Carnival of 1970<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Mr. F. L. Gaum, Commissioner for Coloured Affairs, and George Philips of the Cape Town City Council officially opened the “re-instated” road march in 1973, significantly altered and restricted though it was<sup>8</sup>.

Evidently these segregationist sympathisers, eager to validate and entrench the notion of a distinct Coloured culture and so legitimate its treatment as a discrete racial group, saw official recognition of the Coon Carnival as a means to this end. Indeed, their attendance must be interpreted in similar vein to I. D. du Plessis’ recognition and manipulation of “Malay” ethnicity. Commissioner for Coloured Affairs for a decade from 1952, Du Plessis authored several attempts at definitive socio-historical accounts of the Cape’s “Malay” community. In 1953, a year after his appointment as head of the Department for Coloured Affairs, his book The Malay Quarter and its People was published by the Department. It

---

<sup>4</sup> Howard, ‘No-Persons’, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Cissie Gool was elected President of the National Liberation League in 1936. A more “militant” organisation than the APO before it, the NLL rejected tactics of “deputations” and “appeals” to the Government in favour of “mass action”. Significantly too, it demanded “full racial equality” [Lewis, Between the Wire, p. 183].

<sup>6</sup> Bickford-Smith, Ethnic Pride, p. 205.

<sup>7</sup> Cape Times, (3/1/70).

<sup>8</sup> Cape Times, (5/1/73).

emerged as the first treatise in a series of books with a stated aim to “correlat[ing] facts about the Coloured people, to draw conclusions from these facts and to publish work which will lead to a better understanding of this group”<sup>9</sup>.

Du Plessis’ interest in “Malay” ethnicity cannot be separated from the concerns stemming from his position leading a government Department committed to the implementation of “separate development”. As Jeppie asserts, underlying Du Plessis’ preoccupation with “Malay” history and culture was a driving ideological imperative:

a purpose for which Malay otherness operated was to construct and maintain a *divide et imperia* policy in a local setting... Du Plessis’ vocation was to disarm popular culture from remaining alternative and becoming oppositional, and contribute to the emasculation of the underclasses of the Western Cape. In the CAD - from 1951 to 1962 - Du Plessis continued his role with full institutional backing.<sup>10</sup>

In like vein, Du Plessis constructed the notion of “coons” as a comically exotic “Other” to civilised White Cape Town; a culture that was distinctly different:

Coons form one of the most colourful and entertaining sights of Cape Town and never fail to intrigue the visitor with their strange antics and enticing music as they parade the streets on their way to the competitions.<sup>11</sup>

Politically-based rejection of the Carnival in the sixties and seventies arose as a response to the ideological manipulation of notions of a distinct, finite and static culture, history and tradition by the likes of Du Plessis.

Many middle-class members of the community objected to the celebration, not because it implicitly affirmed the concept of cultural uniqueness, but because the “Coloured Culture” it represented was not their own; working-class and disreputable, it’s drunken licentiousness

---

<sup>9</sup> I. D. Du Plessis, The Malay Quarter and its People, (Balkema, Cape Town, 1953), Inset, front cover.

<sup>10</sup> M. S. Jeppie, ‘I. D. du Plessis and the “Re-invention” of the Malay. c.1935-1952’, (Centre For African Studies Seminar Paper, University of Cape Town, 28/9/88), p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Du Plessis, The Malay Quarter, p. 43.

offended their bourgeois sensibilities. The Coon Carnival displayed to White society a base caricature of what it meant to be “Coloured”: a stereotype with which the middle-class felt not affinity but contempt. Indeed, in a context where many middle-class Coloureds were trying to protect their diminishing rights on the grounds of their cultural affinity with Whites, the event stood as a handicap.

Essentially then, class-based adversity to the Carnival from within the Coloured community was premised on the belief that it misrepresented Coloured culture by depicting the “lowest” denominator as indicative of a common tradition. Politically-motivated opposition based its rejection on the conviction that any depiction of a distinct, racially-defined, Coloured culture was part of the ideological project of Apartheid, inspired by totalitarian interests. The Coon Carnival, asserted these antagonists, tacitly supported Apartheid by re-enforcing notions of ethnic exclusivity, so subverting attempts to create a broad-based Black opposition to White domination.

On first appearance it seems that these two strands of opposition are mutually exclusive: that to claim the Carnival does not represent Coloured culture is to concede that such a phenomenon exists, and so to collude with apartheid thinking, acquiescing to the correlation of race with culture and tradition. Alexander warns of the ideological objective of ethnic-labelling in the South African context, arguing that Apartheid has simply changed its jargon but not its message or hegemonic design. He points to:

the obvious and crude ways in which the present regime [of 1985] has “moved away” from racial terminology into ethnic terminology to effect the same purpose, justifying disorganisation and exploitation of the working-class.<sup>12</sup>

His implication is that to acknowledge the existence of ethnic difference is to concur with the contrived devices of White, capitalist repression and domination. Dubow similarly

---

<sup>12</sup> Bekker, *Ethnicity*, p. 26 quoting N. Alexander, *Sow the Wind: contemporary speeches*, (Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1985), p. 134.

points out the interchangeability with which the Nationalist government employed the rhetorics of “race” and “ethnicity” to effect an identical design:

The notion of ethnicity has... been seized upon with alacrity by the government. [During] the late-apartheid era the concept has served as a convenient surrogate term for “volk” or “race”.<sup>13</sup>

Dubow’s object, however, is neither to deny nor reject the existence of ethnic groups in the South African context. He argues rather for a critical understanding of the adaptive and situational nature of ethnic identity. “Ethnicity” when depicted as a static, immutable and essential state of primordial belonging, he implies, fails to comprehend the necessarily fluid and changing nature of identity. When directly conflated with other similarly rigid categorisations, such as “race”, use of the concept becomes reactionary and repressive, imposing stifling and intractable limits on constructions of identity:

So long as we understand *ethnicity* as a malleable, historically conditional process, and reject its use in categorical or reified terms which approximate to “race” or “population group”, we may well be in a position to advance our understanding of this society’s manifest complexities.<sup>14</sup>

Using Dubow’s guidelines, the poles of opposition to the Carnival lose their stubborn incompatibility. Political opponents of the event were essentially arguing more against the *politicisation* of Coloured ethnicity (and the Coon Carnival as its iconic representation), than against the notion of ethnicity per se. Such qualification explains the recently changed attitude of non-racial, liberation movements like the ANC, and Dudley’s softening of antagonism towards the Carnival. For them, the event was unacceptable when represented as part of a static, racially defined culture, that ignored the “dynamic quality of ethnic relations”<sup>15</sup>. This is not however, the case for Alexander who continued, in 1985, to reject the concept of ethnicity outright as a fabricated construct bent on fragmenting the working-

---

<sup>13</sup> Bekker, *Ethnicity*, p. 26 quoting S. Dubow, ‘Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes’, (Paper presented at the Conference on Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, April 1993), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Dubow, ‘Ethnic Euphemisms’, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Bekker, *Ethnicity*, p. 8.

class. [For a fuller discussion of the debate around *ethnicity* in general and *Coloured ethnicity* in particular, see Appendix IV].

If the Coon Carnival articulated Coloured ethnicity then, it was ethnicity in the sense that Dubow defines, a “malleable, historically conditional process”, part of a ceaseless dialogue. Government drives to inhibit and confine the event from the late sixties marked an attempt to stifle this regenerative process. The Carnival’s ability to survive in spite of such pressures marks not only its durability and resilience but mirrors the adaptive, creative and situational nature of the ethnicity it expressed. Coloured ethnicity, as any other discourse of identity, is fluid, multi-layered and fraught with inconsistencies, contradictions and difference. The Coon Carnival reflected this.

Alluding to the “Creole culture” of the Cape, Turner and Jensen assert that the “only” definitive “group feature” of Cape Town’s Coloured community is “heterogeneity”<sup>16</sup>. Whilst their thesis takes pains to depict the diversity of this group, its religious and economic variance, they suggest that the binding element of group consensus was a shared and mythical association with space. Cape Town, South Africa’s “Mother City”, and District Six most specifically, exist as a “sacred space” for Coloureds, the Danes insist<sup>17</sup>:

By removing Coloureds from District Six, the Whites are doing more than clearing slums or underpinning their exclusive claim to central Cape Town’s sacred space. They are also destroying one of the symbols of whatever Coloured identity may exist, a space in parts at least seven generations deep and one with associations with the emancipation of the slaves.<sup>18</sup>

Space, history and ethnicity are thus inextricably woven. Smith’s final two criteria for constituting an ethnic group infer this link as he points to a group’s “association with a specific territory, and a shared sense of solidarity”<sup>19</sup>. These defining characteristics are the

---

<sup>16</sup> Turner and Jensen, ‘A Place called Heideveld’, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Bekker, *Ethnicity*, p. 12. quoting A. Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986), p. 22.

most pertinent to an understanding of any sense of Coloured ethnicity, and find powerful reflection with the Coon Carnival. Turner and Jensen assert as fundamental, the “sacred space” of urban Cape Town, and District Six more particularly, in constructions of Coloured identity. They point to the area’s long historical links with slavery and the celebration of Abolition. What is unclear however, is when the city centre became such a critical and central motif in the construction of Coloured ethnicity.

Stone observes that Coloured carnival-goers in the sixties and seventies were blindly ignorant of, and uninterested in, the event’s history and origins, yet in the 1990s its long memory and tradition is repeatedly stressed by informants. Similarly, the poverty and social-ills of the lost District Six are blurred in a mist of nostalgia and hazy reminiscing, characteristic of the testimonies of oral informants, and the art and literature of former residents. Stone historicises the significance of territory to constructions of Coloured identity. In so doing, he outlines how particular spaces have come to assume critical prominence in defining, creating and representing an ethnicity. We begin to see how space has not simply reflected a pre-existing group identity but has helped to form and express it: how particular places have been vested or instilled with historical significance within a specific political and social context and time. Urban social spaces have been mined as cultural resources in an effort to articulate contemporary identities through a recourse to the past.

It is not that District Six has always been important to Coloureds because of its links to the emancipation of slaves in the last century, for indeed, many Coloureds claim no links to such ancestors or history. It is rather that in the context of Group Areas (the wresting of land from its inhabitants) space and access to it have come to assume central significance. A recourse to history thus becomes one way to interpret, contextualise and articulate the struggle for territory.

With the Coon Carnival so centrally located, both physically and mythically, in the sacred space of the city, we can begin to comprehend its situation as an integral component in the cultural dimension of the group identity.

Evident almost universally throughout the oral testimonies of Coloured carnival participants and observers is the notion that the essence of the event changed with the removal of people from the city centre to the Cape Flats (and particularly from District Six) under the Group Areas Act, and with the simultaneous restrictions imposed on the road march. Such lamentations connect the loss of a peaceful and harmonious past to the changes brought about by people's enforced migration. Thus, they see a specific urban space as fundamental to the Carnival. Recourse to this romanticised notion of Carnival Past offers a route back to this mythical antiquity - this lost Eden - through the cultural vehicles of music, memory, song and dance. It is as though the awareness of history and the significance of place within the event have only become important with the loss of the space.

Howard points to the binding historical link provided by music: a bridge offering access to an imaginary past of a proud group identity. The process of imagining is a communal exercise; a unifying activity of mourning. It is the grieving for a lost space which creates empathy, identification, and a degree of something like solidarity amongst the participant community.

The sonic landscape of District Six was rich and complex. Physically the area is now lost forever, but the continued practice of the music may ensure some compensation for the "community's" loss of a "sense of place", this unifying sense which seems to have overridden all other "diversifying" factors in the inhabitants' own sense of their social identity.<sup>20</sup>

Howard notes difference and "complex[ity]" as characterising pre-removal urban life. The need to create a unified and common "social identity" is interpreted as a response to the loss of territory and space. It is as though removals created a psychological need for a common

---

<sup>20</sup> Howard, 'No-Persons', p. 77.

past: demanded the creation of homogeneity from difference. Cultural forms then, offer some kind of emotional compensation for this physical loss.

The mere act of participation in post-removal Carnival served as such a path to a communal past; an historical route to a territorial claim. The Coon Carnival was about belonging and urban territory, as urban space and belonging were about the Coon Carnival; they existed symbiotically.

Searching for a historical precedent to the “hooliganism” of many British football supporters, Holt sees their contemporary organisation and violence as closely linked to territory and changes to urban spaces. Interpreting the disorder often accompanying football games as something akin to the carnivalistic Misrule of the Middle Ages, he states:

Across the centuries, we have seen the same rituals of dominance, trials of strength, gang fights, mockery against elders and authorities, and antagonism towards “outsiders” as typical focuses of youthful energy and aggressive mischief. Even under vastly different social conditions there are striking continuities between violent interruptions to pre-industrial fairs and festivals, and the customary eruptions during modern Bank Holidays or the weekly Carnival of Misrule at contemporary football games.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst conceding that the “hooliganism” of today differs vastly from festive disorder of the past, he suggests that the existence of certain significant continuities does point to the operation of an historical continuum - the youthful organisation of Misrule semi-sanctioned by the immediate community to which participants belong. Different “social conditions” however, shape the specific form in which this disorder manifests itself. Holt sees football supporters’ clubs in Britain since the 1950s to have replaced old-solidarities lost with changes to the urban social environment. He views them as an attempt to recreate allegiances fractured by the breaking-up of “networks of neighbours” brought about by rehousing:

---

<sup>21</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 328. quoting G. Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, (Macmillan, London, 1983), p. 202.

Football since the 1950s has come to provide a kind of surrogate community for the young; the club defines their identity and the “end” is their territory, even if they have moved out to high-rise blocks miles away.<sup>22</sup>

Several notable parallels connect Holt’s musings to Cape Town’s Coon Carnival since the 1960s, in particular, the close link between young, essentially masculine, predominantly working-class, solidarities of organised disorder, and territorial identification and allegiance. Space, and the notion of its historical ownership, provides a rallying point for such groups. The history to which they turn exists in the form of a lost urban space. i.e. many Chelsea fans may not even live in South London but they define themselves in terms of their allegiance to the club. The club in turn is synonymous with, and inseparable from, the place. Thus, the supporters derive a sense of communal identity through an imaginary connection to a specific territory, embodied physically in the concrete form of Stamford Bridge, Chelsea’s home-ground.

Holt claims that for many people moved by 1950s housing schemes, football club membership bridged the dislocation, providing an element of psychological continuity and a connection to the past. Affiliation to a pre-move local club offered a way back into a lost community for a displaced youth searching the past for their identity. Holt presents a scenario where membership patterns, and so territorial allegiances, primarily reflected the places where people moved from rather than moved to:

When a group have lost their old territory in which their traditions were established, football provided a symbolic substitute for the young in the heart of the old community. Supporting West-Ham was a way of staying an East-End.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, it provided not just an historical route to an individual and personal identity, but to a glorious communal fraternity. Quoting Pratt and Turner’s observations of “the boisterous

---

<sup>22</sup> Holt, *Sport and the British*, p. 337.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

and anti-social” activities of rival football supporters<sup>24</sup>, Holt relates that as the youths battled with fans of another team, each group seemed to “experience a transcendental moment of community with their mates”<sup>25</sup>. Holt concludes however, that though steeped in historical precedent, the “specific forms” of hooliganism are new.

Pinnock argues that a similar pattern characterises the formation of gangs (and thereby troupes, for their memberships frequently overlap) on the post-removal Cape Flats.

Gangs are not only bound together by collective behaviour or need but more particularly by territoriality. It is through staking out a geographical area that a gang becomes, in a sense, rooted in the community... In this “magical” way the brotherhoods of Cape Town express a territorial ownership lost by the relocated parent culture - retrieving thereby the solidarities of the traditional neighbourhood destroyed by Group Areas.<sup>26</sup>

Under Pinnock’s definition, the specific role of gang/troupe membership and the importance of place within it, changed after removals. His implication is that, post 1967, such collectives were primarily concerned with establishing a feeling of common identity in terms of historical belonging. Recourse to history and tradition in the legitimization of an identification with lost land became the primary vehicle for this.

Within the Coon Carnival the links between territory and troupe, between Carnival and urban social identity, are overwhelmingly evident, yet it is imperative to ascertain the extent to which pre-removal troupe affiliations persisted after 1967, or whether novel troupes, their legitimacy derived from the places where people were moved to, took over. If rival troupes established some sort of territorial-based *communitas* through carnival organisations, was it a solidarity based on historical belonging, as Pinnock suggests, or on their new and contemporary residence in the Cape Flats?

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 342. quoting from Pratt and Slater. ‘A fresh look at football hooliganism’, in Private Eye, (10/1/86), p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> Holt, Sport and the British, p. 342.

<sup>26</sup> Pinnock, the brotherhoods, p. 101.

Place assumes critical centrality in the construction of identity only subsequent to removals. Indeed, this assertion is borne out by the frequency of allusions to space in troupe names after removals. Whereas before the implementation of Group Areas troupes had often reflected transatlantic influences, inspired by the cinema, in their titles, from the late 1960s and '70s names increasingly demonstrated an awareness of local space. For example the *Grand Parade Darkies*<sup>27</sup> (alluding to the central Capetonian landmark), and the *Hanover Nigger Minstrels*<sup>28</sup> (after Hanover street, District Six); names stressing an intimate link with the lost inner-city, emerged only in the wake of removals. Commenting similarly on the contemporary names of Christmas choirs, Howard observes:

An interesting fact is that some of the bands, although from the townships, have tenaciously retained a name which connects them with District Six.<sup>29</sup>

She suggests that the reason for this may be a linguistic “reminder of the “permanence” of District Six, compared with the “temporary”, almost makeshift nature of the townships”<sup>30</sup>. She observes, for instance, that though 90% of it’s membership now lives in Mitchell’s Plain, *The Bloemhof Crusaders* retain a name which connects them with the now long-gone flats in District Six.

Whilst some established troupes from the city centre managed to bear the blow of relocation, other new organisations simultaneously flourished in the areas to which people had been moved. Many individuals, unable to afford the regular transport costs to rehearsals in town, found they had little choice; either they joined a new troupe close to their place of relocation or they stopped participating in the event. Indeed, as well as the obstacle of exorbitant travel fares, dislocated memberships lacking cars, phones, and isolated from former neighbours and fellow troupe affiliates, found it difficult to get information about the time and venue of rehearsals. Though some pre-removal troupes did survive the implementation of the Group Areas Act, most notably the *Woodstock*

---

<sup>27</sup> Reported in the *Cape Times*, (4/1/72).

<sup>28</sup> Reported in the *Cape Times*, (3/1/73).

<sup>29</sup> Howard, ‘No-Persons’, p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

*Starlights*<sup>31</sup>, generally new troupes were established and came to take the place of the old, central ones. This is hardly surprising considering the extent of difficulties experienced by members trying to maintain the links.

Strangely though, it appears that efforts to maintain a link with the lost urban space through allegiance to pre-removal troupes were often emphasized more by female interviewees than by their male counterparts. For men, an historical territorial connection was stressed primarily through linguistic allusion in reference to pre-move areas by troupe title. Many women on the other hand, insisted that the connection be more concrete than symbolic; that a physical connection be maintained with established troupes rather than merely implied by name. This is particularly ironic considering the fact that women seldom belonged to the troupes in the first place. Particularly compelling, were such female attempts to preserve a pre-removal authenticity of Carnival: to protect a notion of cultural integrity. An interview featured in *South Debate* in 1994, with a woman living in Manenberg reflects this. Moerida Mohamed professes her staunch allegiance:

I support the Beach Boys even though we're from Manenberg and they are the team from Athlone. We stayed all these years in Athlone and for twenty-one years my husband was with them. All these years we have been coming to watch him and the team. Now he's with the African Zonks... but I'm still for the Beach Boys.<sup>32</sup>

Her declaration has a similar ring to the tone of female oral informants who lament the transformation of a peaceful pre-removal, community Carnival, into a post-move orgiastic display of gang violence and commercial greed. Both Mohammed, and informants like Radifa Thompson, nostalgically hanker after a lost urban space, conveyed as an almost violent desire to preserve the Carnival's authenticity. The Coon Carnival becomes the embodiment of what has been lost. Changes to the event are related as part of this deprivation. Indeed, narratives relating the Carnival appear to differ significantly according to gender.

---

<sup>31</sup> Though the reason for this is probably that most of Woodstock was never reclassified "White" as District Six was and Coloureds did not have to relocate on the same scale.

Bakhtin writes that “in the carnival proper, everything (except violence) is permissible... it is as if all existing differences between the social orders [is] temporarily... obliterated”<sup>33</sup>. In similar vein he insists that Carnival “demonstrates that other less rigid and hierarchical social relations [than those of the prevailing status-quo] are possible... through the utopian enactment of an integrated, egalitarian community”<sup>34</sup>. The conception and dramatisation of these novel and ideal social relations can only occur on the *Street* where interaction is “free and unrestricted”<sup>35</sup>. These are the core elements of Bakhtin’s thesis and the premise on which diverse theorists from Jeppie to Falassi, insisting on the inherent revolutionary impetus of Carnival, base their arguments.

Yet these claims repeatedly falter at the practical test of Cape Town’s Coon Carnival. Interpreting participation, significance and meanings of the New Year festivities during the 1960s and ‘70s, Bakhtin’s generalisations are continually buffeted by evidence of friction, disharmony and difference at all levels of the event; from perception to organisation and performance. The Coon Carnival clearly meant many different things to its champions and antagonists but also amongst its diverse participants there was little evidence of consensus. Nor was it the case that all structures of order and social control were suspended for whilst some hierarchies were inverted in the festive context, others found validation and re-enforcement within the Carnival arena.

On one level, the symbolic occupation of central Cape Town (an area which Coloureds had been forcibly evicted from) by its Coloured working-class and gangsters operated as a significant inversion of urban power relations and the city’s socio-political geography. A disenfranchised and dispossessed underclass physically and metaphorically took hold of the metropolis. On another level, other patterns of domination and authority were replicated within the event. Gang structures, for example, invariably paralleled troupe hierarchies to

---

<sup>32</sup> South Debate, (21-25/1/94).

<sup>33</sup> M. Gardiner, The Dialogics of Critique. (Routledge, London, 1992), p. 44. quoting Bakhtin. Rabelais.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 94. quoting Bakhtin, Rabelais.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 52. quoting Bakhtin, Rabelais.

the extent that power and status between the two were interchangeable. Thus, the aggressive masculinity of the gang translated to prohibit women access to the higher echelons of Carnival organisation. The rigid gendered delineation of social space central to gang organisation found re-enforcement during the Carnival, as the discourse of “respectability” and rhetoric of religion simultaneously worked to stigmatise conspicuous female participation.

The increasingly overt involvement of women, escalating with the advance of time, failed to mark a real change in their position or the perception of their engagement. Generally, if women did participate, they did so in sexually over-determined roles, for example, as carnival-queens and majorettes rather than captains, promoters, or musicians. Thus, they tended to occupy passive positions, present for visual consumption whilst men retained artistic, creative, officially recognised and financially rewarded situations.

Note must be taken however, of the instances of, and possibilities for, slippages, contests and challenges to these entrenched gender roles. Particularly for pious Muslim women, the New Year afforded many the opportunity to breach the confines of the *private* (the home) into the realm of the *public* (street). Further still, the Carnival provided many women with the chance to earn a timely bit of independent capital through cooking, sewing and preparing for the festivities. The role of transvestite performer was particularly ambiguous for though not officially recognised at a competitive level, the *moffie* enjoyed a unique degree of artistic and creative autonomy and popular status.

Whilst there was some room for negotiation and challenge, gender roles and sexual power relations largely found re-enforcement within the Carnival during the sixties and seventies. Yet these were not the only overt hierarchical indices fracturing the notion of Carnival as an anarchic and limitless occasion of free association and unfettered potential. As gang authority overlapped with troupe hierarchy, so informal occupational status and financial clout determined an individual's position within the festival. Shebeen owners, self-employed hawkers and other professions involving large clienteles and the ready availability

of sizable amounts of cash, tended to occupy the position of troupe captain. Thus, the artistic and metaphoric imperative of the troupe followed ultimately the whim of its financier.

Discourses of religion and bourgeois “respectability” acted to stigmatise Carnival participation not only for women. The involvement of Muslims in an occasion associated with drink, drugs and excess was slated by Islamic religious leaders through the journalistic mouthpiece of the Muslim Establishment, the *Muslim News*. Their tirades seemed to have negligible impact on the numbers participating, except when Ramadan directly coincided with the event, yet echoes of their negative censure are often reflected in the tone of Muslim interviewees. Frequently, Muslim informants (and again, particularly women) vehemently denounced the event at the start of an interview, only to reveal their affection for the festivities later on.

With still others rejecting the Coon Carnival of the sixties and seventies as “disreputable” or politically unacceptable it is clear that the event meant many different things to different people. Even those actively participating in the festivities did so for a diverse range of reasons and to varied extents. To a tailor, for instance, the Carnival meant money. To a gang/troupe leader, it fulfilled several functions. Even if a captain failed to make a profit on the sale of coon uniforms, regular rehearsals provided the opportunity to consolidate a loyal client base and the chance to service it through the sale of illicit liquor or drugs. To the rank-and-file membership the Coon Carnival also played a host of roles. It provided an occasion for all to publicly show off in front of friends, family and the city and at the same time enjoy a drunken public party. For others it offered the chance of being spotted by talent-scouts at the competition, a showbiz career, and maybe stardom. For most participants though, it was simply a time for fun.

Even the ambivalent attitude of the State and provincial administration toward the Coon Carnival reflected the ambiguous, unstable, and contested metaphoric significance of the festivities. On the one hand the organs of Apartheid prevented the event’s free-movement

on the streets, banned it from Green Point and enclosed it in remote stadium venues. On the other, through people like I. D. du Plessis, they continued to exploit its image as an exotic tourist attraction and an historical artifact of Coloured culture.

Cohen captures the fundamentally ambiguous position of popular festival stating that “every major Carnival is precariously poised between the affirmation of the established order and its rejection”.<sup>36</sup> Carnival, he asserts, is a “contested event”. Like Zemon Davis, Cohen negates the premise of the Bakhtinian school (which claims that Carnival is necessarily utopian in outlook and revolutionary in impetus) and rejects the simplistic “safety-valve” theory (which insists all Carnival is counter-revolutionary: temporary release dissipating social tension). Rather, he depicts a context where different and conflicting forces battle for hegemony through an adaptive cultural form. Critically for him however, the outcome is not predetermined. Though evolving from its specific, contemporary, socio-political context, rather than simply reflecting the existing status-quo, Cohen sees Carnival to play an active part in the struggle for dominance:

Cultural forms are evolved to express and consolidate the sentiments and identity of people who come together as a result of specific economic and political conditions and at the same time serve to mobilise yet more people who, in turn, develop more elaborate cultural forms which... mobilise still more people ...once developed, it becomes an intervention, not just an expression.<sup>37</sup>

Cape Town’s Coon Carnival in the sixties and seventies was just such a form, its significance changing with legislation that fractured its participant community and frustrated its free-movement. In particular, the salience of *space* was highlighted as a point of conflict and significance for those involved. Carnival in the sixties and seventies, became a cultural marker for belonging; the physical reminder of a lost home and way of life. Attempts to inhibit or distort the festivities were thus, an attack on the very foundations on which many contemporary identities were built.

---

<sup>36</sup> Cohen, Masquerade Politics, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

The Coon Carnival assumed a variety of roles and meanings within different dialogues and for different actors. For the discourse of Apartheid, it helped to evoke a notion of Coloured cultural uniqueness, for a dispossessed working-class it assumed significance as a concrete marker of a lost urban home. In this sense it was precariously poised between the entrenchment and negation of the existing social order.

Perhaps however, the State and provincial administrations' increasingly antagonistic approach from the late 1960s toward the Carnival marks the growing dominance of its oppositional and potentially revolutionary significance. It was a potential which liberation movements, like the ANC and NEUM in their denouncement of the event, failed to exploit. Indeed, not until almost two decades later was the Coon Carnival accorded any positive significance by them. Cohen states of festivities at Notting Hill:

carnival ha[s] become a symbol of, as well as a mechanism for, achieving corporate identity, unity and exclusiveness.<sup>38</sup>

It is recognition of this; Carnival's dynamic role in the construction and articulation of Coloured, working-class identity, which political organisations like the ANC have become critically conscious of in the 1990s. ANC representative Lerumo Kalako, in an attempt to incorporate the event and its community under its national ambit, declared in 1994 that "the Coon Carnival is so much part of the Western Cape culture, we all have to promote it".<sup>39</sup> President Mandela's appearance at the opening ceremony of the 1995 festivities similarly served as a political appeal to a predominantly working-class Coloured Community through one of its chief cultural forms. In the global history of Carnival (as well as the localised context of Coon Carnival in particular) it marked yet another attempt to seize a political constituency by appropriating its cultural artifacts. It reflected once again, the ability of Carnival to convey different and conflicting meanings simultaneously; the power of metaphor in a concrete, national, political context.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>39</sup> *Cape Times*, (4/1/94).

Perhaps the most telling demonstration of changing attitudes, and recognition of the powerful political potential of the event and its participants, was Nelson Mandela's opening of the 1996 Coon Carnival at Green Point stadium on 1st of January. In ironic response to those critics who condemned the event for racial stereotyping and ridicule, the President, accompanied by Chris Nissen and Cyril Ramaphosa, donned the gaudy and ostentatious garb of a coon, but in the yellow, green and gold of the ANC: a strategic move in the run up to community elections in a city where the "Coloured" vote keeps his party from power. Such an act was clearly yet another symbolic attempt to appropriate and lay claim to the Carnival and its actors. Indeed, it comes as little surprise, for the history of Carnivals world-wide, and in Cape Town in particular, has been characterised by the struggle for ultimate control of meaning: of metaphoric signification. It was an attempt, however, which in its inability to comprehend the essence of the celebration or its people, misfired. The crowd met his speech, a piece of early electioneering, with an uncomfortable impatience and irritation. Though his failure to inspire his audience seemed to leave Mandela unpeturbed, their sentiments were to be more keenly felt by the President and his party at municipal elections five months later when inflicted as electoral defeat.

### **POST-SCRIPT.**

The state of Coon Carnival in the mid 1990s bears out many of the themes highlighted in this study, re-enforcing the notion of cultural continuity and validating my academic speculation.

Battles over money and claims that troupes were being financially exploited by avaricious and profiteering promoters climaxed in 1994-'95. Antagonism and resentment towards the remote organisers fomenting since the sixties and seventies, culminated in their ousting in late 1994. They were replaced by an amalgamated Carnival Development Board comprised of troupe captains, in an effort to reclaim profits previously lost to individual entrepreneurs,



F6-1

Rival troupes both using South Africa's new national flag as the theme for their uniforms. Informants suggest that troupes were unofficially competing to be the troupe chosen to be used as part of Cape Town's Olympic bid. Note the young girl coon in the top picture. Also the use of traditional banjos and brass instruments in the bottom picture. January 1996. Author's photographs.



F6-2

and channel them back into the Carnival. The Carnival henceforth, would effectively be run and controlled, financially and organisationally, by its participants.

In 1996, the appeal of a once distinctly parochial event seems suddenly to have assumed some national significance. Indeed, the Carnival's exploitability as a tourist draw in the run up to the city's bid for the 2004 Olympics has been recognised by the Cape Town City Council who, in 1996, subsidised the event for the first time. This follows popular claims that the Coon Carnival will be the "cultural part" of the city's Olympic bid. Indeed, a full-page advertisement in the *Weekend Argus* of 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1995, for returning medallists from the Atlanta games, and for Cape Town's candidacy for 2004, tells that the victory parade will feature coon "minstrels and Malay dancers alongside athletes"<sup>40</sup>. [See also F6.1 and F6.2].

Reports of fighting between vigilante organisation PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs) and Cape Flats gangs, re-enforces the contemporary salience of a gang/ coon troupe connection apparent throughout the sixties and seventies. Front-page articles in both the *Cape Times* and *Argus* reported that one of my informants (the captain of a leading and established coon troupe) was targeted by PAGAD. To chants of "One Merchant, One Bullet"<sup>41</sup>, the vigilantes torched a minibus outside his home and warned his wife that unless his "activities" ceased within twenty-four hours, his house would be destroyed. The *Argus* of the same day indicates what such "activities" may be, terming him an "alleged drug peddler"<sup>42</sup>. Though the allegations of a vigilante group cannot be taken as fact, it is interesting that the informant is viewed by PAGAD as both a powerful gangster and as a drug-merchant. The connection stresses the link between gang and coon troupe authority at a high level and also lends weight to the claim that troupe captains were frequently self-employed men with access to a significant client/membership base through sale of drugs or alcohol.

---

<sup>40</sup> *Weekend Argus*, (31/8/96).

<sup>41</sup> *Cape Times*, (2/8/96).

<sup>42</sup> *Argus*, (2/8/96).

## Appendix I.

### Chart to Show Carnival Competition Venues

#### Key

Carnival venues are cited as the first entry for every year. They are abbreviated and in bold type. Athlone = **A**. Green Point = **GP**. Goodwood = **GW**. Hartleyvale = **H**. Newlands = **N**.

1950	Permit needed from local authority to march in the street under <b>Standard Regulations Relating to Streets. 23/11/50. Processions 35(1)</b> . At least 48 hours notice must be given.
1960	<b>GP. GW. H. N.</b>
1961	<b>GP. GW. H.</b>
1962	<b>GP. GW. N.</b>
1963	<b>GP. GW. N.</b>
1964	<b>GP. GW. H.</b>
1965	<b>GP. GW. H.</b>
1966	<b>GP. GW. H.</b> District Six proclaimed "White" Group Area under the Group Areas Act.
1967	<b>GP. GW. H.</b>
1968	<b>GW. H.</b> Green Point proclaimed "White" Group Area under the Group Areas Act. First year that there is no Carnival at <b>Green Point</b> . Carnival road march effectively barred from central streets.
1969	<b>GW. H.</b>
1970	<b>H.</b> (only Carnival in Cape Town this year).
1971	<b>A. H.</b> First year that Carnival is held at <b>Athlone</b> stadium.
1972	<b>A. GW. H.</b>
1973	<b>A. GW. H.</b> Gatherings and Demonstrations Act No. 52. gives Minister of Justice the power to ban gatherings and demonstrations of any number of people in a prescribed area. From this year, a legal gathering must have the written consent of the Chief Magistrate, Police, Traffic Department and the Council. Road march back on streets along a limited, prescribed route dictated by the Council.
1974	<b>A. GW. H.</b>
1975	<b>A. H.</b>
1976	<b>A. GW. H.</b>
1977	<b>A. GW. H.</b> Road march vanishes from the central streets again, significantly, the year after events at Soweto and national student unrest. It re-emerges only really in 1989.
1978	<b>A. GW. H.</b>
1979	<b>A. GP. H.</b>

## Appendix II.

### The “banning” of the road march: Western’s claim interrogated using City Council records.

No records can be found to support Western’s spurious allegation placing responsibility for the disappearance of the central parade solely with the City Traffic Department. Cape Town City Council records lend some clarity to the scenario. It appears that whilst the event was never actually banned from the streets per se, its free movement was severely inhibited. Less certain is exactly where these restrictions came from. In blatant contention with Western’s insistence that the Traffic Department issued the definitive confinement is a memorandum from the Traffic Manager to the Town Clerk, dated 25th October 1972. It states unequivocally that:

contrary to popular belief this branch at no time banned the Coon Troupes from parading in the streets of Cape Town Municipal Area and each year permits have been issued to various troupes on the conditions that they confine their passage in the Central Area to the following route: - Buitenkant Street, Albertus Street, Corporation Street, Mostert Street, Spin Street, Bureau Street, Adderley Street and Wale Street to Schotsche Kloof.<sup>1</sup>

With reference to an enclosed permit it points out; “it will be noted that the parading of troupes in the Central Area of Cape Town, excluding the afore mentioned route, is prohibited”. The memorandum outlines the past, traditional route of the parade, hinting at reasons for both its “spatial” and “temporal” confinement. Previously, it relates, troupes assembled in the “old Early Morning Market site [Grand Parade] and paraded from there two or three hours later than the appointed time... via District Six to Buitenkant... the prescribed route to Wale street... to Green Point Track which was at that time the main venue for the Carnival”<sup>2</sup>. But, “after fighting broke out at the Green Point Track, and along the route, future Carnivals at that venue were banned by the South African Police and certain organisers then decided that in future if members of the public wanted to see the Coon Troupes they would have to attend the Carnivals and pay for admission”.

The Traffic Department, whilst at pains to exonerate itself from responsibility for “banning” the road march, simultaneously justifies the enforcement of precise restrictions on its timing and use of space. Alluding to the implicit threat of violence, it evokes a discourse of fear to justify Carnival’s incarceration, recommending that “as far as possible the activities of all Coon Troupes... be confined to off-street venues”<sup>3</sup>. Ultimate blame for containing the event however, is directed towards the Police and to the organisers themselves.

This document, articulating the Traffic Manager’s position, stands in direct opposition to Western’s declaration, and to popular belief, that his Department outlawed the central road

---

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the agenda and minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of Cape Town City Council, (7/12/72), State Archives. File GM. 25/3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

march in 1967. Cross-referencing Council memoranda with contemporary newspapers adds some clarity to this confusion. A front-page article in the *Cape Times* on 29/12/67 only days before New Year, for example, emblazoned “Coons March is OFF”, validates the Traffic Manager’s claim that the road march would not take place the next week due to the sentiments of a particular Carnival promoter. Sonny Lloyd, it reports, moaned that he was “sick and tired of giving Cape Town a free show”<sup>4</sup>. Every year, he contends, the coons entertained the city with no support from the City Council. Putting the financial cost of staging the event at R4000, Lloyd states that potential gate-takings at the competition venues were forfeited annually as people went instead to the free road march. Unless the Council subsidised his costs this year, “it was not a financial proposition to entertain the city”<sup>5</sup>. Significantly, no mention is made in the report of the “banning” of the road march. Its disappearance from the streets is presented instead as the decision of a single, autonomous, individual: the promoter.

An article only a week later in the same broadsheet however, implicates another factor as responsible for the absence of the street parade. In a report of 2/1/68, the *Cape Times* laments:

the centre of Cape Town was for the first time in many years, almost devoid of coons of New Year’s Day and today, and thousands of sightseers waited in vain for the revellers... the absence of coon troupes marching through the main city streets was largely due to the fact that for the first time since 1906, no carnival was held at Green Point. Troupes went by bus, train and lorry to Hartleyvale and Goodwood.<sup>6</sup>

The disappearance of the road march is interpreted as resulting from the loss of Green Point as a competition venue. The minutes of a Council Executive Committee meeting held on 7/12/72 discussing the retrospective suspension of Green Point Track’s use (from 1968) for the Coon Carnival and the restrictions imposed on the road march expose the contemporary position of the Traffic Department:

In the light of previous experience, the Traffic Manager was unable to recommend that Coon Troupes be permitted to parade through the Central City Area and that as far as possible their activities should be confined to off-street venues.<sup>7</sup>

In the same, restricted access, document, the attitude of District Commandant Col. van Lill of the SAP is outlined. Like the Traffic Department, the Commandant “could not recommend the granting of the permission requested [to stage a central road march] as in the past Coon Parades were the cause of numerous unpleasant incidents which usually

---

<sup>4</sup> *Cape Times*, (29/12/67).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Cape Times*, (2/1/68).

<sup>7</sup> Extract from the agenda and minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of Cape Town City Council, (7/12/72), State Archives. File GM. 25/3.

ended with bottle-throwing, the invasion of the City... from as early as 4am by thousands of undesirables, assaults and robberies and the disruption of vehicular and pedestrian traffic”<sup>8</sup>.

Thus a picture emerges where numerous organs of the municipal administration advised against the road march in the City centre from the late 1960s, yet none were willing to shoulder responsibility publicly opposition. Such departments; the Police, Traffic, and Public Works and Utilities (whose opinion was also sometimes sought by the Town Clerk), if not opposing the event outright, behind the secure doors of the Council Committee room, advocated “spatial” and “temporal” restrictions inhibiting its unfettered progression. Evident in these quoted documents are objections to both the timing and place of the Carnival, as well as attempts to impose official order on the event by dictating most precisely where and when it could take place.

The Traffic Department, during the Executive Committee meeting of December 1972, argued against a central road march, demanding its limitation to “off street venues”. Yet, in a letter only two months previously to the Town Clerk, the same Department had exonerated itself from blame for the event’s incarceration declaring that it had “at no time banned Coon Troupes from parading in the streets”<sup>9</sup>, every year readily issuing numerous marching permits.

The SAP adopted a similarly ambiguous position, their attitude to the event vacillating between the Council Committee room and before the unwelcome attention of the press and critical gaze of their readership. Whilst the District Commandant argued in private for its restriction, less than a year later in a *Cape Times* article headed “Police not opposed to Coon Carnival”<sup>10</sup>, he seemed anxious to qualify this stance.

Responding to an article the previous day, reporting the Chief Magistrate of Cape Town, Mr. J. W. van Greunen’s refusal to grant a permit for any road march at all on “police advice”, the Commandant insisted that the “police were not opposed to the Coon Carnival as such”, but to “problems” associated with it; “many... not even created by the coons themselves, but by the crowds of followers”<sup>11</sup>. Publicly at least, the SAP were eager not to portray a position of outright hostility to the event. Indeed, the commandant conceded, the event had some value as a tourist draw:

For some people it has become traditional festivity and an attraction to up-country people and foreign visitors.<sup>12</sup>

Blame for the disappearance of the central procession from 1967 centres on several factors; namely objections to the use of the Central Business District by the Traffic Department and the SAP (though publicly these departments underplayed their hostility), and the alternative

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum to the Town Clerk from the Traffic Manager, (25/10/72), State Archives. File GM 25/3.

<sup>10</sup> *Cape Times*, (5/12/73).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

claim as to promoter Sonny Lloyd's unwillingness to provide a free spectacle, wanting to maximise gate-takings by limiting the event to the stadium.

Two further critical determinants are alluded to in a Mayoral statement to an Ordinary monthly meeting of the City Council on December 21st, 1972. "Every year", he states, the council received complaints from Somerset Hospital's authorities (Green Point Track's neighbours) of "hooliganism, vandalism, excessive noise, drunkenness and the breaking of fences and intrusion into the Somerset Hospital Grounds by participants and spectators"<sup>13</sup>. Strangely though, Council records which are otherwise fastidiously comprehensive reveal no trace of any such complaints.

Mayor Friedlander's second explanation for the sounding of the "death knell" at Green Point is undoubtedly the most illuminating. He states:

When the Green Point area was declared an area for occupation by Whites by the Minister of Community Development, the Council had to apply for a permit for non-White persons to continue using the Green Point Track for sporting purposes. This was ultimately granted by the Minister with the specific provision that no further Coon Carnivals would be allowed on the Green Point Track.<sup>14</sup>

Curtailement, containment, and restriction of the Carnival thus stemmed directly from the initiatives of Government Ministries. Indeed, the *Cape Times* of 2/1/68 similarly attributed the sorry "absence of coon troupes marching through the main city streets"<sup>15</sup> to the removal of the competition from Green Point - Carnival's historical residence.

Access to restricted Council documents lends some clarity to Western's erroneous claim. The road march was not officially banned in 1967: in fact, the street procession appears never to have been straightforwardly and completely outlawed. Rather, increasing restrictions and curtailments were imposed on its organisation effectively making the traditional parade through District Six, the City Centre streets, to Green Point, impossible. Under 1930s legislation council permission had to be obtained for a road march, yet it appears that this formality was seldom enforced or observed until the 1960s - attested to by the absence of applications for permits until this time. From the mid-late sixties, municipal authorities were increasingly conscientious in enforcing the official procedure for staging the street parade; insisting that permission was obtained from the Police, Traffic Department and Council. Indeed, individual departments utilised their authority to dictate the terms and conditions of the road march with a novel diligence. In a report to the Executive Committee dated 7/12/72, for example, the Town Clerk states:

---

<sup>13</sup> Statement by His Worship the Mayor (Councillor R. M. Friedlander) at the Ordinary Monthly Meeting of the City Council, (21/12/72), State Archives. File GM 25/3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Cape Times*, (2/1/68).

A condition of the permit issued by the Traffic Control Branch is that the parade of Coon Troupes in the Central City Area ....is prohibited.<sup>16</sup>

The Gatherings and Demonstrations Act No. 52 of 1973 prohibited “certain gatherings and demonstrations in a defined area”. A “gathering” applied to “any number of persons”, and a “defined area” on the creative whim of the Minister of Justice. For any open air “gathering” to take place, written permission had to be obtained from the Chief Magistrate of Cape Town. Thus, for a coon troupe to march anywhere on the roads after 1973 they had to have permission from; the Chief Magistrate, the Police, the Traffic Department and the Council.

All four of these state organs proved increasingly inventive in their stipulations and demanding in their preconditions. In a memorandum to the Town Clerk, dated 12/5/75 for example, the Traffic Manager signaled his consent for a road march the following January on the conditions that a route prescribed by him was followed, that all troupes “move off promptly at 2pm” without the “delayed departure ...experienced in previous years”, and that no motor vehicles form part of the procession<sup>17</sup>. Using his authority to dictate terms to the full, he further stipulated that “the gaps between the individual troupes must not exceed 100 metres”: a clear attempt to dictate the precise spatial and temporal limits of celebration. Indeed, in the wake of the draconian new Act, the granting of permission to stage the road march was by no means a foregone conclusion. Only the first year after it’s passing, the Chief Magistrate used his authority to veto the procession.

An extract from the Agenda and Resume of a meeting of the Council’s Executive Committee on 4/12/73 reports that “The Chief Magistrate of Cape Town, who had been approached in terms of Carnival and Demonstrations Act No. 52 of 1973 [sic], had refused authority for the parade to take place”<sup>18</sup>. The same extract relates that the Mayor was then authorised to make representation to the Chief Magistrate to “endeavour to get him to withdraw his refusal and grant authority for the parade”. For the record, his efforts must have been suitably persuasive for correspondence in 1974 indicates that some sort of march did eventually take place at New Year.

This incident should not be taken as representative in its portrayal of the Mayor and Council championing the liberty of the Coon Carnival against the Ministry of Justice in the form of the Chief Magistrate. A report from the Town Clerk to the Executive Committee of 7/12//72 marked “Confidential - Not for Publication”<sup>19</sup> provides fascinating evidence of the Council’s attitude to the event, and stands in uneasy contention with the recorded Minutes of the same meeting<sup>20</sup>. In the *confidential* document, the Town Clerk concludes with the recommendation that “the permission sought [for a street parade] be not granted”. The

<sup>16</sup> Report from the Town Clerk to the Executive Committee, (7/12/72), File GM 25/3.

<sup>17</sup>Memorandum from the Traffic Manager to the Town Clerk, (12/5/75), File GM 25/3.

<sup>18</sup> Extract from the Agenda and Resume of the Executive Committee, (4/12/73), File 25/3.

<sup>19</sup> Report from the Town Clerk to the Executive Committee, (7/12/72), File GM 25/3.

<sup>20</sup> Extracts from the Agenda and Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee, (7/12/72), File GM 25/3.

*minutes* of this committee however, make no reference to the negative recommendation of the Clerk, instead reporting the resolution of the meeting to be “that authority be granted for the Coons to parade through the Central City Area, subject to them complying with the route and the conditions to be laid down by the Town Council”. The council and clerk were evidently as keen as the District Commandant and the Traffic Department to hide their negativity towards the road march from public scrutiny.

University of Cape Town

### Appendix III.

#### A brief discussion of the relationship between the Press and State in 1960s-'70s South Africa.

Gerald Shaw<sup>1</sup>, remembering the state of the media in the sixties and seventies notes that government pressure on the Press escalated from Sharpeville in 1960, onwards. Behan<sup>2</sup> similarly asserts that the State became more sensitive to media coverage from this point and that its policy approach became accordingly more severe. He declares that after Sharpeville, the government's emphasis on the need for a "responsible" Press increased, reflecting the "desire to control information as a way of preventing opposition from Black liberation movements. This concern grew alongside clear evidence of increasing Black readership of English-language newspapers in the 1960s"<sup>3</sup>.

Commentators on the state of the South African media agree that 1960 marked a fundamental turning point in the freedom of the Press as well as in the relationship between newspaper proprietors, the State, and individual editorial committees. Behan<sup>4</sup> claims that the most significant factor in the government's invigorated paranoia towards the English-language Press was based around the issue of *who* reads papers, coupled with a concern over the ideological bases of these broadsheets. The fundamental difference between the Afrikaans and English Press in South Africa, he asserts, lies in the latter's basis in the "libertarian theory of the Press"<sup>5</sup>: in the belief of the ability of the individual to reason, judge, and so extrapolate the "truth"<sup>6</sup>.

South Africa's English-language papers, he asserts, saw their role as one of social responsibility, a duty to serve as "watchdog"<sup>7</sup> to the government's actions: accountable ultimately to the market, its readership, in its power to shop (read) elsewhere<sup>8</sup>. The Afrikaans Press, conversely, viewed itself as directly accountable to the state with a patriotic allegiance to the Nationalist government. Potter encapsulates the scenario, describing the Afrikaans Press as "an integrated part of the political organ of Nationalist Afrikanerdom, the Nationalist Party"<sup>9</sup>.

To account for the government's growing weariness of the English-language Press, we must look beyond its ideological basis, to its patterns of circulation and corresponding

---

<sup>1</sup> Telephone conversation between author and Gerald Shaw of the Cape Times (30/5/95).

<sup>2</sup> D. Behan, 'The Press and the State in South Africa, 1960 to 1986, with Special Reference to three Cape Town Daily Newspapers', (BA(Hons) Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Behan, 'The Press', p. 67. quoting E. Potter, The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers, (Chatto and Windus, London, 1975), p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Behan, 'The Press', p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Essentially a philosophy derived from Enlightenment ideals.

<sup>7</sup> Behan, 'The Press', p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> A view articulated by Gerald Shaw in telephone conversation (30/5/95).

<sup>9</sup> Potter, The Press as Opposition, p. 205.

potential sphere of influence. Hepple<sup>10</sup> points to the predominance of the English-language Press in relation to its Afrikaans equivalent at this time. He states that the former enjoyed 80% of the daily, and 75% of the weekly national circulation figures.

The ferocity of the government's attack however, was incited in reaction to the racial composition of their readerships. Significantly, states Behan, the English-language Press monopolized a much higher number of Black, Coloured and Asian readers than did the Afrikaans Press<sup>11</sup>. In fact, he claims, during this period as much as half of the *Cape Times*' readership was Coloured<sup>12</sup>. In similar vein Charney asserts that amongst Coloured working-class (presumably in the Cape Peninsula) the *Cape Herald* dominated 42% of readership figures and was "almost twice that attracted by [other] local English-language dailies"<sup>13</sup>.

Fear of prosecution provoked increasing self-censorship from the 1960s. The President of the South African Society of Journalists outlined, in 1969, how newspapers' fears of overstepping the law and inviting prosecution resulted in self-censorship to the degree that the "truth" was often distorted or vague. Mourning the rapid diminishment of the country's "free-Press" he bemoaned the "many restrictive laws within which newspapers have to operate so that some newspapers are avoiding trouble by "playing it safe" rather than giv[ing] readers the true position"<sup>14</sup>. Similarly Potter quotes the editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Raymond Louw, in his assertion that "things were kept out of the paper... simply to comply with the law"<sup>15</sup>.

Morris Broughton suggests that the 1960s heralded a significant shift within the media industry "with... proprietorial pressure slackening off and... increased pressure that the Press came under from government"<sup>16</sup>. The height of the Nationalist government's paranoia of the Press peaked only in the mid-seventies however. The government's Press policy crystallised with the definition of the Nationalist's "Total Strategy" concept: an all encompassing ideological battle-plan emerging in response to the perceived threat of a "total [communist] onslaught" against the state. The Minister of Defence, P. W. Botha, outlined the link between the state of the nation's security and the responsibility of its the Press in a Government White Paper on Defence:

[the] news media remain an essential link in the total national strategy, because of the great influencing role they can play through proper co-operation.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A. Hepple, *Press Under Apartheid*, (IDAF, London, 1974), p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Behan, 'The Press', p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> C. Charney, 'Black Power, White Press; Literacy, newspapers and the Transformation of Township Political Culture', (African Studies Institute seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 10/5/93), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Hepple, *Press Under Apartheid*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Potter, *The Press as Opposition*, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> Behan, 'The Press', p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Behan, 'The Press', p. 44 quoting from Government White Paper on Defence. 1977. p. 35.

Two years after the unrest at Soweto and at the height of this onslaught against the Press, the *Muslim News*<sup>18</sup> ran a front-page comment pointing to the relative positions and comparative degrees of “freedom” of the Afrikaner, English, and the Black Press. Under the headline “Freedom of the Press” the paper pronounced that in South Africa this liberty was a “matter of degree”:

The Afrikaner Press is relatively free; the English Press is sniped at, while the Black Press is constantly, and, at times, killed by bannings.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *Muslim News*, (30/7/78).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

## Appendix IV

### An interrogation of “Coloured Ethnicity”:

To ask whether the Coon Carnival represents Coloured ethnicity, we need first to be clear about what we mean by *ethnicity* in general and *Coloured ethnicity* in particular. Bekker calls the conceptual term “the greatest enigma of our time”<sup>1</sup>, positing conflicting definitions from a range of disciplines in an attempt to extrapolate coherence. He differentiates between those theorists who see ethnicity as an imposed, classificatory group label (those who view it as the existence of distinct, fixed and static cultural groups), and those who see it as a self-determined, autonomous expression of a living identity. He posits the French anthropologist Meillassoux as representative of the first camp in declaring that “ethnic groups in South Africa are no more than administrative inventions, without historical foundations or living social identities”<sup>2</sup>.

Weichers conversely, defines ethnic groups as essential, innate, and static cultural entities where “ethnic change or transfer seldom occurs”<sup>3</sup>. His conception is one of primordial and rigid categories whose boundaries are, in the main, impenetrable. Such a definition corresponds most closely with Apartheid’s notion of ethnic exclusivity where people are born into a ready established cultural identity. For them, ethnicity and cultural identity are pre-destined birth-rites.

It is the third interpretation with which Dubow seems most sympathetic in arguing for the constructive use of the concept in understanding South Africa’s social complexities. Alluding to an image of ethnicity as something related more to sentiment and belief than to blood and destiny, Bekker quotes the six basic element of Smith’s definition:

a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a shared sense of solidarity.<sup>4</sup>

These aspects emphasise ethnicity as a community’s own *feeling* of affinity and consensus: defined more from the inside, by its constituents, than from the outside. Smith accords *territory*, or space, central significance in underpinning this common sentiment. His use of comparatively vague and ethereal terms, of “*myth*”, “*sense*” and “*association*”, words connected with belief and emotion, depict ethnic identity as something emotional and relational rather than stubbornly scientific, pre-determined and inflexible.

Where perhaps Smith’s elaboration falls down is in its talk of “distinctive shared culture” for he fails to convey the fluid and contextual nature of ethnic culture that Dubow hints at.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bekker, *Ethnicity*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2 quoting M. Weichers, (Unpublished Paper presented at a conference on Identity and Ethnicity, CEAN, Bordeaux, France, 1992), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12. quoting A. Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986) p.22.

Though he talks of ethnicity as an essentially psychological construct, his acceptance of *history* and *culture* as immutable givens prevents the assertion of a truly dynamic working concept. Any definition of *ethnicity* which relies on binaristic ideas of finite or static *culture*, *history* and *tradition*, tends towards the totalitarian imperative of Apartheid; to categorise and essentialise, impose inflexible boundaries in a world of ambiguity and change.

Yinger provides the most compelling outline of “ethnicity” for our purposes:

In a general definition, an ethnic group is a segment of a larger society, whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients.<sup>5</sup>

Elaborating on his description Yinger posits three determining ingredients in the construction of an ethnic group. Members must be perceived by those outside the group as different, they must believe themselves different, and they must “participate in shared activities around a real or mythical common origin and culture”<sup>6</sup>. Like Smith, Yinger emphasises the *imaginary* basis to the construction of group identity, but goes further in suggesting that *culture* too is about *myth* and *belief*. It matters little whether a group can lay convincingly claim to shared lines of descent, or prove ancient common origin in the same village. Of greater significance is the fact that members believe themselves to share a history, roots, culture, tradition, or space (though all these aspects may not necessarily coexist simultaneously). Indeed, it is this shared notion of space which seems the dominant factor underpinning ethnic consensus amongst Cape Town’s Coloured community.

How far then do Cape Town’s “Coloureds” fulfill the criteria for definition as a distinct ethnic group? Indeed, they share a “collective name” (the first point on Smith’s checklist) but it is one rejected by many of those it defines. Legislatively entrenched by the Nationalist Government as a residual category of racial classification, the term “Coloured” encompassed a range of people, differing not just in the shade of their skin but in socio-economic class, religion, belief and expectations. Ridd points, for example, to “strong social divisions” in the community premised on three central bases; “colour, religion and economic status”<sup>7</sup> i.e. race, religion and class. Add to these divisions those centred on gender and it becomes difficult to talk of a homogenous community at all.

Further still, the group shared little common *history* or *myth of descent* (the next two of Smith’s criteria), for the classificatory label applied to all from the descendants of the indigenous Khoi-khoi and San peoples, to those of seventeenth-century Javanese political exiles, from the products of Afrikaner miscegenation to the grandchildren of Indian

---

<sup>5</sup> J. M. Yinger, *Ethnicity: Source of Strength? Source of Conflict?* (University of New York Press, Albany, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Ridd, ‘Position and Identity’, pp. 102-104.

indentured labourers. Whisson states that “lacking a common cultural heritage or myth of origin, there is little to bind Coloured people into a group”<sup>8</sup>.

Perhaps it is merely the historical experience of liminality, of being discriminated against as a residual and intermediate group which has served as the nearest thing to a social cohesive. Shields quotes Turner in suggesting that “the experience of liminality is a socially unifying one”<sup>9</sup>. The aggressive assertion and entrenchment of a distinct Coloured ethnic identity from 1948 onwards, outlines Stone, must be seen as part of the “Nationalist system of communal identity formation”<sup>10</sup>. Apartheid’s project was to rigidly stratify society, classifying individuals into finite and immutable groups according to their *race*. Access to housing, employment, residential and political status and rights, mirrored this racial stratification. An individual’s civil rights and life opportunity effectively paralleled their group classification. But the Nationalist’s drive to divide society between the polar opposites of White and Black was fraught with inconsistency and contradiction. Even these two categories - the essential limits of classification - were characterised by ambiguity and contradiction, for example, “White” subsumed everyone from fourth generation Afrikaner to Greek and Portuguese immigrant.

Apartheid tried to conflate *race* with *culture* and *tradition* but it did so in a context where the only certainty was uncertainty: ambivalence and difference. The classification of those in-between the two poles - Coloureds - was even more problematic. Consolidating the notion of an encompassing White cultural identity amongst peoples often divided by a history of animosity (English and Afrikaner for example) was difficult enough, though in practical and material terms they had only to gain from this classification. Creating and sustaining a link between culture and race amongst people who neither looked nor felt the same, and furthermore had nothing to gain and little to protect (other than escaping the even harsher restrictions imposed on those classified “Black”), from classification as Coloured, was ambitious in the extreme.

Stone suggests however, that it was not the belief in a common origin, history, culture or tradition, which united people as a Coloured group but it was their relatively recent historical experience of being treated as in-betweens, non-entities, a residual group characterised by their lack of commonality or shared heritage. It was not that Apartheid successfully imposed a notion of historically rooted Coloured ethnicity then, but rather that it created a situational context in which it could flourish. Unity in this sense was not simply derived from a common heritage but from the contemporary experience of people *treated* as a group, and furthermore, a group defined by its in-betweenness; its self-conscious ambivalence and the blurring of racial and cultural givens. Bickford-Smith points out though, that even in the nineteenth-century some people were using the term “Coloured” to

<sup>8</sup> M. G. Whisson, *South Africa’s Minorities*, No. 2. (SPRO-CAS, Johannesburg, 197[1]), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> R. Shields, *Places on the margin: alternative geographies of modernity*, (Routledge, London, 1991), p. 89. quoting Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> G. Stone, ‘The lexicon and sociolinguistic codes of the working-class Afrikaans-speaking Cape Peninsula coloured community’, in R. Mesthrie (ed.), *Language and Social History. Studies in South African Sociolinguistics*, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1995), p. 277.

describe themselves and that this did not represent a straightforward acquiescence to an imposed classificatory label. "The fact that they did so", he states, "was the result of a dialectical relationship between racialisation by Whites and self-definition"<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> Bickford-Smith, Ethnic Pride, p. 186..

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1. Unpublished Primary Sources

- A. Record of Oral informants cited.
- B. Archival material: Cape Town City Council Records.

### 2. Published Primary Sources.

- A. Street directories.
- B. Government Publications.
- C. Newspapers and Magazines.

### 3. Secondary Sources.

- A. Published Books.
- B. Journal Articles.
- C. Chapters in Books.
- D. Unpublished Papers and Theses.

### 4. Others.

University of Cape Town

## 1. UNPUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES:

### A. Record of Oral informants.

All interviews were conducted by the author between May and September 1995, with the exception of those with Levy, Small and Jacobs which were conducted for the Western Cape Oral History Project, University of Cape Town, in 1990. Copies of all transcripts are housed in the Manuscripts Library of the University of Cape Town.

### Western Cape Oral History Project Interviewees

<u>Name</u>	<u>Year of Birth</u>	<u>Residence- pre-removals</u>	<u>Present residence</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
<i>MEN</i>				
Thomas Carelse	1926	Woodstock	Woodstock	Ex-hawker
Michael Cyster	1956	Harfield Village	Athlone	Security
Barty Daniels	1946	District Six	Mitchells Plain	Labourer
Richard Dudley	1928	Claremont	Heathfield	Retired Headmaster
Miley Ferris	1940	Athlone	Mitchells Plain	Maintenance
Ali Ismael	1941	Bo Kaap	Athlone	n/a
Ibrahim Ismael	1950	Woodstock	Surrey Estate, Athlone	Carpenter
Jamaldien Jumah	1950	Woodstock	Woodstock	Factory foreman
Kassiem Khan	1951	Bo-Kaap	Mitchells Plain	Maintenance
Hadji Levy	1909	District Six	Mitchells Plain	Tailor
Ashiek Marnie	1958	-	Lansdowne	Councillor - educationalist
Eddie Matthews	1929	District Six - Bo-Kaap	Kensington	Fish-smoker
Melvin Matthews	1948	Bo-Kaap	Kensington	Retrenched metalworker
Adiel Mohammed	1953	Athlone	Athlone	Carpenter
Achmat Sabera	1942	District Six	Heideveld	Unemployed craftsman
Maddenie Salie	1952	Bo-Kaap	Mitchells Plain	Clerk
Abe Sheldon	1941	Harfield Village	Hanover Park	Security
Mr. Small	circa 1930	-	-	n/a
Karriem Thompson	1933	District Six	Surrey Estate, Athlone	Retired factory worker

**WOMEN**

Faldila Isaacse	circa. 1955	District Six	Woodstock	Seamstress
Gadja Jacobs	1926	-	-	Factory worker
Fagmieh Jansen	1946	Bo-Kaap	Bo-Kaap	Seamstress
Janet Matthews	1929	District 6/Bo-Kaap	Kensington	Fish-smoker
Radifa Thompson	1928	District Six	Athlone	n/a

**B. Archival material.****Cape Town City Council Records:****(GM Filing System Prior to 1968).**

GM 1/1/10 Road Traffic Ordinance 1966 (1966-67)

GM 1/2 Road Traffic Regulations 1967 (1968-75)

GM 1/20 Regulation No. 1912 - Processions, Closing of Streets, Performances in Streets (1968)

**(GM Filing System Effective 1976).**

GM 25/3 Pedestrian Processions. 1968 onwards.

**(General Purposes Committee - G Files)**

G 5/260 Celebrations, Exhibitions, etc.

**2. PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES****A. Street directories:****Cape Peninsula Street Directories,** (Cape Times Directories, Cape Town, 1960 to 1980).**B. Government Publications:**Criminal Procedures and Evidence Act. No. 56 of 1955. **Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1955,** (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1955).

Government White Paper on Defence. W.P.G - '77, (1977), Department of Defence.

Group Areas Act. No. 41 of 1950, in **Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1950,** (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1950).**Hansard.** Vol. 70; Col. 414. Jan 1. 1950

South African Government gazette. no. 1370, (11 February 1966), Notice no. 43, and no. 20153, (30 August 1968), Notice no. 252.

Suppression of Communism Act. No. 44 of 1950, in Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1950, (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1950).

Publications and Entertainment Act No. 26 of 1963, Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1963, (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1963).

Population Registration Act. No. 30 of 1950, Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1950, (Government Printer, Parow, Cape Town, 1950).

### **C. Newspapers and Magazines:**

The Cape Argus. Cape Town.

3/1/07

1960 - 1980

30/10/90

2/1/96

The Cape Herald. Cape Town.

1960-1980

The Cape Times. Cape Town.

7/1/33

1960-1980

The Muslim News. Cape Town.

1960-1980

Financial Mail. Johannesburg.

17/8/73

Personality. South Africa.

23/2/73

Private Eye. London.

10/1/86

South Debate..

21-25/1/94

### 3. SECONDARY SOURCES.

#### A. Published Books:

Anderson, B. Imagined Communities, (Verso, London, 1991).

Bakhtin, M. Rabelais and His World, (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1968).

Bekker, S. Ethnicity in Focus: The South African Case, (The Indicator, South African Issue Focus, 1993).

Bendix, R. Progress and Nostalgia: Silverklausen in Urnasch, Switzerland, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985).

Bickford-Smith, V. Van Heyningen and Worden, N. Cape Town, (David Philip, Cape Town, Forthcoming).

Bickford-Smith, V. Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: Group Identity and Social Practice, 1875-1902, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995).

Bozzoli, B. Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1987).

Brake, M. Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subculture in America, Britain and Canada, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985).

Brandes, S. Power and Persuasion: Fiestas and Social Control in Rural Mexico, (University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 1988).

Clarke, C. Ley, D. and Peach, C. (eds.) Geography and Ethnic Pluralism, (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1984).

Cohen, A. Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements, (Berg, Oxford, 1993).

Cooper, F. On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombassa, (Yale University Press, London, 1987).

Coplan, D. B. In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1985).

Da Matta, R. Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes, (University of Notre Dame Press, London, 1991).

Davis, S. G. Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1986).

Desai, D. and Marney, C. The Killing of the Imam, (Quartet, London, 1978).

Dirks, R. The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations, (University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1987).

Docker, J. Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994).

Du Plessis, I. D. The Malay Quarter and its People, (Balkema, Cape Town, 1953).

Falassi, A. (ed.) Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival, (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987).

Fanon, F. Black Skin, White Masks, (Grove Press, New York, 1967).

Fiske, J. Understanding Popular Culture, (Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1989).

Gardiner, M. The Dialogics of Critique, (Routledge, London, 1992).

Gluckman, M. Custom and Conflict in Africa, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1963).

Goldin, I. Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa, (Longman, London, 1987).

Green, L. G. Tavern of the Seas, (Howard B. Timmins, Cape Town, 1975).

Grundy, K. W. Soldiers Without Politics: Blacks in the South African Armed Forces, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983).

Hepple, A. Press Under Apartheid, (IDAF, London, 1974).

Holt, R. Sport and the British: A Modern History, (Clarendon, Oxford, 1990).

Hugo, P. Quislings or Realists? A Documentary Study of "Coloured" Politics in South Africa, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1978).

Humphries, S. Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981).

Institute of Race Relations. Fast Facts, (Institute of Race Relations, Braamfontein, September 1994).

- Jarvie, G. (ed.) Sport, Racism and Ethnicity, (Falmer Press, London, 1991).
- Jeppie, S. and Soudien, C. (eds.), The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present, (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1990).
- Le Roy Ladurie, E. Carnival in Romans, (George Braziller Inc., New York, 1979).
- Lewis, G. Between the Wire and the Wall: A history of South African "Coloured" politics, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987).
- Lodge, T. Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983).
- Mackenzie, J. M. (ed.) Imperialism and Popular Culture, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986).
- Mahida, E. M. History of Muslims in South Africa: A Chronology, (Arabic Study Circle, Durban, 1993).
- Manuel, G. and Hatfield, D. District Six, (Longmans South Africa, Cape Town, 1967).
- Mortimer, M. Journeys through the French African Novel, (James Currey, London, 1990).
- O'Toole, J. Watts and Woodstock: Identity and Culture in the United States and South Africa, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973).
- Patterson, S. 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, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1953).
- Pinnock, D. the brotherhoods: street gangs and state control in cape town, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1984).
- Pollack, R. Up against apartheid: the role and the plight of the press in South Africa, (South Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1981).
- Potter, E. The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers, (Chatto and Windus, London, 1975).
- Rive, R. "Buckingham Palace": District Six, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1986).
- Schechner, R. The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance, (Routledge, London, 1993).
- Scheper-Hughes, N. Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992).

Shell, R. C. H. Children of Bondage: A social history of the slave society at the Cape of Good Hope, (University of the Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

Shields, R. Places on the margin: alternative geographies of modernity, (Routledge, London, 1991).

Soudien, C. and Meltzer, L. District Six: Image and Representation, (South African National Gallery and The District Six Foundation, Cape Town, 1995).

Stallybrass, P. and White, A. The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, (Methuen, London, 1987).

Thompson, P. The Voice of the Past, (OPUS, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988).

Turner, V. The Ritual Process: structure and anti-structure, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969).

Vail, L. (ed.). The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa, (Currey Bekeley, London, 1989).

Van Deburg, W. L. Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture, (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1984).

Van der Ross, R. E. Myths and Attitudes: An Inside Look at the Coloured People, (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1979).

Western, J. Outcast Cape Town, (Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, 1981).

Whisson, M. G. South Africa's Minorities, No. 2. (SPRO-CAS, Johannesburg, 197[1]).

Williams, R. Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society, (Fontana, London, 1987).

Worden, N. and Crais, C. (eds.) Breaking the Chains, (Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

Yinger, J. M. Ethnicity: Source of Strength? Source of Conflict?, (State of New York Press, Albany, 1994).

Zemon Davis, N. Society and Culture in Early Modern France, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1975).

**B. Journal Articles:**

Adhikari, M. 'The Sons of Ham: Slavery and the Making of Coloured Identity', Southern Historical Journal, 27 (1992), pp. 95-112.

Bender, B. 'Theorising Landscapes and the Prehistoric Landscapes of Stonehenge', MAN: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 27:4 (Dec. 1992).

Bickford-Smith, V. 'Slavery, Emancipation and the Question of Coloured Identity with particular attention to Cape Town, 1875-1910', The Societies of Southern Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, 19 (University of London Press, London, 1993), pp. 17-25

Birmingham, D. 'Carnival at Luanda', Journal of African History, 28 (1988).

Hoy, M. 'Bakhtin and Popular Culture', in New Literary History. 23:2 (1992).

Stone, G. 'The lexicon and sociolinguistic codes of the working-class Afrikaans-speaking Cape Peninsula coloured community', in (ed.) Mesthrie, R. Language and Social History. Studies in South African Sociolinguistics, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1995), p. 277.

Van der Spuy, P. 'Slave Women and the Family in nineteenth-century Cape Town', South African Historical Journal, 27 (South African Historical Society, South Africa, 1992).

**C. Chapters in Books:**

Bank, A. 'The erosion of urban slavery in the Cape. 1806 to 1834', in Worden, N. and Crais, C. (eds.), Breaking The Chains, (University of Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

Bickford-Smith, V. 'Meanings of freedom: social positions and identity among ex-slaves and their descendants in Cape Town. 1875-1910', in Worden, N. and Crais, C. (eds.), Breaking The Chains, (University of Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

Burton, R. D. E. 'Cricket, carnival and street culture in the Caribbean', in Jarvie, G. (ed.), Sport, Racism and Ethnicity, (Falmer Press, London, 1991).

Cohen, A. P. 'Belonging. the experience of culture', in Cohen, A. P. (ed.), Belonging: identity and social organisation in British rural cultures, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1982).

Falassi, A. 'Festival definition and morphology', in Falassi, A. (ed.), Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival, (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987).

Handelman, D. 'Inside-out, outside-in: concealment and revelation in Newfoundland Christmas mumming', in Bruner, E. M. (ed.), Text, Play and Story: The construction and reconstruction of self and society, (Proceedings of The American Ethnological Society, Waveland Press Inc., Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1983).

La Hausse, P. '*Mayihlome!*: towards an understanding of amalaita gangs in Durban. c. 1900-1930', in Clingman, S. (ed.), Regions and Repertoires: Topics in South African Politics and Culture. South African Studies, 6 (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1991).

Marin, L. 'Notes on a semiotic approach to parade, cortege and procession', in Falassi, A. (ed.), Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival, (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987).

Mason, J. E. 'Paternalism under siege: slavery in theory and practice during the era of reform. c.1825 through emancipation', in Worden, N. and Crais, C. (eds.), Breaking the Chains, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

Mesril, M. 'Place and time in the carnivalesque festival', in Falassi, A. (ed.), Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival, (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987).

Napier, D. 'Festival masks: a typology', in Falassi, A. (ed.), Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival, (New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987)..

Nasson, B. 'Oral history and the reconstruction of District Six', in Jeppie, S. and Soudien, C. (eds.), The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present, (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1990).

Rive, R. 'District Six: fact or fiction', in Jeppie, S. and Soudien, C. (eds.), The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present, (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1990).

Scharf, W. 'The resurgence of urban street gangs and community responses in Cape Town during the late eighties', in Hansson, D. and Van Zyl Smit, D. (eds.), Towards Justice? Crime and State Control in South Africa, (OUP, Cape Town, 1990).

Scully, P. 'Private and public worlds of emancipation in the rural Western Cape. c. 1830-1842', in Worden, N. and Crais, C. (eds.), Breaking the Chains, (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994).

Shepherd, B. 'Showbiz imperialism: the case of Peter Lubengula', in Mackenzie, J. M. (ed.), Imperialism and Popular Culture, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986).

Stone, G. L. 'The lexicon and socio-linguistic codes of the working-class Afrikaans-speaking Cape Peninsula coloured community', in Mesthrie, R. (ed.), South African Sociolinguistics, (David Philip, Cape Town, 1995).

Western, J. 'Social engineering through spatial manipulation: apartheid in South African cities', in Clarke, Ley, and Peach. (eds.), Geography and Ethnic Pluralism, (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1984).

**D. Unpublished Papers and Theses:**

Behan, D. 'The Press and the State in South Africa, 1960 to 1986, with Special Reference to three Cape Town Daily Newspapers', (BA(Hons.) Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1988).

Charney, C. 'Black Power, White Press; Literacy, newspapers and the Transformation of Township Political Culture', (African Studies Institute seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 10/5/93).

Dubow, S. 'Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes', (Paper presented at conference on "Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism", Rhodes University, April 1993).

Glaser, C. L. 'Urban Youth Culture and Political Mobilisation: A Comparative Perspective', (Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge University, 1994).

Haron, M. 'Muslim News: Its Contribution Toward an Alternative Press in Cape Town', (Paper presented at conference on "A Century of the Resistance Press in South Africa", University of the Western Cape, 6-7/6/91).

Heard, T. 'The History of the Alternative Press', (Paper presented at conference on "A Century of the Resistance Press in South Africa", University of the Western Cape, 6-7/6/91).

Howard, C. 'The "No-Persons": An Investigation into Secular Popular Music in Cape Town', (M. Mus. Thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1994).

Jeppie, M. S. 'I. D. du Plessis and the "Re-invention" of the Malay. c.1935-1952', (Seminar paper presented to the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 28 September 1988).

Jeppie, M. S. 'Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner Cape Town, c. 1939-1959', (MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990).

Johnson, P. 'Talking the Talk and Walking the Walk: The Spring Queen Festival and the Eroding Family Cult in the Western Cape Garment Industry', (Seminar paper presented to the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 7/10/93).

Kagan, N. 'The Growth and Development of the Municipality of Green Point and Sea Point', (BA(Hons.) Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1975).

B, Nasson, '*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. 1920-1950s*', (History Workshop paper, "The Making of Class", University of the Witwatersrand, 9-14/2/87).

Rich, P. 'Liberals, Radicals and the Politics of Black Consciousness, 1969-76', (Paper presented to the Department of African Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, 24/7/89).

Ridd, R. E. 'Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape: Coloured and Malay Contrasted', (Seminar paper presented to the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 31/3/93).

Ridd, R. E. 'Position and Identity in a Divided Community: Colour and Religion in the District Six, Walmer Estate, Woodstock area of Cape Town', (Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford University, 1981).

Scharf, W. 'Street gangs, survival and political consciousness in the eighties', (Seminar paper, Joint workshop on the "History of Greater Cape Town, Western Cape", Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 5/12/85).

Stone, C. 'Industrialisation and Female Labour Force Participation: Coloured Women in the Cape Peninsula', (Centre for Intergroup Studies, 5th Workshop, "Mobility and Social Change in South Africa", 23-25/6/75).

Stone, G. 'The Coon Carnival', (Extended paper, University of Cape Town, 1971).

Taliep, W. 'A Study in the History of Claremont and the Impact of the Group Areas Act, c1950-1970', (BA (Hons.) Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1992).

Turner, S. and Jensen, S. 'A Place called Heideveld: identities and strategies among the coloureds in Cape Town, South Africa', (MA Thesis, Institute of Geography and International Development Studies, Roskilde University, Denmark, 1995).

Weichel, K. 'A Study of Aspects of Folk Cultural Activities Among the Coloured Peoples in The Cape', (Urban Problems Research Unit working paper, University of Cape Town, 1977)

Weiss, A. G. 'The Cape Coloured Woman - within an industrial community and at home', (MSc. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1950).

**4. OTHERS:**

'Coon Carnival', (Cape Times photographic collection, Special Collection, South African National Reference Library, Cape Town).

Stone, G. L. Interview with author, (April 1996).

Rawkins, M. 'Cape New Year', (Cape Town Municipal Photographic Society, 196[0s], Film stored at the Centre for African Studies Library, University of Cape Town).

Shaw, G. Telephone conversation with author, (30/5/95).

Wilson, L. 'Last Supper in Horstley Street', (1983, Video stored at the Centre for African Studies Library, University of Cape Town).

University of Cape Town