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HISTORY WORKSHOP

STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF APARTHEID

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In recent years there has been an increased effort on the part of historians to recover the historical experience of urban Africans within specific communities. We have begun to see more clearly how urban social and economic processes worked in places on the Rand like Sophiatown, Orlando (and later Soweto), and African urban areas in Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria. As Paul Maylam (1981) suggested it is one of the tasks of historians to show how Africans have been active agents in urban areas, shaping their own environment and resisting excessive administrative control over their daily lives.[1] One urban African community with a long history of African settlement and struggle against European state control is Alexandra.

Much of the recent work on the history of Alexandra has focused on the European administration of the Township, local political resistance and alternative structures set up by various sectors of the population. My work ultimately hopes situate the political manifestations of experience in Alexandra within the broader context of economic, social and cultural developments from early settlement to the 1963 decision to attempt to transform the area into a hostel location for single migrant workers.

Alexandra was founded in 1905 as a European freehold area. However, Europeans were not eager to buy land so far away from the centre of Johannesburg. Facing the prospect of bankruptcy, the Township Company obtained permission to open the area to "Coloured" and African settlement in 1912. As the Township was laid out and approved prior to the passage of the 1913 Land Act, it was exempt from the general provisions of the Act. Thus, Alexandra became one of the few urban areas where Africans could own land with security of tenure.

The theoretical base for my work emerges from a reading of popular culture theory which seems to best combine sophisticated structural analysis with the cultural experience of people's everyday lives. The forms of popular culture can only be understood historically against the background of various social struggles, negotiations and compromises. In this formulation, popular cultures consist:

> ... of those cultural forms and practices -- varying in content from one historical period to another --which constitute the terrain on which dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural values and ideologies meet and intermingle, in different mixes and permutations, vying with one another in their attempts to secure the spaces within which they can be influential in framing and organising popular experience and consciousness.[2]

Thus, popular cultural forms and practices have their roots in everyday life experiences which vary from time to time and place to place. The economic, social and political structures at the local level cannot be abstracted into a wider context of urban social or cultural historical processes without first recovering local perceptions, aspirations and desires in continuous tension with the dominant culture. In this way class, race, gender, and any other category of analysis, can be recovered without resort to structural abstraction. Rather, by moving beyond this, to look behind "the historical peaks of dissidence and confrontation [to uncover] the connective tissues of cultural life."[3]

In the case of Alexandra, most work has focused on outbreaks of "heroic" manifestations of resistance to state and capital in the form of bus boycotts, squatter settlements and, more recently, on campaigns to save the township. This is partially due to the wider accessibility of evidence on these issues. Yet these popular mass struggles are not the only ways in which resistance has been expressed. Everyday existence for the majority has meant struggling to survive on sub-subsistence wages, fighting both starvation and diseases.

Belinda Bozzoli's introduction to the 1984 volume of History Workshop papers focuses on the concept of community as an analytical tool for the recovery of experience from below. At this local level people form social, cultural and political responses to the structures of the society in which they live. Rather than presenting people in reaction to state initiatives or capitalist transformations (which operate as processes rather than isolated events), "ordinary" people are seen as active agents making their own history in the experiences of their everyday existence.[4] However, this history is never made in isolation from the social and economic formations of the society in which they live. The hegemonic power of the political and economic elites define the parameters in which oppositional cultural forces operate, although these parameters are always contested, creating the central dynamic in the process of forming lived experiences.

Bill Nasson's 1987 History Workshop paper on District Six provides a useful model for the recovery of popular culture in urban communities. Nasson used oral evidence to discern levels of popular experience not accessible in documentary sources to see "how some fragments of leisure experience moved in the lives and consciousness of people in District Six".[5]

My research is still at an early stage, but the basic framework of the process of formation, disappearance and emergence of political and social organizations in Alexandra during the period running roughly from 1930 to 1963 has become clear. This working paper explores these processes

and suggest areas where more work both empirically and theoretically must be done in order to recover, to the greatest extent possible, the cultural and political manifestations of the experiences of the people of Alexandra from c.1930 to 1983.

Early Political History of Alexandra

In a memorandum for the City Boundaries Commission submitted by the Alexandra Coloured Associated Associations in 1935, an overview of the administrative history of the Township was presented. It stated that from the first the residents had a committee which looked after the common affairs of Alexandra. The committee consisted of "Coloured" and African members. In 1915 the first committee came to an end, for reasons which were not explained, but in 1916 the committee was revived by the Township Company with one African and one "Coloured" member. The first Health Committee (AHC) was established in 1917 with four members. Members of this committee consisted of one representative each from the "Coloured", Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu residents. In 1922 the membership was increased to four Africans and four "Coloureds", revised in 1926 to six Africans and two "Coloureds" due to the increased influx of Africans into the Township.[6]

The AHC financed its communal business from a sanitary charge, which in 1924 amounted to 2s. per month. At that time the Committee had £500 in the bank which was later spent enclosing a cemetery, planting trees, purchasing a cart and twenty oxen and the beginnings of a road-making programme. Later the charge was increased to 2s.6d. to finance the purchase of new sanitary buckets. By 1927 the sanitary service comprised over 900 buckets.[7]

The memorandum goes on to say that the affairs of Alexandra had suffered since 1930 with the great increase in the Township's population exacerbated by the Johannesburg Municipality's clearance of its slum areas, with many of the dispossessed moving to Alexandra to escape municipal control. Interestingly, the Association blamed the European chairman of the Board of the AHC for squandering the Committee's finances, claiming that part of the problem was that there was no "Coloured" member on the Committee at the time.[8]

This reference was the first mention of Europeans on the AHC. Other evidence suggests that Europeans were involved in the administration of Alexandra from the inception of the Health Committee in 1918. However, this evidence also confirms that the running of the affairs of Alexandra prior to 1930 predominantly remained in the hands of African and "Coloured" members of the AHC.[9]

It was only with the abolition of Johannesburg slum yards and the subsequent rapid increase in Alexandra's popu-

lation that the state perceived Alexandra's existence and expansion as a threat. By 1933 the AHC was under heavy financial strain and was unable to keep up the very basic services of bucket-service for sewage removal and road maintenance. The Transvaal Native Affairs Department took over control of the AHC, nominating a board of four whites, two Africans and one "Coloured". H.G. Falwasser, a retired member of the Native Affairs Department, was asked to head the reconstituted committee.[10] The fact that the Minister for Native Affairs was to appoint the African and "Coloured" members to the Committee caused considerable ill-feeling in Alexandra.[11] The AHC was reconstituted in 1941 with African and "Coloured" representatives in a minority, but now elected. Socialist Action in its November-December 1945 issue stated that out of a population estimated at 65,000, only 700 were on the voters' roll, and only 50 votes were cast in the 1944 elections for the AHC.[12]

Social Relations and Political Economy in Alexandra

It was clear that most Africans settled in Alexandra to escape the control of the Johannesburg municipality, whether they were standholders or tenants. For standowners Alexandra was the only place close to Johannesburg where they could own land and be reasonably sure of their future security, while for tenants, Alexandra provided a place to live that was not surrounded by wire fences, was free from municipal controls, and was reasonably close to Johannesburg. In an interview with Luli Callinicos, a woman who lived in Alexandra from 1929 to 1962, stated that many came to Alexandra because it was comparatively simple to get a pass there, while Modikwe Dikobe said people came to Alexandra because, in its early days, it was free from the enforcement of the pass laws.[13] According to Dikobe, in his 1984 History Workshop paper, Alexandra consisted of two distinct classes. "Shackowners, who liked to term themselves landlords, and tenants. Landlords urged that tenants have no say in the township".[14]

From early on people involved in "official" local political structures were the elite in the township, those owning one or more stands, shop-owners, and landlords. This class always defended their position by insisting that only recognized standholders should be allowed to vote for representatives. In the 1930s the standholders agitated for restrictions on the numbers of people allowed to settle in Alexandra, fearing that too large an influx would undermine their position and would also lead to greater state interference in the running of the township. Furthermore, this class wanted protective legislation to protect its dominant economic position within the township. At a meeting of the AHC on 1 March 1942, African representative, J.M. Mrupe, proposed that the Committee frame regulations for the prevention of peddling and hawking within the boundaries of Alexandra by not allowing any business to move from place to place, unless a 5s.

fee was paid.[15]

The interests of this group coalesced with those of the majority of residents of the township when their position of power was threatened, i.e. at times when the Health Committee consisted of nominated members appointed by the Native Affairs Department, or when removal of the township was proposed intermittently from the late 1930s. However, there was an element of conservatism and caution among standowners. Modikwe Dikobe, in an interview with Tim Couzens, recalled that during the 1944 bus boycott there was a clear distinction in the manner of protest between the workers and the standholders. E.P. Mart Zulu was chairman of the Bus Boycott Committee while Dikobe was secretary. Zulu was one of the group who tried to decree that no meetings should be held in public. Dikobe stated that the standholders were "dead against a tenant taking part in any activities ... [tenants] were even prohibited from holding meetings on the square". However, Dikobe continued that Zulu was for bus boycotts, but against rent agitation.[16] Therefore, while interests of standowners and tenants merged on certain issues, the position of each group in the local political economy provided for different responses to exploitative issues.

One area for future research is to examine the development of local business interests and how the emergence of a accumulating class affected local experience and popular cultural reproduction. African-owned township business in South Africa has been much too under-researched, and group interests which have arisen out of African capitalist enterprises are a vital area of urban African political economy which must be understood both theoretically and empirically.

The African Liberator, in its first issue of September 1935, encouraged Africans to patronize African owned businesses. It told readers that when "you go to Alexandra Township see that you get on the 'United Alexandra Township Bus Service' buses, which are an African Cooperative Enterprise for the welfare and benefit of Africans as a whole".[17] Support for cooperative enterprises was very actively encouraged with the paper asking: "Acting together on the football field, why can you not do likewise outside?" The article went further: "Sportsmen in general, why do you leave the friendly spirit of sport behind in recreation grounds instead of taking it outside and using it for the economic and educational uplift of your own Africans?" Africans were asked to take any printing work to the Spes Bona Printing Works in Alexandra, and any news to the African Liberator which hoped to become the national newspaper for Africans. This was all supposed to gain the "respect" and "sympathy" of "fair minded" Europeans. A triple bonus for African capitalist enterprises would be possible. First, there would be an increase in business viz. a viz. non-African competition. Second, African solidarity

would be enhanced. Finally, accumulating and self-improving Africans would be respected by liberal-minded whites, and, perhaps, they might take their place as full members of South African society, both socially and politically.[18]

National Organizations and Politics in Alexandra

Tom Lodge (1987) pointed out that in the 1950s the ANC was strongest in old freehold communities like Alexandra, Sophiatown, Lady Selbourne and Cato Manor. Some of these still were subject "to the constraints of locally contending class interests and all, throughout the decade, with their moral and physical resources under erosion from state removal policies".[19] The threat of removal had been a significant feature of local political struggle in Alexandra since the late 1930s.

As Lodge suggested, local issues were the prime motivators in most communities in the 1950s and Alexandra was no exception. The most volatile issue in the 1940s and 1950s, around which residents organized, was the amount of bus fares. Bus boycotts were organized in 1940, 1943, 1944, and 1957. The people of Alexandra also organized around the issue of saving the township against efforts by segments of the European population and the state to remove it.

The ANC was very active in Alexandra prior to the populist influence of Josias Madzunya in the 1950s. Although Dr. A.B. Xuma, President of the ANC was the Medical Officer of Health in Alexandra, and Gaur Radebe, a leader in the Transvaal ANC was a resident, the ANC in Alexandra in the 1940s was not very strong. It did, however, generate enough support among the African middle class to merit Hoernle's complaint to Xuma at the AHC meeting of 16 June 1942. Hoernle was upset that a meeting of the Transvaal ANC in Alexandra was scheduled at the same time as the AHC public meeting, drawing away many residents. Xuma explained that the meeting had been called by the local branch of the ANC without his knowledge.[20]

The Spark of 3 October 1952 stated that a mass conference of active workers was held recently in Alexandra as part of the Defiance Campaign. The meeting was held to review the township's participation in the struggle and to make plans for greater contributions in the future. The meeting was attended by more than 250 delegates from the local ANC branch and 18 other organications, including many churches and the Transvaal African Teachers' Association.[21] On 22 February 1953 there was a mass youth rally organized by the ANC Youth League featuring Albert Lutuli as chief speaker.[22] Counter Attack of July 1961 stated that there were seven branches of the ANC in Alexandra in 1958, one of which was headed by Madzunya.[23] Thus it seems that the ANC expanded with the growth

in population in Alexandra. The ANC was active in local issues, most particularly the 1957 bus boycott, which it turned into a national issue of resistance.

Evidence I have seen thus far indicates that the Communist Party (CPSA) was active in Alexandra. The Annual Conference of the Johannesburg District of the CPSA of 26 April 1947 adopted resolutions on the squatter movement which condemned the arrest and trial of leaders of the Alexandra squatters.[24] In 1944 the CPSA Johannesburg District published a statement on its transport position which declared that the CPSA "will actively associate itself with any steps the people decide to take to protest against the increases [in bus fares] and to demand cheaper transport".[25]

Local Political Structures and Local Protest

Tim Couzens' (1979) work on Modikwe Dikobe and Alexandra in the 1940s provides some useful background to the creation of local organization among people in the squatter settlement in 1948:

> Lucas Bokaba acted as a magistrate. We had a committee of justice and Kunene was chief of police. I [Dikobe] was the secretary. We were so organised ... We had a school committee too ... one chap, John Motshabi, he was in charge of education ... we had teachers, some people who would teach from primary to standard one, standard two: children, who could not get to Alexandra Township schools, had their own schools.[26]

This passage clearly illustrates the capacity and ability of Africans in Alexandra to organize structures themselves outside the control of the State or State-sanctioned, European paternal guidance. Despite government, white missionary and liberal conceptions the number of local organizations which appeared between the 1930s and 1960s in Alexandra proves that urban Africans were able to organize political and social structures without European control or assistance.

Organizations which emerged in Alexandra in the period 1930-60 can be divided into two broad categories. In the first group were organizations based on class interests, usually standholder's associations. The second group consisted of more mass-based organizations often arising in response to specific issues such as the raising of bus fares, or attempts to remove the township by the local or provincial state.

The Transport Action Committee, formed during the 1945 bus strike, went further than mere opposition to a rise in bus fares. The February 1945 issue of Socialist Action listed a nine point programme put forward by the committee which demanded rights such as: the franchise for every man and woman over the age of 21 "to elect and be elected to Par-

liament, Provincial Council and other Divisions and Municipal Councils"; free and compulsory education for all up to the age of 16, "with free meals, free books and school equipment for the needy"; freedom of speech, press, meetings and association; full equality of rights for all citizens regardless of race; and the inviolability of person, of one's house and privacy.[27]

In 1941 there was a mass protest by women in Alexandra over difficulties with the new water supply. Women were forced to queue for many hours at standpipes to obtain water, and the new water rate was assessed on the basis of the number of rooms in each stand. The protest was directed against Falwasser and the Health Committee, and they demanded Falwasser's dismissal.[28] The protest was broken-up by the police, but is further evidence of problems between local administration and the residents of Alexandra manifested in everyday experience. Poor conditions were tolerated by residents only to a certain point, and the ability to stage mass protests, appearing on the surface to be spontaneous, was indicative of wide networks of communication which facilitated rapid organization of any outward, focused projection of protest and struggle.

During the 1930s and early 1940s African bus operators were gradually being replaced by European owners, creating a feeling of increased exploitation among the people in Alexandra. This occurred at the same time that segregationist laws were being strengthened, and European capital, protected by discriminatory laws, was replacing African small scale capital. During World War Two the costs of maintenance and running the buses skyrocketed prompting the bus owners to seek an increase in fares. However, African wages had not increased at a rate anywhere near that of inflation. When fares were increased the people decided to boycott rather than pay an increase over which they had no control. The rapid organization of the people is attests to their awareness of the processes of change in South African society.

The bus boycotts of the 1940s have been analysed as a local grievance, a response to specific local conditions of exploitation. However, the 1957 bus boycott has been given a wider role in sparking a national protest led by the revitalized and active ANC. It is true that the ANC was heavily involved in the 1957 bus boycott, however, the local leaders like Thomas Nkobi and Josias Madzunya were all from Alexandra and established leaders in local political organization.[29]

The outcome of the bus boycotts was a short-term victory for the people of Alexandra in their struggle to survive against the dominant hegemonic forces over them. The boycotts should not be seen in isolation from the wider structure and the process of resistance and opposition to that structure. Rather than "heroic" moments of defiance, the boycotts

were part of the reproduction of everyday life in which oppositional forces to hegemonic power constantly pull against that power.

Popular Culture in Alexandra

A crucial part of an extended work on Alexandra should include sections on popular cultural developments. Specific points of focus will be on the political economy of health; the popular culture of brewing and drinking; the production and reproduction of various social relationships between people; popular art, including music and literary expression; the emergence of modern sport; and the role of other leisure activities. All of these areas are central in recovering the lived experience of everyday life in Alexandra. Unfortunately, due to the evidence available to me thus far, the picture presented here is sketchy and any conclusions tentative. It is hoped, however, to provide guidelines for further research, not just in Alexandra, but other urban areas in southern Africa and further afield.

From the crisis period of 1918-22 it was realised that the leisure time of Africans needed to be as carefully controlled and channeled as did their work time. The leader in this movement to "moralize leisure time" of Africans on the Rand was the American Board Missionary, Ray Phillips. Phillips wrote two books (1930, 1938) and several articles on the problems which rapid urbanization of the African population presented.[30] The result of Phillips' and other liberals work was the formation of the Joint Councils movement, the Institute of Race Relations, the Bantu Men's Social Centre and the Bantu Sports Club, to name the most significant. However, this movement was limited to attempts at incorporating African elites into "civilized" society in a very controlled and carefully guided way.

Sport

The study of sport in Africa is in its infancy. Few works have systematically analyzed the role of sport in any African society. A recently published collection of essays (1987) edited by William Baker and J.A. Mangan entitled Sport in Africa supports this point. The essays are widely divergent in focus and scope with only one essay (by Robert Archer) on South African sport.[31] The only work which has concentrated to a significant degree on the historical development of African sport in South Africa prior to the 1960s is Archer and Antione Bouillon's (1982) study entitled The South African Game: Sport and Racism.[32] Still, this work is more concerned with the position of South Africa in the contemporary international sporting world, and does not systematically approach the complex issue of the development of modern sport among urban black South Africans. Tim Couzens has provided useful launching points for the study of African football on the Rand, but much more work needs to be done.[33] The

history of African boxing in South Africa also demands at least one major book-length study. Other work such as Couzens' "Moralizing Leisure Time", and Brian Willan's "An African at Kimberley" have suggested that sport played a significant role in the development of an urban African culture in South Africa.[34] There is a very long way to go, however. In Rodney Davenport's most recent edition of his history of South Africa, sport gets a mention on just five of 576 pages.[35] Richard Parry's recent PhD thesis on colonial Salisbury provides the best model to date for incorporating sport into studies of urban social and cultural history.[36]

The paucity of studies examining the role of sport in urban social and cultural history is surprising given the interests of a number of scholars in different disciplines working to recover the experience of urban South Africans. In an otherwise impressive study by Nasson (1987) on District Six mentioned above, there was no discussion of sport in the thirty-nine pages of text, outside a short reference from one of his informants which stated that many "just used the roads as a playground, soccer, rugby, cricket, whatever we wanted to play".[37] A curious omission given that fourteen pages were devoted to a detailed analysis of the role of cinema.[38]

Sport and games were essential components of liberal notions of moral physical development descended from the Victorian ethic of Christian manliness, more popularly known as "muscular Christianity". By the early 1940s all of the major sports were organized into city or provincial unions. There were also school leagues in association football, basketball and athletics.

Although the development of sport among Africans in urban areas was overwhelmingly male centred, efforts were made to organize women's sport,[39] however this was strictly limited by patriarchal Christian-liberal concerns over the role of sport in reproducing healthy male physicality. In the context of South African capitalism between the wars, African women were largely peripheral to the industrial labour force, alleviating the necessity for organizing women's sport on the level of men's sport. White liberals, as well as mission educated Africans, saw sport as a way to harness the spare-time energies of African males, thus preventing the emergence of large-scale crime and gang activity. Due to pre-conceived notions of gendered behaviour in the public sphere, women were not viewed in the same light, and less justification for the needs of sport for women were vocalized.

Sport has been significant in the experience of Alexandra. The development of sport is closely linked with the political struggles of the township in resisting removal or incorporation by the Johannesburg municipality. Instead of allying with the Johannesburg Bantu Football Association (JBFA) or the Johannesburg African Football Association

(JAFA) in the 1940s, Alexandra remained outside these organizations with local teams forming the Alexandra African Football Association (AAFA). Jokl's 1949 study of recreational facilities for Africans on the Rand stated that there were thirty football pitches for about 280 teams, but only two of these were located in Alexandra.[40]

Lucas Xhoza, a resident of Alexandra since 1916 or 1917 stated in 1983: "Alex has always produced the best footballers". It was in Xhoza's house that meetings were held to form the South African Soccer League, the first professional football association in South Africa.[41] Records of the JAFA and the Transvaal African Football Association (TAFA) during the 1940s show that Alexandra teams were very successful in Provincial competitions. The Henochsberg Cup, later the Vusumuzi Cup, played between teams representing the eight district associations within the TAFA, was won by the AAFA in 1941, 1944, 1950. The Alexandra Moonlight Darkies won the 1950 Transvaal Challenge and in the same year the Moroka Lions won the Transvaal Charity Games.[42] Danger Makatalele, from Alexandra, became the first black South African player to go overseas and make a name for himself in professional football as a player for the English club, Wolverhampton Wanderers'.[43] This success sparked a fire in every young footballer in Alexandra. Football skills were seen as a way to transport one out of a bleak future. Sporting prowess enabled players and spectators to believe that people from Alexandra were as good as people from other places, not only among Africans, but among all South Africans.

By 1961 Alexandra had also produced South African champions in boxing and tennis.[44] This was impressive given the scarcity of facilities in the township. In 1949 there were two tennis courts in Alexandra out of a total of 26 for Africans in Johannesburg.[45] Mark Mathabane's autobiography of his life in Alexandra in the 1970s confirms that, for tennis players, facilities were still grossly inadequate, forcing him to play at a white club in Johannesburg.[46]

Although there was no golf course for Africans in South Africa, let alone in Alexandra, the game has been successful, with many of South Africa's top African golfers originating in Alexandra. DeRidder (1961) stated that "Alex has produced the best African golfers in the country."[47] The Pan-Africanist Bulletin of July-August 1959 stated: "That the South African White Parliament deliberately delayed the passport of Johnson Sedibe, the Alexandra Township African golfer so that he arrived on the eve of the British Open Golf championship at Muirfield to inconvenience him-- so they could say -- 'we told you the Bantu can't do it'."[48]

For boys there was the Alexandra Boys' Club which was affiliated to the Transvaal Association of Boys' Clubs. The

basic purpose of the clubs was "to be creative forces which mould and strengthen a boy's character; widen and enlarge his outlook and lead him to become a worthier and more effective citizen".[49] Sporting activities for African Boys' Clubs included football, cricket and athletics, as well as handball, Volleyball and competitive relays in the club room. Boxing and wrestling were supposed to be offered only as a taught subject when suitable teachers were available. Inter-club athletic competitions were encouraged and arranged through the TABC headquarters.[50]

Despite the sketchy amount of information I have seen so far on the role of sport, it is clear that in Alexandra, like other urban areas on the Rand, sport was a key component in the expression of popular culture, both for participants and spectators. Originally designed to divert energies of idle urban labourers, sport took on its own dynamic in the townships and became one of the clearest elements of oppositional cultural expression. This was particularly true of Alexandra where African sport was not subjected to the control of municipality or the mining houses as was the case in other areas around Johannesburg.

Music, Dance and Theatre in Alexandra

As the studies by David Coplan (1979, 1982, 1985), Robert Kavanagh (1985) and Bill Nasson (1987) have argued, music, dance and theatre have been crucial elements in cultural expression among urban black South Africans. Coplan has traced the history of urban music and theatre in South Africa, linking the development of various cultural styles into wider social developments in urban areas.[51] Kavanagh argues that theatre in South Africa must be understood within the social framework of the society in which it operates. He combines classical Marxist political economy with notions of hegemony derived from the work of Gramsci and Raymond Williams in explaining theatre as an expression of oppositional social forces to the hegemonic power of the South African state.[52] Nasson, in his work on District Six, placed cinema, theatre and music at the centre of his analysis of the development of local popular cultural expression.

By 1950 a new jazz style called kwela had emerged. Kwela was developed by street children from Alexandra in the mid-1940s according to one source. Little boys like Lemmy "Special" Mabaso, of "King-Kong" fame, began by imitating the music of their heros on the penny-whistle. The name kwela was derived from the name kwela-kwela given to roving police vans on the lookout for illegal street-corner gambling.[53] Innovators included Ntemi Piliso and his Alexandra All-Star Band, as well as the Jazz Maniacs. Turning kwela into a style known as mbaqanga, non-music reading groups produced recordings such as "Baby Come Duze" by the Alexandra All-Star Band. However, royalty agreements and recording

alone could not provide sufficient income, so groups had to continuously play shows in the townships in order to survive.[54]

Another Alexandra resident prominent in jazz circles at the time was 'Era Zakes', Zakes Nkosi, saxophonist for the Jazz Maniacs among other groups. His group the City Jazz Nine was originally formed by some members of the Jazz Maniacs who wanted to earn money playing for afternoon stokfel parties in the urban locations, and later they recorded on their own. As Coplan has shown, internal problems in the bands centred on money, authority and professional reliability. Disregarding the increasing dangers in the 1950s, many followers travelled twenty or thirty miles to hear their favourite bands play in outlying townships.[55]

Musicians used recordings to spread the message and inspiration of protest, strengthening the resistance. The Alexandra bus boycott inspired "Azikwelwa" (We Won't Ride), banned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation.[56] In Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood the main character draws inspiration and strength from recordings by Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela and Dollar Brand.[57]

Closely linked to musicians and the shebeens and clubs where they played was a criminal element. Zakes Nkosi recalled that "There were the Thuta Ranch from Alexandra, the Young Americans and later the Spoilers and the Msomi gangs. You know how gangsters like social life ... and pretty girls also like going to such places".[58] Gangs of tsotsis drew much of their inspiration from movies made in America. Names of gangs on the Rand often reflected this influence.

Crime and Experience in Alexandra

Alexandra had a reputation among Rand townships of having the most law-abiding citizens prior to the mid-1940s. However, the perception changed due to the increased propaganda of social conditions in the township by supporters of removal, as well as an increase in gang activity in the late 1940s and 1950s which plagued all of the townships on the Reef. Rise in gang activity was due to worsening economic conditions for urban Africans coupled with the steady influx of more people into the urban areas.

Mongane Serote, who grew up in Alexandra in the 1950s has described the feeling which gangs affected in Alexandra.

> Alexandra was pitch dark at night in these days. And there were the Spoilers who made sleeping a terrible inconvenience. I do not know how the Spoilers broke down the doors, but they did, and they took everything: wardrobes and the clothes in them, tables, money, even lives. They were feared. There were the Msomis, equally brutal, more efficient and better organised.

> The Spoilers and the Msomis brought the movies out of the movie houses into the streets of Alexandra, for real, guns, blood and all.[80]

In the mid-1940s American movies were screened in Alexandra at the King's Theatre. Some of the films shown provide examples of the influence of American cinema on the gang subculture. The King's Theatre advertisement in Inkukuleko on 12 November 1945 promoted upcoming films such as "We Go Fast", described as follows: 'It's a fast and a thrilling one for the motor-cycle squad!". Also advertised was "Crash Dive" and "Road Demon", both fast action pictures.[80] Western adventures were also popular and inspired gangs.

A more sophisticated analysis of the role of gangs in Alexandra during the 1940s and 1950s is necessary in order to recover how this aspect of township life, so often distorted by white and African middle class press reports affected the lives of Alexandra's residents.

Other Areas for Research

Among the areas which I plan to investigate further is the popular culture of brewing and drinking in Alexandra. The popular culture of drinking was closely linked with that of music and gangs. I also plan to examine the role of churches in Alexandra. Finally, I will focus on the political economy of health and disease which was a significant factor in the everyday life of Africans in Alexandra. Statistics on health conditions are not good, but reports by the Medical Officer of Health of the AHC provides some useful information on the level of disease and health facilities in the township.

CONCLUSIONS

Much work remains to be done in order to recover, as much as is possible, the experiences of the people of Alexandra. The process whereby these experiences were generated is crucial in understanding the ways in which society is reproduced in a racially-based capitalist political economy. Historians must be cautious in writing "history from below", as Parry has argued in the context of colonial Zimbabwe, "history from below is not simply the story of historic workers standing against the massed ranks of capital and state but encompasses the corners where colonialism cast its shadow but could not fasten its chains".[81]

NOTES:

1. Paul Maylam "Strategies of Control and Evasion: African Urban History in South Africa c. 1900-1950", unpublished paper presented to the South African Historical Society, University of Durban-Westville, July 1981, p. 1.

2. Richard Gruneau, "Notes on Popular Cultures and Political Practices", in Richard Gruneau, ed., Popular Cultures and Political Practices (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988), p. 23.

3. Bryan Palmer, "'What the Hell': Or Some Comments on Class Formation and Cultural Reproduction", in Gruneau, ed. (1988), p. 37.

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