

THE CULTURE AND RELIGION OF THE PEOPLE  
OF LANGA DURING THE PERIOD  
ca.1938 TO ca.1958

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A thesis submitted to the Department of History, University  
of Cape Town, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of B.A. (Honours) in History.

*"First, events in history are not rational or logical. They rather constitute a dialectical character in their development. To understand the World, we must have a grasp of dialectics". (In these times : A.H. Babu)*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my honest gratitude to my two supervisors, Dr. Patrick Harries and Prof. Colin Bundy. They have been pillars of support and guidance in many ways. I thank all members of staff in the History Department for their encouragement.

I have a wonderful family in Transkei; they know very well what they mean to me. They supported me in many ways, though from a distance. A special thanks goes to Mhleli Papama Nkukwana who, though painstakingly, typed this thesis. I should definitely say that without him this work would not have been finished in time. Other people who helped me along and to whom I am very grateful are; Sandisiwe Mangcu and Nandi Mandela. They assisted me very much when I was doing oral interviews; Esra Lungisa typed the interviews. Mlamli Boo is a wonderful friend of mine whom I constantly harrassed for transport whenever I wanted to see Prof. Bundy in Woodstock or visit my informants in Langa Township. His enduring patience and willingness to sacrifice is unforgettable to me. I thank all the people who allowed me to interview them for this thesis. Portia Mbude helped me, especially in the latter part of the thesis, by identifying relevant informants and showing me their places of residence in Langa Township. The Oral History Project provided financial assistance which enabled this research to be completed.

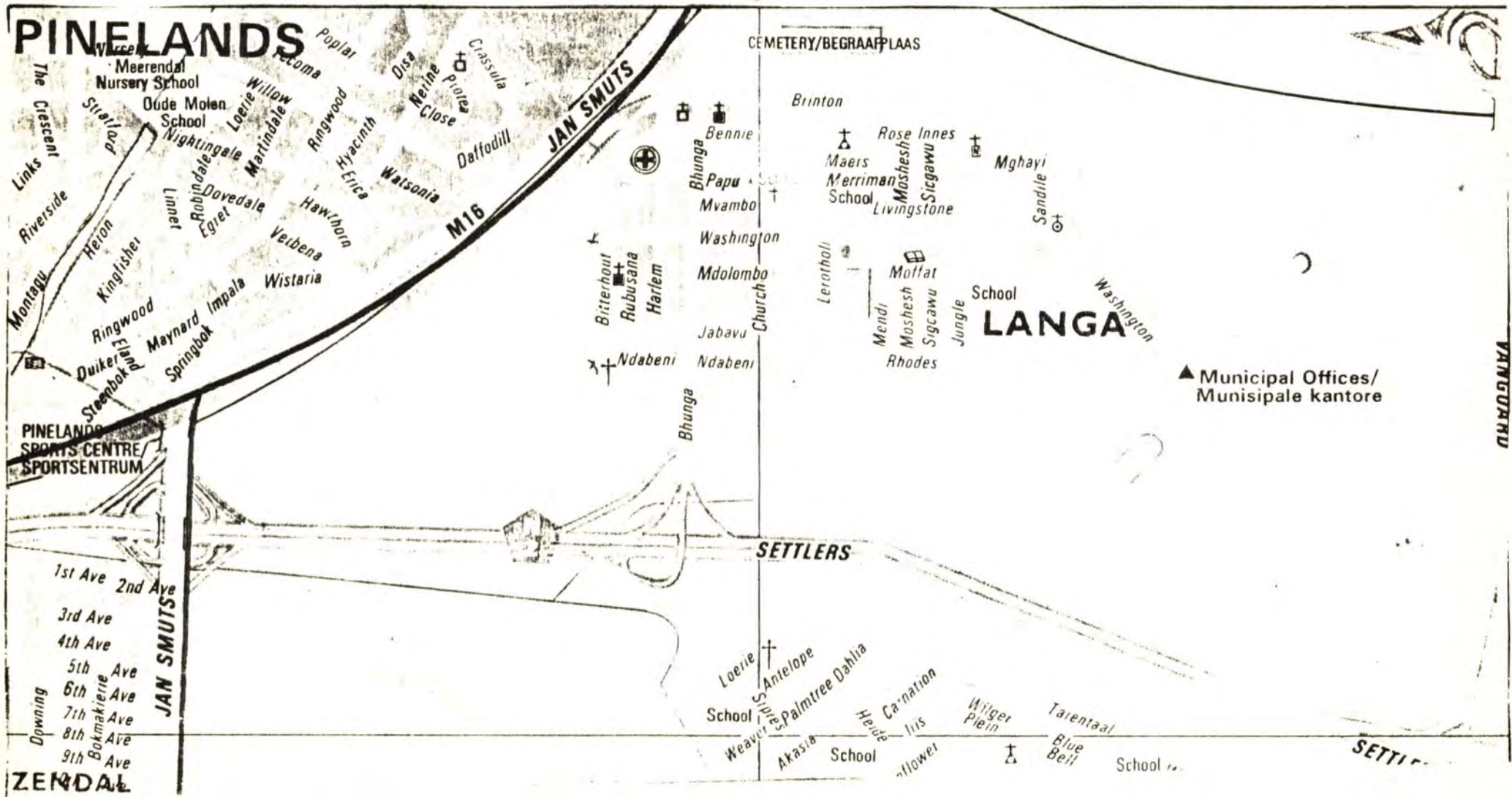


Figure 2: Street Map of Langa:1989

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTORY PREFACE

"The task of the historian, especially if he is a specialist of social history, is very much akin to that of a novelist. There must be a wide element of guesswork. It is like attempting to sound the unsoundable and to penetrate the secrets of the human heart."<sup>(1)</sup>

Writing about Langa poses many problems and the main one involves the issue of contextualization. Failure to come to terms with it affects the quality and richness of analysis. This points towards the need to expose the dialectical interrelation of events inside and outside Langa, which gave shape to the life of the community. Put in a nutshell, it is within the broader context of a socio-historical dialectic in South Africa as a whole that our research should be examined.

The main focus of this thesis is on culture and religion of the people of Langa in the period between ca.1938 to ca.1958. It seeks to examine the contribution or the role played by religion (Christianity) in the developing culture of the people of Langa. Besides the most obvious need for conceptual clarity, there is also a need to explain reasons for choosing the set period as the limit of this research. In fact the theme of the research itself raises a number of questions. These may include questions about the origins of an African community in Cape Town (i.e. when, how and why they came to the city). An informative sketch of the origins

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1. R. Cobb : Paris and its Provinces, Oxford, 1975.

of this young urban community; its life and experiences in the city up until the establishment of Langa should serve as a good starting point.

The people of Langa are originally from the Transkei, Ciskei and very few are from other areas outside Eastern Cape. They were uprooted most principally, though not exclusively, by loss of land, a factor which proved to be compelling enough to make them join the ranks of modern-wage labourers.<sup>(1)</sup> It was not loss of land in the sense of formal expropriation (for the most part) but rather confinement to limited land areas, hence overcrowding, as a result of colonial conquest, segregation and creation of the reserves.

These people flooded the city of Cape Town in search of jobs despite the government's many restricting laws. This happened initially at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century and again in the 1930s and 1940s. Most of these people got employed in the docks, railway department and by Cape Town's developing industries, whilst others worked as maids and washboys.<sup>(2)</sup> Apparently their labour was needed even though there was no place for them to live in the city. As a result they squatted in the least desirable parts of the town because "they couldn't build and capitalists had not

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1. C. Bundy : The rise and fall of South African peasantry, 1988, p. 2.
  2. W.W.M. Eiselen : Secretary of Native Affairs : Paper read at the sixth annual congress of South African Bureau of Racial Affairs, Jan. (1955), Stellenbosch

built proper houses for them."<sup>(1)</sup> They were therefore apparently from necessity crowded into cellars, backcourts in and around the city of Cape Town proximal to their places of work.<sup>(2)</sup>

The overcrowded living conditions of these people created a situation in which the implications of lack of adequate water supplies and sewage facilities were seriously felt and that was a necessary breeding ground for various diseases. The first incidence of Plague in Cape Town in March 1901 among African squatters in Grey street<sup>(3)</sup>, testifies to the wretchedness of their conditions of life. The incident as Shula Marks and Neil Anderson put it, became a "dramatic and compelling opportunity for those who were promoting segregationist solutions to social problems."<sup>(4)</sup> Hence the forced removal at the end of February of the first group of Africans from District Six to Uitvlugt (Ndabeni). No formal housing was provided at Ndabeni and according to Budow, there were only twenty permanent dwellings in Ndabeni by 1918, as well as no street lights, no sanitation services and water.<sup>(5)</sup> That is why Wilkinson, arguing in the Cape Town

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1. S. Judges : "Poverty, living conditions and social relations - Aspects of life in Cape Town in 1830s", (MA UCT, 1977), p. 79.

2. Ibid. p. 79

3. E. Van Hyningen : "Refugees and relief in Cape Town, 1899 - 1902" Studies, Vol. 3 (1980), p. 75.

4. S. Marks and N. Anderson : "Issues in the political economy of health in South Africa" in J.S.A.S (13) 1987, p. 263.

5. M. Budow : "Urban squatting in Greater Cape Town 1939-1948", (B.A.(Hons.) UCT, 1976) p. 19.



Magistrate's court on behalf of Africans who had refused to pay for accommodation, said that the residents of Uitvlugt were being forced to live in "huts unfit for the accommodation of pigs".<sup>(1)</sup> So, the creation of Ndabeni Location never solved the housing problem of Africans in Cape Town. Some evaded forced removals to Ndabeni and continued squatting in the suburbs. Ndabeni was gradually getting pushed to a very overcrowded state by newcomers from the reserves, birth increases and by those the police were forcibly removing as squatters in the suburbs. As Saunders explains, though the population of Ndabeni was decimated by Spanish influenza, by mid 1919, it had again reached 4 000 and the location was said to be seriously overcrowded despite the construction of 44 extra huts.<sup>(2)</sup> In the minutes of the Native Township Committee, it is said that the number of children alone was 1200.<sup>(3)</sup>

The outbreak of the Spanish flu in October 1918 "highlighted the wretched state of Ndabeni thus making it plain that considerable improvements were necessary".<sup>(4)</sup> Unfortunately

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1. C. Saunders : "The creation of Ndabeni", Studies, Vol. 1 (1984), p. 183.
  2. C. Saunders : "The creation of Ndabeni", Studies, Vol. 1 (1984), p. 194.
  3. Minutes of the Native Township Committee of the Cape Town Council, 1923, p.76.
  4. H. Phillips : "Black October", The impact of Spanish influenza epidemic on SA (Phd. UCT, 1984)

the state of affairs was used as a pretext to further segregationist tendencies hence the removal of Africans from the city and also from Ndabeni to Langa Township; about 8 miles away from Cape Town. On the margins of the white city, the people of Langa were able to build a cohesive world of their own. They organised around the spheres of religion and culture and asserted their lives as dignified and meaningful beyond the definitions set by the social system. We will explore and elaborate fully all these points in the chapters that follow. At this juncture we should outline as we promised reasons for choosing the period between ca.1938 to ca. 1958 as the limit of the research.

First and foremost I have chosen the period because it is recent enough to gain oral information. Secondly, 1939 marks the beginning of the Second World War, as a result of which the city of Cape Town experienced greater industrial development. This was accompanied by greater demands for labour hence the influx of Africans into the city. The secretary of Native Affairs, Mr W.W.M. Eiselen, in his paper read at the Sixth Congress of South African Bureau of Racial Affairs in January 1955, provides figures for increases in the number of private industries and number of workers.<sup>(1)</sup> This is clearly illustrated in the table provided in page 6.

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1. W.W.M. Eiselen : Secretary of Native Affairs : Paper read at the sixth annual congress of South African Bureau of Racial Affairs, Jan. (1955), Stellenbosch

**INCREASE IN NUMBER OF PRIVATE INDUSTRIES :**  
1938/39 (X) - 1945/46 (Y) - 1951/52 (Z).

	Number			Percentage Increase		
	1938/39 X	1945/46 Y	1951/52 Z	X-Y	Y-Z	X-Z
Western Cape	1,555	1,470	1,899	5.8	29.2	22.1
Port Elizabeth	288	309	587	7.3	90.0	103.9
Durban and Pinetown	838	904	1,120	7.9	23.9	33.7
Southern Transvaal	2,881	3,450	4,616	19.7	33.8	60.2
Rest of Union	4,275	4,752	6,865	11.2	44.5	60.6
Union	9,837	10,885	15,087	10.7	38.6	53.4

**INCREASE IN NUMBER OF WORKERS : PRIVATE INDUSTRY (1)**  
1938/39 (X) - 1945/46 (Y) - 1951/52 (Z)

Natives

	Number			Percentage Increase		
	1938/39 X	1945/46 Y	1951/52 Z	X-Y	Y-Z	X-Z
Western Cape	7,915	16,177	28,534	104.3	74.7	260.5
Port Elizabeth	3,034	6,279	15,265	106.9	144.1	403.1
Durban and Pinetown	13,778	24,644	39,385	78.9	59.9	185.7
Southern Transvaal	81,689	130,385	189,908	59.6	45.6	132.4
Rest of Union	35,534	58,487	121,797	64.6	136.2	242.8
Union	141,950	235,974	394,889	66.2	67.4	178.0

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1. W.W.M. Eiselen : Secretary of Native Affairs : Paper read  
at the sixth annual congress of South African  
Bureau of Racial Affairs, Jan. (1955), Stellenbosch

In the Mayor of Cape Town's minutes, a more detailed view of the situation in Langa is provided. (See table below)

POPULATION OF LANGA (MONTHLY AVERAGE P.A.)<sup>(1)</sup>  
AFRICANS

Year	Children			Total	Masculinity ratio (m:100f)	Total (Pop.)
	Male	Female	(under 16)			
1930	1,116	324	320	1,760	344	-
1935	1,963	621	1,146	3,730	316	-
1939-40	3,655	874	1,509	6,038	418	6,063
1944-5	4,453	1,254	2,142	7,489	355	7,875
1949-50	6,558	1,433	3,026	11,017	457	11,054
1952-3	7,156	1,470	2,347	10,973	486	11,016
1953-4	7,320	1,650	2,938	11,908	443	11,947
1954-5	8,102	1,695	3,150	12,947	477	12,984
1956	15,004	1,734	3,282	20,020	865	20,058
1957	17,941	1,177	3,373	23,085	1,013	23,122
1958	18,697	1,807	3,485	23,989	1,034	24,017
1959	19,445	1,842	3,624	24,911	1,055	24,932
1960(Dec)	19,050	2,190	4,317	25,557	870	-
1961(Dec)	18,847	2,175	4,314	25,336	866	-

The year 1939 saw a remarkable increase in the population of Langa from 3,730 in the year 1935 to 6,038 in the year 1939. This led to the crowding and later overcrowding of homes of friends, relatives and the barracks where single male workers

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1. City of Cape Town, Mayor's Minutes : M.O.H. Reports, 1960 and 1961 : figures by courtesy of Administrative Office, Langa

lived.<sup>(1)</sup> This served to create slum conditions and exacerbated an already growing squatter problem. The years after 1948 are important for they allow a study of the post-war situation and also mark the era of Nationalist Party government. There was also a rise in African nationalist political activity in this period culminating with the "Poqo insurrection"<sup>(2)</sup> of 1960. All these events make it particularly interesting to examine the areas of religion and culture in a place like Langa in order to identify patterns of change. In fact, the entire period is interesting because it is essentially one of African immigration/urbanisation and it saw considerable economic, social and political changes.

At this point I feel we need to explain firstly the culture this thesis focuses on, not just for the sake of conceptual clarity but also to help identify the parameters or cut-off points I have set, for the field seems so vast hence "the complex whole"<sup>(3)</sup> designated by the concept. Culture is one concept whose difficulty to pin down or contain in a single definition may confuse us and make us more than usually illusive in our use of it. "The concept culture was ~~from~~ the beginning controversial and often confused",<sup>(4)</sup> hence its

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1. Interview with Mr Magaqa - No. 52 Moshesh Street, Langa.
  2. T. Lodge : Insurrection in South Africa : The Pan African Congress and the Poqo Movement, 1959 - 1965. (York University 1984)
  3. R. Thornton : "Culture: a contemporary definition" in S.A. Keywords.
  4. Ibid : p. 273

definition suffices for all purposes. Attempts to define culture vary between idealist emphasis in which "culture is seen as a process and a state of cultivation that should be a universal idea"<sup>(1)</sup> - and the emphasis on particular 'cultures' which stresses the differences in the ways in which men find meaning and value in their lives and indeed conceive of perfection.<sup>(2)</sup> "Standing uneasily between these emphasis is what is still probably the most common popular meaning of the word 'culture', namely, a body of actual artistic and intellectual work".<sup>(3)</sup> I will not get bogged down by the details of tensions between this meaning and the other two as it is not our main concern. Suffice to say that, it appears in the light of the above explanations that when we use the concept 'culture', we are concerned largely with the making of meaning. We are largely concerned with the intellectual products, practices and interconnections of a social formation (of course, the material tangible aspects are not excluded). So it is largely in the sense of making meaning that the concept is used in this thesis.

While we say definitely that when we use the concept 'culture', we mean to refer to the changing songs, poems, religion, education, beliefs, customs, tastes, fashion, etc. of a group of people, it is clear that such attempts at definition represent arbitrary delimitations of a completely

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1. Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Vol. 2, Macmillan Co. and Free Press, U.S., 1967, p. 274.

2. *ibid* : p. 274

3. *ibid* : p. 274

fluid concept. Religion itself is apparently also an aspect of culture in spite of its mythical claims. Peter Berger defines it as "the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Put differently, religion is cosmization in a sacred mode. The cosmos posited by religion thus both transcends and includes man".<sup>(1)</sup> Biko also explains religion as "a social institution that attempts to explain what cannot be scientifically known about the origins and destiny of men".<sup>(2)</sup> All these points are perfectly illuminated and given theoretical form as Jerry Mosala argues that "religion may therefore be pushed back to its material socio-historical base. Man's understanding and positing of divine reality must of necessity correspond in some important ways with the level of development of historical society".<sup>(3)</sup> He proceeds and says that "to speak of a people's religion is to speak of their history and to speak of their history is to speak of their culture."<sup>(4)</sup> But at the same time he admits that culture is not only the outcome of people's history but is also a determinant of that history.<sup>(5)</sup> Michael McKale concurs as he observes that "historically, culture has been fused

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1. P. Berger : The social reality of religion, Penguin, Middlesex : (1967), p. 13.
  2. S. Biko : I write what I like, Bowerdian Press (1978), p.55
  3. I.J. Mosala : "The relevance of African Independent Churches and their challenge to Black Theology", in The unquestionable right to be free : Essays in Black Theology, p. 94.
  4. Ibid : p. 98.
  5. Ibid : p. 98.

with religion".<sup>(1)</sup> So this embeddedness of religion in a cultural matrix makes interesting this investigation of its role in the general development of culture. In the case of Langa, Christian religion and the role it has played should be examined from a broader historical perspective. In South Africa Christian religion represented by the mission churches during the time of colonisation was usually the ideological vanguard of the colonial conquest of African people. It assisted, however partially, in the destruction of "many good practices and folk customs"<sup>(2)</sup> among African people. So there is considerable degree of truth in the assertion that colonial conquest of African people which first entailed military defeat, was confronted at the end of it by an indispensibility of "spiritual and cultural murder",<sup>(3)</sup> as safety valves of white domination. "People's songs, poetry, dances, education, languages were attacked and often ruthlessly suppressed".<sup>(4)</sup> Christianity as Biko puts it "was made the central point of a culture which brought with it new styles of clothing, new customs, new forms of etiquette, new medical approaches and perhaps new armaments".<sup>(5)</sup> The point is that Christian religion helped to step up receptive

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1. M. McKale : "Culture and human liberation", Radical Religion, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1980), p. 11f.
  2. J. de Vries : Mission and colonialism in Namibia, Johannesburg, Ravan Press (1978).
  3. C.A. Diop : Great African thinkers, Vol. 1, p. 162.
  4. Ngugi wa Thiong'o : "The role of culture in the African revolution" - round table discussion with Ngugi and Serote. African Communists (113) 1988.
  5. S. Biko : I write what I like, Bowerdian Press (1978), p. 56.



tendencies to European ways of life. This was done through missionary control of education. As a result this made possible the realization of an imperialist theory of 'progressive assimilation or adaptation'.

But the whole process was not free of opposition from within. This took a form of an attempt by Africans to adopt Christianity to their heritage hence the emergence of separated Christian sects early in the colonial period. In fact, what this exposes is the dialectic involved in the role played by Christian religion throughout history. In the rest of South Africa, Christian religion provided channels of assimilation into a culture shaped largely by the European dominant classes but at the same time it also became a new sphere of mobilisation against the same classes. This will be clearly elaborated when we examine the role of the mainline churches and indigenous churches in Langa Township in the chapters that are to follow.

All in all what we have done so far is to build a theoretical background that informs our conception of culture and religion of the people of Langa during the set period. Material from American and European experiences (bearing in mind the differences of historical contexts) has been of help in shaping my ideas and developing insights. The works of A.J. Raboteau, E.D. Genovese and H. McLeod for instance have been of special importance in providing me with a basic

understanding of religion and culture in historical context.

At this juncture I should offer a clear map of where I mean to go and how to get there in an organised fashion. The thesis comprises the following chapters. Chapter 2 is a general outline of the establishment of the community and the church in Langa before 1938. The chapter attempts to explain the meaning of the word 'community' and demonstrates how it was formed in Langa Township. The third chapter outlines cultural activities in Langa from ca.1938 to ca.1958. It also raises questions about the relationship between class and culture, culture and mode of production. The following two chapters, that is, Chapters 4 and 5 examine the roles of mission churches and Independent churches in the cultural life of Langa. In chapter 5, the thesis focuses on the Zionist section of Independent churches. It describes Zionist or 'Spirit' churches as churches of the Black working-class because they were initiated and led by it. This is followed by conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE CHURCH IN LANGA TOWNSHIP

About eight miles away from the city of Cape Town, adjacent to its main sewerage works, an African township called Langa was built in 1923. It was officially opened as a residential area for Africans in 1927.<sup>(1)</sup> The central concern of this chapter is to examine the way how a community took shape in Langa and what the role of the church was. The chapter begins with a summary outline of the reasons behind the establishment of a new township. This helps to shed some light onto our central concerns. The next step involves an attempt to come into grips with the concept "community" because it is ambiguous in its meaning and therefore deserves explanation. Having done so, the central concern of the chapter is addressed.

Racism, inextricably tied up with the state's responses to the changing material requirements of capital accumulation<sup>(2)</sup>, is fundamental to our explanation of reasons for the establishment of Langa Township. The establishment of this township is best explained within the context of

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/1, (Cape Archives)
  2. M. Padayachee & R. Haines : "Capital accumulation, control and construction of urban-space" in The struggle for social and economic space in South Africa, p.1.

urbanisation and the dynamics of the political economy of urban-land-use in South Africa. As Padayachee and Haines explain, urban-space construction in South Africa expresses a form of dominance and the way in which capital attempts to resolve its contradictions in spatial terms.<sup>(1)</sup> They proceed and argue that the interplay of factors (including racial factors), the contradictions of capital and concomitant class-struggle determine the location of residential area and where companies build their factories.<sup>(2)</sup>

In the light of this background the level of focus can be narrowed down to specific issues to help explain the establishment of Langa. In this instance, too, there are also demonstrated the inextricable links between racism and the entire process of capital accumulation. We will refer specifically to industrial expansion and its concomitant demand for more land. This was presented in the guise of a health concern which ultimately distanced the 'culprits' from the 'respectable' residents in the city. The growing presence of Africans in Cape Town after the First World War and more especially after the second one, evoked a host of divergent reactions from white people in the city. Some hated what they saw as the 'kaffir' invasion of the city<sup>(3)</sup> whilst others

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1. M. Padayachee & R. Haines : "Capital accumulation, control and construction of urban-space" in The struggle for social and economic space in South Africa, p.3.
  2. Ibid : p. 3.
  3. C. Saunders : "The creation of Ndabeni" in Studies, Vol.1 1984, p. 168.

could not avoid welcoming an abundant and cheap labour force. But the city could not accommodate an ever increasing African population so those in authority were constantly pressured to devise a solution. A letter from the Women's Municipal Association reflects exactly resentment of the increasing number of unemployed Africans without shelter in the city. This Association requested a meeting with the Mayor of Cape Town whom they asked to see to the repatriation of Africans back to the 'reserves'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Even before that, other scholars have established that the health crisis, (outbreak of Bubonic Plague in 1902,<sup>(2)</sup> for example) gave pretext for segregative solutions to the problem, and led to the first forced removal of Africans from District Six to Ndabeni Location. It was again the health camouflage strategy which provided a reason for the establishment of Langa and a second forced removal of Africans from the city, suburbs and Ndabeni Location to the new township. Ostensibly, other reasons for such acts were that Africans needed to be protected from all sorts of bad habits that they might learn through living in touch with European or Coloured surroundings. It was also argued that keeping them in one place would prevent them from getting drunk and from being a nuisance to their neighbours. An

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/1, (Cape Archives)
  2. E. van Hyningen : "Refugees and relief in Cape Town, 1899-1902", Studies, Vol. 3 (1980), P. 75.

interview with Mr Maho who once lived in Ndabeni Location and later moved to Langa Township, provides another perspective which emphasizes industrial expansion as the main reason for the forced removal of people from Ndabeni Location and the establishment of a new township. As he puts it;

"The law dictated that we should move to Langa because there were factories to be built at Ndabeni. There was nothing we could do because the law said so."<sup>(1)</sup>

So the establishment of Langa Township is one instance which demonstrates the complicated admixture of racism with capitalism in defining a peculiar historical situation of South Africa. The basic contradiction was that whilst industry needed an available labour force, the combination of industrial pressure for land with racial concerns distanced the same labour force.

Historians have not yet adequately reconstructed the bitterness and resistance the forced removals evoked from the African people. Here we will refer specifically to their forced removal to Langa Township in 1927/8. Resistance emanated not only from the growing awareness among Africans about the conditions of the 'model' township but was also caused by the distance of the new township away from their places of employment. Although wages earned by Africans were among the lowest earned in the Cape Peninsula, they were required to undertake substantial journeys to reach their

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1. Interview with Mr Maho, Langa Old-age Home, Langa Township.

places of work. In 1927, for instance, the average wage earned by an African was 2/6d a day.<sup>(1)</sup> With that money, they supported their families, paid taxes and travel costs. Besides that to the people of Ndabeni, for instance, moving to the new township implied the breaking down of the communal spirit that had formed among the residents.<sup>(2)</sup> Another issue was clearly identified during the interview between the Native Township Committee and representatives of the urban Native Community and the Native Advisory Board, Ndabeni in 1927. This was the physical condition of the new township.<sup>(3)</sup> Rev. Oliphants of the Board elucidates the point thoroughly as he points out that "Langa is worse than a location despite the fine exterior appearance". He further says that "Langa is not a township but an unhealthy compound and ventilation is like that of a stable".<sup>(4)</sup> The Board and representatives of Africans also pointed out the disproportion of rentals in the new township to the wages earned by Africans, the high railway fares and the regulations framed for the control of the township. These were worse than those governing the locations; they protested.<sup>(5)</sup> To crown everything the residents of Langa were held responsible for the expenditure incurred in the building

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/2, (Cape Archives)
  2. V. Bickford-Smith : "Commerce, class and ethnicity", (Phd Cambridge, 1988)
  3. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/2, (Cape Archives)
  4. Ibid : p. 6.
  5. Ibid : p. 2.

of the township. Illustrated below is the summary of the financial demands in the new township in which African people had to live very much against their will.

**Calculations for rents proposed in 1924<sup>(1)</sup>**

**Basis of calculation :-**

The calculation is based on 5.75% of the capital cost of building.

The figure arrived at is divided by the number of people using the buildings.

**Rents per category of residents**

	No. of Residents*	Capital costs	Total rent pa	rent/person	pa. add 1%	total
Main barracks [single men]	2000	34000	1955	1	1	1.10
Quarters [single men]	250	10000	575	2.60	26	2.96
Quarters [spinsters]	150	10000	575	3.16	3.16	3.476
Houses [married families]	350	47000	2702	7.14	714	7.854
Nissen Huts	850	12000	690	812	0812	89

*N.B. : All figures, except \*, are in pounds*

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/2, (Cape Archives) *N.B. I made the summary from detailed calculations which are in the original document.*



Total costs of buildings excluding (roads, etc.)

Domestic = 113 000

Non-domestic =  $\frac{10\ 500}{123\ 500}$

Annual charges = 20 436

Domestic buildings =  $\frac{113\ 000}{123\ 500} \times 20\ 436 = 18\ 699$

Non-domestic =  $\frac{10\ 500}{123\ 500} \times 20\ 436 = 1737$

Therefore rent by wage earners =  $\frac{18\ 699}{36\ 000} = 5.164$

Rent for common places (eating house)

Capital cost = 10 500

Rent @ 5.75% = 603.75

Proportion of annual charges =  $\frac{1737.00}{2340.75}$

Add 10% = 2340.075

Total charge = +/- 2575

Shared as follows :

	Capital cost	%	Total rent
Market	2700	26	662
Main eating house	3500	33	858
Barracks eating house	3000	32	736
Nissen tent eating house	1275	9	313
Total	<u>10 475</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>2569</u>
(say)	10 500		2575

The main significance of the above illustration is that it makes intelligible African resistance to the forced removal to Langa Township as well as the history of protest against rents in Langa Township.

The first group of Africans to be evicted in 1927 was from the city and surrounding suburbs.<sup>(1)</sup> In the case of Ndabeni residents moving to the new township was first presented as a choice but when the majority rejected it, it was made an obligation. Even though the details and nuances of African resistance to their forced removal to Langa cannot be explored to their fullness in this chapter, it is suffice to say that their resistance which took various forms met relatively little success. This was mainly because of its failure to take an organisational form.<sup>(2)</sup> The most notable form of African resistance in the city was their movement from one part of the city to another as squatters. By so doing they resisted the law which required them to be out of the city. As a result it was not easy to fill the barracks in Langa as quickly as was necessary to avoid economic losses on the part of the City Council. While some of the barracks stood empty it is estimated that the City Council was losing

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1. C. Saunders : "From Ndabeni to Langa in Studies, Vol. 1, 1984, p. 209.
  2. Interview with Mr S. Zibi, No. 68 Brinton Street, Langa, gives indication that even though people were not satisfied with being moved to Langa they were not actually organised to present formidable resistance.

1000 pounds a month.<sup>(1)</sup> The Council had to hire special constables to aid the police in ejecting Africans from the city and the suburbs.<sup>(2)</sup> In the case of Ndabeni Location resistance was articulated by bodies like the Native Advisory Board and the Vigilance Association. Their ideas against moving to Langa Township are clearly illustrated by the interview we outlined in the previous pages.

Whilst the historian can identify the fact of African resistance to the forced removal to Langa Township, he should at the same time not overlook the possible fact of willingness to move to the new township on the part of some sectors of the African community. This illustrates the fact of heterogeneity possessed by them as a social group. Heterogeneity involves differences of interests as well as different outlooks displayed by the social group. So it largely testifies to this fact that there are indications (however vague) from oral information that some people wanted to move to Langa Township. To these people moving to the new township was viewed in terms of the scope for self-advancement<sup>(3)</sup>, that is, opportunities that may be available to open businesses and therefore improve one's lot. That is why as early as 1925 before Langa could even be opened

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/2, (Cape Archives)
  2. C. Saunders : "From Ndabeni to Langa" in Studies, Vol. 1, 1984, p. 209.
  3. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/2, (Cape Archives)

officially, the Chairman of the Native Township Committee received a delegation from the Bantu Commercial Union. The Union wanted to enquire about whether shops were to be allowed in the new township and the conditions under which they were to be allowed.<sup>(1)</sup> After that a number of applications for business sites were received by Native Township Committee. As examples, we can mention applications from James Dude for a coffee stall site, Alfred Ngaju for a butcher's licence and Jane Ntsundukazi for a baker's licence.<sup>(2)</sup> All these people were to form after the township had been officially opened the core of a small middle class which developed in Langa. The differences of interests point towards the inherent conflict which is the very dynamic of social existence. Unfortunately there is remarkably thin evidence to elaborate fully this dynamic, particularly in the case of Langa.

The church as well wanted to establish itself in the new township. In September 1925 a number of applications for church sites were received by the Native Township Committee. They were from the following denominations :

1. Church of England
2. The Wesleyan Church of South Africa
3. Zion Baptist Church

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/1, p.23, (Cape Archives)

2. Ibid.

4. Presbyterian National Baptist Church of Africa
5. African Methodist Episcopal Church
6. Presbyterian Church of South Africa
7. Ethiopian Church of South Africa
8. Mission Church of the Dutch Reformed Church of S.A.
9. Congregational Union of South Africa. (1)

The reply to these applications stated that sites were to be granted "only to recognised religious bodies after an intimation from the church authority in question to the effect that within a period of six months they will be prepared to proceed with a building which will meet the requirements of the regulations, and the committee will in due course be prepared to consider the plans".(2) Before the end of 1926, three churches, viz. the Wesleyan, Presbyterian and the Ethiopian had signified their agreement to the conditions stipulated by the Council under which sites would be granted.(3) Before the end of the same year, the Methodists started with their plan to erect the church in Langa. Their church building was ultimately finished in 1932.(4) Other churches were actually built in Langa after the closing down of Ndabeni Location in 1935. Some were established in 1938 following the increase of the African population residing in Langa. This category includes most of

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/1, (Cape Archives)
  2. Ibid : (1926), p. 96.
  3. Ibid : p. 121.
  4. Interview with Rev. Madlala, a resident priest of the Methodist Church in Langa

the indigenous churches in Langa. As churches of the Black working-class they increased after 1938 as the size of the urban Black labour force almost doubled.<sup>(1)</sup> The Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa and the Ethiopian Church of South Africa were also established in this period.<sup>(2)</sup>

At this juncture we should examine what the word 'community' actually means and how it was actually formed in Langa Township. The term 'community' has a considerable and complex history.<sup>(3)</sup> "In South Africa, as elsewhere, the term 'community' is used to denote aggregations of people who have something in common, such as common residence, geographic region and shared beliefs, or who claim membership in a common lineage structure, or who are distinguished by similarities of economic activity or class position."<sup>(4)</sup> Sometimes the term is used interchangeably with race, ethnic group or nation. According to Bozzoli, the word may refer to "a social ideal, a future state in which communal solidarity and sharing are commonplace."<sup>(5)</sup> In certain instances it is used to refer to a group of people experiencing the trauma of forced removal by government decree.<sup>(6)</sup> But in essence, "the

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1. G. Kruss : "Religion, class and culture; indigenous churches in South Africa, with special reference to Zionist Apostolics", (M.A. Thesis 1985, UCT),p.154
  2. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A247, UCT Archives.
  3. R. Thornton & M. Ramphela : 'The quest for community', in South African Keywords, p.36 (eds.) Boonzaier E. and Sharp J., 1988.
  4. Ibid : p. 30.
  5. B. Bozzoli : Class, community and conflict, South African Perspectives, p. 4.
  6. Ibid : p. 4.

word community refers in a self-contradictory way to a belief and practice. It can best be understood as an image of coherence, a cultural notion which people use in order to give a reality and form to their social actions and thoughts."<sup>(1)</sup>

Essential to an explanation of the term 'community' is that in practice, there is a conscious act of creating involved. "Communities are made, enacted and believed in."<sup>(2)</sup> It is largely from this perspective that I explain the coming into existence of the community of Langa. This community came into existence due to conscious acts of co-operation in matters of common interest, eg. the building of cultural institutions like churches and schools, conflicts and resistance to the imposing authority of powers that be. To illustrate this point we can mention the struggles that were waged by the people of Langa against high rents, liquor searches by the police and unfair arrests.<sup>(3)</sup> All this happened in the background of common origins which fed into the communal consciousness which developed amongst the people of Langa.

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1. R. Thornton & M. Ramphela : 'The quest for community', in South African Keywords, p.38 (eds.) Boonzaier E. and Sharp J., 1988.

2. Ibid : p. 39.

3. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A247, UCT Archives; in the 1940s there were several campaigns organised against rentals. One of them was spearheaded by Langa Women's Deputation. Protests against liquor searches and unfair arrests were mainly a concern of Langa Vigilance Association.

The notions of co-operation and resistance are clearly demonstrated when we look into how the Christian churches came into existence in Langa Township. The building of churches is one sphere in which there was a remarkable co-operation among Langa residents. Not only church members made donations to the church building fund; all friends and well-wishers inside and outside the township also made their contribution.<sup>(1)</sup> Hence these institutions came to be dominating symbols of community in the township. The concepts that were staged to raise funds to build churches were attended by everyone. Independent churches like Ethiopian Church of South Africa and the Bantu Presbyterian Church benefited a lot from this as they had little financial backing from any organisation or people outside Langa.<sup>(2)</sup> Mission churches like the Anglican Church and the Methodist Church had a lot of support from outside. We may refer at this point specifically to the contribution of the Cowley Fathers from Oxford who really sponsored the building of the Anglican Church in Langa.<sup>(3)</sup> White Christian friends outside the township helped Langa Methodists to build their church.<sup>(4)</sup>

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1. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A247, UCT Archives - letters from the Bantu Presbyterian Church and the Ethiopian Church of South Africa asking for donations from friends in the township. Confirmed by oral information from an interview with Mr Magaqa, an elder of the Bantu Presbyterian Church in Langa.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Interview with Rev. Msengane, a retired Anglican priest, Washington Street, Langa.
  4. Interview with Rev. Madlala, a resident priest of the Methodist Church in Langa.



Most independent churches, in Langa Township came into existence as breakaways from the established mission churches. One example of this is the Bantu Methodist Church which broke away from the Methodist Church in 1933, "after a dispute in the Methodist conference over church dues."<sup>(1)</sup> Others came into existence due to claims of revelation, holy inspiration and differences with mission churches' interpretation of scriptures. The indigenous churches represented, as it were, a significant venture of the African spirit which sought to realise itself. In the most precise terms their emergence represented a response to a particular class position. We will clearly elaborate on these points in chapter 5.

In the early 1960s, "of the Independent churches only four, the Presbyterian Church of Africa, the African Ethiopian Baptist Church, the Ethiopian Church of South Africa and the Bantu Methodist Church had buildings in Langa."<sup>(2)</sup> The other Independent churches had always met in private houses or in some other townships, since the time of their establishment. Included in this group are churches like the Holy Church of Christ, Medium Zionist Church, Kenana Zionist Church and the Holy Apostolic Church, all established in the 1940s.<sup>(3)</sup>

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p. 97.
  2. Ibid : p. 94.
  3. Ibid : p. 92-93.

Having established themselves at Langa, the churches had a number of restrictions to contend with more especially after 1937. From the very beginning of the settlement in Langa, the government feared an uncontrolled preponderance of churches. As a result a number of restrictions were imposed. These stipulated that there had to be a five mile radius between churches inspite of the size of the township. Divine services in private houses and open-air services were prohibited whilst all unlicensed church buildings were to be demolished.<sup>(1)</sup> In 1937 the Amended Act of Urban Natives was promulgated. One of its clauses (Section 26f), forbade the City Council to grant land to native churches but only to lease it.<sup>(2)</sup> Everywhere the indigenous churches had to contend with this law. It made it difficult for them to get money because "money-lenders refused to have any thing to do with a building on somebody else's land".<sup>(3)</sup> Besides these regulations the government had set very high standards of recognition of churches. The Independent churches suffered most because of this. For instance, for a church to be recognised by a government, it ought to have had ten years quiet life, a good number of membership and a good bank account.<sup>(4)</sup> Pastor Eben Koti of the African United National Baptist Church argued that as the Christian church they were

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1. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A24.91, UCT Archives; the ideas are taken from a letter written to Molteno by Eben Koti, a minister in the African United Baptist Church.

2. Ibid. BC 579.A24.740

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid. BC 579.A24.91

not out to make money so it was not easy to have a good bank account. He lamented the government's inability to appreciate the role African Independent churches played in Langa Township. In spite of their efforts to evangelise the hundreds of thousands "who have become law abiding", Koti argued "the government cannot appreciate what is self-evident".<sup>(1)</sup> The regulations were a formidable challenge more especially to the existence of the Independent churches but in spite of that, through co-operation and also "by the mercies of God",<sup>(2)</sup> as one informant said, they continued to exist.

Apparently the community of Langa created itself more than it was created by 'authorities' under specific circumstances. The church was of central importance in developing the spirit of co-operation necessary for a community to exist. In fact, as Thornton and Ramphele explain, the history of community lies in religious concepts.<sup>(3)</sup> This shows the close connections of community formation and religious activity. But a community itself is a result not only of religion but of a complex socio-political and historical process. The following two chapters (i.e. chapters 3 and 4) will help delineate aspects of this complex process and will demonstrate how the community of Langa created itself. In

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1. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A24.91, UCT Archives.
  2. Interview with Mr Ernest Gcwabe, Nduli Crescent, Gugulethu
  3. R. Thornton & M. Ramphele : 'The quest for community', in South African Keywords, p.38 (eds.) Boonzaier E. and Sharp J., 1988.

this chapter we have explained the coming into existence of a church community and very little is said about the coming into existence of the community of Langa as a whole.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURE IN LANGA TOWNSHIP FROM ca.1938 TO ca.1958

When we confront the issue of culture, we expose ourselves to a world of conflicting and contradictory views hence the debate as to the exact meaning of the word 'culture' is still an ongoing process. But when we use the concept 'culture', it usually infers the making of meaning. It is largely in this sense that the concept is used in this chapter. So the main aim of this chapter is to examine the cultural activities in which the people of Langa were involved. We will show how they helped to give meaning to the lives of these people. Because it was in that way that the people of Langa created a livable world for themselves within the narrow living space and harsh adversity.<sup>(1)</sup>

The cultural life of Langa Township had secular as well as religious aspects. The line of demarcation between the two aspects is not rigid and in some cases it hardly exists and therefore very difficult to identify. But for the sake of ordering information we will preserve the distinction. When we speak of religious aspects of culture, we refer specifically to those cultural activities initiated and led

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1. E. Genovese : Roll, Jordan, Roll; the World the slaves made, 1974, p. (xvi).

by the churches. These will be examined in chapters 4 and 5.

The type of cultural activities we will focus on in this chapter are sport, music, dancing and the activities of self-help clubs, civic associations and political organisations. Some of these activities were nothing new in Langa Township during this period, they had existed since the inception of the township in 1923 and before that in Ndabeni.<sup>(1)</sup> Father Botto, in his research done in 1954, found the total membership of the various clubs and societies to be just over 11 000 out of a total African population of 44 300.<sup>(2)</sup> This shows that these activities had assumed a role of prime importance in the cultural life of the community of Langa, more especially in the 1950s. The discussion of these activities which follows, is organised under specific headings like (i) music and dancing, (ii) sporting activities, (iii) self-help clubs, (iv) political organisations and civic associations.

**Music and dancing** : "In Africa", according to Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), an exiled African jazz musician,<sup>(3)</sup> "music pervades everyday life. It is a healing force. Music reaches the heart of human beings". Music gives expression to

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.113.
  2. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT), 1954, p.3.
  3. A. Ibrahim : "Music is a healing force"; in Umhlaba wethu, p. 63.

what is deepest in the heart of human beings and this is usually demonstrated by the accompanying style of dance. Put in a nutshell, music discloses implicitly and explicitly, the conflicts and contradictions of the social world of human actors and this makes it important to examine the songs of a community. This is what we intend to do as we examine the aspect of music and dancing in Langa Township. It appears that there was more diversity in music than in any other aspect of culture in Langa. Therefore one should differentiate between music and dancing performed in traditional African celebrations and the more Western influenced type of music and dancing of music bands and choirs. The former helped to preserve links with the tribal traditions of the reserves.<sup>(1)</sup> But in the 1950s traditional music and dancing were losing ground to band and choral music. This is clearly indicated in the interview conducted in Langa Township with Mrs C. Nkomo, formerly, a leading choir mistress.<sup>(2)</sup> Before we examine closely a few songs, we should first provide the context of specific social activities in which they were sung.

After 1938, Langa experienced a tremendous increase in population and a development of cultural life. This is shown by a high frequency of traditional African celebrations and

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1. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 168.
  2. Interview with Mrs Cecilia Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.

by the increase in the number of clubs, societies and organisations. The former were performed in the same manner as in the rural areas. Some of these celebrations (except Ntsikana celebrations) were traditional activities in the strictest sense of the word. They were celebrations of historical events which occurred after the coming of white people to South Africa.<sup>(1)</sup> In this category we have the Fingo celebrations, National Mendi Memorial and Moshesh celebrations. The chapter examines each of these.

**Ntsikana celebrations** : These celebrations started in Langa after 1933.<sup>(2)</sup> They were held in honour of Ntsikana whom many Xhosa speaking people accepted as their patron Saint.

Ntsikana was the son of Ngqika's councillors. He is believed to have prophesied among other things, the coming of the white men carrying a book (the bible) and a holeless button (symbolising money)<sup>(3)</sup>. He became an influential evangelist at the beginning of the 19th century and urged his people to embrace Christianity and educate their children.<sup>(4)</sup> At his homestead, it is said that Ntsikana would gather about him a band of disciples for worship that included some songs and a

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1. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 138.
  2. Interview with Mr S. Zibi, No. 68 Brinton Street, Langa.
  3. J. de Gruchy : Cry justice, 1986, p.56.
  4. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 139.



hymn of his own composition.<sup>(1)</sup> The song in its original form is titled 'Ulo Thixo omkhulu ngoseZulwini'. In its translated version the title is 'The great blanket with which we are clothed'<sup>(2)</sup> The song lyric consists of incremental repetitions with slight but important variations.

"Sele! Sele! Ahom, ahom, ahom!  
Come forward, come forward,  
Our creator God is calling.  
Ahom, ahom, ahom, ahom, ahom.

Behold - behold the Life-creator,  
it is he who calls us.  
Behold - behold the Life-creator,  
let us call together  
Ahom, ahom, ahom, ahom, ahom.

It is you the Great God, who dwells on high  
It is you, it is you, true shield, protector  
It is you, it is you, true fortress, stronghold  
It is you, it is you, true forest of refuge  
It is you, it is you, true rock of power  
It is you, it is you, who dwells on the highest.<sup>(3)</sup>

It should be remembered that the composer of this song appeared in the history of AmaXhosa during a time of great crisis. A vacuum in their life had been created by defeat and dispossession of their land. Ntsikana with the pacifist Christian course he preferred,<sup>(4)</sup> emerged to fill this vacuum. This is subtly reflected in the song he composed. The song articulates a general feeling of insecurity, hence the frequent use of concepts like "the true shield, protector; stronghold, etc", in the last verse of the song.

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1. J. de Gruchy : Cry justice, 1986, p.56.

2. Translation by Fr. Dave Dargie of Lumko Institute, in de Gruchy, J. ; Cry justice, 1986, p.57.

3. Ibid.

4. E.V.K. Tisani : "Nxele and Ntsikana"; (MA. UCT, 1987), p.5

So it can be argued that the song gives expression however indirect, to the political experiences of amaNgqika because Ntsikana himself was umNgqika and a close associate of Ngqika.<sup>(1)</sup> It was this song which was sung in Langa Township during the Ntsikana celebration. Botto observed in the 1950s that Ntsikana's hymn was capable of steering the feeling of his countrymen more than any poetry yet written. The song not only reminded the people of Langa about their historic past as amaXhosa; its content also reflected on their life and experiences as a young urban community. They also needed 'a true forest of refuge and a true shield, protector', from the dehumanising injustices of a white dominated capitalist society. The time of crisis their ancestors went through still lived on. It was their time of crisis though under different circumstances.

Ntsikana celebrations in Cape Town were organised and led by the "settled urban African middle class".<sup>(2)</sup> Men, women and children wore traditional costume at the celebrations. In the 1950s, which I describe as the heyday of passive resistance and anti-pass campaigns, the form and character of Ntsikana celebrations in Langa began to change. The celebrations lost their original tribal character and assumed a national form.<sup>(3)</sup> During this period the celebrations were opened to

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1. E.V.K. Tisani: "Nxele and Ntsikana"; (MA. UCT, 1987), p.23

2. Notes written by M. Wilson in her preparations for the book titled Langa, a study of social groups in an African township, 1962, UCT Archives.

3. Ibid : p. 13.

everybody and were at best only tolerated by the young generation of activists who extremely opposed any move aimed at reviving old tribal cleavages. Speeches in the celebrations did not address themselves to the tribe even though at times the exploits of tribe were glorified. The intention was not to praise the tribe as such but to show that "Africans as a nation had some history".<sup>(1)</sup> The main aim of Ntsikana celebrations in this period was to promote progress and self-improvement among Africans. The organisers of the celebrations collected money from participants and arranged a scholarship every year to help deserving students irrespective of tribal origins.<sup>(2)</sup> By the 1960s, insistence on tribal dress was no longer demanded when attending these celebrations. All these demonstrate the complete change Ntsikana celebrations had undergone, moving from an expression of narrow tribal (ethnic) belonging to one of membership of the nation. *(See pictures in page 54)*

**Fingo celebrations** : These were held annually in May in Langa Township. These celebrations were organised and attended by Fingo people. Their purpose was to commemorate "Fingo emancipation day".<sup>(3)</sup> They were also intended to revise the oaths that were taken by Fingo ancestors "under the Milk Tree on the 14th May 1835" when the Fingo ancestors pledged their loyalty to the British government, to educate their children

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1. M. Wilson notes, p.14, UCT Archives.

2. Ibid.

3. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A24.236, UCT Archives.

where in 1835 they swore allegiance to white people to adhere to the teachings of Christian religion. To symbolise the migration of Fingos from Butterworth to Pedi, members of the Cape Town community would enact a colourful bundle-carrying ceremony. The Fingos in full tribal costume would march from a spot on the outskirts of Langa Township (Butterworth), to the Langa Market Hall (Peddie) carrying the bundles and in so doing pay homage to their forefathers who came to the Western Cape.<sup>(1)</sup> In the evening of the celebration a concert would be held in Langa Market Hall. On the following day a meeting was held in the same hall to tell the story of how Fingo ancestors travelled from Tukela to Butterworth and from Butterworth to Peddie.<sup>(2)</sup> Tribal dancing and feasting would follow. In the afternoon of the third day a "church service of the tree pledges"<sup>(3)</sup> would take place. In 1943 the Fingo celebrations sparked off a bitter confrontation and subsequent tensions between the Fingo and Xhosa sections of Langa community. The issue was taken up by the Langa Vigilance Association. It outrightly objected to any form of Fingo memorial celebrations in Langa Township.<sup>(4)</sup> The Fingo memorial celebrations had to be stopped because they included "deep and wounding language and insults to

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1. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 138.
  2. Interview with Mr Magaqa, No. 52 Moshesh Street, Langa.
  3. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 138.
  4. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A24.236, UCT Archives.

amaXhosa",<sup>(1)</sup> the Vigilance Association argued. It was agreed by the Advisory Board and the Vigilance Association that such memorial services should be stopped as they disturbed the peace "in an industrial centre and cosmopolitan area like Cape Town".<sup>(2)</sup> After round table discussions between the two groups (Xhosas and Fingos), it was agreed to stop the Fingo celebrations. But oral evidence indicates that the celebrations were continued afterwards. They were organised in such a way as to be open to everybody. The National Anthem, 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika', that is, 'God Bless Africa', was adopted as the main song at the Fingo celebrations.<sup>(3)</sup> The underlying intention was an attempt to give to the Fingo celebrations a national character. Even then their popular appeal remained severely limited. The youth resented the Fingo celebrations for their sinister reminders of the past.<sup>(4)</sup> Most young people, one of my informants said, would only turn up when the dishes were ready. Mr V. Nkomo, one of my informants, concurs as he says that "as boys we would only go there to eat".<sup>(5)</sup> The failure of attempts to change the tribal nature of the Fingo celebrations caused their slow death. By the late 1950s these celebrations were rarely performed in Langa. In fact by the end of the 1950s all tribal celebrations in Langa were disappearing.

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1. Moltano Papers : BC 579, A24.236, UCT Archives.

2. Ibid.

3. Interview with Mr Magaqa, No. 52 Moshesh Street, Langa.

4. Moltano Papers : BC 579, A24.236, UCT Archives.

5. Interview with Mr Victor Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.

National Mendi Memorial : These celebrations were regarded with positive acclaim by the people of Langa hence they are said to have been the most well attended. The main intention of the National Mendi Memorial was to commemorate the death of 600 African soldiers in the sinking troopship 'Mendi' in 1917, during the First World War of 1914 to 1918. "South African Labour Contingents were recruited to serve overseas. Of the first convoy, two ships landed safely in France, but the Mendi, was sunk with over 600 men off the Isle Wight on the 21st February 1917, as a result of collision with another vessel in the fog."<sup>(1)</sup> The Mendi celebrations attracted many people because they had no tribal foundation. During the celebration, government employed people (eg. Nurses) would come, mostly in their uniforms.<sup>(2)</sup> What this shows is that Mendi celebrations were recognised by the government. There was generally a speaker from the Native Affairs Department in these celebrations. Church and school choirs were invited to come and render musical items. An important contribution which the National Mendi Memorial made in Langa, was the bursary it offered to deserving students who wanted to further their studies. Mr Victor Nkomo, for instance, was helped by this bursary to further his studies at the University College of Fort Hare in 1959. But in the early 1960s National Mendi Memorial celebrations also disappeared

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1. Handbook of Race Relations, p.57, in Botto, R. : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 139.

2. Interview with Mrs Cecilia Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.

in Langa Township.<sup>(1)</sup> In this period the township was changing into a site of intense political conflict spearheaded by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).

**Moshesh celebrations** : These celebrations recognised the incorporation of Basutholand into the British Empire by Sir Phillip Wodehouse, the Governor of the Cape Colony, on the 12th March 1868.<sup>(2)</sup> It was this event which was commemorated annually as Moshesh's Day. Like the Fingo celebrations Moshesh celebrations in Langa were not popular with the wider public. Members of the organisation were accused of "exclusiveness and tribalism".<sup>(3)</sup> Opposition was of such an extent that it precipitated a split among the Sothos in Langa. This split was between those who were settled in Langa and the migrants. The former seemed to agree with the rest of the community. It was in the early 1960s that the latter group felt antagonised and left Langa Township.<sup>(4)</sup> They established themselves at new headquarters in Nyanga.

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1. Interview with Mr Victor NKomo, Makana Square, Langa.
  2. Handbook of Race Relations, p.706, in Botto, R. : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 139.
  3. Notes written by M. Wilson in her preparations for the book titled Langa, a study of social groups in an African township, 1962, p. 497.
  4. Ibid.

Apart from traditional African celebrations there were other activities where the more western influenced type of music and dancing was performed. We will first look into a few music bands which existed in Langa. The oldest and the best known music band in Langa was the Merry Macs. In the 1940s they absorbed a group of vocalists into the band. The vocalists used to call themselves the 'Zoomboom Rhythm Jizzlers'.<sup>(1)</sup> From then the Merry Macs consisted of an instrumental section and a vocalist section; making up a big band. "They were competent in reading music and had a considerable range, playing jazz, calypso and samba, as well as the more old fashioned ball-room dances".<sup>(2)</sup> But as Mr S. Zibi (an informant who was a member of Merry Macs) says, "the Merry Macs were basically a jazz and ball-room dance music band. They also played a little bit of 'umbhaqanga' but were not very good in it."<sup>(3)</sup> The ball-room dance songs that were played by the Merry Macs included numbers like "Tuxido junction; Air-mail special and In the mood".<sup>(4)</sup> Their 'umbhaqanga' songs were usually in Xhosa. The most popular of these songs was "Yiza nezembe Malayisha" meaning "come with an axe Loader",<sup>(5)</sup> a song that narrated everyday work experiences. 'Umbhaqanga' music was played mostly by groups from Johannesburg, but it seems to have been

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1. Interview with Mr S. Zibi, No. 68 Brinton Street, Langa.
  2. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.126.
  3. Interview with Mr S. Zibi, No. 68 Brinton Street, Langa.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid.



of limited appeal even to the youth in Cape Town. The Merry Macs, preferred instead to play "dignified music" that was appreciated by the educated sector of the community.<sup>(1)</sup> Youngsters were fond of 'hot music', that is, 'umbhaqanga' and disliked dance music and jazz of the Merry Macs. This precipitated the emergence of two new musical bands called 'The Cordettes and The Disciples'. The two bands were trained by the same person and had their headquarters in the same street in Langa.<sup>(2)</sup> The bands were composed mainly of youngsters and played 'hot numbers' really appealing to the youth. Together they symbolised opposition to the middle-class oriented tradition of the Merry Macs. This was followed by the emergence of other musical bands like 'Hop Skippers and the Honolulu Swingsters'. The Hop Skippers did not operate for a long time while the Honolulu Swingsters remained moribund.<sup>(3)</sup> All these splits and formation of new musical groups occurred in the early 1950s, a period which can be called "the era of big bands in Langa Township".<sup>(4)</sup> Most of them collapsed because of lack of financial support.<sup>(5)</sup> During the same period associations and clubs were formed in Langa and they had an important role in the cultural life of this young urban community. One good example is the Peninsula African Socialite Association (PASA) which

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1. Interview with Mr S. Zibi, No. 68 Brinton Street, Langa.
  2. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.127.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Interview with Mr Victor Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.
  5. J.K. Moeketsi : Roll 'em morolong; in Umhlaba wethu, p.71

was formed in 1952.<sup>(1)</sup> It was initiated and organised by the educated adult sector of Langa community and sought to inculcate more western standards of civilization in the youth of Langa Township. Young people were always encouraged to attend the meetings and social activities organised by PASA. In these activities men had to be in formal dress and accompanied by well dressed lady partners.<sup>(2)</sup> Mr Victor Nkomo also confirms this when he says, "not every Tom, Dick and Harry would get into the meeting, everyone had to be formal".<sup>(3)</sup> The most interesting activities PASA used to organise in Langa were the midnight shows on New Year's Eve. Everyone had to buy an admission ticket of approximately 50c in order to attend the show and the same tickets were used the following day as permission to attend organised picnics.<sup>(4)</sup> The midnight show would start at eight o'clock, with soloists and choirs performing until midnight. After that bands would take over until four o'clock in the morning. Thereafter busses organised by PASA would come to collect people to picnic spots on New Year's Day.<sup>(5)</sup> A change in the form of these activities took place because of a split which occurred in PASA. The division was mainly on the basis of

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.131.
  2. Interview with Mr S. Zibi, No. 68 Brinton Street, Langa.
  3. Interview with Mr Victor Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid.

the basis of class and age.<sup>(1)</sup> Most of the youngsters and less educated people in Langa felt that PASA did not really cater for them.<sup>(2)</sup> They organised themselves into the Peninsula African Social Club (PASC). A number of musical groups formally opposed to the middle-class oriented musical tradition of the Merry Macs affiliated with PASC. Even though PASC duplicated the activities of PASA to a certain extent, it served the interests of the youth. The kind of music and the form of social activities were not at all formal or 'dignified' as it were. There is little evidence that the division affected inter-personal relations because in other activities people would mix freely. That was also the case in sport.

In spite of the lack of adequate facilities, there were several sporting activities in Langa. Soccer and rugby were the most popular sport. 'Homeboyism' was the main basis for forming sports clubs. People from the same region (eg. Transkei) considered themselves 'homeboys' and formed sports clubs on that basis. This was particularly so in the case of rugby and soccer. This is immediately apparent from the names of sports clubs. For example, among the rugby clubs in Langa there were Transkeian Lions, Zulu Bombers, Basutholand Lads.<sup>(3)</sup> As the numbers in a club increased, there was a

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.131.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid : p. 114.

tendency to split again on a homeboy and urban-rural basis. The growth of rugby clubs in Langa clearly illustrates this point. In Langa the first rugby team was the Busy Bee, whose members were from the King William's Town area.<sup>(1)</sup> As the numbers increased differences between those from the 'town' and the 'country' resulted in a split which led to the formation of a new club called the Harley Queens. Most of the members of this team were from rural areas and stayed in the barracks and zones in Langa.<sup>(2)</sup> But when there were matches in Langa among various teams, the Busy Bee always cheered the Harley Queens and so did the Harley Queens to the Busy Bees. In the case of fights, members from both teams used to rally together. For instance, in one match a fight broke out between a Kensington team and the Harley Queens. The Busy Bees and other spectators from Langa came to help the latter.<sup>(3)</sup> So in this case 'homeboyism' and the fact of being Langa 'boys' combined to propel members of the Busy Bees and spectators to side with the Harley Queens.

Besides the Busy Bees and the Harley Queens, there were a number of other rugby clubs in Langa, for example, the Mother City formed by the Cape born who wanted to assert their

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.115.
  2. Notes written by Wilson, M. in her preparations for the book titled, Langa; a study of social groups in an African township, 1962, p. 267.
  3. Ibid : p. 270.

distinctiveness from the migrants; the Red Lions, the Tembu Club and the Bush Buck, all dominated by people from the Transkei.<sup>(1)</sup> Soccer clubs in Langa during this period were Transkei Lions, Bombers, Basutholand Happy Lads, Zulu Bombers and Langa Blues.

The significance of all these sporting activities lies in the fact that they were a popular pass-time of the African youth and provided a channel for expressing talents. "More and above that, sport is a great leveller; all classes of people come into contact with one another. In this way they get to know one another more intimately. Through sport we get into friendly terms with anybody, thereby our circle of friends is widened", says Father Botto.<sup>(2)</sup> So sport contributed to a considerable degree in the making of the community of Langa. Besides the sphere of sport there were also a number of other clubs like self-help clubs, civic associations and political organisations in Langa. We will examine only a few of these and we will start with self-help clubs which were

(a) Umgalelo Clubs, (b) Zenzele Clubs.

(a) Umgalelo Clubs : These were saving clubs with a maximum number of eight members. Each club had its chairman and secretary whose duty was to record all the money that

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.115.
  2. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 109.

individual members contributed.<sup>(1)</sup> The chairman would preside over meetings and parties of the club, some of which had parties fortnightly.<sup>(2)</sup> The Umgalelo clubs were given names like choirs. For example there were Night Walkers, Happy Lillies and Heavy Bombers. A club would organise parties in rotation for the benefit of each member. Other clubs, friends and patronisers would be invited to the party staged at the house of a particular club member. Umgalelo clubs in Langa Township were found mostly among the poor elements of the community. But that does not mean they were purely an exclusive activity of the poor. The main importance of these clubs lies in the fact that they are a demonstration of working-class self-organisation and reveal their determination not to give in to their conditions but seek to transcend the narrow limits of their economic position.

Zenzele clubs : There was one Women's Zenzele Club in Langa Township. Its motto was "living as we climb". The club imparted its members with useful knowledge about house management and the essentials of home-making, for example, how to serve dinner, flower arrangement and how to give parties.<sup>(3)</sup> The club also offered a health and beauty course. "Lectures on etiquette and public speaking were also

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1. Notes written by M. Wilson in her preparations for the book titled Langa, a study of social groups in an African township, 1962, p. 424.

2. Ibid.

3. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 109.

given"<sup>(1)</sup> Apparently the Zenzele club was a realization of the important role African women could play in the new social circumstances. So they were being prepared for adjustment to a Western way of life.

Civic Associations and political organisations : Here we will consider civic associations and political organisations together because even though the former were not political groups in the strictest sense, in practice they were closely associated with local politics. One of the most organised and well known associations in Langa was the Vigilance Association. It was described by one of my informants as a symbol of opposition to the state controlled Langa Native Advisory Board.<sup>(2)</sup> People elected to the Vigilance Association were usually strong critics of the Advisory Board. The two Associations had existed in Ndabeni, so they were nothing new in Langa. Apart from the Vigilance Association and the Native Advisory Board, there existed in Langa various branches of political organisations like, the African National Congress, the Communist Party, the Cape African Congress and the National Liberation League of South Africa.<sup>(3)</sup> We will only examine the role and significance of these organisations, not their ideological programmes. Available evidence testifies to the existence of a fair

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1. R. Botto : "Some aspects of the leisure occupations of the African population in Cape Town", (MSoc. Thesis UCT, 1954), p. 119.

2. Interview with Mr Victor Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.

3. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A247, UCT Archives.

degree of co-operation among these organisations when dealing with issues which affected the community as a whole. We can mention as an example the conference which was held in 1940, in Langa Township. It included all the above mentioned organisations. They strongly condemned the searching of houses for beer, the authority responsible for making arrests and the searching of passengers getting out of the train at Langa station for liquor by the police.<sup>(1)</sup> The members of the Native Liberation League of South Africa, took it upon themselves the task of writing a letter to Mr D. Molteno, the Native parliamentary representative, informing him about the grievances of African people.<sup>(2)</sup>

But it was the Langa Vigilance Association and the Native Advisory Board that were the most active Associations in the Township. Even though there were differences of political orientation between the two, (the former was more representative of the politicised youth and the latter was led by a fairly conservative 'old guard') they co-operated on certain issues. For instance, in 1941 the two organisations co-operated to solve problems relating to housing in Langa Township.<sup>(3)</sup> Again in 1943, the Vigilance Association and the Advisory Board unanimously rejected any future performances of

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1. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A247, UCT Archives.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.



Fingo celebrations in Langa.<sup>(1)</sup> The Vigilance Association also went to the extent of organising protest meetings in Langa. One of the protest meetings organised by the Vigilance Association was in 1942. It was organised on behalf of Daniel Mahloane who was searched by the police for liquor even when there were no "reasonable grounds for suspecting such a person of being involved in some unlawful action".<sup>(2)</sup> The meeting also condemned the rough and bullying treatment meted out, the bad and obscene language used by responsible officials at Langa police station to people arrested and detained there.<sup>(3)</sup> The Association wrote a letter which contained all these grievances and sent it to the deputy commissioner of police. Again in 1944, a public meeting was scheduled to take place in Langa Market Hall. The Vigilance Association was the driving force behind this action. The residents of both north and main barracks wanted to protest against the action of the Manager of the Native Administration who arrested them for picking up dry wood and to make fires and cook in the barracks instead of buying food in the communal kitchen run by the municipality.<sup>(4)</sup> Unfortunately the meeting was banned before it could take place and the police began to raid people in the barracks. It was police repression which also led to the ultimate dissolution of the Vigilance Association just before

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1. Molteno Papers : BC 579, A24.235, UCT Archives.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid : BC 579, A24.590, UCT Archives.

1960.<sup>(1)</sup> The importance of all these clubs, societies and political groups we have discussed in this chapter is that, joining them was one way of integrating oneself into the township community. They contributed in a very remarkable way towards knitting together the people of Langa. As aspects of culture of the people of Langa, they leave us with many things to question. In a predominantly working-class community like the one at Langa, we cannot avoid asking questions about the relationship between class and culture as well as that between culture and mode of production. In the explanation of aspects of culture in Langa Township in this chapter, one may wonder whether there were any indications of a distinctive working-class culture separate from that of the dominant class. Was there any indication of values which distinguished the ideology and culture of a working-class community from the ideology and culture of the dominant classes? Of course, the scope of the research is limited to be able to address adequately all these questions. But after we have dealt with religious aspects of the life of this community we will be able to attend to these questions even though we may not come with definite solution.

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5. Interview with Mr Victor NKomo, Makana Square, Langa.



Some of the crowd in a celebration in honour of Ntsikana, the 'Bantu' Saint. This celebration was held in Langa Township.



Some of the Africans in Langa at the annual celebration in honour of Moshesh.

(Photographed by "The Cape Times")

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF MISSION CHURCHES TO THE CULTURAL LIFE OF LANGA TOWNSHIP.

Karl Marx in his 'Theory of Alienation', describes religion as "the sigh of an oppressed creature; the soul of a heartless World; the spirit of a spiritless condition".<sup>(1)</sup> He goes on to say, "it offers us meaning for a mode of life which without this illusion would be experienced directly for what it is: unredeemed meaninglessness".<sup>(2)</sup> It is clear in this Marxist idea that religion in spite of the illusory essence of its fundamental claims, does open a breathing space for oppressed creatures. In this chapter, we will demonstrate and elaborate this notion by examining the contribution of mission churches in Langa in building the cultural life of a community. When we speak about mission churches we refer specifically to those churches that owe "their origin directly to missionaries from Europe or America or from white congregations in South Africa".<sup>(3)</sup> We can mention as examples, the Methodist Church of South Africa and the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican Church). These churches were composed of many classes of people but were dominated by the educated middle-class of Langa. Religiously and ideologically, they were controlled by the ruling classes. As part of the broader Christian church, the

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1. Istvan Meszaros : Marx's Theory of Alienation, 1972, p.93.

2. Ibid.

3. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; the study of social groups in an African Township, p. 93.

mission churches helped in building "a livable World"<sup>(1)</sup> for the people of Langa. Whilst acting as channels of assimilation into a new culture dominated by a white ruling-class, they were at the same time a sphere of self-expression, relaxation and pleasure. This will become clear as we examine their contribution in the sphere of education, church clubs and music, as well as their general social work.

Education : As early as 1925 when the churches first planned to move to Langa Township, the question of educational facilities was their main concern. Hence a meeting took place between representatives of various churches who had applied for sites in Langa, and the Native Township Committee.<sup>(2)</sup> Various churches voiced their preparedness to co-operate in the matter of native education in the new Township. The meeting agreed to the erection of two lower primary schools; one to be under the control of the Anglican Church and the other under the joint control of various denominations. There was also going to be one higher primary school, representative of all the denominations. Langa was to have two inter-denominational schools controlled by committees on which the missionaries and the parents would be represented, the superintendant in each case being the chairman and inspector of the Circuit.<sup>(3)</sup> This shows that the mission

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1. E.D. Genovese : Roll, Jordan Roll; the World the slaves made, 1974, p.(xvi).
  1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/1, p.108, (Cape Archives)
  3. Ibid : 1926, p.1.

churches were from the beginning of the settlement in Langa associated with the education of Africans. Even after 1938 the education of Africans was still a traditional role of the mission churches.

The Native Township Committee decided to allow the Anglicans to run a separate school in Langa on the lines of their establishment in Ndabeni. This caused tensions between Anglicans and Methodists who also wanted a school in Langa. In their application for a site the Methodists stated the following; (i) Methodists were the largest denomination and possessed double the numbers of any other native church, (ii) other denominations supported the idea of a Methodist school in Langa and were prepared to send their children to the Wesleyan School if it was built.<sup>(1)</sup> The first application did not succeed as the site which was applied for was very close to the Anglican Church. Their second application in which a new site was proposed succeeded and they had full support of the Secretary of the Minister's Fraternal. This was a body in which Ministers of various denominations were represented. The building of a Wesleyan School was found necessary in order to prevent the establishment of a number of rival churches and schools.<sup>(2)</sup>

During this period a remarkable contribution of the mission

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1. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols. 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/1, p.109, (Cape Archives)

2. Ibid.

churches was the role they played in the establishment of a high school in Langa. For about ten years, that is, from 1927 to 1937, Langa Township was without a high school. Most children in the Township, whose parents could not afford to send them to schools like Healdtown and Lovedale in the Eastern Cape, were unable to get a secondary education. The only high school in which Africans were accepted in Cape Town, was the Salt River School. But in 1933, Africans were prohibited by the Cape Provincial government.<sup>(1)</sup> There were reasons for this action by the Cape government. The first one had to do with the government's philosophy of anti-urbanism. According to this philosophy, Africans were temporary sojourners in the city. This status had to be maintained at all costs. That is why the Cape government decided to limit the schooling of Africans. It was one way of forcing them to return to the reserves, by making the city less attractive to them. More and above that, South Africa's changing material base had not yet reached a stage in which "mass schooling"<sup>(2)</sup> was a crucial factor in the functioning of the economy.

Towards the end of 1936, the churches decided to confront the issue of establishing secondary educational facilities in Langa Township. They formed an inter-denominational Committee, comprised of Rev. Father Bull, Rev. Father Savage, Rev. A. Wells, Rev. Mvambo, Rev. Olifants,

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1. N. Mohammed : Langa High School: the struggle for existence, 1989, p.53.

2. P. Kallaway (ed.) : Apartheid and education, 1984.

Mr Rogers, Mr Malangabi (a local businessman) and Mr W.G. Mears (Chairman of the Native Advisory Board), to deal with the issue.<sup>(1)</sup> They were authorised by the Cape Education Department to initiate secondary classes in Langa. The inter-denominational Committee was given a period of three years in which to prove to the Cape Education Department that a high school was really needed in Langa.<sup>(2)</sup> With the support of the community, the inter-denominational Committee was able to get qualified teachers for secondary classes. By 1940 the need for secondary education was confirmed in the Township by the increase, to 51, in the number of pupils entering secondary schools.<sup>(3)</sup> There was also a demand for the introduction of a Junior Certificate Course. Even on this issue the mission churches were of help. The first Junior Certificate classes that were started in Langa in 1941, used vestries of churches like Presbyterian Church of South Africa and African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), as additional classrooms. That time no school buildings had been erected to accommodate all classes. During the same year, the inter-denominational Committee wanted to hand over the control of the school (Langa High) to the Cape Education Department because of the possibility of the reduced cost of attending classes. The Cape Education Department was prepared to take over only if the transfer

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1. N. Mohammed : Langa High School: the struggle for existence, 1989, p.54.
  2. Cape Times, 19/10/1968 & The Argus, 24/04/1967.
  3. N. Mohammed : Langa High School: the struggle for existence, 1989, p.56.



of the school was devoid of financial commitment and the inter-denominational Committee was going to cease to function. With a grant of 4650 pounds made by the Minister of Native Affairs, a secondary school building was eventually erected in Langa in 1943. All fell under the control of the Cape Education Department.<sup>(1)</sup>

After tracing the origins of schooling in Langa Township, it is important to examine the kind of education offered by the school. The education of the mission schools, had strong religious and moral underpinnings. This stems from the churches' conception of education which is clearly outlined in the Minutes of the Native Township Committee, 1925. The provision of education for children was seen by the churches as "an essential service and one which would make for discipline, good behaviours and contentment in the ownship".<sup>(2)</sup> The interview with Rev. Msengane, who once taught in the Anglican mission school in Langa, confirmed this idea. He emphasises the benefits of mission school education as it produced a 'cultured' people, as compared with the education of today. The generation of educated people who were produced by mission schools actually led in the development of a Black urban culture in Langa. But mission school education was a means of integrating the youth

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1. N. Mohammed : Langa High School: the struggle for existence, 1989, p.56.

2. Minutes of the Native Township Committee, Vols 3/CT, 1/4/10/1/1, p.2.

into the economic system of the conquerors (Europeans). Mission schools, as Bowles and Gintis put it, prepared the youth for participation in the capitalist mode of production.<sup>(1)</sup> Even the subjects taught in mission schools in Langa show that Africans were being prepared for a servile position in a hierarchy of social relations. There was no diversity in their curriculum. Illustrated below is a good example of the curriculum of subjects taught in mission schools, in Langa.<sup>(2)</sup>

English  
Xhosa  
Arithmetic  
History  
Geography  
Religious Education  
Hygiene  
Sewing (for girls)  
Gardening (for boys)  
Singing

Education provided by mission schools not only had a Christian dogma and moral instruction as its base but also attempted to inculcate a work ethic in the life of an African. In broad terms mission education was an ideological basis of a rising capitalist society in South Africa after 1938.

In addition to the contribution made in the field of education the mission schools had clubs in which most people,

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1. S. Bowles & H. Gintis : Schooling in capitalist America, Educational reforms and the contradictions of economic life, 1976, p.131
  2. W.D. Hammod-Tooke : "Six Native Churches"; (MSoc. UCT, 1948), p.37

both young and old, in the community participated.

The clubs that were common in almost every mission church were :

- (i) Women's Christian Association (Umanyano lwabafazi)
- (ii) Young Men's Christian Association (Umanyano lwamadodana)

In the Methodist Church these clubs were called 'Guilds' not Associations. They were started in 1938, the time when the church was experiencing a sudden great revival.<sup>(1)</sup> The guilds were initiated by young men and women who had felt the "warming of their hearts by the Holy Spirit".<sup>(2)</sup> At first, church leaders and members of the General Council of the Methodist Church were not happy when all this started. They were anxious that a split in the church might be caused by the formation of the Guilds and it was only with reluctance that they allowed them to form. But fortunately the formation of Guilds proved of help in attracting and involving the youth in church activities. The Guilds that were formed were :

- (i) Women's Guild
- (ii) Young Women's Guild, and
- (iii) Young Men's Guild.

The Women's Guild was helpful in the sense that women, for the first time, were able to make their voices heard on church matters. Each section of the Guild was divided into four groups which were called "Four Cs".<sup>(3)</sup> This stood for

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1. Interview with Rev. Madlala, The resident priest of the Methodist Church of South Africa in Langa

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

"creation, culture, comradeship and Christian Fellowship".<sup>(1)</sup> Each group of Guilders worked according to its label. They invited different speakers to come and address the youth on different topics. The meetings of the Guild were open to everybody. Young people from different churches were invited to attend. The intention, though not explicitly put, was to groom a young generation of future church members and leaders. In the meeting of the Guilds various local church choirs were invited to come and render musical items. As a result the whole activity was both exciting and attractive to young people. In essence, the Young Men's and Young Women's Guilds, were a means of conveying the religious moral teachings of the church to the youth. Hence the notions of good behaviour, self-control on the part of a young man were the core teachings of the Guilds.

Mission schools also contributed remarkably in the field of music. In Langa Township choral music was initiated and developed by mission schools and churches.<sup>(2)</sup> Hence most choirs which existed in Langa in the period ca.1938 to ca.1958 were based in churches. Remarkable developments in choral music took place in 1944. This was when the Cape Inter-denominational Choir was formed in Langa Township. Mrs Cecilia Nkomo was the first person chosen to lead the choir immediately after its formation. A number of choirs

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1. Interview with Rev. Madlala, The resident priest of the Methodist Church of South Africa in Langa
  2. Interview with Mrs C. Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.

soon emerged. These were :

- (i) The Peninsula Choristers
- (ii) The Shining Stars
- (iii) The Shining Singles
- (iv) The Messiah

There were also a number of school choirs which had existed since the beginning of schooling in Langa. The choirs held competitions annually in Langa. There were set 'pieces' which were practised by all choirs for the competitions. The most popular ones were, Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus", "Worthy is the Lord", and "I have set watchman".<sup>(1)</sup> There was only one popular Xhosa song titled, "Menzi wento zonke" meaning "Creator of everything".<sup>(2)</sup> From these songs (which were mostly in English) we can assess the degree to which educated Africans had assimilated a new culture. They laid a foundation to the present tradition of choral music in Langa, which is more middle-class in orientation. There is hardly any correspondence between songs that were sung by the above mentioned choirs in Langa and the social realities as experienced by people in the township during the period of this research. It appears that choral music was romantic escapism from that reality. Hence Mr S. Zibi, one of my informants, said that through music they made themselves happy, kept themselves busy and forgot about other things temporarily.<sup>(3)</sup>

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1. Interview with Mrs C. Nkomo, Makana Square, Langa.

2. Ibid.

3. Interview with Mr S. Zibi, No. 68 Brinton Street, Langa.

Through their general social work, the mission churches contributed to the developing cultural life of Langa. They were responsible for burrial of members of the community; that resulted in greater co-operations between different churches.<sup>(1)</sup> The divide between mission churches and indigenous churches was fairly eroded. In most funerals, members of independent churches were allowed to come in their uniforms and their leaders would sit in front with other leaders of the mission churches.

Linked to the mission churches were burial societies which were formed mostly after 1938.<sup>(2)</sup> In essence these societies were "homeboy welfare organisations founded on the basis of the district or location in Transkei or Ciskei from which the people came".<sup>(3)</sup> As an example we can mention the Willowvale Burial Society. If any member of a particular society died, it was the duty of fellow members to inform the family concerned and collect money to send to the bereaved family. The amount of money collected depended on the number of members of a society and the fees set for all members to contribute. This was not fixed, it varied from society to society.

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1. Interview with Rev Dwaba, a resident priest of the Baptist Church in Langa.
  2. Interview with Mr Magaqa, No. 52 Moshesh Street, Langa.
  3. Notes compiled by Monica Wilson in preparation for the book titled, Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township.

As a result of all the above mentioned activities and services, the mission churches became important social centres for the people of Langa. They attracted great support from many people as they encouraged hard-work, self-discipline, literacy and a generally methodical approach to life. The importance of faith and its indisputability as being above reason was the most pervasive influence of the mission churches. Hence most people who lived in Langa Township in the period of this research (even those who were not church goers), consider themselves Christians and cannot doubt their faith.<sup>(1)</sup>

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1. Interview with Mr G. Madasa, a man of the working-class who stayed in Langa but presently staying in workers' hostels in Gugulethu, does not doubt his faith and Christian background even though he cannot be described as a church-goer.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES TO THE CULTURAL LIFE OF LANGA TOWNSHIP

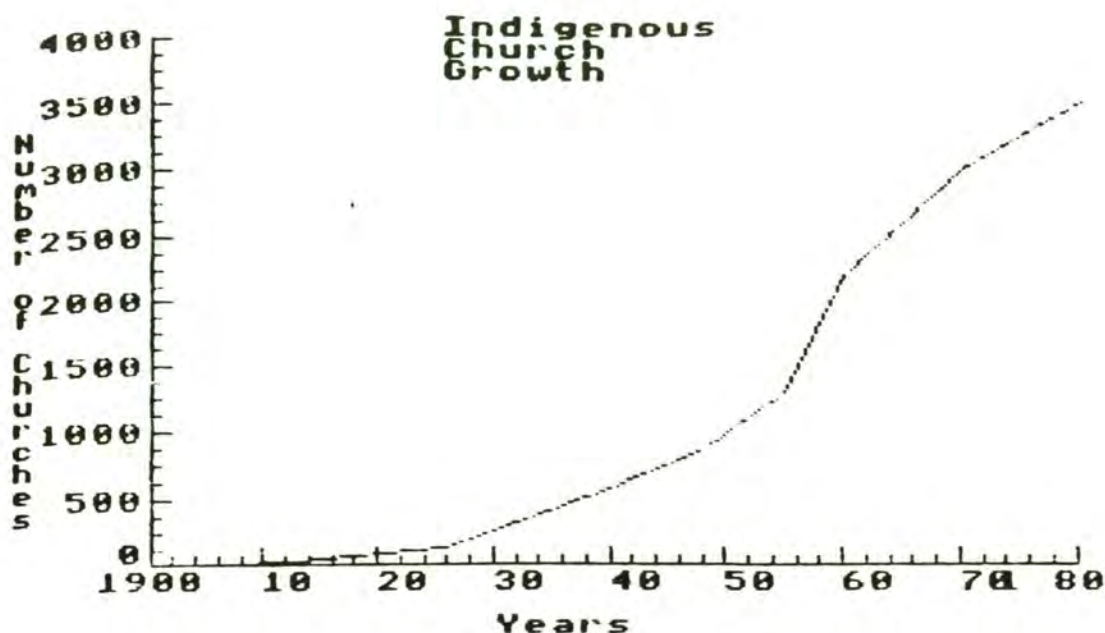
"The term African Independent Churches, connotes a specifically religious version of the wider African struggle for liberation from colonialism, capitalism, racism and cultural chauvinism. This is so irrespective of the form that each one of these churches takes".<sup>(1)</sup> African Independent Churches are classified into two main categories, namely, 'Ethopian' or 'Separatist', on the one hand, and 'Zionist', or 'Spirit' or 'Prophetic', on the other hand.<sup>(2)</sup> These churches emerged in the late 19th century, initially as break-aways from mission churches. These churches represent the quest for spiritual freedom from mission control and support. This underlies their theological roots even today.

In the period after 1938 the number of these churches increased dramatically. The reason for the increase is that with the complete erosion of pre-capitalist social formations and the consolidation of industrial capitalism, a settled urban Black working-class was formed. The increase in the number of Independent Churches which went hand in hand with the increase with the number of the Black working-class

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1. I.J. Mosala : "Independent Churches; a new theology.", in Tribute, 1989, p.18.
  2. J.B. Ngubane : "Theological roots of African Independent Churches and their challenge to Black Theology" in The unquestionable right to be free, p.73.



qualifies the nature and character of their religious activities. The figure below is a graph indicating growth of Independent churches in South Africa.<sup>(1)</sup>



Even though the graph does not indicate the exact types of indigenous churches and their differences in different periods, it does demonstrate the overall trend and process.

In this chapter we will examine the contribution of the Zionist section of Independent Churches to the cultural life of Langa Township. Unlike the 'Separatist' or 'Ethopian' imitation of mission churches, Zionist churches in the period

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1. The graph is taken from Glenda Kruss, p.69. Figures used to compile the graph appear to be based on letters written to the Secretary of Native Affairs requesting recognition of various churches. In all probability they are not very exact as they cannot even indicate when a church ceased to function.

ca.1938 to ca.1958, embodied more creative efforts to establish a new African Christian identity. They did this by Africanising Christianity thus making it relevant to their situation as African people. For instance, ritual performances in Zionist churches tended to approximate to those of traditional diviners.<sup>(1)</sup> This will become clear when we examine their rituals of healing and purification. All these provided old securities in the face of the destruction of traditional society.<sup>(2)</sup> Zionist churches were the new bases for social organisation African people required in order to adapt to the new and changing urban situation. Put in other words, Zionist churches in this period should be seen as a religio-cultural response to the experiences of the Black working-class. "Dispossessed of the land, the Black working-class was incorporated as alienated wage-labourers into a capitalist mode of production, with dominant social relations structured on racial lines".<sup>(3)</sup> Most members of the Zionist churches were illiterate people who were employed in the least paying hard jobs in Cape Town. In the midst of hardships of life, their churches provided a sense of hope and a vision for the future.

Even though a number of Zionist churches emerged in Langa Township in the period ca.1938 to ca.1958, they were not as

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social; groups in an African Township, p.95.
  2. G.C. Oosthuizen : Post-Christianity in Africa, 1968.
  3. G. Kruss : "Religion, class and culture", (M.A. Thesis UCT) p.202.

numerous as those in other Black Townships in the Witwatersrand region. The table below shows comparative figures for the percentage of Black members of indigenous churches<sup>(1)</sup>:

**Provincial distribution of indigenous churches : 1936-1960**

<u>years</u>	<u>S. Africa</u>	<u>Cape</u>	<u>Natal</u>	<u>Tvl</u>	<u>O.F.S</u>
1936	1089479	234373	294042	445339	115725
		11,5	18,9	18,2	20,9
	16,5	3,6	4,4	6,8	1,8
1946	758810	150503	177946	364517	65844
		6,4	10,4	11,7	9,9
	9,7	1,9	2,3	4,7	0,8
1951	1593939	301249	391020	745850	155820
		12,1	21,6	21,4	20,1
	18,6	3,5	4,6	8,7	1,8
1960	2313309	470068	496409	1140579	206073
		15,6	22,6	24,6	19,0
	21,2	4,3	4,5	10,4	1,9

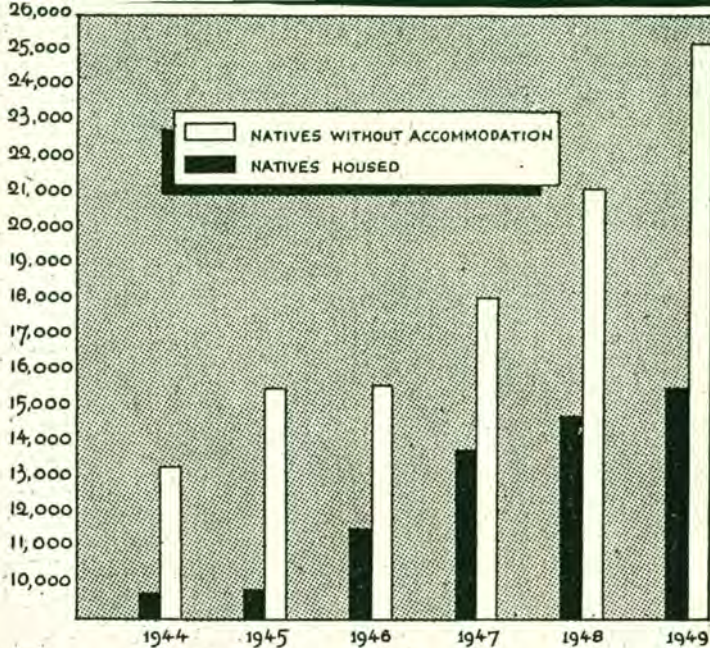
***NB. The first row of cells gives absolute numbers; the second, the proportion in each province; the third, the proportion of the Black population***

Besides the obvious reason of the presence of mines and a flourishing capitalist infrastructure, where the largest number of Black workers were employed, the reason for the vast differences in the number of members of indigenous churches in the Cape and those in the Transvaal can also be explained as follows. Even though Langa Township was predominantly working-class in composition, it was dominated by a rising educated middle-class. This gave the Township a middle-class outlook. Another possible reason put forward by Wilson and Mafeje, is that migration of Africans to Cape Town

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1. G. Kruss : "Religion, class and culture", p. 178.





*Cape Town's losing battle to provide housing for its fast-growing Native population is illustrated in this diagram. With sub-economic building at a standstill, the gap between accommodation available and accommodation wanted is expected to be even greater at the end of this year. The figures above refer only to Native men.*

was selective.<sup>(1)</sup> Most Africans who came to Cape Town had had some schooling in the reserves and had already worked either in the Johannesburg mines.<sup>(2)</sup> Because of their experiences of both mission education and previous exposure to town life, they were more middle-class in orientation. Together with their educated fellows, these migrants gave Langa Township an appearance of a Black middle-class community. Hence Langa is today regarded as more middle-class than all other African townships in Cape Town. The significant implication of these ideas is that they give indications to the fact that there was little room in the township for independent organisations of the illiterate and the poor. This explains why the membership and number of independent churches in Langa Township was small as compared to the Witwatersrand area.

The Zionist or Spirit churches that were formed in Langa Township in this period were :

- (i) Holy Church of Christ
- (ii) African Holy Church of Christ
- (iii) Medium Zionist Church
- (iv) Kenana Zionist Movement
- (v) Spiritual Zionist Church
- (vi) Holy Apostolic Church
- (vii) The Christian Fellowship in Zion
- (viii) The Christian Mission

The common message preached by all these churches was that people should repent of their sins and "go back to the river Jordan".<sup>(3)</sup> From an interview with Mr Tshingana, a leader of Sigxabhayi Church, it appeared that it was this 'back to river Jordan' message which in the period after 1938 became

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa, p.95.

2. Ibid.

3. Interview with Rev Msengane, Langa Township.

the most contentious point between churches of the 'Spirit' or Zionist churches and main-line churches (mission churches).<sup>(1)</sup> The Zionist churches emphasised baptism by total immersion as opposed to baptism by sprinkling done in the mission churches. Besides that there were other differences between the two religious groups which we will pick up as we proceed. At this point we will show when and how the above mentioned churches were formed in Langa Township.

**The Holy Church of Christ :** It was formed in 1948 under Bishop Dyantyi. He broke away from the church of Christ led by Bishop Limba after a dispute over the control of church property. The total following of the Holy Church of Christ in the early 1960s was about 100, in Cape Town, with fifteen members in Langa.<sup>(2)</sup>

**African Holy Church of Christ :** It was formed in 1937 under the leadership of Bishop Xibanye who broke away from Sigxabhayi's church whom they accused of running his church as a business enterprise.<sup>(3)</sup> The new church had an approximate membership of twenty people in Langa Township.

**Medium Zionist Church :** It was formed in 1956 by Bishop Mpongo. It had an approximate membership of twenty people in Langa Township.<sup>(4)</sup>

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1. Interview with Mr L.L. Tshingana, the leader of Sigxabhayi Church in Gugulethu Township.
  2. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.99.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid.

Kenana Zionist Movement : It was formed in 1958 by a group of people who broke away from the Medium Zionist Church. They were led by Sangota. During the same year, another group led by Lalela, an arch-deacon of the Medium Zionist Church, broke away to form the Spiritual Zionist Church. A third split from the same Medium Zionist Church, was led by Matros in 1959. He formed his own Holy Apostolic Church. All these splits were caused by clashes over administrative issues by the leadership itself.(1)

From all the splits which took place in Zionist churches, we can notice an undisclosed ambition to wield power and following by individuals in the churches. The formation of the Christian Fellowship in Zion is one interesting case which deserves more attention. Instrumental in the formation of this church in Langa was Mr Mxi, a migrant worker from Cofimvaba in Transkei. He was initially a member of the Full-Gospel Church of Langa since 1930. He left this church when a clash concerning a spiritual issue occurred. As Mr Mxi puts it, he was at the centre of the clash. On a certain day, he was "possessed by the Spirit"(2) and something was revealed to him by God. When he explained his revelation before the congregation, it was not accepted. It only resulted in tension and conflict between members of the church who

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1. M. Wilson & A. Mafeje : Langa; a study of social groups in an African Township, p.99.
  2. Interview with Mr Mxi, arch-deacon of Christian Fellowship in Zion.



believed Mr Mxi's revelation and the leadership who rejected it. Mr Mxi, disappointed by the unacceptance of God's message decided to leave the church and look for another one where revelations were accepted.<sup>(1)</sup> So he joined the Christian Fellowship in Zion and was instrumental in forming a branch of this church in Langa Township in the 1950s. Like all other Zionist churches they had no church building in Langa. Meetings were held in his house.

Fitting, though uneasily, in the category of 'Spirit' or Zionist churches is the Christian Mission church. The church was started by two fairly educated migrant workers who stayed in the barracks in Langa in the early 1950s. They were Rev A.M. Minyi and Rev Thaiyi. They broke away from the Faith Mission Church in Langa because, as Rev Minyi puts it, they realised their special calling to go out and evangelise.<sup>(2)</sup> Unlike the other Zionist or 'Spirit' churches which were purely self-supporting, the Christian Mission had an overseas sponsor from T.L. Osborne who was part of an organisation which was called World Evangelism.<sup>(3)</sup> Apparently, Minyi and Thaiyi had applied for a sponsor because they wanted to proceed with their work. In its theology the Christian

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1. Interview with Mr Mxi, arch-deacon of Christian Fellowship in Zion, presently staying in Gugulethu.

1. Interview with Rev A.M. Minyi, who is presently staying in Gugulethu.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Mission put more emphasis on "salvation through repentance and healing through faith",<sup>(1)</sup> but almost undermined ritual performances. In spite of that they were similar to other 'Spirit' churches. The actual contribution the above mentioned 'Spirit' or Zionist churches made in the cultural life of Langa, becomes clear when we examine their music, rituals of healing and purification and general social work.

Zionist churches used to compose their own songs. They were usually very short like choruses. Outlined below is one of the favourite songs most 'Spirit' or Zionist churches used to sing.<sup>(2)</sup>

Nam ndiyafun' ukuhamba  
neeNgelosi  
Nam ndiyafun' ukuhamba  
nabaNgcwele

When translated to English the song says :

I want to march along  
with the Angels  
I want to march along  
with the Saints

As we can see from the song outlined above, it appears that songs sung in 'Spirit' or Zionist churches had nothing to say about social conditions of people. Instead they stimulated their imaginative lives and provided a temporary escape from harsh realities and social conditions. The powerful impact of the eschatological imagery of the book of Revelations (last

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1. Interview with Rev Minyi, presently staying in Gugulethu.  
2. Interview with Mr Mxi. He recited for me the words of the song.

book of the bible) is clearly reflected in the song we have outlined above. The song mentions "marching with the Angels", something which the book of Revelations portrays as a reality to happen when Jesus comes back again. For the majority who could not read, the song was their channel to the 'word' of God.

The problem is how to classify the kind of music sung by the Zionist or 'Spirit' churches. It can definitely not be classified as Western or traditional African music. It appears a very eclectic kind of music. Such kind of music according to Raboteau, is born of mutual influence and reflects reciprocal borrowing between traditions.<sup>(1)</sup>

Besides music, Zionist churches performed rituals of healing and purification. These attracted a number of people who swelled the ranks of Zionists in Langa Township. These rituals as Ngubane explains, were usually performed when the church services were held next to a river or a stream.<sup>(2)</sup> Stream water mixed with some traditional medicine was given to all the sick to drink. This used to be followed by the laying-on of hands on the sick by the charismatic prophet-healer or Bishop who would perform miracles under the

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1. A.J. Raboteau : Slave religion; the invisible institution in the Antebellum South, 1978, p.243.
  2. J.B. Ngubane : "Theological roots of African Independent Churches and their challenge to Black Theology" in The unquestionable right to be free, p.87.

***N.B. From oral interviews conducted, we could not get exact indication whether the form of rituals was exactly the same in all Zionist churches.***

invisible guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>(1)</sup> Healing attracted many people from maine-line churches to Zionist type churches. This caused tension between the Zionists and maine-line churches in Langa Township.

In spite of that there was co-operation between churches because the church community of the Zionists was never exclusive in its concern, care and love. They identified closely with the agony of all people in Langa Township irrespective of denominational affiliation. In cases of illness they would visit the sick, in cases of death or funerals the Zionists were there to pray and console, give words of encouragement and consolation. Mr Zondani, one of my informants (also an elder of the Methodist Church in Langa), confirms this and even points out that in nightvigils as well, Zionists were always there to pray for the bereaved.<sup>(2)</sup>

In that way the Zionists contributed in the making of the community of Langa. In essence they represented the attempts of the "poorest of the poor"<sup>(3)</sup> and the illiterate elements of this community to regain some control over the process of cultural change experienced by African people. They were

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1. J.B. Ngubane : "Theological roots of African Independent Churches and their challenge to Black Theology" in The unquestionable right to be free, p.87.
  2. Interview with Mr Zondani, Washington Street, Langa
  3. Institute of Contextual Theology, Speaking for ourselves; members of the African Independent Churches report on their pilot study of the history and theology of their churces, 1985.

definitely not what Sundkler calls "bridges back to heathenism"<sup>(1)</sup> but were, instead, a religious language of African resistance against white domination and cultural chauvinism.

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1. B.S.M. Sundkler : Bantu prophets in South Africa, London, 1961.

## CONCLUSIONS

The culture and religion of the people of Langa in the period ca.1938 to ca.1958, is a very complex phenomenon. Because of the limited scope of this research, we have only managed to expose a few aspects of it in chapters 3, 4 and 5. These chapters demonstrate clearly the diversity of cultural life of Langa Township during this period. They expose patterns of co-operation, conflict and resistance which are posited in chapter 2 as important ways through which the community of Langa built itself. All these chapters have a theoretical base outlined in chapter 1.

The thesis as a whole raises a number of questions, which though specifically relating to the situation in Langa, involve the entire social formation. The first one is about the nature of relationship between culture and religion. Because of problems at the level of conceptualisation of both culture and religion, it is difficult to posit a definite solution. Suffice to say that, culture and religion are inextricably linked with one another and are mutually constitutive. To speak of a people's religion is to speak of their culture, and to speak of their culture is to include their religion. In other words, religion is part of the intellectual products, practices and interconnections of a social formation which are designated by the word 'culture'. So culture and religion in Langa Township, were inextricably

interlinked in giving meaning and coherence in the life of this young urban community. Leaders of the Christian churches were also leaders of secular cultural activities, for example, most church leaders played a prominent role in organising Ntsikana celebrations in Langa. Even the church community which emerged with the Zionists, was not exclusivist or self-isolating. As a result, the dividing line between the secular and the religious was not as strong as one would expect. So the secular and the religious culture of Langa involved maximum participation by all people.

Another question which arises from the thesis concerns the relationship between culture and class. Langa Township for instance, in the period ca.1938 to ca.1958 was a predominantly working-class area. So it becomes interesting to question the class character of the culture of the people of Langa during this period.

Basically the relationship between culture and class can be explained as dialectical, uneven and contradictory. Its form is affected by the relations of domination and the dominant ideology. What this implies is that, a working-class community may not necessarily have a working-class culture. In South Africa for instance, one is tempted to conclude that with the erosion of erstwhile material social relations of African society, the subsequent proletarianisation of Africans and the emergence of a settled urban Black working-

class in the townships, emerged a Black working-class culture. In the case of Langa, it was definitely not so. The Black urban culture which emerged as demonstrated in chapters 3, 4 and 5, was not purely distinct from that of the white ruling-classes. In essence it represented progressive assimilation into the culture of the dominant classes except for the religious culture of the Zionists which was purely working-class in ethos. Numerically a minority in Langa, a middle-class with its assimilationist goals and ideals, strongly shaped popular culture in Langa.

All in all, as demonstrated in this thesis, the culture and religion of the people of Langa is a very immense field which will need further research in future.

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12. Interview with Mr Mxi, arch-deacon of Christian Fellowship in Zion, presently staying in Gugulethu.
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