

PARADING RESPECTABILITY: THE CHRISTMAS BANDS MOVEMENT IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SUBJECTIVITY¹

by

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Christmas Eve 2005 has finally arrived. The St. Joseph's Christmas band gathers at around 10p.m. at their clubhouse, the home of the founder member in Fairways, a middle class neighborhood in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. They make their final preparations for their all-night house visitations to the lower middle class area of Mitchell's Plain where several band members live. They are neatly dressed in a uniform consisting of trousers, belt, shirt and shoes (all white), yellow tie, black blazer with badge, and a black and yellow band tied around the hat which has a dark feather placed dashingly on the right-hand side.² After traveling to Mitchell's Plain by bus, band members disembark a little distance from the home they will be visiting, and gather in marching files – three abreast – on the left-hand side of the road. The marching files are led by three voorlopers (drum majors)³ starting with the 'senior' voorloper – Mr. Cecil Toockley, followed by the 'junior' voorloper – eleven-year-old Cheslyn Noble and the 'tiny tot' voorloper – six-year-old Brighton Esau. Mr. Toockley calls out briskly, "By the left, quick, march!" which sets the band enacting a military-style parade to the member's home. They accompany their parade with, "Fairest Lord Jesus,"⁴ played up-tempo on wind and string instruments. Once they reach the house, they gather in a semicircle at the gate to perform two Christmas carols for the awaiting family and neighbors outside. They receive a huge tafel (a table of foods) of local delicacies. Thereafter a member of the band addresses the family and another member is asked to pray before they line up in formation and march back to the bus waiting to transport them to the next family. They perform the same ritual at several members' houses that evening. The hours pass by and it reaches the most beautiful time of the morning – around 3a.m. to 4a.m. It is incredibly quiet and the sea air is fresh. As the band marches by the sleeping houses lights are turned on as some of the occupants peep through the windows to watch them and cheer excitedly; others wave at them sleepily.

In my research on the Christmas Bands Movement in the Western Cape (November 2003 to March 2006), which this extract from my field notes speaks to, I have often observed how important it is for the bands to display their respectability and discipline.

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² Blazers are usually more colorful but recently some bands have taken to wearing suits.

³ In Afrikaans, the preferred spoken language amongst Christmas band members, *voor* means in front and *loper*, someone who walks, thus the word literally means the one who walks in front.

⁴ Refer to accompanying CD.

In this article I investigate how the bands constitute themselves as respectable members of society through disciplinary routines, uniform dress, and military gestures.⁵

Christmas Bands are ensconced within lower class coloured communities of Cape Town, mostly situated on the Cape Flats, a large flat plain filled with crowded suburbs, to the east and south of Table Mountain and Table Bay. (I use the word 'coloured' here in the South African sense of a local racialized designation for people of mixed descent, although it is a highly problematic term.⁶) Christmas Bands are musical and social organizations that have been established since the 1920s (see Bruinders 2006/7: 109-126).

Issues of race and class have dominated the history of coloured people in the Western Cape because it is a history rooted in a particular context. As elsewhere in the colonial world, the Creole offspring of colonizers, slaves⁷, and indigenous populations signaled racial impurity, moral degeneracy and shame to the European settlers, who harbored notions of fixity with regard to human origin (Brah and Coombes 2000; Papastergiadis 2000). While the formation of the hybrid community of the Western Cape is historically far more complex than black/white racial or sexual encounters, due to the varied origins of the people there, the struggles around coloured identity have often played themselves out in terms of a racial binarism. Coloured people mostly received preferential treatment under the various segregationist and racist governments,⁸ but they were precariously located within the white/black interstices, "less than white...but better than black" (Erasmus 2001: 13). The vulnerability of their social position within the body politic has manifested itself through, among other things, political ambivalence and a sense of marginality: as a political grouping their political ambivalence is evident from a history of vacillation at the polls by some sectors of the coloured community,⁹ and as a class they have maintained a marginal

⁵ Thanks to Christine Lucia, Nishlyn Ramanna and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

⁶ Robert Shell (1997: xxxv) suggests that in 19th century South Africa "race was decisively folded into the social order when the word colored (*sic*) was applied by self-styled whites to the descendants of slaves." Naming is a problematic political exercise – who does the naming is integral to this problem. A highly contentious term for activists and the politically conscious during apartheid, the designation coloured has been given renewed attention since the democratic elections in 1994 and certain sectors have re-identified as such. Afrikaans speakers have more recently adopted the term *bruin mense* (brown people).

⁷ Slaves were brought from Southeast Asia – Indian subcontinent and present-day Indonesia – as well as East Africa – Mozambique and Madagascar (Shell 1997: 41).

⁸ An historical example of the preferential treatment of coloured people was the extension of the franchise to coloured males who had a certain level of education and income or owned property in 1892 (Du Prè 1994: 280). This franchise was quite precarious, however, and continuously eroded during the 20th century until in 1956 when they were struck off the voters' role. Another example is the Coloured Labor Preference Area Policy, which dated back to the 1920s and became official policy of the apartheid government in 1954. This was a discriminatory policy that protected coloured workers and excluded Africans in the Western Cape (Saunders and Southey 2001: 44).

⁹ Evidence of this vacillation include support for the Afrikaner South African Party in the 1908 elections (Lewis 1987: 43); support for the white supremacist National Party in 1915 (Lewis 1987: 83); voting for the National Party, their former oppressors, in 1994 despite their participation in the anti-apartheid struggles in the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s.

status politically, economically, socially and culturally. For the coloured community, the politics of location has been compounded by the fact that the struggle for national liberation has often assumed a racially polarized form. Part of the reason for my study is to challenge the longstanding notion held in both white and black groups in South Africa, that Cape Town's marginalized Creole people have no history or culture (see James, Caliguire and Cullinan 1996 for ethnographic evidence of these enduring perceptions).

In this article I sketch a brief history of the Christmas Bands and investigate the underlying moral ethics and possible organizational precedents. I discuss their musical sound as emblematic of the communities and the communal expressive practices out of which they emerge. I also trace the emergence in South Africa of Christian and political organizations which may have influenced the ethos of the Christmas Bands Movement. I have found Foucault's notion of 'embodied subjectivity' (see Atkins 2005: 206-9) useful to show how the band members constitute their subjectivity collectively *as* a band, which consequently impacts on their individual subjectivity. Even though the notion of subjectivity may seem more concerned with inner thoughts and experiences, while concern with respectability is an outward manifestation of a social ideal, these two themes overlap in the way in which the band members constitute themselves.

The Military Metaphor in the Christmas Bands

The Christmas Bands' Movement, which today consists of about 80 Christian wind and string bands, is a cultural formation peculiar to the Western Cape region.¹⁰ Christmas Bands are formally constituted voluntary organizations with a strong family and community foundation. Like several prototype organizations – the military and Christian organizations exhibiting the military metaphor, such as the Salvation Army, Anglican and Dutch Reformed Christian Lads Brigades – they wear uniforms and parade in their communities over the Christmas and New Year period. Historically, they were all-male organizations. Women are acknowledged to have been the supportive backbone of the movement behind the scenes (HS 01/07/25 and 05/05/16; CS 01/07/19; KM 08/08/4) despite the restrictions on their membership, but when the new South African Constitution (post the first democratic election in 1994) ensured gender equity, women demanded to be included as performance members and can now be full participants.

The earliest documented Christmas Bands are vocal and string musical ensembles referred to as 'Christmas Choirs', that paraded at Christmas Eve in the 1850s, going from door-to-door and collecting alms for the churches (Worden, van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith 1998: 195 from the Cape Argus 26 February 1857). In the 1940s they established annual competitions (which are still held) in which they compete in several categories during February and March for a range of trophies. They display a strong

¹⁰ This section includes a very brief history of the Christmas Bands, for more detailed discussions see Bruinders 2006 and 2006/7.

military influence in both performance arenas: street parades and competitions. Their uniform is playfully reminiscent of military uniforms: jackets are often quite colorful while trousers are of a dull color. Although minus the epaulets and braiding, the strict deportment and military-style marches accompanied by Christian march tunes complement the regimented effect that they want to portray.



Photo 1. The St. Joseph's Christmas Band in black suits on parade in Woodstock © Paul Grendon February 2009

A further example of militarism is when two bands meet each other during the street parades: the band that is not playing at that moment forms a guard of honor and stands to attention with their hats held over their hearts. This kind of etiquette, associated with military parades, is quite prevalent in their activities, and I have argued elsewhere that these symbolic acts are implicated in the enactment of citizenship and an idealization of community (see Bruinders 2006/7). During the performance of their annual rituals Christmas Band members dynamically preserve their cultural practice and simultaneously constitute their subjectivities: uniforms, deportment, and parades embody notions of respectability and discipline that are integral to the way in which they constitute themselves. It is within such collective experiences and discursive formations that they are able to situate their collective history and culture (see Mama 1995: 89). These symbolic acts are not merely imitative, but set down deep cultural attitudes, knowledges, and discourses around notions of respect, discipline,

order, and integrity. Through them the bands – and their communities – consciously challenge notions of a “lack of culture,” proudly displaying instead a community that is deeply engaged in cultural truth making; and music performance is the frame within which their annual ritual celebrations take place.

Musical sound of community

The importance of music as a social connector and marker of identity has been the focus of many ethnomusicological research studies (see Turino 1984, 1993; Pacini-Hernandez 1995; Austerlitz 1997). Turino (2008) argues that the goal underlying indigenous participatory practices is to enhance social bonding, and that various sound features such as rhythmic repetition, certain musical forms, and dense textures function to reach this goal (examples being found in Zimbabwean mbira music and Aymara panpipe music in Peru). Furthermore, he suggests that dense overlapping textures, wide tunings, and loud volume provide a “*cloaking function* that helps inspire musical participation” (2008: 46, italics in original). The focus of attention is therefore not on sound as an end product, but rather on the heightened social interaction integral to the performance activity. Similarly, although Christmas Bands draw upon the repertory and musical practice of Western hymnody and light classical pieces rather than create a new repertory, and although it is performed in a largely presentational way, they constitute large social organizations of musical and related performance where music functions to connect people in very special ways. Band members and their local supporters bond as a community: in this case, by adhering to a particular cultural practice and Christian ethics. At important occasions, such as the annual ritual house visitations and competitions, members of these communities experience a deep sense of engagement and solidarity in which music plays a crucial role. They experience a *communitas* (Turner 1969) in which petty differences disappear and they unite through their common humanity. Through their participation they not only learn what it means to be a member of a Christmas Band, but also ultimately that these practices, with their enduring notions of order, discipline and morality, involve a performance of citizenship through their parading of respectability. Since the notion of citizenship was such an elusive one for the coloured community throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Christmas Bands’ embodiment of respectability and their moral constitution of their collective selves is, I suggest, an enactment of their desire for the recognition of their inalienable right to citizenship. Even though the democratic elections in 1994 have changed the political situation for South Africans, the working class coloured people among whom I did my fieldwork do not necessarily feel that much has changed for them.

Christmas Bands use a variety of wind instruments, but the overall sound is quite unlike the sound of a typical wind band or military band. This is due to a range of factors that may be perceived as unconventional performance practices in comparison with Western art musical standards. Firstly, the bands are quite heterogeneous in their constitution: no band has an identical or similar instrumental format. Each

Christmas band is thus unique in some way, as each one is constituted with whichever wind and string instruments are at hand. Secondly, typically inaccuracies exist with regards to embouchure, intonation, phrasing and pitching. There is a predilection for breathiness on the saxophones, and a wide vibrato that makes tuning of the band virtually impossible. The resulting sound is similar to the “heterogeneous sound ideal” (Wilson 1992) of New Orleans second line brass bands. Charles Keil suggests that it is precisely these “participatory discrepancies” that give music its social power: “The power of music is in its participatory discrepancies ... music to be personally involving and socially valuable must be ‘out of time’ and ‘out of tune’” (1987: 275). These two factors, along with individualistic interpretations, repertoires, and practices within the ensemble, are responsible for the production of a dense sonic texture, which indeed can be seen to epitomize in many ways the sound of Cape Town and the entire Western Cape region.



Photo 2. The St. Joseph's Christmas Band on parade © Paul Grendon February 2009

Another characteristic of this regional sound is the *ghoema*¹¹ rhythm, a syncopated underlying rhythm found in several Western Cape musical practices, played on a two-headed barrel drum with the left hand marking the beat and right hand playing the syncopated rhythm. It can be represented thus¹²:

¹¹ *Ghoema* is a complex term that refers to many different but related entities. It refers to the rhythm noted below, the barrel drum on which it is played, a certain way of being, and the culture to which all of these belong.

¹² Drums are generally not used in the Christmas Bands; the banjos usually maintain the rhythmic drive using a

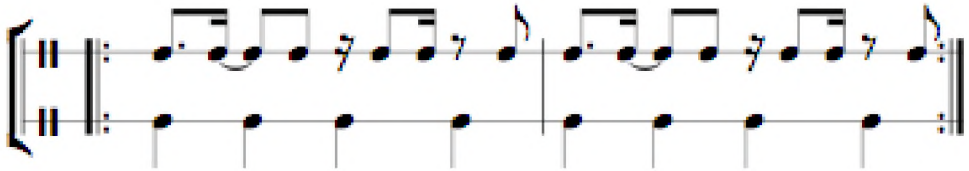


Figure 1. The *ghoema* rhythm can be heard in various genres of the Western Cape.

These are essential sonic ingredients for what I refer to as the *ghoema* musical complex. This complex is represented by three parading ‘disciplines’ in which the Christmas Bands have played an integral role. The other two are the Malay Choirs – choral ensembles formed predominantly by descendents of the slaves from southeast Asia (see Davids 1985; Desai 1985; Du Plessis 1935, 1972) and the *Klopse* – carnival troupes influenced by U.S. blackface minstrelsy (see Cockrell 1987; Jeppe 1990; Erlmann 1991, 1996, 1999; Martin 1999). (Both disciplines have used members of the Christmas Bands to accompany their parades.) The *ghoema* musical complex thus emerged out of the Creole community, for whom inclusion in the nation state has historically been marked by ambivalence. It may be no coincidence that this rhythmic syncopation, with its displaced beat, symbolizes a community that still bears the scars of apartheid dislocation.¹³

I contend that the sound density generated by all three ‘disciplines’ masks individual performers and allows for members at various performance levels to participate in the ensemble, particularly when the bands are performing in street parades and at community events. When the Christmas Band performs in the community, this typical ‘Cape’ sound is not only expected by the community but also allows individual members to perform comfortably without feeling self-conscious about their individual competence. Band members very quickly learn to play confidently within the ensemble. Having to fast track my learning to play the clarinet in order to play with the band in the street parades, I really appreciated this point. This relaxed approach allows for deep embodied social experiences of feeling and playing music together.

Religious and Modal Underpinnings

But what were the precedents for social organizations like the Christmas Bands Movement? On joining St. Joseph’s Christmas band I was struck by the strong religious undertones of the band practices and the meetings. Prayers are offered constantly; no meeting or practice begins or ends without a prayer. On the Sunday street parades at the beginning of the year when the band visits each member’s home, a prayer is said at each house. The musical repertoire is mainly of a religious nature and members greet

variant of this rhythm.

¹³ A representation of this characteristic sound and rhythm is emulated in what is often referred to as the ‘Cape Jazz’ style brought to international attention by Abdullah Ibrahim, through works such as “Mannenberg is where it’s happening” (The Sun, 1974).

each other with a handshake, which is a common way of greeting for churchgoers. Like many South Africans, including Capetonians who are not associated with the bands, I previously assumed that these bands were all about entertainment, about having a jolly time over Christmas and New Year, which could include excessive use of alcohol.¹⁴ While this may not be entirely untrue for some members in some bands, the majority of members do not subscribe to it, especially not as behavior appropriate to the bands' uniforms and their participation in the street parades.

I suggest here that the Christmas bands emerged out of the socio-cultural milieu of the Temperance movement. In particular, the religious emphasis and importance of values such as respectability, discipline and order are common to both organizations. The Temperance movement started in Europe and gained momentum in the United States in the mid- to late-19th century.¹⁵ The International Order of Good Templars reached the colonial city of Cape Town in 1873 and after a slow start, by the 1890s the Good Templars boasted a membership of 10, 000 while the True Templars (the black branch of the Good Templars) had a membership of 12, 000. The problem of drunkenness in the colony was widespread by the 1830s already. This was due to various factors such as farm labourers being paid by the *dop* (tot) system and the fact that wine and brandy were the most available, cheapest and healthiest beverages available to passing ships. Although excessive drinking was recognized as a social problem in the 1830s, by the late 19th century it had almost become endemic. Not only were soldiers, sailors and travellers often inebriated, but alcohol had been the cause of ruin of many working class people. The middle classes recognized that the working classes lacked recreational activities and recreational spaces and thus turned to pubs to fulfil this need. They were also aware that the working classes experienced such harsh living and working conditions that drinking had become a way to forget their dreadful reality. Since many of the farm labourers paid by the *dop* system were coloured people, this excessive drinking had the effect of stereotyping coloured people as drunkards.

The Temperance movement was a response to this, and to the rapid industrialization and urbanization of cities in Europe and the USA throughout the 19th century and the ensuing social transformation that profoundly changed human life. Many voluntary associations and societies emerged, aimed at alleviating some of the worst effects of urbanization on the poor (Pearce 1985: 21). According to Lewis (1987: 14), these voluntary organizations "provided valuable training in administration and leadership" and often, as in the case of the Masonic lodges, "they stressed an ideology of equality and fraternity that had political overtones." Emerging as it did in the Victorian era, the Temperance movement was essentially a reform movement that emphasized certain qualities the middle classes perceived necessary for modern urban life. These were an emphasis on morality, order, frugality and an efficient and productive workforce. The notion of respectability, another middle class value emerging strongly in the Victorian

¹⁴ The media historically portrayed working class coloured people and their expressive practices in this way.

¹⁵ I draw on the work of Jennifer Pearce in this section (Honors Thesis 1985, University of Cape Town).

era, was integral to the Temperance movement.

The success of the movement with the working classes lay in the fact that it provided access to middle class respectability. The stigma of the socially inferior, drunken coloured was no doubt extremely degrading and the movement particularly attracted people with desires for upward social mobility. Since the movement espoused ideas of self-reliance, progress and self-improvement through involvement in its organizational structures, it was ideal for working class people seeking upward social mobility. Thus the movement flourished in areas such as Woodstock, a respectable lower class area, and amongst coloured people. The significance of the Temperance movement reverberated in elite social and political organizations for many decades as summed up by Gavin Lewis:

For 'respectable' Coloureds alcoholism among the Coloured underclasses formed the most visible and humiliating indicator of their community's poverty and degradation and temperance always remained a priority in Coloured political organizations later (1987: 14).

Lewis also suggests that for the coloured elites, these voluntary organizations, as well as "churches, clubs and societies, provided a means of developing and sustaining their values as an elite community, incorporating new members, and overcoming language, religious or other barriers to create an overarching sense of class and community" (ibid.).

In the early 20th century three important coloured political organizations were in existence for which the notions of sobriety and probity were of utmost importance; these were Francis Peregrino's¹⁶ Coloured People's Vigilance Council; John Tobin's¹⁷ Stone Meetings in District Six and the better known African People's Organization (APO)¹⁸ that was successfully led by Dr. Abdurahman for 35 years. All three organizations placed value on educational upliftment, economic self-help and respectability as well as the principle of equal rights for civilized men. The 'civilized status' was achieved through the "adoption of white middle class standards of behaviour" (Lewis 1987: 24). These beliefs were shared by their counterparts in the USA, espoused by leaders such as Booker T. Washington and W.E. du Bois and others of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s (see Floyd 1990). In fact, Peregrino, who lived in the USA during the 1890s and whose ideas were influenced by both African-American leaders, was responsible for dispersing these ideas through several social organizations as well as through the newspaper he established in 1900, *South African Spectator* (Lewis 1987: 17).

¹⁶ Originally from Ghana, Peregrino, was educated in England, came to South Africa in 1900 where he established the *South African Spectator*, a fortnightly newspaper for blacks. He became involved in business ventures and political organizations and played a significant role in shaping the views of the early coloured political organizations that emerged in the Cape at the turn of the previous century (Lewis 1987: 16-18).

¹⁷ An associate of Peregrino, Tobin was a local businessman who was one of the founder members of the APO. Their open-air meetings were held near landmark boulders in District Six.

¹⁸ Although it had 'African' in its name, it was essentially a coloured political organization that did not include other blacks, generally referred to as Africans.

Like the Temperance Movement, the Christmas Bands emphasize a middle class respectability, discipline, and order. Members of the bands are usually from the lower middle and working classes, who are socially and politically conservative, are generally churchgoers, have comparatively decent, stable family lives, and are socially upwardly mobile. They value social formalities such as the formal address to families of band members during the annual parades, the discipline and order necessary for the street parades, as well as the official meeting procedures. Involvement in the bands has also meant that they have accrued certain skills, which they may otherwise not have gained. These organizational skills include chairing meetings, secretarial and treasury skills, public speaking and reportage skills as delegates to the federal structures, as well as writing up and delivering reports by the executive at the annual general meetings. The youth learn these skills passively initially through attendance of the band meetings and then more actively as they are roped into the organizational structures. These skills relate particularly to the ideas of self-reliance, progress and self-improvement espoused by the Templars.

Strategies of Disciplining

Within the Christmas Bands members see discipline as a continuous burning issue and they have devised quite explicit requirements about how discipline works. Firstly, members have to be disciplined to be good musicians. In rehearsals this requires intense focusing as well as practicing between rehearsals. The bandmaster, Wally Witbooi, often reminds them, "Musicians have to be very disciplined; they have to be disciplined when they practice alone and they have to be disciplined at rehearsals, otherwise you gain nothing by it!" This attitude is echoed by the captains who are often heard to pronounce, "*Dissipline mense, dissipline, asseblief!*" ("Discipline people, discipline, please!"). Secondly, marching strictly in file requires discipline and concentration, which is related to militarization and represents a distinctly local imagining and performance of western middle class modernity. During the street parades Mr. Tookley, the most senior *voorloper* who trains the children, often walks alongside the marching file with a switch, which he taps near their feet if they are tiring and not executing the march strictly. Thirdly, members see wearing the band's uniform as a 'privilege,' thus misbehavior on the parades or wearing it outside of the band's activities is seen as a misuse or even an abuse. These measures are not simply about discipline for its own sake, but are geared towards effective participation in the competitions. If the band does not do well at competitions, members attribute it to a discipline problem rather than anything else.

Discipline is thus an overarching strategy by which people constitute themselves: moving in line, orderly appearance and deportment are ways detailed above, the structure of meetings is another. General meetings are particularly well placed for the transmission of the band's ethics. These are very formal meetings to which strict meeting procedures are adhered. The very structure of these meetings and inherent hierarchy necessitate discipline; the chairperson reprimands young and old members

when they speak out of turn in the meetings. Children from as young as two and three years old attend the meetings, sitting on their father's or grandfather's knees where they learn the organizational rituals of the band. Members are required to look neat and wear the band's blazers to meetings, although this is no longer strictly enforced and the younger members dress more casually. Members show each other respect by shaking hands in greeting. Furthermore, the annual ritual exchanges and renewal of friendships require members to be attentive and disciplined. These are usually on a Sunday, customarily a holy day, and members are in their best dress and should be on their best behavior. It is particularly when the band is out in the community that their code of ethics is strictly implemented.

While the founder members of the Christmas Bands Movement were not the architects of these disciplinary practices – similar codes of ethics and “discourses of truths” (Foucault 1980: 93) are evident in many similarly constituted organizations in cosmopolitan societies – they have certainly localized these “discourses of truths” making it their own in order to suit their local situations. One can argue that their adoption of these discursive strategies has allowed them to make sense of their subjective sociopolitical experiences, which have consistently exposed an ambiguity around their inclusion in the nation-state. There also seems to be a reciprocal influence on members' subjectivities as individuals and as collectives: certain strong ‘moral’ personalities influence individual bands and this in turn affects other members. Strong personalities are often elected onto executive structures and drive the ethical agenda of the whole Christmas Bands Movement. Besides the authority invested in the executive members, the Life President, usually the longest serving member and often the founder and ‘father’ of the band, is invested with an historical authority and is deferred to in sensitive or unusual matters arising in their everyday practice.¹⁹

The trustees of the band are usually younger, often school-going members who are elected onto the executive. They take care of the band's assets, not a minor position as it is the bands rather than the members that usually own the instruments. At a house visitation of one of the young trustees, Mr. Cecil Toockley, the ‘senior’ *voorloper*, addressed his family thus: “*Ek dank die ouers dat hulle so getrou vir Heinrich na die aktiwiteite van die band bring. Hy is a wonderlikke voorbeeld vir die jonger kinders in sy getrouheid aan sy band dienste. Sy oupa sou baie trots op hom wees.*” Translation: I thank the parents for regularly bringing Heinrich to the activities of the band. He is a wonderful example to the younger children in his dedication to his band duties. His grandfather would have been very proud of him.

Another example of valuing and trust is when the band visits the ‘tiny tot’ or ‘junior’ *voorloper*'s homes. Here the juniors (or children) lead the bands to their homes rather than the ‘senior’ *voorloper*. This gesture was especially poignant when six-year old Brighton Esau, the youngest *voorloper*, who usually walked third in line behind the

¹⁹ While outside the scope of this article, the special leadership role of the Life President emerged strongly during the deliberations on whether to allow females to become active performance members of the band.

'senior' and 'junior' *voorlopers*, led the band of about 50 members to his home in Athlone. The same happened when the band visited the home of 11-year old Cheslyn Noble. These are significant moments of affirmation for the families and the community, who beam with pride at the neat executions of the march and expert twirling of the mace by these young boys. Their fellow junior band members covet this expertise; they take up the mace and imitate the *voorlopers* whenever possible during the drill practices. The responsibility and sense of self-respect associated with the role of *voorloper* is a strong incentive to aspire to, especially when, with the collapse of the vibrant civic spirit that characterized coloured (and black) communities during the anti-apartheid struggle, lower class youth are left with little to engage in socially and may often be caught up in marginal activities leading to crimes in which even human life may not be cherished. The simple but important gestures of value, discipline, and co-ordination displayed by the bands are therefore highly symbolic, the embodiment of civic pride.

Conclusion

In this ethnographic interpretation of the Christmas Bands, how the bands constitute themselves as collective subjectivities through which the members constitute their individual subjectivity (and vice versa) is closely linked to the way Christmas Bands function as hierarchical organizations. Their executive leadership provides guidance, although it is always open for contestation by the membership. The executive itself is hierarchical in its structure, with the chairperson as the most authoritative member. Organization is affirmed by codes of dress and conduct, the division of the membership into age-group categories, the annual rituals, and the musical repertory: these are some of the 'normalizing practices' (Atkins 2005: 207) typical of large-scale institutions, that the Christmas Bands have established.

The normalizing practices also speak to the aspiration of the Christmas Bands Movement to produce 'disciplined bodies' for visual and competitive display. Their disciplinary practices include a repertory of military gestures, dress, etiquette, musical training, and the maintenance of order on the street parades and during the training sessions. Through these rituals of truth making they construct such normalizing practices not only to produce disciplined bands and selves that are merely "conformist and cooperative subjects," (Atkins 2005: 207); but also, and more particularly, to perform the enactment of self-respecting, unique communities. By employing these strategies, they identify themselves in a particular way as South African citizens, despite the denial of their citizenship that has been a feature of their history and still remains a contested and difficult terrain.

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