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'One Beer, One Goal, One Nation, One Soul': South African
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Past & Present, Number 188, August 2005, pp. 163-194 (Article)

Published by Oxford University Press



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‘ONE BEER, ONE GOAL, ONE NATION, ONE SOUL’: SOUTH AFRICAN BREWRIES, HERITAGE, MASCULINITY AND NATIONALISM 1960–1999*

‘Much of South Africa’s history can be written through its drinking habits and regulations’, claims a recent general history.¹ From the mid nineteenth century, this tale runs, restrictions on African home brewing and the sale of cheap Cape brandy were designed to ensure a smooth flow of labour to the mines, farms and growing cities. In the first decade of the twentieth century, municipalities acquired a monopoly on the brewing and sale of sorghum (millet) beer, from which they derived a large part of the revenues for the administration of urban townships. State beerhalls generated angry opposition. African women resented losing their right to brew and that men wasted their earnings. Men objected to the unpalatable mass-produced brew served without respect. A thriving illicit liquor trade sprang up in backyard shebeens (drinking spots) across the country and continued long after the beerhalls were razed to the ground by anti-apartheid activists in the mid 1980s.²

The place of private commercial liquor producers in South Africa’s industrialization and capitalist development has received

*The order of the South African Breweries’ (SAB) jingle, ‘One nation, one soul, one beer, one goal’, has been reversed in this title. The South African Breweries, now SABMiller, will be referred to as the SAB throughout this article. I wish to thank Luise White for her comments on an earlier version of this article.

¹ Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge, 1999), 158.

² Jonathan Crush and Charles Ambler (eds.), *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa* (Athens, Ohio, 1992), editors’ ‘Introduction’; Paul la Hausse, ‘Drinking in a Cage: The Durban System and the 1929 Riots’, *Africa Perspective*, xx (1982); Paul la Hausse, ‘Drink and Cultural Innovation in Durban: The Origins of the Beerhall in South Africa, 1902–1916’, and Helen Bradford, ‘“We Women Will Show Them”: Beer Protests in the Natal Countryside, 1929’, both in Crush and Ambler (eds.), *Liquor and Labor*. See also fictional accounts: *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s*, comp. and ed. Michael Chapman (Pietermaritzburg, 1980); Ezekiel Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue* (London, 1959); Peter Abrahams, *Tell Freedom* (1954; Boston, 1981); Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History* (1963; Cape Town, 1986); Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (Johannesburg, 1985); *The World of Nat Nakasa*, 2nd edn, comp. and ed. Essop Patel (Johannesburg, 1995).

considerably less attention than the state's brewing ventures.³ Launched in 1895, the SAB was the first industrial share on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, and half a century later it enjoyed a virtual monopoly in 'clear' beer production.⁴ The corporation's history does not readily serve earlier debates on the relationship between capitalism and apartheid.⁵ From the early decades of the twentieth century, the key issue for the brewing industry was less one of labour costs than one of state controls over liquor distribution. Prohibition on the sale of 'European liquor' to Africans restricted the legal beer market and created a parallel illicit liquor trade. While liquor producers pressed for the lifting of the ban, they were unable to secure the liberalization of liquor distribution.⁶ Marketing to Africans remained a state preserve. Expansion for liquor producers was limited. The SAB moved further into the white market by gaining control of a wider range of beverages, which entailed costly competitive battles with the government-supported wine industry and competition from Afrikaner beer producers.⁷ The corporation also diversified beyond its core interest in beer production.⁸ Apartheid appeared to bring considerable cost and little benefit to the SAB. Nevertheless, it was the corporation's ability to

³ Charles van Onselen, 'Randlords and Rotgut, 1886–1903', in his *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914*, 2 vols. (London, 1982), i; Christian Myles Rogerson, 'The Survival of the Informal Sector: The Shebeens of Black Johannesburg', *GeoJournal*, xii, 1 (1986).

⁴ 'Clear' beer was a euphemism for 'European' beer, visibly distinguished from opaque sorghum beer.

⁵ Nicoli Nattrass, 'Controversies about Capitalism and Apartheid in South Africa', *Jl Southern African Studies*, xvii, 4 (Dec. 1991); Nancy Clark, 'The Limits of Industrialisation under Apartheid', in Philip Bonner, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel (eds.), *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935–1962* (Johannesburg, 1993); Merle Lipton, *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910–1986* (Aldershot, 1985); Frederick A. Johnstone, 'White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today', *African Affairs*, lxi (1970); Martin Legassick, 'South Africa: Forced Labour, Industrialisation and Racial Differentiation', in Richard Harris (ed.), *The Political Economy of Africa* (Boston, 1973).

⁶ Anne Mager, 'The First Decade of "European Beer" in Apartheid South Africa: The State, the Brewers and the Drinking Public, 1962–1972', *Jl African Hist.* (Oct. 1999), 380–2.

⁷ Michael Fridjhon and Andy Murray, *Conspiracy of Giants: The South African Liquor Industry* (Johannesburg, 1986); 'Last Round', *Financial Mail*, 16 Nov. 1979, 691.

⁸ This article does not examine the SAB's non-beverage acquisitions, a diversification largely consequent on the restrictions placed on the liquor market.

harness the social consequences of apartheid that provided the key to the success of their brewing operation.

From the early 1960s, the SAB's beer division developed an astute sense of how to harness for their own purposes the deep alienation of black people as colonial subjects living strangled lives in labour compounds and townships. As the number of African clear beer consumers grew, the SAB ignored the embargo on supplying liquor directly to shebeens, which enhanced the liquor trade as a business opportunity and opened avenues denied to black people. The beer division also began targeting African consumers in its marketing. This boldness brought the white commercial beer men into closer touch with African people, facilitating sophisticated play with brand identities in a volatile political climate. Advertising represented clear beer as a signifier for sociability, pleasure and aspiration — social needs denied by apartheid. African consumers buying into this commercial fiction contributed to the enormous growth of the SAB's beer division and helped to propel the corporation to 'blue chip' status by the 1980s.

More was at work, however, than crude manipulation of nationalism by a capitalist company. The ways in which the SAB's beer division thought and talked about consumer identities and markets was, from the 1960s onwards, significantly in advance of dominant Afrikaner discourses of nationalism.⁹ And its brand images moved beyond nationalist self-imagination. This article focuses on how beer advertising created brand identities, which influenced and responded to wider social and political changes.

The SAB's trajectory as a monopoly brewer for the South African market followed its takeover in 1956 of Ohlsson's Breweries in the Cape and Union Breweries in Natal. With the smallest asset base of the three, the Johannesburg-based SAB now owned three major lager brands — Castle, Lion (previously a Union Breweries brand) and Ohlsson's. National beer volumes remained small in the first five years and increased modestly after the lifting of prohibition in 1962; only in the mid 1960s, when the new corporation introduced strategies of scientific

⁹ Merle Lipton, 'The Debate about South Africa: Neo-Marxists and Neo-Liberals', *African Affairs*, lxxvi (1977); Dan O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934–48* (Cambridge, 1983).

management and focused marketing, did they begin to grow significantly. Borrowed from United States initiatives, a key element of the marketing process was the development of brand identities through packaging and media advertising. From the late 1960s, branding evolved into a sophisticated sub-industry of the corporation as the beer advertisers drew on the international maxim that branding required the backing of story, feeling and experience.¹⁰ Advertisers ensured that competing brand personalities were rendered recognizable through their character profiles and 'signatures' or insignia. Common to nearly all the SAB's beer brand identities were the markers of heritage, masculinity and nationalism. These ideological constructs were loosely interlinked within a single brand identity which allowed for malleability in the face of changes in the market, itself an ideological and institutional construct.

The term 'heritage' in its commercial definition is functional. Understood as the reconstitution or invention of a past, heritage 'reinforces the knowledge and expertise of prior success; it builds on nostalgia and relies on a mystique bigger than personality'.¹¹ From a beer marketing point of view, heritage enabled a brand to move beyond the parochial to claim universal values. In providing a past it created reliability, something to hold on to in a rapidly changing consumer world. Heritage suggested permanence and security, the timelessness of a mythical Arcadian fantasy of the past. A beer without a heritage was bricolage, of no lasting value, an 'instant' brew, as kitsch as an engagement ring with an imitation diamond. The importance of heritage within the industry is reflected in tales of the lengths to which brewers went to secure a brand's heritage. SAB insiders like to tell the story of Intercontinental Breweries' (ICB) quest to acquire brand heritage in the 1970s. The narrative begins with the belittling of the Afrikaner entrepreneur of ICB, Louis Luyt, described as a man without heritage. Louis Luyt is nothing but a 'fertilizer salesman' (a reference to his past in the fertilizer business): someone with no knowledge of brewing. His efforts to create a brand for a new brewing venture require the invention

¹⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'A Social History of the Bagel', Presentation at Cox Hall, Emory University, Atlanta, 13 Feb. 2003.

¹¹ Interview, Senior Marketing Manager, B, Kenton-on-Sea, 28 Apr. 2000. This and all subsequently cited interviews were conducted and transcribed by the author.

of a name with a 'ring' of heritage — Kronenbräu — and its linking with a centuries-old date, 1308. To ensure authenticity he is compelled to buy a fourteenth-century brewery in Bavaria. Finally, he sticks a picture of a beer dray, an 'image loaded with apparent heritage', on the label.¹² Beneath the disparaging tone in this tale is a hint of respect for Luyt's understanding of the process of branding. Kronenbräu's association of place with brand signalled a culture and heritage diametrically opposed to the 'Englishness' of SAB symbols. It conveyed that ICB understood the significance of branding through the invention of experience, lifestyle and corporate meaning.¹³ And it announced the Afrikaner capitalist's intention to take on the SAB's beer division.

Commercial constructions of heritage have little in common with historical inquiry. From a scholarly perspective, heritage conceived for, and harnessed to, commercial ends is often understood as a 'contemporary commodity purposefully created to satisfy contemporary consumption'.¹⁴ Within the context of market competition, what constitutes heritage — or masculinity or nationalism — and how a brand takes on a particular configuration are the creation not of a disembodied corporate 'imaginary' but of designers reading social values in order to rework and sell them to the consumer as signs.¹⁵ Advertising then provides a structure through which goods and consumers become interchangeable, so that in place of the product — beer — it encourages the consumption of signs such as success, status or powerful male physicality. Media analysts have observed that in acting as consumers, we consume the signs rather than the product, and in so doing, we consume ourselves.¹⁶ They have

¹² Interview, Senior Marketing Manager, B. Louis Luyt, an Afrikaner entrepreneur who had made his money selling fertilizer to farmers, established Intercontinental Breweries in the 1970s in competition with the SAB (perceived as English capitalists): see Fridjhon and Murray, *Conspiracy of Giants*, 183–4.

¹³ See Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs. Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York, 2000), 21.

¹⁴ Gregory John Ashworth, 'From History to Heritage — from Heritage to Identity: In Search of Concepts and Models', in G. J. Ashworth and P. J. Larkham (eds.), *Building a New Heritage: Tourism, Culture and Identity* (London, 1994), 16.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, 'The Rhetoric of the Image', in his *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, 1977); Gillian Dyer, *Advertising as Communication* (London, 1988), 114–27.

¹⁶ Dyer, *Advertising as Communication*, 123; Robert Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially* (London, 1992), 19, 104; Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London, 1978), 177.

also noted that advertisements are not merely reflections of reality but specific representational practices that have an effect on society.¹⁷

Historians can take these insights further by examining how advertisements and the contexts in which they were produced construct aspirations for public consumption. Exploring which signs were taken up or abandoned yields information about how societies come to see themselves and provides insight into consumption patterns. Examining marketing imperatives helps to highlight the relationship between promotional strategies, representations and consumer responses. Historical method used in this way helps us to find out how value systems are made and negotiated in consumer societies and how markets are imagined as ‘communities’ within and across categories of class, gender and nation.¹⁸ This article seeks to avoid setting up images simply to shoot them down, a tendency in some historical work on advertising.¹⁹

I

‘TAKING BEER OUT OF THE KITCHEN’

The early 1960s were a period of dramatic change at the SAB. For over half a century, it had been a ‘totally production-oriented company with no enthusiasm for modern marketing’. Promotion was crudely associated with sportsmen — ‘a phalanx of reps — ex-rugby and wrestling Springboks, over-the-hill sports stars with cauliflower ears, and other sports types — who traipsed around the pubs buying rounds of drinks on the company. Their main challenge was to stay erect’.²⁰ Marketing took little account of brand difference. ‘Here’s a beer, take it’, rather than, ‘What kind of beer do you want?’ informed sales technique.²¹ The lifting in 1962 of the prohibition against the sale

¹⁷ Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, 1996), 53; Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially*, 104.

¹⁸ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), 6, for a discussion of the style in which communities are imagined.

¹⁹ See, for example, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1994), ch. 4.

²⁰ Interview, Senior Marketing Manager, B.

²¹ Interview, Marketing Executive, A, SAB Beer Division, Sandton, 12 July 2000.

of 'European liquor' to blacks heralded a new era. If beer was to establish itself ahead of other beverages among African consumers, it needed a new image. 'As a matter of principle, we had to take beer out of the kitchen and put it in the living room', said the then marketing manager of the SAB's beer division.

'Respectability, heritage and perceptions' became the new watchwords of the beer division's ascendant marketing department. 'Don't talk to me about people being your main asset', the marketing man said, 'Your main asset is your brands'.²² Stage one in the process of building brands was to achieve consistency in brand characteristics such as colour and taste of the beverage, and uniformity in the shape, size and colour of the bottle. A 'packaging improvement programme' produced revamped labels centred on heritage insignia signalling prestige and power — castle turrets, lions and gold ribbons. Signatures described the beer and stressed its quality and nourishment: 'golden good . . . rich with flavour', 'good health in every glass' and 'Brewmaster approved'.²³

Advertising, the second stage of the SAB's brand-building, was precipitated by the need to fend off competition from local and international beer producers. The 1970s were known as the 'beer wars era', as the SAB fought off ICB's introduction of the high alcohol content American lager Colt 45, and a bid by the British brewer Whitbread to market draught lager in South Africa.²⁴ In developing its competitive strategy, the SAB's beer division followed the lead of the United States, 'the scratch and bite society that has made advertising agencies superbly efficient'.²⁵ American advertisements were already using 'positioning concepts' to turn products into brands and linking these to the values, lifestyles and perceptions of the target market.²⁶ The marketing managing director was sent to Harvard,

²² Interview, Marketing Executive, A. In practice, human resource development did not lag behind. The SAB employed more skilled black workers than most other companies, and implemented 'scientific management' and personnel development programmes.

²³ SAB Archives, Johannesburg: Packaging Improvement Programme, Notes for Presentation, 7 Jan. 1966.

²⁴ Anton Rupert, doyen of Afrikaner capital, had bought Intercontinental Breweries in an attempt to bail out fellow Afrikaner Louis Luyt: see Fridjhon and Murray, *Conspiracy of Giants*, 183–4.

²⁵ Interview, Marketing Executive, A.

²⁶ Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially*, 39.

where he learned how advertising could establish brand identities and generate brand recognition. Three ground rules were laid down at the SAB's beer division in this period, providing the possibility for developing brand personalities: 'talk about the beer itself'; portray sociability as the prime reason for drinking; and focus strongly on men's sporting activity.²⁷ Together with the earlier maxim of 'respectability, brand heritage and perceptions', these rules constituted the blueprint for beer advertising for three decades.

Central to SAB beer advertisements were brand masculinities. In the SAB imaginary, beer was 'a very important part of a man's life', so much so that, 'If you want a fight, tell a man his beer is "piss"'.²⁸ Brand identification was crucial to the meaning of beer for 'a man':

If you go into a bar with two or three friends, you have to know what brand you want. You must be seen calling for it, putting your hand in your pocket and taking out hard-earned money. Then you put it in your mouth, taste it and swallow. In swallowing, the beer causes a change in your personality. If you break that chain with say a hot beer or an oily glass, then God help you.²⁹

SAB marketing set down firm parameters for the imaging of masculinities. 'Manly advertising must address the largely male beer drinkers', whom they understood as physically dominant heterosexual men. The beer division specified the sexual preference of its creative designers. 'We didn't allow any queers on the brewers' account', said the marketing manager. 'Could you imagine two Springbok lock forwards leaving the field and saying, "Let's have a glass of that cheeky red wine?"'³⁰ All brands were defined in terms of a powerful physical masculinity and measured on a continuum of alcohol content and rugged masculinity. At one end were brands with a high alcohol and kilojoule content, like Lion lager, a major SAB brand which sponsored rugby and sought loyalty from sportsmen and their supporters. At the other end were light brands with less alcohol and a lower kilojoule content, aimed at powerful corporate figures keeping 'trim and efficient at work'. Once these associations were imprinted on the market, deviation from this normative scale

²⁷ Interview, Marketing Executive, A.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

was risky. Lion Special, introduced so that Lion lovers might have a lower-alcohol alternative, failed as a brand 'because it was perceived to be weak, and "manly" men were not prepared to be seen drinking weak beer in public'.³¹ Other configurations of image and alcohol content were more successful. In the late 1960s, a strategic brand called Rogue was introduced by the SAB to take advantage of a government reduction on excise. In this case, the pairing of low alcohol content with a strong masculine image successfully added 'symbolic strength to the appearance'.³²

In controlling the spatiality of the advertising imagination, a dominant apartheid mindset shaped possible configurations of masculinities in beer advertisements. Perceived and imposed divisions along racial, cultural, gender and ideological axes limited opportunities for advertisers to configure social relations in innovative ways. By the late 1970s, the consuming public began to tire of the limited repertoire and formulaic renditions of white male outdoor social interaction. Too many advertisements depicting healthy white men standing around holding beer glasses had become tedious. Standard images included muscular men posing as hunters under the caption, 'Down a lion . . . feel satisfied'; in sports clothing, 'I like my sport. I like my beer. Hansa is the answer', and after a rugby game, 'Castle lager. The beer of your life'.³³ One bored consumer parodied a Lion lager commercial which he caricatured as 'a gang of intrepid explorers schlepping through the bush to rub two sticks together, roast some crocodile liver and wash it down with beer to the accompaniment of the most melancholy jingle this side of the Marche Funebre'.³⁴ Implicit in the journalist's criticism was his alienation from the masculinity presented as aspirational in the commercial and his rejection of the emptiness of the masculine identities portrayed. His criticism echoed weaknesses in beer advertising elsewhere in the world.³⁵ But the SAB's response to the charge of 'dour, earnest, humourless — and deadly dull', was defensive. 'If Mr Howard can tell us how

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Data* (the SAB's in-house magazine), Sept. 1972; *Insight* (Institute of Marketing Management, Johannesburg), Nov. 1978, 20.

³⁴ Rafe Howard, 'Beer Advertising: Why So Stale and Flat', *Insight*, Nov. 1978, 20.

³⁵ See Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto, 1999), 148.

he could be funny to the cultures of Afrikaans, English, Hindu, Moslem, Tamil, Coloureds, and nine major African language groups all at the same time and still maintain a central brand image, would he please do so'.³⁶ Notwithstanding his annoyance, the beer division's marketing manager promptly 'banned all *braais*' (outdoor barbecues) in beer adverts.³⁷

Femininities in beer advertisements were no less stereotyped. SAB advertisements matched particular femininities with their unsmiling physical masculinities. Since market expansion to African consumers was restricted by the municipal monopoly on the sale of all liquor, white women became an important target market for the corporation in the late 1960s. Marketing to women meant finding a way round the moralistic cossetting of femininity in Calvinist ideology and apartheid regulations which confined white women to ladies' bars. Advertisements did not show women drinking in the company of men.³⁸ To overcome ideological barriers and introduce the idea that female drinking was acceptable, the SAB produced a series of 'educational' advertisements whose aim was to turn social anxiety about female drinking into desire. Women beer drinkers were portrayed as companionable, intelligent and capable of feminine self-control. This 'look', and the gender relations it signified, were designed to become the object of desire for women and men; their acquisition was through the female consumption of beer.³⁹ The series was made up of three line drawings of attractive, self-assured women in their thirties, facing the camera and sporting a full beer glass. One caption read:

Everything a man wants! Plays it cool. Never at sea, wherever she is. Doesn't chatter. Does communicate. Can say more with one long-lashed glance than any doll since Cleopatra. And she likes beer! Thinks 'two beers' is the friendliest call. And she's right! Beer is traditionally the companionable drink . . . No wonder more and more women are joining the men for a beer or two. What more could a man want!⁴⁰

The campaign caption read, 'Issued in the interests of a better understanding between the sexes by the brewers of Lion beers'.⁴¹

³⁶ Peter Savory, letter to *Insight*, Jan. 1979, 12.

³⁷ Interview, Marketing Executive, A.

³⁸ 'Remember the Beer Campaign', *Data*, Dec. 1969; June 1972.

³⁹ See Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially*, 24, for the 'active agency' of the object of desire.

⁴⁰ *Data*, June 1967.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

These award-winning advertisements added a complementary femininity to established images of heterosexual masculinity and so avoided uncoupling beer and masculinity and disrupting the assumption of universal male bonding through beer. The advertisements affirmed that women's drinking was for male pleasure, took place under male control, and legitimized male drinking. Women drinkers were positioned in spaces that overlapped with those of men — the relaxed outdoor environment of the home, the swimming pool and patio — reinforcing femininity as an adjunct to male sociability. These images helped to dispel fears of uncontrolled female drinking and the stigma of public bars.⁴² This marketing respectability was dropped in the SAB's in-house magazine, where advertisements for recently introduced sixteen-ounce cans used a topless 'cowboy girl' to promote 'man-size', 'long tom' and 'king' cans. With the cans pushed under the feminine figure's belt and a hat pulled down over her eyes, the image paired the female body with the beverage packaging and invited male consumption of the contents of both.⁴³

It was not only the SAB's cautious promotional advertising that drew white women into the beer-drinking community at the height of apartheid. The Castle lager key game, a live quiz show conducted by presenters Adrian Steed and Beatrice Reed on Springbok radio, gripped the imagination of suburban South Africa on Wednesday nights at the height of apartheid. The SAB reported on a show in the Germiston city hall:

So up they roll to share in the Castle Key Game — a thousand honest, sober citizens with babes in arms and granddads bringing up the rear and pretty girls on their boyfriends' arms and even the Mayor and Councillors . . . all arriving to egg the contestants on, to bellow advice, to groan over misfortune, to rejoice over a major killing . . . The crowd hangs breathless on the turn of fate, then screams as the tension mounts. It's self-identification. Call it, if you like, emotional strip-tease.⁴⁴

This racially exclusive emotion-letting in a whites-only city hall both entertained and fixed brand images in the suburban white imagination. Identification with the risk, anxiety and elation of 'Little Mrs Brown Eyes' as she chose the key and won a car secured brand loyalty.⁴⁵ Gender stereotypes in the journalistic

⁴² *Data*, Dec. 1968.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Data*, Sept. 1967.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

discourse reflected the dominant values of the East Rand locality and the language of paternalistic masculinity that pervaded the corporation's representations of women. If these family events served to take beer out of the kitchen, they did little for women's status. However, along with successful efforts at ousting competitors Whitbread SA (Pty) Ltd and Union Free State Mining Corporation's Stag Breweries, these advertising campaigns undoubtedly contributed to the 28 per cent growth recorded for the financial year that ended in March 1970.⁴⁶

II

'A HUGE HERITAGE FOR A LONG DRINK AMONG AFRICANS'

While one aim of the SAB's beer division's marketing was to target white suburban women, another was expansion in apartheid's African townships. Despite the lifting of prohibition, these markets remained worlds apart. The idea of beer brand differentiation for African consumers was scorned in the 1960s. SAB marketers took their cue from the principal purveyors of clear beer in the townships, independent illicit traders outside the municipal beerhall system. Shebeeners were said to hook on to 'the dominant brand in the market because they knew they could turn that brand around'. In directing customers to that brand, they 'created a barrier to entry for other brands'.⁴⁷ As one SAB old-timer put it, township drinkers understood that the shebeener was 'doing customers a favour, taking the risk of purchasing and providing liquor and risking the law. Imagine trying to be individual in that situation — "Now really chaps, I'd prefer Hansa Pilsener!"'⁴⁸ Shebeen drinking was communal and the larger quart bottles were preferred to pints. A drinking session began when 'arrivals would pool money and the shebeener would "load the table"'. In the 1960s, SAB marketers expressed no uncertainty in their construction of the meaning of commercial beer for Africans. The quart bottle was the equivalent of the gourd passed around in a rural homestead, the symbol of 'a huge heritage for a long drink among Africans'.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ SAB Archives: Annual reports, year ending Mar. 1969 to year ending Mar. 1979.

⁴⁷ Interview, Senior Marketing Manager, B.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

This characterization of African consumption assumed an essentially separate African market, cast 'the African' as a singular "traditional", non-individualised and "unknowing" collective being'.⁵⁰ As Timothy Burke has argued, it was a discourse of market to which the idea of difference was central.

By the mid 1970s, the SAB began to look to brand differentiation in 'the African market', driven not so much by a more complex understanding of African consumers but out of concern that a single brand should not dominate too strongly. The SAB's beer division feared that a smart competitor could exploit the vulnerability generated by single brand dominance. The corporation's ideal scenario was for three leading brands to be vying for market share at any one time. To fabricate this ideal competition, and to see if anyone 'could crack the dominant brand', new brands were constantly introduced.⁵¹ The marketing challenge was to identify an appropriate brand with a personality equal to taking on the dominant brand. Racial divisions in the market and anxiety over associating brands with black drinkers presented enormous obstacles. One way round this was to import a lager whose brand identity was masculine but wholly un-South African. Carling Black Label, a Canadian brand, fitted the bill. The brand's American cowboy packaging facilitated promotion to African consumers without the taint of apartheid stereotypes. Its high alcohol content and success in the black American market fitted neatly with the industry's assumption that blacks preferred a strong alcohol-content beer and that trendy young urban blacks looked to North America for cultural images.⁵²

Not all blacks in the cities were trendy or interested in clear beer, however. Urban black communities in South Africa were distinguished by many different styles of self-imaginings and consumer practices. In the townships of Port Elizabeth and East London in the Eastern Cape, sherry was the favourite tipple after sorghum beer, a set of preferences that the SAB

⁵⁰ Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, NC, and London, 1996), 129, 101.

⁵¹ Interview, Senior Marketing Manager, B.

⁵² See *Shebeens Take a Bow! A Celebration of South Africa's Shebeen Lifestyle*, comp. and ed. Jim Bailey and Adam Seftel (Johannesburg, 1994).

sought to remedy in the early 1980s.⁵³ The corporation sent a graduate of psychology and management to promote a culture of clear beer in this market. Initially, his efforts to introduce Lion lager, a brand associated with sponsorship of white rugby, met with little success. 'There were too many social issues in the way', he said.⁵⁴ In order to remove the obstacles, the regional marketing manager sought to create a way in which people might identify Lion lager with caring for the community. Responding to local anger over the denial of free books to black (but not white) schoolchildren, the SAB man devised a scheme for the brand to subsidize books. Two cents for every bottle of Lion lager sold in the townships went towards the purchase of school books for selected schools. The government backed the initiative and agreed to contribute a 0.5 per cent share, their support stemming from the long-established practice of using black liquor revenues for township services.⁵⁵ The 'Books from Beer' fund took off, hundreds of books were bought and school buildings constructed. Clear beer sales soared, rising to 50 per cent of market share in the region within three years. The Port Elizabeth townships became Lion lager territory. 'Books from Beer' associated the brand with goodwill, enabled Lion lager to deliver 'values other than liquor' and earned the brand a following.⁵⁶ By 1983, 79 per cent of male drinkers in New Brighton drank lager beer while sherry drinkers were reduced to a mere 27 per cent.⁵⁷

Zimbabwean independence in the early 1980s sparked anticipation of political change in South Africa. The SAB seized the opportunity to experiment with images of post-apartheid, multi-racial social scenarios that ran ahead of the drinking public. Despite some anxiety over losing the white market, the corporation

⁵³ Sorghum beer production remained a state monopoly, responsible for 46.7 per cent of market share and non-taxable earnings of R70 million compared with R13 million earnings from clear beer in 1984: see Fridjhon and Murray, *Conspiracy of Giants*, 5, 195.

⁵⁴ Interview, Marketing Manager, Eastern Cape, C, Knysna, 29 Apr. 2000.

⁵⁵ See Mager, 'First Decade of "European Beer" in Apartheid South Africa'; la Hausse, 'Drink and Cultural Innovation in Durban', 98–105.

⁵⁶ Interviews, Marketing Manager, Eastern Cape, C; Senior Marketing Manager, B.

⁵⁷ S. M. Gatley and J. E. Bayley, 'A Report on a Research Project on Patterns of Use and Attitudes towards the Use and Misuse of Alcohol, Dagga, Mandrax, and Inhalants in the Black Community of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth' (unpubd report), Vista University and South African National Council on Alcohol Abuse (SANCA), Port Elizabeth, Nov. 1987, 25.

followed North American brewers who had demonstrated the power of masculinity and aspiration over skin colour in liquor advertisements. The beer division's history of sponsorship provided the vantage point from which to construct a masculine heritage common to both black and white men. As a non-verbal means of communication, sports advertisements helped to circumvent potential communication difficulties produced by cultural and class divisions. 'Wordless communication', Nick Green and Reg Lascaris point out in their analysis of the changing character of the South African advertising landscape, was 'becoming more and more important in our society as we become relatively less sophisticated, less experienced, less lettered'.⁵⁸

Sports imaging presented other potential difficulties, however. One of these was the intense politicization of South African sport in the international arena and, to a lesser extent, inside the country. By the end of the 1970s, the anti-apartheid movement in Britain, New Zealand and Australia was engaged in a pitched battle to cast racist South Africa out of international sporting competition and trade.⁵⁹ Within the country, however, restrictive media regulations spared South Africans the full weight of external opposition to racism. Segregated sport remained the principal form of social activity for most young whites and an increasing number of black people. Black sporting codes from boxing to soccer had developed since the late 1960s partly through SAB sponsorship, creating new opportunities for beer advertising. The introduction of state-controlled television in the 1970s further shielded South African sport from hostile imaging and opened vistas for local advertisers. SAB television commercials within and across the racial divide followed the masculinity, sociability and aspirational rules: 'Beer advertising is only an adjunct to male social interaction and social enjoyment. If this is depicted well — credibly, aspirationally — that's what you are getting in the bottle'.⁶⁰ Beer volumes rose

⁵⁸ Nick Green and Reg Lascaris, *Communication in the Third World: Seizing Advertising Opportunities in the 1990s* (Cape Town, 1990), 65.

⁵⁹ Douglas Booth, *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa* (London, 1998); John Nauright and David Black, "'Hitting Them Where It Hurts": Springbok-All Black Rugby, Masculine National Identity and Counter-Hegemonic Struggle, 1959-1992', in John Nauright and Timothy J. L. Chandler (eds.), *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity* (London, 1996).

⁶⁰ Interview, Senior Marketing Manager, B.

dramatically following the advent of television, despite the turmoil in sport. The year 1980/1 was lauded as the most successful in the SAB's history, with beer volumes up by 40 per cent and Africans accounting for 70 per cent of beer sales.⁶¹ A 1985 survey found that 89 per cent of African men and 64 per cent of African women liquor consumers drank clear beer compared with 29 per cent and 25 per cent respectively in 1976, two years before television advertising.⁶² Economic analysts cast SAB advertising as a model of communication across market divisions. 'By using the unspoken language of sport, Castle and Lion, the country's top beer brands build up favourable associations without exhortation and without explanation', they eulogized.⁶³ Not everyone was happy, however. The anti-liquor lobby deplored the general increase in expenditure on liquor advertising.⁶⁴

Like sport, pub sociability was a dominant convention for the imaging of beer brands. Again, the SAB had to run the gauntlet of apartheid media regulations and racially segregated social practices. Curiously, the SAB used Charles Glass, colonial brewmaster, as the icon around which to construct multiracial pub sociability as a celebration of racial sameness. The myth of Charles Glass, the master brewer and entrepreneur who started Castle Brewery on the Rand in the 1880s, depicts Glass as a lovable beer baron, pioneer of brewing and sociability. Castle lager is cast as the beer with the longest and proudest heritage in South Africa. Glass is represented as a genius, a master of the craft of brewing, a man with deep knowledge and commitment to the country and its people. He is almost God-like. The myth of Charles Glass began to take shape in television commercials in the late 1970s. At this time, Glass was imaged as the quintessential colonial brewer of old Johannesburg entertaining upper-class English settlers, teaching Afrikaners and miners how to drink respectably, and hosting visiting cricket players and the press.

⁶¹ *Financial Mail*, 21 Aug. 1981, 874; SAB Archives: Annual report, year ending Mar. 1981.

⁶² Lee Rocha-Silva, 'Drinking Practices, Drinking-Related Attitudes and Public Impressions of Services for Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in Urban South Africa' (unpubd report), Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1989, table 4.

⁶³ Green and Lascaris, *Communication in the Third World*, 28.

⁶⁴ SANCA reported that liquor advertising expenditure increased from R32.8 million in 1984 to R37.8 million in 1985, an increase of 15.25 per cent: SANCA Information Bulletin, c.1986.

In 1987, soon after print advertisements used ‘mixed settings’, Charles Glass was deployed to render multiracial camaraderie acceptable to whites and aspirational to blacks on television. In these path-breaking television commercials, a Castle lager anthem was introduced to reinforce the familiar icon of Charles Glass and to help viewers to cross into a world of black and white drinking sociability. The anthem signalled an imaginary multiracial, masculine nation centred on a colonial brewing heritage:

When we drink Castle
We fill with admiration
For Charles whose brewing class
Won fame across the nation.
When we drink Castle
We draw our inspiration
From Charles’ brew and
How it grew upon our reputation!

The men raised their glasses ‘To Charles!’ in drinking scenes that were entirely invented, yet ‘legal and almost credible’, like weddings or graduations. These images imbued the slogan ‘Making beer, making friends’ with new, multiracial meaning. ‘This was not apartheid South Africa’, explained a senior marketing man, ‘it was the projection of people into a future’.⁶⁵ The understanding and respect in the imagined encounters remained aspirational rather than achieved. Castle lager sales soared and the brand regained its dominance over the rival Lion lager in the beer market. The SAB celebrated the success of another round of internal competition and profitability.

Responses to this weaving of a capitalist culture into an imaginary national identity varied, ranging from curiosity to annoyance. The US-based editor of the *Christian Science Monitor* phoned to find out if this sort of socializing was indeed happening. Local advertising purists deplored the lack of authenticity — ‘we can’t drink like this in South Africa’, they said.⁶⁶ Apartheid censors refrained from commenting, perhaps because the SAB’s massive turnover yielded handsome excise revenues. Asked to explain this official silence, the SAB marketing manager

⁶⁵ Interview, Marketing Executive, A.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

ventured a guess: 'Deep down they saw the end of apartheid coming, and it eased their burden when they were challenged publicly'.⁶⁷

By the time the African National Congress was unbanned in 1990, one token black in a Castle lager advert had grown into a pub half-filled with black drinkers. From the late 1980s, the Castle lager market was recast as the Charles Glass Society, signified by a colonial icon, a beer brand and multiracial masculine sociability. "My beer will rank with the finest in the world", vows Charles Glass, "Or I will seek alternative employment".⁶⁸ Lisa Glass, the actual brewer, was not present in the advertising narrative. Charles, her husband, was portrayed both as brewer and purveyor of beer on the Rand. In both eliminating the female and obliterating the gender division of labour, the advertising copywriter was freed to construct a male icon and a myth of master brewer. The Charles Glass story, like the wider SAB heritage narrative, is a discourse for men about men. Women were inherently out of place in this progressive forward movement of science, technology and male bonding.

The trope of entrepreneurial success, too, is almost purely fictional. 'Glass's beers grew in fame and stature', the Centenary Centre brochure records, 'taking their identity from the symbol of regal pride and heritage that graced the labels'. However, it is evident that Glass's career was short, dogged by domestic violence and constant bickering with his brewer wife. In 1890, after only 'a couple of years' of successful production, Glass sold the Castle brewery and left for England, returning afterwards to set up in (failed) competition with Castle.⁶⁹ The advertisers' rendition of Glass's physical image and sensuous personality sits uneasily with evidence of an irascible hustler of beer in the mining town.⁷⁰ Also, 'colonial entrepreneur' might be a more appropriate characterization than the slippery trope of 'brewer for the nation'. Glass is unmistakably British. The empire rather than the nation presented him with opportunity: his market was the English miners on the Rand, and when the going got tough he went home to the metropolis. His retreat

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Sowetan*, 10 Dec. 1987.

⁶⁹ Eric Rosenthal, *Tankards and Tradition* (Cape Town, 1961), 109–10.

⁷⁰ Charles Glass is shown demonstrating how beer appeals to man's five senses in *Sowetan*, 15 Oct. 1987, 13.

represents the antithesis of the multiracial socializing of the Charles Glass Society. His presence in the late nineteenth century affirms the history of commercial beer in Africa as supporter of, and supported by, a culture of colonial domination.⁷¹

The marketing success of the Charles Glass icon raises the question of whether African drinkers bought into the myth and blindly raised their glasses, 'To Charles'. African consumers laughed at the idea. One commentator was quick to point out that Africans were accustomed to negotiating 'a heritage imposed on us, a heritage that we have inherited rather than been part of its formation'. African television viewers did not ask 'to what extent we identify with Charles Glass, but whether we like the taste of the beer', he said. Sceptical of the notion that advertising moulded opinion, this observer believed firmly that advertisements stimulated interest in brands.⁷² Ultimately, Charles Glass simply anchored the meaning and personality of the brand through association with generic notions of male bonding. Advertising designers brought together values of 'loyalty, trust and spirit of comradeship' with images of 'socializing in sophisticated style, untainted by officialdom, and paired with something trendy'.⁷³ In the context of the post-apartheid nation waiting to emerge, multiracial sociability was trendy; it conjured up a world beyond apartheid.

By the late 1980s, SAB advertising was responding to increasing social stratification in African society and concomitant changes in buying power. Image-makers sought a deeper understanding of the 'black market', and more 'hooks' were needed to encourage brand switching. Configuring aspiration appropriately was key:

A blue collar white artisan drinks lager for one set of reasons, and a black clerical worker for another. It's an upmarket choice for the township resident. He pays a premium in comparison with sorghum beer and the positioning takes him further from his roots. He becomes a metro swinger. The targets are different and so are the triggers to brand preference.⁷⁴

Some marketing pundits urged the deconstruction of catch-all phrases such as 'black market' and 'the township resident'.

⁷¹ See Crush and Ambler (eds.), *Liquor and Labor*, editors' 'Introduction'.

⁷² Interview, SAB 'Ombudsperson', Johannesburg, 12 July 2000.

⁷³ Interview, Senior Marketing Manager, B.

⁷⁴ Green and Lascaris, *Communication in the Third World*, 81–2.

Reconstituting these consumers as niche markets and 'fragmentary identities' would enable them to be hooked instrumentally into brand images.⁷⁵ Experimentation began with smaller brands. It was made possible by increasing fluidity in both racial and gender orders which allowed for exploration of new forms of subjectivity. The *Sowetan* carried Ohlsson's lager advertisements directed at a 'new generation' drinker.⁷⁶ This fragmentary identity centred on the configuration of alternative forms of masculinity, less securely positioned in the society than sporty, muscular men or sociable pub masculinities. Embracing this new self required a brand switch, a kind of 'coming out'. Under the banner heading, 'How to say goodbye to your old beer', a sophisticated young black man, seated alone at the bar, stares at an old quart bottle, a relic of the shebeen environment. The caption reads, 'Just say that now you've grown up, you simply prefer Ohlsson's distinct but somewhat more subtle flavour'.⁷⁷ A month later, a new Ohlsson's advertisement explained 'How to introduce your old friends to your new beer'. Four men — two white, two black — are seated at the bar. Three are blindfolded. A white man, perhaps the one who has introduced these men to new ways, watches as the blindfolded men guess the brand. 'Beers don't change. People do. As we grow up, we outgrow things. Our taste matures. And we start looking around for a replacement'.⁷⁸ The only man in a collar and tie is black. Somewhat pensive, a little playful, perhaps a trifle cynical and definitely male and multiracial — these are the markers of the new generation.

Two years later, Ohlsson's advertisements identified another marker of the new masculinity for this generation — sensitive, artistic and brooding. Consecutive issues of the *Sowetan* carried full-page portraits of a black university student, a black musician and a white youth conveying the individualism of serious, talented young men who feel alienated from the mainstream. 'They said I wouldn't make university. They said the old beers are best. They were wrong both times', read one legend. 'They say my music is too heavy. They say my beer is too light. They

⁷⁵ Julian Stallabras, *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* (London, 1996), 66.

⁷⁶ For the Anders Ohlsson advertisement, see *Sowetan*, 6 Dec. 1985, 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 Nov. 1986, 20–1 (half-page advertisement across two pages).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 1986, 16–17 (half-page advertisement across two pages).

don't understand either', read another. 'I've got a great understanding with the older generation. They don't drink my beer, and I don't drink theirs'.⁷⁹ In this discourse, the new generation sought to construct heritage by distancing itself from the past. The targeted niche market was more wished for than achieved, however. The consumer community dreamed of by the SAB did not cohere around images of alternative masculinities, and Ohlsson's lager, one of the original brands in the SAB stable, was discontinued by the end of the 1990s.⁸⁰ The marketing of a brand as nonconformist was more successfully taken up by Hansa Pilsener, a brand more readily differentiated from the mainstream lager market. From 1987, Hansa adverts were aimed at more conventional values depicted by the new elite — accountants, medical students, golfers, men in black ties, and lovers of jazz. These men of the new bourgeoisie were cast as discerning, set apart from the lager sheep.⁸¹

In contrast to the local thrust of Hansa Pilsener advertisements, Amstel premium lager, licensed to the SAB since 1964, continued to target a more cosmopolitan niche market through symbols of classical, upper-class European masculinity. The SAB's marketing management issued instructions that this 'expense account' brand was to be associated only with symbols; no images of people were permitted.⁸² In one 1990s campaign, the masculinity of the European 'connoisseur' was featured through handcrafted collectors' items — flintlock pistols, a carriage clock, delft guitar, piano, goblet and fishing rod. The timeless quality of classical craft reinforced the brand's character as mellow, 'slow brewed, extra matured'. Another Amstel heritage series stressing the superior quality of the product centred on images of the natural ingredients of beer and the brewing process — European barley fields, deep burnished copper and bright green, trellised hops. When the designers 'ran dry' on still life and rural landscapes, their bosses were

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1988; 11 Nov. 1988; 18 Nov. 1988.

⁸⁰ See Kobena Mercer, 'Imagine All the People: Constructing Community Culturally', in Andrew Patrizio and Richard Hylton (eds.), *Imagined Communities: Exhibition Catalogue, Pumphouse Gallery, Wandsworth* (London, 1995), 12, for a discussion of how culture shapes the imagining of communities.

⁸¹ Ogilvy and Mather (later, Ogilvy South Africa), Advertising and Marketing Agency, Johannesburg, Amstel History Reel, 2000.

⁸² Interview, Marketing Executive, A.

compelled to permit images of appropriately elitist social behaviour.⁸³ The result was an Amstel television commercial set in the private gambling suite of an exclusive hotel carrying the legend: 'Because Amstel is a premium beer it has often been regarded, unjustly, as a bit snobbish. This of course is entirely untrue when one considers how well it goes down with chips'.⁸⁴ The play on chips reflects the brand's long gambling heritage and association with gaming and horse-racing in the 1970s; it also hints at the SAB's anxiety about competition from casinos in the leisure and consumer markets in the 1990s. As a premium brand, Amstel was positioned to draw the post-apartheid 'travelling elite' who tracked between townships, suburbs, metropolises and casinos.

III

'ONE BEER, ONE GOAL, ONE NATION, ONE SOUL'

The mainstream lager market was given an enormous boost by the formal ending of apartheid in 1994 and the need to forge an all-embracing national identity imagined as a 'deep, horizontal relationship' where race and class were obliterated.⁸⁵ Sporting arenas became places where multiracial nationalism was imaged as spectacle, and Castle lager, as the principal sport sponsor in the country, was in a position to claim this spectacle for its brand identity.⁸⁶ Castle lager's sponsorship of soccer — recast as football as South African sport re-entered the international sporting arena — provided an opportunity for the brand to configure a new popular masculinity. Football stars were predominantly black, their supremely fit and honed bodies offset by non-conformist hairstyles such as dreadlocks or bleached curls, and the team's colours merged with those of the African National Congress. Painted across the faces of football supporters, the national flag submerged signs of race beneath those of nation. Crowds

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Ogilvy and Mather, Amstel History Reel, 2000.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁸⁶ Castle lager introduced the Castle Cup in 1959, a major football and soccer sponsorship: see *'It's a Goal!' Fifty Years of Sweat, Tears, and Drama in Black Soccer*, comp. George Andries Lesitsi Thabe, with M. Mutloatse (Johannesburg, 1983), 101–4.

packed the stadiums, chanting the slogans of a new common identity and pride in the first national football team. ‘From the biggest supporters of soccer in South Africa, to the biggest supporter of soccer’, Castle lager commercials rang out, imaging authentic, exuberant and colourful performances in sports stadiums across the country:

One nation, one soul, one beer, one goal.
Let the nation pull together
Let’s celebrate our soccer today.
The beer of the people is with us,
With us every step of the way.

The advert signs off with an announcement: ‘Castle Lager. Proud sponsor of Bafana Bafana’. National exuberance reaches a climax and bubbles over, like the head of a foaming beer.⁸⁷

While soccer advertisements continued to celebrate the new nation (‘When all the colours and textures of soccer come together — Laduma! Let’s celebrate good times! Come on!’), rugby and cricket advertising was more cautious.⁸⁸ Rugby and cricket were historically white games; in the mid 1990s, selectors had no pool of young black players to draw on for a national team. Nevertheless, President Mandela’s blessing of the players who won the rugby World Cup at Newlands in 1995 symbolically cleansed rugby of its racist past and enabled the Springbok team to be reborn as the *amaboko-boko*⁸⁹ of the post-apartheid nation. Sharing the podium with, among others, the managing director of the South African Breweries, Mandela instilled pride and dignity in the national team. The moment remains deeply tender in the forging of a new South African identity. It also reinforced the power of men in corporations, politics and government to construct sport as a community of men, sponsored, managed and trained by men in the making of masculinist ideals and authority. It affirmed the place of aggressive masculinity in setting standards of ‘beauty and performance’ in

⁸⁷ Ogilvy and Mather, Castle Lager History Reel, 2000. ‘Bafana Bafana’ is the name of the South African national football team. It is a loose translation of the Xhosa *abafana* (the big boys).

⁸⁸ Ogilvy and Mather, Castle Lager Reel 4, 2000. ‘Laduma!’ is a colloquial expression derived from the Xhosa verb *duma* (to make a big noise), implying a shout of triumph (when a football player scores a goal).

⁸⁹ *Amaboko-boko* is a colloquial expression combining a Xhosa plural noun prefix with the Afrikaans *bok* (deer).

the dominant physical culture.⁹⁰ In addition, it provided the SAB with a magnificent photo opportunity used again and again in the corporation's self-imaging.

Multiracialism and nationalism were kept further apart in cricket adverts. During the 1996 Test series against India, only two years after South Africa's first national elections, Castle lager adverts used Indian nationalism as a spur: 'Support your team. We do', accompanied images of Indian supporters scrutinizing the South African game. A year later, parodies of Australian national images — corks hanging on hat brims and references to 'baahmen' — invoked stereotypes of sheep farmers and constructed an 'other' against which commonality among South African viewers might be generated. These adverts achieved a mild form of patriotism in keeping with ruddy-faced players daubed in white sunburn protection and crowds swaying in a 'Mexican wave'. Cricket, the gentleman's game, failed to generate the passion of robust contact games like rugby and soccer. Even the overflowing beer mugs were captioned with restraint: 'It seems there's no containing our national pride'.⁹¹ Fortunately for the SAB, the character of the game did not signal restrained consumption: five-day matches generated great thirsts and kept the pubs full long enough for advertisements to achieve a fusion between the brand and the game. 'Time to steer one down the gully. Just a reminder, keep a good run rate. During the break, snatch a few singles. Time to bring on the great South African All Rounder. Castle lager'. The game's style and extended international matches generated the change needed to inspire creative designers and 'keep the market place alive'.⁹²

If the place of sport in the intensely emotional experience of social change in South Africa generated powerful commercial messages, the formula of pairing beer brands with sport was not tampered with by the mainstream brands. A more radical advertising experiment at this time was the coupling of African dance with Castle milk stout, the most physically masculine beer in the SAB stable. Castle milk stout was marketed predominantly to men from the eastern coastal regions of the country, many of them mineworkers and described by the brand's marketing

⁹⁰ Burstyn, *Rites of Men*, 26, 32.

⁹¹ Ogilvy and Mather, Castle Lager History Reel, 2000.

⁹² Interview, Marketing Executive, A.

manager as 'slightly conservative and blue collar'. The SAB commissioned HerdBuoys, the agency which 'best understood the milk stout user', to produce a television commercial that would satisfy the core market, move volumes and attract younger men to the brand.⁹³ The idea put on the table was that of Dimape Serenyane, HerdBuoys' Strategic Director. They would produce an advertisement 'different from all other beer ads', derived not from sports stadiums or British pub sociability but from African, specifically Nguni, recreational drinking and celebration of masculinity.⁹⁴

The result was a sensuously choreographed version of the *Ndlanu*, a triumphant Zulu war dance. Performed after sunset in a dusty township yard, the backdrop to the dance is a wood and iron township house; there is no hint of the tainted mining compound. Bonding within and between the all-male audience and the muscular performers is palpable. Images of the dance are fused with images of milk stout so that 'the strength and power of the dance is synonymous with the strength and power of the beer'.⁹⁵ Heavy crates of milk stout are passed over the flames and frosty milk stout runs into the sweat of beautiful black bodies. The Castle milk stout man, a familiar icon in the brand's advertisements, is both an individual and 'the essence of a stout drinker who has modernized over time, who hasn't forgotten his cultural traditions, has been successful in an urban environment and continues to prosper'.⁹⁶ This brand personality, 'an element of both worlds — where we come from and where we are going to', embraces the ambiguities present in the target market which in turn echo those of other postcolonial identities.⁹⁷

Conventional brand rules were followed in the making of the Castle milk stout advertisement. The body parts associated with the muscular power of the working class and on which earlier milk stout adverts relied — strong arms, big hands — remain the icons of the milk stout man. In the HerdBuoys commercial, he sports a rugged watch on a bold wrist, wears khaki trousers and works at an outdoor job. He drives a pick-up

⁹³ Alistair Hewitt, SAB Castle Milk Stout Brand Manager, in *The Making of Ndlanu* (Incha Film Productions, 1996).

⁹⁴ Dimape Serenyane, Strategic Director of HerdBuoys, *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Ben Horowitz of Salamander, *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Kingsley Potter, SAB Castle Milk Stout Brand Manager, *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Jackie, Soweto Theatre Choreographer, *ibid.*

truck. These are the icons of the brand personality. The signature is a big, bold masculine glass, and the dark beer with the creamy head are the characteristics of the brand. 'The black and beautiful beer' slogan runs through all the milk stout adverts, transposing 1970s Black Consciousness rhetoric into advertising discourse and sealing the elements of culture, politics and masculinity in African working men's identities.

The Ndlanu Castle milk stout advertisement marks the successful embrace of a concept of heritage that places African culture at its centre. A relatively homogeneous target market provided a unique opportunity for cultural specificity, and it enabled the celebration of previously unrecognized meanings of sociability and drinking practices in SAB brand advertising. If it does not escape the othering of colonial discourse, it moves towards breaking down the binary division between two perceived authentic African beer cultures: one of sorghum beer regulated by 'custom' and another of unregulated shebeen drinking. The HerdBuoy's commercial demonstrates that authenticity and modernity are both present in contemporary recreational dancing and beer drinking: clear beer is a recognizable element of an African culture. It celebrates African culture as a lived 'experiential sense of self', rather than as a matter of style.⁹⁸

Similar in their intense heat, strong physical focus and athletic dance, but dramatically different in the culture and gender which are imaged, are the 1990s television commercials for Redds, a cider aimed at a young, trendy female market. The nightclub scenes are shot through a red filter and speeded up. Fire-eating women perform a red-hot, sex-hot dance, their non-racial flaming lips and overheated bodies cooled by cans of cold, crisp cider — 'so cool, it cools you down from inside out when you absolutely have to be cool'.⁹⁹ Drawing neither on masculinity nor nationalism, this brand claims a forbidden heritage for women, a heritage that brings modernity and complex new lifestyles for city women. It flashes brightly and loudly across the screen, but so swiftly that the image is gone almost before it registers. The brand is new and experimental, and the niche market is largely unknown.

⁹⁸ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, 1993), 102.

⁹⁹ SAB Centenary Centre (now the World of Beer), Redds television commercial, July 2000.

In sum, it was only when South Africa entered a period of 'transitional nationalism' in the mid 1990s that beer brands began to promote multiracial nationalism directly. There was nothing particularly new in the SAB strategy — the corporation was simply extending the masculinity, heritage, nationalism triptych into yet another configuration. Splendid opportunities opened up as the country itself engaged in the production of a new heritage and forged a nationalistic guiding fiction. Colourful crowds and mixed teams created a spectacle through which the rainbow nation might come to see and consume itself. The vast profits of the SAB's leading brand, Castle lager, not only provided 2 per cent of GDP in 1995 but enabled the corporation to be the nation's major sports sponsor, to promote a popular social lubricant, and to 'add value' to spectacular sporting events for millions of television viewers through its commercials.¹⁰⁰

IV

MAKING THE 'AFRICAN MARKET' IN THE 1990s

The success of these multiracial imaginings in beer commercials did not put an end to the idea of a 'dual market' in South Africa. Advertisers continued to work with essentialist notions of African desire and consumer wants. The industry's leading advisers, Green and Lascaris, characterized the growing African elite as inevitably dizzied by an aspirational mix of 'money, envy, greed, ambition, snobbery and covetousness'.¹⁰¹ In this discourse, newcomers to wealth and power were out of control, overcome by their eagerness to 'indulge a taste for extravagant as well as conspicuous consumption'.¹⁰² Africans were naturalized as conspicuous consumers in much the same way as nineteenth-century European discourses of consumption cast women as naturally attracted to luxury.¹⁰³ While this dizzy-headed desire was seen as presenting opportunities for marketing initiative, as in other colonial discourses, fear of the 'other' remained the central element. 'The nouveaux riches are notoriously sensitive

¹⁰⁰ Interview, J.S., Designer of Castle lager advertisements, Johannesburg, 9 July 2000.

¹⁰¹ Green and Lascaris, *Communication in the Third World*, 80.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Mary Louise Roberts, 'Review Essay: Gender, Consumption and Commodity Culture', *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, ciii (1998).

to the least slight or snub', caution Green and Lascaris, who recommend that advertisers look to nationalism as a means of engaging the new big spenders.¹⁰⁴ 'Love of country may initially be expressed as the challenge of building a new South Africa', they suggest. While 'emotions connected with that concept will be strong', they advise 'communicators looking for emotional appeal' to 'seek to harness those feelings'.¹⁰⁵

SAB lager advertisements of the mid 1990s are a clear example of advertising employing the emotional power of nationalism. From the pub to the football stadium to a New York penthouse, Castle lager television commercials infused male bonding with nationalist nostalgia. Beer drinkers became men who took a gulp with a proverbial lump in the throat. Playing to the lifestyle of the new elite, nationalist sentiment was also configured through internationalism. From the real-life contexts of rugby test matches and World Cup football bids to imagined scenarios where pub mates raised funds for a black teammate's air ticket or local engineers built aircraft, South African nationalism was constructed against the idea of other nations. Most popular was the Castle lager advert set on top of a New York penthouse where homesick young South African men roasted sausages on a barbecue and sang the Castle anthem with their hands across their chests. This nationalist imaging of a diasporic situation allowed the reinstatement of the *braai* as a national icon. It simultaneously celebrated the SAB's expansion abroad, lamented the nation's brain drain, and implied its opposite, the irresistible pull of home. In an ironic reversal, the brand signified that the nation's heritage was its people.

Consumer responses to 'love of country' did not reflect the strong emotions anticipated by marketing experts, however. 'Patriotism doesn't work for the black market. You can't build it through powerful images of the nation', said one advertising designer.¹⁰⁶ Market research measures of 'ad recall' indicated that images of athletic, masculine characters, sociability and nostalgia were more powerful than tropes of nation. 'You have to show that Castle means friendship. That's what works. Castle drinkers spend a lot of time getting

¹⁰⁴ Green and Lascaris, *Communication in the Third World*, 151.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Interview, J.S.

their mates into a shebeen and they want to stick with them'.¹⁰⁷ SAB advertisers found that advertisements that 'fit a brand into existing values' were more successful than those which sought to 'influence the leisure market'. In this view, advertisers should not come between brands and consumer values. 'The people who drink these brands are so sure what they want to be, you try to reflect this sentiment'.¹⁰⁸ In highlighting the significance of brands as 'meaningful markers of social relations', this view goes beyond simplistic notions of a dual market and indicates the complexity of social meanings for commerce.¹⁰⁹

Social critics condemn market discourses for reifying consumer values and decry the artificial relationships and invented spaces of liquor adverts. They point to the dangers of commercials which invert the reality of lived encounters.¹¹⁰ They stress that outside the commercial's framing, the bonhomie of liquor adverts gives way to conflicts — heterosexual, racial and class — and places pressure on people to consume for status. Consequent on liquor advertising and consumption, the criticism runs, sports matches become scenes of violence, rowdiness and under-age drinking.¹¹¹ Critics also draw parallels between ravages on the social body and consumerism's devastating impact on the environment. They point to the broken glass, mangled tin, discarded packaging and disintegrating brand symbols like a trail of graffiti thrown up against urban walls. As Julian Stallabras puts it, 'when the material of the brand name falls as trash, its contents must follow'.¹¹² At its most extreme, this discourse

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 12.

¹¹⁰ Marcia Klein, 'Alcohol and Advertising Adds Froth to the Debate', *Business Day*, 30 Apr. 1991; see also Charles D. H. Parry and Anna L. Bennetts, *Alcohol Policy and Public Health in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1998).

¹¹¹ See Chris van der Burgh, 'Some Guidelines for Combating the Advertising/Marketing Strategies of the Alcohol Industry in Black Communities', Paper for Committee Workshop, SANCA, Johannesburg, 1 Oct. 1988, 5; Resolution Taken on Liquor Advertising by the Medical Association of South Africa, 'Minutes of Meeting of the Federal Council of the Medical Association of South Africa', 11–13 May 1977, suppl. to *S. A. Medical J*, 17 Sept. 1977, 22–3; Parliament of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, Administration: House of Delegates, C. N. Moodliar, 18 Apr. 1989, p. 5670; Parry and Bennetts, *Alcohol Policy and Public Health in South Africa*, 143–6.

¹¹² Stallabras, *Gargantua*, 176.

follows form into content and equates the material of consumption with its waste.¹¹³

To counter the effects of the subversion of brand messages, the SAB provides educational material on responsible drinking, advertises the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and funds research into foetal alcohol syndrome. The beer giant also invests in recycling initiatives and conducts campaigns to remove the litter that degrades the South African landscape. Those efforts serve to protect the corporation's image and its product from the disruptive power of waste. The counter-argument points to the failure of this position. The stress on reason neglects to acknowledge the possibility that beer drinkers may be less interested in moderation than in 'a calculating hedonism, a hedonism in which the individual strategically moves into and out of control, enjoying the thrill of the controlled suspension of constraints'.¹¹⁴ It ignores the effects of drink as a 'drug food' and the evidence that commodities themselves, and not only their signs, have a powerful effect on 'the process of seduction and the creation of desire'.¹¹⁵ It is blind to the context of liquor consumption in South Africa, a society ravaged by the effects of migrant labour, racist legislation and, for many, the pressures of living in urban ghettos racked by poverty. Critics note that in the post-apartheid context, while the possibility for self- and social transformation remains distant, excessive drinking provides an escape from disappointment.¹¹⁶ In other words, this argument advances the position that moderation is a weak weapon. It relies too strongly on the power of ideas to change behaviours which may be chemically, socially or ideologically conditioned and which should be prevented.

Criticism has also been levelled at the ideological impact of branding that ignores the corrupting force of status-seeking and consumerism. SA Communist Party official Jeremy Cronin has objected to Castle lager's fictional Charles Glass Society and its

¹¹³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edn (London, 1983), 78.

¹¹⁴ Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 100; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, 1998), 262.

¹¹⁵ Roberts, paraphrasing Jennifer Jones, in 'Gender, Consumption and Commodity Culture', 823.

¹¹⁶ Unemployment in South Africa in 1995 was 29.3 per cent according to the 1995 October household survey: Republic of South Africa, Central Statistics, *Statistics in Brief* (Pretoria, 1997), fig. 10.2.

celebration of consumer values.¹¹⁷ Other critics have derided the transposition of the political discourse of freedom into the language of the market. Such advertising texts 'exploit the aspirational power of the political discourse while defusing its oppositional potential', Eve Bertelsen complains.¹¹⁸ These objections raise the difficulty of the enormous symbolic power of advertising for a transitional society with vast gaps in income, education and standards of living. With the liquor share of advertising-spending around R85 million per year in the early 1990s (most of this on the SAB account), beer advertising was well positioned to influence consumer choices and lifestyles.¹¹⁹

Some advertising designers did explore the possibility of an alternative nationalist sentiment in the 1990s. In one agency, beer advertisements were constructed around the idea of social responsibility and community-building. 'We tried', confessed the creative designer, but 'people don't want it'.¹²⁰ He explained that a lager commercial showing successful men buying land for a playing field had to be withdrawn after it impacted negatively on viewers. The experimental signs, 'responsibility' and 'give back', did not fit well with the established signs of heritage, masculinity and nationalism. The failure of this social responsibility message confirms Jean Baudrillard's observation that advertising works through the 'subversion of all effects of meaning' for which 'we are ready to pay any price, much more than for the "real" quality of our life'.¹²¹

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When prohibition was lifted on the sale of European beer to Africans in 1962, the South African Breweries had little conception of the uses of branding or modern marketing strategy for the invention of tradition. By the end of the decade, the corporation had transformed its product — beer — into a stable of

¹¹⁷ Maureen Isaacson, 'Cronin the Librarian Grapples with History and Transition', *Sunday Independent*, 13 July 1997.

¹¹⁸ Eve Bertelsen, 'Ads and Amnesia: Black Advertising in the New South Africa', in Sarah Nuttal and Carli Coetzee (eds.), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford and Cape Town, 1998), 225.

¹¹⁹ Klein, 'Alcohol and Advertising Adds Froth to the Debate'.

¹²⁰ Interview, J.S.

¹²¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, ed. Jim Fleming, trans. Philip Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski (New York, 1990), 74.

competing brands. Beyond the brand markers conveyed in the taste and colour of the beverage and in the insignia, colour and shape of the packaging, distinctive brand personalities were constructed around the sign values of heritage and masculinity. Heritage provided the story of the brand and established continuity while sporty, outdoor configurations of masculinity added experience and emotion. With the extension of the beer market to white women against the grain of Afrikaner Calvinist ideology, complementary femininities enhanced established masculinities. By the 1980s, advertising campaigns incorporating acculturated black men in the imaging of the monopoly producer's established beer brands were commonplace. Celebration of Castle lager's colonial brewmaster, Charles Glass, served as a bridge to multiracial imaging, preparing the South African market for overcoming racial division. With the formal ending of apartheid, SAB advertising added a new multiracial nationalism to the values of heritage and male bonding, obliterating past divisions and enabling the corporation's brands to reflect the emotional power of the post-apartheid moment. In configuring a new national identity, these advertisements symbolically terminated the SAB's history of straddling a racially segregated market, positioning the corporation alongside a united nation ready to embrace the world. In showing how a powerful firm seized opportunities in a period of volatile politics and unstable markets, this study adds to our understanding of the development of capitalism in South Africa.

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