2

Being a Child of the Mines: Youth Magazines and Comics in the Copperbelt

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Introduction

The Copperbelt has many claims to fame, not least among them the various forms of popular art that developed there over the course of the past century. As it grew in scale, the mining industry threw up a spattering of new urban centres to which large numbers of people from myriad cultural and linguistic backgrounds flocked, thus providing ample fertile ground for new creative endeavours. Perhaps best known among such endeavours is what has become known as 'Congolese Popular Painting': a new approach to figurative painting which gained prominence in the mid-twentieth century and is known for its brightly coloured depictions of the daily lives and struggles of the Congolese people. Yet, there existed another type of popular art which, though it did not achieve quite the same level of international recognition, was no less prevalent on the Copperbelt: comics (*bandes dessinées* in French). Not only were comics of all kinds widely read on the Copperbelt, but Katanga and Zambia have also seen the creation of several widely available and influential youth magazines that published popular comic strips. In September 1964, Katanga's all-powerful mining company, the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* (known as Gécamines after independence), launched *Mwana Shaba Junior*, its very own magazine for the youth. The magazine, which had a peak print run of 41,500 copies in the 1980s, was distributed monthly to the families of every Gécamines employee for free.

Meanwhile, from 1971, Zambian children had access to *Orbit* ('The magazine for young Zambians'), a magazine with an initial print run of over 65,000 copies,[1] which was commissioned by the Zambian Ministry of Education to be circulated in schools across the country. This was followed in 1984 by *Speak Out!* – a bimonthly produced by the Franciscan Mission Press in Ndola with a distribution of 40,000.[2] Not only are these magazines some of the longest-lasting comic magazines on the continent, thus allowing large numbers of children to engage with the medium of comics over an extended period of time, but they also provided local talents with the chance to produce their own. Yet Zambia is not known for its comics at all, while the Katangese Copperbelt continues to be much better known for its popular paintings.

As will be shown in this chapter, comics were a key component of a childhood spent on both sides of the Copperbelt's border. They had played an important role in the imaginative development of the Copperbelt youth even before any of these magazines were published, which, in time, allowed key institutions – in this case, a powerful mining company, the Zambian State and the Catholic Church – to use the medium for their own purposes: as a tool to convey specific messages and values. At the same time, while comics were originally an imported medium to the Copperbelt, and were usually produced to 'educate' or 'steer' their African audience in a certain direction, their target populations were by no means passive consumers. In fact, *Mwana Shaba Junior*, *Orbit* and *Speak Out!* availed the primary space for comics in the region and provided aspiring Copperbelt cartoonists with the opportunity to 're-appropriate' and transform the medium. Crucially, this reappropriation took place against the backdrop of the fast economic, political and social changes that followed the dramatic downturn in copper prices of 1974–75. In this context, comics became an avenue through which to have 'conversations' about these changes. In this way, as will be argued, a medium which had previously been actively deployed to promote a vision for an industrial and 'modern' future became a tool to critique the failures of modernity and the corrosive effects of economic decline.

1 According to the *The Europa World Year*, it was published about nine times a year.

2 Yvonne Malambo Kabombwe, 'A History of the Mission Press in Zambia, 1970–2011', MA Thesis, University of Zambia, 2015, p. 25.

The Comic Cultures of the Zambian and Congolese Copperbelt

At first glance, there appears to be a clear 'comics division' between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. Nancy Rose Hunt argued, based on a meticulous study of magazines and newspapers from colonial Congo, that 'comic imagery flourished in Congo in the 1930s, not only in cities but wherever newspapers travelled'.[3] Similarly, according to Andreas Knigge, Congo was the only African country to have started to develop its own comic culture as early as the 1940s.[4] Independent Congo, for its part, has been associated with an explosion of comic forms, ranging from development comics, to Mobutu's life story, and to ephemeral street comics, and has produced some of the continent's best-known comic artists including the man whom the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) described as 'the Congolese author best known outside his country', Barly Baruti.[5] In contrast, English-speaking Southern Africa, excepting South Africa, has produced few prominent comic artists.[6] Congo's early start in comic-making has been linked to both the popularity of comics in Belgium and their resulting availability in the Belgian Congo,[7] and the fact that they were quickly identified as a useful teaching tool in colonising educational projects. Semi-didactic comics for Congolese audiences proliferated in the post-war period, especially in Catholic (or Catholic-influenced) newspapers

3 Nancy R. Hunt, 'Tintin and the Interruptions of Congolese Comics' in Paul Landau and Deborah S. Griffin (eds), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 90–133, p. 97.

4 Andreas C. Knigge, *Vom Massenblatt ins multimedia Abenteuer* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1996), p. 238.

5 Thomas Hubert, 'Capturing Kinshasa through Comics', BBC, 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11996279 (accessed 19 July 2020).

6 According to comic scholar John A. Lent, as far as the Southern African region is concerned, South Africa and Tanzania 'stand alone in all aspects of comic art'. See John A. Lent, 'Southern Africa: Hardly a Cartoonist's Eden' in John A. Lent (ed.), *Cartooning in Africa* (New York: Hampton Press, 2009), pp. 219–46, p. 223. South Africa has spawned some of the continent's best-known comics, including Zapiro's political cartoons, comic strip *Madam and Eve*, and the underground-style *Bitterkomix*. Tanzania is known for its Swahili comics and cartoons, some early examples of which may have been influenced by Congolese magazines. See Jigal Beez, 'Stupid Hares and Margarine: Early Swahili Comics' in John A. Lent (ed.), *Cartooning in Africa* (New York: Hampton Press, 2009), pp. 137–57.

7 Hunt, 'Tintin', p. 96, p. 111; Christophe Cassiau-Haurie, *Histoire de la BD congolaise* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010), p. 150.

and magazines. Perhaps the most striking example of this didactic brand of comics was *Les aventures de Mbumbulu*, a series created in 1946 for the state-published – though missionary influenced – magazine *Nos Images*. Each Mbumbulu 'story' ended with a moralising sentence, such as 'on reflection, he understood that in order to be able to complete a job successfully, one must be prepared for it',[8] or 'beware of magicians and witch doctors, they make a living at your expense'.[9] Nothing of the kind is known to have existed in colonial Zambia, though this may in part be due to lack of research on the topic.[10] Yet, oral evidence collected on both sides of the border suggested that by the 1960s and 1970s, the inhabitants of the Copperbelt had access to the full range of whatever comics were available in the British and Belgo-French markets at the time, and more besides.

Jacky Mulenda, for example, who worked for *Mwana Shaba Junior* in the 1980s, remembers from his childhood in the 1960s and 1970s that 'everything was there: *Bécassine*, *Spirou* and *Tintin* [comic strips], *Tintin* and *Spirou* magazines as well'.[11] Other comics which informants recalled reading in the same period included *Lucky Luke*, *Ric Hochet*, *Buck Danny*, *La patrouille des Castors*, *The Smurfs*, *Alix*, *Gaston Lagaffe* and *Bob et Bobette*, the latter a French translation of the Flemish series *Suske en Wiske*. In other words, Katangese readers were familiar with the full range of mainstream comics published in Belgium in the middle decades of the twentieth century. As Jacky Mulenda recalled,

> You know when we read *Lucky Luke*, my older brothers always sat down on the ground to read them. Then, we would hear a burst of laughter. It was because of the tomfoolery of the Dalton brothers [characters in Lucky Luke]. You would hear several waves of laughter as the jokes came in the story. They were in stitches.[12]

Similarly, British comics loom large in the memory of Zambian informants who grew up on the Copperbelt prior to the 1990s. Most read *Andy Capp*, a funny strip centred on a wife-beating figure who never works, and

8 *Nos Images*, Issue 30, 15 December 1950.

9 *Nos Images*, Issue 6, 15 December 1948.

10 Several magazines and newspapers published for Africans were circulating on the Zambian Copperbelt in the early 1960s, some produced locally, others imported. It may be that closer examination of this literature would reveal cartoons and comics. See Hortense Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 281–2, p. 340, p. 367.

11 Interview, Jacky Mpungu Mulenda, Lubumbashi, 14 August 2019.

12 Ibid.

Garth, an immensely strong hero who battles various villains across time and space. Both were originally published in the British Newspaper *Daily Mirror*, from 1957 and 1943 respectively, but also appeared in the *Times of Zambia*. Their presence in a national newspaper made them eminently accessible, and several informants remembered having kept a scrapbook. As one recalled, 'I never wanted to miss those … I actually used to cut them out and paste them into an old phone book.'[13] In addition, when prompted about the comics they read as children, informants on the Zambian Copperbelt almost invariably first cited *Dandy* and *Beano*, two children's comics published by the Scottish publisher D.C. Thomson since 1937 and 1938 respectively. Angel Phiri, a comic enthusiast who now works in the televisual field, noted that *Dandy* and *Beano* 'were the go-to magazines for children. If you were bringing anything for the kids, it would have been those.'[14] D.C. Thomson's main rival in the world of British comics, Amalgamated Press (renamed Fleetway Publications in 1959), appears to have been popular in the Copperbelt too. In the 1950s, Amalgamated Press had introduced the 'Picture Library' format, which consisted in one long complete story set in one of several set genres: westerns, detective/thriller stories, sport, science fiction, and war.[15] Peter Kapenda, a cartoonist who later contributed many drawings to *Orbit*, was very fond of 'Fleet Street comics', particularly 'Second World War and detective comics', which, he says, inspired the development of his own style:

> I had a lot of influence from the British comics, the Fleet Street comics … [what inspired me was] the way they told the stories, especially the war comics [and] the artwork. There were some artists who were very good at line drawings. Just black ink on white.[16]

Access to such literature must, in part, have been facilitated by the presence of libraries and bookshops across the mining towns. Even Gécamines' social centres (known as '*cercles*') and youth centres had their own little libraries. Dominique Ilunga, who worked as a librarian for one of Gécamines' *cercles* in the 1960s and early 1970s, recalled that comics such as *Bob et Bobette* and *Tintin* were his library's most popular items, among adults and youths alike. Gécamines did not pay for these books however. Instead, 'we would

13 Interview, Henry Chitaika, Ndola, 18 July 2019.

14 Interview, Angel Phiri, Lusaka, 7 July 2019.

15 For more on British comics, see James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

16 Interview, Peter Kapenda, Ndola, 18 July 2019.

go to houses of the Europeans, or of the Congolese who liked to read. [We would collect] the books they had already read to add them to our library collection.'[17] On the Zambian side, while council and mine libraries reportedly prioritised novels over comics, one significant exception was the Hammarskjöld Memorial Library, which is attached to the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe. This was a well-equipped library, which had opened in 1963 with funds from Sweden, and which, crucially, children could access for free.[18] As Angel Phiri recalled, 'almost half of Kitwe used to borrow books there':

> For me, [the Hammarskjöld library] was like a paradise. Almost half the time, as long as you are out of school, you would go to the library. If you are not playing soccer, you would go to the library. If it's a holiday, the first thing you'll think about is the library.[19]

It is, however, a bookstore which seems to have played the most crucial role in disseminating comics on the Zambian Copperbelt: Kingstons Ltd. The successor to Herald Stationery and Book Store which had established bookstores in Kitwe and Ndola by the 1930s,[20] Kingstons was Zambia's main source of newspapers, records, books, magazines, and comics, and was probably the main route via which D.C. Thomson and Fleetway Publications were distributed in Zambia. This is borne out by the fact that Fleetway comic magazines were published with a note stating that their 'sole agent' for 'Rhodesia and Zambia' was 'Kingstons Ltd'. This also chimes with informants' recollections that 'Kingston was … the source of everything' and 'the sole supplier and distributor of all books from abroad'.[21] Cartoonist Peter Kapenda recalled:

> When magazines came from the UK, they were supposed to sell them for a certain period. If they didn't sell all of them, they used to tear them so that people would not be able to read them and then throw them in the rubbish dump. That's where the boys used to go and pick them up.[22]

17 Interview, Dominique Ilunga, Likasi, 10 August 2019.

18 *Orbit*, 1, 6 (1971), p. 12.

19 Angel Phiri interview.

20 William D. Gale, *The Rhodesian Press: The History of the Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company Ltd* (Salisbury: Rhodesian Printing & Publishing Company, 1962).

21 Interview, Ben Phiri, Ndola, 15 July 2019.

22 Peter Kapenda interview.

In this way, via bookshops and libraries, and as children shared their comics with each other, comics circulated widely on the Copperbelt, reaching even children who did not necessarily have the means to buy books first-hand.

In addition, when asked about what imported comics he read, Angel Phiri immediately came up with a list which suggested horizons going beyond what the former colonial powers produced:

> If you are going to talk about imported comics we had a lot of them. You had *Beano*, *Dandy*, *Asterix*, *Tintin*, *Apache*, *Archie and Sabrina* … We had Marvel and DC comics. All those things used to be around and used to have a lot of influence.[23]

This short list is enough to give an idea of the breadth of material on offer: *Beano* and *Dandy* are from the United Kingdom; *Archie and Sabrina* and Marvel and DC Universe are from the United States. *Tintin* is from Belgium, *Asterix* from France, and *Apache* is a photocomic from South Africa. It is perhaps significant that the informants who grew up before the 1960s do not remember seeing any translated Belgo-French comics, as this more or less corresponds to the period when these comics were first translated into English.[24] According to Austin Kaluba, a cultural journalist at the *Times of Zambia*, *Asterix* and *Tintin* were easily obtainable from Kingstons, circulated in schools and were 'massively popular'. He went as far as saying that 'you have not lived in Zambia if you have not read *Asterix* and *Tintin*'.[25]. Similarly, American comics were, by all accounts, largely available on both sides of the border. Even the oldest Zambian informant, who grew up in the 1950s, remembers reading *Popeye*, as well as Disney and superheroes comics (Marvel and DC universe) such as *Batman*, *Superman* and *Spiderman*. In Katanga, Jacky Mulenda recalled that,

> [Superheroes comics] were always in the A5 format and every other page was printed in colour and the others in black and white. I did not know their origin … But they did not interest us much … We were used to comics published in colour and we preferred humorous characters.[26]

23 Angel Phiri interview.

24 The full process of translating *Tintin* into English was commissioned in 1958 by Methuen, Hergé's British publishers, while the first translated album of *Asterix* was published in 1969 by Brockhampton Press. Other comics of Belgian origins which Zambian informants cited were *Lucky Luke* and *The Smurfs.*

25 Interview, Austin Kaluba, Lusaka, 1 July 2019.

26 Jacky Mpungu Mulenda interview.

In turn, South Africa's main contribution to the Copperbelt's comic culture, at least that of the Zambian Copperbelt, came in the form of photocomics. These enjoyed enormous popularity in South Africa in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.[27] In Zambia, according to informants' recollections, the most popular ones were: *Lance Spearman* (aka 'The Spear'), a super-spy character, created in 1968 by Drum Publications; *Chunky Charlie*, a funny inspector character who carried fancy gadgets in his huge coat; and *She*, described as a 'kickass character' who 'was always in a miniskirt with an afro and very high boots'.[28]

From the mid-twentieth century, and especially from the early years of independence, comics circulated on the Copperbelt in many forms. The breadth and diversity of comics in circulation meant that the cultural trends that influenced Copperbelt children were equally wide. They consumed swashbucklers from the United Kingdom, and glossy adventure or humorous *bande dessinée* albums from France and Belgium, sword-and-sandals stories of ancient Rome and cowboy tales of the American West, photocomics from South Africa, and superheroes from America. Although comics appeared in Congo earlier than in Zambia, by the 1960s, they were a key part of the experience of growing up on both sides of the Copperbelt. Many children cut and pasted comic strips, redrew them, played games involving comic book characters, discussed them at school, and lent each other comic books. The fact that Copperbelt children were not passive readers of comics, but instead, played around with them, is an indication of how popular the medium was and how important a part it played in a Copperbelt childhood. In turn, the fact that a certain number of prerequisites were needed for comics to circulate, such as a knowledge of French or English or the presence of specific bookstores, made sure that comics would be, if not necessarily a Copperbelt-only phenomenon, then at least a mostly urban, and fairly middle-class, one. Henry Chitaika recalled that when he lived in Ndola with his parents,

> [I would] buy comics from Kingstons and start drawing with my friends. Even in class sometimes we'd exchange drawings – *Doctor Strange*, *Captain America*, *Spiderman*. But when we moved from Kansenshi [an affluent neighbourhood] to Chifubu [a poorer township] I noticed that it was a bit different. My friends, when they saw me do this … it was like magic to them. Even the books when I took them out they

27 See Lily Saint, 'Not Western: Race, Reading, and the South African Photocomic', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, 4 (2010), pp. 939–58, p. 939.

28 Angel Phiri interview.

> couldn't even say, 'Oh, can I read your comic for a few days, I'll bring it back.' No. They would just look at them. The interest wasn't there.[29]

Still, in the 1960s and the early 1970s, a time when both Copperbelts were experiencing a period of economic boom and its populations enjoyed a comparatively high quality of life, the situation was ripe for various institutions to use this very popular medium for their own purposes, as the Catholic Church had already been doing for decades in the Congo. By this point, the youth of the Copperbelt had been exposed to a large variety of comics from various horizons while at the same time a large pool of disparate tastes had developed. This, therefore, is the background against which Gécamines and the Zambian State launched their respective youth magazines: *Mwana Shaba Junior* and *Orbit*.

Mwana Shaba Junior and *Orbit*: Science, Paternalism and Expectations of Modernity

In September 1964, UMHK, soon to be renamed Gécamines, became the first Katangese company to produce its own youth magazine, *Mwana Shaba Junior*. Some seven years later, in January 1971, *Orbit* was born in Zambia. Though it was originally developed in 1970 under the aegis of Valentine Musakanya, then Minister of State for Technical Advocational Education, *Orbit* quickly received its own Civil Service department under the Ministry of Education. Despite their different origins, there were significant similarities between the two magazines. Both were educational and sought to ignite interest in science and technology, and both therefore dedicated a significant amount of space to illustrated articles on these subjects as well as history, geography and sport. Yet there were also important differences in tone. When it was first conceived, *Orbit*'s main intended purpose was, in the words of Wendy Bond, one of the creators of the magazine, to 'lay a really secure technical foundation for every child'.[30] This was a very important cause to Valentine Musakanya, who, unlike most prominent members of the Zambian Government at the time, including President Kenneth Kaunda, was known as an opponent to Africanist models and insisted that the future

29 Henry Chitaika interview.

30 Wendy Bond, 'Mporokoso, Chinsali, Bancroft, Mongu, Lusaka, Kitwe' in Tony Schur (ed.), *From the Cam to the Zambezi: Colonial Service and the Path to the New Zambia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 195–212, p. 209.

of Zambia lay in the use of Western technology.[31] Mick Bond, Wendy Bond's husband, recalls Musakanya saying: 'When science and technology replace witchcraft, as they must, here, everyone should have the knowledge to understand them and not blindly believe, changing one superstition for another.'[32] There was also a certain emphasis on agriculture. Wendy Bond was expressly asked to include a permanent 'Young Farmers' Club' section by the Ministry of Agriculture,[33] as it was keen to reduce the country's dependence on imported food. The section offered practical agricultural advice and featured many variations on statements such as 'whatever you do in the future, you will be a richer man if you can grow food. … it is useful not just for you – but also for Zambia'.[34] Created as it was at a time of economic expansion, when the future was envisaged as prosperous and technologically advanced, *Orbit* was designed to steer the youth towards the advanced employment opportunities which the Zambian Government expected would soon need filling.

While *Mwana Shaba Junior* similarly sought to steer the eyes of the youth towards science, technology and, by extension, the mining industry, it went further. *Mwana Shaba Junior* was published as a supplement to *Mwana Shaba* ('Child of Copper'), a free monthly magazine created in 1957 by UMHK for its employees. Both magazines were part and parcel of the distinctive brand of corporate paternalism which the *Union Minière* had pursued since the 1930s but which, with the looming prospect of Congolese independence, was going through a new phase of intensification in the late 1950s. While *Mwana Shaba*'s role was to give company-related news, it also took pains to paternalistically emphasise topics such as the importance of discipline at work, a stable family life, and good behaviour. In other words, it played the role of 'moralizer of the population', as Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu put it.[35] *Mwana Shaba Junior* was intended to play much the same role for the next generation of Gécamines employees. Every issue was introduced by an editorial, which, in the magazine's own words, intended to give young

31 Miles Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Farnham: Routledge, 2011), pp. 40–41, p. 163.

32 Mick Bond, *From Northern Rhodesia to Zambia: Recollections of a DO/DC 1962–73* (Lusaka: Gadsden Publishers, 2014), p. 187.

33 Bond, 'Mporokoso', p. 210.

34 *Orbit*, 4, 3, 1975, p. 22.

35 Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba abandonnés par leur père: Structures de l'autorité et histoire sociale de la famille ouvrière au Katanga 1910–1997* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001), p. 86.

people 'moral, cultural and scientific' advice.[36] These editorials cover a wide range of topics but it is the related themes of the importance of education and discipline which come through the most frequently and the most clearly. One editorial entitled 'La réussite' ('How to achieve success') stressed that 'the path to success necessarily involves regular effort', and with 'effort' comes 'suffering, pain and sacrifice'.[37] Even articles on sport were turned into another opportunity to draw an analogy between discipline and success: 'What matters if you want to achieve anything is discipline: to love making effort, work with perseverance, respect the property of others, observe the rules which are necessary for society to function properly'.[38] *Mwana Shaba Junior* thus displayed a rather explicit brand of didacticism, the aim of which was to produce the hard-working employees of tomorrow while encouraging the Gécamines population to think of itself as a community with common interests.

These divergences in tone and choice of emphasis were reflected in the comics *Junior* and *Orbit* chose to publish. Comic strips published in *Junior* were fully incorporated into the magazine's overall didactic mission: they were to serve, as the editorial team of the March/April 1988 issue revealingly put it, 'as a support for the instruction and moral education of the young honest citizens of tomorrow'.[39] In this, they recycled the paternalistic and moralistic qualities typical of colonial comics but also of the mid-twentieth-century Belgian comic tradition as whole. Partly because of the influence of the Catholic Church and partly as a reaction to France's very strict 1949 censorship law which closely regulated depictions of sex and violence,[40] Belgian comic artists carefully policed their work, producing comics intended to entertain the youth, but also to educate it, and to offer it good role models. Accordingly, the first comic strips published in *Junior* were realistically drawn stories set in antiquity, such as *L'histoire merveilleuse*, which depicted the lives of various Biblical characters, and *Ben Hur* (1965–67), which broadly told the same story of revenge, redemption and

36 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 349–50, March–April 1988, p. 2.

37 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 327, May 1986, p. 2.

38 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 178, 1 December 1974, p. 3.

39 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 349–350, March–April 1988, p. 2.

40 This had been enforced in response to the post-liberation influx of American comics, as a thinly veiled measure to protect the domestic comic market. It also came in handy to regulate the availability of Belgian comic magazines in France. See Philippe Delisle, *Bande dessinée franco-belge et imaginaire colonial, des années 1930 aux années 1980* (Paris: Karthala, 2008), p. 6.

Christian awakening as the 1959 Hollywood film of the same name.[41] Along with these, *Junior* introduced in September 1965 a humorous series called *Les aventures de Mayele*, which quickly became the magazine's flagship series. Mayele (meaning 'clever' in Swahili) was originally invented by two Belgian *Union Minière* engineers called Theo Roosen and Paul Baeke. That the makers of Mayele were influenced by the Franco-Belgian tradition is obvious. Mayele is friends with two young adolescents, a boy and a girl, who are dressed just like the two heroes of the Flemish comic *Suske en Wiske*. His 'adventures' consist of one-page gags, with many of the jokes drawing on slapstick-type humour and the main character's clumsiness, just like *Gaston Lagaffe*, a lazy and accident-prone character from the *Journal de Spirou*. Mayele is an urban young man who owns a dog, and whose 'adventures' take place in the realistic setting of a person's 'normal' everyday life, as they do in the series *Boule et Bill*. For example, in 'Pas de chance!', Mayele finds himself stuck between his garage door and ceiling in an attempt to show off his new electric garage door to his neighbour [42] Mayele lives in a big suburban house, owns a car and various technological items, which provide the basis for much of the hilarity (as they malfunction).[43] He lives in a city, where he has arguments with friends in cafes,[44] clashes with policemen,[45] and goes to football matches.[46] Mayele's stories, in other words, are largely aspirational aimed at an (aspiring) African middle class in the purest tradition of both Gécamines' and mid-twentieth-century Belgian comic paternalism.

The first comic strips published in *Orbit* were more graphically sophisticated than what appeared in *Mwana Shaba Junior*, despite Congo's supposed head start in comic-making, because they were produced by professional cartoonists. Wanting the magazine to be professionally produced, Valentine Musakanya had elicited the help of Peter Clarke, then Managing Director of the London-based news service GeminiScan Ltd. As a result, though the

41 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 14 February 1966, p. 7.

42 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 126, 15 May 1972, p. 1.

43 E.g. in 'Mayele tond sa pelouse' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 82, 15 April 1970, p. 1), Mayele gets angry because he thinks the lawnmower his neighbour lent him is faulty when the issue is that he did not pay his electricity bill.

44 E.g. in 'Elles existent' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 178, December 1974), Mayele argues with a friend about whether 'flying saucers' exist, irritating another customer who throws his saucer, a 'flying saucer', at them.

45 E.g. in 'Une bonne occasion' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 57, 15 February 1969, p. 1), Mayele is persuaded to buy a beautiful car for 6 Zaïres. He is then fined 6 Zaïres by a policeman because most of the car's appliances do not function properly.

46 e.g. 'Mayele Supporter' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 21, 15 July 1966, p. 1).

editorial copy was provided by the Zambia-based team and the magazine was printed in Zambia,[47] all the artwork and editing were done in Britain by British artists commissioned or employed by GeminiScan. That this was the case was kept as discreet as possible. 'One of the many things Peter insisted on was that there should be no indication to the young reader that *Orbit* was being produced in the UK', John Egglesfield who was art editor for GeminiScan, recalled. 'We wanted all the focus to be on Zambia.'[48] Thus, though John Egglesfield elicited the services of some of Fleet Street's finest cartoonists and illustrators to produce the comics, their names never appeared in the magazine. 'Space Safari', *Orbit*'s flagship series which featured two Zambian heroes named Marion and Robert, was a space adventure written by Sydney Jordan with art by Martin Ashbury, both well-established British cartoonists known for their science fiction comics. In turn, *Orbit*'s emphasis on space is not random. *Orbit* had been conceived in an era marked by the moon landing (1969), the success of cult phenomenon series *Star Trek* (1966–69) and the release of two major science fiction films which revolutionised mainstream pop culture: *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In fact, the very title 'A Space Safari' is a clear reference to Stanley Kubrick's film. Science fiction's appeal thus provided a convenient hook to attract children's attention and ignite their interest in science.

In this way, not only were comic strips given pride of place in *Orbit* but, like their counterparts in *Mwana Shaba Junior*, they had a clear role to play, designed as they were to reinforce the specific message outlined by the magazine as a whole. Neither were they devoid of moralising contemplations. Tellingly, Marion and Robert's mini-adventures combine science fiction with agricultural concerns. Marion and Roberts are plant experts who work for the 'Pan-African Survey System'. In their first adventure, which ran over the first four issues of the magazine, they are called to help over mysterious meteor showers which have caused crops to die all across Africa. These showers are identified as missiles or 'sand-bombs' and traced back to one of Mars' moons, to which Robert and Marion duly travel on an international space mission. In their second adventure entitled 'Trojan Horse',[49] a mysterious spaceship shows up in African cities and offers all sort of expensive gifts: cars, tractors, etc. Robert and Marion are sent in a

47 Bond, 'Mporokoso', p. 209.

48 John Freeman, 'Discovering "Orbit" – Zambia's Unique Science and Comic Magazine', 6 February 2020, https://downthetubes.net/?p=114717 (accessed 21 June 2020).

49 *Orbit*, 1, 5, 6 and 7, 1971, pp. 1–2.

special plane to negotiate with the ship's commander and are informed that offering worthless gifts had been used as a way to test people's spirit 'to see if you understand the supreme law of survival': 'to help one another – to work for the creation of the good life – to scorn the ready-made Baubles of the Gift-horse'. Robert is sent back with a spade and ears of corn which he describes as the 'greatest gift'.[50] In this way, science fiction is harnessed to disseminate the government's agricultural agenda. In addition, accompanying Marion and Robert in every issue were two pages of an adventure story drawn in realistic black-and-white style, stylistically similar to Amalgamated comics. These alternated between the aerial adventures of 'Mike Chanda, Charter Pilot' who works for an air company based in Ndola, the investigative adventures of Inspector Mark Phiri, and the sanitary adventures of 'Jenny Moonga, Health Inspector'. These adventure stories must have given their young Zambian audience a sense of possibilities for what the future might hold: all characters have typical Zambian names and all have 'cool' modern jobs.

Early issues of *Orbit* and *Mwana Shaba Junior* followed the comic canons of the former colonial powers. This is not surprising; not only were the artists who produced the comic strips European, but, as demonstrated above, literature of this type had been circulating on both sides of the Copperbelt for at least a couple of decades. As a result, its graphic and storytelling codes would have already been familiar to at least a part of Katanga and Zambia's population, thus making it easier to re-purpose them for these publications' new aims. Gécamines used Belgian-style one-gag-in-a-page and realistically drawn moralising adventures to reinforce its paternalistic vision. *Orbit*, meanwhile, used UK-type space and adventure stories to reinforce the state's belief in a flourishing industrial future. These early comics, particularly *Orbit*'s, are emblematic of an era when, as James Ferguson put it, 'Africa was "emerging"' and 'no place was emerging faster or more hopefully than Zambia'.[51] This was a time when, as Wendy Bond recalled, Zambia was 'buzzing with optimism and opportunity':

> It was all very exciting because everyone was determined to make a success of the new nation … and to do it fast! Doors were opening for everyone. … Zambia became international … there were new projects and new cars and new buildings going up and new roads.[52]

50 *Orbit*, 1, 7, pp. 1–2.

51 James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 1.

52 Bond, 'Mporokoso', p. 208.

Thus, while *Orbit* was not a Copperbelt production, nor was it solely aimed at a Copperbelt audience, it is likely that this is where it was most widely read, along with Lusaka. It is also where it found its most fervent fans, as is suggested by the fact that many of those who later contributed comics to the magazines were Copperbelt natives. Besides, the aim was to inspire the country's youth to aspire to live in a 'Copperbelt-like' society, one characterised by well-organised cities, state-of-the-art infrastructures, an educated labour force and – cherry on the cake – a self-sustained agricultural system.

The script of the Copperbelt's 'emergence' via industrialisation and urbanisation was later confounded by the decades of steep economic decline which followed the fall in copper prices of the mid-1970s.[53] By the early 1990s, *Mwana Shaba Junior* had disappeared and *Orbit* had so severely declined in popularity that it was supplanted, at least on the Copperbelt, by a newcomer youth magazine produced by Mission Press in Ndola: *Speak Out!* Yet, until then, they had become the main vehicles through which the youth of the Copperbelt produced and consumed comics. For one thing, these magazines' longevity and accessibility gave them enormous reach, allowing them to become an 'official space for comics', as Katangese cartoonist Tetshim put it.[54] For another, from the early 1970s, when Congo and Zambia went through a period of 'Africanisation' and 'nationalisation', it was Zambian and Congolese artists who became the sole producers of comic art for the magazines. In fact, for a time, comics became one of the most lucrative activities available to visual artists in Katanga. Cartoonist Kika recalled that in the 1980s, while he and other artists continued to work on painting and metal work, comics were 'what paid best'.[55] Similarly, Kinshasa-born artist Michel Bongo-Liz 'got stuck' in Lubumbashi in the mid-1980s when he was on his way to Southern Africa because 'Gécamines paid good money for the comics which we were producing'.[56] As a result, these magazines provided local artists with the opportunity to 're-appropriate' the medium and say with it what they wanted. Fatefully, they did so in a context of fast economic, political and social change.

53 Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, p. 6.
54 Interview, Tetshim, Lubumbashi, 14 August 2019.
55 Interview, Kika, Lubumbashi, 21 August 2019.
56 Interview, Michel Bongo-Liz, Lubumbashi, 30 July 2019.

Re-Appropriation of the Medium in a Changing Socio-Economic Context

A few years into the 1970s, as the two magazines started using homegrown African talents rather than exported ones, there started to be important shifts in the tone and content of the comic strips published in both *Mwana Shaba Junior* and *Orbit*. Though Mayele survived unscathed because of its popularity with the readers,[57] comic strips published in *Junior* from 1972 showed an increasing 're-appropriation' of Belgo-French narrative and graphic codes in ways that subverted or reversed them. An early example of this are the adventures of 'Mwana' and 'Shaba', two new characters which first appeared in the *Mwana Shaba Junior* in the summer of 1972.[58] The first two of these, *Echec aux Espions* (1972–74) and *Le Trésor de Targaz* (1975–77), follow a fairly similar template in which its two young journalist heroes travel to exotic locales – New York and 'Tibera', a fictional North African country – and are confronted with gangs of villains, whose plans they thwart. These two stories still have many characteristics that connect them to the Franco-Belgian comic tradition. Both are high-adventure stories set in exotic locations and broadly follow the aesthetics of mid-twentieth-century Belgian comics, being reminiscent of Franquin's *Spirou et Fantasio*. Both are full of slapstick humour – Mwana falls down the stairs of his hotel twice in high comical fashion yet never seems to get physically injured – and present Mwana and Shaba as moral paragons. For example, a new character introduced in *Le trésor de Targaz*, a spoiled princess, who is used to her every whim being catered for, progressively learns to emulate the behaviour of Mwana and Shaba who are selfless and help others without expectation of rewards. Yet, on the whole, the usual template is here reversed. While Mwana and Shaba's country of origin has featured in more than one European comic as the exotic destination, in this case, it is the two heroes who are doing the travelling, visiting such exotic locales as the United States, and they are the ones who are greeted as heroes by the 'natives'. Elements of *Authenticité*-era Zaïre,

57 Paul Baeke continued the series from Belgium until 1987, when he was replaced by Gécamines employee Mukiny Nkemba.

58 In total six 'Mwana and Shaba' adventures were published between 1972 and 1989. Cassiau-Haurie suspects that the first two adventures were produced by the Chenge brothers, who ran an influential artistic workshop in Lubumbashi. Cassiau-Haurie, *Histoire de la BD congolaise*, p. 39.

as Congo was known from 1971, are also visible throughout.[59] Characters refer to each other as 'citoyen' or 'citoyenne', Mwana and Shaba conspicuously use 'Air Zaïre' to fly everywhere, and Zaïre is constantly implicitly being presented as a modern nation, a member of the United Nations on par with any other player on the international chessboard. In this way, European codes of comic-making were here used in a way that updated them for a contemporary 'Zairian' audience.

From around the mid-1970s, *Orbit* and its comic strips started to change too, both in outlook and in subjects. These changes were claimed by the editorial team of 1977 to have been inspired by readers' letters,[60] yet this was a period when Zambia too was experiencing important political changes. In 1973, Zambia had become a one-party state, and, as economic decline started to bite, its politics became increasingly centred around the person of the President and the ideologies of the nationalist struggle.[61] This new party line was openly advertised in the *Orbit* of October 1974 which celebrated Zambia's tenth anniversary of independence. For the occasion President Kenneth Kaunda penned a letter for *Orbit*'s young readers in which he grandly stated that 'we older ones fought and won a battle for political freedom' but this, he continued 'was just the beginning – Not the end!'[62] This was accompanied by a 'special insert', a comic advertised as an 'exciting picture-story' depicting

> how the Zambian people became united by the belief that every man or woman has the right to help decide the kind of life they live … to choose their own government! Orbit tells you how the people of Zambia gave voice to that idea through the leadership of Kenneth Kaunda. And how the people, the idea and the man became one nation on October 24 1964.[63]

Soon thereafter, Marion and Robert were taken down from their pedestal as *Orbit*'s star cartoon to be replaced by *Fwanya*, a young Zambian schoolboy whose two-pages-long stories were meant to be amusing and to educate

59 '*Authenticité*', or 'Zairianisation', was an official state ideology implemented by the Mobutu regime in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In an effort to rid the country of the lingering vestiges of Western influence, the country was renamed Zaïre, and Zaïriens had to adopt new 'authentic' names, and change their ways of dressing and addressing each other. See Crawford Young and Thomas E. Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

60 *Orbit*, 6, 6, October 1977, p. 1.

61 Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, p. 167.

62 *Orbit*, 3, 7, p. 5.

63 *Orbit*, 3, 7.

children on good behaviour. In 'Fwanya learns that laziness does not pay', for example, Fwanya collects copies of *Orbit* which he is supposed to bring to his teacher so they can be sold. He stops to rest and to read them, allowing the wind to blow all the copies away.[64] Just as Mwana and Shaba had stuck close aesthetically to earlier Belgian and Congolese comics, Fwanya's realistic black-and-white aesthetics are only a stone's throw away from the Fleetway-style comic strips which had previously been the norm in *Orbit*. Similarly, despite this aesthetic continuity, there is a change in content, in this case towards a new brand of moralistic didacticism.

The content of these comics also differed at times from their predecessors in being located in a more distinctly Zambian or Katangese context and making references to events and societal change experienced by Copperbelt society. For example, in January 1975, a new comic in *Junior* entitled *Un espion à Lusaka* featured a young girl foiling a bomb attack at a summit held in Lusaka, where delegations of all 'African copper-producing countries' met to discuss the impact of the fall in copper prices.[65] In fact, from the mid-1970s onwards, *Junior*'s adventure and detective stories took a darker turn and, by the 1980s, stories depicting a character struggling against crime and corruption grew increasingly common. Similarly, comic strips in *Orbit* had become much less 'European-looking' by the late 1970s and, apart from *Fwanya*, all now touched upon topics relating to the realities of contemporary Zambian life. The stories of *Constable Mulenga*, for example, highlighted urban dangers, such as going home alone from the cinema after dark.[66] In a story entitled *Choose a Husband* published in 1977, it was the tricky topic of marriage and the rift between cities and villages that was explored. Tisa, a chief's daughter, decides to marry 'a successful young man from the city who has come back to the land', who, unfortunately, turns out to be a goat transformed into a man. 'You had a lot of handsome young men to choose from', the goat–husband teases Tisa. 'You just wanted my money and my car and a goat for a husband Ha! Ha! Ha!'[67] This is consistent with the evolution of the depiction of the village-town relationship in twentieth-century Zambian literature identified by Giacomo Macola. Whereas there had previously been a tendency to assign moral superiority 'either to the urban or to the rural space as a whole', he argued, 'the demise of social expectations of urban permanence led to both spheres of social

64 *Orbit*, 4, 3, p. 10.
65 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 180, January 1975, p. 8.
66 *Orbit*, 6, 6, October 1977, p. 3.
67 Ibid., pp. 22–3.

relationships' and was increasingly 'perceived as fundamentally deficient and unappealing'.[68] Similarly, the story here serves as a cautionary tale for young women who get dazzled by the lures of the city, while it also criticises both city dwellers for their empty promises and villagers for their naivety and longing for material wealth.

Similar changes in perception were expressed in *Junior*'s *Le Masque de la Tortue* (1989–90), in which a young village man named Sadiki travels to the city to help his cousin, only to be disabused by the reality of crime and squalor he finds there. However, instead of going home as the heroes of such stories often do, Sadiki stays, and the message seems to be that people from the village and the city should help each other and are stronger if they do so. City life was further de-idealised with the arrival, in 1987, of a new comic character named Mafuta. As with Mayele, Mafuta's comic strips are one page long, and consist of jokes derived from the frustrations of daily and domestic life. Yet this comic strip differs from Mayele in fundamental ways. Whereas Mayele's jokes are slapstick-based, Mafuta's play on (changing) societal mores and situations that Katangese readers may actually have encountered in real life. Mafuta jokes cover a large number of topics such as gender relationships, superstition, insecurity, and religion, and a great number find humour in family and social obligations. In *L'heureux papa*, for example, two drunk men come to Mafuta's house and demand he offers them a drink since a child was born in his family. They pester him until Mafuta buys them one glass of beer, and when they complain, Mafuta protests, 'what are you complaining about? I bought you "a" drink, didn't I?'[69] In *Les visiteurs*, Mafuta receives the visit of his uncle, aunt and children from the village. While his uncle is busy listing all the items he requires from Mafuta (a sewing machine, a bicycle, a suit, a hoe, clothes for his wife and children), Mafuta thinks: 'what a disaster! Now I have five additional mouths to feed … life has become too expensive … I will get rid of them, and quickly.' In order to do so, he gives them a bad supper, leading the unwanted guests to decide to leave of their own accord.[70] Mayele and Mafuta's jokes have in common that they take place in urban settings, mostly in and around the home. Yet, whereas Mayele's jokes show a life of abundance and middle-class aspirations, Mafuta's highlight all that is lacking.

68 Giacomo Macola, 'Imagining Village Life in Zambian Fiction', *Cambridge Anthropology* 25, 1 (2005), pp. 1–10, pp. 6–7.

69 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 366, August 1989, p. 5.

70 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 372, March 1990, p. 5.

From 1989, the year that the Kamoto mine collapsed, causing Gécamines' total production to drop by 90% between 1989 and 1993, the implicit social and political commentary of *Junior*'s comic strips became distinctly more explicit. *Les tribulations de Mashaka*, published between 1990 and 1991, for example, straightforwardly dealt with the effects of poverty. Mashaka is a perennially unemployed character whose wife urges to go out and find work. Yet everything goes wrong for Mashaka. He loses the little money he had earned, breaks his leg yet continues looking for work, finds a job then gets fired, gets evicted from his house, and even tries to commit suicide. He is only saved when a rich uncle comes back from America and offers him a job on no other basis than the fact that he is family. The suggestion is that the only remaining way to get out of one's situation is through a wealthy relative or going abroad. Similarly, *Msumbuko Le syndicaliste*, *les victimes de la tentation* (1989–90, by Mukiny Nkemba and Nansong Yav), deals with the effects of economic collapse. In this story, the protagonist is Masumbuko, the chief trade unionist for the textile company, I.T.M., which acts as a stand-in for Gécamines. The company originally does well but the salaries are too low and as one employee comments, 'it's impossible to make ends meet'.[71] As time goes by, an increasing quantity of goods goes missing from the company as employees help themselves to them to compensate for their low salaries. Masumbuko then summons all of his fellow employees and lectures them on having endangered the company's survival and by extension the ability of all workers to feed their families. Another worker then takes the stand and expresses what must have a widely shared opinion among Gécamines' employees: that the directors of the company shared a part of the blame since they had sold out to 'the capitalist system of exploiting Man to extract as much profit out of him as possible' and neglected their 'obligation to think about improving the living conditions of workers'.[72] In that way, I.T.M.'s story is a thinly veiled reference to Gécamines' contemporary struggle with debilitating thefts and underpaid employees.

On the Zambian side, meanwhile, *Orbit* had been largely been supplanted by *Speak Out! A Christian Magazine for Youth*, created by the Franciscan Mission press in 1984. It too contained comic strips, though fewer in number and of a very different kind than those contained in *Orbit*, having been conceived in a very different political context. Whereas there had hitherto been no significant challenge to the party and its government, by

71 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 364, June 1989, p. 9.
72 *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 376, June 1990, p. 9.

the late 1970s and early 1980s, the unprofitability of the mining industry, rising foreign debt and periodic harvest failures finally led to rising discontent.[73] In this context, Zambia's Catholic Church found itself in the position of mouthpiece for the opposition to the one-party state. This it was largely able to do because of its ownership of independent media including magazines such as *Icengelo* (1971-present) and *Speak Out!* (1984-present).[74] Like *Orbit* and *Mwana Shaba Junior*, *Speak Out!* had games, a questions-and-answers section ('Dear Kabilo'), and competitions. The overall tone however was very different. Whereas *Orbit* was resolutely turned towards a vision of Zambia as a nation at the cutting edge of technology and fully incorporated in a global (or at least Pan-African) world, *Speak Out!* was very Copperbelt-focused, and resolutely turned towards questions of politics and morality. The educational articles on science, technology or history which were *Orbit*'s hallmark, were gone. Instead, the bulk of the articles consisted of thinking pieces, fictional and real-life stories often contributed by readers, and scripted conversations in which two friends debated a topic of interest. While political critiques were present in the magazine, with discussions about the education system[75] or the extent of individual responsibility in the quest of employment,[76] these were now approached through the prism of topics that concerned the youth of the Copperbelt. As Danny Chiyesu, who has been producing comics for Mission Press since 1991, explained, *Speak Out!* stood for 'speaking out on all the issues about youth: smoking, sex, marriage, romance, jobs … anything to do with the youth'.[77] It is thus meant to be educational, but in a very different way to *Orbit*. Much in *Speak Out!* was to do with life in the city, changing social mores, and surviving in a world marked by economic hardship. These, accordingly, were the topics which the comic strips published in *Speak Out!* also tackled.

Whereas *Icengelo*, the 'adult' magazine, had a recurring comic character called Katona, whose jokes were written in Bemba and poked fun at daily life in a Zambian urban environment, the 'comic' strips that appeared in *Speak Out!* were not based around jokes. Most were produced by the same person, Ndola

73 Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, p. 82.

74 Marja Hinfelaar, 'Legitimizing Powers: The Political Role of the Roman Catholic Church, 1972–1991' in Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar and Giacomo Macola (eds), *One Zambia, Many Histories: Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 127–43, p. 141.

75 *Speak Out!* March–April 1984, p. 10.

76 E.g. *Speak Out!* January–February, p. 2, pp. 3–4.

77 Interview, Danny Chiyesu, Ndola, 15 July 2019.

resident Michael M. Nkaka, and usually involved two characters, often a man and a woman named Friday and Frida, discussing an issue of political or societal relevance. Some of Friday and Frida's comic strips were more on the straightforwardly moralising side. Nkaka, for example, chose to portray the dangers of drunkenness by having a drunken Friday slip on a banana peel and break his leg.[78] Similarly, exhortations to avoid sex outside of marriage would be accompanied by warnings that it leads to abortion and AIDS.[79] Yet, in most cases, the dialogue format enabled the expression of critical opinions on debates which do not have easy answers, and were sometimes used to air controversial points without appearing to do so. Some comic strips, for example, tackled the question of the legacy of colonialism. In that of March–April 1984, Friday comments to Frida that he does not like going to church as he dislikes the noise of the drums, and considers 'Gregorian chant' to be 'the only suitable music for church'. In this case, it is Frida who was given the last word, arguing that 'it seems you're another one of those old colonials who can't sever their ties with Europe. It's about time you became an African!'[80] By far the most covered topics, however, were those of love, sex and changing gender relations. The May–June 1984 issue, for example, had Friday and Frida entangled in a debate about men and women's role in society in which Friday argued that without a man, a woman is 'a lonely old spinster' while Frida exclaimed that 'you men have ruled us like servants for far too long'.[81]

The village-town relationship is yet another topic which recurs regularly (see Figure 2.1). In the very first issue, Friday complained that he is forced to do manual labour whenever he returns to the village, feeling that, as the best student in his class, he is above such work. Frida responded: 'you should be clever enough to see that manual work will make a man out of you. There are more ways of learning than out of books!'[82] These are but a few examples in a long list of such discussions published in comic form *Speak Out!* in the 1980s. The comic strips themselves had a simple graphic style and were drawn in black and white. Similarly, while Friday and Frida share space in *Speak Out!* with a series of other characters, they are all interchangeable: all serve as vehicles through which to discuss societal questions. In this sense, *Speak Out!*'s strips were an illustration of the extent to which comics, had, by this point, been fully 'weaponised'.

78 *Speak Out!* January–February 1985, p. 20.
79 *Speak Out!* May–June 1987, p. 20.
80 *Speak Out!* March–April 1984, pp. 12–13.
81 *Speak Out!* May–June 1984, pp. 12–13.
82 *Speak Out!* January–February 1984, pp. 12–13.

Figure 2.1 'Frida and Friday', *Speak Out!*, May–June 1986, back cover. Reproduced by permission, Mission Press, Ndola.

In her 2016 article 'Belgo-Congolese Transnational Comics Esthetics', Véronique Bragard argued that post-independence Congolese *bandes dessinées* displayed what she calls 'a re-fashioning of the genre's form and themes, leading to new engaged postcolonial aesthetics.'[83] She cites the work of Mongo Awai Sisé, one of the first major comic artists who emerged in Congo in the second half of the twentieth century, as establishing the tradition of 'the same but not quite'. By this she means that he borrowed a series of codes and aesthetics from the Belgo-French comic traditions but subverted these codes and aesthetics to tell his own story.[84] Sisé's Bingo series, for example bore some resemblance to *Tintin*, but in a reverse paradigm. In contrast to Tintin, Bingo does not serve as a spokesperson of any civilising mission but instead suffers the consequences of the colonial inheritance, for example when he migrates to the city to find work, only to be confronted with fraud, corruption and general inefficiency (*Bingo en ville*, 1981) or when a trip to Belgium confronts him with the North-South wealth gap (*Bingo en Belgique*, 1982). In that sense, Sisé used some of the codes of the Belgo-French comic traditions to highlight some of the grim realities which Congolese citizens faced.[85] Similarly, the period of nationalisation and Africanisation, coinciding with a fast-changing economic and political environment, marks the beginning of a process of 're-appropriation' of the medium by Copperbelt artists as they sought to distance it from its Western roots. The manner in which this reappropriation took place, along with the themes and stories tackled by the authors, evolved and varied over time, influenced by the intentions of the institutions for whom the comics were produced and also by the socio-political context in which they were produced. The faith in a future that would be urban, prosperous and technologically advanced, and the subsequent gradual deterioration of that faith, have been key features of contemporary Zambian and Katangese literature.[86] It is not surprising therefore that they should also be central to contemporary Zambian and Katangese comics. *Speak Out!*'s comic strips represent the ultimate point at which, in a context of fast-changing societal and economic realities, comics become a means through which to have a conversation about these changes.

83 Véronique Bragard, 'Belgo-Congolese Transnational Comics Esthetics: Transcolonial Labor from Mongo Sisse's *Bingo en Belgique* to Cassiau-Haurie and Baruti's *Madame Livingstone: Congo, la Grande Guerre* (2014)', *Literature Compass* 13, 5 (2016), pp. 332–40, p. 332.

84 Bragard, 'Belgo-Congolese Transnational Comics Esthetics', p. 334.

85 Ibid., p. 339.

86 Macola, 'Imagining Village Life', p. 23.

Conclusion

Much like other forms of popular culture, comics constitute complex and ambiguous historical material. In recent comics scholarship, they have been increasingly thought of as cultural forms existing in relation to the social/popular context in which they are produced.[87] On the one hand popular culture has been seen as instrument of social control: it is one of the means through which members of society are instructed in appropriate values, attitudes and behaviour. On the other hand, popular culture responds to the cultural tastes and social values of its consumers and, in this sense, can be seen as a 'mirror' to society. In other words, comics are both a product of social processes and a medium through which social values are constructed and conveyed, particularly because it is usually aimed at the youth. This tension is visible in the way that comics were produced and consumed on the Copperbelt. Comics were originally an imported form of popular art and, when first embraced by local institutions, it was largely for instrumental reasons, to influence or even manipulate the readers, to inculcate in them carefully chosen values and ideas. At the same time, they had to do so in a way that would 'speak' to its audience. Thus, they not only had to tackle subjects of relevance to Zambian and Katangese society but also had to rely and play on aesthetics already known and appreciated by them. In this sense, the range of comics influences to which the Copperbelt youth was exposed and the extent to which these influences were recycled or updated in comics produced for and by them, is testament to how much of an intercultural crossroads the Copperbelt was, with networks of cultural influences connecting it to several continents. Once Copperbelt cartoonists started publishing, they were able to pick from a wide range of existing codes and themes, and soon adapted them in the way they wished. In the early years, comics in *Mwana Shaba Junior* mirrored Belgo-French albums both in their graphic and didactic style. Similarly, early comics in *Orbit* were influenced both by Fleetway comics and the science fiction craze of the late 1960s and 1970s. Yet, as the political horizon shifted, these styles were increasingly subverted and adapted in order to address aspects of the massive societal changes that the communities who read the magazines were experiencing. As a result, though the medium was introduced in a time when there was little doubt that the future would be industrial and prosperous, it became an important avenue through which the effects of the failure of this future to materialise can be observed.

87 See for example Jean-Paul Gabilliet's *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).