‘Wash Me Black Again’: African Nationalism, the Indian Diaspora, and Kwa-Zulu Natal, 1944-1960

by

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation combines a critical history of the Indian diaspora’s political and intellectual impact on the development of African nationalism in South Africa with an analysis of African/Indian racial dynamics in Natal. Beginning in the 1940s, tumultuous debates among black intellectuals over the place of the Indian diaspora in Africa played a central role in the emergence of new and antagonistic conceptualizations of a South African nation. The writings of Indian political figures (particularly Gandhi and Nehru) and the Indian independence struggle had enormous influence on a generation of African nationalists, but this impact was mediated in complex ways by the race and class dynamics of Natal. During the 1930s and 40s, rapid and large-scale urbanization generated a series of racially-mixed shantytowns surrounding Durban in which a largely Gujarati and Hindi merchant and landlord class provided the ersatz urban infrastructure utilized by both Tamil-speaking workers and Zulu migrants. In Indian-owned buses, stores, and movie theatres, a racial hierarchy of Indian over African developed based on the social grammars of property, relationship with land, family structure, and different gender roles. In such circumstances, practices integral to maintaining diasporic
identities—such as religious festivals, marriage, caste (jati), language, and even dress and food—became signifiers of ranked status and perceived exclusion. Despite the destruction of this urban landscape by forced removals beginning in the late 1950s, these social relationships powerfully shaped African and Indian identities in Natal, the popular memory of different communities, and the later politics of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Although a few recent publications have attempted to break down the bifurcation that characterizes Natal’s historiography, the majority of academic writing on the province employs a race-based framework that focuses on either Indians or Zulu-speaking Africans. As a result, Natal’s African/Indian racial dynamic plays, at most, a secondary role in most scholarship on the region. In turn, Natal itself generally appears in histories of the anti-apartheid struggle as either an exception or a momentary interruption to a “national” narrative overwhelmingly centered on events, organizations, and individuals in the Transvaal. Rejecting a “race relations” approach that hypostatizes coherent racial groups, my dissertation examines how segregationist policies, African and Indian political organizations, and everyday social practices continuously reproduced an “African/Indian divide” despite both the enormous heterogeneity of each group and the quotidian intimacies of urban life. At the same time, it explores the ways in which this division shaped the development of the anti-apartheid struggle in Natal and the consequences of Natal’s politics for South Africa as a whole.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, my thesis committee: Sean Hawkins, Rick Halpern, Bill Freund, and Alissa Trotz—each one an exemplary mentor, collaborator, and friend. My gratitude is inexpressible. I was also fortunate enough to have two generous and encouraging external readers, Aisha Khan and Doris Bergen, both of whom contributed their tremendous erudition to reading my work and, just as importantly, helped make the final stages of finishing this dissertation enjoyable and lively. I would also like to thank Ted Chamberlin for his limitless support, dependable council, and sagacious good humor.

While grounded in Kwa-Zulu Natal, this dissertation follows a number of historical and methodological paths and I have benefited from the advice of many friends and colleagues. Omar Badsha and Mark Hunter read most of the chapters and greatly enhanced my knowledge of Natal’s history, while rescuing me from a number of small errors. Many other people read draft chapters or offered their support at crucial points. In particular, I would like to thank Marcus Rediker, Ritu Birla, Michelle Murphy, Melissa Levin, Brian Beaton, Shivrang Setlur, Allison Schachter, Ken Kawashima, Thomas Blom Hansen, Joseph Lelyveld, Sharad Chari, Luis Jacob, and Phiroze Vasunia. My mother, Jo L. Soske, also read my dissertation with great insight and perspicacity. Kate Elizabeth Creasey, my incredible and dedicated partner, was an endless source of resilience, critical feedback, and practical assistance.

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One of the greatest pleasures of this project was the generous welcome, encouragement, and assistance that I received from academic colleagues and former activists in South Africa, including Isabel Hofmeyr, Sarah Nuttall, Jeff Guy, Elizabeth Gunner, Phillip Bonner, Vishnu Padayachee, David Hemson, Pamila Gupta, Ronit Frenkel, Rehana Ebr.-Valley, Phyllis Naidoo, and Ismail Nagdee. As I was completing this thesis, the incomparable Billy Nair—trade union organizer, Umkhonto weSizwe operative, and Robben Island prisoner—passed away. After meeting together on one occasion near Tongaat, Billy called me at six the next morning to expound on the importance of the Freedom Charter, which he clearly believed that I had not yet grasped. Billy would not have agreed with much that I argue in these pages, but his insights and guidance were crucial.

While finishing this dissertation, I had the immense pleasure of working on a collective intellectual and curatorial project that greatly enriched my thinking and writing, the South-South series and art exhibition at New College and the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, University of Toronto. I wish to dedicate this thesis to my closest collaborators of this past year: Hillina Seife, Tejpal S. Ajjii, and Haema Sivanesan. Thank you, once more, for your inspiring friendship and peerless intellectual companionship.
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oh what lack of love
has caught me
lingering here

in a land where night
must come
to wash me black again

—Shabbir Banoobhai, *Echoes of My Other Self*, 1979
Introduction:
Racial Consciousness and the Boundaries of Diaspora

Arabs from Zanzibar and Bombay are also finding South Africa a fine field for enterprise, and there is scarcely a town or village in which their stores are not seen. Indeed the retail trade in native goods is almost wholly in their hands, to the chagrin and grief of European merchants. Both Arabs and Indians are regarded by many as a curse, but how to get rid of them is a question. Thus there will be an Asiatic as well as African problem to be settled some day in this part of the world.¹

—Rev. Josiah Tyler, *Forty Years Among the Zulu*, 1891.

*If I were to tell you about things I know, it would take a very long time. Things concerning us blacks and the Indians would take a long time to tell, as it is a long story.*²

—Josephine Hadebe, Domestic Worker, Durban, 1981.

The origins of Natal’s distinct racial politics lie, ultimately, in its 19th century history as a British settler colony on the southeastern edge of the Indian Ocean.³ In the early decades of European presence, the still formidable armies of the Zulu kingdom provided a significant check on military expansion and most Africans within the colony maintained access to arable land. Unable to compel African workers to accept their desired wages and terms of employment, Natal’s sugar planters pressed the colonial administration to facilitate the importation of Indian labor. From 1860 to 1911, over 150,000 indentured workers arrived in Natal, largely from the Hindi-speaking Gangetic plains and the south Indian coast. In the mid 1870s, a second wave of South Asian migration began, the so-called “passengers,” who were primarily Muslim Gujarati traders from western India (although this group included a

¹ Rev. Josiah Tyler, *Forty Years Among the Zulu* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1971), 186. “Arab” was originally the term used to refer to Muslim Indian merchants, some of whom came to South Africa via established trading networks in East Africa and Mauritius.
² Interview with Josephine Hadebe by L. Mabaso, Durban, 26 April 1981, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 308), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
³ Today, the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal includes the former British colony and the historic area of the Zulu kingdom. Despite its loss of territory, the Zulu kingdom remained independent until its loss in the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War. In 1887, Natal officially incorporated “Zululand” into the colony.
substantial Hindu minority as well). The Indian diaspora—or, more precisely, diasporas—did not simply bring a South Asian population to Africa’s shores. It also shaped the racial, political, and cultural dynamics of African life in the province and far beyond. Nevertheless, the historiography of 20th century Natal is largely bifurcated between writing on “Indians” and “Africans.”

This dissertation examines the ways in which segregationist policies, African and Indian political organizations, and everyday social practices continuously reproduced an African/Indian racial divide despite the heterogeneity of each group and the quotidian intimacies of urban life. At the same time, it explores the influence of this division on the anti-apartheid struggle in Natal and the consequences of Natal’s racial dynamics for African politics throughout South Africa. Although less than 2 percent of South Africa’s population in 1951, the Indian minority was both concentrated in Natal and the most urbanized of all South Africa’s groups. In 1960, 49 percent of South Africa’s Indians lived in Natal’s largest city, Durban, and Indians constituted 35 percent of its total residents. Natal is also home to the majority of isiZulu speakers, who not only dominate the province numerically, but are heirs to one of the most powerful and brutal histories of resistance and repression in southern Africa. In part due to colonial policies of governance and later apartheid structures, different forms of Zulu and Indian nationalism—both within and outside of historic organizations like the ANC and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC)—profoundly influenced the region’s political, intellectual, and cultural landscapes for much of the 20th Century. These regional political

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4 For a discussion of this bifurcation in the historiographies of both South Africa and the Indian Ocean, see Isabel Hofmeyr, “The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean: Forging New Paradigms of Transnationalism for the Global South—Literary and Cultural Perspectives,” *Social Dynamics* 33, no. 2 (2007), 3–32. I discuss the historiography of Natal and the Indian population in South Africa further in the chapters that follow.

and intellectual traditions not only differentiated the province from the rest of South Africa, but they have at times had a major impact on the Transvaal (today’s Gauteng), the center of South Africa’s industrial revolution and African political life.

In the following pages, I explore the interlacing histories of the Indian diaspora and the development of African nationalist politics from the founding of the ANC Youth League in 1944 to the banning of the ANC and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) in March 1960. I analyze the dominant set of racial dynamics that emerged in urban Natal, particularly Durban, during the late 1930s and early 40s and then explore their ramifications for African politics in both that province and the Transvaal (the location of the national ANC leadership). At the same time, I examine a series of related debates over the national question in South Africa and the political role of “the Indian.” By reading intellectual history against the grain of daily life, this dissertation explores the complicated interactions between African politics, the transnational circulation of discourses, and local power relations embedded within a variety of social, economic, and political structures. It also tries to demonstrate the empirical and conceptual limitations of any history of South Africa during this period that is organized along racial or provincial lines. At least in the South African context, historians of the Indian diaspora must go further than situating “Indian identity” in relationship to its various others: an approach that inscribes the boundaries established and policed by community nationalism in the very framing of historical analysis. Rather, the concept of diaspora needs to be rethought according to a problematic that simultaneously traverses racial categories and excavates the different sites of their reproduction.6

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6 Some recent interventions in the field of Indian diaspora studies have been quite critical of the scholarship’s overall failure to situate the phenomena of diaspora within broader political and social contexts. As Sunil Amrith writes: “There is a tendency in the literature … to paint a very inward-looking picture of diasporic communities isolated from contact with others, and fixated upon
By any estimation, the 16 years from 1944 to 1960 were absolutely critical for the development of South Africa’s opposition to white minority rule. Historians of this period generally describe it in terms of the growing “multi-racial” unity of Africans, Indians, Coloureds, and a small number of whites under the aegis of the ANC-led Congress Alliance. According to this version of events, a series of groundbreaking agreements and common political actions created the basis for transcending racial divisions: the 1947 “Doctors’ Pact” between the presidents of the ANC, NIC, and Transvaal Indian Congress; the 1952 Defiance Campaign during which South Africans of all racial groups collectively violated apartheid laws; the formation of the “multi-racial” Congress Alliance in 1953; and the 1955 Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter, the alliance’s declaration of principles and perhaps the most significant document in South African political history. Unquestionably, these years produced the symbols, personalities, and terminology that came to define the ANC and its allied organizations for the next five decades. This dissertation contends that the Indian independence struggle, the writings of political leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and South African Indian political activists were more central to this process than many historians concede and, somewhat paradoxically, the depth of the racial divisions between Indians and Africans was far more intractable.

reproducing social and cultural institutions from home.” See Sunil S. Amrith, “Tamil Diasporas Across the Bay of Bengal,” American Historical Review114, no. 3 (June 2009), 562. Much of the scholarship on Indian identity and politics in South Africa either passes over the African majority in silence or addresses the impact of African-Indian racial dynamics solely at the level of organized politics. For two recent examples this elision, see Sugata Bose, A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006) 148-70; Parvathi Raman, “Yusuf Dadoo: A Son of South Africa,” in Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, South Africa’s 1940: World of Possibility (Cape Town: Double Storey: 2005), 228-37.
Organization and Chapter Summaries

In this dissertation, I employ the term “racial dynamics” to describe the complex articulation of class relations, social organization, and racial ideology. Neither reducible to an element of social structure nor simply ideological, the idea of racial dynamics refers to the interplay between stereotype and interaction within particular spaces, like stores, bioscopes, factories, or buses. In contradistinction to a totalizing system, a racial dynamic is a pattern or grammar that can become dominant in some circumstances, but does not govern every situation and therefore permits exceptions or alternatives. Since the differing stereotypes of the participants organize or script a racial dynamic, it can also be translated into other locations and reenacted accordingly. As Barbara Fields makes clear in a different context, “The ritual repetition of the appropriate social behaviors makes for the continuity of ideology, not the ‘handing down’ of the appropriate ‘attitudes.’” At the same time, the racial dynamics of a given space, for example the experience of African domestic workers in Indian households, can have a wider impact through vehicles like family history, jokes, and rumors. By privileging the dimension of space, the concept of racial dynamics avoids the twin pitfalls of a “race relations” framework: the abstraction of race from the functioning of other social relations (namely class and gender) and the reification of “racial groups” as historical actors.

Chapter 1 attempts to explain the central paradox of Durban’s racial dynamics. How did the stereotype of the “Indian merchant” become the dominant trope of African discourse

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8 For two critiques of the race relations approach, see Fields, “Race, Slavery and Ideology,” 98-9; Paul Gilroy, There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15-42. It is important to underline the pervasive ideological influence of the race relations framework on the thinking of African and Indian intellectuals in South Africa, who closely followed the publications of the South African Institute of Race Relations and regularly attended and spoke at meetings organized by the institute. I discuss this question at greater length in chapter 3.
about “the Indian” when the vast majority of Indians lived in conditions of urban squalor little different than Africans? In answering this question, I focus on the racial dynamics that developed within a set of Indian-owned spaces—stores, buses, and racially-mixed shantytowns—that provided the ersatz infrastructure for the rapid urbanization of Indians and African from the late 1930s onward. The central role of these sites in organizing urban life helped to translate the complexities of political economy and ethno-linguistic difference into the simplistic, but extremely powerful, idiom of race. More immediately than white domination, many African migrants experienced urban life in terms of a haphazard and fragile hierarchy of “Indian” over “African.” These interactions did not, for the most part, involve the elite of the Indian “merchant class” (a term that homogenizes the vast social and economic disparities between different sections of the Indian petite bourgeoisie), but a poorer and far more vulnerable layer of former indentured laborers: shop hands, bus drivers, and small plot owners. Although African politicians like A.W.G. Champion (president of the Natal ANC during most of the 1940s) regularly employed anti-Indian demagoguery in their speeches and writing, the weakness of organized African politics strongly suggests that they were largely echoing the intense resentments of many migrant workers and shantytown dwellers. Individual Africans and Indians were friends, drinking partners, criminal coconspirators, social acquaintances, political comrades, and lovers. They shopped at the same stores, rode the same buses, often worked in the same factories, and occasionally lived side-by-side. But in narratives of urban life during the 1940s and 50s, these other possibilities appear mainly in the form of anecdotes, marginal details of the city’s social fabric, or individual exceptions.
In chapter 2, I trace the debate between proponents of “Non-European cooperation” and “unity” in African politics during the 1940s. Beginning in the mid 1940s, the Non-European Unity Movement, a leftist organization based in the Western Cape, espoused a single, federated organization of all “Non-European” groups. This position provoked increasing concern among ANC and Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) leaders regarding the possible fragmentation of the “national” organizations over the question of unity. In direct response, ANC President Dr. A.B. Xuma made his first appeals to the leaders of the South African Indian Congress and (Coloured) African People’s Organization for a form of “cooperation” among the established groups that preserved their separate identities. During the same period, the first president of the ANC Youth League, Anton Lemebe, penned a series of polemics against the idea of unity based on an ideological defense of African nationalism and racist denunciations of the “Indian exploiter.” Events in South Asian and South African Indian politics heavily influenced the terms and course of these debates. African intellectuals pored over the writings of political leaders like Nehru and closely followed the development of the Quit India Movement in newspapers like Indian Opinion; African newspapers like Ilanga Lase Natal and Inkundla Ya Bantu wrote extensively about Indian independence and its significance for Natal’s racial dynamics and South African politics. This chapter includes revaluations of the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign by the Indian Congresses and the 1947 Doctors’ Pact between the presidents of the ANC, NIC, and Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC).

Chapter 3 addresses one of the most fraught and controversial events in Natal history, the January 1949 “Durban Riots.” Sparked by a relatively minor altercation between an Indian shopkeeper and an African youth, a melee between African and Indian passersby
escalated into two days of rioting by Africans and an anti-Indian pogrom in the racially-mixed shanty towns surrounding Durban. Crowds of Africans looted Indian-owned shops, attacked and killed Indians, burned houses and buildings, and raped Indian women and girls. These gangs also targeted Africans employed by Indians. In the midst of the chaos, numerous Africans protected Indian neighbors and friends by hiding them or helping them flee.

Although most accounts depict these events in racial terms (no estimates even exist for the number of people involved in the riots), the riots sharply polarized Durban’s Africans: many sympathized with the aims of the attackers, but strongly disproved of the violence employed. The Durban pogrom resulted in a severe crisis within the ANC. Following the pogrom, Natal ANC and Indian Congress leaders worked together to appeal for calm and released a joint statement condemning the violence signed by African and Indian leaders from across the country. However, the circumstances surrounding the joint statement provoked further discord within the ANC leadership and many working-class Africans began to challenge publically the position of cooperation adopted by the ANC. Although a layer of Indian cadre argued that the riots demonstrated the necessity for non-European cooperation, these events deeply traumatized large sections of Durban’s Indian community, particularly the working class, which increasingly retreated into political passivity and racial insularity.

Chapter 4 begins by discussing one of the most common anti-Indian accusations voiced by Africans following the pogrom: Indian men used their wealth and privilege to seduce African women. This claim was ubiquitous: it appeared in erudite discourses on race advancement by African nationalist intellectuals, satirical newspaper articles in the Zulu press, the sermons of Africanist preachers, and everyday rumors. For many Africans, miscegenation represented the usurpation of sexual access to African women by a race whose
relative achievements supposedly came at their immediate expense. The image of Indian men seducing African women exemplified the nation’s powerlessness, humiliation, and collective loss of patriarchal right. Sometimes Zulu intellectuals also alleged that a certain kind of African woman—modern, professional, and outside proper channels of familial control—sought out these attentions. In contrast, Indian nationalists universally denied that miscegenation between Africans and Indians occurred on any significant scale. Whether they advocated or rejected a process of “Westernization,” Indian leaders conflated a degree of racial exclusiveness with cultural survival. Beyond the level of elite discourse, groups of Indian families constructed and reproduced ethno-linguistic communities through a combination of endogamy, religious institutions, and reconfigured elements of caste. The gendered organization of Indian communities resulted in the exclusion of most Africans from Indian social spaces, particularly homes. When Africans did work in Indian households, they frequently experienced a variety of discriminatory and abusive treatments. Despite the greater cooperation between the ANC and Indian Congress at a political level during the 1950s, the questions of interracial sex and gender relations continued to influence powerfully Durban’s racial dynamics.

In chapter 5, I explore the importance of Natal’s racial dynamics and debates over “the Indian” for the transformation of the ANC in the 1950s, the development of the Congress Alliance, and the split of the Africanist current from the ANC in 1958 to form the PAC. The first section of the chapter describes a new urban demimonde that developed in Johannesburg and, to a lesser extent, Durban in the 1950s: a self-consciously cosmopolitan world of underground shebeens, mixed-race dances, jazz concerts, football and boxing matches, curry houses, and magazines like *Drum*. This chapter then analyzes the 1952
Defiance Campaign and the origins of the Congress Alliance between the ANC, Indian Congresses, (white) Congress of democrats, and South African Coloured Peoples Organization. It was during the Defiance Campaign—when groups of volunteers of all races defied apartheid laws wearing ANC colors—that the ANC first emerged as a mass-based organization. The third section of chapter 5 tells the story of the Natal ANC during the 1950s. Despite the election of Albert Lutuli to the ANC presidency in 1952, the Natal ANC continued to stagnate in the years following the pogrom. Membership remained in the hundreds and many Africans continued to oppose any form of collaboration with the Indian Congress. In townships like Cato Manor, conservative, Zulu-nationalist cooperatives like Zulu Hlanganani established a considerable degree of economic and political control. In the late 1950s, the Natal ANC experienced rapid growth driven by the revival of African trade unionism, protests over forced removals from Cato Manor, and resistance in the countryside. Nevertheless, the Natal ANC remained divided over collaboration with Indians and the impact of this upsurge of struggle on Durban’s racial dynamics was ultimately ambiguous at the time of its banning in 1960.

Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the new forms of nationalism that emerged from the political strategy of Congress Alliance and, especially, the Africanist critique of the ANC’s new direction. Following the Defiance Campaign, ANC leaders began to use the word “multi-racial” to refer to an essential characteristic of a South African nation. At the same time, the ANC leaders began to argue that the Congress Alliance—and particularly the campaign for the Freedom Charter—provided a model or image of the nation itself. The Freedom Charter became the central symbol in a transformed rhetoric and political aesthetics: the Congress Alliance sought to create the image of a unified, singular South
African nation that simultaneously affirmed the equal claim of each racial group to belonging. In confronting the immediate dilemmas of building a united movement composed of historically distinct groups, the Congress Alliance created a new image of the nation, an image whose major inspiration was the organizational form of the alliance itself. Finally, I discuss the Africanist current’s critique of the tactical and strategic assumptions embodied in the Congress Alliance’s political aesthetics. Emerging in the early 1950s in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape Youth Leagues, the Africanists faction based its ideas on the debates of the 1940s and Lembede’s critique of non-European unity. Influenced by a combination of ideology and deeply-engrained racial bitterness, the Africanists argued that any assertion of group identity—especially in the form of a separate political organization—represented an acceptance of racial segregation and identification with the status quo. This chapter shows that it was following the secession of the Africanists in 1958 that the terms “multi-racialism” and “non-racialism” were first widely used in African politics; the ANC appears to have adopted the term “non-racial” from the recently-formed PAC in the early 1960s. The ANC-PAC schism radically transformed the intellectual terrain of the South African resistance.

**Sources, Language, and Racial Terminology**

This dissertation relies primarily on three kinds of sources: the newspapers *Ilanga Lase Natal, Inkundla Ya Bantu, Drum,* and *Indian Opinion;* a collection of several hundred interviews carried out in Zulu by researchers at the University of Natal in the late 1970s and early 1980s; and published and unpublished political materials from the 1940s-60s, ranging from leaflets for demonstrations to the personal correspondence of African and Indian political leaders. I also make use of novels, government reports, interviews that I conducted
during two research trips to South Africa, and the published and unpublished memoirs of political activists.

I follow three general rules in analyzing this material. First, I respect the political and racial terminology present in the documents themselves in assessing their intellectual and political import. Although this principle might appear rudimentary, most historians of South Africa utilize political and racial vocabulary predominant in later periods—especially, the terms “non-racial” and “multi-racial”—as a neutral, descriptive language in their discussions of the 1940s and 50s. In effect, this practice rewrites the racial discourse of the past so that it reflects the politics of a later period, thus introducing an inadvertent teleology at the level of narration. It also minimizes the profound political and intellectual disruptions in African politics caused by two events: the 1949 Durban Riots and the formation of the PAC in 1959.

Second, I treat general statements regarding “African-Indian relations” or “the Indian” as examples of discourses that need to be historicized, rather than direct evidence of quotidian interactions or practices. At the most basic level, racial consciousness—the interpretation of personal experience according to a racial typology—functions by attributing the form of social relationships to intrinsic qualities of groups themselves.9 The force of racial consciousness directly shapes the field of social interactions on multiple levels, but its content does not accurately reflect any aspect of that reality—by its very nature, it obfuscates

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9 As Stuart Hall argues: “Here racism is particularly powerful and its imprint on popular consciousness especially deep, because in such racial characteristics as colour, ethnic origin, geographic position, etc., racism discovers what other ideologies have to construct” an apparently natural or universal basis in nature itself. Yet despite this apparent grounding in biological givens, outside history, racism, when it appears, has an effect on other ideological formations within the same society, and its development promotes a transformation of the whole ideological field in which it becomes operative. It can, in this way harness other ideological discourses to itself…” See Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 342.
heterogeneity, underlying social structures, and the operations of power.10 Third, I rely more heavily on material that “appears to be purely incidental to the main purpose of the witness” or describes a specific event or occasion.11 Every analysis of a racial dynamic risks hypostasizing “race” precisely because stereotypes play a central role in determining the behavior of the participants within a particular space. But individual stories often illuminate the limitations of a racial dynamic or sometimes uncover arenas where its script did not apply. In my account, I have tried to establish a judicious balance between emphasizing the enormous power of racial consciousness (and racism) in virtually every aspect of Durban life and capturing the continual presence of social interactions that defy generalization in racial terms.

My dissertation gives particular attention to the intellectual content and representational strategies of African and Indian newspapers, especially editorial writings, articles on major events within South Africa and India, descriptions of Durban life, and the views expressed by readers in letters. What was the audience for these publications? In 1946, a government report on adult education estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 Africans were reading periodicals of some sort. That same year, Inkundla Ya Bantu, a relatively sophisticated journal of politics and ideas, boasted a circulation of 7,000, largely in Natal.12 One estimate suggests that five adults read each copy of the Transvaal-based

10 For a similar argument, see Loïc J.D. Wacquant, “For an Analytic of Racial Domination,” Political Power and Social Theory 11, 221-34. Also see Jonathan Glassman, “Slower than A Massacre: The Multiple Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial Africa,” The American Historical Review 109, no. 3 (June 2004), 720-754.
newspaper *Bantu World* during this period and then shared its content verbally with others.\(^{13}\) *Inkundla* carried articles in both English and a number of African languages. *Ilanga* printed material in English and Zulu, with Zulu predominating. Only a minority of readers could understand the English language pages. During the 1940s, *Indian Opinion* was primarily written in English, although a small section of each issue appeared in Gujarati. *Drum* only used English. *Indian Opinion, Ilanga*, and *Inkundla* sometimes printed articles from each other’s pages; political activists certainly followed the English-language press of each “racial group.”

The influence of the print media also reached significantly beyond the literate public. As Eugen Weber writes regarding 19th-century France: “The printing press stands at the entrance of the modern world as dragons guard the gateway of a temple. But who in nineteenth-century France, had access to the temple of the printing press? The answer is, surprisingly many people, for one need not read to enjoy its products.”\(^{14}\) Although only 23 percent of Africans could read in 1952, crowds of listeners regularly gathered around individuals reading papers aloud in public locations like buses and shebeens.\(^{15}\) But this reach should not be exaggerated. An enormous gulf in comprehension existed between the most literate readers and a wider audience, which was still learning the basic conventions of a

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\(^{14}\) Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 452

Western-style print culture, like the distinction between news articles and advertising. As I discuss at greater length in chapter one, the views of a more subaltern layer of Africans sometimes appeared in *Ilanga* and *Inkundla* in letters, quotations in articles, and stray anecdotes. But such voices were heavily mediated by the worldview and politics of the journalists and editors.

The question of language and linguistic divisions in Durban’s racial dynamics requires further research. Descriptions of Durban often emphasized its polyglot character. Its inhabitants spoke one (or often more) of several languages: isiZulu, four or five Indian languages, several varieties of English, Afrikaans, and a small number of other African tongues. A significant number of Indians, particularly those who grew up outside of Durban, spoke Zulu quite fluently. In rural and small town Natal, racial divisions were far less marked and a much greater level of social intimacy frequently prevailed. In his autobiography, NIC activist Ismail Meer recounts the following anecdote from the early 1930s: “When we reach Kundanlal’s house we find him the centre of attention in a group of Zulu, Tamil and Hindi listeners. He is loudly translating the Gujarati of *Indian Views* into Zulu, which every listener, Indian and African, can follow and fully understand.” But the majority of Indians who thought that they knew Zulu actually spoke a pidgin that drew from English, Zulu, and Afrikaans called Fanagalo (or, among whites, “Kitchen Kaffir”). According to linguist Rajend Mesthrie, Indian migrants quickly learned Fangalo in the late 19th century because it

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16 For a humorous and insightful discussion of the struggles that *Drum* magazine faced in addressing the poorer and less educated African public, see Anthony Sampson, *DRUM: The Newspaper that Won the Heart of Africa* (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Press, 1957), 114-126.
facilitated conversation not only with Zulu speakers, but also the English, Afrikaners, and Indians from different geographic regions. In isolated rural communities, some older Indians—particularly women—continued to use Fanagalo as a lingua franca into the post-apartheid period.\(^{19}\) Most Zulu speakers, however, found the pidgin offensive and the very fact that many Indians confused it with Zulu indicates something of the depths of their alienation from urban African culture. When Fanagalo appeared in a story or column printed in *Ilanga*, it almost always signified that the speaker was either racist or ignorant.\(^{20}\)

This dissertation generally uses the designations “Indian” and “African,” although I sometimes have recourse to the terms “Zulu” to emphasize ethnic affiliation and “South African Indian” to differentiate someone or something from Indians in South Asia. My choice is based largely on the present convention within South Africa. As in most times and places, racial terminology was an enormously charged question during the 1940s and 50s. White newspapers generally avoided the word African (only self-identified liberals or leftists used it in print) and instead employed Native, Bantu, or non-white (*die naturelle* and *nie-blankes* in Afrikaans). African intellectuals had long rejected these appellations.\(^{21}\) When writing about Indians in Zulu, *Inkundla* and *Ilanga* generally employed *amaNdiya*, although writers in *Ilanga* sometimes referred to *amaKula*. *Ilanga*’s English language pages did not,


\(^{21}\) As one editorial in *Inkundla* made clear: “It is plain bad manners to call a man by a name which is not his. To refer to us collectively as ‘Natives’ is merely the magnified form of the insult and indignity the African suffers in European homes and stores where he is called ‘John,’ ‘Jim’ or any but his name.” “Our Friends, Please Note!” *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, 2 April 1949.
however, use the word “Coolies” during the period in question.  

*Indian Opinion* variously writes about Bantus, Natives, and—somewhat less frequently—Africans. In sources written by Indian intellectuals and political figures, an almost dizzying array of terms appears for the diaspora, each with slightly different implications: oversees Indians, South Africans of Indian origin, Indian South Africans, South African Indians, so-called Indians, and Indians of South African origin. In everyday speech and later interviews, the inflammatory terms “Kaffirs” and “Coolies” were simply ubiquitous.

How does one write about the ongoing production of racial difference at multiple levels—including in law, social space, political organization, speech acts, and individual consciousness—without reifying distinct races? It is useful to underline the forms of internal differentiation that complicate every identity and ensure that its terms are *always* contested. As Talal Asad explains: “Even when identity is analyzed into its heterogeneous parts (class, gender, regional divisions, etc.), what is done, surely, is to reveal its constitution, not to dissolve its unity. The unity is maintained by those who speak its name, and more generally by all who adjust their existence to its (sometimes shifting) requirements.”  

Notwithstanding their inescapable basis in political economy, social relations, and forms of governance, identities do not simply “exist,” but are reproduced in consciousness through subjective acts of identification.  

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22 I have not yet been able to fully trace the development of the term *amaKula*, which has a few near homonyms in 19th century isiZulu (including *ukula*, meaning weeds or rubbish). Although *amaKula* appears in interviews conducted by James Stuart during the late 1890s, it was not listed in Colenso’s 1905 Zulu-English dictionary. See Rev. J. L. Döhne, *A Zulu-Kafi Dictionary: Etymologically Explained with Copious Illustrations and Examples* (Cape Town: 1857), 287; and Rev. J.W. Colenso, *Zulu-English Dictionary* (Natal: Vause, Slater & Co., 1905).  


regarding “Africans” or “Indians” generally represented efforts to articulate a sectional project in the unifying terms of a collective racial interest—they aimed, at a fundamental level, to produce the reality which they claimed to describe. As much as possible, I avoid referring to Indians or Africans in an undifferentiated sense. Such statements are never neutral vis-à-vis their intended object.
Chapter 1: 
Political Economy, Stereotype, and Urban Space

*In Durban itself Indian women are distinctive in vivid saris; mosques and temples break the line of colonial architecture with minarets and domes adorned with statues of the Hindu pantheon; shops are stocked with silk, brassware and spices; in the ‘Indian markets’, which are among Durban’s main tourist attractions, stalls are crammed with oriental jewelry and trinkery, with a variety of lentils, rice, beans and oils, with betel leaf and areca nut, lime, camphor, incense sticks, with currie powders, masala, all kinds of fruits and herbs, as well as with more familiar goods which themselves become unfamiliar in the excited atmosphere of oriental bargaining.*


*Now Indians, as you are aware, were the shop keepers of the time, they provided transport, they provided land so Africans were literally helpless. Now this brought about a situation that when an African wrongly boarded a bus and wanted to jump off, invariably he was assaulted and murdered and the Africans couldn’t do anything about it: the shops belonged to the Indians, the very land on which they lived belonged to the Indians.*

—Interview with C.C. Majola, Kwa Mashu, 20 June 1979.

In the years following the First World War, the rapid and large-scale urbanization of both Africans and Indians permanently transformed the social landscape of Durban and other cities in Natal. The expansion of secondary industry created new prospects for employment, especially for former indentured laborers who left the countryside in ever growing numbers. The same period witnessed a protracted economic crisis in the “Native Reserves”—those sad fragments of the dismembered Zulu kingdom maintained by the Natal state as labor reservoirs. Land shortages, population growth, overstocking of cattle, and intermittent years of severe drought encouraged a mass exodus of Africans, largely young men who lived in the backyards of whites and Indian households, government controlled hostels, or—increasingly

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2 C.C. Majola interviewed by A. Manson and D. Collins, 20 June 1979, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 142), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
—found barren rooms in the shack lands that began to surround Durban and other cities. The social and political consequences of this “African industrial revolution” dominated the first half of the 20th century: the rise of Indian and African labor unions, the emergence and radicalization of mass-based African nationalist organizations, and the new system of racial control implemented by the Afrikaner Nationalist regime under the slogan “Apartheid.” Yet in the case of Natal, historians have generally analyzed the urbanization of Indians and Africans in parallel—as largely distinct stories of racial groups, occasionally intersecting in the form of political cooperation or social conflict. In reality, these two processes were interwoven in the details and patterns of everyday life, conditioning and transforming the other on multiple levels. To paraphrase E.P. Thompson’s famous discussion of class, relationships precede identity: we must start by analyzing the concrete social conditions that integrated Zulu migrants and Indians of differing class, linguistic, and religious backgrounds into a common urban landscape.

The image of the apartheid city continues to hold enormous power over the imagination of South Africa’s historians. Since most of the writing on South African urban history concerns the origins of racial segregation and institutionalized white supremacy, historians have often neglected those aspects of the pre-1948 city (and, more accurately, the city before the forced removals that began in the late 1950s/early 1960s) that succumbed to

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3 For a perceptive recent account, see Goolam Vahed, “The Making of ‘Indianess’: Indian Politics in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s,” Journal of Natal and Zulu History, no. 17 (1997). Although Vahed emphasizes that “‘Indianess,’ emerged in relation to Africans and whites,” (2) in his survey this question is largely explored at the level of the political history and the relationship between Indian and African nationalist organizations.

later developments. At its height, the apartheid city boasted large-scale, systematically planned, and clearly demarcated residential segregation between the four official race classifications: White, African, Indian, and Coloured. Although significant regional variations existed, the Nationalist regime succeeded in enforcing a strong correlation between race and class, particularly in the larger cities. The vast majority of the industrial working class was African; Indians comprised a “middle group” of businessmen, professionals, and skilled workers situated between white and black. The apartheid policy of “separate development” sought to secure the correspondence of race and space (in terms of both social and geographical segregation), although the economy’s dependence on super-exploited African labor ultimately made this goal unrealizable.

Remarkably little of this picture held true for Durban before the early 1960s. Although a clear pattern of (largely informal) segregation had emerged between white and Indian areas by the close of the 19th century, the growth of African and Indian neighborhoods in later decades followed a different logic. The city of Durban established some municipal housing for Indian and African workers at locations like Lamontville and Magazine Barracks, but these provisions were woefully inadequate for the scale of urban migration. By

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5 For an overview, see Paul Maylam, “Explaining the Apartheid City: 20 Years of South African Urban Historiography, Journal of Southern African Studies 21, no. 1 (March 1995). While Maylam is correct to argue that a broad continuity existed in segregationist policy and the mechanisms of social control before and after 1950 (although not necessarily the state and capital’s immediate motivations), his argument does not address the changing social realities of African and Indian life after the implementation of Group Areas Act or relations among different sections of the non-European population. For a brief treatment of this latter question, see Bill Freund, “Contrasts in Urban Segregation: a Tale of Two Cities, Durban (South Africa) and Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire),” Journal of Southern African Studies 27, no. 3 (September 2001). Freund notes that: “The local state had limited capacity and financial will to control closely and govern urban space. The administration of areas outside the central business districts, and desirable white suburbs, was subject to neglect as much as to explicit and enforced segregation,” 530-1.

the 1930s, the Durban Commission reported the growth of a “black belt” around Durban: a network of racially mixed shack settlements and sprawling, working-class neighborhoods.\(^7\) In areas largely outside of municipal control, the poor of all races (including a small number of whites) utilized buses, stores, and housing in large part established or owned by the Indians.\(^8\) A system of social hierarchy developed based on this haphazard urban infrastructure. When Africans complained bitterly about the “color bar” in these areas, these imprecations were largely aimed at their treatment in local stores and their own exclusion from Indian community institutions and businesses. At the same time, the vast majority of Indians, particularly former indentured laborers moving into the cities, faced economic conditions little different from African migrants: many were unskilled or semi-skilled workers living at or just above subsistence level.\(^9\) Profoundly alienated from the elite preserve of organized Indian politics, the Indian working class inhabited a world comprised of closely-knit family, religious, and linguistic communities built around local enclaves and landownerships. Africans, in contrast, moved into the city overwhelmingly as single men and maintained strong ties to the rural areas. Indians and Africans of all classes lived among and adjacent to one another, often shopped at the same stores, worked in the same factories, and

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\(^8\) In 1932, the city of Durban extended its municipal boundaries to encompass eight peri-urban areas, adding approximately 51,000 Indians and 21,000 Africans to the city’s official population. However, the effective policing and official control over these areas—and Cato Manor which was more centrally located—remained minimal. See University of Natal Economics Department, *Durban Housing Survey*, Natal Regional Survey, Additional Report no. 2 (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1952), 19.

rode on the same buses. To the extent that segregation existed in the “black belt,” it was primarily imposed and policed from within: by the form of community institutions erected by the inhabitants themselves.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which a set of urban spaces (especially Indian-owned stores, racially-mixed shanty towns, and private buses) shaped the racial dynamics of mid-century Durban. By sharply restricting African landownership and struggling to prevent the formation of an African proletariat in the cities, the colonial state—largely by accident—created the conditions for social differentiation between African migrants and a more settled, urbanized Indian population. Starting in the 1930s, the expansion of industry in Natal resulted in the growing competition of African and Indian workers for employment. But neither factor adequately explains the depth of Natal’s racial polarization. Despite the grinding poverty of most Indians and the sharp cultural divisions between the petite bourgeoisie and working classes, the majority of Africans came to identify Indians in general with the stereotype of the “merchant.” The most brutal expression of this misrecognition occurred during the 1949 Durban Riots, when a Zulu pogrom targeted Indians of all classes and backgrounds in retaliation for (the real and alleged) exploitations of shopkeepers, landlords, and bus drivers. Although the racialist demagoguery of petit-bourgeois African leaders like A.W.G. Champion played some role in fostering these stereotypes, the weakness

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11 Ashwin Desai makes a parallel argument: “Ethnic mobilization cannot be seen simply as something foisted upon people by the state. The possible impulses from below emanating from the lived reality as experienced by the actors needs to be researched.” See “A Context for Violence: Social and Historical Underpinnings of Indo-African Violence in a South African Community” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1993), 14.
of organized African politics in Natal during the 1930s and 40s strongly suggests that the influence flowed the other way: ANC politicians and Zulu-language newspapers echoed the exorbitant resentments of workers and the poor, particularly the anti-Indian rhetoric of buyers’ cooperatives that gained strength in the last years of the Second World War.13

In the following pages, I describe how the day-to-day experiences of Africans within spaces like shops and buses created a “racial dynamic” expressed in a widely-shared set of stereotypes regarding Indians. Alongside Indian landownership, these sites provided a threadbare and makeshift infrastructure that not only shaped the process of urbanization, but integrated “African” and “Indian” into a hierarchical relationship within the same cityscape. In other words, the centrality of Indian-owned sites to the process of African urbanization translated the complexities of political economy and ethno-linguistic fragmentation into the simplistic, but extremely powerful, idiom of race. As I discuss below, this hierarchical relationship could take one of two forms: subordinate incorporation within “Indian” spaces (for example, abusive treatment within shops or buses) or direct exclusion. Relationships between individuals sometimes transcended these divisions, but they appear in most sources from this period—when they surface at all—as either incidental details or singular exceptions to unquestioned generalities. When it came to race, exceptions rarely disproved the rule.

**The Intersection of Space and Stereotype**

The reconstruction of popular African ideas about Indians in the years before the 1949 Riots poses significant methodological problems. Not surprisingly, the most abundant

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sources are the writings and speeches of literate African nationalists and particularly the newspapers *Ilanga Lase Natal* and *Inkundla ya Bantu*. Both newspapers frequently printed letters in English and Zulu voicing (or purporting to voice) the complaints of poorer Africans. Their editors likewise devoted a significant amount of attention to the question of “African-Indian relations,” particularly in the aftermath of the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign, the 1949 pogrom, and increased political cooperation between the ANC and Indian Congresses. *Ilanga* consciously approached “the Indian question” from the perspective of an aspirant nationalist business class; its articles and editorials regarding Indians often reflected the frustrations of would-be small proprietors. A letter written to *Ilanga* following the riots expressed this viewpoint clearly: “Indians have monopolised all Non-European business enterprises by any means where they could not use fair ones, to the great disadvantage of the Africans. Even where the Africans predominate in numbers all business is owned by the Indians.”\(^{14}\) While *Inkundla* broadly shared the above class viewpoint, it generally focused more on the failure of the Indian elite (or often simply the “Indian”) to assist Africans in the project of national uplift and economic advancement. “Though the Indians realised that the whiteman was using them as agents to oppress the African,” an *Inkundla* editorial complained “they made no positive efforts to convince the Africans that they were not willing partners to this dirty business. Here and there individuals maintained an enlightened outlook towards us as a people. But in moments of crisis for the African, the Indians tended to maintain a neutrality that helped our oppressors.”\(^{15}\) In their efforts to articulate the interests of a modern African nationalism, both newspapers translated the idiom of working class grievances into the Weltanschauung of racial populism.


A more plebian rhetoric appears intermittently in the propaganda of buyers’ collectives, the sermons of township preachers, the testimony of working class and poor Africans at the government inquiry into the 1949 Riots, rumors described in memoirs, and later interviews. This idiom often included elements of conspiracy and focused more directly on the quotidian humiliations suffered by Africans. It was also far more explicit than elite statements in asserting a profound Zulu nationalism. The most frequent tropes of this popular anti-Indian sentiment concerned the business dealings of shop owners and bus drivers: “dishonest,” “crafty,” and “arrogant” were common epithets. As many observers of mid-century Durban noted, these images almost exactly paralleled the stock tropes of anti-Semitism. However, these same stereotypes regarding middlemen also emerged in contexts where no racial difference existed between buyer and seller, particularly when social developments challenged the existing norms of economic distribution. Although expressed in the terms of the very prejudices that it purported to explain, the 1949 Riots Commission Report contained an acute observation: among recently urbanized Africans, the Indian often personified the capricious and uncontrollable mechanisms of the market. For many African migrants, the Indian merchant may not have just been ethnically foreign. He embodied the

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17 Describing the search for Indian safes during the 1949 Riots: “They failed. The coolies were extremely clever. They took away the safes first and sent them away. When the fighting broke out and the killing took place before they came here there wasn’t a single safe here.” Tunywa Dlamini interviewed by Bonginkou C. Mkhize, 2 November 1981, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban. Note that the frustration of one stereotype (the stores of hidden wealth) is interpreted to reinforce another (the “clever coolie”), a paranoid mode of reasoning also common to conspiracy theories.


increasing power of an alien ethos of calculating and distributing wealth. As one informant told Leo Kuper in the 1950s: “We cannot compete with Indians in business. Far from it. I don’t think we’ll ever pitch up to their understanding. Where merchants work it out for us, it’s alright.” Rumors concerning the hoarding of wealth, black marketing of staples, and the adulteration of sugar gave a phenomenological immediacy to market forces that were otherwise inherently invisible.

Despite the differences in underlying content, the two main stereotypes regarding Indians were the same in both elite and popular discourses. First, the “Indian” was synonymous with the “merchant.” The letter from Ilanga quoted above neatly expressed this conception: “the Indians” owned all business and utilized any means necessary to protect “their” interests. An equally undifferentiated category—“the African”—was victim to these machinations. This type of racial binary reinforced a second motif: the Indian’s intrinsic foreignness. Anecdotes and rumors often stressed details like the smell of curry, the sari of the woman shopkeeper, or the particular intonations of South African Indian English. However many generations his or her family had lived in Natal, the Indian remained a perpetual outsider.

Stereotypes, by their very nature, simplify complex social relationships and homogenize groups: both the represented object, and implicitly, the intended audience of the statement or joke. Stereotypes frequently provide the lexicon of subaltern rumor and protest,

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21 For an earlier example of this discourse, see the following statement from 1903 by a conservative Christian, Mbovu, recorded in the Stuart Archive: “Money was brought by Europeans. We had none. Natives should not have been given money because they do not know its use. They should be paid in clothing and cattle. But coolies, Arabs, and Chinese understand money. Let contracts exist between them.” See James Stuart, The James Stuart Archive of Recorder Oral Evidence Relating to the History the Zulu and Neighbouring People, ed. and trans. C. de. B. Webb and J.B. Wright, vol. 3, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1976), 29.
22 Quoted in Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie, 300.
but in this process they mask the heterogeneity of oppressed strata (by projecting a particular quality onto the other) and thereby naturalize power relationships within subjugated communities.\textsuperscript{23} It is impossible, even dangerous, to make judgments regarding popular sentiment on the basis of such images alone—however widely they circulated. In different contexts, a given stereotype can express a bewildering and contradictory range of attitudes: resentment, fear, jealousy, anger, humiliation as well as admiration, gratitude, or even desire. And since the fixity of stereotypes is rarely adequate to the complexities of social interactions, they are often deployed inconsistently: individuals uphold the reality of generalizations, while making exceptions in the concrete. As Sander Gilman writes:

“Because there is no real line between self and other [or, in this case, the division abnegates the heterogeneity within both groups], an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self.”\textsuperscript{24} Among both educated Africans and Zulu-speaking migrants, stereotypes regarding the Indian merchant appear to have been virtually ubiquitous until the early 1950s and they still maintained a strong hold on popular

\textsuperscript{23}In emphasizing the heterogeneous and internally stratified nature of oppressed groups, I am following one of Gramsci’s key insights into the social history of class society (an argument, moreover, curiously neglected in debates over the nature of the “subaltern.”). In his “Notes on Italian History,” Gramsci argues that the mechanisms of class domination necessarily fragment the working class and peasantry until each class had developed a political party allowing it to contest state power: “The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot be unified until they are able to become a ‘State’: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States.” See “Notes on Italian History,” in \textit{Selections from the Prison Notebooks}, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 52.

\textsuperscript{24} Sander Gilman, \textit{Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness} (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 18. Gilman’s point here concerns the malleable nature of stereotypes and their contradictory character; however, it also applies to the strategic use of stereotype in the face of contradictory experience. This point is particularly important for the cultural history of race in Durban: the illusion of a bounded community is not only an outside imposition, but is continuously generated by both the institutions that shape and claim to speak for a community and the structures of social endogamy that these institutions police.
imagination in the years of close cooperation between the ANC and Indian Congresses. At the same time, the simplistic racial binaries informing these images not only falsified the social realities of Durban, but also served to mask a more complicated set of attitudes (including, sometimes, genuine appreciation and friendship) that co-existed with vehement anti-Indian prejudice.

The most striking aspect of the stereotypes regarding Indians was their obvious falsity. The vast majority of Durban’s Indians were hideously poor, many lived in earthen-floor dwellings built from scraps of corrugated iron and pieces of wood, and only a minority could afford anything beyond subsistence. The single largest occupation group during the 1940s and 50s was semi-skilled and unskilled industrial labor. African and Indian observers from outside of Natal, even in later decades, were frequently struck by the expanse and poverty of the Indian working class. In his memoir of Indian life in Pretoria during the 1960s and 70s, Jay Naidoo conveyed the following impressions of Durban: “I also saw something I had never seen in Pretoria: Indian petrol attendants, Indian refuse collectors, Indian street sweepers—Indians, in sum, doing all the menial tasks which in Pretoria were reserved for

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25 In an interesting discussion of racial stereotypes in Guyana, Brackette F. Williams suggests that stereotypes initially had a limited basis in the social relations and community values created by plantation society, but then later became incorporated into a racial group’s self-definition vis-à-vis other racial groups. Therefore, even as the original material basis of the stereotypes disappeared, the trope can persist and even intensify: its foundation became the institutions and accompanying discourse of group identity deployed for political ends within a wider social terrain. See Stains on My Name, War in My Veins: Guyana and the politics of Cultural Struggle (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 127-54.


27 “In Durban in 1951, only 4.6 percent of gainfully employed Indians were engaged in agriculture, mining and associated occupations; the percentage for manufacturing industries, commerce, and services being 37.3, 21.1 and 28.7 respectively.” (Note these statistics are organized by industry, rather than job category.) University of Natal, Studies of Indian Employment in Natal, 4.
Africans.” Moreover, the conception of the “merchant class” obfuscated enormous disparities of wealth, security, and prestige among Indian traders. This term generally conflated two very distinct layers. Despite the visibility and political prominence of the Indian elite, only a few hundred Indian professionals and businessmen had obtained levels of wealth comparable to their white counterparts by the beginning of the 1960s. As C.A. Woods warned: “To the casual onlooker the obvious wealth of some Indian traders with well-established premises and first class fittings and stock is apt to give the wrong idea. The other side of the picture, however, shows many small back street traders whose turnover is probably very low.” Although the elite developed relationships with ex-indentured laborers based on economic credit and social patronage, Indians remained sharply divided by language, religion, and reconfigured elements of caste. The division between the poor and relatively affluent—and particularly between worker and trader—heavily overlapped with distinctions of ancestry; intermarriage among the separate religious and linguistic groups was extremely rare. Working class Indians, particularly the descendants of Tamil-speaking indentured laborers, sometimes endured the same abuses as Africans at the hands of Gujarati and Hindi-speakers: overcharging in stores and buses, wage discrimination, and undisguised condescension.

What then explains the equation of “Indian” with “merchant”—and the general invisibility of the Indian working class—in most African sources from the 1940s? In the case

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29C.A. Woods, *The Indian Community of Natal*, 20. Hilda Kuper also emphasized the precarious and marginal situation of most Indian stores. See *Indian People in Natal*, 57.
30My view here is somewhat at variance with Freund, who stresses the connections built by the merchant class with the ex-indentured over the ethnic and class divisions among Indians. See *Insiders and Outsiders*, 37.
31See *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Riots*: “Indians not connected with trade complained to us that they had received similar treatment at the hands of Indian shopkeepers, but were loath to give evidence for fear of reprisals,” 16.
of the Zulu press, this representation was largely ideological. *Ilanga* rarely mentioned poverty among Indians, and those few references served to reinforce the overall case against the Indian merchant. “[T]he poor Indians themselves,” the editor charged after the riots “also complain bitterly against the profiteering of these people, who sell conditionally and change prices according to their whims.”\(^{32}\) Jordan Ngubane’s articles in *Inkudla* sometimes emphasized the class divisions among Indians, but his intent was similar: the impeachment of the existing Indian political leadership and its failure to support the struggles of Africans.\(^{33}\) A different set of factors likely contributed to the power of the merchant stereotype among African migrants. The housing of African and Indian workers in separate municipal barracks, and the concentration of the Indian working class in outlying areas like Clairwood, may have disguised the extent of poverty and class differentiation among the various Indian communities. In addition, Durban’s racially segmented labor market resulted in the concentration of Africans in particular trades (rickshaw pullers, dock workers, and domestic servants)\(^{34}\) and a stratified division of labor existed within some factories that employed both Indians and Africans.\(^{35}\) Nevertheless, these factors only offer a partial explanation, particularly given the significant residential interpenetration of the two groups in many areas and widespread social interactions across the racial line. The stereotypes that circulated about Indians largely derived from the experiences of Africans in and around Indian-owned spaces.

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\(^{32}\) See “As We Were,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 30 April 1949.

\(^{33}\) Concerning Indian foreign missions at the time of the 1946 Passive Resistance campaign, Ngubane wrote: “They themselves [Indians] were so divided by the conflict in their economic interests that it was known world over that the deputations that were now trotting the globe represented only the rich men in the community.” See “The Indian Franchise,” *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, second fortnight, March 1946.

\(^{34}\) Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 38.

\(^{35}\) Interview with Billy Nair, Tongaat, 16 May 2006.
In order to understand Durban’s race politics, we must therefore examine the origin and social dynamics of these sites.

**Stages of Urbanization**

Beginning in the late 19th century, a significant Indian presence developed in Natal’s cities and the surrounding peri-urban areas.\(^{36}\) After their contracts had expired, most indentured workers sought to stay in Natal and a significant number managed to lease and acquire land. On the outskirts of the official Durban borough limits, Indian households could participate in the growing economy of the city (through market gardening, fishing, hawking, and various crafts), while remaining largely beyond the reaches of local state interference. By the 1940s, 40 percent of South Africa’s Indian population settled in the Durban region and smaller communities grew along the “main line” towns connected by the Durban-Rand railway and near the northern Natal coalfields.\(^{37}\) As a market developed among indentured and former-indentured workers, a second migration of “passenger” Indians, largely composed of Gujarati merchants and their poorer kin, began to arrive in Natal and the Transvaal in the mid 1870s. Goolam Vahed explains: “The special circumstances of merchants enabled them to keep their social distance from other Indians and identify with India as their home country. The main distinction in Natal was between Gujarati speaking Muslim and higher caste Hindu traders from northern India and Telugu and Tamil speaking indentured Indians from south India.”\(^{38}\) The condescension of the new mercantile elite clashed sharply with the burgeoning resentments of former sugar-field laborers. By the

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\(^{36}\) For a brief survey of different patterns of Indian segregation in Natal, see Woods, *The Indian Community of Natal*, 12-3.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{38}\) Vahed, “Indian Politics,” 3. This generalization is complicated by the fact that there also existed a large group of indentured laborers from the Ganges valley, debarking from Calcutta, and a small stratum of south Indian merchants, who were sometimes Muslim.
1880s, Gujarati merchants and traders—whom one ex-indentured worker sneeringly referred to as “our so-called Indian brothers”—had come to dominate both Indian business and, especially, politics.\textsuperscript{39} This layer accumulated a considerable amount of wealth. In Durban and Pietermaritzburg at this time, Indians collectively held property valued at £40,000, including 60 retail shops in Durban and two Indian-owned shipping lines.\textsuperscript{40}

The increasing visibility of an urban Indian population sparked a series of racist campaigns by white South Africans and the implementation of new laws directed at controlling Indian movement and economic activity. In 1885 the Transvaal introduced formal segregation for Indian residential areas, and the Orange Free State prohibited Indians from owning and occupying land in 1891. At the end of the decade, the mayors of Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and Newcastle petitioned the colonial secretary for a ban on the purchase of land by Indians—although the secretary refused to comply with their request.\textsuperscript{41} As Maynard Swanson and others have argued, the Natal ruling class’s reaction to the perceived economic, cultural, and ultimately demographic threat of Indian urbanization resulted in some of the first attempts to segregate urban space. By the late 19th century, a combination of legislation (particularly the regulation of trading licenses) and informal coercion had produced “bipolar, spatially juxtaposed European and Indian business districts” in Durban and the creation of racially based “Indian” residential enclaves throughout Natal.\textsuperscript{42} These

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{40} Fatima Meer, \textit{The Ghetto People: A Study in the Effects of Uprooting the Indian People of South Africa} (London: Africa Publications Trust, 1975), 2.
\textsuperscript{41} C. G. Maasdorp and N. Pillay, \textit{Urban Relocation and Racial Segregation: The Case of Indian South Africans} (Durban: University of Natal Department of Economics, 1977), 80.
\textsuperscript{42} Maynard W. Swanson, “‘The Asiatic Menace’: Creating Segregation in Durban, 1879-1900” \textit{The International Journal of African Historical Studies} 16, no. 3 (1983), 403.
enclaves, in turn, were often internally organized around closely-knit networks of Indian families or linguistic communities.43

This early stage of Indian urbanization contrasted with the migration of Africans in two crucial respects. First, a significant number of Indians managed to purchase land for both commercial and residential purposes.44 Along with the growth of Indian business and residential districts, this fact encouraged Indian elites to finance the creation of local community institutions: temples and mosques, schools, social centers, and sporting grounds.45 In contrast, the social lives of African migrants centered on municipal beer halls, overcrowded and pestilential hostels, dancehalls, and underground shebeens. Second, Indian areas developed around networks of intimately-connected family homes.46 As Hilda Kuper observed: “A house in an Indian area is never an isolated dwelling; it is integrated into the street, neighborhood, and community. Kinsmen often live near each other, affairs of the neighborhood arouse the gossip that controls the moral standards of the whole area.”47

Although a small number of African women established themselves in Durban as prostitutes, brewers, and “shebeen queens,” the overwhelming majority of migrants were single men,

43Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, 33.
44 According to Fatima Meer: “The Indian people, although poor, had accumulated substantial freehold property. A door-to-door survey conducted by the Natal Indian Congress of six Indian neighbourhoods in 1944 had found 56% of the houses to be owned by the occupants.” See The Ghetto People, 4. Meer’s language (“the Indian people”) obscures the significant class differences among Indians. The University of Natal 1943/4 housing survey (based on a 1 in 20 sample of all structures listed on the 1941 valuation roll of the municipality) provides a lower number of 36 percent of houses owned by occupants. University of Natal, Durban Housing Survey, 252
45 For the example of Clairwood, see Dianne Scott, “The Destruction of Clairwood: a case study on the transformation of communal living space,” in David M. Scott, ed., The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanization and Social change in South Africa (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 91.
46 In Freund’s words, Indians areas were composed of “networks of community linked together through dense human contacts that tied into family relationships and a myriad of economic connections.” See Insiders and Outsiders, 75.
47 Kuper, Indian People in Natal, XV. See chapter also chapter four of this dissertation. An exception was the Grey Street area, which was more mixed in its composition.
many of whom maintained close ties with rural society and frequently returned to homesteads in the countryside. As a result, Zulu working class culture (particularly among the most insecure and vulnerable sectors) developed largely through associations comprised of single men. For example, male domestic servants organized *amalaita* gangs around stick fighting, crime, defending particular territories, and distinctive modes of dress. An adaptation of traditional youth organizations, these gangs drew on both rural Zulu solidarities and an urban criminal subculture: “Back rooms on their employers’ premises (somewhat ironically referred to as ‘kias’) served as a base for their petty thieving and burglaries on other households. The gangs signaled their presence in the streets by playing mouth organs and took part in ‘pitched battles’ with other gangs usually after the 9 pm curfew.”\(^{48}\) Other important groups included *isihabhnaba* (cross-dressing groups of domestic workers who adapted Zulu notions of marriage and domesticity to a distinctive homosexual culture), Zionist religious movements, and the African “buying clubs” and cooperatives.

In Durban and other Natal cities, the division between European and non-European areas developed on the basis of a pattern established by earlier Indian enclaves.\(^{49}\) Critically, the legislation that existed before the Group Areas Act (1950) prevented Africans from residing within European residential areas, but completely ignored the residential penetration of the other groups. As the urbanization of both Africans and Indians accelerated during the interwar years, the provisions made by the local government for housing proved to be utterly inadequate, and shack settlements began to encircle the city. The scale and pace of this


human influx was extraordinary. By 1951, two thirds of Natal’s Indian population had either moved to the cities or was born in urban areas.\textsuperscript{50} During the same period, the percentage of Africans present in Durban increased threefold.\textsuperscript{51} The population of Cato Manor—the infamous concentration of shack settlements two miles from the center of Durban—expanded from about 2,500 Africans in 1936 to an estimated 50,000 at the end of 1950.\textsuperscript{52} Although census figures from 1951 show that Indians still constituted the largest population in Durban, Africans appeared as a very close second.\textsuperscript{53}

Poverty often threw those newly arriving from the countryside together; Africans, Indians, Coloureds and even some whites lived “cheek-by-jowl”—a term almost ubiquitous in accounts of this period.\textsuperscript{54} According to a 1952 housing survey by the University of Durban, African residences were relatively evenly distributed throughout Durban (reflecting their employment in European households), with the highest concentration in Cato Manor.\textsuperscript{55} Although the maps of residential distribution published with the survey show areas of exclusively African habitation (namely, the Chesterville and Lamontville locations), heavy interpenetration of the two groups occurred in several areas of Durban: Cato Manor, Sydenham, Central Durban (the Grey Street Area), the South Coast Junction, and to a lesser extent Clairwood. Durban’s small Coloured population lived interspersed with Indians.

\textsuperscript{50} Hilda Kuper, \textit{Indian People in Natal}, xii. Some sources provide a higher estimate.
\textsuperscript{53} The revised census figures for 1951 were: Europeans 131,430; Coloureds 16,104; Indians 145,744; and Africans 132,841. University of Natal, \textit{Durban Housing Survey}, 35.
\textsuperscript{54} Summarizing a public discussion of Passive Resistance campaign, \textit{Ilanga} reported: “Take Durban, for instance, he said. Poverty is driving many Africans and Indians to live cheek by jowl, to fraternize, to feel one. In the social sphere, to a less extent, the same thing is happening.” See “Weekly Review and Commentary,” \textit{Ilanga Lase Natal}, 27 July 1946.
\textsuperscript{55} University of Durban, \textit{Durban Housing Survey}, 27.
Describing similar conditions faced by poor Afrikaners in the townships surrounding Ladysmith, Jordan Ngubane recalled:

They [poor Afrikaners] did not have the money with which to pay for expensive accommodation. As a result they often settled in the cheaper parts of Ladysmith where their neighbours were often either the Africans or the Coloureds or the Indians….The poor Whites discovered that only the poor blacks were their real allies; they could borrow salt or sugar or food or money from them in the hour of need and did not laugh at them when they saw them sew pieces of hessian inside white calico flour bags to make blankets. The poor Africans, Coloureds and Indians did these things too.56

These racially mixed neighborhoods varied considerably in ethnic composition, residential patterns, and class structure both within individual townships and from region to region. On a smaller scale, similar areas also emerged in the Transvaal. In the vast majority of cases, the Indian or African petite bourgeoisie lived in the midst of working class neighborhoods, most famously in the freehold townships of Johannesburg (Martindale, Sophiatown, and New Clare). Working class Indians generally settled outside of Durban’s old borough, while “the wealthier tended to try to acquire property in the center of town, probably more as an investment than with the intention of living in those areas.”57 Leo Kuper argues that open rivalry between trading groups in areas like Cato Manor produced some of the most extreme expressions of racial animosity.58 In the majority of areas, however, such intense strife did not reflect the competition between two existing petit-bourgeois factions, but rather the efforts of entrenched Indian interests to block the development of potential rivals. Although a tiny African property-owning group emerged in the Macabise neighborhood of Edendale and

Johannesburg’s Freehold Townships, in Durban Indian merchants largely managed to prevent African competition by employing a combination of monopoly position, underselling, and legal action. Ironically, these efforts to safeguard this position of privilege not only enflamed the resentments of the aspirant African businessman, but also reinforced the racial prism through which most Africans perceived urban social life.

**Grey Street and the “Indian” Store**

The Indian Squatters Market and the Grey Street complex were located at Durban’s city centre, adjoining the white-owned commercial district and the City Market. Similar, if less spectacular, areas existed in other Natal and Transvaal cities. Visitors to this area were struck by the minarets and colonnades of the buildings, the sounds of temples and mosques, the reverberating clamor of Indian languages, the saris of women working in shops, and the accompanying smells of curries and spices. The area around Grey Street also included factories, apartment blocks, and hotels—many owned by Indians. A liberal anthropologist like Hilda Kuper could wax romantic about the excited atmosphere of “oriental” bargaining and the timeless seductions of the marketplace. Before the Group Areas Act, this neighborhood also included the Native meat market, the African-run Macheni flea market, a city beer hall, the Grey Street Native Women’s Hostel, several African churches, the Bantu Social Centre, and numerous small eating rooms catering to either (or occasionally both) groups. In some African descriptions of Grey Street, the sensory mélange of the market place

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60. After the 1949 pogrom and the establishment of African shack stores in Cato Manor, Indian merchants strongly objected to the trading activities of Africans on Indian-owned land and in areas where they did not possess legal trading rights. See C.C. Majola interviewed by A. Manson and D. Collins, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 142), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
and the blunt give-and-take of urban bustle embodied the distinctive spirit of the city. But the Indian character of this district—and the Indian-owned stores throughout Natal—also produced enormous bitterness. In the person of the shopkeeper, many Africans saw evidence of a foreign people settling in their land and gaining some measure of (at least relative) prosperity.

The majority of Indian shops in Durban (which were sometimes little more than stalls) operated with a small stock, probably experienced a very low turn-over, and survived by mobilizing unpaid family labor, especially that of women and children. In the Grey Street area, stores that specialized in “African goods,” i.e. daily provisions for the working class, were largely concentrated on Queen Street. Although a very small number of Africans may have bought items in an establishment owned by a member of Durban’s highly-visible Indian elite, the vast majority of African customers interacted with a far poorer, more dependent, and insecure layer of petty retailers. Many Indian traders sympathized with their African customers, offering them store credit and selling a special meal of soup and bread or putu at cheap prices. Nevertheless, the particular visibility of Indian architecture and institutions helped fuse economic grievances with a broader sense of cultural displacement.

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62 For the reliance on family labor, and the general importance of the joint-family system for Indian accumulation, see Bill Freund, “Indian Women and the Changing Character of the Working Class Indian Household in Natal, 1860-1990,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991). For more on the joint family system, see chapter 4.
64 Okwui Enwenzor has described the symbolic dimension of architecture and new logics of urban planning in colonial and Apartheid South Africa. Although his point concerns European architectural and spatial traditions, it also applies to how many African perceived the “transplant” of India architecture: “In other words, by way of transplanted European spatial design, building traditions, as
The buildings of Grey Street developed a nearly iconic significance in this regard: a rumor circulated during the 1949 pogrom that the decapitated head of a young African boy hung from the dome of the Juma Masjid, the most visible Indian building in the city.\

The experience of urban alienation and the economic hardships of the war years greatly intensified the longstanding resentments of many Africans. During the mid 1940s, famine raged in both the Ciskei and parts of Zululand and many staples were chronically short in South Africa’s major cities. Hoarding rations was common and both white and Indian shop owners often refused to sell to Africans or charged inflated prices. In letters to Ilanga and other papers, African customers bemoaned the hypocrisy and mendacious practices of Indian traders in particular, frequently invoking the terms of segregation: “But in almost all of their dealings with Africans they show marked colour bar segregation. In some of their shops they single out Africans for contemptuous treatment. ‘No bread’, ‘no tea’, ‘no sugar’ applies only to Africans.” According to both African newspapers and later interviews, shopping at an Indian store frequently involved a series of humiliations. These sources recycle a litany of stock complaints, doubtlessly amplified through multiple retellings. Indian store owners sometimes tried to segregate Africans from other customers.

They insulted Africans by calling them “boy” and spoke to them in “Kitchen Kaffir” rather well as monuments erected all across the country to celebrate and inculcate European culture, colonial and Apartheid power systematically worked to erase the presence of the autochthonous groups that made up pre-colonial South Africa and to replace them with other archetypes and representations of civility.” See Okwui Enwezor, “The Enigma of the Rainbow Nation: Contemporary South African Art at the Crossroads of History,” in Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South Africa, ed. Sophie Perryer (New York: Museum for African Art, 2004), 26.

68 “Indians and Segregation,” letter by G.R. Moya, Ilanga. See also “Rolling Stone on Segregation,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 1 March 1947: “Many times we have been told by our store that ‘there is no bread’ only to see bread being served to an Indian.”
than English or Zulu. They allegedly overcharged Africans or manipulated the weight of bulk goods. They brazenly lied to them about available items, while sometimes selling desperately needed staples to others in full view. They gave Africans incorrect change and chased them from the store or threatened to call the police if Africans protested the amount. As Tunya Dlamini recalled a few decades later, Africans overwhelmingly attributed the origins of the 1949 pogrom to the actions of Indian store owners: “One [reason] was that the Indians were ripping them off, the other was they put glass in their sugar.” Ilanga called these traders “sharks” and published the addresses of establishments fined by the police for overcharging Africans. But most Africans felt helpless, especially during the rationing and food shortages of the 1940s: “we can’t quarrel with our shop; it is the only place where our people can buy food.” On rare occasions, Africans desperately petitioned white employers to intercede on their behalf.

A few literary depictions of the market or store expressed envy, ironic appreciation of Indian cunning, and—occasionally—gratitude. Even these more appreciative representations generally reiterated a series of racial stereotypes based on the experience of particular urban spaces. One example can be found in Dugmore Boetie’s brilliantly fabricated “autobiography,” Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost. Written during the mid-1960s, Boetie’s narrative was a darkly humorous panegyric to the life of a hustler and

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72 Tunya Dlamini interviewed by B.T.C. Mkhize, 14 June 1981, Kwa Mashu, , Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 305), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
74 Quoted in “How They Sell Air To The Natives,” Natal Mercury, 26 March 1947. See also “Food” in Ilanga Lase Natal, 16 February 1946: “many traders are fleecing the unprotected African masses who dare not protest, and cannot if they dare.”
75 See Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie, 300.
township criminal: its brutalities, chronic insecurities, and—above all—its flamboyant and often quixotic scams. Race constituted the ultimate sting: the protagonist’s last act was to shave his head and, by ruthlessly manipulating the prejudices of white officials, procure “Coloured” identification despite having lived as an African for most of his life. In this bagatelle constructed around prevarication and the manipulation of credulity, the Indian merchant provided a virtual emblem of Machiavellian intelligence and the frenetic vitality of urban existence (and, arguably, a figure for the author himself). Describing an Indian market district near the Sophiatown bus rank, Boetie granted its intensity, distinctive cadences, and base human passions near metaphysical significance:

> This market is one place where I like to be. I could wander about it the whole day and never get tired or bored with it. Here there’s never a dull moment. The fruit stalls with their crafty looking owners, their high-pitched voices forever urging passers-by to examine and buy their fruit. This place is a symbol of life, guile and greed.

Other descriptions sardonically praised Indian ingenuity in order to urge greater resourcefulness on the part of Africans. In one column, Rolling Stone lauded the proliferation of Indian-owned stores and taxis boasting Zulu names throughout Durban. Celebrating the business acumen of Indian entrepreneurs, R.R.R. Dhlomo went on to suggest reversing this gimmick—a satirical thought experiment designed to lambaste structural inequality while demonstrating the alleged double standard of Indians. “We think that is business enterprise and there is nothing wrong with it;” Rolling Stone pontificated, “although we still have to meet an enterprising Zulu store owner who would dare to name his shop or tea-room

76 Ostensibly based on Boetie’s own life story (and pitched as such to procure ongoing financial support from his white editor), the personal details in the book were almost all sheer fabrications. See Barney Simon, “After word,” in Dugmore Boetie, *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2007), 192-4.

77 Boetie, *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost*, 42.
‘KwaMaharaj’ or ‘Isitolo sakwaNaidoo’ and expect the people from the East to flock to it.”

If an Indian store could sell Zulu medicinal herbs, perhaps Africans could utilize these same marketing practices to attract other races? Dhlomo exclaimed: “Why, he might live to see that rarest of occurrences. Indian customers in an African store!” The attitudes at play in this article were complex. Begrudging admiration bled together with jealousy; both sentiments could coexist with frustration, even contempt, toward unsophisticated Africans drawn to such ploys. However much Dhlomo may have seethed at the legal advantage given to the Indian storeowner, the irony of these comments only worked if some Africans embraced devices like the patronizing signs outside Indian tearooms. Nor would the Indian marketing ploy have been effective unless the storeowners in question knew enough about the local market—including Zulu medicinal practices—to satisfy African customers.

Ultimately, Rolling Stone implied, Africans participated in their own humiliation by flocking to such places. Another suggestion can also be discerned: the Zulu should be a bit more like the Indian himself.

**Landlords and Housing**

The hypertrophy of Natal’s shack lands during the early 1940s resulted from the failure of municipalities to make provisions for housing all but a small portion of the expanding African working class. In previous decades, the majority of Africans sought some form of accommodation in the backyards of European and Indian households. Their options, however, had been greatly restricted by the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) Act, which

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80 Before the election of the Nationalist government, the municipality of Durban had only reserved two locations in the vicinity for African residence, Lamontville and Chesterville.
prohibited Africans from living in white-designated areas unless housed in hostels, government locations, or in servant quarters. As a result, Africans began to lease shacks from Indian landowners or build their own informal housing on Indian-owned land in areas like Cato Manor, Happy Valley (the location of the Wentworth Oil refinery), and north of the Umgeni River in the Newlands area. Given the relatively high rents charged by landlords, a family or (more often) a group of individuals typically crowded into a single room. In 1952, the Natal University Department of Economics estimated that half of Durban’s African population of 132,000 lived in illegal slums.

If these slums had been produced by an insidious combination of urbanization, government neglect, and racial legislation, Indian landowners nonetheless entered the resulting breech and to some extent benefited from the vulnerability and desperate position of Africans. According to one estimate, “Indians” (no further breakdown was provided) owned an estimated 80 percent of the land rented by African shack dwellers. As in the case of the “Indian merchant class,” the category of landlord must be disaggregated. Some notorious slumlords like Omar Sayed owned blocks of flats and vast tracks of land in Cato Manor, which they “farmed” by allowing Africans, Coloureds, and desperately poor Indian families to erect dwellings. But Africans also lived on land provided by Tamil and Telugu-speaking market gardeners, who had purchased plots on what was once the urban periphery and later abandoned farming in favor of subletting their land. During the 1940s, Ilanga alleged that

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82 University of Natal, The Durban Housing Survey, 357-8. Other figures were closer to a third. In 1950, the Mayor of Durban claimed 40,000 Africans were living in shacks. Ibid., 361.
83 Maylam, “The ‘Black Belt,” 418. Maylam cites a town clerk report that estimates that another eighteen percent was owned by whites, and two percent by Africans.
84 Ibid., 418-9; University of Natal, Durban Housing Survey, 232-9.
Indian landlords charged immorally high rents—“sheer extortion”—based simply on the reality that Africans had no alternative. But these landlords were not necessarily elite.

An air of powerlessness, even futility, often pervaded African complaints against landlords, particularly before the 1949 pogrom. Not only did few other housing options exist. Africans had no legal recourse to dispute the dictates or negligence of their landlords since African presence was often illegal. During the 1940s, the Natal City Council directed owners of over 1,800 shacks to provide basic services like water and sanitation to their tenants. In the majority cases, Indian landowners battled these edicts in court, refused to comply, petitioned for the authority to evict the squatters on their premises, and eventually paid fines rather than improve their sites. Eventually, only two of more than seven hundred landowners made any modifications. Their resistance did not simply reflect callous profiteering. Given the insecurity of their property rights, Indian owners—even when they actually had the resources to invest in improving lots—often refrained from ameliorating the plots on which they themselves lived. The threat to their titles had been further underscored by the campaign against “Indian penetration” into white areas during the early 1940s. Nevertheless, the active refusal of these landowners to provide basic amenities undoubtedly reinforced the perception that Indians profited from African suffering.

Despite the genuine intensity of such resentments, a set of more complex relationships developed within the contexts produced by Indian property ownership. Since many Indian landowners provided vacant lots, enterprising Africans would construct multi-room dwellings and sublet accommodations to migrants. By the late 1940s, such “rack

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86 University of Natal, The Durban Housing Survey, 358-9.
renting” by both Indians and Africans had developed in Cato Manor on a vast scale.\(^87\) In other areas, like the Transvaal township of Sophiatown, Indian, Chinese, and white parties would pay Africans to register property under their name and sign bonds.\(^88\) African businessmen, trade unionists, and professionals rented office space in Indian owned buildings—outside of freehold townships and rural areas, these were the only venues available for them to establish their own practices.\(^89\) In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela recalled: “‘Mandela and Tambo’ read the brass plate on our office door in Chancellor House, a small building just across the street from the marble statues of Justice standing in front of the Magistrate’s court in central Johannesburg. Our building, owned by Indians, was one of the few places where Africans could rent offices in the city.”\(^90\) Even an unabashed anti-Indian demagogue like A.W.G. Champion, who occupied premises in a Grey Street building owned by Dawood Jeeva, praised the role of most Indian landlords in notes likely written in the early 1950s: “The Indian Landlord acted as a Saviour when he gave them a piece of ground to live. While other Indian Landlords are bad we have a number of Indian gentlemen whose good memories will remain honourable in our minds!”\(^91\) By the early 1950s, \textit{Ilanga}’s rhetorical posture in describing the housing crisis had shifted, reflecting the greater cooperation between the ANC and Indian Congress in Natal, as well as the emergence of African landlords following the 1949 Durban Riots.\(^92\) Now the newspaper overwhelmingly

\(^{87}\)Edwards, “Swing the Assegai Peacefully?” 82.
\(^{88}\)A.W.G. Champion to Mr. Van Aardt. 25 October 1929, AWG Champion Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
\(^{89}\)Hilda Kuper, \textit{Indian People in Natal}, 63.
\(^{91}\)“Cato Manor Curse,” typescript article draft, undated, AWG Champion Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
\(^{92}\)This process was particularly evident in Cato Manor during the 1940s, particularly following the 1949 Riots: “From African shacklords or rackrenters, minor entrepreneurs, messianic priests, squatter leaders and other ‘nobodies’ emerged a new leadership stratum.” Edwards, “Mkhubane, Our Home,”
imprecated official neglect for the emergence of Durban’s slums. The editor wrote: “The African and Indian landlords who now are being blamed for creating a slum area and exploiting poor workers were in fact meeting a great social need and doing work that should have been done by the authorities.”93

Sites Moving through Space: Buses

Privately owned buses offered the only motorized transportation between African areas and the core of the city. Although a small number of African operators maintained routes between Durban and outlying districts like Port Shepstone and Inanda, Africans only owned four buses in Durban during the late 1940s.94 In the years immediately preceding the 1949 Riots, there was an increase in applications for Motor Carrier Certificates by African operators. These efforts became an important focus of local African politics (the Lamontville Native Advisory Board attempted to ban Indian buses in 1939) and the Zulu Royal house took an active part in supporting African petitions. A memorandum to the Riots Commission describes the scene at the conclusion of one Motor Certificates hearing in Port Shepstone:

In the Port Shepstone Court House the decision of the Board to award the above Certificates was received with mighty shouts of “BAYETE” from the chiefs and their Indunas—this was the Royal Salute presented to the Government as represented by the Board. There were seven Chiefs present including members of the Zulu Royal Family.95

9. See also 86 and 200. Some Africans lived more “respectable” areas or even the reserves and rented out their Cato manor plots. See University of Natal, Durban Housing Survey, 370.
95Memorandum by S.S. Brisker to the Riots Commission, 8 March 1948, AWG Champion Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
However, such efforts were actively resisted by the Bus Owners Association, an Indian body established in 1930. In many districts, Indian-owned buses provided the only transport and when Indians applied for new or extended routes, these petitions sometimes found support among Africans desperate for improved service. Initially, most of these vehicles were wide-bed trucks converted to resemble city buses. Although some companies began to expand and hire fulltime drivers by the late 1940s, most of these ventures were shoestring affairs, owned and operated by individuals, and parked outside of the family home at night. These drivers charged roughly a third the fare of the municipal buses that operated on a few of the same routes. Nevertheless, many working class Africans still found the amount exorbitant and could not afford to travel on them everyday. A substantial number of people walked or took pushbikes from African locations to the city.

Buses integrated a haphazard, patchwork urban system into a quotidian reality characterized by the subordination of “African” to “Indian.” This process began while waiting for the bus itself. Buses frequently ran behind their schedules and made impromptu stops to grab passengers walking from African areas into the cities. As riders fretted about the consequences of arriving late to work, the routine indifference of drivers seemed calculated. Any complaints over service might lead to ejection. Z.A. Ngcobo remembered: “you would be anxiously looking at your watch, realizing that now you would be really late for work…they were only to ready to take your fare, and if you opened your mouth in protest

97At the 1946 Road Transport Commission, F.J. Mazibuko from Edendale complained that busservice was irregular and unevenly distributed throughout the day, no timetables existed, high tariffs precluded most residents from utilizing taxis, and routes suffered extreme congestion. See “Evidence from Edendale Africans,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 15 June 1946.
at the delay they would say to you ‘If you are in a hurry why don’t you walk?’”98 In the center of Durban, the situation was even worse. A report by the Durban Transport Commission captured the daily gauntlet of the Victoria Street Taxi Rank:

All the Non-European bus services in Durban have one starting point—the Victoria Street Extension Bus Rank—from where 116 operators are expected to operate 177 certificated vehicles to various termini. This bus rank is an uneven patch of ground without any facilities for passengers or buses. There are, in fact, periods during the day when there is nothing like sufficient standing room for either buses or passengers, and the crowds of waiting passengers are forced to surge into adjacent streets, where buses also have to stand owing to lack of room or order.

There are no loading platforms where buses could be ranged along-side according to their various routes. There is no shelter whatsoever provided for the passengers… These passengers often, during the rainy season, have to stand in pouring rain for 30 minutes and more. There are no public conveniences and the lighting is extremely poor.99

After riders of all races endured this ordeal, the driver would generally board Indian passengers first. “Ladies first” meant Indian women—conductors would push Africans of both genders back.100 Then a new stage of this ritual would commence: passengers and driver would debate over fares. Adding insult to this injury, conductors regularly gave passengers incorrect change. Drivers flagrantly ripped-off poorer Indians as well.101 If passengers pressed the issue, they were cursed, beaten, and sometimes tossed out.102 Ilanga described

99 Annual Report of the Local Road Transportation Board for the period 1st April 1945 to 31 March 1946, quoted in Memorandum by S.S. Brisker to the Riots Commission, 8 March 1949, AWG Champion Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
100 “When this ‘Zulu’ bus stopped the conductor pushed us back with our rib and said, ‘ladies, first.’ To this conductor who was not a Zulu ‘ladies first’ applied only to Indian women. Our Rib who happened to be a lady was roughly pushed back.” See “Rolling Stone on Umunthi,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 5 January 1946.
101 See “As We Were,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 30 April 1949.
102 Passengers sometimes invested the smallest details with absurdly sinister content. Observing that bus drivers carried axes (a requirement for safety purposes), an African witness at the Riots commission asked: “There are no trees in this bus, nor is their any wood to be chopped. Why does the
“the prevalence of the assaults on Africans in some buses by some conductors and the insolent language used whenever Africans complain to some of these drivers: ‘This is not your father’s bus.’”103 This exchange occurred so frequently, and impressed itself so profoundly in African popular memory, that housekeeper Josephine Hadebe repeated virtually the same words thirty years later in a Zulu-language interview: “the Indians (amakula) were insolent, and on the buses they used to say, ‘No, this is my father’s bus, not yours,’ and push a black man so that he would be injured for the sake of a ticket.”104 The implication was clear. A small profit mattered more than an African’s physical wellbeing.

It is worth speculating about the resonance that a phrase like “This is not your fathers…” might assume in such a context.105 As a speech act negating the passenger’s claim to fair treatment, it implied that private property conferred virtually absolute authority. “Who the hell are you?” the statement seems to demand, “You have nothing, you are nothing, and your father is nothing.” However unintentionally, these words strongly invoked patriarchal authority and family status. Interestingly, Hadebe’s version translated the common English language saying from a straightforward denial of the passenger’s status into a positive assertion (“this is my father’s bus, not yours”). In rural Zulu society, allocation and control of land—which, along with cattle, constituted the major form of wealth—was organized on the basis of lineages tracing descent from a single male ancestor. Occupation of land by a lineage

Indian carry a chopper? Obviously to hack away at poor Native passengers who object to being defrauded of their change.” See Commission of Enquiry into Riots, 15.

103 “As We Were,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 30 April 1949.


105 For a discussion of the importance of the “father” in the rhetoric of Zulu political authority, see Max Gluckman, “The Kingdom of the Zulu of South Africa,” in African Political Systems, eds. M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 44. In chapter four, I discuss some ways in which rights and responsibilities formerly associated with lineages become generalized to the Zulu people in the context of urbanization and their (perceived and actual) usurpation by whites and Indians.
conferred an almost sacred entitlement to its use. Except in cases of witchcraft, not even the chief could interfere with the enjoyment of the lineage’s property.\textsuperscript{106} This same principle generally held within the affairs of individual “houses”: subunits of the lineage defined by uterine ancestry. Writing in the early 1960s, Absalom Vilakazi explained: “There is a principle of inviolability here which is very jealously guarded, and in defense of it, people often quote the Zulu saying, \textit{indla ayikwezwa phezu kwene}—i.e., one never builds a house on top of another. This is an effective restraint on interference with and imposition on ‘houses’ or \textit{imindeni yesisu} by those outside them.”\textsuperscript{107} In the vignette about the Indian bus driver, we can perhaps discern a largely inadvertent confrontation between two divergent understandings of property and rank. The conductor’s insult represented a denial of the other’s entitlement to respect. But by attacking patrimony, it also casually negated the very basis on which Zulu society had determined social belonging and, consequently, personhood.

\textbf{Other Sites: Bioscopes and Employers}

The hierarchy of Indian over African that developed in shops, neighborhoods, and buses was both haphazard and brittle. As Ashwin Desai observes: “Middlemen minorities are visible, vulnerable, and accessible.”\textsuperscript{108} Moreover, storeowners in African areas and the drivers of Indian-owned buses were scarcely representatives of the mercantile elite. The Indian culprits in the above anecdotes would have been, on the whole, among the poorer and less secure layers: Tamil and Telugu-speaking former indentured laborers. In these cases, the African experience of hierarchy did not reflect social class, differences in legal standing, or

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107}Ibid., 18.
\item \textsuperscript{108}Desai, “A Context for Violence,” 256, Desai continues: “They have an immediate relation with the indigenous population as buyer and seller, renter and landlord, client and professional. Whites, on the other hand, are one step removed. They live and trade apart from the indigenous population and are protected by a repressive apparatus.”
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
access to political power so much as discrimination and abuses within spaces coded “Indian.” Perhaps the local and everyday character of this hierarchy, and the relative social parity of the Indians and Africans involved, partially explains the invisibility of class and ethnic divisions among Indians in the testimony of Africans. In other words, the merchant stereotype was not based solely on the visible wealth of the elite. It was derived primarily from the micro-politics of “black belt” social relations.109

This combination of race-based hierarchy and relative equality had significant consequences. In the eyes of Africans, the power exercised by shop owners, landlords, and bus drivers lacked a legitimating ideology—or any justification beyond the brute fact of hierarchy itself. In his editorial on the pogrom, H.I.E. Dhlomo summarized a popular African sentiment: “Africans would be less than human not to feel humiliated, frustrated and outraged to find what to some of them are ‘foreigners’ and ‘people who did not conquer us and who came here as slaves,’ lording it over them in the land of their birth.”110 Witnesses before the Riots Commission reiterated these same themes: “The Indian was introduced into this country as a labourer. Now we find we have to serve two masters. Our ancestors fought the Europeans and lost. We accepted the European as our master—we will not tolerate this other black master.”111 These statements provide some insight into the particular bitterness of Africans regarding Indian “arrogance” and “insolence”—perhaps the two most common

109 See also the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Riots in Durban, 16. The report makes the point that African complaints did not concern the “Merchant Princes,” so much a hired shop hands and petty traders.
111Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Riots in Durban, 13. In a Zulu language interview conducted in 1981, Dupha Mtshali expressed a similar idea: “The government ended the enslavement of people [Indians] completely because it was useless… the Indians are now masters. Don’t you hear me saying that blacks are now living on their farms.” See Dupha Mtshali interviewed by A.M. Jili, 15 February 1981, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 313), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
adjectives used to describe Indians. Not only did the majority of Indians and Africans live closer together and enjoy greater social intimacy than either group shared with white South Africans, but Indians had suffered the indignities of conquest, plantation labor, and urban poverty. They lacked even the de facto legitimacy of the foreign conqueror. It was particularly degrading to suffer insult from the lips of a former “slave.” (Notably, these representations assimilated all Indians to the personage of the ex-indentured laborer.) Pretensions of Indian superiority—whether such attitudes were real or just perceived scarcely mattered—cut especially deep.

Africans described similar encounters with Indians in hospitals, bioscopes, Indian-owned hotels, and tearooms. Although significant in terms of their broader symbolism, these interactions involved a much smaller number of Africans. Particularly in the case of bioscopes, African complaints expressed the frustrations of educated youth who aspired to middle class urbanity. In Durban, six movie theaters catered to non-Europeans in the Grey Street area (including the Raj, the Royal, the Shah Jehan, and the Avalon), one in Mansfield Road, one in Bellair Road, and three or four in the Jacobs area. Bioscopes were paramount centers of social life for the non-European middle classes: going to a movie publicly

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112 As I will discuss in chapter four, the colonial state’s origins in violent conquest did not necessarily negate its legitimacy among many Africans. The 20th century mythology of the Zulu kingdom—encouraged for different reasons by both the colonial state and Zulu nationalism—was based in large part of the narrative of Shaka’s unification of the “Zulu” through conquest. See Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998). Zulu writers of the 1940s often celebrated these wars as a process of building national unity, while recognizing the irretrievable nature of this past. See, for example, Lutuli’s remarks on returning from a trip to the U.S. in “Chief Lutuli’s Reception,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 2 April 1949.

113 Although some Grey Street hotels admitted Africans, the Liquor Act of 1928—which prohibited the supply of any alcohol to a “Native”—meant that African travelers could not enter hotel lounges, or in Durban the dance floor. Carl Keyter, *Holiday and Travel Facilities for Non-Whites in South Africa* (Johannesburg: S.A. Institute of Race Relations, June 1962), 58. These particular cites were also often associated with Indians “preying” on African women. See chapter four.

exhibited a set of values associated with leisure and a modern style of living in the city. The cultural significance of this space became so pervasive by the early 1950s that an Indian widow, who lived and worked her entire life in the cane fields, invoked never having been inside a theater to illustrate the depths of her family’s poverty: “We have never worn shoes in our life. Our cloths are made of the very cheapest material. I have never seen the inside of a bioscope, nor have my children.” 115 Young Africans voiced frustration over exclusion from Indian-owned theaters and, more subtly, used these complaints to mark their distance from uncultivated plebs of both races. 116 A letter to Ilanga vented: “Indians look upon us Africans as inferiors. There are some places where—no matter how decent you are they won’t allow you in; such places as restaurants and cinemas with the exception of the Avalon.” 117 The writer asserted that Indian owners made exceptions for prominent Africans (and hence purchased their complacency). “We non-leaders and small fry,” he continued, “will always be on the ‘Not yet fit’ for such privileges list.” His choice of English underscored the substance of his allegation: the Indian continued to sneer at the African even when he had obtained the accoutrements of modernity and Western civilization. Rolling Stone complained likewise: “There are many, many places here in Durban where yours truly Rolling Stone cannot dare put his foot with all his qualifications and Degrees and Civilizations because he

115 Mr. Drum [Henry Nxumalo], “Sugar Farms,” Drum, February 1953. See below for a discussion of the broader cultural importance of cinema for African life in the 1950s.
116 By the late 1950s, African patronage had become an important source of revenue for a small number of bioscopes. Following the passage of the Group Areas Act, the Shah Jehan Cinema on Grey Street (the largest non-European cinema in South Africa) appealed the complete exclusion of Africans from all urban cinemas. The cinema offered to “comply with apartheid regulations and provide separate entrances, pay-boxes, toilet facilities and seating accommodation for Africans” and requested that the government make an exception to the ruling until cinemas were built in the Bantustans. It proposed reserving 380 segregated seats for Africans. See “Letter from A.M. Rajab to Margaret Ballinger,” 23rd January 1959, Ballinger Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; “Application Shah Jehan Cinema, Indian, 275/9 Grey Street, 28 February 1959,” Ballinger Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
is an African, but in which he has seen Indians not worth his salt allowed because they are Indians."\(^{118}\) Those bioscopes that admitted Africans generally enforced a policy of segregated seating. In *Drum* magazine, the novelist Peter Abrahams related a story about a manager’s refusal to seat a young African intellectual next to his Coloured girlfriend (here again, emphasizing the youth and sophistication of the anecdote’s protagonist).\(^{119}\)

The material basis for most African resentments was located in conflicts over the circulation of commodities and service provision. However, there were also important instances of class antagonism between African labor and Indian employers. Africans frequently asserted that they would rather work for Europeans than Indians. A common stereotype was “the Indian exploiter who treats his employee poorly, overworks and underfeeds him.”\(^{120}\) An African who worked for a Grey Street shop owner during the 1940s recalled waiting two weeks, or even longer, to get paid wages already past due, waking at three a.m. to start work at four, laboring throughout the day with only a cup of tea or piece of bread to eat, and never receiving overtime. The mindlessness of the work—and the condescension it implied—inspired particular bitterness: “You would do the work without knowing much about its purpose or implications.”\(^{121}\) Even some members of the Indian elite expressed horror at the treatment received by Africans. In a *Drum* exposé on the working conditions of Natal’s sugar industry, A.P. Naidoo (a leading merchant from the town of

\(^{119}\)Peter Abrahams, “Can We Unite?” *Drum* (July 1952). Abrahams reported that two Indian Congress members, Yusuf Cachalia and N. Thandray, had recently made personal trips to Johannesburg cinemas to “break down this Apartheid.”
Stanger) publicly denounced the practices of many Indian plantation owners: “I honestly feel that in many instances Indian farmers treat their labour worse than do many whites.”\(^{122}\) The harshness of Indian employers had an economic impetus: possessing substantially less capital than their white counterparts, and often forced to work in their own business or fields, many Indian employers doubtlessly struggled to cover base-line expenses. But economic pressures also intermixed with chauvinism. Indian market gardeners generally paid African labor half the amount that an Indian would receive.\(^{123}\) Wage discrimination occurred against Tamils as well. Mr. Drum described a Hindi-speaking plantation owner who paid laborers from his own linguistic group 5/- more than Tamils.\(^{124}\)

Yet even in these circumstances, social relationships sometimes developed that were far more nuanced and ambiguous than is conveyed by a simplistic narrative of racial antagonism. Market gardeners demanded that Africans perform strenuous labor from dawn to noon for substantially less pay than the Indian standing across the same field, but they also allowed some of their African employees to cultivate their own plots. The Daughters of Africa, an uplift organization concentrated in Durban and Pinetown, petitioned Indian store owners to employ Africans in order to ameliorate racial tensions.\(^{125}\) If many Africans strongly resented the refusal of most Indian firms to hire qualified Africans for skilled positions, they also greatly respected those individuals and businesses that defied the

\(^{122}\) Mr. Drum [Henry Nxumalo], “Sugar Farms,” *Drum*, February 1953. According to the article, Indian farmers produced ten percent of the total sugar output. Some Indian growers were so poor they did not employ labor, but worked the fields with their families.

\(^{123}\) University of Natal *Studies of Indian Employment in Natal*, 21. A significant number of Indian market gardeners—Durban’s most important source of vegetables during the early twentieth century—hired Africans to perform hard labor like plowing, pulling weeds, and carrying water. These casual workers would generally toil from dawn to noon, receiving a light breakfast of black tea or coffee and bread. African workers employed on a permanent earned an income of £3 to 4 a month.

\(^{124}\) Mr. Drum [Henry Nxumalo], “Sugar Farms,” *Drum*, February 1953.

\(^{125}\) Edwards, “Swing the Assegai Peacefully?” 72.
Africans also used these relationships to pursue their own ends. In some cases, Africans served an informal “apprenticeship” with Indian craftsmen in order to accumulate the knowledge and experience necessary to set off on their own. Bertha Mkhize and her brother, for example, worked for an Indian tailor on Field Street during the late 1940s before leaving and setting up a successful business at the Native Market.127

**Relationships and the Complexities of the Everyday**

Ultimately, a set of common spaces (neighborhoods, stores, and buses) defined the parameters of African-Indian racial dynamics in South African cities before the Group Areas Act. The interactions that developed in these sites, and the codified series of expectations that informed each participant’s behavior, produced a stable canon of stereotypes that individuals unintentionally inhabited and played out based on their position within these locations. Unlike the qualitative social and economic differentiation later engineered by apartheid, this hierarchy of “Indian over African” was local, unstable, and relatively fragile. The highly visible wealth of the Indian elite—embodied in Grey Street’s minarets and movie theatres—may have symbolized “Indian” privilege. But on an everyday basis, the racial dynamic operated between African migrants and a layer of former indentured laborers who drove buses, worked in shops, and lived in tightly-knit, family based communities among and adjacent to African areas. The strength of the resulting stereotypes reflected the centrality of such locales to the urbanization process of the 1930s and 40s. Although the forced removals starting in the late 1950s significantly transformed the nature of urban geography, by then these stereotypes had long since entered into African popular culture and the discourse of

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racial identity in Natal. They had broken loose from social organization and became part of an ethnic mythology used to analyze and give shape to reality.  

In fact, the prose of everyday life—the complicated, fragmentary, and often-incoherent realm that Ranajit Guha has called *historicality*—was far more diverse and varied than such stereotypes convey. Africans and Indians were friends, drinking partners, criminal coconspirators, social acquaintances, political comrades, and lovers. Individuals shopped at some of the same stores, rode buses together, worked in the same factories, played football together at lunch, and occasionally lived side-by-side. They joined Christian sects, like the Zionist movement of Isaiah Shembe. A small, privileged layer attended university classes together, negotiated the same professional and political milieus, and visited each other on social occasions. An interview might mention an area within a township named after an Indian who lived in a community of “Inkoshana” (homosexual men—often prostitutes—who dressed like women). Photographs reveal African participants joining in the celebration of the annual Muharram festival as it wound through the streets of central Durban. Yet in narratives of urban life during the 1940s and 50s, these other possibilities appear mainly in the form of anecdotes, marginal details of the city’s social fabric, or

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128 For a similar analysis of stereotypes in Guyana, see Lee Drummond quoted in Williams, *Stains on My Name*, 127.
132 Africa Ambrose interviewed by C. Shum, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 300), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban: “At Sinyameni some young men used to stay who said they were not girls but played like they were girls [Esinyameni kwakuhlala khona izinziswa ezazithi aziswiwa amantombazana zidla amantomgazane]. Myafethe was an Indian who lived there.”
133 A letter sent by the Natal Muslim Council to the chief constable in 1949 complained: “Most of the participants in these celebrations are African, Coloureds, Hindus and Muslims of the ignorant type…. Quoted in Gollem Vahed, Unpublished Manuscript on Islam in Natal, chapter 3.
individual exceptions. It is not simply that an African nurse dating an Indian doctor, or a close bond of affection between an African worker and the family of an Indian market gardener, were uncommon. As individual relationships, they managed to navigate (or, briefly and on a personal terrain, overcome) the barriers of community structure, differences in legal and social status, and ambient prejudices that generally prevailed. In their motivation, affections, and social circumstance, they were often singular, contingent, even accidental. They took shape in the interstices—rather than the central spaces—of the city.

Until the first years of the 1960s, African and Indian nationalism in Natal developed within the social landscape described in this chapter. As we will see, narratives of the anti-apartheid struggle often abstract “politics” (meaning major events, the decisions of leaders, party structures, and ideological positions) from the weary persistence of such everyday realities. But these local hierarchies persisted and modulated, at least on some level, virtually everything that transpired in African and Indian political life. Overwhelmingly, the ANC and Natal Indian Congress mobilized their constituencies along racial lines; later declarations of non-European cooperation or multi-racial unity rarely mentioned—let alone addressed—the nature of the underlying divisions. Even when political groups managed to transcend the chasm between African and Indian, the resulting cooperation was often relatively small-scale, fragile, and located in particular organizational structures. These alliances did not significantly transform the social relations that persisted in other urban spaces. Individuals from a variety of backgrounds—including working class Indian communists, African intellectuals, and mission-educated Zulu chiefs—fought to overcome Natal’s racial divide.

As a result of these efforts, African and Indian activists often forged relationships of

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134 The major exception occurs in the autobiographies of political activists, where relationships between individual Indians and Africans involved in political struggle are extremely important. I address this question (and the internal racial dynamics of the ANC) in the next chapter and chapter 5.
enormous strength and symbolic significance, despite the adversity of circumstance. But as the next chapter will begin to show, the success or failure of their efforts cannot be judged solely on the basis of well-intentioned statements of unity or formal agreements between different “national” organizations.
Chapter 2:
African Nationalism and the Indian Diaspora, 1945-1949

And then—UN! The whole of South Africa has been shaken by the decisions of that Assembly. The decisions have had international repercussions. The main source of the upheaval which is revolutionizing race relations in this country is—Durban! The centre of the Indian problem is Durban. And but for Durban there would have been no reverse for this country at the UN, and South West Africa would be our fifth Province....In Durban, the Indians (like the uprooted, war torn new European settlers) are experiencing rebirth. What of the African? May not Durban be the spring—or at least a chief actor in the story—of African Regeneration?


This chapter explores two related questions: the influence of the Indian Congresses on the development of African nationalist politics during the 1940s and the debates between different African political factions over “cooperation” versus “unity” with other non-European groups. Tom Lodge has aptly described the 1940s as “a watershed moment … a period in which a massive expansion of the black labour force, its increasing deployment in manufacturing industry, the revival of trade unionism and the stimulation of class consciousness had a radicalizing effect on African political organizations, particularly the ANC.”

Strikes, bus boycotts, squatters movements, and militant rural protests erupted throughout the war. In the single year following the armistice, three mass social struggles threatened to transform the country’s political landscape: the national anti-pass campaign, the 80,000 strong African mineworkers strike on the Rand, and the initiation of Passive Resistance by the Indian Congresses for the first time since Gandhi departed in 1914. Yet the ANC cast a rather odd shadow in the midst of these events. During a period of political ferment and social maelstrom, the ANC remained an organization of a few thousand, elite in African terms and temperamentally isolated from the growing ranks of the working class,

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fractured along provincial lines, and heavily based in the Transvaal.\(^3\) The double issue of the Indian—the nature of the Indian presence in South Africa and the correct relationship between the ANC and Indian Congresses—was only one of several related debates that convulsed the organization during this period. Other important discussions included unity negotiations with the All Africa Convention, the battle over participation in the Native Representative Councils, and broader questions of political strategy. Nevertheless, the importance of the “Indian question” has been significantly underestimated. It inaugurated a profound and lengthy reevaluation of the ANC’s character as a “national” organization, deepened the rift between the Transvaal-based leadership and the Natal organization, and established the intellectual terms for the later split between the ANC and the Pan African Congress in 1959.

The persistent avoidance of topics like regional fragmentation, anti-Indian racism among leading Congress figures, and the alienation of the ANC from the moods and outlooks of most Africans occurs even in the work of historians who are otherwise quite critical of the organization during this phase.\(^4\) This equivocation springs from both ideology and method: it results from framing African politics as a single story that can be narrated across different regions and analyzed primarily at the level of the political groups themselves. As a result,

\(^3\)“In 1945, the Transvaal, Orange Free State, and Natal reported 69 branches (three-fourths of them in the Transvaal) and 4,176 members (nearly half of them in the Orange Free State). …[In 1949] Only 46 branches, out of a much larger number of known branches, were alive, with 2,755 members.” Tom Karis, *Form Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1954*, vol. 2: “Hope and Challenge,” ed. Tom Karis and Gwendolyn M. Carter (Stanford: Hoover Institute, 1973), 86.

\(^4\)In his treatment of politics in the 1940s and 50s, Karis mentions events which occurred in the Cape that have an impact on the Transvaal-based “national” organizations, but does not discuss local conditions in the Cape and barely mentions Natal, excepting the 1949 Riots. Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 2. Given his focus on local and grass roots struggles, Tom Lodge pays more attention to regional variation than any other historian of South African politics. See *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London: Longman, 1983). Nevertheless, Lodge treats the question of regionalism empirically, rather than as a significant question that deserves analytical discussion in its own right.
even a historian like Tom Lodge—despite his strong focus on popular action and the variance between provinces—sometimes generalizes regarding South African developments on the basis of events and alliances that are largely confined to Johannesburg. This metonymic gesture is characteristic of nationalist history in the colonial and post-colonial world: the creation of a unified past through the privileging of a dominant city or region. In an elegant discussion of the nation as an object of historical analysis, Gyanendra Pandey analyzes the teleology implicit in a similar approach to the Indian anti-colonial struggle:

By attributing a natural quality to the particular unity called India, and adopting its official archive as the primary source of historical knowledge, the historian has adopted the view of the established state. With the emphasis placed on the unity of India and the unity of the struggle to realize its independence, the history of India since the early nineteenth century has tended to become the biography of the emerging nation state… The history of sectarian strife in general, and of what is called communalism in India, has been written up as a secondary story, entirely subsidiary to the main drama of India’s struggle for independence from colonial rule.

During the last decades of the anti-apartheid struggle, adherents of the ideas of non-racialism and Black Consciousness, including many historians, minimized the racial and ethno-linguistic divisions among the oppressed: discussing these questions, or so it was frequently alleged, played into the hands of the regime’s divide-and-rule strategy and endangered the solidarities of the national liberation movement. Ironically, this position derives the unified biography of the national struggle—sometimes seen as comprising one nation, other times four—from the external limits of the regime it fought to overthrow: the 1910 borders of the Union of South Africa. Accounts of the anti-apartheid struggle have overwhelmingly followed this framework by the endowing the colonial-derived boundaries of the South

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5 For an incisive critique of claims about African proletarian politics based on “some of the organizations which claimed influence among such persons,” see Edwards, “Mkumbane, Our Home,” 6. Edwards also criticizes Lodge for generalizations about African politics based on organization developments in the ANC that have little effect on working class political life in Durban.
African state with virtually \textit{a priori} status in organizing historical knowledge. For example, most recent surveys of the liberation movement have either reduced the rest of southern Africa to an appendix or simply passed the battle against white supremacy in Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe over in silence.\footnote{For an otherwise strong example, see \textit{The Road to Democracy in South Africa} (5 vols.) series, produced by the South African Democratic Education Trust, which contains an entire volume on external anti-apartheid activism in Europe, but no substantive discussion of the interrelationship of white supremacy or the liberation struggles throughout southern Africa. The exclusion of Namibia from the overall narrative of the anti-apartheid struggle is especially revealing of an attempt to write history according a nationalist framework that silences the regional dimensions of apartheid and the struggle against it. See South Africa Democratic Education Trust, \textit{The Road to Democracy in South Africa} vol. 1-5 (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004-forthcoming).} But neither the external boundaries nor the internal homogeneity of this construct hold up particularly well under examination. Both Natal and the Western Cape frustrate the identification of the anti-apartheid struggle with the cohesion of a unified South African nation. In each case, racial and ethnic cleavages, which were mediated in complex ways by class forces, permeated and shaped day-to-day social interactions, the development of the anti-apartheid movement, and the ANC itself. As a result, both provinces generally appear in the broader literature on African nationalist politics—when they do in fact find their way onto the stage—in the form of local exceptions or temporary interruptions to a Transvaal-based “national” narrative.

This chapter discusses some of the major developments in African and Indian nationalist politics during the 1940s: the post-war transformations in the ANC and Indian Congresses, the Passive Resistance Campaign, and the December 1946 delegation of Indian and African advisors to aid in India’s case against South Africa in the United Nations. However, its main focus is on a relatively minor event, which nevertheless has become quite central to the historical accounts of the ANC. On March 9, 1947, the Presidents of the ANC, TIC, and NIC—Dr. A.B. Xuma, Dr. Yosuf Dadoo, and Dr. M.N. Naicker—released a
collective statement following a meeting in Johannesburg. The Doctors’ Pact, as it soon came
to be known, announced that: “a Joint Declaration of co-operation is imperative for the
working out of the practical basis of co-operation between the National Organizations of the
non-European peoples.”8 Although historians have noted the limited nature of the agreement,
most accounts of this period describe it as an important precursor to the multi-racial alliance
of the 1950s.9 More baldly, ANC literature frequently traces a direct line between the
founding of the organization in 1912, the 1930 unity conference convened by Dr.
Abdurahman in Cape Town, the Doctors’ Pact, the 1955 Freedom Charter, and the adoption
of an open membership policy at the Morogoro conference in 1969.10 Vijay Prashad goes
even further and describes the agreement as the “foundation for the anti-apartheid
struggle.”11

In challenging the manner that most historians have addressed the Doctors’ Pact, this
chapter seeks to accomplish two goals. First, it attempts to render more legible the
teleological nature of the predominant narrative by restoring the intricate ballet—both
between different organizations and within the ANC itself—that produced this declaration
and conditioned its political fallout. The motives of its proponents within the ANC and

8 “Joint Declaration of Cooperation.” Statement by Dr. A.B. Xuma of the ANC, Dr. G.M. Naicker of
the Natal Indian Congress, and Dr. Y.M. Dadoo of the Transvaal Indian Congress. 9 March 1947.
9See Karis, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 72; Lodge describes the Pact as a “symbolic”
achievement of common struggle, see Black Politics, 38; Walshe draws a direct line between the Pact
chauvinist attitudes on both sides, George M. Fredrickson notes that the reality of non-European
cooperation was more difficult to achieve, see Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black
10 See for an example see Kader Asmal, “The Origins of South African Unity,” at
March 2009. For a slightly nuanced restatement of this basic position, see Flint, “Indian-African
Encounters,” 374.
11 Vijay Prashad, Everyone Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural
Purity (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 95
Indian Congresses were complex and, in some cases, antagonistic; the terms of the pact (which deliberately avoided the word “unity” and nowhere contained the vocabulary of multi-racialism or non-racialism) were construed differently by the various parties; the agreement deepened the growing rift between the Transvaal and Natal ANC leaderships; and most contemporary observers believed that the pact was simply moribund. Furthermore, the Transvaal ANC leadership and Indian Congresses signed this document in the midst of growing political demoralization among the Indian working class and a growing racial polarization throughout Natal. Second, this chapter begins to situate the actions of ANC leaders like Xuma, Champion, and H. Selby Msimang within their differing social contexts by exploring the ramifications of the Pact—and the “Indian question” more broadly—in the two provinces. Although relatively obvious, this point nevertheless deserves elaboration. It is not enough to juxtapose the specificity of regional politics against a hypostasized idea of the nation. Instead, this chapter explores an alternative approach by analyzing the mutual interplay of each region’s political dynamics and then describing the impact of this dialectical—if uneven—relationship on efforts to imagine and construct a political organization that united black South Africans.

**Post-War Changes in the ANC and Indian Congresses**

Despite the early ANC’s substantial authority in the eyes of many Africans, it suffered from chronic organizational weaknesses and regional factionalism. Powerless to arrest the advance of segregationist legislation and devoid of a mass political base, the ANC stagnated through much of the 1930s. Following the outbreak of the Second World War and the election of Dr. A.B. Xuma to its presidency, the Congress experienced the beginnings of a revival. Although legalistic and cautious in his outlook, Xuma pressed for a more assertive
program of political demands, including—for the first time—an unqualified, universal franchise.\textsuperscript{12} David Walshe explains: “In propounding such a policy Xuma had hastened the reorientation of Congress away from Seme’s concern with chieftaincy and economic self-help. The intent was now a deliberate cultivation of mass support as an integral part of the movement’s commitment to color-blind justice for all.”\textsuperscript{13} In response to wartime statements by Smuts and other officials indicating openness to reform, a prevailing optimism had developed in African political circles. These expectations shipwrecked against racist campaigning by all the white parties in the lead up to the 1943 general elections, lethal repression against African strikes and demonstrations, and renewed police actions after 1944 to enforce pass laws which had previously been relaxed.\textsuperscript{14} The entire period was shot through with the consequences of rural economic crisis and rapid industrialization: the increased movement of Africans into the cities, the lightning spread of slums and shanty towns, growing working class militancy, and explosive protests in the countryside.

During the last years of the war, the ANC faced enormous pressure, both internally and externally, to harness this social ferment and craft effective strategies to advance African interests. The leadership of the ANC remained in the hands of individuals who were moderate and in some respects conservative, their outlook shaped by the values of mission Christianity, the rhetoric of Cape liberalism, and Booker T. Washington’s ideas of race advancement.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, the recalcitrance of Smut’s government—culminating in the sanguinary repression of the 1946 African miners strike—pushed sections of the ANC slowly

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\textsuperscript{12} According to Karis, there is some ambiguity as to whether Xuma himself endorsed universal suffrage at this time. ANC statements from the period contain both positions. See Carter and Karis, \textit{From Protest to Challenge}, vol. 2, 88-9.
\textsuperscript{13} Walshe, \textit{The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa}, 268.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 279-80.
\textsuperscript{15} Fredrickson, \textit{Black Liberation}, 241-2.
in the direction of non-cooperation and direct action. By the mid-1940s “racial bitterness and distrust had increased sharply in African political circles.”\textsuperscript{16} In 1943, a small group, mainly composed of law students and schoolteachers, obtained the consent of Xuma to form a youth league of the ANC. During their initial discussions with Xuma, Anton Lembede, Jordan Ngubane, Nelson Mandela and others sharply juxtaposed the legalistic tactics of the ANC leadership with the Quit India movement and Gandhi’s imprisonment.\textsuperscript{17} Despite this manifest respect for the Indian struggle, the Youth League’s emphasis on African nationalism and self-emancipation compelled its leadership to reject anything but the most temporary and circumscribed forms of cooperation with Indian or white parties. “Non-European unity,” Lembede famously declared, “is a fantastic dream that has no foundation in reality.”\textsuperscript{18}

In some respects, the pre-war Indian leadership shared the political outlook and social character of its African counterpart, although its situation was compounded by the minority status of South African Indians and its own accretion of material advantage. Dr. Goonam recalls in her autobiography: “this class had accumulated some property and some privileges within the segregatory framework and their main concern was to protect those privileges, and preserve what the ‘community’ had accumulated rather than protest race laws on principle.”\textsuperscript{19} Except for a brief period following the 1913 Indian coal workers strike, the South African Indian Congress virtually ignored the issues confronted by working class and poor Indians: its political activities centered on the recognition of Indian rights as British

\textsuperscript{16} Walshe, \textit{The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa}, 281. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Mary Benson, \textit{African Patriots} (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 109. \\
imperial subjects and the protection of trader interests. Nor did the pre-war Indian Congress champion the cause of the country’s dispossessed majority. The Indian elite generally held attitudes of paternalism, indifference, or open hostility toward the aspirations of Africans—an outlook vigorously defended by Gandhi until the mid 1940s. Indian newspapers ran occasional human interests stories about white assaults and humiliations of “Natives”; leading politicians, like P.R. Pather and A.I. Kajee, maintained cordial relationships with ANC leaders or donated money to African charities. But such labored gestures of “friendship” between the races generally served to reinforce social distance. In an article following the suppression of the 1946 African mine workers strike, Indian Opinion succinctly expressed the remote and condescending affect of this stratum: “The Indian community has all these years given its moral and material support to the uplift of the natives whenever required and that we should still continue to do.” The columnist then proceeded to warn: “But there is a long way yet to go before the natives can be expected to resort to methods commonly used by Europeans and Indians for the redress of their grievances excepting at their peril.” For the most part, the writings and speeches of the pre-war Indian leadership simply passed over the African in silence.

In 1945-6, a group of younger Indian activists captured the leadership of the Natal and Transvaal Congresses with overwhelming working class support. They immediately undertook to rebuild the Indian Congresses as mass-based organizations, develop closer working relations with the ANC, and mobilize Indians in a campaign of passive resistance

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against the government.22 The “Radicals,” as they subsequently came to be known, drew on two political traditions. In many of their homes, Indian nationalism was a virtual birthright. These activists cherished family connections with the subcontinent and personal memories of Gandhi and Sarojini Naidoo. They followed the progress of the Indian anti-colonial struggle in the pages of newspapers like *Indian Views* and *Indian Opinion*. Several of them, for example Drs. Yosuf Dadoo and Goonam, were exposed to nationalist politics while attending school abroad and traveled in India during the height of the Quit India Movement. While prominent younger leaders such as Dadoo and Monty Naicker frequently spoke of Gandhi in reverential terms, their views were in many ways closer to those of Nehru. Beginning in the late 1920s, Nehru had consistently argued that Indians in Africa must identify their interests with the indigenous majority and abandon their colonial derived privileges in favor of African rule.23 Interventions by Nehru and other members of the Indian National Congress were instrumental in precipitating the generational shift of the South African Indian

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23 Nehru’s statements were regularly reprinted in both the African and Indian press. For example, at the beginning of the Defiance Campaign, Nehru warned that “Indians in South Africa must be careful not to claim anything which goes against the rights and dignity of the African people. We cannot claim anything for ourselves which we deny to others.” See “Pandit Nehru’s Message to South African Indians,” *Indian Opinion*, 21 June 1946. According to one account, Nehru became aware of the South Africa situation and Gandhi’s activities in 1912, which first inspired him to seek out Gandhi when he returned from South Africa. His interests in Africa broadened considerably after he attended the famed 1927 International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels, where he met and talked with the South African delegation of Josiah Gumede (then President of the ANC), J.A. Laguma, and D. Cobraine. See Hari Sharan Chhabra, *Nehru and Resurgent Africa* (New Delhi: Africa Publications, 1989). In his autobiography, Nehru states that C.F. Andrews gave him books that addressed economic imperialism in Africa (including a copy of *The Black Man’s Burdon*) during the non-cooperation movement in 1920. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967 [1941]), 67. Nehru’s extensive writing and interventions into African politics are completely absent from Judith Brown’s *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).
leadership. The other source of the Radical’s political education was provided by the Communist Party of South Africa. In the mid-1930s, a small layer of Indians began to join the CPSA in Durban, which at the time was mainly older and white. This group, particularly H.A. Naidoo and George Ponen, played a central role in the revival of the Natal labor movement, organizing unions of African and Indian workers in industries like sugar, textiles, and dairy. A few years later, prominent Indians in the Transvaal, such as Dadoo, also began to join the Party. Until its dissolution in 1950, the Communist Party provided its members an unparalleled experience of camaraderie. It was perhaps the one organization in South Africa where members of all races could meet, interact, and debate on equal terms.

As Rehana Ebr.-Valley observes, most historians of South African Indians have postulated a homogenous Indian community—in other words, a coherent basis for a nationalist project. Particularly before the Group Areas Act, Indians were sharply differentiated by language group, region within South Africa, and religion. “South African Indian” was more a colonial (and later apartheid) racial category than a coherent sociological entity or cultural identity. When the Radicals rejected the older politics of individual statesmanship in favor of mass mobilization, they tried to construct a new movement through unifying these disparate and sometimes antagonistic constituencies. Three strategies were central to this undertaking: the Indian Congresses channeled the growing militancy of the newly urbanized working class into protesting restrictions placed on Indians; they worked closely with the Indian middle classes not only for financial reasons, but also because of their

24 During her visit in 1941, Indira Nehru publicly rebuked the older generation of Indian leaders over their support for the war and strongly endorsed common political action by Indians and Africans. Her intervention had a powerful impact on Manilal Gandhi, who then changed the line of Indian Opinion on the question of non-European cooperation. See Meer, A Fortunate Man , 60-6.
authority within respective ethnic communities (Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Telegu); and they symbolically asserted continuity with the earlier campaigns led by Gandhi. Their rhetoric was characterized by a strong pan-Indian nationalism: leaflets distributed during the Passive Resistance Campaign reported meetings between Radical leaders and both Hindu and Muslim figures, including Mohammad Jinnah of the Muslim League, throughout South Asia.

The Radicals’ dual emphasis on Indian racial solidarity and non-European cooperation necessitated a complex and often fraught strategy of political negotiation. On the one hand, the cadre of TIC/NIC played a prominent role in supporting and even leading African struggles. Beginning in 1938, the Non-European United Front (headed by Dadoo in the Transvaal and H.A. Naidoo in Natal) organized antiwar protests in African townships and produced both English and Zulu language leaflets defending its arrested leaders. According to Ismail Meer, “the membership of the NEUF increased and exceeded that of the ANC.” During the war, the Radicals confiscated hoarded rice, sugar, and condensed milk (i.e., black market staples) from Indian merchants in Durban and then sold these goods to poor Africans and Indians at cost. Indian activists assisted in the Anti-Pass Campaign in 1944, supported the Alexandra bus boycott, and carried out relief work during the 1946 African mine workers strike. Indian CP members, including Dadoo and H.A. Naidoo, were arrested alongside their African counterparts in the strike’s aftermath. On the other hand, the agitation of the Radicals helped further consolidate an emerging Indian community nationalism during the 1940s, a growing racial consciousness that appears to have deepened the profound alienation

28 Ibid., 93.
felt by many Indians from the African majority. In an analysis of Indian working class politics during this period, Goolam Vahed argues: “Only ‘Indian’ issues successfully mobilized the Indian masses who failed to embrace the broad non-racial and class alliances that were taking shape.” The chasm between the Congress’s rhetoric of Afro-Indian cooperation and the attitudes of many, if not most, Indians would only deepen as the decade progressed.

**The NEUM, Xuma, and the Communist Party**

In the mid 1930s, the Hertzog government introduced a new package of segregationist legislation, including the Native Representative Act and the Native Trust and Land Act. No viable African organization existed to coordinate opposition on a Union-wide scale. In 1935, African leaders from across South Africa came together to establish the All African Convention (AAC). The ANC later withdrew from the AAC and a group of leftist intellectuals based in the Cape, many of whom were members of the Workers Party of South Africa (affiliated with the Trotskyist Fourth International), gained increasing influence. In 1943, the Cape leftists used the AAC as a platform to launch the Non European Unity Movement and adopted a ten point program of democratic demands. NEUM politics in the 1940s focused on two main axes: non-collaboration with state institutions and Non-European unity. In a relentless stream of blistering articles and pamphlets, the NEUM impeached the self-serving racial parochialism of the current leaderships and argued for a single, federated

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29 Vahed, “Race or Class?” 122. See also Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 61-3.
30 Ibid.
organization on the basis of common racial discrimination. In *The Awakening of a People* (1950), I.B. Tabata wrote:

> It is a curious thing that though all the members of this group [i.e., non-Europeans] suffer from the same fundamental disabilities, though they have been cast out from the body politic and are excluded from the privileges of citizenship, yet they find it possible to regard themselves as different and separate entities. Though their only rights and privileges are to serve their masters in different capacities, to starve in different degrees and to die at different rates, yet they find it possible to nurse their separate sores, to guard their dire “privileges” as if these were their exclusive possession and source of pride from which the others must be jealously shut out.…

> It eminently suits the master to foster these artificial differences and supposed superiorities. The curious thing is that he has always found no more willing assistants in the game of divide and rule than the slaves themselves, who guard the rigid barriers with an almost religious zeal.33

Although smaller than the ANC and hampered by the fact that most of its members lacked the ability to speak an African language, the NEUM’s militant rhetoric and denunciation of the moderate ANC leadership won a hearing among younger Africans, particularly among future Youth League members at the University of Fort Hare.34 Lengthy exchanges between ANC leaders and the Unity Movement filled the English language pages of African newspapers throughout the mid and late 1940s, particularly *Inkudla ya Bantu*, which was edited by Youth League member Jordan Ngubane. The arguments of the NEUM forced Youth League members to clarify their own inchoate ideas in the course of debate; and on certain questions (like non-participation in government advisory boards) the Youth League adopted the Unity Movement’s position. In contrast to the occasional platitudes raised by

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34 Interview with Robert Sobukwe by Gail M. Gerhart, 8 and 9 August 1970. Gerhart Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The intellectual influence of the NEUM, both as a source of ideas and a constant critical presence, continued throughout the 1950s and is rarely accorded its proper weight in the development of ANC’s politics. Both Winnie Mandela and Fatima Meer—among many others—were later attracted to some arguments within the NEUM’s polemics. The NEUM also made some inroads into the Natal Indian Congress during the 1950s. See Meer, *A Fortunate Man*, 148-51.
African and Indian leaders regarding cooperation, the Unity Movement pushed for the immediate formation of federated bodies of Indians and Coloureds affiliated to the AAC. The ANC leadership, the CPSA, and ANC/YL—each for very different reasons—saw this later proposal as a significant threat to the nationalist movement and moved quickly to undercut the NEUM’s maneuvers.35

Earlier ANC leaders had occasionally voiced support for some form of agreement between the non-European organizations.36 But it was the threat of the Unity Movement that forced Xuma to take the first concrete steps in this direction. In May 1945, the Unity Movement contacted Xuma, requesting that he attend a meeting of its central executive committee to discuss the prospects for Africa politics following the end of the war.37 After he failed to attend, the NEUM wrote him immediately, requesting an audience in Johannesburg. In reaction to these overtures, Xuma sent letters to the SAIC and APO that motivated a meeting among the leaders of the three parties. His overriding concern, stressed repeatedly in his half page missive, was to preserve the integrity of the existing national organizations. Emphasizing the urgency of a joint conference, Xuma wrote:

I am suggesting this as a precaution against disruption within our respective groups through individuals and local organizations trying to form unity.

There could be only two or three leaders from each as the case may be, to explore ways and means whereby leaders of the three organisations could co-operate on points of common suffering without trying to force artificial unity of the groups….

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36 In 1939, the ANC endorsed the principle of a “Non European United Front,” but made no effort to affiliate to organization of that name led in the Transvaal by Dadoo. See Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 2, 84.
37 S.A. Javiva and E. Ramsdale to Dr. A.B. Xuma, 31 May 1945. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
There is no other reasonable and logical approach to co-operation of the “Big Three” on behalf of the three groups without causing divisions among the respective communities.38

By August 1945, Xuma was preoccupied with the conditions for greater cooperation between racial groups and the dangers posed by a polarization over non-European unity within the ANC. In an address delivered at the Conference of Non-White Trade Unions, Xuma advised against the precipitous formation of a National Council of Non-European Trade Unions, which might alienate Indian and Coloured workers: “I know some of our Coloured and Indian friends will find their position and attitude compromised at this stage because many of them are members of Trade Unions in common with Europeans. We must sympathize with them and not be harsh with whatever attitude they take.”39 If Xuma’s writings of this period show considerable insight regarding the impediments to greater unity, they also express the conservative outlook of a middle class nationalist, insistent on the subordination of mass struggle (if and when it should occur) and working class organizations to a “responsible” leadership, and committed to political mobilization along racial lines. The watchword of this perspective was “cooperation at an organizational level”—in other words, between the respective elites of racial groups—rather than a “fusion of groups” which would dilute their identity.40 At the time, Xuma’s stance received approbation from the Communist Party, which also sought to reverse the growing influence of the NEUM. In a 14 November letter to Xuma, Moses Kotane wrote: “You will also doubtless agree that unless this co-operation is established soon the people who are at present fiddling with the wonderful ideal of unity of

38 Dr. A.B. Xuma to Dr. E.T. Dietrich, 10 August 1945. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
39 Dr. A.B. Xuma, Opening Address of the All-In-One Conference of the Non-White Trade Unions at Bloemfontein. 4 August 1945. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
40 For an example of this distinction, “Dr. Xuma Questioned,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 17 April 1948.
the non-European people will create further confusion in the minds of our people and we are likely to be regarded as being against unity.”

African party members within the ANC, particularly Kotane and J.B. Marks, consistently supported common action with the Indian Congresses.

Behind this approach to non-European cooperation was a distinctive class politics. While more obvious in Xuma’s case, the evolutionary convergence between his tepid nationalism and the strategy of the Communist Party requires some elaboration. Major studies by Frederick Cooper and O. Nigel Boland have emphasized the sharp conflicts between colonial labor movements and nationalist parties in West Africa and the Caribbean. During a period of rapid urbanization (the urban African population almost doubled between 1930 and 1945) and significant labor struggles, the South African nationalist movement did not experience an equivalent polarization along class lines. The foremost reason was the considerable influence of the CPSA. Following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935, the South African party abandoned its earlier “Black Republic” slogan and adopted the perspective of the “anti-fascist popular front.” As a result, the party downplayed the questions of class struggle and African majority rule, instead centering its agitation on general democratic demands directed against the Smuts government.

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41 Moses M. Kotane to Dr. A.B. Xuma, 14 November 1945. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.


43 See Martin Legassick, Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: The South African Communist Party and the “Native Republic” 1928-34 (Syracuse: The Program of Eastern African Studies, 1973). Legassick argues that this later turn was prepared by an interpretation of the Native Republic slogan according to the Stalinist scheme of two-stage revolution. Beginning in the late
union activity to “mobilizing support for the war effort” and correspondingly opposed actions that might interfere with transport or war-related production. Given the importance of joint African-Indian strikes occurring in Durban at this time, the party’s new policy—publicly defended by union leaders like H.A. Naidoo and George Ponen—may well have weakened the Natal trade union movement at a vital conjuncture. In the early 1940s, the CPSA leadership mandated the Non-European United Front’s liquidation and ordered its members to strengthen the existing “national” political organizations. By the mid-1940s, the Communist Party had begun to advocate the alliance of the SAIC, APO, and ANC in opposition to the NEUM’s proposal of unity through a federated AAC.

The Passive Resistance Campaign and the United Nations

Shortly after the Radicals assumed control of the Indian Congresses, they launched a campaign of passive resistance against the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946. Christened the “Ghetto Act” by the Indian Congresses, this bill made permanent an earlier restriction of Indian landownership to scheduled areas and provided a limited form of group franchise. The two-year campaign of Passive Resistance—which saw crowds of Indians assaulted by gangs of racist whites and Indian men and women of all ages, classes, and faiths sentenced to hard labor in prison—galvanized African politics. Some Natal ANC leaders warned that Africans could fall behind the other two races and a few articles in Ilanga characterized the Asiatic Act as the partition of Durban between Indians and whites. But the

20 twenties, the CPSA equated national liberation with equal juridical rights and a removal of discriminatory laws.

44 Padaychee et al., Indian Workers and Trade Unions in Durban, 164.

45 Meer, A Fortunate Man, 67.

response of most African political activists was overwhelmingly positive. On its front page, the first bulletin of the ANC Youth League declared that: “it is time we emulated the excellent example of the freedom-loving Indian people in rejecting segregation. Our answer to the inevitable UNO condemnation of the Union’s policy of racial oppression should be a full scale mobilization of the African people.”

Harshly criticizing the failure of African intellectuals to organize the masses, an *Ilanga* editorial praised the reinvigoration of the Indian Congresses by a younger generation of “virile Indian leaders” and emphasized the important role played by Indian women in the struggle for freedom. Another article in *Ilanga* took the ANC leadership to task for failing to mobilize its membership in support of the Indian Congresses: “First, the struggle of all oppressed people is one, whether or not they realize it. Second, the Indians, in their hour of need and desperation, remembered the African, and actually appealed to him. Here was a unique opportunity for our leaders to force a bargain with profit to our cause.”

Professor Z.K. Mathews later claimed that the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign was “the immediate inspiration” for the adoption of civil disobedience by the ANC. Numerous articles, some written by Indian activists, debated the meaning of these events in the African press. Significantly, Mahatma Gandhi—following the lead of Nehru and Jinnah—changed his longstanding position and began to publicly advocate political action with Africans.

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At the height of passive resistance, the Indian government brought the treatment of South African Indians before the General Assembly of the United Nations. As the first question moved by an independent India at the UN, the petition attracted enormous international attention.\(^53\) Seizing an opportunity to augment pressure on South Africa, the South African Indian Congresses organized and financed a delegation of H.A. Naidoo, Sorabjee Rustomjee, and Xuma to travel to New York and advise the Indian effort. Vijayalakshmi Pandit (Nehru’s sister) presented the Indian case before the assembled countries and media of the world.\(^54\) The UN resolution, which passed in December 1946, was limited to the treatment of Indians and the strained relationship between South Africa and India. Nevertheless, the Indian delegation utilized the opportunity to launch an unprecedented attack on the overall racial policies of the Union, especially its treatment of Africans. Given Smuts’s international renown (he had personally authored the preamble to the United Nations Charter), the mere fact that the case appeared before this body represented a humiliating defeat for South Africa’s Prime Minister.

The African papers reported these events with undisguised glee. According to one account, Smuts and Xuma both attended a private cocktail party as honored guests and Smuts—unaware of the ANC president’s presence in New York—rushed over to ask: “Xuma are you here? What are you doing here?” In the style of high apocrypha, Xuma replied: “I, on behalf of the African National Congress, have for many years been trying to get near you without success and I have had to come to New York to meet my Prime Minister for the first

\(^{53}\) For an account by an Indian participant, see C.S. Jha, *From Bandung to Tashkent: Glimpses of India’s Foreign Policy* (Madras: Sagam Books, 1983), 22-30. Jha claims that the high-powered Indian delegation was handpicked by Nehru except for the delegation’s leader, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, who was chosen by Gandhi.

\(^{54}\) Pachai’s truly insular account of these events fails to mention the presence of Xuma, who does not even appear in his book’s index. See B. Pachai, *The International Aspects of the South Africa Indian Question, 1860-1971* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1971), 184-96.
time.” Other press reports revealed Pandit’s rhetorical humiliations of an inept and racist South African delegation, particularly the Durban politician and sugar grower G. Heaton Nichols. While in New York, Pandit and Xuma spoke together at a November 17 demonstration commemorating African mine workers shot the previous August.

The impact of these events on African public opinion was tremendous. In his capacity as acting President-General of the ANC, A.W.G. Champion gave a widely circulated speech calling for Africans to “view the Indian cause as their cause” and promoting greater cooperation. *Inkundla* ran the headline “India Triumphant!” and *Ilanga* immediately translated the speech into Zulu. After returning from the U.S., Xuma traveled to Natal and spoke to thousands of Africans and Indians at a rally organized by the Natal Indian Congress. Introducing Xuma, NIC president M.N. (Monty) Naicker declared: “this meeting proved there was unity between the Africans and the Indians.” Xuma defended the contributions of Indians to South Africa and argued that they deserved full citizenship rights. “If India comes of age,” he added, “there is hope for world peace.”

Despite the euphoria that greeted this (entirely symbolic) victory, the final outcome of the Passive Resistance Campaign was anticlimactic and—in some respects—represented a significant defeat for the new leaders of the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses. The two-year campaign failed to achieve concessions from the government and resulted in significant disillusionment among many Indians. The membership of the Congresses initially swelled. But from the beginning, the Congresses struggled to mobilize the working class, who were

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far less affected by the new restrictions than property-owning elements. According to Maureen Swan, the “passive resistance movement despite strong links with politically aware organized labour and despite the manifest grievances of Indian workers, mobilized only around 1,000 of the 20,000 Indian trade union members.” A thoughtful article in *Inkundla* argued that a white boycott of Indian businesses—which resulted in the cancellation of important contracts and rising Indian unemployment—produced greater support for the Indian opponents of Passive Resistance, particularly among the merchant class and in the districts of northern Natal. In addition, the Partition of India and inter-communal violence profoundly damaged the authority of both Nehru and the new Indian government, which had strongly supported the strategy of passive resistance. According a police report, the formation of the conservative Natal Indian Organization in May 1947 undermined the campaign and a number of prominent Indians, particularly wealthy Muslims who had formally supported Passive Resistance, soon joined this avowedly “moderate” and anti-Communist organization. The struggle between the two factions culminated during a visit by the British Royal Family to Natal. Despite the Passive Resistance committee’s call for a boycott, a celebration organized by the NIO brought out tens of thousands of Indians at Curries Fountain to “welcome the Royal Family and the majority of stores in Grey Street displayed flags and bunting in honour of the King.” A giant streamer across from the NIC’s Grey Street office declared: “The Indian Community Welcomes the Royal Family.” The

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60 Padayachhee et al., *Indian Workers and Trade Unions*, 155-7.
61 Quoted in Ibid., 155.
Transvaal Indian Congress launched a new phase of the campaign in January 1948. However, the effort soon dissipated and attendance at Indian Congress meetings faded to a “handful.”

*Ilanga* also began to voice concerns regarding the repercussion of Xuma’s actions in Durban. In a generally positive commentary on Xuma’s visit to Natal, the paper observed that Xuma had broken ranks with the Natal ANC by openly announcing his indebtedness to “Indians” and addressing an Indian meeting where he supported cooperation. “In other words,” *Ilanga* sermonized, “Dr. Xuma rode roughshod over the taboos, tactics and feelings of some local schools of political thought and did and said things that are simply not done in Durban, things for which a local man would be chastised, branded, ostracized.” While the author noted the approval that these actions generated in some circles, he also observed that they produced a flurry of speculation and concern. Although largely implicit, the questions posed by the author were unmistakable. Was Xuma aware of the extent of hostility within Natal to his course? Was he consciously trying to force the Natal ANC in a new direction? Did he fully understand the dangers of the rift developing between him and Champion? In other words, did the ANC president really understand the potential ramifications of his stance for Natal? The article was an apostrophe, the message in fact addressed to a character somewhere offstage: the National ANC leadership should work to strengthen elements within Natal that shared its viewpoint, pay greater attention to local political conditions, and act far more deliberately. Otherwise, the writer intimated, Xuma was headed for disaster in the province.

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The ANC leadership debated its attitude toward the Passive Resistance campaign and its relationship with the Indian Congress at a special meeting of the National Executive in Bloemfontein, early February 1947. The question emerged when the working committee proposed motions “pledging full active support to the struggle of the Indians.” In response, H. Selby Msimang—seconded by Transvaal Businessman R.G. Baloyi—moved to defer a motion on the United Nations resolution and the Passive Resistance Campaign until after “a decision had been arrived on the question of co-operation with the other non-European national organisations.” Although Msimang recognized the “gallant men and women” of the Indian community, his maneuver must have infuriated some present, especially Xuma who had just returned from the UN. The discussion continued under a separate point on “Co-operation with other non-European national groups.” After the reading of a letter from the Passive Resistance Council, a lengthy debate erupted between those who stressed economic competition and others emphasizing the urgency of finding common ground in the struggle for full citizenship rights. In the course of the exchange, Lembede and A.P. Mda of the Youth League supported the reservations of the Natal Congress, which insisted that it should play a central role in any negotiations. The executive empowered the working committee to arrange a meeting “of the three national groups for exploration of the basis for co-operation.” Although the majority of those present voiced some degree of reservation, Xuma and the Transvaal-based leadership effectively marginalized these concerns by encompassing the

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68 Minutes of a special meeting of the National Executive held at Community Hall Batho Location on Saturday-Sunday 1 and 2 February 1947. A.W.G. Champion Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

69 Minutes of the African National Congress National Executive, Bloemfontein, 1-2 February 1947. ANC Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Note that these sets of minutes differ significantly in the amount of verbatim material they report.
question of Indian/African relations within the broader issue of Non-European cooperation—a far less charged sobriquet than unity.

The meeting took place on March 9, 1947 in Johannesburg and produced a declaration signed by Dr. A.B. Xuma, Dr. Yosuf Dadoo, and Dr. Monty Naicker, which soon became known as the “Doctors’ Pact.” The Pact is often credited with establishing the basis for closer relations between the ANC and Indian Organizations and, by extension, preparing the way for the Congress Alliance of the 1950s. It read, in part:

“This Joint Meeting between the representatives of the African National Congress and the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses, having fully realized the urgency of cooperation between non-European peoples and other democratic forces for the attainment of basic democratic rights and full citizenship for all sections of the South African people, has resolved that a Joint Declaration of co-operation is imperative for the working out of a practical basis of co-operation between the National Organisations of the non-European peoples.”

Nowhere did the agreement reference Dr. Abdurahman’s 1930 unity conference or the Non-European United Front; and Xuma was conspicuously silent regarding these earlier undertakings in his later public statements. The Pact announced a relatively straightforward program of bourgeois democratic demands: the achievement of universal franchise; state recognition of Trade Unions; the removal of land restrictions and the provision of adequate housing; free compulsory education; abolition of laws restricting movement; and the elimination of all discriminatory legislation. Regarding strategy, it called for a campaign that would compel the Union Government to implement the UN resolution and adhere to the principles of the UN Charter, but the text provided no concrete direction and completely failed to specify the nature or duration of the proposed action. The effect was clearly intentional: the document employed a vague terminology that could describe satyaghraha or the ANC’s tradition of petition and deputations—i.e., a formulation designed to

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70 “Joint Declaration of Cooperation.”
accommodate moderates and militants on both sides. The vocabulary of multi-racialism or non-European unity was decidedly absent and the organizational measures proposed were limited. The three parties would meet “from time to time” to take steps advancing this perspective.

Different motivations guided the hands of the signatories. For the Communist Party and Indian Congresses, the Pact most likely represented a limited first step towards the goal of eventual political unity—or, at least, a permanent formal alliance between the “national” organizations. It was, perhaps more than anything else, Dadoo’s victory: the apparent vindication of a course he had steadfastly pursued since the late 1930s. But other considerations were also involved. Contemptuously dismissing the U.N. resolution, the South African government showed no signs of propitiating the demands of the Passive Resistance Campaign, which faced increasingly harsh repression. As Unity Movement polemics noted at the time, Nehru and the Indian National Congress continued to pressure South Africa’s Indian population to work with African organizations and Dadoo wanted tangible evidence of progress on this front before visiting India later that year. At this point, the TIC/NIC’s strategy still relied heavily on the prospects of effective foreign pressure on the apartheid regime and the nebulous weight of international opinion. On Xuma’s part, the Pact was a circumscribed agreement, based on a conservative idea of occasional collaboration between the established leaderships, and designed to outmaneuver advocates of unity. In public

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71 Xuma’s papers include letters from Dadoo in his capacity as Leader of the Non-European United Front and Leader of Nationalist Group of the TIC beginning in 1939. Dadoo invited Xuma to attend both informal gatherings to discuss current development, send speakers to mass meetings held at Gandhi hall, and sent him copies of petitions to the government. See Dr. Y. Dadoo to “Dear Friend,” 27 February 1939; Dr. Y. Dadoo to “Dear Friend,” 30 March 1939; and Dr. Y. Dadoo to Dr. A.B. Xuma, 28 February 1943. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

interviews, Xuma was quick to emphasize that the Pact did not entail any form of organizational fusion: “Co-operation is a working together of two bodies in which the organizations or bodies retain their identities, whereas in unity the groups or bodies are merged into one.” Other ANC leaders viewed the agreement similarly. “Isharina” (a Youth League member writing from Orlando) enthusiastically motivated the agreement to the readers of *Inkundla*, while making clear that its terms differed fundamentally from the earlier position espoused by Dadoo and the Communist Party: “Therefore talk of an amorphous ‘unity’ of a type that Dr. Dadoo and his African satellites once preached in Johannesburg in their Non-European United Front, is nothing but glib nonsense.” Some ANC leaders who endorsed the agreement still viewed the motivations of the Indian Congresses—and Dadoo in particular—with considerable suspicion.

In reality, the Pact was stillborn. The fact that it was announced in Johannesburg—and without the presence of a signal member of the Natal ANC’s executive, let alone their foreknowledge—insured its rapid and graceless demise. Although guarded in his language, Xuma soon acknowledged that practical steps toward coordinated efforts had been prevented by “constitutional difficulties” and categorically ruled out launching a campaign in sympathy with the Passive Resistance struggle. In August 1948, a Unity Movement spokesperson writing in *Inkundla* could declare in passing that the agreement was already dead. The Congress Youth League, particularly Ngubane and Mda, shared this assessment. Evaluating Xuma’s tenure in June 1949, an *Inkundla* editorial rendered a damning judgment on the Pact: “On the question of non-European unity, the Durban Riots are the best commentary on his

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73 “Dr. Xuma to Wait and See,” *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 5 May 1948.
75 “Dr. Xuma to Wait and See,” *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 5 May 1948.
[Xuma’s] success.” Even NIC stalwarts such as Ismail Meer and Dr. Goonam later criticized the prematurity of the Pact: “Time alone would tell if there was any reality to the Pact. In retrospect, the Pact may be deemed as having been premature.” Within the ANC, the impact of the agreement was largely twofold: it provoked a backlash among Natal Africans that deepened the existing rift between the provincial leaderships and it intensified the Youth League’s ongoing campaign against any form of unity with the Indian Congresses.

**Backlash in the Natal ANC: The Ambiguities of Dependence**

The initial drive against the Xuma-Dadoo-Naicker Pact was spearheaded by the Zulu petite bourgeoisie, exemplified by such men as Champion and Msimang. A quintessential middle stratum, this layer’s political and economic livelihood depended on its ability to mediate between—and converse with—the urbanized African masses, rural elites, and the state. Champion, Msimang, and others served as members of the government-appointed Native Representative councils, sat on the advisory boards of hospitals and local charities, and cultivated intimate relationships with the Zulu Royal house. In her seminal book *The Ambiguities of Dependence*, Shula Marks describes the perpetual vacillation of the urban Zulu leadership between declarations of plebian radicalism and servility, alternately dawning masks of defiance and deference in relation to an awesomely powerful state. However, Marks and others who write about African politics in mid-century Natal fail to address adequately the way in which this dynamic was modulated by the Zulu middle class’s intimate relationship with Indians.

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80 Along similar lines, Heather Hughes has noted that the historians who write about John Dube, the quintessential Zulu power broker and first President of the ANC, consistently ignore the anti-Indian
In the first instance, this relationship took the form of competition between aspirant Zulu and an established layer of Indian shop owners, bus drivers, and merchants. The Indian exploiter was a ubiquitous trope in the proclamations of urban Zulu businessmen during the 1940s, who particularly resented what they perceived as a double standard: Indian businesses relied heavily on African patronage, but Indians refused to buy from Africans. But this was only in the first instance. For many Africans, and particularly for a small number of more established business and political figures, their interactions with the Natal Indian community were substantially more complex. Almost every aspect of their economic and social lives interpenetrated in some fashion with the world of the Indian petite bourgeoisie. Individuals like Champion consulted Indian medical specialists and lawyers, negotiated with Indian creditors or wholesalers, established (sometimes clandestine) businesses with Indian partners, used the services of Indian printers, held their events at Indian-owned theaters and conference halls, paid rent to the Indian landlords willing to provide them with office space, and sometimes developed close relationships with their Indian social peers. In actively manipulating the animosities between African and Indian workers, the African petite bourgeoisie employed an instrumental threat of racial violence (based in part on a particular construction of the Zulu as a bloodstained and savage warrior) in order to put pressure on both the Indian elite and the Natal colonial state. Simultaneously, their actions were constrained by a convoluted alchemy of symbiosis and personal dependency.

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82 For a discussion of this construction of Zuluness, see Dan Wylie, _Savage Delight: White Myths of Shaka_ (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000) and John Laband, “‘Bloodstained Grandeur’: Colonial and Imperial Stereotypes of Zulu Warriors and Zulu Warfare,” in _Zulu Identities:_
Letters between Xuma and Champion in the months before the Pact provide some insight into the tortuous negotiations and posturing of the African leadership. In early January 1947, Xuma requested a personal meeting with Champion (then president of the Natal province) to discuss recent developments in the Congress. Undoubtedly aware of Champion’s marked suspicion of the NIC, Xuma emphasized the potential embarrassment of publicly appearing at Indian events, while expressing his own frustrations regarding the ANC’s passivity. His justification for working with “the Indians” was strikingly utilitarian:

I am now embarrassed in that when I arrived the Indians here wanted to give me a banquet but I declined and suggested that they should wait until Rustomjee arrives. In fact, I hated for them to do something while the Africans were silent. Now I am invited to Durban to a Drs Naicker and Dadoo fare well to India on Feb 9th. As equally embarrassing as it is I must accept as we must co-operate with them in our own interest and for what the Delegation from India did at the UNO [United nations Organization] for us.83

Champion sent a telegram insisting that Xuma must “be in Durban before the Indian function” and arranged for Xuma to address an ANC meeting.84 In a letter following the event, Champion retrospectively cited his “fear that our people may misunderstand the object of your address to the Indians.”85 Their exchange brimmed with coded intimations, sometimes alluding to nameless enemies who might distort the ANC’s intent. As their later correspondence shows, this complicated dance between cooperation with Indians and the potential resentments of Africans continued after the Pact. In a letter written in October 1947, Champion referred to a crisis precipitated when the NIC scheduled the Reverend Scott, rather

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84 Dr. A.B. Xuma papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
than an ANC member, to address a Durban rally. The situation was serious enough that Champion apparently called a special meeting of African leaders at the Zulu royal kraal. He pointedly confided to Xuma: “Our Asiatic friends have not played the game in this matter.”

After news of the “Doctors’ Pact” appeared in the press, the executive committee of the Natal ANC protested. There are also reports of dissatisfaction throughout the Natal ANC branches. Several letters to *Ilanga* testified to the general reaction: “I say it with full confidence that public opinion especially in Natal, a people who know something about the psychology of the Indian, is much aversed [sic] to cooperation in any form.” While the record is vague, Xuma appears to have first written Champion regarding the question on 14 April 1947, over a month after the document was signed. Caught off guard, Champion and Msimang, bitter rivals throughout much of the forties, closed ranks and attempted to overturn the decision. The Natal ANC leadership justified its opposition by pointing to the outrage of African public opinion. With characteristic bravado, Champion challenged the national working committee to travel to Natal and see the reaction for themselves. Msimang emphasized “the very strained relationship between Indians and Africans in this province.” Both men operated with a double agenda. When Xuma suggested a public meeting on the topic of non-European cooperation—largely to clear up misrepresentations of the ANC’s position in the Natal press and rumors “circulating among Africans”—Champion blocked him

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86 A.W.G. Champion to A.B. Xuma. 15 October 1947. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
88 See the draft letter from Xuma to Champion. 17 April 1947. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
by claiming organizational difficulties. Champion could clearly ill-afford close public association with the pact’s African signatory. Xuma dug in.

Other ANC leaders adopted a more conciliatory posture towards the Natal Executive. In a letter to Msimang dated 17 June 1947, Reverend James A. Calata wrote:

Please allow me to plead with your Congress not to kick too hard so as to give UNO the impression that we are divided. The Indians helped us at the UNO last year and we still need their help even this year. By that I do not mean that no mistake has been made. I just want you to be careful of the manner in which you handle this matter for it concerns two of the most important provinces of the INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS. Transvaal to my knowledge is not complaining and I want to ask Natal also to put their case tactfully.

Msimang responded that the pact between the ANC and the TIC/NIC violated Xuma’s mandate. The TIC and NIC were provincial organizations; the purview of negotiating any arrangement with them thus belonged to the respective ANC provincial congresses—and only Natal, in his view, was competent to negotiate an agreement with the Indian organizations. Although his letter reflected longstanding tensions between the Natal and Transvaal leaderships, Msimang’s fundamental point was twofold: the “Doctors’ Pact” constituted an end run around the local ANC leadership (which it undoubtedly did) and was concluded at the expense of Natal’s Africans. Msimang wrote: “Before an agreement could be reached with the Indians therefore, very important and vital issues involving political, economic and social differences would have to be examined and determined in the light of the very strained relations between Indians and Africans in this province.” First and foremost, any statement of cooperation must “guarantee the Africans a measure of protection

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90 Dr. A.B. Xuma to A.W.G. Champion, 19 April 1947. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
from the Indians.” Absent such promises, he concluded, the Natal Congress could not possibly lend its support to the pact, but would temporarily refrain from voicing public opposition for the sake of unity.93

**Backlash in the ANC: African Nationalism**

The evidence regarding the Youth League’s immediate response to the Pact is limited, which itself suggests a significant internal disagreement over the question. According to Elinor Sisulu, Lembede surprised his Youth League colleagues by enthusiastically supporting the agreement, but his death shortly after its signing renders his actual position an open question.94 The most direct statement by a member of the Transvaal leadership was the article signed by “Isharina” cited above. More likely than not, this statement articulated Lembede’s thinking. Instead of opposing the agreement outright, this piece sought to highlight those aspects of the document that distinguished it from either the politics of the Unity Movement or the Communist Party. After claiming the Pact marked a tremendous political advance, Isharina emphasized that the agreement could either be extended indefinitely or cancelled the very next day: “this is an agreement that amounts to nothing more than an alliance to present a united front in tackling certain particular problems or questions.” In other words, “unity” was not on the table. The letter also aimed to disarm elements in “Johannesburg and Orlando” (in all likelihood, a section of the Youth League itself) that were already claiming that the Pact transformed the Congress into an “appendage” of the Communist Party. Like some other Youth League statements from this period, this letter included a strained and self-negating attempt to overcome the popular anti-Indian

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prejudices of many Africans (at least to the extent that it veiled the main enemy) while at the same time opposing “Indian” exploitation of Africans:

It is to be hoped that many of our avaricious, money-grabbing, black-marketing and parasitic Indian brethren, will be led to see a new light and end their career of merciless exploitation of our people; whilst on the other side our people should sink their strong but sometimes stupid personal prejudice against the Indians in the face of a common enemy—the dragon of white domination!!

The author concluded by warning the Indian Congress that it had to settle accounts with the “crawling quislings” who divided the Indian masses by “endeavoring to pick up crumbs falling from the white man’s table”—i.e., the newly founded Natal Indian Organization of Pather and A.I. Kajee. The importance placed on the divisions among Indians reflected a central assumption of Youth League thinking. YL members believed that a meaningful agreement could only be effected on the basis of a clear understanding between the African and Indian peoples as united groups. According to this perspective, divisions among both Indians and Africans mitigated against any permanent alliance at this time. The priority was clear: the ANC must instill the African masses with a powerful, even “fanatical,” devotion to African nationalism.

During the 1940s, the ANC Youth League was unanimous in rejecting non-European unity. However, a significant difference existed in the rhetoric of the Natal and Transvaal leaderships. In the years following the Passive Resistance struggle, the two foremost leaders of the Natal branch, H.I.E. Dhlomo and Jordan Ngubane, began to motivate the importance of cooperation with the NIC in their newspapers. Dhlomo spoke on behalf of the ANC at the demonstration that launched the Passive Resistance movement and wrote a series of articles

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on the importance of the campaign for Africans. In a 1947 editorial, Ngubane argued that “the Indian’s battle is ours” and “there is a dangerous tendency among sections of our people to fall in for the propaganda from white circles to the effect that the Indian is the African’s worse exploiter.” However, Ngubane and Dhlomo also placed two significant preconditions on meaningful rapprochement. First, Africans needed to build unity among themselves. Second, Indian merchants had to make significant economic concessions in order to resolve the social conflicts produced by their exploitation of Africans. Ngubane conceded to the opponents of collaboration: “It is true that the Indian community on the whole is interested only in making money out of us and when it has done this, it avoids doing anything tangible to help the African march to a better life.” Because Ngubane and Dhlomo insisted on separating the questions of political cooperation and economic conflict, they could simultaneously advocate some form of mutual understanding and repeatedly call for an organized struggle against Indian traders and bus drivers in African areas.

In contrast, ANC Youth League members based in the Transvaal—only a few of whom were from Natal—emphatically stressed the danger of anything but the most episodic forms of collaboration. This position was elaborated by the Youth League’s first president, Anton Lembede, in polemics against the Unity Movement published in newspapers like Ilanga, Inkundla, and the Bantu World. Lembede categorically rejected the possibility of whites or Indians assuming a leading part in the liberation struggle: “Some foreigners Asiatic or European who pose as African leaders must be categorically denounced and rejected.”

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96 Pachai, The South African Indian Question, 190; Meer, A Fortunate Man,121-2 and articles in Inkudla Ya Bantu and Indian Opinion cited above.
98 Ibid.
He also urged the precedence of African unity and mass organization over common action: “Co-operation between Africans and other Non-Europeans on common problems and issues may be highly desirable. But this occasional co-operation can only take place between Africans as a single unit and other non-Europeans as separate units.”100 In August 1945, Lembede launched a barrage against the NEUM in *Bantu World* and *Ilanga* entitled “Fallacy of the Non-European Unity Movement.” Along with emphasizing the cultural divisions between Africans and the other non-European groups, Lembede asserted that Africans, as natives of the continent, fight for Africa whereas other sections (i.e. Indians) “are fighting only for their rights to trade and extract as much wealth as possible from Africa.”101

Among most Youth League members, Lembede’s arguments seem to have been more influential.102 His chauvinism was nourished by the venom of experience: Mary Benson claims that Lembede—who came from Natal—once worked as a kitchen-boy for an Indian family in order to pay for his school fees.103 However, his writings and later relationships suggest that Lembede’s anti-Indian position reflected less his own subjective prejudice than the logic of his nationalist ideology. Lembede possessed an uncritical, even romantic appreciation of the Indian independence struggle. He declared in the pages of *Inkundla* that Nehru was “one of the greatest men of modern times” and affectionately quoted Nehru’s semi-autobiographical account of his own search for the continuity and unity of Indian history, *The Discovery of India*: “nationalism was and is inevitable in the India of my day; it is a natural and healthy growth. For any subject country national freedom must be the first

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100 Ibid.
102 Mandela, for example, attributes his early anticommunism and opposition to Non-European Unity to Lembede’s influence.
and dominant urge." In his memoirs, Ismail Meer describes an engrossing day of conversation with Lembede at Wits campus that included sharing a lunch of curry at Amina Pahad’s house. Nevertheless, Lembede’s writings systematically reduced the entire Indian population in South Africa to the figure of the exploitative merchant. This rhetorical device rendered anything but the most circumscribed forms of collaboration dangerous to the national liberation struggle. Either Indians participated in African politics in order to further personal economic interests or Indian organizations necessarily diluted African nationalism to protect their minority racial privileges. In tandem, Lembede’s anti-communism had a significant impact on the Youth League’s attitudes toward the Transvaal Indian Congress (whose chair, Dadoo, was also a prominent member of the Communist Party). His polemics against Marxism did not explicitly address the question of national minorities. Yet given the prominence of Indian CP members in the TIC/NIC after 1945, Lembede’s suspicion of the “foreign” provenance of Marxism likely concerned not only its European origins, but also its extremely visible Indian proponents.

Following Lembede’s unexpected death in 1947, a section of the ANC/YL leadership (including his friend and intimate collaborator A.P. Mda) began to distance itself from his more extreme formulations and adopt the rhetoric developed earlier in Natal. The 1948 Youth League Statement of Policy, for example, stated that “[Indians] did not come as conquerors and exploiters, but as the exploited.” Youth League documents still rejected

105 Meer, A Fortunate Man, 84.
106 “Basic Policy of Congress Youth League.” Manifesto issued by the National Executive of the ANC Youth League, 1948. Printed in Karis, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 329. See also Jordan Ngubane, “What is African Nationalism?” Inkundla ya Bantu, 25 September 1948. He argues: “[Indians] are a distinct group with a different historical and cultural background, from the Africans and Europeans. However, they did not come to Africa as exploiters and conquerors; they came as the exploited. They have their own motherland, India, but thousands have made South Africa their
unity in favor of the far more circumscribed idea of cooperation, but they placed greater emphasis on the common oppression suffered by both populations. During this period, the ANC was engaged in protracted negotiations with the All Africa Congress over the creation of a single African organization. Youth League spokesmen, who strongly endorsed this rapprochement, implied that the ANC leadership jeopardized the goal of African unity by chasing a precipitous alliance with other Non-European groups: “Non-European unity cannot be achieved so long as the African people themselves are united and strong. Thus any effort to weaken national unity will inevitably weaken non-European unity.” In some cases, this new stance simply masked the continuation of anti-Indian chauvinism. Other Youth League members, for example Ngubane, genuinely worried that popular anti-Indian prejudice was too strong to impose cooperation from above; the situation appeared to necessitate a more considered and gradualist approach. Critically, those like Ngubane believed that African unity would allow the ANC to pursue cooperation from a position of strength: Indian merchants had to make substantial and visible sacrifices to advance African economic interests and only a united and powerful African movement would inspire such a gesture of goodwill. Otherwise, political cooperation would simply camouflage the ongoing economic humiliations faced by Africans.

Despite this shift in emphasis among Youth League intellectuals, Lembede’s more strident anti-Indian position did not follow him to the grave. In a 1948 resolution later

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107 See especially A.P. Mda, “Statement to the Youth league of the Congress, Inkundla ya Bantu, 27 August 1949. Mda writes: “African nationalist are also not anti-Indian or anti-Coloured. The oppressed Coloured and Indian national minorities are in a way, our brothers and sisters in national oppression.”

published in the *Rand Daily Mail*, the New Clare Youth League called on the Minister of the Interior to impose residential segregation between Indians and Africans. After Xuma publicly repudiated the press report’s factual accuracy, the New Clare branch wrote him: “The committee feels that the president is working hand in glove with the Indians in imposing these economic difficulties on Africans. We have also felt that the president has forsaken our cause by going to the press without calling the League, for information.”  

The 1949 ANC Program of Action, adopted in the wake of the 1949 Durban anti-Indian pogrom, emphasized “ultimately the people will be brought together by inspired leadership, under the banner of African nationalism with courage and determination.” The Youth League was also starting to watch developments concerning Indians in East Africa and—despite the enormous differences between the situations—draw local parallels. In 1948, the British Colonial Office established a central legislative assembly of thirteen members in Kenya: “one European, one Asian, and one African from each territory, a single Arab, and three others nominated by the Chairman.” Evaluating the prospects of a new organization to coordinate the struggles of all non-Europeans, Ngubane argued that Africans should predominate in any executive body: “Otherwise we shall find ourselves confronted with the position that obtains in Kenya where the Africans and the Indians are placed in the position of numerical equality in the legislative council in spite of Indians numerical inferiority.” The Youth League maintained that Africans, as the country’s numerical majority, were entitled to greater weight.

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109R.M. Nkopo to Dr. A.B. Xuma, 13 August 1948. Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

110 Karis also notes this dissonance. See Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 2, 92.

111 See Robert G. Gregory, *Quest for Equality: Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900-1967* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1993), 62-3. The ANC/YL was unaware at the time the several Asian organizations, and leading Indian political figures like Bildad Kaggia and Pio Gama Pinto, opposed the assembly, which was part of British moves towards East African confederation.

By the late 1940s, the Youth League had invested the question of proportional representation with enormous significance: one of the key demands of the Program of Action was “direct representation in all governing bodies of the country.” In the eyes of African nationalists, the composition of leadership bodies was directly connected to the broader demand for African majority rule. This question allowed the Youth League to link a number of different arguments: Africans were entitled to the leadership of any joint struggle by virtue of their claim to indigenous priority; African leadership was necessary in order to break the masses from a colonial mindset of dependence on other races; and the greater financial resources of Indians would give them disproportional influence within any coalition—necessitating a numerical counterweight in any joint structure. In March 1950, the executive of the Transvaal Youth League issued a leaflet entitled “Our Fight.” Denouncing an ANC/Indian Congress campaign to defend several Indian leaders against state banning orders, the authors stridently proclaimed that Africans would no longer be a football for political parties (the CPSA) or racial groups striving for self-preservation (Indians). They warned:

In the Transvaal, a new and highly infectious animal has been born. It is called the Convention[.] it is said that Dr. Dadoo, Mr. Sam Khan, have, by an admittedly unholy government measure been prohibited to address public meetings. We are not told that the Indians are in danger of repatriation by the nationalist government, or alternatively segregated by the white bosses in the cities and residential areas, facts which readily explain the high birth-rate of prophets and izangomas among Communists and Indians, and all for the sake of the age-long segregated and speechless African.

This passage criticized Indian leaders for disingenuously claiming to protest (an admittedly unholy) government injunction while in reality opposing their own deportation and sectional discrimination. Whatever the Indian might say, in other words, he perforce manipulated the

113 “Our Fight.” ANC Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
African’s struggle in order to advance his own ends. The leaflet did not deny the reality of segregation and discrimination against Indians, but rather insinuated—in an echo of white hysteria regarding Indian birthrates—that they perversely benefited the Indian people (here simply equated with Communists). The opposition of African to Indian interests was so complete, so a priori, that their political aspirations were simply assumed to be mutually exclusive. Hence the all-important possessive in the title: “Our Fight.” The entire logic of the argument rested on the equation of the Indian with the foreign colonizer: the “false prophets” asserted a paternalist claim to speak for Africans, a pretense that effectively reproduced the very form of oppression—the stripping of speech—that the Indian leaders claimed to oppose. The reference to prophets and izangoma (the Zulu word for healers) was a sardonic rebuke aimed at those Africans who would trust a figure like Dadoo. It implied that they behaved like unlettered savages by accepting the promises of false religions and counterfeit medicines. The leaflet concluded by lashing out at ANC leaders who justified cooperation on the basis of political expediency:

What is the basis of this pact? What are the terms of this pact? Africans offer their sweated labor and the strength their numbers give. What is the whole Indian community represented by the T.I.C., prepared to and indeed pffer [sic]. What are the details? Your prophets cannot answer this question. The answer for them is given by us. There are no terms; there are no details. What they say, is: “ride on the devil if you can’t cross the river, and kick him back to the river when you reach the other bank.” This is both fascinating and thoroughly misleading. But our contention is, it is the African who has become now, as in the past, the Devil of the Prophets. The African is not riding. He is ridden on.

**Conclusion: An Irresolute Culmination**

By the end of the 1940s, a significant realignment had taken place between the ANC and the Indian Congresses. Confronted with the complete failure of legalistic appeals to extract concessions from the government, the Transvaal-based ANC leadership began to
adopt a more confrontational rhetoric and revaluated its earlier dismissal of cooperation with the Indian Congresses. A number of factors strongly influenced the ANC leadership: the active promotion of non-European cooperation by the Communist Party, the growing political threat posed by the NEUM, the militant stance taken by the new leaders of the Indian Congresses in Natal and Transvaal, the hugely popular example of the Passive Resistance Campaign, and India’s case against South Africa at the United Nations. But the overall impact of these events was enormously uneven and the circumstances of the late 1940s did not favor an alliance implemented “from above” by the existing leaderships. During the mid 1940s, the CPSA had abandoned its earlier experiments in building multi-racial organizations and embraced a policy of encouraging cooperation through the existing “national” parties. Xuma’s own efforts to negotiate an agreement between the ANC and Indian Congresses reflected his mounting anxieties regarding a polarization over non-European unity within the ANC and the NEUM’s activities. Rather than foreshadowing the multi-racial alliance of the 1950s, the Doctors’ Pact represented a set of compromises among several different political agendas: the CPSA’s perspective uniting the “four nations,” the Youth League’s resolute hostility to any organizational fusion or permanent agreement, and the Transvaal ANC’s highly circumscribed conception of cooperation between the established leaderships. The 1947 agreement was a confused and irresolute culmination of the foregoing political period, not the tocsin of a radically new era.

Despite its limited nature, the Doctors’ Pact strained the already factious relationship between the Transvaal and Natal ANC leadership, inspired widespread outrage among Natal’s Africans, and resulted in significant discontent within Johannesburg and Orlando. It was, in effect, stillborn. As public statements by Champion and Msimang show, the Natal
ANC leadership did not oppose all forms of cooperation with the Indian Congress in principle. However, their position was significantly complicated by both their highly ambivalent relationship with the Indian elite, their own prejudices, and popular anti-Indian sentiment among African migrants, petty traders, and urbanized workers. Both the Natal ANC/YL and the Old Guard argued that any agreement with the Indian Congress should address the obstacles to collaboration, i.e. “Indian exploitation of Africans.” While partially an acknowledgement of very real plebian resentments, this stance also represented an instrumental utilization of the “popular” in order to articulate the interests of an aspirant African petite bourgeoisie. In the Transvaal ANC Youth League, the opposition to collaboration was more directly ideological and centered on the ostensible danger that foreign elements posed to the development of a powerful, mass-based African nationalism. Insisting that national unity among each group must precede non-European cooperation, Youth League intellectuals also pointed to the strength of support enjoyed by the collaborationist Natal Indian Organization, which openly spurned collaboration with “Natives.” In both Natal and the Transvaal, elements within the ANC openly appealed to the state to “protect Africans” by preventing Indians from operating in African areas, in effect a demand for segregation.

As this chapter begins to show, the language of “African-Indian” or “Non-European” unity is inherently mystifying: political alliances occur between organizations or factions of parties that articulate their program as some form of “general interest” in an effort to transcend their immediate class basis and establish hegemony over broader forces.\footnote{Gramsci, \textit{Selections from the Prison Notebooks}, 148.} Nevertheless, the rhetoric of a bloc between racial groups—rather than, say, between parties that have a base of support in particular classes, racial groups, or regions—played a major
role in South African politics during the late 1940s. The accompanying debates over cooperation and unity largely remained the provenance of a few thousand members of the ANC and several thousand more readers of African and Indian newspapers. In all likelihood, such disputes also influenced popular ideas through the grapevine of rumor, gossip on buses, political rallies, and discussions in beer halls and shebeens. But the increasingly bitter polarization over non-European cooperation was remote from the immediate concerns of most Africans and Indians. The anticlimactic demise of the Passive Resistance Campaign in 1948 and the sharp divisions within Indian politics strengthened a growing demoralization, especially among the organized Indian workers who had suffered a series of defeats in Natal throughout the early 1940s. As both Bill Freund and Gollam Vahed demonstrate, the increased commitment of the Indian Congresses to a political alliance with the ANC did not generally reflect the consciousness and attitudes of the Indian working class: “militancy in the Indian cause did not flow easily into support for a Congress Alliance and the politics of the ANC, given the circumstances of job rivalry and Indians feeling threatened by Africans claiming what they had seen as ‘their’ jobs.”

Among the majority of Natal’s Africans, opposition to collaboration was, as the next chapter will explore, even more intense.

115 Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, 61.
Chapter 3:  
The 1949 Anti-Indian Pogrom and the Crisis in the Natal ANC

Today world events profoundly affect the home politics of each and every nation. And to speak of local traditions [in matters of race relations] is to ignore the rapid and fundamental changes that are taking place in all countries in the world—changes that are giving birth to a new world order.¹


We would pray and thank God for the 14th, the day when the Indian Riots started. When the Riots started, God, you knew what you were doing on that day. That lightening that struck that day made Africans think differently from the way that they had been thinking. Some started working by selling potatoes. Others sold food and changed their characters.²

—Ambrose Africa interviewed by Colin Shum, 1981.

“We are running to the hills. If we die, keep these things. If we return, we shall collect what remains....”

Day after day I slept on the sickbed fearing the worse by night. After about a week the Indians returned and found their belongings intact. I was a relieved and very happy man when they took their things out of my house and saved me from possible attacks by my people.³


This chapter focuses on one of the most traumatic and controversial events in Natal’s history. On the 13th of January 1949, a clash between and an Indian shopkeeper and an African youth escalated into a melee between crowds of Indians and Africans in the Grey Street area. After word of the battle spread overnight, African workers from local hostels and groups of shantytown dwellers in areas like Cato Manor organized to retaliate the next day,

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leading to large-scale racial violence directed against Indians throughout Durban and outlying areas. Groups of Africans humiliated, beat, and killed Indian men and raped Indian women; after most Indians had fled, they turned their rage against Indian-owned stores and houses. The rioters vented their fury at those nearest at hand; frequently, they attacked poorer Indians who lived near and among Africans in the city’s slums. Many Africans who worked for Indians fled the carnage, afraid for their own safety; other Africans helped shield Indians from vengeful mobs. Indian men, sometimes armed with guns, retaliated when they found opportunity. At the end of the two-day pogrom, South Africa police and Navy forces suppressed the rioters with heavy weapons fire, killing dozens more. The violence resulted in the death of over 140 people, the temporary displacement of nearly half Durban’s Indian population, and the destruction of the Indian presence in large parts of once racially-mixed shantytowns, like Cato Manor.

The “Durban Riots” remain a highly charged part of Natal’s living memory, an almost latent point of reference embedded in representations of an African/Indian racial divide. The year itself has become iconic in Natal and throughout South Africa. In 1976, members of the Kwa-Zulu Natal legislature made threatening references to 1949 after Fatima Meer suggested that the true leaders of blacks were imprisoned on Robben Island, not running the Bantustans.4 When the Soweto Township Uprising erupted the same year, a large number of Indians—especially of an older generation—feared the possibility of anti-Indian violence and directly referenced the pogrom.5 Reinforced by the violence in Inanda in 1985,

these rhetorical gestures have continued in the post-apartheid period. One apocryphal narrative, frequently reiterated in memoirs and novels by Indian writers, depicts Indians as victims of a state-orchestrated plot to disrupt an emerging non-European unity. This narrative generally implies that the pogrom interrupted a long history of harmonious “friendship” between Indians and Africans. Another version of these events (which became central to an ideology of Zulu plebeian nationalism that consolidated in the 1950s) describes the riots as a battle for the liberation of the city against the foreign and exploitative Indian. According to this construct, the “war” between the Indians and the Zulus not only retaliated against the arrogance of the Indian, it also facilitated the emergence of African self-assertion through business. Despite their nearly diametrical valence, both versions laid claim to collective victimization; both also assumed that the violence should be understood in the context of a history whose protagonists are coherent racial formations.

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8 See Edwards, “Mkhumbane, Our Home,” chapter 3. Although I rely heavily on Edwards’s discussion in this chapter, it has two substantial limitations. First, Edwards follows an Indian leftist analysis that attributes African resentments primarily to the actions of the petit bourgeois elite. As I argue in chapter one, African resentments were, in large part, a result in of their interactions with a much poorer, less elite layer of Indians like bus drivers and shop keepers. Second, in his desire to uncover “proletarian” (or more properly plebeian) consciousness of Cato Manor residents, he sometimes slides into utilizing the rioters’ own language regarding the “liberation” of space. As a result, he both tends to homogenize African responses and underplay the coexistence and interpenetration of Indians and Africans that existed before the pogrom. In part, this flows from a social history project centered on uncovering “consciousness,” rather than a spatial analytic that would have led to a fuller picture of the lives of all of Cato Manor’s inhabitants, African and Indian.
Although a significant literature exists on the 1949 pogrom, most of it remains in the form of unpublished theses. These analyses are largely sociological rather than historical; they focus on explaining the possible causes of people’s actions rather than analyzing the actions and statements of the *dramatis personae* themselves. With one partial exception (Iain Edward’s dissertation), the scholarship has virtually ignored the debates over these events within the African and Indian press as well as testimony by the rioters. As a result, discussions of the riots tend to overlook the relative novelty of the pogrom’s immediate context (the rapid urbanization of the 1940s and the accompanying transformation of Durban’s racial dynamics), generalize about motivations and experiences on the basis of race, and minimize the Riot’s political dimensions: both the role of anti-Indian racism in Natal African politics and the enormous repercussions of the pogrom on the development of the ANC. Importantly, the three principal explanations advanced in the secondary literature originated in the political debates over the pogrom that occurred in its immediate aftermath. They included: 1) ostensible instigation by the state and white media; 2) the surrogate targeting of Indians for broader African grievances; and 3) resentment produced by the racial

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11 These criticisms can be made of even the two best discussions of the pogrom, Nuttall, “‘It Seems Peace but It Can Be War’” and E.C. Webster, “The 1949 Durban ‘Riots’—A Case Study in Race and Class,” in *Working Papers in Southern African Studies,* ed. P.L. Bonner (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1977). Both authors focus on “a process of differential incorporation into a social hierarchy of whites at the top, Indians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom” (Nuttall, 2). The main problem with this analysis is that it substantially overstates the efficacy and stability of an existing racial hierarchy at the municipal and provincial level and, therefore, endows racial groups with more sociological and political homogeneity than they possessed during the same period. It should be underlined that not only were most Indians as poor as most Africans, but that the Afrikaner nationalist government and much of the white population advocated the eventual expulsion of this “foreign” element. The intensity of African resentments reflected the local, haphazard, and relatively novel character of their subordination to the “Indian” in the cities (see chapter 1).
hierarchy created by segregationist legislation. Exploring the discourses in which these claims were embedded, this chapter will examine them primarily within the intellectual and political context of the late 1940s.

The election of the Nationalist government in 1948 did not, at first, significantly transform racial dynamics in Natal. But it reinforced a growing sense of frustration and despair among many Africans; the post-war optimism regarding the promises of the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and a coming “New Africa” had begun to fray. The victory of India at the United Nations in 1946 and Indian independence the following year raised enormous expectations of rapid, profound social change in South Africa—even relatively sober observers felt a tremendous sense of possibility. Less than two years later, *Inkundla* described a widespread view “among African people today that they are facing the grave threat of physical extermination.”

Beginning with African responses to Indian decolonization and the murder of Gandhi, this chapter places the changing political mood of the late 1940s in a broader international context. Articles in *Ilanga* and *Inkundla* from this period provide considerable insight into the aspirations and anxieties of the Zulu intelligentsia; they also reveal the ways in which their views of the changing domestic and international situation were refracted through the “Indian question” in Natal. This chapter then discusses the pogrom in depth and the response of the ANC, NIC, and Natal press to these events. Even as the riots sharply polarized Durban’s Africans, they provided a potent unifying symbol for Indians: a fear of African violence derived, partly, from a colonial image of bloodthirsty and savage Zulu hordes. The chapter then concludes with an analysis of the profound crisis in the Natal ANC following the riots and the backlash against cooperation with the Indian Congresses among Durban Africans.

Although the pogrom created the possibility for a much stronger alliance between the ANC and NIC/TIC at the level of the political organizations, it also resulted in the increased alienation of a great many Africans and Indians from both organizations. This disillusionment, combined with the growing political and economic power of the Zulu cooperative movement in the shanty towns, would shape Durban African politics for the decade to come.

**India on the World’s Stage**

The years of the Second World War, as Iain Edwards observes, magnified the interest of ordinary Africans in the “outside world” of international affairs and nation states.\(^\text{13}\) In Durban, demobilized African service men and foreign sailors—including Indian and Black American seamen—found audiences hungry for information, however anecdotal. The experience of food rationing and blackouts made the events transpiring on other continents tangible in the rhythms of daily life.\(^\text{14}\) African newspapers published articles on the Nazi Holocaust, the Greek Civil War, and the question of Palestine that invited readers to draw parallels and appreciate differences between developments transpiring in South Africa and elsewhere. Perhaps even more importantly, these articles self-consciously promoted the emergence of nationalist consciousness by encouraging Africans to conceive of themselves as potential members an emerging international order, a community of sovereign nations in part defined by its collective interest in the shared arena of world affairs.\(^\text{15}\) In other words,

\(^\text{13}\) Edwards, “Swing the Assegai Peacefully?” 63.
\(^\text{14}\) For the importance of African soldiers and foreign sailors, see Ibid., 64.
\(^\text{15}\) See, for example, “Contrasts, Contradictions, and Impossibilities,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 31 July 1948.
African nationalism promoted a greater degree of international awareness, particularly concerning political changes elsewhere in Africa and throughout the colonial world.\(^{16}\)

In the pages of African newspapers, the independence of India in August 1947 possessed a tripartite significance. First and foremost, columnists enthusiastically speculated on the impact that an independent India—a country of 347 million and the oft celebrated “jewel” of the British Empire—would have on the Commonwealth of Nations and the colonial system elsewhere. Not only did Britain’s withdrawal and the establishment of universal franchise definitively establish the capacity of the “non-European” for self-government, African intellectuals also hoped that an Indian democracy would provide a powerful counterweight to Western imperialism in the U.N. and elsewhere.\(^{17}\) Secondly, African writers employed the image of India as a historical mirror, a device that allowed them to reflect on Africa’s colonial experience and future prospects. The mode of writing in these essays sometimes approached allegory: they used India to reframe the particularities of South Africa’s experience within a universal history of colonial rapacity and (implicitly) post-colonial deliverance.\(^{18}\) Even when contrasting elements of the two histories, this juxtaposition shifted the axis of historical narration from the colonizer’s dominance of the colonized to a shared story of resistance, foreign oppression, and nationalist rebirth. Third,

\(^{16}\) Recent scholarship of the development of nationalism in China and the Indian Ocean has stressed the ways in which the emergence of transnational associations (for example, linking together a Chinese diaspora re-imagined according to an ethno-nationalist principle of unity) combined with a new spatial imaginary of a global world composed of nations states. It was in part through and in relation to broader international developments and a new idea of the global that intellectuals defined, articulated, and located an idea of nation within an emerging world order. See Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). For a broader overview that situates the near simultaneous development of nationalism within both Europe and Asia within the broader context of 19\(^{th}\) century imperialism, see C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 199-242.

\(^{17}\) “India’s Independence and Africans,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 23 August 1947.

\(^{18}\) See, for example, “India and Ourselves,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 14 June 1947.
African newspapers anxiously questioned the significance of India’s independence for race relations within South Africa, particularly in Durban. In the weeks before the momentous date, the entire country seemed gripped with anticipation and the topic preoccupied both Indians and Africans. Festive decorations covered buildings across Natal, and thousands of men, women, and children attended political meetings and celebrations at which the new Indian flag was unfurled. In Johannesburg, Xuma publicly thanked Nehru for his messages to Africans and predicted: “the light of the East will naturally spread to Africa and help the African people’s struggle for freedom.” In sharp contrast, *Ilanga* struck a chord of anxiety and growing resentment: “Must both the Indian and the European be the supreme masters in the land of his birth, whilst he remains a hewer of wood and drawer of water? Must he be crushed economically between the European and Indian ‘grinders’? Must he politically and socially remain their underdog?” Many Africans worried that an independent India would strengthen the position of South Africa’s Indians to their increasing detriment.

On 30 January 1948, an assassin shot Mohandas Gandhi in Bombay, killing him. Most coverage in the Natal African press—which invoked all of the above themes—did not, strikingly, mention Gandhi’s almost 21 years in South Africa. Perhaps the editors of *Ilanga* and *Inkundla*, sincere in their expression of grief for the martyred figure, judged that a lengthy discussion of his career in the country would raise uncomfortable questions regarding his attitude toward Africans. In any case, the tenor of outrage and sorrow in these newspapers was undeniable. *Inkundla* sermonized: “By murdering the greatest advocate of peace, the

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22 An exception is the brief mention of the march from Natal to the Transvaal in “Bambulaleleni uGandhi?” *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, 19 February 1948.
advocates of violence have only exposed the poverty of their own human worth.”

Inkundla’s editorial focused on defending India itself from cynical accusations of national failure: the true friends of India, it argued, will not turn their backs on the “non-European democracy” and Africans should see in India’s staggering sacrifices the path of struggle yet ahead. Gandhi died at India’s hands, Inkudla implied, and this tragedy was India’s trial to collectively endure and overcome. In effect, the article was a defense of the principle of Indian nationhood (and hence the general right of non-European self-determination) in the face of the Partition of India and Pakistan, communalist strife, and Gandhi’s murder by a rightwing Hindu nationalist.

The article on Gandhi’s death in Ilanga expressed a more complex and uncertain array of attitudes. Ilanga began by meditating on Gandhi’s exemplification of the human soul’s universal and constant dignity, a magnitude of personhood that transcended “race and colour, creed and class, clime and time.” Greatness, the writer eulogized, knows no color and is respected everywhere. This appropriation of Gandhi for the entirety of the human race, ironically, served to contest his status as a specifically Indian symbol. Admiration for the fallen leader, the writer soon made clear, did not entail respect for the political and economic doings of Indians—even if, the article conceded, some Africans believed that “we can profitably learn from them.” Ilanga prophesized:

Naturally, most of us will think about the practical and political implications of the matter not only in connection with India, but as it affects South Africa and other parts of Africa where the presence of the Indians is creating complex problems. There were some who think that Mahatma Gandhi was a steadying and sublimating influence in this direction; that he was against nascent Indian imperialism and Indian exploitation of the peoples of Africa. Now that he is gone they fear that Indian economic greed and exploitation, Indian adolescent political assertiveness and Indian expansionist

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23 “Gandhi,” Inkundla ya Bantu, 4 February 1948.
tendencies will have a new lease on life. They doubt if free and ambitious India and Indians care for the freedom and aspirations of Africans.

The tone of the Natal African press had shifted considerably since the first victory of India at the U.N. a year and a half earlier. In the aftermath of Indian independence, two of the themes in the above passage achieved a novel prominence. First, both *Ilanga* and *Inkundla* worried about the increasing diplomatic assertiveness of India and began to depict the Indian population of South and East Africa as potential agents of a new empire. Articles in *Inkundla* first sounded this note in the mid 1940s, but this concern intensified considerably after Nehru began to assert strongly India’s interest in East African affairs. In 1946, Nehru argued that India, along with Britain, should participate in a U.N. trusteeship over Tanganyika. Although virtually every later account stresses Nehru’s role in bringing about a greater degree of understanding between Indians and Africans, *Ilanga* and *Inkundla* viewed such pronouncements with an enormous degree of suspicion in the late 1940s. Implicitly casting doubt on Nehru’s injunction that Indians should support the liberation struggle of Africans, *Inkundla* warned against “the imperialistic ambitions of the new India. …It is not impossible that certain Asiatics might support our own cause so that they should have our people’s support for their expansionist ambitions.” Second, the Indian National Congress’s acquiescence to a Partition negotiated and engineered by the former colonial rulers severely

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25 See also “Africans and the U.N.,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 8 March 1947. This editorial claimed that both the white and Indian delegations are cynically utilizing the African for their own purposes at the U.N. and, contrary to widespread belief, the African’s case had not been presented at the U.N. the previous year: “It was, as we have said, used as a convenient springboard for attack by the two contending groups.”


damaged the moral authority of the new Indian state in the eyes of many African intellectuals. *Ilanga* cautioned African leaders to learn from India’s failures: “events in India show how deep, dangerous and crippling cultural, language and religious differences can be among people supposedly of one nation. …African leaders should heed this warning and lesson.”

Natal’s African press continued to argue that India’s fate would have far reaching consequences for their own struggle for freedom and South Africa as a whole; they also still viewed their own recent history through the lens of India’s experience. But the post-war optimism regarding Indian independence and non-European cooperation had largely faded.

**The 1949 Anti-Indian Pogrom**

Early in the evening of Thursday, January 13th, an Indian attacked an African youth, George Madondo, knocking him through a window and cutting open his head. Articles in *Ilanga* and *Inkundla* following the riots stressed that physical conflict between Africans and Indians occurred regularly in Durban, particularly in stores and on buses. But this altercation, as Tim Nuttall vividly describes, took place in particularly explosive circumstances: “It happened at the end of the day amidst the crowds of Victoria Street, near the central bus depot where thousands of Africans and Indians queued for a bus home. This

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30 According to one account: “When he arrived an Indian came and took a paper from Madonda. When he had taken the paper the India said when the boy asked him for the money, he said, ‘Fuck off!’ He took him and pushed him over there so that the boy crashed into a window.” Tunya Dlamini interviewed by B.T.C. Mkhize, 14 June 1981, Kwa Mashu, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 305), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban. The Riots Commission Report contains the following version: “A Native boy, 14 years of age, had words with an Indian shop assistant, 16 years of age, and slapped the latter’s face. The Indian youth lodged a complaint with his employer, also an Indian, who came out of the Indian Market to Victoria Street and assaulted the Native boy. In the tussle, the Native’s head accidentally crashed through the glass of a shop window.” See *Report on the Commission of Enquiry into the Durban Riots*, 5. The Indian was later convicted on a charge of assault and sentenced to a fine £1 or seven days hard labor. Notably, while African accounts of this event both in the press and later interviews identify the boy Madonda by name, the Indian remains unnamed in all of the contemporary versions.
was the heartland of the Indian commercial centre, and the site of Durban’s largest ‘Native’
beer hall and market stalls.” Outraged African bystanders attacked the shopkeeper and
Indians rallied to his defense. With lightning speed, rumors circulated through the market
that a crowd of Indians had beaten or killed the boy. Indian men and women hurled brickbats
and bottles from the balconies onto the heads of Africans. Africans rushed to the scene.
According to Inkundla, “within an hour it had spread to every part of the Indian quarter of
Durban. Groups of Indians all over engaged in free fights with Africans. Stones and sticks
were freely used.” As the number of combatants swelled, an African mob set out from the
scene of the initial fracas—chanting “Usuthu!” (in some accounts, “Zulu”)—and began to
attack individual Indians, stone any vehicle not driven by an African, and loot Indian stores.
Ilanga claimed “Indians were as much responsible and fought as wildly and behaved as
recklessly as Africans at the beginning until superior strength told and Indians retired.
Innocent people suffered on both sides.” Sporadic looting continued late into the night.

However spontaneous the initial melee, a fair amount of evidence suggests that the
next day groups of Africans, organized through workers hostels and other social networks
(perhaps ingoma dancing troops and boxing clubs), sought to take advantage of the
situation. Champion and others later claimed that African leaders from Cato Manor had

32 Nuttall, “‘It Seems Peace but It Can Be War’,” 16.
34 Z.A. Ngcobo interviewed by Simeon Zulu, 13 September 1980, Killie Campbell Oral History
Project (KCAV 361), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
36 M.S. Manyathi interviewed by C.N. Shum, 16 September 1980, Killie Campbell Oral History
Project (KCAV 327), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
38 See Nuttall, “‘It Seems Peace but It Can Be War’,” 18 and Hemson, “Class Consciousness and
Migrant Workers,” 351-3.
tried to organize the rioters with some degree of success. Doubtlessly encouraged by the slowness of police intervention (numerous reports also indicate whites cheered on the African assailants and joined in raiding Indian stores), crowds of African workers, domestic servants, and shack dwellers escalated the attacks on Friday and violent confrontations occurred whenever groups of Indians were in a position to retaliate. By the early evening, government troops blockaded the Indian district and the focus of the assault shifted from central Durban to outlying districts, particularly Cato Manor and the Jacobs area. Rampaging crowds burnt houses and stores, raped Indian women and girls, and viciously bludgeoned Indians of all ages, sexes, and social classes. Particularly in the outlying areas, the pogrom targeted the Indian poor and working class—the only target readily available. The goal was clear: to drive Indians out. An article in *Indian Opinion* captured the ensuing devastation:

> Huddled under the flames of one of the burning shops were four Indian women and a dozen weeping children. The male owner was in a grotesque attitude on the front path, knifed in several places and dying. A younger son staggered in the road with his head split open. This was one of the hundreds of pathetic sites that were witnessed in Cato and other districts of Durban.

Friday night saw the apogee of the violence: Africans hurled paraffin tins into Indian-owned buildings, families burned alive, Indians retaliated with weapons fire, desperate individuals offered money for their lives and the lives of their families, Zulus who worked for Indians fled for their safety, African women hid in their homes and begged their husbands to stay with them while bullets flew overhead from the direction of Westville. During Friday night, state repression likewise intensified. According to Nuttall: “For a local news reporter it

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41 These details are taken from interviews, in particular Josephine Hadebe interviewed by L. Mabaso, 26 April 1981, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 308), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban. For an African whose mother sent him away out of fear he might be attacked, see William Maseko interviewed by E.N. Yengwa, 22 September 1981, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 342), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
seemed the clock had turned back to battles he had observed during the Second World War. Machine guns were set up, and sometimes fired ‘for five minutes at a time’ in the direction of groups looting and burning buildings." The military and police had largely managed to reestablish order by Saturday, despite scattered acts of revenge by Indian gunmen. A more limited outbreak of violence occurred a few days later in Pietermaritzburg. The official commission of enquiry set the following casualty and damage figures: 87 Africans, 50 Indians, 4 unidentified, and 1 European killed; 1,087 people injured; 40,000 Indian refugees; over three 300 buildings destroyed; and more than 2,000 structures damaged. Articles in both the African and Indian press insisted that the number injured and killed was likely higher.

Drawing a direct parallel with American “race riots,” the white Natal Press immediately entitled these events “The Durban Riots,” a designation that most historians have respected. Liberal social scientists connected to the South African Institute of Race Relations soon developed the comparison explicitly. In the American context, this term provided a rather thin euphemism for “a tidal wave of homicides, arson, mayhem, and organized racial combat” that swept the country in response to growing African American political organization and assertiveness, particularly following the First World War. The

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42 Nuttall, “‘It Seems Peace but It Can Be War’,,” 23.
47 This quote is a description of the Red Summer of 1919 from David Levering Lewis, W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919 (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 579. A shift has occurred in the U.S literature on “race riots” from a focus on job competition and social conflict produced by the Great Migration (exemplified by the work of sociologist Elliot Rudwick) to an emphasis on the political aims of disrupting civil rights struggles and destroying black community institutions. Pointing out the parallels between orchestrated racial violence in the U.S. and Jews in Tsarist Russia,
term “riots” reduced the precipitating causes of the Durban events to racial tension between coherent and unproblematic groups, disappeared the centrality of social hierarchies grounded in segregation and state racism, and—perhaps most disturbingly—abstracted the violence from both perpetrator and victim. Bill Freund’s characterization is far closer to the mark: the later phase was an anti-Indian pogrom followed by the brutal massacre of “rioters” by the police and military. Notably, Africans immediately contested both the appellation of “riots” and its underlying presuppositions. In its editorial the following weekend, Ilanga deliberately avoided using the word, in large part because it implied that the participants were “mad, blind and unreasoning impis.”

While deploring the brutality and the all-sided suffering, Ilanga and Inkundla argued that Africans participants—however misguided, tragic, and destructive their actions—were simultaneously redressing a real collective humiliation and fighting to assert their rights as human beings. Numerous articles in the African press also observed that far more Africans had been killed (some by Indians) and harshly criticized accounts that represented Indians as the only victims. In popular African discourse, these events were frequently called an “impi”: a battle or a war.

Why did Africans participate in the massacres? Testimony at the Riots Commission and interviews conducted during the late 1970s contained a number of self-justifications, including economic desperation and fear of retaliation for appearing to side with Indians. But the foremost reason offered by the participants themselves was retaliation for Indian

newer literature argues that the term pogrom (or, in one case, ethnic cleansing) better captures the political character of these massacres. See Charles L. Lumpkins, American Pogrom: The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), xi-xii. Other recent works that emphasize the political dimensions of organized racial violence include Elliot Jaspin, Buried in the Bitter Waters: the Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

arrogance. Several sources indicate that rioters largely turned to arson after Indians had fled, leaving them no other targets. *Ilanga* claimed that the “usual” criminal elements, rather than the combatants, carried out most of the looting; in some cases, whites may well have initiated some of the theft.50 One participant boasted almost thirty years later: “They learned a great lesson, and to this day you will not hear an Indian say to an African, ‘Voetsak.’ No matter where he is working, if you say ‘Hey!’ there is perfect silence to this day.”51 Many of the rioters’ actions appear to have been specifically aimed at humiliating their victims. One Cato Manor resident explained: “When the men returned and told us about it all, they said tins of oil had been poured out on the floor of Indian stores, making it so slippery that people fell and hurt themselves. They looted whatever they could from the shops whenever they saw an Indian they hit him, and that would be that.”52 Participants described the outcome in terms of a military victory over a foreign opponent.53 Later accounts of the pogrom often manifested a strong sense of Zulu nationalism: “We beat them up. We ‘burnt them.’ Even though I did not join that company, I can say ‘we did it’ because it was done by Zulus.”54 As I will discuss in the next chapter, the sexual violence directed at Indian women and girls may have represented acts of retaliation directed at Indian men, whom many Africans believed used their wealth and superior position to seduce African women.

We do not know how many Africans participated in the riots. None of the contemporary sources—including the Riots Commission Report—provide even the roughest

52 Josephine Hadebe interviewed by L. Mabaso, 26 April 1981, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 308), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
53 This is particularly stressed in Edward’s account.
54 W.S. Manyathi interviewed by C.N. Shum, 16 September 1980, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 327), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
estimates. This persistent vagueness strengthened the image of racial conflict between two seamless totalities. Among Durban Africans, the rioters’ perceived goals found broad support, although many people also expressed shock, horror, and disgust over the violence. *Inkundla* reported: “Almost every African this correspondent asked about the riot had a measure of sympathy with the Indian’s attackers. This does not mean that they approved of the methods used.” The article claims that Africans were almost evenly divided over the use of force. Resentment and anger at the “Indian” appear to have been nearly ubiquitous; the complete dehumanization and depersonalization of Indians was not. Some rioters made efforts to protect familiar individuals even while they lashed out against the property and lives of others. In her autobiography, Dr. Goonam describes the following incident, which took place after she drove into Cato Manor to treat a patient during the pogrom:

> I saw a group of burley [sic] Africans with stones and bricks. I immediately braked. ‘This is it … the end of me,’ I said to myself. They surrounded my car and were about to take aim when they recognized me and throwing away their missiles shouted in chorus, ‘Aeo Doktela, Aeo Doktela’, I explained that I was going to the camel man’s house, his wife was very ill. They listened sympathetically and said, ‘Hamba Kahle, Hamba Kahle’ (go well)…. As I was leaving the camel man’s home, one or two of the Africans who stood poised with stones came to ask me how the ‘camel lady’ was feeling. Shaking their head, they showed concern, and called in God’s grace, ‘Nkulunkulu!’

Other Africans actively opposed the attacks and took action to protect Indians—although, here again, the evidence does not provide a basis to even begin speculation regarding the actual numbers. Goonam writes: “All Africans did not attack Indians. Many, in fact, in Cato Manor, Mayville, Second River, Briardene, Sea Cow Lake and Springfield protected their

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56 Goonam, *Coolie Doctor*, 138-9. The camel man received his name—and local notoriety—because of his unusual pet.
Indian neighbors and sheltered them in their home against attacks by Africans.\(^{57}\) In response to the press coverage that demonized all Africans, *Inkundla* celebrated the “Heroes of the Riots”: African men and women who risked their own personal safety to shelter Indians in their homes and the African nurses who cared for the wounded, regardless of their race, in the pogrom’s aftermath. According to the newspaper, many of those who shielded Indians lost their homes and escaped only with their lives. “There are hundreds of instances,” Ngubane claimed, “where Africans were beaten up by their own people for giving sanctuary to Indians.”\(^{58}\) One editorial focused on the sacrifice of an unnamed African man in Cato Manor, who died attempting to rescue two Indian children from the flames of a burning house. Comparing this individual to Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln (leaders murdered by members of their own race), *Inkundla* sermonized that he “was the true representative of the Africa that will endure. When friends and foes heap insults on the whole African race, the Unknown Man of Africa stands out as a silent rebuke to their smallness of mind.”\(^{59}\)

**Initial Responses**

In the years preceding the pogrom, *Ilanga* had pointedly warned the ANC that the failure to defend African trading rights “might lead to organised and patriotic gangsterism when impatient Africans will raid and damage or burn Indian buses and stores in African Areas.”\(^{60}\) Few Durban Africans expressed much surprise over the massacres.\(^{61}\) In striking contrast, the riots caught the Transvaal leadership of the ANC and the Indian Congresses of

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57 Ibid., 138. Note that she reinforces the generalization of “African” violence by depicting the attackers in racial terms even while she argues against the involvement of all Africans.


both provinces completely off guard. In the immediate aftermath, G.M. Naicker and A.W.G. Champion toured the city with loudspeakers, both men appealing for calm in Zulu and English; and the ANC and NIC cooperated in providing relief to those displaced. The Communist Party sent a team of Moses Kotane and H.A. Naidoo (who was living in Cape Town at the time) to Durban in order to address the situation. On February 6, the ANC and Indian Congresses released a joint statement, signed by African and Indian leaders from across the country, expressing “deep and heartfelt sympathy to the relatives of all the victims.” Ignoring the grievances voiced by Durban Africans, the statement forcefully indicted the policies of segregation: “the fundamental and basic causes of the disturbance are traceable to the political, economic, and social structure of the country, based on differential and discriminatory treatment of the various racial groups and the preaching of racial hatred and intolerance.” Groups of concerned Africans and Indians formed non-European Friendship Committees in towns across the country. When the government commission of inquiry refused to allow the cross-examination of witnesses by African and Indian organizations, the ANC and Indian Congresses protested and then boycotted the official proceedings.

In his autobiography, Ismail Meer argues that the February 6th meeting in Durban inaugurated meaningful, ongoing collaboration between the ANC and Indian Congresses.

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62 The first sentence of the Ilanga editorial on the Riots is “The inevitable has happened.”
67 Meer, A Fortunate Man, 118-9.
Goonam describes a similar reaction: “Politically we had to reorganize and reorient ourselves, and the Durban Riots … made it clear to us that never again would we take up the government as Indians alone. Our survival lay in a non-European United Front.”68 M.B. Yengwa, at the time a Natal Youth League member, later expressed a similar opinion: “It was the incitement to racial animosity which was responsible for the riots. We felt that we had to confront the question of our deprivation of rights together, and fight as a united organization.”69 The president of the Youth League in Natal and the editor of Inkundla, Jordan Ngubane, was profoundly shaken after witnessing the pogrom first hand. He began to question significant aspects of the Youth League’s nationalism. According to Ngubane, A.P. Mda (who like many others traveled to Natal) reacted strongly to the violence, blaming the quality of political leadership on both sides. In an unpublished autobiography, Ngubane remembered:

After the riot, Mda came out clearly with his insistence on the quality of our ideals in the League being above reproach. He had been a very close friend and admirer of Lembede, who had attempted to popularize Africanism. Mda did not say Africanism should be scrapped. He produced a new phrase. African Nationalism was the force for which he stood. For him, Africanism had racial connotations he found dangerous.

At the Bloemfontein Conference toward the end of 1949, he delivered a long speech in which he warned that the African’s fight for freedom would be in vain if it was waged merely to ensure that the African debased the human personality in the way the white man did. Fascism, he said, like race oppression, was evil from the White side as it was from the African. He warned that there could be fascists also right within the League itself who had in mind the idea of establishing a closed racial state precisely in the way Afrikaner Nationalism wanted to do. These were the most dangerous enemies of African nationalism…. Uttered against the background of the riots, these were brave words. 70

68Goonam, Coolie Doctor, 134.
69Quoted in Julie Frederikse, The Unbroken Thread: Non-Racialism in South Africa (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1990), 52.
70Jordan K. Ngubane, “An Unpublished Biography,” Gwendolyn Carter Papers, Center for Research Libraries, University of Chicago, 136-7. According to Ngubane, Mda intended this address to be published, but it was later lost.
Additionally, the ANC faced significant external pressure to prevent another conflagration and develop stronger ties with Indian organizations. Representatives of the Indian government intervened during the months after the riots, warning ANC leaders that African anti-Indian sentiments compromised India’s efforts to isolate the apartheid regime internationally.  

The Indian Congress immediately declared that the hand of a third party was behind the riots. Speaking at a press conference in England on the 27th of January, Dadoo (who employed the terms “pogrom” and “massacre” rather than “riots”) alleged the existence of a government conspiracy to disrupt the emerging forces of opposition to apartheid. Dadoo cited the race policies of the “Fascist” regime and the enormous utility of the riots for the state:

One cannot escape the conclusion that the outbreak here has the resemblance of organized attack, that it was premeditated, although something went wrong with the timing, that a hidden hand of instigators lurks behind the events, that such events eminently suited the Government in order to weaken the growing opposition to the Government policy, and that it may be used as a weapon to impose further repression on both Indian and African people…

As many Indians struggled with the trauma of the riots, the leaders of the Indian Congress largely remained silent regarding the grievances voiced by Africans. Among intellectuals and political activists, considerations of political strategy (i.e., attributing primary blame to the unjust system rather than its foremost victims), a powerful sense of community pride, and personal denial all contributed to embracing a narrative of white instigation. Fatima Meer later summarized this position: “direct blame was apportioned to the Government, the white public, and the local authority in Durban, which had for years waged a vendetta of

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71 Ibid., 153.
72 “Press Conference Held by Dr. Y.M. Dadoo, the President of the Transvaal Indian Congress,” 27 January 1949, Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
unrestrained malignancy against the Indian people.” Indian activists pointed to circumstantial evidence that suggested a state-orchestrated conspiracy: anti-Indian statements by the government; the intensified campaign of vilification by the white press during the Passive Resistance Campaign; the failure of police to protect Indian property and lives; the participation of whites in looting; the undisguised glee of white Natal at Indian suffering; and the cynical manner in which the white press circulated “alleged” African complaints. A paternalist undertone frequently accompanied this explanation. It generally implied that white propaganda and unnamed provocateurs had misled credulous and unsophisticated Africans: Indians were simply a convenient and accessible scapegoat for their real frustrations over poverty, urban overcrowding, and segregation.

Although this view was strongly held by Indian Congress activists, it did not reflect the rage, despair, and horror of most Indians. Indian Opinion followed the Congresses in blaming the government, but it also forthrightly voiced Indian outrage at the attackers, generalized to represent all Africans: “The murders committed, the ravages on our women and girls, the burning of our homes and our business premises, make us wonder whether there is human feeling in some human breasts. The hatred shown and the fury with which our people have been attacked, makes one shudder.” In Indian press accounts, the strident denial that Africans were ultimately responsible for the violence went hand-and-hand with images of Zulu barbarism, primitiveness, and savagery: Shaka reborn and unleashed during the evening rush hour. Indian Opinion praised the “good work” of the navy and police who suppressed the rioters; Indian Views printed ominous reports of African drilling squads preparing for war in central Durban and “Native” nurses in an unnamed hospital attempting

to poison Indian patients.\textsuperscript{75} Multiple sources indicate that some Indians threatened retaliation and Indian vigilantes attacked Africans in the pogrom’s aftermath.\textsuperscript{76}

Representatives of the Indian government publicly challenged both the outpouring of anti-African racism and the willful indifference of Indian leaders (both conservative and radical) to the grievances articulated by Africans. Addressing a forum in Pietermaritzburg, the secretary to the High Commissioner for India in South Africa, R.T. Chari, demanded that relief funds sent by India be used to assist all sufferers, Indian \textit{and} African. He strongly criticized a speaker who had argued that political unity was impossible because Africans were savages. “Because people are illiterate and do not conform to Western standards of life,” he pointedly declared, “it does not mean they are savages.” In villages across India, he cuttingly observed, thousands of such “savages” were receiving full franchise. Chari went on to argue that the Indians must stop ignoring Africans and find a way to come to their aid. If Africans had not felt truly aggrieved, the riots would not have been so widespread.\textsuperscript{77} Having witnessed the riots in Clairwood, Chari spoke with a degree of authority and an edited version of his remarks appeared in both \textit{Inkundla} and \textit{Indian Opinion}.\textsuperscript{78} But as the thousands of displaced sought new homes and families interred their dead, the equanimity of his stance found little popular resonance.

\textbf{The Debate between \textit{Ilanga Lase Natal} and \textit{Indian Opinion}}

The outpouring of accusations by Africans provoked swift and impassioned denials from Indian newspapers. “It is an irony of fate,” the small journal \textit{Pravasi} virtually lamented,
“that of all people the Indian should have suffered for no fault of their own.”79 None of the charges were new: they included black marketing and overcharging in Indian shops, exploitative rents charged by Indian landlords, the alleged arrogance that Indians displayed towards Africans, the seduction of African women by Indian men, and the abuse of legal and social privileges created by the policy of segregation. African newspapers had regularly voiced all of these complaints in the past. But the riots compelled the Natal Indian press to respond to these grievances in print, particularly after white newspapers like the Natal Mercury began to publicize African statements in lurid and self-serving detail.80 The result was a rare, open discussion of African stereotypes of Indians and Indian attitudes toward Africans in the pages of Indian Opinion and Ilanga.

Although Ilanga’s editorial following the riots presented an analysis largely based on a race-relations framework, H.I.E. Dhlomo tried to place the violence of recent days within the broader context of South Africa’s system of discrimination. At the same time, he trenchantly criticized the attitudes and actions of many Indians. In contrast to white and Indian journalism which casually invoked stereotypes of rampaging Zulu hoards, Ilanga emphasized the objective basis of long-simmering African resentments and the extent of the violence directed against both Indians and Africans. The stunning first paragraphs of this article surveyed the misery and devastation unleashed by these events without so much as mentioning race. While insisting that the “conflict” was perfectly foreseeable (and therefore

79 “Durban Massacre---First Fruit of Apartheid,” Paravasi, April 1949.
80 Several articles in the African press warned Africans against a new found solicitousness on the part of Europeans: “All of a sudden the European community of Durban has discovered that the African has been cruelly exploited by the Indian; that he has been charged extortionate rentals by the Indian and that, after all, ‘he is a better human being’ than the Indian.” “Timeo Danaos…” Inkundla Ya Bantu, 12 February 1949.
preventable), Dhlomo also attempted to capture a human dimension to the all-sided suffering that transcended any particular group:

The inevitable has happened. The flood has burst out. Much damage has been done. Many places lie waste and desolate. Some people mourn and will not be comforted. There is fear, shock and confusion. There is hate, the nursing of wounds and a fatal desire for revenge. Although the main current of the storm has passed, there are rumblings of discontent, uncertainty and a savage desire to hurt. People continue to be assaulted and killed indiscriminately.

If what has taken place is tragic, sudden and regrettable, it is not surprising nor was it unexpected by unprejudiced, honest and well informed observers of our racially corrupted society. The whole grim business was logical, simple, and inevitable.81

Despite the painstaking equanimity of the above passage, Dhlomo’s article proceeded to reiterate a series of racial stereotypes based on the image of the Indian merchant. In many respects, this process of generalization was the product of a deterministic analysis that derived racial antagonisms directly from the legal-economic system. The repetition of the word “inevitable” conveyed that Africans, however brutally, were responding to a situation that they neither created nor had any recourse to change. The very ambiguity of agency in the above description implied that Africans and Indians were both victims in a tragedy that neither had authored. This version of events, as we shall see, must have stunned most Indian readers.

After the initial paragraphs, Dhlomo enumerated a comprehensive list of complaints against Indians. The first and most virulent charge was directed against the practices of Indian shop owners and merchants: “It is a well known if unpalatable fact that many Indian business men use unfair and immoral business methods. Haggling and downright fleecing of Africans is the order of the day, and has been going on for decades.” Underscoring the questions of space, land, and property at the heart of African resentments, Dhlomo

particularly objected to Indian efforts to defend their monopoly position in “the Reserves and exclusively or predominantly African areas.” Dhlomo assailed not only the deliberate sabotage of African business, but also the quotidian humiliations suffered by Africans in the spaces controlled by another race: “the very Indians who oppose to the bitter end those Africans who desire to run their own buses, stores and cinema houses, behave with nauseating, adolescent arrogance, superiority, patronage and even brutal insult to African customers and patrons.” It was, he implied, simply too much to endure.

In effect, Dhlomo’s editorial contended that each racial group responded rationally to an unjust system that gave Indians legal and economic advantage: Indians, by exploiting these avenues for profit and advancement; and Africans, by striking out against Indians. However inadvertently, he shifted in the course of his argument from an empirically qualified assessment of “many” Indians to an evaluation of a racial group based on actions and prejudices that he himself recognized were prevalent, but not necessarily universal. In part, this generalization served his defense of African actions during the pogrom. Although he used words like “tragic” and “regrettable,” Dhlomo strongly rejected the term “riots” and condemned the racism behind an exclusive emphasis on innocent Indian victims, a “dangerous” myopia that ignored the many Africans likewise displaced, wounded, or killed. Dhlomo described the pogrom as a war that the Indians lost: “Indians were as much responsible and fought as wildly and behaved as recklessly as Africans at the beginning until superior strength told, and the Indians retired. Innocent people suffered on both sides.”

He also defended the rationality of the African combatants in their choice of targets (particularly their decision not to attack whites) and ultimate objectives:

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82For the prevalence of this narrative in the 1950s, see Edwards, “Mkhubane, Our Home,” 50-1.
The so-called mad, blind and unreasoning impis were angry groups of Africans who sedulously attacked Indians only, were most careful even at the height of the storm not to have clashes with Europeans…

To paint the whole affair as the work of wild, blood thirsty savages doing they knew not what, is not true…. as if the fighting taking place in Greece, Palestine, etc., is the work of wild savages and not men prepared to die for their rights.

Dhlomo’s bitterness throughout was extraordinary. “It should be remembered,” he asserted with sardonic control, “that in normal times Indians assault Africans daily.” Once Africans reversed the terms of oppression and retaliated against decades of abuse, they immediately became unreasoning barbarians—a racial slander whose intent in the post-World War II international order was pellucid. Already, the Nationalist government and European press had begun to argue that the riots illustrated the necessity for apartheid. In response, Dhlomo predicated a defense of the African capacity for political reason, and therefore the very possibility of national self-determination, on the equation of Indian merchant with the Indian victim. Behind this argument rested a vicious irony. If white liberals and Indian nationalists could rationalize that the behavior of merchants and bus drivers did not represent a racial group, but instead reflected a natural response of individuals to the structural conditions created by an unjust system, the same could be said of their African assailants.

It is possible to imagine Manilal Gandhi’s shock and disbelief while reading Dhlomo’s article. The editor of Indian Opinion felt compelled to reply in the next issue of his journal. Even if all of these accusations were true—which Gandhi did not for a second concede—how could Dhlomo possibly justify the rape of young girls or the immolation of entire unarmed families, atrocities the Ilanga editorial passed over in silence? Gandhi ominously concluded that Ilanga “is believed to be a Bantu paper, but here too there seems to
be a hidden hand doing mischief.”83 His own article the previous week had already endeavored to refute the allegation that African resentments ultimately precipitated the violence. The contrast between the two accounts could scarcely have been more dramatic. “Our people being non-violent by nature,” Gandhi sermonized “do not arm themselves with any lethal weapons and, fully armed, as they were, the Africans found a defenseless people, an easy prey.”84 Dhlomo’s attempts to qualify his racial generalizations, however partial, did not find a parallel in *Indian Opinion*’s columns. Refusing to countenance any suggestion of Indian culpability, Gandhi presented the tenants of the Mahatma’s philosophy, particularly non-violence and personal sacrifice, in the form of shared Indian racial attributes. He also explicitly called into question the rioters’ humanity and pointedly expressed sympathy for the Indians who had lost their homes and members of their families.

Echoing the position taken by the Indian Congresses, Gandhi alleged that the riots were orchestrated by an unknown mastermind, most likely the apartheid state. Africans, oblivious to the government’s strategy of *divida et impera*, had been duped: “The Africans have no hatred against the Indian people but their pent-up feelings resultant of the repression by the Whites, have had to be directed against the innocent and defenseless people.” In the same issue of *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi reprinted numerous articles from the more liberal European newspapers and statements by Indian leaders that broadly supported his claims. Many of these pieces also contained the imagery that informed Gandhi’s own paternalism. “We must try to tolerate the African,” he warned Indians, “because it was their savage instinct that prompted them to do what they did.” Employing logic perfectly symmetrical to *Ilanga*, Gandhi’s insistence on the irrationality and primitiveness of the rioters coincided

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with a defense of the Indian merchant. Crucially, Gandhi employed an alternate spatial language to describe their role. Against the accusation of exploitation and undermining African control in their own areas, he claimed that the Indian merchant—here also standing in for the entire racial group—had served the economic needs of Africans despite the barriers erected by the state:

One word to the Africans. Both the Indians and Africans are repressed by the same law. The Indian suffers from discrimination just as much as the African. It grieves us to learn that Africans are attributing economic causes for these disturbances. Nothing could be more absurd. It was the Indian who ventured into the wilds to serve the wants of the Africans. It was the Indian who had pioneered in the Transport business and carried the African to their remote homes. It was the Indian who, as the vegetable gardener, had been supplying the Africans at prices which are within their reach.85

The assertion that Indians suffered “just as much as the African” facilitated an attitude of racial superiority. Why had Africans not managed to found businesses, develop gardens, provide for their own needs? If this question remained implicit in this article, the ensuing series of metaphors conveyed Gandhi’s attitude. The Indian had ventured into the wilds of Natal, dared far-off regions (“remote” for whom? according to what geography?), and tilled the land to provide for the incapable and now resentful African. The pioneer had brought the rudiments of civilization to the bush. The imperial context of this “service,” or the fact that Africans could not purchase land outside of reserves following the 1913 Native Land Act, went unstated. In dismissing African complaints, Gandhi appropriated the stock tropes of

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85 “The Racial Disturbances,” Indian Opinion, 21 January 1949. Similar language appears in the Natal Indian Organization’s submission to the Riots commission, which also echoes the language of Hollywood westerns: “They [Indian traders] ventured the wilds to serve the Natives of the colony. In carrying trade to the reserves of the Natives, when mere footpaths served as roads and access to their stores, the Indian traders faced untold hardship and hazards both from desperadoes and wild animals. Their tenacity, their will to serve and their inherent courtesy, have time and again earned encomiums from the Native people.” See “Statement submitted by the Natal Indian Organization to the Chairman and Members of the Judicial Community Appointed to Enquire into the Durban Riots (1949)” 3.
settler colonialism. The Indian merchant had entered an uncharted, undeveloped, and putatively vacant landscape—he had, in effect, “made the desert bloom.”

The Crisis in the Natal ANC

The political rapprochement between the ANC and Indian Congress following the pogrom was built on precarious foundations. The ANC itself was fragmenting under the strain of events. *Inkundla’s* diagnosis was clear: “African leadership has never been so divided.” Without consulting the Natal executive, Xuma initially organized a joint meeting with the Indian Congresses in Kimberley. We do not know exactly what Champion said to the ANC’s President, but his and Msimang’s protests apparently forced Xuma to immediately change his plans and move the venue to Durban. After arriving with a group of advisors, Xuma then hastened to convene a joint meeting with Indian and African leaders without first consulting with the Natal ANC or holding a public rally to speak directly to Durban’s Africans. Rumors of a deep rift between Xuma and Champion circulated throughout the province. According to the writer Mary Benson, Champion, Msimang, and Lutuli initially opposed cooperation with the Indian Congress, but eventually acquiesced to

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86 Jordan Ngubane responded sharply to this article several times in *Inkudla Ya Bantu*, pointing out that Africans had been sharply divided about the Riots and that wealthier Indians had behaved provocatively towards Africans. Indian Opinion did not publicly respond to Ngubane. Rather Manilal Gandhi answered this critique in a personal letter, apologizing and inviting Ngubane to visit the Phoenix settlement. This correspondence began a close friendship and political alliance, in part based on both men’s strident anti-Communism and increasing political isolation, which lasted until Manilal’s death. Eventually Ngubane, who had left the ANC and joined the liberal party, became the editor of *Indian Opinion* for a short period. See Jordan Ngubane, *Unpublished Autobiography*, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 346.


88 After consulting with Indian leaders in Pietermaritzburg, Msimang discovered they were completely ignorant of Xuma’s proposed meeting. He warned Xuma “you will achieve very little in the way you are going about this delicate question.” A subsequent letter reiterated the point: “The focus should be in Natal. To send the conference away from the explosive centre would be begging the question.” H. Selby Msimang to Dr. A.B. Xuma, 31 January 1949, Dr. A.B. Xuma Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Xuma’s arguments. In an act of startling indifference to local African opinion, Xuma apparently left Durban immediately after the joint statement’s release.

The February 6 joint statement soon generated its own share of controversy. Ilanga derided the statement and openly declared that Xuma had become outmoded: “The statement itself was a futile and puerile attempt to avoid the facts and difficulties of the situation.” Lambasting Xuma’s clumsy maneuvers, the newspaper declared: “All along the line, it seems the African leaders have been made pawns of the Indians.” Without descending to the same depths of naked race baiting, Inkundla likewise condemned “the cowardly and not convincingly sincere effort.” Neither paper denied that the policies of segregation bore ultimate responsibility for the explosion. But in their eyes, this truth hardly accounted for the depth of antagonism between the two parties, which they attributed to the complicity of Indian merchants in blocking African economic development and the complacency of African leadership. In particular, Inkundla argued that the Doctors’ Pact had misled Indian leaders by minimizing the intensity and significance of anger: “In so far as these African leaders misled the Indians and did not advise them to mend their ways, they are guilty of the Durban massacres.” Shortly afterward, the Transvaal ANC Youth League raised almost identical criticisms. African figures soon began to distance themselves from the joint

90Mary Benson, *The African Patriots: The Story of the African National Congress of South Africa* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 153. Benson’s source is unnamed. It is possible that this opposition was in fact to the proposed meeting in Kimberely, not to “cooperation” altogether.
95In particular, the Youth League harshly criticized the “Doctors’ Pact”: “Instead of a serious effort to look the Natal situation in the face, the African Congress leadership went out of its way to sign a pact with the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congress. In the pact itself no reference was made to the ugly situation in Natal, and there can be no doubt that the signatories to the Pact were fully aware of the conditions. In fact the pact itself was an impudent piece of bankrupt opportunism because neither side
statement. In an interview with *Ilanga*, S.B. Ngcobo (secretary of the Combined Locations Advisory board) denied that he had wished to sign the declaration and protested that “he had nothing to do with the statement … he attended the meeting as an observer, was not allowed to speak, and was not even present when the resolution was made.” Another alleged signatory, D.W. Moshe, also claimed that his name had been falsely appended.96

In the midst of such recriminations, Champion clearly sensed that the Natal ANC leadership had lost control of an increasingly volatile situation. Acting on their authority as members of the Native Advisory Board, Champion and Ngcobo organized a public meeting at the Bantu Social Centre “with the people of Durban in order to enable them to express themselves on the Riots.”97 According to the press report in *Ilanga*, the meeting teetered on the brink of chaos as different factions made impassioned speeches—“impossible to report verbatim”—from both the platform and the floor of the house.98 Acutely aware of the widespread dissatisfaction with the ANC’s response to the riots, Champion launched into a lengthy and emotionally charged apologia that defended his actions and violently berated the “mushroom leaders” who had begun to spring up around the city. After strongly denying that “he was under the influence of certain Indians,” Champion insisted that the issues dividing Africans and Indians were “not political but economic,” invoked Nehru’s warnings to South Africa’s Indians, attacked the Indians for “things they had done,” and lambasted all the South African governments for their crimes against the Africans. Despite its longstanding disagreements with Champion, *Ilanga* characterized the performance as brilliant and

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mesmerizing. Nevertheless, a series of “rank-and-file” speakers rose to challenge the stance taken by Champion and other African leaders. *Ilanga* reported:

> From this point, there came fiery after fiery speech from the floor of the house. It was clear even to a child that the cleavage that had been caused by the riots would be most difficult to repair. Leader or no leader, trouble or no trouble, the people are grimly determined to have their way. . . . What the people demand is separate land and residential areas for each group. They demand not to be mixed up either in the Reserves or in the city. They want Africans to run their own busses and stores. Many attacked the European bitterly for giving Indians better rights and treatment.

This public revolt against Champion and ANC’s right to speak on behalf of Natal’s Africans was the culmination of mounting distrust and frustration by the Durban African working class in the post-war years. Previously “tsotsis” had disrupted ballroom dance classes and musical recitals at the Bantu Social Centre and intimidated “educated Africans” to such an extent that they stopped attending Joint Council meetings.\footnote{Edwards, “Swing the Assegai Peacefully?” 73-4.} Following the pogrom, this diffuse, plebeian assertiveness expressed itself in the form of a direct challenge to Champion’s personal leadership, the ANC’s style of politics, and the national position of “non-European cooperation.” Both the opponents and advocates of non-European cooperation recognized that the pogrom signaled the bankruptcy of the current leadership. As one critic from outside the province argued: “The Riots show, too, that no African leader enjoys the confidence of the people. The people are ripe for political organization; the leadership, at any rate the present leadership, is out of touch with them.”\footnote{N. Nomnganga, “Is Natal Really Impossible?” *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, 5 February 1949.} A contributor to *Ilanga* similarly observed: “We have now come to a point where people in Durban are out touch with their leaders on the question of the riots. They prefer now to place more reliance on the authority than on their leaders.”\footnote{“Lack of Foresight in Our Leadership,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 19 March 1949.}

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\footnote{Edwards, “Swing the Assegai Peacefully?” 73-4.}

\footnote{N. Nomnganga, “Is Natal Really Impossible?” *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, 5 February 1949.}

\footnote{“Lack of Foresight in Our Leadership,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 19 March 1949.}
Natal ANC, some Africans turned directly to the government. *Ilanga* and *Inkundla* published several letters by Africans calling on the state to intervene and impose segregation between the two groups: “Indians despise Africans and Africans keep patronizing their businesses. This lop-sided relationship should be ended once and for all. We should ask the government to intervene and separate us. ‘When your sons do not get along, one leaves the home.’”

A mass boycott of Indian stores and buses began immediately after the repression of the riots. At the same time, African small traders seized the opportunity to displace Indian business in areas like Cato Manor. In the eyes of many observers, these actions dramatized the gulf between the ANC’s declarations on the riots—particularly the February 6th statement—and the attitudes of most Africans. The reality was far more convoluted. Working through African newspapers and the Native Location Advisory Boards, Natal ANC leaders supported the campaign against Indian business and attempted to co-opt it for their own purposes—even while they worked with Indian leaders to calm the city, entered into negotiations with the Indian Congress, provided relief to the displaced, and signed the Joint statement.

The boycott was apparently “spontaneous” (a political characterization denoting that the action was organized outside the channels of the ANC’s political authority). Nevertheless, it was immediately defended by the Advisory Boards, which at this time included leading members of the Natal ANC. By January 16, the Boards had already petitioned the Durban City Council to provide de facto legal sanction of the displacement of Indian traders. Their demands included the banning of buses operated by non-Africans, new

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premises for African traders in predominantly African areas, the exclusion of non-African hawkers from African locations, and the reclassification of the areas of Cato Manor “which are at present predominantly occupied by natives.” According to *Inkudla*, unnamed ANC leaders (likely Champion and Msimang) drafted this program. A month later, the Advisory boards organized a mass meeting at the Bantu Social Centre, nominally to endorse the ANC’s declared boycott of the Riots Commission. Yet far from echoing the position of the national (or, rather, Transvaal) ANC leadership, the motions proposed at the rally called on its conveners to give every possible support to the boycott. They continued:

This mass meeting of Durban Africans instructs the African National Congress of Natal and the Durban Locations Advisory boards either jointly or separately to set up machinery [sic] to, (a) stop malicious and anti-African propaganda in sections of the Indian press; to stop Indian attacks on isolated Africans; to stop the eviction of African tenants by Indian landlords; and these things are regarded as evidence of lack of goodwill towards the Africans; (b) impress on the Indians that African development is such that African economic progress can no longer be delayed or obstructed; (c) ensure that whenever the African expresses willingness to take over the services at present in Indian hands in predominantly African areas the Indian should give proof of his goodwill by disposing of these to the African at a reasonable price and that the African be given every facility to trade and to run buses to and from African areas…

Although the boycott movement began to atrophy by February, Indian businesses in African areas still suffered in early March, a month and a half after the riots. Educated African leaders helped hundreds, perhaps thousands, apply for trading licenses in areas that were

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104 “Statement to City Council by Native Representatives,” dated 16 January 1949, S. Bourquin Papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban. These demands were subsequently publicized in *Ilanga*, which reported that Chief Isaac Zulu was among the representatives who addressed the Durban City Council. See “African Leaders on the Riots,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 22 January 1949.
106 Ukpanah, “Yearning to be free,” 305-6.
previously almost the exclusive preserve of Indians. The boycott also received extensive and positive coverage from the Natal African press, although Inkundla warned that it might veer out of control without proper leadership. The government and Durban Corporation directly condoned many of these efforts, for example by expropriating Indian traders in areas of Cato Manor and allocating their shops to Africans. Deepening the schisms in the Natal ANC, the Communist Party opposed the boycott and courageously distributed leaflets warning “African workers … that their problems will not be overcome with the granting of licenses to African businessmen.”

The Vicissitudes of A.W.G. Champion

The Natal ANC had been significantly compromised by the contradictions between the National policy and the actions of its own leaders. Champion’s opportunism and prevarications were largely responsible for this outcome. Nevertheless, the statements and actions of his harshest critics—Jordan Ngubane, H.I.E. Dhlomo, M.B. Yenga—evinced similar inconsistencies: they rejected the violence of the pogrom, but endorsed many of its goals; they argued for collaboration with the Indian Congresses and simultaneously embraced the boycott; they denounced anti-Indian racialism while perpetuating many of its stereotypes. Both Champion and Yenga utilized the riots and subsequent boycott to advance their own business interests, for example by investing in the Zulu Hlanghani cooperative that established its dominance in Cato Manor. In later years, Champion would become an intensely bitter, open racist. But it is impossible to make sense of his actions in January-February 1949 solely in those terms. According to Edwards, Champion openly expressed joy

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109 Ibid.
110 "Boycott of Indian Establishments, Inkundla Ya Bantu, 12 February 1949.
112 “Communists Angry,” Inkundla Ya Bantu, 30 April 1949.
on multiple occasions following the riots. But he never removed his name from the February 6th statement and, despite widespread criticism of this stance, honored the commitment not to testify at the Riots Commission. Not only did he publicly defend all of the ANC’s actions, he took steps to implement the new understanding with the Natal Indian Congress. In May 1949, Champion launched a Joint Conciliation board with the NIC, a decision that was far from popular with “the rank and file of his followers.”

As a younger generation of ANC activists understood, Champion’s gyrations represented the failure of a style of Durban African politics based on state patronage through advisory boards, the authority of the chiefs, personal enrichment in the name of race progress, provincial insularity, and Zulu nationalism. His conflicted actions stemmed from conflicting imperatives. He struggled to maintain the position of the Natal ANC in the national organization, fulfill his official responsibilities as a member of the Advisory Board, and safeguard his personal alliances with key Indian political and business figures. At the same time, he moved to reinforce his rapidly collapsing authority among urban migrants and utilized the riots—and the possibility of future violence—to negotiate personal business deals behind closed doors. In the 1951 election for the Natal presidency, Lutuli defeated Champion by a slim margin. Most accounts attribute Champion’s removal to his conflict with

116 For a forceful expression of this critique, see N. Nomnganga, “Is Natal Really Impossible Politically?” Inkundla Ya Bantu, 5 February 1949.
117 Champion entered into negotiations with an Indian-owned bus service, suggesting the creation of a new holding company comprised of both Africans and Indians: “I know that whatever happens your Indian people and the present shareholders will control the company because our African people have no money. What the African people have is the name and the means to preserve your business and conduct it without fear of rioting at any other time.” A.W.G. Champion to Mr. Moodley, 24 February 1949, A.W.G. Champion Papers, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
the Youth League and anger in the executive over his dictatorial methods.118 However, there is some evidence to suggest that Champion’s response to the pogrom was also a factor. M.B. Yengwa remembers:

We were then in the Youth League, and the ANC in Natal was still led by Mr. A.W.G. Champion. Mr. Champion was not prepared to cooperate with the Indians, but from our experience we felt that the Indians were to be trusted to go along with us because they were in the Passive Resistance campaign. We argued that we have no alternative but to work with the Indians, that we are fighting the same enemy. We won, Champion was deposed…119

Champion’s demise marked an important strategic and rhetorical turn toward building a mass-based, democratically accountable, African nationalist organization. However, the precipitants of this shift were largely internal: the new line was far removed from the political mood of the African working class and urban poor. In the aftermath of the 1949 riots, the organized buying clubs, plebeian Zulu radicalism, and the ideology of racial uplift came to dominate the political landscape of Cato Manor and other urban locations.120 As Kuper and Edwards both describe, two associations emerged in Cato Manor that directly linked anti-Indian rhetoric with Zulu economic initiative: the Zondizitha (“Destroy our Enemies”) Buying Club and the Zulu Hlanganani (“Zulus Unite”) Association.121

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118 See for example, Benson, The Struggle for a Birthright, 136-7.
119 Quoted in Frederikse, The Unbreakable Thread 52. In an unpublished interview with Stanly Tradipo, Champion boasts that he played an active role in organizing and encouraging the pogrom itself. He asserts that this transgression constituted the real reason for his deposal by the ANC leadership. See Interview with A.W.G. Champion by Stanly Trapido, undated, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. These claims—neither of which are supported by other evidence—likely reflect the 1949 riots’ continuing popularity among Durban Africans and Champion’s own immense bitterness.
120 Ashwin Desai quotes a 1949 Ilanga article written by a cooperative movement leader: the cooperative movement was “much more powerful, in membership and accumulation of funds, than the Congress.” See “A Context for Violence,” 91.
early 1950s, Zulu Hlangani obtained economic dominance and political hegemony in Cato Manor, and it reportedly held annual celebrations of the pogrom.122

Conclusion

In 1956, *DRUM* magazine published an investigative article by its managing editor in Durban entitled “Why Do Indians Kill Themselves?”123 “What despairing economic and social conditions,” G.R. Naidoo asked, “are driving these cautious, civilized people to do away with itself?” The article addressed a wave of suicides by Hindu Indians unparalleled in other groups. Its lead page carried a gruesome and unforgettable picture of the five Taplan sisters, who had taken their lives together on 22 July 1955. In the breathless and sensationalist tone characteristic of *Drum*, Naidoo explained:

The family itself was of reasonable means until they lost all they had in the 1949 riots and were destitute. The father was a farmer in the Marianhill area, a reasonably prosperous area. He later moved to the Newlands area and with the help of his daughters struggled for a living. The girls were doing a man’s job. They woke up early in the morning, prepared the breakfast for the family and worked on the farm until sunset….

They were poor and deeply conscious of it. Their father was unable to provide them with things girls of that age expected, and, like most poor fathers, he ruled his children with an iron hand of discipline. The girls must have discussed well beforehand the intention to commit suicide, and on the fateful morning after their father had refused them permission to visit their brother, they set out with the dreadful determination to do away with themselves.

Photographs of more suicides, complemented by name and method of self-destruction, encircled the following pages. Each of these suicides revealed the disintegration of a family, someone’s debt and economic failure, the stress and humiliation produced by racist discrimination, or growing despair at the failure of Indian politicians to change the existing situation. Historians have generally depicted the period following the pogrom as a high point.

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of multi-racial unity, largely based on the pronouncements of nationalist leaders and political events in the Transvaal. But stories like Naidoo’s inadvertently reveal a far darker social landscape: the ongoing insecurity, economic desperation, and psychological torment endured by many of Durban’s Indians following the pogrom.

Writing in the early 1960s, Fatima Meer denied that the riots had produced any significant resentment against Africans. “The outburst against the Indians,” she claimed, “was a freak occurrence, a deviation from the common rule, which—due to some rare chance causes—lost its target and became confounded in a mood of violent human imbalance.”

Such statements represented the projection of an activist’s perspective onto Indians as a whole. For many Indians, these events were in fact profoundly traumatic. When Lutuli won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1962, Phyllis Naidoo asked students at the Durban Indian High School if they had read about the event in the papers: “A deathlike silence greeted me. Then a shy student said, ‘You were not in Cato Manor when we hid in our ceilings and they burnt our homes in 1949.”

The pogrom became part of Indian identity, a core element of a collective racial mythology that demarcated “Indian” from “African.” Kogila Moodley described the continuing influence these events—and their multiple retellings—on Indian racial consciousness during the 1970s: “By the exaggerated transferal of the stories of rape and looting, common in the folk history of Indians and endowed with the legendary authenticity of personal experience, the dominant view of Africans creates a climate for fear and apprehension.”

Fear of African violence became engrained in the psychology of Durban Indian life.

In his autobiography, Ismail Meer argues: “the riots unwittingly had positive results, in that they provided a basis for Afro-Indian cooperation.” At the level of political organizations, this statement has some degree of truth. Within the ANC, the pogrom heavily discredited the different approaches to the Indian Congress that dominated throughout the 1940s (Xuma’s “non-European cooperation” and the Youth League’s hard-line nationalism), and it may have contributed to the downfall of the Old Guard in Natal, particularly Champion. Among a layer of politically conscious Indians, the riots greatly strengthened the conviction that a strategic alliance was a matter of literal life or death. To a considerable degree, these developments facilitated the formation of the 1950s Congress Alliance. But two significant qualifications to Meer’s evaluation are in order.

First, it is necessary to stress the complex social and geographic physiognomy of the coalition that began to form in the Riot’s aftermath. Centered in Johannesburg, the alliance was based on a section of the Indian middle class (particularly a new generation of younger professionals and their economic supporters in the merchant elite), the leadership of the Transvaal ANC, the ANC Youth League in Natal, and the Communist Party working in both the ANC and Indian Congresses. The new arrangement provided the ANC with desperately needed financial assistance, organizational expertise and infrastructure, and international connections at a crucial juncture. But this coalition did not receive the support of the majority of Indians or Africans, particularly in Natal. The end of Passive Resistance represented a partial defeat for the new leadership of the Indian Congresses, and the riots

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127 Meer, A Fortunate Man, 119.
128 In looking for a way to prevent another outbreak of violence, the ANC/YL in Natal decided not approach the Indian Congress directly and left it to the Transvaal ANC to begin discussions due to the connections that existed between Indian and African activists in Johannesburg. According to Ngubane, Lutuli approved this approach. See Jordan K. Ngubane, “An Unpublished Biography,” Gwendolyn Carter Papers, Center for Research Libraries, University of Chicago, 138.
unquestionably strengthened a tendency toward political disillusionment and isolationism among the Indian working class. The conservative leadership of the old Indian Congress—roundly defeated in the mid-1940s—was considerably strengthened by both of these events. In the eyes of many Durban Africans, the Natal ANC emerged from the pogrom both compromised and discredited. As Iain Edwards has shown, the working class in Cato Manor and elsewhere rejected collaboration with the Indian Congress and refused to support ANC initiatives in the 1950s, like the Defiance Campaign.\textsuperscript{129} While ANC membership exploded elsewhere in the country, the Natal ANC remained virtually stagnant until the end of the 1950s.

Second, the decisions of ANC leaders during the next decade continued to be guided by the potential volatility of the alliance and the danger of another pogrom: the ambient hostility toward the Indian trader remained a fact of political life. Youth League members worried about militant actions spinning out of control. In an autobiographical manuscript, Ngubane recalls the concerns voiced during this period: “If we launched a campaign confined to Africans only, we would, indirectly, emphasise the racial angle. The danger was very real from this that our people would conclude that the Indian was sitting on the fence as usual, remaining neutral in the fight where this helped the whites.”\textsuperscript{130} A number of smaller outbreaks of anti-Indian violence erupted during the early 1950s, although in each case the ANC and Indian Congresses minimized their racial dimensions. In late January 1950, African protestors engaged in a series of pitched confrontations with police around the freehold township of New Clare in the Transvaal. The first upheaval took place after the arrest of a local woman for selling liquor; the second occurred when cops assaulted an African man

\textsuperscript{129} Edward, “Mkumbane, Our Home,” 217.
during a pass raid. In the midst of these events, crowds burnt down Indian and Chinese shops. Walter Sisulu’s report to the ANC executive captures the fraught character of the ANC’s position: “In my opinion this fact did not indicate an anti-Asiatic attitude. My impression was that this was directed against certain individuals. I must point [out] that throughout this situation, there was much cooperation between Indian and African leaders.” Whether or not Sisulu was correct in his estimation regarding the absence of “anti-Asiatic” sentiment, distrust and resentment toward the Indian shopkeeper—that figure of the diaspora *par excellence*—remained profound.

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131 W.M. Sisulu to the Executive Committee of the ANC, undated [February 1950?], A.W.G. Champion Papers, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
A wealthy merchant in East Africa answered his door one evening to find two young Africans. Upon enquiring the purpose of their visit, it turned out that one of them had come to ask for the hand of the merchant’s daughter in marriage. With due decorum, and considered coolness, the merchant called the visitors into the living room, offered them a drink, and called in his daughter. The proposition was put to her. Respectfully she replied that she had nothing against it if the gentlemen would take care of her and if she were to have her parents’ permission. The merchant then told the young men that, in accordance with tradition, it would only be correct for them to bring their parents to formally approach him. That night, after the guests had left, the family packed its belongings and fled the country for India.\footnote{Apocryphal story frequently told by South African Indians during the apartheid years.}

—Apocryphal story frequently told by South African Indians during the apartheid years.

You came to their country when they were ruling themselves and you took away all their rights in their country of origin, you took away their cattle from them and their lands and placed on them the burden of passes together with harsh laws that cause them to fill goals without any cause, and they are persecuted by your laws that bring about sin...\footnote{“Letter from Jeremiah Sithole to the Manager, Native Affairs Department, Durban,” 10 August 1951, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35a/64), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.}

—Letter by Jeremiah Sithole, a Zulu prophet, to the Native Affairs Department, 1951.

“She wants to be modernised,” said Patrick. “It’s true! It’s no good! So they get divorced like flies, like FLIES, man. And then you have to get another Sheila, and she’s worse. Man, they’re all the same nowadays, true’s God!”\footnote{Anthony Sampson, \textit{DRUM}, 1957}

—Quoted in Anthony Sampson, \textit{DRUM}, 1957

On the first evening of the 1949 Durban Riots, a crowd of African men gathered outside the Grey Street Women’s Hostel, demanding the delivery of women who associated with Indians.\footnote{“Evidence on the Causes of the Race Riots,” January 1949, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/33/11), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.} This tragic moment—which has been overlooked by historians of the pogrom—reveals a great deal about the centrality of gender and sex to the racial dynamics of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

2 “Letter from Jeremiah Sithole to the Manager, Native Affairs Department, Durban,” 10 August 1951, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35a/64), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
\end{thebibliography}
mid-century Natal. At the government commission enquiry into the riots, Senator Brookes observed that miscegenation was the second most common accusation raised by Africans in the period before the riots.\(^5\) Numerous articles and letters following the riots in *Ilanga Lase Natal* accused “certain Indian men” of seducing or preying on African girls.\(^6\)

Sexual violence against Indian women also played a central role in the events of January 1949. In her autobiography, Dr. Goonam recalls: “I treated girls of 14 and 15 who had been raped in Clairwood, Jacobs and Merebank.”\(^7\) *Indian Opinion* bitterly emphasized the occurrence of rape: “The murders committed, the ravages on our women and girls, the burning of our homes and business premises, makes us to wonder if there is human feeling in some human breasts.”\(^8\) Another Indian newspaper, *Pravasi*, reiterated these accusations four times in as many pages, attributing these acts to the “Bantu people” as a whole: “the Bantu people …have committed the most heinous crimes of murder, rape, loot and arson, which have shocked the whole civilized world.”\(^9\) In later testimony, some participants in the riots boasted of targeting women rather than the possessions of Indian men.\(^10\) It seems likely that these rapes were acts of revenge against humiliations both real and perceived, including the

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5 See Kirk, “The 1949 Durban Riots: A Community in Conflict,” 114. When scholars have addressed these claims, they have briefly focused on the problem of their empirical accuracy and bracketed the problem of interracial sex from the other causes of the riots. As a result, they have failed to raise the question of gender and Durban’s racial dynamics. For example, Kirk mainly focuses on the factual reliability of the testimony regarding miscegenation (which—agreeing with the commission’s report—he states was exaggerated). Eddie Webster also briefly discusses these accusations, arguing that their importance lies in the subjective impression by witnesses that “Indian men were taking advantage of their ‘privileged position.’” See Webster, “The 1949 ‘Riots’—A Case Study in Race and Class,” 35.


7 Goonam, *Coolie Doctor*, 138.


10 Tembinkosi Phewa recalls: “We ran up to Pelwane’s place at the top. There were some other Indians living there as well. Pelwane was inside his shop shitting himself. The cops arrived in navy blue coats. We sat on their truck and Pelwane came out. He said we could take everything—just leave me alone. Ja, but you see we just laughed and said we just want his women—the police—they could take the blankets and things!” Edwards, “Mkhumbane,” 51.
alleged seduction of African women. In turn, assaults against Indian women and girls further cemented the colonial stereotype of the violent, savage, and (now) sexually-threatening Zulu.

In this chapter, I explore some of the complex intersections between race, the constitution of public and private spaces, and gender in mid-century Durban. As the urbanization of Africans and Indians accelerated during the inter-war period, debates intensified within both groups over the meaning of nation, tradition, and the status of women. Many Africans and Indians understood the proper boundaries between the races—boundaries that were in continuous dispute during the 1940s and 50s—in terms of the relationship between gender and social space. In this context, questions such as public interactions between African women and Indian men, African domestic workers in Indian households, and miscegenation assumed a fraught and sometimes explosive significance.

**African Nationalism, Gender, and Urbanization**

Since the late nineteenth century, the Durban government’s attempts to establish and control a dependable supply of migrant labor centered on preventing the movement of African women to the city and arresting the formation of a permanent, urban working class. David Hemson explains: “The influx of African women, although posed in terms of prostitution, venereal disease, and public morality, threatened the drive to force all African workers into barracks by posing the alternative of working class households in the towns.”

The increasing urbanization of Africans and Indians following the First World War—and especially the development of racially mixed working class neighborhoods of African, poor whites, and Indians—produced a growing panic among missionaries and the local ruling class over the looming “degeneration” of the detribalized African and the dangers of

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11David Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock Workers of Durban,” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1979), 125.
miscenegenation. Expulsions of African women from Durban occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, and in 1935 the Durban council passed a resolution banning African women from entering the city without written permission. Town councilors called for the organized medical examination of African women. In the late 1930s, a representative on the African advisory board warned of growing anger among Africans over harassment of women. In addition to ubiquitous threat of police harassment, deportation to the reserves, and political repression, African residents of Durban confronted another aspect of state power: an intrusive biomedical surveillance that not only displaced and “humiliated” Zulu patriarchal authority, but transformed the African woman’s body into an object of symbolic and political struggle.

If the state’s effort to arrest the formation of a modern, urbanized African population relied heavily on the policing of African women, two other agencies served to politicize the control of women’s sexuality: the influence of the mission-educated petite bourgeoisie and the authority of Natal’s “traditional” leaders, the Zulu chiefs. As Shula Marks has shown, the social dislocations caused by the Mineral Revolution and the intensification of migrant labor precipitated the political realignment of these forces in the late 1920s. A formidable bloc developed between the Natal Christian elite, the Zulu royal house, and elements within

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12 Ibid., 163.
15 For a discussion of missionaries and the introduction of Victorian ideas of domesticity and female sexuality in South Africa, see Cherryl Walker, ed., Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945 (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1990), especially chapters 3,5, and 8.
the government based on ethnic nationalism and a neo-traditional cult of the monarchy.16 “It was,” Marks argues “in the position of African women that the forces of conservatism found a natural focus.”17 On the part of the Natal state and the chiefs, the continuing subordination of women in the reserves played a critical economic function. The labor of African women subsidized the system of low-paid migrant labor; their near complete legal disenfranchisement—and the need for young men to pay lobolo to marry—enabled chiefs to assert control over migrant workers and their earnings.18 The Christian middle class had been deeply worried over the disruption of authority within the African family, premarital pregnancy, and the spread of venereal disease since at least the first decade of the twentieth century.19 Such concerns reached new heights in the 1930s, and many African intellectuals believed that a modernized Zulu culture, grounded in respect for male elders and the disciple of the home, could counteract these scourges.20 For the next two decades and beyond, the status of women was at the heart of debates over Zulu tradition and modernization. Lobolo, female initiation rites, social etiquette for women, and witchcraft continued to provoke vigorous exchanges in Inkundla and Ilanga during the 1940s and early 50s, especially in the African language pages.21

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21 Ukpanah, “Yearning to be free,” 167.
By the mid 1940s, several additional factors had combined to accentuate the political 
importance of the “African woman.” Not only had migration to the major cities accelerated 
during the war, but women began to enter new spheres of employment, including factory 
work and professions that potentially afforded some measure of financial independence. African women also started to displace men in the role of domestic servants or “kitchen 
boys.” The response to these developments among African intellectuals was decidedly 
complex. Given the strangulating impact of the color bar legislation on the employment 
prospects of most African men, African newspapers and politicians saluted the growing 
number of women in distinctly modern professions like nursing, factory work, and teaching: 
“Today African women are winning major battles by themselves as nurses and factory 
operatives—many of these receiving better wages than men.” In numerous articles in 
Ilanga during the late 1940s and 50s, H.I.E. Dhlomo extolled the virtues of cultural 
transformation and scientific progress, imprecating those who would intern the contemporary 
African within the mockery of unchanging “tradition.” “Tribalism,” he prophesized “is 
doomed.” A frequent target of his critique was the legal and social status of African 
women: they were considered perpetual minors under Natal’s Native Code. In the midst of 
the growing disillusionment of the late 1940s, the success stories of nurses, teachers, and

22 Consigned to the status of a perpetual minor under Natal’s Native Code, African women did not 
have legal personhood under pass law legislation or the industrial codes, and therefore had greater 
freedom of movement and employment than African men. See “Weekly Review and Commentary,” 
23 Nuttall suggests that the gender imbalance in the townships and shanty towns disappeared between 
1946 and 1951 and “Among African women during the same period, manufacturing employment 
remained minimal, at no more than a few hundred; but tertiary employment, mostly in domestic 
service, rocketed by 50% to 18,000.” See Timothy Andrew Nuttall, “Class, Race and Nation: African 
City council announced that it would construct a new hostel and flats for African women, citing the 
acute housing crisis caused by the large number of women were entering domestic service and the 
factory workers were one of the few evident signs of race progress. Profiles of attractive, smartly-dressed young nurses soon became a fixture of *Ilanga*, foreshadowing the celebration of the sleek, cosmopolitan—and frequently bikini clad—woman emblematic of 1950s magazines like *Drum*.²⁶

This greater financial and personal independence also generated enormous fear concerning the loss of patriarchal control over African women. *Ilanga* published a regular satirical column by “Rolling Stone,” which sometimes featured a nurse named Jane Maplank. A misogynist caricature directed at the “wrong kind” of African women in the professions, nurse Jane used her uniform to set up “dates” around town—scandalously blurring the distinction between profession and prostitution—and could be bought (*lobolo*) for a single car ride. “Rolling Stone” (in fact, *Ilanga* editor R.R.R. Dhlomo) directly associated these attitudes with miscegenation: “she is a progressive nurse with modern outlook she does not see why she shouldn’t love to be inside the car of anybody even if he is not an African.”²⁷ While the new African woman may have embodied modernity and racial advancement, she also revealed the dangers to male authority posed by urbanization, novel forms of mobility, and the perversion of Zulu institutions (in this case, the transposition of bride price with purchasing sex).²⁸ Urban anonymity allowed a significant number of women to break free

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²⁶This remained true into the 1960s: “African nurses, in particular, set an example of style and elegance.” See Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie*, 113.
²⁸“Busy Bee” derisively reported that some people thought nurses “should not receive too high salaries when African men receive low wages” since it will interfere with marriage. See “Weekly Review and Commentary,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 16 February 1946.
from the authority of the rural family. Moreover, most African women in Durban were not relatively well-paid professionals. They often lived in fetid hostels or cohabitated with boyfriends, and many women survived through brewing traditional beer or prostitution. Drawing on Victorian conceptions of propriety and eugenics, articles in the Zulu press directly linked socio-economic progress and the question of female promiscuity.

The panic over the sexual foundations of African nationhood was closely related to a second question: the crisis of the African family. An increasing body of social scientific research, much of it organized and funded by the South African Institute of Race Relations, catalogued the social impact of migrant labor, pass laws, and slum existence on the new urban households. Columns in *Ilanga* regularly praised the efforts of the SAIRR and often reiterated its claims, particularly in denouncing influx controls and pass laws: “One of the strongest things that can be said against them [the pass laws] is that they have helped to break African family life. And since the family is the fundamental unit of society, it would be superfluous to mention the evils and misery caused by a system that breaks down family life.” *Ilanga* argued that the absence of housing produced overcrowding and the complete abrogation of familial privacy; low wages necessitated that mothers work, leaving children

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29 For an early account of a Zulu woman who fled the Royal household in the late 1920s and supported herself through working for a white family, see Rebecca Hourwich Reyher, *Zulu Woman: The Life Story of Christina Sibiya* (New York: Feminist Press, 1999), 166-171.

30 “A progressive, self respecting community is the result of women. If you want to discover the social and economic position of the various races in this or any country, study the women. The women of the ‘better’ races or classes are less available, more ‘stiff’ more ‘moral’ than the ‘cheaper,’ more available women of the oppressed and submerged groups.” See *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 25 May 1946. The association of promiscuity and miscegenation with “lower social orders” was common among liberal social scientists in South Africa. Such views also appeared in *Indian Opinion*. See “Liberals and Indians,” *Indian Opinion*, 19 July 1946. For the general importance of eugenics to imperialism and domestic ideology, see Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 90 and Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 62-7.

subject to pernicious influences. In addition, *Ilenga* asserted that the prohibition of alcohol resulted in the transformation of private homes into public shebeens, while pass and liquor laws allowed police to enter the African’s home with impunity. The result of this abeyance could only be national degeneration. “Children see their parents nakedness,” H.I.E. Dhlomo lamented, “There is no privacy between sexes. It is a slow process of debasement, torture, and death—both physical and spiritual.” The next sentence proceeded to finger an accomplice to this process: “Meanwhile Indian and other landlords are reaping a huge and rich harvest fleecing the people who have no alternative.”

Durban’s African leaders employed the same language in discussing the status and role of women that informed the rhetoric of anti-Indian racism: the discourse of economic self-help and race progress. If the African woman simultaneously provided an index and vehicle of such progress, the dominant position of Indian merchants and landlords—or, at least, so it seemed to many Africans—directly interfered with the African’s national aspirations. The broader political ferment of the early 1940s resulted in efforts to revive the ANC Women’s League on a Union-wide scale, although these developments only echoed in Natal somewhat later. A small Durban branch of the ANC Women’s League was active by 1947. Significantly, African politicians cited the prominence of Indian women in the 1946-7 Passive Resistance Campaign to urge a greater role for African women. If anti-Indian demagoguery permeated the nationalist rhetoric of moral-sexual panic (we will see more examples below), the importance of women in South African Indian mobilizations provided

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the ANC with a critical mirror for self-examination. A 1946 *Ilanga* editorial concluded on
the following note:

> Just one word to our womenfolk. Indian women who are regarded as ‘stay-at-homes’
and only interested in the kitchen and the nursery are to-day in the spearhead of the
attack for Indian freedom in this Country. In their remarkable faith in the
righteousness of their Cause they are daily going to prison.35

Champion and the Natal executive expressed admiration for the prominence of Indian
women in the campaign, while indicating concern that the African nationalist movement
might fall behind the level of progress achieved by other “non-Europeans.” A call for African
women to attend the 1947 Provincial Conference likewise warned: “All races are fast moving
forward in this country and yet the African is left behind. The Indian women have
participated in the Passive Resistance struggle and are to be congratulated.”36 Indian women
had ostensibly managed what Africans had not yet attempted. They transcended the
constraints of tradition in pursuit of national liberation. This view also reflected the growing
influence of American consumer culture—what Kristen Ross once labeled “fast cars and
clean bodies”—on urban African ideas of femininity.37 In the mid 1940s, *Ilanga* began
publishing a family and children’s supplement, and by 1947 a “Women’s Corner” appeared
which mixed domestic and fashion advice with nationalist platitude: “In the world of to-day,
civilization is making great strides and it is our duty as mothers of the race to move forward
with the rest.”38 Proliferating advertisements for skin cream, hair products, and beauty
pageants articulated a self-consciously modern ideal of womanhood mediated by commodity

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Champion, “Call to African Women,” *Ilanga*, 20 April 1947. Invoking the prominence of Indian
women in agitation against the “Ghetto Act,” A.W.G. Champion saluted the leadership position held
by Dr. Goonam and the impassioned speeches of a young Fatima Meer.
37 Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars and Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*
(New York: October books, 1995).
consumption. Among some literate and Western-educated Africans, modern nationalism was impossible without a new femininity.  

**Africanist Christianity and Subaltern Patriarchy**

By the mid 1950s, the African press and nationalist movement had managed to create a sophisticated and wide-reaching public sphere despite the high level of political persecution, economic insecurity, and the white ownership of most African press (*Inkundla* was the most notable exception). Nevertheless, the discourse of literate nationalists was probably less influential in this period than the ideas of Natal’s independent African churches, or Zionism. With the hypertrophy of Natal’s shantytowns in the 1940s, the various Zionist churches spread rapidly, and their messianic gospel of conquest and future redemption contributed to the development of a new, plebeian Zulu nationalism. The disruption of patriarchal authority and the proliferation of “sin” (venereal disease, premarital intercourse, and miscegenation) were significant motifs in the liturgy of these groups. Their cosmology drew heavily on ancestor veneration, healing practices, and the traditions of the Zulu monarchy. It also employed a melancholic narrative of collective loss, which generalized a vision of Zulu national redemption from the shattered moral economy of the

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39 In her study of the newspaper *Bantu World*, Lynn Thomas finds examples of this “modern girl” already in the inter-war period, including a developed discourse around the imitation of white and Indian women as well as anxieties over interracial sex. See Lynn M. Thomas, “The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability In 1930s South Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 47 (2006), 461-490.


41 The work of Zulu anthropologist Absolom Vilakazi stressed the critical importance of Shembe’s condemnation of premarital sex and his embrace of polygamy, a practice rejected by European missionaries. Notably, Vilakazi’s work was first written in the 1940s and reflects the concerns of the Zulu intelligentsia regarding sexuality and the transformation of gender relations. See Absolom Vilakazi with Bongani Mthethwa and Mthembeni Mpanza, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers), 24-5, 32-5. For the importance of Shembe’s teaching on adultery see Gerald O. West, “Reassessing Shembe ‘Remembering the Bible’: Isaiah Shembe’s Instructions on Adultery,” *Neotestamentica*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2006), 157-184.

42 For a classic discussion of these issues, based on the now widely-criticized model of syncretism, see Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 338-42.
individual homestead. Part of Zionism’s power was that it promised the moral regeneration of the Zulu nation, while simultaneously upholding the form of patriarchal authority represented by polygamous marriage. If articles in *Ilanga* largely expressed the worldview of the literate elite, Zionist preachers voiced similar anxieties regarding gender and the crisis of the African family in a plebeian idiom. They were, however, far more skeptical of the redemptive promises of Western civilization.

On 26 August 1933, Isaiah Shembe (the founder of the Zionist Church and the most influential of the Africanist Christian leaders) delivered his first sermon at Rosboom, a small town near Pietermaritzburg in Natal. Shembe began the Rosboom advice by warning the house of Senzangakhona (the Zulu nation) not to worship its enemies: the people from the ends of the earth that had annihilated their livestock and left them without maize. After castigating his audience with quotations from scripture, Shembe then proceeded to declare that the black man’s name had become a term of derision in his own land. Rather than returning home “to milk the cattle of his father” after his education, the son of the black man went to another nation and labored for men who were not his father and women who were not his mother.43 But the most searing humiliation that Shembe invoked was the inability of Zulus to protect their daughters from seduction—a visceral image of the nation prostrate, biologically disrupted:

> And so the word of Jehovah, who does not lie, was fulfilled: that you will bear sons and daughters but they will bring you no joy because you will be oppressed (Deuteronomy 28 v 41). Today, your young girl is made pregnant by an Indian and then flung aside like snot because she is a prisoner’s girl. Today, your young girl is

43Shembe saw the performance of domestic duties for a foreign family (in other words, a family of no kinship relation) as a form of slavery: “Our daughters are slaves of the Boers. / The daughters of the Boers pass water within their houses, / and our daughters remove all the filth.” See “The Prayer to Confess their Sins on Behalf of His Nation,” in *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha of EkuphaKameni: Selected Writings of the Zulu Prophets Isaiah Shembe and Londa Shembe*, ed. Irving Hexham (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1994), 46
made pregnant by a white and then flung aside like snot because she’s a prisoner’s girl.44

Shembe described foreign domination in terms of a collective loss of control over the labor of young men, female sexuality, and ultimately the entire process of social reproduction. Incorporating the promise of messianic redemption into his narrative, Shembe understood this crisis of moral economy in terms of a profound disruption of the Zulu’s relationship with God.45 The Rosboom advice concluded with a parable-like story of an educated son who left home to become a minister in the European church, giving his parents’ savings to foreign schools and women, and thus leaving his father destitute and his mother without clothing, naked. The son’s actions synthesized the spiritual, economic, and sexual betrayal of the Zulu nation: worshiping Christ in the conqueror’s church (breaking the Zulu nation’s pact with Jehovah), giving labor and money to the European economy (sabotaging the collective accumulation of wealth), and pursuing an affair with a foreign woman (dishonoring his

45Although historians and anthropologists often conceive of moral economy in terms of a set of traditional rights and obligations, it is critical to remember that in many pre-industrial societies these rights and obligations are understood to derive from the natural order of the cosmos. The set of obligation between ruler and ruled—although often differently understood between the two—cannot be understood in isolation from the proper relationship between this world and the other, the living and the ancestors, the village and the bush, elders and youth, men and women. As Eric Wolf writes regarding agricultural societies based on tributary relations:

"Typically they show a hierarchical representation of the cosmos, in which the dominant supernatural order, working through the major holders of power, encompasses and subjects humanity. At the same time, the ideological model displaces the real relation between power-wielding surplus takers and dominated producers onto the imagined relation between superior deity and inferior subject...This displacement also embodies a contradiction. If public power falters and justice is not done, the ideological ties linking subject and supernatural are also called into question. The rulers lose legitimacy; the mandate of Heaven may pass to alternate contenders, or people may begin to assert claims of their segmental morality against the official apparatus of mediation.”"

See Eric R. Wolf, Europe and the People without History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 83.
mother’s sacrifices by failing to return home and lift her from poverty and pre-Christian barbarism).

Eighteen years after the Rosboom advice, a Zionist prophet named Jeremiah Sithole—who at the time lived in the Durban location of Baumannville—wrote a letter addressed to the manager of the Native Administration Department. Although it did not discuss miscegenation, Sithole’s letter (which seems to have been dictated to a professional notary) followed Shembe in emphasizing both colonialism’s sexual dimensions and the perturbation of Zulu gender norms. The tract began by announcing that God had sent him to this earth in order to wipe away the tears of Senzagakona’s children, for the sufferings of the Zulu people had come before the eyes of God. “Did you create these people whom you are troubling,” he demanded “or are they God’s creation?” Sithole caustically enumerated the agonies inflicted by the conquering nation: the dispossession of rights, land, and cattle; the imposition of passes and causeless imprisonment; the creation of persecutory laws that bring about “sin.” In Sithole’s language, foreign domination, urbanization, and the daily humiliations of Apartheid (“you cause them to go to the pass offices to be in the hot sun suffering”) fused into a state of moral degradation that simultaneously crippled the Zulu and exposed the satanic nature of the colonizer. The European had illegitimately disrupted both Zulu patriarchal authority and divine sovereignty, violently inserting himself into their place.

In this context, Sithole invoked the European woman’s body—or rather its concealment—in order to exemplify the perversity of the new order. Although Western-styled clothing initially symbolized moral probity and the evangelical rational for conquest,

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*Letter from Jeremiah Sithole to the Manager, Native Affairs Department, Durban,” 10 August 1951, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35a/64), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.*

*For an early 20th century remark on the symbolic power of clothing, see the Stuart Archives: “J.K. remarked that Indians are not naturally very clever, for, see, they come here from their own country badly clad.” Stuart Archive, vol. 1, 264.*
Sithole proclaimed that the actual conduct of the Europeans had denuded their women under the divine gaze:

In the land of their origin you have caused them [the Zulu] to suffer through hard and bad tasks and you refuse them licenses to do work that would improve them because you are a bad nation that came under religion into this country when your woman folk were wearing long cloths, to-day they go about naked in the eyes of God—you are a bad nation that is jealous and with hardened hearts, and God—God has sent me to ask where you have placed Dinizulu and Cetshwayo—bring them back to-day or…you will be sorry for some time.

The visual force of these words was intended to strip bare the European, replicating the moment of self-awareness in the Garden of Eden and humiliating the colonizer. But this image also invoked the function of clothing and sexual inaccessibility in distinguishing civilization from savagery. Sithole had leveled a familiar, but nonetheless powerful, accusation: the crimes of the foreign occupier have transformed the putative civilizer into the savage, the damned. By appealing to the divine’s transcendent vision, Sithole succeeded in inverting the relationship between the appearance of the colonial order and its underlying reality. If the European woman served to embody rectitude in the midst of native sinfulness, the judgment of heaven had determined that the jealously and cruelty of the foreigners (their refusal to allow the nation to improve itself) had driven the Zulu people to their current deprived state. This image was one of several symbolic reversals that culminated in the demand for the return of the vanquished Zulu kings. Sithole concluded the letter by swearing that he would overthrow the Europeans with soldiers from heaven, employing water and fire against guns, unless the government set his people free: “I who is the truth, the Faithful of God, I have now come to Durban, a city of sins. I was born amongst you but you cannot see me during 1951, I live on the space above. I am not seen. I rise with the sun and set with the sun—look at the sun with telescopes.” The figure of the sun embodied the cyclic inevitability
of restoration, while revealing the intrinsic limitation of the colonizer’s vision and strength: the impotence of European technology when confronting the raw power of the cosmos’s natural order.

**Neighborhood, Family, Caste**

By the early 1950s, two thirds of Natal’s Indian population lived in urban or peri-urban areas. In contrast to African migrants, Indians moved to the city not as individuals, but as families: a substantial minority succeeded in purchasing land and building a local community infrastructure of temples and mosques, community centers, movie theatres, and homes. Areas in the heart of Durban (such as Grey Street) generally contained a dense mixture of people from different religious, linguistic, and class backgrounds. But the vast majority of Indians—over 80 percent—lived in outlying regions where neighborhoods formed around ethno-linguistic communities: Telugu speakers in Puntans Hill and Stella Hill; Hindi speakers in Newlands; and Tamil speakers in Springfield and along the South Coast. Hilda Kuper and Fatima Meer have provided rich descriptions of these areas. In the average Indian suburb, the better houses—sometimes owned by quite wealthy individuals—lined the few good roads; behind them, rows of wood-and-iron shacks lacked kitchens or bathrooms and relied on communal taps. Most households were large, averaging seven people, and two or three families often rented the same piece of land. As a result, strong communities

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48 Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, xii.
51 Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*, 87.
developed around extended families or groups of neighbors informally incorporated into an enlarged kinship group.52 As Hilda Kuper wrote in the late 1950s:

A house in an Indian area is never an isolated dwelling; it is integrated; it is integrated into the street, neighbourhood and community. Kinsmen often live near each other, affairs of neighbours arouse the gossip that controls the moral standards of the whole area; temples and schools are subscribed by local donations and become local and public meeting places; shops give credit to the families in the area; the local community develops an in-group awareness expressed in a number of local associations.53

Although some evidence suggests the joint families were a minority by the mid 1950s, the ideal of the extended family (Kutum in Gujurati and Urdu; Kudumbom in Tamil) continued to inform aspects of social life ranging from business decisions to marriage negotiations.54 A tiny elite of Western-educated Indians had begun to rebel against such norms by the early 1950s; most Indians, of all classes and religions, continued to live in a world tightly circumscribed by collective family life. Gender roles were absolutely central in the organization of these communities. As Bill Freund observes, many Indian men actively participated in two worlds: a public universe of gambling, sport, horse racing, bars, and—sometimes—Coloured girlfriends and a self-consciously traditional universe of temples (or mosques), cultural associations, language schools, and family life.55 With the exception of a small number of professionals, the social activities of Indian women largely remained

52H.R. Burrows, “Indian Life and Labour in Natal,” Race Relations 10, no. 1 (1943), 18; Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans, 66-7; Kuper, Indian People in Natal, 102.
53 Kuper, Indian People in Natal, xv.
54 Surveys conducted in the early and mid 1940s found that 22 and 38 percent of households interviewed were joint families. See The Durban Housing Survey, 293. The evidence suggests a secular decline in joint families from 1927, which accelerated following the relocations imposed by the Group areas Act. See Gavin Maasdorp and Nesen Pillay, Urban Relocation and Racial Segregation: The Case of Indian South Africans (Durban: Department of Economics, University of Natal, 1977), 85. For the continuing importance of the ideal of the joint family, see Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans, 66; Kuper, Indian People in Natal, 97-102.
confined within the extended family: collectively raising children, performing rituals, preparing food, and adding their energies to family economic activities like shop keeping, market gardening, or craft production. When women participated in cultural or recreational activities outside the home (for example, attending cinema), they often did so accompanied by a male relative or a significant part of the household. Reflecting the outlook of her informants, Kuper argues that women—through “their enforced attachment to the home, their constant influence over the children, and their adherence to traditional rituals”—bound separate households together within the extended family and thereby preserved the Kudumbom as the basis for urban Indian life.

Within and between these communities, ideas of caste possessed significant, if highly uneven, force. In her comprehensive work on the history of caste in South Asia, Susan Bayly writes that “caste was and is, to a considerable extent, what people think of it, and how they act on these perceptions.” In most usages, the Portuguese-derived term “caste” stands in for one of two words: varna (the four ritual categories of Hinduism) or jati (an endogamous, occupationally-specialized group claiming common descent). Both phenomena evince

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56 This was not necessarily purdah, which entails both seclusion and the removal from labor outside the home. Rather, as Freund suggests, the notion of home itself underwent ideological expansion to accommodate labor and activities beyond the physical boundaries of the household. Freund, “Indian Women,” 421. Gender norms and expectations of women differed between Indian ethnolinguistic groups. Tamil women, for example, did not draw their saris over their faces and had a tradition of greater freedom (Kuper, Indian People in Natal, 120). In many cases, the isolation of Indian women reflected a lack of acculturation. In arguing for the foundation of schools for Indian women, one reformer noted the linguistic isolation suffered by many Indian women who did not speak English: “They were almost an alien community, yet at the same time genuine South Africans, born in this country.” See “School for Indian girls,” Indian Opinion, 25 July 1935. However, it is also important to note that purdah was practiced by certain Indian groups at least into the 1950s and, especially among Muslims in rural areas, until later. For the case of Vohra Muslims, see Molnira Banu, “Muslim Women in South Africa,” The Great Ramadan, no date [mid 1950s?] (KCM 17060) Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

57 Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans, 115.
58 Kuper, Indian People in Natal, 139.
considerable local and regional variation; the relationship between the two has also changed significantly over time. Although innumerable representations of India convey the image of an unchanging and ancient caste system, Bayly and others argue that a pan-Indian system of caste relations organized around Brahminical values and embracing the majority of the sub-continent’s population is relatively modern, particularly in south India. In describing the operations of colonial “power-knowledge,” Nicholas Dirks emphasizes the importance of the colonial bureaucracy, legal system, and education in systemizing and enforcing a unified idea and system of caste across India. Extending this general critique, Radhika Desai enumerates the largely post-colonial process through which caste hierarchies once based on agrarian relations of exploitation become integral to a national-popular culture reproduced through political parties, civil society, and modern class relations. Rather than postulate a single definition of “caste,” these analyses suggest that it is necessary to examine the reconfiguration of the intertwined concepts and practices of caste hierarchy in different political and economic circumstances. And, as Bayly emphasizes, we cannot separate this process of reconfiguration from the ways that “caste” is imposed, redefined, and deployed by different groupings in the course of struggles over political power, economic resources, and social prestige.

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61 See also G. Aloysius, Nationalism without a Nation in India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44-6.


63 Bayly, Caste, Society, and Politics in India, 7. Compare this approach with Stuart Hall’s injunction regarding race: “One must start, then, from the concrete historical ‘work’ which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions—as a set of economic, political, and ideological practices, of a distinctive kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation” [emphasis added].
Most of the literature on caste in South Africa postulates a unified system in India that then underwent a dual process of disintegration and selective retention.\(^6^4\) As Sidney Mintz and Richard Price have argued regarding Afro-Caribbean culture, this approach both homogenizes the societies of origin and misrecognizes the process of creative reinvention necessitated by radically differing material circumstances.\(^6^5\) It also overstates the general autonomy of caste from its articulation with related forms of class and gender dominance: these social relationships—and their evolutions—must be understood in relation to each other.\(^6^6\) For a number of reasons, the experiences of plantation labor and urban community life forced (or, perhaps, enabled) a significant transformation of the different caste ideas and

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\(^6^4\)See H. Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 18-43; B. Rambiritch and Pierre L. van den Berghe, "Caste in a Natal Hindu Community," *African Studies* 20 (1961), 217–225; Rajend Mesthrie, *Language in Indenture: A Sociolinguistic History of Bhojpuri-Hindi in South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1991), 8; and Rehana Ebr.-Vally, *Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001). This approach has several problems in the South African context. First, it fails to address the regional differences in caste understandings in India. Second, it assumes that all Indian migrants equally understood and accepted the Brahminical construction of caste hierarchy. For example, in many contexts within India, the identification with varna (rather than jati) was itself characteristic of a self-consciously high caste status. See Aghanand Bharati, *The Asians in East Africa: Jahind and Uhuru* (Chicago: Nelson Hall Company, 1972), 28. Third, this approach fails to historicize caste in terms of changes occurring within India both before and, especially, after the experience of migration. It rests on a version of modernization theory that assumes modern urban life simply disrupts or attenuates—rather than reconfigures and transforms—caste relations (Kuper, *Indian People in Natal*, 20). Fourth, this approach conflates the experiences and attitudes of indentured and passenger Indians. As a generalization, passenger Indians maintained a higher degree of caste orthodoxy related to their continuing ties to India. However, this assertion of distinctiveness by the cultural and economic elites may have had some influence more broadly through institutions like temples and language associations.


\(^6^6\)Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran argue: “Gender within caste society is thus defined and structured in such a manner that the ‘manhood’ of the caste is defined both by the degree of control over women and the degree of passivity of the women of the caste. Buy the same argument, demonstrating control by humiliating women of another caste is a common way of reducing the ‘manhood’ of those castes.” See “Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence,” in *Gender & Caste*, ed. Anupama Rao (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003), 254. For the articulation of caste and gender hierarchy in the control of marriage, see Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, 220.
practices brought to South Africa. Many ideas and practices were just abandoned. But this distillation and reconfiguration also facilitated their synthesis with other discourses and forms of organizing community.

Among the relatively small populations of Gujarati Hindus, Hindi-speaking Brahmins, and Telugu Naidu, families continued to adhere to caste endogamy, some prohibitions on commensality, and ritual exclusiveness until at least the 1960s. In the case of Gujarati Hindus (who came to South Africa as passengers), their class position as merchants and continued ongoing ties with their communities in India—including through marriage—facilitated a considerable degree of continuity in practice. A significant number of Telugu indentured laborers migrated from the same castes and districts of Andhra, allowing them to recreate aspects of their former community structures after they had fulfilled their contracts. The majority of South African Hindus, however, incorporated particular elements of caste into a more diffuse idea of Indian tradition. By the 1950s, restrictions on commensality and diet, basic caste terminology, and many aspects of the pollution barrier had largely disappeared except among some conservative members of the

Historians generally point to a number of factors leading to the attenuation of rigid caste orthodoxy: the impossibility of maintaining interdictions against commensality in transit; a high male to female ratio leading to the break down of caste endogamy; daily and intimate physical proximity on plantations; the inability to maintain hereditary occupational specialization both on plantations and following indenture; the conscious adoption of new caste identities in transit; and the removal of caste ideas and practices from their former social contexts. Notably, a related process seems to have taken place in South Africa and the Caribbean during the period of indentured labor: the emergence of a broader notion of caste predicated on a high-low caste distinction. For a summary of debate over caste in Trinidad, see Tejaswini Niranjana, Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 38-41.

Kuper, Indian People in Natal, 30-2.

Gujarati Muslim passengers also maintained sub-group endogamy (between Surti and Vohra) and a range of social prohibitions centered on Shari'a. The case of passenger Indians closely parallels the stricter maintenance of caste endogamy among Indians in East Africa. See Bharati, The Asians in East Africa, 23-94; H.S. Morris, The Indians in Uganda: Caste and Sect in a Plural Society (Hertfordshire: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1968), 60-2.

Kuper, Indian People in Natal, 32.
older generation. But a general awareness of caste status and its accompanying prohibitions remained wide-spread, particularly among Indian elites, and the petite bourgeoisie often attributed lower caste status to working class professions.\textsuperscript{71} The available evidence suggests that distinct communities consolidated around religious and language-based institutions: a form of linguistic endogamy heavily conditioned by class or general social status, and further modified by the differentiation between families who continued to employ some caste criteria in arranging marriages (and who generally identified themselves as high caste) and those who did not.\textsuperscript{72} The principal mechanism for reproducing these communities was the control over marriage: women assumed the material and symbolic responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the community.

**Progress, Tradition, and the “Indian Woman”**

With the crucial exception of the imprisonment of female Passive Resisters, the question of the Indian woman rarely entered into the politics of the Natal Indian Congress during the 1940s and 50s.\textsuperscript{73} Indian nationalist discussions of gender and the family—which were heavily influenced by the SAIRR, liberal social science, and developments on the

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\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{72} Both B. Rambiritch and Pierre L. van den Berghe and Kuper both describe the persistence of endogamy within \textit{varnas}. However, it appears that they simply assign \textit{varna} status to their non-elite informants. B. Rambiritch and Pierre L. van den Berghe report: “The vast majority of local Hindus have no clear idea of the meaning of the four \textit{varnas}, much less of their component castes or subcastes,” 217. Kuper likewise states that only 23 percent of Durban high school students could provide a “traditional caste name” in one survey (\textit{Indian People in Natal}, 39). The idea of \textit{varna} endogamy probably reflects the perception of self-consciously high caste Indians. Notably, Kuper adopts Gujurati terms throughout her analysis despite the fact that most Durban Indians came from Tamil-speaking families.

\textsuperscript{73} This relative absence is in contrast to the 1913 Passive Resistance Campaign, when the Searle decision illegalizing Indian marriages as inherently polygamous played in a major role in mobilizing Indian support around “defense of the honor of Indian women.” See Radhika Mongia, “Gender and the Historiography of Gandhian \textit{Satyagraha} in South Africa,” \textit{Gender & History} 18, no. 1 (2006). Strikingly, Dr. Goonam’s statement to the court during her second trial for Passive Resistance did not mention women, although her presence was itself tremendously significant. See “Resisters’ Statements to Court,” \textit{Indian Opinion}, 5 July 1946.
Indian subcontinent—generally abstracted “Indian culture” from the South African political context. This reification enacted a characteristic gesture of secular nationalism: literate, nationalist Indians and white liberals debated social practices like marriage, education of girls, and purdah within an idealized schema of progress and modernization, while ultimately locating the problem of culture in the private spheres of community, temple (or mosque), and home.74 As a result, the distinctive practices of Indian social groups were displaced from the political sphere and then subsumed under the unifying rubric of race and “Indian tradition.” In many respects, this conception of Indian unity had its origins in the alliances among different ethnolinguistic and religious factions brokered by Gandhi in the early 20th century.75 By the mid 1940s, both moderate and conservative Indian leaders generally employed a social scientific idiom of progress alongside an overarching conception of a single Indian tradition. Their statements generally approached the future of “the Indian” in terms of an irreducible dualism: either the preservation of Indian culture or assimilation to Western social norms.

74 In part, this outlook reflected the political course adopted by the Indian politicians following the 1927 Cape Town agreement between the Indian and Union governments. While promoting voluntary repatriation of South African Indians, the Union government pledged to help raise the remaining Indian population to “help conform to Western standards of life…” See Bridgal Pachai, The International Aspects of the South African Indian Question, 1860-1971 (Cape Town: C. Struik (pty) Ltd., 1971), 119. In subsequent years, Indian politicians frequently invoked this promise in appealing for expanded rights for the Indian population. As a result, they often strenuously objected to accusations made by white politicians and news papers that Indians had failed to assimilate (the alleged practice of polygamy, for example, often appeared in European anti-Indian propaganda). For example, in 1951 the conservative Natal Indian Organization wrote in a petition: “In matrimony there is no question of any differentiation between a passenger Indian and an Indian immigrant. Both intermarry very freely. There is no such thing as a caste system present in South Africa.” The petition further objected that the very mention of polygamy in the legislation was repugnant to South African Indians. See “Memorandum on Indian Marriages” submitted by the Natal Indian Organization to the Protector of Indian Immigrants, Stanger Street, Durban, 17 January 1951, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, relatively little had changed in the situation of most Indian women. The first girls’ high school only opened in 1936; fewer than 7,000 Indian women held formal employment in 1951 (7.3 percent of the Indian workforce); in 1956, girls constituted 15.6 percent of Standard 9 and 10 pupils. Although some degree of education had become a marriage criterion among the elite, the small number of women doctors, lawyers, and teachers continued to face significant disapprobation from the broader community. Nevertheless, many observers focused on these limited developments and suggested that they reflected a process of Westernization. The education of girls and the adoption of Western dress by younger Indian women drew special attention. Writing in the *Race Relations* journal, S. Coopan and B.A. Naidoo argued:

“In urban areas the Indian is subject to the dual influence of urban conditions of living and of a Western pattern of culture. This may be observed in the changing dress habits of working and adolescent girls. Western frocks have found favour amongst them, and response to variations in fashion has become sensitive.”

Significantly, these celebrations of Indian progress directly assimilated the social dynamics of Natal to similar processes ostensibly underway in India itself. In a 1955 dissertation on the education of Indian women in Natal, Birbal Rambiritch treated social change in both locations as a single phenomenon:

The women in India are then being uplifted gradually. Humane thoughts are filling the minds of the politicians and statesmen, magistrates and lawyers. Progress is found everywhere, in schools, colleges and universities… In Natal, too, the emancipation of Indian women is gradually gaining ground. The chief factors that are contributing to this development are the raising of the economical and educational status of the family.

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76 Freund, “Indian Women,” 422-3.
77 Hey, *The Indian Elite*, 22-3.
This construct of the Indian woman—which appeared in newspaper articles, scholarly journals, and speeches to the Rotary Club and the SAIRR—performed three functions. First, it unified the various segments of the diaspora into a single historical agent by abstracting an idea of “Indian culture” from different individuating practices: the decisive question became the collective dynamic of cultural reform. The very notion of a generic Indian woman negated the continuing salience of religious, ethno-linguistic, and caste differences as well as the persistence of endogamy within all three categories.\(^8\) Second, it generalized a linear trajectory based on the experiences of a small section of the Hindu petite bourgeoisie. Indian women from working class families primarily lived within contexts shaped by family; however, their activities could include assisting in stores, hawking produce, working in market gardens, and shopping, i.e. labor outside of the space of the home. Although a widely-shared ideal of the Indian wife stressed delicacy and seclusion, only the elite actually practiced *purdah*: most women’s experiences defied both poles of the expected transition from a normative “traditional” to a singular “modern.”\(^8\) Third, this construct removed the issue of cultural identity from the context of South Africa. At one level, this gesture undercut a form of racial essentialism (the equation of India with a set of cultural traits) by emphasizing a shared project of modernization throughout the colonial and postcolonial

\(^8\)Studies appearing in the 1960s began to disaggregate issues like marriage, female education, and employment outside the home on the basis of language and religious group, showing that significant distinctions persisted. See Hilda Kuper, *Indian People of Natal*; G.G. Maasdorp, *A Natal Indian Community: A Socio-economic Study in the Tongaat-Verlun Area* (University of Natal Department of Economics, 1968).

\(^8\)Freund, “Indian Women,” 418. Freund argues that the Natal Indian family (particularly before the 1950s) effectively utilized the labor of Indian women and children (as market gardeners, petty traders and in craft production) as part of its overall accumulation strategy. Rather than a product of religious or cultural injunction, the extended family and its control over women’s labor had a powerful economic logic poorly captured by the standard idea of “domestic labor.”
world. It also ensured that a “Western” modernity was the sole axis of comparison. Notably, African women appeared in these discussions rarely, if ever.

By the 1940s, deep misgivings about the impact of “Westernization” began to appear. Drawing on the anthropological model of “cultural contact” and the ideas of colonial ethno-psychiatry, the first Indian social scientists warned that the new generation of urbanized youth faced a crisis of identity: “the younger generation, educated in English only, and absorbing the superficial characteristics of western civilization, in the absence of more intimate contacts with European culture…are in danger of being deprived of moral and spiritual purpose in life.”82 Religious and social organizations voiced these fears more forthrightly. In 1944, an Indian Youth Cultural Conference organized by the journalist P.S. Joshi declared: “This conference calls upon Indians of Greater India in general and of South Africa in particular to respect, to follow, and to maintain Indian culture in place of the indiscriminate imitation of the Western one.”83 Emphasizing the essential unity of India and its several diasporas, both the conference greetings and subsequent motions strongly endorsed national unity across caste, provincial, and “communal” (i.e., religious) lines, and repeatedly referred to Indian culture in an all embracing singular. The motions called on Indian educational institutions to impart “Indian culture, community, and mother tongue,” and urged “the Indian people to use their mother tongue at all times and on all occasions—

83 This conference received greetings from Hindu organizations throughout South Africa and India, as well as the Yosuf Dadoo for TIC, South African government, and African Youth League.
except where it is inevitably necessary—in order to maintain the dignity of Indian nationhood.”

What did the globalizing term “Indian culture” signify in these two conflicting rhetorics? In an influential critique of Indian secular nationalism, a number of South Asian and leftist scholars have argued that “the period when an anti-colonial national identity was being forged was also the period when the Indian national polity was being communalized, and the congress-led National Movement cannot escape most of the responsibility for this.”

According to this argument, Gandhi and the Indian National Congress relied heavily on religious leaders and cultural organizations for mass mobilization, conciliated caste and religious divisions, and—in the final analysis—constructed a “national” movement on the basis of vertically organized and mutually exclusive communitarian blocs. Despite its secular and universalizing ideology, the Indian National Congress further politicized religious identity and created the structural conditions for the identification of the nation and Indian culture with the Hindu majority. In South Africa, a similar construction of the Indian nation—also underpinned by a bloc between several religious and ethnic communities—largely served a different function. Although the idea of Indian culture lacked unifying content, it reinforced a distinctive Indian identity by constructing a common origin in an (ultimately imaginary) historical past. National progress and the maintenance of cultural integrity demanded a politics grounded in racial difference. The Indian Youth Cultural

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84 “Resolutions Passed by the South African Indian Youth Culture Conference Held at Gandhi Hall, Johannesburg on the 9TH April, 1944,” Ballinger Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
Conference discussed above sharply denounced the “mixed marriages taking place in this country, and in order to protect the purity of the Indian race, entreats our countrymen to take pride in their own culture and marry within our religious communities.” The education of girls, communal harmony, and cultural education would serve these ends. As Sir Maharaj Singh, former Agent General for India in South Africa, stated in his greetings to this same gathering: “The Indian race in South Africa should be kept pure and unsullied. For this purpose an ardent love for India, her wisdom, her language and her ideals must be maintained.”

The Problem of Miscegenation

African-Indian miscegenation could never be just another question. For many Africans, miscegenation represented the usurpation of sexual access to African women by a race whose relative achievements not only illuminated the continuing misery of Africans, but supposedly came at their immediate expense. The idea of Indian men seducing African women exemplified the nation’s powerlessness, humiliation, and collective loss of patriarchal right. Sometimes Zulu intellectuals also alleged that a certain kind of African women—modern, professional, and outside proper channels of familial control—sought out these attentions, in the process compromising their own people. In the majority of circumstances, Indian nationalists (and most white liberals) denied that miscegenation between Africans and Indians occurred on any significant scale.87 Such an act would have vitiated the core

87 Notably, the South African Institute of Race Relations openly opposed miscegenation: “The South Africa Institute of Race Relations, in common with the overwhelming majority of all people in South Africa, is against miscegenation.” See “Mixed Marriages,” *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, 4 June 1949. A few Indian witnesses before the Riots Commission conceded that a small amount miscegenation took place, but insisted that some amount of interracial sex occurred between all racial groups. See *Commission of Enquiry into Riots*, 14.
institutions of Indian diasporic identity. Obviously, not all Africans or Indian held such views. But they were extremely wide-spread.

Statements by Indians and Africans from the 1940s sharply diverge regarding the occurrence of miscegenation. With very few exceptions, Indian political leaders and social scientists stridently denied that sexual relationships between Indians and other racial groups occurred with any frequency. In a pamphlet assembled for the SAIRR, M. Sirkari Naidoo (a researcher at the University of Natal) wrote: “Pride of race and culture has, in large measure, preserved the purity of the [Indian] race and prevented miscegnantion with the other two races.” The leader of the Natal Indian Congress, Dr. Monty Naicker, employed almost identical language in order to deny that legal equality would lead to marriages between Indian men and European women: “Those who have lived amongst Indians will bear testimony to the fact it [miscegenation] is a false alarm; in fact, their civilization has instinctively instilled into them the ideals to preserve intact the purity of their race.” Naicker then proceeded to cite statistics demonstrating that marriages between whites and other non-Europeans vastly outnumbered those between Indians and Europeans. The submission of the conservative Natal Indian Organisation to Durban Riots Commission played the same chords:

The Indian people deny most emphatically that promiscuity between Indian males and African females is common. There might be a few cases here and there and this is understandable in a multi-racial country. If this occurrence were as common as it is

88 Naidoo, “As an Indian sees Natal,” 29. This judgment also represented the conventional wisdom of white liberalism: “Marriage taboos are still strong enough to prevent miscegenation on a wide scale. The sanction of the Mixed Marriages Act is not a strong as the traditional taboos.” See Dr. S. Coopan and A.D. Lazarus, “The Indian as an Integral Part of South African society,” in The Indian as a South African (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1956), 67. For an early pronunciation of these ideas, see Mabel Palmer, The History of the Indians in Natal (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 27).
made out to be, the attention of the Indian people would have been drawn to it long ago. This is an allegation we submit has no substance. Indians have been in South Africa for nearly 90 years, and it is to their credit that they have not created a community of Indian-African origin by promiscuous relations. On the contrary, extremely conscious of their race pride, they have maintained the purity of their race.90

Significantly, the repeated invocation of race pride and Indian cultural values was not, at least in the first instance, meant to demarcate Indians from Africans. Rather, the disavowal of miscegenation served to indict the sexual mores of the white population and the supposed superior culture of South Africa’s “Western Civilization”—a particularly charged term given its pivotal role in Jan Smuts’ defense of South Africa’s Indian policy at the United Nations in 1946. Few South African readers would have missed the implication that the very presence of a Coloured population betrayed white society’s true level of civilization, or that the values of “Indian culture” had prevented sexual unions across racial lines without resorting to the statutes brandished by the South African state.

The declarations of African men convey an entirely different reality. The accusation that Indian men seduced, mixed-with, or dated African women was ubiquitous during the 1940s and early 1950s. It appeared in African newspapers, religious sermons, testimony in front of government commissions, short stories, and right-wing African propaganda produced with the support of the apartheid state. This claim often took a particular form: the denunciation of unequal control over women and unequal access to social space more broadly. A letter to Ilanga from the mid-1950s typified this duality: “What’s funny is that you will never find Indian girls at the Y.M.C.A. They only come when the function is strictly theirs. I hate this business of Indians mixing with us in our concerts. Now they take

90“Statement submitted by the Natal Indian Organisation to the Chairman and Members of the Judicial Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Durban Riots, 1949,” Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
advantage and go so far as to date African girls.” Following the 1949 pogrom, a full-page editorial of *Ilanga Lase Natal* explicated this lack of reciprocity at greater length:

The moral attitude of some Indian men towards African women is shocking to say the least. (It would be unfair and inflammatory to refer to Katherine Mayo’s “Mother Indian” although one cannot help recalling its contents.) They associate with African women openly! This incenses the most humble and even some of the most advanced “I-know-it-is-the-system-and-not-the-Indian-as-such” Africans. 

Even in their most vulgar and explicitly racist form, accusations of miscegenation almost never alleged rape. Rather, these rumors depicted Indian men taking advantage of superior wealth and status and—implicitly—the vulnerability of recently “de-tribalized” African women. Their focus was often on particular urban spaces. In addition to the dances mentioned above, stories of miscegenation often took place in or around cinemas, hospitals, urban streets, stores, and (especially) buses. Interrupting a diatribe against the behavior of Coloureds at Indian-owned cinemas, “Rolling Stone” sardonically alleged: “we even have Indians who really want to be near African women—as near as makes no difference—if you get our meaning.” One African witness at the Riots Commission opined that Indians sought bus licenses as “just another avenue which they explored to get a hold of our womenfolk.”

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92 “How Long, O Lord!” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 22 January 1949. Emphasis in the original. This reference to Katherine Mayo’s notorious *Mother India* is particularly telling. A classic work of imperialist feminism written in 1927, *Mother India* imprecated the putative hyper-sexuality of Indian men and invoked the status of women within an eternal and unchanging Hindu tradition in order to argue against self-rule. While he denounced the sexual attitudes of Indian men, Dhlomo elsewhere recognized that Africans themselves practice a form of “Zulu purdah” and that the apartheid state not only invoked African backwardness to justify white supremacy, but also utilized a reified and repressive form of African tradition that legally infantilizes African women. Hence, his—rather hypocritical—statement that it would be inflammatory to refer to *Mother India*. See Mrinalini Sinha, “Introduction,” in Katherine Mayo, *Selections from Mother India*, ed. Mrinalini Sinha (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).
93 An African witness before the commission of enquiry reported that “his sister-in-law as robbed and ravished by an Indian bus-driver and his friends.” See *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Riots in Durban*, 13.
95 Quoted in Kirk, “The 1949 Durban Riots,” 83.
Rumors circulated that certain Indians traded goods for “services” behind the closed doors of their shops, and people gossiped about relationships between African nurses and Indian doctors. Not only did each of these sites create the possibility for a promiscuous mingling of the races and sexes, they also represented the institutionalization of Indian social privilege based on both economic and legal advantage. Even the Durban streets—the quintessential locus of movement, intermixing, and social collectivity—necessitated that African men, unlike both Indian men and African women in this period, carried passes.

In some cases, this representation of Indian male sexuality embodied a profound ambivalence regarding the impact of urban modernity on Zulu culture. In psychoanalytic terms, the Indian became a “mirror” on to which African intellectuals could project internal conflicts within Zulu society, thus locating the social disruptions produced by urbanization outside the process of modernization and nation building. In 1948, Ilanga carried an article entitled “Stopping the Bus,” a paean to the modernizing powers of new public spaces. In almost breathless ecstasy, H.I.E. Dhlomo hailed the fact that buses mixed all classes of people, upsetting the regimental etiquette of both missionary schools and rural Zulu society. Buses, Dhlomo eulogized, provided a theater where Africans could develop a new psychology: the collective outlook of an urban, democratic society. However, Dhlomo also warned about certain dangers associated with the dramatic transformations the bus introduced:

In parts of this country buses are ethical questions. An Indian bus is introduced into a self-contained, quiet rural or mission with high standards of morality. In no time, pop goes the self-sufficiency, quietness and morality and ethical codes of the place. An

96 Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie, 221 and 306.
97 A parallel set of concerns emerged around railway trains in late 19th century Bengal, particularly regarding the erosion of social boundaries between women and strange men and different castes. See Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism (New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001), 81.
enterprising African ousts out the Indian, and morality like the coy and slow-moving maiden she is, returns slowly and diffidently through the back doors—but the village returns not to quietness and self-sufficiency. The habits and outlook of the people are changed forever.98

Dhlomo proceeded to celebrate the life of the bus, the dramas of the waiting stop, the raucous conversations between men and women who could sit together and talk freely. The expulsion of the Indian resolved the peril threatened by the disruption of rural self-sufficiency—a peril clearly tied to the Indian’s economic role and symbolized by the (implied) violation of maidenhood. Later in the same essay, Dhlomo praised the sexual conquests of African men, drawing a subtle parallel between the Zulu’s awakening to modern forms of consciousness (such as democracy, theater, and nationhood) and the loss of virginal innocence. “A wolfish man sits next to a beautiful but obviously uninitiated woman—a newcomer in town,” he narrated, “In no time, in no whispers, he is making love to her….Give me drunkards, bootleggers, pads, murderers and other bad characters! Of such is the kingdom of literature!” Comparing the “dashing” traveler to Don Juan and Romeo, Dhlomo endowed his brazen act of backseat seduction with mythic significance—a foundational act in the literature of modern African nationhood. But when the Indian appears again, he posed a sexual threat. An African woman exclaims: “Hang this Indian who pesters me about where I am going and tries to be familiar.”

How often did African-Indian liaisons take place? The pervasiveness of African accusations certainly suggests that interracial sex had a much greater impact on Durban’s race politics than indicated by the virtual silence surrounding the question.99 Nevertheless,

98X. [H.I.E. Dhlomo], “Stopping the Bus,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 10 January 1948.
99 The Riots Commission’s conclusions on this score were reasonable: “Complaints were continually being made to Native Commissionaires, and resolutions by Native bodies recording this grievance were passed long before the riots….We are satisfied that the allegation is in substance true, but that
evidence concerning the actual frequency is necessarily anecdotal. In small town Natal, African/Indian marriages did take place. Sometimes African women converted in order to be married under Indian religious law. These unions took place often enough that one could be reported in *Indian Opinion* in 1935 without any additional comment. A survey of 63 Indian households in the peri-urban settlement of Edendale reported one mixed couple in 1947-8, a Hindu man married to a Christian African woman. Marriages between Indian men and Coloured women were significantly more common, a fact *Ilanga* once cited to demonstrate that Indians had chosen to assimilate into Western culture and the framework of white supremacy: “Some [Indians] use the official languages as their home language, others intermarry with Coloureds. Thus it is difficult to know where they owe their allegiance and where they stand politically.” Sex poses an even more intractable question. Muslim Indian men growing up in Durban during the 1950s and 60s often had their first sexual experiences with African or Coloured domestic servants (“Zim” as it was called), either in weekend trips to small town Natal or sometimes in servant quarters and bucket toilets. Rape and sexual abuse of African working in Indian homes must have occurred. But with the exception of an unpublished autobiography of Jordan Ngubane, I have not yet found any

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Native witnesses have exaggerated the incidence of the evil,” *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Riots in Durban*, 14.

100See “Registration of Indian Marriages,” *Indian Opinion*, 30 August 1935.

101University of Natal, *Experiment at Edendale*, 36.

102“United Front or Separate Ways?” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 26 March 1949

103Articles on Durban and urban prostitution published in *Drum* during the 1950s described a sex trade organized largely on racial lines. Indian and Coloured prostitution—in large part, aimed at visiting sea men—was organized into “houses” by pimps. Zulu “bad women,” however, worked mainly out of Cato Manor, catering to African stevedores and industrial workers. It does not appear that prostitution represented a significant source of tension. See “Durban Exposed,” *Drum*, July 1952.

104Interview with Omar Badsha, Pretoria, 25 April 2006; personal communication, Rehana Ebr.-Vally.
sources that openly discuss this question. The averment of miscegenation did not generally take the form of naming specific instances, but circulated as rumor. These accusations were anonymous, embedded in the experiences of everyday life, and centered on powerful symbols resonant within the codes of several competing discourses (the changing moral economy of the countryside, petit bourgeois African nationalism, Africanist Christianity). Perhaps most importantly, this rumor condensed an intricate web of social conflicts, economic relations, and political actors into a single, tangible object. It created a materiality around which action could be organized.

This allegation against Indian men remained pervasive during the years following the pogrom. In the early 1950s, the “Indian peril” was a staple in the propaganda of the Bantu League, a pro-apartheid political organization, which temporarily gained a significant hearing...

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105 Ngubane recounts the following (undoubtedly fictionalized) monologue from a woman rioter: “I came into town,” she returned to me, “because my uncle had been ejected from a Boer farm. I had no father and no mother; they had both died when I was young. I did not have a penny in my pocket. I roamed the streets of this city, hungry, cold, lonely and with no place I could hide my head. One of these Indians said he would give me a job; I could look after his children. He gave me food and showed me a small room at the back of his house. He walked into my room in the darkness of one night….” Jordan Ngubane, Unpublished Autobiography, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.


107 Some Durban Africans were enormously conscious of the power of this rumor and utilized it for political ends. In March 1949, *Ilanga* printed a muck-raking article regarding a Sastri College dance, which both Indian and African students attended. After referring to the “oft repeated” charge that Indian men seduced African women, the author breathlessly narrated: “When, therefore, the news got round that educated Africans (and the women) would fraternize with Indians in garden parties and dances, there was a flare up in some places.” The unknown correspondent cynically informed his audience that cool heads prevailed in this particular circumstance, and no trouble broke out. But the implied warning was clear enough. Social fraternization with Indians might well be seen as “the educated African …defying and blackmailing the race by getting African women to mingle with Indians in dances and social parties.” See “University Celebrations and the Riots,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 26 March 1949.
in Durban.\textsuperscript{108} In a social distance survey conducted a few years later in the Durban location of Baummannville, the vast majority of residents disapproved of interracial contact with Indians, although only eight percent openly complained about miscegenation. Significantly, while most people surveyed rejected interracial marriage, an inverse relationship emerged between education/socio-economic status and willingness to associate with other races: “Better educated respondents appear to be more intolerant than less educated; for instance, about one fifth of those educated to standard II or less favor intermarriage, while only one tenth of those who have passed a higher standard do so.”\textsuperscript{109} In a 1952 speech reprinted in \textit{Ilanga}, high school principle Rev. George Molefe declared that Africans unanimously condemned intermarriage. Paraphrasing Booker T. Washington, he urged: “In matters social we can be divided like the fingers of the hand.”\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ilanga} continued to print letters and articles that bitterly complained about the “growing practice” of seduction and the hypocrisy of Indian men throughout the 1950s.\textsuperscript{111} Many of these articles berated the wholesale adoption of Western fashion by African women, expressing horror at the \textit{Drum}-inspired culture of beauty pageants, cosmetics and “vices” that had spread among urban Africans in the 1950s. Conflating social independence with prostitution, one contributor alleged that uncritically adopting the gender norms of “more civilized” races led directly to interracial sex:

They paint their lips, straiten their hair, and to complete the outfit most favorable for attracting races who are more civilized than we are, walk about the streets in the evening puffing cigarettes. At this stage they can then be able to respond to invitations to cocktail parties specifically arranged for them in the backyards of a Mr. Smith or most commonly a Naidoo.\textsuperscript{112}

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Not surprisingly, we soon find out that some of these women are nurses. Mocking the camouflage of lasciviousness under a sophisticate’s veneer (“cocktail parties specifically arranged for them”), the author established the familiar connection between women, moral turpitude (note the cigarettes), and new forms of social mobility and interaction created by urban life. While his animosity is directed at those who slavishly mimic European aesthetics of beauty, the sexuality of the Indian male remains the foremost emblem of this debauched modernity. Such views seem to have remained strong among the African middle class despite sustained cooperation between the ANC and the Natal Indian Congress at a political level. In the early 1960s, half of the teachers whom anthropologist Leo Kuper interviewed rejected miscegenation, the majority citing the need to maintain of racial purity.113

**Indian Domestic Space**

African men, particularly educated intellectuals, also voiced bitterness regarding their exclusion from Indian social, cultural, and domestic spaces: “In their residential quarters, social and public institutions they do not want the African, but they gate crush African institutions and locations.”114 A regular target of these complaints was the sequestering of Indian women from social interactions with Africans. In a 1953 article, Dhlomo argued that no sane person could deny that sex relations represented one of the most explosive issues in Durban’s complicated fabric of racial politics. He did not, however, proceed to discuss miscegenation. Instead, he focused on how Indian cultural norms shaped quotidian interactions between racial groups, particularly within social spaces associated with the outlook of progressive modernization and nationalist politics:

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Indian custom and tradition keep a jealous and ‘regimental’ eye on THEIR women folk. There is purdah and the keeping away of Indian women from public contacts. Even ‘liberal’ advanced, modern-minded Congress and Unity Movement Indians are not untainted. In the Defiance Campaign and University and other functions where Indians mingle with their African and Coloured equals and have no excuse for it, it is often seen that their women are left behind while they frequently with startling forwardness approach other women. 115

This emphasis on the hypocrisy of sexual attitudes—Indians guarding “THEIR” women from contact with Africans while flagrantly ignoring the patriarchal sensibilities of African men—was meant to illustrate an engrained sense of racial separateness and social superiority. But the actual protagonist of this passage is a personified and stereotyped “Indian custom and tradition” whose vigilant watch enforces a form of gender apartheid. Even supposedly liberal Indians, who in other respects interact with African and Coloured on equal terms, ostensibly could not erase this one polluting intersection of pre-modern custom and contemporary socio-economic privilege. As Shalini Puri notes in another context, this type of rhetoric in fact deploys the same ideal of the Indian woman as Indian cultural nationalism: the secluded, sexually modest bearer of Indian tradition. 116 In the course of daily social interactions, Dhlomo and others interpreted the general isolation of Indian women in terms of a particular cultural practice characteristic of the economic elite. “Purdah” became an essential marker of cultural distinctiveness and Indian racial exclusiveness. 117

In The Nation and its Fragments, Partha Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalism assumed a dual structure in its confrontation with the colonial state. In order to struggle for power, the Indian nationalist movement of Bengal (which Chatterjee generalizes into a model not only for India, but Africa as well) emulated the economic, technological,

and scientific practices of the colonizer, the attributes of Western material superiority that enabled conquest—including the language and very idea of the nation state. Concurrently, nationalist ideology invested the home and family with a special function: to preserve the inner ‘spiritual’ values of the nation, the cultural traditions that defined the separate identity of the colonized. As symbolic wife and mother to the nation, the Indian woman came to exemplify a reformed and rationalized tradition, and female conduct (in dress, eating habits, social demeanor, and religion) represented the honor and virtues of the nation itself.

Chatterjee writes:

The subjugated must learn the modern sciences and arts of the material world from the West in order to match the strengths and ultimately overthrow the colonizer. But in the entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve, and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence. No encroachments by the colonizer must be allowed in the inner sanctum. In the world, imitation and adaptation to Western norms was a necessity; at home they were tantamount to annihilation of one’s identity.118

But the project of nation building also necessitated the development of new public and private spaces within colonial society—a process so violently contested precisely because it often created (or reproduced) forms of hierarchy and exclusion among the subjugated.

Chatterjee’s consistent rendering of “nationalism” in the singular and his exclusive focus on anti-colonial discourse obscures this problem. In the eyes of many Africans, institutions of diasporic endogamy—marriage, religion, domestic space, dress, even music and food—became signifiers of social hierarchy and racial exclusion. In mid-century Durban, the separation between public life and the “traditional” private sphere did not occur solely, or even primarily, in terms of the state. Whatever the explicit content of nationalist discourse,

the domestic realm was in the first instance demarcated through the exclusion of the also-colonized other.

Ironically, the post-war period saw the increased employment of African women in Indian homes. According to Kogila Moodley, the shift from male to female domestics reflected a prevalent fear of African violence: Indians believed that women would be more “controllable” than men in the aftermath of the 1949 pogrom. In some cases, African domestic workers stayed with the same family for decades and learned the Indian language of their employers. But the majority faced harsh conditions: lower wages than in white households, constant and physically demanding work, and sometimes abuse. The presence of Africans within Indian domestic space posed the problem of their symbolic exclusion (from the home itself despite their continual presence) and subordinate incorporation (in the form of labor). The mechanism for this dual process was frequently a series of prohibitions concerning food. Z.A. Ngcobo worked for an Indian family in Durban before the 1949 pogrom. In a 1980 interview, he described the bitter irony of intimate physical proximity without meaningful personal or social exchange. The issues of domestic space and dietary prohibitions dominated Ngcobo’s recollections. While Africans necessarily bought from Indian storekeepers, they in turn faced exclusion from Indian residences: “They would tell you to stand over there, at a distance. Others would say ‘You are a beast eater! How can you come in here?’” When regularly employed working for an Indian family, he and his co-workers either slept each night in the vehicle outside his boss’s house or in the basement. Ngcobo recalled meals with particular acrimony:

[121] Interview with Mohammed Quata, 17 April 2006, Johannesburg; Interview with Ismail Nagdee, 14 August 2008, Johannesburg.
Furthermore the eating utensil you are given to eat from when working for them is issued separately. It is kept over yonder below the house where it is taken when your food is dished up. It goes to emphasize the discrimination, the colour bar. You are served your food like a dog.\textsuperscript{122}

The same elements recur in the testimony of both Indians and Africans. In many Indian homes, Africans were served with separate utensils. They were not allowed to eat at the family table or from the same plates as their employers (even when they, in fact, washed these very dishes). They did not use the same toilet.\textsuperscript{123} The reasons offered for this treatment related to hygiene and diet: Africans were “dirty.” They did not adhere to the Hindu prohibition against eating beef or follow halal in the case of Muslim households. These practices and rationalizations strongly resembled caste restrictions or—for example—the form of “untouchability” practiced by Hindus toward Muslims throughout large areas of South Asia.\textsuperscript{124} But such prohibitions obviously did not entail a simple transposition of caste. Rather, the social grammar of caste hierarchy was reconfigured in order to institutionalize racial difference in the intimacy of the home. The organizing category of these new relationships was not purity or auspiciousness (religious values justifying caste restrictions), but the concept of Indian tradition integral to diasporic identity.

After the implementation of the Group Areas Act, Africans who worked in Indian areas did so illegally and were subject to frequent police raids. In these neighborhoods, stories of break-ins by Africans—and particularly former employees—were part of an everyday racial discourse concerning “African violence.”\textsuperscript{125} In interviews conducted in a

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\item\textsuperscript{122} Interview with Z.A. Ngcobo by Rev. Simeon Zulu, 13 September 1980, Killie Campbell Oral History Project (KCAV 361), Killie Campbell Africa Library, Durban.
\item\textsuperscript{123} Interview with Phyllis Naidoo, Durban, 24 May 2006.
\item\textsuperscript{124} For an example from West Bengal, see Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of Indian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 31.
\item\textsuperscript{125} See Moodley, “The Ambiguities of Survival Politics,” 450. To this day, many African men and women express enormous anger over the treatment of African domestic servants by Indian families,
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Durban slum during the mid 1960s, Fatima Meer found that although they had almost no contact with Africans, Indian women nonetheless had developed strong impressions: “The house wife remembers the Riots. She remembers too one evening when she was accosted by two African men at the bus stop. The girl who works at the factory offers an opinion. ‘Crooked hair and crooked brain.’”

Unfortunately, I have located only a small number of sources that express views held by African women working in Indian homes. In 1965, the Natal Native Affairs Commissioner issued an order banning the husbands and boyfriends of domestic workers from cohabitating in backyard servant quarters. In several Zulu language letters, domestic workers vehemently protested this edict. These letters complained that the intervention of the state into conjugal arrangements involved an illegitimate usurpation of patriarchal responsibility. At the same time, they made clear that the banning of husbands would increase the sexual access of employers to domestic servants. One letter threatened to ensnare white and Indian men with sorcery in order to undermine apartheid racial divisions:

> We received your notices, separating us from our husbands which is going to cause us to sleep with our bosses. When you wrote this notice did you realize what the outcome shall be? Since we are so many, do you think that we can all sleep with you and be satisfied? Europeans stay with their wives night and day. Do not force European customs on us.

> What are you aiming at? Is it not through this reason that we have Coloured children by Indian and European fathers? We are now going to sleep with them as they are also fond of sleeping with us. We are going to attract them by using love charms then you shall realize that by separating us from our husbands and wives you are causing interracial mating.

particularly the treatment of their older relatives under apartheid. I have also heard some Indians who grew up during the 1970s articulate the view that crimes by Africans against Indians were a form of retribution over the mistreatment of African domestic servants.

126 Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans, 116. A third woman who had been recently treated in a hospital by African doctors and nurses dissents: “But they very kind, they, too good.”
That is a stiff question we have asked you, so come out with it. We are challenging you for sexual intercourse with all of us.\footnote{127}

Another letter (written by a man) questioned why the Native Commissioner should concern himself with someone else’s visitors and likewise warned that the unwarranted intrusion into African relationships threatened the sexual boundary between races: “Allow us to sleep with your female folks and our female folks to sleep with European males.”\footnote{128} These letters captured an extremely fraught sexual dynamic. The authors clearly believed that Indian and European men regularly sought sex with African women.\footnote{129} The rhetorical question about the reason that “we” have Coloured children conveyed the sentiment that this dilemma was both frequent and collectively shared. The presence of their husbands or boyfriends would have shielded women from such molestations. But these letters also articulated a powerful sense of domestic and sexual right: the explicit rejection of European customs; the demand that the Native Commissioner personally fulfill the sexual role of all the displaced husbands; and the threat of undermining the racial boundaries of apartheid by actively reciprocating the existing attentions of European and Indian men.

These letters directly addressed a sexual and domestic hypocrisy that characterized many white and Indian families. Although the master-domestic servant relationship replicated the social hierarchy based on race, the presence of African women in Indian and white homes—and particularly their integration into the daily work of social reproduction—undercut the ideal of segregation espoused by government ideologues. Often separated from

\footnote{127}{Letter to S. Borquin, 28 April 1965, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35/29), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.}
\footnote{128}{Letter to S. Borquin, no date, S. Sti. Bourquin Papers (KCM 99/42/35a/32), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.}
their own children, African domestic workers lived with the incongruity of performing the essential labor necessary to raise someone else’s family. The sexual attentions of Indian and white men would have only intensified this contradiction. The above invocation of witchcraft was hardly an ideal threat. In response to a violation of her perceived domestic rights, the author promised to exploit this structural irony in order to attack the biological separation of races themselves.

**Conclusion**

Why focus on the questions of miscegenation and Indian domestic space at such length? What place do the intimacies, conflicts, and misrecognitions described in this chapter have in the history of African and Indian nationalist politics in Natal? In discussing these issues, I have sought to emphasize two aspects of Durban’s racial dynamics that significantly complicate political narratives organized around the themes of either non-European unity or separate racial protagonists.

First, an analysis of gender helps to illuminate a paradox that appears in many sources from this period: the coexistence of day-to-day interactions between individuals of different races and the marked social distance of Indians and Africans as groups. Despite constant physical proximity and quotidian encounters in a variety of sites, the gendered organization of Indian communities resulted in the exclusion of most Africans from Indian social spaces, particularly homes. The social isolation of Indian women further contributed to African perceptions of “arrogance” and “hypocrisy,” terms implying the deliberate assertion of distinctiveness by Indians as a whole. When Africans did work in Indian households, they experienced a variety of discriminatory and abusive treatments. At the same time, intimate relationships between Indian men and African women—whatever their circumstances and
motivations—came to symbolize the “dual standard” of Indians and the collective humiliation of African men. Undoubtedly, some Africans and Indians rejected these attitudes. But the prevalence of these views significantly shaped the reactions of many Africans to even those situations where Indian men interacted with Africans of both genders on a relatively equal basis: bus rides, political rallies, concerts and dances. In such circumstances, African men often interpreted the presumption of equality in terms of a (perceived) hierarchy expressed through the absence of Indian women. Indian men, in their eyes, claimed an unreciprocated prerogative in their very presence within gender-mixed spaces.

Second, this chapter has emphasized origins and forms of racial consciousness that did not simply reflect class relationships or the state’s segregationist policies. In many accusations of miscegenation, African men associated Indian economic privilege with an irrepressible salaciousness. But this image also derived its power from several other sources: a crisis in the African family, the urban transformations of gender roles, exclusion from Indian households and institutions, and the nationalist discourses of cultural reform and race advancement. In other words, this trope enunciated a direct, “common sense” relationship between multiple dimensions of urban life that were otherwise structurally independent. Among Indian politicians and intellectuals, the denial of miscegenation reflected a politics of cultural nationalism ultimately grounded in the assertion of racial difference. Whether they advocated or rejected a process of “Westernization,” Indian leaders generally conflated a degree of racial self-consciousness with cultural survival. Beyond the level of elite discourse, groups of Indian families constructed and reproduced ethnolinguistic communities through a combination on endogamy, religious institutions, and reconfigured elements of caste. In the
context of the informal hierarchy that developed in Durban’s shanty towns and mixed neighborhoods, the structure of these communities—particularly, the gendered nature of the Indian household—became one of the most powerful forms of demarcating race.
Chapter 5: 
Remaking African Politics in the 1950s: 
The “Indian Question” and the Origins of Non-Racial Nationalism

At one moment this doctor is the implacable Marxist and the next he is a passive resister—a mystic—the fervent Gandhi disciple he has always been....One might even say Yusuf Dadoo has a Marxist head, a Hindu heart, Mohammedan nails, and an African blood system. No more a nationalist, he believes in the unity of all democrats and even has White friends.... And for your dessert, Dr. Dadoo is an excellent cook who puts everything in one pot.¹

--Ezekiel Mphahlele, Drum, October 1956.

For myself, I would say the day of unity has arrived when Coloureds and Indians have enough faith in the Africans and their capacity for leadership as to join, as individuals, the African National Congress and make that the one organisation for non-Europeans. It would then be both national and African. Or are there non-Europeans who object to being called Africans?²

--Peter Abrahams, Drum, July 1952.

We aim, politically, at government of the Africans by the Africans, with everybody who owes his only loyalty to Africa, who is prepared to accept the democratic rule of the African majority, being regarded as an African. We guarantee no minority rights, because we think of individuals and not groups.³

--Policy and Program of the P.A.C. of Azania, Dar Es Salaam, December 1972.

In an important corrective to recent discussions of the nation, the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch observes that much of the recent English language scholarship employs a variety of methodological idealism: theorists have come to equate the emergence of national groups with the “unfolding or spread of the ideas of ‘nationalism.’”⁴ Undoubtedly, a one-sided reading of Benedict Anderson’s now canonical Imagined Communities has

² Peter Abrahams, “Can We Unite?” Drum, July 1952.
³ Policy and Program of the P.A.C. of Azania, Dar Es Salaam, December 1972.
strengthened this tendency. Too often, studies of nationalism divorce “print capitalism” or
the activities of nationalist intellectuals from the broader processes of social transformation
produced by mercantile (and subsequently industrial) capitalist development and new forms
of democratic governance that began to emerge at the end of the 18th century. Arguing that
the ideology of “nationalism” is too amorphous and chimerical a phenomenon for
comparative analysis, Hroch’s own research focuses on the composition, timing, and role of
national movements of non-dominant groups in Eastern and Central Europe. In addition to
the structural changes and new forms of social communication emphasized by other writers
(for example, Karl Deutsch and Ernest Gellner), Hroch’s work underlines the mass, popular
dimension of nationalist agitation and political organization—an aspect of nation formation,
it should be added, that inevitably influences the content, symbolism, and debates of the
resulting nationalist intellectual traditions.

Drawing on the insights of Hroch and others, this chapter argues that the new social
dynamics of South Africa’s cities (primarily Johannesburg), the organizational structure of
the Congress Alliance, and debates within the ANC over collaboration with Indian and—
slightly later—white organizations produced a fundamentally new aesthetics and vocabulary
of nationalism during the 1950s. Contrary to histories of the ANC that stress the continuity of
its founding ideas and principles, I argue that the “inclusive South African nationalism” of
the 1950s Congress Alliance and the later concept of “non-racialism” were unprecedented
and, in important respects, adventitious. Like their Africanist critics (and, in some respects,
the Nationalist Party as well), the ANC leaders’ principle concern was the development of a
mass, national movement in the new social and political conditions produced by the South

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5 For a useful discussion of Anderson’s reception, see Pheng Cheah, “Grounds of Comparison” in
Pheng Cheah and Jonathan Culler, eds., *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict
African industrial revolution of the interwar period. Debates over the organizational form of the national struggle generated new ideologies of nationhood, in particular the concepts of “multi-racialism” and “non-racialism.” In this chapter, I emphasize the political aesthetics of these debates: their rhetoric, imagery, and symbolism. In confronting the tactical and strategic dilemmas of building a unified, national movement composed of historically distinct groups, the Congress Alliance created a new image of the nation, an image whose major inspiration was the organizational form of the alliance itself. It was only at the end of the 1950s that the polemics of the Alliance’s enemies, particularly the Pan Africanist Congress, endowed this image with the coherence of an articulated doctrine.

Historians often depict the 1950s as the high water mark of “multi-racial unity.” In some respects, this characterization is merited. Following the calamitous violence of 1949, the ANC and Indian Congresses were able to regroup, establish closer ties, and jointly launch the Defiance Campaign in 1952. During the ensuing six months of civil disobedience, the ANC metamorphosed into a truly mass organization, South Africans of every racial group held demonstrations and collectively courted arrest, and the new bonds of camaraderie and trust developed among both leaders and some rank-and-file members. The election of Albert Lutuli to the ANC presidency exemplified this ecumenical spirit. In 1953, the ANC and

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7 Even some of the most nuanced discussions of black politics in South Africa, for example George Frederickson’s *Black Liberation* and Malcolm McDonald’s *Why Race Matters in South Africa*, generally focus on the differences between the political ideologies of the ANC and PAC, i.e. “multiracialism” or “non-racialism” versus “African nationalism”—itself an indication of the PAC’s success in fundamentally redefining the discourse of nationalist politics after its formation in 1959. As I argue below, this focus simultaneously diminishes the central question of the ANC and PAC’s tactical and strategic differences, while projecting terms like “multiracialism” and “non-racialism”—which first widely came into use among African political organizations in 1958-9—back onto the formation of the Congress Alliance in 1952 and even earlier. See Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 282-5; Malcolm McDonald, *Why Race Matters in South Africa* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 2006), 92-123.
Indian Congresses encouraged the formation of the (white) Congress of Democrats and the South Africa Coloured People Organization. The resulting Congress Alliance led a series of campaigns throughout the rest of 1950s, including pass protests, “stay aways,” strikes, boycotts, and—perhaps most importantly—the 1955 Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter became the central symbol in a transformed nationalist rhetoric and political aesthetics: the Congress Alliance sought to create the image of a unified, singular South African nation that simultaneously affirmed the equal claim of each racial group to national belonging. As I explore in the first section of this chapter, the impetus for greater interaction across the race line also reflected a new urban culture and self-consciously modern social style that had developed in Johannesburg and, to a far lesser degree, Durban. Shamelessly appropriating both fashion and lingo from American cinema, a new generation of younger Africans and Indians attended events like boxing matches, soccer games, and jazz concerts—and read about the new, decidedly multi-racial Africa in the pages of magazines like *Drum*. Things “Indian” became part of the urban panorama of a modernist Africa. Whatever the enormous limitations of this novel style (these spaces involved a limited number of Africans and could also generate conflict), it reflected a shift in view point among many urban youth and contributed to a new political mood.

However, the current portrait of the 1950s requires qualification and, in some cases, significant revision. First and foremost, the narrative of growing multi-racial unity rests almost entirely on events and personalities located in the Transvaal. Despite Lutuli’s election, the Natal ANC remained stagnant until the end of the decade and the Natal Indian Congress withered to a mere two active branches in 1952. The majority of Africans strongly opposed the ANC’s policy of collaboration with the Indian Congresses and, in the aftermath of the
pogrom, conservative, Zulu nationalist cooperatives like the Zulu Hlanganani Association established both economic and a degree of political hegemony in shanty towns like Cato Manor. Unsurprisingly, the Natal ANC leadership itself was internally divided over this issue. Both intensified competition for employment and the trauma of the riots contributed to the growing conservatism of the Indian working class, which largely turned its back on the NIC and embraced registered unions that excluded Africans. Although it probably enjoyed a wider degree of passive support (as did the ANC), the Indian Congresses possessed only a few thousand members throughout South Africa during this period. Some Indian merchants sustained the ANC financially and NIC cadre devoted their enormous political energies to ANC campaigns: neither translated into mass support by Indian workers for the alliance. During the late 1950s, the Natal ANC experienced rapid growth driven by the revival of African trade unionism, protests over forced removals from Cato Manor, and the explosion of resistance in the countryside. Nevertheless, this upsurge in protest did not compel a revival of the NIC and its consequences for Natal’s racial dynamics were complicated and, ultimately, ambiguous.

Second, the image of “multiracial unity” understates the complexity of motivations for the Congress Alliance and the widespread—even endemic—opposition to the alliance within the ANC during the 1950s. Although some ANC leaders came to see a broad, democratic alliance as a matter of principle (e.g., Lutuli), other ANC leaders had a much more pragmatic approach to collaboration with the Indian Congresses and, later, the Congress of Democrats. In their eyes, the role of Indians was an ancillary question—and, despite close friendships with Indian comrades, many still nurtured bitterness towards Indians, particularly the “merchant class.” Similarly, opposition to the Defiance Campaign
and cooperation with the Indian Congresses came from several quarters: conservative African business men and newspaper editors in the Transvaal, the “Old Guard” of the Natal ANC who had opposed the Doctors’ Pact, former members of the ANC Youth League (like Mda and Ngubane) who continued to advocate elements of Lembede’s views, and the Natal chiefs. The most significant foe of the alliance, however, was the Africanist current: a group of younger activists, largely based in the townships of the Eastern Cape and the Transvaal, who broke from the ANC in 1958 to establish the Pan Africanist Congress in the following year. Drawing on the ANC Youth League’s anti-Communism and earlier rejection of non-European unity, the Africanists believed that collaboration with Indian, and then later white, organizations had resulted in the abandonment of African nationalism by the ANC and an ultimately disarming confusion of the struggle’s terms: the African against the European, indigenous against foreign. The Africanists rejected the projection that a significant section of the white population could be persuaded to abandon its privileges—only a mass, spontaneous wave of protests by the African majority could disrupt the current system and create a truly democratic government. It was therefore necessary to develop African independence from foreign influences (such as Indians and Communists) and sharpen anger against the white minority “ruling class.”

A Partial Transformation: “The Fabulous Decade” of the 1950s

As the new decade began, the once powerful CP-led unions atrophied and the 1949 pogrom had destroyed a significant amount of earlier residential integration, leading to the exodus of Indians from several Durban areas, particularly sections of Cato Manor. Not only did racial antagonisms persist, but in some notable respects animosities worsened. Nevertheless, many newspapers (particularly the English-language pages of the African
press) began to emphasize new spaces of racial interaction, including some outside the realm of political activity: dances, jazz concerts, football and boxing matches, and different kinds of cultural events. While articles and letters complaining about Indian exploitation and hypocrisy still graced the pages of *Ilanga*, the overall tenor of its coverage of Indians shifted dramatically. Other periodicals, like *Drum* magazine, both captured and actively promoted the new atmosphere emerging in certain quarters. Deliberate acts of “racial mixing” became a centerpiece of a self-consciously modern, cosmopolitan style. John Didcott's description of a Durban concert (published in the liberal journal *Africa South*) employed all of the urbane imagery characteristic of this mood, including jazz music, an Indian cinema, and labored American slang:

> Nearly 1,000 people—Africans, Indians, Europeans and Coloreds—squeezed into a packed Indian cinema in Durban on a recent Sunday night to hear four hours of jazz performed by leading local white and non-white musicians, in a concert arranged by the South Africa Institute of Race Relations. …

> The audience, overflowing into the aisles, were too preoccupied with pumping their knees and shouting encouragement to the musicians, as they swung from hot Dixieland to cool, intellectual modern music, to care two hoots who was in the next seat as long as he was not “square.” Applause reached its climax in a thrilling “battle” between a young Coloured and a young white guitarist, each striving to create the more exciting and expressive solo.8

An emerging generation of writers, like Nadine Gordimer, detailed the casual transgressions of intimate Johannesburg parties where “white friends and black friends, Indian friends and friends of mixed blood” would gather in unassuming comity, drinking, dancing, flirting, and passionately arguing about the politics of the moment. Of course, the most potent symbols of this carefully groomed atmosphere emerged at the intersection of race and sex: a middle class

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white woman marrying an Indian communist or couples fox trotting across the color line. Curry also sometimes appeared as a sign of urban diversity and the manifold possibilities of Johannesburg life. In a letter to Ismail Meer written shortly after they had spent an afternoon together, Anton Lembede meditated on the necessity of developing self-respect on the basis of respecting one's culture: “The day was full of wonders, but what moved me most was to see all of you eating with your fingers.”

A few years later, Drum writer Can Themba described Sophiatown—the “Paris of Africa”—in the following terms: “You have the right to listen to the latest jazz record at Ah Sing’s over the road. You can walk a Coloured girl of the evening down to the Odin Cinema and no questions asked. You can try out Rhugubar’s curry with your bare fingers without embarrassment.”

None of these actions, Themba explained, entailed the slightest “heresy.” They were virtual rights, endowed by the city. Youth League activists regularly dropped by the Pahad family at the Orient House or Ahmed Kathrada’s flat at Kholvad house to enjoy a home-cooked meal. For some politically conscious younger Africans, the sharing of curry with Indian friends represented a rare and exceptional communion: the experience of cultural and racial difference in a context outside of the social relations imposed by white domination.

This atmosphere was most visible in the domains of culture and sport. In the early 1950s, Ilanga began running an English language “Sports, Entertainment, Social and Cultural Page.” Most events advertised in these columns expressed the colonial ethos of the amakholwa Christians, although dances, beauty pageants, and jazz concerts rapidly gained in

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10 Quoted in Meer, A Fortunate Man, 84.
12 Luli Callinicos, Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains (Claremount: David Phillip Publishers, 2004), 192.
prominence. A distinctly American-influenced, urban consumer culture made itself felt amongst reportage on the achievements of the local African elite and highbrow displays of Victorian civilization. The affairs covered in the Ilanga cultural pages were mostly African. But a significant number featured participants from all racial groups. In the face of the Nationalist government’s victory and the first sweeping round of apartheid legislation, some of these events were organized in explicit defiance of newly-instituted racial legislation. The South Africa Institute of Race Relations hosted evenings of “African, European and Indian Art” featuring arias, ballet dancing, theatrical performances, choirs, and instrumental performances. Jazz shows and dance competitions, often held at the Grey Street YMCA, attracted a younger and more urbane crowd. Africans, Indians, and Coloureds competed for prizes for the best dressed “gentleman” and “lady” and out danced each other in competitions featuring an eclectic range of steps, including the waltz, jive, quickstep, and tango. City-wide band contests became increasingly popular, and Indian bands frequently triumphed. In 1955, Ilanga hailed the annual contest, then entering its fourth year and boasting 20 different ensembles, as “Natal’s Most Popular Show.” The previous two years an African group,

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14 Ilanga Lase Natal, 23 August 1952.

15 “Easter Ballroom Dance Contest,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 26 March 1955. In some cases, competitions charged different entrance fees for Africans and other “non-Europeans.”

16 Ilanga reported one instance where the Indian group “Rhythm Jazz Band” not only won the competition, but eight of the other ten bands did not bother to show up and play: “It was rumored that most of them were discouraged by the high standard of the Indian Band.” This piece (written by H.I.E. Dhlomo) did not mention racial friction, although other articles and letters in the Ilanga cultural pages reveal a significant amount of resentment over the behavior of Indians and occasionally whites at multi-racial dances. See “Concert and Bands Competition,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 16 October 1953.
Thomas Ndada’s *Swingsters*, won the competition, while in 1954 Indian groups placed second, third, and fourth.¹⁷

Like other leisure activities, sport was largely segregated.¹⁸ “Soccer is one of the most—perhaps the most—popular game among our masses.” H.I.E. Dhlomo wrote: “Thousands attend the weekly matches and pay their money without complaint. It is a huge organization, one of the few Union-wide organizations still in African hands entirely.”¹⁹ Beginning in the late 1940s, athletes and a few activists made the first—highly symbolic—efforts to transcend these divisions. Interracial soccer matches took place between Transvaal and Natal teams in 1947, 1953, and 1955, drawing on the “best African, Indian and Coloured soccerites of the two provinces”²⁰ Most interracial sporting events, however, pitted competitors against each other along color lines. In a spirit of high fraternity, *Ilanga* reported the annual tournament organized by the Natal Inter-Race Soccer Board for the Singh Cup:

> Natal Indian soccer team beat the Natal Africans by one goal in an exciting inter-race match which was replayed at Currie’s Fountain Indian Sports Grounds last Saturday afternoon before a mixed record crowd of Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Europeans. The African team, with the wind in its favour, pressed the Indians almost the whole first half, but due to the skilled work of the Indian full-backs, the African front line could not penetrate their defensive line.²¹

Similar developments occurred in the more rarified world of Natal cricket. Although local teams had fielded a handful of mixed matches in the past, an inter-race tournament only

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¹⁷“Natal’s Most Popular Show to be Held This Year,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 2 July 1955.
began in the mid-1950s in response to growing demand. The Seedat Brothers (a famous Ladysmith cricketing family) donated a trophy in 1955.22 The following year, the first significant challenge to the racial boundaries dividing African, Indian, and Coloured players occurred during a series of tests against a touring Kenyan Asian team. As Desai et al explain: “The tour, ironically given the make-up of the Kenyans, focused on racial divisions within the ambit of Black cricket. Indians, Coulereds, Malays, and Africans played together at national level for the first time, making this the most widely representative South African team ever chosen.”23 Such events obviously did not transform the racial character of sport or—in the vast majority of cases—negate personally-held stereotypes. But they do seem to have encouraged a broader sense of interracial fraternity. Their greatest importance may well have been positive coverage in the African and Indian press. After crowding into the Currie Gardens sporting grounds or some other venue, fans could then read accounts of Indian-African sportsmanship on pages facing stories about the Defiance Campaign or Indian sanctions against the Afrikaner Nationalist government. The representation of local happening in this context, especially when the reader directly knew or participated in the subject matter, facilitated the translation of individual experiences into a shared imaginary encompassing a qualitatively broader geographic and social range. In other words, these events helped manufacture a new public.24

22 Desai et al., Blacks in Whites, 210.
23 Ibid., 9
The most striking embodiment of this public was the Johannesburg-based *Drum* magazine. *Drum* was a sensation. In pages cascading with brash monochrome graphics and advertisements for beauty products, *Drum* managed to combine the values of a new middle class (consumerism, modern domesticity, and nationalism), the upright probity of Christian moralism, and a breathless celebration of urban African life. At one level, the magazine portrayed a fantastic lifestyle of leisure and social mobility. Writing during the late 1940s, Henri Lefebvre described a comparable aesthetic in post-war American film: “the display of luxury to be seen in so many films… takes on an almost fascinating character, and the spectator is uprooted from his everyday world by an everyday world other than his own.”

Yet *Drum* also revealed the brutal, capricious, and impoverished demimonde of urban African existence, often in the form of a sermonizing critique of its failings. Lewis Nkosi, perhaps better than anyone else, captured its significance for a younger generation of Africans:

…we longed desperately for literary heroes we could respect and with whom we could identify. In the moral chaos through which we were living we longed to find a work of literature, a drama or a film, home grown and about us, which would contain a significant amount of our experience and in which we could find our own attitude and feelings.

In Nkosi’s words, *Drum* was less a magazine than a symbol of the modern African “cut adrift from the tribal reserve.” Its brazen antiheroes were gangsters, prizefighters, investigative journalists, shebeen queens, tough-talking PI’s—anyone stylish, clever, aggressively refined,

27 Ibid., 8.
and at least slightly dissolute. It created a representational space, “a confidence of community in anonymity,” in which Africans could recognize themselves in fundamentally new terms. While Sophiatown was the undisputed capital of African modernity, the Drum universe stretched across the continent and spanned the globe: articles saluted political developments in the Gold Coast, probed the causes of Mau Mau, and celebrated the heroes of American bee-bop. Significantly, Indians and India regularly filled its pages.

Drum’s coverage of Durban—no less than its representation of other South African cities—rifted on a string of pat dichotomies: beach front hotels and slum hovels, glitzy boardwalk lounges and underground gambling houses, the faint glimmer of paradise and the realities of a slouching Babylon. South Africa remained largely two countries: white and black. But Drum writers used these same binaries to undercut a simplistic division between African and Indian. At the beginning of the muck-raking survey “Durban Exposed,” the author contrasted the Orient nightclub “where Indians entertain diplomats and delegations in style” and areas like “Jacobs and Magazine Barracks slums: at least as bad as Cato Manor, where three quarters of the Indian population live below the breadline in extremes of poverty.” In the ensuing columns, everything was sensationalized except Indian-African

28Lefebvre’s idea of “reverse image” of bourgeois life captures an important aspect of the Drum antihero: “an image of everyday reality, taken in its totality or as a fragment, reflecting that reality in all its depth through people, ideas and things which are apparently quite different from everyday experience and therefore exception, deviant, abnormal.” See Critique of Everyday Life, vol. 1, 12. The Drum hero exemplifies many of the values of the urban petite bourgeoisie (ambition, wits, style, class and/or geographic mobility) that are ultimately frustrated by the realities of white supremacy. He simultaneously conveyed the seamy reality of the township, its social pathologies, and its Pyrrhic rebellions. In other words, the Drum hero embodied both a modernist, middle class ethos and a symbolic rejection of social realities that ensured it continuing frustration.

29 The quote is from Anderson, Imagined Communities, 35.

30 See also Riason Naidoo, The Indian in DRUM Magazine in the 1950s (Johannesburg: Bell-Roberts Publishing, October 2008).

31 “Durban Exposed,” Drum, July 1952. See also Mr. DRUM, “Sugar Farms,” Drum, February 1953. Henry Nxumalo (“Mr. DRUM”) described the slave-like conditions of “55,000 labourers, African and Indian…They earn in one month as much as sugar workers in Australia make in one day.” He showed
relations. African Tsotsis, Coloured “Won’t works,” and Indian gangsters—smoking dagga and playing dice on the corners of Grey Street—terrorized hard-working, decent folk of every conceivable race in order to get cash for the bioscope. An Indian con artist, operating with a team of African accomplices, manipulated the racism of Indian factory workers and stole their cash in rigged games of cards. Fatherly Indian pimps capitalized on the dire poverty of young girls, drawing them into prostitution rings with the promise of “good cloths, a shelter, good food and bioscope money.” Zulu “Bad Women” brewed skokiaan and serviced factory workers on Saturday night in the slums. *Drum* warned:

> Among all races in Durban the face of crime and violence is showing itself more and more. Africans and Indians alike are being corrupted by poverty and want, and turning away from their strong traditions of laws and morals. The glittering lights and gaiety of the seaside city conceal the true character that lurks behind. This terrible degradation must be stopped, NOW.\(^{32}\)

Other stories juxtaposed the respectable, non-European businessman to the criminal element. When a crowd of enraged Africans burnt a recently purchased £7,000.00 bus in September 1953, *Drum* ran an exclusive by the bus company’s owner, D. Nepaul Singh. The author vigorously denied that this “disturbance” was a manifestation of “racial animosity towards Indian people” and fulsomely praised the friendship and support shown by Africans after his loss. Singh discribed an elderly African woman who, while holding his hand in tears, lauded him in the following improbable terms: “Do not be discouraged and give up the wonderful work you are doing for my people by striving to provide us with the best.” Singh went on to

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\(^{32}\) Other articles lionized the vitality of Durban nightlife while describing the racket carried out by Indian taxi drivers and African prostitutes on visiting sailors. See “A Negro Sailor Looks at Durban,” *Drum*, October 1953.
blame the arson on unruly, drunken individuals.33 Drum’s representation of the African city deliberately rejected the view held by an earlier generation of mission-educated Africans and many white liberals who preached that urbanization and the overly-rapid breakdown of “tribal” life led to crime and moral degeneracy.34 These articles tried to demonstrate the exact opposite. Drawing on post-war American social science, they attributed social pathology to poverty and the frustration of modern aspirations.35 Furthermore, as Drum sometimes observed, an identical state of affairs had proven equally devastating for most Indians and Coloureds. The Indian businessman, according to Drum, was hardly to be blamed. If anything, he represented a model of race advancement for all non-Europeans.36

Drum’s attitude toward race reflected its location in Johannesburg, where the Indian population—and therefore the African-Indian division—had substantially less social weight than in Natal. Nevertheless, Indians from Durban and across the continent devoured each issue and recognized their concerns reflected in its pages. In close step with the Congress Alliance’s new political aesthetics, Drum presented a vision of urban Africa in which Indians had an integral place. At the same time, it created a representational space for the readership to participate in this brave new world, particularly through features like surveys, contests, and write-in columns. Drum’s letter pages published gushing testimonials from Indian

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33D. Nepaul Singh, “Why They Burnt My Bus,” Drum, November 1953. The incident began when the bus hit and killed an African man. Strikingly, Singh implied that the accident was entirely the African’s fault, whose name he does not provide. As I discuss below, this incident in fact precipitated a series of attacks by Africans against Indian targets, mostly stores and homes rebuilt after the 1949 pogrom.


36See “Write to Drum,” Drum, March 1954: “I enjoyed both your articles on S.A.’s Richest Indians. Until I read the articles I did know there were so many black millionaires in this country, most of them self-made.” Drum responded: “It’s a good sign. Many of us could become millionaires!” This is one of the earliest uses of the term “black” to refer to all three racial groups that I have found.
subscribers.37 “I am an Indian,” declared one reader, “and am very glad to see that DRUM has helped in some way to break down the barrier between the Africans and the Indians.”38 Indian boys wrote to *Drum* asking for autographed pictures of African Boxers.39 Hindu youth penned maudlin letters to the advice column *Heart Breaks*, hoping that “Africa’s magazine” could assist them in reconciling a newfound ideal of romantic love with their family’s unyielding expectations. They also read that other young Africans, Indians, and Coloureds from across the country were wrestling with the challenges of love across the racial, tribal, or religious divides.40

**A New Nationalist Vision: the Beginnings of the Congress Alliance**

When the Nationalist government passed a sweeping agenda of racist legislation in 1950 (including the Group Area Act, the Population Registration Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Immorality Act, and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act), the stage had already been set for a joint response by the ANC and Indian Congress. Nevertheless, substantial opposition arose to the first tentative steps toward organized, mass action. In early 1950, the Transvaal ANC joined a Free Speech convention initiated by the Indian Congress

37 A typical letter from N.A.G. Rasoola (Victoria Street, Durban) reads: “Your magazine has thrilling stories and interesting sports features. It completes a man’s weekend. Keep it up!” *Drum*’s response implicitly underlines both the nonracial character of the reader’s identification and the importance of week-end leisure to the *DRUM* aesthetic: “Completing a man’s week-end means a lot to us!” In response to a letter signed “Let every African read DRUM” the editor responded “We like patriotism but we also like commonsense. We don’t mind who reads DRUM: the more non-Africans read the magazine, the better for Africa!” On the same page, a Coloured reader is encouraged to participate in *Drum* contests. See “Write to DRUM,” *Drum*, November 1953.


40 In almost every case, “Dolly” (the columnist of “Heart Breaks”) recognized the challenges posed by defying tradition, but advised that honesty and romantic love—if truly felt—will prevail. An rare exception was the following advice to an 18 year-old reader who had been threatened with death by a Muslim girl’s parents: “If you are a Muslim I advise you to ask your parents to approach the girl’s parents. Muslim law is very rigid: Muslims arrange marriages for their daughters: they must approve of their prospective son-in-law. But if you are a Hindu, forget her.” See “Heart Breaks,” *Drum*, December 1953. Importantly, Dolly often defended an assertive role for women in relationships. See “Heart Breaks,” *Drum*, May 1954.
and Communist Party in defense of several banned leaders, including Kotane, Marks, and Dadoo. Without consulting the ANC executive, Dr. Moroka (the ANC president elected in 1949) agreed to chair the convention, which then called for a one day general strike on the 1st of May. The Youth League strenuously opposed this initiative, arguing that the ANC had not initiated the campaign and it represented a diversion from the Program of Action.\textsuperscript{41} In addition to denouncing this campaign in a leaflet, Youth League members, including Mandela and Tambo, carried out vigilante attacks to disrupt integrated meetings, including once physically dragging Yosuf Cachalia off a platform in New Clare.\textsuperscript{42} The initial rally attracted close to 10,000 protestors and between half and two thirds of Johannesburg's African workers joined the May Day strike.\textsuperscript{43} The success of this action—which faced lethal police repression—further polarized the Transvaal ANC and deepened the enmity between the Youth League and Communists.

Increasingly, a diffuse and heterogeneous opposition to the alliance with the Indian Congress became linked with concern over CP influence in both organizations. Earlier that year, the Communist Party leadership had dissolved the aboveground organization, leaving its former members to focus their political work solely on building the race-based organizations. When CP member J.B. Marks ran for provincial president of the Transvaal ANC in November 1951, his campaign galvanized opposition from both the younger generation and elements of the old guard (some of whom had also opposed the 1947 Doctors’ Pact). In 1951, a small “nationalist bloc” emerged around a Transvaal businessman named R.G. Baloyi and Selope Thema, the editor of Bantu World.\textsuperscript{44} Thema decried the alliance

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{41}] Lodge, \textit{Black Politics in South Africa}, 33.
\item[\textsuperscript{42}] Sampson, \textit{Mandela: The Authorized Biography}, 62-3.
\item[\textsuperscript{43}] Sampson, \textit{Mandela: The Authorized Biography}, 63; Mandela, \textit{Long Walk to Freedom}, 101.
\item[\textsuperscript{44}] Karis and Carter, \textit{From Protest to Challenge}, vol. 2, 409.
\end{itemize}
developing between the ANC and Indian Congresses as “a drowning man holding onto a shark.”

After Thema’s expulsion from the ANC, H. Selby Msimang attempted to mediate a reconciliation and, then painfully disillusioned, published a letter in *Ilanga* protesting that the Joint Planning Council of the ANC and NIC had “practically taken over the control and leadership of the African National Congress.”

Msimang—who had become increasingly brazen in his embrace of African development within the confines of segregation—resigned shortly before the Defiance Campaign.

In late 1951, a handful of Youth League members formed a “watchdog committee” to advocate for Lembede’s understanding of African nationalism; the Bureau of African Nationalism in East London began publishing material critical of the ANC’s new direction at the beginning of 1952. These efforts were inspired in part by Mda, who produced a document signed “Africanus”—likely a reference to Karl Liebknecht’s “Spartakus” statement against the pro-war stance of the German Social Democratic Party during the First World War—that criticized the Congress leadership. While supporting the Defiance Campaign, a faction of the ANC Youth League began to position itself internally as defenders of African nationalism and the imperiled tradition of the earlier ANC. Although many accounts stress their attitude towards collaboration with whites and Communists, the Africanists’ opposition to the Joint Planning Council emerged before the formation of the Congress of Democrats in 1953 and drew its rationale from Lembede's earlier critique of non-European unity.

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46 Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 2, 413.
49 Ibid., 413.
As Gail Gerhart argues, non-Communist African leaders initially saw cooperation with the Indian Congresses in bluntly utilitarian terms.\textsuperscript{50} During the 1947 debate over the Passive Resistance Campaign, some ANC leaders had suggested that Indian financial support would provide a form of compensation for profits obtained from Africans; many ANC leaders likely first accepted closer relations with the Indian Congress on the basis of acute financial necessity. By late 1951, a form of strategic realism began to develop among some African nationalists who continued to voice sharp criticisms of Indians within a small group of likeminded individuals, but strongly championed cooperation in public. Based less on idealism than an steely evaluation of the relative balance of forces, this grouping believed that the issue of non-European minorities was ultimately of limited importance: the overwhelming preponderance of Africans would assure their position both within the anti-apartheid struggle and in a future democratic government. Given the unarguable reality of demographics, they reasoned that the need for financial, legal, and international political support in and of itself justified an alliance with the Indian Congresses.\textsuperscript{51} Explaining the shifting viewpoints of the Transvaal ANC leadership on this question, \textit{Ilanga} summarized this perspective (which individuals, for obvious reasons, avoided stating publicly):

\begin{quote}

The more brilliant of them [advocates of cooperation] do not deny that Indians have held aloof from Africans and still exploit them. But they say the European or, more correctly, our system and policy are responsible. That salvation lies in changing the system and policy, not in fighting Indians. They contend that action is the only way out…. The real struggle is between the oppressed (mostly Africans in this case) and the oppressing system. Once this is solved, they maintain, Africans need not fear
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50}Gerhart, \textit{Black Power in South Africa}, 101.

\textsuperscript{51}“You begin to try to figure out your resources; not only in relation to these groups, but to the international forces that operate, you see. If you are going to say in your policy, well look, never mind what has happened or what they have done, I think the Indians don’t belong in this country. Well then you can’t go to India and tell the Indians, people in India, that they must support your struggle, because one of the things they are going to ask you is what’s your policy about the Indians?” See Joe Mathews interviewed by Gail Gerhart, 15 August 1970, Gaberone, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interview, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
minority groups like Indians and Coloureds who are themselves blind and helpless victims of the system, and who will be forced to fall in line with the superior African majority once Africans get their full rights.\footnote{“Weekly Review and Commentary,” *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 12 January 1952.}

During the same period, some younger ANC members were increasingly impressed by the radicalism and anti-racism of both white and Indian Communist party members. As even Robert Sobukwe (an Africanist leader and later the first president of the PAC) later observed: “we knew that if someone was a communist it meant he had no colour prejudice. He accepted you as a human being, this you just knew.”\footnote{Robert Sobukwe interviewed by Gail Gerhart, 8 and 9 April 1970, not verbatim, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.} Not only did they watch Indians of all ages and genders go to prison during the Passive Resistance Campaign, but ANC Youth League members—who were largely students and professionals with little to no significant political experience in leading mass struggles—became increasingly aware of the personal and professional sacrifices made by Indian Communists in the service of African working class causes.\footnote{In their introduction to *Apartheid's Genesis*, Philip Bonner et al. have observed that most accounts of the 1950s minimize the importance of the Communist Party in orchestrating campaigns that established the ANC’s mass base. See Philip Bonner, Peter Delius, Deborah Posel, eds., *Apartheid's Genesis: 1935-1962* (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1993). A similar observation can be made regarding the elision of Indian Congress cadre (many of whom were Communists) in the transformation of the ANC into a mass based organization.}

A small number of Youth League members also interacted with whites and Indians as students or professionals. Nelson Mandela, for example, first developed close personal relationships with Indian activists like Ismail Meer, J.N. Singh, and Ahmed Bhoola during his legal studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in the mid 1940s, almost a decade before he entertained the idea of a political alliance between African and Indian organizations. In his autobiography, Mandela fondly recalls his time spent with this group at
Kholvad House, a residential building in central Johannesburg: “There we studied, talked, and even danced until the early hours of the morning, and it became a kind of headquarters for young freedom fighters. I sometimes slept there when it was too late to catch the last train back to Orlando.” According to Mandela, discussions with Ismail Meer—whose fluency in Zulu strongly impressed the young African nationalist—challenged his Johannesburg experience that Indians were all “rich shopkeepers.” Meer introduced Mandela to the history of indentured labor and the fact that Natal’s Indian population was overwhelmingly poor.

Mandela also describes conversations about Gandhi’s concept of Ahimisa, Nehru’s socialism, and the militancy of Subhas Chandra Bose—long hours spent analyzing parallels between the nationalist struggles of the respective countries and Gandhi’s place in South African history. These personal relationships, which developed in situations defined by camaraderie of student life and intimacies of the home, broke down prejudices and broadened Mandela's understanding of white domination in South Africa (he later admitted to borrowing substantial materials in his speeches from Nehru's writings).

Ultimately, it was the ongoing arguments, organizing efforts, and individual example of Indian militants that led African nationalists like Mandela, Tambo, and Sisulu to abandon their opposition to common action with the Indian Congresses and, correspondingly, their refusal to work with Communists. In turn, Mandela's conversion greatly influence other Youth League members like Joe Mathews and Diliza Mji.

In July 1951, a Johannesburg conference of the ANC and Indian Congresses established a coordinating committee of Marks, Sisulu, Dadoo, Moroka, and Y.A. Cachalia

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57 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 65.
to develop a political response to the new laws implemented by the Malan government. The committee proposed a campaign centered on the strategy of defying unjust laws through non-cooperation, although its initial report gave a nod to the possibility of future industrial action. Notably, the Coloured APO was effectively defunct and played virtually no role in the Defiance Campaign.\textsuperscript{60} The committee chose the 300\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of settler colonialism—the day of Jan van Riebeeck’s first landing—to inaugurate non-violent passive resistance:

\begin{quote}
We consider this day to be most appropriate for the commencement of the struggle as it marks one of the greatest turning points in South African history by the advent of European settlers in this country, followed by colonial and imperialist exploitation which has degraded, humiliated and kept in bondage the vast masses of the non-white people.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

The committee's proposal envisioned disciplined volunteer units—all wearing ANC colors—divided according to racial groups, with exceptions made in cases “where a law or regulation to be defied applies commonly to all groups.”\textsuperscript{62} If Coloured organizations in the Transvaal, Natal, or Orange Free State applied to participate, the proposal stipulated that their members could form separate volunteer corps. Each racial group would defy specific legal strictures: Africans would violate pass laws; Indians would defy provincial barriers, public segregation, and (where possible) the Groups Areas Act. At the Bloemfontein Conference, the majority of the delegates, led by J.B. Marks and members from the Transvaal, voted for the Campaign. Others present dissented, and Natal’s delegation continued to reject the establishment of a permanent Joint Planning Committee of Africans and Indians.\textsuperscript{63} According to Jordan Ngubane, the Natal Youth League and Luthuli held that equal representation on the Joint

\textsuperscript{60} Karis and Carter, \textit{From Protest to Challenge}, vol. 2, 408.
\textsuperscript{61} “Report of the Joint Planning Council of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress,” presented to the 39\textsuperscript{th} Annual Conference of the African National Congress, 15 to 17 December 1951, ANC Papers (AD 2186/Ba 2), Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} “At Bloemfontein Africans Choose Between—Congress and Convention,” \textit{DRUM}, February 1952.
Planning Committee gave unfair weight to minorities and implied recognition of “groups rights.”

_Ilanga’s coverage of the Bloemfontein conference emphasized an atmosphere of lurking controversy and high emotions: the Cape and Natal delegations had not seen the main documents in advance; a motion transferred responsibility for the campaign from the ANC executive to the Joint Action Planning Council; and a polarization seemed evident between an “inner group” guiding ANC policy behind the scenes and the Transvaal-based nationalist bloc who opposed the growing influence of former members of the Communist Party and declared “frankly that real co-operation between Africans and Indians is not possible at this time… co-operation of equality, honour, and respect.”_ Exacerbating an already tense situation, Manilal Gandhi reportedly delivered a speech in which he boasted of giving African passengers chocolates during his train journey and warned against the strategy of passive resistance on the basis of Africans’ impulsive natures and lack of civilization. Although Indian activists demonstrably walked out of the room, significant damage had been done. Following the conference, the Natal African press immediately descended into speculation over whether the provincial leadership would implement the campaign given the hostility of most Africans to cooperation with the Indian Congresses. Amidst wide-spread

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64 Jordan K. Ngubane, “An Unpublished Autobiography,” Gwendolyn Carter Papers, Center for Research Libraries, University of Chicago, 155. Ngubane is not clear about where these objections were raised.
66 In an effort to minimize the impact of this speech, Ahmed Bhoola responded to this column by sending a blistering attack against Gandhi to _Ilanga_: “Mr. Manilal Gandhi is in fact a far cry from his great father. He has cut himself away from his own people, and quite rightly cannot claim to represent their views. Mr. Manilal Gandhi has spoken once again. It is of little consequence and signifies nothing. We should treat it strictly on its merits—with contempt!” See “M. Gandhi and Congress,” _Ilanga Lase Natal_, 20 January 1952.
rumors that it might exempt itself from the campaign, the ANC executive waited more than two months to publicly announce its participation.67

Other debates soon followed. In the months preceding the Defiance Campaign, Manilal Gandhi publicly rebuked the ANC for failing to approach the protests in the proper spirit of satyagraha. In an interview with Drum magazine, Gandhi decried a Communist take-over of the ANC (“Communist are behind the whole plan”) and predicted that the undertaking would result in violence.68 Speaking from his bed in the middle of a hunger strike, Gandhi sagaciously lectured the ANC:

I support the African National Congress in their struggle, but I think the resolution to boycott the Van Riebeeck Festival which was passed at Bloemfontein last year is being prosecuted in the wrong way…. To make passive resistance effective, there must be spiritual discipline among those taking part in it. In order to serve, one must deny oneself: there should be no drinking or gambling. The soul should be perfect. Passive resistance should be truly spiritual.

The ANC leadership decided that it would be best for Indian activists to answer Gandhi's views, which had little—if any—following inside of the Natal Indian Congress.69 Within the ANC and Indian Congresses, however, Gandhi's statements propelled a broader exchange over the political significance of non-violence, which many older Indian Congress members continued to argue was a fundamental principle until the early 1960s. Mandela and younger African leaders strongly disagreed, arguing that non-violence was “a tactic to be used as the situation demanded.”70 According to Walter Sisulu, the Youth League insisted on the terminology of “defiance” to differentiate its intended militancy from the “passive” element.

69 See the reply to Gandhi by T.N. Naidoo, Vice President of the Transvaal Indian Congress and an adopted son of Mahatma Gandhi, in the same issue of DRUM cited above. See also “M. Gandhi and Congress,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 20 January 1952.
70 Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom, 111.
of passive resistance. Tambo's later writings invoked a sharp opposition between the ANC's strategy of "aggressive pressure from the masses of people" and Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of appealing to the moral consciousness of the oppressor. "The African National Congress," Tambo insisted, "expressly rejected any concepts and methods of struggle that took the form of self-pitying, arms-folding, and passive reaction to oppressive policies." When Mandela quoted Nehru at the end of his 1953 address "No Easy Walk to Freedom" (the title itself was taken from Nehru's writings), he may well have had these debates in mind. In their statements regarding the campaign, ANC leaders avoided invoking Mahatma Gandhi and the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign. More strikingly, Lutuli failed to so much as mention the senior Gandhi or his time in South Africa in his famous defense of non-violent civil disobedience, "The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross." In all of their statements, ANC leaders carefully avoided any intimation that Gandhi or the Indian Congresses had inspired the campaign.

The first acts of defiance occurred in Natal some two months later than the beginning of the campaign elsewhere. In September, a crowd of 3,000 Indians and Africans assembled

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71 Callinicos, Oliver Tambo, 180.
73 Neither Mahatma Gandhi or the Passive resistance campaign are discussed in the initial proposal (cited above), the published speeches of Mandela and Lutuli during the campaign, or the flyer issued by the ANC (Transvaal) and the TIC. See "April 6: People’s Protest Day,” flyer issued by the ANC (Transvaal) and the Transvaal Indian Congress in Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 2, 482-3.
75 Privately, it was a different matter. Joe Mathews wrote to his father, ANC veteran Professor Z.K. Mathews, the following lines: “I am quite sure in the long run Natal will beat everybody in the response they get. I only hope it will be possible to keep down the spirit of Chaka and infuse the spirit of Gandhi among the Zulu masses.” Quoted in Baruch Hirson, “The Defiance Campaign, 1952: Social Struggle or Party Stratagem?” in A History of the Left in South Africa, 144.
in Red Square to listen to speeches by Lutuli and Naicker before accompanying the first 21 volunteers to the Berea railway station, where the resisters entered the “Europeans only” seating area. A photo in *Drum* showed a group of African and Indian women—striking in their immaculate saris—later exiting the female gaol, their faces beaming and arms raised in a clinched fist “Africa” salute. Across South Africa, over 8,000 individuals participated in acts of defiance. Only 300 people offered themselves for arrest in Natal, all in Durban (some sources provide a lower number of 192). In his book *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Lodge attributes the meager nature of Natal defiance to the ineffectiveness of the 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign, the political divisions still enflamed by the battle to oust Champion from ANC leadership, organizational disarray, and awareness that any common action would be far from popular. According to a letter written by Joe Mathews, tensions emerged early on between Indian and African leaderships: “You see that the Indians are perturbed over the fact that throughout this campaign the Congress is not leaning on them at all. Our organization is entirely independent, and if anything is giving orders to them.” By and large, the Indian working class showed very little enthusiasm for the protests.

When the Joint Council suspended the Defiance Campaign near the end of 1952, the ANC and Indian Congresses hailed the outcome as an enormous success. Although ANC’s membership grew by orders of magnitude, the campaign only developed a mass base among Africans in the Eastern Cape (where, perhaps significantly, Indians and whites played no real

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76 “‘Defiance’: Crowd of 3,000 Watches First Natal Resisters,” *DRUM*, November 1952.
77 Hirson, “The Defiance Campaign,” 152.
79 Quoted in Hirson, “The Defiance Campaign,” 142.
role in its leadership). Despite the weak response in Natal and among Indians and Coloureds generally, both ANC and Indian Congress leaders declared that the experience had established the unbreakable unity of the “Non-European” peoples. Speaking to a 1953 conference of the Transvaal ANC, Mandela declared: “In the past we talked of the African, Indian and Coloured struggles…. Today we talk of the struggle of the oppressed people which, though it is waged through their respective autonomous organizations, is gravitating towards one central command.” At a February 1953 gathering of the NIC, Naicker went so far as to predict the eventual abandonment of race-based organizations: “With the development of the national liberation movement, a day must come when there will be no need for separate political organizations for the different sections of the oppressed people of the Union. Statements by Congress leaders equated the collaboration of political organizations with the “unity” of racial groups and substantially overstated the degree of support for both parties, particularly the Indian Congresses.

81 Naicker claims that ANC membership jumped from 7,000 to 100,000 and the organization was transformed from “a lose-knit body to an effective mass movement with branches in almost every single area of the country.” See M.P. Naicker, Defiance Campaign in South Africa 1952 (New Delhi: A Mainstream Publication, undated [1972?]), 16. However, the ANC was itself aware of a sharp drop in enrolled members in the year following the Campaign, By the end of 1953, the ANC claimed the following total membership: 16,000 in the Cape, 11,000 in the Transvaal, 1,300 in Natal, and 600 in Orange Free State. As Hirson observes, these numbers are clearly gross approximations, and the Natal figure is four or five hundred higher than given by other sources. See “The Defiance Campaign,” 154-5.


83 Agenda Book, Sixth Annual Provincial Conference of the Natal Indian Congress, 21 and 22 February 1953, Hassim Seedat Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

84 It is significant that the following statement by Dr. Naicker was printed in Ilanga: “The present campaign is further strengthening the already harmonious relationship between the Indian and African peoples whose struggle against oppression is one and indivisible. Unity in action gives a death blow to the Government’s attempt to create hostilities on the part of the African people against the Indian people. It is the task of every Indian in every walk of life to work in co-operation with the African people on the basis of complete equality.” See “Dr. Naicker’s Call to the Indian People,” Ilanga Lase Natal, 26 July 1952.
Nevertheless, a genuine shift in attitudes had occurred, especially among a layer of militants. Following the Defiance Campaign, close working relations existed between the Transvaal Youth League and the Indian youth organization. Activists later described the level of interaction as “constant, constant, they were one, they were a single movement…” and claimed that Ahmed Kathrada, the young Indian firebrand, had become a member of the ANC/YL. Based on the successes of mixed rallies, some Orlando youth leaders proposed replacing the YL with a new organization including all races, arguing “the days of African inferiority have passed, when the African feared and felt small in the circles of Indians, Coloureds and Europeans.” In Durban, the apparatuses of ANC and NIC virtually fused. Both organizations had their offices in Lahkani Chambers on Saville Street. Together, they published a common information bulletin entitled Flash, which regularly quoted Gandhi and Nehru.

The published statements by political leaders offer little insight into the psychological drama of evolving views and lingering resentments that certainly occurred during this period. Amidst the declarations of non-European unity, such issues became increasingly taboo outside of a small circle of leading cadre. Many ANC and NIC members no doubt struggled with the contradiction between a sincere intellectual abhorrence of racial attitudes and personal discomfort with individuals of other races. Others probably believed that they were

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85 Interview with Dr. Ismail Nagdee, Johannesburg, 4 April 2006.
87 The quote is a summary of positions argued by Duma Nowke and Robert Resha by Lakaje. See “Unpublished Autobiographical Notes,” Nairobi, February 1970, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
88 See Flash, issued by African National Congress and Natal Indian Congress, ANC Papers (Hb1.6), Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
free of prejudice while still holding onto unexamined stereotypes or an engrained sense of superiority. Racial consciousness can take many forms, and not all of them are particularly conscious. Returning to South Africa after several years abroad, the novelist Peter Abrahams described some of the tensions and condescension that still remained in social interactions:

There is a new move towards unity among the non-Europeans. This is being spearheaded by the A.N.C. and the I.N.C. But within these two bodies there are still reservoirs of very sharp prejudice. I saw this at an Indian social gathering where there was a very conscious toleration of an African friend. There is then, platform unity between the two Congresses and a degree of social apartheid in personal relations.  

Some Africans who came to support cooperation with the Indian Congress still maintained profound bitterness regarding the racism of some Indians and the privileges of the “merchant class.” Ezekiel Mphahlele’s classic autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*, describes arguing with Indian and Coloured friends about the “Group Area Politics” of their communities:

“How long, I asked, was the Indian merchant class going to dole out money to support their Congress only when a particular law was being resisted which threatened Indian business?”

As if to provoke his interlocutors, the next sentence collapses the distinction between merchant and Indian: “Why had not the Indians ever helped Africans in their fight against, say, the Pass Laws, and only come in when Indian trade was being strangled by group area legislation?”  

If the average Indian was so different than the merchant in his attitudes, Mphahlele seemed to imply, why did he too remain aloof from the struggles of the country’s indigenous majority, leaving the Indian political organizations in the hands of a self-serving elite? Although he recognized the class divisions among Indians, and enthusiastically cultivated a multi-racial circle of intellectual associates, Mphahlele could not shake the

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89 Peter Abrahams, “Can We Unite?” *DRUM*, July 1952.
impression that most Indians wished to remain separate and protect their modicum of privilege—however petty and ultimately humiliating.

**Natal African Politics During the 1950s**

At the time of Lutuli’s election to the Presidency of the ANC in December 1952, Africans from across the country understood that a momentous transition had occurred. Less than a month before, the Native Affairs Department had stripped Lutuli of the Groutville Chieftainship in response to his leadership of the Natal ANC during the Defiance Campaign. His almost immediate ascension to national office not only served as an unmistakable rebuke to the government, it also symbolized the transformation of the ANC itself into a mass movement dedicated to civil disobedience and the recognition that South Africa was “a multi-racial society.” In an article on the 1952 national conference, *Drum* depicted Lutuli as “a conservative turned radical” who personified a more inclusive and popular style in African politics.91 Even at the level of personal affect, Lutuli’s warm, humane, and accessible manner distinguished him from avowedly patrician forerunners like Drs. Xuma and Moroka.92 The Youth League, which strongly urged Lutuli to stand for the Natal and then national presidencies, depicted his election as the end of the “great man” style of African politics and the beginning of a new era of leadership. “Today it is the people who dictate the course along which they want to march to freedom,” Ngubane wrote in *Drum*, “it is they who set the pace, the leader is only their servant.”93

Lutuli had traveled to Madras in 1938 for an International missionary conference on “the place of the indigenous church in missionary endeavor,” an experience he claimed

92 Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 62
opened his mind and broadened his horizons. But his autobiography (partially ghost-written by the liberal priest Charles Hopper) does not discuss the evolution of his views regarding Indians and only mentions Gandhi in a brief factual footnote. Mary Benson claims that Lutuli initially opposed collaboration with the Indian Congress following the 1949 pogrom. Whatever his earlier beliefs, Lutuli’s opponents in Natal attacked him over the Defiance Campaign’s program of joint action with the Indian Congresses and Drum interpreted his election as a rejection of Champion’s influence and a strong endorsement of the ANC’s closer relationship with other non-European groups. In May of 1953, Drum published an interview with the new ANC president that addressed the topics of Communism, the dangers of “extreme nationalism,” and future congress policy. When asked if common cause existed between Africans and Indians, Lutuli replied: “Yes, our immediate objects are bound to be the same, and we can and must work closely together. Since we welcome the sympathy and support of all races in the rest of the world, it would be absurd and contradictory to reject Indians in our own country.” In the opening address at the NIC conference on 1953, Lutuli insisted that the alliance was not a matter of tactics or circumstance, but dictated by fundamental principle: “In concluding this observation on our formidable alliance, I must state that ours is not a marriage of convenience but is a political alliance based on a common, genuine regard for true democracy, and is resulting in a growing spirit of friendship between

94 Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, 78
95 Ibid., 251
96 See chapter 3.
99 “Interview with Luthuli!” *Drum*, May 1953.
our respective communities.”\textsuperscript{100} Denouncing government efforts to generate hostility between Indians and Africans, Lutuli stated that responsible African public opinion completely rejected the expatriation of Indians and endorsed the creation of a “partnership in the system of governing our country.” After the Defiance Campaign, the language of “cooperation” appeared less and less frequently in the statements of ANC leaders. The rhetoric of unity seemed to prevail.

In other matters of policy, Lutuli embodied the considerable degree of continuity that historian Andrew Walshe describes in the ideology of the ANC between the 1940s and early 50s.\textsuperscript{101} Even as the influence of both African nationalism and the CPSA grew considerably, an older generation of widely respected figures, like Lutuli and Professor Z.K. Mathews, continued to have a significant influence on the rhetoric, political perspectives, and campaigns of the ANC. A devoutly Christian man who placed immense faith in human dignity and kindness, Lutuli believed that the Defiance Campaign and similar acts of non-violent struggle would awaken the conscience of a large section of South Africa’s white population, resulting in the electoral defeat of the Nationalists and a transformation of government policy toward Africans. In order to appeal to potentially sympathetic whites, he consistently employed a language of racial understanding and human brotherhood deeply indebted to both Cape Liberalism and the Race Relations tradition. While Lutuli sometimes described his outlook in terms of an “inclusive African nationalism,” most of his statements emphasized the importance of the coexistence of \textit{racial groups} and the need for mutual respect between them. He shunned language that could feed into European fears of rising

“black peril.” As Tom Lodge observes, Lutuli expressed the ANC’s goals in terms of “participation” or “partnership in the government of the basis on equality” rather than majority rule or self-determination. Far more frequently than Xuma and in sharp contrast to earlier Youth League statements, Lutuli continuously returned to the theme that South Africa was a “multi-racial society.”

Lutuli’s election did not, however, result in a rejuvenation of the Natal ANC. In the last months of the Defiance Campaign, the morale of Congress members in the province ran high. In an editorial on the 1952 Natal ANC congress, Ilanga optimistically trumpeted the increased vitality of rural ANC branches, the new spirit of fraternity among African professionals and working class congress members, and the fact that “thousands of Africans and Indians meet together as one united force.” Given the prominence of Lutuli, Ngubane, and Yenga, Drum even speculated that the ANC’s center of gravity would shift to Natal. It was not to be. Membership grew modestly from its low in the mid 1940s, but remain desultory compared to the Transvaal or Eastern Cape. Billy Nair claims that the ANC could boast some 800 members at this time. Although crowds of thousands responded to protests called by the ANC, the Congress struggled to transform the passive loyalty of many Africans into sustained political activism.

There were several reasons for this continued stagnation. State repression and political rivalries undoubtedly contributed. After the crushing of the 1949 Riots, the Durban City Council ordered a wave of arrests and expulsions aimed at drastically reducing the number of “surplus” Africans in the city. According to the estimates of the Native

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102 Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, 68.
104 Interview with Billy Nair, Tongat, 25 May 2006. Walshe states that membership was no more than 250 in 1945. See Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 394
Commissioner for Durban, the enforcement of influx control had resulted in the expulsion of 4,000 Africans by the end of 1950. During this period, the African unions founded in the 1940s “disintegrated in a period of declining wages and official repression.”

Simultaneously, the European press and Natal Nationalist Party encouraged the rise of the rabidly anti-Indian Bantu National Congress, a reactionary organization led by the herbalist S.S. Bhengu. This new party received a significant amount of support from Natal’s chiefs and other local opponents of the Defiance Campaign until a series of articles in the Natal African press, orchestrated by Ngubane and Dhlomo, exposed Bhengu’s pro-apartheid policies. Even after Bhengu’s conviction for fraud in 1953, the Bantu National Congress held the allegiance of powerful African trading interests in Cato Manor. In 1955, the Natal executive submitted a report bemoaning the lethargy of the Zulu “once renowned for their courage.” It went on to state: “We are working among an extremely conservative people, the Zulus, who sometimes show too docile respect for the whites in South Africa.”

Although editorials in Ilanga continued to warn other provinces about the fraught character of Natal’s racial dynamics, the ANC leadership failed to confront a main political reason for the organization’s weakness: continued anti-Indian sentiment following the pogrom and the rejection of cooperation with the Indian Congress by a majority of Durban’s Africans.

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106 Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers,” 357-8; See also Edwards, “Mkhumbane, Our Home,” 205. Edwards quotes a lower number of 3,166 African deported.
107 Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers,” 358.
Perhaps the most significant expression of this sentiment was the growth and transformation of cooperatives or “buying clubs” in African areas following the 1949 pogrom. Immediately following the riots, African residents of Cato Manor occupied vacated Indian locations and began to establish small stores with the purported approval of the Minister for Native Affairs and later support from the Durban Corporation, which allocated abandoned sites to African traders.\footnote{Kuper, \textit{An African Bourgeoisie}, 302-6.} Seizing on the power vacuum and smoldering anti-Indian sentiment in the area, two organizations emerged that sought to pool resources and establish their economic preeminence: the Zondizitha (“Hate the Enemies”) Buying Club and Zulu Hlanganani (“Zulus Unite”) Association. Both groups represented the assertion of an emerging layer of African shack lords, shebeen owners, and illegal petty traders in the shanty towns, especially Cato Manor.\footnote{The Durban Housing Survey reports the operation of buying clubs and three African shops in New Town as well as “a self-appointed headman” who sold water, let sites, collected rents, and looked after “good order of the little community.” See University of Natal, \textit{The Durban Housing Survey}, 377. It is interesting to note that the Zondizitha Buying Club was an alliance between small traders from other areas with aspirant store owners in Cato Manor.} Far less secure than the majority of their Indian counterparts (simply characterizing both as “petit bourgeois” implies a misleading equivalence), these elements nevertheless asserted themselves with a self-confident vigor following the pogrom: they opened stores, established wholesale outlets, invested in land and buses, applied for traders licenses, wrote appeals to the Durban Corporation and Governor General, and managed to impose a loosely-knit structure of political authority. Although most of these ventures failed in short order, they nonetheless represented a new spirit of entrepreneurship and political assertion among the motley and heterogeneous shantytown elite. Zulu Hlanganani—the larger of the two associations—organized an annual celebration
of the 1949 pogrom. Iain Edwards’ dissertation provides a masterful portrait of Mkhumbane (Cato Manor) society during this period:

Dominated by a new proletarian consciousness, Mkhumbane was based around complex networks of patron-client relationships. From African shacklords or rackrenters, minor entrepreneurs, messianic priests, squatter leaders and other “nobodies” emerged a new leadership stratum. Having either control over or decisive influence over access to material resources, such a new leadership element offered residents a form of protection and guidance in return for money, goods and the services of loyalty and obedience so essential to patron relationships.113

The strength of these organizations and the anti-Indian sentiment of African shantytown residents posed an enormous challenge for Congress leadership.114 The major questions of concern to shack dwellers concerned residential security, buses, and trading rights: issues that directly involved the business practices and property rights of Indian groups. Indian-owned bus service—now sometimes employing African drivers or attendants—resumed almost immediately after the pogrom; following an absence of a few years, many Indian shopkeepers rebuilt their stores and landlords appeared again, asserting their right to collect rent. When the city proposed the expropriation of Indian-owned land in Cato Manor to construct housing for Africans, both the NIC and Cato Manor Rate Payers Association voiced their stringent opposition: these groups had called for the expulsion of Africans from the area on

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113 Edwards, “Mkhumbane, Our Home,” 9. My debt to Edwards’s ground breaking research should be obvious throughout this section. I have serious reservations, however, about the use of the term proletarian to describe the consciousness of this stratum or Edward’s political conclusion that the “growth of assertive shantytown communities,” i.e. the temporary consolidation of a heterogeneous dominant layer, “gave to the ordinary African, whether worker, lumpen or newly migrant, a vital control over the substance and pace of African political and organizational advance,” 32. Edwards’s remark that this layer had “control over or decisive influence over material resources,” significantly complicates his general tendency to treat the support given to these organizations by shanty town dwellers as simply expressing subaltern agency and an alternative set of cultural values developed by shantytown dwellers.

114 According to Leo Kuper, one prominent ANC leader was “associated professionally” with Zulu Hlanganani and defended the commemoration of the 1949 Riots on the grounds that “there was nothing really anti-Indian about it.” See Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie, 304.
several occasions. In 1953, another outbreak of anti-Indian violence followed the death of an African in a bus accident. African rioters targeted Indian shops and homes rebuilt after the 1949 Riots. As Edwards documents, most shantytown dwellers believed that they had won “the battle for Cato Manor” and liberated the area from the Indians. Shantytown leaders mobilized around this sentiment and threats of renewed violence frequently appeared in petitions sent by the co-operative groups to the Durban City Cooperation or the Native Affairs department.

Although the Natal ANC understood the importance of organizing within Cato Manor, Congress actively avoided campaigns or forms of agitation that either directly targeted “Indian interests” or could assume an anti-Indian dimension. Partially based on a defense of the Alliance in principle, the calculations behind this strategic decision were likely complex: a boycott against Indian businesses could devolve into further violence, drive larger sections of the Indian community further into the arms of the conservative Natal Indian Organization, fracture the Alliance in the Transvaal, provoke a new round of state repression, frighten white allies, and alienate badly needed international support. At another level, this policy reflected both the Alliance’s reliance on Indian Congress funds and the increasingly disadvantageous situation in Natal Indian politics, particularly the growing conservatism of the Indian working class and the weakness of the NIC. During the 1950s, NIC members devoted the much of their energies to Congress campaigns and the Indian Congress continued to support the ANC financially. However, the NIC itself underwent a severe

118 Former NIC member Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim recalls: “The only issue we were able to mobilize the Indians around was the Group Areas Act. We succeed there, but with Africans there was the pass law, the beer hall struggle, it was mainly African struggles…. The money came from the Indian
decline: it had shrunk to the miniscule size of two active branches in 1952 and many former strongholds, including in Cato Manor, shifted their allegiance to more conservative Indian forces. When the South African Trades and Labour Council split in 1955, most Indian workers affiliated with a legally recognized union which excluded African workers rather than the Congress-led South African Confederation of Trade Unions (SACTU). Protests or campaigns that targeted Indian businesses—if only incidentally—would have imperiled Indian financial support and seriously, if not fatally, weakened the ANC’s embattled ally.

Not only did many Africans outside the ANC believe that the organization was protecting the interests of Indian merchants, but this policy also resulted in a series of bitter struggles within the Natal ANC beginning in the mid 1950s. Informed by the increasingly vocal opposition to the Alliance in other provinces, activists began to accuse the Communist Party and the ANC executive of undermining African political initiatives when they threatened “Indian interests” (i.e., the interests of merchants and bus owners). In an unpublished autobiography, Jordan Ngubane describes two instances of Congress and Communist Party leaders intervened in order to prevent boycotts directed, at least in part, at Indian buses:

The Natal Branch of the ANC was led for a while by Gabriel Nyembe while Luthuli was involved in the treason trial. At one stage the Africans wanted to boycott Indian and municipal buses….He once came to my house in a very bad temper. He complained bitterly that the communists in Durban had sabotaged his and the ANC’s plans to stage a Boycott—because they did not want Indian interests threatened by the Africans. He was eventually shunted out of the ANC. On another occasion the Indian

Congress, they [the ANC] got the money whenever they wanted.” Interview with Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Pretoria, 2 May 2006. This support took other forms as well. During strikes, trade unionist would sometimes approach Indian merchants for donations of food and other groceries and the NIC often used its connections with sympathetic merchants to provide relief to African individuals and families referred by the ANC and SACTU. See Ken Luckhardt and Brenda Wall, Organize or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), 313.

Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, 58.
bus owners decided to raise fares in Durban. The PAC called a meeting in the Bantu Social Centre which decided on a boycott. That night the Congress Movement leaders in Durban ran all over the city telling the Indian bus owners not to raise African fares. For some months the Indians and the Coloureds from Mayville paid a higher fare while the Africans paid less.120

In 1956, the Natal executive expelled two well known leaders of the ANC Women’s league who possessed significant followings among the Cato Manor shack dwellers. As Edwards explains, “At the root of the conflict lay the desire of certain ANCWL organizers to uphold an exclusive African and even Zulu populism which had developed in Mkhumbane during the later 1940s.”121 One of these women, Bertha Mkhize, was respected across the country: a member of the ICU during the 1930s, she served as one of four national vice presidents of the Federation of South African Women in 1954, and was a defendant in the 1956 Treason Trial. A number of members within the provincial executive supported the expelled women and both rejoined the ANC in 1958.122

By the late 1950s, the Durban ANC had become increasingly polarized between ANC members active in SACTU and close to the Communist party and a “nationalist” group whose base of support was largely in the shantytowns.123 In his memoir, Natoo Babenia claims this grouping was “often very racist towards whites and Indians and took issue with SACTU people over the role of the working class.”124 Whatever the truth of this accusation, this faction included several popular and dedicated ANC leaders, including George Mbele (who in exile would join the group of eight senior ANC members who opposed the ANC’s

121 Edwards, “Mkhumbane, Our Home,” 258.
122 Ibid., 259.
1969 adoption of a nonracial membership policy), Youth League official S.B. Ngcobo, and Dorothy Nyembe, a branch leader in Cato Manor and indomitable activist who led protests against the city-owned beer halls in the late 1950s and later joined Umkhonto we Sizwe.\(^{125}\)

In some respects, the sheer force of events soon eclipsed these internal divisions. Natal’s political landscape began to dramatically change in the course of 1958. Three separate developments converged that radicalized different layers of Durban Africans and resulted in the explosive growth of the ANC in the following year. Both wings of the Natal ANC reaped the harvest. First, the government began the resettlement of Cato Manor residents to Kwa Mashu in 1958: bulldozing houses, deporting African without proper documentation (principally women) to the impoverished wastelands of the reserves, and cracking down on illegal brewing in order to improve sanitation.\(^{126}\) African women responded in June of 1959 by launching a protest movement against city run beer halls—including occupying and burning some bear halls to the ground—that nearly culminated in a city wide insurrection. Over 20,000 people attended a Congress Alliance rally held at the end of June and ANC membership swelled.\(^{127}\) Second, the resulting influx of women into the countryside and the state’s drive to remove “Black Spots” (areas of land owned or occupied by Africans outside the reserves) inspired a series of rural rebellions. When Lutuli visited Ladysmith earlier in the year, between 3,000 and 4,000 people packed a meeting organized by the ANC and NIC on the question of Black Spots.\(^{128}\) By late July, militant protests involving tens of thousands of men and women had begun to spread throughout the countryside. Third, membership in SACTU, which had risen steadily in the previous few

\(^{125}\) Bernard Magubane et al., “The Turn to Armed Struggle,” 109
\(^{126}\) Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, 147-8.
years, expanded prodigiously. As a new layers of African workers had entered into low-wage industries in areas like Pine Town and Hammarsdale during the mid 1950s, the horrendous conditions and unregulated wages drove them to demand unionization. Propelled by the waves of township protest, new members flooded the unions in 1959. According to Billy Nair: “We went flat out for the organization. Just in Durban alone 16,000 were recruited in one year. Sixteen thousand workers were recruited, right at the factory floor, were recruited to the ANC.” As banning orders removed subsequent layers of the union leadership, SACTU rushed to bring forward and train African shop stewards. Nair recalls:

We had mass based political classes of about 800 to 1000 workers, leading workers, shop stewards and so on at the YMCA. It used to be packed on Saturday afternoons. We used to pay for it. Workers themselves…one penny and so on each they contributed for the hiring of the hall. They were educated and the workers were actually able to express themselves publicly, get onto the platform, take the PA (the large speaker) and speak. You know they learned public speaking. They were politicized….

It was mostly African, but Indian as well. They were all groomed and moved up and the leaders of the various trade unions overtime became increasingly African.

Unable to address the immanent threat of forced removals, the “mayors” and big men of the cooperative associations—whose essentially local and insular politics centered on securing trading and land rights—faded before ANC activists like Dorothy Nyembe and new, grass roots leaders that quickly adopted the language and symbols of Lutuli and the ANC. As one Cato Manor resident stated during a meeting with the Bantu Affairs commissioner, S. Bourquin: “During the Indian Riots, the people’s war cry was ‘Zulu!’ because people had faith and confidence in the chiefs then. But today the cry is “Afrika!” It is a demand for

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129Luckhardt and Wall, *Organize or Starve*, 209.
peace and freedom in Africa.” However, the growing identification of Cato Manor residents with the ANC did not completely displace the earlier force of anti-Indian sentiment. The first protests against the removals began after residents heard that the City Council planned to rezone the area for Indian occupation. While occupying Bourquin’s offices, a group of women from Cato Manor confronted him in the following terms: “why should they be expelled merely to make room for Indians and Europeans, why should they be moved if Indians were allowed to stay, why did I act like an enemy instead of a father, in what way had they wronged me that I should destroy their homes?” Other evidence indicates that acute differences persisted within Durban’s African population over collaboration with the Indian Congress. Only 20 to 25 percent of Durban responded to the ANC’s call for a strike to protest the Sharpeville Massacre on 18 March 1960 (compared with 85 to 95 percent in other major urban areas). Even after the removal of Cato Manor residents to the Kwa Mashu township in the early 60s, the ANC’s attempts to establish organizational structures encountered some opposition on the basis of “Africanist” distrust of the Congress Alliance and its affiliates.

By the end of the 1950s, Natal had the greatest number of ANC branches (49 versus 41 in the Transvaal) and the highest number of delegates at the annual ANC conference.

130 “Meeting between Bantu Affairs Commissioner and Cato Manor Residents,” 18 July 1959, Bourquin, Papers (KCM 55252), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
131 “Protests against Shack Removal, Memorandum by S. Bourquin,” 2 March 1959, Bourquin Papers (KCM 55170), Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
134 Babenia and Edwards, Memoirs of a Saboteur, 75.
The ANC stopped advertising its planning meetings because it could no longer find a venue to accommodate everyone who would show up.\textsuperscript{136} Concurrently, the first seizure of Indian properties under the Group Areas Act and the general rise in militancy resulted in a degree of greater political activism among a much smaller number Indians and the revitalization of some NIC Branches. During a protest outside of the Victoria Street beer hall, a crowd of “Native males, females, and Indians” encircled the building and Indian store owners threw a volley of bottles at the beer hall’s staff form their balconies across the street.\textsuperscript{137} At its 1961 conference, the NIC appointed Babenia district organizer of sixteen Durban branches, some of which (Clairwood, Bayhead, Magazine Barracks, Happy Valley, and Quarry Road) possessed active working class members.\textsuperscript{138} When the government banned the ANC in 1960, the Alliance organized public meetings under the aegis of the NIC and SACTU—Congress joint structures served as the de facto policy making bodies of the banned African organization.\textsuperscript{139}

In the midst of this constant political activity, the greater education, skills, and economic resources of Indian activists undoubtedly bred some resentment among ANC members. But ANC stalwarts rarely voiced these sentiments in public. At the level of leadership, the prominent role played by Indians—and its potential ramifications—was discussed bluntly, especially among senior cadre of Communist Party, who met frequently in Natal. Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim explains: “yes, there was this resentment, I think more from saying that they’re wary that the Indians should not play a role that is more important than

\textsuperscript{136} Interview with Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Pretoria, 2 May 2006.
\textsuperscript{137} “Memo to Manager re Disturbance Victoria street Beer Hall,” 24 July 1959, Bourquin Papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
\textsuperscript{138} Babenia and Edwards, \textit{Memoirs of a Saboteur}, 52. According to Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim: “The Natal Indian Congress didn’t grow so much . . . . the entire leadership was demobilized, was banned. The African masses were in the forefront of the struggle. The Indian Congress, we made attempts in the late fifties to revive the branches, with very limited success.” Interview with Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Pretoria, 2 May 2006.
\textsuperscript{139} Babenia and Edwards, \textit{Memoirs of a Saboteur}, 53.
their numbers.”

According to Ismail, most interaction across racial lines occurred in the course of organizing campaigns: “there was very little interaction on a social level between Indians and Africans or in all the racial groups….I think in the 50s it was easier, but there were still those differences.” Another NIC activist, Phyllis Naidoo, vividly captures the mundane, but nonetheless pernicious, barriers to greater individual intimacies among rank-and-file activists: “You see, if you came from work to meetings it was nice to say ‘Hello, hello’ but you went back to your group areas. So where the hell is interaction?”

During the late 1950s, Phyllis Naidoo and a group of Indian and African students at Natal University petitioned the provincial leadership to establish a branch of the ANC. Despite their invocation of the Freedom Charter and direct appeal to Lutuli, the ANC ultimately refused the request. Naidoo’s description of this episode deserves quotation in full. It provides something of an allegory for Durban politics during this era—the malignancy of social prejudice, the tremendous efforts made by individuals to overcome racial divisions, and the ultimate limitations of the ANC’s inclusive South African nationalism. She begins by describing a walk to the ANC offices with Lutuli:

We walked down Grey Street toward the ANC offices—this was before ’60—and coming through two Africans, myself, George, we walked near a taxi rink. These fellows were saying in Hindi: “Look, there’s a woman with these Kaffirnese,” which is really ugly, ugly, ugly.

So I said to Chief: “Do you know what he said?”

He was such a loving human being, so he bent down, I told him, so he stopped, we went back and he says: “Gentlemen, I’m Lutuli, Chief Lutuli of the ANC and these comrades”—introduced the four of us to them—and said, “we’re all South Africans.”

And they walked up, virtually on their knees to the Chief, “sorry for the mistake” and all that. They were laughing. They were all bloody rascals, thugs they were. Anyway,

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140 Interview with Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, Pretoria, 2 May 2006.
141 Interview with Phyllis Naidoo, Durban, 24 May 2006.
we go to the ANC office and they have this meeting telling them why we need to
open up a branch and they listened to us and said, look we need time to think.

A couple of weeks later they called us and said: “No, the ANC constitution hasn’t
been changed up till now. The ANC constitution says only African members of the
ANC.”

**The Africanist Faction, the Congress of the People, and the Freedom Charter**

The 1952 Defiance Campaign and the formation of the Congress of Democrats in
1953 strengthened the influence of the self-identified Africanist faction of the ANC,
particularly in the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape.¹⁴² Initially based in the Johannesburg
branches of Orlando, Evanton, and Alexandra, the Africanist opposition sought to mobilize
the wide spread discontent within the ANC over the increasingly prominent role of Indians
and white activists in the Congress Alliance. Describing the mood in Orlando during the
early 1950s, Mathew Nkoana states: “there were a great many people, whether they were
Africanist or not, who were very dissatisfied with the ANC’s collaboration with Indians, the
Indian Congress and the Congress of Democrats.”¹⁴³ This remained true throughout the
decade.

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¹⁴² For a full discussion of the politics of the Africanist current, see Gerhart, *Black Power in South
Africa*. While probably the best single discussion of the ANC and PAC’s political ideology, Gerhart’s
tends to privilege the debates over collaboration with whites and communists in her discussion of the
1950s. In doing so, she projects the PAC’s formulations from the late 1950s and 1960s back onto the
formative discussions of the earlier period. This telescoping also affects her use of some oral
testimony. In describing the evolution of “multi-racialism,”’ she excerpts her interview with Joe
Mathews so that it appears that he is only discussing the problem of collaboration with whites, while
in fact he speaks of both whites and Indians in the same passage and throughout the interview.
(Compare Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 113-114 with her interview with Joe Mathews, 15
August 1970, Gaberone, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, Cullen Library,
University of the Witwatersrand). Gerhart accurately describes the anti-Indian attitudes of many
Africanist leaders. Nevertheless, by compartmentalizing the Indian question, she tends to downplay
the ongoing ideological importance of debates over the Indian question and anti-Indian racism in the
development of African nationalist politics.

¹⁴³ Interview with Mathew Nkoana by Gail M. Gerhart, London, September 1969, Not verbatim, PAC
Interviews, Gerhart Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the
Witwatersrand.
The rhetoric of the Africanists initially centered on three issues related to political organization and the alleged corruption—the moral and political became inextricably fused in their rhetoric—of the ANC leadership. First, the Africanists alleged that the equal voting weight of each organization (the ANC, SAIC, SACPO, SACTU, and COD) gave Communists and minority groups inordinate influence over the decisions of the Congress Alliance. Arguing that both Communist and Indian groups worked to extend the influence of foreign powers in Africa, they attacked the “false diabolical machinery—the Joint Council of Non-European Organizations—for political intrigue and conspiracy against the A.N.C.” whose orders came from the “Downing Streets of Moscow and New Delhi.”144 From the perspective of the Africanists, the undemocratic character of the Congress Alliance was compounded by the fact the recently-founded COD and CPO had a few hundred members, the Indian Congresses several thousand at the most (compared to the ANC’s claimed membership of tens of thousands).145

Second, this grouping voiced intense disquiet over the growing dependency of the ANC and its leaders on outside financial resources, particularly funding obtained from the Indian Congresses. In an interview with Gail Gerhart conducted in 1970, Sobukwe stated that ANC leaders initially welcomed the Indian Congresses and the Congress of Democrats into the Defiance Campaign and then grew increasingly dependent on Indian support: “These communists from the Indian Congress—Dadoo and Cachalia—came and supplied the ANC and Sisulu with money. Also Sisulu’s business was in trouble. You couldn’t blame him for

being grateful to these men.” Similar rumors circulated about Lutuli’s relationship with Indian merchants.

Third, the Africanists expressed tremendous unease regarding social interactions at the leadership level: interracial parties in wealthy suburbs of Johannesburg, drinking alcohol (at the time, illegal for Africans), interactions between African men and white women, and the predominance of Indians and whites at gatherings which doubled as clandestine planning meetings. Most African activists were intensely aware of the economic and cultural abyss between them and their would-be allies. Describing the personal resentments of many Africans, Ngubane aptly captures this discomfort: “Social stratifications followed racial lines…. Try as he would, the White communist could not identify himself completely with the African worker. This went for the Indian too.”

The Africanists alleged that the ANC leadership had abandoned the African nationalism of the 1949 Program of Action and the goal of African majority rule in order to maintain their bloc with the Indian merchant class and white Communists, whom they described as liberal members of the ruling class (the “so-called Communists”). Influenced by a combination of nationalist ideology and deeply engrained racial bitterness, Africanists denied that members of minorities would work to dismantle a system that guaranteed their own privileges: any assertion of group identity—especially in the form of a separate political

146 Interview with Robert Sobukwe by Gail M. Gerhart, August 8 and 9, 1970, Kimberley, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
148 See interview with Nkoana; Interview with Charles Lakaje by Gail M. Gerhart, February 1970, Nairobi, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
149 See also Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa, 156.
organization—represented an acceptance of racial segregation and identification with the status quo. Even if non-Africans could fully identify with the African cause, Africanists rejected including them within a common organization on the basis that it would have the psychological effect of undermining African initiative and self-reliance.151

In 1956, the Orlando-based Africanist published an article by N. Ka Linda entitled “Congress and Other Organizations.” The author began with the fiercely asserted axiom that African nationalism—which, he wrote, was aimed at “building a higher civilization based on the African’s ethics”—represented the irreplaceable instrument for the liberation of the African people. The great crime of the Communist Party and Indian Congresses, Linda alleged, was that they actively worked to supplant African nationalism with other ideologies in the service of “the capitalists and socialists colonizers of the Twentieth Century.” Further, Linda claimed that the very existence of national organizations representing minority groups—and here he included the CPO, the “Indian National Congress” (in effect denying that a South African Indian Congress is a possibility), and the “chameleon” Congress of Democrats—represented a “declaration of war” on the values of the ANC, especially African majority rule. He continued:

If for humanity’s sake we are to tolerate them the only alternative which will create a reasonable understanding, is that they should disband and dissolve their political organizations or reduce them to the status of non-political organizations. If they want to create good relations, they ought to be mere spectators in this chess political game. If they have to take sides then they must go to the side of the enemy.152

Why must these organizations, in the course of political battle, necessarily adhere to the white supremacist regime? Linda asserted that minority groups should receive “every conceivable right” to concern themselves with the preservation of customs, traditions, and

151 Interview with Robert Sobukwe by Gail M. Gerhart, August 8 and 9, 1970, Kimberly, Gerhart Papers. PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
152 N. ka Linda “The Congress and Other Organisations” The Africanist (Orlando), April-May 1956.
non-African cultures. (In this regard, Linda is more tolerant than some Africanists, who frequently rejected the continued development of “foreign” cultures in South Africa.)\textsuperscript{153} But once they assume an active role within the liberation struggle, minority races both to dilute the historic centrality of African nationalism and threaten to vivisect land according to race. The Freedom Charter’s “The land shall be divided equally among the people,” he charged, was analogous to Major Warden drawing his knife and cutting apart the country of the Basoto. An editorial note following the piece offered a slight correction. Saluting the frankness of the article, the editor suggested that there was no need for these organizations to disband “now,” if only they leave the ANC “to run its affairs ITSELF.”

Behind the sensationalist rhetoric and often tendentious argumentation, the Africanist dispute with the ANC leadership concerned the nature of South African society and the Congress Alliance’s strategy for ending white supremacy. Formally, the ANC had not abandoned earlier policy statements like \textit{African Claims} (1943) that advocated universal suffrage and, by implication, African majority rule. However, Lutuli and most other ANC leaders believed that that mass protest and international pressure could impel a large enough section of the white population to reject the racial policies of the Nationalist government and insist on negotiating a new political compact with the African population. Consequently, the speeches of ANC leaders avoided slogans like “Africa for the Africans” or “African majority rule” and left open the possibility for a variety of interim power-sharing arrangements by stressing the need for mutual understanding between racial groups.

Addressing the Natal Indian Congress in 1953, Lutuli explained: “we work for the creation of a partnership in the system of governing our country as shall give all people in the

\textsuperscript{153} For a statement of these views, see Interview with Peter Molotsi by Gail M. Gerhart, August 25 and 17, 1969, New York City, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
union of South Africa, regardless of their race, creed or land of origin, a voice in the
government of the country."154 Indian Congress leaders openly intervened into ANC
meetings to support this posture. At the 1954 ANC national conference, Dadoo congratulated
the ANC leadership for rejecting the slogan “South Africa for the Africans” and, consciously
echoing Mda's language from 1949, warned that the growing Africanist current in the ANC
“can become an anti-democratic force giving rise to the emergence of black fascism in the
Union.”155 While Lutuli argued that Congress Alliance was a matter of principle, a strong
current within the ANC leadership viewed its organizational form and fundamentally liberal
rhetoric in terms of tactical expediency. As Communist party member and former ANC
Youth League leader Joe Mathews told Leo Kuper: “Many African nationalists would regard
the Africanists as blunderers who have let the cat out of the bag too early whereas at this
stage we should work with other groups.”156 Such elements had little doubt that their ultimate
goal was African majority rule, but embraced the Congress Alliance and Lutuli’s brand of
inclusive African nationalism on the basis of political expediency. Crucially, the ANC’s
perspective of internal, democratic reform and the rhetoric of racial understanding
contributed to the emphasis on a South African struggle—rather than, for example, a regional
or Pan-African perspective—and a democratic understanding among South Africa’s
component groups.

In contrast, Africanist writings described white domination as a form of foreign rule:
they denied that South African society differed significantly from settler colonial societies

154 Agenda Book, Sixth Annual Provincial Conference of the Natal Indian Congress, 21 and 22
February 1953, Hassim Seedat Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the
Witwatersrand.
155 Address delivered by Dr. Yusuf Dadoo at the Opening of the National Conference of the A.N.C,
Durban, Thursday, 16 December, 1954, ANC Papers (Ad 2186/Ba 3.3), Historical Papers, Cullen
Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
elsewhere in the continent (Kenya, Algeria, Southern Rhodesia). Placing far less emphasis of the current Nationalist government, they denied that a significant component of the white population would ever agree to abrogate its privileges—particularly, its near monopoly control of land—and accept a government controlled by Africans. According to their logic, the influence of “foreign ideologies” like Marxism and the political role of minorities groups could only obfuscate the true nature of the liberation struggle: the overthrow of white minority rule through a series of direct (although still non-violent) confrontations by the African people themselves, the only group which ostensibly lacked an immediate material interest in upholding a system of racial privileges. In their eyes, the questions of organization, rhetoric, and even the struggle’s imagery were thus absolutely key: the prominence afforded to a small number of Indians and whites in the Congress Alliance prevented Africans from seeing their true enemy (foreign domination) and simultaneously forced the ANC to make concessions regarding the eventual goal of building a society governed by Africans based on (a vaguely defined) “African values.” In opposition to the ANC leadership, the Africanists adopted a Pan-Africanist stance that openly challenged both the historical and political integrity of the state resulting from the 1910 unification of South Africa.

Since the Defiance Campaign, the rhetoric and political aesthetics of the ANC had begun to change substantially. In large part constructed around the statements and persona of Lutuli, the new imagery of struggle drew selectively on the earlier history of the ANC, the terminology of the Communist Party, and the imagery of national liberation movements throughout Asia and the rest of Africa. Growing out of the organizational form of the Congress Alliance itself, this iconography and lexicon focused on articulating two seemingly
disparate political claims: the national unity of South Africa’s diverse peoples and the recognition of each racial (or national) group’s fundamental place within South African society. Contrary to the arguments of critics like Neville Alexander, the ANC did not clearly articulate this new political stance at the level of a consistent doctrine (i.e. the “four nations thesis”): ANC leaders continued to hold a wide variety of views on the “national question,” including liberal pluralist, African nationalist, and orthodox Stalinist positions.157 Rather, the ANC strived to reconcile the two political claims of national unity and racial diversity in the organization and imagery of the Congress Alliance itself. The mixed platforms at Congress meetings, the four-spoke wheel representing the component racial “sections” of the Congress Alliance, and the Freedom Charter came to symbolize a new, inclusive “South African nation” in which each racial group had—at least symbolically—an equal claim to belonging.

The ANC also aligned itself with the image of Afro-Asiatic unity forged at 1955 Bandung Congress in Indonesia, which Moses Kotane and Maulvi Cachalia attended on behalf of the Congress Alliance. At the 1956 Natal ANC conference, Lutuli emphasized this association: “I wish especially to cite the Bandung Conference that unequivocally declared

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157 On the “four nations thesis,” see Neville Alexander, An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 35-7; and earlier, Neville Alexander, “Approaches to the National Question in South Africa ,” Transformation 1 (1986), 77-80. I have three main points of disagreement with Alexander’s invaluable work. First, Alexander tends to write as if unchanging theoretical schemas drive political practice. While this might sometimes be the case, I have found the opposite dynamic at work in the Congress Alliance during this period: political strategies, often shared by groups espousing a variety of world views, are the basis of post facto generalizations at the level of theory. Second, the evidence does not show that a single view point on the national question—whether “multi-racialism” or the “four nations thesis”—was hegemonic in the Congress Alliance during the period before 1960 or inspired (among other things) the Freedom Charter. Rather, a contradictory set of views were reconciled through a political aesthetics that simultaneously affirmed the unity and plurality of a South African nation. Third, I therefore find it somewhat confused to compare this political aesthetics with various theories of the nation because, at a fundamental level, they are phenomena of a different kind. The political aesthetics utilized by the alliance reconciled a historic antinomy at the level of imagery: any translation into the language of theory necessarily results in incoherencies, as the ongoing debate over the meaning of “non-racialism” demonstrates.
against discrimination, racialism, exploitation and colonialism generally and the nations there assembled pledged to fight these evils anywhere they are found in the world.”158 In a 1957 editorial, Liberation declared: “A new force in world politics has emerged, the Afro-asiatic bloc of powers, holding the balance of world power between the lands of socialism and the lands of imperialism.”159 The 1958 ANC Handbook included Afro-Asian Day (April 24) in the Congress’s official calendar.

The major event in the development of this new political aesthetics was the 1955 Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter. Since its conception, the Freedom Charter has been the subject of enormous controversy and searing criticism from multiple political perspectives.160 As much as its content, these debates have often concerned the Freedom Charter’s status as a symbol: statements by ANC leaders at the time emphasized its importance as a democratic expression of the South African people. Indeed, its most unprecedented idea was that there existed a singular people within South Africa whose will could be collectively embodied and represented. This imagery differed substantially from the Congress Alliance’s rhetoric even two years before, let alone the earlier positions of the ANC and the Youth League. Although the ANC’s political language during the Defiance Campaign was inconsistent, ANC leaders generally advocated “cooperation” or “understanding” between racial groups and sometimes described South Africa as a

“multiracial” country. In a 1952 interview, for example, Moroka characterized South Africa as a “multi-racial society” and explained that the policy of the ANC towards other non-European groups was to “cooperate fully, not combine.”

When ANC leaders used the term “multi-racial” in the early 1950s, it simply referenced an empirical facet of the country: it did not have any particular doctrinal or ideological significance. The ANC’s dominant idiom, in fact, largely came from the traditions of Cape Liberalism and the SAIRR. The Working Committee of the Cape ANC summarized the organization’s viewpoint in the following terms: “The A.N.C. is the only organization with a policy that can lead to harmonious relations between the races in this country and indeed the policy places the A.N.C. in par with progressive and civilized mankind.”

By the end of the Defiance Campaign, the earlier language of cooperation had largely given way to the call for a common, democratic movement and the celebration of unity between the non-European peoples. Particularly in the speeches of younger leaders like Mandela, a militant rhetoric inspired by the CPSA became increasingly prominent: “In the past we talked of the African, Indian, and Coloured struggles…. Today we talk of the struggle of the oppressed people which, though it is waged through their respective autonomous organizations, is gravitating towards one central command.”

At the same time, ANC statements began emphasizing the need for a South African loyalty and shared set of democratic values that would eventually build a single nation out of the “apparently

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161 “Dr. Moroka Gives His Views,” *DRUM* (February 1952).
162 Lutuli made the following statement in a 1952 speech: “In these past thirty years or so I have striven with tremendous zeal and patience to work with other sections of our multi-racial society in the Union of South Africa.” See “The Road to Freedom is by the Cross,” 12 November 1952, in Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 2, 486-7.
conflicting racial groups.” As Malcom McDonald observes, the argument that the shared belief in a set of democratic ideals and institutions could produce a unified nation was central to many ANC statements during the 1950s.

In the campaign for the Congress of the People, two important transformations took place in the ANC’s language and political symbolism. First, African leaders, particularly Lutuli, began to use the word “multi-racial” to refer to an essential characteristic of the South African nation itself. Describing the COP, Lutili explained that “people from all walks of life in our multiracial nation will have the opportunity to write into this great Charter of Freedom their aspirations for freedom.” The language used to describe the elements of this nation remained enormously inconsistent: Africans, Whites, Coloureds, and Indians were variously described as “national groups,” the “four sections of the people of South Africa,” and “races.” However, the overwhelming emphasis became that all racial groups (rather than, for example, all individuals) belonged to a single, existing South African nation and these different groups collectively defined South Africa’s national essence. Second, the ANC leaders began to argue that the Congress Alliance—and particularly the campaign for the

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166 McDonald, Why Race Matters in South Africa, 111.
169 Lutuli seems to have differed with other Congress leaders over whether racial and cultural differences would eventually disappear in a future democratic South Africa. In discussions following the Kliptown Congress, the Natal ANC raised concerns over the Freedom Charter’s emphasis on racial differences and proposed instead a clause emphasizing the need to build “one united nation.” See Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3, 66. In response to the Charter’s defense of language rights, Lutuli suggested that there should be a single “lingua franca,” but conceded it would be best to remain silent on this question in the Charter. See Albert Lutuli, “The Implications of the Freedom Charter,” speech made at the 44th Annual Meeting of the ANC (16-18 December 1955) in Voices of Liberation, vol. 1, 85.
Freedom Charter—embodied the collective will of South African and provided a model or
image of the nation itself. In this context, the otherwise unremarkable singular in “Congress
of the People” was an extraordinary and deliberate statement (infamously, the ANC invited
the National Party to contribute to the proceedings as well). Leaders of the ANC and Indian
Congress repeatedly emphasized that the Kliptown gathering was far more representative of
“the people” than any other body convened in South African history. In 1955 his speech
on the Congress’s significance, Mandela quoted the following remarks made by Lutuli:

Why will this assembly be significant and unique? Its size, I hope, will make it
unique. But above all its multi-racial nature and its noble objectives will make it
unique, because it will be the first time in the history of our multi-racial nation that its
people from all walks of life will meet as equals, irrespective of race, colour, and
creed to formulate a freedom charter for all people in the country.

Echoing the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution, the first incantatory
lines of the charter declared: “We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and
the world to know: That South Africa belongs to all that live in it, black and white, and that
no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people.” This
imagery also informed the pageantry of the Congress itself: representatives of each Congress
organization occupied the platform while speakers drawn from across the country addressed
the crowd in front of the four-spoke wheel of the Congress Alliance. At least 320 Indians
were present among the 2,884 delegates, including a delegation of “young Indian wives, with
glistening saris and shawls embroidered in Congress colours [and] smooth Indian lawyers
and business men, moving confidently through the crowd in well-cut suits.”

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170 See “Presidential Address” by G.M. Naiker at the Opening of the 9th Provincial Congress of the
NIC, 22 June 1956, Hassim Seedat Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of
the Witwatersrand.
172 Quoted in Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 3., 61.
bestowed the title of *Isitwalandwe* on Trevor Huddleston, Lutuli, and Dadoo, whose aged mother accepted the honor on behalf of the banned leader.\(^{173}\)

Despite later claims that the Freedom Charter articulated a “multi-racial nationalism,” the document never employed the words “multiracial” or “multiracialism.” Nor did it contain the language of “an inclusive African nationalism,” the terminology that Lutuli preferred during the mid 1950s. The text also managed to avoid the word “African,” which most whites still refused to utter in the 1950s (nor, for that matter, did it mention “Indians”). It did not articulate a coherent idea of the South African nation or a clearly conceptualized policy regarding minority groups. Although many critics charged that its second section implied the equal representation of racial groups in state institutions, its wording was notoriously vague—the ANC did not directly address the issue of group rights or communal representation until after the PAC split, when it publicly denied that it advocated minority privileges beyond the legal protection of language and culture.\(^ {174}\) Rather, the Freedom Charter distilled the organizational and (especially) rhetorical tactics of the Congress Alliance: a calculated ambiguity designed to facilitate the greatest possible unity among “democratic forces” by leaving open the possibility of significant guarantees for minorities or a power sharing agreement with the white population. At the same time, the ANC incorporated the Freedom Charter and the Congress of the People into a broader political aesthetics, which emphasized the national unity of South Africans while presenting an image of a nation comprised of four distinct racial groups, each represented by a distinct party.


\(^{174}\) See my discussion below.
within the Congress Alliance. The organizational form of the alliance had, effectively, undergone an apotheosis.

A critique of the Charter written by Ufford Khoruha and Kwame Lekwame, despite its recourse to innuendo and demagoguery, was perhaps the most sophisticated article produced by the Africanists in the 1950s. In the eyes of the Africanists, any vision of a future South Africa that did not explicitly affirm its African character denied the historic reality of European conquest and the socio-economic foundations of African exploitation. Employing ideas and terms culled from the intellectual traditions of their political opponents (Marxism, Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, the Jan Smuts’ preamble to the United Nations Charter), the authors moved beyond earlier Africanist statements, which relied almost exclusively on asserting the principle of African nationalism in their polemics. Frequent reference was made to existing social and economic relations—a clear attempt to refute the arguments of the CPSA using the terminology and concepts of Marxism. Khoruha and Lekwame argued that the “people” of the Charter was an abstraction with no reality in South Africa: the assertion that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it”—i.e. both the European occupier and the dispossessed African majority—implicitly denied “the fundamental right of the African people to control their own country.” By merely protesting the unjust and unequal form of government, they continued, the Charter implied “a general acceptance of the existing framework” and avoided the underlying social relationship of oppression and national degradation. Ridiculing the document’s lack of “realism,” the authors asserted that the

175 Earlier ANC history was then rewritten in accord with this imagery. The first item in the 1958 ANC Handbook’s section on program and policy is entitled “A Multi-racial Country.” It read: “The African Nation Congress has always accepted that South Africa is a multi-racial society and has stated its aims a common multi-racial society based upon equality of rights for all national groups and equal respect between them…. the A.N.C. and its co-Congresses stand for a broad and true South Africanism, extending to all irrespective of color.” African National Congress Handbook, ANC Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
Charter’s universalistic rhetoric obscured the fundamental antagonism between European and African:

To them master and slave—exploiter and exploited, the oppressor and oppressed, the degrador and the degraded are all EQUALS, to them African Nationals and Alien Nationals—the disposed indigenous peoples and their alien dispossessors are all COUNTRY MEN. For them the tribalist and the nationalist, the Herrenvolkist and the Africanist are all BROTHERS.176

“The problem of the synthesis of opposites,” they caustically instructed “cannot be resolved by a magic wand.” Although emphasizing that Europeans could remain in South Africa under an African government, Khoruha and Lekwame argued that a transformation must occur in both the material relations of exploitation and the philosophical outlook of the master group. However, they believed the Freedom Charter’s recognition of the place of whites and Indians was premature. Only a government of the African majority would have the moral authority to grant citizenship rights to members of minorities: “For the alien nationals to become African nationals, they must restore the control of the country and be nationalized by them.” Accordingly, the Charter’s acceptance of distinct ethnic and national groups simultaneously denied “the common community of man” and typified the racial arrogance of minority groups whose desire to maintain and develop separate cultures from African represented a refusal to abandon their privileges. The “Herrevolkenist” could become an “Africanist.” He must place the economic interests of the subjected majority above those of his own class interest. Since “the social question is primarily a national question,” political democracy necessitated a government that would promote the interests of the African majority, organizing and distributing national wealth on an equitable basis among Africans. Only after

the destruction of the racial and economic hierarchy between groups, Khoruha and Lekwame intimated, would a relationship of “brotherhood” develop between people as individuals.

As in many Africanist documents, the authors took great pains to emphasize the unity of the human race and their opposition to racial chauvinism in all of its forms. Nevertheless, their argumentation relied on a crude equation of socio-economic relationships with interactions between cohesive racial groups. Witness the genuflection before the Communist Manifesto in the passage quoted above. Racially-defined blocs—African, Indian and European—were the protagonists of South African history, their scripts determined by the confluence of material interest and historical origin. The equation of national oppression and class exploitation was likely drawn from the writings of the Communist Party: it played a central role in the schema of “colonialism of a special type.” The authors, however, had deftly inverted this analysis into an a priori indictment: white and Indian activists involved in crafting the Charter, as putative members of South Africa’s ruling class, were necessarily defending the racial status quo. Regarding Indians, they wrote: “The elements [at Kliptown] were the Indian Merchant Class who though politically repressed are in fact not in fact not oppressed. They are an exploiting alien group whose material interests are in direct conflict with those of the Indian masses.” Despite recognizing the anomalous situation of the “Indian masses,” this article nevertheless struggled with a paradox at the heart of Africanist politics: the coexistence of militant anti-racism and a worldview constructed through a crude racial typology. In their eyes, this antinomy reflected an objective political dilemma created by the South African situation: the social system oppressed Africans on the basis of a falsely-ascribed racial status and only the oppressed majority, mobilized around the ideals of revolutionary nationalism, could abolish racial domination by overthrowing the “white
oppressor.” Rhetorically, the Africanists sought to overcome this contradiction by defining “Africans” on the basis of indigenous status and ideological loyalty rather than ethnicity, culture, or skin color (the founding conference of the PAC in 1959 raised the slogan “Africa for the Africans from Cape to Cairo, from Morocco to Madagascar!”). But in practice, the Africanists deliberately appealed to the force of popular resentments against whites and Indians.177

In April of 1959, a section of the Africanists established a new political party, the Pan Africanist Congress. As the PAC managed the transition from an internal faction to an independent party, its rhetorical focus largely shifted from opposing Indian and Communist influence within the ANC to opposing foreign domination of Africa and white supremacy.178 Building on the earlier tradition of the Youth League’s philosophical idealism, the PAC sought to explain its differences with the ANC at the level of fundamental principles and adopted the term “multi-racialism” to describe the ANC’s alleged deviation from African nationalism. PAC speakers began to juxtapose “multi-racialism” with “non-racial democracy” and, somewhat later, “non-racialism.”179 A.B. Ngcobo explained this position at

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177 Lodge quotes the following statement from by Africanist leader: “The masses do not hate an abstraction like ‘oppression’ or ‘capitalism’… They make these things concrete and hate the oppressor—in South Africa the White man.” See Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 83.

178 See also Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, vol. 3, 313-4.

179 Although I have found a few scattered uses of the term “non-racial” in Congress Alliance speeches before 1958, they were purely descriptive, i.e. they did not refer to a doctrine or outlook. Furthermore, the words “non-racial” and “multi-racial” (with or without the –ism) are absent from the major policy documents of the ANC before the period of exile. The first use of “multi-racialism” that I have found in Lutuli’s speeches refers to “an important fact of our situation”—i.e. to the composition of South Africa, not to a doctrine or political policy. See “Freedom in Our Lifetime,” presidential address to the 46th annual conference of the African National Congress, Durban, December 12-4, 1958 located at http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/speeches/1950s/ lutuli58.html (accessed on 5 July 2009). It appears that “non-racial” nationalism was first opposed to “multi-racialism” in writings of Cape Town intellectuals during debates over the NEUM and Congress Alliance in the late 1950s. The first instance that I have located is in Kenneth Hendrickse, “The Opposition in Congress,” *The Citizen*, 4 March 1958 in Allison Drew, *South Africa’s Radical Tradition*, vol. 2. However, the opposition between “multi-racialism and “non-racialism” (implying
a Durban meeting several months before the PAC’s founding conference: “Multi-racialism is not non-racial democracy. Where we see it practiced as in the CAF [Central African Federation], it means partnership between races as groups…. When imperialist found that it was no longer possible to force people, multi-racialism began. Multi-racialism means equality of groups.”\(^{180}\) The organization’s first president, Robert Sobukwe, compared the ANC’s policy with the “multi-racial constitution imposed on the African people [of Tanganyika] by imperialist Britain” and argued that it violated “the non-racial democratic principle of ’one man one vote.’”\(^ {181}\) The 1959 *Pan-Africanist Manifesto* declared that the African people: “deny the foreigners any right to balkanize or pakistanise their country. To such schemes, programmes or policies, the African people cannot be a party. The African people are neither racists or racialists and they unreservedly condemn all forms of racism, including multi-racialism.”\(^ {182}\) In an interview after the founding conference, Sobukwe told reporters that any person who acknowledged the right of Africans to govern South Africa and showed respect to Africa’s indigenous peoples—in other words, who had assimilated to African society and values—could become citizens in a future South Africa. The PAC would guarantee human rights as individuals, but not “minority rights.”\(^ {183}\)

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\(^{180}\) Leo Kuper, Report on Meeting Held at Bantu Social Centre on 31\(^{st}\) January 1959, Gerharts Papers (A422, Box 3), Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.


\(^{182}\) “The 1959 Pan Africanist Manifesto,” in *The Basic Documents of the Pan Africanist Congress* (Lusaka: Secretary, Publicity and Information, Pan Africanist Congress of S.A., 1965), 21-2.

Despite this insistence on the principle of non-racial democracy, the PAC excluded whites and Indians from membership in the new organization.\footnote{Although most Africanists cadres had long insisted that Coloureds were “Africans,” the PAC excluded them as well until a former Central Committee member of the Communist Party, John Gomas, petitioned for membership. According to Pogrund, Sobukwe struggled with the rest of the PAC leadership the accept him and it then took considerable effort to convince the branches. See Pogund, \textit{How Can Man Die Better}, 197.} At its founding conference, Sobukwe advocated the inclusion of poor Indians into the PAC based on the class divisions within the Indian population. In his address to the conference, Sobuwke described the Indian minority in the following terms:

Then there is the Indian foreign minority group. This group came to this country not as imperialists or colonialists, but as indentured labourers. In the South African set-up of today, this group is an oppressed minority. But there are some members of the group, the merchant class in particular, who have become tainted with the virus of cultural supremacy and national arrogance. This class identifies itself by and large with the oppressor but, significantly, this is the group which provides the political leadership of the Indian people of South Africa. And all that the politics of this class have meant until now is the preservation and defense of the sectional interests of the merchant class. The down-trodden, poor “stinking coolies” of Natal who, alone, as a result of the pressure of material conditions, can identify themselves with the indigenous African majority in the struggle to overthrow White supremacy, have not yet produced their leadership. We hope they will soon.\footnote{“Inaugural Convention of the PAC, 4-6 April 1959: Opening Address by R. M. Sobukwe,” in Karis and Carter, \textit{From Protest to Challenge}, vol. 3, 515.}

Sobukwe’s appeal failed to convince the assembled delegates.\footnote{Interview with Robert Sobukwe by Gail M. Gerhart, 8-9 August 1970, Gerhart Papers, PAC Interviews, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.} In the conference’s aftermath, the ANC renewed its earlier charges that the PAC represented “narrow nationalism” and even “black fascism.” Outsiders sympathetic to the new organization, like journalists Benjamin Pogrund and Jordan Ngubane, soon queried the contradiction between the PAC’s declared ideological stance and its organization practices.

In an article on the PAC’s founding conference, Ngubane observed that there were two schools of thought within the party on the question of minorities: racialists and “non-
racialists.” Although Ngubane argued that the racialists constituted a minority, he clearly believed they posed a significant danger to the PAC and even the whole of South Africa: “They want no contact between Black and White and reject reason in favour of an emotionalism that will lead to civil war. There in no point in mincing words. Some of the attitudes expressed by the Africanists are bound to produce civil war.”\textsuperscript{187} Ngubane argued that the majority of the PAC, represented foremost by Robert Sobukwe, believed in non-racial democracy based on the rights of the individual and the elimination of race in political or economic matters. “But they will be hypocritical,” he warned, “if they do not face squarely the problem of what to do with the European or Indian who subscribes fully and sincerely to Pan-Africanism and is willing to identify himself with the African.” Unless it changed its policy, Ngubane concluded, the PAC risked proving its critics justified in the charge of racialism. Although Pogrund claims that Sobukwe began reconsidering this question shortly afterwards, the PAC’s membership policy remained the same up until its banning in 1960 and only changed after its members went into exile.\textsuperscript{188} Outside of its leadership, deep

\textsuperscript{188} Pogrund, \textit{How Can Man Die Better}, 107. In 1966, Barney Desai and Cardiff Marney released a document in London announcing the dissolution of the Coloured People’s Congress that called on “South African Coloureds and Indians numbering two and a half million enslaved People to follow our example by becoming members of the dynamic PAC, and for all time bury racial tags.” According to the authors, they had petitioned to join the ANC in 1962, but had been rebuked. See “Statement of the Dissolution of the Coloured People’s Congress,” by Barney Desai and Cardiff Marney, London, March 1966 (abridged) in Tom Karis and Gail Gerhart, eds., \textit{From Protest to Challenge: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979}, vol. 5, \textit{A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882 - 1990} (Bloomington : Indiana University Press), 370-2. According to Dr. Ismail Nagdee, there was a cell of PAC-aligned Indian medical students from South Africa in Karachi, Pakistan, during the 1960s. Several of these doctors returned to South Africa after their studies and consciously worked in the African townships, providing medical aid to the African poor and using their practices to help African activists, particularly in the years following the 1976 Soweto Townsjip uprising. The most well-known of these physicians was Dr. Abubaker “Hurly” Asvat, who was assassinated in his Soweto surgery in 1989. Interview with Dr. Ismail Nagdee, 4 April 2006, Johannesburg.
currents of anti-white and anti-Indian racism continued to exist within the organization. Nevertheless, the birth of the PAC and the concept of “non-racialism” had permanently transformed the intellectual terrain of African politics.

Conclusion

Publicly, the ANC derided the significance of the new organization. Rather than engage with the substance of the Africanist faction’s arguments, the ANC had attempted to brand the faction as “racialists” and “anti-Congress” office seekers whose actions (wittingly or not) strengthened the Nationalist regime by dividing the forces of the liberation struggle. The ANC leadership largely pursued the same line of attack following the secession and claimed that a hostile white press exaggerated the strength of the breakaway party. In retrospect, some ANC leaders claimed that the dispute over “multi-racialism” was confused and entirely semantic: the real difference between the ANC and PAC revolved around an “inclusive” versus “exclusive” ideal of nationalism. PAC leaders countered that the Congress Alliance consisted of racially exclusive organizations and the Freedom Charter defended the continued existence of racial divisions within a future South African society.

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189 PAC leader Peter Molotsi describes the racial attitudes within the PAC in the following terms: “You know at the PAC Convention, and at PAC meetings, you always had this problem. The people from Natal they hated Indians more than whites.... The people from the Cape hated Coloureds, you, the people from the Western Cape, this part. They hated the Coloured people more than they hated the whites. Transvaal-Free State, these didn’t mind. They liked the Coloureds, they liked the Indians, but they had no dealing with the whites, Transvaal-Orange Free State.” Regarding the Natal PAC’s attitude towards Indians, he summarized: “If they do not see themselves as Africans, we shall go out of our way to provide free transport to their port of origin... They will have to become African or quit the fatherland. Quit.” See Peter Molotsi interviewed by Gail Gerhart, 15 and 17 August 1969, Gerhart Papers, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

190 Karis and Gerhart attribute this position to Joe Mathews and it seems to have been widely shared in the early 1960s. In his autobiography, Lutuli suggests that the difference between the PAC and ANC might be primarily a matter of means rather than their overall vision of a future South Africa (suggesting that he adopted the language of non-racialism in hopes of an eventual political reconciliation). See Lutuli, Let My People Go, 187.
The PAC split had a far more dramatic impact on the ANC than most accounts suggest. The ANC clarified its position on minority rights immediately following the PAC’s founding conference and, by 1961, adopted the terminology of “non-racialism.” In a wide-ranging critique of Sobukwe’s address to the PAC’s founding conference, Joe Mathews argued that the guarantee of linguistic and cultural freedom was “fundamental in any democratic society,” but then sharply differentiated this position from the defense of privileged status as, for example, demanded by minorities in Kenya. Soon, other ANC leaders would go further. In his 1961 Nobel acceptance speech, Lutuli established a new narrative of ANC history by projecting the language of “non-racial” democracy back to the founding of the organization: “Our vision has always been that of a non-racial democratic South Africa.” The following year, he voiced his opposition to group rights in terms identical to Sobukwe: “The question of reserving rights for minorities in a non-racial democracy should not arise. It will be sufficient if human rights are entrenched in the constitution.” Mandela also began to use the term “non-racial” during the early 1960s.

At the same time, the emergence of the PAC inspired the revival of an African nationalist rhetoric that the Congress Alliance leadership had consciously downplayed throughout most of the 1950s. Pressure to assert a more robust Africanism also came from abroad. The PAC’s critiques influenced political leaders throughout the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, who then sharply questioned the prominence of Indians and white in the Congress

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193 “What I Would Do if I were Prime Minister,” reprinted from Ebony, February 1962 in The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross, 77.
Alliance. Following his travel to a number of African countries in 1962, Mandela developed a searing reevaluation of the ANC's image and began to argue that the ANC needed to assert a clearer leading position within the alliance, strengthen the participation of Africans at a mass level, and represent itself as “the vanguard of the Pan African movement in South Africa.” Although Mandela emphasized that he was not rejecting the correctness of the ANC’s overall policy, his new emphasis on African leadership resulted in painful exchanges with Dadoo in London and Lutuli in Natal. The main elements of Mandela’s argument later appeared in the exiled ANC’s 1969 *Forward to Freedom*, which heavily stressed the central role of the African masses and advocated national pride, confidence, and assertiveness. In the ensuing decades, the relationship between African nationalism and non-racialism would become a major issue of debate within the liberation struggle—and it remains a widely discussed question in the post-apartheid period.

The events of the year 1960 marked the end of an era: the March 21st massacre of PAC-led demonstrators at Sharpeville, the banning of the ANC and PAC, and the ANC’s decision to initiate armed struggle against the South African state. By the mid 1960s, the security police had infiltrated and dismantled the underground organizations of the ANC and PAC and the leadership of both organizations was either in prison or abroad. The state had effectively crushed mass political dissent. As an effort to bring down the Nationalist government or overturn apartheid legislation, the Congress Alliance had decisively failed. It would take a decade of mass struggle and near civil war, accompanied by protracted capital flight, before a section of the Nationalist Party would seriously consider basic democratic

reforms at the end of the 1980s. The ANC leadership had vastly overestimated the willingness of a substantial section of the white population to abandon the existing racial order. It had also failed to anticipate—despite abundant warning signs—the way that resentment over the structure of the Congress Alliance would coalesce with growing impatience for radical social transformation among a younger, increasingly bitter generation of Africans. If the PAC’s instigation of a direct challenge to the state’s authority was both premature and fatally romantic, it was also a direct consequence of the Congress Alliance’s failure to produce any significant changes in the political situation governing the lives of Africans.
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