Being an Indian Communist the South African Way: The Influence of Indians in the South African Communist Party, 1934-1952

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Abstract

The Indians that settled in South Africa were differentiated by class, caste, religion, language and region of origin. Whilst some Indians were imported as indentured labourers to work on the sugar plantations in Natal, others came as merchants and traders and set up businesses in South Africa. In this thesis, I consider the historical background to the construction of 'Indianness' in South Africa, where the idea of 'community', a contested and transformative concept, called upon existing cultural traditions brought from India, as well as new ways of life that developed in South Africa. Crucially, central to the construction of 'Indianness' were notions of citizenship and belonging within their new environment. I look at the ways in which sections of the Indian 'community' were radicalised through fighting for democratic rights and citizenship in South Africa, and subsequently joined the South African Communist Party.

With Indian South African communists, there was, I argue, a complex articulation between the influence of Gandhi and the Indian national movement, socialism and class politics, and the circumstances of their new social and political landscape. Historically, Indians have been disproportionately represented in the South African Communist Party in relation to their numbers in wider South African society. They have played an important part in the development of political strategies within the party and, in particular, have contributed to the ongoing debate on the relationship between nationalism and socialism and the practical application of this in party work. In this thesis, I look at the role of Indians in the South African Communist Party and consider the social, cultural and political influences that they brought to the organisation. I examine how these traditions were woven into new forms of political resistance within the CP, and how these fed into the Defiance Campaign of 1952.

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Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ANC	African National Congress
APO	African People's Organisation
ASC	Anti Segregation Council
BIA	British India Association
CBIA	Colonial Born Indian Association
CBSA	Colonial Born and Settler's Association
CBSAIA	Colonial Born South African Indian Association
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
DIA	Durban Indian Association
DIC	Durban Indian Committee
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FAC	Franchise Action Committee
HIC	Hamidia Islamic Society
HYMA	Hindu Young Men's Association
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
INC	Indian National Congress
InSL	Industrial Socialist League
ISL	International Socialist League
IWA	Industrial Workers of Africa

LSG	Liberal Study Group
NEUF	Non European United Front
NIA	Natal Indian Association
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NIPU	Natal Indian Patriotic Union
NP	National Party
NRWIU	Natal Rubber Workers Industrial Union
PRC	Passive Resistance Council
SACP	South African Communist Party
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAIO	South African Indian Organisation
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
TIO	Transvaal Indian Organisation
VDS	Veda Dharma Sabha
YMCA	Young Mans Christian Association
YMHA	Young Mans Hindu Association

Introduction

In 1860 the first Indian indentured labourers were shipped to South Africa to work on the sugar plantations of Natal. Since then the Indian population has become permanently settled in South Africa and since 1994 has been a part of the 'rainbow nation'. But far from being transformed into a single, essentialised ethnic group, the South African Indian community has become differentiated over time and its conditions have been continually in flux. The aim of this thesis is to look at one part of that population and its changing role in the political process with specific reference to the South African Communist Party.

In the 1970s, a group of South African historians used the tools of Marxism, amongst other methodologies, and the parameters of political economy, to reconfigure the South African past. Much innovative and groundbreaking theory helped liberate historical narratives from the positivist assumptions of the dominant liberal tradition and brought categories such as race and class to the fore. I wish to build on this body of knowledge but also to move beyond it to incorporate the new theoretical insights, which have critiqued the more deterministic of these narratives. I have therefore attempted to include more recent categories of academic inquiry around notions of diaspora[1], identity[2] and place and space[3] with a view to introducing a complex and dynamic articulation between structures and agencies around the events and peoples I describe. My work therefore falls between historical representation and ethnographic narrative and sets out to contribute to the continuing (and increasingly fruitful) dialogue between history and anthropology, in the light of contemporary debates about the shifting boundaries of knowledge and our position within the environment. I have also attempted to embrace the seminal insights of radical geographers such as David Harvey[4] and Edward Soja[5] in my analyses of this period of

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[1] J. Clifford, 'Diasporas', in Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century, (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. 244-278.
[2] S. Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?', in S. Hall and P. du Gay, (eds) Questions of Cultural Identity, (London, 1996), pp. 1-17.
[3] D. Harvey, 'Class Relations, Social Justice and the Politics of Difference', in M. Keith and S. Pile (eds), Place and the Politics of Identity, (London, 1993), pp. 41-66.
[4] D. Harvey, The Urban Experience, (Oxford, 1989); D. Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of social change, (Oxford, 1989); D. Harvey, Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference, (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

segregation and apartheid in order to represent the growing cartography of social control, with its resulting impact on discourses of power and identity. In short, this thesis sets out to be an interdisciplinary project using the tools of a critical historical materialism.

In my introduction, I aim to achieve three things. Firstly I set out to describe the people that I studied and the nature of the fieldwork that I undertook in the five months I spent in South Africa in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. I then want to look at problems of methodology in more detail and outline some of the more recent debates concerning modernity and postmodernity, and their applicability to the South African context. I will conclude the introduction with a chapter outline that traces the arguments and lines of enquiry I hope to pursue.

Fieldwork in South Africa

The aim of my thesis is to study Indians in the South African Communist Party between 1934 and 1952, with a view to analysing why they joined, and what impact they had both inside and outside the party. In particular, I want to look at how their political discourses intersected and articulated with those of place and nation – in other words how political identities helped form, and were in turn formed, by the wider body of socio-cultural factors within which they operated.

I went to South Africa in 1995, a year after its first non-racial elections, when hopes were running high for the new South Africa, and the country was in the first throes of trying to transform the nation state in a meaningful political way. Expectations at ground level were high, as much had been promised in the run up to the elections. And, unlike other parts of the world, where people were busy dancing on the grave of communism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, because of its 'special relationship' with the ANC, in South Africa, the Communist Party had ministers in government and a hand in shaping policy.

As has always been the case with the party historically, Indians were prominent amongst its members. This made targeting my first round of informants fairly straight

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[5] E. Soja, Postmodern Goegraphies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory, (London, 1989).

forward, but, as with all fieldwork, events took turns that I could not plan and luck played a big part in giving me some of my best opportunities for research. I subsequently interviewed current Indian party members, some of who had left the organisation, as well as Indians who were active in politics but had never been in the party. In wider and mostly informal social settings I also talked to African and white party members and continued the library-based research I had started in London, as well as looking for primary sources. Interviews were conducted mostly in an informal framework, as I found the amount and type of information divulged in that setting far richer and more interesting than in more formal interviews. Many of my sample group were men in their seventies and eighties who had been interviewed before and who tended to fall into formulaic representations of their lives and the party line, unless nudged in other directions. Unfortunately the number of women that I interviewed was small, not through choice but through circumstance.

Although I did some work in Johannesburg and Cape Town, most of my four-month stay was spent in Durban, where most Indian South Africans live. The flat I shared near the university represented a rather neat microcosm of the cleavages and seeming disparities within the Indian political community. I stayed with an Indian female student who was an SACP member and her Indian engineer boyfriend who was an Azapo supporter (his brother in fact was the head of the Durban branch of the black consciousness organisation). His mother and father were respectively National Party and ANC supporters. This was an early reminder that I had continually to question the simplistic and essentialist portrayals of South Africa in the international arena. It demonstrated to me the need to locate what people perceived as their material interests and how these translated into areas of political support, a far more complex phenomenon then reductionist notions such as false consciousness allow for.

I also found that on the whole people were eager to tell their story, but to varying degrees. Ex-party members were perhaps the keenest, as were those disillusioned with the new ANC government. Many felt betrayed by the fact that after years in the liberation struggle they returned to South Africa with only poor jobs and few prospects to greet them, whilst more senior ANC and party members were visibly reaping the material rewards of

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government. The SACP itself was on the whole generous with me after initial suspicion. In the Durban office I was questioned about my politics before it was felt that I could be trusted with contact addresses, general information, and access to back copies of journals. (although my path was considerably facilitated because I was introduced by my flatmate, with whom I had become friendly). The older members, who were the main focus of my study, were intrigued by the fact that I was Indian and Tamil like themselves. This bred a mutual accommodation that perhaps otherwise would have taken longer to establish.

The main problem with the interviews I conducted was that some of my interviewees had re-invented themselves in the light of the new South Africa. Many denied their communist past, despite contemporary evidence to the contrary. I could hardly accuse them of lying and still expect to conduct a fruitful interview. I came to realise, however, that my job involved attempting an analysis of how and why they were re-inventing themselves, rather than nudging them towards a more 'truthful' account of their past experiences. More poignantly, those who had suffered under years of house arrest or prison were still obviously affected by the restrictions the Apartheid State had placed on them. One octogenarian, who rather touchingly still dressed in combat jacket, a black beret and dark glasses, continued to negotiated the streets of Durban as if under surveillance. And the wives tales of long years of separation because their husbands were in prison or in exile abroad, resulting sometimes in broken marriages, told of another aspect of the human cost of involvement in the political struggle in South Africa.[6]

These were some of the factors that influenced the construction of an Indian identity in South Africa. Another important element in this was the shifting relationship South African Indians experienced with India itself. Indians came to South Africa either as indentured labourers or merchants, and originated from different geographical regions, speaking different languages, practising different religions, with variations in caste and class. But their political and social interaction with India was a continuous process that articulated with their South African experience and was kept alive by reporting in the South

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[6] Phyllis Naidoo, interview with PR, Durban August 1995; M. D. Naidoo, interview with PR, London 1986; R. D. Naidoo, interview with JF, Durban August, 1985; A. K. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban August, 1995; N. Babenia, interview with PR, Durban August, 1995.

African Indian press. It became evident to me however, that India was represented in ambivalent and contradictory ways. On the one hand there was enormous pride in, and identification with, the Indian struggle for independence. On the other, whenever Indian South Africans were threatened with deportation back to the 'Motherland' images appeared of that country as a backward and poor place to which no Indian South African in their right mind would want to return. Although there were shared and overlapping versions of this discourse amongst Indians, interesting differences emerged through the prism of class and political background.

The working class Indians whom I interviewed who were least involved in politics also seemed to display the least knowledge of, or interest in, their Indian past. They were first and foremost South Africans who had little more than a vague notion that one of their distant forefathers had come to South Africa from India. Of course this was grounded in material experience; the poorest of the workers who had been forced into indenture did not have the means to maintain their ties with India, nor did they want to retain their links to their low-caste homeland status. The working-class Indians who had joined left-wing struggles, however, seemed to me to be in the process of recovering and recording their histories, and some had been back to visit their villages of origin to discover their 'roots'. Wealthier Indians had maintained their contacts with India. They returned 'home' on a regular basis, were often educated abroad and were in the main the ones who conducted and filtered the dialogue between Indian and South African political processes. Others had gone back to fight in India's independence struggle especially the 'Quit India' movement prior to independence and had returned to South Africa with their skills, which contributed to South Africa's national liberation movement.[7]

From Gandhi onwards, if not before, a complex interaction with India helped constitute the political and social identity of Indians in South Africa. This will be an ongoing theme in my thesis. In particular I want to explore the notion of the 'Motherland', which became a potent symbol of 'Indianness' and was evoked by the young radical intelligentsia in the 1940s. This 'Indianness' also helped invoke new cultural and political

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[7] See N. Babenia, Memoirs of a Saboteur, (Cape Town, 1995).

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discourses. Gandhian ideas of power and social action were reappropriated and re-represented, and became a crucial part of emergent concepts of what it mean to be a political subject, and of subjectivity itself. This in turn fed into a larger nationalist project – the project of modernity and the notion of rights within a nation state. For a diaspora community fighting multiple displacements, the configuration of an essentialised identity, or a 'temporary closure', became a vital strategy in their struggle to locate themselves in the political and social worlds that they wished to inhabit, and invoking Indianness became one way of doing that.

If these are the wider parameters of my lines of enquiry, I now wish to turn to problems of theory and methodology – in other words to how I want to conceptualise the body of knowledge that I collated. It seems to me that the political projects of both the South African Communist Party and the South African state revolved around the project of modernity, however differently that project was perceived from their divergent vantagepoints. The conceptualisation of this project, and the struggle to implement it, informed the parameters of political practice and contestation. This in turn interacted with identity and subject formation, as discussed above. My study concentrates mainly on an urban environment still in the process of development, where the battle to survive in the margins of poorly formed infrastructures, such as housing and transport, gave rise to specific types of political protest. The next section of the introduction looks at the debates around modernity and urbanisation. Much of this covers well trodden ground,[8] so I only intend to tease out those threads of the argument that are pertinent to my study.

The Contradiction of Modernity

The debate on modernity by historians and other academics is not only voluminous but also spans recent decades and beyond. I cannot hope to cover that entire debate adequately here, but I will attempt to include and critique some of the main points of the argument. The debate is relevant in this context because the nature of the expressions of modernity by states and opposition movements and the international counterflows between

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[8] See D. Harvey, Social Justice and the City, (London, 1973); Harvey, The Urban Experience, pp. 17-58; D. Massey, Spatial Divisions of Labour: social structures and the geography of production, (Basingstoke, 1984).

national manifestations of this dialogue informs a central aspect of my work when applied to the South African context.

In his introduction to <u>All That Is Solid Melts Into Air</u>, Marshall Berman makes the point that modernity (the process of modernisation) and modernism (its cultural reflection in painting, music, literature and architecture) has always consisted of contradictory and dialectical processes that are juxtaposed as well as 'entangled with each other's traces'.[9] Hence modernity was never a distinct rupture with the past but an ambiguous process in which elements of the old were embedded in the new. Moreover, the nature of modernity and attempts to implement and shape its practical application has always been framed within a contested discourse, representing the interests of various social actors. At its heart lies a seeming contradiction in that manifestations of benefit and progress as well as destruction and ruin are both, so far, part of its determinant features. Late nineteenth century thinkers from Marx to Kirkegaarde and beyond acknowledged and analysed this core characteristic and there has been a continuing debate about how to counteract these supposedly inherent tendencies. Different actors, operating from various political and social subject positions laid down contested visions of the modernist project and competed over how it could best be conceived.

But Berman also notes a more recent phenomenon, in which sight is lost of the dialectical tension around this contradiction. This has given rise to two cruder tendencies that borrow from, but also simplify, Adorno[10] on the one hand and Habermas[11] on the other. These tendencies have not only created a binary opposition of future possibilities juxtaposed onto an idealised past, but also bestows on modernity an agency and will devoid of human actors. The first of these tendencies rejects modernity out of hand, portraying it as a doomed project that not only failed its emancipatory possibilities but brought destruction and disillusion on such a scale that only its total abandonment can bring about the different possibility of future liberatory worlds, so contaminated has it become with its own negativity. These themes have been well played out in some postmodernist and

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[9] M. Berman, <u>All That Is Solid Melts Into Air</u>, (London, 1983) pp. 15-36.
[10] T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u>, (London, 1997).
[11] J. Habermas, <u>The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity</u>, (Oxford, 1990).

poststructuralist discourses. The second of these tendencies hopes to rescue modernity from these accusations and looks to the benefits it has undoubtedly brought to mankind. However, in so doing, much of this literature tends to gloss over some of the very pertinent criticisms that have come out of the postmodern camp, as well as critiques from the more lucid of modernity's cogent thinkers. As Berman notes 'their twentieth-century successors have lurched far more towards rigid polarities and flat totalisations. Modernity is either embraced with a blind and uncritical enthusiasm or damned with a neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt: *in either case, it is conceived as a closed monolith, incapable of being shaped or changed by modern men.'* (emphasis added). [12]

In this thesis, I re-view modernity as a process that is still unfolding internationally in contradictory and ambiguous ways, with interconnected spatial and temporal articulations that give rise to a shared group of manifestations. There are, in addition, characteristics that are locally produced and reproduced in previously unconceived, and in part, unpredictable, ways. I suggest that the modernity that arose historically in Europe was only possible because of its global relationships with other economic and social systems. [13] Viewing modernity as an unfolding process in space, place and time also helps invalidate the argument that it is inherently a western phenomenon that has been falsely transplanted into other locations. Rather, there is a more complex process at play, in which local modernist tendencies not only sometimes interact with more politically dominant aspects of modernity, but these interactions can have both beneficial and negative consequences both locally and internationally at economic, social and political levels. These differing tendencies within modernity take shape and are manifested as a result of the struggle between different interest groups, in which there is a slippage between contestations at the level of discourse, and their application and practical implementation at ground level, with subsequent material consequences. These interactions take place within a hierarchical web of power relations. In the context of South Africa in the 1930s-50s, we can see this taking shape through the interaction of capitalism, (developing through a colonial relationship, in both urban and rural contexts, and the growth of indigenous accumulation), and remaining

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[12] M. Berman, All That Is Solid Melts Into Air, p. 24.
[13] See J. S. Kahn, 'Anthropology and Modernity', Current Anthropology, vol. 42, no. 5, December 2001, pp. 651-680, for a similar argument.

and partially resistant peasant modes of production.[14] Relationships on the international, national and intra-national level, and the struggle between contending forces in these arenas, therefore shaped the nature of modernity in South Africa. [15]

One aspect of this is how the notion of modernity was given different expression by the newly formed Indian state in 1947 and the Apartheid state in 1948. An idea of democratic rights, protected within state structures, remains one of the central tenets of the discourse of modernity. How this is translated and implemented by various states also helps inform the nature of opposition the state experiences. The South African and the newly independent Indian state gave this notion of democratic rights a very different expression. The treatment of Indians by the South African state provoked protests from India, with its constitution based on ideas of international human rights, and democratic representation within the nation state, in the transnational public space created by the United Nations. The Indian left in South Africa also adopted this discourse, which articulated with the international language of anti-fascism in this period. I hope to demonstrate that the interaction of South African and Indian left, via the conduit of the South African Indian communists, helped shape the nature of opposition movements in South Africa, particularly from the 1940s to the 60s, and gave form to subsequent political and social identities.

Central to this conception of a process of interaction both inter and intra-nationally, informed by an interconnected structure and agency, is the idea of an articulated multilectic as an analytical tool, a development of the idea of the dialectic. I want to discuss this idea in some detail for two reasons. Firstly, I think it is necessary to signal where you are within the Marxist tradition because of the volume of critiques and counter critiques that methodology has undergone and the very different subject positions of the authors involved in that debate. Rather than go over the history of that discussion, (some of which is now so well worn that it achieves little more than setting up and targeting straw men) I want to locate myself within the discourse by looking at, and developing the idea, of the dialectic into the multilectic, incorporating some of the more useful criticism from poststructuralism

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[14] R. Miles, Capitalism and Unfree Labour: anomaly or necessity?, (New York, 1987), pp. 118-142.
[15] See J. Kahn, 'Anthropology and Modernity', p. 664, for an argument on the interrelated character of specific forms of modernity.

and postmodernism. Secondly, I am against inventing language for invention's sake. Some detail is therefore necessary in order to demonstrate that the term multilectic might be useful as a tool of analysis rather than as a mere description of complexity.

The Multilectic

The debate on dialectics, like that on modernity, has a long and complex history.[16] The term has become common currency for Marxists and non-Marxists alike. Recently, it has undergone a further resurgence as a result of its use by environmentalists such as Tim Ingold et al, because of the epistemological possibilities of using it as a descriptive tool to outline the networks of interdependence between people and nature.[17] But its very popularity has contributed to a theoretical confusion about what the term really means and its effectiveness as an analytical concept. The following discussion is therefore necessary in order to clarify, extend and facilitate the use of the dialectic as an analytical tool within my thesis, and hopefully, beyond.

As with the notion of ideology, Marx and Engels wrote little specifically on the dialectic itself although the methodology is embedded in their texts, most noticeably in Capital. It is not my intention here to trawl through their written material in order to return to some essentialised source of the Marxist dialectic. What was written specifically, beyond a scattering through various articles and books, can be found in Engels's The Dialectics of Nature and Anti Duhring, where he attempted to lay down some basic principles, that corresponded to general laws that also governed the material world. Marx and Engels were trying to theorise about an environment that they saw as more complex and inter-related than the mechanical universe of the Newtonian imagination. Harvey suggests that it is Engels's incorrect use of the term dialectic that lies the root of its subsequent misuse.[18] By this I take him to mean Marx's appropriation and reversal of the Hegelian idealist dialectic and Engels's incomplete attempts to resolve this into a fully materialist translation.

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[16] See D. Harvey, Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference, pp. 46-68; R. Bhaskar, Dialectic: pulse of freedom, (London, 1993), pp. 1-32 for useful overviews.

[17] See T. Ingold, The Perception of the Environment: essays on livihood, dwelling and skill, (New York, 2000).

[18] D. Harvey, Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference, pp. 57-58.

However, building on Engels's insights that all thought is a product of its historical time,[19] I suggest that it is of far more interest, and analytic value, to re-read the text in a different light. It seems to me that Engels' writings in these two books reflected a historical moment when a shift was taking place in scientific thought and language which was also to be reflected in the social sciences. By rereading the text as a reflection of ideas coming into being, rather than as representing a fixed definition, we can avoid the dispiriting quest for origins that historians so often strive for in an attempt to find an academic authority.

I suggest that the shift taking place in Engels's writings was between a Cartesian rationality that posits a primary opposing system of thought such as that built into classical physics, other sciences and some philosophical systems, and scientific ideas of interconnectedness and process, which are more akin to quantum physics, and Einsteinian models of science. In other words, there is a tension in the text between a positivist dualism and a relational relativism that is indicative of a wider shift in systems of knowledge.[20] The former tendency has in part rigidified in classical and structural Marxism, thereby reducing the dialectic into a binary polarity of atomised opposite, whereas the latter has fed into more creative schools of Marxist thought (as represented, for example, by Volosinov, Bakhtin et al through their insights on language)[21] as well as some postmodernist and poststructuralist notions of non-fixity and process. Adopting a new terminology gives us the space to develop and creatively use two conceptual categories that have been, in the main, confused or collapsed into one.

Marx and Engels always seized upon theoretical approaches that suggested the interconnectedness and shifting nature of the material world, to demonstrate how the general laws that governed this world were equally valid for our understanding of the environment, and human beings, who are situated in it. The political purpose of this was to

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[19] 'In every epoch, and therefore also in ours, theoretical thought is a historical product, which at different times assumes very different forms, and therewith, very different contents. The science of thought is therefore, like every other, a historical science, the science of the historical development of human thought.' F. Engels, The Dialectics of Nature, (Moscow, 1954), p. 43.

[20] See E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, 'Postmarxism Without Apologies', New Left Review, 1/166, November-December 1987, pp. 79-106, where they argue that Marx understood this shift but never fully realised it.

[21] M. Holquist, (ed.), The Dialogic Imagination: four essays by M. M. Bakhtin, (Austin, Texas, 1981); V.N. Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

illustrate that the current socio-economic system of capitalism was not an all-pervading natural entity fixed for all time. On the contrary, it was the product of historical contingency, which could, above all, be transformed by people within the constraints of their historical contexts. Much of classical Marxist and structural schools of thought has fallen into an overdertministic and mechanical theorising, however, especially in regard to notions of subjectivity and human agency, and in the process they have robbed Marxism of its most fruitful characteristic, '...the fluid, essentially transient and transformable nature of the social world'.[22] This determinist path has provided a field day for many of Marxism's most trenchant postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques, an epistemological critique, if you will, of a supposed ontological arrogance. However, much of this new critique has merely moved towards descriptions of complexity per se, rather than reformulating analytical methods in a creative light. Postmodernism and poststructuralism, at its worst, does little more than parrot phrases that end up simply reiterating the supposed multiple and polyphonous worlds around us. In my view, the mere evocation of polyphony leads to little more than cacophony if posited for its own sake. This only parades as 'democratic representation', and can imply an amoral relativism and lead to an intellectual paralysis that has recently been fairly well documented.[23] This perhaps reveals the practical difficulty of applying notions of complexity and process. My suggestion here is by retaining the notion of the dialectic in a epistemological and reductionist sense, and extending it into the idea of the multilectic as an ontological and complex framework, we can describe notions of being, as well as becoming.

A certain amount of 'strategic essentialism' is methodologically necessary if we are to describe states of being successfully, not least because the people and processes we set out to describe often tend to experience and construct the world in essentialist ways. The idea of identity is a fundamental example of this, where moments of arbitrary closure are experienced as absolute states of being. The dialectic can achieve this, not only because it represents a certain mode of thought, but also because it still has value as an analytical tool.

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[22] T.Benton, The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and his influence, (London, 1984), p. 60.
[23] See T. Eagleton, The Illusions of Postmodernism, (Cambridge, Mass., 1997) for one example amongst many. See also S. Zizek, 'Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism', New Left

This leaves room for the multilectic as ontology, describing a greater complexity, when developing theoretical models that necessitate interweaving multiple aspects, notions of process and acts of becoming. Harvey quotes Marx as saying 'every historical form is as in fluid movement and therefore takes into account its transient nature no less than its momentary existence'.[24] Developing the dialectic into the multilectic perhaps enables us to describe both the transient nature and the momentary existence, as well as to move beyond the Hegelian ideal and Cartesian linear causality.

This theoretical framework is useful in looking at Indians and the Communist Party of South African for a variety of reasons, especially in its reconceptualisation of certain Marxist concepts. I want to begin by examining the notion of class. As a communist party, the idea of class provided the central organisational principle for the CPSA. In South Africa, this proved to be continually problematic. I argue that this is because of factors which go beyond the notion of a South African specificity.

Class and Identity

The concept of class has been rethought by many writers because of the need to break free of the 'orthodox' Marxist idea that the fundamental contradiction in society was between the working class and the bourgeoisie. As suggested above, this conceptualisation reveals a philosophical outlook based on frozen binaries of being. More recently, more fluid and dynamic models of societal change have been emphasised. Marx himself understood the 'radical contingency and historicity' of social life in his analysis of the transition from feudalism to capitalism.[25] In doing so, he 'exposed' the contingent nature of identity formation and hierarchies of power, which now inevitably had to be seen as historically situated. However, Laclau and Mouffe consider that he failed to build on this insight, and instead he retreated into the idea of a 'meta-identity' of social class, and a

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Review, 1/225, September-October, 1997, pp. 28-51 for a more damning indictment of the possible political implications of postmodernism.

[24] D. Harvey, Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference, p. 62.

[25] S. Tormey, 'Do We Need Identity Politics? Postmarxism and the Critique of "Pure Particularism"', unpublished paper presented at ECPR Joint Sessions Workshop on Identity Politics, Grenoble, France, 6-11April, 2001, p. 4.

conception of political struggle that was to be played out through an essentialist opposition of worker and bourgeoisie.[26]

In response to this, Zygmunt Bauman offers useful insight into the historical development of class in Britain, which helps disrupt this neat category of being which pre-determines political mobilisation. He highlights the complex nature of class formation through an historical examination that shows how the traces of past cultural practices can and do persist under capitalism. He reveals the difficulties inherent in seeing class as a unified and coherent category. Bauman sees class at the time of early industrialisation as a 'complex and uneven' process, and suggests that there was a significant degree of popular resistance to incorporation into industrial production. Many peasants who were forced into capitalist relations did not develop a workers' consciousness. Instead of a united working class, early industrialisation gave birth to a 'fragmented, alienated and amorphous' body that held on to existing cultural practices and older forms of cultural identity.[27] In particular, Bauman suggests that artisans took their experience of organisation in the guilds and craft unions into the industrial workplace, where they negotiated with owners for preferential rates of pay. This led to the protection of skilled work against the unskilled, and early union organisation centred on gaining concessions from the new socio-economic system. Other groups of workers, he suggests, had no shared history, but came from disparate parts of society, which had been dispossessed or driven off the land. These masses were created as workers by industrialisation, but they did not develop a collective consciousness. They remained fragmented as a social group for quite some time. Thus, rather than the Marxist ideal of class as a coherent social category, Bauman suggests that early class formation in Britain was a contradictory process, in which workers were divided amongst themselves, and busily collaborated with capitalism, rather than organising to overthrow it. Importantly he emphasises the emergence of elites and strata within the working class, segments which were able to articulate their own interests rather than those of the whole class. As capitalism matured, these tendencies developed rather than disappeared. I have used Bauman here because Marx's analysis of capital was also based

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[26] E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, 'Post-Marxism Without Apologies', p. 91-92.

[27] Z. Bauman, Between Class and Elite: the evolution of the British labour movement: a sociological study, (Manchester, 1972); Z. Bauman, Memories of Class: the prehistory and afterlife of class, (London, 1982).

on Britain, and because many of the white workers who went to South Africa as part of an international 'imperial labour diaspora', as John Hyslop describes them, also came out of this context.[28]

In South Africa, historians such as Martin Legassick have analysed class from a similar perspective, demonstrating that configurations of class developed out of a complex of different histories, and that the relationship between the 'law of capital', and subsequent forms of subjectivity and identity were 'emergent assemblages' rather than fully formed categories of class.[29] Similarly, Indian historians such as Dipesh Charkrabarty have added valuable insights into the contextual nature of class formation, where in India industrialisation did not lead to the erasure of 'traditional' forms of identity such as caste, which reconstituted themselves through the conduit of emergent classes.[30] The complexity of class formation in South Africa, and its interaction with other forms of identity, most significantly, those of race and nation, will be an ongoing theme throughout my thesis. In South Africa, with the fundamentally disruptive nature of modernity, class became one form of struggle (albeit an important one), amongst others. In this reconceptualisation of class, the individual is reconceived as an 'ensemble of subject positions'[31], which combine in different ways, at critical junctures in time. In particular, in the period under discussion, ideas of class overlapped with notions of national and diasporic identity.

In the case of Indian South Africans, it is also necessary to emphasise the ambiguous and open-ended nature of identity construction. To understand this better, it is perhaps necessary to look not only at the political and economic framework within which this construction took place, but also to examine the 'cultural imaginary' as it was revealed and reconfigured over time, and within which Indian South African social practices were

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[28] J. Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself White: white labourism in Britain, Australia and South Africa before the First World War', Journal of Historical Sociology, vol. 12, no. 4, December 1999, pp. 398-421.
[29] See M. Legassick, 'South Africa: Forced Labour, Industrialisation, and Racial Discrimination', in R. Harris (ed.), The Political Economy of Africa, (Boston, 1974); S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness 1870-1930, (London, 1987).
[30] D. Chakrabarty, Rethinking Working Class History, (Woodstock, 1989).
[31] E. Laclau, 'Introduction', E. Laclau, (ed.), The Making of Political Identities, (London, 1994), pp.1-10; E. Laclau, New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time, (London, 1990), p. 40.

performed. 'Indianness' was understood differently by divergent parts of the Indian community, in a continuing process of retranslation, reinscription, and reappropriation. Notions of South African Indian subjectivity and identity developed in certain social contexts in a series of mutually transformative relationships. The historical and cultural circumstances within which these took shape therefore had a particular salience. I hope to describe the development of Indian subjectivity in South Africa within a relational and dynamic theoretical model, which is able adequately to theorise notions of process, change, interrelatedness and acts of becoming. Anthropological theorising on the construction of the subject as open-ended and on-going, can form a useful plank in building such a model.

Homi Bhaba[32] and Stuart Hall[33] have suggested that identity can be understood as a continual ongoing process of identification, situated within discourse. Seen this way, subjects 'have the capacity to break with and transform the situations within which they are formed'.[34] By emphasising the slippages, ambivalences and ambiguities of identity formation, and by stressing how Indians were Indian in a particularly South African way, we can perhaps understand how ambiguity, within certain contexts, 'can become a part of the constitutive practices of creating and recreating social orders.'[35]

The notion of ambivalence in these circumstances also becomes an integral part of South African Indian identity and is a product of that community's ambivalent social relations with other groups in South African society, a reflection of specific forms of uneven development. Like significant sections of the Jewish community, it was the ambiguous and marginal position of Indians in South Africa that spurred some of them into radical politics. However, notions of 'Indianness' also came to represent moments of 'temporary closure', in which identity was perceived, and represented, as fixed and bounded. This 'Indianness' became an important vehicle for political mobilisation, as well as a way to assuage the inherent anxiety that can result from a continual sense of

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[32] H. Bhaba, 'Introduction: narrating the nation', in H. Bhaba, (ed.), Nation and Narration, (London, 1990), pp. 1-7.
[33] S. Hall, 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities', A. D. King (ed.) Culture, Globalisation and the World System, (London, 1991), pp. 41-68.
[34] D. Battaglia, 'Towards the Ethics of the Open Subject: writing ethnography in good conscience', in H. Moore, (ed.), Anthropological Theory Today, (Oxford, 1999), p. 115.

marginality and dislocation. Ironically, this essential 'Indianness' was constructed through disrupting a sense of belonging to the confines of a single nation state.

The Indian Diaspora

James Clifford refers to diaspora as a 'loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in displacement'.[36] As with other post-essentialist theories of identity, the term diaspora is a useful analytical tool in the context of this thesis because it provides one of the frameworks for understanding Indian identification in South Africa. The concept allows us to chart diasporic imaginations that transform themselves over space and time. Most often, migration has been described as a 'movement between two distinct cultures or communities'. Instead, we can now visualise 'transnational migrant circuits', which are constituted by flows of people, commodities and cultural practices. This diaspora (or more correctly diasporas) is characterised by an imagination of community beyond the nation state, and a feeling of dislocation that feeds a struggle for a re-assertion of social space, in order to create a place 'to be'. Diasporas can emerge as a result of a population expansion from the homeland, as people move in search of work or in pursuit of trade. There can be a strong retention of group ties over a long period of time as well a myths of connections to a homeland, especially when the levels of social exclusion within the new nation is high. This often involves an 'entangled tension of relational positioning', as diasporic communities are defined against 'the norms of the nation state', and in relation to the concept of 'indigenous peoples'[37]. Because of these tensions, Indian South Africans came to inhabit the landscapes of ambiguity described above.

Diasporas are not usually uniform in terms of class at the time of migration, and if they are, they do not remain so over time. The indentured labourers who were shipped over to Natal can be seen as the first of the Indian diasporas, leaving 'home' in search of work in South Africa. As a form of 'unfree' labour, indenture formed a vital plank in the emergence of capitalism as a global system. But the initial waves of Indian workers who came over to South Africa were from disparate social groups, and a high percentage came from migrant

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[35] Battaglia, 'Towards the Ethics', p. 115.
[36] Clifford, 'Diasporas', p. 254.
[37] Clifford, 'Diasporas', p. 250.

populations. I discuss this further in Chapter One. The question I ask is how they came to reconstitute themselves in South Africa. The first factor is that they were aware of other Indian workers who had gone abroad in search of jobs. With the help of information disseminated through so-called 'returnees' in India, this had propagated ideas about conditions in other places, which were both good and bad. This knowledge generated a sense of self, that extended beyond both the 'homeland' and the new place of work, a sense of identification with disparate others in scattered geographical locations. Later Indian migrants came from a trading disapora, and had a strong relationship with 'home' in India. These factors acted on their sense of 'Indianness' in South Africa.

The Politics of Resistance as the Struggle for Space

Another fundamental aspect of the notion of displacement was the effect on Indians in South Africa of a series of dislocations, which fed into their experience of class in particular ways. This displacement did not only effect questions of identity, in that the Indian community became Indian in a specifically South African and diasporic sense, but also in the complex ways that spatial issues shaped the nature of their political protests. The question of space, and the move into, and struggle over, urban space, particularly in the 1940s, became an important aspect of popular protest that had to be addressed by the CPSA. The struggle for space, within unfolding capitalist spatial relations, helped generate certain states of social and political consciousness, within a geography of uneven development.[38] As we have already seen, the majority of South African Indians in Natal initially worked in rural areas, with up to 50 per cent located in the sugar industry. They later moved to urban areas in growing numbers, some via market gardening enterprises on the edge of town.[39]

In Durban itself, the Indian workforce was divided between those who were gaining a foothold in the industrial workplace and those who were involved in petty trade and services. A sizeable number also worked for the municipality. Consequently, they were in competition with Africans on the one hand, and on the other, sections of the white

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[38] Harvey, The Urban Experience, pp. 125-164.
[39] W. Freund, Insiders and Outsiders: the Indian Working Class of Durban 1910-1990, (London, 1995), pp. 11-28.

community. Indians therefore found themselves in a multiple network of relationships, where ideas of social being and political action were constantly re-configured, in their struggle against geographical and economic dislocations and relocations.

In the workplace, Indians were caught between Africans and whites. In areas of petty commodity enterprise, their collective efforts in individual entrepreneurial activity in the areas of trade, transport and housing also encroached on Africans and white interests. In the process of these interactions, although, ideally, capitalism may seek to create its own geography of modernity through orderly built environments, the agency of interacting communities can bring about a 'second nature' of assembled surroundings, in particular kinds of spatial configurations which are often out of the direct control of the state.[40] These can become contested spaces, expressing a desire on the part of the people who challenge the system in order to 'stay put'.

Henri Lefebrve's seminal text, The Production of Space, [41] has helped initiate an animated theoretical rethinking of the notion of space as a central perspective on the development of capitalism, as well as on the corresponding politics of resistance.[42] David Harvey, Frederick Jameson and Edward Soja have all contributed to a radical new analysis of spatial categories, in which space has become a constitutive feature of identity formation and states of becoming. In this reconceptualisation, the notion of space has largely come to displace an earlier Marxist politics of time, within which the history of man was envisaged as a teleological unfolding of progressive stages, striving towards the goal of a common humanity. In this project, the working class was burdened with the role of bringing about a universal emancipation. Whereas people played out their agency within the constraints of their position in historical time, spatial location has now come to be seen to be as a major constituent of subject positions, and a subsequent politics of resistance. Frederick Jameson observes:

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[40] D. Harvey, Consciousness and The Urban Experience, (Oxford, 1985), p. 109.
[41] H Lefebvre, The Production of Space, (Oxford, 1991).
[42] M. Keith and S. Pile, 'Introduction: the politics of place', M. Keith and S. Pile (eds), Place and the Politics of Identity, pp. 24-25.

> I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time, as in the proceeding period of high modernism.[43]

In Lefebvre's description, the history of space, and its changing conception in social theory, lies somewhere between anthropology and political economy. He describes the 'evolutionary' development of space through time, and charts how *a specific* representation of space, has in recent times, become *the objective* representation of space. Euclidean space, which western philosophical thought has subsequently treated as an absolute, was an historically specific representation of space, which has became used as *the* space of reference; specifically defined by its homogeneity, space is presented to us as an empty, but measurable, void in which 'things' can be placed.[44] In the process of reifying space in this way, the heterogeneous spaces of nature, and the complexity of the social production of social space, have been reduced to a monolithic entity, which appears as a neutral, immutable, blank slate. This conception of space helps conceals how power is 'inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life.'[45] Thus the ordering of space throughout history, and through hierarchies of power, is a profoundly political act, which helps locate us within particular political and social landscapes.

Lefebvre describes how the concept of three-dimensional Euclidean space was extended and transformed into a two-dimensional representational model, which subsequently became an authoritative 'space of representation'. Diagrams and plans come to represent 'the real'. In particular, the map, articulating the new relations of capitalist enterprise and corresponding alignments of power, came to define identity, within newly delineated borders. Not only did these borders become co-terminus with forms of modern subjectivity, but these spaces of representation were subsequently projected as primordial demarcations of an authentic identity. The representation of naturally 'discontinuous spaces', which contained discrete cultures and nations, necessitated ideas of 'contact' between cultures or nations, which was represented as *the problematic* by dominant

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[43] F. Jameson, <u>Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism</u>, (London, 1991), p. 16.
[44] S. Kern, <u>The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918</u>, (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 132-134.
[45] E. Soja, <u>Postmodern Geographies</u>, (London 1989), p. 6.

powers.[46] Space became a neutral grid, 'on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organisation are inscribed'.[47]

The example of this new era of mapping also underlines the centrality of the development of capitalism to the theoretical reconceptualisation of space, where capitalism, in its different phases, ideally seeks to inscribe alternative spatial orders, to facilitate the networks between money, production, and markets. From the beginnings of global capital five hundred years ago,[48] the developing political economy of capitalism has territorialised and reterritorialised the world, especially around the concentrations in its hierarchically organised urban centres. Space is thus hierarchically connected, rather than naturally disconnected. This global political economy helped place Indians in South Africa, and once there, framed their struggles over urban space. Despite the fact that people have always experienced some degree of mobility, and a sense of self probably less rigid than that of popular representation, as modernity has become increasingly, a 'modernity on the move'[49] with the growth of the mobility of capital and labour, there has been an acceleration in the creation of spatial reconfigurations beyond the nation state. In the process, previously held essentialised identities have been disrupted, fragmented and dispersed, only to recombine in different ways within their new locality. The complexity of modern, international space reproduces these re-articulations of identity in heterogeneous ways. For Indian South Africans, conceptions of caste, class, religion, race, and nation(s) were re-assembled in unstable combinations, giving rise to new political identities and strategies of resistance as well as, for some, a politics of accommodation.

Representations of space are consequently deeply ideological, as is its physical ordering, and contemporary spatial theory redirects us towards 'a new kind of spatial imagination capable of confronting the past in a new way ...reading its less tangible

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[46] A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, 'Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference', Cultural Anthropology, Vo.7, No.1, February 1992, p. 6.

[47] Ferguson and Gupta, 'Beyond Culture', p. 7.

[48] I. Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future demise of the World Capitalist System: concepts for comparative analysis', in I. Wallerstein, The Capitalist World Economy, (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 1-36.

[49] See P. Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness, (London 1993) for a good exploration of this idea.

secrets.'[50] In this case, it can reveal the dialectic between separation and the desire for some form of closure among South African Indians.

Social theorists have rethought space in terms of social practice, suggesting that the ideological representation of space as a homogeneous and external 'reality' has resulted in a non-recognition of the spatial dimension of political struggles. Diasporas are born through spatial alienation. Their place in new spaces requires a reinscription of being, which draws on familiar, as well as newly produced, transcripts of identity, which helps formulate new subject positions in unfamiliar terrains. The condition of being 'out of place' requires a relocation of self 'in place', which is both a political and a social process. South African Indians had to struggle for a place 'to be'. By the twentieth century, they were located in the 'marginalising milieu' of modernising cities, in liminal, transient spaces, whose very instability provided the basis for developing strategies of resistance.[51] Being placed on the 'edge', a place both at risk and unstable, seemingly under constant threat from competing 'others', fuelled a politics of defiance and a community of opposition, which amongst other things, expressed a desire for stability. Heidigger's ontology of being recognises a human desire (and need) to be rooted,[52] and this desire often has to struggle against the tendency of capitalism to uproot, displace and reposition people within complex international relations of production.[53] It is therefore not surprising that in the period under discussion in my thesis, contests over urban space were a central feature of South African Indian political struggles. The use of passive resistance as a weapon of rebellion, involving traversing contested borders and the symbolic appropriation of 'forbidden' spaces, which were ascribed by the state through the prism of race, was a fundamentally spatial act of politics.

The dislocations of South African Indians, a consequence of their diasporic experience, fed into struggles for social space, which in turn informed frameworks of political action. The ensuing political identities were imagined beyond the boundaries of the South African nation state. Interactions with India and Britain, within shifting

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[50] F. Jameson, Postmodernism, pp. 364-5.
[51] b. hooks, Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics, (Boston, 1991), p. 149.
[52] D. Harvey, 'From Space to Place and Back Again', J. Bird et al (eds), Mapping the Futures: local cultures and global change, (London, 1993), pp. 9-13.

perceptions of nationality and political identity, intersected and competed with one another, but also helped articulate an Indian transnational public sphere, which became an important testing ground for the pursuit of rights of citizenship in South Africa.

Spatial theorists have also been concerned to discover how new spaces were turned into 'places', as history and culture were inscribed into the seemingly blank slate that is space. In South Africa, Indians have attempted to do this in the face of a host of competing spatialities.[54] Turning spaces into places was the means through which identity was both produced and expressed. South African Indians did this through reconstituting religious and social practices, building temples and mosques, rebuilding family structures, and developing political cultures, including a vibrant political press. These were the constitutive elements of their social and political lives. Spatial transformations drew on the relationship between the real and the imaginary, and South African Indians created places through a complex articulation of narratives drawn from the idea of a homeland, an India of ancient tradition, and contemporary South African practices. And although these new identities were formulated in new ways that fundamentally blurred the distinctions between 'here' and 'there', 'us and 'them', ideas of culturally and racially distinct places became increasingly important in the South African political landscape of segregation and apartheid.

Within this context, the 'production of locality'[55] as Arjun Appardurai calls it, became an increasingly pressing question for sections of the Indian South African community, who, from as early as the later 1930s, began to accept some measure of segregationist discourse and practice in order to find a place 'to be', put down roots, and produce narratives of community and belonging. Capital investment pledged by the state contained the promise that it would change the lived experience of 'place', and the material

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[53] D. Harvey, 'From Space to Place and Back Again', p. 27.

[54] I have found this a useful line of enquiry as it allows an alternative analysis for human motivation to the argument that workers merely became 'passive' and 'inert' once they stopped taking industrial action, which is an expression of their 'class consciousness'. See Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 59, and G. Vahed, 'Race or Class? Community and Conflict amongst Indian Municipal Employees in Durban, 1914-1949', Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 27, no. 1, March 2001, pp. 105-126 for two examples amongst many on the idea of 'passive workers'.

[55] A. Appardurai, 'The Production of Locality', Cultural Anthropology, pp. 204-235.

conditions for Indian workers, which were often appalling, temporary, squalid, places of uncertainty. Life on the margins engendered a desire for the prospect of long-term settlement and networks of community. Identity and place became intertwined in the social, mental and physical process that helped constitute them. Locality is not something that is given, but requires continuous work in order to produce and maintain its materiality. Some sections of the Indian community agreed to municipal housing schemes, ran local ratepayers associations, and specifically used Indian labour. South African Indians imbued locality with local knowledge, and in the process, reinscribed the self through the production of neighbourhoods. This was an ongoing act of 'colonisation', an exercise of power in a hostile environment, a defence against external threats.[56] In these ways, context was produced, where 'neighbourhood' was delineated 'from, against, in spite of and in relation to' others.[57] The growing hostility between Indian and African communities, as Africans came to deeply resent the Indian presence within urban space, most profoundly expressed during the Durban riots of 1949, accelerated the desire in the community for specifically Indian neighbourhoods.

Locales of memory and commemoration provided the frameworks for rootedness.[58] Neighbourhoods became sites for the production of context, which had to be continually regenerated, where ideas of context were competed over. In these ways, new 'places' were constructed, and naturalised in their material forms; they subsequently became a geographical landscape made up of new networks of signification. Areas became 'specifically' 'Indian', but this internal 'Indianness' was always constructed in relation to African and white neighbourhoods, its constitutive outside. This production of locality was also mediated through a powerful dialectic with state structures, which, during the 1930s and 1940s, articulated with the growing desire to produce racially distinct neighbourhoods. In this period, The South African state increasingly attempted to hierarchically delineate spatial relationships within the developing capitalist economy.

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[56] Appardurai, 'The Production of Locality', p. 208-209.
[57] Appadurai, 'The Production of Locality', p. 209.
[58] Appadurai, 'The Production of Locality', p. 204-207.

The Indian desire for rootedness and being led them to see themselves as specifically Indian workers, who now 'belonged' in the urban spaces of South Africa. This was increasingly at odds with the struggle against segregationist measures conceived of as protecting 'national honour' in the discourse of leftwing Indian South Africans in this period. As I will show, Indian South African communists fought against racial segregation, not because they held an alternative notion of a community of working class interests across the colour line, but because they saw enforced segregation as a racial 'slur on the Indian nation'. They harnessed this to a political programme that linked the struggle against segregation and apartheid with the struggle for democratic rights within the nation state. But by the 1950s, as significant numbers of Indians became determined to 'settle' and 'produce locality', Indian radical political leaders lost an important part of their political constituency, which failed to respond to their 'non-racial' politics of citizenship.

Chapter Outline

In Chapters One to Three, I describe the early social and political life of Indians in South Africa, and illustrate the continuities of cultural and political practices transplanted from India. In particular, through re-interpreting a range of secondary sources, I reappraise the development of a Gandhian sense of political identity, in order to ascertain its appeal to Indian South Africans, especially those in the Communist Party. I outline the development of satyagraha and passive resistance in South Africa.

In Chapters Four and Five, I trace some of the transnational and historical influences in the development of communism in South Africa and India, and outline the changing relationship between ideas of socialism and nationalism in the CPSA, along with a description of the cleavages in the South African working class. Not only did this impede creating political unity on class lines, but forced the party to begin to re-evaluate its relationship with nationalism.

In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, using NIC, TIC and SAIC documents, interviews, and newspaper articles and government documents, I describe the complex political identities forged by Indians in the 1930s and 40s, and how these articulated with the

political agenda of the CPSA. In particular, I show how Indian communists increasingly enunciated an Indian national identity in this period, and how Gandhi was appropriated as a symbol of 'Indianness', which shaped particular forms of resistance. In the absence of a politics of class struggle, passive resistance became a vehicle for extra-parliamentary political organisation, and inspiration for this was drawn primarily from the Indian national struggle for independence. I also discuss how, as workers' concerns were marginalised, Indian radical politics in this period increasingly became the domain of a few, radical nationalist, socialists and followers of Gandhi.

The discussion of the Durban Riots in Chapter Nine highlights the cleavages between Africans and Indians, and traces how narratives of 'otherness' were reinforced through material practices. Although non-racial politics were only experienced at the level of the political leadership, this leadership did go on to spearhead a popular front for democratic rights, which appropriated and transformed passive resistance. This political mobilisation, around issues of urban space and democratic rights, assumed the characteristics of a national alliance around a series of interconnected issues conducted primarily outside of parliamentary politics.

In addition, throughout, I argue that much of the influence of South African Indian communists derived from their identification with the Indian nationalist struggle, rather than a communist one, and this in turn fed into the politics of the democratic alliance of the 1950s with the ANC. This was an important thread of the continuing tension within the CPSA itself, between nationalist and communist ideologies, and is traced in this thesis, from the examples of the party's Black Republic policy in 1928, to its reactions to Indian independence in 1947, and its subsequent relationship with nationalist organisations. Some of the contradictions, but also mutually transformative character, of discourses of nationalism and socialism, as represented by the CPSA's Indian members, is illustrated by the role of Gandhi, and his significance to Indian South African communists. They reappropriated his ideas and tried to translate them into a language of international liberation, despite Gandhi's antipathy to working-class struggles, the central tenets of modernity, and the wider aspirations of a socialist project. This thesis describes a 'moment'

in South African history when anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggles provided a backdrop to the idea of a 'radical nationalism' for Indian South Africans in the Communist Party of South Africa.

Chapter One

Leaving 'Home'
Coolie Dislocation:
Indian Migration and Settlement in South Africa

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the world underwent a structural transformation as Europe began to abandon old forms of industrialisation based on coal, cotton, iron and steam and moved to patterns of industry based on new technological innovations.[1] The movement of large numbers of peoples and goods at a relatively low cost arose from these circumstances and was part and parcel of the changing relationship between capital and labour which took different expressions in different geographical locations. Transnational movements of people became an integral part of the modern world. About 100 million people left their homelands during the nineteenth century, mostly in search of work.[2] 50 million Europeans set out for the colonies of settlement, including the USA, while another 50 million 'non-whites' – 'coolies', 'Chinamen', 'kanakas' to mention a few of the names they were given - set sail to places where their labour was needed. New technologies such as steam ships accelerated the possibility of transporting large groups of people to where they were wanted in the international labour market, an important element in the growth of an Indian diaspora. Indian indentured labour played a large part in the transition from slavery to 'free' labour.

However, if the industrial process was beginning to encompass and transform the entire world, 'development' in European terms was taking place unevenly. Countries such as India remained principally primary producers and captive markets for manufactured goods from metropolitan areas. Industrialisation came to South Africa later than it had to Europe. It spread with an internal inconsistency and was constantly shaped by the differing ability of capital to access and control labour. Modernity developed in South Africa within this context, and was fashioned by specific ideological, political and social forms.

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[1] T. Kemp, Historical Patterns of Industrialisation, (New York 1978), pp. 5-6.
[2] S.W. Mintz, 'The Localization of Anthropological Practice: from area studies to transnationalism', Critique of Anthropology, vol. 18 (2) 1998, pp. 111-114.

The South African labour market was defined by a perennial problem: how to find sufficient workers for production needs. Historically, capitalism has always relied on 'unfree' labour as an integral part of its production process, both internationally and in the South African context. There were a number of Indian slaves who worked in the Eastern Cape from the seventeenth and eighteenth century.[3] Liberal political economists predicted that the growth of capitalism would see a 'rationalisation' of this process and a shift towards universal 'free' labour. As a number of authors have shown, the failure of this to unfold with any consistency was due to the internal contradictions of international capital and its articulation with local contexts.[4] It was precisely these contradictions that led to the first Indian indentured labourers being shipped out to work in the sugar fields of Natal. It is therefore necessary to begin by looking at the background to these events, and to describe the Indian communities that initially migrated to South Africa, before examining the ideological underpinnings that helped shape forms of identity and political consciousness in their new 'homeland'. The past experiences of Indians in the subcontinent formed an integral part of their identities in South Africa, where narratives of being and belonging were shaped by old histories, customs and practices. Indians found a place within South African economy, but they did not abandon their own forms of protest and organisation. I set out to create a historical narrative that seeks to avoid the crude prioritisation of the economic over the political. Rather, I suggest a complex interplay – a mutually transformative multilectic- between the economic, political, ideological and social, that provided the framework for the Indian struggle for citizenship and democratic rights in South Africa.

Sugar Production in Natal

Internationally, sugar production was hard hit by the abolition of slavery. After worldwide ideological and political considerations made the possibility of resurrecting chattel slavery unviable, farmers in Natal initially tested the possibility of importing child or convict labour from Britain to the colony.[5] Freed black slaves from America were also

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[3] U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, From Cane Fields to Freedom: a chronicle of Indian South African Life, (Cape Town, 2000), p. 10.
[4] See Miles, Capitalism and Unfree Labour, pp. 118-142.
[5] Miles, Capitalism and Unfree Labour, p. 122.

considered. In addition, there was an attempt to persuade 'agricultural labourers' from Britain to emigrate to Natal but this met with little success. When these avenues were blocked or failed, it was not surprising that thoughts turned to using Indian indentured labour, as there were historical precedents for this. Indenture as a system had been in existence even before the heyday of slavery, especially in the Caribbean and what was later to become the United States. The system had been introduced into Mauritius, another sugar economy, as early as 1834.[6] Very soon after, at least another ten, mainly British, colonies had followed suite. Sir George Grey, governor of Cape Colony, had seen Indian indentured workers in the sugar fields of Mauritius and had declared that Indians, as a 'half civilised race' would best be suited for sugar production in Natal, a sentiment that prefigured their later social positioning between black and white communities in South Africa. From 1860 onwards, indentured labour was introduced to Natal. By 1917, over 1.3 million Indians had crossed the seas to work as indentured labourers in Mauritius, the Caribbean, Fiji and Martinique, as well as South Africa.[7] The colonial state was able to negotiate the introduction of extant procedures and on the 16 November 1860 the SS Truro docked in Natal Bay with 342 'coolies' on board.[8] Although Indian immigration was suspended between 1865 and 1874, partly because of an international economic recession, and partly because of the complaints of returning indentured labourers about their conditions of work, in 1874, the importation of indentured labour was re-introduced. By the time it was halted in 1911, largely because the South African government refused to guarantee that Indians would be accepted as permanent citizens in South Africa,[9] 152,184 Indians had been shipped to Natal.[10]

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[6] H Tinker, A New System of Slavery: The export of Indian labour overseas 1830-1920, (London, 1974), p. 63.

[7] Dhupelia-Mesthrie, From Cane Fields to Freedom, p. 10

[8] Tinker, A New System, p. 97; S. Bhana and J. Brain, Setting Down Roots: Indian migrants in South Africa, 1860-1911, (Johannesburg, 1990), p. 28.

[9] Tinker A New System, p. 313.

[10] M. D. North-Coombes, 'Indentured Labour and the Sugar Industries of Natal and Mauritius, 1834-1910', S. Bhana, (ed.), Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal, (Leeds, 1991), p. 12; for other accounts of indentured labour in Natal, see also Tinker, A New System, pp. 293-314; Bhana and Brain, Setting Down Roots, pp. 23-28; J.B. Brain, 'Indentured and Free Indians in the economy of colonial Natal', B. Guest and J.M. Sellars (eds) Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: aspects of the economic and social history of colonial Natal, (Pietermaritzburg, 1985), pp. 210-226; M. Swan, Gandhi: the South African Experience, (Johannesburg, 1985), pp. 1-24.

The Origins of Indian Indentured Labour

There were several reasons for the decision by the sugar planters and British authorities to use Indian labour. Indenture could be passed off as a more 'respectable' form of labour exploitation than slavery, especially while Indians themselves had limited self-representation within the colonial system of government. Exporting Indians from rural areas was also in part a short-term solution to the economic and social crisis in large areas of India's countryside in the 1850s, where agricultural stagnation was leading to growing poverty. As British influence in India spread, the interaction of the newly introduced property relations and a money economy with older communal social and feudal relations disrupted the potential for growth within the agrarian sector.[11] Although India's involvement in the world market grew, it was principally as a producer of primary products for export. Colonial policy engendered de-industrialisation, and as agricultural production became geared to the needs of the world market, it did little to increase the prosperity of the majority of India's rural population.[12] Pre-existing relations of debt and bondage exacerbated these social conditions and many agricultural workers were keen to escape the burden of poverty under which they laboured.[13] Encroaching rural poverty provided a ready pool of workers for the South African economy. However, it is important to emphasise that migrants were not merely the passive victims of a voracious capitalist system, hoodwinked and coerced into overseas migration.

Traditional explanations of out-migrations look to local famine and paid personnel to coerce the marginalised. In reality, rural labourers had a greater degree of agency in the processes involved. For example, 'returnees' from the colonies gave local populations some idea of the conditions and opportunities awaiting them. Competition between colonial and internal markets for migrant labour also offered a degree of choice to workers. On occasions, this competition between rival labour exporters became intense. There was a reported instance in Madras where depot clerks and contractors were accused by several

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[11] F. Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness and Control: Indian South Africans, 1860-1946', D. Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1974, pp. 16-18; C Kondapi, Indians Oversea, 1838-1949, (New Delhi, 1951), pp. 2-4; Tinker, A New System, p. 83. R. Palme Dutt, India Today, (London, 1940), pp. 94-101.
[12] See M. Carter, 'Strategies of Labour Mobilisation in Colonial India' H. Bernstein, V. Daniel, and T. Brass (eds), Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Africa, (London 1992), pp. 229-245.

Mauritian returnees of sending the bands they had recruited for Mauritius to Natal instead.[14] Labour recruiters targeted potential workers by tapping into existing, economically-induced seasonal rural-rural or rural-urban migrations, in other words, into communities that were used to migrating between different locations in order to sell their labour. Competing interests between different recruiting agencies meant that offers of financial inducements to attract indentured labour overseas were not uncommon. Also, knowledge that was gleaned from 'returnees' about different colonies gave potential recruits some choice between the differing benefits and drawbacks of various locations. After 1860 for example, Mauritius increasingly recruited families, hoping to pave the way for their long-term settlement in the territory, where labour patterns were changing. Financial inducements for migrating to South Africa were higher but there was not the same emphasis on family recruitment or permanent settlement. With access to these sorts of information, and a competitive market for labour, rural workers had some degree of choice in determining their decision to migrate, as well as their final destination.

Migrants recruited for distant locations were often found in the spaces in between the rural and the urban, along roads or places of pilgrimage or gatherings for religious festivals. They were mobile and actively seeking work. Others were picked up at 'coolie points' in harbours where they had drifted in order to find employment.. Heterogeneous in character, they were part of a migrant population which had been forced to find other means of employment at a time of social and political flux.[15]

The indentured workers who found their way to the African continent were in the main, but not exclusively, recruited from the rural low-caste poor and primarily from the areas around Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the south, and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the north-east. They were drawn from a variety of backgrounds: ex-service workers, soldiers, barbers, cooks, washermen, etc.[16] But there was also a flow of small-scale producers and entrepreneurs, some from higher castes, who were already skilled in sugar

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[14] Carter, 'Strategies of Labour Mobilisation', p. 234.
[15] Carter, 'Strategies of Labour Mobilisation', p. 234.
[16] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness', p. 288-303.

production,[17] and who also opted for the South African solution. They hoped it would give them opportunities beyond those provided by their Indian environment, especially as indenture was presented as a short-term stepping stone to increasingly lucrative options on a more self-sufficient basis. Indenture was initially for a period of three years, later increased to five. Once this initial period was served, workers could either extend their period of contract labour for a further three years, or alternatively get a passage home or a piece of crown land. The pay was 10 shillings a month for the duration of the three years with free food, accommodation and medical attention. Although this looked adequate in theory, the terms of contract were open to abuse and most indentured workers, but especially those living on labour-intensive sugar plantations, where they constituted 80 per cent of the workforce, lived in squalid overcrowded conditions with barely enough to eat. Medical attention for the sick was more theoretical than real.[18] Conditions for Indian women workers were even worse.[19] Some research has suggested that suicide amongst Indian indentured workers in South Africa was higher than amongst those in the Caribbean or Mauritius.[20]

Once in South Africa, whether they ended up in the sugar plantations or not, and despite their heterogeneous background, these workers were generally lumped together under the derogatory term 'coolie', a word that remains a term of abuse to this day. As with all identities, the notion of the coolie is neither unitary nor consistent. The inherent ambiguity of the term facilitated its incorporation of new meanings in different contexts. There are two main sources for the term coolie, one Tamil and the other Gujarati. The former, originally Kuli, was a term for payment for menial work for a person without any customary rights, representing the lowest level in the industrial labour market. The Gujarati root of Kuli refers to a person belonging to the Kuli tribe, commonly described as 'thieves,

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[17] Tinker, A New System, p. 30.
[18] See Swan, Gandhi, pp. 25-26; Swan, 'Indentured Indians: Accommodation and Resistance 1890-1913' in S. Bhana, (ed.), Essays on Indentured Indians, pp. 117-136.
[19] See J. Beal, 'Women Under Indenture in Natal', in S. Bhana, (ed.), Essays on Indentured Indians, pp.89-116.
[20] S. Bhana, and A. Bhana, 'An Exploration of the Psycho-Historical Circumstances Surrounding Suicide Amongst Indentured Indians 1875-1911' in S. Bhana (ed.), Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal, pp. 137-188.

robbers, plunderers, degenerate and inferior – a villainous race'[21] The English slang term coolie combines both of the above meanings as well as Coloured, African and white perceptions of Indian identity in South Africa. But it was also used to label the Indian merchant communities who came to South Africa from the 1870s onwards. All Indians were seen as 'coolies'. All Indian workers were thus framed within an identity which implicitly gave them no rights of citizenship, and a low status in society. The term also implied a lack of personhood when Indians first arrived in South Africa. Indeed, some workers of Tamil origin continued referring to themselves as 'Kulial' as the suffix restored a sense of identity which the term otherwise lacked.[22]

Other ways in which indentured workers asserted their struggle for rights, and in the process reinscribed their identities, can be seen in the acts of rebellion in their everyday lives and in the maintenance and transformation of the cultural practices that they brought with them. Migrant workers in India came with traditions of violent protest in the rural areas.[23] Once in South Africa, they did not merely become the passive victims of their circumstances and it would be a misrepresentation to suggest that they only suffered a crisis of identity or committed suicide during their early days in Natal. Indeed, there is some evidence that there were attempts at political organisation on the first boat to Natal, although it is not clear what form this took.[24] Types of peasant resistance such as stock mutilation and desertion were common from the start. But the earliest recorded instance of more widespread and organised resistance was on the Shire estate in 1862.[25] After severe ill treatment the labourers refused to return to work and were arrested three times. Although the season's sugar crop was lost, their contracts were not cancelled and a commission later found their grievances justified.[26] However, their action was subsequently referred to as

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[21] V. Daniel and J. Bremen, 'The Making of a Coolie' in H. Bernstein et al, Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants, p. 268.

[22] Daniel and Bremen, 'The Making of a Coolie', p. 276.

[23] See D. Arnold, 'Industrial Violence in Colonial India', in Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 22, 1980, pp. 234-255.

[24] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness', p. 224. There is other evidence that indentured labourers did not take their conditions lying down, and complained to official bodies. See 'Charges of Assault Against Estate Manager', 1.1./1/3, 20/1877, Natal Archives, and 'Complaint of Ill-Treatment on an Estate sent to Protector of Indian Immigrants, February 1884, 1.1./1/18, 189/1884, Natal Archives, in S. Bhana and B. Pachai, (eds), A Documentary History of Indian South Africans, 1860-1982, (Cape Town, 1984), pp. 4-5.

[25] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness', p. 225.

[26] Report of The Coolie Commission: Indian immigrants in the Colony of Natal, 1872, p. 7.

'leaving the estate in a body', and was made illegal in 1870. This suggests that similar actions had also taken place on other estates, as it is unlikely that one incident would provoke preventative legislation. These early acts of mass desertion also suggest the actions of workers who had recently come from an environment where they could move relatively freely to look for work.

Workers also protested by complaining to the authorities about their treatment in South Africa on their return to India, and their complaints contributed to calling a halt to continued indenturing between 1865 and 1876[27]. In one known instance in 1866, a literate indentured labourer wrote to the papers complaining about conditions on the estates.[28] These scant reports of localised actions in the early days of indenture are amongst the few scatterings of evidence we have at present. They suggest some unity of purpose and a degree of leadership at estate or barrack house level beyond the 'peasant resistance'[29] usually attributed to Indian arrivals in South African labour history. As yet this early narrative of workers history remains largely unrecorded. Hopefully it is not completely lost to us.

The Muharram Festival

Cultural practices could also constitute a form of resistance and became an assertion of identity. An important early example of this was the festival of Muharram, described by white South Africans as the 'Coolie' Christmas. Religious cultural practices were important to indentured workers from the moment of their arrival in South Africa, partly as a performance of an identity and personhood that they was seemingly denied. In some instances, this performance of identity also contained the seeds of a political rebellion and defiance that upset the colonial authorities. As one illustration of this, I want to examine the background to the festival of Muharram as it was practised in Durban, a festival which was remarkable in many ways.[30] Although it was a Muslim festival, and Muslims formed only a

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[27] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness', p. 225.

[28] Natal Mercury, 14 July, 1866.

[29] By this I mean the largely unselfconscious acts of individual defiance, which are not part of a wider political purpose. See J.C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: every day forms of peasant resistance (London 1985).

[30] See G. Vahed, unpublished paper, 'Constructions of Community and Identity amongst Indentured Indians in Colonial Natal, 1860-1910: The Role of the Muharram Festival', which inspired me to research this topic

small minority of the overall population of indentured workers, as Goolam Vahed has shown, it was practised by Hindus and Muslims alike. As a cultural practice, it partly carried over traditions from India, but in the process, it also for a short time transformed itself and came to resemble a 'carnival'[31] rather than a solemn mourning ceremony commemorating the death of Mohammed's grandson Hussein.

To even call Muharram a festival can be seen as contradiction in terms and points to the ambiguous nature of the event within the Muslim community. In some senses it is remarkable that it developed into an occasion that enjoyed such polytheistic participation, becoming an expression of the heterogeneous indentured cultures that came to Durban in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It developed into an annual event when workers came together to forget the grind and strictures of their daily lives, subverting official hierarchies, indulging in a heteroglossic cacophony that challenged the hegemonic structures of the political order. It was a moment of contrived misrule and disorder.[32] Some detail of its Muslim origins is needed here to illustrate this point.

Muharram has a different significance for Shia and Sunni Muslims. It is the first month of the Islamic calendar, when Muslims begin their lunar Hirjah month, and is one of the four sanctified months of their twelve-month calendar. Voluntary fasting can take place at this sacred time, but the tenth day is the most sacred of all within this period, the day of 'Ashura', when fasting promises to bring a 'great reward'[33] However, the special significance of Ashura is contested amongst different branches of Islam. There seems to be some general consensus that it was on this day that Moses crossed the Red Sea with his followers, saving the Jews from the Pharaoh, but there are theological disputes over

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further. Another version of this has now been published as 'Uprooting and Rerooting: Culture, Religion and Community among Indentured Muslim migrants in Colonial Natal, 1860-1911, South African Historical Journal, no. 45, Nov 2001, pp. 191-222; also my thanks to some very fruitful discussions with G. Roberts which helped me understand some asprcts of Shia idenity and the Muharram festival.

[31] I am using the term 'carnival' in the spirit of M. M. Bakhtin in Rabelais and His World (Cambridge MA, 1984) (tr.) H. Iswolsky, where he develops the idea of 'carnival' as subversive celebration of disorder and ambiguity against the strictures of everyday life.

[32] See S. Hall 'For Allen White: metaphors of transformation.' in D. Morley and K.H. Chen, (eds), Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies. (London 1997) pp. 287-308, where Hall has extended the notion of the 'carnivalesque' to all levels of cultural production.

[33] Council of Muslim Theologians, POBox 62564, Bishopsgate 4008, South Africa.

whether human beings were created on Ashura or whether it is the day when the world will end. However, it appears to have been important for Sunni Muslims to establish the fact that Ashura, or the tenth day of Muharram, was a day of significance before the martyrdom of Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Mohammed, which took place on the same day. For Shias, Ashura became even more significant after Hussein's death, as they believed he was the true successor of Mohammed. As far as Sunnis are concerned, Mohammed was the last prophet. No one would succeed him. Mourning the death of Hussein, then, and the rituals that accompanied this, became a major point of contention between these two branches of Islam and remains so to this day.

For Shiites, India represented a place of refuge from Sunni caliphal persecution,[34] and they exercised an important influence in pockets of the sub-continent, especially around Lucknow and Hydrabad. These were both areas from which indentured labour was recruited. The Mughal dynasty also retained strong links with its Shiite Iraqi counterpart, and subsequently the act of mourning for Hussein on the tenth day of Muharram became a widespread practise in certain areas of India. Ashura became an important outlet for the political grievances of Shiite urban groups. The drama of Karbala, and the figure of Hussein, were transformed into an outlet for the 'conflicts, antagonisms, and frustrations of social living.'[35] Men paraded through the streets carrying replicas of tombs, tearing their clothes, flagellating their bodies and in some cases, cutting their flesh with knives. An interesting aspect of this, which was echoed in the South African context, was the reaction of the colonial authorities to the practices of Muharram in India. Rudyard Kipling, writing for the English paper The Gazette, in the 1880s, reported from Lahore that the Muharram was made up of 'scum, riffraff, drinking and marauding'.[36] It reinforced the British view that the natives were irrational beings who were in the habit of losing their self-control and were thus not fit for self-rule. The colonial authorities also associated the mourning ceremony with anti-English treachery, a potential threat to the empire. This was not surprising as the occasion often turned into an opportunity for violence against the police

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[34] D. Pinault The Shiites (London 1992), p. 59.
[35] G. Thaiss, 'Religious Symbolism and Social Change: the drama of Hussein', PhD thesis, Washington University, 1972, pp. 59-60.
[36] Pinault, The Shiites p. 66.

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and the voicing of anti-British sentiment.[37] As such, Muharram became something that had to be contained and controlled.

Muharram in South Africa

There is some speculation as to why Muharram took the form it did in South Africa. I suggest that one important conduit may well have been through the cultural practices associated with Hydrabad and its surrounding area. The city had been founded by a Sh-ite dynasty in an area populated by a large percentage of migrant communities, consisting of mercenary soldiers, Uzbekis, Kabulis, Rajputs, Bengalis and local Hindus. The form that Muharram subsequently adopted in Hydrabad shows the influence of numerous aspects of both Hindu and Muslim religious cultural practices. Hindus were active participants as entertainers, mendicants and processionists.[38] In other localities, there was often tension between Hindus and Muslims during Muharram. But in Hydrabad, it became a way of creating 'a common cultural ethos' amongst the very diverse people of the Deccan.[39] The martyrdom of Hussein came to personify the oneness and brotherhood of all humanity and represented a refusal to capitulate against overwhelming odds. As many indentured labourers were recruited from the area around Hydrabad, this syncretic form of Muharram may well have travelled to Durban via this route.

In some areas of India, Sunnis also took part in the liturgy, because the martyred Hussein was a member of the prophet's family, and therefore mourning was seen as appropriate. But many Sunnis considered it (and still do) 'harram' to mourn in such a fashion, an act that is forbidden and brings shame on oneself. This debate continues among Indian Muslims of South Africa to this day.[40] The disputed nature of the festival in the Muslim community became significant in the period that I am discussing.

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[37] Pinault, The Shiites pp. 66-74.

[38] Pinault, The Shiites p.156.

[39] Professor Sadiq Naqvi, quoted in D. Pinault The Shiites p. 158.

[40] Whilst researching Muharram on the internet, I came across a webpage where Indian Muslims in South Africa were busy debating this very issue.

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By 1904, 86.2 per cent of the Indian population in Natal was Hindu and a mere 9.9 per cent Muslim.[41] Despite this, employers granted the three days annual leave to which indentures were entitled during the period when Muharram fell. It became the first communal Indian workers' festival in South Africa. It took the form of a public procession with the participants carrying models of 'tazzias'.[42] There was fierce competition for the prize for best tazzia between different estates, and in town, between the different barracks where Indian workers were housed. However, the tearing of clothes and self-flagellation was largely replaced by other cultural practices such as fire-walking, tiger dancing, wrestling, and in the early days, the occasional ritual killing of animals. This was an amalgam of northern and southern Indian rural traditions, and was often accompanied by the copious consumption of ganja and alcohol.

Like its cultural counterpart in India, violence sometimes flared during Muharram between different groups of workers as well as against the colonial authorities. In Durban, it was transformed into a noisy and 'anarchistic' spectacle that whites and Africans came out to watch. [43] The nature of the events, or rather they way in which they were perceived and interpreted, served to re-inforce negative stereotypes of Indians amongst white South Africans. The fact that African policemen were often used to break up trouble when violence erupted led to a deterioration in relations between all three groups of people, white, African and Indian, to whom the festival came to represent very different things. Africans seemed to resent this taking over of public space by an alien group at a time when their movements were still strictly curtailed in the urban environment. This resentment continued in subsequent struggles over urban space between Africans and Indians, and continued to shape relations between them. Whites initially enjoyed the spectacle of the 'Coolie Christmas' but it also served to confirm their orientalist view of Indians as a savage and heathen people, depraved in their practices and incapable of responsible behaviour. The colonial authorities soon 'wanted to put a stop to this absurd annual Pagoda parading business about out streets...(otherwise) we may expect shortly to have an army of these

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[41] Vahed, 'Constructions of Community' p. 4.
[42] A tazzia is a coffin.
[43] At least this is how it must of appeared to those on the outside who understood little of the cultural practices involved.

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scull breaking fanatics taking charge of our borough' as R. C. Alexander, the Police Superintendent of Durban put it.[44] Alexander had previously been in the Indian Army, [45] so he may well of brought preconceptions of Muharram as practised in India with him. On one occasion, when violence erupted, Alexander declared

> '...the police were ordered to charge and clear the area. The police then removed the pagoda to the coolie quarters, but were met with resistance in the streets and had to abandon the idea. To bring the British rule further into contempt, the coolies were permitted by the magistrates to complete their programme the next day. The coolies were triumphant, the police sullen.'[46]

In response, Alexander urged that 'this festival tomfoolery be suppressed'.[47]

Echoing their Indian counterparts, Natal's colonial authorities represented Muharram as a threat to civic order (and subsequently also as a bad example to the African population, an accusation that was to be increasingly hurled at Indians) which also displayed contempt for the British Empire. Because of this, it had to be suppressed, or at the very least contained. In India this had proved impossible. In South Africa the situation was different. Measures were taken by the colonial authorities to stem the worst excesses, as they saw it, of Muharram. They had unexpected allies in this exercise. Higher-caste Hindus and Muslims alike regarded the Murahham festival with horror.

The Arrival of Passenger Indians

Passenger Indians, so-called because they paid their own fares to South Africa on passenger ships, began to arrive in South Africa from the early 1870s. At this time, Natal was under-supplied with capital and goods, was relatively stable and had a weak bureaucracy. Passenger Indians were mainly from higher castes than their indentured counterparts and were predominantly Muslim. Many had had access to some level of education. Significantly, unlike indentured labourers, they were considered, and considered

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[44] Police Superintendent Alexander quoted in Vahed, 'Constructions of Community', pp. 9-10.

[45] M. Swanson, 'The Asiatic Menace: creating segregation in Durban, 1870-1900'. International Journal of African Historical Studies, vol. 16, no. 3, (1983), p. 408. Alexander, who was appointed as Durban's 'inspector of nuisances' was also responsible for hiding Gandhi from a baying crowd on his return from India in 1896, giving him a policeman's uniform to escape in. See E. H. Erikson, Gandhi's Truth: on the origins of militant nonviolence, (New York, 1969), p.179.

[46] Alexander, quoted in Vahed 'Constructions of Community', p. 9.

themselves, British subjects. The majority was part of an Indian trading diaspora and came over as merchants to fill the gap in the market in foodstuffs and imported goods for the resident Indian population. These new merchants played a significant role in building up the colony's commercial network in areas of trade, credit and money lending. They had important ties with a global Indian business diaspora.

Indians from the west coast of the subcontinent had traded with East Africa since at least the sixth century. By the eighteenth century, Indian handicraft and textile production flourished in places such as Surat in the Gujarat, which became an important commercial and entrepreneurial entrepot, housing a wealthy merchant community.[48] By the nineteenth century, however, this situation was in reverse as the textile trade declined. From the 1820s, shipping and merchant business came to be increasingly dominated by the British.[49] Factory production also undermined the local cottage industries that had previously been controlled by families from production to distribution. Local Indian merchants needed to find new avenues for reinvigorating their business interests, and investment in as yet undercapitalised areas became an attractive prospect. A number of Indian merchants had already made their fortunes in Zanzibar, where it was estimated that some £1.6 million of Indian capital was invested by 1873.[50] From here, many merchants spread their activities to the mainland. Mauritius had also proved to be a lucrative area for Indian merchant capital, but after malaria decimated the population, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 diverted trade from the island, Natal seemed to offer better business prospects, especially after the mineral discoveries in the 1880s.

The first merchant pioneer in Natal came from Porbandar, Gandhi's hometown in the Gujarat, and news of his growing prosperity soon reached his home.[51] Others soon followed his example. These men were either agents of large Indian business houses or former peasants with a small amount of capital to invest. They were generally young, with

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[47] Vahed, 'Constructions of Community', p. 9.
[48] See .V. Padyachee and R. Morrell, 'Indian Merchants and Dukawallahs in the Natal Economy 1875-1914' Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 17, no 1, March 1991, p. 71-102.
[49] Padyachee and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants', p. 73.
[50] Padyachee and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants' p. 74.
[51] Padyachee and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants' p. 77.

extensive business experience. One example of this was Aboobaker Amod who came to Durban in 1874 at the age of 25.[52] He had already worked in business in Bombay, Calcutta and Mauritius where he had been the agent for a powerful merchant family from the Vania trading caste. Amod left Mauritius for Delagoa Bay in 1869, after which he travelled to the Transvaal by ox-wagon. He arrived in Natal three years later. Like others of these newly arrived businessmen, Amod soon came to own ships, and charted others, some of which were leased to the British for the transportation of indentured labour.[53]

As well as trading as far afield as India, England and Germany, these merchants provided local credit facilities for the Indian community in Natal and owned properties, which they often rented out to small shopkeepers. Part of a sophisticated international business diaspora, they claimed the status of 'British Indian' for themselves; they saw themselves as citizens of the empire and had little in common with indentured workers. British petty entrepreneurs feared their competition, and used their political powers to curb Indian enterprise.

Coming as they did from Gujurati Muslim sects such as the Memons, Bhoras and Khojas, this merchant elite would not have recognised Muharram in its early South African form as primarily a workers' festival. A significant proportion of this community were Shi'as themselves but observed Muharram with the more 'genteel' practices of mourning associated with the area of northern India around the Gujurat.[54] South Africa's Muharram festival highlighted both the class divide amongst Indian South Africans and revealed the way caste prejudices were transplanted onto South African soil. In 1906, for example, Indian Opinion, the newspaper founded by Gandhi in 1903 to reflect Indian merchant concerns, lamented the… 'existence in trade of men who are not fitted by training or descent for such a career. Agriculture is the natural standby of all these people and when they depart from their ancestral custom they will naturally run serious risk of failure.'[55] The paper clearly expressed the merchants' concern to distinguish themselves from workers and

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[52] Swan, Gandhi, p. 3.
[53] Padyachee and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants', p. 78-79.
[54] Dr Prakash Shah, interview with PR, London, June 2000.
[55] Indian Opinion 27 October 1906.

maintain a class and caste divide. In 1905, the paper decried the fact that whites indiscriminately classified all Indians as either 'coolies' or 'Arabs'[56], pointing out that there were, in fact, two main classes of Indians in South Africa, traders and indentured labourers, adding that the latter were also 'low caste'.[57] To distance themselves from the 'antics' surrounding Muharram became doubly necessary; in the first place, it was a political necessity, as they were pushing for rights of citizenship as 'civilised' British subjects, and in the second, it was a religious imperative, as Muharram was a contested practise. Far better to promote Eid[58], which seemingly united rather than divided all Muslims.

If Muslim traders wished to distance themselves from Muharram and advocate the observance of Eid in its place, sections of South Africa's Indian Hindu community were even more vociferous in their condemnation of the festival, and actively sought to promote colonial measures to exclude Hindus from the event. As Hinduism was established in South Africa, practitioners and religious leaders attempted to formulate desirable cultural practices in line with their Indian antecedents. This became an active constituent in the creation of an Indian South African identity. During this process, organisations such as the Hindu Young Men's Society were established from 1906.[59] Its members were colonial-born educated Tamils who wanted to work for the spread of the Hindu religion, promote the Tamil language and culture and rediscover the grandeur of southern India.

Around twelve Hindu organisations emerged around this time and many of them sponsored visits by Indian religious scholars. One such sponsored visitor was Swami Shankeranand, who arrived in Durban on the 4 October 1908.[60] A major concern for these organisations and their religious leadership was to gain state recognition for Hindu religious festivals such as Diwali and to stop Hindu participation in the Muslim festival of Muharram. Shankeranand applied to the authorities in order to try and stop them making

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[56] So-called because of the 'flowing robes' and head-dress of the Memons. See M. K. Gandhi, 'The Grievances of British Indians in South Africa: an appeal to the Indian public', (The Green Pamphlet, 1896), Collected Works of M. K. Gandhi, vol. 2, (Ahmedabad, 1958), p. 7.

[57] Indian Opinion, 14 January 1905.

[58] Eid marks the end of Ramadan, a month of fasting during the day for Muslims, and is generally a time of celebration.

[59] Vahed, 'Constructions of Community' p. 12.

[60] Vahed, 'Constructions of Community' p. 12.

Muharram the occasion for a general Indian public holiday so as to prevent Hindus from joining in.[61] For orthodox Hindus, such involvement was unthinkable and raised serious questions of pollution. The South African form of the festival posed even greater moral issues, and Hindu religious leaders were quick to emphasise the disputed nature of the occasion even in the Muslim community. The colonial-born educated elite which formed the membership of these new religious organisations, saw itself as an upwardly mobile section of the population and wished to distance itself from working- class actions that served to reinforce negative stereotypes of the Indian community in wider South African society.

The issues that surrounded the festival of Muharram in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century serve to illustrate the complexity of the Indian community from its early days in South Africa. For the workers, it became a syncretic expression of popular cultural performance adopted from their rural past in ways that outstripped the austere nature of its contested religious origins. It was transformed into a carnivalesque expression of leisure and protest, an assertion of identity and a kick against authority; it also signalled a rebellion against the collective term of 'coolie' with its implied lack of rights and personhood. Its origins in the martyrdom of Hussein and his fight against overwhelming odds at Karbala may have symbolised for some the struggle to be recognised as human beings in their new South African environment. For others, it provided temporary relief from the harsh realities of everyday life, a time to play out rivalries and turn the streets of Durban into a contested space, where state control, or their servile position, could not be taken for granted. For three days, the 'coolie' could claim some degree of authority and control. And this is precisely what threatened African, settler and sectional Indian interests alike. In the main Hindus stopped celebrating Muharram after 1910 and turned instead to Hindu festivals such as Deepavali and Pongal. But Muharram continues in South Africa to this day, albeit in a somewhat subdued form.

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[61] J.B. Brain, 'Religion, Missionaries and Indentured Indians', in Bhana (ed.). Essays on Indentured Indians,

Workers and Patrons: The economic ties that bind

The Indian trading community in South Africa was built around close ties through which they developed a 'community of interest'. Social, economic and religious life was closely interlinked and family networks were strong. On their arrival in South Africa they immediately came into competition with ex-indentured workers who were also trying to go into business. These workers had some level of education and were generally higher caste than the majority of indentured labourers. In 1870, ex-indentured labourers owned ten stores in Natal. By 1880 this had risen to thirty out of a total of 37 Indian-owned businesses. But by 1890 a very different picture had begun to emerge. Passenger Indians now owned sixty out of the 67 Indian stores in Natal.[62] Traders had more access to capital, and with pre-existing business, family and community links, and they were able to assume a dominant position within the domain of South African Indian entrepreneurial activity. Ex-indentured labourers were unable to compete effectively.

Traders' relationships with lower-class workers were ambiguous, however, both economically and politically. Merchants and workers entered a web of patron-client relationships within which workers constituted the merchants' client base, but were also able to access small amounts of capital through credit and loan schemes; this gave them an edge over their African counterparts. Indian traders set up alternative credit networks that facilitated small-scale entrepreneurial activity. The way in which credit facilities were extended was not straightforward, however. The majority of the ranks of ex-indentured workers were considered outsiders as they were in the main South Indian and low-caste Hindus. These people had to seek help through other means, sometimes through South Indian banking networks such as those developed by the Chetty family in Natal. Kinship and family ties tended to determine where, and how, financial resources were allocated.

Small Gujurati Muslim traders were the main beneficiaries of Indian merchant credit networks. But both ex-indentured and ex-peasant passenger Indians set themselves up as small-scale storekeepers or Dhukuwallahs as they became known, in remote rural

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p. 214.
[62] Swan, Gandhi, p. 4.

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areas of South Africa, catering mainly for Africans. They made their way into remote Zulu villages, places 'where no white man would go' selling goods such as 'calico, needles, groceries and lace'[63] If a Dhukuwalla could accumulate enough capital, he would usually aspire to build a simple shop of wood and iron and try to make it as a small-time trader. But it was a precarious way to make a living, often a hand-to-mouth existence with the threat of bankruptcy always lurking around the corner. Many of them had to turn their hand to a variety of tasks, becoming 'part storekeeper, part farmer, part moneylender' to make ends meet. Their simple lifestyle was not dissimilar to small-scale Jewish traders in South Africa who also worked extended hours for little reward, amongst intense competition, and with the constant threat of insolvency.[64]

From their arrival in Natal in 1860, up to the First World War, it can be seen that Indians formed a diverse and heterogeneous part of the South African population in terms of caste, class, language and religion. Rather than having a single sense of community, they lived in overlapping communities whose interests began to converge because of the increasing burden of state legislation directed against them. I will look at this in the next chapter and describe the forms of political response that this invoked. Nevertheless, a loose sense of community may perhaps have been experienced by Indians on other levels at this time, and was mainly created through segregated social spaces. The earliest segregation measures in Natal were directed against Indians. Within Durban itself, the Indian business centre was focused around the Grey Street Mosque with 'alleyways...full of petty traders and small scale manufacturers, jewellers, watchmakers, scribes, servicing the illiterate'.[65] Grey Street became the residential heartland of Muslim Passenger Indians. As early as 1871 it was already known as the 'Coolie Location'. Some ex-indentured workers did come to live in this area, but they were few in number. A large percentage of the ex-indentured population was employed by the Durban municipality or the railway authority and was housed in dirty and overcrowded barracks towards the north of Durban.

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[63] Padyachee and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants' p. 88.
[64] Padyachee and Morrell, 'Indian Merchants' p. 88.
[65] W. Freund Insiders and Outsiders: the Indian working-class of Durban 1910-1990, (London 1995), p. 33.

Many others lived on the urban semi-periphery, places with little or no infrastructures, which were largely outside the control of the Durban civil authorities.[66] These spaces in between the urban and the rural offered a little of both contexts, and also the possibility of creating and establishing lifestyles beyond the strictures of increasing state control. A family was able to run a garden plot or fish while some of its members could go into town to find work. This allowed families to engage in farming and small-scale commerce and, given that Indian economic activities were facilitated by extended family networks, it was generally women who hawked produce from door-to-door.[67] The joint family pooled their resources and had ready access to labour. They usually lived in a series of shacks built of wattle and daub or wood and iron, a house built of brick being their ultimate goal, representing as it did security, prestige, and permanence. These communities were made up of Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Priests helped re-create a religious culture and a whole series of temples, miniature replicas of important shrines in India, came to dot the countryside. These shrines became important cultural signifiers in the process of Indian communities putting down roots, and producing locality, creating shared spaces of significance, and shared memories. [68]

As in India, Natal also had mendicant Brahmins, well-educated men who travelled the rural areas and recited extracts from the scriptures to groups of workers at the end of their working day. [69] Stories from the epics and religious observances were kept alive through this oral tradition. These Brahmin scholars were often arrested for vagrancy by the authorities[70], who failed to understand their function within their societies, where they helped reinscribe identity and redefine community, despite dislocations and uncertainty.

Whilst religious practices were observed in separate communities, the whole neighbourhood would often come together for dramas and sporting events and men would congregate for gambling and drinking sessions. During these activities, there was some mixing with Africans and whites. And because these areas were also largely 'uncontrolled

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[66] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 66.
[67] George Ponnen, interview with PR, Durban, July 1995; Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 68;.
[68] P.A., interview with PR, London, March 1997.
[69] Brain, 'Religion, Missionaries and Indentured Indians', p. 213.

peripheral spaces', illegal activities such as ganja smoking, prostitution and gambling also flourished.[71] The Indian population, then, was concentrated in these three main areas of Durban, around the Grey Street mosque, in barracks in the north of Durban, and in an unpoliced urban periphery.

Even at this time, Durban was a very segregated city and the concentration of Indians in certain areas must have helped develop some sense of community, however divergent and contested. Until the First World War, however, this remained a fragile identity, and one that could easily fracture along class or religious lines. Nonetheless, the growing management and development of the social environment by the state at this time, helped define and was in turn defined by, both racial attitudes and economic interests which were expressed through the state's social policies. Both of these helped form notions of identity and framed ideas about rights of citizenship, as we shall see.

A small but significant number of the Indian community came to believe that their rights could best be obtained through the struggle for socialism within the Communist Party, using the vehicle of the working class. But class formation is a complex and uneven process. Early industrialisation in South Africa, as elsewhere, gave rise to fragmented, alienated and amorphous bodies of workers who held on to existing cultural practices and older forms of political identity. For Indians, traces of past cultural practices persisted in South Africa and influenced the ways in which they organised against discriminatory practices. Indians joined the Communist Party in the 1930s, but prior to this, Indian South Africans initiated other forms of political organisation, which also contributed to the ways in which Indians influenced the Communist Party in later years. I now turn to an analysis of these early forms of organisation, and especially the role played by Gandhi, who went on to exert a powerful hold on the South African Indian political imagination. His construction of 'a new type of Indian', a new form of political subject,[72] greatly influenced later CP members such as Yusuf Dadoo.This was strange phenomenon, given Gandhi's ambivalent

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[70] See Report of the Protector, 1905, where they are described as a 'bad influence' on society.

[71] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders p. 70.

[72] See D. Chetty, 'Identity and "Indianness": reading and writing ethnic discourse', paper presented at Conference on Ethnicity, Society and Conflict in Natal, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, September, 1992, where this idea is raised but not fully developed.

attitude to Africans, his growing anti-modernist views, and his antipathy to industrial workers, all of which are seemingly at odds with the political programme of the Communist Party.

At the same time, the early 'nationalist' Indian organisations were to have important links, and a continuing, if at times contentious, dialogue with Indian communists, which helped shape the relationship between nationalism and socialism in South African politics. This dialogue between nationalism and socialism was a contingent, relational, and dynamic process which helped constitute South African Indian political identities, through an interwoven discourse of past and present practices.

Chapter Two

Early Indian Political Organisation in South Africa:
in defence of the 'Motherland'

In Chapter One, I illustrated the heterogeneous origins of Indian settlers in South Africa and examined the sets of cultural practices that helped shape them into a loosely defined community during their first fifty years. I suggested that any sense of community was tenuous and fragile, and tended to dissolve during 'critical moments' along the lines of class, caste and religion. The Muharram festival was an example of workers' resistance and the disparate interests in the Indian community. To differing degrees, these disparities continued after Indians had become long-term residents in South Africa. An Indian 'community' remained an ambiguous entity, meaning different things to different people, adapting, as well as giving shape, to the development of a language, both political and social, that allowed the performance of being 'Indian' in various ways in South Africa. Underlining this process were the material differences that continued to develop amongst Indians, as they tried to situate themselves within the South African economy. Many indentured labourers went on to become workers in South African industry, while others took to small-time trade and market-gardening enterprises.[1] Frequently, workers had to move between different sectors of the economy in order to make ends meet. But a considerable number of the offspring of these workers also went into professional occupations and formed a 'colonial-born' elite within this diverse 'community'.

Wealthy merchants from the Gujurat, including Bohras, Khojas and Memons,[2] formed another significant part of the Indian population. But Gujuratis did not form a homogenous group either. Small-scale peasant farmers who also came from the Gujurat in the 1890s and had gone into petty trade in South Africa, formed a client basis for this merchant elite, so class differences were prevalent in this part of the Indian population as well. All of the sections within this community brought, or observed, diverse religious and

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[1] Bhana and Brain, Setting Down Roots, pp. 63-76.
[2] Swan, Gandhi, p. 3.

cultural practices from India and these were adapted in South Africa. These practices helped shape the forms of group and individual identity that developed there.

The Indian 'political community' was also ambiguous. In matters of political organisation, Indian precedents were heavily drawn on in this new context. In Chapter One, I described how indentured labourers continued to employ forms of protest already practised in rural India. I will develop this theme in Chapter Three, where I also look at the role of colonial-born' Indians in the early twentieth century. The analysis of the 1913 strike in Chapter Three will serve to illustrate how the political actions of different Indian groups overlapped and developed into a complex of relationships between workers and merchants, involving different translations of ideas of nation, race and class. This chapter consists of an examination of the nature of political organisations set up by the merchant community around the turn of the nineteenth century and Gandhi's early contributions to the political life of Indian South Africans.

Gandhi casts a long shadow over Indian politics in South Africa in this period, where what he has come to represent outstrips, and in some cases is fundamentally at odds with, his developing political philosophy. Gandhi became a metaphor for a quintessential 'Indianness' that was a symbol of pride, self-help, and resistance to South African political hierarchies, an 'Indianness' that was differently translated and understood in various parts of the community. This gave room for the possibility of articulating a collective Indian politics that brought disparate interests together. I wish to illustrate the fundamentally heterogeneous and eclectic nature of Gandhi's 'quintessentially' Indian political subject, which will, in later chapters, allow an examination of how this 'subject' was re-appropriated and re-translated by Indian South African communists. In addition, I wish to explore how Indian political activities articulated with, and were framed by, discourses of empire and the question of rights within a nation state, as these gave shape to the forms of protest and an enunciation of a nationalist dialogue that was adopted by Indians in the Communist Party in the 1940s.

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From the very beginning, India exerted a powerful hold on the political imagination of the Indian community in South Africa.[3] It provided frames of reference, historical precedents and models of political organisation that were transplanted onto South African soil. Indian political organisation was also to have an impact in South Africa beyond the politics of the Indian community. Gandhi's elaboration of passive resistance, itself a complex of different ideological influences, fed into the Congress Alliance and Defiance campaigns of the 1950s, through the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses. In addition, Indian national organisations in South Africa (national in that they framed themselves in terms of organisations that had evolved in the national movement in India and were part of a continuing process of defining Indianness) had an ongoing and complex relationship with the Communist Party of South Africa, a relationship that became mutually transformative in terms of ideas, practice and membership. Above all, in the process of establishing these relationships, Indian political agitation in South Africa was transformed from one agitating for civic rights on foreign soil to struggling for full rights of citizenship within the South African nation state. This changing political struggle took place at the same time as segregationist policies were being formulated by the South African state, which increasingly sought to systematically exclude Indian, African and Coloured populations from rights of citizenship.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the emergence of a discourse that was to form the basis of popular 'social' movements, and the adaptation of constitutional parliamentary politics, bearing in mind that these were not mutually exclusive fields of protest. Both had their roots in the first fifty years of Indian residence in South Africa. Both drew on different, if overlapping, sets of ideological practices. And they both became part of the practice of the Communist Party in later years.

Gandhi in South Africa

As Gandhi was quick to realise when he first arrived in South Africa in 1893,[4] Indians were poorly treated in their everyday lives and were systematically subjected to

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[3] Chetty, 'Identity and Indianness', p. 5; Vahed, ' The Making of "Indianness": Indian Politics in South Africa During the 1930s and 1940s', Journal of Natal and Zulu History, vol. xviii, no. 17, p. 7.
[4] Swan, Gandhi, p. 40.

discrimination and prejudice. Because of this, there were four main areas of concern for Indian South Africans at this time, although these affected sections of the Indian population in different ways: trading restrictions, rights of residency, the franchise, and the question of taxation without representation. By the early 1890s, there were approximately 42,000 Indians in Natal, roughly about the same as the region's white population.[5] About 24,459 of these Indians were 'free', i.e. not indentured. At this same time, there were about 15000 Indians in the Transvaal, mostly clustered around the goldmines, where the mining industry had opened up opportunities for trade, as well as employment in the service sector.[6] Later on, as in Natal, Indian traders dispersed to small towns in rural areas.[7] From 1885 onwards, even before the discovery of gold, the Transvaal authorities were increasingly uneasy over their presence and tried to restrict their residence into segregated areas that were known as locations.

The number of Indians in the Cape was even smaller than in the Transvaal. From the 1870s onwards, Indians migrated to Cape Town and the diamond fields of Kimberley in search of work. By the 1890s, around 5,000 Indians populated these areas. The Orange Free State barred Indians altogether by the 1870s. By the 1890s, there were only a handful of them left there. By that time, the authorities in all four states sought to restrict their rights and exclude Indians more uniformly, and after the South African War ended in 1902, when the whole area came under British control, these exclusionary initiatives by individual states became better co-ordinated, and more centralised.[8]

The first joint response to the spate of anti-Indian legislation in the South African colonies and republics came from the Gujurati business community in 1891. Later, they were to work in conjunction with the influential Gandhi himself, but Indian merchant politics were formally initiated before this by the wealthy traders Dada Abdullah and Haji Mohamed. Between them, they monopolised commercial interests in Natal and had outlets

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[5] S. Bhana Gandhi's Legacy: The Natal Indian Congress 1894-1994, (Pietermaritzburg, 1997), p. 3.
[6] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy p. 4; Swan, Gandhi, p. 3.
[7] Swan gives a good description of these early merchant families and their networks; see Swan, Gandhi, pp.2-11.

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as far afield as the Transvaal and the Orange Free State within South Africa, as well as overseas in Mauritius and India. Together, they formed the Durban Indian Committee, which met periodically to discuss political issues that threatened Indian business interests.[9] Their political activity mainly centred around interpretations of the law so that, from its inception in South Africa, organised Indian politics needed legal advice from advocates who were fluent in Gujurati as well as English.

The main significance of this first Indian political organisation was that it brought the plight of Indian South Africans to the attention of a wider body of colonial officials. It was especially important in highlighting the fact that not all Indians resident in South Africa were 'coolies', whose ill-treatment might be regarded more lightly by the Colonial Office than that of 'educated Indians'.[10] Members of the Indian Committee used their business links with other influential merchants in Bombay to bring themselves to the attention of the Government of Bombay and the India Office as well as the Natal Colonial Secretary's Office and the Protector of Immigrants. Hence a precedent was set early on whereby influential members of the Indian political and business community in India gave South African Indians more of a hearing from the British, and in turn, from the South African government

Gandhi and South African Indians

In South African historiography, the Gandhian tradition has been elaborated mainly from the standpoint of the 'Great Man' theory of history. Initial historical research on Indian South Africans tended to credit Gandhi with instigating Indian resistance in that country and inspiring a rather passive and downtrodden Indian community into action.[11] However, in their work, both Frene Ginwala and Maureen Swan have attributed greater agency to Indian workers, and have opened the way for scholarship that demonstrates that Indians were politically active as soon as they arrived in the country, independently of

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[9] Swan, Gandhi, p. 41.
[10] Swan, Gandhi, pp. 41-42.
[11] See R. Huttenback, Gandhi in South Africa, (Place, 1971); B. Pillay, British Indians in the Transvaal, (London, 1976); R. Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, (Zurich, 1925) as typical examples.

Gandhi's influence.[12] Indeed, during his stay, many Indians continued to agitate from a different platform and were openly critical of him.

Nevertheless, Gandhi's role needs now to be re-evaluated. As mentioned above, the Communist Party and the Defiance campaign used Gandhian notions of passive resistance in the 1940s and 1950s. In addition, a whole body of recent research looks at political activity within the framework of 'social movements'. Central to the idea of 'social movements' is non-violent protest. Many modes of protest and new theoretical understandings draw legitimation from so-called Gandhian practices. The main concern in this part of my thesis is to re-examine the historical basis of this legitimisation and to analyse why it was deemed necessary. Gandhi drew on an eclectic range of philosophical and historical sources, but, for many, he has come to represent an essential sense of 'Indianness'.[13] Moreover, if other forms of political action were already evident among Indian South Africans we need to ask why Gandhi has assumed such significance? My contention is that Gandhi was prominent in giving substance and shape to two forms of political protest utilised by Indian South Africans in their early days: constitutional politics within a code of imperial brotherhood, and *satyagraha*, more popularly known as passive resistance, a combination of both European and Indian political and religious practices which he developed and reconstructed through the notion of an ancient Indian tradition. Satyagraha, in particular, came to represent a civilised, specifically Indian, form of protest, which was morally superior to the degenerating politics of modernity.

Satyagraha became a particular way of describing Indianness. This notion of an Indian 'self' assumed significance within a community that suffered multiple displacements and had an unstable position in the labour market. I will discuss this in more detail throughout the thesis. Satyagraha, a means of developing new forms of political and moral identity, derived, in part, from earlier forms of non-violent Indian rural protest, which Gandhi adapted in the South African context and elaborated into a moral philosophy for the Indian independence movement. Later, the Indian independence movement was to provide

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[12] Swan, Gandhi; Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness'.

[13] This is particularly true in India at the moment, where the BJP have used discourses of Gandhian Indian specificity in its creation of a fundamental Muslim 'otherness'.

a continuing point of identification for South African Indians. Ironically, given Gandhi's influence on South African Indian communists, his relationship with Indian workers was highly ambivalent during his sojourn in South Africa. Much of the inspiration for the development for Gandhi's philosophy also derived from his meetings with European theosophists, vegetarians and pacifists, through whom he collected an eclectic complex of ideas that were transformed into a worldview through his material experiences in South Africa. As Judith Brown has said, South Africa literally changed his life.[14]

When Gandhi came to South Africa to take up a legal case for an Indian merchant, he did not expect to stay there long. 'The engagement in South Africa was only for a year. I had nothing to lose... I had only gone for a single case, prompted by self interest and curiosity.' [15] Gandhi came from a family of well-to-do merchants who were active in local government. They sent him to London in the late 1880s, to train as a lawyer, and his three years in London exposed him to a range of new influences and experiences, and represented a time of moral, religious and intellectual ferment for him. It was in London that he read Salt's Plea for Vegetarianism while looking for a restaurant that would accommodate his diet. This led him to develop the idea that vegetarianism was part of a moral code.[16] He got to know members of the Vegetarian Society and was elected onto its executive committee. This gave him his first experience of organised voluntary activity and committee work, and provided him with his first journalistic experience while writing for their paper.

It was also in London that Gandhi first encountered theosophists. Theosophy had come into being towards the end of the nineteenth century as a popular and influential religious movement in America, India and Europe. Initiated by an Englishman named Henry Steele Olcott and Madam Blavatsky, a Russian who was stalked by scandals throughout her theosophical career,[17] it was a controversial blend of different religious traditions mixed with dabblings in the occult. This proved to have a significant influence on

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[14] J. Brown, Gandhi, Prisoner of Hope, (London, 1989), p. 94.
[15] M. K. Gandhi, quoted in R. Gandhi The Origins and Growth of Satyagraha p. 122. (details)
[16] Brown, Prisoner of Hope, p. 24.
[17] See P. Washington, Madam Blavatsky's Baboon, (New York, 1993), p. 74.

Gandhi's early development for several reasons. Theosophy cultivated religious neutrality and stressed the importance of the individual striving to become a better human. Both became important facets of his initial philosophy. It was also through the theosophists that he initially encountered the Bhagavad Gita. An important text within the theosophical movement, it remained deeply significant to Gandhi throughout his life. Through his reading of the Bhagavad Gita, he encountered some of his own religious heritage and came to re-evaluate it. His friends also introduced him to theosophy *per se*. Gandhi also read Madam Blavatsky's Key to Theosophy, which not only helped give him an interest in, and tolerance of, many different religions; it also helped dislodge from his mind the invidious British belief that Hinduism was an illogical religion rife with superstition.[18]

During his stay in London, Gandhi was also interested by Annie Besant, a radical theosophist of Irish descent who was briefly influential in the politics of Indian independence. When he returned to India after his student days in London, he found that Besant had a large number of followers, based on the membership of the Theosophical Society. He later took time to visit her during visits to India in 1902 and 1905. By 1911, however, he sought to distance himself from the wilder shores of the theosophical movement. Its interest in the powers of the occult and reports of unethical practices from its headquarters in Adyar on the outskirts of Madras, as well as tales of Madam Blavatsky's fraudulent practices, brought the movement increasingly into disrepute. But by then, Gandhi had gained from their influence and found new horizons through intellectual discussions with members of the organisation. [19]

Gandhi returned to India from London in 1891 but his professional career took a disastrous turn when he lost his nerve during his first case in Bombay and was unable to stand up to cross examine a witness. He had to return to the Gujurat and passed his time drafting petitions and memorials, which, ironically, was to stand him in good stead when he began to practise politics in South Africa. When a trading firm from his home town of Porbandar wrote to his brother and offered Gandhi a one-year contract in South Africa, to

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[18] Brown, Prisoner of Hope, p. 26.
[19] Brown, Prisoner of Hope, p. 78.

give legal advice to local lawyers involved in a big court case, Gandhi saw this as a chance to escape from his failures in the Indian legal system.

South Africa was to come as a rude shock. According to Judith Brown, he had experienced little racial tension in late nineteenth-century London.[20] Only 23 years old when he landed in Durban, his initial experiences left him dismayed at the everyday treatment of Indians in South Africa, especially as he saw himself as an educated and civilised man, a subject and citizen of empire. Within two weeks of his arrival, he had been ordered to take off his turban in court, refused a room in a hotel, denied a seat on a coach to Johannesburg and, infamously, kicked, punched and thrown out of a first-class railway compartment and left standing on the platform.[21] In addition to the everyday insults that Indians had to face, where they were commonly abused as 'coolies' (Gandhi soon became known as the 'coolie lawyer'), he also saw any equality of opportunity with white South Africans increasingly denied. Gandhi was all set to leave South Africa after his casework was complete, when, at a leaving party organised for him in Durban he saw a newspaper article in the Natal Mercury about the government's intention to impose further limitations on the Indian right to the franchise. It 'strikes at the root of our self-respect', he commented. The question of the 'self-respect' of the Indian community was to become a recurring theme in the writings of Gandhi and other Indian political activists in South Africa. The party transformed itself into a working committee and Gandhi stayed on to fight the proposed bill.[22]

The Indian National Congress and the Politics of Diaspora

Gandhi soon became heavily involved in the politics of the South African Indian merchant elite. In 1894, with his merchant allies he formed the Natal Indian Congress in order to organise more concerted political action against discriminatory state practices towards Indians. Gandhi chose the name of the organisation as well as drafting its initial

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[20] Brown, Prisoner of Hope, p. 25.
[21] F. Meer, 'The Making of the Mahatma: The South African Experience' in B.R.Nanda, (ed.) Mahatma Gandhi: One Hundred and Twenty Five Years, (New Delhi, 1995), p. 42.
[22] V. Banphot, 'The Emergence and Making of a Mass Movement Leader: a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa', PhD thesis, University of California, 1968, p. 67.

constitution.[23] It was largely modelled on the Indian National Congress which had been founded in 1885, and although he had little direct knowledge of the organisation at the time of the formation of the NIC, Gandhi had been deeply influenced by the creation of this nationalist organisation and was in close contact with Dadabai Naroaji, a founder member of the INC who was based in London in the early 1900s. Naroaji had become a Liberal Member of Parliament for Finsbury Central in 1892, and acted as a spokesman for the Indian cause in London.[24]

If Gandhi looked to the INC for support for his cause in South Africa, however, this was not immediately forthcoming, although the relationship transformed over time. The INC grew to have an important and extremely influential relationship with Indian politicians in South Africa, both Nationalist and Communist. In its early phase, the INC consisted of conservative liberals who wanted to move towards a form of representation for India through constitutional means. Their initial response to the South African Indian question was to argue that as Indians had no rights in their own country, they should not complain about the situation in South Africa. In fact, M.G. Ranade, a leading liberal founder member of Congress, had argued in 1893 that indentured labour was 'beneficial to all parties involved and opened up possibilities for the future'. He saw indenture as an outlet for 'surplus population'.[25] However, by the early twentieth century, both Ranade and G. K. Gohkale began to take up the issue of Indian South Africans more seriously, at a time when their disenfranchisement began to be seen as 'affront to the whole [Indian] nation'[26] and they were trying to find a serious voice within an international political arena. The South African situation increasingly became part of an Indian nationalism invoked through the concept of a motherland, which represented the dignity of 'Indianness'. This discourse of nationhood also took root within important sections of the South African Indian population. At this same time, the INC was being petitioned to support Indian problems in Canada, Australia and Mauritius.[27] Together these appeals formed the basis for the beginnings of an articulation of the demands of an Indian political diaspora whose rights

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[23] Banphot, 'The Emergence', p. 127.
[24] Banphot, 'The Emergence', p. 141.
[25] D. B.Mathur Gandhi, Congress and Apartheid, (Jaipur, 1986), p. 57.
[26] Mathur, Gandhi, p. 60.

were married to the question of their place within the empire, and later, Indian independence

There were important differences between the INC and the NIC. The Indian Congress developed into a full-scale political party and went on to run the government of India. The NIC on the other hand was intended primarily as an umbrella pressure group representing in the main the material interests of the merchant elite and, by paternalist extension, hoping to ameliorate the worst excesses of workers' conditions. At its inception, its aims were to maintain an Indian heritage and to 'keep India alive to Indian South Africans, but to keep India informed of the situation in South Africa as well'.[28] Like its Indian counterparts the NIC set up support groups in London in order to help espouse the South African Indian cause abroad. Above all, Gandhi saw himself as the mediator between South African Indians and the agencies of government and in doing so, he drew initially on the idea of Indians as citizens of Empire, something he borrowed from his INC colleagues. The British Proclamation of 1858 had promised the subjects of Queen Victoria freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, or colour. This became Gandhi's 'Magna Carta' for Indian rights in South Africa. In 1901, he stated 'What we wanted in South Africa was not a White man's country, nor a White brotherhood, but an Imperial brotherhood'.[29] Gandhi emphasised that Indians saw themselves as members of a civilised community in the Empire with basic rights which granted them a kind of 'travelling citizenship,' and in this they were at one with their Indian Congress counterparts.

Like Gandhi, the 'typical' member of the Indian National Congress was in the legal profession, often educated abroad, a westernised Indian male who was deeply loyal to the Raj.[30] Their professional training gave them a legalistic approach to politics. They contended that the issue of taxation without representation had to be legitimately addressed. Gandhi found this philosophical outlook easy to harness to the interests of South Africa's Indian merchant elite, as it was also part of an international cosmopolitan community which

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[27] Mathur, Gandhi, p. 63.
[28] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy, p. 9.
[29] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy, p. 9.
[30] S. R. Mehrotra, The Emergence of Indian National Congress, (Delhi, 1971), p. 49.

viewed itself as having transferable rights within the Empire and between nation states. This was one of the factors that had facilitated the creation of a successful trading diaspora in the first place.

Also like its Indian equivalent, the NIC claimed to represent and speak for all Indians, although again like the INC, the NIC had little intention of incorporating indentured workers, let alone leading their revolts. In fact, when workers got involved in political campaigns in large numbers, Indian merchants were often the first to withdraw, set up different organisations and seek direct dialogue with state bodies. In the early years, few Congress officials saw themselves fighting to extend the franchise to include agricultural labourers and workers. In India, merchants held rent-collecting rights over workers and saw them through the prism of caste relations. The patron-client relations that had characterised their relationships in India, a part of a class and caste hierarchy, were replicated in various ways in the South African context. Merchants may have claimed to speak on behalf of indentured workers, but these workers did not become part of the early NIC. The NIC and INC were dominated by deep-seated class, caste, and gender prejudices and hierarchical ideologies.

Given these Indian precedents, it comes as little surprise that the second organisation which Gandhi helped set up in the Transvaal in 1903 called itself the British Indian Association and also modelled itself on an Indian equivalent. This organisation had a leading role in the initial stages of the first passive resistance movement. Membership of both the NIC and BIA was fairly restricted. Membership of the Natal Indian Congress was ostensibly open to all Indians, but the annual fee effectively precluded this. At £3 per year (ironically, the same amount as the indentured tax that was causing such material distress to Indian agricultural workers), it was a third of the average Indian annual wage in South Africa in the early 1890s.[31] At this same time, the average annual income of the merchant elite was around £300. Periodically, a gesture was made to lower fees for 'Tamil members', a euphemism for ex-indentured workers, but this measure failed to materialise. In fact, money taken from Tamil members of the community was used to build up NIC funds

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[31] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy, p. 10.

although their interests were rarely addressed. In its early days the NIC invested in property with the money that it accumulated in subscriptions from its membership, which numbered around 228 in 1895.[32] This property was generally rented out to Tamil tenants and the revenue re-invested in the NIC. Many colonial-born Hindu Tamils subsequently formed their own, cultural, religious and political organisations and set up their own press. I will return to this in Chapter Three. In the meantime, the main political concerns of the NIC were dominated by trade and immigration issues. Their primary forms of protest, again like the Indian National Congress, took the form of drawing up and presenting petitions and memorials, which they sent to influential imperial and colonial officials.

From an early stage, contact was also sought with Indian politicians in the independence movement. Gandhi, for example, made contact with Krishna Gopal Gokhale, the influential Indian Nationalist leader in 1896.[33] Born in May 1866, Gokhale had been a journalist in his youth, and then became a prominent politician in the Indian National Congress. From early on, he gave support to Gandhi's South African struggle. He was part of the 'old guard' of Congress who had faith in political evolution through the constitutional process, but he also wanted politics to be 'spiritualised'. He became Gandhi's spiritual 'guru'.[34] Subsequently, he sent him advice on courses of action and, importantly, visited South Africa in 1912 during the first Passive Resistance campaign. He influenced Gandhi just as Gandhi himself would influence other Indian leaders in the political struggle in South Africa.

The NIC also sent deputations of paid agents to plead their case, and sometimes this agent was Gandhi himself. He went to London in 1906 and again in 1909, where he was an eloquent spokesman in the South African Indian cause. Through these activities, the NIC gained a prominent profile and came to be seen to represent the views and interests of all Indian South Africans. By the mid 1890s, anti-Indian legislation was gathering apace in South Africa, especially in Natal. In 1895, a £3 tax on agricultural workers, designed to force them back into indenture or to return to India, came into effect. 1896 saw the

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[32] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy, p. 11.
[33] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness', p. 164.
[34] B.R.Nanda Gokhale, Gandhi and the Nehrus: studies in Indian nationalism, (London, 1974), pp. 12-18.

introduction of the Franchise Law Amendment Act, which restricted the right to the franchise and allowed immigration officers to apply a literacy test at the point of entry. In 1897, the Immigration Restriction Act came into force, and in the same year the Dealers Licences Act was also brought in, under which licensing officers reviewed trading licences annually and had the power to refuse their renewal for a whole range of reasons, ranging from matters of hygiene to the nature of the goods being sold. These powers were blatantly used to curtail Indian trading interests, and Indians had no right of appeal.

Of all these attacks on their status, the question of the franchise became particularly contentious and a key element of future political campaigns. By the late 1890s, the actual number of Indians registered to vote was low, 251 in Durban and 31 in Pietermaritzburg. White voters at the same time numbered 7000 and 300 respectively.[35] Despite this, the South African political authorities increasingly tried to exclude Indians from the franchise by manipulating the qualifications. Unable to bar them from the franchise purely on the basis of their Indian origins, as overt racial discrimination was ostensibly outside the imperial code, they looked to other means. Thus in 1896, a bill was passed which excluded all persons 'who (not being of European origin) are Natives or descendants in the male line of Natives of countries which have not hitherto possessed elective representative institutions founded on the parliamentary franchise'. [36] In the early 1900s, Natal tried to use the same legislation to try and exclude Jews from the franchise.

Gandhi organised a petition against this disenfranchisement, which was sent to the colonial authorities. But the British were not quite the true friends that the NIC and its constituency were looking for. The discourse of empire and citizenship did not match the application of political policy at ground level. Joseph Chamberlain approved of the 'Natal formula' regarding Indian immigration and wanted to extend it to other British colonies.[37] After the South African War the situation deteriorated even further. The main aim of the British government at this time was to co-ordinate some sort of workable reconciliation between the Afrikaner and English sections of the white population as the British wanted to

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[35] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy, p. 15.
[36] A. E. Kajee, The Leader, 20 September 1947.
[37] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy, p. 15.

keep the region safe for trade, for strategic reasons to maintain control over South African gold.[38] The political position and welfare of a small group of immigrants could hardly compete with these needs. The South African Act of Union in 1910 'was primarily in the interests of the white population and the British effectively washed their hands of responsibility for the political rights of African, Asian and Coloured Peoples'.[39] When a Labour member of the British Parliament tried to introduce a bill to remove the colour bar for the membership of the Union parliament, Asquith pleaded with the House of Commons not to wreck a 'great work of reconciliation' between British and Boer'.[40] The British expressed the hope that 'Cape liberalism' would lead to the gradual expansion of the franchise throughout South Africa. However, this failed to materialise.

Soulmates in Suffering: Gandhi and South African Jews

Gandhi's experiences in London are a clear demonstration of the fact that he was eager to acquire knowledge from as wide a range of sources as possible. It nourished one tenet of his belief that a tolerance of diverse traditions could foster a sense of unity amongst people. An early account of the contents of the bookcase in his home in Durban soon after his arrival in South Africa demonstrates the breadth of his reading.

> Conspicuous in the bookcase were the writings of Tolstoy, Madam Blavatsky and Edward Maitland, publications of the esoteric Christian Union and the Vegetarian Society, The Koran, The Bible, literature on Christian, Hindu and other religions and the biographies of Indian national leaders.[41]

Gandhi also sought friends from many different backgrounds during his political development, and white liberals and socialists formed an important part of his intellectual education, and had done so from his days in London. Highly influential amongst these was an important number of Jewish intellectuals, the beginnings of a significant relationship between Jewish and Indian radicals in South Africa that was to continue for many years and became especially salient in the Communist Party. Gandhi felt a great sense of empathy with Jews. 'In South Africa I was surrounded by Jews...my attitude to Jews is one of great

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[38] Brown, Prisoner of Hope, p. 33; T. G. Ramamurthi, Non Violence and Nationalism: a study of Gandhian mass resistance in South Africa, (Delhi, 1990), p. 6.
[39] L. Thompson, The Union of South Africa, 1907-1910, (Oxford, 1960), pp. 398-400; Ramamurthi, Non Violence, p. 6.
[40] Ramamurthi, Non Violence, p. 6.
[41] Pyerelal, 'Mahatma Gandhi: the early years', p. 491, quoted in E. H. Erikson Gandhi's Truth, p. 174.

sympathy...they have got a wonderful sense of cohesion. That is to say wherever you find them there is a spirit of comradeship amongst them. Moreover, they are a people with a vision.' [42] Gandhi saw a similarity in the situation of the Jewish people and Indians, and wished to develop a similar collective identity in South Africa. In 1895, a year after the NIC was formed, he stated that 'many times in the past the "sons of India" were found wanting and their civilisation was in great jeopardy, and yet, the ancient India is still living. The wonder of all wonders seems to be that the Indians, like the favoured nation of the Bible are irrepressible, in spite of centuries of oppression and bondage.' [43] Gandhi drew an analogy between the Jewish and Indian diasporas, which, in his eyes, were both denied justice. He saw it as the persecution of two races in exile. This analogy became underlined in people's every day perceptions as well. For example, The Times in London compared the Indian 'locations' in South Africa with Jewish Ghettos. The Jewish liberals and socialists who Gandhi met were prepared to fight for the liberal-universalist values of fairplay, liberty and justice that were espoused by the guardians of Empire, and Gandhi saw the treatment of Indians within the Empire as similar to the treatment of Jewish people within the Christian world or, in more recent times, in the Russian Empire. To emphasise this, he wrote a comparative study of the Indian National Congress and the Russian Zemstovs. [44]

Henry Polak, Lionel Rich and Hermann Kallenbach, all of whom were also interested in the theosophical traditions that Gandhi had encountered in London, were amongst the Jews who influenced him most in South Africa. They all became heavily involved in the 'Indian Struggle'. Polak had already developed a keen interest in Indian politics and philosophy in London. Louis Rich was Gandhi's first Jewish contact in South Africa. He was a wealthy businessman who was initially drawn to Gandhi because of their common interest in theosophy. Rich had been inspired by hearing Annie Besant talk about theosophy in a theatre in the Strand in London. As we have seen, theosophists, and Annie

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[42] V. Lal' 'Bittersweet Encounter: Mahatma Gandhi and South African Jews 1893-1914', unfinished draft for MA Dissertation, unpaginated.

[43] M. K. Gandhi, quoted in Lal, 'Bitterseweet Encounter', from the pamphlet The Indian Franchise – An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa, (1895).

[44] These were elected institutions of local government which had limited powers of taxation, and some influence in the areas of education, health, and welfare.

Besant in particular, were also deeply involved in the Indian independence struggle so he too would have been familiar with Indian politics. In 1899, Rich helped found the Johannesburg branch of the Theosophical Society. He was drawn by its combination of spirituality and socialism:

> We were socialists because we were devotees of Truth, Righteousness, Justice: idealists who felt keenly the sufferings of our kind and ached to find their root, explanation and real remedy. Theosophy furnishes both. It also directs its disciples as to the best and worst effective way in which they may qualify as instruments for the removal of the world's ills.[45]

Although Gandhi was never officially a member, he too was drawn by these qualities and often gave talks to the society, and probably also believed that the Theosophical Society provided a template of a religious and spiritual organisation that readily took its principles into the realm of the political. Theosophists had been influential in initiating setting up a national Indian Congress in India. Polak was interested in theosophy as well, and importantly, also introduced Gandhi to the writings of Ruskin. Polak, Rich, and Kallenbach also formed part of a wider vegetarian group, and Gandhi helped fund restaurants in Johannesburg where they could meet to discuss and debate contemporary issues. They came to form a part of a modern diasporic intelligentsia to whom the universal ideals of socialism and liberalism had an immediate appeal.[46] Tolstoy's pacifist teachings, which Gandhi had encountered in his first year in South Africa, as well as issues around comparative religion, formed a lively focus for debate. There was much discussion of the problems posed by unrepresented aliens within nation states or within the empire, who felt that they had split loyalties between their own people and their perceived place within the modern world.[47] Many also had a keen desire to keep alive their own cultural traditions whilst fighting for universal rights of citizenship.

Both Rich and Polak entered the legal profession with Gandhi's encouragement and became influential in defending protesters and drafting propaganda material that was based on close readings of the law. Polak, who came to South Africa in 1903, developed a particularly close and intellectually stimulating relationship with Gandhi. Once in South Africa he saw the 'Indian Question' as 'the Jewish problem all over again…There was a

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[45] Lal 'Bittersweet Encounter'.
[46] Lal, 'Bittersweet Encounter'.
[47] Lal 'Bittersweet Encounter'.

remarkable parallel between treatment accorded to the Jews of Eastern Europe and that which was meted out to the British Indian community of South Africa'.[48]

Given this background, there was little question that once they met, he and Gandhi would form a lasting and mutually influential relationship. Polak became an emissary for Indian South Africans in England and India, during which time he met with Annie Besant and discussed both South African Indians and the question of Indian independence. He also took his articles under Gandhi and handled many Indian legal grievances, as well as becoming editor of the Indian Opinion, the newspaper that Gandhi established in 1903, following in the tradition of Indian political journalism. This paper became tremendously important as a voice for the Indian community and helped shape the Indian popular imagination in South Africa. Its stated aims were:

> to voice the feelings of the Indian community, to remove the misunderstandings which had bred the prejudice of white settlers against Indians, to point out to Indians their faults and give them practical and moral guidance and a knowledge of the motherland and to promote harmony in Empire.[49]

Indian Opinion was not the first Indian newspaper in South Africa; P.S. Aiyar, a South Indian journalist, had published the Indian World briefly in 1898, and this was followed by the Colonial Indian News between 1901 and 1903.[50] These papers will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, Indian Opinion was formed at a time that marked a new phase of Indian political activity. In the wake of the South African War, as the Afrikaner republics were brought under British colonial rule, expectations ran high amongst Indians, who anticipated British intervention to protect their interests. The British had used the maltreatment of Indians by the Transvaal government as a way of portraying 'Boers' negatively before and during the war.

> There were several indirect benefits to be gained from the use of the issue of maltreatment of Indians as British subjects. It enabled the British to assume the mantle of a protector

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[48] Lal, 'Bittersweet Encounter'.

[49] M. K. Gandhi, quoted in J. Brown, Prisoner of Hope, p. 53.

[50] U. S. Mesthrie, 'From Advocacy to Mobilisation: Indian Opinion, 1903-1914, in L. Switzer, (ed.), South Africa's Alternative Press: voices of protest and resistance, 1880s-1960, (Cambridge, 1997), p. 100-101.

while the Boers became the persecutors, and this allowed them to reinforce images of an imperial authority standing up for the rights of its subjects, regardless of their colour.[51]

The British used the 'Indian question' in South Africa to win support for the war in Africa and India and to portray it as a moral crusade. It became a testing ground for the ideal of imperial citizenship.

For Indians in South Africa and India, the war tested British claims to protect Indian rights within the Empire. In India, it offered some Indians the chance to demonstrate loyalty to the Raj. But support for the British cause was neither unconditional, nor uniform. The main 'loyalists' were maharajas and nawabs, who saw their support of the war as a sign of their 'superior education, culture, and a sense of duty'.[52] The support of the INC was far more conditional on the British taking concrete action against discrimination towards Indians in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and was generally linked to the freedom of movement of Indians within the Empire. The Indian Congress was keenly aware that the Indian army was an 'essential instrument of British imperial policy', paid for by India. In return, Indians wanted a fairer share of the supposed benefits of Empire. Indian cavalrymen from Madras, Bengal and the Punjab were used as water-carriers, washermen and stretcher-bearers during the war. From within South Africa, Gandhi also formed an ambulance corps, hoping to demonstrate Indian loyalty to Empire, as he believed a moral and political victory for the British would lead to justice for Britain's imperial subjects.[53] Despite the fact that Gandhi's sympathies lay with the 'Boers', he felt that it was his 'karma', as an imperial citizen to give practical support to the British. By fulfilling this duty, Indians could morally demand the privileges of that citizenship. In addition, Gandhi consistently asserted that Indians came from an ancient civilisation, which placed them above the 'savage and barbarous' aboriginal population. This discourse intersected with the 'civilisational' concepts that 'underpinned European colonial encounters' in Africa.[54] By placing Indians higher up the evolutionary ladder than the African population, Gandhi's assumption was that Indians had more right to the benefits of imperial citizenship. After the war, these

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[51] B. Chandramohan 'Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark Left Out'?: The South African War, Empire and India in D. Lowry, The South African War Reappraised, (Manchester, 2000), p. 153.
[52] Chandramohan, 'Hamlet', p. 156.
[53] Chandramohan, 'Hamlet', p. 159-160.
[54] Chandramohan, 'Hamlet', p. 164.

hopes were dashed. The British did not intervene as measures were taken in the Transvaal and Natal to segregate Indian shopkeepers in bazaars.[55] Indians were even more segregated and discriminated against than before. South African Indians suffered an acute sense of disappointment, which helped strengthen a sense of Indian national identity and a closer identification with India.

Gandhi felt there was an urgent need for a newspaper that could voice the concerns and injustices of the Indian community. He established the paper with the help of Madanjit Vayavaharik, a former schoolteacher from Bombay who owned the International Printing Press in Grey Street, and Manusukhal Hiralal Nazar who was joint secretary of the NIC.[56] Indian Opinion, it declared, was published for a 'cause, not a profit'. It laid great emphasis on winning white approval, and it sought do this by moderate articles that continued to invoke the imperial ideal:

> The editorial in the first issue noted that Indians suffered "undeserved and unjust" disabilities, but it emphasized 'there is nothing in our programme but a desire to promote harmony and good will between the sections of the *one* mighty Empire.' Later editorials declared: 'We have unfailing faith in British justice…(Indians should seek redress of their grievances) by 'well sustained continuous and temperate constitutional efforts.'[57]

Indian Opinion saw its purpose as forging 'one community' of Indians, irrespective of differences of caste or language, who saw themselves as British Indians. In the beginning, the newspaper was printed in three Indian languages, Gujurati, Hindi and Tamil, but this soon became too difficult to maintain, and it became a Gujurati and English newspaper which reflected the interests of the merchant elite.

Nevertheless, Indian Opinion, played a significant role in Gandhi's attempt to build a 'new type of Indian' in certain parts of the community and performed an important function during the passive resistance campaigns. When the paper ran into severe financial trouble, Gandhi suggested moving the press to the Phoenix settlement where its production would form a part of the shared duties of workers on the farm. Gandhi and Polak shared an

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[55] Mesthrie, 'From Advocacy', p. 101.
[56] Mesthrie, 'From Advocacy', p. 101.
[57] Mesthrie, ' From Advocacy', p. 103.

office on the farm and collaborated intimately in producing the paper. In fact, his closeness and willingness to take advice from South African Jews was to become a major point of contention between Gandhi and his critics, not least colonial-born Indians who were in the process of finding their own political voice. These were some of the early instances of the close alliance that was to develop between Jewish radical intellectuals and Indians in South Africa. In the future the Communist Party itself came to be described as 'no more than a discussion group between South Africa's Indians and Jews'.[58]

Polak became heavily involved in the passive resistance campaign. He first became really aware of Gandhi as a politician in 1904 when a plague broke out in a Johannesburg location. The outbreak was blamed on a group of Passenger Indians from Bombay. A discourse of disease and hygiene was invoked by the state, as it had been many times before,[59] to justify anti-Indian feeling and Indians were herded into marginalised locations. In the popular white imagination, they had came to represent a threat and became known as the 'Asiatic Menace'. The Indian 'location' was burnt down for 'health reasons', and in the process, many Indians lost their homes as well as their livelihoods. Both Lionel Rich and Gandhi became active in a campaign to help the stricken community and to counter government claims that the outbreak had been due to the poor hygiene of the Passenger Indians. Gandhi wrote a carefully worded letter to a Johannesburg newspaper, countering the claims and suggesting instead that the outbreak was the result of the severe lack of amenities suffered by Indians, despite the fact that they paid their taxes, just as the white population did.

Polak read the letter and was impressed by the qualities that had become the hallmark of the Indian political literature being produced at the time, its calm and rational refutation of accusations, lucid account of facts, and respectful reminder of the illegalities involved. Without government support in the crisis, Indians came together to form make-shift hospitals and provide ad-hoc medical care. In a similar fashion, on many occasions in the future, Indians pulled together to provide services and support amongst themselves in

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[58] JA, interview with PR, Durban July 1995.
[59] See M. Swanson 'The Asiatic Menace'.

the face of the failure of the state to provide these for them. Self-help became one of the distinguishing features of Indian South Africans, as it was of the Jewish community. Self-help, self-respect, and national honour were established in this period as the hallmarks of 'Indianness'. Loss of 'honor', declared a poem in Indian Opinion , was something that could never be regained.[60]

As a result of the burning of the Johannesburg location, many Indians who had lost everything, migrated to other parts of the Transvaal and set up small businesses. Although Indians were few in numbers compared to the overall population of the Transvaal, in the climate of anti-Indian feeling that already existed, not only around issues of trade and residence but now increasingly stoked up by fears of disease, the Transvaal government began to introduce even harsher anti-Indian legislation. A change in mood, both amongst Indians and whites, was taking place. Indians were feeling increasingly frustrated at their impotence, whites more hysterically anti-Indian. Political organisations representing the interests of both constituencies had to look to measures to quell their fears. Indian organisations, not having any form of state power, understandably met with less success.

'A New Kind of Indian': producing the political subject as moral being

Also in 1904, Gandhi left Johannesburg for Durban, By December, he had purchased a farm in Phoenix just outside Durban where he set up a commune where workers could live a simple life in return for a nominal wage, and as we have seen, also moved the press of Indian Opinion there. Gandhi specifically stated that he had been influenced by Ruskin and Tolstoy in setting up Phoenix. Maureen Swan has suggested that he may well have also have heard of the experiment of the American-educated Zulu, the Reverend John L. Dube, who founded the Ohlange Institute in 1901, an industrial school based on Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. Dube believed in African advancement through education, and was later to become first president of the ANC. He had already set up a school and industrial training workshop in Phoenix.[61] To this I would add that Gandhi was probably also influenced by the experiments of theosophists in South

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[60] Indian Opinion 12 May 1907.
[61] Swan, Gandhi, pp. 59-60.

India, which were themselves based in part on the Indian concept of the Ashram, something that Gandhi developed on his return to India.

More importantly, Phoenix represented a new phase in Gandhian politics in South Africa. Gandhi had arrived in Durban, dressed in a western suite, with a vague understanding of the constitutional political movement in his country that had resulted from colonialism. The structures that the British had built for stable administration and financial security had meant some acceptance of colonial rule, colonial assumptions and colonial conventions for Indians entering political life. Despite his early experiences of settler society in South Africa, Gandhi adopted the discourse of imperial brotherhood as the political means of winning redress for his fellow Indians. When change was not forthcoming, he had to address fundamental issues regarding the nature of human existence. Central to this, I would suggest, was his idea of what it meant to be an Indian.

On his arrival, and through the pages of Indian Opinion Gandhi had called on Indians to unite. But given the disparities that existed amongst them, on what basis was this to be done? Initially, he tapped into the language of his nationalist brothers in India, who spoke of the subject of empire as a decent and rational being who was accorded rights on the basis of these attributes. This was, basically, an imperial, constitutional subject whose rights would be protected with recourse to the law. But their appropriation of the discourse of empire was also an act of translation and came to incorporate a notion of the glory of the Indian nation, personified as the motherland. This ideal was to resonate in Indian political discourse in South Africa for some time to come. In South Africa, Gandhi had his first extended experience of public work, and political activism, but at the same time he was also broadening his vision, through reading widely and in intellectual debate with his eclectic circle of friends. As the ideal of imperial brotherhood failed to deliver rights to Indians, and the harshness of settler society became increasingly apparent, Gandhi had to not only ask himself questions about the nature of the imperial project, but also to confront fundamental issues about Indian civilisation, because of the criticism levelled at it by

western observers.[62] A large part of his re-appraisal of 'Indian tradition' came through his encounters with European thought and with liberal intellectuals who were also challenging the values of their own society. He began to introduce these intellectual discoveries into the political sphere in order to bring about a shift in people's morality. Central to this, he called for a transformation of the self: Phoenix, he said, was about the 'creation of a new kind of human being, and a new kind of Indian'. His words would later be echoed by Indian South African communists. The tenets of his new political philosophy, how they related to different section of South Africa's Indian population, and why they had such an enduring appeal, (despite his contradictory and problematic relationship to Africans and Indian workers) will be the subject of the next chapter. Gandhi's philosophy was retranslated and woven into ideas of universal democratic rights that fed into a social democratic, anti-fascist tradition in the 1940s and 50s. It became one of the ways that nationalism and socialism spoke to, and informed, each other in South Africa.

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[62] J. Brown, 'The Making of a Critical Outsider', J. Brown and M. Prozesky (eds), Gandhi and South Africa: principles and politics, (Pietermartitzburg, 1996), p. 26.

Chapter Three

An 'Insult to Indian Honour':
the first passive resistance campaign

The method of political protest devised by Gandhi that came to be known as passive resistance has become a highly influential means of expressing dissent in South Africa. Notably for this study, the Communist Party of South Africa used it as a form of protest in the 1940s, before it became a defining feature of the Defiance Campaign under the leadership of the Congress Alliance in the 1950s. Much has been written about Gandhian resistance and it is not my intention here to give a definitive description of its features. Rather, my purpose is to trace some of the influences that fed into the formulation of satyagraha, as Gandhian passive resistance came to be known, in order to evaluate why it became a central hallmark of CP activity and how Gandhi came to play such an enduring role in the South African Indian political imagination. Within these parameters, I also want to trace why the strike that took place in 1913, at the end of the first passive resistance campaign, became such a politically defining moment or 'critical event'[1] for Indian South African political identity.

In the last chapter, I discussed the relationship between the Natal Indian Congress and the Indian National Congress, and how the cause of South African Indians contributed to a discourse of what was perceived as being 'Indian'. This was grounded in a sense of national honour, and fed into a developing construction of a communal diasporic identity. Politically, the status of Indians in South Africa was linked to the status of Indians in the subcontinent. The emphasis in the early Indian National Congress was on constitutional politics based on a western model of representation and democratic rights. But even by the early twentieth century, it was becoming increasingly clear to Gandhi that this method of protest, no matter how many additional 'friends' he attached to his 'cause', was failing miserably in persuading the South African government to rethink its policy towards Indians. Indian petitions and memorials had failed to make any meaningful impression on the state and 'non-white' affairs were effectively being removed from the realm of politics

to that of mere administration. Up to that point, confrontation was 'not seen as responsible behaviour'[2], by Gandhi and his colleagues, as was continually re-iterated by sympathisers in the INC such as Gandhi's mentor, G.K. Gokhale. An important reason for this was that Gandhi, like Gokhale, initially felt that while indigenous Africans and Coloureds could demand full equality with white subjects in South Africa, Indians were a small community of settlers who should concentrate on their civil rights rather than demanding full political status.[3] Forms of direct action were therefore deemed inappropriate.

The formation of the NIC, as had been the case with the INC, was the logical outcome of the only path that the English constitution gave to South African Indians to represent their views to the authorities. However, the way they utilised legal channels was complicated by the fact that Indians were British subjects, but from a colony without representative government. Their rights rested largely on interpretations of the law. Partly as a result of this, there was room for the continual manipulation of the franchise qualifications in South Africa. Indians frequently responded to increasing exclusion by arguing it was an affront 'to the whole Indian nation', echoing INC discourse, which in turn was echoed by Yusuf Dadoo and other radicals in the CPSA in the 1940s. Progressively, political exclusion became a moral issue. Moreover, the struggle for civil rights in South Africa was increasingly linked to Indian independence, as the maltreatment of Indians in South Africa was construed as 'an insult to Indian honour and dignity'. This theme was also taken up and echoed by Indian members of the Communist party in the 1940s. In addition, it became part of a set of issues that Indian politicians used as a testing ground in order to gain political credibility in the international arena. Educated Indians in the subcontinent grew increasingly concerned with the situation of Indian South Africans, and the Government of India felt under some pressure to be seen to be representing the interests of its Indian subjects abroad.[4]

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[1] I am using this term in the spirit of Veena Das, <u>Critical Events,</u> (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 84-187, where she explores the ways in which 'communities construct themselves as political actors', through collectives memories of 'defining moments'.
[2] Ramamurthi, <u>Non-Violence and Nationalism,</u> p 13.
[3] See E.S. Reddy 'An African One Should Know', <u>The Hindustani Times</u> 26 January 1992.
[4] Bhana, <u>Gandhi's Legacy,</u> p. 19.

'Sons of the Soil': on brotherhood with Africans

In this atmosphere of heightened international awareness about Indians in South Africa, as well as growing unrest amongst Indians within the country, Indian South African politics took a critical turn. In 1906, the Bambatha Rebellion broke out in Natal, when the Zulu protested against an imposition of poll tax. Unfair taxation may have provided some possibilities for an alliance of interests between Indians and Zulus. But Gandhi's attitude to Africans was deeply problematic and at times ambivalent. Editorials in <u>Indian Opinion</u> and the objectives of the Phoenix settlement stressed the importance of building a closer understanding and co-operation between Indians and whites. Gandhi had built up an entourage of 'loyal white supporters'. His attitude to Africans and their organisations was very different. The only Africans to be found on the farm at Phoenix were a few Zulu labourers. Their presence obviously made him feel uncomfortable as he soon wanted to replace them: 'I believe it would be better, in so far as possible, to have Indians working with us instead of Kaffirs.'[5] The NIC often took political action to protest at legislation that put Indians in the same category as Africans. Soon after its inception, for example, the NIC drew up a petition contesting a bill proposed by the Natal government disenfranchising Indians, declaring that it 'would rank Indians lower than the rawest Native'.[6] Gandhi himself was to comment after three years in Natal:

> Ours is one continual struggle against a degradation sought to be inflicted upon us by the Europeans, who desire to degrade us to the level of the raw Kaffir whose occupation is hunting, and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with and, pass his life in indolence and nakedness.[7]

Gandhi was also vociferous in demands for separate segregated facilities for Indians to keep them apart from Africans, believing that Indians should preserve their 'purity of type'; 'about this mixing of the Kaffirs with Indians, I confess I feel most strongly', he remarked.[8] Frequently, when whites wanted separate facilities, Gandhi and the NIC wanted still further segregation between Africans and Indians. For instance, the Natal Indian Congress 'asked the authorities to provide three entrances, instead of two, to public buildings such as the Post Office so that Indians would be separated from Africans'.[9]

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[5] Mesthrie, 'From Advocacy', p. 107.
[6] Chandramohan, 'Hamlet', p. 163.
[7] Mesthrie, 'From Advocacy', p. 107.
[8] Swan <u>Gandhi</u>, p. 113.
[9] Chanramohan, 'Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark Left Out?' p. 163.

During the passive resistance campaign he was particularly unhappy with having to share cells with Africans, and wear prison clothing emblazoned with an N for native. As David Arnold has noted, 'The experience of being threatened, taunted and abused by 'Kaffir' prisoners convinced Gandhi that the 'separation' of Indians and Africans was a physical necessity.'[10] Gandhi surmised that Indians had nothing in common with Africans; rather, they had 'everything to fear from them'. 'Kaffirs' he concluded, 'are as a rule uncivilised – the convicts even more so. They are troublesome, very dirty and live almost like animals...The reader can easily imagine the plight of the poor Indian thrown into such company!'[11] Gandhi was reacting as a middle-class, high-caste Indian. The attitude of many Indians towards Africans remains very similar to this day. When speaking of Africans in the context of the Durban Riots in 1949, many of my informants used the same stereotypical images evoked by Gandhi. It proved to be a continuing problem for Indians in the Communist Party when they attempted to organise on a non-racial basis.

Gandhi's experiences in prison were nevertheless also a part of the eclectic process that was to transform him into the 'mahatma', and his attitude towards Africans became increasingly ambivalent. As he became steadily more 'enamoured' with rural life and perceived an innate morality in manual labour, the African, as a 'son of the soil', was recast as romantic hero. After his first period in jail in 1909 he stated 'I regard the Kaffirs, with whom I constantly work these days, as superior to us. What they do in their ignorance we have to do knowingly, in outward appearance we should look just like the Kaffirs'.[12] In particular he regarded that Zulus as 'second to none in physical courage, strength and capacity for endurance' although they were, apparently, 'frightened at the sight of a European child'.[13] His ambivalence was underscored by a deep paternalism and this reappraisal of the African character failed to translate into political practice. Gandhi remained adamant that Indians should not enter into alliances with African political organisations.

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[10] D. Arnold. 'The Self and the Cell: Indian Prison Narratives as Life Histories', paper presented at School Of Oriental and African Studies, conference on Cultures of Confinement, 20 June 2001, p. 7.
[11] M. K. Gandhi, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 8, p. 135.
[12] M. K. Gandhi, letter to Manilal Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. 10, p. 308.
[13] S. Agarwal 'Gandhi and Black South Africans', in S. Sadiq Ali (ed.), Gandhi and South Africa, (Delhi, 1994), p. 183.

Instead, once more, as during the South African War, Gandhi set out to demonstrate his loyalty to Empire, and the basic 'decency' of Indian South Africans, by offering to form ambulance corps during the Bambatha Rebellion.[14] Although he expressed sympathy for the Zulu cause and tended wounded Africans during the disturbances, as in the South African War, he saw it as his duty to support the British. The rebellion ended in July 1906, and the role that Indians played as stretcher-bearers duly won praise from the British authorities. But any ideas that this would force whites into giving more thought to Indian democratic rights within South Africa were soon dashed. In August of that same year, new rules regarding registration were introduced by the government in the Transvaal which represented a fundamental and humiliating attack on the Indian community, undermining their civil status still further and degrading their struggle to gain some level of respect.

'Driving Out The Coolies': The Black Act

All Indians were now expected to register by law and carry a certificate with them at all times. They had to submit to fingerprinting.[15] Previously this had consisted of thumbprints only, but now impressions of all ten digits would be taken, putting Indians on a par with criminals. Police could stop and search people at will, and failure to carry the certificate meant the imposition of hefty fines or imprisonment. Police could also enter Indian homes when they wished. This new law became popularly known as 'The Black Act'[16]. In 1906 and 1907 respectively, the Transvaal and Orange Free State were granted responsible self government and the British stated that they would try not to interfere with regard to the introduction of new racial legislation. South African politicians felt more able to speak their minds, and during his election campaign for the position of Prime Minister, Botha told the electorate that if his party won, he would see to it that the 'coolies' were 'driven out of the country within four years'[17].

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[14] Swan, Gandhi, p. 117.
[15] Erikson, Gandhi's Truth, p. 197.
[16] Banphot, 'The Emergence', p. 135.
[17] Banphot, 'The Emergence', p. 143.

This new legislation, and the general atmosphere in the country, marked a turning point in organised South African Indian politics.

> For my family it was the last straw. We had tried so hard to play things by the book, take the civilised path, despite being treated so humiliatingly in our daily lives. But this was another turn of the screw. I remember my father talking of it with great anger. He had been very loyal to Gandhi and his methods. But pleading for justice no longer seemed enough.[18]

Initially, Gandhi turned once more to the pages of Indian Opinion, writing articles in Gujurati and English against the proposed legislation. A letter of protest was sent to the South African government through the British Indian Association and in September an Indian delegation met with the British Colonial Secretary to discuss the situation. Nevertheless, the bill was introduced on the 4th of that month. By September 9 Gandhi was urging Indians not to comply with the new law, thus initiating direct action, or civil disobedience.

What instigated this change of direction? One important factor may have been a change in the mood of Indians at large, as indicated by the quote above. Such is Gandhi's legendary status that historical narratives often read as if he single-mindedly developed new strategies independently of the forces at work in the wider population. But the introduction of methods of passive resistance was probably in part a response to the growing unease of Indians to their diminishing status, their dwindling business prospects, the attack on their property rights and their shrinking employment opportunities.

'A Pathway of Suffering': the beginnings of passive resistance

An inaugural meeting of the passive resistance campaign was held on September 11 1906 at the Jewish Empire Theatre in Johannesburg.[19] The mass attendance and the discontent that was aired are testament to the mood of Indians at the time.[20] In part, Gandhi was responding to this. Something needed to be done as, for the time being at least, constitutional methods alone seemed to have been exhausted. His response was drawn from his wide reading of philosophical, religious and political texts as well as his practical

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[18] JN, interview with PR, Durban August 1995.
[19] M. K. Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. 5, pp. 424-6, 439-43;Erikson, Gandhi's Truth, p. 199; Swan, Gandhi, pp. 119-122.
[20] V. Lal 'Bittersweet Encounter'; Banphot, 'The Emergence', p 138.

experience in South Africa and current international events. But why did it take the particular form that it did? Gandhi, obviously, did not develop satyagraha overnight and he himself was insistent that it was not his invention, more a systematic application of old principles and practices. The Rev Doke, an English priest working in South Africa who was Gandhi's first biographer, quotes him as saying

> Some years ago I began to take an active part in the public life of Natal an adoption of this method occurred to me as the best course, should petitions fail… in Johannesburg when the Asiatic Registration Act was introduced, the Indian community was so deeply stirred and so knit together in a common determination to resist it that the moment seemed opportune…their action should not take a riotous form, but that of Passive Resistance. They had no vote in parliament, no hope of obtaining redress. No one would listen to their complaints. So, I proposed a pathway of suffering and after much discussion it was adopted.[21]

Protesting the Indian Way: 'indigenous struggle', not imperial brotherhood

Passive resistance initially started off as a form of civil disobedience, a means of political protest for a small minority in an alien state. But from the outset, Gandhi was worried, perhaps with due cause, that the term was not fully understood amongst the political community; Sheth Haji Habib, a member of the BIA and the Hamidia Islamic Society[22] who was prominent in the first meeting of passive resisters in the Empire Theatre, stated shortly after the meeting 'I cannot at all restrain myself, if any officer comes and proceeds to take my wife's fingerprints, I will kill him there and die myself'.[23]

If Habib had not grasped the main tenets of this particular politics of resistance, it is perhaps not surprising. At the time of the meeting the basic strategies of passive resistance were still largely unstated. Also, the political goals of Gandhi, the merchants and other Indians and Europeans attending the meeting were not identical. The concept of passive resistance, however loosely formulated at this time, and for many of the audience, the invocation of God by Haji Habib, sought to bring together disparate interests and concerns. Gandhi was also worried because the term passive resistance as used by the Suffragettes was seen as a 'weapon of the weak', which avoided violence but did not exclude it. This was not exactly the philosophy that he wished to propagate At this stage, his ideas were not

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[21] K.S.Bharathi The Satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi (New Delhi, 1990), p 162.
[22] This was a Johannesburg-based Muslim benevolent society
[23] Bharati, The Satyagraha, p. 163.

been fully developed, but Gandhi had in mind methods which were closer to Tolstoyan notions of non-resistance and non-cooperation with the state, allied with Indian traditions and ideas of civil disobedience. He had also been watching closely the various non-violent actions taking place from the 1890s in different parts of the world - in Russia, China and Ireland as well as India.[24] However, as he wanted to give his outlook a specifically Indian authority, this led Gandhi to coin the new term satyagraha, literally meaning a form of moral strength, for his form of non-violent resistance.

As he put it '...The idea of passive resistance as a means of opposing evil is inherent in Indian philosophy. In old time, it was called "to sit dhurna".'[25] He claimed that there had already been many satyagrahis in Indian history 'who had 'walked through blazing forests.' This was probably a religious metaphor, but it was an interesting choice of expression. Around this time in India there were widespread rural protests against the Forestry Acts introduced by the British, and some of these protests consisted of setting fire to woodland. Indeed some environmentalists such as Vandana Shiva have retrospectively called these Indian protesters 'satyagrahis'.[26] Gandhi may well have been aware of these anti-government protests, as well as of the famous story of Bishnoi in Rajastan, where four hundred years previously rural dwellers had peacefully protested against the attempts of the local king to cut down their forests and had lost their lives in the process. The story of Bishnoi and the Forest Protests of the late nineteenth century have become part of the lexicon of environmental protests, now termed new social movements. They are of significance here because they form part of a discourse in which Gandhi played an important part, which attempted to turn to indigenous forms of struggle in reaction to the imperial dialogue of constitutional politics. As Gandhi came to question aspects of modern civilisation, he increasingly turned to Indian historical precedents for a moral code and

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[24] Bharati, The Satyagraha, p. 25.

[25] Gandhi, quoted in J.J.Doke, Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa, (London, 1909), p. 86. It means literally when one has been wronged to go and sit in front of the offending party's house or office until the offence is put right.

[26] See V. Shiva, The Violence of the Green Revolution: agriculture, ecology and politics, (London, 1991) for a selection of essays outlining her Gandhian views on politics, modernity and consumerism.

forms of protest, although he was certainly not the first to do so.[27] The Indian national movement itself also increasingly looked for forms of indigenous protest.

The Indian Forest Protests became a significant part of the attempt to adopt indigenous forms of struggle in the Indian independence movement from the 1920s onwards, as a more radical political body challenged the conservative constitutional approaches primarily adopted by the INC until then. Gandhi's methods also seemed like a radical challenge to the 'traditional' INC. Conservative elements in Indian Congress objected to his model of passive resistance when it was first practised in South Africa. In constructing his notion of a moral politician, Gandhi was also greatly influenced by his readings of the Bhagavad Gita, and he modelled much of his persona on the role of the Sadhu, or moral individual (in common with theosophists). Like the Sadhu, he hoped that through penance and personal privation he would attain an individual morality that would equip him for a wider political struggle.[28] All these strands of thought came together to create and re-establish supposedly 'indigenous' forms of protest in opposition to the 'degenerate politics' of the modern world. Increasingly, Gandhi viewed modern civilisation as perfidious and inherently corrupting.

A vital part of the ideas behind satyagraha lay in training people as 'moral disciples'. This was facilitated by the two communal settlements that Gandhi established, first in Phoenix, and later, on Tolstoy Farm outside Johannesburg, which was donated by Hermann Kallenburg, the Jewish sympathiser with the Indian cause, and Gandhi's close confidant.[29] For Gandhi and his supporters, Tolstoy Farm was seen as a centre for spiritual purification, where the principles of self-sufficiency would foster loyalty and a community spirit. Here, trainee satyagrahis led a simple life based on the ideas that Gandhi drew from both Ruskin and Tolstoy, and from his notions of an idealised traditional India where an

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[27] Abu Taleb, an eighteenth century Muslim from Lucknow of Persian and Turkish desent, who became a civil servant, was an early chronicler of the 'evils of western materialism', and anticipated many of the arguments used by later Indian nationalists when they reconstructed a nationalist discourse on the basis of the idea of a distinct Indian character and historical tradition. See S. Hay (ed.), Sources of Indian Tradition vol. 2, (New York 1988), pp. 13-15.
[28] My thanks to Dr Subir Sinha for discussion on these issues.

uncomplicated rural life and the rewards of honest labour were extolled. He saw these settlements as a 'nursery for producing a new kind of human and a new kind of Indian'.[30]

In setting up the Phoenix and Tolstoy settlements Gandhi may also have drawn on the example of theosophists who had set up a community in Adyar on the outskirts of Madras where their followers lived according to the principles of theosophy and attended schools where they were trained in the main tenets of its beliefs. In fact, it was a Jewish theosophist and Gandhi sympathiser who set up and ran the school for the trainee satyagrahis at Tolstoy farm.[31] For Gandhi, in common with the theosophists, political action could only be successful if undertaken within an overall moral and spiritual code, although many have argued, and I would agree, that he also continued to act pragmatically, and make concessions when necessary in order to gain material results. He incorporated continued constitutional negotiation within his concept of satyagraha.

'The True Self': satyagraha as 'Indianness'

Satyagraha, in its inception in South Africa, assumed a morality and individual spirituality that was deemed universal, but also emphasised a sense of Indianness, which was invoked through images of the 'Motherland' and pride in an ancient Indian tradition. The pages of Indian Opinion constantly re-inscribed this in the Indian popular imagination through articles about Indian history, politics, and religious texts. It can perhaps be best described as a set of practices drawn from eclectic sources, both European and Indian, that built on notions of a constructed and idealised past that was counterposed to a corrupting modernity. Yet it also blended Indian philosophical traditions of a universal spirituality with Enlightenment notions of rights and citizenship.[32] This was an aspect of Gandhi's thought that South African Indian communists would later take up. And if certain religious traditions were invoked to underscore the necessity of peaceful protest, the road towards non-violence was certainly re-emphasised for Gandhi through his first-hand experiences of

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[29] See J. D. Hunt, 'Experiments in Forming a Community of Service: the evolution of Gandhi's first ashrams, Phoenix and Tolstoy farms', K.S.L. Rao and H.O. Thompson (eds), World Problems and Human Responsibility: Gandhian perspectives, (New York 1988), pp. 24-58.
[30] Brown, Prisoner of Hope, p. 43.
[31] Lal, 'Bittersweet Encounter'.
[32] See A. J. Parel, 'The Origins of Hind Swaraj', in Brown (ed.), Gandhi and South Africa, pp. 35-67.

the South African War and the Bambatha Rebellion, emphasising the way he was able to incorporate material experience into his moral philosophy.

An examination of the different phases of the first passive resistance campaign highlights the way Indian political organisation in South Africa drew from these experiences and laid down some of its practices in this period. One aspect of this that was to become a dominant feature of Indian politics was the way in which many Indian political organisations, both religious and political, had an overlapping membership, consisting of people who had gained considerable political experience. Indians developed extensive social networks, which facilitated the mobilisation of a political constituency. This often meant that new political actors continued to engage with existing bodies, and thus could utilise an infrastructure that was already in place. In the initial stages of the passive resistance campaign, this was most notable in the Transvaal in the case of the British Indian Association and the Hamidia Islamic Society. Men who belonged to both organisations often filled leading positions in associations such as the Passive Resistance Association.[33] This was a pattern of organisation and agitation that continued after Indians began to join the Communist Party from the 1930s, with individuals having transferable membership in several political organisations, national, social and religious.

A fundamental aspect of the Gandhian resistance movement was its ability to draw in Indians from the Muslim, Christian and Hindu communities, and from both north and south India. The class dimension is a different issue and will be discussed below. Moreover, 'colonial-borns', South African born Indians of indentured parents, were not as easily incorporated. But a considerable number of Tamils, especially those who had gone into trade and were deeply affected by anti-Indian legislation, men such as Thambi Naidoo, who was born in Mauritius but nevertheless had 'patriotism running through his veins'[34], played an important part in the movement. The first meeting of the passive resistance campaign that took place at the Empire Theatre was an important instance of Indians from different cultural backgrounds coming together as Indians with common concerns. Every

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[33] Banphot 'The Emergence', p. 145; Swan Gandhi, pp. 120-122.
[34] Banphot 'The Emergence', p. 267.

Indian shop in Johannesburg observed *hartal.* [35] Europeans apparently thought that it was a 'coolie' holiday. [36] Organisers of the meeting provided Tamil and Telegu translations of the proceedings. Many Jewish sympathisers, including men such Liechtenstein, who was one of the founders of the Yiddish–speaking group within the South African International Socialist League, a forerunner of the Communist party of South Africa, also attended this meeting and added a socialist dimension to the debate. Speakers spoke regretfully of having to resort to civil disobedience, pleading to the king-emperor to further their cause, and oaths were taken, couched in strongly religious language.

In the first stage of the campaign against the 'Black Act', pickets were set up outside the permit office and pamphlets were distributed. A placard declared:

> BOYCOTT, BOYCOTT PERMIT OFFICE: BY GOING TO GAOL WE DO NOT
> RESIST BUT SUFFER FOR OUR COMMON GOOD AND SELF-RESPECT.
> LOYALTY TO THE KING DEMANDS LOYALTY TO THE KING OF KINGS,
> INDIANS BE FREE![37]

A strong sense of honour, morality and rights was intertwined in the language that was used. At the same time, Gandhi still left the door open for negotiations with Smuts. The political organisation of the campaign was facilitated by several factors. Firstly, as I have already noted, people who were practised in some aspects of political activity were involved. Secondly, there was ready access to a printing press and many activists had some level of journalistic experience, which facilitated writing political propaganda and distributing leaflets. Thirdly, people such as Polak, Rich and Gandhi were trained in the law and were able to defend protesters who were arrested. Fourthly, Tolstoy Farm acted as a place to train recruits and as a space to retreat to in the face of state intimidation. Phoenix also became an organisational pivot point towards the end of the campaign in 1913.

Volunteers courted arrest through non-violent means by non-cooperation with the agencies of the state. After the first arrest of one Ram Sunder, who presented himself as a Hindu priest from Germiston but was later exposed as an escaped indentured worker, events escalated on both sides, and Gandhi himself was arrested. It was at this time that he

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[35] i.e. they were closed in protest.
[36] Lal 'Bittersweet Encounter'.

read the work of David Thoreau on Civil Disobedience in the prison library, which confirmed his belief in the veracity of his methods and helped refine them.[38] Despite his arrest, Gandhi continued to negotiate with Smuts via Albert Cartwright, then editor of the Transvaal Leader. A compromise was reached by which Indian prisoners would be released and Indians would register with the government voluntarily, and in return the 'Black Act' would be repealed. Gandhi did not have anything in writing from Smuts but nevertheless told the protesters: 'the Act will be repealed and the Immigration Bill will be suitably amended. The object of the Government will thus be secured and we shall get the freedom that we have been demanding.'[39]

Gandhi made some significant concessions. Although Smuts gave way on the requirement that the literate were now allowed to sign their names when they went to register with the police, those who could not still had to submit to the humiliation of ten-digit fingerprinting. No mention at all was made of the £3 tax, which was still in force, with crippling consequences for indentured workers. As the campaign continued, it is clear that Gandhi increasingly saw it as a struggle to restore the dignity and win rights primarily for *educated* Indians. In 1908, in the Indian Opinion of 10 July, he baldly stated 'the fight now is really on behalf of educated Indians.' His attitude to working-class Indians and agricultural workers was, at best, paternalistic.

By 9 May 1908, nearly 9,000 'qualified' (educated) Indians had registered voluntarily. But the government did not repeal the law. Quite the opposite in fact; they made it compulsory. The rupture that developed in the community as a result of this setback was perhaps most starkly illustrated by two assassination attempts on Gandhi's life by members of the Muslim community, which led him to employ a full time bodyguard, a Natal-born Tamil boxer.[40] The high ideals of the satyagrahis were also brought into question when the first arrestee, Ram Sunder, was exposed as a 'fraud'.[41] For Gandhi, being a mere runaway indentured labourer, who had attempted to disguise his identity, was it

[37] Banphot 'The Emergence', p. 151.
[38] Bharathi The Sayagraha, p. 15.
[39] Indian Opinion 8 February 1908.
[40] Banphot 'The Emergence', p. 203.

seems, an unpardonable crime. He was characterised as a 'demon' who had to be exorcised.[42]

For a while the struggle returned to its emphasis on constitutional methods and Gandhi continued to be conciliatory in dealings with Smuts, but the government would still not make any concessions. Indeed, it hardened its attitude and began confiscating property and deporting Indians out of the Transvaal. Some were even deported to India. At this point, Gandhi made another trip to London.

Hind Swaraj and the Invention of Tradition

During his earlier visit to London in 1906, Gandhi had set up the South African Indian Association with Dadabhai Naoroji, the Liberal M.P. for Finsbury,[43] and Lionel Rich, recognising the importance of gaining public support within a wider political landscape. In doing this, he was always careful to use coherent arguments based on 'facts', which invoked a moral premise. This tactic, which was later adopted by Indian members of the Communist Party, had not paid off by the time of his visit to London in 1909. Gandhi came back to South Africa empty-handed. However, this trip to London came to assume a particular significance. During his visit he encountered Indian anarchists, who were a part of a radical Indian diaspora[44] in search of political support for their struggle against the British. Gandhi had many an exchange of ideas with them. They were bent on challenging what they saw as the collaborationist politics of the Indian independence struggle as represented by Indian Congress. These 'extremists' did not rule out the use of violence. Gandhi saw this 'rot' (as he described the advocacy of the use of violence) taking hold within the political community in South Africa as well, indicating his unease at the way that Indian politics was developing there. At this time, Gandhi also read a letter from Tolstoy, which had been sent to an Indian newspaper but had remained unpublished

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[41] Erikson, Gandhi's Truth, p. 202.

[42] Banphot, 'The Emergence', p. 206.

[43] Between 1892 and 1924, there were three Indian MPs in the British parliament. All three were Parsees, and covered the political spectrum. M.M. Bhownagree was a Tory, Naoroji a Liberal, and S. Saklatvala, a member of the Communist Party who stood as a Labour candidate. Saklatvala was to become highly critical of Gandhi and the INC. See 'London's Asian M.P.'s: the contrasting careers of three Parsee politicians.' B.A. Kosmin, unpublished paper presented to Conference on the History of Africans, Asians, and West Indians in London, University of London Institute of Education, 27-29 November, 1984.

because the editor disagreed with its view. According to Judith Brown, in this text, 'Tolstoy urged Indians not to attempt to eject the British by force, but to use the weapon of non-participation in the state; for they could only be slaves if they accepted that status and willingly co-operated in the system of enslavement.' [45]

This resulted in Gandhi entering into a correspondence with the Russian thinker. Their exchange of ideas, coupled with Gandhi's fears of a violent turn in the events of the Indian political community both in India and South Africa, led to his writing the seminal Hind Swaraj during his sea voyage back to Durban. This was subsequently serialised in Indian Opinion in the guise of a question and answer session between a reader and the editor, and formed a narrative in which Gandhi composed his ideas of non-violent action and anti-industrial tradition.[46] It was published as a book in Johannesburg in 1910, after the text was banned in India.[47]

Hind Swaraj was the first coherent overview of his ideas on Indian independence and marked his increasing disillusionment with his interpretation of modernity. In particular, he emphasised that it was the moral failure of Indians themselves which led to the conquest of India, because they were 'seduced by the glitter of modern civilisation'.[48] Moreover, modernity itself, and its claims of progress through increased productivity, and subsequently, increased wealth and happiness for all, were a sham, because, in reality, modernity actually produced men who were the victims of their cravings for the spoils of civilisation, leading to increased competition, poverty and war. Modernity and its offspring, progress through industrialisation, produced mass 'cultures of desire'. By opening the 'floodgates' of industrial production, unprecedented levels of violence and oppression had been unleashed on the modern world: 'the driving social urge behind industrial production is the craving for excessive consumption.'[49] No wonder Gandhi was to view factory workers with such great suspicion, and speak of 'red ruin' when the prospect of industrial

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[44] See below, Chapter Five.
[45] Brown, Prisoner of Hope, pp. 78-79.
[46] M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj (Ahmedabad, 1984).
[47] P. Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: a derivative discourse, (London, 1993), p. 85.
[48] Chattejee, Nationalist Thought, p. 86.
[49] Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought, p. 86-87.

unrest threatened to be a part of the anti-British struggle in India.[50] According to Gandhi, traditional India

> managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before...It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and loose our moral fibres. They, therefore, after due deliberation, decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. [51]

And, apparently, 'traditional India' was also organised around self-sustaining village communities.

I am not going to counter Gandhi ideas of India's past here, except to observe that they are remarkably similar to British notions of 'traditional village India'.[52] For the purposes of this thesis, it is sufficient to note that Hind Swaraj, as an ideological statement, stands in stark contrast to the project of modernity as interpreted by socialists and communists, something which was well understood and argued by Indian communists in India and Britain in discussions about Gandhi, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

In the light of what was seen as his failure to force any meaningful political change there, Gandhi came back to South Africa to find morale amongst members of the passive resistance movement at an all-time low. Volunteer numbers had dropped, colonial-born Indians had become increasingly critical of his leadership, and there had been no attempt to address the concerns of agricultural workers, except in the most perfunctory fashion. In addition, Gandhi himself became critical of the traders, whom he saw as interested only in immediate material gains. The Indian 'community' was beginning to fracture, and it was at this time that colonial-born Indians first attempted to set up their own political organisations.

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[50] See R. Palme Dutt, India Today, (London 1940), pp. 524-525.

[51] M. K.Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, p. 55.

[52] See J. Breman, 'The Village in Focus', in J. Breman, P. Kloos, and A. Saith, The Village in Asia Revisited, (Delhi 1997), pp. 15-77; C. Dewey, 'Images of the Village Community: a study in Anglo-Indian thought', Modern Asian Studies, 6 (3), 291-328, for arguments which suggest that many such images of 'traditional India' are in fact an ideological and administrative fiction of the British. See also S. Kaviraj, 'Modernity and Politics in India', Daedalus, 129, vol. 1, 2000, pp. 137-162, for a discussion of the complexity of Indian pre-colonial political networks of power, which, he suggests, were far more diverse, operating on several levels, than stable village-based units of production.

The Politics of the Colonial Born Elite

In Chapter One I described how the 'new Indian elite' in South Africa had already begun to set up religious bodies, in particular the Young Men's Hindu Association and the Young Men's Christian Association. These religious organisations now became involved in the politics of the 'new elite'. However, the 'new elite's' attempts to establish independent organisations to further their interests was not a step that they undertook lightly. Although Congress may have been unrepresentative of the whole community, it undoubtedly had the ear of government in South Africa, England and India, unresponsive as those governments were. Moreover, as we have seen, Congress also had the political expertise as well as the financial means to run campaigns. The resources of colonial-born Indians were singularly lacking in these areas. They had made several overtures to Congress to lower their membership fees so that a larger proportion of the new elite might agitate from within the organisation. However, Congress repeatedly stalled on this issue, and membership fees stayed as they were.[53]

The period following the South African War was difficult for colonial-born Indians. An economic depression cut off employment opportunities for Indian white-collar workers, as well as those ex-indentured workers who were trying to make headway in small-time trade. Many letters written to Indian Opinion at this time reflected the 'new elite's resentment of the narrow focus of organised merchant politics within the NIC.[54] But their marginalisation by Muslim traders also resulted in the formulation of a different expression of 'Indianness' than that voiced by merchants, who still maintained strong business and family links with India. The colonial-born elite, as their name suggests, were first-generation Indian South Africans whose parents had first-hand experience of India, but who themselves maintained far more tenuous ties with the subcontinent. They felt a greater connection with South Africa, and in this period they began to articulate their political demands much more directly. In March 1908, the Natal Indian Patriotic Union was formed, electing P.S.Aiyar as its president. It consisted mainly of Hindu and Christian Tamils, the

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[53] See Swan Gandhi, pp. 191-198.
[54] Swan, Gandhi, p. 58.

children of indentured labourers. Aiyar, a journalist from Madras who settled in Natal, had been active in Indian politics for some time but took a critical view of Gandhi in particular and merchant politics in general.

In 1898, Aiyar launched a paper called the Indian World but it soon folded.[55] Between 1901 and 1903 he started a more successful newspaper which set out to reflect the interests of the colonial-born elite, the Colonial Indian News. Aiyar edited this from Pietermaritzburg, and it was originally published in both Tamil and English but from April 1902, the paper only came out in Tamil.[56] This journal set out to cover issues, both political and cultural, that were pertinent to the new generation of Tamil white-collar workers and small-scale traders. There was extensive coverage of Indian sporting events in Natal, as well as a weekly report on the Pietermaritzburg produce market. News concerning indentured workers featured heavily and small-scale Tamil business interests dominated advertising space. However, India also held an important place in the imagination of the new elite, and the many articles concerning the INC and nationalist activities in general reflected this. Colonial Indian News collapsed in 1903 due to lack of funds, but it set a precedent for the articulation of an Indian identity that drew from a similar pool of Indian nationalist imagery utilised by Gandhi and the NIC, but they combined it with a strong sense of pride in their indentured ancestry, together with a powerful feeling of belonging in South Africa. The following extract from a speech by Lazarus Gabriel, vice-president of NIPU, which was reproduced in the African Chronicle, a paper that Aiyar set up in 1908, conveys this new mood very successfully:

> I am proud to stand before this audience, and to own that I am a descendent of an immigrant Indian who shed his lifeblood for the welfare of this Colony...we have made this our home, and as Colonial Born Indians we have an inherent right to remain in this Colony and enjoy all the rights and privileges of a properly constituted British colonist...We know no other country than Natal, and this is our home. To many of us, India is only a geographical expression...By private study, four Colonial Born Indians appeared [in] and passed the Civil Service Exam of this Colony. The government, determined to keep the Indian down, has now formulated some law by which they debar Indians from competing. Where is the British sense of justice and fairplay? And where is the British Constitution?...it is certainly not here in Natal.[57]

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[55] Mesthrie, 'From Advocacy', p. 101.
[56] Mesthrie, 'From Advocacy', p. 101; Swan Gandhi, p. 57.
[57] African Chronicle 12 Sept 1908.

Gabriel's speech indicated the mood of many colonial-born Indians, but a close reading of the early issues of the African Chronicle suggest a community that was still trying to define itself. Aiyar originally wanted to publish the Chronicle solely in Tamil, not only to make it more accessible to those uneducated in the English medium but also to keep alive the traditions of Tamil culture. But due to popular pressure from other parts of the community, it also published four pages in English. The weekly paper promised to provide 'a racy commentary on the current news of the week'.[58] In fact, the English commentary adopted a rather ponderous and formal style, the 'book English' so common among those with a colonial education at the time. Aiyar used the editorial columns of the African Chronicle to voice the deep disquiet that many felt over Gandhi's relationship with Smuts, which was viewed as being collaborationist and too inclined to compromise. His very first English editorial declared that the

> so-called compromise (after Gandhi's first arrest) effected with the government was a pure and simple farce...Mr. Gandhi and the Passive Resisters, untaught and undisciplined as they were in the art of diplomacy were hoodwinked by Mr. Smuts.[59]

Aiyar was also wary of Gandhi's close relationship with Henry Polak and Lionel Rich, a resentment that was probably based on Gandhi's willingness to take the advice of white liberals when the opinions of the colonial elite, Aiyar included, were more often than not side-tracked or ignored. A certain level of political jealousy is tangible between the two men,[60] and this resonated through their respective newspaper columns.

Other articles in Aiyar's papers indicate some of the wider social concerns of his supporters. Women were urged to be 'progressive' and to further their education, and the formation of the Indian Women's Association received prominent coverage in the first issue. Judging from the list of its members, who are referred to as 'enlightened Indian ladies,'[61] this organisation was formed by the wives of Durban's politically active Tamil men. The association seemed widely concerned with the education of Tamil girls but also tackled issues such as the £3 tax from the 'woman's point of view'. This attitude to women

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[58] African Chronicle 27 June 1908.
[59] Editorial, African Chronicle 27 June 1908.
[60] Swan, Gandhi, p. 58.
[61] African Chronicle 8 June 1908.

and the emphasis on education in the <u>African Chronicle</u> formed part of a wider discourse that can be traced through the pages of the paper, advocating an ideal of the 'modern citizen', formed through a colonial education, and with a belief in enlightenment notions of a civil society that invested its members with an individual responsibility, with democratic rights within the nation-state in return. It drew on more universal notions of freedom than the hierarchical ideas of 'civilisation' that had first inspired Gandhi and the NIC, but it was also infused with a strong sense of Indian, and more particularly, Tamil national pride. In talking of the struggle of the passive resisters, the <u>Chronicle</u> declared: 'they have been standing shoulder to shoulder to fight for a cause that effects [sic] them deeply, but they are (also) fighting for the honour and freedom of their nation. This is a national cause.'[62]

This concern with a 'national cause' was underlined by the extensive coverage of Indian politics and the reproduction of stories from Indian newspapers in the <u>Chronicle</u>. In 1908, there was much interest in the 'extremists' who were challenging the conservative INC between 1907 and 1909, the same 'extremists' who had in part spurred Gandhi's writing of 'Hind Swaraj': Articles entitled 'Anarchism in India' discussed the value of non-constitutional methods and the tactics of violence in the independence struggle. In spite of an inherent rejection of violence, which was represented as being against the 'Indian character', it is possible to detect the increasing incorporation into the political language of the colonial elite the direct challenge used by radical nationalists, especially over the promises made by the discourse of imperial brotherhood. Many of the Indians who joined the Communist Party came from this background and the CP's strongest allies within the Indian community in Durban were also from this group.

The language in the pages of the <u>African Chronicle</u> sprang from the material circumstances of the new elite. Far more willing to challenge the failures of notions of 'imperial brotherhood' directly, colonial-born Indians were frustrated by the lack of higher educational opportunities and job prospects and were more determined to seek redress for their indentured parents. Too often, indentured workers had been reduced to the status of a bargaining counter in the negotiations of the NIC. The Natal Indian Patriotic Union was

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[62] <u>African Chronicle</u> 4 July 1908.

formed because of the repeated failures of the NIC to address these issues, and although NIPU made many gestures indicating that they wished to continue to work closely with Congress, Gandhi regarded the new elite and, in particular, P. S.Aiyar, with a great deal of ambivalence. Indian Opinion openly criticised the new organisation, arguing that it only represented the interests of a small section of the Indian community whereas the NIC represented all Indians.[63] Although much of the membership of NIPU remained deeply loyal to Gandhi, and some continued to belong to the NIC, for many others, this ambivalence was reciprocal and they set about forming a mass-based organisation which would involve wider sections of the Indian community. NIPU did not occupy an equivalent political niche to that enjoyed by the NIC, and it tried to mobilise its constituency by drawing on the cultural, religious and social networks that Tamil Indians had specifically established since settling in South Africa. The leadership emphasised that meetings would be held in Tamil, so that poor labourers could follow the proceedings and that their main concerns would be grassroots issues, taken up by local men acting on behalf of workers. They laid particular emphasis on dealing with the £3 tax. But despite attempts to galvanise broad-based support for the organisation around questions that affected workers in their everyday lives, NIPU collapsed a little over a year after its inception.[64]

This collapse may have been partly due to political inexperience, but, according to Maureen Swan, it was also largely precipitated by the involvement of Swami Shankeranand, the Indian religious leader who had been so active in discouraging Hindus from participating in Muharram.[65] My reading of his significance is slightly different from Swan's. The early pages of the African Chronicle cover many religious issues and reflect the close relationship between religion and politics for a large section of the Tamil community. This was true for much of the Indian community, and the general meetings of the TIC, NIC and SAIC were all started with prayers.[66] NIPU held its meetings at the hall of the Young Men's Hindu Association. There is also extensive coverage in the Chronicle

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[63] Indian Opinion, 28 September 1908.
[64] Swan Gandhi, p. 193.
[65] Swan, Gandhi, p. 198.
[66] The Agenda Books of the annual general meetings of NIC and SAIC in the 1940s all demonstrate the intrinsic part that religion played in South African Indian politics. See ANC Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, GB 101 (ICS) ANC (RF 1/4/1-4). No. 10, Box 2-3.

of religious practices and the interpretation of religious texts. Indeed, this formed the backdrop for the demonisation of Muharram that I discussed in Chapter One. There are two aspects to this. Older members of the community still had a first-hand memory of India at this time. A series of articles that narrated the progress of a 'coolie' from being 'caught' in South India to his experiences in South Africa gives an intensely evocative account of a South Indian village that probably came from personal experience.[67] Narratives of this kind, together with religious dialogues, formed a language that was taking shape within the community, especially between the older and younger members. The latter had no direct experience of India, although it formed an important part of their self-definition. This was especially significant in counteracting their lowly position as 'coolies' or as the sons and daughters of 'coolies' in South Africa. Drawing on a discourse of an ancient religious and social tradition helped challenge their low status.

The invitation of Swami Shankeranand to South Africa formed a part of this redefinition. He encouraged the reinvigoration of Hindu religious practices, but he did not initiate it. This was already taking place. The damaging side to this was the accompanying perception that it was Hindus who were oppressed, not lower-class Indians, and this helped split the community on religious lines. Criticism of the NIC was now imbued with anti-Muslim sentiment and the community of interest that had bound Hindu and Christian Tamils dissolved in part into one of religious difference. An early article in the African Chronicle, for example, reported the story of a new minister, the Reverend Subramaniam Iyer, taking over the Wesleyan and Methodist church in Durban. Obviously, from his name, he was a Hindu who had converted to Christianity. In a statement that suggested a syncretic tolerance of difference, the paper wished him well and hoped that he would 'use his great learning and inherited Brahmanical traditions for the furtherance of the common welfare'.[68] Two months later, after a flurry of articles on Hinduism, and amidst the heady atmosphere created by the arrival of Shankeranand, a short article by a Christian reader defended the minister from his Hindu critics. It denounced criticisms of the new Wesleyan minister and his humble origins, declaring that Hindus had the prejudices of caste 'in their bones'.[69] This

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[67] African Chronicle, 4 July 1908.
[68] African Chronicle 1 August 1908.
[69] African Chronicle 10 October 1908.

anecdote and the stories of Hindu revivalism that proceeded it, illustrate the complex nature of the South African Indian community, and how differences of religion, class and caste came to the fore at particular historical junctures and undermined attempts to build a political community around common concerns.

As NIPU faded into the background, an overtly Hindu organisation, the Veda Dharma Sabha, was set up in its place. It is important to remember, however, that this religious schism between Hindu and Muslim was by no means representative of the whole community. This is reflected in a rather weary article in the Chronicle written by Aiyar regarding Muharram, which was attracting a lot of correspondence at the time. Aiyar observed that collecting money to celebrate Muharram

> benefits no-one but the beer shops and the Tom-Tom drummer. We would do better service by utilising the same amount for some nationalist purpose, such as for the funds of the British India Association.[70]

This phase of overt religious difference passed relatively quickly, although religious organisations continued to be influential in Indian politics. By 1909 the more politically-minded Indians in the community had formed the Durban Indian Association, the forerunner in terms of membership and ideology to the Colonial Born Indian Association which was founded in 1911. Its establishment demonstrated how easily Indians fractured into sectional interests at points of crisis, but then seemed able to regroup themselves.

The founding of the DIA also highlighted the need for reinvigorating Gandhian notions of resistance. I have already noted that Gandhi returned to South Africa in late 1909 to find morale low and little political activity amongst the passive resisters. Not only did he face hostility from merchants because of the absence of meaningful political results; he was also being challenged by the new elite, while the community itself was breaking up on communal lines. It was a point of crisis,[71] and the passive resistance campaign continued to limp along rather ineffectively. Gandhi's main concern was for the passive resisters. By May 1911, the British India Association had reached another compromise with the

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[70] African Chronicle 2 January 1909.
[71] See Indian Opinion 27 May 1911.

government; all prisoners were released and satyagraha was suspended. Once more, colonial born Indians felt sidelined. The Colonial Born Indian Association was formed as a direct result of the NIC's neglect of their interests, and of Indian workers, in the face of the 1911 Union government immigration bill, which attempted to unify the laws affecting Indians.

The 1911 legislation attacked Indians on various fronts. It allowed immigration officers to apply language tests to Indians. This affected the ability of merchants to recruit clerks and shop assistants from India. Indian rights to domicile were also weakened. As many merchants made long trips back to India this also affected them.[72] Immigrants who were prohibited entry had no legal appeal. The new legislation severely restricted movement between provinces within the union, and specifically attempted to remove the particular rights that Indians held in the Cape. Ayiar was especially vociferous about the need to fight this last issue, but the NIC failed to give this feature of the bill any specific consideration, as they were more concerned with the aspects that affected merchant business interests. The CBIA wanted to address the issue of protecting existing rights of citizenship more directly. They were deflected from issuing a statement of protest by Henry Polak, who was keen not to muddy the waters for Gandhi, who was deep in negotiation with Smuts at this point over issues affecting his satyagrahis. Aiyar was critical of the CBIA's 'capitulation' to the NIC. In particular, he took exception to the way the NIC reversed the priorities of the CBIA when petitions were sent to government bodies, putting merchant concerns at the top of the agenda and sidelining matters such as licences for small-time traders (which were often blocked by established merchants) and the £3 tax. Polak did include the £3 tax in his representations to the Colonial Secretary on his visit to London in 1911, but it was way down the list of issues raised.[73]

In October 1911, Aiyar formed the South African Indian Committee, whose main purpose was to have the £3 tax removed. Its leadership was drawn predominantly from the new elite, many of whom came from rural areas. Using the press, as well as pamphlet

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[72] Swan Gandhi, p. 207.
[73] Swan, Gandhi, p. 211.

campaigns, Aiyar called on 'preachers, missionaries, schoolmasters, storekeepers and sirdars' to take the campaign against the £3 tax into the rural areas. The South Africa Indian Committee was instrumental in bringing the £3 tax onto centre stage, and by the time of Gokhale's visit to South Africa in October 1912, it had become an integral part of his political agenda in his talks with Smuts. Gokhale had helped put the cause of low-caste Hindus on the political agenda in India[74], and felt morally committed to pursue this in South Africa. Gokhale left South Africa in November 1912, thinking that he had achieved some form of settlement with Smuts. This was a long way from the truth, but for Indian South Africans, this visit from a prominent representative of the Indian nationalist movement was psychologically significant and helped place an emphasis on the question of the taxation of indentures which had failed to materialise under the leadership of the NIC.

Shortly after Gokhale's departue, a fresh grievance erupted. On 14 March 1913, Justice Searle decreed that Indian marriages would no longer be recognised under South African law.[75] Any offspring of such marriages also lost their inheritance rights. The main purpose of this legislation was to stop the entry of the families of male Indians resident in South Africa, but the psychological impact on Indians in South Africa was immense. Indian women became directly involved in the campaign, as their status, both moral and political, was directly affected, and it also provided a powerful propaganda card for Indian political leaders. In particular, it helped win the support of Indian nationalist leaders who had disapproved of Gandhi's divergence from constitutional methods of protest. With wider sections of the community now involved, and the campaign taking on pan-South African dimensions because the Union of South Africa itself was acting more efficiently as a coherent state, satyagraha now drew towards its climax. The vital added ingredient in this last stage of passive resistance lay in the mass mobilisation of workers. In the last section of this chapter, I will examine how this came about.

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[74] See Sources of Indian Tradition, pp. 116-120.
[75] Banphot, 'The Emergence', p. 311.

The Indentured Tax and Workers Rebellion

In my discussion of Gandhian resistance in South Africa, Indian workers have so far formed a rather shadowy presence on the periphery. But of course they constituted the majority of the Indian population in South Africa, and in terms of their position within the South African economy had a greater potential to affect government policy. Their mass involvement in the strike that swept Natal between mid October and early December in 1913 was a result of accumulated grievances that had not been seriously addressed by Gandhi or the South African state. In addition, changes taking place in the Natal economy increasingly affected their employment opportunities, an issue that was later used by Indian CP members to mobilise workers.

In 1910, 70 per cent of indentured workers in Natal were employed on the sugar estates.[76] Significant numbers were also employed in the coal-mining industry, where they made up 37.3 per cent of the workforce between 1903 and 1913.[77] Indian indentured workers were often paid four to five times less than African workers. Indentured labour created problems, however, as workers were generally needed as a short-term stop gap and were not cost effective in the long term because of seasonal production patterns. But employers were unwilling to hire more expensive free Indian labour. By 1913 there was a growing consensus in some industries that Indian labour should be replaced with that of African workers whose free labour was cheaper. African labour had become more plentiful at the time because of the decline of the African peasantry, exacerbated in part by cattle epizootics such as rinderpest and 'East Coast Fever', as well as by a growing need for cash in African communities because of the effects of the poll tax. At the same time, the system of indenture was becoming increasingly incompatible with the ways in which South African industry was developing.[78] The £3 tax had originally been introduced to force workers either to re-indenture or to go back to India. But re-indenture was now becoming a progressively more unattractive option as job opportunities contracted and the possibility of accumulating small amounts of capital in order to escape indenture and enter small-scale

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[76] J. D. Beal, and M. D. North-Coombes, 'The 1913 Disturbances in Natal: the social and economic background to passive resistance', Journal of Natal and Zulu History vol. VI, 1983, pp 48-74; M. Swan, 'The 1913 Natal Indian Strike', Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 19, no. 2 (1984), pp. 239-258.
[77] Beal and North-Coombes, 'The 1913 Disturbances', p. 54.

business diminished. There was as yet no infrastructure to provide training for better jobs for this section of the population.[79]

Indentured labourers suffered particularly badly because of these circumstances. Many were simply unable to pay the tax and by 1912, 95.25 per cent of indentured labourers had re-indentured. They were caught in a trap. In addition, the depression affecting Natal at this time meant that unemployed white workers were taking over skilled and semi-skilled jobs held by Indians. According to Beal and North-Coombes, the subsequent treatment and control of indentures was akin to that of a 'penal settlement'.[80]

There was a large constituency to be mobilised around this and the other conditions experienced by working Indians, and it is not surprising that so many of them were ready to join the wider political protests mounted by Indian leaders at this time. The CBIA had already taken up the tax issue, and Tamil women, who had become involved in the satyagraha campaign after the question of the marriage laws arose, now helped mobilise workers at the Newcastle colliery. Railway workers and labourers went on strike and on 28 October 1913, six thousand labourers and their families joined the 'Great March', as the protest moving from the Transvaal to Natal was described.[81] The strike spread quickly and effectively and the government was forced to respond.

Gandhi's reaction to these events reveals his ambivalent attitude to Indian workers. In this last phase of his satyagraha campaign, he was initially keen to draw in workers as a part of the protest, not least because he believed it would add political muscle to a long-running campaign that was singularly failing to produce any meaningful concessions from the government. Gokhale's visit to South Africa in 1912 probably also gave a priority to the issue of the £3 tax that Gandhi could not ignore, as did the fact that the CBIA had taken up the issue so vociferously. But Gandhi wanted workers' involvement strictly on his own terms. He did not want to upset relations with South African employers or endanger his

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[78] Beal and North-Coombes, 'The 1913 Disturbances' p. 63.
[79] See Beal and North-Coombes, 'The 1913 Disturbances' pp. 65-66 for details.
[80] Beal and North-Coombes, 'The 1913 Disturbances', p. 68.
[81] Banphot 'The Emergence', p. 323.

'special relationship' with the South African government. More profoundly, despite his re-creation of an Indian tradition based on an idealised rural past, where the peasant held a special place because of his honest toil and earned his living from the land, Gandhi consistently sidelined workers' issues in favour of merchant interests. His attitude towards them was one of patronage rather support for basic rights, and in this he perhaps revealed his caste attitudes as much as anything. His justification lay in a concept of satyagraha which incorporated a constitutional approach based on 'educated individuals'. This translated politically into the marginalisation of workers, and their opportunistic use. This did not stop Gandhi viewing workers with a deep sentimentality as well. When a young indentured Tamil girl, Vallianma, who had been imprisoned, died shortly after her release, she became one of the martyrs of a 'motherland' she had never known. Gandhi visited her on her deathbed and lamented:

> We mourn the loss of a noble daughter of India who did her simple duty without question and who has set an example of womanly fortitude, pride and virtue, that will, we are sure, not be lost upon the Indian community.[82]

The same Indian 'martyr' would be evoked by Yusuf Dadoo in the late 1940s as a symbol of Indian resistance to the repressive South African state.

The way that the strike spread made Gandhi extremely uneasy. He felt that he had lost control of the campaign. The speed with which mine compounds and the railway barracks responded to the call for political action indicates that a degree of organisation was already involved.[83] The activities of the CBIA, with their emphasis on grass-roots organisation, also laid some of the groundwork. Both Beal and North-Coombes and Swan also suggest that Gokhale's visit had heightened expectations amongst workers. Swan surmises that workers had some kind of 'preindustrial consciousness' which meant that their actions were disorganised and rather inarticulate. [84] I think that workers were fully able to articulate their grievances, but not necessarily in ways that were understood or successfully translated into 'conventional' politics. The eclectic nature of the people who became indentured workers, described in Chapter One, indicates that that they would have

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[82] Banphot, 'The Emergence', p. 356.
[83] Beal and North-Coombes, 'The 1913 Disturbances' p. 72.
[84] M. Swan, 'Indentured Indians: accommodation and resistance, 189-1913', in Bhana, (ed.), Essays on Indentured Indians, pp. 129-132.

had organisers and individuals who could articulate their grievances amongst their number. Many workers practised 'dhurna' in their barracks, refusing to work.[85] However, they had no official political organs, were sidelined by mainstream Indian politics and were scattered in different locations, both rural and urban, where they experienced a variety of working conditions. All, however, experienced intense hardships. Given their varied circumstances, responses could not be completely unified and coherent. That there was such an overwhelming response in this instance, however, suggests that workers had some unity of purpose, because of the £3 tax and the generalised hardships they were experiencing.

From the state's point of view, the strike had to be crushed fairly swiftly for several reasons. Stoppages in the coalmines and on the railways struck at the heart of the Natal economy, encouraging financial panic. The mines were promptly turned into temporary jails, and managers doubled as prison warders as workers were forced underground at bayonet point. Nine workers were killed and 25 wounded in the process.[86] The strike also happened to coincide with the crucial cropping and crushing season in the sugar industry. Politicians were also fearful of the precedents set for African resistance. It was also feared that a strike by white miners on the Rand at the same time would also adversely affect 'the native mind'. The strike was crushed, but the government also appeared to make concessions, not least because of the international outcry over press reports in Britain and India of police brutality.[87] Most importantly, the £3 tax was repealed and in talks with Gandhi in March 1914, measures were implemented for an Indian Relief Bill. Gandhi returned to India soon after, his political credibility on the rise, leaving an important legacy behind him for Indian South Africans. He had arrived in South Africa wearing a western suite; he left dressed in the clothes of a peasant, having developed many important aspects of his political philosophy along the way.

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[85] I have interpreted Swan's description of workers remaining in their barracks, as 'dhurna'. As I have already indicated, 'dhurna' (although she does not use the word, and sees workers remaining in their barracks as part of a confused and inarticulate overall response) is an old form of Indian protest where workers simply sit down where they are and refuse to move until their grievances have been addressed. See Swan, 'Indentured Indians', p. 131.
[86] Beal and North-Coombes, 'The 1913 Disturbances', p. 76.
[87] Swan, 'Indentured Indians', p. 132.

In the last two chapters I have tried to outline those aspects of Gandhi's intervention in South African politics which underpin the general arguments in this thesis, in particular, the appropriation of certain elements of Gandhian discourse by Indian members of the South African Communist Party, but also wider aspects of Indian identity formation. An important element of this was Gandhi's contribution to the construction of an Indian identity in general and an Indian political identity in particular. The notion of being Indian became associated with a discourse of the 'motherland' which was steeped in certain traditions that helped shape ideas of community. The idea of an ancient heritage became a defining feature of this, as it provided a powerful counter to the category of the South African 'coolie'. For Gandhi, a central element of this 'new kind of Indian' was non-violent political action, bound by concepts of honour and duty. This intersected with the contemporaneous dialogue of Indianness amongst colonial-born Indians, although they spoke in more radical tongues than Gandhi and his merchant constituency. In particular, colonial-born Indians attempted to address the issues concerning workers, who were at this time without the formal political means of voicing their grievances. Through all these activities, South African Indians gained political skills and organisational abilities, as well as an established political press, and there was a close relationship with Indian nationalist politics in the sub-continent as well as a strong emphasis that their struggle in South Africa was part of a national cause. Although the material interests of different sections of the community varied, there was also an overlap and linkage between different political, religious and cultural organisations, which helped Indians draw on a common pool of resources and skills. This would become even more important later on.

In many ways, all sections of Indian South Africans were highly politicised at this time, because of their material circumstances. In the interviews I conducted during fieldwork, it became increasingly clear that the 1913 strike had come to represent a seminal moment in this early phase of Indian South African politics. All my respondents claimed to have family members who had taken part in the march, and saw it as significant because the Indian community had come together and 'beat the government'. Many had an extremely idealised view of Gandhi's role; an historical family link seemed to provide some form of political credibility, and membership of a political aristocracy. Understandably, informants

felt that Gandhi's experiences in South Africa had made a significant contribution to Indian independence.

All this raises fascinating and complex questions as to how and why a nationalist leader who felt such political ambivalence towards workers, who had no desire to form alliances with Africans, had a distaste for many of the tenets of socialism, and such an abhorrence of violent revolution, should cast such a long shadow on the thinking of South African Indian communists. For example, many of the statements issues by Yusuf Dadoo during the 1946 Passive resistance campaign and after the Durban Riots in 1949 are phrased in Gandhian terms, and Gandhi often advised Dadoo on questions of policy. South African Indian communists were to constantly evoke Gandhi as a symbol of political resistance. The answer, in part, lies in the tangled and thorny relationship between nationalism and socialism that played itself out in the twentieth century. Indeed, the story of Indians in the South African Communist Party is an aspect of that dialogue. In Chapters Four and Five, I discuss this relationship in greater detail, as I examine the historical beginnings of the SACP.

Chapter Four

The Origins of the South African Communist Party

The CPSA was formed in August 1921in Cape Town by disparate white socialists who stood to the left of the South African Labour Party. If South African Indian political organisations developed by drawing on existing social, cultural, and political frameworks created by international flows of people, political practices and organisational links, so did other organisations on the South African left. Migrants to South Africa brought their radical traditions with them, making the growth of oppositional politics there an eclectic mix of differing ideological traditions. In particular, radical Jews and British trade unionists brought their very different experiences to South Africa and, interacting with black and Afrikaner political developments, gave shape to the politics of the Communist Party of South Africa.

Jewish people have had a long association with militant socialist politics, partly as a response to their treatment within the Russian Empire, and many radical Jews became members of the Communist Party, bringing their own historical and cultural baggage with them. Welsh, Cornish and Australian miners and other workers likewise brought traditions of craft and union organisation, which were translated into political practice in South Africa. This chapter will examine the origins of the CPSA and look at the various 'social threads' that were woven into the ideological make up of the party. This will serve to illustrate the relationship between black[1] and white workers and the difficulties of party policy in this respect, in order to explore the associations between the young party and burgeoning African organisations in the next chapter, where an analysis of the Black Republic thesis will demonstrate the beginnings of the dialogue in the party on the relationship between nationalism and socialism. This was a relationship that its Indian members had constantly to renegotiate, both between themselves and their political constituency. This will hopefully help us understand the complex relationships between African, Indian and white workers, and the heterogeneous nature of the Communist Party

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[1] Despite the fact that the term black has become a contested badge of identity in contemporary South Africa, I am using it here to refer collectively to African, Indian and Coloured communities due to the lack of a viable alternative.

that Indians encountered in the 1930s. It will also, perhaps, illuminate why so many Indians began to join the CP in the 1930s.

Early Socialist Organisations in South Africa

Members of the Jewish community set up unions in South Africa from 1898, but by 1907, these organisations had begun to merge with British and Coloured unions. [2] In the 1910s, as Smuts' immigration policy increasingly threatened their position in South Africa, many Jews joined the South African Labour Party, which was then dominated by British trade unionists. When the First World War broke out in 1914, however, the SALP split between a pro-war faction, and those who saw the war as an inter-imperialist conflict, echoing events in the Second International.[3] This signalled the division that was taking place internationally between parliamentary social democracy and a more radical socialist tradition, which was formulated as political Marxism through a vanguard party. Anti-war campaigners formed a War-On-War League, the forerunner of the International Socialist League.

The ISL, formed in 1915, had a large Jewish membership drawn from socialist organisations (who brought their Eastern European Marxist traditions with them), unions, and anarchist groups. It attracted members from both inside and outside the SALP. The International Socialist League also attracted British trade unionists, and an important number of 'revolutionary syndicalists'. Men such as A. Z. Berman and Joe Pick split from the Socialist Democratic Federation to form the Industrial Socialist League, which also later merged with the ISL. The Industrial Socialist League's activists were predominantly Jews from Eastern Europe who were politically active in the Cape.[4] They tried to attract black workers into the organisation, as well as establishing a Coloured workers' unions. These would eventually merge with the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, founded in 1919 in Cape Town, by Albert Batty a one-time member of the SALP,[5]

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[2] M. Israel and S. Adams, 'That Spells Trouble': Jews and the Communist Party of South Africa', in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 26, no. 1, p. 148.

[3] This was an international grouping of socialist and labour parties that was set up in 1889.

[4] A. Drew Discordant Comrades: identities and loyalties on the South African Left, (Aldershot, 2000), p. 47.

[5] By the time Batty helped form the ICU he had left the SALP to set up the Labour Democratic Party. See R. Simons and H. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, (London, 1983), p. 226.

and Clements Kadalie. In many ways, the political agitation of the InSL amongst Coloured dockworkers in the Cape laid the groundwork for future ICU success.[6] The In.SL exemplified an important political stream of the South African labour movement which held that 'racially integrated industrial unions should overthrow capitalism' and believed in 'direct action' rather than political change through the institutions of the state. In this, they were influenced by the writings of Daniel De Leon, the Caribbean-born labour leader in the United States. They constituted an important socialist strand of non-racial organisation within the League, which was carried over to the CPSA in later days.

The ISL was, perhaps, not as directly the fore-runner of the CPSA as is sometimes suggested. It was shaped by its own eclectic influences, and less dominated by the political Marxism that was to become an important current of the CPSA.[7] Nevertheless, it provided the CPSA with many of its leading figures, a large proportion of its membership and its weekly journal, The International. The first conference of the League reflected this eclectic coming together of various socialist traditions, with a report in their paper entitled 'The First Conference of the League-Enthusiasm, Harmony, Diversity'.[8] The leadership of the ISL also provided many future leaders of the CPSA. These included W.H. Andrews[9], a fitter and turner by trade who had risen through the ranks of British trade unionism, and S. P. Bunting, a British solicitor who came from a family of Methodists who's father was politically active in the Liberal party, while his mother supported 'causes of the poor'.[10] Bunting married Rebecca Notlowitz, a Russian Jewish émigré whom he met in the ISL. There was also Gabriel Weinstock, and David Ivon Jones, a Welshman, also from a Methodist background.[11] These men placed an emphasis on organising on class lines across the racial divide. Reflecting the impact of the Russian Revolution in 1917, they tried to apply the lessons of the revolution to South Africa. The editorial of The International declared that:

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[6] B. Hirson 'The IWA and the ICU-1917-1920', paper presented at The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries Seminar, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London 1996, pp. 1-7.

[7] See L. van der Walt 'The International Socialist League and Revolutionary Syndicalism in South Africa' Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East vol. XIX no. 1 1999, pp. 5-30.

[8]'The First Conference of the League-Enthusiasm, Harmony, Diversity', Report in The International, Document 10, South African Communists Speak 1915-1980, (Inkululeko 1981), pp. 22-28.

[9] R. K. Cope, Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader, (Cape Town, 1948).

[10] E. Roux, S. P. Bunting: a political biography, (Belville, 1993), pp. 57-61.

> What does sympathy with the Russian Revolution imply, comrades? It implies the solidarity of labour irrespective of race or colour. That phrase may be hackneyed so let us be precise. The Russian revolution in South Africa means the welcome hand to the native working man into the fullest social and economic equality he is capable of attaining with the white workingman.[12]

This statement underlined one of the basic contradictions within the ISL and later the CPSA. Although there was a genuine commitment in some quarters to building an inter-racial solidarity, this was based firmly on a class perspective that prioritised workers at the point of production. In stark opposition to Gandhi's creed, the industrial worker was to be the saviour of history. It assumed that a politically-conscious industrial working class would form the vanguard of the revolution. This was, in part, a reflection of the times, where the interpretation of classic Marxist texts laid stress on the scientific basis of Marxism within an implicit (and at times explicit) evolutionary framework.

Both class and race intersected in this evolutionary scheme, with agricultural workers lower down the evolutionary ladder than their industrial cousins and black workers lower placed than white. But, as with Indian workers, the majority of South Africa's workers did not enjoy a stable position within the South African labour market; they moved between different sectors, whilst others remained firmly within agricultural production. Workers in South Africa at this time were an amorphous, fragmented and racially divided population with multiple political and social identities. Early ISL and CPSA policy had to grapple with this problem in the light of an interpretation of Marxist doctrine that outlined South African society in monolithic and reductionist class terms, and which saw class as a unified and coherent classification.

Conceptualisations of South Africa's white industrial class also presented many problems to the party, as will be seen. And, muddying the waters further, even South Africa's white industrial workers came into being through a complex and uneven process. On the one hand, some came from a white workers' imperial labour disapora whose migrations coincided with mass movements of people from China and India. These streams

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[11] B. Hirson and G.A. Williams, The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924, (London 1995).
[12] 'The First Conference of the League', Document 10, pp. 27-28.

of white workers brought their radical but exclusionary practices to South Africa. Many Afrikaners, on the other hand, were resistant to being forced off the land, and were reluctant to be incorporated into industrial production. South Africa's white workers were not, by any means, a homogeneous entity, and the radical politics that they sometimes expressed were deeply racist and exclusionary. Workers had very different visions of South Africa and their place within its social landscape.

White Labour and the 'Racial Vision'

The English-speaking, white working class that developed in South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a product of imperial and colonial flows of political culture and people between different locations. This working class was fundamentally 'shaped by radical labour militancy, an ideological hostility to capitalism but also an intense racism.'[13] This was borne out of the fear of competition from relatively cheaper Asian and African labour white workers encountered during these migrations, and the discourse of racism that was prevalent in the Empire. The British trade union tradition had already developed political strategies primarily around the principle of protecting the interests of skilled workers.[14]

Workers, however, also wanted to be included in 'white civilisation' where 'whiteness was the phenotype of civilisation.' and underwrote notions of rights and citizenship.[15] Whiteness was far more than merely a skin colour; it reflected a higher class position, and civilisational qualities. In early and mid-nineteenth century Britain, much of the working class and urban poor were denied the whiteness that would give them membership of a 'civilised imperial brotherhood'.[16] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a diaspora of 'imperial workers' struggled for an assured place in the international labour market through militant trade unionism and an intensely racist vision, where exclusionary practices were bolstered by biologically determinist ideas of differences

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[13] Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class, p. 399.
[14] See above, Introduction.
[15] Hyslop 'The Imperial Working Class', pp. 398-421.
[16] J. Marriott, 'In Darkest England: the Poor, the Crowd and Race in the Nineteenth-century Metropolis', in P. Cohen, (ed.), New Ethnicities, Old Racisms, (London, 1999), pp. 82-110; A. Bonnet, 'How the British

between the races. This went hand in hand with the construction of a working-class idea of whiteness, which implied both inclusion in the white imperial brotherhood, and exclusion of inferior races.

This 'white vision' had a particularly virulent expression in Australia and South Africa, in notions of a 'white Australia' and a 'white South Africa'. The migrant white workers who came to South Africa brought their experiences with them and helped shape the South African labour movement. This international labour movement was part of a wider series of out-migrations, which intensified the competition between workers from Europe, Australia, the United States, China and India. For example, in Australia, white workers developed strong, militant unions built around the principle of protectionism, excluding unskilled workers, especially Chinese labourers who came to work on the Australian goldfields from the 1850s.[17] Protectionist trade unionism became couched within a strongly racist discourse. When Australian miners immigrated to the Rand after a depression in Australian mining in the 1890s, they took these political practices with them. In South Africa, they were joined by a large number of Australian soldiers, who had formed a 16000 strong military contingent during the South African War. Many of these soldiers stayed on in South Africa and found work, so that Australians formed an important part of the white traded unionism that developed in the Rand in the early 1900s. They helped white workers gain a powerful position in the labour market, especially the mining industry.

Cornish miners also made a crucial contribution to a militant white trade unionism that was also deeply racist. Cornish workers became part of a labour dispora because of a large demand for their particular mining skills, at a time when an exhaustion of ore deposits in Cornwall coincided with the opening up of mining opportunities in other places. Many of these miners carried a strong sense of a collective Cornish identity with them and had enjoyed a fiercely independent tradition of industrial organisation. In Cornwall, Stannary Courts had operated, where mineworkers were subject to the enforcement of their own laws. These Cornish miners migrated mainly between America, Australia, and South

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Working Class Became White: the symbolic (re)formation of racialised capitalism,' Journal of Historical Sociology, 1998, No. 11: pp. 316-340.
[17] Hyslop 'The Imperial Working Class', p. 406.

Africa. From 1886, they came to the Rand in increasing numbers. As they moved from one location to another, they developed an international industrial culture based around 'crews' where members of the same crews 'shared the same manners, customs, slang, prejudices, dress, leisure habits, virtues and vices...the same subculture...Crews were prefabricated communities into which new members could easily slot....(where members valued) strength, toughness and manual skills.'[18] It was a competitive industrial culture, based on exclusivity, and preferential treatment for fellow Cornish workers. Often, members of a crew were all drawn from the same Cornish village, and in one instance 'in one Rand mine, Ferreira Deep, the entire white workforce was made up of workers from a single Cornish pit.[19] The tradition of Cornish 'crews' was part of the cultural background to the promotion of exclusive work practices and, along with other white trade unionists, Cornish workers used their industrial muscle and militant politics to shut out not only African and Indian workers, but Afrikaners and other whites as well. The founding leader of the Miners' Association, which was started on the Rand in 1902, was a Cornishman named Tom Matthews.

This section of the Cornish dispora on the Rand, which, by 1905, numbered some 7000 out of 16000 white miners,[20] sent around £1m back to Cornwall each year. Their job protection in South Africa became part of the wider question of their social and economic ties with Cornwall; they were crucially important to the Cornish economy, and Cornish social life also became entwined with events on the Rand. One example of this was Harry Laity, a Cornish miner who came from Praze-am-Beeble in West Cornwall. After training at the Camborne School of Mines, Laity, who was also a mason and a Methodist lay preacher, came to South Africa in 1894, 1897 and 1898. His family were due to join him, but he went back to Cornwall in 1899 because of the outbreak of the South African War. A 'local proxy' for Boschhoek Prospecting Company near Heidleburg, Laity sent enough money home to Cornwall to put his two brothers through the Mines school as well as pay

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[18] J. Belich, The Making of a People: a history of New Zealanders from Polynesian settlement to the end of the nineteenth century, (Auckland, 1996), pp. 428-431. See also G. Burke, 'The Cornish Diaspora of the Nineteenth Century', in S. Marks and P. Richardson, (eds), International Migration: historical perspectives, pp. 57-75.
[19] Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', p. 413.
[20] Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', p. 411.

for the upkeep of this wife and children, who were conceived on his trips home. In later years his daughter was to remark that every time she saw a pair of trousers on the end of her mother's bed, she knew her father was back from South Africa and another baby was on the way. Laity went to work in Australia in 1901, only to return to Cornwall in 1906 to die of silicosis.[21]

In the 1890s, 85 per cent of white workers on the Rand were British born. They brought a highly developed trade union structure to the Rand, which they had successfully transplanted around the world. Unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which had branches in Australia and North America, gave their members high levels of organisational training and literacy skills, which helped produce leaders for the wider trade union movement. The ISL and CPSA stalwart W. H. Andrews came from this background. At the same time, the British trade union tradition, which was an important strand within the ISL and the CPSA, came out of the working class customs of a 'labour aristocracy' in Britain which also bore the traces of its past cultural practices. When guilds and craft unions transplanted their practices into the industrial workplace, they mainly used their organisational skills to negotiate with owners for preferential rates of pay, initiating the practice of protecting the interests of skilled workers against the unskilled, and collaborating with capital for concessions and protection of their privileged position. rather than organising to overthrow capital.

The British working class also included elites and strata who were able to articulate their own interests rather than those of all workers.[22] Heterogeneity therefore also existed within classes as well as between them. All these practices were brought to South Africa and formed part of the complex articulation of differing interests and identities amongst workers and on the left. An important section of the white labour movement in South Africa came from these historical trajectories. They combined the use of radical ideologies and militant practices in order to achieve privileged access to jobs, using the discourse of race for the purpose of promoting exclusionary practices, as well as constructing a 'white

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[21] R. Crabb, interview, with PR, London July 2001.
[22] See above Introduction.

identity' that would help access citizenship within the new nation state. Above all, these workers required a political party that would look after their interests.

These interests, however, did not coincide with the long-term vision of the ISL, nor did white workers favour non-racial political organisation. Forming multi-racial unions in a country where the 'ideologies of its social worlds were many and complex',[23] deeply prejudiced and materially experienced, set up a specific series of obstacles. Thus the hurdles came not only from the state and its exclusionary practices towards 'racial others', but also from the South African white working class itself. This presented many problems for the ISL. The organisation believed in building inter-racial class solidarity and rejected the policy of the SALP, which supported the segregationist measures of the SAP and Unionists. After its initial attempts to inaugurate an all-encompassing multi-racial union were stillborn, the IWA became the ISL's vehicle for work amongst South Africa's 'non-European' population. In 1917, the ISL was forced to form separate trade unions for Africans and Asians. It thus helped organise Indian workers into trade unions in 1917 and formed the Industrial Workers of Africa in 1918, which was one of the precursors of the ICU.[24] In 1918, S. P. Bunting, who later became the Treasurer of the CPSA, was still optimistic that 'the different races of workers in this country, white, coloured, natives, Indians, are rapidly coming together to form one great Industrial Workers Union'.[25] However, given the political make-up of the country, this was not to be, and the League's relationship with different communities in South Africa remained deeply problematic. White and black workers found little in common from which to forge a 'community of interest'.

On the Margins: Jewish Radicals and the Communist Party of South Africa

Jewish people also played an important part in the CPSA. Like Indians, their numbers in the party were disproportionate to their numbers in wider society. Also like Indians, they came to occupy many leadership positions within the organisation. Unlike white and black workers, Jews and Indians in the party often felt a 'community of interest'

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[23] Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', p. 418.
[24] See below, Chapter Six.
[25] Simons and Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, p. 205.

with one another. Both had experienced a series of social dislocations. Both had formed 'identities and cultures of movement'.[26] Both faced severe discrimination in South Africa. Both were 'ambivalent parts of a social formation that left them marginalised by the white ruling class, but socially and politically privileged over black workers'.[27] Both were subject to the radicalising potential of marginality, where they were 'alienated from social order, conventions and ideological norms' of wider society.[28]

Many Jews and Indians also went into trade and provided basic services for black people, thus earning the contempt of white South Africans. For example, many 'low class Russians' i.e. Eastern European Jews, opened 'kaffir' eating houses on the Witswatersrand for African mineworkers. Indicating the attitude of English-speaking white South Africans to this phenomenon, the Johannesburg Evening Chronicle observed 'a man who is content to serve food to kaffirs cannot expect to rank any higher than a kaffir, for what self-respecting white man would wait on a native at a table?'[29] Indians and Jews 'came to fill a gap created in the South African urban economy by racial discrimination and discovered in the process economic and social advantages stringently denied to blacks.'[30] However, in filling these gaps, Jews and Indians were despised by English-speaking South Africans, and Afrikaners in the countryside, who, according to Charles Van Onselen 'loathed Jews , as much as they later came to abhor Indian traders because they 'not only lived off people by buying cheaply and selling dearly, but were alien.'[31] In these trading enterprises, many Indians and Jews also employed members of their own communities for 'exploitatively low wages'. In the process, they became both the 'recipients and administrators of a many-sided exploitation'. Small but significant sections of both communities dealt with the ruptures, discontinuities, and discriminatory nature of their existence by turning to radical politics to renegotiate their place in a foreign environment. Jews and Indians were a crucial element of

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[26] G. Shimoni 'Accounting for Jewish Radicals in Apartheid South Africa', in M. Shaun and R. Mendelsohn (eds), Jews and Apartheid (forthcoming), unpaginated.

[27] J. Sherman 'Serving the Natives: Whiteness as the Price of Hospitality in South African Jewish Literature', Journal of Southern African Studies vol. 26, no. 3, September 2000, p. 506. He is talking specifically about Jews here.

[28] G. Shimoni 'Accounting for Jewish Radicals'.

[29] Evening Chronicle December 1916, quoted in Sherman 'Serving the Natives', p. 507.

[30] Sherman, 'Serving the Natives', p. 507. He is again referring specifically to Jews.

[31] C. van Onselen, The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, (Cape Town, 1996), p. 135.

the political culture of the CPSA and helped shape the debates and policies that the party adopted. On a social level, despite the deeply-held prejudices of society, several Jewish and Indian party members intermarried.[32]

Internationally, Jewish radicals have played an important part in the history of left politics. The idea of the 'radical Jew' has been an important strand of Jewish identity in the diaspora. This has, in part, been compounded by the fact that many of the most prominent leaders in the socialist tradition have themselves been Jewish, for example, Rosa Luxembourg, Karl Marx and Leon Trotsky. As well as this, the experience of Jews in the Russian Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century proved to be a breeding ground for radical politics. Severe political oppression led to the formation of a militant working class, and many workers' circles were set up, including the Bund, a radical Jewish workers' union, which was initiated in 1897.

Pogroms against Jews in Lithuania in the 1880s and 1890s also spurred 'one of the most dramatic mass migrations in the history of the modern world.' [33] Between 1880 and 1914, more than three million Jewish people, around a third of Russia's total Jewish population, had to leave their homes in the Pale of Settlement, 'driven (out) by grinding poverty, escalating legal discrimination and savage pogroms'.[34] By the 1890s, over half the breadwinners in the Pale had lost their jobs and only managed to survive on some form of charity, if at all. Others were denied access to education or certain professions. Out of these dispossessed and oppressed people, 40,000 Eastern European Jews immigrated to South Africa. They were spurred on by exaggerated tales of South African prosperity, where the streets of Johannesburg were said to be paved with gold, as well as the stories that reached home about the success of fellow Jewish countrymen. They comprised the majority of the South Africa's Jewish community, which by 1946 formed 4.39 per cent of South Africa's total population.[35] Of these Eastern Europeans, the vast majority were working-class transmigrants from Lithuania, some members of whom had spent some time in other

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[32] The first of these 'mixed marriages' was between Pauline Podbury and H.A. Naidoo, one of the first Indians to join the CP. See P. Podbury, White Girl in Search of the Party, (Pietermaritzburg, 1993), p. 108.
[33] M. Israel, S. Adams 'That Spells Trouble' p. 147.
[34] J. T. Campbell 'Beyond the Pale: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left', (forthcoming) p. 5.

countries such as England before arriving in South Africa. Through all these experiences, many of them absorbed socialist ideals:

> My grandfather....left Lithuania in the 1890s as a result of the pogroms against Jews, but also because he was an active Bundist, that is a Jewish socialist, and went to England and met my grandmother who worked in the sweatshops there and she had a history of trying to defend themselves against the bosses and exploitation. So when they arrived in South Africa...both of them had come out of Europe...imbued with ideas which were against racialism, ideas broadly supportive of socialism.[36]

Many Jewish radicals entered politics through a process of 'generational transmission', where the parental home became 'communist nurseries', because of their parents' experience of socialist organisations:

> My parents were born in Britain and settled in South Africa with their communist identity already established. My father told me that the greatest moment in his life was while he was in New York in the USA on 7 November 1917. There, at the Grand Central Station he saw the triple-decker banner headlines,
>
> **Revolution**
> **Bolsheviks**
> **Seize Power**
>
> My mother had gone to regular meetings of the Hackney Socialist Sunday School in London in England. Her two brothers, Joseph and Abraham, had worked with Maxim Litvinov, first Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain of the new Bolshevik state.[37]

Many Jews came to South Africa through a series of social dislocations and ruptures, with families torn apart, some only to be reunited after a considerable time, others never. As with Indians, to whom family life, build around 'a mutual web of obligations'[38] that lasted throughout their lives, helped define a person's place within a social world, South Africa set new challenges for ways of being Jewish and recreated Jewish ways of life. Some challenged Jewish 'traditions'; others reinvented older forms of community. In the Communist Party, as with Indians, many Jews found a 'cosmopolitan home',[39] a sense of social and political belonging that could not be experienced within society at large.[40]

> In those early days apparently the reason for the strength of the CP in the small town Jewish communities and even in some of the cities was the social and community aspect as well as being an important link to getting news from their 'shtetels' where they left other family

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[35] Drew <u>Discordant Comrades</u>, p. 7.

[36] Interview with Barry Feinberg by Wolfie Kodesh, quoted in Israel and Adams 'That Spells Trouble' p. 148.

[37] D. Goldberg, 'Impressions and Memories of Communism in South Africa'. (forthcoming) p. 1-2.

[38] Campbell, 'Beyond the Pale', p. 9.

[39] I met M. D. Naidoo while he was in exile in London in 1986, and this is very much the way he talked to me about how he saw the Communist Party as part of his social life as much as his political life.

[40] Shimoni, 'Accounting for Jewish Radicals'.

members. [My parents] were barely literate and religion was [also] and important aspect particularly as my father owned a kosher grocery store in town.[41]

Large-scale Jewish immigration in the 1880s and 1890s coincided with the beginnings of South Africa's industrial revolution.[42] This was a time of general upheaval and dislocation for South Africa's disparate populations who were all competing to find a place in a rapidly changing environment. Eastern Europeans had to jostle for their own place within this social landscape and they drew on political and cultural practices that they brought with them from the Russian Empire. Most Jewish immigrants joined the ranks of the white urban poor and had to face virulent anti-semitism. They were 'perhaps the most visible, dispossessed and unsuccessful group of workers on the Witwatersrand...the unhappy recipients of the most vicious class and race prejudice that society could muster'.[43] In Landsmanschaft associations,[44] workers clubs and synagogues, craft unions, schools and book clubs, Jewish people set up institutions 'through which consciousness was shaped and expressed' in an effort to define themselves within an alien environment.[45] The heterogeneous nature of these organisations was a reflection of a South African Jewish community that was 'defined by diversity and conflict', where seemingly contradictory hopes and aspirations would coincide:

> My leaning towards left socialist politics was ...formed partly by the bizarre and paradoxical embrace of socialism shared by most of the immigrants who filled the boarding houses where I lived. I say bizarre because they tended to combine a passionate devotion to the Soviet Union with a Zionism and vicious racism towards the majority of the South African population.[46]

Indeed, Zionist youth movements proved to be radical breeding grounds for potential communists, where nationalist aspirations, with ideals of *hagshama*, or 'fulfillment' interacted with a strong desire for socialist justice. A number of young Jews, including Baruch Hirson, found their way into the party through Hashomer Hatzair.[47] In later years, as Zionsim became increasingly associated with right-wing nationalism, and the creation of the state of Israel, many radical Jews negated aspects of their Jewish identities,

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[41] H. Zarenda, interview with PR London July 2001.

[42] Campbell, 'Beyond the Pale', p. 4.

[43] C. van Onselen, 'Randlords and Rotgut, 1886-1903', in C. van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic Transformation of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, vol.1: New Babylon, (London, 1982), p. 74.

[44] These were organisations set up to help newly arrived immigrants from a shared geographical area.

[45] Campbell, 'Beyond the Pale', p. 4.

[46] J. Slovo, Slovo: the unfinished autobiography (Johannesburg, 1995), p. 22.

but in the 1920s and 1930s, a 'radical political ambivalence'[48] produced by marginalisation and alienation from wider society wove together the seemingly contradictory ideals of nationalism and socialism, as it did for so many Indians, where a deep-seated pride in the motherland and Gandhi somehow coexisted with communist ideology. Another important aspect in the radicalisation of Jews, and another similarity with many South African Indians, was the liberal and humanitarian ideals that they picked up from English teachers during their education.[49]

'Universalist Cake, Segregated Tables': the CPSA and South African Workers

The membership of the CPSA was mainly drawn from the ISL, as well as the Jewish Socialist Society of Cape Town and Jewish Socialist Society of Johannesburg. Amongst its all-male membership were Harry Haynes, Bill Andrews, Issy Diamond, Willie Kalk, Bernard and Solly Sachs and T.W. Thibedi, a schoolteacher and the only black member of the new organisation.[50] These men would hold rallies on the steps of Johannesburg City Hall, later to be the scene of many running fights with South African fascist sympathisers, which would prove to be a fertile recruiting ground for many more CP members.[51] For the party's Jewish comrades, taking the lead against fascism in South Africa became 'profoundly meaningful.' Party members would deliver fiery speeches about the class enemy and the need for revolution, attracting large crowds of people. Similar meetings on the city steps in Durban attracted the CP's first Indian members to the party.

The party's relationship with Africans was complex and ambivalent. Despite a belief in some quarters of the need for inter-racial class solidarity, attitudes towards African workers were couched at best, in terms of a barely concealed paternalism. There was also much confusion as to their actual role in the 'forthcoming revolution'. This was, perhaps, not surprising. Despite the egalitarian underpinnings of communist ideology, Marx and Engels themselves were deeply influenced by the evolutionary aspects of late nineteenth

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[47] 'The Young Sentinel'
[48] Shimoni, 'Accounting for Jewish Radicals'
[49] Shimoni, 'Accounting for Jewish Radicals'. See below Chapter Six for further discussion on Indians and education.
[50] Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 53.
[51] Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 58.

century anthropological thought.[52] And although they tried to rid this epistemological model of its cruder racist assumptions, the more 'subtle' racist presuppositions of the evolutionary model remained intact. Even the most prescient of white socialists in the early CPSA expressed contradictory attitudes towards Africans. W. H. Andrews believed that Africans would only play a significant part in the revolutionary process as they became proletarianised. He also believed that black political organisation should be left to black people themselves, and saw his own role as one of organisation within white trade unions. Bunting believed that black South Africans would provide the 'shock troops' of the revolution, but not the theoretical understanding. David Ivon Jones, despite some perceptive early comments about joint action between the races being unrealisable because the majority of white workers identified with their 'top exploiters', remained convinced that white workers would lead the African revolution.[53] And despite Jones's sympathetic attitude towards Africans, in 1922 he wrote from Moscow that they were 'the lowest possible form of cheap, unskilled labour, drawn from the most primitive people in the world, politically passive and industrially unorganised'.[54] Jones reflected the general attitude towards Africans in the party, and revealed his own evolutionist belief that Africans were not yet ready to form the 'revolutionary vanguard'.

There was a general recognition within the CPSA that white workers were deeply racist. But they believed that this was an expression of 'false consciousness' that could be overcome by a recognition that only class solidarity could defeat the economic 'crisis of capitalism', which would reduce white workers to the level of Africans. To many CPSA members, it was as if racism was no more than an 'unfortunate temporary ideological infection'.[55] Some members of the party displayed little ambivalence about their racism, and many were to leave the organisation when the CPSA directed its agitational work towards Africans, Indians and Coloured workers after 1925. But in the early days of the CP, party organisation was focused primarily on white workers in trade unions. Their main argument for working class unity seemed to be its necessity if white workers were not to be

[52] M. Bloch Marxism and Anthropology, (Oxford, 1983), pp. 1-20.
[53] D. Ivon Jones, 'Communism in South Africa', Document 19, South African Communists Speak, p. 41-56; Simons and Simons, Class and Colour p. 207.
[54] D. Ivon Jones, quoted in B. Hirson and G. A. Williams, The Delegate for Africa, p. 232.

reduced to the level of 'natives'. A party leaflet produced against Hertzog's White Labour Policy encapsulates these attitudes, and underlines the party's perspective on the scientific basis of its theories:

> The Communist Party calls for working class co-operation. That does imply political co-operation between the native and the european (sic). The Communist Party does this because **it is an essential for the preservation of the european worker as much as any.** (original emphasis). This can be scientifically proved and it is being tragically demonstrated in practice.[56]

This pragmatic political observation was modified with a view of social relations between the races that reflected segregationist and evolutionary discourses. Addressing the common taunt of "How would you like your sister to marry a native?", stemming from the general deep fear of miscegenation, the pamphlet goes on to declare:

> This sort of talk shows a great want of confidence in South African women and is a cheap and unworthy insult to them. It overlooks the fact that neither race **wants** to mix with the other. Where racial mixing does take place, it is largely due to the poverty and backwardness of native women which leaves them without self-respect. If both races have the self-respect that come from a proper human status and a proper standard of living, mixing will be far less likely to take place.[57]

It seems that the CPSA wanted to have its 'universalist cake and yet eat it at racially segregated tables'.[58] South African communists were formed within the social context of South Africa at that time, and this was reflected in their ideologies. Their feelings towards Africans were not dissimilar to those of many Indians, for Gandhi's attitude towards Africans, discussed in the last chapter, was widespread among Indians. Indian ideas about Africans during the 1949 Durban Riots also demonstrate how this bigotry was reinscribed, rather than eradicated, indicating the deep-seated nature of these prejudices and their reproduction through material practices. It also situates South African communists within the wider traditions of socialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where radicalism was inexorably intertwined with racial prejudices, although to varying degrees. The pamphlet also reflects early theoretical understanding in the Party from orthodox Marxist classics. This emphasised the leadership role of white workers at the point of

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[55] Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', p. 400.
[56] CPSA pamphlet, Communism and the Native Question (Johannesburg no date) p.1.
[57] Communism and the Native Question, p. 10.
[58] Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', p. 402.

production, a doctrine which accepted the South African racial divide, segregationist discourse, and an evolutionary view of social relations.

A comprehension of the wider ideological debates prevalent in the 1920s in the international socialist community, which laid great emphasis on the relationship between class and nationalism, was at times hindered by the relative isolation of South African comrades from the world socialist movement. Although David Ivon Jones was in Moscow between 1919 and 1924 and helped maintain limited contact between the CPSA and the international communist movement, this rather tenuous link was severed with his death in 1924.[59] At this time, the Communist International was becoming increasingly pre-occupied with the question of colonial liberation movements, because of their potential force as an anti-imperialist weapon. From 1920, the Communist International was also forced, albeit intermittently, to address the question of nationalism, recognising it as a powerful political factor in the world context, and the form that colonial struggles were taking. At the Second International in 1920, a heated debate took place between Lenin and the Indian delegate M. N. Roy on the nature of the relationship between the communist and nationalist movements[60], a relationship that lies at the heart of the 'Native Republic' thesis of the late 1920s and 'Colonialism of a Special Type' in the 1950s. However, the CPSA never received a copy of Lenin's 1920 draft on the National and Colonial question.

Despite the ambivalence of some of its party members, because of their experience of different social worlds, the early CPSA viewed nationalism as a reactionary force that had to be countered. Like racism, it was seen as another instance of 'false consciousness'. The agrarian question was given even less attention in early CPSA days. By dismissing the peasantry as backward, over 85 per cent of the African population were disregarded. Because the majority of Africans in industry were migrant workers, they were not seen as 'pure proletarians'. White workers therefore constituted the vanguard of the revolution, but little theoretical attention was paid as to how the 'masses' should be moved to follow this leadership, or how this white leadership, given its prejudices, would unite in action with

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[59] M. Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: The CPSA and the Native Republic, 1928-1934, Occasional Papers, (Syracuse University, 1973), p. 4.
[60] See below, Chapter Five.

black workers. Party members had a naïve faith in working class unity, but this failed to analyse the political, social, and economic reality of South Africa at a time when unity on class lines across the races was little more than a utopian dream. The experience of the 1922 Miners' Strike[61] was a stark illustration of this and of the dilemmas the CPSA faced in its early days.

Although many CP members were involved in the strike, the SALP and the Afrikaner Nationalist Party were the most active political parties. They organised many meetings on a platform 'for a white South Africa'. [62] Many of the Afrikaner workers, who formed a majority of white workers on the Rand, cared 'little for Britain and less for Empire' and thought of the Union Jack as 'nothing more than a dirty dish cloth'.[63] During the 'Rand Revolt', Afrikaner nationalism was an important element in the strike. Many of the speeches that strike leaders made to workers invoked the Afrikaner 'fathers of the nation, the Voortrekkers'.[64] At one such meeting at Jeppes in Johannesburg, strikers were told that they 'had to be unanimous in standing by the victory of the Voortrekkers over (the Zulu King) Dingaan in 1838. It was nothing short of cheek for the Chamber of Mines to try and reverse this position.'[65]

Afrikaners felt deeply resentful towards their 'foreign' bosses and their perceived subjugation by British imperialism. For them a 'white South Africa' was one where the Afrikaner occupied their rightful place within the South African nation state. Reflecting this anti-British feeling, the National Party couched much of its political discourse in terms of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. Proclaiming itself to be the 'small man's party', the NP denounced Smuts as the paid agent of the Chamber of Mines and 'vowed to free South

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[61] On the 'Rand Revolt' see S. Johns, Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932, (Belville, 1995), pp. 128-145; on some of the complexities of class identity during the strike see J. Krikler, 'White Working Class Identity and the Rand Revolt', paper presented at conference The Burden of Race? 'Whiteness and 'Blackness in Modern South Africa, History Workshop and Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 5-8 July 2001; J. Krikler, 'Women, Violence and the Rand Revolt of 1922', Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 22, no. 3, September 1996, pp. 349-372.
[62] Roux S. P. Bunting, p. 91.
[63] Quoted in Krikler 'White Working Class Identity', p. 4.
[64] Krikler 'White Working Class Identity, p. 2.
[65] Rand Daily Mail, 12 January 1922, quoted in Krikler, 'White Working Class Identity', p. 2.

Africa from capitalist domination'.[66] Borrowing from, and in the process, transforming, socialist discourse was not a new phenomenon for the NP. In 1919, Hertzog had gone as far as to say 'Do not let us be afraid of Bolshevism. Bolshevism is the will of the people to be free. Why do people want to suppress and kill Bolshevism? Because national freedom means death to capitalism and imperialism.'[67] The rhetoric during the strike was couched in fiercely nationalist and racial terms but also framed within a socialist discourse of class equality, translated as white working-class equality. The strike became a fight to maintain the Colour Bar in employment practices, but it was also much more than that.

In analysing the nature of the rebellion, many members of the CP such as S. P. Bunting still emphasised the future prospects for inter-racial class-consciousness amongst white workers. And although some members did denounce the rampant racism of the white miners, the views of party members were, at least, ambivalent. The CPSA paid no attention to the African workers on the coalmines who stayed in their compounds and continued to work throughout the strike. No proposals were made to agitate for skilled employment for Africans at equal rates of pay with their white counterparts. And a party statement published in The International, described the strike as 'the most glorious event in the history of white civilisation in South Africa'.[68] In the eyes of African organisations, the CPSA must have seemed deeply compromised and seen to be colluding with white racism.

The strikers did borrow strands of communist ideology. The impact of the Russian Revolution still reverberated around the world. Red banners featured prominently during the strike. 'The Red Flag' was sung repeatedly. Many speeches included talk about the struggle between labour and capital.[69] But within this discourse lay a tension between a racially specific international proletariat, and an ideology of industrial protectionism inherited and translated from British trade-union practices. Socialist ideology was also interwoven with South African racism and a developing Afrikaner nationalism during the

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[66] A. Lerumo Fifty Fighting Years: The South African Communist Party 1921-1971 (Inkululeko 1971), p. 50.
[67] Hertzog, quoted in Fifty Fighting Years p. 50.
[68] Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 297.
[69] Krikler, 'White Working Class Identity' pp. 11-21.

strike, and some of these elements were expressed in the infamous slogan 'workers of the world unite and fight for a white South Africa.'[70]

The workers expressed a specific vision of South Africa and their place within it. Above all, their insistence on inclusion within this 'white community' was because as 'civilised workers', they wanted to have a stake in the building of a 'civilised nation'. This in turn entitled them to 'civilised' wages. To be civilised, you had to be white. To be reduced to 'kaffir' work was the opposite. Importantly, membership of this white brotherhood included citizenship and rights.

The events of the first two decades of the twentieth century had left white workers deeply alienated and disillusioned. The mine-owners seemed to care little that many miners, through the nature of their jobs, died from fatal damage to their lungs.[71] They were reluctant to spend money on expensive health and safety equipment. Furthermore, when mine magnets decided to cut costs, they proceeded to hand over 'white man's work' to Africans. The Smuts government not only failed to protect white miners' interests, but also had no hesitation in using troops against them. And those who fought in the war to protect the interests of Empire came home to face threatened redundancies and the powers of the state unleashed against them. In the words of the miner Taffy Long, who was hung along with several others after the strike:

> Only a few years back I lay drenched in water and soaked in blood in the trenches of Flanders...But what did we find when we got back from the hell of war?...What do mineowners care about our homes and the dignity of our lives? If they thought they could grind an ounce of gold from the Union Jack they would put it through the mills of their mines.[72]

A different, and white, South Africa, where white workers were respected, is what they were fighting for.

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[70] Hirson, The Delegate, pp. 228-230; Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 60.
[71] See G. Burke and P. Richardson, 'The Profits of Death: a comparative study of miners' phthisis in Cornwall and the Transvaal , 1876-1908', Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 14, no. 2, April 1978, pp. 147-171.
[72] Quoted in Drew Discordant Comrades, p. 66.

As Ivon Jones was to write acerbically from Moscow about the strike, 'working class consciousness meant white working class consciousness'.[73] Yet he was also to comment that it was 'not a conflict of white against black, but a pure class struggle against politically conscious workers who happened to be white, and the capitalist class'.[74] A privileged elite under threat, white workers wanted to be a part of 'white civilisation', to negotiate with sections of its bourgeoisie rather than organise to overthrow it. Enraged by Smuts and the policies of the United Party, white workers turned to the SALP and the National Party to protect their interests. They wanted representation within the South African capitalist system, and the NP's anti-capitalist rhetoric was in reality a bid to have access to government institutions that would allow it to re-allocate the profits of capital amongst its political constituency. Marx and Engels had addressed the phenomenon of furthering class interests through a compromise with capital in relation to English workers and the Irish,[75] but this was not a theoretical aspect developed by the CPSA in the 1920s. In 1961, the SACP was to comment, with hindsight, that the strike marked

> the greatest defeat (of the white labour movement) as a force independent of the bourgeoisie. As the more farsighted of the ISL leaders had foreseen....the purely white labour movement in this country was transformed step by step into an emasculated adjunct of the boss class, exchanging their independence and privileges, the price of their support for white imperialism in its brutal oppression and exploitation of the African people.[76]

The experience of the strike helped shape white and black politics for years to come. Smuts became the hated hangman and butcher and was personally held responsible for the suppression of the strike and the effects of the recession. The NP and the Labour Party formed a pact against the SAP and set about winning white workers to their political constituency. They won the 1924 election and encouraged the development of domestic capital, and there was some growth in secondary industry. The Pact government began to recognise the interests of white workers. Smuts' SAP had already laid the groundwork for segregation. Hertzog continued these policies and extended the privileges of white workers, as well as accelerating the exclusion of black communities from constitutional politics. Through increasing segregation, Hertzog sought to constitute a white consensus against

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[73] D. Ivon Jones, quoted in Hirson, The Delegate, p. 234.
[74] D. Ivon Jones, quoted in Hirson, The Delegate, p. 232.
[75] K. Marx, Collected Letters, quoted in R. Palme Dutt, The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire, (London 1953) p. 351.
[76] 'After Forty Years', SACP pamphlet, 1961.

mounting black opposition. The Pact government also attempted to regulate the supply of black workers between the labour hungry sectors of the South African economy. A 'civilised labour' policy[77] was introduced and African and Indian workers who were employed by the government were dismissed in their thousands. White workers took their place.

The CPSA's first major political outing was not a huge success, but contained many lessons. Their espousal of inter-racial solidarity, however ambivalent, alienated them from white workers. Their collaboration with white miners gave black organisations reason to regard communists as the left-wing of an exclusively white labour movement. Alienated from black organisations, shunned by trade unionists, members deserted the ranks of the CPSA, leaving the fledgling organisation even weaker and less effectual. For the next two years the party continued to try to organise white workers in trade unions as well as to tap the discontent of the unemployed, but with little impact. The party also backed the Nationalist-SALP pact, convinced that once the pact was in government they would reveal their true credentials to white workers, who would then turn to the CP with a newly awakened class-consciousness. Characterising the pact as an 'alliance between bourgeois nationalism and labour imperialism' The International proclaimed:

> the workers will rapidly discover that the administration of this country will not be materially different to the present time. New groupings will inevitably take place....The rank and file of both the Labour and Nationalist parties must sooner or later refuse to follow their bourgeois leaders, and will form a real workers party, not to be side-tracked either by British imperialism nor bourgeois republicanism, but organised, drilled and determined to unceasingly work for the overthrow of the capitalist system.[78]

However, the 'revolutionary vanguard' failed to do this and the 1922 strike and the victory of the Pact government were major turning points in the history of the labour movement in South Africa. White workers were increasingly co-opted into the system and the CP had to look elsewhere for its political constituency. They had to move on to work

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[77] This set out to create employment for unskilled whites, as well as protect those in the semi-skilled sector from black workers.
[78] The International, 27 April 1923.

with black organisations, which required a discussion of united front tactics and the question of the relationship between nationalism and socialism.

Chapter Five

Nationalism and Socialism: New Horizons

The International Origins of Indian Communism

Just as the CPSA was formed out of international flows of people and ideas, important aspects of Indian communism also had their roots in a radical Indian diaspora that gained experience and transformed their politics in the course of their travels, through the people they met, and the organisations they encountered. Many of these Indians were radical nationalists who opposed British colonial rule, who later became communists. They epitomised the threat of the 'Indian radical terrorist' in the British colonial imagination, a perception that was to grow and also caste its shadow over South African Indian communists in later years. M. N. Roy was a particularly significant example of these early Indian national revolutionaries who turned communist. In many respects, he was at the 'opposite end of the spectrum' to Gandhi in Indian politics in the first half of the twentieth century.

Roy also made an important contribution to the debate on the national and colonial question, which was discussed at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920.[1] He disagreed fundamentally with Lenin's perspective on Gandhi and Indian nationalists, whom Lenin considered were revolutionary because of their anti-imperialist potential.[2] Roy believed the national bourgeoisie to be a reactionary force, which could not be trusted. In particular, he considered that Gandhi used ideas of religion and tradition to develop a mass following, whereas Roy despised religion and considered that 'tradition' did little more than keep India hidebound to a conservative past.[3] Roy was a champion of 'modern values,' and his views on Gandhi were later shared by many communists in India, as well as by R. Palme Dutt, an influential Indian member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. This was in sharp contrast to South African Indian communists, who were to hold a very different view of Gandhi and what he represented.

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[1] M. A. Persits, Revolutionarie of India in Soviet Russia, (Moscow, 1973) pp. 124-158.
[2] S. Roy, M. N. Roy: a political biography, (London, 1997), p. 48.
[3] S. Roy, M.N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi (Calcutta, 1987), p.15.

Since the initial debate at the Second Congress, there have been endless interpretations of the national and colonial question. In the CPSA, it was the touchstone of the contentious issue of the 'Black Republic' and was to dominate discussions in the party in the late twenties and the early thirties.[4] It set the terms of their relationship with the national congresses in South Africa for years to come. The debates on 'Colonialism of a Special Type' which started in the party as early as 1950 were also directly related to this discussion. The tensions, contradictions, and intersections that existed, and were reproduced, in the interplay between nationalism and socialism also lay at the heart of the contribution of Indian communists to the CPSA, and was manifest in the nature of their party work at grassroots level. In many ways, the evocation of Gandhi as symbol of 'Indianness' by CP members epitomised these tensions.

Indian Nationalists Abroad

Gandhi's experiences in South Africa and his formulation of a political vision were very different to those of other groups of radicals who travelled from India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the time that Gandhi was returning to India from South Africa with his blend of political morality and expedient constitutional politics, other Indians were also travelling across the world and developing important political ideas that were woven out of different political traditions. Many of these Indian nationalists formulated a far more radical form of politics than Gandhi's, which flowed from their experience of, and opposition to, British colonial rule in India. In the early part of the twentieth century, the INC still seemed a conservative and largely ineffective body. In their attempts to formulate an alternative discourse of liberation, many early Indian radicals were drawn to clandestine terrorist organisations which looked to support from countries abroad

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[4] See B. Bunting, Moses Kotane: South African revolutionary, (London, 1975), pp. 14-42; E. Roux, S. P. Bunting, pp. 118-130; B. Hirson, 'Bukharin, Bunting and the 'Native Republic Slogan', Searchlight South Africa, vol. 1, no. 3, July 1989, pp. 51-65; B. Hirson, 'The Black Republic Slogan-Part 11: The Response of the Trotskyists' Searchlight South Africa, vol. 1, no. 4, February 1990, pp. 43-56; M. Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism; M. Legassick, 'The 1928 'Black Republic' resolution of the CPSA and the struggle for national liberation and socialism' unpublished paper, 2001; For the CPSA programme on the Black Republic see 'Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa adopted at the seventh annual conference of the party on January 1, 1929, Document 44, South African Communists Speak, pp. 100-106.

in order to fund their anti-British activities.[5] Many were also Muslims, and they fused anti-British sentiments with a desire for Indian independence and a sense of an international Muslim brotherhood. They forged inter-textual translations of socialist ideals, nationalist aspirations and religious beliefs.

A considerable exodus of Indian militants had begun as early as 1908, following a split in from Indian National Congress between its radical and conservative wings.[6] Radical Indian nationalists were ruthlessly hounded by British intelligence, and subsequently they fled overseas to America, Europe and other parts of Asia to set up revolutionary organisations in countries that were either hostile to Britain at the time, or at least would tolerate their presence. Gandhi met some of these 'terrorists' in London in 1909, and his talks with them served to confirm his belief in peaceful protest.

In the following years, Indian radicals who were opposed to Gandhi's approach set up a number of international organisations which became networks of political ideas and organisation. Thus, in 1913, the Ghadar Party was established in America by Har Dayal and Mohammed Barakattullah. A typical example of the diasporic Indian political community, Barakatatullah taught Urdu at the University of Tokyo, where he also published a paper called <u>Muslim Unity</u>. In 1914, he was dismissed from his job in Tokyo on the insistence of the British because of his political activities, and moved to San Francisco, home to a number of Indian activists at the time. He later travelled to Kabul, and then to Tashkent in the Soviet Union.[7]

The Ghadar Party attempted to unify various smaller Indian political bodies across America and Canada, and also began centres in Argentina, France, Britain, and China and the Phillipines.[8] Many of its organisers were amongst the group of Indian radicals who moved to Berlin after the outbreak of the First World War, hoping the Germans would help fund their anti-British political activities. They set up an Indian Revolutionary Committee

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[5] Persits, <u>Revolutionaries of India</u>, p.18.
[6] Persits, <u>Revolutionaries of India</u>, p.18.
[7] <u>Documents of the History of the Communist party Of India, vol. 1, 1917-1922</u>, (New Delhi 1971), p. 17. Barakatatullah returned to Tokyo after setting up the Ghadar Party in America.

there, and the German government promised them money and arms.[9] Not surprisingly, these actions increased the British perception that they were dangerous terrorists. Much of their political activity was propaganda work directed at Indian army units abroad, as they believed that small groups of trained, armed men would best be able to spark an uprising in India and drive out the British. Reflecting their social position in India, they often interspersed their views on how to overthrow British rule militarily with prejudices that derived from the caste ideology which was common to Hindu and Muslim communities alike. Thus, they believed that military operations could only be carried out by an educated elite, and that peasants and workers were, apparently, not capable, or intelligent enough for the task. One such revolutionary was to remark: 'Anyone can buy and bribe a poor man, and what does a poor Indian know about the condition of India?'[10]

M. N. Roy was an important member of this revolutionary Indian diaspora. Unlike the majority of Indian political exiles, Roy was not a Muslim. He was born into a high-caste Brahmin family in an area of Bengal that had already produced a number of political activists and social reformers.[11] He grew up in a political culture replete with anti-British sentiments, which also fostered his initial belief that Hindu culture was fundamentally superior to that of the west.[12] His Brahmanic pride fuelled his anger against the British, who treated Indians as second class citizens in their own country. Roy became politically active whilst still at school, and eventually joined several nationalist groups that believed in direct terrorist action. In his early political life, he shot a policeman. By 1914, Roy had begun a series of abortive attempts to smuggle arms for the struggle for Indian independence, which took him abroad to China and Japan. At this time, he had a strong sense of racial self-determination as well as national pride, and believed that Japan would free Asia of the racial domination practised by the British. On one of his ill-fated gun-

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[8] Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p. 19.
[9] M. N. Roy, Memoirs (Bombay, 1964), p. 3.
[10] M. Pavlovich, V. Gurko-Kryahin and S. Weltman, India in the Battle for Independence, (Moscow 1925), quoted in Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p. 21.
[11] S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 2.
[12] S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 2.

running expeditions, Roy met Sun Yat-sen and discussed the question of national independence in Asia. He also set up another arms deal with him.[13]

Unable to return home, as he was being hunted by British intelligence, Roy set sail for San Francisco, where he planned to finalise the details for the arms shipment. On the boat, he met a Miss Gray, a 'Tamil orphan' who had been brought up by American missionaries. Like many Americans whom he would meet in San Fransisco and New York, Miss Gray was 'enthralled' by Roy's 'cosmopolitanism'.[14] The British government, however, took a very different view. On his arrival in the USA, he was greeted by a headline in a local newspaper which declared: 'Mysterious Alien Reaches America, Famous Brahmin Revolutionary or Dangerous Communist Spy'.[15]

Once in America, Roy became a part of its Indian political community, but also began to mix with a broader group of intellectuals who were sympathetic towards the Indian struggle against British colonial rule. In America, sympathy for the Indian cause had already been fostered by the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York in 1879.[16] Amongst others, Roy met Isadora Duncan, Jack London, and Professor Arthur Pope, who taught philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley, as well as Evelyn Trent, who was to become Roy's wife, and Agnes Smedly. Smedly later married the Indian radical political activist, Virenranath Chattopadya, who was the brother of Sarojini Naidu. In later years, Naidu was to visit South Africa in an attempt to intervene on behalf of the Indian community there. Yusuf Dadoo helped arrange a meeting during her visit, and Naidu persistently interceded on behalf of Indian South Africans in the 1930s and 40s.[17] Roy also frequented Greenwich Village with Evelyn Trent, where he exchanged ideas with socialists, pacifists and anarchists.

During his sojourn in the States, Roy was constantly followed and harassed by British intelligence. The United States Attorney for Northern California described him as 'a

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[13] S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 6.
[14] S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 13.
[15] S. Roy, M. N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, p. 9.
[16] S. Roy, M. N. Roy, p. 19.

man steeped in crime, one of the most violent revolutionaries India has produced...altogether he is the most dangerous Indian still at large on the American subcontinent.'[18] Because of these perceptions, it was not particularly safe to befriend him, and Arthur Pope lost several jobs because of their association. Roy was finally arrested in March 1917, but was released on bail and fled to Mexico. Once there, he continued to mix with the radical American bohemian diaspora he had encountered in New York, many of whom were in Mexico to avoid military service, and was increasingly seduced by European culture and ideas. Unlike Gandhi, who formulated an Indian 'uniqueness' in exile in opposition to the 'perils' of western civilisation, Roy felt a new world opening up which freed him from the constraints of caste and 'Indian tradition'. It engendered a new internationalist spirit in him. He was drawn increasingly to socialist ideas and helped set up the Mexican Socialist Party, which later became the Communist party of Mexico. When Michael Borodin came to Mexico in 1919, he wanted to meet the Socialist Party's 'Hindu secretary'. It was Borodin who introduced Roy to communism. Roy later claimed that he had undergone profound intellectual changes in Mexico:

> Mexico was the land of my rebirth. It is true that before coming there I had begun to feel dissatisfied with ideas and ideals of my earlier life. But it was during my stay in Mexico that the new vision became clear and dissatisfaction with a sterile past was replaced by a conviction to guide me in a more promising future. It was more than a change in political ideas and revolutionary ideals, I acquired a new outlook on life; there was a revolution in my mind-a philosophical revolution which knew no finality.[19]

The Russian Revolution of 1917 also formed a backdrop to these changes in Roy, and altered the political perspective of many other Indian nationalists as well. They were inspired by the Russian Revolution for several reasons. Unlike social-democrats in the west, the Bolsheviks promoted the right of nations to self-determination, particularly in relation to the Muslim areas within the borders of the Soviet Union. Indian radicals felt this legitimated their fight for Indian political independence. In addition, the anti-capitalist rhetoric of Soviet communism was translated by many Indian radicals as specifically anti-British in the Indian context. Mohammad Barakatullah told an Izvestia correspondent, for example, 'a capitalist is synonymous to a foreigner, to be exact, the Englishman, for

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[17] Bhana, Gandhi's Legacy, p. 35.
[18] Quoted in S. Roy, M.N. Roy, p. 16.
[19] M. N. Roy, Memoirs, p. 217.

us...Therefore, the Soviet Government's well-known appeal for a fight against capitalists... produced a colossal impression on us.'[20]

Many Muslims also chose to believe that there was a community of interest between the egalitarian and international aspects of communism and Islam. As a consequence of these ideas, a considerable number of Indian émigrés headed for the Soviet Union after 1917, hoping to find a sympathetic reception for their political cause. In December 1919, Roy himself left for Moscow via Berlin, where he wrote an 'Indian Communist Manifesto'.[21] In Moscow, he was one of two Mexican delegates to the Second Congress of the Communist International. By late 1920, a small group of Indian revolutionaries were studying at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union. Many later returned to India and began work with various left-wing organisations. Others stayed in the Soviet Union. A small group of these Indian communists, including Roy, established the first Communist Party of India in Tashkent in 1920.[22]

The Second Congress of the Communist International

Roy was among the large group of Indian communists who attended the Second Congress of the Communist international, a number of them travelling from Tashkent.[23] The Congress was significant because it was the first international meeting of the Comintern to include delegates from non-western countries, and it attracted a diverse collection of people from around the world who were keen to see the 'New Jerusalem'. The Congress also consolidated the split that had taken place within the Second International between social democrats and communists during the war, over whether or not the national bourgeoisie should be supported during the war (as it had in South Africa) and over the question of independence for the colonies. A new, radical perspective on the colonial question was therefore of central concern to the Second Congress of the Communist International. Two of the main issues on the agenda, which were to affect South Africa and India equally, were the national question, in the form of the right of nations to self-

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[20] Izvetsia May 6, 1919, quoted in Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p. 29.
[21] M. N. Roy, Memoirs, p. 39.
[22] M. A. Persits, 'The Origin of the Indian Communist Movement and the Comintern's Oriental Policy', in R. A. Ulyanovsky (ed.), The Comintern and the East: A Critique of the Critique, (USSR, 1978), p.122.

determination, and the question of the united front, or the nature of the relationship between communist and nationalist organisations, questions that have dogged the left ever since.[24]

Although many at the Second Congress considered Roy an 'Indian upstart', Lenin gave him a considerable amount of time, listening carefully to his arguments, and trying to incorporate his views in amended form in the final draft on the memorandum on the 'national question'. There was, however, a fatal flaw in the amended draft because there *was* a basic difference in their positions, a difference that could not be easily papered over in a 'compromise'. The endless re-drafting of the national question by the CP internationally, including its 'Black Republic' variant, is, in my view, evidence of the fact that party members were trying to reconcile two divergent approaches to the relationship between nationalism and socialism. Connected to this are the perennial permutations of the debate on 'stages' versus 'permanent revolution', where, most often, Trotsky is set up in a dichotomous opposition to 'the devil' Stalin (or vice versa according to ideological orientation).[25]

Lenin thought of imperialism as a set of international, mutually transformative relationships, framed by unequal power relations.[26] Within these, there were oppressor and oppressed nations, or the capitalist countries and their colonies. A programme of self-determination for the colonies therefore not only suggested a moral agenda, and one that would be attractive to much of the world's population, but also seemingly had the capacity to fundamentally weaken imperialism and the capitalist powers. From this perspective, communists in the colonies should therefore support, and be a part of (but not be subsumed by) national movements, as they were anti-imperialist, and had the capacity to become anti-capitalist. The problem was, 'how to unite with the national bourgeoisie without being

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[23] M. Ahmad, Myself and the Communist Party of India, (Calcutta, 1970), pp. 67-69.

[24] A united front is built on the assumption that communist organisations can form alliances with other social groups, but must maintain their own political identity. See V. I. Lenin, 'Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions', July 26 1920, Collected Works, (Moscow, 1977), pp. 241-245. In contrast, a 'popular front' results in communist organisations subsuming their politics to nationalist groupings, and adopting a nationalist agenda. Many would argue that this was the fate of the CPSA by the 1950s.

[25] See M. Legassick 'The 1928 'black republic thesis' (sic) as a good contemporary example of this.

[26] V.I. Lenin, 'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (a popular outline)', Collected Works, vol. 22, pp. 185-304.

completely absorbed by them.'[27] Lenin, nevertheless, considered that national leaders such as Gandhi, had revolutionary potential. 'Revolutionary Asia' had to go through a democratic phase, and this had to be done in alliance with the 'national bourgeoisie'.[28]

Roy, however, considered that the national bourgeoisie was corrupt, pro-capitalist and in league with an international bourgeoisie, because this is where their material interests lay. The working class therefore had to lead the 'national revolution'.[29] What was needed was a proletarian social revolution in the colonies rather than a bourgeois democratic one. To Lenin's contention that the working class was insufficiently developed in the colonies, as they were 'backward', and consequently needed the 'support' of proletarian parties in the capitalist countries, Roy offered the rather dubious response that colonial countries were already largely capitalist, and did not need a 'national stage'. By the seventh reformulation of the thesis, it read 'the Revolution in the colonies is not going to be a communist revolution in its first stages...(the) co-operation of bourgeois nationalist revolutionary elements *is useful* for the overthrow of foreign capitalism' (emphasis added).[30] By the ninth version, this had been changed again to declaring that all communist parties *must give active support* to the revolutionary movements of liberation.' (emphasis added).

This vacillation on the national question led in its more extreme forms in the 1920s and 1930s, to the characterisation of all bourgeois democrats as social fascists. Lenin's and

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[27] J. P. Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-1939, (Princeton, 1971), p. 216.

[28] See Lenin's Prediction on the Revolutionary Storms in the East, (People's Republic of China, 1970), pp. 1-15.

[29] This is clearly problematic. Taking a 'classical' Marxist approach to class, the proletariat can of course be the carriers of nationalist ideology, but if it is to lead a successful national democratic revolution in the absence of any bourgeoisie, this surely becomes synonymous with a workers and peasants government as they would already hold the levers of state power. Any further 'stage' would imply that the proletariat would have to struggle to overthrow itself! Whether a revolution has stages depends on the actual strength of class forces in the fight against the state, and carrying out a national-democratic revolution implies that there would have be an alliance between classes with nationalist forces, including the leadership of those nationalist forces, however critical that alliance might be. The question of stages then comes to the fore when, after the national democratic stage, yesterday's allies become todays enemies and under expanded democratic conditions a class struggle supposedly takes place between the working class, who have become class conscious, and the bourgeoisie. Workers and peasants can of course be nationalist before they are socialist but a workers and peasants government is not synonymous with a national democratic government.

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Roy's positions were replicated by the CP in many parts of the world, including in South Africa and India. Over the next few years, different permutations of the thesis on the national question were churned out by the Comintern, and by the late twenties, Roy himself had radically changed his position. I consider that the relationship between nationalism and socialism, as part of a revolutionary strategy, is so dependent on context that it is probably not possible to articulate a definitive centralised policy directive.

From the mid 1930s, Roy became active in Indian politics once again. Unlike his Indian South African comrades, however, he was highly critical of, and opposed to, Gandhi's leadership of the Indian national movement. Palme Dutt, the prominent Indian communist in the Communist Party of Britain (which had been given guardianship of the Communist Party of India) held a similar position to Roy, and many communists in India were to repeat his criticisms of Gandhi.

Gandhi in India

In his analysis of Gandhi, Palme Dutt describes his return to India in terms that demonstrate a continuity with Gandhi's political programme in South Africa. When Gandhi arrived in London en route from South Africa in 1914 after the outbreak of World War 1, he was quick to call on Indians to 'think imperially' and 'do their duty'.[31] As with the South African War and the Bambhatta Rebellion, he organised a volunteer ambulance corps, and when he was back in India, urged Gujurati peasants to join the British army, as the best, and speediest, way to win 'swaraj' for India.[32]

He returned to India at a time when there was a reunion between the 'moderate' and 'extremist' wings of the national struggle, as well as plans for an alliance between Congress and the Muslim League, which had been founded in 1905. Annie Besant was also active in Indian politics at this time, and, in language heavily reminiscent of that used by Gandhi and the Indian merchant elite in South Africa, she was an ardent advocate of demonstrating the

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[30] Persits, Revolutionaries of India, p.137.
[31] M. K. Gandhi, quoted in R. Palme Dutt, India Today, (London 1940), p. 299.
[32] Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 300.

'keen loyalty' of Indians to 'His Majesty the King Emperor.'[33] This new spirit of co-operation between different political forces, was, however, put quickly to the test. It was placed under severe strain as a wave of massive unrest began to shake India in 1919. In January that year, 125,000 workers were on strike, and the imperial government responded with ferocity. Drawing on his experience in South Africa, Gandhi organised a passive resistance movement against imperial legislation, and a 'hartal' was called for April 6[th.] The response to this call overwhelmed the organisers, as demonstrations, strikes and riots swept the country. In the repression that followed, the 'Amritsar massacre' took place, where the British army fired indiscriminately into an unarmed Indian crowd. The British resorted to these extreme measures because, in their opinion, the revolts that swept India had the earmark of ' an organised revolt against the British raj.'[34]

Gandhi was appalled at the outcome of events, proclaiming that he had committed 'a blunder of Himalayan dimensions which had enabled ill-disposed persons, not true passive resisters at all, to perpetrate disorders'. As he was later to explain, ' a civil resister never seeks to embarrass the Government'.[35] As with the 1913 strike in South Africa, Gandhi felt extremely uncomfortable when protest that he felt he had initiated under the name of passive resistance, took on a mass character, and seemed to move beyond his control. His intention had been to 'settle down quietly' to work with the government to initiate a programme of reforms, but his first experiment with satyagraha in India failed in achieving this. As in South Africa, he blamed the people involved in the protest for not understanding the 'true' nature of passive resistance.

However, mass civil unrest continued in India, and in 1920, Congress officially adopted a programme of non-violent non-cooperation in an attempt to assume leadership of the movement, which consisted of spontaneous acts of revolt and rebellion across the country. This was a part of a significant development, through which Congress became a truly national political party, with organisational networks down to the village level, and a programme which advocated national freedom, rather than devolved power.

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[33] Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 302.
[34] Sir Valentine Chirol, India, 1926, p.207, quoted in Palme Dutt, India Today, p. 304.
[35] M. K. Gandhi, quoted in Palme Dutt, India Today, pp. 304-305.

Gandhi played a central part in these events. However, Palme Dutt suggests that although Gandhi conceived of passive resistance as part of a religious and philosophical world-view, he was 'extremely vague' about its specificity as a political programme.[36] I consider that it was exactly this 'vagueness', or rather its fundamentally eclectic character, that allowed people representing other political interests to adopt passive resistance as a part of an expedient tactic of the relatively dispossessed against a powerful, and armed, enemy. It enabled passive resistance to become a series of acts of political translation, and in many ways, passive resistance became a site of struggle for contending political interests. In Dutt's view, as with other Indian communists, Gandhi attempted to manipulate passive resistance in such a way as to use the masses to gain leverage with the government (as he had tried to do in South Africa), while at the same time preserving middle and upper class, and caste, interests. For Palme Dutt, this was the central contradiction in the political programme of Congress's non-violent non-co-operation, a contradiction that was also going to emerge in the programme of South African Indian communists in the 1940s.

The Indian left were beginning to develop in the 1920s through trades union organisations, the influence of Marxist-Leninist ideas, and the literature which was sent back from the embryonic Indian communist movement in the Soviet Union. In the years to come, they had to try to maintain a balancing act with the nationalist movement in India. On the one hand, Indian nationalists exhibited a capacity for harnessing an eclectic mass of discontent under the umbrella of passive resistance, whilst on the other, through using the concept of non-violence, they were wedded to an identity of interests, and a close interconnection with the landed classes, and bourgeois interests. E. M. S. Namboodiripad was a South Indian politician who was to become a member of both Congress and the Congress Socialist Party, before becoming a prominent member of the central committee of

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[36] Nerhu himself, amongst others, was to comment on this 'delightful vagueness'. See J. Nehru, An Autobiography; with musings on recent events in India, (Bombay, 1962), p. 76. The general consensus, seems to have been that Gandhi was given a 'blank cheque' because of his ability to 'rouse the masses' something that even Roy was aware of, and paid tribute to. See M.N. Roy, Men I Have Met, (Bombay, 1968), pp. 26-30.

the Communist Party of India.[37] Namboodiribad went on to lead the first democratically elected Communist government in Kerela. Writing about Gandhi, he considered that:

> Gandhiji's idealism had its strong and its weak points. His strong points may be summed up in his ability to rouse the masses and organise them in the struggle against imperialism and feudalism; his weak points may be summed up in his insistence on a scrupulous adherence to what is called non-violence, which, in effect, served to restrain the mass of workers and peasants....This, incidentally, is precisely what the interests of the bourgeoisie demanded. They wanted the mass of people to be roused and organised against imperialism and feudalism; they however, wanted these masses to be severely restrained in their actions and struggles. It was this coincidence of what the bourgeoisie required and the totality of the results of Gandhiji's leadership that is meant when I say that Gandhiji's approach to life and history is a bourgeois-democratic approach.[38]

Jayaprakash Narayan, who was instrumental in forming the CPS, was another of Gandhi's critics at this time. In 1936 he claimed that 'Gandhi...was inadvertently giving his approval to a system of "large-scale, organized theft and violence" [which was] being used as a "cloak for reaction and conservatism."'[39] He also refuted the notion that Gandhi's approach was 'uniquely Indian', observing that many of his views 'were also imported from the West.'[40]

In 1940, Gandhi made his position clear again:

> It has been suggested to me by a Congressman wielding great influence that as soon as I declared civil disobedience I would find a staggering response this time. The whole labour world and the kisans[41] in many parts of India will, he assures me, declare a simultaneous strike. I told him that if that happened, I should be most embarrassed, and all my plans would be upset...I hope I am not expected knowingly to undertake a fight that must end in anarchy and red ruin.[42]

Gandhi had a general antipathy towards, and mistrust of, industrial workers,[43] as well as the tenets of socialist doctrine, which drew its inspiration from the same, if differently

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[37] Socialists in Congress had formed the CPS because they did not trust Gandhi's tactics and were sceptical of his philosophy. See Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism, pp. 218-222.

[38] From E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 'The Mahatma and the Ism', p. xii, in S. Hay (ed.), Sources of Indian Tradition, pp. 354-355.

[39] Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism, p. 221. Narayan had been introduced to Marxism in the 1920s when he was a student in America through the writings of M. N. Roy.

[40] Haithcox, Communism and Nationalism, p. 221.

[41] These were trade unions.

[42] M. K. Gandhi, Harijan, January, 1940

[43] R. Palme Dutt, Modern India, (London, 1927), p. 80; There were also many other times when his class prejudices were made abundantly clear. In an article in Young India in 1927 entitled 'Horrible Practices' on certain temple rituals involving animal sacrifice in Umbilo in South Africa, he observed: 'The origin of these practices is easy enough to trace. There are three classes of Indians in South Africa. The free Indian trader has

interpreted, modernist ideals so roundly condemned in <u>Hind Swaraj</u>. Why then did he enjoy such popularity with South African Indian communists? In order to begin to trace this history, I will now returned to the problematic narrative of nationalist-socialist relations in the South African CP.

South African Comrades at the Comintern

In contrast to the sizeable Indian contingent, there were no South African delegates at the Second Congress of the Comintern. The CPSA had still not been formed, and Comintern membership was reliant on the formation of one official communist organisation in South Africa. However, the Second Congress acted as a spur to several left organisations in South Africa to come together and form a communist party, which meant acceptance of the Comintern's 21 conditions of membership.[44] In late 1920, when this process had just begun, David Ivon Jones left for Moscow with Sam Barlin of the International Socialist League to attend the Third Congress in June 1921. According to Baruch Hirson, Ivon Jones was 'still a learner...profoundly ignorant of Russian Revolutionary literature, knew little of the writings of the older generations of social democrats in Europe, and had only a fragmented knowledge of the works of Marx and Engels.' [45] It seems that this was true of many ISL and CPSA members at the time. They generally appeared cut off from the international communist community, and this may well have contributed to the chaos produced in the party in 1928 by the 'Black Republic' proposal[46], which called for an 'independent native republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic, with full

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nothing to do with these practices. Nor have the large number of Colonial-born Indians who have received in the face of terrible odds a tolerably liberal education. The third class is the indentured Indian, now become free. He is drawn mainly from the poorest class here. Nothing has ever been done by the Government or the employers or by the free Indian community to help these unfortunate men and women out of their ignorance and superstition.' Gandhi, <u>Collected Works</u>, vol. 33, pp. 339-40; Gandhi also often cited the basically hierarchical position of Hinduism: 'All are born to serve God's creation, the Brahmin, with his knowledge, the Kshatriya, with his power of protection, the Vaishya, with his commercial ability, the Shudra, with his bodily labour.' Gandhi, quoted in R. Palme Dutt, <u>Modern India</u>, (London, 1927), p. 80; He also commented on the 'moral lapses' of low-caste Indians. See <u>Indian Opinion</u> 14 January 1905.
[44] See 'The Twenty-one Points-Conditions of Admission to the Communist International', Document 21, <u>South African Communists Speak</u>, pp. 58-62, for the full Twenty-one Points.
[45] B. Hirson, <u>The Delegate</u>, p. 209.
[46] This was a document produced by the Comintern in 1928 which outlined how the Communist Party should approach the national question in South Africa.

equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white'[47]. No copy of Lenin's preliminary thesis was to be found in South Africa, and party members must have felt that they were working, to some extent, in the dark. In the atmosphere at the Comintern, where so much emphasis was being laid on the colonial question and the 'toiling masses' the South African delegates must have seemed a curious couple. The apologetic tone of a leaflet written by Jones for the Comintern on 'Communism in Africa' is, perhaps, an indication of this:

> The South African delegates were introduced to the bare footed, 12 year old delegate from the Novgorod Young Communist the other day. The first thing he asked us was 'Why aren't you black!' Coming from South Africa, we feel quite apologetic about our colour. An African delegation should at least include Negroes. This will be remedied in time; but it would be a mistake to think that in future there should be no white South African delegates. The African revolution will be led by white workers.[48]

The debate on nationalism and socialism was at the heart of the continuing dialogue in the party about their relationship with nationalist organisations, and the party's political programme. Jones's statement cited above reflected his belief in the role of skilled workers in the revolution, and much like Roy and his opinion of Indian nationalists, Jones placed little trust in African nationalist organisations and held that they would soon transform into fully proletarian bodies. Again, like Roy on Indian workers, he thought that 'national consciousness' would not affect black workers.[49] In contrast to this, Sidney Bunting took a more pragmatic approach to the 'bourgeois democratic liberation movements' and was prepared to work with them if this gave the party access to 'potential revolutionary workers'. However, as discussed below, Bunting also fundamentally misunderstood the significance of the nationalist movement in South Africa, believing that it would be a 'short lived phase'. In reality, the debate was part of the wider dialogue in the CPSA on the relationship between black and white workers in South Africa and the failure of a development of class alliances between the two. Moreover, by the time of the 'Black Republic' directive, the experience of CPSA members with the ICU may well have made some party members hesitant about renewing relations with nationalist organisations.

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[47] 'Resolution on 'The South African Question' adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist International following the Sixth Comintern Congress', Document 42, South African Communists Speak pp. 93-94.
[48] D. Ivon Jones 'Communism in Africa' Moscow Organ of the 111 Congress of the Communist International, vol.1, no. 14, 9 June 1921; Document 19, South African Communists Speak, pp. 41-56.
[49] See 'The White Workers' Burden', The International 11 April 1919.

Black Workers and the CPSA

In Chapter Four, I illustrated the complex nature of the relationships between white and black workers in South Africa in the early part of the twentieth century, a relationship that was formed not only through the particular patterns of capitalism that developed there, but also as a result of the interaction of different cultural practices and prejudices. Given their 'classical' Marxist orientation and their alignment towards workers at the point of production, this set the CP a complex range of tasks. The Party now began a painful redefinition of its role in South Africa during which it was dragged into a reconsideration of its relationship with nationalist organisations. This re-orientation seriously divided the party and led to the expulsion of many of its most committed white members. It was only by the end of the 1930s that it began to recover, and in the process, greatly increased its black membership, a trend which accelerated during World War Two.

The CPSA had called on black workers to support the 1922 Miners Strike, in the belief that defeat would signal a setback for the whole working class. In the context of attacks on black people by the strikers,[50] black workers, unsurprisingly, responded primarily to the racist content of the strike. In practice, black workers were only too aware of the hostility of whites and found it hard to identify any community of interest.

However, the realisation that white workers were increasingly being co-opted as the popular constituency of the Nationalist-Labour alliance after 1924, as discussed in Chapter Four, strengthened the hand of those in the CPSA who emphasised the need for more consistent work with black South Africans, especially in the light of their increasing levels of militancy. Party members such as Eddie Roux and S. P. Bunting questioned the continued significance given to work in the white labour movement.

The party made its first concerted attempts to adopt united front tactics, which also reflected a change in direction for the international communist movement. As the prospect

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[50] See J. Krickler, 'The Inner Mechanics of a South African Racial Massacre', The Historical Journal, vol. 42, no. 4, (1999), pp. 1051-1075.

of revolution in the industrial countries seemed to be fading, the issue of the colonies, along with the national question within the Soviet Union, 'became more acute', where the relationship of national liberation movements to socialism became a pressing issue. Sidney and Rebecca Bunting attended the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in 1922 where united front tactics were being discussed, and Sidney Bunting tried to formulate a version of the united front that he felt was appropriate to South Africa. In December 1924, at the third national conference of the CPSA, there was a historic shift to a stress on party work amongst Africans, when it was resolved that:

> The Communist Party must recognise the necessity of supporting every form of native movement which tends to undermine or weaken capitalism, and must fight for race equality of the natives on the economic and political field. The Communist Party must use every instrument which will induce the trade unions to admit native workers. Failing this, it must organise the natives into unions of their own, and apply United Front tactics.[51]

Many party members were not happy with this attempt to re-direct the party towards black workers. W. H. Andrews, for example, 'disagreed with the emphasis and speed with which the new leadership of the Party proposed to tackle the job (of organising black workers)',[52] and resigned from the party that he had helped to form. Others had more overtly racist objections, even before the official change of direction in 1924.[53] Frank Glass also resigned from the party, claiming that it had become an anti-white sect.

The CPSA and African Nationalism

The CPSA had to decide on where to concentrate its work. On its own, the party had little influence on black South Africans. It was generally considered that it could best make an impact by joining a mass organisation. However, to a large extent, it still regarded the ANC with disdain. Party members considered that the Congress was made up of 'petty bourgeois nationalists', who, like the NIC, were constantly seeking help from the very forces that oppressed them. The obvious candidate for communist infiltration and agitation was the ICU, which, with its 'young guns', attracted more radical elements than the more conservative ANC. As a trade union body, it would also complement the CPSA's emphasis

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[51] W. Kalk, 'Report on Native Affairs' presented at the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party, Johannesburg, December 1924, Document 34, <u>South African Communists Speak</u>, p. 80.
[52] Lerumo, <u>Fifty Fighting Years</u>, p. 52.
[53] Drew, <u>Discordant Comrades</u>, p. 65.

on union work. By 1925, the ICU enjoyed a mass following in South Africa. Communists joined the ICU and in the process they recruited the union's Assistant General Secretary, James La Guma,[54] amongst others, into its ranks. La Guma was to become a key figure in the party debate over the 'Black Republic'.

The CPSA's decision to join the ICU in 1925 helped radicalise the union and was also an important step for the party. It signalled the party's attempt to form a united front in South Africa. Although the 'official' relationship between them was short lived, it left an important legacy. Communists brought their organisational skills and enthusiasm into the union. In the next three years, there was a steady increase in African members in the CPSA. It also gave members important experience of work at grass-roots level. In many ways, the ability of the ICU to link questions of national and democratic rights with class and mass action echoed latter day CP tactics, including those adopted by its Indian membership.

Communist members who joined the ICU where, however, critical of the amorphous nature of the ICU and argued for a more centralised body and tighter structures. In a letter to Eddie Roux, who was studying in London at this time, Thibedi complained that there was 'no freedom of speech at all more especially [for those] who are known to be the revolutionary camp'.[55] Relationships with the CP became strained and their members were eventually expelled.[56] However, even after the expulsions, there continued to be some degree of cross-fertilisation between the ICU and the CPSA. In particular, Thibedi continued addressing ICU meetings and tried to organise protest to the expulsions from within the organisations although, as he confided in Roux, Kadalie and Champion were often unaware that he was still doing so.[57] As part of the process whereby the CPSA re-orientated its policies towards black workers, its relationship with the ICU proved invaluable. As a result of the expulsion of communist officials from the ICU, the party had to reassess its relationship with the ANC.

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[54] La Guma was a 'Cape Coloured' who had previously worked in the diamond mines before joining the ICU. See M. Adhikari, (ed.), Jimmy La Guma: a biography by A. La Guma, (Cape Town, 1996).
[55] Letter from Thibedi to Roux, E.R.Roux Papers, ICS, No. 67.
[56] On the ICU see H. Bradford, A Taste of Freedom: the ICU in rural South Africa, (London, 1987); on its origins see C. Kadalie, My Life and the ICU, (London, 1970); B. Hirson, 'The IWA and the ICU'.
[57] Letter from Thibedi to Roux, E. R. Roux Papers, ICS, NO. 67.

By 1927 many members of the CPSA had come a long way from the party's earlier concentration on 'white workers at the point of production'. But a new division was beginning to develop. If the earlier antagonism had been between those who questioned the very idea of work amongst black workers and those who saw it as primary, the latter still laid stress in the main on the need for class unity and belittled the role of nationalism. In particular, Bunting continued to believe that the nationalist stage of African consciousness had been embryonic and was now practically over, and continued to stress inter-racial class solidarity.

But the new wave of Africans who entered the organisation after 1925 were either recruited from, or had developed extensive experience in, the nationalist bodies such as the ICU and the ANC, and this led them to regard the issues of land, liberation and nationalism in a more sympathetic light. There was also an increase in white members who had actually been born in South Africa, such as Eddie Roux and Willie Kalk, who recognised the need to examine the specifics of South African capitalist development, rather than try to apply 'universalist' notions of communist practise. The Cape Town branch in particular was more ready to examine new concepts of struggle. By the late 1920s, the contentious dialogue on the relationship between nationalism and socialism was already embedded in party practise and discourse, and the idea of an African 'nation' in South Africa was already being espoused in African nationalist organisations.[58]

The CPSA and The Native Republic Thesis

At the sixth congress of the Communist International in July 1928, a resolution was passed calling on the CPSA to fight for 'an independent South African Native Republic'.[59] The reaction to this 'diktat' in the historiography of South Africa has been mixed, with

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[58] See See Worker's Herald 15 December 1925; A. D. Kemp and R. Trent Vinson, '"Poking Holes in the Sky": Professor James Thael, American negroes and modernity in 1920s segregationist South Africa', African Studies Review, vol. 43, no. 1, April 2000, pp. 146-155; R. A. Hill and G. A. Pirio, "Africa for the Africans': the Garvey Movement in South Africa', S. Marks and S. Trapido, (eds) The Politics of Race, pp. 209-253.

[59] See 'Resolution on The South African Question', Document 42, South African Communists Speak, pp. 91-97, for details of the statement issued by the Executive Committee of the Communist International on the Black Republic.

writers either seeing the resolution as a solely Comintern-inspired directive that had little application in the South African context, or as a much-needed move towards a reconsideration of nationalism and the 'class struggle' in that country. In a series of articles in Searchlight South Africa, Baruch Hirson, for example, has described the slogan as 'absurd' for conditions in the 1920s,[60] while Jack and Ray Simons consider it to be a 'great advance in the analysis of the relations between national and class forces in the liberation movement.'[61] According to Hirson, the new slogan greatly damaged the party, whilst Jack and Ray Simons consider it to be a positive development. Despite the misgivings of the majority of the CPSA, the Executive Committee of the Communist International instructed the party to implement the resolution as party policy, thereby supposedly signalling a new direction for party work. Within a short space of time after the directive, the CPSA was a shadow of its former self, decimated by internal purges, and unable to rally significant support. According to Hirson, the new policy 'crippled the CPSA'. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the impact of the 'Black Republic' thesis as part of the dialogue that was already taking place within the party on the relationship of national liberation and socialist revolution.

In February 1927, James La Guma had been sent as a delegate to the League Against Imperialism in Brussels where a resolution for the 'right of self determination through the complete overthrow of capitalism and imperial domination' was passed.[62] La Guma then travelled to Moscow, convinced that white workers in South Africa were too imbued with racist ideology to form meaningful alliances with their black counterparts, a belief that was also expressed by Bukharin of the Soviet Communist Party. La Guma also began to regard the agrarian and national struggle as a fundamental part of the revolutionary process in South Africa, a view that was reinforced after discussions with the international delegates at the League Against Imperialism and the Afro-American secretariat in Moscow. The air was thick with the rhetoric of self determination, and this coincided with several strands of thinking in South African where demands were beginning

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[60] B. Hirson 'Bukharin, Bunting and the 'Native Republic' Slogan', p. 52.
[61] Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 411.
[62] Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 389; H. Haywood, Black Bolshevik: autobiography of an Afro-American communist, (Chicago, 1978), p. 236.

to be made by Africans for either a separate state and parliament as part of the British Empire as one response to segregation, or black majority rule. The call for a Black Republic was also part of the discourse of the international Pan-Africanist movement, and these ideas overlapped in this period with the Comintern's renewed focus on nationalist movements, and the 'Negro question',

Before La Guma returned from Moscow, a draft proposal for the Native Republic thesis was forwarded to the CPSA for discussion, but the debate continued long after his return. Although Douglas Wolton, an English member of the CP, La Guma and the Cape Town branch supported the Comintern proposal, the majority of the party, including Bunting, totally rejected it. Bunting considered the motion to be anti-white, claiming again that it pandered to a non-existent 'nationalism' at the expense of class. Bunting, his wife Rebecca, and Eddie Roux, all opponents of the Native Republic, were dispatched to Moscow to discuss the issue at the Comintern.[63] The Simons's comment that it might have been 'a mistake ' to send three white delegates, all opposed to the new line, is perhaps, an understatement.[64]

Bunting at the Comintern

According to Hirson, Bunting 'fought against the policy (of the Native Republic) at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, and dismissed the facile position of the proponents of the new policy with arguments that have stood the test of time'.[65] However, an examination of Bunting's contributions at the Congress seem to indicate that the general content of his speeches was remarkably similar to the views that he had held since the formation of the party, and, rather than standing the test of time, compounded the serious analytical mistakes that had dogged the party since 1921.

Despite a recognition of the hostility of the white workers to black workers, Bunting still laid the main stress of party work on the need to build inter-racial working-class unity. He continued to under-value and misunderstand the force of African nationalist feeling,

[63] Hirson, 'Bukharin, Bunting, and the Native Republic Slogan', p. 61.
[64] Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 406.
[65] Hirson, 'Bukharin, Bunting, and the Native Republic Slogan', p. 53.

also saying that a 'concentration of interest on a nationalist movement seems to involve a lack of interest in the day to day struggle against race oppression itself'.[66] Bunting did not elaborate why this should be the case. He maintained that white workers would fight on purely class lines, given the right approach, despite all the evidence that white workers eagerly supported Hertzog's segregationist policies and were increasingly structurally alienated from their black counterparts. One of his major objections to the thesis was that 'white workers are unquestionably going to be alienated by the present slogan'.[67] As La Guma was to ask, was it

> in accord with Communist principles, to sacrifice or delay the freedom of the large majority in the interests of a small minority of imperialistically imbued white workers?... In 1922 they rose in arms to perpetuate our serfdom; now through the Labour Party, they supported anti-native legislation and the enactment of colour bars in industry.[68]

Bunting's analysis failed to give sufficient weight to the actual differences in class forces within South Africa in the 1920s. Whilst he rightly criticised the Comintern's frequent reference to the 'colonial masses' as an inadequate appraisal, one of the biggest failures within the CPSA itself was its lack of attention to the disparate nature of the class forces that were emerging with the initial stages of capitalist development in South Africa, and how these might form alliances in a popular struggle against the South African state.[69] By positing the only divide as that between workers and capitalists, a very crude reading of Marxist ideas of class, they failed to assess the potential role of the 'ill defined groups of dissidents characteristic of early industrialisation in the South African colonial situation'.[70] By contrast, in both Russia and China, for example, there had been an analysis of class divisions within the peasantry itself in relation to revolutionary forces.

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[66] S. P. Bunting, 'S. P. Bunting at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, 1928' Serachlight South Africa, vol. 1, no. 3, July 1989, p. 78.

[67] Bunting, 'S. P. Bunting at the Sixth Congress', p. 81.

[68] J. La Guma, quoted in Simons and Simons, Class and Colour, p. 409.

[69] Ivon Jones did acknowledge the 'corrupt' nature of white workers, but again this was seen as a 'temporary infection' that would be replaced by a 'real' class consciousness. See 'Communism in South Africa', pp. 45-48.

[70] M. Legassick Class and Nationalism, p.27.

The National Question

The CPSA's early obsession with proletarians, and with a particularly Eurocentric conception of proletarian consciousness as the only true one in opposition to ideologies of race and nationalism, also lay at the heart of the majority of the party's inability to conceptualise the evolution of the nationalist project in South Africa. It is true that in the 1920s, there had been little theoretical attention given to nationalism by the left. Once considered the product of primordial sentiments that bound people together in a common territory through language, culture and common descent, more recent analyses of nationalism have demonstrated that it is much more a product of 'imagined community', forged from the human imagination, above all in dialectical opposition to the construction of the other, although it is reflected and shaped by its engagement with the material world.[71] In South Africa, nationalist feeling amongst the black population grew out of a reaction to the structural racism of the state, increasing white appropriation of African land, and the growth of Afrikaner nationalism. In that race and class largely overlapped, there was a potential articulation between class and nationalist aspirations, although these aspirations were not identical. The changing emphasis in the writings of both Lenin and Marx on the national question stressed not only its potential role as a force for anti-imperialism, but also the need to contextualise it.[72] The consequences of specific nationalist struggles have to be examined, and nationalism needs to be seen as a dynamic and reactive process. In other words, there was not one relationship between nationalist and class movements, rather this relationship would vary according to local conditions and change in the course of struggle itself.

At this stage, there was no creative elaboration of African nationalism in the CPSA, although there was certainly, in some sections, a more sympathetic reaction to it than Bunting's. The 'ultra-left' Douglas Wolton conceded that 'ANC activities reveal a conscious desire of the African people to one day possess power and constitute a very strong national

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[71] The seminal text on this is, of course, B. Anderson's Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, (London 1983).

[72] See K. Marx and F. Engels, Communist Manifesto, pp. 68-73, (New York, 1988); V. I. Lenin, 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination', Collected Works, vol. 22, 143-156; H. B. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism: marxist and labour theories of nationalism to 1917, (New York, 1967),

expression of the people towards independent action.' Of the ICU he remarked that 'the mainspring of its astounding development was its appeal to the nationalist sentiments of the African people.'[73]. It is ironic that Wolton instigated the intercine purges that were to decimate the party in the early 1930s.

To be fair to Bunting, he accepted the Comintern's decision and returned to South Africa to lay the new policy before the party, which was accepted. However, party work carried on much as before. It is highly unlikely a Native Republic or a Worker and Peasants Republic could have been established in the 1920s, whatever tactics the CPSA adopted in 1928. Nevertheless, the question that has to be asked is whether the party was able to grasp theoretically what slogans would reflect current material conditions. Putting the national and agrarian question on the agenda, and seeing how they 'intersected,...(understanding) the major role envisaged for the peasantry and the emphasis placed on rural mobilisation'[74] was not absurd, but necessary.

The CPSA did begin to undertake more work than previously in rural areas, but as Bundy comments, 'not very much'.[75] In the 1929 election, Sidney Bunting stood in Tembuland West and conducted a dogged campaign in the face of continual harassment from the police and managed to secure 289 votes.[76] The Native Republic slogan was used, but in the main his election platform consisted of interim demands for equality as well as expanded social welfare. More importantly, the party formed The League of African Rights in both cities and rural locations. The League organised around the extension of the native franchise, universal free education and freedom of speech. As Legassick remarks, with the collapse of the ICU, and the unwillingness of the ANC to organise mass protest due to a 'rightward swing', the way should have been open to the League.[77] But a shift in Comintern policy now affected the party more profoundly than any slogan of a Native Republic.

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pp. 1-82; W. Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy, (Princeton, 1984), pp. 5-28.

[73] Bunting, Moses Kotane p. 36.

[74] C. Bundy 'Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1920-1960.' S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), The Politics of Race, Class, p. 260.

[75] Bundy 'Land and Liberation', p. 260.

[76] Roux, S. P. Bunting, pp. 131-140.

[77] Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism', pp. 17-18.

By 1930, the Communist International was suggesting that capitalism was entering a new phase of disintegration. In preparation for the 'forthcoming revolution', all alliances with bourgeois democratic movements were rejected: overnight they had all become 'social fascist'. This change of policy was in part a reaction to the disastrous outcome of tactics adopted in China between 1926-27, where an alliance between the nationalist Kuomintang and Communists had resulted in a slaughter of Communist forces.

In South Africa, the CPSA was instructed to disband the League, which was pronounced 'reformist'. The CPSA complied. Worse still, Wolton returned from Moscow with instructions to 'bolshevise' the party which resulted in a series of intercine struggles which once again decimated CPSA ranks. Bunting was amongst those expelled. The expanded programme for party work lacked sufficient cadres to carry it out, and as Legassick remarks, the Native Republic policy 'disappeared in Umsebenzi doctrine'.[78]. Long articles appeared in the party paper concerning ultra left or right deviations. Moses Kotane, future secretary of the party commented that the paper 'was no more sold and read by the masses - in fact it was simply unreadable'.[79] Membership had steadily risen to around 3000 in 1929 but now fell rapidly, until by 1935 there were only around 250, mainly white members left.[80] The CPSA's fortunes were only to revive after this as it attracted Indian workers into its ranks from the mid 1930s, and with a further Comintern swing to United Front tactics in the build up to the Second World War. [81]

The other factor 'crippling' the party was the extent of the repression by the new National government in the wake of the 'Black Peril' elections of 1929, as they attempted to stamp out the militant activity that had characterised the twenties and made the white minority feel threatened. Many Africans felt that there was simply no point in joining the CPSA, as the almost inevitable consequence was government harassment. This factor also

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[78] Umsebenzi was the name of the Party's theoretical paper. Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism', p. 27.
[79] Bunting Moses Kotane, p. 36.
[80] Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism', p. 25.
[81] See below, Chapter Six, Seven and Eight, where I discuss this further.

contributed to the stagnation of the ANC and the collapse of the ICU. In this clamp-down, the Nationalists were aided by the onset of the worldwide depression.

It would therefore seem that the CPSA was crippled by far more than 'implementing a policy', which by Hirson's own admission had little immediate effect on party activities after its ratification in January 1929.[82] However, the slogan did not represent 'a great advance' with regard to the national question as the Simons' suggest either. An analytical resolution of the national question was not forthcoming from the party in this period and the crisis within it was a reflection of the struggle between various political tendencies that had been developing since its inception, a crisis provoked by the Black Republic thesis but not caused by it. The CPSA's initial concentration with white workers at the point of production, one based on their understanding of orthodox Marxist dogma, was one that never fully disappeared. Bunting's continued concern with white workers at the Comintern was a reflection of this. The later move to the African 'masses' was still built around a belief in inter-racial class solidarity, and with one division between worker and capitalist. This ignored the lessons of the 1922 Miners Strike and of white worker support for the segregationist policies of the Pact government.

There was also no theorisation of either class fragmentation or the disparate class tendencies invoked by the early stages of capitalist development in the South African context. The experience of the phenomenon of the ICU illustrates the complexity of the South African situation. But if the ICU lacked any coherent ideology capable of harnessing the mass discontent of the twenties, the CPSA's analysis was also clearly inadequate. However, the Africanisation of the party brought new elements into its ranks that put questions of land and liberation to the fore. La Guma's contact with the Comintern coincided with the CI's renewed turn to questions of national liberation. The Black Republic thesis, if not fully developed, was more in tune with the South African situation than CPSA analysis so far.

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[82] Hirson, 'Bukharin, Bunting and the Native Republic Thesis', p. 63.

In the 1930s, before a fully-fledged relationship with African nationalist organisations took shape, the CPSA was to successfully form alliances with Indian nationalist organisations through the Indians it recruited into its ranks, and joint campaigns with the NIC and SAIC were to foreshadow later relations with the ANC. Indians helped shape the debate between nationalist and socialist organisation, and in many ways, Gandhi, reinterpreted and reinscribed onto South African soil, came to symbolises the mediation between the two. I now turn to an examination of why Indians were drawn to the CPSA, and their very different relationship to Gandhi to that of Indian communists in India in the 1930s and 40s.

Chapter Six

Indian Worker Militancy and the CPSA 1932-46

The Comintern in the 1930s

In Chapters Four and Five I discussed how the question of the relationship between national and socialist movements and workers at the point of production dominated both the policy decisions of the Comintern and the formative years of the Communist Party of South Africa around the question of the slogan of the 'Black Republic'. By the 1930s, significant political shifts had taken place around the world. The president of the United States, Herbert Hoover, had predicted a 'chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage' in the heady days of 1920s prosperity. By the early 1930s, tens of millions were jobless, homeless and hungry in Western Europe and America.

Internationally, the world witnessed the rise of fascism. Not only did fascism begin to spread across, and beyond, the map of Europe; it also attempted to strangle communist movements worldwide. Salazar seized power in Portugal in 1932. In Germany, Nazis outlawed Communists in 1933. In the same year Vidkun Quisling formed a fascist party in Norway. In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia and Franco's fascist militia commenced war against the democratically elected government of Spain. 1936 saw Samoza seize power in Nicaragua and Metaxas set up a dictatorship in Greece. Hitler invaded Austria in 1938. In such an international climate, the Comintern's previous policy of renewed class struggle against all 'social fascists' as they had deemed all social democrats, not only seemed inappropriate but also suicidal. Communist movements were under attack and needed all the allies that they could get. More specifically, the Soviet Union was under attack and needed to form alliances. In July 1935, the seventh, and last, world congress of the Comintern took place in Moscow. Building on policy changes that had led to calls for the international resistance to fascism through the League of Nations, the seventh congress called for the formation of 'broad anti-fascist popular fronts' in the colonies.[1] For the

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[1] C. Bundy 'Left, Right, Left, Right: The CPSA in the 1930s and 1940s' The History of the Communist Party of South Africa, (University of Cape Town Department of Extra Mural Studies 1991), p. 27. It is significant that by this point the terms 'united front' and 'popular front' were being used almost interchangeably and the

CPSA, this shift in direction coincided with a changing political environment in South Africa, changes that were already being reflected in the party's policies by 1934. The struggle against fascism in South Africa, fought out on the streets of Johannesburg, Durban and other towns and cities, attracted many new members to the party, including Jews and Indians who would become prominent in the organisation. For many, it seemed that the CP was the only organisation that was serious about combating fascism. These fights on the city hall steps in Durban and Johannesburg between communists and 'brownshirts' brought, amongst others, George Ponnen, H. A. Naidoo and Joe Slovo into the party. The struggle against fascism in South Africa also became inexorably intertwined with the struggle for democratic rights and citizenship and helped shape the nature of trade union organisation as well.

For the party, the 1920s were characterised by internal struggles around questions of class and nation and a socialist project. These were far from being fully resolved by the early 1930s. The party emerged from its early attempts to form alliances with African nationalist organisations somewhat battered and bruised. The new central committee of the late twenties and early thirties was dominated by the 'ultra left' Douglas and Molly Wolton and Lazar Bach. In 1931 they 'masterminded' a series of expulsions of all its 'right-wing, social democrat and vacillating elements' and the CPSA lost the bulk of its membership. At this time, the party's influence had become almost negligible. According to Eddie Roux, Durban merely had a 'subterranean' Party presence.[2] At its party conference in 1929, the CP purported to have 3000 members. But a series of expulsions seriously weakened the organisation. W. H.Andrews, Solly Sachs, Fanny Klenerman, and Sidney Bunting were all expelled. Many members only learned of their expulsion through reading their names in the columns of Umsebenzi, the party paper. Party meetings, according to Benny Sachs, came to resemble a 'Witches Sabbath'.[3] A large number of CP members who were expelled were trade unionists, accused of using 'social democratic and reformist' methods of struggle'.

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distinction between them was largely lost. Increasingly in this period, it was the politics of the 'popular front' that was practised by some CPs.

[2] Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, p. 269.

[3] Drew, Discordant Comrades p. 124.

By 1933, numbers in the CPSA had dwindled to a mere 150 members; the overwhelming majority was white.[4] However, In the same year, Lazar Bach, who had assumed a leadership role in the party after the Woltons left South Africa, went to Moscow to report on the Party's 'newly cleansed' membership to the Comintern in Moscow. By the time of his arrival, the tide had already turned from the 'ultra leftism' of the previous period, and after being sent into exile, Bach was sentenced to death in the Soviet Union.[5] In South Africa, by 1934, Hertzog's segregation bills and the threat of domestic fascism had already prompted a move towards broader united front policies on the left. Despite a lengthy spell of bitter infighting in the Party during these years, often expressing itself on race lines,[6] the League Against Fascism and War was formed in 1934 in alliance with the Labour Party. Soon afterwards Cissy Gool and James La Guma, members of the CPSA's Cape Town branch, launched the National Liberation League. At this same time, the Transvaal African Congress called for a national convention of Africans in order to build resistance to the proposed segregationist legislation of the United Party. As a result of this, the All Africa Convention was inaugurated in December 1935, and drew together the largest body of African politicians and activists the country had ever seen. For the party, despite the continuing divisive infighting, these events increased the possibility of working in broad front organisations. This tendency was given a boost in 1935, when the Comintern sent its agent, George Hardy, to South Africa. He set about forming broad white anti-fascist organisations with an assorted ragbag of political elements including the Labour Party, Afrikaner farmers, and white trade unionists.[7] But these moves towards broad front activities were taking place alongside rapid industrialisation and militant activity amongst African and Indian workers. In a confluence of circumstances, it was the Party's anti-fascist activities that attracted its first two Indian members, George Ponnen and H. A. Naidoo, men who were already actively involved in radical trade unionism. I will now examine the background to these events.

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[4] Roux, Time Longer Than Rope p. 269.
[5] Johannesburg Sunday Express, 18 July 1937.
[6] See Drew, Discordant Comrades, pp. 167-187.
[7] Bundy, 'Left, Right', p. 28.

Emerging Indian militancy

From the mid 1930s, Indians in Natal were drawn to the CPSA in increasing numbers and became actively involved in trade union politics and broad democratic alliances. This renewal of trade union activity in the wake of increased industrialisation was welcomed by many CPSA members, who were starting to come back to the party after the purges of the early 1930s. It seemed to represent a return to familiar Marxist bread and butter issues around the point of production. This renewed trade unionism coincided with, and was in part facilitated by, circumstances which saw the radicalisation of Indian workers, many of them South Indian Hindus and Christians, who had become actively involved in trade union organisation before joining the CPSA. In the 1930s, Indian workers were becoming more militant because of their experiences in the workplace and through the relative growth in their access to education. As Indian workers were increasingly driven off the land and the move towards urban centres increased, many families settled on the edge of town and some of the offspring of indentured workers found work in factories, often while still very young. There was a ready market for the exploitation of cheap and supposedly docile child labour. Their meagre wages helped make ends meet in their families.

Many, such as George Ponnen spent their early lives fluctuating between school and the factory floor, depending on the family's financial circumstances. Both environments fuelled Ponnen's political consciousness. Born on June 1, 1913, Ponnen's family background was fairly typical example of the Indian working-class of the time in South Africa. From a very early age, he was influenced by his father's tales of corruption and mismanagement at work. According to Ponnen, 'although he [his father] was unable to read or write he was able to narrate glaring stories of exploitation. They played on my mind'[8] Ponnen's father had left the sugar estates where he originally worked, to take up employment with Durban's Department of Tramways. He compensated for his inadequate salary by doing extra gardening work in his spare time with the help of his wife. After an accident at work he was forced to leave his job and acquired some land from a private white landowner. He was a small-scale farmer until his death in 1921. As Ponnen recalls:

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[8] G. Ponnen interview with PR Durban, June 1995.

> We were brought up in a household where there was often talk of politics...my father had taken part in the 1913 Gandhi strike against the £3 tax...my eldest brother who was sixteen also took part in that strike, it had a big impact on me, that and seeing how my mother struggled to provide for us all after my father's death .[9]

After his father died, Ponnen's brother got married and moved nearer to town. His mother could not manage the farm on her own for very much longer and the rest of the family also moved nearer the city where they rented accommodation from an Indian landlord. At this point, Ponnen was sent to school. Two of his brothers found work in a sheet metal factory, and his mother got a hawker's license which enabled her to buy vegetables from a local market and sell them from door-to-door in an African part of the outlying city. In 1920, Ponnen began to attend the St. Thomas Government-aided Indian Primary School. 'Education was not free nor compulsory as it was for the whites. We had to pay fees and buy books. The school building was old and had no playground and other facilities.'[10] Like many other Indians, Ponnen's family struggled to send at least some of their members to school in order to open up possibilities for better prospects and higher paid work. Education played a large part in the consciousness of South African Indians. As the state still made inadequate provision for this, Indians themselves tried to set up and fund educational establishments. These became one of the crucial building blocks of notions of an Indian 'community' which organised around the ethos of 'self-help'.

The Role of Education in the Indian Community

For the first decade after Indians arrived in South Africa, there was no provision for their education. The matter was not even discussed until 1872 when the Coolie Commission recommended compulsory education for Indians, something that was only achieved over a 100 years later.[11]

As teachers, South Indian Christians formed an important part of this early establishment of education for Indians. A teacher training college was also opened in Natal

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[9] Ponnen, interview with PR, Durban June 1995.

[10] G. Ponnen, 'Gangen-George Ponnen Speaks of His Life and Involvement in the Trade Union, Political and National Liberation Movements in His Country, South Africa', unpublished undated mimeo, p. 2.

in 1869, but once trained, the newly qualified teachers often took up domestic work as the teaching profession was so poorly paid.[12] By 1878, with the formation of the Indian Immigrant School Board, the government was vying with missionaries to take the initiative and control Indian education. This body created a two-tier system of education for Indians, in which the children of free or passenger Indians were allowed to attend European schools while those of indentured parents were to go to Board schools. Three of these were set up, but they received poor state support and they soon came to be seen as second rate 'coolie schools'. In part, indentured labourers and their families rejected these schools and expressed a desire to transcend the 'coolie' education being offered to them, but economic considerations also played a significant role. For many families trying to eke out a living, education for their children was a luxury they could not afford.

By the early 1900s, some Indians were beginning to advance economically, and resented the increasing racial discrimination that seemed to stand in their way. They resented an education policy that attempted to peg them at the level of primary education. In the eyes of the state, this would prepare 'good citizens' for particular occupations but render them incapable of competing effectively beyond that point. On the one hand, the growing sophistication of Indians led to greater demands for education. On the other, stereotypical ideas of Indians dominated government educational policy and it was increasingly seen as a means of shaping a compliant and docile workforce. By 1905, attempts were made to remove Indian children from European schools and place them all in the small number of Indian schools provided by the state. But this was soon followed by cuts in Indian education, which looked set to destroy entirely what little educational provision there was.

Sections of the community began to think that the only effective way to combat this in the long-term was to found their own educational institutions as well as provide their own staff. In 1909 the Natal Indian Patriotic Union was formed. It consisted of non-trader colonial- borns, a group that was to become highly influential in the politics of the 1940s

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[11] P. Thakur, 'Education for Upliftment: A History of Sastri College 1927-1981', MA Dissertation, (University of Natal, 1992), p. 1.
[12] Thakur, 'Education for Upliftment', p. 7.

and to whom education became an all-important means to an end.[13] The pages of African Chronicle and Indian Opinion in the first three decades of the twentieth century are testament to the near obsession with education of the Indian community. At a series of mass meetings Indians called for an end to restrictions on Indians attending Natal University and for measures to overturn discrimination against Indians regarding educational opportunities in general. By 1914, the few existing government aided schools were overflowing and there were increased calls for the provision of higher education. Many Muslims set up madressas for their children, which were to have important consequences for subsequent forms of identity formation, Fatima Meer recalls:

> Madressa is a Muslim idea, it's a Muslim educational institution…it taught you the Indian languages…we learnt Arabic, we learned to read the Koran, then we learned Urdu, and then at a later stage we would be introduced to Gujurati, although Gujurati was the language of my parents..Arabic and Urdu took precedence..because madressas are basically Islamic institutions, so I would say that in my first years developing an identity outside of my family was an identity I developed in the madressa.[14]

By the 1920s, a small number of technical and higher-grade schools for Indians began to appear, the most significant of which by far was Sastri College, which was named after the first Indian Agent-General to South Africa. At Sastri College, they combined teacher training and secondary education and a number of future community leaders and radicals obtained their education here. One of these was I. C. Meer, who has, however, suggested that there already existed a strong and growing impetus on the part of the Indian people to educate themselves in this period.[15] He maintains that 'whilst the college was named after India's first agent in South Africa, who played a leading role in its founding, the credit for the building of this institution must go the community as a whole'.[16] Meer considered that by the late 1920s, the Indian community was already strongly attached to the ethic of self-help. In illustration of this, he pointed out that 43 community built schools had already been established before Sastri arrived in South Africa. Most of the funding for these came from merchants and traders. According to Meer, Sastri College 'attracted children from all economic, social and religious backgrounds'.[17] Once there, they were

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[13] Swan, Gandhi, p.203.
[14] F. Meer, interview with JF, Durban 1985.
[15] Thakur, 'Education for Upliftment', p. 30.
[16] I. C. Meer, quoted in Thakur, 'Education for Upliftment', p. 31.
[17] Thakur, 'Education for Upliftment', p. 28.

encouraged to think of themselves as South African and appreciate the benefits of a western education. The four pillars of the college were dedicated to Culture, Civilisation, Truth and Beauty, suggesting ideas of assimilation and westernisation, and inculcating notions of democracy and citizenship that were to feed into the radical politics of the next three decades, not least because of the role of white liberals in Indian education.

The two first principals of Sastri College, W.M. Buss and B. Anderson, were both white liberals. White teaching staff were gradually replaced by Indian teachers especially brought over from India, while the training of local Indians eventually allowed them to take over. The syllabus centred mainly on teacher training or foundation courses for university.[18] The next step, the struggle for a university education, proved to be a protracted affair. In 1933, two Indians applied for B.A. courses at Durban University College. The Registrar explained to Buss, then head of Sastri College that it would not possible to admit them. However, the Registrar was put under renewed pressure in 1934 when he received a visit from the then Agent General to India, Kunwar Sir Maharaj Singh, who requested that a few select places be opened to non-Europeans as was the case by this time at Cape Town and Witwatersrand Universities.[19] In the impasse that followed, Durban based liberals proved to be influential in helping to provide non-European access to higher education, in the first instance through informal means.

Mabel Palmer, Maurice Webb and Edgar Brookes were part of a group of people who recommended that evening classes at Natal University be open to Indians, but given the unfeasibility of this, as a compromise, they proposed that classes be held separately in Sastri College so as to not upset white students and or 'offend' the parents of female pupils. Palmer, a Fabian socialist from Britain, had had a lifelong interest in the provision of adult education. She herself had entered Glasgow university in 1893, the year after it was opened to women. Here, like Durban's Indians, women had studied in separate classes. Palmer helped launch the first Fabian Summer School for socialists in Britain in 1907 and became

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[18] Thakur, 'Education for Upliftment', p. 31.
[19] S. Vietzen. 'Mabel Palmer and Higher Education in Natal 1936-42' Journal of Natal and Zulu History vol. VI, 1983, p. 99.

involved in the Worker's Educational Association.[20] It was through education that Palmer became a socialist.[21] It was in her role as tutor and later organiser of the Workers Educational Association tutorial classes at the Technical Institute in Durban that Palmer came to the city and settled there. She tried to apply her Fabian principles to South Africa's central question of race and for her, education was a driving force for change, opening the way for opportunity and equality. In the early 1930s she began to provide informal tutorial sessions for non-European students in her own home.

Segregated education, however, remained a contentious issue amongst Indians.[22] As sections of the Indian community, including Sayed Sir Razia Ali, the new Agent General, debated whether to boycott separate classes, Palmer and Maurice Webb, a liberal with Quaker sympathies who was active on the Joint Councils and had carried out social work in African and Indian communities, helped sway influential Indian opinion to accept the 'jam today' as better than nothing in the context of South African society.[23] Palmer used the analogy of women in Scotland who had accepted segregated university classes. The non-European evening classes proved to be a great success, with nineteen students attending five courses in 1936. By 1936 there were 80 students and nineteen courses.[24]

Mabel Palmer was a vociferous champion of Indian South African rights. As far as providing education went, her perspective was straightforward:

> Since they came here at the express (and sometimes pressing) invitation of our fore-fathers
> and not of their own initiative...(and) further by the Cape Town Agreement,[25] they bound
> themselves to adopt a western standard of living and South Africa bound itself to provide
> the necessary means. Surely the Natal University College ought to be ready to play the very
> important role of providing for them under its own supervision and control.[26]

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[20] Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer', p.106.
[21] See 'Socialism in Daily Life': an essay read before the Fabian Society of Glasgow University by Mabel Atkinson, (Mabel Palmer), 14 February, 1899, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Mabel Palmer Papers, KCM 17352.
[22] See Indian Opinion, 31 January 1936; see also 'How non-European classes began at Natal University', by Mabel Palmer, Daily News 15 March 1957, for Palmer's reasons for accepting segregated classes.
[23] Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer, p. 105.
[24] Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer, p. 110.
[25] See Chapters Seven and Eight below.
[26] Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer', p. 111.

To her it was 'only fair' that Indians should have access to higher education, and as a white liberal she played her part in making education a force for radicalising sections of the Indian population rather than reproducing a docile workforce. I. C. Meer considered that pupils at Sastri were aware of wider social and political issues and that the college helped develop a culture that was to become opposed to all social barriers.[27] Many Sastri pupils of the 1930s and 40s joined and played important roles in political organisations including the Liberal Study Group, which drew many ex-pupils from the college. This body was formed in the late 1930s as a kind of left-wing think-tank, consisting mainly of progressive whites and Indians, although it also boasted African and Coloured members. The organisation became very active in the mid 1940s in the Anti-Segregation Council. According to A. K. M. Docrat, the LSG had an important co-ordinating role in the Indian community. It helped arrange meeting, book halls, and sort out finance as well as collating libraries for community organisations. The LSG also had connections with the India League.[28] The Indian influence in the LSG in Durban was demonstrated by the fact that in 1941, the new officials of the organisation were all Indians: I. C.Meer was chair, S. N.Moodley was deputy chair, A. K. M. Docrat was secretary, J. P. Soni was assistant secretary, and E. I. Moola was the treasurer.[29]

Sastri College also provided a nucleus of informed leaders who gave direction to trade union struggles and political groupings. Another of these organisations was the Non European United Front formed in 1938 by young members of the LSG.[30] Both bodies were closely associated with the CPSA. The college also produced many of the radical educated Indians who helped take over the Natal Indian Congress in 1945. Calls for a full franchise and free and compulsory education for all were prominent in their political platform. For South African Indians, education was closely aligned to the overall upliftment of the community; it helped radicalise sections of the Indian population and was seen as a way of alleviating poverty.

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[27] Thakur, 'Education for Upliftment', p. 32.
[28] A. K. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban August 1995.
[29] Indian Opinion, 25 January 1941.
[30] R. D. Naidoo Interview with JF, Durban August, 1985.

Expansion in trade, commerce and industry created better job opportunities, but also required improved educational qualifications. Increased access to education acted on the Indian community in multiple ways. It increased patron-client relations between indentured workers and traders and developed community bonds, although at times these were ambivalent. It fed aspirations for better jobs and professional status. And, of political significance, the burgeoning 'Indianness' that was promoted through the ethic of self-help, was grounded in a South African specificity and framed within a liberal notion of rights and citizenship, partly as a result of the radical teachers and the liberal traditions that were prominent in establishing Indian education.

George Ponnen himself was aware that education held the key for improved job prospects but fluctuating family circumstances meant that he was taken in and out of school as he grew up. At the age of nine he had to leave St. Thomas's Primary School as his mother was finding it hard to make ends meet:

> I went to the city looking for work. I was about 10 years old and looked very small and this made it more difficult finding a job. Eventually, after days of searching, I found a job at the Standard Cigar Company in Alice Street, Durban for a wage of five shillings a month. My job was to strip tobacco and fill in moulds for cigars and cheroots. Working hours were nine hours a day and six days a week. If we were asked to work extra time there was no overtime pay. [31]

This was the first of a series of factory jobs that Ponnen was forced to take up. Interspersed with his education, the factory floor proved to be another vital element in the radicalisation of his politics. When working at Wrights Knitting Mills in Durban, he had his first experience of working with white women and African men. When he tried to organise workers in order to reduce the disparities between the wages of the white women and black workers, he was sacked along with two other Indians. At his next job in a clothing manufacturers, George Ponnen met the man who was to become his lifelong comrade and fellow party member, H. A. Naidoo. Like Ponnen, Naidoo had had to give up his schooling because of his family circumstances. The two became inseparable and together they attended evening classes in the Indian Technical Institute in the Hindu Tamil Institute Building. They also attended Sastri College, but their education was soon to be interrupted

again, this time because of their involvement in politics and trade union work. At this point in their lives, they were also attending lectures and public debates with other Indian students. In a debate which took place in 1933 in the Gandhi library in Durban, Ponnen and Naidoo won the argument that India was fit for self-government.[32] Like other Indian students, the politics of the Indian independence movement, and the now internationally prominent Indian leader, Gandhi, exercised a powerful hold on their imaginations. Coupled with this, both were increasingly drawn into the fight against fascism in South Africa. In 1934, Hitler's Grey Shirts were organising in South Africa.

Both Ponnen and Naidoo started attending meetings organised by the Anti-Fascist League of South Africa, a coalition of left groups that included CPSA members.

> The meetings were terrific and often ended by making the Grey Shirts run and their swastikas being burnt on the City hall steps....HA and I became very interested in the movement against fascism. We bought various literature that were sold by the Anti Fascist League at these meetings. At one of the meetings held at Durban City hall steps, we bought a paper called 'Umzebenzi' from an African person whose name was Ramoutla. We asked him what the paper was about, Ramoutla told us that it was an organ of the Communist party of South Africa.[33]

Ponnen and Naidoo went on to meet Eddie Roux for discussions and joined the CPSA shortly afterward. Very soon they were in the thick of organisational activities:

> The party had become very small after the shooting of Johannes Nkosi[34] in 1930, during the Anti Pass demonstrations at Cartwright Flats,[35] Durban. Many were imprisoned, deported and banished. The party had to be built up. HA and I got so much involved in work that we had to forego the evening classes at the Technical Institute.[36]

Both Ponnen and Naidoo threw themselves into trade union activity. But it is clear that both of them were radicalised through a set of processes far wider than that experienced on the

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[31] Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 13.

[32] Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 5.

[33] Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 5.

[34] Johannes Nkosi was one of the few Zulu-speaking members of the early CPSA. A former farm labourer, he became a communist through joining the CP night school in 1926. He was shot and killed by the police. See: 'Comrade Johannes Nkosie, First African Revolutionary Martyr' by A. Nzula, editorial in Umsebenzi, January 9, 1931 Document 50, South African Communists Speak; Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, pp. 247-249.

[35] According to Roux, this was part of the beginnings of attempts by the Party to organise mass based non-violent protest, which he calls 'passive resistance'. See Roux, 'Time Longer Than Rope', pp. 243-244. Legassick remarks that the failure of these demonstrations, and the tragedy of Nkosi's death, illustrate the inadequacies of 'Chartist-style non-violent demonstrations'. See Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism', p. 22.

[36] Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 6.

factory floor. Debates and experiences in their intermittent education had introduced them to ideas of equal rights, justice and citizenship, which resonated with the desire to right the wrongs of their South African existence. The Indian struggle for independence gave an added salience to the struggle for democracy as did the fight against fascism. And their experiences on the shop floor, where both men were organising before they joined the CPSA, gave a practical edge to their political identity. The Communist Party provided a forum where these various strands of political consciousness could be brought together and woven into what seemed like a coherent whole. If personal identity can be fluid and ambiguous, those of organisations can be even more so, and because of the series of internal and external factors described in this chapter, in the 1930s, the CPSA provided a focus for political organisation around a number of issues concerning trade union activity and democratic rights that had become intertwined. In the 1930s and 40s, a considerable amount of trade union activity, especially in Durban, took place under the leadership of Indian Communist members. I will now turn to the history of trade union politics within the Indian community in order to demonstrate the continuities of Indian radicalism, often espoused in nationalist terms, that fed into the agenda of the CPSA.

Indians and Trade Union Politics

After the 1913 strike and its repercussions, certain concerns became more pronounced within the Indian community. Between 1914 and 1920, the pages of Indian Opinion show that the issues of trading licences and property rights were still a central part of traders' anxieties. The status and conditions of work of indentured workers was also given extensive coverage. Gandhi's every move in India was reported, as were the twists and turns of the Indian independence movement. Increasing coverage was also given to the position of Indians in other parts of the Empire. Much ink was spilled over segregation as its effects began to bite, and access to transport and public buildings were segregated. Many of these anxieties took the form of trying to define 'who an Indian was' in relation to other members of South African society. Indian Opinion indignantly reported an example of this when a taxi driver refused to pick up an Indian on the grounds that he was a 'native'. The article triumphantly concluded that when the matter came to court, the judge ruled that 'native' only referred to the 'indigenous' population of South Africa, and that the taxi

driver was wrong to refuse to pick up the Indian. <u>Indian Opinion</u> went on to comment that the Indian involved 'lives and conducts himself in a manner that would do credit to any European'.[37]

In the light of several other similar cases earlier in the same year, <u>Indian Opinion</u> had cited an article from the London <u>Standard</u> to support its case for the particular position of Indians in South Africa, a position that differentiated them from 'natives'. In an editorial entitled A Test of Empire, the <u>Standard</u> stated the 'Afrikaner needed to treat Indians with more generosity'. It continued:

> Possibly they might do so if the majority understood a little more clearly the distinction between the Indian settlers and the natives with whom they are more familiar. To the Colonist every coloured person is apt to be a "nigger", a member of a barbarous race, and an inferior order of human species...but the Indian immigrant is also a different category from the semi-savages.[38]

Not only were Indians trying to define themselves within the wider social landscape, but also in relation to each other, as changes were taking place within the community as well. As more Indians found jobs in industry and manufacture, in particular the sons and daughters of indentured labourers, the paper paid increasing attention to topics concerning workers and trade unions.

The colour bar was a particularly contentious issue. Initially, this was reflected by the stories of the racism of white workers and their exclusionary practices, even if at times this was framed within a hierarchical racial discourse. Commenting on a story taken from the Pretoria News, <u>Indian Opinion</u> declared: 'To the socialists of South Africa, the brotherhood of man means the brotherhood of the white man...we have the Bakers Union positively demanding that no black labour shall be employed in making bread...(because it is)...able to work more cheaply.' Taking up the question of unfair Indian competition, the paper remarked: 'All such persons would, as a matter of fact, repudiate with scorn the suggestion that an Indian was equal to a European...we do not begrudge the European worker his superiority in his work'; however, it concluded, people were needed to 'fill

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[37] <u>Indian Opinion</u> 1 July 1914.
[38] Quoted in <u>Indian Opinion</u> 10 January 1914.

lower positions'.[39] It should be borne in mind that Indian Opinion was talking about the offspring of indentured workers here, reflecting their caste and class prejudice, as well their ideas of the social negotiations needed to protect their position in wider South African society. This is borne out by other reports in the paper in this period, in which several Indians took action against whites who had called them 'coolies'. This was not only because of its wider derogatory connotations, but specifically because, amongst Indians, it was a term used for someone from the 'labouring classes'.[40]

Nevertheless, Indian Opinion frequently addressed the question of the colour bar, especially in the mining industry: Attacking the Labour Party on their position on labour practices in the industry, in its editorial Indian Opinion declared:

> The rights that the white workmen demand for themselves they have no intention of sharing with the native. The brotherhood of man, of which the socialists talk so glibly under the Red Flag, does not embrace the half-caste or the Bantu...But the native is also learning the stupidity of attempting to stand up unarmed against magazine rifles and machine guns. His weapon will not be a syndacalist strike, but a passive resistance...he will call attention to his grievances in a manner as amazingly effective as it is annoying.[41]

Despite the many references to the formation of unions in this period, in parts of the Indian community, socialism came to be associated with the white chauvinism of the labour movement, and passive resistance was presented as a morally superior form of dissent, something that was to be reiterated through the decades. However, in this period, some aspects of this gradually began to change, partly as a result of the International Socialist League, which began to organise Indian workers in Natal as early as 1915. In October 1917, Indian Opinion reproduced a report on a conference called by the Social Democratic Party in Durban, expressing pleasant surprise that Indians were welcome in their midst. 'Scores' of Indians attended the meeting and Indian Opinion found 'Europeans and Indians together on equal terms to discuss what is known as the "class struggle"...The object of the Socialist party is the complete overthrow of the present capitalist society and the establishment of a Co-operative Commonwealth' it concluded.[42] B. L. Sigamoney was the

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[39] Indian Opinion 15 April 1914.
[40] Indian Opinion 16 May 1919.
[41] Indian Opinion 15 April 1914.
[42] Indian Opinion 5 October 1917.

vice-chairman at the meeting and members of the 'Indian Workers Union' were also present.

Sigamoney, an Indian teacher who was born in Durban, became a seminal figure in the organisation of Indian workers in this period.[43] An important public and sporting figure within the community, in his youth he was a committed socialist and a leading member of the ISL. He helped organise mass public meetings of Indian workers as well as evening classes, where the works of Marx and Daniel DeLeon were studied. David Ivon Jones and W. H. Andrews came to Durban to address these meetings.[44] Indian workers were also organising independently of the ISL around this time. An article in the Indian Opinion describes how the Indian Typographical Union had three hundred members by 1917, and shop assistants, hotel employees and Indian dockworkers had also formed unions.[45] However, the ISL helped draw these organisations together.

From 1917, agitation amongst Indian workers intensified. Although the ISL advocated multi-racial unions in South Africa, because of the high concentration of Indian workers in Durban, and the prejudices and fears that mitigated against non-racial union association in this period, they opted to organise specifically within the Indian community, although they continued to stress inter-racial political action. The Indian Workers Industrial Union was formed in March 1917, and pamphlets were produced in Telegu and Tamil. By February 1920, the IWIU included Durban Tobacco Workers, Durban Hotel Employees, Furniture Workers, Printers, Dockworkers, Master Bakers, Vanmen and Indian Shop Assistants, covering all the main areas of work that Indians were employed in.[46] At this time, the NIC was more or less 'defunct'[47], leaving the field clear for the ISL. The ISL paper, The International, expressed optimism that Indian workers had gained a clear understanding of class issues.

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[43] E. Mantzaris. 'The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike of 1920', Journal of Natal and Zulu Studies, vol. VI, pp. 116. Sigamoney later became a minister of the Anglican Church and tried to combine Christianity and socialism.
[44] International, 2 June 1918.
[45] Indian Opinion 21 November 1919.
[46] Indian Opinion 20 February 1920.

Meetings were held at the junction of Grey Street and Victoria Street where an Indian workers' choir would sing a repertoire of left songs such as the Red Flag and The International under Sigamoney's guidance.[48] Importantly, Sigamoney was also generally active within the Indian community in a number of other areas. He attended meetings outside the orbit of purely trade union activity. One example among many was his presence at a meeting in May 1919, which was called to demonstrate sympathy with their 'countrymen in the homeland' who were involved in the Independence movement. Sigamoney was involved in many issues concerning Indian independence.[49]

The International also ran articles about the political situation in India, which, it considered, was building into a 'great mass movement, both industrial and political'. India, the paper suggested, was developing a 'sense of unity' under Gandhi, and reported that the INC stressed the importance of trade union organisation. 'With widespread labour unrest' it concluded, 'India threatens to become another Ireland' [50] 'Bennie', as Sigamoney was popularly known, and was, according to Indian Opinion 'easily distinguished as a well-known activist in the interest of Indian workers', blazed a trail for other Indian activists. He acted as a conduit between the politics of the Indian community and a socialist organisation, and facilitated the spread of socialist ideas amongst Indians by being a part of the intricate web of relations in South African Indian politics at that time.

The 1920 Tobacco Workers Strike

George Ponnen had got first job in the tobacco industry at the age of ten. It was known for its exploitation of child labour and the poorest working conditions. The industry was also to witness a significant Indian strike in this period. The tobacco business was controlled by a small monopoly of businessmen in Durban who oversaw production, distribution and manufacture. Prominent amongst these businessmen was a Tamil Indian named R. B. Chetty, who had come to South Africa from Mauritius and was the head of Durban's Cigar Manufacturing and Trading Company. He had been one of Gandhi's

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[47] Indian Opinion 25 January 1918.
[48] Mantzaris, 'Tobacco Workers', p. 117.
[49] Indian Opinion 3 May 1919.
[50] Quoted in Indian Opinion, 3 December 1920.

wealthiest supporters and also represented Indian South Africans at the conference of Indian National Congress in Madras in 1908. For many years he was the vice-president of the Natal Indian Congress and, in particular, he championed education for Indian girls in South Africa.[51] Chetty employed around 120 Indians in his factory. Like other tobacco manufacturers, a large proportion of ex-indentured workers and 'free' Indian labourers were employed in the industry as they could be paid relatively low wages. Chetty's factory, where they processed tobacco came form his own plantations, was no exception.

Conditions in the workplace were very poor in terms of long hours, poor equipment and low pay. There were only two toilets for 120 men and none for the part-time women workers employed. In October 1920, the workers went on strike for improved pay, equipment and conditions. The ISL had organised sections of Indian tobacco workers before. Although many Indian workers supported the strike at Chetty's factory, a large number felt obliged to stay with Chetty as they had been employed by him for many years and feared that finding work elsewhere would prove to be difficult. Within the factory, fifteen men were elected to a strike committee, and they immediately set out to canvass Indian neighbourhoods for financial and moral support. The lack of support from white workers and the wider trade union body meant that Indian workers had continually to draw on the resources of their own communities. Money was raised and some sections of Indian workers, for example railway workers, also came out in support.

However, factory owners combined against the workers whom they employed, imposing harsh conditions and joining forces with the racist South African League to stamp out workers' militancy. The League, an Afrikaner nationalist organisation, was formed in December 1919 and one of its central aims was to protect white South Africa from the 'Asiatics' who were, allegedly, 'affecting the very life and existence of our white civilisation'. In a circular issued after their first meeting, the League declared:

> Your ancestors, the Voortrekkers, have made their name great in the history of the world as pioneers of white civilisation in this country, they fought their way through millions of black savages, and made this country a safe home for every man to live in. By supporting the Asiatic you are working contrary to the ideal of the Voortrekkers. The Asiatic is endangering the position of the white man every day more and more. Just look at your

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[51] Mantzaris, 'Tobacco Workers' p. 119.

beautiful village, the centre, practically the heart of it, is occupied by the miserable looking coolie. It gives the appearance more of an Indian Bazaar, than a dwelling place of a white man. Is that the ideal your forefathers fought for?[52]

The South African League expressed the threatened position felt by many whites in this period, where increasing numbers of Afrikaners, Indians and Africans were moving into the towns and vying for space and jobs. Poor Afrikaners, in particular, found themselves in direct competition with Africans and Indians. The question of whiteness, and the preservation of it, was intimately linked to membership of 'civilised society' which implied access to jobs, housing and services. As we have seen, the question of 'work' was a central aspect of ideas of 'whiteness'.

In general, most white trade unionists ignored the strike. Although Bill Andrews and David Ivon Jones came to Durban in support as representatives of the ISL, their political rhetoric lay at odds with the very practical manoeuvrings of the strike committee. Andrews called on workers to join the ISL in order to form a Worker's Republic; Jones called for the formation of soviets in all factories.[53] Meanwhile the Strike Committee continued to negotiate with Chetty for economic concessions, improved conditions and a closed shop. Perhaps Indian workers had not grasped 'class politics' as expressed by the ISL as effectively as the organisation wished. Sigamoney and Ramsamy of the ISL did not succeed in widening the political horizons of the strike, partly because the workers remained primarily concerned with ameliorating their material hardships. The cost of living had risen sharply in Durban after the war and rents, in particular, were proving hard to meet.[54] In part, both Sigamoney and Albert Christopher, another notable Indian political leader of the time, recognised this. Sigamoney had previously pointed out that the organisation of Indian workers was necessary in order to promote Indian employment, that trade union activity was in fact a response to Indian exclusion rather than anti-capitalist.[55]

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[52] Quoted in Indian Opinion, 11 October 1920; see also Natal Mercury, 11 October 1920; Natal Witness, 11 October 1920.
[53] Mantzaris, 'Tobacco Workers', p. 122.
[54] Mantzaris, 'Tobacco Workers', p. 122.
[55] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 48.

Echoing this, Albert Christopher thought that the formation of Indian unions was necessary in order to enable Indians to rise within the industrial world.[56]

In many ways, the Tobacco Workers Strike set precedents for South African Indian labour organisation. During the strike, the primary role of the trade unionism was a compromise between labour and capital. It was not essentially anti-capitalist, but sought to provide protection against the worst excesses of capital, and fight measures that excluded Indians from certain parts of the job market. Its inherent programme was therefore one of reform rather than revolution. Within this context, Indian workers were able to draw on the support of the community, including elements of its bourgeois leadership. But Indian workers were also held back from more radical action because of their clientist position within this environment. Their relationship with R. B. Chetty, on the one hand an educational philanthropist, on the other an exploitative factory owner, was a classic example of this. I will go on to argue that it was the organisational capacities of Indian Communist Party members, their ability to draw on community-based support, and their pursuit of material reforms which made them influential in the trade union movement in Durban in this period, rather than their organising on an anti-capitalist agenda as part of a CPSA platform.

The Tobacco Workers strike was a part of the wider tendency for Indian workers to organise in unions in this period, and the experience of Ponnen and Naidoo demonstrate that there was a continued culture of resistance by Indians in the workplace. Although both of them had been involved in trade union activity before, their first engagement in a full strike took place in November 1935, after they had joined the CPSA. This was at the Durban Clothing Co. where an Indian worker was caught stealing trouser material, which he had hidden under his clothes after a visit to the toilet. At this point, the employer punched the worker and told him not to return to the factory.[57] On coming to work the next day, non-white workers discovered that the factory owner had drilled holes in their toilet doors, so that they could be spied on whenever one of them went for a break.

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[56] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 48.
[57] Ponnen Interview with PR, Durban June 1995.

Every time the non-white male workers went to the toilet, the employer would follow them and peep through the holes, by lunchtime the whole procedure became most humiliating and there was resentment and protest by all the workers including the white women.[58]

That evening Ponnen and Naidoo organised a meeting of all the non-European workers in the factory who then voted to go on strike. After further advice from the radical trade union organiser, A.T. Wanless, a CPSA executive meeting decided to go ahead with strike action until the holes in the toilet doors were blocked up. All the workers, including the white women, were unanimous in their support for strike action. However, when Ponnen and Naidoo got in touch with the Industrial Council, it ruled that the strike was illegal. Although the council put pressure on the factory manager to block up the holes, Naidoo and Ponnen were victimised as the organisers and were summonsed to appear in court.[59] A Defence Council was set up to pay their costs, as they did not receive official union support.

Although Ponnen and H. A. Naidoo were Indian members of the CPSA, there was no attempt to widen the strike's political platform. There was one important exception to this, however, which reflected the wider political trends affecting the party discussed earlier. By December 1935, Nazi Grey Shirts were organising in South Africa, and the League Against Fascism and War distributed leaflets to factory workers calling on them to elect delegates to attend a national conference against fascism in Johannesburg.[60] At the Durban Clothing Factory, Ponnen and Naidoo were elected as delegates. The conference clearly made a big impression on them, especially its message that 'Workers must be strongly organised into trade unions to keep fascism at bay'. According to Ponnen they 'came back with a lot of literature pamphlets and leaflets against fascism and on trade union organisation'.[61]

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[58] Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 8; P. Podbury, White Girl, p. 91.
[59] Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 9.
[60] Ponnen, interview with PR, Durban July, 1995
[61] Ponen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 10.

In this period anti fascism was the central aspect of the party's political agenda and trade union organisation became an integral part of an agenda of a 'bill of rights'. The anti-fascist struggle was increasingly tied to political demands for rights and citizenship in South Africa, including rights in the workplace, and this was to become more pronounced in the war years.

Naidoo and Ponnen both lost their jobs at the Durban Clothing Factory. Both of them found it difficult to secure another job and suspected that they had been blacklisted. Ponnen eventually found work in the Dunlop Rubber Company, the site of another famous strike by Indian workers in 1942. Before discussing that particular strike, it is necessary to discuss events at the Falkirk Iron factory in 1937.

The 1937 Falkirk Strike

The Falkirk Iron Works strike of 1937 where Indian workers and CPSA activists, H. A. Naidoo and Ponnen among them, were involved in a dispute with management for over three months, demonstrates some of the continuities of the trends in trade union organisation discussed above. Initially, all the workers at the factory, white, Indian and African, had gone on strike over wages. However, white workers came to a separate agreement with management and the majority of black unskilled workers understandably felt aggrieved as they were sidelined and did not receive a pay rise. According to George Ponnen, a group of workers from the factory came to see him at this point and asked for help with forming their own union as they felt that their interests were not being represented by the AEU.[62] Management refused to recognise it. The workers reiterated that they had only formed a separate union because of continued wage discrimination and victimisation over a range of issues, including access to toilets. The workers went on strike but returned to work fairly quickly when management agreed to meet with them to discuss their demands. However, little was achieved and the company decided to a adopt a 'hard-line' approach as a way of dealing with the issue quickly. Shortly after 11 May, Naidoo was dismissed and 26 other workers, including the union chair P. M. Harry, were put on short time. In response the workers decided to work to rule. The management asked them all to

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[62] Ponnen interview with PR, Durban July 1995.

leave the factory and the next day implemented a lockout and closed the workplace. When workers failed to show up the following day, the company declared that this constituted a strike and dismissed all of them.[63] At this point, according to George Ponnen, the strike organisers approached the Natal Indian Congress for support. 'We said, look, you are supposed to represent the Indian workers...we were able to convince them it was their duty to support the workers'.[64] As already described, and for good material considerations, there were precedents for involving the community in strikes affecting Indian workers, especially as this was that this was one way of raising the financial support needed to keep it going.

Given the failure of white workers and the official union movement to support the strike, calling on community resources seemed to be the most obvious short-term solution. Involving the NIC directly, however, was to go one step further and had certain important political consequences. One was that the strike now became characterised as 'Indian'. The NIC was not content to sit on the sidelines and just arrange financial support, and A. I. Kajee the 'moderate' NIC leader,[65] became heavily involved in the negotiations. If the NIC was going to help financially and help organise the community as a whole, he was determined it should receive the political kudos. Kajee's first act was to ask the Indian Agent General to South Africa to participate.[66] NIC rhetoric talked of defending 'Indian honour' and demanded the amelioration of the conditions of the families of the workers involved in the dispute. The Indian press began referring to the strike as an 'Indian dispute', further marginalising the one hundred African workers who were involved.

The NIC now exacerbated this division by making the dispute specifically Indian in character, and by getting the Agent General to act specifically on behalf of Indian workers. On the 28 May the Secretary to the Agent General held talks with management on behalf of

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[63] V. Padyachee, S. Vawda and P. Tichmann Indian Workers and Trade Unions in Durban, 1930-50, Report no. 20, Durban, University of Durban-Westville, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1985, p. 95.

[64] Ponnen, Interview with Iain Edwards, Durban, 1985, quoted in G. Vahed, 'Indian Politics', p. 13; Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 12-13. It seems likely from Ponnen's account that the organisers believed that getting Congress involved in this way was a means of 'radicalising' the organisation.

[65] Kajee was a prominent political activist and businessman, often at odds with 'radicals', who became director of the firm Kajee, Moosa and Co, who ran a country-wide chain of 'non European cinemas'. See G. C. Calpin, Indians in South Africa, (Pietermaritzburg, 1949), p. 213.

[66] Padyachee et al, p. 95.

the Indian workers in the dispute.[67] Shortly afterwards the South African Indian Congress also conferred with management and tried unsuccessfully to persuade the workers to return to work. When the Industrial Council ruled that the Falkirk factory had acted within its rights in dismissing its employees, it was Kajee and the secretary to the Agent general who gave the workers the news. [68] According to the Industrial Council, Kajee had attended the meeting as 'an official delegate of Congress' to 'support' Indian workers whilst A. C. Wanless represented the union. But it was Kajee who ended up making a damning statement about the Industrial Council and its position on the dispute.[69] He also attacked the AEU for not organising all of the workers at the factory. It had offered to take on NISUW as a subsidiary union but without the African members for fear of upsetting its own white membership. This was seen as too little too late and the offer was rejected.

Thus the NIC became deeply involved in the dispute, giving the strikers material and moral assistance. They also organised a mass meeting which was attended by around 1200 people, and received considerable press coverage. The NIC was to continue in its role as the representatives of the Indian workers, as part of the Indian community; this emphasised the Indian character of the dispute: 'the attack on these men is because they are Indians, because they are without political power.'[70] With this, the strike became subsumed under the broad political programme of the NIC. Kajee stated that 'We are Indians first and foremost'.[71] But Indian CP members were also involved in negotiations, both as members of the strike committee and as members of Congress. Yusuf Dadoo, who was to become a prominent Indian member of the CPSA in the 1940s was part of a delegation which included S. Nana, Moola, and Ahmed Kathrada, who met with the Minister of Labour, in another aborted attempt to resolve the dispute. CPSA members who were involved in the strike did not differentiate themselves sufficiently from the NIC, and were in fact using popular front rather than united front tactics. They were subsumed by the nationalist organisation.

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[67] Padyachee et al, p. 97.
[68] Padyachee et al, p. 99.
[69] Padyachee et al, p.100.
[70] E.M. Paruk, quoted in Padyachee et al., p. 103.

The dispute at the Falkirk foundry has been characterised in several ways. White labour and the official trade union movement of the time, held paternalistically that the workers did not really understand what they were doing, were unfamiliar with proper trade union procedure, and were in any case the hapless dupes of 'reds' with ulterior motives. It seems that workers did go to party members for their help in establishing a union, but Ponnen and Naidoo already had a reputation as trade union activists before they joined the CPSA. 'After our work in organising workers at the garment factory before we joined the party, we became well known as organisers and people would often come to us for advice if there was a dispute in their workplace.'[72] They were more probably approached because of their union experience than their party membership. This is supported by the fact that those involved in the strike were rather disingenuous about their CP connections, as articles in Indian Opinion at the time show. Adopting a rather authoritarian tone, on 25 June the newspaper reported that the 'dispute between..... Management and their Indian employees (sic) remains unsettled...' It repeated allegations that management believed that workers had been led by communist influences, and warned Indian workers against following the example of white workers who used the strike weapon, because they did not have the same political muscle and lacked the support of white workers.

The paper also quoted a letter to the Natal Advertiser from P. M. Harry, by now a party member. It began 'We workers of the Falkirk Iron Company do not know what Communism means. We are entirely unorganised. We were not accepted as members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.'[73] After setting out the specific grievances of the non-European workers, Harry claimed that 'If as a result of this dispute we are admitted as members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union we shall be fully satisfied, and our union will have served its purpose and will immediately be disbanded...(it) has been unfair to us (that) by raising the bogey of Communism...(they are) trying to alienate public sympathy from our cause.'[74]

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[71] Padyachee et al, p.104.
[72] Ponnen interview with PR, Durban July 1995.
[73] Indian Opinion 25 June 1937.
[74] Indian Opinion 25 June 1937.

Harry's attempt to distance the strikers from the Communist Party is perhaps not surprising, given the climate of the times. But to some extent it was given credence because all the demands of the workers made through the strike committee were in the terms of an industrial dispute, i.e. about wage discrimination, victimisation and the right to organise in a union. I have found no evidence that members of the CPSA who were also on the strike committee tried at any time to broaden the strike by adopting a wider political agenda. In line with earlier Indian trade union activity, Indian CPSA members were following a tradition of reformist Indian worker militancy, which drew on the resources and organisational experiences of the Indian community, rather than inaugurating a period of radical anti-capitalism, although their programme fed into some aspects of the CPSA agenda of the time.

The second important point to consider is the role of the NIC. A careful reading of events suggests that NIC spokesmen did in fact voice workers' demands. Kajee, in particular, took pains to refute Industrial Council findings which suggested that management had not implemented a lockout and that workers involved in the dispute had intimidated other strikers. His attack on the AEU for not organising all the workers at the factory in the first place was, however, rather ironic, as Kajee, a prominent businessman, was bitterly opposed to the unionisation of his own workers.[75] In addition to this, according to Ponnen, both he and Naidoo were on the strike committee with members of the NIC, and they worked together.[76] Again, as with earlier Indian workers' organisations, different sections of the community became involved in these struggles because differential discrimination made 'Indianness' an important category of identification. CP members organised around wresting concessions from capital rather than confronting it head on, and by allowing African workers in the dispute to be marginalised, helped accentuate the 'Indianness' of the strike. In the process they fractured the formation of a non-racial class identity. Indian CP members operated in the same way that radical Indian workers had done before.

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[75] G.C. Calpin, A.I. Kajee: his work for the Indian community, (Durban, n.d.), p. 22.
[76] Ponnen, 'George Ponnen Speaks', p. 13.

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In addition to this, the strike took place at a time when the Comintern, at its seventh congress in 1935, had once more turned to the politics of the popular front [77] and was urging all communist parties to make alliances with bourgeois organisations; and as we have seen, anti-fascism, as a prerequisite of the struggle for democratic rights, provided the wider political agenda. These events suggest that there was no neat division between a 'radical' union politics and the bourgeois alliances of the 1940s. Indian CPSA members organised with bourgeois Indian organisations in a variety of contexts, including in the trade unions, well into the 1940s, as we will see. These tactics were also echoed in the relationship between the ANC and the unions in the 1950s.

The 1942 Dunlop Strike

In the early 1940s, strike action was still widespread in the Transvaal and Natal. In Durban there had been some strikes where joint action between African and Indian workers had secured some benefits for workers.[78] In order to discourage this tendency, both the government and industry sought ways of curbing the power of radical unions in this period. In December 1942, the government implemented War Measure 145, which outlawed strikes by African workers, who would be liable for a £500 fine or three years imprisonment if they took strike action.[79] Employers, for their part, endeavoured to co-ordinate between industrial sectors and formed the Natal Employers' Association, which sought to co-ordinate employers and management in relation to trade unions. They also tried to suppress strikes more effectively and direct the flow of African labour more efficiently.[80] One way in which they attempted to undermine radical union activity was to set up company unions as an alternative to the militant non-racial unions that were beginning to emerge in this period.

The attempt of management to do this at the Dunlop Rubber Plant formed the backdrop to the strike that broke out there in December 1942. From 1938, the non-racial

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[77] Bundy 'Left, Right', p.29.
[78] See P. Alexander, Workers, War and the Origins of Apartheid: labour and politics in South Africa, 1939-1948, (Oxford, 2000).
[79] D. Hemson 'Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940-1959', Journal Of Southern African Studies, vol. 4, 1977, p. 101.
[80] Padyachee et al., p.107.

Natal Rubber Workers Industrial Union (NRWIU) had represented 450 'European, Asiatic and Native' workers at the factory and had succeeded in winning them improved conditions and wages.[81] By 1942, they boasted 625 members, the majority of them Indians and Africans. However, earlier in the year management at the factory had started on a policy of replacing Indian labour with African because it was cheaper. From March to December 1942, the number of Indian workers at the factory went down from 282 to 149, despite the fact that an industrial arbitration body had already ruled that 30 per cent of Dunlop's employees were to be Indian, and further 40 per cent African. Dunlop tried to argue that the company was re-employing white workers who had left to join the army because it had promised it would take them back at the appropriate time. But an investigation by the Natal Indian Congress revealed that the white workers who were being hired at the factory were in fact new recruits, and that in any case the majority of the new employees were Africans.[82]

At the same time, Dunlop set up a company union and through various means, including veiled threats that only 'loyal employees' would be kept on by the company, managed to get a significant number of the white workers, as well as a few Africans, to join. Up to that point, they had been members of NRWIU. In addition, in December, thirteen 'militant Indian workers', all of whom had been with the company for a long period were also dismissed. When management refused the request of the NRWIU to re-instate the men, the union called a strike. Neither white workers nor non-unionised Africans supported the strike. The strikers were quickly brought to court but once again Indians and Africans received differential treatment, as they had a different legal status. The Strike Committee elected at Dunlop reads like a Who's Who of the CPSA Indian membership, with George Ponnen, H. A. Naidoo, M. D. Naidu and R. D. Naidoo all amongst its members. Pauline Podbury, the only woman on the picket line, and a member of the committee and the CPSA, who was soon to marry H. A. Naidoo, was arrested and charged with incitement to violence. R. D. Naidoo was a South Indian Christian who, like Ponnen, had had his education interrupted and spent his teenage years selling bread from house to

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[81] Padyachee et al., p. 108.
[82] Padyachee et al., p. 112.

house. He had become politicised by reading Sidney and Beatrice Webb's History of the British Trade Unions and became active in South African trade unions from the early 1930s. R. D. Naidoo joined the party through the Liberal Study Group.[83]. Along with members of the NIC, the strike committee at Dunlop's was involved in collecting money and food and articulating the political demands of the strike. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, however, neither the CPSA, nor the NIC wanted to disrupt the war effort, and this moderated their attitude towards the Dunlop strike. Kajee observed: 'I wish there was no war and this powerful octopus of Dunlops might have been made to feel the weapon of boycott of its goods both here and in India.'[84]

A mass meeting was called outside Durban City Hall on 17 January 1943 and over 4000 people attended to show support for the strikers and protest against the introduction of company unions. The meeting was chaired by Alec Wanless, who declared, significantly, that the attempt to impose company unionism was a 'manifestation of fascism and a direct threat against the war effort'.[85] Continuing in the same vein, R. D. Naidoo stated that it was 'contrary to the aims of the United Nations (who were) fighting for freedom of association'.[86] The NIC also sent a message of support and voiced fears about a disruption of the war effort,[87] but once again overtly 'Indianised' the dispute. It stated that it supported the strikers but would have liked to mediate on the workers behalf before strike action was taken. NIC members had approached the Indian High Commissioner to pursue the matter with the Minister of Labour, as the matter had now 'passed beyond the borders of trade union activity and had assumed an Indian national aspect'.[88]

In January 1943, the strike was lost. The Indian and African employees out on strike were dismissed by the Dunlop management. African strikers were accused of violence towards 'scab' labour. In the main, African workers replaced the strikers, over 580 of whom were especially brought in by truck from Pondoland and trained by the white

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[83] R.D.Naidoo, interview with JF, Durban, August 1995.
[84] Alexander, Workers, War, p. 49.
[85] Padyachee et al., p. 113.
[86] Indian Opinion 23 January 1943.
[87] Indian Opinion 28 January 1943.
[88] Indian Views 29 January 1943.

workforce.[89] This 'selective use of a reserve army of labour' helped cause considerable distrust and ill-feeling amongst Indians and Africans, but this was not something new, merely old resentments and competition that were heightened and brought to the fore. These animosities were accentuated in this period as, although increasing industrialisation and the growth of the service sector provided more job opportunities, Africans felt that Indians blocked their chances.[90] No Indians worked at Dunlop for a long time after the strike. After another seminal strike in Indian labour history, that of the Indian laundry workers in Durban in 1945, Indian labour was once again replaced by African, and Indians were never employed again.

In the 1930s, the spectre of fascism dictated the political strategies and policies of left organisations around the world. The international opposition to fascism and the pursuit of democratic rights articulated with the developing programme of the CPSA in the context of South African politics. The specific instances of trade union organisation discussed in this chapter demonstrate that Indian workers became a part of this agenda, and that trade union reforms were seen as part of a wider struggle for rights, citizenship, and anti-fascism. This organisational work was facilitated by the entry into the party of a number of Indian militant trade unionists who continued the tradition of Indian workers struggles, struggles that had a history of drawing on community support, both in South Africa and abroad. The ethos of self-help that fostered notions of community was particularly influential in education, where many Indians were politicised within a liberal tradition that encouraged ideas of equality and citizenship. Alliances with the NIC during these strikes took place within the context of changing Comintern policy and its anti-fascist platform, but were facilitated by wider notions of 'community', and by a convergence in the interests of NIC and CPSA leaders. The involvement of the NIC, however, intensified perceptions of the strikes as specifically 'Indian' and marginalised African workers in trade union disputes. The differential treatment afforded African workers by the state also encouraged the experience of class through the vector of nationality, promoting a sense of their being specifically 'Indian', African, or white workers'. However, the relationship between Indian

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[89] Padyachee et al., p. 114.
[90] Hemson, 'Dock Workers', p. 103.

CPSA members and Indian nationalist organisations was complex, dynamic, and permeable. In the next chapter, I will examine the CPSA's involvement with Indian broad-front organisations in greater detail, in relation to Gandhi and the Indian independence movement, and around issues of class. I will highlight some of the differences that emerged between Indians in the Communist Party and Indian nationalist organisations, with contested visions of Indianness, community, and political action. I will also discuss the continuities in the political programme of the CP, which contradict the idea of a distinct rupture between the radical politics of the 1930s and 40s, and the supposed accommodation with nationalist organisations in the 1950s.

Chapter Seven

'Space to be Indian': protecting 'national honour' in the 1940s

In Chapter Six, I examined the background to the continuing construction of 'Indianness' in South Africa, which, with other factors, militated against the development of an inter-racial class-consciousness. In this chapter, I will examine how struggles over urban space between Indians, Africans and whites in the 1940s exacerbated these divisions, but also accentuated differences amongst Indians themselves. In this period, the CPSA was increasingly drawn into broad front activities, which mobilised people around issues of democratic rights and citizenship, in a continuing agenda of a struggle against fascism. Indian communists were particularly active in these fields. They were also involved in radicalising the NIC, but, ironically, once in control of Congress, they organised around issues that primarily affected merchants' interests, especially around the effects of the segregation of urban space.[1] In many ways, the struggles over who controlled Congress illustrated the divisions within the community, but political action was mounted predominantly to protect trading and property rights, rather than primarily addressing the critical housing shortage and lack of amenities that affected most Indian workers. The failure to address these issues helped exacerbate the rupture that was developing in the community between workers and those who sought to be their political leaders.

Indian CP members such as Yusuf Dadoo were heavily influenced by the politics of the Indian nationalist movement which was gathering momentum in the 1940s. Dadoo was in constant contact with leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru, and formulated a politics that combined national and class dimensions, in a way that resonated with the agenda of the CPSA. In this period, political struggles were acted out against a backdrop of accelerating segregationist legislation, racial zoning, and attempts at the increasing exclusion of Indians from the political process. In the 1940s, the continuing threat to the status and location of Indians created an 'endemic sense of anxiety and instability' in their social life, causing many of them to crave places where they could 'stay put', where locality could be

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[1] See M. Swan, 'Ideology in Organised Indian Politics', S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds) <u>The Politics of Race, Class and Nationlaism</u>, pp. 198-205.

produced as a property of being, which facilitated setting down roots and the reproduction of communal ties. These struggles over social space helped reinforce a sense of Indianness, but the notion of what a South African Indian was varied considerably between different sections of the community. The growth of segregationist practices helped define the boundaries of identification between communities, but also gave rise to oppositional political practices.

Locating the 'Coolie' in 'Other Spaces': early attempts at segregation in South Africa

Segregation 'arose out of the modernising dynamics of a newly industrialising society'. A complex of ideological beliefs and legislative practices that attempted to mediate relations between whites, Coloureds, Africans and Indians through an extreme form of racial discrimination, it set out to 'legitimise social difference and economic activity in every aspect of life'.[2] Older 'Boer' practices and British colonial racial attitudes, had, by the 1910s and 1920s, been woven together with liberal notions of cultural relativism derived from anthropology, in part, as a defence against 'the forces unleashed by industrialisation'. Above all, segregation represented white anxieties about racial degeneration in the context of modernity, capitalist growth and urbanisation. These anxieties became particularly acute in the environment of the 'urban melting pot', which forced people to live 'cheek by jowl', and seemingly threatened to dissolve the differences that helped people define themselves in relation to 'others'.

Early segregationist measures were directed at Indians settling in Durban, and these were justified as public health measures against the 'Asiatic Menace'.[3] From the 1870s onwards, the presence of Indians in the city helped shape its race relations, politics and public administration. Their impact was as much psychological as it was economic. The social and political landscape was drawn around a fear of crime, disease and concern over public health issues. In the late nineteenth century, Durban's city rulers were more

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[2] W. Beinart and S. Dubow 'Introduction' in W. Beinart and S. Dubow (eds), Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Centurt South Africa (London 1995), pp. 1-24.

[3] Indians in the Dominions: Memorandum regarding the British Indian Problem in the Dominions during the last twenty five years, Dominions Office (hereafter DO), 35, G717/2, 1/6/1944, Public Records Office, pp. 2-4; M. Swanson 'The Asiatic Menace', p. 401.

preoccupied with Indians than Africans, as the number of commercial and propertied 'Arab'[4] merchants increased. Indians were perceived as a threat, and an active menace to white commercial interests, 'competing for space, place, trade and political influence with the imperial authority'.[5] At the same time, they also posed a legal and political conundrum, claiming, as they did, political and civil rights as British subjects. Native Law did not apply to them and, as they acquired property, they became eligible for the franchise under Natal law. Thus they came to occupy a contradictory position within social and production relations. On the one hand, they made a significant contribution to the early development of the colony, and were 'economically intertwined' with their white counterparts. On the other hand, they increasingly came into competition with white South Africans. Indian merchants were scapegoated at local government and popular levels due to the economic and political frustrations of sections of the white community.

Until 1875, the Durban municipality tried to solve the problem by suggesting separate Indian and African residential locations, or 'kaffir' and 'coolie' villages 'remote from each other...(where) coloured constables would probably have to be appointed specially to look after these villages'.[6] This was one of the first attempts at group area segregation in a major South African city. For the next twenty years, there were continued efforts to implement these plans, with repeated endeavours to only sell plots of land to Indians on the urban periphery. However, the project failed, as Indians already had a foothold in Durban and wanted to remain. Even at that stage, they desired to produce neighbourhoods with communal kith and kin, shared histories, and 'collectively traversed places and spaces', of particular importance for displaced and deterritorialised people.[7] How Indian workers understood the spaces that they experienced, and interacted with the spaces which they produced, given the continual threat of dislocation, helped shape their value systems and social landscapes and became a matter of acute concern in the 1940s.

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[4] It is interesting to note that in contemporary South Africa, where many Indians are in the process of re-defining themselves in terms of a religious identity, many Muslims are now reclaiming the term 'Arab'. See Thomas Blum Hansen, 'We are Arabs from the Gujurat!: the purification of Muslim identity in contemporary South Africa', paper presented at The Centre for Southern Asian Studies Seminar, School of Oriental and African Studies, 6 February 2002.

[5] Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 404.

[6] Swanson The Asiatic Menace p. 406.

[7] Appadurai 'The Production of Locality', p. 215-217.

The drive to put down roots meant that some Indian workers began to accept the political language of 'voluntary' segregation, to facilitate the creation of social space that was settled, that meant they had made the transition from 'routes to roots'.[8] This desire for permanent social space became a primary concern for workers.[9]

As we have seen in Chapter Two, the Durban municipality only had limited powers in the early part of the twentieth century. It had to be cautious in its dealings with the imperial authorities, and in its treatment of 'imperial' citizens. The issue of public health became interconnected with the 'problem' of Indians in towns and the 'sanitation question' was used in an attempt to control the development of both the Indian commercial community and the growing number of ex-indentures 'gathering on the margins of the city'. In 1871, a cholera epidemic was advancing from East Africa and smallpox was devastating the population of Cape Town.[10] These epidemics fed into the question of 'coolie habitation' in Durban. Environmental pollution was the responsibility of local government, which perceived the issue of the 'sanitary improvement' and 'public health' of Durban not merely as police work and public services, but above all as a question of 'coolie habitation'.[11] 'Coolies' were equated with urban squalor and portrayed as a risk to public health, and building restrictions and sanitation codes (such as laws relating to the subdivision and overcrowding of social and commercial property) were used against Indians in an attempt to curtail their economic advance. A discourse of sanitation and hygiene resonated with real concerns amongst the white population. However, in reality, these fears were more apparent than real, reflecting a 'panicked state of mind which dwelt on the substance of things feared and the vision of things unseen.'[12] This is aptly illustrated in George Russell's

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[8] P. Gilroy, ' Diaspora, Utopia, and the Critique of Capitalism, There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the cultural politics of race and nation, (London, 1987), pp. 153-222.

[9] To some extent, this was also recognised by the government from the late 1930s and 1940s, and they hoped to play on these desires in order to encourage ideas of 'voluntary' segregation. See J. H. Basan, '..in the case of Lichtenburg, where Indians had informed my office that, Congress, or no Congress, they were prepared to collaborate with the local authority,...Indians can acquire their own properties and at last experience a feeling of security and permanence'. 'Commissioner for Immigration and Asiatic Affairs' Memorandum, Cape Town 27/3/45, ANC Papers, ICS, GB 101 (ICS) ANC (RF/1/4/1-4), No. 10.

[10] Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 407.

[11] Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 407.

[12] Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 420.

The History of Old Durban, written at the end of the nineteenth century, in which he declares:

> Idolatry, cholera and other epidemic and contagious evils were at our door. Skilled thieves, Dacoits and Indian mutineers more or less sanguinary, were certain to infect our native population. [13]

The Vagrancy Laws were also used against Indians, but this often conflicted with their status as property owners with a right to franchise, and thus embarrassed the imperial government, which would not authorise the overt exclusion of Indians from economic and political rights in South Africa. In order to address the question of 'who belonged' in South Africa, some government authorities tried to make a distinction between 'Arab merchants' and 'coolies', deciding citizenship claims on grounds of economic class rather than race. Their strategy met with too much opposition, however. The majority of white South Africans sought to define all Indians as 'coolies', and race began to emerge as the criteria of citizenship over formal property requirements. By the time Natal acquired responsible government in July 1893, there were moves underfoot to disenfranchise Indians, step up anti-immigration laws, introduce the poll tax and deny them trading rights. These legislative measures 'struck a crucial blow at civil rights and economic liberties vouchsafed to British subjects under the Empire...and signalled the final transference of those rights and liberties from criteria based on the possession of a stake in the political community to criteria based on racial conceptions'.[14] In the first two decades of the twentieth century, local and central government authorities began to frame rights of citizenship and to organise the spatial structures of communities, along with increasing the management of the social environment, but they met with limited success. Indians continued to move to the towns and were particularly keen to build permanent homes that would accommodate the extended family structures that they had transplanted to South Africa. The ownership of a permanent house was, for many, the ultimate goal, what they 'planned, worked and saved for'.[15] Building houses was one of the most fundamental ways that locality could be produced, neighbourhoods reproduced, and social life stabilised. Unlike the migrant, and

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[13] G. Russell The History of Old Durban (Durban 1899), p. 490, quoted in Swanson. The Asiatic Menace p. 401.

[14] Swanson, The Asiatic Menace, p. 414.

[15] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 35.

mostly male, African population, Indians continually threatened to become a permanent presence in towns. They visibly put down roots, to the horror of white colonists.

Local and central government continued to try and solve the 'Indian Problem'. In 1924, Indians were denied the municipal franchise in Natal, further restricting the tenuous links they had to local government power structures. In 1925, the Pact government tried to introduce an Indian Areas Reservation Bill, but it had to be dropped, due to vociferous opposition from the Indian government and Indian South Africans.[16] With the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, a compromise was reached on the position of Indians. This tried to balance competing white interests at central and local level, along with concessions that would appease the Indian government. The agreement sought to 'get rid' of 'impermanent elements' from South Africa, whilst pledging to 'improve the position' of the remaining Indian population'.[17] The government's promise of 'upliftment' and the Indian community's commitment to living according to 'western standards' framed much of the contentious dialogue between Indian political organisations and the South African state in the face of increasing anti-Indian legislation in the 1930s and 40s.

By the 1920s, the housing situation for Indians and Africans in South Africa was chronically bad. A 'belt' of shack settlements had sprung up on the margins of Durban. The people in them had no 'electricity, piped water, or sewerage'. The Indian poor were expected to live in squalor. At the same time, there was also a shortage of better quality housing for middle-class Indians. As a result, many of them bought houses and land in 'white areas'. This tendency became known as 'Indian penetration' and continued into the 1930s, when access to the private housing market in desirable residential areas of Durban became hotly contested between the Indian bourgeois, petty-bourgeoisie and white residents. This so-called 'penetration' of Indians into white areas was seen as a major problem for the Durban authorities, at a time when increasing numbers of white South Africans were also moving into Durban from small outlying towns, drawn by expanding industry and improving trading opportunities and service provision within the town. More

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[16] J. Grest 'The Durban City Council and the "Indian Problem": Local Politics in the 1940s', unpublished paper presented at the ASSA Conference, Cape Town, July 1985, p. 2.
[17] M. Palmer The History of Indians in Natal Natal Regional Survey, vol. X, (Cape Town 1957), pp. 97-99.

and more, white South Africans wanted exclusive control of desirable areas of Durban, with African and Indian workers bussed in from surrounding areas to work in the factories and the industrial and service sectors. White South Africans wanted a built environment that reflected their social values and relationships.

By the 1940s, there was an intensification of the struggle for social space, in which issues of citizenship, property rights and segregationist measures became inexorably interlocked, and purportedly brought together an Indian 'community' in a political sense. The social and economic insecurity that many Indians faced in the 1940s made them identify with an Indianness that drew on the prestige of the Indian nationalist movement, and helped counter the series of dislocations that they faced in South Africa. Yet the notion of an Indian 'community' was a contested and fragile concept, because of very different readings of the inter-class ideologies of nation, citizenship, and the idea of democratic rights, within different sections of the community. Segregation acted on Indians in different ways, and the question of 'rights' also came to mean different things.

The Indian Working Class

In the 1940s, the vast majority of Indians in Durban lived in relative poverty. A survey undertaken in 1941 found that 36 per cent of Indian families were in debt and a 1944 University of Natal survey showed that 70.6 per cent of Indians were living below the poverty line compared to 5 per cent of whites, 38 per cent of coloureds and 25 per cent of Africans.[18] 40 per cent of Indians were destitute. Unemployment figures were also high. A six-year study of the clothing industry found that 90 per cent of its Indian workers suffered from malnutrition and 60 per cent from amoebic dysentery. Average income per head was one-sixth that of whites. Contrary to the popular image of Indians as exploitative shopkeepers, the majority of Indians in South Africa were, in fact, poor members of the working class. As Indians steadily became a permanent presence in the urban environment their political struggles became centred on a desire to maintain their place within towns.

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[18] 'Memorandum submitted by a Deputation of the South African Indian Organisation to the Honorary Minister of the Interior' August 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 11; F. Ginwala 'Class, Consciouness', p. 303.

This was a time of rapidly changing work patterns for many Indians. The capitalisation of agriculture diminished the prospects for work in the rural economy, and Africans continued to replace Indian workers in agricultural production. These circumstances spurred on the movement of Indians to South African towns. In 1910, 88 per cent of the South African Indian population was engaged in rural labour. By 1945, this figure was dramatically reduced to 7 per cent.[19] By 1949, 12,3165, Indians were living in Durban, constituting 32 per cent of the total population at that time.[20] But whilst the population of Durban was increasing, especially after the outbreak of the Second World War, the Durban municipality had not developed an infrastructure to deal adequately with the new numbers 'flooding' the urban environment. Indians became prominent entrepreneurs in the informal sector that sprang up to fill the gap left by the state, in areas of petty trade, transport and housing. Here, however, they came into competition with both Africans and whites, often in geographical spaces beyond the direct control of state bodies, such as the police. In addition, the question of housing and property became a crucial issue to Indians in this period. For the economically deprived working classes, the lack of adequate social housing in town was particularly onerous. Many had no more than a shack in which

> old tar drums, relics of corrugated iron, and old pieces of wood are pressed into the construction, which with its earth floor and smoke grimed walls offers more suitable accommodation for the cockroaches and other vermin who share the uneasy symbiosis. The water supply for these shacks is drawn from springs and streams which are frequently highly polluted, and commonly nothing but the most primitive methods of stercus disposal are attempted. [21]

The process of urbanisation in Durban was heterogeneous and ad hoc. Different populations in Durban built their own housing within the poorly developed infrastructures of segregationist state planning. Capitalism may seek to create its own 'rational geography', but people's own social actions often contribute towards the creation of a 'second nature', of built environments in informal types of spatial arrangements, often beyond direct state control.[22] Another example of this was the 'Shanty-town' movement on the Witwatersrand where the housing situation for African workers became desperate by 1944. These

[19] Vahed, 'The Making of "Indianness"', p. 10.
[20] The Durban Housing Survey, (Durban, 1952), p. 35.
[21] 'A Preliminary Report on the Housing of the Indian Community in the City of Durban', Oct. 1940, p.1, quoted in Maureen Swan 'Ideology in organised Indian politics', p. 190.
[22] Harvey, The Urbanization of Capital, p. 25.

Shantytowns were controlled and administered by Africans themselves and became anathema to the white authorities.[23] They became a focal point of political conflict over who had control over peri-urban spaces in the Witwatersrand and illustrate that the housing shortage, in the face of growing population movements to urban areas in the 1940s, was not confined to Durban. The Indian experience over housing in Durban was but one aspect of the multiple conflicts between the state and communities over jobs, services and urban housing which gave expression to political struggles and identities beyond those of class. As Harvey puts it, in circumstances such as these, the urban process itself became a series of active moments in the historical geography of class and ethnic struggles, of capital accumulation and political consciousness.[24]

Urban conditions had deteriorated even further by the middle of the 1940s. Indian movement to towns grew, and severe overcrowding resulted from the lack of sufficient housing provision. At the same time, Indians were increasingly ousted from their market gardening enterprises on the margins of the city because Europeans wanted these sites, either for house building, or for the industries that were spreading along the coast.[25] Dispossessed Indians were thus driven into the unskilled labour market, where they had to compete with Africans and poor whites for jobs.

'I am colonial-born'

Colonial-born South African Indians had emerged as a powerful and influential force within the community by the 1940s, and they wanted to mobilise workers in particular as part of their political constituency against repressive state policies. The offspring of indentured workers from Natal, they were members of the Indian lower-middle class who had managed to get a western education and had entered the white-collar professions. They were mostly Tamil-speaking Hindus and Christians and, to a large extent, their livelihoods depended on the colonial administration. Many also became teachers.

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[23] See E. Baring, 'Race and Colour Problems in South Africa: a commentary on the situation', DO 35,1122, G.689/35A, Native Affairs Union, where the author links the inadequate provision of native housing, natives 'squatting' in shelters and shanties on the Rand , and the growth of communist activity amongst natives; Lerumo. Fifty Fighting Years.p.73.

[24] Harvey, The Urbanization of Capital, p. xi.

[25] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, pp. 31-32.

Colonial-born Indians began to cohere self consciously as a social group in the inter-war period when it became more difficult for this western educated elite to maintain its standard of living.[26] In 1933, they formed the Colonial Born Indian Association (later the Colonial Born South African Indian Association) and once more started publishing their own newspaper, the <u>African Chronicle</u>. Their political platform consisted of agitating for the rights and privileges of citizenship for Indians, on the grounds that they were South African born. But, by the 1940s, they were being squeezed even further by they state and their fundamental fear was that their standard of living would be reduced to the growing squalor of Indian workers, which many of them felt they had only recently escaped.

In the 1930s and 40s, as the idea of a nation was taking shape in India, 'colonial born' activists in South Africa were creating a diaspora politics fuelled by a morality and rationality of statehood which fed into the Defiance Campaign of 1952. To protect their position as young South African Indian professionals, they challenged the compromising politics of the merchant class for more radical measures from the state that would protect Indian job security. They had been badly affected by the United Party's 'civilised labour' policy in the 1920s, and now their urban residential status was also being challenged. Their struggles over urban space in the 1940s began a contest over citizenship and belonging which continued until the 1960s. Colonial-born Indians constructed their 'Indianness' in an ambiguous and 'oppositional mode', which was represented as 'tradition' through Gandhi's cult of satyagraha and an anti-colonial nationalism.[27] In the South African context, this framed their political struggle to gain rights of citizenship in the South African state. They were 'being Indian in a South African way'.

Merchants

For Indian traders and merchants in town, the question of actual land tenure was the most pressing issue. The fact that Indians could purchase land, despite the fact that this was increasingly restricted, allowed them access to a form of capital accumulation denied to their African counterparts and, to some extent, explained their ability to compete so effectively with their entrepreneurial rivals. The use of family labour in Indian businesses

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[26] Swan 'Ideology in Organised Indian Politics', p.198.

also gave them a competitive edge. In the early 1940s, elite Indians were flourishing and increasingly investing in property in Natal and the Transvaal. Between 1927 and 1940, the rateable value of Indian property in Durban rose from £1,441,210 to £3,448230.[28] In the peripheral slum areas, where workers leased the urban land on which to erect their shacks, sometimes from Indian landlords, the rateable value increased from £1,736,910 in 1934 to £2,39400 in 1940.[29] 70 per cent of these Indian land purchases were for investment purposes.[30] In 1940, the government set up a commission under Justice F. N. Broome,[31] to investigate Indian penetration into towns. In an attempt to protect their interests, Indian merchants collaborated with the commission. Durban City Council gave evidence that segregation was a 'natural communal instinct and that penetration ran counter to this.'[32] They brought forward an 'expert' witness, Professor Burrows of Natal University, who argued the case for an 'ecological "invasion-Succession" model', which suggested that Indian penetration arose because Indians felt a psychological need to prove their equality to whites. Local Ratepayer's Associations also gave evidence, objecting to the 'slaughter of goats, fowls, filth, cooking smells, noise and danger to daughters' emanating from Indian residence in town. [33]

The Broome Commission concluded that trading and property were to be the only two outlets for investment for middle-class Indians.[34] As the licensing laws restricted the expansion of trade in the Transvaal, and the further Indian occupation of land was prohibited, the Durban property market became a crucial outlet for Indian middle-class capital accumulation. The Indian scramble for land accelerated as rumours spread that the government was planning a new Pegging Bill.

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[27] D. Chetty 'Identity and 'Indianness', p. 5.
[28] Swan, 'Ideology in Organised Indian Politics', p. 191.
[29] Swan, Gandhi, p. 191.
[30] Swan, Gandhi, p. 191.
[31] This was called Report of the Indian Penetration Commission, (Pretoria, 1942)
[32] Grest 'Indian Problem', p. 6.
[33] D. R. Bhagwandeen 'The Question of "Indian Penetration" in the Durban Area and Indian Politics 1940-46', PhD thesis, University of Natal, 1983, pp. 96.
[34] Report of the Indian Penetration Commission, (1942) p. 65.

However, it could be said that the reality of Indian penetration was more imagined than real, configured as it was in the language of racial otherness and undesirability.[35] By 1942, Indians made up 25 per cent of Durban's population, but only owned 4 per cent of the city's acreage of land. Despite this, whites feared being swamped by unhygienic and money grabbing Indians in white residential districts and this fear was fuelled by the very real competition between Durban's racial populations in trade and in the workplace.

Meanwhile, international events were having their impact on CPSA policy and its organisation within communities.

The CPSA and the Second World War

In the 1930s, the CPSA was active in fighting the proto-fascist organisations that began to spring up in South Africa, such as the Ossewabradwag, the Defence League, and Oswald Pirow's 'New Order' movement.[36] Anti-fascism, especially for the party's Jewish members, was a central aspect of party work, and crucial to their development of a 'people's front' in South Africa. In the second half of the 1930s, the organisation attempted to bring together broad-front campaigns with trade unionists and nationalist organisations. In 1936, it passed a resolution at its annual conference calling for an anti-imperialist people's front, which would require members to actively participate in 'national reformist mass organisations'.[37] In the same year, the CPSA organised a 'Conference Against Fascism and War' which was an attempt to draw in trade union and nationalist organisations under a 'Minimum Programme' of democratic rights.[38] Despite this, when war broke out in 1939, CP members in South Africa took a little time to readjust to the international re-alignment of political forces. The Hitler-Stalin pact, announced in August 1939, was in part caused by the continued appeasement of Hitler by Britain and France, which led Stalin to believe that that he would receive little support from the axis powers if

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[35] The British government, however, saw the question of Indian penetration in South Africa by 1944 as 'no figment of the imagination' and considered that segregation was not working. See DO 35, 1122, G.715/31; G.689/1.
[36] Drew Discordant Comrades p. 226.
[37] Extract from resolution on 'The Liberation Movement and the Tasks of the Party', passed at Communist Party conference on September 5 and 6, 1936', Document 60, South African Communists Speak, pp. 127-128.
[38] 'Towards the People's Front-Conference Against Fascism and War' report in the South African Worker, October 16, 1936, Document 61, South African Communists Speak, p. 128.

the Soviet Union were attacked.[39] The international communist movement now described the war as an inter-imperialist conflict, and against the interests of workers. The anti-war position initially divided party members in South Africa. In Cape Town, the branch was strongly anti-war, whilst in Johannesburg, the majority of cadres were pro-war, and believed that fascism had to be fought at any cost. Although the majority of the party soon fell behind the anti-war position, many of them reluctantly, there was little hesitation on the part of Indian communists in the organisation, who were heavily influenced by the Indian nationalist movement and its anti-colonial and anti-British stance.[40]

D. A. Seedat and Yusuf Dadoo were particularly vociferous anti-war campaigners. Seedat, a young Muslim bookkeeper who came to the party via the LSG and the NEUF, addressed several meetings denouncing the war and was imprisoned for treason.[41] During this period, Yusuf Dadoo, who had recently joined the Communist Party, was prosecuted and imprisoned because of his ant-war activities and became one of the heroes of resistance politics. One reflection of this was a graffiti campaign that developed on the walls and streets of Durban, demanding his release.[42] In a leaflet distributed in 1940, he touched a nerve by asking the mass of 'non-European' South Africans:

> You are being asked to support a war for freedom, justice and democracy. Do you enjoy the fruits of freedom, justice and democracy? What you do enjoy are the pass and poll tax laws, segregation, and white labour policy. Low wages, high rents, poverty, unemployment and vicious colour bar laws.[43]

Dadoo was locked up for his trouble, but at his trial he highlighted a point that was to become of vital significance for party policy in the years to come. He insisted that the only way that the war could be a just one for democracy and against fascism was if full democratic rights were given to all non-Europeans in South Africa, and the colonies were granted independence.[44] This demand became central to the party programme, which was articulated through an agenda of democratic rights on an anti-fascist platform.

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[39] See D.N. Pritt, Light On Moscow, (London, 1939), for a contemporary analysis of this. Pritt was also an advocate of rights for Indian South Africans.
[40] A. K. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban July 1995.
[41] Natal Mercury 8 April 1941.
[42] E. Roux. Time Longer Than Rope, p. 309.
[43] Y. Dadoo, quoted in E.Roux. Time Longer than Rope p. 308.

Dadoo was to become a particularly powerful example of a South African Indian communist who, influenced by Gandhi and the Indian nationalist movement, tried to combine this with socialist politics. Dadoo was born in Krugersdorp in the Western Rand in 1909. His father had come to South Africa from the village of Kholvad in the Gujurat. Mohamed Dadoo was a merchant, and, in 1920, when the local municipality attempted to evict the family from their premises and home, it was none other than Gandhi, all the way from India, who took up, and successfully defended, his case.[45] Yusuf Dadoo's childhood was heavily influenced by his family's tales of life in India, which seemed to contrast sharply with his experience of being Indian in South Africa. While still at school, Dadoo went to several meetings organised by Gandhi's former South African allies on Indian issues, and the need to support the INC in its fight for independence.[46] He also arranged a meeting of students to hear Sarojini Naidu, the Indian nationalist leader and poet, when she toured South Africa.[47] In 1921, because of the severe inadequacies of educational provision for Indian South African children, Dadoo's family sent him to Aligargh in India to finish his schooling. There he was further influenced by Indian nationalist politics.[48] However, like many other Indian South Africans, who had romantic images of an India that they had created from a distance, once there, Dadoo became somewhat disillusioned. Arriving in his village in the rainy season, he was to observe glumly, 'This place is full of mud and water. And it looks so grim and dismal. I don't think India is the paradise I thought it to be.'[49] He soon observed that India itself was rife with caste discrimination and glaring inequalities between rich and poor. His sentiments were to be echoed by many South African Indians who were to return 'home' to try and find the India they had conceived in their imaginations.[50]

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[44] E. Roux. Time Longer Than Rope p. 309.

[45] M. K. Gandhi, Collected Works, vol. 16, pp. 501-3; V. Soobrayan They Fought For freedom: Yusuf Dadoo, (Cape Town 1993), p. 4.

[46] E. Pahad 'A Proud History of Struggle' African Communist, no. 78, 3rd Quarter 1979, p. 48.

[47] E. S. Reddy, 'introduction', in Yusuf Dadoo: His Speeches, Articles and Correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi (1939-1983), (Durban 1991), p. 51.

[48] Ginwala, 'Class, Consciousness,', pp. 409-410.

[49] Soobrayan They Fought for Freedom, p. 5.

[50] Many of the younger political Indian South Africans I met during my fieldwork had undertaken 'roots' tourism, and returned to India to visit their villages of origin, and most of them were highly ambivalent about their Indian experiences.

In 1929, Dadoo arrived in London to continue his studies. Within six months, he had been arrested at an anti-imperialist demonstration against British rule in India. His father dispatched him to Edinburgh in an attempt to keep him out of trouble. Whilst studying medicine there, he was joined by both G. M. Naicker and Kaisaval Goonam, who also became active in left-wing politics in South Africa. G. M. Naicker was introduced to radical politics through the Liberal Study Group.[51] Among the Indian student community in Scotland, Dadoo found his imagination fired by an international politics of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. It was also there that Dadoo began to read Marxist literature,[52] and his commitment to the Indian nationalist movement developed. He was also particularly influenced by Nehru's advocacy of a union of 'oppressed people and democratic whites' and the anti-fascist struggles in Europe.[53] Before returning home, he visited Krishna Menon in London for lengthy talks on the South African situation.[54] Dadoo arrived back in South Africa in 1936, and his political philosophy there continued to reflect all these influences. Within this, a nationalist agenda of rights and citizenship was married to the socialist idea of class oppression. In 1938, Dadoo became one of the founders of the Non European United Front in the Transvaal, and early in1939, he joined the CPSA. He also continued to have close, if at times contentious, relationships with South African Indian Gandhians in Congress organisations, such as P. S. Joshi and A. I. Cachalia.

A Community of Indian Communists?

As has been suggested, Dadoo's route into the party, was very different from the working class and trade union experiences of Ponnen and H. A. Naidoo, or M. P. Naicker, another prominent CP activist who had been force to leave school prematurely. Naicker subsequently worked in factories and drove a bread van before becoming active in trade union politics. During interviews in Durban, both Kaisaval Goonam and A. K. M. Docrat suggested that there was some tension in the CP between South Indian Tamils and North Indian Gujatratis, with Tamils still mainly conversing in their mother tongue and coming from working class backgrounds, whilst the Gujuratis were generally considered better

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[51] New Dictionary of South African Biography, (Pretoria, 1995), pp.196-7. G. M. Naicker might be described as a 'radical Gandhian Christian nationalist'. M. P. Naicker was a member of the CP.
[52] Pahad A Proud History, p. 48.
[53] Reddy 'introduction', Yusuf Dadoo, p. 51.

travelled, higher caste and class, supposedly more sophisticated, speaking mostly in English, and with far greater direct contact with India.[55] This is not be entirely surprising, as it reflects prejudices transported from the Indian subcontinent, where south Indians were often considered the 'country hick cousins', of the nation, reflecting preconceptions of the 'Dravidian' south and the Aryan north, which intersected with caste prejudices about skin colour. South Indians were often darker, which was associated with lower castes.

Although all the CP's Indian members were deeply attached to, and influenced by, events in India, north Indians seemed to have more links with, and were particularly closely connected to Gandhi and the leadership of the NIC. Dadoo was a prime example of this. As Indian CP members pursued a policy of infiltrating and taking over the NIC, they called themselves the 'Nationalist bloc', an ambivalent term that seemed to encompass both an acknowledgement of their alliance with, and support of, the Indian nationalist movement and their commitment to a South African 'national community'.[56] By the late 1930s, colonial-born Indians hoped to challenge the conservative merchant politics of the NIC and entered into an alliance with CPSA members to do so. In 1939, this radical wing formed the Natal Indian Association. They began to organise against the segregationist measures which were being introduced by the government, and established the Anti-Segregation and Passive Resistance Councils.

Segregation was a pressing issue at the time, and was obviously causing major divisions amongst Indians. However, these were not always as clear cut as a fight between accommodationist merchants and radical political activists. In the latter half of the 1930s and early 1940s, amidst growing hysteria about Indian penetration, as well as alarm amongst Indians regarding their threatened interests, the Natal Municipal Association called for 'voluntary Indian segregation' as a way of resolving plans for racial zoning. The NIA and NIC were keen to accuse each other of collaborating with the authorities, but, in

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[54] Soobrayan pp. 10-11.

[55] A. K. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban, August 1995; Dr. K. Goonam, interview with PR, Durban August 1995. This perception of Tamils as 'the lowest of the low' was at times also reinforced by British officials; see DO 35, 1122, G.715/2, where, in a communique written in December 1944 on the 'Indian Political Question' the writer speaks of 'Tamil workers' who are even 'lower than the Natives' and who were despised by the 'Zulu, with their great war-like traditions' because of their 'puny' size and passivity.

reality, they both seemed prepared to enter a 'gentleman's agreement' in terms of which Indians would not buy residential property in white areas, but would vigorously defend their right to trade in non-Indian areas. Whites, after all, constituted the vast majority of the merchants' customers.[57] While each tried to outdo the other in calling for the protection of 'Indian national honour', they were nonetheless following a logic which required trading rights in all areas, but was ambivalent about residential segregation. They argued that while enforced segregation was a slur on 'national honour' because of its inference of racial inferiority, it was 'natural' for people of the same race to live together: 'historical experiences show that the world over people of the same race find it congenial and convenient to live together and the Indians in South Africa are no exception to this rule.'[58] Indians, they claimed, only moved into white areas because of a lack of amenities elsewhere: 'it is our belief that if suitable residential sites and other amenities are provided for all Indians, this alleged problem would be solved.'[59]

Though merchants wished to reach a compromise with the government which would protect their businesses, the popular perception, among South Africans of all 'races' at this time, was that it was a 'sociologically accepted fact' that people preferred to 'live amongst their own', and some Indian workers also saw a form of segregation as a solution to their acute lack of civic amenities. Writing in the Rand Daily Mail in June, 1939, B. L. Sigamoney, who had previously organised Indian workers through the ISL, voiced the opinions of many working-class Indians regarding voluntary segregation, stating that many of them considered it to be a solution to their problems.

Indian attitudes to segregation were complex. Merchants were not always against segregation per se; rather they wished to help shape segregationist legislation in ways that protected their interests. From a different perspective, many workers saw voluntary

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[56] A. K. M Docrat, interview with PR, Durban August 1995; Freund Insiders and Outsiders p. 50.

[57] This was also recognised in a report entitled 'Indian Political Activists in the Union' which was produced for the British government at the request of Atlee. It noted that 'the Indian merchant ...is not ready to risk his investment or trade by pressing the whites, who purchase 95 per cent of his goods to far'. Office of the High Commission for Pretoria, 19 October 1943, DO 35 1122 G.715/10.

[58] NIC Pamphlet, ANC Papers, ICS, No.18. This was a sentiment that voiced by CP members, colonial born Indians and merchants alike, as well as the Broome Commissions and government bodies.

[59] NIC Pamphlet, ANC Papers, ICS, No.18.

segregation as a solution to their material problems. On the other hand, although radicals advanced the interests of the business community in many ways, they saw opposition to *enforced* segregation as a central principle of their political platform of equality, democratic rights and citizenship, even if this opposition was often expressed in terms of 'an affront to Indian honour', or a 'slur on the Mother country'.[60]

In 1939, Dadoo and the 'Nationalist Bloc' were considering a passive resistance campaign as a response to the Asiatic Land and Trading Act. For advice, Dadoo turned, not to the party, but to Gandhi to whom he wrote: 'follow(ing) the path of Satyagraha to stop the act from passing on to the Statute Book.'[61] This was followed by several telegrams sent by Dadoo and Gandhi's son Manilal, to India. On April 30th, they wrote,

UNION GOVERNMENT INTRODUCING INTERTIM BILL TOMORROW. COMMUNITY RESOLVED. OFFER SATYAGRAHA EXPECTING YOUR BLESSING AND GUIDANCE.[62]

After a period of non-commital, Gandhi, advised Dadoo: 'You have to suffer, not I; therefore let god be your guide'.[63] By this time, Gandhi had begun a correspondence with Smuts, and wanted to see if he could negotiate a 'favourable' solution. Thus on July 19, 1939 he instructed Manilal and Dadoo to 'postpone passive resistance till further instructions'. Dadoo was dismayed, and responded that all the preparations had been made and that supporters of the campaign would be confused. He would now have to tell his 'Indian brethren' that despite taking a 'definite decision to launch the Passive Resistance struggle on August Ist...at that historic gathering of 6,000 Indians...we had to postpone that struggle at the eleventh hour on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi.'[64] Nevertheless, Gandhi still hoped for a 'honourable settlement' through Smuts, and the campaign was delayed until further notice. This was not the last time that Dadoo was to follow Gandhi's advice. After the decision to postpone the campaign, Dadoo issued a press statement:

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[60] Statement made by SAIC Deputation to India, March 1946, <u>ANC Papers</u>, ICS, No. 3.
[61] Letter from Dr. Y. M. Dadoo and S. B. Mehd to Gandhiji, March 15 1939, Reddy, <u>Yusuf Dadoo</u>, p. 366.
[62] Telegram from Dr. Dadoo and Manilal Gandhi to Gandhiji, April 22 1939, Reddy, <u>Yusuf Dadoo</u>, p. 366.
[63] Telegram from Gandhiji to Dr. Dadoo, May 4 1939, Reddy, <u>Yusuf Dadoo</u>, p. 367.

Mahatma Gandhi has been our guide and mentor in all that the Passive Resistance Council has been doing in this matter, and we shall wholeheartedly await his advice; for we realise that his interest in the cause of the Indians of South Africa has not abated one whit, even though many years have elapsed since he left South Africa. *I desire however, to stress the fact that the Asiatic (Land and Trading) Act of 1939 aims at the virtual economic extinction of the Indian community of the Transvaal, and casts a slur of inferiority on the whole Indian nation.* (Original emphasis).[65]

By October, 1939, Manilal Gandhi was appealing to Indians 'in a spirit of tolerance to keep calm and abstain from giving the slightest cause or irritation to the European public'.[66] It was not 'right' the time, and Indians were again asked to refrain from purchasing land or property in European areas.[67]

A Change in Direction for the CPSA

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, it was to affect the CPSA in several ways. The CPSA had to rethink its policy towards the war. Now, the Soviet Union called on all socialists to support the war effort in order to help protect the world's first, and to date, only, socialist state. The CPSA changed direction, declaring that the nature of the war had altered. Broad fronts of democratic forces had to be set up in order to fight fascism and defend the Soviet Union. For many people with socialist leanings, particularly left-wing white South Africans, this was a welcome move, and the Party became increasingly popular. Previously, the CPSA had occupied the ambiguous position of organising the only anti-war movement in South Africa apart from the far right that openly supported Hitler. Now, they seemed joined to a national cause, and in this new climate, they enjoyed some degree of tolerance from the government. As it was also fighting Hitler's troops, the Soviet Union was no longer the hated and feared enemy. Stalin was transformed into a cuddly 'Uncle Joe'. Sales of The Guardian, the party paper, soared from 1,200 in 1940 to 42,000 in 1943. Membership of the party also grew to over 1300.[68]

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[64] Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo p. 61.

[65] Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo p. 371.

[66] This was Gandhi's refrain when he left South Africa in 1914, and was to become his mantra to South African Indians at times of radical resistance.

[67] Indian Opinion, 20 October 1939.

[68] Drew Discordant Comrades p. 235; The Guardian, had been started by Cape Town left-wing activists, many of whom were members of the Left Book Club. Many prominent Indian activists, such as H.A. Naidoo, Ismail Meer, Dawood Seedat,and M.P. Naicker, both party and congress members, were regular contributors to the paper. Seedat was the editor of the paper in the Durban office in the early 1950s. Dadoo met his future wife, Winnie Kramer, at the Johannesburg Guardian office when she started work there as a bookkeeper. See L.

But much of this expansion was amongst white South Africans, and members of the CPSA began to direct party work towards the white electorate. In 1943, Sam Kahn and Betty Radford were elected to Cape Town City Council. Party members subsequently participated on the controversial Advisory Boards[69] and were 'equivocal on issues of social integration'.[70]

As a consequence of this, Indian and African members were, in the main, left to work within their own communities. This tended to emphasise the national character of their particular struggles. A considerable number of Africans were, in any case, ambivalent towards the Second World War. Many were sympathetic to the fight against fascism, and, in particular, supported Abbysinia's struggle against Mussolini's invasion of the country.[71] In 1935, African and Coloured dockworkers in Durban and Cape Town refused to 'load Italian ships with chilled meat destined for Mussolini's soldiers in East Africa.'[72] But Japan's entry into the war caused ambivalent feelings, as many Africans considered Japan to be a 'coloured nation' that might attack South Africa and liberate its black population.[73] And the war in Europe for the defence of democracy failed to resonate in the same way as it did for other sections of South African society, given the lack of African democratic rights.

However, Indian party members responded to the new party line on the war quite quickly. By now, India itself had become heavily involved in the war. And Indian members of the CPSA continued their political dance with the NIC. At this time, communists, colonial-born Indians, and merchants alike, looked to Indian workers for their political constituency. Ideologically and practically, they had little choice. For their part, for Indian workers, the 1940s were fearful and uncertain times. As discussed in Chapter Six, by 1945, Indian workers had suffered defeat in their trade union struggles and were on the defensive, because of the possibility of their being replaced by African labour. They were retreating

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Switzer, 'Socialism and the Resistance Movement: the life and times of The Guradian, 1937-1952', in L Switzer, (ed.), South Africa's Alternative Press, pp.267-307.

[69] These were boards that were set up with the government, in order to co-operate with the national organisations on questions of housing and municipal planning. They proved to be largely ineffectual.

[70] Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 237.

[71] Drew, Discordant Comrades, p. 225.

[72] 'Refuse to Ship Goods to Abysinnia!', Umsebenzi, June 22, 1935, Document 58, South African Communists Speak, p. 124.

into a specifically Indian working-class identity, and mobilising to protect what they saw as specifically Indian jobs. White workers were also returning from the war at this time, and the labour market subsequently became even more competitive, with little room for militant trade union activity. Indians, on the whole, were uncertain of their present and fearful for their future. The lure of Indian nationalism and the attraction of imminent Indian independence played a powerful role in their consciousness, but in very contradictory ways. Pride in being Indian helped them deal with the way they were treated in South African society. However, whenever there was increased government legislation, threatening Indians with repatriation, as was frequent in this period, imaginings of India began to change quite dramatically. Echoing the reaction of the young Dadoo and his first experience of India, a memorable picture in The Leader, a Natal Indian newspaper, depicted a windswept village hut during the monsoon in India with the caption 'Do you want to be sent home to this?' [74]

'A Slur on the Indian Nation': The Pegging Act of 1943

The Trading and Occupation of Land Restriction Act of 1943 was an extension of the Transvaal Pegging Act of 1939. The act proposed to prohibit the further sale of any fixed property and to segregate Indians permanently in limited areas to prevent them from expanding from these areas in future. This was set up as yet another temporary measure and a second Broome Commission was organised in 1943 to investigate whether Indian 'penetration' had accelerated since 1940. The Smuts government was trying to juggle international opposition to anti-Indian legislation with white South African demands for action to be taken against Indian encroachment and economic competition. When the second Broome Commission did not conclude that Indians would soon be flooding urban areas, a third Broome Commission was set up in 1944, which was to co-operate and

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[73] E. Pahad, 'A Proud History of Struggle', p. 53. Similar views were expressed in India.
[74] The Leader 23 February 1949.

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negotiate a settlement with the Natal Indian Congress.[75] The result was the Pretoria Agreement of the 19th of April 1944.[76]

It was the so-called conservative wing of the NIC that agreed to collaborate with the Smuts government at this time, representing the interests of the merchant class in the guise of providing leadership for the whole community. Their initial reaction to the Pegging Act had been to protest in the traditional political ways, calling for petitions, making statements to the government and calling on the international community to come to their aid. By compromising with the government in the third Broome Commission, they hoped to protect their commercial interests within the urban sector and to agree to some form of segregation, as long as housing and service provision met with European standards. In terms of the Pretoria Agreement, a board was established of two Indians and three Europeans under the aegis of a European legal adviser, who would allocate property under licence to Indians. Legally, this agreement recognised the right of Indians to own and occupy land anywhere in Natal except where it 'engendered racial bickering due to juxtaposed living in residential areas'.[77] In practice, this meant that the NIC had agreed to accept voluntary segregation as long as reasonable civic amenities were provided. This was intended not only to ensure their future commercial interests but also to protect current investments, which were threatened with confiscation.

Not only did the new Act seem to close all the opportunities for advancement that Indians had managed to carve out for themselves; it also contained an internal contradiction. While it did not recognise the right of India to intervene officially on behalf of Indian South Africans, they were being denied any right to equal citizenship precisely because they were Indians.[78] The government of India severed relations with South Africa after the introduction of the Act and attempts at mediation through the United Nations also

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[75] By this time, the NIA had folded and radicals were once more directly involved in the NIC.

[76] 'Memorandum submitted on behalf of the NIC to the Select Committee of the Provisional Council on the Subject of the Draft Ordinance for the Licensing Regulations and Control of Occupation of Dwellings', ANC Papers, ICS, No.20.

[77] S. B. Mukherji, Indian Minority in South Africa, (New Delhi, 1959), p.132.

[78] Mukherji, Indian Minority, p.142.

failed.[79] The involvement of the Indian government, and its insistence on airing the 'South African Indian problem' in the international arena was to become an increasing irritant to the South African government.

Relations between different interest groups in the NIC were deeply contentious at this time. In 1943, a memorandum on Indian political activities in the Union was prepared by the High Commission in Pretoria for their Kenyan counterparts at the request of Clement Atlee. It reflected these divisions, observing that the 'most obvious character' of Indian political organisations in South Africa 'was their disunity'. It also noted that 'communism is spreading among the younger urban Indians and indeed the chairman of the Durban branch of the Communist Party is an Indian Hindu, H.A. Naidoo'.[80]

At the SAIC conference in June 1943, there were many calls for unity amongst Indians in Natal, and the conference recorded a 'deep sense of disappointment' with the NIA, who were not given representation at the meeting.[81] At the same conference, C. Ismail and A. I. Kajee called for a united front with other non-European organisations. After much discussion, the conference passed a motion limiting any joint political action to 'specific issues'.[82] Heated debates also centred on 'alien ideological doctrines', which threatened to split the Indian community. Councillor Ahmed Ismail declared: 'Within recent times, I have noticed that there has been a tendency for certain groups to introduce into Indian organisations such as the TIC and NIC ideals where differ – are entirely alien – to the objects of Congress..I view this tendency with grave apprehension as harmful to the organisation of the Indian community.' Radicals were told to maintain discipline when they suggested that 'Indians are not a single class undivided in political thought.'[83]

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[79] E. Roux. Time Longer Than Rope, p. 365.
[80] 'Indian Political Activities in the Union', DO 35, 1122, G.715/10.
[81] SAIC Conference, Gandhi Hall, 26-29 June 1943, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 10.
[82] SAIC Conference, Gandhi Hall, 26-29 June 1943, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 10.
[83] Councillor A. Ismail, 'Statement made to bodies of Congress' on 24 May 1945, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 10.

Radicals rejoined the NIC in 1944,[84] not least because of the psychological importance of controlling the organisation founded by Gandhi, who was invoked in every letterhead and in many of the speeches and articles. Nevertheless, after they had stated their understanding of class, however limited, it seems even more incongruous that they were to highlight the interests of the Indian business community during the 1946-48 Passive Resistance campaign and beyond. They argued that if Indian commercial opportunities were curtailed, the prospects for Indian employment would also diminish. However, Indian employers used the same rationale of the competitive market place as their white counterparts, and were often the most exploitative landlords of working class Indians and Africans. Dadoo himself was acutely aware of the housing shortage, but saw it as an aspect of need for a political struggle for democratic rights. In an article published in The Guardian in March 1947, written as he was leaving for India with G. M. Naicker in the middle of the passive resistance campaign, he wrote:

> In South Africa the situation is growing from bad to worse. The appalling and unbelievable housing shortage shows no signs of solution. Thousands of homeless people are forced to live in sacks and hessian shanties....the important task is to pursue with greater intensity...full democracy for all',[85]

It was not that Indian communists in nationalist organisations ignored the working class. Rather, like Gandhi and Polak and the £3 tax, workers' interests were not concretely addressed, and often came lower down the agenda than property and trading rights and the ideal of citizenship. Numerous examples of this can be found in the working committees set up within the NIC after the radical take-over. In 1948, a report given by the Housing Sub-Committee at the NIC conference in Durban illustrated this starkly. Tenants of the Indian merchant and political activist, E. M. Paruk, who were resident in Riverside, were given notice to vacate the shanties that they occupied on Paruk's land. They asked the NIC to intervene on their behalf. Congress's response was to obtain a promise from Paruk that 'no-one would be evicted with undue harshness or severity'.[86] The same report advocated defending Indian land investments from a government intervention which aimed at

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[84] The list of members attending the provincial conference in Durban in February 1944, includes D. A. Seedat, M. D. Naidu, P. M. Harry and G. Ponnen. See Provincial Conference, Durban, 19-20 February 1944, Agenda Book, ANC Papers, ICS, No.24.
[85] Y. Dadoo, The Guardian, March 13, 1947.
[86] 'Report of The Sub-Committee on Housing', NIC Second Provisional Conference, 29-31 May 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No.26.

redistributing areas of Cato Manor to Africans, in an attempt to improve the squalid living conditions of African tenants, most of whom had Indian 'shacklords'. In these circumstances, the creation of an overarching political identity was no easy task. In the next chapter I will examine how theses problems fed into the passive resistance campaign of 1946.

Chapter Eight

Being Indian the South African Way:
finding a place in the urban landscape

In the 1940s, despite the deeply inscribed contradictions amongst Indian South Africans, workers still found some comfort in the wider politics of 'community' in the face of tightening state repression. Indian workers had an ambivalent relationship with merchants, not least because their relationship was defined by both patronage and exploitation. The contradictory political agenda of Indian radicals in 1946 in primarily pursuing merchant interests also complicated matters. However, a significant number of Indian workers joined the passive resistance campaign against the 'Ghetto Act'. Through trade unions, they joined the political resistance organised by the Anti Segregationist Council, which was set up in 1944, in opposition to the accommodationist politics of the merchant elite.[1] In the years between 1944 and 1946, it seemed that the category of class was proving an insufficient focus for Indian political organisation. A radical national consciousness was apparently in the ascendant. In 1945, a CP-SACB coalition took over the leadership of the NIC.

On the 21 October, 7,000 Indians attended an 'historic' NIC meeting at Curries Fountain in Durban, and elected all 46 nominees of the Anti Segregation Council to the NIC executive, including 13 CPSA members.[2] As the incoming president, G. M. Naicker set out the aims of the new leadership:

> 'the Anti-Segregation Council candidates had been elected because the Kajee-Pather leadership had become outdated - it had left the Indian people to drift to disaster.' He continued 'We offer you our earnest desire to serve the community. We have no ambition for power. We decided to fight because we felt that your voice was not being heard. We repudiate the charge that we want to pit the poor against the rich. We hold no ill-will against anybody. "We must mobilise all our strength to seek a better life... We are, after all, sons of South Africa; and all we want is to live as free citizens in a free world." Continuing, Dr. Naicker said that this was a great day for the members and officials of the Anti-Segregation Council. "There comes a time in the life of the people when the opinion of the common people jumps ahead of those few who are in control and the man-in-the-street becomes wiser than the politician." This was such a time in the life of the Indian community, he said. "We will not dilly-dally with our demands. We will be bold, sensible and decisive. We will never compromise on our principles and we make it clear to the authorities

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[1] For example, see interview with Mr. M in Chetty 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', paper presented at History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand, February 1990, p. 6; Kay Moonasamy, interview with PR, Johannesburg August 1995.

[2] Kay Moonasamy, interview with PR, Johannesburg August, 1995; Minutes of Annual General Meeting of NIC held at Curries Fountain, 21 October 1945, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25.

that we will not go down on bended knees for crumbs. We want to live as men." The policy of the new leadership could not possibly be broader, for it was based on national lines, Dr. Naicker said. The new leaders would fight against any measure directed against the Indian people. The immediate programme of the Congress would be: the demand for the unconditional repeal of the Pegging Act; the vetoing of the Natal Housing Ordinance; no segregation and no residential zoning; the removal of the provincial barriers, which were a stigma on the Indian people; adult suffrage for the Indian people; and free education for Indian children up to the Junior Certificate.[3]

This meeting at Curries Fountain forms an integral part of the popular imagination of the Indian radicals that I interviewed. Like the 1913 Passive Resistance campaign, 'everyone' was at there, and the routing of 'conservative' leaders such as P.R. Pather and A.I. Kajee[4] was seen as a seminal moment in radical Indian politics. Nevertheless, Naicker's speech reinforces the desire to organise around specifically Indian issues. Membership of the NIC rose from 3000 to 22,000,[5] and campaign members vowed to make Indians in India more aware of the situation of Indians in South Africa; there was a general celebration of being Indian, which fuelled defiance towards discriminatory state policies in South Africa.

The Politics of Space: passive resistance 1946-48

Opposition to the Pretoria Agreement of 1944, which the government soon reneged on, came both from radical Indians and whites. Within the Indian political community, the radicalised NIC began a new campaign of passive resistance which was co-ordinated by the Anti-Segregation Council.[6] In February 1946, the SAIC held a conference in Cape Town. The concerns expressed at this meeting, and the terms in which they were framed, reveal, despite the radical take-over of the NIC, an agenda that was, at heart, nationalist.

> The SAIC in conference assembled is gravely perturbed at the proposals announced by the Prime Minister to deal with land tenure in the Transvaal and Natal provinces...which

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[3] The Leader, 27 October, 1945.

[4] I have qualified the word conservative here because at times it is extremely hard to tell where people fall across the political divide, and there were moments when the 'reactionaries' were just as happy to use a socialist discourse and push workers interests as the communists were to adopt nationalist sentiments. As well as Kajee's involvement in trade union issues, (in addition to those discussed in Chapter Six, he was vice-president of the Natal Workers Congress, formed by the NIC in 1928), he wrote an article for Race Relations in 1946, in which he gave a class analysis of Indian South Africans, outlining how 'the Indian community, like every other community, has reacted to class struggle, and .this struggle is now super imposed upon the racial struggle', Race Relations, vol. xiii, no. 1, 1946.

[5] The Leader 12 January 1946.

[6] Inkululeko, the party newspaper, ran an article in July, 1946, criticising the resisters for their pacifist tactics, claiming that 'turning the other cheek brings defeat and disillusionment', indicating dissent in the party ranks regarding passive resistance, despite the high profile of many Indian communists in the campaign, and a CPSA message of support to the NIC conference.

proposes seriously to limit the land rights and the free economic development of the Indian community in the Transvaal and Natal.[7]

Their discourse was one of human rights, evoking the principles of the Atlantic Charter. The conference stressed the need for settlement through negotiation, whilst complaining again that the new measures were 'an insult to national honour and the dignity of the Indian nation', delegates were nominated to travel to India, England and America. The conference also called on its Executive, through the 'action of its constituent bodies... immediately to prepare the Indian people of South Africa for a concerted and prolonged resistance'. [8]

The proceedings of this conference illustrate the complex articulation of the different interests involved in the SAIC and NIC at this time. It still spoke of Indian honour, utilised petitions as a political tactic, and continued to highlight merchant interests. Passive resistance was reinscribed as a means to win democratic rights and citizenship. Despite its 'radical' take over in 1946, the dialogue of the NIC was still directed to radical national democratic rights, rather than a specific programme in the interests of the working class. And this was made possible because notions of equality and rights embody a 'plurality of meanings', which leave room for them to be translated, appropriated and differentially understood.

By this time, a campaign of passive resistance had support from both Gandhi and Nehru, who sent a message declaring that the time had come when 'this theory and practice of racial arrogance and discrimination' had to be challenged.'[9] As India approached independence, its leaders sought to use the case of South African Indians in order to exercise their political muscle, particularly at the United Nations, much to the embarrassment of the British government.[10]

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[7] 'Resolution passed at the seventeenth session held at the Mayor's Hall, SAIC, Cape Town, 8-13 February 1946, ANC Papers, ICS, No.1.
[8] 'Resolution on the Subject Matter of Round table Conference Between India and South Africa', SAIC ANC Papers, ICS, No.1.
[9] Natal Daily News 1 June 1946.
[10] See DO 35, 1122, G.715/30, where in a preliminary report in preparation for the forthcoming UN conference, it is stated that it would be ' a great potential embarrassment for us if India is allowed her head'.

The British government increasingly took the view that 'the Indian problem' was an internal matter for the South African government, and one that Smuts was genuinely trying to resolve since his return to power in 1939.[11] They agreed with Smuts' position, stated at length at the United Nations conference held in 1946, that Indian South Africans enjoyed a far higher standard of living than their counterparts in India, and were well rid of the 'deep-seated' caste prejudices that still prevailed there. Evidence was produced that Natal was, in fact, an 'economic paradise'[12] for Indians, and Smuts complained of UN interference in the domestic affairs of a member state.[13] The British delegation also concluded that the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, which was continually invoked by the government of India and the NIC, was not binding, as it had not been registered with the League of Nations, and was merely a 'gentleman's agreement'.[14] The consensus expressed in several British documents prior to, and during, the conference, was that the imperial government did not really want the 'Indian problem' discussed at the UN, and that 'a number of Indians of moderate views' felt the same way. The NIC's many lengthy pleas and telegrams to 'Socialist Britain', some from Dadoo to Attlee, were clearly an embarrassment that the British hoped would 'go away' if quietly ignored.[15]

On behalf of the Indian government, Mrs. V. Pandit stated that the treatment of Indians in South Africa was an affront to 'national pride, and the right of an individual to own land', as well as a matter of racial discrimination, which deprived Indians of their 'human rights' and 'fundamental freedoms'.[16] The discussion of the Indian question at the

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[11] See DO 35, 1122, G.715/36, where the government is 'formulating views on an official level' for the UN conference in September 1946.

[12] This was according to the Durban City Council, who produced a pamphlet in 1947 called The Indian in Natal, illustrated with pictures of well-dressed, smiling Indian school children, a view of the Springfield municipal housing scheme, and Indian men playing golf.

[13] General Smuts Address to Assembly, United Nations Organisation General Assembly Papers, 7 December 1946, DO 35, 1123, G.715/40.

[14] DO 35, 1122, G.715/36.

[15] Several telegrams were sent by the NIC and TIC to Atlee in 1946, prior to, and after the start of passive resistance. Atlee did not respond. In other correspondence to the Prime Minister's Office from the TIC regarding the Asiatic Land Tenure Bill, there is a scribbled note underneath stating 'don't reply' and another saying 'I agree'. See also DO 35, 1122, G.713/5; when Labour MP, A. Henderson unofficially received two Indian representatives from South Africa, the secretary of state, C. Dixon, wrote a confidential letter in April 1946, stating 'it is rather a pity that Mr. Henderson has found it necessary to receive these two representatives…no doubt he will do no more than listen to what they have to say.' DO 35, 1122, G.715/33.

[16] Mrs. V. Pandit, Press Release, United Nations Organisation General Assembly Papers, 7 December 1946, DO 35, 1123, G.715/40

United Nations in 1946 did little to change the position of Indians in South Africa, but the 'problem' now received considerable international publicity. It was a profound embarrassment to the British government, who were also alarmed at the letters of support for Indian South Africans that were flooding in from communist and left-wing organisations.[17] The issue hardened anti-Indian feeling on the part of the South African government, and further alienated its relations with India; in contradiction to the government's previous position on the status of Indians, it was now felt that Indian South Africans were South African citizens. Therefore they should desist from appealing to external political bodies.

Passive resistance began in earnest in June 1946, when six Indian women took a train to Durban from the Transvaal without the permits required for border crossings. In a move designed to deliberately flout the Ghetto Act, a group of men and women then squatted a piece of municipal land in Durban, illegally pitching their tents to form a resistance camp. Everyone who came to the camp in support of the campaign faced arrest under the Riotous Assembly Act,[18] and the tactical decision was made that as protesters got arrested, new volunteers would take their place. A 'hartal' was also called and many Indian shops and businesses were closed in Durban.[19] Children were kept away from school. Although these actions drew on Gandhi's example of passive resistance in South Africa in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and were also inspired by the growing importance of passive resistance as a weapon against the British in India, the campaign of 1946-48 was nevertheless also an act of political and cultural translation. Gandhi's calls for 'truth' and conscience' were replaced with ideals of 'equality' and 'democracy', giving voice to the programme of the CPSA and its contemporary platform of the popular front.[20] Whilst Gandhi's vision emphasised the attainment of spiritual truth through suffering, in 1946, passive resistance became a weapon in pursuit of democratic rights and citizenship. The campaign was able to draw on the networks of Indian political organisations and self-

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[17] See letter to Sir J. Stevensen, 16 Nov 1946 from the Dominions Office, DO 35, 1123, G.715/40.
[18] Mukherji, Indian Minority, p.142.
[19] 'Report on Passive Resistance', Passive Resistance Council of NIC: 13 June 1946-13 May 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25
[20] See Y. Dadoo, Facts About the Ghetto Act, CPSA pamphlet, 1946.

help groups that had developed in South Africa in the past forty years, as well as its tradition of political journalism.

Unlike satyagraha in 1913, the campaign set out to mobilise workers from the start, and here, Indian members of the CP could draw on their experience and influence in trade unions.[21] Despite calls for joint action between Indian, African, and Coloured congresses, many sections of the Indian community still felt that satyagraha was a 'civilised weapon', with its strict adherence to non-violence, one that Indians could 'utilise because of their ancient heritage and culture', but something that Africans were, as yet, not capable of.[22] Despite marginal support from Africans and whites, the 1946-48 campaign was very much an Indian affair, mainly involving young people in the community. The radical leaders of the NIC, and most resisters, were in their twenties.[23]

In much the same way that Gandhi had come to symbolise Indianness, satyagraha also represented something specifically Indian, which, in seeming contradiction, nevertheless had universal aspects as well. Upholding Indian honour could be combined with fighting for universal suffrage. But in 1946, although this Indianness was still rooted in an ancient Indian cultural tradition, it was transformed from its anti-modernist Gandhian antecedent into the concept of the Indian South African citizen of the modern nation-state. In the transformation, it fed into a diasporic, trans-national Indian political identity.[24]

In order to rally support for passive resistance, Yusuf Dadoo made a personal visit to Kenya, and East African Indians contributed to campaign funds. Twenty-one South African trade unions with 25,000 Indian members also pledged support. The government of India severed relations with South Africa and a South African Indian delegation went to

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[21] Kay Moonasamy, interview with PR, Johannesburg August 1995; See also 'Report on Passive Resistance', as above, which lists the occupations of the resisters. The majority were workers including bus conductors, builders, municipal and factory workers, and most (1,175 out of 1,710,) were aged between 20-25.

[22] See E.S. Reddy ,'Indian Passive Resistance in South Africa', Mainstream, New Delhi April 5, 1997.

[23] Of the 1, 710 passive resisters who went to jail, 1,476 were between 18 and 30. Of these, 1,175 were between 20 and 25. 'Report On Passive Resistance', NIC First Biennial Conference, 31May-1 June 1947, 13 June 1946-13 May 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 25.

[24] Soon after the 'radical' NIC was formed, it suggested setting up a federation of Indians in the diaspora, 'to protect and champion the cause of Indians abroad'. See The Leader, 8 June 1946.

America to petition the United Nations, where they produced propaganda outlining the conditions of Indian South Africans [25]

When the campaign first began in June 1946, it was very much an affair of the whole community, and numerous extracts from Indian papers of the time quoted Indian South Africans as saying that the bill affected the 'honour of the whole community'[26]. As noted above, factory workers, housewives, and students, as well as members of the radical political community offered themselves up for arrest.[27] Kay Moonasamy, later to become an Indian member of the Communist Party gave up his job in a factory to join the passive resistance campaign after having been active in union politics from the age of 16.[28] Yusuf Dadoo, G. M. Naicker and Dr. Kaisaval Goonam who was a member of the Indian Women's Association, were amongst those thrown into jail. All in all, around two thousand people were arrested over a two-year period, around three hundred of them women. In a leaflet issued by the CP, Dadoo outlined the main points of the campaign, invoking both India, Gandhi, and the 1913 campaign:

> It must not be forgotten that the Indian people are sons and daughters of a country with a proud and cultural heritage (sic). Their ancient motherland is the bearer of a tradition of civilisation as old as any in the world....Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the first Passive Resistance struggle was launched in South Africa in 1906. It lasted for eight years and ended in a victory. The Indian people cherish the memory of the heroes and martyrs, the many noble deeds and sacrifice and bravery, of that struggle. Whilst serving imprisonment, a young girl of only 16 contracted a fatal fever. She died within a few days of her release. Her name was Valliama R. Munuswami Mudliar.[29]

Dadoo chose to recall the young girl who was transformed into a martyr and a symbol of passive resistance by Gandhi. Addressing the specifics of the Ghetto Act, Dadoo continued:

> This Act condemns the Indian community to economic and social ruin. It takes away their fundamental and elementary right of land ownership and occupation....it strikes at the heart of Indian commercial and economic life.[30]

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[25] See A. I.Kajee, P. R. Pather, A, Christopher, The Treatment of Indians in South Africa: a memorandum of the facts, (Washington, 1946); Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, p. 365.

[26] Vahed, 'The Making of 'Indianness', p. 24.

[27] The records show 492 Factory workers, 117 waiters, 77 shop assistants, 21 bus conductors, and 43 builders and 53 municipal workers amongst the resisters. 'Report on Passive Resistance', NIC First Biennial Conference, 31 May-1 June 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25.

[28] Kay Moonasamy interview with PR, Johannesburg August 1995.

[29] CPSA pamphlet, Johannesburg, 1946, unpaginated.

[30] CPSA pamphlet, Johannesburg, 1946.

Dadoo added that as a consequence of this, all sections of the Indian community would be affected. However, beyond a bland reference to 'Food, jobs and homes for all', there is nothing of consequence in the pamphlet that specifically addresses issues affecting the Indian poor. Equal rights and citizenship are invoked as the means to achieve 'a great and proud future for our beloved country', and, although the pamphlet ends by calling for the end to all discrimination, it articulates its political demands by invoking an Indian identity, South African belonging, and a nationalist programme of democratic rights. Throughout the campaign, Gandhi and Nehru were Dadoo's mentors. In 1947, Dadoo and G. M. Naicker visited India and discussed the campaign with both of them,[31] and they continually sought their advice during its two-year duration. It was generally recognised that Dadoo and Gandhi had a 'tremendous rapport'.[32]

In April 1947, Nehru began to write to Smuts about the 'Indian South African question'. Smuts' response was: 'Nehru is keeping bombarding me with his silly correspondence...solutions are made more difficult by a general election next year, the prospect of which prevents clear-cut solutions, even if they were otherwise possible.[33] Smuts had to attempt a delicate balancing act on the 'Indian question', hamstrung by international pressures, but also having to heed the extent of anti-Indian feeling in South Africa.

The reaction of whites to the campaign was hostile and violent. They set fire to the satyagrahi camps at night, and women protesters were kicked and punched. An Indian policeman was attacked by a gang of Europeans and died from his injuries. Some whites also started a campaign called the Indian Boycott Congress (later the South African Protection Movement) which aimed to boycott Indian stores, refuse employment to Indians in European firms and generally promote anti-Indian feeling. However, if anything, this violence produced more publicity and sympathy for the passive resisters abroad.

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[31] In particular, G. M. Naicker and Dadoo consulted several times with Nehru, and although they also met P. S. Joshi, leader of the Communist Party of India, on this trip, he hardly gets mentioned in subsequent speeches and political literature. See Report on Passive Resistance, as above.
[32] E. Pahad, interview with JF, 1985.
[33] J. van der Poel , Selections from Smuts Papers: vol. 11 p. 137, quoted in W. B. White, 'Passive Resistance in Natal', Journal of Natal and Zulu History, vol. 1982, p. 19.

Initially, passive resistance did enjoy some level of success. It is important to bear in mind however that overall, support for the campaign was very mixed; there was practically no activity in places such as Ladysmith and Escourt, whilst in Pietermaritzburg and Greytown it was, at best, lukewarm. Altogether, only 5 per cent of the total Indian population of South Africa actively took part.[34] Only the community of politically active Indians participated, representing a cross-class alliance of differing political interests, that mobilised around dislocations in Durban's urban environment which mainly affected middle-class Indians. The ideological articulation of this mobilisation was through a notion of Indian community umbilically connected to a motherland on the verge of statehood. August 15, 1947, the date when India achieved independence, was also a big day for Indian South Africans.[35] With this re-affirmation of Indian political rights and the Doctor's Pact between Drs Dadoo, Naicker and Guma in the same year, the stage should have been set for a show-down with government. Yet by the end of the second year of the campaign, support was beginning to decline seriously. The police decided to stop arresting protesters, hoping to choke the movement further by starving it of the oxygen of publicity. The campaign was called off on the election of the National Party to government, and leaders of the Passive Resistance Council even sent Malan, the new Prime Minister, their congratulations. They decided to wait and see what the intentions of the new government would be before taking further action: 'The Indians are confident that you and your victorious party will make every effort to alleviate the grievances of the Indian minority in the Union amicably'.[36] Although this decision to send congratulations to the Malan government was taken at an NIC conference, it was deeply contentious, and led to much acrimonious debate, further underlining divisions within the political community.[37]

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[34] White, 'Passive Resistance', p. 8.

[35] See the Presidential Speech, NIC Second Provincial Conference, 29-31 May 1948, where B.T. Chetty declares: 'On the 15 August, 1947, our great motherland, the fountain head of our traditions and ways of life, the inspiration of our struggle for freedom attained political freedom' and goes on to emphasise the importance for South African Indians. 'Independence Day' became the 'happiest day of the year', and schools and businesses closed in celebration, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 26.

[36] Natal Daily News 28 May 1948.

[37] Whilst A. I. Meer claimed that he had 'merely acted with an open mind', M. P.Naicker, M. D.Naidoo and I. C. Meer were deeply critical of the decision, calling for its withdrawal. See NIC Provincial Conference, 29-31 May, 1948, Agenda Book, ANC Papers, ICS, No.26.

'Making a Home': community redefined

We can perhaps get closer to understanding of the collapse of passive resistance, and the failure of wider mobilisation, by looking at the campaign and the relations between groups within it in more detail. The Asiatic Land Tenure bill primarily affected the material interests of the merchants. Their place within the alliance was always an uneasy one. They had continued to collaborate with commissions set up by the government, and to have dialogue with Smuts. When the National Party came to power, the merchants' main political strategy was to negotiate with the new government. Merchants wanted to protect their material interests and this included acceptance of some level of segregation. Despite the fact that the passive resistance campaign called for reforms that would benefit merchant interests, its methods were anathema to merchants.

The passive resistance campaign seriously split Indian political leadership. When merchants withdrew their political, and more importantly, their financial support from the campaign, and formed the Natal Indian Organisation in May 1947, it was seriously weakened. Not least, it gave the government an opportunity to fracture the fragile unity of the Indian community further. The NIC suggested that 'the government ... inspired the formation of the Natal Indian Organisation in the time-honoured imperialist tradition of divide and rule: Smuts recognised it with indecent haste.'[38] The 'unholy alliance' of Smuts and Kajee collaborated to oppose the radical leadership of the NIC, and win over other parts of the Indian community. In a letter addressed to the South Africa Indian Organisation in July 1948, a breakaway umbrella group consisting of the Natal Indian Organisation and the Transvaal Indian Organisation, the government minister of the interior, Dr. T. E. Donges, stated that he was 'prepared to receive a deputation (from the SAIO) because he was aware that the NIO and TIO were 'not communist in their orientation or leadership..nor associated with any organised flouting of the laws of the country.'[39] In a reply to the minister, the SAIO outlined proposals, which, as well as trading rights and land tenure, also called for housing for the '70 per cent of Indians below the poverty datum line', and underlined the need for increased civic amenities, education facilities, and employment

[38] NIC First Biennial Conference 31 May – 1 June, 1947, ANC Papers ICS, No.25.
[39] South African Indian Organisation, Memorandum to Dr. T.E. Donges, 23 July, 1948. ANC Papers, ICS, No.11.

rights for Natal's 7,000 unemployed Indians, as well as increased social welfare. It added: 'We look on South Africa as our home.'[40] Their proposals were very similar to those outlined by the NIC at the same time. If anything, there was more emphasis on workers' issues in the SAIO statement. They wanted to collaborate with government to protect their interests, but they also wanted, and needed, Indian workers as part of their political constituency.

This was, potentially, possible because the programme and tactics of the NIC did not resonate with the whole community. One example of this was the boycott of the Royal Tour that was called by the NIC and the ANC in 1947. This decision was taken, for once, against the advice of Nehru, who was keen not to complicate negotiations at the U.N. regarding a series of Indian issues, including the South African question.[41] The proposed boycott did not enjoy popular support amongst Indians, and Kajee built on this. He formed the Durban Indian Royal Visit Committee, which organised a reception for the royal couple at Curries Fountain. They were seated on a dais shaped like the Taj Mahal and some 65,000 Indians attended the celebrations.[42] Even given that the pomp and ceremony of Royal visits always attracts onlookers, these numbers illustrates the complexity, and ambivalence of Indian identity at this time, in which ideas of imperial citizenship interacted with identification with Indian independence and notions of Indianness within South Africa. The success of the celebrations seriously undermined the NIC's leadership amongst Indians, whom it characterised as merely 'politically less advanced groups' and 'a deluded and curious crowd'.[43]

The Homeland Reimagined

Working-class support for the NIC began to fall off sharply after the early heady days of the passive resistance campaign. CP members had succeeded in involving workers through their trade union networks, but their enthusiasm declined quickly. Although the rhetoric of 'Indian honour' did mobilise workers initially, there was a failure to address the

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[40] SAIO, Memorandum to Dr. T.E. Donges, July 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No.11.
[41] Indian Views 26 February 1947.
[42] The Leader 22 March 1947.
[43] 'Presidential Address', NIC First Biennial Conference, 31 May – 1 June 1947, ANC Papers, ICS, No.25.

issues that affected workers in their everyday lives consistently. As we have seen, measures in the Ghetto Act did not directly affect workers adversely. Many of them resented the merchant community, which acted as their exploitative landlords, took their money in shops and benefited financially at their expense through extending loans and credit which were often hard to repay. Materially, Indian workers were in a class relationship with merchants, which often over-rode the ambiguous umbrella of their Indian identity. Their sense of India as an imaginary homeland was perhaps the weakest of all the groups involved, given their indentured past. Materially and ideologically, Indian workers had the least to gain from the passive resistance campaign. The manner in which the campaign addressed workers was also problematic in the long term:

> It is for the removal of the difficulties of the Indian community and for the upholding of the honour of Indians that we have launched this campaign...We consider this inhuman Act derogatory to the honour and dignity of the Indian community as a whole and to the Indian nation.[44]

This, and the many other calls on Indians to uphold Indian dignity, have pride in the Indian nation and recognise a kinship with Indians in the 'Motherland' were ineffective as a political programme that would actually address the inadequacies in the material living conditions of Indian workers. By the second half of the 1940s, the local state had begun to provide segregated municipal housing in a small way,[45] and the Ghetto Act included measures for the expansion of the municipal housing programme to replace the overcrowded and squalid living conditions of poor Indians. These proposals were welcomed by significant sections of workers. As has been shown, poor accommodation and a lack of services directly affected large parts of the Indian population, and it is not surprising that some sections of the community chose to collaborate with the authorities in the creation of their new built environments.

The example of the Cato Manor Ratepayers Association provides an interesting illustration of the malleable nature of readings of identity, as Goolam Vahed has shown. This Indian association was willing to co-operate with the Durban municipality, but

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[44] Y. Dadoo.The Guardian July 4 1946.
[45] By June 1946, according to official sources, the Durban City Council had built 675 Indian houses under the Municipal Housing Scheme, and promised another 18,533. See The Indian In Natal.

requested that Indian workers carry out the building work.[46] These Indian ratepayers wove together notions of class and nation in a very particular configuration that was significantly different to that of the merchants, with their strong material ties to India. Indian workers, with their history of rural and urban dislocations, finally found in the promise of provision of municipal housing, a place to be, settle, put down roots, and 'produce the locality' so essential so social life. Ironically, the very process of segregation and apartheid in the development of capitalism in South Africa eventually created the conditions for a 'home'. They too were being Indian in their own South African way.

The falling away of mass support in the passive resistance campaign also highlighted other factors. Despite its importance to communists and radical nationals, the issue of democratic rights and citizenship, for example, failed to appeal to workers, who were more concerned with issues of social space, access to jobs, and their place in the urban landscape. Within the Indian working class, this involved some acceptance of segregationist measures, because these went some way to meeting long-term housing requirements and service provision beyond those offered within the confines of their own community. Possibilities of more secure, long-term settlement shaped different readings of identity beyond a politics of national rights based on the franchise. Theirs was a fundamentally different compromise with segregationist measures than that of the merchant elite, who wished to protect their business interests. Above all, at this time, there was a reformulation of a sense of place and being, where being came to represent the specific, the concrete, the known and familiar sites of social practices within which they were shaped and formed, and with which their identities were so closely bound. There 'place' had become urban South Africa, where they worked, lived and experienced their social relations.

India may have provided a 'resting place for their imagination', a seeming comfort and haven in times of uncertainty about work and housing, but the landscape of South Africa had become the 'real'. 'Home' was relocated after the dislocations of indenture and

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[46] Vahed 'The Making of "Indianness"', p. 29; the SAIO also suggested using Indian workers for specifically Indian municipal projects as a way of creating employment opportunities in Natal. See SAIO Memorandum, July 1948, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 11.

their experiences in South Africa, and India became the mirror image of identification. If India was the 'motherland', it was the motherland from which one had to separate.

Many Indian workers now wanted to arrest further displacement in order to clear a space for the formation of new relational histories, new shared codes of community:

> I remember when we moved into our new home the sense of overwhelming relief, of feeling that this was something long term and not under continuous threat. I came from a family of indentured labourers and our family had had to shift several times…we were still Indian but South Africa was our home and where we had our livelihoods..India seemed very remote. What would I do if I went there? I'd never even been there and nor have my children.[47]

> We wanted to have secure jobs and places to live. We wanted to send our children to school, the traders, the merchant Indians, they were happy to exploit us but they couldn't offer us that. They said we were part of an Indian community but I felt that this was only when it suited them. They kept on saying that the government was insulting the Indian nation. But what I wanted was work so I could support my family.[48]

> (we) are just ordinary workers endeavouring to eke out a living… We favour segregation, and do not consider it a stigma, or an affront to our national pride. We welcome townships well laid out with amenities, solely for Indian Occupation.[49]

Community is both 'a narrative product, and an organic achievement', in which there is a tension between 'the representation of space' (the conceived) and the spaces of representation (the lived).[50] In this period, a community of Indian workers began to move from the former to the latter. In doing so, they opened up another fissure in the wider politics of Indianness.

For some, the new urban housing schemes also reinforced a class identity as they differentiated themselves from merchants, but they conceived this identity in exclusive nationalist terms because of their antagonistic relations with other social groups. In housing and work, an identity of Indianness was becoming as important as that of class. Radical leaders had a different narrative of nation, one conceived out of India's political struggle for independence, and articulated through the project of modernity and democratic rights within a nation state. This project of modernity did not necessarily accord with what

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[47] SK, interview with PR, Durban June 1995.
[48] KD, interview with PR, Durban July 1995.
[49] The Natal Mercury 19 February 1946.
[50] This is drawn from Lefebvre, The Production of Space, pp. 68-168. See also L. Back and M. Keith, 'Rights and Wrongs': Youth, Community and Narratives of Racial Violence', in P. Cohen (ed.), New Ethnicities, Old Racisms, pp. 131-153.

workers perceived as their material interests, as a result of their daily altercations with other groups. Notions of a common citizenship and non-racial alliances became political abstractions. For instance, the Doctor's Pact, a symbolic marker for non-racial and democratic politics, meant little to Indian workers who regarded both Africans and whites as competitors for jobs and urban space. In particular, relationships with Africans tended to be acrimonious and exploitative, perhaps because in part the relationship between Indian merchants and Africans was conflated to represent all Indian-African interaction. In the 1940s, this social hostility expressed itself in terms of increased competition over space, something that will be discussed in more detail in relation to the Durban Riots.[51]

Integrated Spaces: 'it was how we lived our lives'

From the point of view of Indian radicals and communists, however, non-racial democratic politics also had a social basis:

> I would say that the Doctor's Pact only had meaning at the level of the leadership, to workers on the ground, they felt differently you know. But it seemed real to us. We were caught up in bringing democracy to the non-European. Non racialism seemed like a real possibility to us. But this was because of the mix of people we would have contact with in our political activities. It was how we lived our lives.[52]

M. D. Naidoo stressed, for example, the point that the politics practised by radicals in the 1940s were based on their perceptions of where their material interests lay and how their perceptions were framed within their social relations. Although many tensions existed within the CPSA, it was nevertheless a multi-racial organisation, as were many of the societies that it helped to create. A good example of this was the Liberal Study Group. As an article in Indian Opinion put it: 'Perhaps very few organisations can boast of such a mixed membership as that of ours. In the Group we have Indians, Coloureds, Europeans, Africans and Chinese'.[53] Such eclecticism was rare in wider South African society. Many communists saw the political struggle as necessitating the formation of a multi-racial anti-fascist movement, which incorporated democratic alliances and universal franchise and citizenship rights. This platform of liberal democracy was given a boost when it intersected with the political platform of radical sections within nationalist organisations.

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[51] See below, Chapter Nine.
[52] M. D. Naidoo, interview with PR, London April 1986.

'Marvellous People': Indian heroes and communist struggle

Because of their class positions, radical nationalists also had more to gain from a programme of democratic rights which provided greater opportunities to compete more effectively, on a level playing field, for white collar jobs and desirable housing in attractive social spaces shared with white South Africans. Moreover, it would be wrong to draw a firm line between Indian communists and radical nationalists. India, and in particular, Gandhi, provided a powerful bridgehead between them. Congress organisations all invoked Gandhi, 'the greatest man of all time'. In Dadoo's words: 'This is the man – the pilot of India's march to freedom – who is the source of inspiration of our joint struggle for democratic rights in South Africa.'[54] By this time, Gandhi was an international folk-hero of resistance. Despite the hostile analysis of Indian communists in India, he was re-invented many times around the world, and came to symbolise disparate hopes and aspirations. In addition, in South Africa, there was a feeling of personal involvement in the 'production' of Gandhi as anti-colonial messenger.[55] Contrary to the antagonism at that time between Indian communists and Congress in India, where for many communists, Gandhi was far from a national hero, in South Africa, Gandhians and communists shared many political ideals. Gandhi himself declared that Dadoo had 'made a very favourable impression on everybody here.'[56] It is telling that Gandhi was so favourably inclined to communist-nationalist co-operation in South Africa, at a time of such hostility between communists and nationalists in India. It is, perhaps, an indication that South African Indian communists were also, at heart, good nationalists.

In South Africa, Indian communists did not enjoy a discrete identity. They were Indian and South African and communist and they were not immune from the wider enticements of identification with the nationalist struggle in India. Indian national heroes were their heroes. In <u>White Girl in Search of the Party</u>, Pauline Podbury, a member of the CP who married HA Naidoo, recalls:

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[53] <u>Indian Opinion</u>, 25 January 1941.
[54] Y.S. Dadoo, statement to the court, 1948, Annexure No.5, NIC Provincial Conference, 29-31 May, 1948, <u>ANC Papers</u>, ICS, No.26.
[55] JK interview with PR, Durban June 1995.

On Monday 31st of March 1941 I walked into the Liberal Study Group to work on our weekly magazine and found an atmosphere of extraordinary excitement. 'have you heard the news?' Seedat buttonholed me and without waiting for a reply announced triumphantly, 'Indira Nehru is in town'.[57]

Fatima Meer also remembers this identification with Indian national heroes:

We became very involved with the Indian liberation movement in India, and Nehru and Gandhi were, you know, very great figures – they really loomed as superbeings, you know, they could do no wrong. It wasn't just a simple kind of heroism...they were marvellous people, wonderful people, and they were involved in this whole liberation of India, and my father was constantly writing about that struggle[58] -so we had a sense of goodness, and we had a sense of righteousness and we had a sense of freedom..the thing to do in life was to fight for one's freedom.[59]

The politics of Indian nationalism thus powerfully gripped the imagination of Indian party members. Men such as M. D. Naidoo had become politicised by reading about the history of India and joining the Indian Youth League in the 1930s.[60] Many others were members of Indian community and religious organisations and became politicised through their treatment as Indians in South Africa. Radical nationalists had also come out of these organisations. Communists and nationalists formed overlapping communities and a key point of intersection was a shared Indian identity. When there was a need to raise funds for political activities or organise self-help, for example, radical Indians were not averse to turning to merchants and asking them to provide finance. Community could be, and was, invoked if and when necessary.

The Franchise and the Popular Front

The question of a universal franchise came to dominate the CPSA's perspective within this period, and one of its central concerns developed into the question of democratic rights and citizenship within South Africa. An important reason for this growing emphasis was the change in policy regarding the Second World War. When war broke out in 1939, the Communist Party had characterised it as an inter-imperialist war and engaged in anti-war propaganda. When the Nazi government invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the party subsequently changed its position and advocated an anti-fascist front to defend the

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[56] E. S. Reddy, Gandhiji's Vision of a Free South Africa, (New Delhi, 1995), p. 116.
[57] P. Podbury. White Girl in Search of the Party, p. 81.
[58] Fatima Meer's father was running the newspaper Indian Views at this point.
[59] F. Meer, interview with J.F., Durban 1985.
[60] M. D. Naidoo, interview with JF, London June 1986.

USSR, this question of democratic rights and the franchise began to assume a increasing significance. It became an integral part of their demands within campaigns and was given added weight when the political mobilisation against the National Party after the war was also conducted in the language of anti-fascism. At a mass meeting in Durban to celebrate the release of Dadoo and M. P. Naicker from prison, Naicker informed the crowds: 'We have reached a stage when we can no longer think in terms of the Indian people alone. We must form a United Democratic Front and challenge any force that will lead the land of our birth to the fate of fascist Germany or Japan.'[61]

The spectre of fascism was not some remote question that was only aligned with events in Europe. According to M. D. Naidoo, Mein Kampf was translated and published as a weekly column in the Daily News in South Africa.[62] Fascists and communists often came to blows on the streets of Johannesburg and Durban. Fascist ideology was seen as infecting the policies of the United Party and underlying the ideology of the National Party. The CP had its position clear five months before the elections of 1948:

> While the United Party contains the seeds of Fascism, yet it provides opportunity for progressive advances; while the National Party policy, if adopted, would immediately place South Africa under a Fascist regime in which the right of the working people and the non-Europeans would become non-existent. [63]

Anti-fascism, as a political strategy, generates the need to pursue democratic goals, not least, so that further political activity remains possible. In the long and short-term demands inherent in the Communist Party's language of socialist change, notions of citizenship overlapped with the political agenda of radical nationals in resistance politics. The right to the franchise and to buy land that was demanded by the passive resistance movement were part of a wider democratic agenda against the forces of fascism rather than one plank of a political programme dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism. That, the communists argued, would come later.[64]

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[61] M. P. Naicker, 'Statement on Release from Prison', Annexure no. 2, NIC Provincial Conference, 19-20 February, 1944, ANC Papers, ICS, No. 24.

[62] M. D. Naidoo interview with JF, London June 1986.

[63] The Guardian, 29 April, 1948.

[64] M. D. Naidoo, interview with PR London April, 1986.

Allied to this, was the shift in the party's position on its capacity to organise on non-racial lines. In 1939, younger members of the LSG, including M. D. and R. D. Naidoo and Yusuf Dadoo formed the NEUF, and M. D. Naidoo was elected secretary of the group in 1940.[65] As we have seen in Chapter Six, many of these men were also involved in intense trade union activity. On both fronts, there was a real desire, at leadership level, to form non-racial political organisations. However, by 1942, CP members were told to disband the NEUF and return to radicalising the nationalist organisations. The emphasis was now on an alliance between different national bodies, rather than multi-racial organisations. The Party saw this as a way of accepting the reality of South Africa, and learning to overcome problems of organisation, in a situation in which communities were geographically differentiated, often deeply hostile to one another, and, vitally, spoke in different languages.

In the 1940s, as segregation sharpened the oppression of groups of people perceived of and discriminated against as racial/national entities, the nationalist organisations were increasingly drawn into challenging the state. There thus seemed to be a real possibility of forming alliances that would feed into a wider struggle against repressive state legislation. As the party stated:

> new forms of mass struggle are being evolved by the people themselves. The increasingly reactionary drive of the Smuts government is creating a new spirit of unity amongst the non-European peoples in particular which is laying the basis for an offensive against all oppressive legislation.[66]

The CPSA now made a real attempt to relate to political movements on the ground. Much of the political activity of the 1940s, such as actions around the Alexander bus strikes and the Shantytown movements, grew out of spontaneous workers' actions rather than directed by the party. This also made it seem opportune to develop a closer relationship with radical nationalists. A confluence of interests emerged from the demands of radical nationalists on the one side and the Party's anti-fascist platform on the other. And these overlapping interests articulated with multiple notions of self, place and nation within contemporary South Africa and beyond. Radicals and communists joined in a struggle against the more conservative forces within the nationalist organisations and a series of joint political actions ensued. The party's justification for this was that in South Africa, class and national

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[65] M. D. Naidoo, interview with PR London April 1986.
[66] The Guardian 18 July 1946.

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oppression were intertwined.[67] With the encouragement of CP members, NIC and the ANC leaders also co-operated closely. Although Indian political activity was mostly confined to a small politically conscious community, the Indian capacity for organisation and mobilisation impressed many African nationalist leaders. In addition to this, and despite its overall failure to force radical change in government policy, passive resistance nevertheless had become an important international symbol of resistance.

The party was particularly eager to build links with the ANC. In June 1944, the CP was heavily involved in the Anti-Pass Laws campaign with the ANC. At its second conference, the Campaign passed a resolution pledging full support for the Indian people with talk of joint action through an elected committee. Moses Kotane stated 'you are fighting against the Ghetto Act, we against the Pass Laws'[68] In this political forum communists also repeatedly put the question of a universal franchise on the agenda. On August 15, exactly a year before Indian independence, a joint meeting was called condemning both the Ghetto Act and the Pass Laws by the CP, NIC, APC and APO. Over 2000 people were present. By this time, the Communist Party enjoyed a small degree of influence with some members of the ANC Youth League, which seemed to represent a breakthrough, although the Youth League as a whole still remained deeply suspicious of links with Indian organisations. Many members of the NIC were equally wary about links with the ANC. The two organisations also worked together on deciding how to challenge the Native Representative Councils politically.[69] In 1946, the Party also accepted the ANC tactic of a boycott, launched in that year. This was in opposition to its previous position, where challenging the system through participation and agitating for universal franchise had held sway. In his biography of Moses Kotane, Brian Bunting states with some pride, that contrary to common accusations, this was evidence that the nationalist movement

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[67] Bunting, <u>Moses Kotane</u> p.139.

[68] Bunting, <u>Moses Kotane</u>. P.131.

[69] For an interesting outsiders' perspective on the Native Representative Councils, see <u>Ralph J. Bunche. An African American in South Africa: the travel notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937 – 1 January 1938,</u> R.R. Edgar, (ed.), (Ohio, 2001), pp.229-242. Bunche, the first African American to be awarded a PhD in political science, who also met A.I. Kajee whilst travelling in South Africa, was scathing about the NRCs, attacking their condescending attitude, their incompetence and ineffectiveness. He was convinced that their main purpose was to reinforce African dependence on whites.

influenced the Communist Party and not the other way around.[70] This trend was to grow significantly over time, and perhaps indicated that the CP did not want to risk losing the wider political constituency that it had reached in its alliances with the nationalist movement. In order to preserve 'unity' party policies were, to some extent, subsumed in those of its Congress allies.

In 1946, the biggest strike by African miners ever seen in South Africa took place. The number of Africans in the mining industry had risen steadily in the pre-war years; by 1939, they numbered over 400,000, and in 1941 they formed a trade union in order to improve their conditions within the workplace. Although the union acted with some restraint between 1939 and 1945 because its leadership shared the Communist Party's position on the war, by 1946, this constraint had been removed, and on August the 12th a strike began, involving up to 60,000 miners. Communist Party members were active in the strike and were immediately targeted by the government. Despite the fact that he was in jail, Yusuf Dadoo was accused of promoting the strike and was brought from his cell in Newcastle jail to stand trial in Johannesburg, where he was already serving a sentence for defying the Ghetto Act. This was an indication of the government's fear of Indian radicals at this time. Many CP members were accused of treason as the government cracked down on those believed to be behind the strike. The British government was almost equally alarmed, noting that 'communist activities among the natives as well as other non-Europeans, have greatly increased in recent years.'[71] Several British newspapers also laid the blame for the strike on local 'communist agitators'.[72] The involvement of Indian communist was also noted.[73]

When, a day into the strike, the Natal Indian Congress in Durban voted £100 towards assisting the strikers, it was seen as significant. The donation fed into notions of cross-national congress-CP alliances against the government on several fronts, union-based

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[70] Bunting, Moses Kotane , p.139.
[71] Race and Colour Problems in South Africa: a commentary by E. Baring, Native Affairs Union, DO 35, 1122, G.689/35.
[72] See Financial Times 13 September, 1946; Manchester Guardian 13 September, 1946; The Observer 1 September, 1946.
[73] Memorandum, Native Affairs, DO 35, 1122, G.689/24.

and otherwise, and it fed into the government belief that Indians were dangerous trouble-makers intent on 'stirring up the natives'. Although the United Party smashed the strike within a week, it was in the context of all these gestures of solidarity, with joint committees issuing joint statements, that the 'Doctors Pact' between Dadoo, Naicker and Xuma was signed on March 1947. Their joint meeting's Declaration of Co-operation stated:

> This Joint Meeting declares its sincerest conviction that for the future progress, goodwill, good race relations, and for the building of a united, greater and free South Africa, full franchise rights must be extended to all sections of the South African people, and to this end this Joint Meeting pledges the fullest co-operation between the African and Indian people and appeals to all democratic and freedom loving citizens of South Africa to support fully and co-operate in the struggle.... This joint meeting is therefore of the opinion that for the attainment of these objectives it is urgently necessary that a campaign be immediately launched and that every effort be made to compel the Union Government to implement the United Nations' decision and to treat the Non-European peoples in South Africa in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter.[74]

Perceptions at ground level were very different to those of the leaders in the organisations involved however, and events over the next two years were to prove a bitter testament to the hopes enshrined in the declaration.

The Communist Party may have forged alliances with Congress, but it was also intent on contesting the all-white elections in 1948. It fielded candidates, running on an anti-fascist platform, and called for a democratic South Africa, which entailed keeping the National Party out of government. As a part of this programme, in January, 1948, Yusuf Dadoo called for a national convention of the organisations of the Non-European peoples against fascism. He stated 'the future lies with the struggle of the Non-European people for the franchise.'[75] There was also a call for a People's Assembly for Votes for All. The CPSA called on workers to vote for their candidates in the forthcoming election, and crucially, where there was no CP candidate, to vote for the United Party. The party's position was that, however bad the United Party seemed, the National Party was explicitly fascist, and therefore the difference between them was fundamental.

By 1948, the CPSA was involved in trying to create a broad multi-racial coalition of nationalist organisations in an anti-fascist struggle with rights to franchise and citizenship as a central pivot of its programme. Indian communists were a crucial part of this agenda,

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[74] 'The Xuma-Naicker-Dadoo Pact' 1947', S. Bhana and B. Pachai, <u>A Documentary History</u>, p. 193.

engendering political activity around a nationalist rhetoric and demands for democratic rights. This was recognised by the mainstream parties fighting the 1948 election. The National Party election manifesto declared: 'The Party will take drastic action against Indians who incite the Non-European races against the Europeans.[76] But in June of that year, the National Party won the election, rejected the United Nations Human Rights Charter, and set about disenfranchising wider sections of the population.

The victory of the National Party came as a shock to the left. The Communist Party line was that the victory of the National Party was due to the limited franchise in South Africa.[77] It strengthened their commitment to the 'struggle for democracy' which had been adopted at the party conference in January of the same year.[78] The NP victory came at a time when it was increasingly difficult to maintain the momentum in the levels of political activity within and between the nationalist organisations. The passive resistance campaign collapsed, and relationships began to deteriorate with the ANC over the issue of boycotts. Creating a united movement for the franchise also proved difficult, and within a year, the Durban Riots had erupted between Africans and Asians. The CPSA programme may have appealed to radical South Africans, but mass mobilisation was a different question.

The suspension of the passive resistance campaign and the message of congratulations sent by some of the leadership to the NP were indications of the confusion, even in the radical community. Yusuf Dadoo, who was interviewed in jail when the National Party came to power commented 'when the most reactionary political party in the country wins control of the government, organisations fighting for democracy and freedom do not congratulate it on its success. It was a stupid blunder'.[79] Indians had become deeply divided. Far from the 1940s representing a radical coming together of 'community', Indians were splintered in terms of their political and material aspirations. Responses to government plans to extend the social control of urban spaces reflected how different

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[75] Bunting. Moses Kotane, p. 151.
[76] Quoted in E.S. Reddy 'Passive Resistance', Mainstream.
[77] 'The Lessons of the Election Result', statement by the Central Committee of the Communist Party published in The Guardian, June 3 1948, Document 89, South African Communists Speak.
[78] 'Resolution on the 'The Struggle for Democracy' adopted at the national conference of the Communist Party held in Johannesburg on January 2.3, and 4, 1948', Document 88, South African Communists Speak.

sections of the community wanted to negotiate their sense of place and belonging in South Africa. In Chapter Nine, I will examine whether the Durban riots succeeded in bringing together an Indian political community in ways that managed to heal the rifts of the 1940s.

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[79] The Guardian, 8 July 1948.

Chapter Nine

Remembering the Durban Riots

In January 1949, the Durban Riots left 87 Africans, 50 Indians, 1 white person and a further 4 unidentified people dead. In the region of 1,087 people were injured and 1 factory, 58 shops and 247 houses were destroyed. Another 2 factories, 652 stores and 1,285 houses were badly damaged.[1] The riots were sparked by a relatively minor incident. Late in the afternoon of the 13th of January 1949, an Indian shopkeeper attacked an African youth named George Madondo, suspicious that the boy had not paid for an item taken from his shop. Madondo's head was injured on a broken window and although he only suffered a superficial wound, it resulted in heavy bleeding. The incident took place in the busy vicinity of Victoria Street, where Africans and Indians were queuing for buses to take them home from the central bus depot. In addition to this, hostel dwellers from the middle city district were shopping after work. Durban's largest beerhall was also close by, packed with domestic workers enjoying an afternoon drink. In the context of these crowds, the wounded Madondo attracted a lot of attention. What Africans saw was an adult Indian shopkeeper attacking an African youth. Violence quickly erupted, and Indians, as well as their stores and buses, were attacked. Stones and bricks were thrown, looting began in earnest, and Indians began to turn on Africans as well. Some semblance of order was not restored until later that night. In the meantime, rumours spread like wildfire about the incident that had lead to the riots. The informal networks employed by African hostel dwellers, and the lack of early, effective police intervention paved the way for the riots to spread and levels of violence to escalate. George Madondo was released from hospital after being treated for minor injuries. But in its retelling, the story had taken a dynamic of its own. In the most extreme account Madondo's head had been cut off and impaled on the railings outside a mosque.[2] Violence erupted once more and spread to the residential areas of the city:

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[1] Report of Commission of Enquiry into Riots in Durban 1949, (hereafter Report of Riots Commission) (Union of South Africa), UG 36-49, p. 5.
[2] R. D. Naidoo, interview with JF Durban, August 1985; The Leader 23 April 1949.

Houses were now being burnt by the score, all in the vicinity of Booth Road. Almost all the Indians not evacuated from the area were burnt to death, or left dying. While the men were clubbed to death, Indian women and young girls were raped by infuriated natives. [3]

There had been riots in Durban before, but not on this scale. Anti-Indian feeling on the part of Africans, to some degree spurred on by whites, had reached a new height. In analysing the riots, Fatima Meer has emphasised the role of the white population and the apartheid state, suggesting on the one hand that the non-racial alliance politics of the 1950s were premature, and on the other, giving whites the leading role as manipulators of African frustration and desires[4]. This sentiment was echoed by many of my Indian South African informants. However, apart from being over conspiratorial, this view leaves little room for African agency, the nuances of the situation, or cleavages that were appearing within, as well as between, communities at this time. Leo Kuper's account of the riots is a necessary corrective to this, and illustrates how sections of Durban's African middle classes gained from the 'disturbances' and their consequences.[5] In a different vein, E.L.Webster[6], and Tim Nuttall and Iain Edwards[7] have attempted to locate the riots in their political context, highlighting class divisions and their articulations with race and identity. In particular, Nuttall sees the riots as a key moment when Africans challenged authority within the city as part of an attempt to carve a space for themselves in the urban environment. In this chapter, I want to explore the ways in which people remembered the riots, to chart a passage from personal to collective and public memory, to describe how Indians viewed their relations with African workers, and how members of the CP sought to portray these events and translate them into party policy. Competing histories of the riot tend to represent not only competing visions of South Africa, but also alternative agendas for political action. In one sense, the riots helped reinscribe notions of an identity of community for Indians, but on other levels, reactions to it were indicative of sectional interests and underlined the

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[3] Major Betsford, District Commander of Durban area, evidence given to Riots Commission, Report of the Riots Commission, p. 2; M. Webb and K. Kirkwood, 'The Durban Riots and After', Race Relations Journal, vol. XVI, no. 4, 1949. p. 3.

[4] F. Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans, (Durban, 1969).

[5] L. Kuper An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa, (New Haven, 1965).

[6] E. L.Webster ' The 1949 Durban Riots – A Case Study in Race and Class', In P.Bonner (ed.), Working Papers in South African Studies (Johannesburg 1979), pp. 1-54.

[7] I. Edwards and T. Nuttall 'Seizing the Moment: The January 1949 Riots, Proletarian Populism and the Structures of African Urban Life in Durban during the late 1940s', paper presented at History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand, February 1990.

growing rift between politics at organised party level, between radicals and merchants, and that of workers' experience on the ground.

In the last chapter, I examined the way the SACP saw their political agenda as an anti-fascist struggle in South Africa, with their main objective the struggle for universal democratic rights. Within this formulation, there was a growing disparity between workers' consciousness, which meant in some quarters there was some acceptance of segregationist discourse (in relation to municipal housing projects, for example,) and the SACP's call for a non-racial politics of alliance and full citizenship within a framework of liberal democracy. Additionally, Indian members of the CP increasingly addressed the Indian 'community' in terms of an Indian identity tied to notions of the 'motherland' and 'national honour', inspired as they had been by the political writings of Gandhi and Nehru and the prestige of Indian independence. Yusuf Dadoo, in particular, was a keen advocate and practitioner of an Indian nationalist discourse. There was an attempt to reconcile these two elements in the 1946 Doctors' Pact that was formed in 1946. Behind this alliance between African and Asian leaders was a suggestion that Africans and Indians had their own national identities but could unite politically against discriminatory and oppressive government policies. But, as discussed in Chapter Eight, the question of alliance politics was problematic. Many workers had very different views of their identity and their political allegiances, especially as there was usually intense competition with other white and black groups, both in the labour market and over social space, particularly on the margins of the urban environment. This disjuncture between the Indian leadership of the CP and their political constituency was tragically underlined in January 1949 when the riots erupted in Durban. The utopian ideal of non-racial politics rapidly collapsed into the dystopian reality of existing South African relations between Europeans, Africans and Indians in the city.

By 1949, Durban was undergoing profound changes in social and labour relations with an ensuing increase in competition over trading, transport and residency rights. Communities were uprooted, and the process of redefining boundaries had an impact on Europeans, Africans and Indians alike, although to varying degrees. The riots were one

expression of this. But the competing histories of the riots that emerged perhaps also demonstrate the ambiguities and interdependencies of political and social identities in this period. As a consequence of growing competition and resentment from both Africans and whites in the face of what they saw as continuing 'Indian success', Indians became increasingly targeted, and were blamed for blocking business and social opportunities in the three key areas mentioned above. In this chapter I examine the riots and political responses to them through contemporary newspaper reports, as these provided a space for a wider public discourse on the riots. I draw on the personal memory and recollections of interviewees in Durban, for whom the past had become a place which helped define their present notions of identity and belonging. As Edwards and Chetty have both observed, the riots are still talked about today, and are celebrated by some Africans as the 'day they beat the Indian'.[8]

It took the state over two days to regain control of events after the riots broke out. According to many of the Indian papers, one reason for this was the tentative character of police intervention. Initially, only a small number of unprepared police had gone to the area in question where they maintained a low profile, hoping that the violence would die down. However, some eyewitness reports suggested their more direct involvement, and that the police specifically incited Africans to attack Indians and their property. A statement made to The Leader by a European who believed in 'segregation with human rights', proclaimed, 'I saw an Indian being assaulted by Natives. I saw about eight European policemen on the spot. Three of them definitely encouraged the natives. One of them said "We don't want coolies in Africa".' The witness then spoke to 'a Native' who told him 'they gave us petrol and sticks. They gave us drink and told us to kill all the Indians and burn their places. Then they come up there and shot us for doing it. The next time we will start on the Europeans.'[9] Police presence was at best ambiguous, at worst absent, or directly inciting violence. This reflected the uneven control of the state in the urban environment, where Indians and Africans inhabited spaces which were no-go areas for whites and the police, and where Indian and African competition over social space sporadically spilt over into violence. Urban violence was not unusual in Durban in the 1940 and 1950s, as increasing migrant

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[8] See Edwards, 'Seizing the Moment'; Chetty, 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', p. 1.

labour, and the growth of industrialisation fuelled not only population expansion but also an intensifying struggle for the control of resources and public services, especially by poorer whites, as well as between Africans and Indians. South Africa's entry into the Second World War had increased industrial production and subsequently saw the relaxation of controls over African migration into urban areas in order to fill expanded requirements for labour.[10] Little infrastructure existed for this increase in the population and many newly arrived Africans squatted on land rented from Indian landlords in places such as Cato Manor, as they were excluded from other areas. Between 1939 and 1943, the number of African squatters living in shacks in Cato Manor increased from 2,500 to 17,000.[11]

Contested Space: the growth of Cato Manor

Although the 'disturbances' as they came to be known, erupted in the centre of town and were intimately connected with competition over trade, transport and housing, the background of how these antagonisms unfolded socially can perhaps be best illustrated through looking at the development of Cato Manor, a 'contested space in which various parties claimed authority'. Originally owned by George Cato, the first mayor of Durban, it covered an area of roughly 4500 hectacres.[12] It was a 'marshy, animal-infested jungle', and the land varied in quality. Even in the early 1940s, Cato Manor was not a suburb of Durban but an agricultural district where Indian families held small plots of land. It was one of the marginal locations of a modernising city, beyond the range of direct state control and public order, consisting of people who were rooted in their own group but were not wholly part of, or fully recognised by, the wider society in which they lived. Ex-indentured labourers had bought land in this district from as early as 1878.[13] The joint family system enabled Indians to pool their resources and build simple accommodation. Many of them were market gardeners who supplied Durban with fruit and vegetables. One reason why Indians were

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[9] The Leader 26 February 1949.

[10] Durban became particularly significant during the Second World War as it was a stopping point for British ships taking troops to the east.

[11] T. Nuttal 'Class, Race and Nation: African Politics in Durban, 1929-1949', PhD thesis, Oxford University 1991, p. 226.

[12] I. A. Edwards, 'Mkhubane Our Home: African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm', 1946-1960, PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban 1989, p. 192.

[13] Chetty, 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', p. 12.

attracted to Cato Manor was because, until 1932, it was located outside the jurisdiction of the Durban City Council, and they were therefore able to erect housing that would have been considered substandard in terms of council regulations, but was cheap. From these small beginnings, there was a development from small-scale farming practices to intermittent wage labour interspersed with petty trade. From 1928, buses began to run from Cato Manor, and Indian entrepreneurs, such as the Seebran and Jughoo Brothers, were pioneers in setting up public transport in this part of town.

The Durban periphery had a poorly developed infrastructure, and this facilitated the growth of Indian entrepreneurial activity as Indians stepped in to fill the gap. There was generally little in the way of utilities until the early 1930s and by the 1940s, and a significant number of Indians landowners and rentiers found renting land to Africans financially lucrative.[14] A growing number of Africans found it difficult to find accommodation in Durban as the city council continued to move them out of areas such as Overport and Putan's Hill. Cato Manor was near to their work and Indian landlords known as 'shacklords' proved to be more accommodating than whites. The post-war years saw a reversal in the relaxation of the Pass Laws, which had been a necessary part of utilising large numbers of Africans in industry during the war. This restricted the movement of Africans in Durban itself even further, and the number of African shacks built on Indian land on its periphery increased; as one informant recalled, 'planting shacks proved more profitable than planting crops'[15] A flourishing trade in providing provisions to the growing African population also mushroomed. By 1949, according to Mr M, 'Cato Manor was booming with thousands of squatters, One hundred to one hundred and fifty thousand Africans were settled in the Booth Road – Umkumbaan complex.'[16]

Sometimes Indians rented a large plot of land for a nominal sum to an African, who would then subdivide it. Other Africans would subsequently build shacks on this land and pay rent. In this way, a significant group of 'tenant-landlords' came into existence; many of them also opened 'shackshops'. From the start, these enterprises were harassed by the

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[14] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, p. 25.

[15] Mr. M, interview with Chetty, in 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', p. 4..

[16] Mr. M, interview with Chetty, in 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', p. 7.

authorities and came into direct competition with Indian traders. These environments soon became home to a range of illegal activities such as gambling and the sale of alcohol by both Africans and Indians.

Indians employed Africans in their small-scale businesses. Many wealthy Indian families had African servants, whom they often called Mary or John, irrespective of their African names, aping the 'idioms of domination' of white South Africans. The recollections of Stanley Chetty suggest the ways that relationships between the races also could become acts of cultural translation:

> my mother's mother had a stall in an Indian market. And I was there when my Granny used to have lots of beautiful tomatoes. And my Granny was seated, my mother and I were standing and a white Afrikaner woman (sic).[came up to us] I can understand an Afrikaner, a very guttural language (sic). She addressed my Granny as Mary, so my mother got up....My mother said 'Yes Jane what do you want?'. Who are you calling Jane? Who are you calling Jane? Who the hell are you to call my mother Mary. See that was the gap, the big gap between us and the whites. But we too called our maids Mary. We never said Mrs. Mkhise or Mrs. Khumalo. We too were guilty of that. And we addressed our gardener as John. But that was all derived from the whites. .this is what whites did to address their servants and this became adopted by the Indians.[17]

Chetty also suggests that Africans increasingly became the clients of Indians not just in services but also in housing, and transport. Many Cato Manor Indians began to flourish socially and economically, but at the same time, relations between the two groups deteriorated, although many Indians still interacted socially with their African neighbours and the children of both communities continued to play together. More and more Indians bought property in Cato Manor because of its proximity to town, and a significant minority became increasingly rich. This affluence was reflected in the houses that were built, the growing number of places of worship that sprang up, and the establishment of community centres such as the Arya Samaj, which had a long history of community care in the area and expanded its activities in the 1940s. [18] Many new schools were also established. To quote Mr M again, 'By 1949...nineteen community schools [had been] built by the community with Indian money, blood, sweat, labour and initiative. Not a cent came from the authorities then, they were out to stifle the Indian community'.[19]

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[17] Stanley Chetty, interview with PP, Durban 12 June 1998.
[18] Shisupal Rambharos, interview with PP, Durban 19 May 1998.
[19] Mr M, interview with Chetty, in 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', p. 7.

As disparities of wealth increased between middle-class Indians and poor Africans, Indians appeared increasingly to be thriving, while Africans, separated from their families, were exploited by them, and were often abused and harassed in the process. To Africans, Indians seemed to inhabit a privileged space. They were not subject to the Pass Laws, were able to consume liquor legally, and, despite growing restrictions, still had land rights. Moreover, whites and Africans viewed Indians as outsiders and interlopers who were growing rich on the backs of Africans, and this must have made the situation even more intolerable for them. 'The reason for their [Indian] resistance [to repatriation] is of course, clear. They are not producers of any importance. They live on the labour of other racial groups. They get their wealth from Europeans, Coloureds and Natives.' [20] This view of Indians as 'outsiders' was continually repeated and can be seen in the resentment of Indian entitlement to land, particularly by Africans, in the state's plans for their repatriation, and in the sustained attempts by whites in Durban to segregate the city.[21]

'The Children of Shaka': Indians on Africans

Cato Manor also had a thriving Indian political culture. In the 1930s, the Colonial Born Settlers Association had an office in Cato Manor. N.T. Naicker and George Poonen grew up there, and NIC activities also originated there. Much of the political symbolism of Indians in Cato Manor was drawn from the Indian nationalist movement, as Stanley Chetty recalls: 'It was Indians in white saris with the Nehru cap – identifying non-violence. That was the old cap saying non-violence we won't fight you, we will talk to you.'[22] But in the 1940s, the increasing emphasis on Alliance politics by Congress and the CP seems to have had little effect on day-to-day inter-community political activism. Many of my Indians interviewees, who would have described themselves as left-wing, argued that Africans 'knew no better' (i.e. were considered 'ignorant') and very few activists attempted to organise amongst them. As Mr. M. told D. Chetty, 'For a start, we did not sell them the

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[20] Quoted in The Leader from Die Transvaler 11 December 1948.
[21] Freund, Insiders and Outsiders, pp. 57-58.
[22] Stanley Chetty, interview with PP, Durban 12 June 1998.

paper[23] as they were illiterate'.[24] Others held that Africans were 'newly arrived from the country' and were therefore unable to deal with, or understand, the politics of the city.

At the same time, competition intensified between Indians and more established Africans over who would provide lucrative services for the continuing influx of migrants. Africans were at a disadvantage, as the municipal authorities turned down their applications for trading licences and the provision of bus services. Although this was a result of state policies, Indians became the most visible scapegoats, as they were allowed to run local shops and control the bus services. This was exacerbated by the deeply held prejudices of both communities, with Indians generally treating Africans with some degree of contempt if not outright racism in their everyday transactions. Even where Indians were broadly sympathetic towards African, their prejudices came through. Thus Mr Singh, in recounting why Africans resented Indians remarked,

> ...blacks had to move away from their traditional areas in which they lived because there was no industrial activity there. And if they wanted to find work they had to leave their families and come to town to find employment. And the living without a family has an adverse effect on them...but these people were looking at Indians happily living with their families and here were these people living in compounds, all male compounds...there weren't any areas where they could own land...they couldn't open business because they didn't have finance. Not only that. If you look at their culture, their background, they were not businessmen. If you went back a few generations, they were in old Shaka's days and Shaka was one of those old black chiefs..the male blacks were all warriors...they were not farmers.[25]

These stereotypes of 'African warriors', ill-suited to certain occupations, echoed the prejudices voiced by Gandhi some fifty years earlier, indicating the deep-seated nature of the preconceptions Indians held of Africans.

It seemed as if Africans were barely tolerated in the city. In contrast, despite the fact that they were seen as outsiders, Indians had somehow carved out a comfortable niche for themselves in urban areas, and seemed to have an unfair access to resources, which provided them with a flourishing livelihood. When Cato Manor was zoned as an Indian area under the 1946 Asiatic Land Tenure Act, Africans felt that Durban was being divided

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[23] The Guardian was a CP paper that was generally regarded and sold as a workers paper.
[24] Mr M, interview with Chetty, in 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', p. 7.

between Indians and whites, in an attempt to push them out completely. Quite frequently their hostility expressed itself in the form of a distinct Zulu cultural identity, which was invoked as a way of obtaining resources from the state, as segregationist and apartheid discourses encouraged them to do. This interacted with the development of a self-defined cultural identity. The radical union leader, Zulu Phungula, and A.W. Champion both gave vent to anti-Indian sentiments which were articulated around notions of a discrete Zulu cultural identity. A central aspect of this identity was through evoking their close relationship to the land, something that Africans had lost but felt they had to regain. From a different perspective, the language adopted by the newspapers, which specifically highlighted tensions between lower-class Zulus and middle-class Indians, reinforced this Zulu identity.[26] The report of the Riot Commission also talked specifically of 'Zulus' in terms of a distinct and essentialised cultural identity: 'the Zulu is by tradition a warrior' and 'one of the braves of Chaka' whose 'blood boils at the so-called preferential treatment of Indians.' [27] 'The mobs of Natives swelled into impis chanting the Zulu war cry and indulged in bestial orgies', it decalred.[28]

The two communities lived cheek by jowl, and tensions ran high between them. Coupled with this, state control of certain sections of Durban was still tenuous. As recounted previously, the police were reluctant to intervene in any meaningful way when violence erupted, as the 'coolie quarters' were seen as no-go areas. Two years earlier, when African-Indian violence broke out in Victoria Street in 1947, for example, involving a crowd of over 200 people, there were merely thirteen arrests, eight African, one Coloured and four Indian; all of these cases were acquitted when they came to court.[29] This seeming lack of legal sanction gave an added impetus to the rioters to continue their anti-Indian onslaught in January 1949. These violent events shook Durban's residents and brought to the fore many of the fears and cleavages in the city's population.

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[25] S. Singh, interview with PP, Durban 30 July 1998.
[26] See The Leader Jan 19 1949.
[27] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 23.
[28] Report of the Riots Commission. P. 24.
[29] Nuttal, Class, Race and Nation p. 302.

As far as whites were concerned, they emphatically did not wish to see Durban divided between themselves and Indians. They were still afraid of being 'swamped' by the Indians who were moving into white areas. These concerns become apparent in contemporary accounts in the white press, in particular, the Natal Daily News, but also in The Natal Witness and The Mail, and illustrate some aspects of white opinion in South Africa at this time. The press accounts also demonstrate the divisions amongst whites. Even before the riots, the Daily News gave extensive coverage to the issues that were to form the backdrop to the 'disturbances'. Clearly, whites felt frustrated with the practical difficulties they encountered in making Durban a 'white city'. On 9 January 1949, there was a report in the paper on the City Council's plans to strengthen the 'European' hold on property in the city. The Council also wanted to counteract further 'non-European' penetration into 'European' zones. It also proposed further amendments to the 1946 Asiatic Land Tenure Act, which, it alleged, was ineffective. The paper argued that there would be a 'constant state of war' between the two communities, Indian and white, as long as this state of affairs continued and the act remained in its present form. Much of this rivalry was, of course, informed by competition in business between Indians and whites. It was also further fuelled by negative European perceptions of Indians. Indians were constantly scapegoated as an urban threat, as they had been ever since their arrival in the city towards the end of the nineteenth century. White South Africans seemed to believe that Indians had no valid presence on South African soil, and that their only real ambition was to exploit both Africans and whites. Renewed calls for repatriation suggested that only their physical removal could solve the problem.

On the other hand, Africans were increasingly referred to by whites as ignorant and child-like 'natives', 'savages' who erupted irrationally into violence. In this instance, Africans' thwarted ambitions had spilled over into bloodshed. They were portrayed as being in need of the help of the white community and the state, not only to facilitate their business practices (within limits), but also to prevent this kind of violent incident ever happening again. The implicit subtext was that this should be done at the expense of Indian businesses, so that white ambitions for expansion in trade would not be hampered. Poor whites severely resented municipal housing schemes that seemed to give preferential

treatment to black and Indian communities, and felt deeply frustrated. Re-housing schemes for Africans and Indians, which were still embryonic in the second half of the 1940s, and which were intended to provide the basis for the implementation of the Group Areas Act, were interpreted by poor whites as unnecessary fillips to communities which had contributed to their social impoverishment. A letter to the Natal Daily News of January 10 1949, by 'Sardine' described how he, his wife and two children had lived in one room for well over a year, and calls on the newly elected National Party to provide adequate housing for whites, instead of building more homes for black communities. Poor whites more generally formed a significant section of the political constituency of the National Party. They looked to the NP to redress the failure of the United Party and to prioritise their interests.

The Daily News, the Witness and the Mercury broke the story of the riots on the morning of Friday January 14, and the tone of the reports convey the sense of shock felt by Durban's European population. This is hardly surprising given their scale, and the violence had taken place in an area of town generally unfrequented by whites, who were sleeping soundly in their beds at the time. The shock was accompanied by fear that the disturbances would spill over into adjacent white residential districts. Amid reassurances from MPs such as D.R. Shearer that the permanent forces were standing by to regain control of the situation, came more sensational reports of 'natives' 'out of control' on beer and 'dagga', and of men with 'menacing, jeering Zulu faces' smashing new Indian cars.[30] But the very emotive eye-witness accounts also included some from young white soldiers voicing their extreme reluctance at having to shoot at 'natives', as well as their frustration at having to deal with a situation for which they felt ill equipped. 'As soon as we turn our backs on these people they start hell raising. When we rush to the spot they look as innocent as angels' said one policeman on the spot.[31]

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[30] Natal Daily News 14 January 1949.
[31] Natal Daily News 14 January 1949.

The National Party and 'native policy'

By Saturday January 15, the editorial in the <u>Daily News</u> suggests that sections of the press had begun to formulate a moral language within which to frame recent events. Heavily couched in tones of 'mea culpa', blame was nevertheless largely apportioned to the newly elected National Party. Their editor warned that

> when people are ill housed, packed into congested areas, deprived of proper transport, denied recreational facilities, subject to political frustration and some degree of economic exploitation, then the ground has been well prepared for terrorist outbreaks...people whose whole way of life has been changed (i.e. Africans coming from a rural to an urban environment).Our politics is deeply sectionalised and our outlook is coloured with prejudices and discriminations. There are natives that can pretend, not without some foundation, that any anti-Indian measures they take earn the covert sympathy of many Europeans and are justified by their rasher words.[32]

In the same paper on the following day, Senator Heaton Nicholls openly blamed apartheid, and cited current government 'native policy' for the riots. He observed that the African rioters were drawn from different 'tribes' but were united by a common feeling that Indians had no rights to residence in Natal. Under apartheid, separate tribal identities were supposedly the best way forward for development; nevertheless, according to Nicholls, discriminatory state measures were creating a common bond between Africans, and, most dangerously, as far as he was concerned, these nationalist sentiments were being fused with communist ideals. In particular, Nicholls singled out Indian communist leaders who were trying to form a united front with Africans. Nicholls had expressed similar anti-communist views equally forcefully in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but his observations at the time of the riots linked up with widening concerns amongst sections of the population about a growing 'communist threat.'

On the same day the <u>Daily News</u> also quoted a cross-section of international opinion on the riots, which had attracted wide coverage, especially in England and India, but also in the United States and Europe. According to the <u>Hindustan Times</u> 'India was profoundly stirred by the riots'. It concluded that to suggest that the riots were started by someone slapping a boy was equivalent to saying that World War One was started by the

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shooting of Archduke Ferdinand. Echoing sentiments voiced by the CPSA about the riot, the paper asserted that the 'disturbances' had been deliberately inspired by forces seeking to prevent a 'non-European front of Africans and Indians.'[33] Contemporary British and American newspapers echoed opinion in the Daily News. The Manchester Guardian, for example, condemned the colour policy of the Nationalist government and compared it unfavourably to its United Party predecessors. The same sentiment was to be found in the Daily Mail, and in this reformulation of the past, General Jan Smuts became the hero of the hour. His opinion was eagerly sought, not only on the cause of the riots, but also for a solution to the 'native problem'. It was generally assumed that under his governance such an occurrence would have been unthinkable. This popular account of a political schism before and after 1948 informs much of liberal South African historiography, and the position of the Communist Party and its characterisation of this period as one that specifically required an anti-fascist platform was, in some ways, similar.

Segregation and apartheid may have both been described as the irrational ideology of ignorant whites, anachronisms that were directly detrimental to the development of a capitalist economy in South Africa; but at the same time, apartheid was somehow seen as a distinctly new phenomenon which represented a particular rupture with the past. This analysis suggested that, prior to 1948, the urban policies of the United Party were leading to the modification of segregation as a result of the efforts of educated liberals and the rationale of capital development. This was partly because of the temporary relaxation of influx controls and the Pass Laws during the war. On the other hand, the National Party, it was proclaimed, was ready to sacrifice 'economic rationality' and the interests of capital in order to perpetuate an outmoded racist hierarchy.

A substantial body of the revisionist scholarship of the 1970s and 80s has ably challenged this dichotomous view of the 1948 'watershed', and has shown how the National Party's ideology and economic strategy contained many threads of continuity with

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[32] Natal Daily News 15 January 1949.
[33] Hindustan Times 17 January 1949.

their United Party predecessors.[34] In previous chapters I have also discussed the effects of the Pegging Acts of 1942-3 and the Ghetto Act of 1946, both initiated by the United Party, and have touched on the notion of a constructed ideological and political watershed post 1948 which sought to erase the continuities between segregationist and apartheid discourse. In particular, the uprooting of Indians from parts of Durban and their relocation in other areas was clearly not a new phenomenon under the Nationalists, but was part of a wider struggle for place and space in the city between different interest groups in the context of an unevenly developing urban modernity. However, the NP's policies were often contradictory in content and poorly executed – ad hoc responses to emerging conditions rather than pre-laid plans at the level of ideology or economic rationale. The very ambiguities in these political dialogues facilitated their appeal to different parts of a political constituency. As Smuts himself said shortly after the 1948 election

> our policy ...has been European paramountcy.. it has not been equal rights...we have always stood and stand for social and residential separation in this country and the avoidance of all racial mixture...there is a great deal about apartheid that is common to all parties in this country. [35]

The 'historical amnesia' surrounding Smuts in the late 1940s, in light of the clarity of some of the statements that he made at the time, as well as his own past record in relation to Indian South Africans perhaps seems remarkable. It can posibly be best understood as an attempt by liberals and some radicals to distant themselves from the policies and practices of the South African state. By counterposing a 'liberal past' to a reactionary present they could both deny the continuities of South African history and their own implication in that process.

The riots and their aftermath presented problems to the state of how to construct cartographies of social control within a city that had an inadequate infrastructure, and still contained peripheral urban spaces out of direct state authority. For sections of Indians these in-between-spaces provided business opportunities in which their customers were mainly

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[34] For some different aspects of the debate, see D. Posel, 'The Meaning of Apartheid before 1948: conflicting interests and forces within the Afrikaner nationalist alliance', Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 14, no. 1, October 1987, pp. 123-139; M. Legassick, 'Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa', Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 1, no. 1, 1974, pp. 5-35; H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid', Economy and Society, vol. 1, 1976, pp, 425-56;. M. Lipton, Capitalism and Apartheid in South Africa, 1910-1986, (Aldershot, 1986).

Africans and poor whites. From the Indian perspective, they were providing services for the burgeoning African population, which were woefully neglected by the state. Indian businessmen provided Africans, who were overcrowded in hostels and barracks, land to squat on, cheap housing, trade and transport facilities. Indians were therefore fundamentally shaken by the scale of the rioting on January 13· Newspaper reports vividly described the violence inflicted on Indians and their families, and give some indication of the deep psychological trauma they suffered. By Saturday 15 January, about a hundred people had already been killed and over a thousand injured. The charred bodies of Indians were found in their homes and the bodies of Africans who had been shot by troops lay around the district of Cato Manor. At a crisis meeting held to discuss the situation, the NIO and NIC tried to sink their differences and co-operate on emergency measures. The ANC and TIC also issued a joint statement, asking Transvaal Africans and Indians to remain calm.

'Petrol, Sticks and Blackened Faces': Europeans and the Riot

Two features of the situation emerge powerfully in the Indian press reports of the time. By Monday 17 January, there were 25,000 Indians in refugee camps and there was a strong feeling that the government was not doing enough to help. Once again, Indian self-help became the key to the amelioration of the situation and the network of Indian political and cultural organisations was a central element in organising this successfully. The second issue was the bitterness that Indians felt about the role of whites in the whole episode. Stories of plots or deliberate instigation repeatedly appeared in the pages of The Leader and Indian Opinion. Although the white press admitted that the riots were partly caused by the way Europeans fanned anti-Asian feeling, many Indians considered that there was a much more direct relationship. Several of my informants told stories of how Europeans openly incited African attacks and even joined in the violence and looting themselves. Others suggested pre-laid plans by whites:

> I saw the Europeans draw up in a truck, they were handing out sticks to the Africans, and others had blackened faces and were joining in the looting. The Europeans had a great deal of animosity towards Indians and they basically used the Africans to get back at us.[36]

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[35] J. Smuts, quoted in M. Legassick, 'Legislation, Ideology and Economy', p. 15.
[36] N. Babenia, interview with PR, Durban August 1995.

> There were many Europeans in Durban who felt a lot of resentment towards Indians. They didn't like our success, they thought we were 'too big for our boots' and they thought that we needed putting in our place. Africans were frustrated with their lot and Europeans used this in order to turn them against us. My family had always lived peaceably with Africans, but the riots caused a terrible rift in our relations. I saw many Europeans egging them on, giving them weapons to attack us and some were also joining in as well. The Europeans felt that they would gain from making Indians and Africans be at each other's throats.[37]

These stories of 'Europeans with blackened faces' even got back to India. Government of India intelligence reports tell of interviews with Indians returning to Madras on 6 May 1950. Some of these returnees were questioned and repeated these allegations.[38]

A few days after the riots, a pamphlet produced by an organisation called the Afrikaner Protection Movement was circulated which, according to the TIC, 'preached naked and organised violence'. It stated 'if you are a white man, you should understand better than a Zulu what threatens you and you should be able better to organise and fight' [39] The Minister for Justice ordered an investigation into this rumour but, as it was produced for an Afrikaner Protection Movement meeting which was held on 29 January, nearly two weeks after the outbreak of the riots, the pamphlet was clearly an opportunist attempt to cash in on recent events. It helped Indian newspapers repeat the refrain, however, that there were 'earmarks of an organised movement' and that 'certain Europeans were behind the riots'.[40]

The Riots Commission, as it became known, was an all-white body. It interviewed 146 witnesses[41], 60 white, 34 Indian and 52 African. The Indian witnesses were mainly merchants and businessmen from the NIO, as other Indian organisations had boycotted it. The African witnesses did not speak English on the whole and, as a result, many of their accounts had to be translated. The subsequent published report was generally considered a disappointment and was popularly regarded on the left as a mouthpiece for the state. An article in Inkululeko concluded that it

> In fact (this) reveals the true character of the report itself, which consciously or unconsciously is a political polemic designed to prove that the African is happy with his lot,

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[37] A. K. M. Docrat, interview with PR, Durban August 1995.
[38] Ramamurthi, Non-Violence and Nationalism p. 75
[39] The Leader January 29 1949.
[40] The Leader April 23 1949.
[41] Webb and Kirkwood, 'The Durban Riots', p. 6.

that apartheid is lovely, and anyone inside or outside the country who says something different is a liar, or at any rate 'out of touch with the native' and misinformed.[42]

Much of the report attempted to deflect blame from government bodies, arguing instead that certain 'fundamental' racial differences were responsible for the riot. In particular it stressed Indian passivity and, as already discussed, contrasted this with the 'warlike children of Chaka'. On the one hand it stated that it was 'satisfied that the police [had] acted with promptitude and discretion, considering the unexpectedness of the situation which developed and the forces at their disposal'. On the other, it suggested that 'while the disturbance was at its height they [the Indians] were pathetically passive and allowed themselves to be slaughtered like sheep.'[43] Indians were thus to blame for their own deaths, and the state, seemingly, was absolved of responsibility for the safety of its citizens. Many African and Indian organisations as well as the CPSA boycotted the commission because of its all-white membership, its pro-state bias, and its refusal to allow the cross-examination of witnesses.[44]

The Commission's sole recommendation was that the Immorality Act should be extended, as many Africans complained that middle-class Indians took advantage of their positions and had sexual relations with African women. There is evidence that this was, indeed, a real bone of contention for Africans. Moses Kotane of the CPSA came to Durban after the riots to question Africans about what had happened. When he asked some Africans 'why did you hit the Indians?' their response was 'Because they despise us; they make our girls pregnant'. [45] But the commission prioritised this single issue, making it the most frequently stated and important African expression of anti-Indian feeling. It considered that if the Immorality Act 'could be extended to illicit carnal intercourse between Natives and Indians it would in some measure repress this evil'.[46] They were displaying their own obsession with miscegenation. The police were absolved of any blame for exacerbating the violence, and African complaints were generally said to be unfounded or exaggerated. Indeed, Africans were thought to be 'generally happy with their lot' and keen 'supporters of

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[42] Quoted in The Leader, 30 April, 1949
[43] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 6
[44] Webb and Kirkwood, 'The Durban Riots', pp. 6-7, 13.
[45] Bunting, Moses Kotane, p.162-163.
[46] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 13.

segregation'.[47] The Commission did suggest, however, that European incitement intensified the riots, although these Europeans were 'rare exceptions (and) degraded specimens of their race'.[48]

These conclusions failed to address the many issues that the riots revealed. The report issued a warning about Indians who 'have tried to unite African and Indian against the government and use international opinion to cause feelings of unrest with a section of the community not yet ripe for responsibility'.[49] This was to become an increasingly vocal complaint by the government and its agencies, as Indian radicals were alleged to be 'stirring up the Natives'. 'From all sides', the report proclaimed, 'it is dinned into the heads of the natives that they have grievances'[50] The passive resistance campaign, 'shorn of its quasi philosophical trappings', was 'defiance of the law', and seen as setting Africans 'a bad example', and these ideas fed into the wider fears about the 'communist menace':

> In the result the Indians were hoist with their own petard. ...in the recent passive resistance movement in Durban the Indians ostentatiously contravened the law of the land, attracting much attention as they could to the fact that they were flouting authority...it set the Natives a bad example.[51]

> The government is gravely concerned at the considerable dimensions already assumed by communist activities among certain sections of the population and is considering steps to combat them effectively.[52]

The riots thus became part of the justification for the suppression of radical politics and activists, and were held to illustrate the impossibility of inter-racial harmony. The report became part of a wider state discourse serving to justify the implementation of apartheid. It also helped pave the way for a more direct state presence in peripheral no-go areas.

Some degree of white incitement of Africans during the riots seems highly probable. Evidence of any more wide-spread organisation, however, seems tenuous. Indian concerns about white involvement helped them neatly side-step a more serious debate about

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[47] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 14.
[48] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 16.
[49] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 14.
[50] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 9.
[51] Report of the Riots Commission, p. 12.

the nature of African-Indian relations in Durban in the 1940s. Indians felt most bitter about the indiscriminate nature of the attacks. Some of the more radical reporting pointed out that the majority of Indian workers were as exploited by the Indian merchant elite as were Africans and shared many of the same social and economic hardships. Many working-class Indians probably felt a degree of sympathy for African frustrations:

> My family were poor workers. We lived in a crowded shack and often there was very little to eat, there wasn't always work. We lived much like our African neighbours. We too resented how rich Indians exploited us. Some of us sympathised with their shops and property being attacked. But Africans turned on us too. I cannot tell you how that made me feel.[53]

But things seemed very different from an African perspective. African violence and destruction did not discriminate and was meted out to all sections of the community. Although 70 per cent of Indians in Durban at this time were workers who endured social and economic conditions of hardship, Indian business clearly did exploit poor Africans, who were not only viewed through the prism of a hierarchical racial ideology, but were seen as doubly ignorant because many of them had recently arrived from the country and lacked the savoir-faire of their urban fellows. They were not considered 'modern', and often enough this construction of naïve ignorance was exploited to the full. The white press reported instances of inflated prices in Indian shops for their African customers as well as general abusive treatment in everyday relations. Africans who gave evidence at the Commission were particularly vociferous about their mistreatment on Indian buses. Also, illegal marketeering and the highly inflated prices that accompanied the practice had been particularly rife during the war and to some extent this had continued after it. The NIC made a special statement in the Indian newspaper, The Leader, to try and counteract claims of the wholesale exploitation of Africans, including illegal marketeering and bad treatment, and insisted that this was only the behaviour of the few. For the NIC, the rising price of goods and general inflation was pushing Africans into further poverty as they had failed to gain any rise in wages.[54] It did not occur to them that the two factors were not mutually exclusive.

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[52] The Leader 21 April 1949.
[53] JM, interview with PR, Durban July 1995.
[54] The Leader 29 January 1949.

It is also true that many Indians held Africans in contempt, whether openly or through an implicit discourse around the 'simple native mentality'. This notion accorded with Indian ideas of caste, in which ideas of 'darkness' was correlated with 'low-caste' characteristics. The general view that Africans were unsuited for certain jobs and the widespread use of African servants by middle-class Indians (including political activists) were aspects of this. Many Indian businessmen aspired to the lifestyle of 'civilised whites' and implicitly placed themselves higher up on the ladder of South Africa's racial hierarchy. The Riot Commission also noted this and tied it in part to the impact of Indian independence in 1947:

> Events in India had repercussions here. A certain type of Indian began to ride the high horse. The native thinks on colour lines and could not understand why a man of colour should exalt himself above his fellow men.[55]

All this suggests that there were real problems between Africans and Indians on both an ideological and a material level, which could not be addressed solely through accusations of white involvement. Yet Indians seemed unable to address these issues. Thus, according to The Leader, before the riots, Indians and Africans had always got on well; 'natives' had the monopoly in the unskilled labour market while Indians were in the more skilled occupations, i.e. 'everyone knew their place'. Again, this fitted well with caste rhetoric. In interviews, I was repeatedly given anecdotal evidence of the exceptions to African violence, such as the important role of 'Bantu' nurses in the hospitals where Indians were taken for treatment. Dr Goonam repeated to me the celebrated story in her autobiography detailing her arrival in Cato Manor to tend to the wounded during the riots.[56] Initially, Africans blocked her path. They eventually let her pass when they realised that she was a doctor who had come to tend the wounded.[57] Undoubtedly, these incidents did occur, and some testimonies describe how African servants also protected their Indian employers.[58] While these stories reflected liberal and left attempts to absolve Africans from blame, at heart they revealed a view of Africans as child-like innocents who could easily be manipulated. Like white liberal and left opinion, these Indian narratives also sought to

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[55] The Leader 23 April 1949.
[56] Dr K. Goonam, interview with PR, Durban July 1995.
[57] Dr K. Goonam, interview with PR, Durban July 1995.
[58] Jeeva Chetty, interview with PP, Durban 26 May 1998, In 'The 1949 Riots' unpublished paper, unpaginated.

distance Indians from complicity in the circumstances that had led to the outbreak of violence in the first place.

Where African violence was recollected, the narrator often expressed a sense of disbelief or perplexity:

> The family which my uncle was, (sic) they had black tenants, they had black servants. But their own tenants turned against them. Their own servants turned against them….there was also a bus owner. And his drivers were blacks when it started, the first thing they did was they were working, they were earning a living, they burnt the bus. And they burnt the home of the person who was employing them and they killed him.. in my uncle's house the blacks came in..they were thrusting spears under the bed to see if anyone was there…We could never understand….[59]

The riots helped fracture even further the limited social and political contact that existed between Indians and Africans, often tilting the balance to open animosity. To quote Mr M:

> The 1949 riots made us have nothing to do with the African, beware of the African…That suffering we underwent, the misery which has been caused at the hands of the Africans made us more anti-African..We hated the Africans to be quite honest with you and you can't blame us too.[60]

Mr. M. adds, however, 'I'm a leftist and I make no bones about it.'

The Response of the CPSA

Articles by CP members attempted to address the issues raised but did so primarily from an economic and moral perspective, which, like white liberal opinion, blamed the policies of D. F.Malan and his NP government. A statement was issued on the riots by Yusuf Dadoo while he was in London in January 1949, addressing a multiracial demonstration of Indian, African and Colonial students against the National Party, during which a life-size effigy of Malan was burned in Trafalgar Square. In his speech to the two hundred demonstrators present, Dadoo neatly summarised some of these views. He placed 'primary and main responsibility for the pogrom on the shoulders of the extremely and fascist Government (sic) of Dr Malan and the Nationalist Party':[61]

> One cannot escape the conclusion that the outbreak here has some resemblance of organised 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 Government policy, that it may

[59] S. Sing, interview with PP, Durban 30 July 1998.
[60] Mr. M, interview with Chetty, in 'The Durban Riots and Popular Memory', p. 9.
[61] Y. Dadoo, 'Statement at Press Conference in London January 25 1949, Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo, p. 145.

be used as a weapon to impose further repression on both Indian and African people....the hands of the Malan government are stained with blood.[62]

In South Africa, an alarmed NIO denounced Dadoo's statement because of its anti-government sentiments, highlighting the growing rift between South African Indian merchants and radicals. Dadoo's other main concern was to refute accusations of communism.

> Mr Louw's[63] charge that the Congress (NIC) was dominated by Communists is a canard which I hurl back into his teeth.....the Natal Indian Congress was founded by that great apostle of truth and non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi. He has given it the great tradition of his matchless weapon of passive resistance, first tried out in South Africa.[64]

Dadoo's rather vociferous denial of communist influence was, of course, partly inspired by the beginnings of the Cold War and the growing anti-Communist climate in South Africa. But his evocation of Gandhi indicated his increasingly close relationship with the Indian Congress. As outlined in the previous chapter, Dadoo had corresponded with Gandhi and at several key points of the passive resistance campaign, had sought his advice. Many felt that Dadoo was being groomed to take on a Gandhian role in South African politics. After Gandhi's death, Nehru became his principal adviser. The prestige of Indian independence and Indian representation in the United Nations, gave the political struggle of Indians in South Africa increasing international prominence.

The Durban Riots and the narratives that stem from them describe the complex ways in which communities relate to one another in changing social, economic and political circumstances. They help illustrate the heterogeneous process of identity formation in South Africa, and the difficulties of organising class actions across the racial divide. Martin Legassick has remarked that early industrialisation in South African had given rise to 'ill defined groups of dissidents' rather than pure categories of class.[65] By the 1940s, capitalism had continued to develop unevenly and identities continued to be heterogeneous rather than 'fully proletarianised'. Most African and Asian workers worked in, but also between, industry, the service sector, petty trade, and agriculture. In these circumstances, identity was differentiated on the individual, group and national level in all communities. But, as

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[62] 'Statement', Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo, p.145.

[63] Cabinet Minister Eric Louw was a prominent member of the National Party, the Minister for Economic Affairs, and chief South African delegate to the United Nations in 1949.

[64] 'Statement', Reddy, Yusuf Dadoo, p.146

Franz Fanon[66] and Homi Bhaba have observed, colonialism produces its own particular forms of hybrid identity.[67] For Indian South Africans, cultural transformations gave rise to a particular form of hybridity, based on an identity that was not fixed, but a point of identification, an act of becoming in relation to Africans and whites. However, political action around a set of demands often still required a more essentialised vision of self and community.

For some, the fragmented and fundamentally competitive experience of class in South Africa undermined its ability to act as a vector for mass mobilisation. Dadoo returned to a nationalist narrative because this discourse enabled him to call on a 'true self', which recognised a common history, culture and links with India. It provided a sense of 'oneness, continuity, and coherence, in opposition to the experience of dispersal and fragmentation' under colonialism.[68] Gandhian notions of Indianness became the vector through which a 'true Indian self' could be reinscribed as a political identity which outlined specific forms of action. It was one essentialising discourse amongst many. Apartheid itself was an essentialising discourse that sought to unite the disparate interest groups and classes within Afrikaner society.

On January the 13th 1948, Gandhi began his famous, and last, fast to stop the communal bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims that had broken out after partition in India. A year to the day later, the Durban Riots broke out in South Africa. There was a deep chasm between African and Indian residents of the city. Despite Dadoo's brave words, Gandhi's philosophy had not as yet provided a 'matchless weapon' with which to forge a non-racial unity that would effectively counter discriminatory state policies. In the next

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[65] Legassick, Class and Nationalism, p. 7.

[66] F. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, (London, 1986).

[67] H. Bhaba, The Location of Culture, (London, 1994), pp. 40-65.

[68] See S. Hall, 'Cultural Identity and the Diaspora', P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: a reader, (Hemel Hempstead,), pp. 392-403.

chapter I will examine how these difficulties fed into the Defiance Campaign of the 1952 and the changing relationship between community and party.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

At the beginning of the 1950s, as the policies of apartheid intensified in South Africa, qualitative shifts were taking place within the CPSA as well. It was in the process of re-defining its relationship to other organisations around a nationalist programme for democratic rights. The CP's relationship with the national congresses became closer in this period, although this had been foreshadowed by the party's activities prior to, during, and immediately after World War Two. Grassroots activity had provided the CPSA with broad-based support and access to widespread organisational networks.[1] These circumstances helped accommodate a South African Indian nationalist discourse within the CPSA. The ideological framework for this was provided by the party's characterisation of South Africa as of 'Colonialism of a Special Type'. This implicitly continued the issues raised by 'Black Republic' thesis discussed in Chapter Five.

The Black Republic thesis advocated a 'two-stage' process, suggesting that a nationalist group would have to execute the first stage of a bourgeois democratic revolution, which would then be followed by the struggle for a workers and peasants republic. The CP therefore had to constantly evaluate its relationship to the nationalist groups, no easy task given the vacillation of the international communist movement on this matter. While Indian communists had more or less successfully maintained a bridgehead between the Communist Party and the Indian Congresses, relations between the CP and the ANC were not quite so straightforward, especially after formation of the Youth League in September 1944. The League aimed to challenge the 'petty bourgeois' politics of an ANC which was led predominantly by white-collar professionals, with a more directly Africanist agenda of democratic rights. As the League's influence began to spread within the ANC, two difficulties soon became apparent. One was the hostility towards communist ideology displayed by some Youth League members because it was seen as inherently 'foreign'; the other was the unease that some party members felt with collaborating with such overtly

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[1] T. Lodge, <u>Black Politics in South Africa</u>, (New York, 1983), pp. 33-66; H. Sapire, 'Apartheid's Testing Ground; urban native policy and African Politics in Brakpan, South Africa, 1943-1948', <u>Journal of African History</u>, vol. 35, 1994, pp. 99-123.

nationalist aims, which, according to some, obscured the party's supposed principle focus on class.[2]

A series of resolutions were passed at CP conferences requesting its African members to join the ANC, although many were reluctant to do so as 'the ANC was dominated by sophisticated intellectuals who only spoke in English'.[3] They felt that there was a wide gap between the political constituency of the ANC and the workers' movements that the Communist Party was used to working in. But at this time, the ANC was in a process of change, and the CP was trying to formulate a political programme, which would encourage an alliance of the unions, the party and the national organisations. The programme that was produced at the end of the Second World War by the CP called for universal equal rights and a welfare system, both of which could be implemented through a nationalist organisation in the first part of a 'two stage revolution'.

As with its Indian members, in the Transvaal, and also in to some extent in Durban, leading communists were also leading Congress officials. CP members Bopape, Marks and Thloome were also members of Congress. Congress politics and CP politics became intrinsically intertwined. 'Progressive' nationalism was viewed as capable of providing a platform for an agenda of equal rights and an end to racial discrimination, and CP members, particularly in the Transvaal, began to articulate an official reorientation within the party which prioritised the national liberation movement.[4] In 1949, CP members Rusty Bernstein and Michael Harmel began to formulate the beginnings of the notion of 'Colonialism of a Special Type' which would provide a theoretical basis from which to direct this increasing realignment towards nationalist organisations. The thesis behind 'Colonialism of a Special Type' was first officially put forward in a CP Central Committee Report of the last official conference convened by the party in January 1950. The CP dissolved itself and went underground in June of that same year. The document was trying

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[2] See D. Everatt, 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party 1945-1955', The History of The South African Communist Party, pp. 36-37.

[3] Everatt 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party',p. 37.

[4] Everatt makes the valid point that this was not the experience of the party on a national level. The CapeTown branch, in particular, was anxious to maintain a line that continued to give primacy to the 'class struggle'. See Everatt, 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party', pp. 38-39.

to deal with changes taking place within South Africa that seemed undeniable to a significant section of the party's membership:

> Conflicting Nationalisms: South Africa is entering a period of bitter *national* conflict [original emphasis]. An intensive racial oppression, an aggressive and virulent Afrikaner nationalism, are provoking an exclusive nationalist consciousness among the Indian, the African, the Coloured, and even among the English-speaking Whites, whose former unchallenged pre-eminence is now being threatened. On all sides the national and racial differences are being emphasised, and the realities of the *class* divisions are being obscured. All but a small majority of class-conscious South Africans view the clash of interests, not as one between worker and employer, but as a clash between white and black, or between English and Afrikaner.[5]

The report argued that a theory of Colonialism of a Special Type was necessary because an internal colony existed in South Africa. This new formulation was an attempt to articulate a pragmatic and indigenous response to the circumstances of South Africa and it underwent much fine-tuning in the party over the next few years. Broadly speaking, CP theoreticians argued that black South Africans actually suffered a double oppression, in that they were oppressed as a nation and as workers. South Africa contained a permanent white population that was the colonising power. This population controlled the political system of exploitation and this system had the same characteristics that were found in other parts of colonial Africa, such as a racially divided working class and a system of migrant labour. The white population of South Africa, however, had no metropolitan centre to return to. In South Africa, the colonisers and the colonised inhabited the same national boundaries. On top of this, segregation and apartheid had stunted the formation of a black bourgeoisie as all racial groups were treated as homogenous entities by the state, both politically and economically, and therefore differentiation within them was obscured or minimal. And, as this was a colonial struggle, the correct response to it was a struggle of national liberation. [6]

The report went on to deal with the actual nationalist organisations which, it considered, were predominantly petty-bourgeois and economically dependent on the white ruling class, because of conditions in South Africa at that time. It characterised them as mainly weak and ineffectual, except for the Indian bourgeoisie, who 'in conjunction with

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[5] 'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', extract from Central Committee report to the National Conference of the Communist Party in Johannesburg on January 6, 7 and 8, 1950', Document 91, South African Communists Speak, p. 201.

[6] Everatt 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party', p. 49.

Indian workers have been able to conduct a mass struggle of limited dimensions.'[7] The other organisations, it concluded, could only develop into powerful, mass movements to the extent that the interests of the workers and peasants determined their content and aims. The document tried hard to reconcile the two main trends in the party at that time, those calling for a closer relationship with the nationalist organisations, and those who were anxious to retain a fundamental commitment to class politics. It suggested implicitly that the CP should try to do this by acknowledging that there could be no clear line between bourgeois and working-class demands, around issues of residential segregation, pass laws and employment legislation for example, as these affected all non-Europeans and therefore were 'national interests.' And the struggle against racial discrimination had to be played out in terms of the struggle against capitalism and by 'ensuring the dominant role of class conscious workers in the national organisations'.[8] It therefore suggested that the nationalist organisations be

> transformed into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants and intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, linked together in a firm organisation, subject to strict discipline and guided by a definite programme of struggle against all forms of racial discrimination in alliance with class conscious European workers and intellectuals.[9]

The argument for Colonialism of a Special Type and for stronger links with nationalist organisations was facilitated by the less exclusivist, but radical, leadership that had emerged in the Youth League (including Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo), and a discourse within the ANC which talked of colonial oppression and capitalism as the enemy – a discourse which co-incided to some extent with Marxist analysis. In 1949, the Youth League had six members elected to the Executive of the ANC, which adopted the Programme of Action, committing itself to a grassroots programme of mass action. It also coincided with yet another change in direction in the internationally Communist movement regarding the relationship between communist parties and the national bourgeoisie. In 1949, the Cominform (which had replaced the Comintern) reversed its previous position and advocated alliances between workers and the colonial national bourgeoisie.

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[7]'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', p. 208.
[8] 'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', p. 211.
[9] 'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', p. 211.

Colonialism of a Special Type was a part of a much wider debate than that taking place within the international communist movement:

> The first cogent statement of internal colonialism was made in 1952 by Joe Mathews, the president of the ANC Youth League and not a member at that time of the Communist Party. The first major theoretical support for internal colonialism came, not from any of the leading communists, but from Leo Marquard – president of the South African Institute for Race Relation, and vice-president of the Liberal Party....When looking at CST, one should remember that it was in the air as it were. It was the era of decolonisation and national liberation struggle, and CST was the result of a widespread debate which took place across party political boundaries on the liberal/left in the early and mid 1950s.[10]

In this climate, the Indian radical nationalism espoused by Dadoo fitted like a glove. And it was given extra resonance through its strong relationship with Congress in India, which seemed to represent the very epitome of a 'progressive' nationalism. Congress advocated a modernist agenda; It enjoyed a close, if at times fraught, relationship, with the Soviet Union; its framework of socialist orientation for economic and technological development was to be implemented through five year plans; and it exercised a democratic voice at the UN. In addition, the INC emphasised, in theory, a secular politics of democratic rights that would wash away centuries of caste discrimination. But this political orientation was combined in Congress with Gandhian notions of tradition and an essential Indian character.[11] If Congress's socialist tendencies co-incided in some respects with a communist programme, the Gandhian 'true self', a political and moral being, appealed to Indian South Africans in reaction to their place in the racialised landscape of South Africa.

The contradiction of having Gandhi as model for political action (who, as we have seen, made no bones about his anti-socialist sentiments and often displayed an anti-worker ethic) for a Communist Party and its members could be blurred at a time when the party was in alliance with nationalist organisations. In this context, the highly eclectic nature of the philosophical underpinnings of passive resistance meant that it could act as an overarching vehicle for mobilisation, and extra-parliamentary mass protest. Passive resistance became transformed, yet again, like a vessel of 'fluid signs', which could signify

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[10] Everatt, 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party', p. 5.

[11] This contradiction at the heart of Congress policy is most visibly demonstrated in its post-independence development programmes, where there are attempts to apply a modernist development agenda around ideas of 'traditional village India'. See S. Sinha, S. Gururani and B. Greenburg, 'The "New Traditionalist" Discourse of Indian Environmentalism', Journal of Peasant Studies, vol. 24, no. 3, April 1997, pp. 65-99.

different things at different moments in time, in order to articulate different political demands. In the early twentieth century, Gandhi had formulated it as a moral weapon of truth and conscience against a corrupting modernity. In the 1940s, it was appropriated by Indian communist members as a tool in the struggle for democratic rights and citizenship. In the 1950s, it was transformed once more, now by Africans, to represent Christian values of justice and truth,[12] and a means of mobilising extra-parliamentary opposition to the apartheid state. These ideas of truth and justice interacted with a broad-based political platform of national democratic rights and citizenship against a 'fascist' state.

There were many contradictions in the new direction the party was taking. The claim that certain issues were equally relevant to workers and the bourgeoisie is questionable. Residential segregation, for one, did not affect all non-Europeans in the same way, while discriminatory laws regarding the purchase of land primarily affected middle-class Indians.[13] Employment legislation also had a differential impact on communities, depending on such variables as class, gender, and access to capital. Nonetheless, 'Colonialism of a Special Type' represented an attempt to synthesise a position between class and nation. It provided party members with a theoretical basis for increasing involvement with the nationalist struggle and membership of the nationalist organisations, as well as a legal platform from which to carry on illegal work. Indian communists had already employed these tactics for some time.

Anti-communist legislation introduced by the NP after 1948 enabled the government to contain and eliminate political opposition in a decade which saw increasing control over the lives of black people. The Pass Laws stepped up the constraints on African movement. Stock limitation and the Bantu Authorities Act sought to alter economic and political relations in the reserves. The Bantu Education Act tried to break the monopoly on African schooling held by the Christian Missions and replace it with an African education system geared towards training Africans for 'their station in life', with a special emphasis

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[12] A similar political movement was, of course, taking place under Martin Luther King in the United States, who specifically evoked Gandhi as the inspiration for the methods adopted in the Civil Rights Movement, and combined this within a Christian agenda. See G. M. Fredrickson, _The Comparative Imagination: on the history of racism, nationalism and social movements_, (London, 1997), pp.173-188.
[13] See above, Chapter Eight.

on manual training. The Group Areas Act extended the racial boundaries of segregation and created further rigid racial boundaries in the occupation and use of space. The control and the racialisation of urban space was extended even further in 1951 with the introduction of the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act which gave the state powers to 'resettle' the 'surplus peasants' living in 'black spots' in designated white areas in reserves.[14]

The Communist Party, in conjunction with nationalist groups, organised a May Day strike in 1950 to protest against the Unlawful Organisations Bill. On 20 June, the Communist Party dissolved itself. In the House of Assembly in Cape Town, Sam Kahn stated:

> Recognising that the day the Suppression of Communism Bill becomes law every one of our members, merely by virtue of their membership, may be liable to be imprisoned without the option of a fine for a maximum period of ten years, the central Committee of the Communist party has decided to dissolve the Party as from today....Adopting the technique of all Fascists, the government destroys what it claims to defend...Communism will outlive the nationalist Party. Democracy will still be triumphant when members of this government will be manuring the fields of history. Millions in South Africa will echo my final words: Long live communism.[15]

Dadoo, by this time an established and important party leader chaired the meeting in Johannesburg when the decision to dissolve the party was announced.. The decision to dissolve the CP was contentious for its members. Rusty Bernstein suggests that many part members were left with a deep sense of shock and disorientation, and were unhappy with the legalistic reasons they were given for the decision.[16] Nor was the decision by any means unanimous.[17]

However, as Bernstein also points out, freed from their party membership, many ex-CP members were now more readily welcomed into mass organisations, and were not viewed with the same suspicion as before.[18] Some party members such as Jack and Ray Simons felt that a broad-based movement, based around the nationalist organisations,

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[14] D. O'Meara, Forty Lost Years: the apartheid state and the politics of the National Party, 1948-1994, ((Randburg, 1996), p. 69.
[15] Central Commmittee statement read out in the House of Assembly, Cape Town on June20, 1950, by the Communist M.P. Sam Kahn, Document 94, South African Communists Speak, p. 214.
[16] R. Berstein, Memory Against Forgetting: memoirs from a life in South African Politics 1938-1964,, (London 1999), pp. 114-124
[17] Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, p. 380.
[18] Bernstein, Memory Against Forgetting, p. 122.

would be the driving force in this period, and that the party was not really needed at that time.[19] Whatever the internal disagreements, there is little doubt that party members took their organisational skills into the nationalist political bodies.

Communist Party members began to take their first practical steps in redefining their relationship with the nationalist organisations. White, African and Indian, they were determined to advance non-racial organisation against the Malan government and actively promoted this through their membership of the Congresses. A significant section in the Congress supported them. The CP had 1500 African members at the time of its dissolution and many of them were already in the ANC.

By 1951, a 'Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws' was beginning to take shape as the government passed 75 pieces of apartheid legislation in one parliamentary session.[20] The ANC invited the SAIC and the FAC to a meeting of its National Executive Committee in June, 1951, to discuss a joint campaign of 'civil disobedience'. The subsequent Joint Planning Council consisted of J.B. Marks, Walter Sisulu, Y.M. Dadoo and Y.A. Cachalia, who between represented a spectrum of communist, nationalist and Gandhian influences. The proposed campaign also began to attract international support, from newly communist China, Kwame Nkrumah, who was leading the fight for independence on the Gold Coast, and Indian Congress, amongst others. Again, passive resistance, or Civil Disobedience as it now became known, also helped put the situation in South Africa in the international public arena, when the issues it raised were placed before the UN. It also became identified with a wider anti-colonial struggle, and added to the considerable growth of international hostility to the policies of the National Party.

The campaign was launched on the 26 June, the same month that the Indian campaign of passive resistance had started in 1946. The tactic of the 'stay-at-home', first tried out in 1950, similar to the Indian 'hartal', was one strategy employed in non-violent resistance. Others, as in the Indian campaign, included breaking apartheid laws, crossing borders, and courting arrest.

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[19] Bernstein, Memory Against Forgetting, p. 124.
[20] M. P. Naicker, 'The Defiance Campaign Recalled', Notes and Documents, No. 11/72, June 1972.

There was generally a positive response to Civil Disobedience, but the actual Indian participation was relatively small, confined by now to a radical minority which managed to negotiate, or at least work alongside, communist ideals and nationalist sentiments, in a campaign for democratic rights and citizenship. I have discussed the reasons for the loss of their wider political constituency in previous chapters. Nevertheless, Indians were prominent in leading some of the initial campaigns, and brought their previous experience with them, and many of the organisational structures, such as setting up volunteer corps, and taking an oath of allegiance, were derived from the methods that Gandhi had initiated in South Africa. Gandhian tactics were also popular because of India's recently gained independence, which was often represented as a direct result of his methods of struggle. If passive resistance could defeat the British, could it not be used to gain concessions from the National Party?, There were, however, also important differences from earlier campaigns. In the 1950s, the methods of passive resistance were reinscribed as a means to win democratic rights and citizenship, but this time, through predominantly Christian notions of justice and truth. They were also translated beyond the supposedly specific Indian character that passive resistance had acquired in South Africa, where it had been regarded a particularly compatible with 'Indian philosophy' or state of mind:[21] 'Passive resistance comes readily to the Hindu mind, whereas it would be incomprehensible to a Zulu or a Sioux.'[22] In the course of this reappropriation, passive resistance was emphasised as an activity of 'civilised men', African citizens who were now calling for full democratic rights for all races in an 'integrated South Africa.' This was a direct challenge to notions of 'primitive, savage, warlike' Africans' who were seen as intrinsically incapable of embracing non-violent protest. There were overt comparisons to the violent methods of Mau Mau in Kenya, which at this time haunted the European imagination, and were fuelled by primitive archetypes of 'African savagery'. These stereotypical views had, of course, also been expressed during the Durban Riots, both through 'common sense' discourse and in the language of official state bodies, and one important aspect of adopting passive

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[21] L. Kuper, <u>Passive Resistance in South Africa</u>, (London, 1956), p. 9.
[22] Quoted in Kuper, <u>Passive Resistance</u>, p. 92.

resistance as a weapon of political expedience was to emphasise that Africans were capable of responsible political behaviour.[23]

The movement was now also increasingly translated largely in Christian terms, and the principles of Christianity used to challenge the government to change its racist policies. The organisational structures of the campaign were often framed around prayer meetings, the singing of hymns, and Bible readings; this was particularly marked in the Eastern Cape.[24] The combination of politics and prayer also assumed a significant practical aspect as, soon after the campaign started, the government outlawed all public meetings, apart from religious gatherings. This espousal of Christian values were was also part of a stark challenge to the supposedly Christian principles of the National Party, where the Congress bodies issued a moral challenge to the government in terms of its own Christian morality.

This evocation of Christian principles was also to be found at meetings of the Indian congress. Many Indian South Africans were Christians, and during the Civil Disobedience campaign they espoused their views with increased conviction. Indian participants in the campaign spoke of a suffering that would bring about justice and truth, and these notions also appealed to Gandhian ideas of suffering through moral conviction. Indian politics in South Africa had always had a strong religious element. Congress meetings often started with prayers. In the early 1950s, there were also many direct references to Christianity. In October 1951, G. M. Naicker declared: 'Christianity is based on the brotherhood of man...and apartheid is the very negation of the noble principles which humanity has inherited from Christ.'[25] Other Indian campaign members also emphasised issues of human rights and the teachings of Christianity.

Many ex-party members, such as R. D. Naidoo and Kay Moonasamy, remained active in their trade union organisations.[26] Others who were banned by the state, found it more difficult to stay politically active in this period. For example, In 1950, George

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[23] E. S. Reddy, 'Defiance Campaign in South Africa, Recalled', <u>Asian Times</u>, June 26, 1987.
[24] Kuper <u>Passive Resistance</u>, p. 93.
[25] NIC Agenda Book, Fifth Annual Provincial Conference, 29 September-1 October, 1951, <u>ANC Papers</u>, ICS, No. 28
[26] R. D. Naidoo, interview with JF, Durban August 1985.

Ponnen, the first party member to be banned in Natal, was ordered to resign from all unions, as well as Indian Congress, and forbidden to enter any factory. He consequently also lost his means of living, and was forced, first and foremost, to try and feed his family.[27] A number of Indian and African women, many of whose husbands were members of Congress, also started the Durban and District Women's League in 1952, which organised functions to raise money for the campaign.[28]

In many ways, Dadoo, who fought the campaign on the slogan of 'unity against fascism', came to symbolise an Indian communist narrative of class and nation that fed into the Defiance Campaign of 1952. By this time, Dadoo had become a transnational Indian political hero. In South Africa, in the 'vast majority of Indian homes, every one carried a photo of Dadoo', and he also had achieved a very high profile in India. Promoted as 'Gandhi's favorite son', who also had the ear of Nehru, Dadoo appealed to a wide political constituency, in part because he did not see a contradiction between being 'a real activist in the national liberation movement and being a communist at the same time.'[29] Dadoo's image, seen as a badge of Indian South African identity, transcended the boundaries of the politically active.

There was also, however, a new emphasis in the constitution of radical Indian political identity in this period. South African Indian communists had used the passive resistance campaign of 1946 to bring their plight to an international audience. This had caused considerable annoyance to Smuts and the South African government, but also produced wider anger amongst white South Africans, and under the Nationalists, Indians were increasingly pressurised to demonstrate where exactly their loyalties lay. How could they lay claim to South African citizenship *and* keep calling on India to champion their interests? As the Natal Mercury bluntly put it: 'if Indians belong here, stop appealing to outside bodies'.[30] In NIC conference minutes and agenda books in this period, there were far fewer references to the Motherland, to Indian honour and dignity, or to racial

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[27] G. Ponnen, George Ponnen Speaks, p. 19. Ponned ended up starting a factory run on 'egalitarian lines', where trade union and ANC meetings took place during the Defiance Campaign.

[28] F. Meer, interview with JF, Durban August, 1985.

[29] E. Pahad, interview with JF, Durban 1985.

discrimination as a 'slur on the Indian nation'. Their oppression was expressed in ways that emphasised their belonging in South Africa, and their community of interest with other 'non-Europeans'. The demand that they make a choice about where they 'belonged' brought a shift in their political language, and led to an emphasis on the joint struggle for democratic rights in a multiracial partnership. Leaders of the African National Congress now regularly attended their meetings and addressed the audience. In the 1950s, Chief Albert Luthuli was a regular guest at annual NIC conferences.

The government responded swiftly to the political unrest of 1952, cracking down both on campaigners, and their leadership. Ahmed Kathrada and Dadoo were both arrested in August. Chief Albert Luthuli, who was elected President of the ANC in December, 1952, called off the campaign in April 1953. The Defiance Campaign of 1952 was not intended as a challenge to state power in South Africa. The leadership sought the repeal of the accelerating apartheid legislation in this period. It did not succeed. However, the campaign brought together forms of political protest and political alliances that were to increasingly form the basis for opposition to the apartheid state, a method of mass, inter-racial and cross class extra parliamentary protest that would later be termed a 'social movement'.

The influence of Indian communists helped shape the civil disobedience of the 1950s in several ways, and it fed into an international anti-colonial discourse of socialism and nationalism.[31]

Conclusion

In the period under discussion, the Communist Party of South Africa significantly changed its political orientation, and Indian South African communists were an important part of redirecting that change. Initially, the party's theoretical basis and its practical work were centred on white workers at the point of production. Although many members considered that they had to alter their perspective because of the 'specifics' of a South African 'reality' which could not be ignored, their response was a reflection of the fact that they was no pure category of class that would selflessly fulfil its historic mission, in South

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[30] Natal Mercury, October 2 1951.

Africa or elsewhere. All classes in South Africa were a product of their complex histories, bore traces of their past cultural practices, and were entangled with other forms of identification. Classes became divided on racial and gendered lines, but also came to be experienced through forms of national identity and the struggle for social space. For Indians, an important element of this national identity was derived through their diasporic experiences, and their continuing relationship with their 'homeland'. These national identities was reinforced through state legislation which sought to spatialise its racially hierachical practices, and also sought to determine access to jobs, housing, and public services. The growth of partially formed urban spaces, where many Indians lived in the margins of the modernising city, helped fuel a radical politics of inclusion and citizenship.

Indians had a history of trade union organisation, but it was the wider politics of anti-fascism that brought many into contact with the party. Although the Indians who came into the CP initially organised around issues which arose in the workplace, their fight was primarily around rights for Indian workers, even when this had not specifically been the intention. Moreover, party members conflated union organisation with the wider antifascist struggle for democratic rights in South Africa. Workplace issues also became further Indianised through the involvement of Indian Congress community leaders (despite the contested and fragile nature of community) as well as representatives of the Indian government. The strong ties with India, and Indian national liberation politics, also gave radical Indian political organisation in South Africa a strong anti-colonial flavour, and an attachment to the 'progressive nationalism' being championed by the international communist movement in this period, because of its anti-imperialist potential.

The international political landscape witnessed the rise of fascism at this time, which profoundly affected the strategy of communist parties world-wide. There were significant points in time when the party's primary focus shifted to a popular front against fascism, which also proved to be a major recruiting point for the organisation. In South Africa, this interacted with the perceived threat of a growing domestic fascism, which accelerated the need for forming broad front organisations. When the CP switched its position on the

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[31] Dr. Debi Singh, NIC Fifth Annual Conference, 29 September-1 October, ANC Papers, ICS, No.28.

Second World War, it seemed tied to a national cause and subsequently grew in popularity, giving it experience of working in grassroots organisations on a wide variety of workers issues, such as access to housing and jobs, and struggles over urban space.

After 1948, when the National Party initiated its anti-communist legislation, forcing the CP to dissolve itself, the party decided that the way forward was to join a broad-front democratic alliance, but this was the outcome of strategies and tactics already in place, and in particular, reflected modes of organisation already adopted by Indian party members. Indians in the CP had developed a complex political subjectivity, which tried to combine a diasporic national politics, South African belonging, and, at least in principle, a socialist political programme. Gandhi had become a symbol of resistance and 'Indianness' in South Africa. But Dadoo took over the mantle, and also came to represent a political identity that was Indian, South African and in some sense, communist. The fact that he became such a prominent figure in the organisation symbolised the disparate ways that Indians were to influence the Communist Party of South Africa in this period, and the ease with which Indian radicals became a part of, and influenced, the Defiance Campaign of 1952. That this was initiated by such a small number of Indians makes this all the more remarkable. They helped formulate a particular articulation between nationalism and socialism in the CPSA, which was itself part of a wider dialogue taking place in twentieth century international politics.

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