Edward Ramsamy, "Post-Settlement South Africa and the National Question: The Case of the Indian Minority," *Critical Sociology* 22, 3 (1996): 57-77

Post-Settlement South Africa and the National Question: The Case of the Indian Minority

Edward Ramsamy

ABSTRACT: The various liberation movements in South Africa historically have criticized ideologies that emphasize political mobilization along ethnic lines. However, the African National Congress (ANC) has had to contend with former KwaZulu Chief Minister Buthelezi's attempts to appeal to Zulu identity in order to mobilize political support, as well as the difficulty of attracting the Indian and coloured votes. These trends have forced the ANC to acknowledge in its political strategy the potential power of ethnic mobilization, in spite of the commitment made by the organization and its allies to a secular democracy based on equality of citizenship.

The role of ethnicity in political mobilization is a contentious issue in South Africa today. Ethnic identities were always manipulated by the white ruling classes to reinforce apartheid policy. As a consequence, progressive scholars and activists approached the issue of ethnicity with caution, fearing that any acknowledgement of ethnicity's role in political mobilization could be used to legitimate the ideology of separate development. Bekker (1993: 26) observes that, as a result, talking about ethnicity became "a virtual taboo" among progressives in South Africa. An examination of current political events and grass-roots popular sentiment suggest that ethnicity is also an organizing force in South African politics and worthy of consider-

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Department of Africana Studies, Beck Hall, Room 112, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903. Earlier drafts were presented at the Southern African seminar series in Mansfield College, Oxford and at colloquia sponsored by the Africana Studies Department at Rutgers University. I wish to thank Anthony Lemon and Kim Butler, the respective organizers of these series, for giving me a forum to discuss my ideas. I am grateful for the assistance from the office of James Reed, former Dean of Rutgers College, which enabled me to attend the conference at Oxford. Kavitha Ramachandran and Betty Govinden read the earlier drafts and provided insightful criticisms. Any remaining errors are attributable to me alone.

ation in its own right. Former KwaZulu Chief Minister Buthelezi's attempts to appeal to "Zuluness" to mobilize political support in Natal, Inkatha's strong showing in KwaZulu/Natal in the national and local elections, and the difficulty experienced by the ANC in attracting Indian and coloured votes in the 1994 national election indicate that ethnicity is an important variable in contemporary South African politics. Indeed, the very existence of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) as separate organizations with the approval of the "non-racial" African National Congress is an acknowledgement of ethnicity's power.

The aim of this paper is to examine the persistence of group identification and ethnic consciousness in the "Indian" community of South Africa and discuss the nature and consequences of their political alignments. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section examines how national liberation movements are generally characterized by the internal opposition of the forces of unity and the forces of disintegration. The second part examines the successes and failures of anti-apartheid movements in South Africa in organizing inter-ethnic coalitions to oppose the apartheid system. Finally, the challenges of responding to a politics based on group identity while simultaneously forging a new society of national unity are examined in the context of the Indian position in South Africa's socioeconomic and political order.

National Liberation Struggles and the Ethnic Question

Looking back in time, the exuberance of national liberation was short-lived in many states in Africa. The coalition of interests that formed the various anti-colonial movements splintered into a cacophony of sub-national challenges to new state boundaries. The undercurrent of cultural and regional interests, once obscured in the rhetoric of independence and national unity, increased in volume and intensity (Nagel, 1993). While it is unlikely that the territorial integrity of the South African state would be challenged seriously by sub-national movements in the near future, there are signs that group affiliations, ethnic or ideological, may trigger conflict at some point.

National liberation struggles, including those in South Africa, were frequently premised on the notion that the cultural identities of colonized peoples reflect a shared set of historical experiences that provide stable and continuous frames of reference. Such a conception of cultural identity lay at the center of the Pan-Africanist political project and, to some extent, the inclusivist ideology of non-racialism in South Africa. It was, according to Stuart Hall (1990: 223), "a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation among hitherto marginalized peoples." Hall goes on to argue that a second view of

cultural identity has to be posited in conjunction with the above. This second position recognizes that, in addition to the many points of similarity and agreement, "there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are' " (Hall, 1990: 225). In this respect, while multiple identities coalesced into a national identity in the interest of national liberation, that coalition was not a fixed or permanent essence. It was a strategic positioning of those identities to achieve a certain end. Thus, there are two processes simultaneously at work in the formation and political posturing of national liberation movements. On the one hand, there is the theme of similarity and continuity, with shared histories and common experiences acting as centripetal forces holding the movement together. On the other hand, the movement is periodically interrupted by difference and rupture.

This tension within national liberation struggles is evident when the positioning of the "Indian" in various political groupings in South Africa is examined.[1] The ideology of non-racialism (which emphasized a unified South African identity) and the Black Consciousness Movement's emphasis on solidarity of the oppressed groups in South Africa were important strategies in referencing the common experience of racism and political and economic marginalization in South African society. They were vehicles for a politics of resistance for groups with very different histories, traditions, and identities. However, ethnic identities did not disappear in the process of struggle, and all the major liberation tendencies in South Africa have had to grapple with the particularities of ethnic identity while simultaneously enunciating a singular, unified framework of resistance.

The above dichotomy does not imply that ethnicity has a determinant quality in affecting political processes. The instrumentalist (the belief people are by nature tribal) and premodalist (belief in an idyllic past that binds people together) conceptions of ethnicity have been challenged by a more constructivist view in which the constitution of ethnicity is analyzed in terms of the dialectical relationship between structured circumstances and peoples' actions and perceptions (Young, 1993). People's ethnic affiliations, political alliances, and value systems develop from given historical conditions and circumstances and change accordingly over time. It is necessary to examine the way in which people handle and respond to these conditions of existence, as well as the lived traditions and practices through which those understandings are expressed. According to Adam (1995: 463), "the notion that ethnicity constitutes a mere invention, contrived, conjured and manufactured by manipulating elites must be supplemented by the focus on the 'popular truth' that ethnic mobilizers air. They build on what Habermas has called 'pre-cultural understandings' in each society." Thus, while ethnic identity may be an

"imagined community" as described by Anderson (1983), it is important to understand that "constructs" have consequences in the way people organize their lives and rally around specific causes.

The Indian Experience in South Africa

The indentured servants who came to Natal from the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century were divided by caste, class, religion, and language (Bhana, 1991). Many came to South Africa to escape caste and class oppression in India and were thus willing to forget their ties to caste. In addition, the emerging racial hierarchy in South African society in the end of the 19th century led Indians to see themselves increasingly in terms of a broader "Indian" identity rather than in terms of their particular caste or linguistic identities from India. As a result, there emerged "a neo-Indian creole identity" in South Africa (Freund, 1995: 8).[2]

Upon arrival in South Africa, Indian indentured servants were subjected to extremely harsh working conditions on the sugar and tea plantations. In 1881, the first group of repatriated laborers informed the Indian colonial government of exploitation and abuses such as flogging, inadequate medical treatment, and excessive fines for minor offenses (Bhana and Pachai, 1984). However, because Indians had very limited means of organized resistance, collective action was rare prior to 1913. Although there were sporadic strikes, resistance generally took the forms of malingering, absenteeism, and occasional destruction of estate property (Swan, 1978). In addition to degrading work conditions, these Indians found themselves increasingly entangled in the emerging racial hierarchy of South African society. Consequently, they had to devise various political strategies.

The political history of South African Indians is characterized by the constant tension between individualistic, legalistic, non-confrontational, and militant strategies. The activism of the Indians during the early 1900s was greatly influenced by M.K. Gandhi. Essentially concerned with the plight of the Indian merchant classes, Gandhi founded the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in 1894. He believed that the interests of the Indians would best be advanced independent of the African cause, through a separately articulated politics. However, the accommodationist overtones of the Indian merchant class was ineffective in deterring the colonial government's introduction of more anti-Indian legislation. In 1939, a new generation of activists vied for leadership positions within the NIC, giving way to more militant politics in the post-1945 period (Padayachee et al., 1985). There was also the increasing realization that Indians needed to form partnerships with Africans to strengthen their opposition to the colonialists. In 1947 a pact was signed between the South African Indian

Congress (SAIC), the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), and the African National Congress to form a united front opposing segregation and oppression. While the pact was an important symbolic expression of the unity of experience and the desire to cooperate, both the African and Indian leaders were aware of the difficulties of eliciting grassroots support for agreements signed. For instance, Selby Msimang, executive member of the Natal ANC at the time, acknowledged that "the pact reflected a spirit of cooperation only at the leadership level" (Maharaj, 1992: 10). Although inter-organizational and inter-ethnic solidarity to articulate a unified politics of resistance representing the entire spectrum of marginalized groups was often successful, it was, nevertheless, replete with contradictions that were not without consequence, as this paper will attempt to show.

Group Identity in the National Liberation Struggle in South Africa

These inherent schisms are evident in the variety of positions within the anti-apartheid movements on how group/ethnic differences ought to be accommodated. First, the ANC and other groups ideologically committed to the Freedom Charter (commonly referred to as the Charterists) stressed the principle of non-racialism and emphasized the need for unified national coalitions to achieve the political and economic goals outlined in the Freedom Charter. Charterist organizations rejected the ethnic nationalism promoted by the state, as well as the Africanist conceptions of nationalism including only indigenous peoples. The activists belonging to this tradition highlighted the common interests of all peoples as a whole and relegated ethnicity and other cultural differences to the private sphere. Mac Maharaj, long-time ANC activist of Indian descent and current Minister of Transportation, explicitly stated that he did not want to be recognized as an Indian: "The only thing I have in common with Indians is that I share a mutual love of curry and rice. I am non-racial as they come or supposedly come, but don't call me Indian" (*Asian Times*, September, 1991). He believed that overlooking ethnic identity was important in the struggle for an all-inclusive "South Africanness." Thus, the Charterists promoted the self-defined "imagined community" of the South African nation "united by the experience of history, shared ideas and a sense of destiny" (Marx, 1992: 15).

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) also emphasized the necessity for solidarity among all oppressed peoples, regardless of their ethnic identities. The BCM defined coloureds, Indians and Africans as "Blacks" since they all experienced similar patterns of institutional discrimination. BCM activists aimed to forge solidarity among all the victims of apartheid.[3]

These unified oppositional movements made substantial gains in spite of the state's attempts to divide the various communities along ethnic lines. As early as 1946, the Indians rejected the state's offer of communal representation in the government of South Africa as a co-optive strategy because it did not include the African majority. Africans and Indians worked together in the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s. Indians were instrumental in formulating and incorporating the concerns of all three "Black" groups into the Freedom Charter. The 1973 strikes, which are often described as "African strikes," included a sizable number of Indian participants (Moodley, 1980).[4] Indian-African unity was also witnessed in the 1974 boycott of bus fare increases by Indian bus owners in Chatsworth, Durban. The (African) Black Allied Workers' Union supported the (Indian) Southern Durban Civic Federation in rejecting the planned fare increases. The solidarity of Indian students at the University of Durban-Westville with the African struggle and the joint actions by both the Indian and African communities in boycotting rent increases in Durban are further evidence of the success of unified mobilization of politically and economically marginalized communities in South Africa.

While these successful coalitions propelled the liberation movements forward, ideological conflicts over group identity and group position in the South African racial order often threatened the coalitions from within. Charterist organizations were ambivalent about the relationship between group identity and political mobilization. The ANC frequently labeled ethnic consciousness an invention of the white ruling class, yet it sanctioned the organizational expression of ethnically-based organizations like the NIC, TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress), and Coloured Peoples Congress (CPC). Although rhetorically committed to non-racialism, the Charterist organizations themselves fell prey to various forms of chauvinism. Non-Africans were excluded from the executive board of the ANC until 1985 (Horowitz, 1991: 16), and the vision of non-racialism was often forgotten in ethnocentric statements made by leaders of Charterist organizations. Archie Gumede, president of the United Democratic Front, stated in a television interview that he knew the Indian community would vote for whites if there were to be an election (*Weekly Mail*, August 3-5, 1990). Indian leaders were outraged at this remark and claimed that it disregarded the historical alliance between Africans and Indians in the anti-apartheid struggle.

Like non-racialism, the universalist ideology of "Blackness" articulated by the BCM also succumbed to inter-ethnic squabbles, in spite of its admirable intentions. A common complaint against the Indians was that they often remained aloof and showed insufficient support for the cause. Many Indian activists in the BCM renounced their heritage and adopted African traditions and symbols. Some even gave

their children African names to authenticate their "African-ness" and dispel Africans' perceptions of Indians as chauvinistic (Moodley, 1991).[5] Yet the Indians remained suspect to the Africans, as evident in Gomolemo Mokae's recent accusation (*Work in Progress*, Johannesburg, October, 1992) that the BCM has "molly-coddled the Indian component of the Black community: Given that this component has yet to show, across the ideological spectrum of the liberation movements, much passion and willingness to engage in struggle at grassroots level, is it not incongruous that they command such considerable power within all sections of the liberation movement?" The unity between Indians and Africans was often fragile and resentment of Indians was undisguised at times. For example, a *South African Students' Organization (SASO) Newsletter* article published in 1972 titled "Ugandan Asians and the Lessons for Us" argued that Indians refused to see themselves as part of the African soil and sympathized with the plight of Ugandan Asians who were discriminated against by Idi Amin. South African Indians were portrayed stereotypically as traders who came to South Africa to exploit the African population. The article confirmed that in spite of its purported faith in Black unity, the BCM betrayed its own skepticism by confusing the Indians of East Africa with South African Indians. Unlike East African Indian merchants and colonial civil servants, the majority of Indians in South Africa today are working class descendants of indentured laborers. The caricature of Indians as exploiters and opportunists ignores their present class position in the socioeconomic order of South Africa (Adam and Moodley, 1993: 108). Small businesses catering to an African clientele are frequently used as the basis for propagating the myth of the Indian exploitation of Africans, obscuring the fact that whites owning large department stores and supermarkets were "protected" from African contact precisely because of the Indian buffer. Indians were also employed by whites in supervisory positions over Africans to execute the commands of the white bosses. In many cases, African and Indian workers were pitted against one another by white employers to prevent inter-racial working class alliances (Padayachee et al., 1985). Africans at times fell prey to the white portrayal of the Indians as a parasitic threat; these apartheid-induced perceptions were not uncommon within the BCM, which sometimes sought to hide the problems of Indian-African alliance under the blanket of "Blackness," pointing to Indians as the weak link in the movement.

Despite their shared histories of economic exploitation, political marginalization, and resistance, Indians evoke the resentment of Africans because of their more privileged position in the South African pecking order. Because they are sandwiched between the powerful and affluent white minority and the disadvantaged African

majority, Indians are perceived by the Africans as "middleman" beneficiaries of the hierarchy. These emotional accusations often serve as a rallying point for Africans. In reality, whites protected themselves by establishing Indians as a buffer, which the Africans assaulted from time to time. Thus whites were able to distance themselves from violence and other retributive action by the Africans. This is illustrated clearly in the August, 1985, riots in Inanda, near Durban, which was one of the few areas where Africans and Indians lived in shacks, side by side, occupying similar class positions. The historic Gandhi settlement, popularly associated with UDF (United Democratic Front) supporters, was wrecked by Africans during the riot. The violence and looting had clear racial overtones; looting African mobs faced Indian vigilantes who screamed, "Kill the kaffirs." An estimated 70 people died in this riot.

Adam and Moodley (1986) argue that the riot was an unfortunate manifestation of the difficulty faced by anti-apartheid forces in promoting non-racialism against the apartheid doctrine without heeding the particular differences between Indians and Africans. It confirmed the success of the state in alienating the different communities from each other through separate institutions and differential incorporation into the apartheid system. It also highlighted the urgent need within the liberation movements for a cross-cultural understanding of the particular grievances of their various component groups.

Without the political or economic power of the whites or the numerical security of the Africans, Indians find themselves in a politically precarious position. Despite attempts at identification with the African majority, they feel threatened by both white and black domination. As a result of political and cultural encroachment from both groups, Indians have cultivated a form of "cultural narcissism" when faced with hostility (Adam and Moodley, 1986: 37). Cultural nationalism was a mechanism by which the Indian community protected themselves in a threatening environment.

Cultural Nationalism versus Unity in Struggle

As part of their efforts to survive in South Africa, Indians practiced a contradictory politics, expressing solidarity with the African majority while simultaneously withdrawing into forms of nationalism and isolationism. They could not resolve the conflict between their "non-racialism" or "black solidarity" and their particular lived experiences at the level of praxis. Kumi Naidoo, NIC activist and former president of the Student Representative Council at the University of Durban-Westville, expressed this dilemma:

> [W]hen you do fieldwork and go to people's houses, they ask you, "What guarantee do we Indians have that when the blacks take over they won't just boot us out?" When you talk to them, you can't talk as a black person — you have to connect with people at the level at which they are thinking. When relating to ordinary working class people you have to talk in terms of being Indian or coloured. That is why it is necessary to have the Indian Congress: because that is how people perceive themselves (Frederikse, 1990: 84).

In spite of the philosophical debates over the pros and cons of identity politics, the reality of ethnic consciousness in the everyday lives of individuals cannot be ignored. Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that effective political strategy needs a clear and coherent conception of the world it wants to change. According to Gramsci (1987), people's common sense understanding of the world should not be dismissed as mere "false consciousness" just because it does not conform to a prescribed course of action. Classical Marxism, which influenced the national liberation struggle in South Africa, assumed a direct correspondence between economic status and political position, meaning that political motivations, social interests, and attitudes could be inferred from economic class positions. However, history has shown that the individual's perception of his or her needs, worldview, position in the geo-political and economic order of the world, and the perceived and actual capacity to act within structural limitations, have provided the basis for political action. In other words, a person's community, locality, languages, religion, and cultures inform his or her politics in addition to economic position alone (Hall, 1990). Therefore, the reality of ethnic socialization within the Indian community should not be ignored by movements that claim to represent its interests in South Africa.

An examination of the attempts by liberation movements to mobilize the Indian community against the introduction of the tricameral parliamentary system confirms this conclusion. In May, 1982, the National Party proposed a new constitution that would give the coloured and Indian communities the right to vote for their own representatives in ethnically separate houses of parliament. The proposal was a state response to the potential threat posed by the BCM in unifying Indians, coloured, and Africans. The tricameral system sought to fragment resistance by co-opting Indians and coloureds into the apartheid structures (Marx, 1992: 192).

In their important study of the discourse of the NIC's opposition to the tricameral elections, Singh and Vawda (1988) show that the NIC intervened by appealing to the particular circumstances and interests of the Indian community, not to an overriding non-racialism.

An advertisement opposing the tricameral constitution appeared as follows ([Durban] *Sunday Tribune*, November 13, 1983):

> Let us protect our future now!
>
> Ever since we have been brought into this country we have faced many problems. Our grandparents have worked under harsh conditions on the sugar cane plantations and mines. . . .
>
> Our achievements in improving our communities were destroyed by the Group Areas Act. . . .
>
> Under the banner of Congress we have fought against these problems. Our fight has been for a peaceful just society in which all people can live in harmony. . . .
>
> Now the government is forcing a new constitution upon us. This new creation is going to destroy our future in this country.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of its general non-racial rhetoric, the NIC conceives of the Indians as a definable constituency separate from the Africans. The NIC's primary concern is for the Indian community, which is highlighted in one of their 1986 pamphlets:

> Mandela's Release: How will it affect us?
>
> In this time of violence, anger and pain in our country we must talk about the future of the Indian people.
>
> Do we get along with Mandela and the majority of Africans and Coloureds in South Africa or do we hide behind a falling apartheid government? (Singh and Vawda, 1988: 13)

The text asks Indians as a community to debate their position and role in the larger processes of the South African political economy. The NIC's Yunus Carrim (1988: 4) argues, "If the Indian community is to be mobilized . . . it must be [done] on the basis of its specific political oppression and its specific material conditions." According to Carrim, the reason for evoking an Indian identity is to deal with the alienation of the Indians from the African community, not to reinforce a separate Indian ethnic identity. Carrim argues that "Indian-ness" exists because of the political reality of apartheid society, not because Indians are a nationalistic group. However, Zac Yacoob, an NIC executive member during the 1980s, went even further; he argued for the rights of national groups to observe their national cultures: "That there are Indians, coloured, African and whites in our country is a self-evident and undeniable reality. It is a reality precisely because each of those national groups has its own heritage, culture, language, customs and traditions" (Singh and Vawda, 1988: 14). Such an argument suggests that there is a strong sentiment within the community that Indians should have their own political organization to represent them in a culturally specific way. In 1984, NIC activist Praveen Gordhan, stated in a newspaper interview ([Durban] *Sunday Tribune*, September 9, 1994):

> We [NIC] have the potential to become the only authentic political body representing the Indian community. . . . We have gauged from our fieldwork that generally the community looks to us as the guardians of our people. We have been around for a long time — 90 years — and intend to remain at the forefront of Indian politics.

The NIC has frequently maintained that it exists because of the political necessity of organizing under apartheid, which has separated communities on a racial basis. Singh and Vawda's analysis demonstrates that NIC's notion of political participation for the Indian community is a multi-racial conceptualization of South African politics rather than a non-racial one.

Thus, the rejection of the tricameral system in 1984 by the majority of Indians as an exercise in co-optation by the state should not be interpreted as a simple commitment to non-racialism. Opinion polls reveal that Indian perceptions of it were complicated. Fifty seven percent of the Indians surveyed thought that the constitution did not go far enough in addressing the democratic aspirations of all the disenfranchised communities in South Africa. However, 41 percent of the respondents did not reject the proposal altogether, accepting it as a gesture of power-sharing by the white government. Furthermore, 47 percent of the Indians surveyed favored participating in the new system to influence change from within. Only 20 percent of the Indians surveyed believed that the proposals should be ignored totally and boycotted (Schlemmer, 1983: 3).

The actual election results were in stark contrast to the sentiments expressed in the opinion polls. Only 20 percent of the Indians exercised their vote. If participation in the election is measured in terms of all eligible voters rather than those who actually registered to vote, the national figure is only about 14 percent. The official figures were also inflated by abuse of the absentee vote procedure. More than one third of the votes cast for the Indian House in Parliament were absentee votes and in several constituencies they outnumbered votes cast on polling day (*The Leader* [Durban], August 31, 1984).

Lemon (1990: 144-146) identifies six reasons for the low percentage poll in the tricameral elections for the Indian community: (1) the high rate of Indian urbanization sensitized the Indian community to the nature of anti-apartheid struggles which were mainly concentrated in urban South Africa; (2) the memory of the SAIC elections of 1981

deterred Indian leaders from participating in establishment politics; (3) the proximity of the Indians to the Zulus. Chief Buthelezi's opposition to the elections contributed to a low turnout at the polls. He warned Indians that accepting the tricameral system was an "ulcer in the body of black unity" and threatened to re-enact the 1949 riots (*The Leader* [Durban], January 7, 1983). He also threatened a consumer boycott of Indian stores if they participated in the elections. Other reasons include (4) the re-constitution of the NIC and their use of Gandhi's name in claiming that he would have boycotted the elections; (5) student activism in the Indian community; and (6) the detention of senior members of the NIC under Section 28 of the Internal Security Act just before the election, which destroyed any emerging legitimacy for the new political dispensation.

In sum, the rejection of the tricameral system by the Indian community was an important symbolic gesture of their identification with the democratic aspirations of the African majority. The initiative of the NIC and TIC in creating the United Democratic Front (UDF) to oppose the tricameral system indicates that the Indian community realized that their interests could best be articulated through a national body representing the various disenfranchised communities in South Africa. However, the success of the anti-tricameral campaign was not due to the appeal of non-racialist rhetoric; it succeeded by situating the Indian struggle as a cause in its own right within the larger struggle for a democratic order in South Africa. Thus, the present difficulty experienced by the ANC in garnering Indian support is attributable to Indians' sense of uncertainty of their fate under majority rule, which is discussed in the next section.

Indians and the Recent Elections

The method of polling used in the recent national elections make it difficult to ascertain how specific ethnic/racial groups voted. The results of the election were reported in terms of provincial totals. Consequently, assumptions on how Indians voted have to be gauged from opinion polls. Reynolds (1994: 192) estimates that approximately 65 percent to 70 percent of Indians and coloureds voted for the National Party. The NP received approximately one-tenth of the Natal vote and depended heavily on Indian supporters. Furthermore, a significant number of the Indian voters in Chatsworth in Natal remained loyal to the tricameral parliament politician, Amichand Rajbansi, giving his Minority Party its only seat in parliament.

It is important to note that these results do not mean that Indians support white minority rule. In a survey conducted in July, 1990, the majority of Indians (71 percent) and coloureds (82 percent) supported universal franchise and a non-racial parliament. The reasons for these

results are complicated. The various parties' positions on a future economic order influenced Indians' choices on the ballot. Fifty-four percent of Indians surveyed indicated that they supported a U.S. style free market economy. The NP's portrayal of Mandela as a committed communist turned potential voters away from the ANC. In the Johannesburg area, some 27 percent of Indians favored Mandela's political views but not his views on economic policy (Charney, 1991).

The ambivalence toward the ANC within the Indian community is related to the defense of group interest and identity. The survey found that despite their support of universal franchise, both the Indian and coloured communities wanted some form of guaranteed representation for minorities in parliament. Furthermore, about 63 percent of each group preferred a choice between mixed and single race neighborhoods and schools, as opposed to universal integration.

In an attempt to reach beyond their traditional white constituency, the National Party attempted to manipulate the fears to the Indian community. In an aggressive election campaign, some NP officials reportedly spread rumors that blacks would soon seize Indian homes (*Natal Post* [Durban], March 2-5, 1994). In his campaign trail, de Klerk repeatedly stated that the Indians have been intimidated by ANC supporters, not NP supporters, and that their homes were under threat (*Natal Post* [Durban], March 9-12, 1994). The National Party campaign successfully tapped on the pre-existent economic and racial insecurity in the Indian and coloured communities. For instance, the invasion of vacant low-income Indian and coloured homes in Cato Manor, Durban, by the neighboring African squatters substantiated the Indian and coloured communities' fears of retributive actions by the Africans ([Durban] *Daily News*, February 9, 1994). Some members of the Indian community saw these actions as part of future measures to dispossess Indians of their hard-earned gains. During its election campaign, the ANC constantly had to allay the fears of the Indian and coloured communities over property rights, but people remain skeptical because of the ANC's inability to take action against the invasion of Indian homes in Cato Manor (*Natal Post* [Durban], March 16-19, 1994).

While there are a number of Indians in the hierarchy of the ANC, the frequent rejection of Indian identity by Indian ANC activists has also contributed to the Indian community's misgivings towards the ANC. After demoting ethnicity in favor of the umbrella ideology of non-racialism, the ANC now finds itself in a quandary. It is unsure about how to respond the power of ethnic identification in the Indian and coloured communities, as well as in the African communities. In other words, the symbolic "Africanization" of the ANC has made it difficult to gain support from the Indian community, many members

of which fear African political and cultural domination in a post-apartheid era (Adam and Moodley, 1993).

In an attempt to woo the Indian vote, the ANC named House of Delegates chairperson J. N. Reddy as a candidate for parliament. D. S. Rajah, a member of Reddy's Solidarity Party, was also on the ANC's list of candidates. Reddy was given priority over NIC leaders George Sewpershad and Ismail Meer ([Durban] *Sunday Times [Extra]*, January 23, 1994). NIC leaders protested the inclusion of Reddy and Rajah in the ANC election list, claiming that it is hypocritical for their organization to campaign for the same individuals they protested against during the tricameral elections. Reddy and Rajah were subsequently dropped from the ticket.

At the 1991 National Convention of the ANC, Mandela acknowledged that the ANC will have to be more sympathetic to the power of ethnic mobilization: "We must ask ourselves frankly why this is so. . . . [We have to] confront the real issue that these national minorities might have fears about the future. . . . The ordinary man, no matter to what population group he belongs, must look at our structures [ANC structures] and say that 'I, as a coloured man, am represented. I have got Allan Boesak there whom I can trust. And an Indian must also be able to say: There is Kathrada-I am represented' " (*The Star* [Johannesburg], July 18, 1991). Mandela's invitation of Indian actress Shabana Azmi to campaign for the ANC in the Indian community reflects the ANC's acknowledgement of "Indian consciousness" in the popular culture of the Indian community (*The Leader* [Durban], December 24, 1994).

Mandela's sensitivities toward the power of ethnic mobilization met with opposition from political movements to the left of the ANC and from certain members of the ANC Alliance itself. Neville Alexander of Workers' Organization for Socialist Action (WOSA) argued that the ANC's notion of ethnic representation is analogous with the National Party's policy of separate development.[6] The ANC's attempt to build a governmental leadership core representative of the diverse ethnic/racial groups in South Africa was thwarted by a number of controversies, beginning with the withdrawal of Indian John Samuel from the position of Director General of Education. Although Samuel headed the ANC's Strategic Management Committee and designed its educational policy, certain individuals within the ANC caucus thought it was inappropriate for an Indian to head the educational department in the "new" South Africa. They argued that Samuel lacked the credentials to advance African educational interests and that his directorship would portray the ANC as being insufficiently sensitive to African needs in the new order ([Johannesburg] *Weekly Mail*, July 1-7, 1994). Second, when a faked confidential memorandum alleging a plot to remove Nelson Mandela as President of the ANC was circulated in 1992, Indians were the first to come under suspicion (Parekh, 1993: 31). Finally, Cyril Ramaphosa, who some once saw as Mandela's successor, has been identified by critics as a member of an "Indian-dominated cabal" which is alleged to dominate the party. These critics are said to include Peter Mokaba, the past president of the ANC Youth League, and Winnie Mandela, two individuals who recognize that Africanism has a powerful popular appeal (*Economist* [London], December 3, 1994). These incidents send out disturbing messages to Indians who, as a group, do not have the same economic clout as whites. The fact that the ANC caucus did not oppose the appointment of Derek Keyes (a white South African) to the all-important position of Minister of Finance with the same vociferousness and temerity as it did the Samuel appointment seems to indicate that Indians could potentially serve as convenient scapegoats for certain expedient African politicians who want to demonstrate to their constituencies that African interests will not be compromised in the new order. These incidents could potentially discourage a universalist politics in South Africa and accentuate cultural nationalism in the Indian community.

Reasons for Persistence of Group Identity

The persistence of group identification within the Indian community ought to be understood as a product of the social and cultural reproduction of the community, which is situated within the larger scheme of the national and global socio-political and economic orders. Indians are generally endogamous and have a strong extended family system. The cohesiveness of the community is also maintained through a network of associations and institutions, including religious bodies, schools, welfare organizations, management committees, and business groups. These organizations play crucial roles in group reproduction and reinforce identity through their teachings and everyday practices (Moodley, 1980).[7] In the current period, Indians perceive that their economic, cultural and religious interests may be crushed and therefore assert group identity more vehemently than in the past. It is clear that the implications of the current reform initiatives for the community are the most important factor in influencing Indian political choices at present. Unskilled Indian workers fear African competition. Professionals and students tend to be more liberal but are increasingly expressing concern that affirmative action programs will inhibit their upward mobility in the new order.

The post-Soweto period was characterized by a national resurgence of extra-parliamentary protest movements advocating a radical politics. Indians and the older generations of Africans are extremely uneasy about militant forms of protest. While factions within the ANC

have tried to dissociate themselves from the militant ideology of the 1970s and 1980s, many suspect that left-wing forces may gain the upper hand in the organization in the future.

Generational differences also play a role in the choices made within the Indian community, especially differences between the pre- and post-1976 generations. The trauma of the Indian-African riot of 1949 remains embedded in the folk history of the older generation, creating a sense of apprehension and doom. At least 142 people (50 Indians, 87 Africans) died in inter-racial conflicts between Africans and Indians, and approximately 550 Indians and Africans were injured in the riots. Two thousand Indian families became refugees overnight. The poorest sections of the Indian community bore the brunt of the upheaval because of their greater proximity to the African poor in outlying slum areas. In fact, surveys indicate that the poorer sections of the Indian community express greater fear over the possible negative repercussions of the recent changes than more affluent Indians. Freund (1995) estimates that about 25 percent of the Indian vote in Natal went to the ANC and that this came from younger, more educated middle-class Indians. Class factors were important in determining the Indian vote.

Another major factor influencing Indian attitudes towards the new order is the factional warfare between the ANC and Inkatha in KwaZulu Natal, where 78 percent of the Indian population lives. Indian support for the ANC would have antagonized Buthelezi's Inkatha movement. The Indian community itself was frequently threatened by Buthelezi when Indian activists and politicians openly criticized his politics. When Fatima Meer, a veteran NIC member, asserted in a public forum in 1976 that Buthelezi was not a credible leader and that the real black leaders were in Robben Island, her statement was raised in the Kwa-Zulu legislature as a case of Indians insulting African leaders, and open threats of a repetition of the 1949 race riots were made. A year later when Buthelezi was invited to address a meeting at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), Indian students protested that he was a government stooge. Buthelezi responded with threats of another "1949." He made a similar threat again in 1990 when African and Indian students prevented him from addressing a public forum at the University of Durban-Westville.

The boycott by the Indians of the tricameral system in 1984 suggests that they are more likely to support African causes if Buthelezi and other oppositional movements agree with each other on an issue. Inkatha and the UDF both campaigned for a boycott of the tricameral elections and Indians expressed the most forceful commitment to a politics of non-racialism during this boycott. Thus, tensions between Inkatha and the ANC in the national elections of 1994

undoubtedly played a role in the Indian community voting for the National Party.

The Challenge of Ethnicity in a Post-Apartheid South Africa

The new government of national unity faces enormous challenges as it attempts to foster a sense of national unity in a highly fractured society. The Indian and coloured communities' hesitation to support the ANC reflects their insecurity about how their identities would be accommodated in the new order. Factions within the ANC have realized that a sense of common nationalism can be built only by accepting the cultural diversity in South Africa, in spite of the fact that difference was used historically as a euphemism for apartheid. Political philosopher Ernesto Laclau correctly notes that "nationalism has no political belongingness . . . [I]t is capable of being inflected to very different political positions — at different historical moments" (quote in Hall, 1993: 355). The character of nationalism depends very much on the other discourses and forces with which it is articulated. Accommodating cultural diversity is not tantamount to legitimating the old apartheid order if it is used as a means of mutual recognition and joint discovery of self and other. Cultural ethnicity is problematic only if it is transformed into an economic and political ethnicity intended to give leverage to particular groups over others, as in the case of apartheid. Non-racialism does not imply color blindness, as observed by Adam (1995: 472): "Non-racialism merely holds out the promise that the state will not recognize or tolerate race as a public and legal criterion of exclusion." Therefore, it should not be taken to imply that ethnicity is insignificant as an arena of struggle in the post-apartheid South Africa.

Historically, a shared determination to struggle against the apartheid system has united culturally heterogeneous groups in South Africa. In this respect, Indians and Africans have long worked together in political solidarity. However, Indians have little historical relationship with African culture. The solidarity between Indians and Africans "is based on the political factor of common discrimination, not on common cultural affinities" (Adam and Moodley, 1986: 49). The abstract political bond between these groups was founded on shared political grievances more than anything else.[8]

The tensions between African and Indian students at the University of Durban-Westville is illustrative of this point. Durban-Westville was once the hotbed of Indian activism against the apartheid regime. Indian students fought for the rights of Africans and were politically affiliated to either the UDF or the BCM. However, the influx of African students in large numbers has brought the challenge of living in a multiracial environment to the fore. On the opening day of the

Hindu Temple on campus, the keynote speaker invited by the Hindu Student Association stressed the necessity for minority protection (*Natal Post* [Durban], March 9-12, 1994). It is unlikely that a few years ago students would have invited a speaker holding such a position. In contrast to present sentiment, if such ideas were voiced in a public forum at the University then, they probably would have elicited vehement opposition from the Indian student body.

Another disturbing trend is that Indian students at the University of Durban-Westville are becoming increasingly apathetic toward political involvement and express frustration over the frequent boycotts and disruption of academic schedules. Presently, there are few Indians actively involved in student politics at UDW. At a mass meeting over shortage of housing on the campus in February, 1994, African students expressed their anger at Indians for not supporting their struggle for accommodation. In fact, very few Indian students now live in campus residence halls, citing the difficulty of living in a radically different cultural environment as one of the reasons. The irony is that during the political activism of the 1980s at UDW, the struggle for the desegregation of the residence halls was a major rallying point for all progressive students. The situation at UDW illustrates that political solidarity does not always translate into cross-cultural accommodation and acceptance.

Nearly all democratic and democratizing societies face the challenge of whether and how to accommodate cultural pluralism (Taylor, 1992). Public institutions are finding it difficult to remain neutral in the increasing politicization of ethno-cultural identities. In South Africa the notion of a "Rainbow Nation" is a recent attempt to grapple with the complexity of forging a new national identity in a culturally heterogeneous society. However, the ANC's support for the "rainbow" metaphor has been interpreted by some as an abandonment of the principle of "non-racialism." Desai (1996: 120), for example, argues that the "logic of rainbow-racialism ultimately functions to contain and constrain other more revolutionary interventions on the body and the body politic. . . . [The] ideology reinforces ethnicity." Thus, for Desai, the ANC's "Rainbowism" promotes an "Indian-ness" that is conservative and silent on the class contradictions within the Indian community and South African society in general. Desai does point to an important weakness in certain schools of thought that tend to treat ethno-cultural identities as unitary categories, reifying cultural differences into impenetrable boundaries. One must always be sensitive to the degree of diversity within groups perceived as culturally homogeneous and the vertical distribution of power within such groups. However, this conclusion should be careful not to obscure the present realities of ethnic identification among the Indian, coloured, and other communities in South Africa, or the actual and potential significance

of the politicization of ethno-cultural identities. Greenfield (1992) points out that the politics of ethno-cultural nationalism is not confined to material and political injustices. The notion of dignity is one of the driving forces of nationalism. In this respect, the recognition of cultural identity in a manner that does not diminish individual citizenship or violate the rights of others can potentially affirm the agency of those who perceive themselves to be culturally and socio-politically marginalized in the new order. Therefore, in addition to merely removing formal discrimination, the process of national integration and nation building should also address the subjective fears and perceptions of national minorities.

South Africa has been remarkably successful so far in preserving national unity since the 1994 elections. The Speaker of the House is a women of Indian descent. The composition of the Cabinet and Parliament reflects the diversity of South African society and the non-racialism espoused by the ANC does envision a civic culture based on individual rights and equal recognition of all cultural traditions in the public sphere. However, Inkatha's strong showing in Natal's local elections last May, its insistence on greater regional autonomy, Mandela's promises to accommodate Afrikaner nationalism, and the ambivalent attitudes of the Indian and coloured communities toward the ANC suggest that cultural and ethnic identity may continue to play a role in South African politics in spite of the ANC's vision. The suggestion to recognize the potential power of ethno-cultural identity as a means of igniting agency should not be confused with advocacy of a return to the socioeconomic hierarchies, cultural prejudices, and exclusivism of the apartheid era when the white ruling classes used difference to create a sense of absolute otherness and alienation. The challenge for a future political and constitutional dispensation in South Africa, in the words of American cultural critic Cornel West (1992), is to articulate a universalism that does not become a smoke screen for someone else's particularism.

Notes

1. Here I refer specifically to movements fighting colonial rule and the apartheid regime, not political movements that worked in cooperation with the white ruling classes.

2. Indians first came to South Africa in 1860 as indentured laborers to meet the agricultural labor requirements of British colonial Natal. From 1860 to 1913, approximately 150,000 Indians came to South Africa until the Indian Immigration Act prohibited the entry of new migrants apart from the wives and children of laborers. Ten percent of the Indians entering South Africa in the period of 1880 to 1890 were "passenger" immigrants who came at their own expense for commercial purposes. See Bhana (1991) for an overview of the circumstances that brought indentured immigrants to Natal, their places of origins, and the socioeconomic backgrounds of migrating Indians.

3. Steven Biko (1978: 48-52, 97), founder of the Black Consciousness movement in the late 1960s, wrote: "Being black is not a matter of pigmentation. . . . [W]e have defined blacks as those who are by law or tradition, politically, economically and socially, discriminated against as a group in South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations. We [Africans, Indians and coloureds] are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group. We must cling to each other with a tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil."

4. It is sometimes argued that Indians participated in the strikes out of fear of African retaliation, but a study by the Durban Institute for Industrial Education found that 80 percent of the Indian strikers had an eigth-grade education or less and 50 percent earned below the poverty line, revealing that Indian workers were neither better educated nor better paid than their fellow African workers. The majority of Indian participants in the strike expressed solidarity with Africans as the reason for participating. See Moodley (1980: 222) for an analysis of Indian participation in the strike.

5. Indians played an important role in the early stages of the Black Consciousness Movement and occupied prominent leadership positions in the organization. Saths Cooper, a South African of Indian descent, was one of the co-founders of the movement.

6. Statements made at a seminar on the changes in South Africa at Rutgers University, April, 1993.

7. See Bhikhu Parekh (1993) for an overview of cultural coping mechanisms across the Indian diaspora.

8. Tate (1988) argues that Black nationalism in the United States has four ideological components: religion, racial unity, cultural history and a philosophy of self-determination, which work in concert to propel the movement forward. In contrast, in the South African case, there is tension between the political forces that bring disparate groups together, on one hand, and on the other hand, components such as religion and cultural history that perpetuate ethnic consciousness in the Indian and coloured communities. The tension between these components of nationalism is partly responsible for the schism between the Indian and African communities in South Africa at present.

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