Indian South Africans as a middleman minority: Historical and contemporary perspectives

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Abstract

Beginning in the 1940s, a literature on middleman minorities emerged to demystify the intermediary economic niche that Jews had occupied in medieval Europe. They were viewed as ethnic entrepreneurs occupying the economic status gap. In the 1960s, scholars began to apply middleman minority theory to colonial societies and to American society. More recently, Coloureds in South Africa have been identified as a middleman minority of another type: semi-privileged proletarians occupying an economic status gap in labour between whites and Africans. A political status gap between whites and Africans, both seeking alliances to achieve hegemony, is also occupied by Coloureds. Among South African Indians, one finds ethnic entrepreneurs: a small shopkeeping and trading class from South Asia. But there are also Indian semi-privileged proletarians who emerged from the indentured labour population in the early twentieth century. This article employs a historical institutional approach to analyse political tensions among Indians, and examines the cleavage between Indians and other races over political rights vis-a vis the South African state. It also offers a typology contrasting ethnic entrepreneurs with semi-privileged proletarians in terms of the differing economic status gaps they occupy. Furthermore, it illustrates how Indians occupy a political status gap in a complex settler colonial society like South Africa.

Keywords: Indian South Africans; Middleman minorities; Status gap; Ethnic entrepreneurs; Semi-privileged proletariat; Settler colonialism.

Introduction

Beginning in the 1940s, a literature on middleman minorities emerged to demystify the intermediary economic niche that Jews had occupied in medieval Europe, in a time when they were viewed as ethnic entrepreneurs occupying the economic status gap. In the 1960s, scholars began to apply middleman minority

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theory systematically to colonial societies and to American society.[2] More recently, Coloured South Africans have been identified as a middleman minority of another type, that of semi-privileged proletarians who occupy an economic status gap in labour.[3] This research also identifies a political status gap occupied by Coloureds. The questions the article seeks to address are: a) Does one find evidence of a semi-privileged proletarian population among Indian South Africans? b) Do Indian South Africans also inhabit both economic and political status gaps as Coloureds do? This article marshals evidence that a petty bourgeoisie of ethnic entrepreneurs and semi-privileged proletarians emerged from the indentured labour population and has existed among Indian South Africans since the late nineteenth century. It offers a typology contrasting ethnic entrepreneurs with semi-privileged proletarians in terms of the differing economic status gaps they occupy. It also illustrates how Indians occupy a political status gap in a complex settler colonial society like South Africa.

Middleman minority theories

Howard Becker coined the term "middleman minorities" to demystify the intermediary economic niche that Jews occupied in medieval Europe.[4] That positioning often gave rise to anti-Semitism, but Becker found that many other groups, such as the Scots in the British Empire, the Chinese in Asia, Indians in East and Southern Africa and the Caribbean, and a series of European and Asian groups in North America, have also occupied similar positions. These groups frequently developed a "Chosen People" complex, and incurred the antipathy of dominant and other subordinate groups. Middleman minorities emerge where there is an "economic status gap" between a dominant producing group and a subordinate stratum of consumers. They are immigrants who become a petty bourgeoisie operating in an intermediate economic niche, distributing goods and services to indigenous consumers of lower status socioeconomic classes, which existing elites have no interest in serving.[5] Subsequent research on middleman minorities returned to focus on Jews and the causes of anti-Semitism.[6]

2 WP Zenner, *Minorities in the middle: A cross-cultural analysis (*Albany, New York, State University of New York Press, 1991), chapter 1.

3 VD Johnson, "Coloured South Africans: A middleman minority of a different kind", *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture,* 2016, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2016.1175930, (accessed 16 May 2016).

4 HP Becker, "Constructive typology in the social sciences", *Contemporary Social Theory*, HE Barnes, HP Becker and FB Becker (eds) (New York, Appleton-Century, 1940) pp. 17-46.

5 WP Zenner, *Minorities in the middle…*, pp.1-9; PG Min, *Ethnic solidarity for economic survival: Korean greengrocers in New York City* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).

6 I Rinder, "Stranger in the land: Social relations in the status gap", *Social Problems*, 6, 1958, pp. 253-260; S Andreski, "An economic interpretation of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe", *Jewish Journal of Sociology,* 5(3), 1963, pp. 201-213.

In the 1960s scholars began to apply middleman minority theory systematically to colonial societies and also in their studies on the United States.[7] Rinder suggested that the wide socioeconomic and cultural gap between whites and blacks in Mississippi necessitated a middleman a decade earlier. In this case the vacuum was filled by Chinese Americans. Others began to see the role of Jewish and Italian merchants in urban black ghettos as the same kind of phenomenon.[8] Pyong Gap Min observed that in urban African American and Latino neighbourhoods, Chinese merchants were superseded by Koreans and then Indians. Min has termed this reality the "serial middleman minority" phenomenon.[9] This notion highlights the ongoing structural inequality between African Americans and white-American society and the necessity for some group to continue the role of filling the status gap so that whites do not have to serve African American communities directly, nor provide them with amenities such as quality education to enable them to fill the gap for themselves. Min also interrogated the advantages that living in a liberal democracy offers for middlemen who use the system to defend their position against hostile surrounding communities. In so doing he advanced the examination of a political middle stratum.

Johnson continued this study of more assertive middleman politics and introduced the concept of a political status gap in his work on Coloured South Africans.[10] The political status gap is that terrain between the most dominant groups in society and other smaller or more marginal groups with whom the dominant groups seek alliance in order to achieve hegemony.[11] Antonio Gramsci saw hegemony as "intellectual and moral leadership in civil society".[12] The political status gap places small minorities in the middle between the more powerful groups, but aspirations flow in two directions. The more powerful groups seek to lead a hegemonic alliance, but the weaker groups also possess agency and can actively embark on seeking alliances with one or the other of the hegemony-seeking groups in search of, if not hegemony, then security. Nevertheless, middleman minorities become the fodder for political contestation between more powerful groups. Johnson also offered a typology contrasting ethnic entrepreneurs with semi-privileged proletarians as different types of minorities in the middle (see Image 1). This article builds upon those earlier classifications by finding both ethnic entrepreneurs and semi-privileged proletarians among Indian South Africans.

7 On colonial societies see H Blaylock, *Toward a theory of minority group relations* (New York, John Wiley, 1967). On America, see E Bonacich, "A theory of middleman minorities", *American Sociological Review*, 38(3), 1973, pp. 583-94; HL Kitano, "Japanese Americans: The development of a middleman minority", *Pacific Historical Review*, 19, 1974, pp. 500-519.

8 N Cohen, *The Los Angeles riots: A sociological study* (New York, Praeger, 1970).

9 PG Min, *Ethnic solidarity for economic survival: Korean Greengrocers in New York City* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).

10 VD Johnson, "Coloured South Africans: ...", *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture,* 2016, available at http://dx.doi. org/10.1080/ 13504630.2016.1175930 (accessed 16 May 2016), pp. 3-4.

11 For the political and economic forces shaping the construction and evolution of "Coloured" as a race, see I Goldin, *Making race: The politics and economics of coloured identity in South Africa* (New York, Longman Group, 1987); Z Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history: Shaped by place* (Cape Town, Kwela, 2001).

12 Q Hoare, and GN Smith (eds.), *Selections from prison notebooks* (New York, International Publishers, 1971), p. 57.

The American experience with middleman minorities is most useful for this study. Like the United States, South Africa is a "complex settler colony." Both are societies founded on principles of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Subsequently, both became committed to capitalist industrialisation and gained their political independence, which transformed them into advanced white settler colonies. In the course of their histories racial categories were politically constructed and reshaped to accommodate shifting white requirements for access to and control over the labour of other races.[13] Complex settler colonies have two racial groups at opposite ends of the system in terms of political rights, economic opportunity and social status; but they also have other racial minorities who are cast into an intermediate position, worse off than whites, but better off than blacks in the political, economic, and social spheres.

This analysis will illustrate how economic "middleness" for Indians arose from indentured labour and a petty bourgeoisie trading class in the late nineteenth century. The political middle first arose in the mid-twentieth century when first Indians and then Africans and whites sought alliances in the quest for hegemony. This study will examine the genesis and evolution of Indian economic and political middleness in settler colonial South Africa from 1860 until the presidency of Jacob Zuma (2009–2018). In South Africa's post-apartheid constitution of 1996, all individuals are equal before the law. However, South African Indians are caught in the middle between a super-impoverished African majority and economically privileged whites. As we shall see, allying with Indians, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, may assist whites and Africans to alleviate their respective political status gaps.[14]

This article traverses much the same terrain as recent writings by Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed. They also discuss Indian South Africans as middleman minorities in the economic and political sense. However, here, I talk of the status of ethnic entrepreneurship and semi-privileged proletarianism more precisely, introducing the latter term into the discussion on Indians. Desai and Vahed also pay attention to political aspects of Indian middleness, but do not refer to the political status gap or the way it preoccupies different dominant and subordinate types of middlemen in the literature.[15]

13 Here "race" refers to a social category that groups people based upon phenotype, i.e., skin colour and other physical characteristics. See DR Roediger, "Historical Foundations of Race", available at https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race (accessed 12 Oct 2022). For the way race is socially constructed in South Africa, see G Hodson, "Race as a social construction", *Psychology Today,* available at https://www.psychologytoday.com/ za/blog/without-prejudice/201612/race-social-construction (accessed 12 Oct 2022).

14 Though my thoughts here rightly might be reviewed as assumptious, I hope to respond to this in the rest of my discussion to support this claim.

15 G Vahed and A Desai, "Stuck in the middle? Indians in South Africa's fading rainbow", *South Asian Diaspora*, 9(2), 2017, pp. 147-162; A Desai and G Vahed, *A history of the present: A biography of Indian South Africans, 1990-2019* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2019).

The white supremacist, liberal democratic, and globalising capitalist setting lends greater complexity to the study of minorities in the middle. The issue of how different racial identities shaped white supremacy is articulated to policy debates and coalition politics in the open liberal democratic milieu is of prime importance for political actors as well as scholars. Let us now turn to a comparative examination of the two types of middleman minorities represented among Indian South Africans.

Ethnic entrepreneurs and semi-privileged proletarians: A typology

Until recently, the literature on middleman minorities revolved around a consensus that middleman minorities were "ethnic entrepreneurs" occupying an economic status gap.[16] Zenner has summarised these scholarly findings. He identifies four structural features that define what it means to be a middleman minority:[17]

- External conditions of the larger society and the economic niches of the minority;
- The situation of the stranger/sojourner/pariah;
- The attributes of the minority: (a) culture; (b) internal cohesion; and (c) objective visibility;
- Host hostility.

Zenner found that while most of the characteristics from the literature were accurate, those having to do with the attributes of the minority culture were not uniformly true for ethnic entrepreneurs everywhere and at all times.[18] I concur with that understanding in light of the analysis presented here. Another typology adapted from my work on coloureds reconfigures Zenner's categories and adds one for politics. The revised categories are as follows:

- Social niche
- Objective visibility
- Popular stereotypes
- Societal hostility
- Politics

There is considerable literature discussing Indian middleman minorities as ethnic entrepreneurs in the colonial world. There is also an overlapping body of work that discusses Indian immigrants as indentured labour. After their period of servitude (as indentured labourers) expired, many of the former labourers remained in South Africa and became semi-privileged proletarians in ways described below. This article seeks to integrate the literature on Indian ethnic entrepreneurs and indentured

16 I Light and E Bonacich. *Immigrant entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).
17 WP Zenner, *Minorities in the middle* ..., p. 12.
18 WP Zenner, *Minorities in the middle* ..., pp. 100-102.

labourers while delineating a more variegated terrain of middleness. What follows, supported by this heuristic typology, is a comparative discussion of the experiences of Indian South African ethnic entrepreneurs and semi-privileged proletarians as contrasting types of middleman minorities (see Image 1). The way that Indians fit into each category of the typology will be discussed for successive historical periods from 1860 to 1918.

Image 1: Indian South Africans as a Middleman Minority

	Semi-Privileged Proletariat (Indentured contract labour)	**Ethnic Entrepreneurs** (Traders, small shopkeepers, petty commodity producers)
Origin of Identity	External, pre-immigration identity as basis for re-shaped one in South Africa	External, pre-immigration identity as basis for re-shaped one in South Africa
Social Niche	a. Filling economic status gap in labour b. Filling political status gap 1940s - present	a. Filling economic status gap, in goods and services b. Filling political status gap, 1940s - present
Objective Visibility	Race, dress, rituals	Race, dress, rituals
Stereotypes	a. Past – coolies, strangers b. Present – Strangers, privileged	a. Past – passengers, sojourners, hucksters, coolies b. Present – Strangers, privileged
Societal Hostility	Resented by Africans for privileged status in labour hierarchy	Resented by whites and Africans for business acumen
Politics	Engaged, take advantage of democratic political space	Engaged, take advantage of democratic political space

Source: Adapted from VD Johnson, "Coloured South Africans …", *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture,* 2016, available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2016.1175930 (accessed 16 May 2016).

Indians in the settler colonial political economy: 1860-1910

Social niche

Indian South Africans filled the economic status gap in colonial South Africa in two ways. The majority of them arrived as indentured contract laborers from 1860. Typically, they came for contracts of five-years or less. Contracts could be renewed only once for another five years. Initially, they were given a grant of land at the end of their period of service or be offered a free passage to return home. The land grant stipulation was dropped in 1891. Nevertheless, from 1860 until 1911, a total of 152 184 Indians, mostly Tamil- and Telugu-speakers from the southeast around Madras, arrived in South Africa as indentured laborers.[19] About 52 per cent of the indentured remained in South Africa after their contracts had expired. Most formed

19 "History of Indians in the diaspora: South Africa", 2009, available at http://indiandiaspora.nic.in/diasporapdf/chapter7.pdf. (accessed 17 Apr 2016), p. 76.

the basis of the modern proletariat in Natal, working on sugar plantations, in the mines, laying railroads, and on the docks. Others went into municipal service and domestic employment.[20] These people became proletarians supplying semi-skilled and unskilled labour in a region where access to African labour was limited.[21] At the time, many Africans preferred to remain on their traditional land and to follow a subsistence lifestyle.

Two strata of Indian immigrants became ethnic entrepreneurs and filled the classic economic status gap in South Africa. One group comprised former indentures who acquired land and became petty commodity producers and traders hawking their produce to whites as well as Africans. In Natal, many traders, primarily from the Gujerat region of Western India, came to provide familiar goods and services to the indentured Indian people and their families. After establishing themselves in Durban they moved inland and began to sell to the indigenous population.[22] In the rest of the subcontinent Indians arrived as free immigrants. They engaged in a range of economic activity from manual labour to factory work, office positions in businesses, and business ownership itself. Those who were part of the owning strata became ethnic entrepreneurs. The workers, however, were not yet privileged over their African counterparts, since Africans had not yet entered the Natal workforce in large numbers.[23]

Objective visibility/popular stereotypes

This refers to "ethnic markers, including religion, race, language, dress, or some previous status" that distinguishes middlemen from both the dominant and the other subordinate groups, and creates the perception that they are strangers. Racially stratified societies depend on phenotypical differences to mark people for differential rights, treatment, and rewards. Dominant groups need to know who they are, so they can keep them in their place. If they are visibly identifiable, the lower status indigenous groups will also resent their privilege. Thus they become "strangers" or "sojourners" to those who have been there longer.

Indian South Africans have been classic middlemen in all the above aspects . They are distinguishable racially from Africans and whites. Under colonialism, as either Hindus or Muslims of the first or second generation, Indians continue to be identifiable by dress as well. In those early decades whites saw indentured Indians as poor in material terms and as uncultured "coolies". Indian petty traders were called

20 M Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics", S Trapido, and S Marks (eds.) *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth century South Africa* (London, Longman, 1987), p. 186.

21 F Meer, "Indentured labour and group formation in apartheid society", *Race & Class*, 26(4), 1985, pp. 45-46.

22 F Meer, *A portrait of Indian South Africans* (Durban, Avon House, 1969), p. 16.

23 For a comprehensive look at middlemen across South Africa, see U Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *From cane fields to freedom: A chronicle of Indian South African life* (Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2000).

"passenger" Indians because they paid for their own passage from India to South Africa. Many of them also conformed to the "sojourner" stereotype because they travelled the countryside in Natal selling their wares.[24] They came to be viewed also as "hucksters", aggressively hawking their goods and inclined to milk their poorer clients via usurious interest rates on loans.[25] As has been noted above, Indian South Africans come from different class and religious backgrounds, and from several parts of the subcontinent, but for all of their diversity they could still be identified as Indians, by physical appearance and by dress.

White settler hostility toward Indians

I have described how ethnic entrepreneurs were called "strangers" not belonging to the country and "hucksters," who preyed on other residents. Those stereotypes slide very nicely into the label of "hostility" against this immigrant element as "alien intruders".[26] Like the moniker "coolie" it was used with reference to all classes of Indian people who were grouped indiscriminately as interlopers occupying a niche in the economy that might otherwise be fulfilled by those "to whom the country belonged". This is in part due to the original agreement of indenture in the 1860s which offered a maximum of two five-year contracts, at the end of which servants were given the choice of a free passage home to India or a grant of land. As mentioned in the previous section, most had opted for the land grant, and by the 1890s were becoming successful petty commodity producers who melded into the sojourning trader class. Their success as small businesspeople incurred the resentment of white competitors who took their cause to the Natal legislature.

The settler cause was aided immensely when responsible government was introduced in Natal in 1893. Representative government until then allowed for an elected Natal parliament, but the executive was still under the control of the Crown, which held a veto. Responsible government, including executive power, conferred parliamentary control over all domestic affairs. From that point forward the force of metropolitan liberalism waned as local (British dominant) elites moved steadily towards disenfranchisement and social exclusion of Indian people over the next generation. In 1891 the government of Natal rescinded the land grant and declared that after ten years the indentured had the choice of free passage home or continuing their indentured servitude.[27] Those who remained in South Africa (but chose not to re-enter indenture) had to pay an annual £3 tax. In 1903 the tax was extended to South African-born descendants of those who stayed. The propertied

24 F Meer, *A portrait of Indian South Africans*, pp. 16-20.

25 See next footnote source.

26 H Tinker, *The Banyan tree: Overseas emigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (London, Oxford University Press. 1977), p. 16.

27 South African History Online, "Anti-Indian legislation 1800s-1959", 2016, available at https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/anti-indian-legislation-1800s-1959 (accessed 12 Feb 2018).

class of Indians who had enjoyed the franchise since their arrival in 1869 also saw that right terminated in 1895. In 1897 Natal and the Cape Colony "restricted the entry of free Indians".[28]

In the rest of greater South Africa, the reaction to a creeping presence of Indian traders in mining districts was even harsher. In 1885 the South African Republic (Transvaal) restricted Indian workers and traders. Subsequently, it "prohibited [Indians] from becoming licence holders in any enterprise connected with mining, curtailed their property rights to segregated wards, subjected them to carrying passes; and even forbade them from walking on the pavements".[29] After 1903 Indians could not enter the Transvaal without a permit.[30] In 1891 The Orange Free State "closed down all Indian businesses … and deported their owners without compensation".[31]

By the time of Union in 1910, Indian ethnic entrepreneurs continued, although tenuously, to occupy the economic status gap. The political status gap, however, did not exist during this period. Indian ethnic entrepreneurs could vote until 1896, because they met the threshold for the franchise and were not considered a threat by the imperial government. However, when the settlers gained responsible government in the 1890s, any Indian political influence was viewed as threatening and the settler government did all it could to marginalise Indians, even to the point that some of them began to feel that returning to India might be better than staying in South Africa. Despite this, events in the first decade of the twentieth century demonstrated that Indians had resources at their disposal that settlers had not considered.

Indian politics under settler colonialism

The literature on middleman minorities stresses their political vulnerability as a result of host hostility; internal cleavages as a reflection of their social diversity; and their tendency not to participate in local politics unless their group interests were threatened.[32] One finds all of these characteristics in a study of the Indian experience in South Africa. But in the waning days of the settler colonial regime, Indians began to engage in mass collective action and to change the trajectory of Indian politics in South Africa. From the time of the Peace of Vereeniging which ended the South African War in 1902 until the establishment of the complex settler colonial regime of the Union of South Africa in 1910, efforts were made to harmonise Indian interaction with the former Afrikaner republics (which were now also British colonies) and the Cape Colony. This began to seem like further marginalisation as many Indians

28 F Meer, *A portrait of Indian South Africans*..., p. 26.
29 "History of Indians in the diaspora...", 2009, available at http://indiandiaspora. nic.in/diasporapdf/chapter7. pdf. (accessed 17 Apr 2016), p. 78.
30 F Meer, *A portrait of Indian South Africans*..., p. 26.
31 F Meer, *A portrait of Indian South Africans*..., p. 24.
32 WP Zenner, *Minorities in the middle*..., pp. 93-99.

suspected that whites sought to push them out of the country. The stereotype of the sojourning middleman, who had no permanent place in society, continued to haunt South African Indians. However, the presence of an Indian proletariat lent itself to political action that while still defensive, was more militant than the rather deferential style of the Indian shopkeeping stratum.

Three issues converged in a combustible way in the decade following the South African War. Of primary concern was the system of indenture. None of the provinces outside of Natal wished to adopt a similar system and since the 1890s, many business interests even those in Natal had begun to seek African labour to preclude the need for continuing Indian immigration. With the defeat of what appeared to be the last major Zulu rebellion in 1906, it was felt that African labour would become more accessible. The poll tax was another part of the equation. It was intended to induce those Indians whose contracts were ending to return "home", or to re-enter servitude. The policy was starting to take effect by 1907. In that year 77 per cent of those whose contracts ended either re-enlisted or returned to India.[33] For those Indians with limited resources who chose to remain without re-entering servitude the £3 annual tax represented an onerous burden for a populace whose average annual income was only £10.[34] In 1908, the Natal legislature introduced a bill to terminate indenture contracting. This marginalised Indians even further and raised tensions with both London and the British Indian Legislative Council. The British government used the moment to lodge grievances over the treatment of indentured Indians across the empire. London was able to convince Natal to withdraw its bill and allow imperial forces to act. In February 1910 the Indian Legislative Council passed a law to the effect that all emigration "be prohibited and made unlawful to any designated country". It then immediately passed a resolution to "deny indentured labour to Natal".[35] The Viceroy for British India issued an edict to this effect on 1 July 1911 and thereby terminated all indentured labour emigration to Natal.

A final set of issues revolved around documentation and freedom of movement around the entire Union. The Transvaal began prohibiting Indian entry without a permit in 1903. In 1906 the province passed another law requiring Indians to carry identification documents. In response, the Transvaal British Indian Association, another organisation formed with Gandhi's urging, initiated a passive resistance campaign encouraging Indians in the province not to register. After some early enthusiasm featuring widespread refusals to register, Indian merchants in the province began to accede to the policy "as they feared financial loss".[36] Nevertheless,

33 H Tinker, *A new system of slavery: The export of Indian labour overseas, 1830-1920* (London, Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 302.
34 F Meer, *A portrait of Indian South Africans*..., p. 26.
35 H Tinker, *A new system of slavery:* ..., p. 313.
36 A Desai and V Goolam Vahed, *Inside Indian indenture: A South African story, 1860-1914* (Cape Town, HSRC Press Books. 2018), p. 371.

the campaign was significant for two reasons. First, it was Gandhi's first experiment with the strategy of passive resistance for which he would rise to global prominence upon his return to India. Secondly, the campaign against the pass system involved the mobilisation of the masses of post-indentured workers and peasants alongside the Indian ethnic entrepreneurs. In the crucible of struggle, there was the forging of a more cohesive Indian South African identity, transcending the weight of caste, class, religious, and regional cleavages inherited from the homeland. Although the campaign did not meet with immediate success it continued into the period when the Union of South Africa was born. The Union government came into existence on 31 May 1910. From March to July that same year, South Africa deported 288 people involved in passive resistance, 257 of whom were Indians.[37] The system of indenture was on its way to ending by that time, but the broader desire to eliminate all Indian presence from the new white dominion was yet to be realised.

When the period of Union government began, Indian South Africans were by and large structured into economic middleman status in two ways. There was a stratum of ethnic entrepreneurs and an Indian peasantry, an intermediate stratum emerging from those fortunate enough to receive post-indenture land grants before 1891. However, as mentioned above, the perception of taking a political status gap had yet to emerge.

Indians and the emergence of the political status gap: 1910-1948

With the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 whites gained virtual complete control over domestic policies. But for the previously independent Afrikaner republics, incorporation into the Union meant a recognition that they had lost their sovereignty. As a trade-off Afrikaners along with their British counterparts would institute successive governments that were more and more adamant in pursuit of racial exclusion in the polity, racial hierarchy in the economy and racial segregation in civil society.[38]

During this period the Indian population was undergoing rapid change in the niches it occupied in the economy and in its political posture as well. The following sections examine the strata in the economy that were occupied by Indians, and then the discussion turns to the stereotyping and hostility directed towards them, and finally, the varying political strategies employed by differing classes within the Indian population.

Social niche

Two types of Indian ethnic entrepreneurs persisted across this particular post-Union

37 H Tinker, *A new system of slavery*..., p. 314.

38 AW Marx, *Making race and nation: A comparison of the United States, South Africa and Brazil*, 9th printing (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 91-94.

period. The Gujerati traders who had arrived in the1870s continued to thrive in the 1930s and 40s in the Transvaal and also in Natal. Their investments were almost all in the sectors of trade and commercial real estate.[39]

However, the fortunes of the post-indenture Indian peasantry began to decline in the course of the twentieth century. This was due to a combination of legal constraints placed on Indians who wished to purchase property; the fact that subsidies were paid to white farmers but these were denied to Indians; and that rising land values in and around Durban became a problem. These constraints converged to push Indian market-gardeners out of agriculture and into other occupations. Most would become wage laborers in agriculture or manufacturing.[40] By 1946, 53% of Indian males countrywide worked in the wage labouring economy.[41] They enjoyed advantages over Africans because, legally, they were allowed to unionise, whereas Africans were not permitted to do so after the passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1924. Thus, Indian workers became a semi-privileged proletariat in Natal. Image 2 illustrates the semi-privileged status of Indian workers in Durban in the interwar years:

Image 2: Average wages per annum of Indian and African labourers in interwar Durban

	1924-25	1929-30	1934-35
Indians	£ 52	£68	£63
Africans	£39	£ 43	£43

Source: Table created with data from B Freund, *Insiders and outsiders: The Indian working class* of *Durban, 1910-1990* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 1995), p. 42.

Politics in opposition to stereotypes and societal hostility: 1910-1948

In the early years of the Union government, Indians were able to get the £3 head tax and a number of restrictions on business and freedom of movement repealed with the passage of the Indian Relief Act of 1914.[42] Those successes in extracting concessions from the government delayed the exploration of an Indian-African workers coalition in an industrialising South Africa.[43]

During World War II a new generation of Indian leadership came to the fore and they re-mobilised Indian workers. The new leaders comprised trade unionists and the offspring of ethnic entrepreneurs, who were frequently foreign-educated professionals. Many of the trade unionists were members of the Communist Party of

39 M Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics", Trapido and S Marks (eds),*The politics of race, class and nationalism…,* p. 191.

40 M Swan, "Ideology in organised Indian politics", S Trapido and S Marks (eds), *The politics of race, class and nationalism*…, pp. 18-24.

41 *Union of South Africa Census,* 5 (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1946), pp. 152-62.

42 A Desai and G Vahed, *Inside Indian indenture*..., pp. 380-381.

43 A Desai and G Vahed, *Inside Indian indenture*..., p. 419.

South Africa (CPSA). Yusuf Dadoo and HA Naidoo, who emerged as leaders of this new force in Indian politics, were office-bearers in the CPSA.

While World War II raged, the radicals moved aggressively to reshape the nature of Indian South African politics. Their focus was on mobilising the Indian working class and encouraging cross-racial solidarity, particularly, with Africans. This strategy paid dividends in the post-war period. By the end of the war, Dadoo was the president of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), while GM Naicker led the Natal Congress (NIC). In 1946 the Union parliament passed the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act, which extended the segregationist legislation of the previous seven years and made these restrictions permanent.[44] In response, the NIC and TIC, with the new radical leaders at the helm, "mounted a passive resistance campaign that began when seventeen militants pitched tents on a piece of vacant municipal land" in June, 1946.[45]

The authorities were quick to react and over the next two years as many as 2 000 people were arrested. The law was not repealed, but the mobilisation would have lasting effects on Indian politics. The African National Congress (ANC) declared its support for the campaign. And significantly, in August, when African miners went on strike, the NIC and TIC reciprocated in that solidarity.

The period culminated with the so-called "Doctors' Pact" of solidarity between the leaders of the two Indian congresses and ANC president AB Xuma in 1947. Together they pursued an African-Indian coalition over the next generation.[46]

Indians under apartheid: 1948-1994

The National Party (NP), formed to unite Afrikaners behind one platform, called for a policy of apartheid (separate development of the races) in its election campaign and came to power in 1948. It promised stricter control over the influx of Africans into the cities, and more rigid segregation. After winning a narrow victory, the NP immediately set out to implement its strategy. Among the legislative measures that became the cornerstones of apartheid were the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949); the Population Registration Act (1950), which required every person to carry a card designating their race; and the Group Areas Act (1950), which segregated the races for purposes of residence and work.[47] How would this new political landscape affect the fortunes of Indian South Africans?

44 M Swan, "Ideology in organized Indian politics", S Trapido and S Marks (eds), *The politics of race, class and nationalism*..., p. 202.

45 South African History Online, "Indian passive resistance", 2016, available at sahistory.org.za/article/indian-passive-resistance-south-africa-1946-1948 (accessed 20 Feb 2017).

46 "Joint Declaration of Cooperation", *South African History Online,* available at https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1947-joint-declaration-cooperation, (accessed 15 Oct 2022).

47 L Thompson, *A history of South Africa* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 190-195.

Societal stereotypes and hostility

As part of its platform for apartheid in 1948 the National Party had a slogan; "The Kaffir in his Place, the Coolie out of the Country".[48] Following the victory of the National Party, NIC leader GM Naicker was elected president of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), and TIC president, Yusuf Dadoo was elected as deputy president. A new generation of Indian leadership was now in power, and the political acumen of leaders were soon tested.

It was not only the white minority government that wanted "coolies" out of the country. As Africans became more urbanised and integrated into the modern industrialised South African political economy, they also came to resent Indian shopkeepers with whom they traded on a daily basis. Those sentiments exploded in the Durban riots of 1949, when Africans attacked Indian businesses, damaging as many as 1 000 buildings, destroying a factory and 58 shops. In the wake of the upheaval, 87 Africans and 50 Indians were killed and 1 883 people were hospitalised. Indians were devastated. Why, they asked, had Africans turned on another oppressed people? Indians were made even more paranoid when the commission established to investigate the causes of the riots provided legal assistance for Africans who testified while none was made available for Indians, who, it was assumed, could afford counsel. The Durban City Council also provided transport and food in African areas after the riots, filling "the economic status gap" left by crippled Indian traders. The vulnerability of Indians' middling status was revealed, and they even wondered if a black/white coalition was forming against them.[49]

In 1976 a massive protest march was launched by African youth in Soweto. One of the many causes was opposition to instruction in the Afrikaans language at schools. Soon the unrest spread countrywide. The government responded with oppressive violence and hundreds of Africans died in the ensuing months. The Soweto uprising opened a period of sustained militant action against apartheid in the country and international condemnation that lasted until the regime was forced to accede to democratic reform in the 1990s, when the African National Congress (ANC) came to power.[50]

To back-track to the 1980s, in the midst of the tumultuous period following constitutional change in 1984, there were attacks on Indian shopkeepers in Inanda township outside Durban. The area was the site of political competition between the ANC affiliated United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Zulu Inkatha Freedom

48 "Kaffir", though historically relating to being a member of a group of southern African Bantu-speaking peoples, politically became a highly pejorative term for Africans in South Africa and for this reason is no longer used except for direct quotations from the sources, as is the case here. Furthermore, in academic work, the terms white and black are not capitalised.

49 F Meer, *A portrait of Indian South Africans*..., pp. 35-36.

50 L Thompson, *A history of South Africa,* pp. 212-213.

Party (IFP) for control in the home territory of the Zulu nation. Inkatha was an instrument of KwaZulu Bantustan administration under apartheid. The rioting was precipitated by the assassination of attorney and UDF stalwart Victoria Mxenge on the eve of a trial at which she was defending sixteen activists charged with treason.

The political landscape was now complex and treacherous. Indians were prominent in the UDF, but other Indians were participants in the 1984 state parliamentary structure (the so-called tricameral parliament) and there were still Indian shopkeepers in the African township of Inanda. As Desai observes, though Indian businesses were targeted, anti-Indian sentiment was not the sole cause of the Inanda uprisings in 1985:[51]

> ... to simply see the violence as anti-Indian is not to see the full story. The youth challenged the authority of Inkatha in all African townships, an organisation perceived by them to be a surrogate of the South African state. This gelled with resistance struggles in townships across South Africa. In Inanda, the violence went beyond the looting and burning of shops and houses as the community rose up to defend Inanda against the incursions. of Inkatha-aligned warlords. To see the riots as simply anti-Indian would be to render invisible the anti-apartheid dimensions and vice-versa.

In the crucible of a complex settler colony in crisis, Indian shopkeepers became low-hanging fruit when longstanding frustrations against them were intertwined with grievances against the state and its collaborators to produce a combustible situation.

However, the Inanda riots, like the Durban ones of 1949, remain seared in the psychology of a people caught perpetually in the in the middle between the African majority and a white minority that was clinging desperately to social and economic status and political power.

Social niche

Despite the tumult surrounding the Durban riots and the passage of the Group Areas Act, the status of the ethnic entrepreneurial class of Indians and that of their brethren as semi-privileged proletarians was well-established by the early 1950s. In the succeeding decades they became firmly entrenched in those strata and expanded their purview. A small Indian industrial bourgeoisie emerged from the ethnic entrepreneur stratum in the post-war era. Primarily in textiles, Indians owned "82 factories employing 6 500 workers by 1968".[52] We also see the increasing proletarianisation of Indian workers across the board in the same period. Freund tells us that whereas only 19.1% of Indians held manufacturing jobs in 1936, 53% were so employed by 1970. As their number rose, bosses came to favour them above

51 A Desai, "The eye of a violent storm: Inanda 1985", *New Contree*, 70, Special Edition, 2014, p. 59.
52 B *Freund, Insiders and outsiders*…, p. 79.

Africans for their discipline and quick grasp of industrial processes. As a result, in many industries, Indian wages grew more rapidly than those of Africans.[53]

This semi-privileged status in the labour force was happening as the Congress Alliance increased political pressure upon the apartheid regime with strong Indian involvement (see next section). Perceiving that it now had a political status gap with Indians, the Verwoerd government now (1961) recognised officially that Indians were South Africans.[54] Socio-economically, after the creation of the Department of Indian Affairs in 1966, a wider range of educational opportunities were opened up. By 1976, educational expenditure per student for Indians was only about one-third of the figure for white students, but over twice that spent on Africans.[55] In higher education the MI Sultan Technical College and the University of Durban-Westville were established for Indians and the University of Natal opened places for them in its medical school. These opportunities allowed the children of industrial workers to begin moving into the professional classes by the 1970s.[56]

Group Areas legislation did however mean that Indians were pushed out of urban spaces, which were often racially mixed, and that they were relocated into segregated Indian townships. Although Indians resisted these forced removals, they managed to accommodate to township life, built vibrant cultural livestyles and took advantage of the new opportunities extended by the government. New social organisations emerged to construct an autonomous Indian community life around self-help and collective advancement, albeit under the strictures of apartheid.[57] Residents of one Indian township, Clairwood, went as far as describing the area as a "veritable Group Area of our own choosing and a model of self-help and separate development".[58] Although apartheid policies represented the zenith of the white supremacist hegemonic project, they brought "real" socioeconomic advantages, and sociocultural empowerment to Indian South Africans.[59]

Politics under apartheid

While the average Indian on the street was left in a state of horrified delirium after the 1949 riots, the SAIC was more determined to seek an alliance with the African movement. After complex negotiations which lasted for the better part of a year the SAIC and the ANC announced plans for a passive resistance campaign

53 B Freund, *Insiders and outsiders*..., pp. 78-79.

54 South African History Online, S Bhana and B Pachai (eds), "A documentary history of Indian South Africans", available at http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/ documentary-history-indian-south-africans-edited-surendra-bhana-and-bridglal-pachai (accessed 12 Apr 2016).

55 A Desai and G Vahed, *A history of the present:* …, p. 237.

56 A Desai and G Vahed, *A history of the present*: …, p. 252.

57 TB Hansen, *Melancholia of freedom: Social life in an Indian South African township* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 2012), pp. 79-92.

58 B Freund, *Insiders and outsiders*..., p. 70.

59 A Desai and G Vahed, *A history of the present:* ..., p. 249; B Freund *Insiders and outsiders*..., pp. 84-85.

against the segregation laws of the apartheid government. It was to coincide with the 300th anniversary of Dutch settlement in 1652. In what came to be known as the "Defiance Campaign," militants engaged in acts of non-violent civil disobedience. After four months of peaceful protest, heavy-handed police action instigated riots in several locales during October. Following the arrest of 8 000 protesters, the ANC suspended the campaign in January 1953.[60]

After a period of regrouping the anti-apartheid coalition expanded. In June of 1955 the ANC and the SAIC joined the South African Coloured People's Organisation, the multiracial South African Congress of Trade Unions and the white liberal Congress of Democrats in sponsoring what it called the Congress of the People. Some 3000 delegates gathered at Kliptown outside Johannesburg and voted to adopt the Freedom Charter. The Charter became the manifesto of the Congress Movement in South Africa. It declared that South Africa belonged to all who lived there, be they black or white, and that no government could claim authority unless based on the will of the people.[61]

The progress of the liberation struggle is described in minute detail elsewhere, but here the focus is on South African Indians. In the 1960s the turn to armed struggle, the Sharpeville Massacre, the Rivonia arrests and the long, drawn-out Treason Trial that followed, led ultimately to few convictions when in a last gasp of liberal legalism, the South African Supreme Court overturned the conviction of all the defendants from the lower courts.[62] However, the Sharpeville Massacre spawned calls for economic sanctions against South Africa from the United Nations and the apartheid regime came under severe international pressure. The massacre was followed domestically by a severe crackdown on the mass movement. Some Indians joined the ANC armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, the "Spear of the Nation", but because activists and all anti-government political entities were banned, public activism against-apartheid remained relatively dormant.

Despite its successful political repression campaign, the NP government recognised that it had a political status gap problem after witnessing the unprecedented multiracial coalition represented by the Congress Movement. The government created an advisory body called the South African Indian Council (SAIC2) in 1964. In 1974 SAIC2 was expanded and thereafter, half of its membership was elected. In 1977 loans were made available to Indian businesses through the Indian Industrial Development Corporation. With time, educational opportunities beyond those

60 J De Fronzo, *Revolutions and revolutionary movements* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1991), p. 278.

61 "Freedom Charter", Kliptown, South Africa, 26 June 1955. The text is available in S Johns and RH Davis (eds.), *Mandela, Tambo and the African National Congress. The struggle against apartheid: A documentary survey* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 81-85.

62 N Worden, *The making of modern South Africa: Conquest, apartheid, democracy* (Oxford, John Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 115. On the liberation struggle see the seminal study, SADET, *The road to democracy in South Africa*, Volumes 1-10 (Unisa Press, 2004 to 2022 and ongoing).

enjoyed by Africans and coloured people were granted to Indians.[63]

In the late 1960s a new anti-apartheid hegemonic project emerged around the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Started in 1969 when black members of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) broke away to form the South African Student Organization (SASO), Black Consciousness became the umbrella for all oppressed races in South Africa. Steven Biko was renowned as the leader of the movement, but it originated in Natal were Biko was studying. It was in conversations at the University College in Durban between Biko, Harry Nengwekhulu, Barney Pitanya and Indians such as Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley, that the rudiments of BCM ideology began to take shape.[64]

The Natal Indian Congress re-emerged in the 1970s. It opposed the government's campaign to turn the SAIC2 into a fully elected body. BCM activists attempted to prevent the NIC from remaining an "ethnic" organisation but this failed. Some continued to work within NIC while others left. Elections were scheduled to make the SAIC2 a fully elected body in 1981. The NIC and the TIC called for a boycott and only 10.5 percent of Indians voted.[65] Still, the regime made SAIC2 a fully elected body in 1981. Cooper, Moodley and other BCM leaders were arrested and banned following the Durban strikes of 1973. Other Indian BCM activists lost their jobs and were otherwise pushed to the margins of society. Among Indians, the BCM idea was most influential in universities and other intellectual circles and to some extent in the trade unions, but Indians subscribing to BCM ideology continued to find ways to contribute to the anti-apartheid struggle. The notion of a movement that sought to unite all those who were racially subordinated under apartheid, and moreover, to articulate the uneven ways that subordination had been instituted in the name of racial equity, was an important hegemonic idea. Consequently, it was an important thrust at filling the Indian political status gap with other people of colour.[66]

The regime continued to work through the SAIC2 despite its lack of legitimacy. Facing growing domestic and international pressures, it proposed a new constitution in 1983 in an effort to fill its political status gap. This project was embodied in the establishment of the tricameral parliament in 1984. As the name suggests, the new parliament featured separate, elected chambers for whites, coloured people and Indians although whites had more seats than the other two houses combined. Each house controlled internal community matters such as education, health and public

63 A Desai and G Vahed, *A history of the present:* ..., p. 247.

64 South African History Online, "Sathasivan 'Saths' Cooper", available at https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/dr-sathasivan-saths-cooper (accessed 19 Nov 2022) .

65 S Bhana, *Gandhi's legacy* ..., pp. 121-123.

66 A Desai, "Indian South Africans and Black Consciousness under apartheid", unpublished paper, available at https://docslib.org/doc/12000928/indian-south-africans-and-the-black-consciousness-movement-under-apartheid-professor-a-g (accessed 19 Nov 2022); South African History Online, "Sathasivan 'Saths' Cooper", available at https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/strinivasa-strini-moodley (accessed 19 Nov 2022).

administration, while issues such as domestic and international security were the domain of the white House of Assembly.[67]

By this time the regime had already implemented a series of laws designed to extend sham independence to the "homelands", now called Bantustans. Africans would realise their sovereignty in these unpromising circumstances rather than in the context of mineral-rich greater South Africa. For the urban African townships, the Black Local Authorities Act was passed extending greater autonomy to elected township leadership.[68]

From the perspective of the apartheid regime everything was in place to establish a new order in which middleman minorities would be allied with whites in forestalling the aspirations of the African majority. Unfortunately for the architects of apartheid, a pan-racial United Democratic Front (UDF) comprising many anti-apartheid organisations was mobilised in opposition to the tricameral "reforms". The Natal Indian Congress was instrumental in the launch of the campaign to oppose the new constitution and the formation of the UDF.[69] The UDF agitated for Indians and Coloureds to boycott the first elections under the new constitution in August 1984. "That strategy proved successful when only 30% of Coloureds and 20% of Indians turned out to vote".[70] However, the Tricameral Parliament became a haven for Indian ethnic entrepreneurs who continued to collaborate with the regime. Yet it is true to say that from the point of view of the National Party government its attempt to relieve its political status gap in alliance with Indians was an abject failure after 1984.

Unrest grew throughout the country in the final months of the year. On New Year's Day 1985, ANC President Oliver Tambo called upon militants "to make the apartheid system unworkable and South Africa ungovernable".[71] The movements did just that, and in July 1984 the government declared a State of Emergency, which had the greatest effect on African townships. Both the NIC and the TIC were intimately involved in the UDF. Their leaders were on the UDF executive committee and were among those arrested in that tumultuous period.[72] The state of emergency was broadened in 1988. In response, the UDF and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (SACTU) allied to form the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) to coordinate activities and

67 For the myriad ways the 1983 tricameral parliament was arranged to preserve white domination, see H Deegan, *Politics in South Africa* (Abingdon, Pearson Education, 2011), pp. 52-56.

68 RM Price, *The apartheid state in crisis: Political crisis in South Africa, 1975-1990* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 132.

69 A Desai and G Vahed, "The Natal Indian Congress, the mass democratic movement and the struggle to end apartheid: 1980-1994", *Politikon*, 42(1), 2010, pp. 1-22.

70 A Sparks, "Indian turnout about 20% in South African elections", *Washington Post,* 29 August1984, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/ 1984/08/29/indian-turnout-about-20-in-south-african-elections/8084da12-ff0e-4a33-9363-7f4f46f75813/, (accessed 17 Nov 2022).

71 OR Tambo, "Address by Oliver Tambo to the nation on Radio Freedom", South African History Online, 22 July 1985, available at http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/address-oliver-tambo-nation-radio-freedom-22-july-1985 (accessed 18 Jul 2017).

72 S Bhana, *Gandhi's legacy*..., p. 126.

increase protest action around the country.[73] As domestic and global pressures to end apartheid grew, the NP replaced PW Botha with FW de Klerk in the presidency and embarked upon the path toward political change. In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the transition toward South Africa's first fully democratic elections began. Those elections occurred in 1994. Under the UDF umbrella, the Indians allied with Africans to topple the apartheid regime, but the heirs to Dadoo and Naicker did not represent Indian ethnic entrepreneurs, workers, or the growing professional classes. Although some sections of the Indian trade union movement had been mobilised for the movement, most had not. A more assertive form of shop floor politics emerged among Africans in the 1970s, and Freund observes that:[74]

> The cautious and non-militant trade unions to which Indians largely belonged, developed and expanded "parallel" structures for Africans, and then declared themselves non-racial, but were unable to capture the support and enthusiasm of African workers.

Moreover, where Indians found themselves in unions dominated by Africans, *The South African Labour Bulletin* reported that "Indian workers are not integrated into the union – they don't attend locals or BECs, so they are not familiar with union policies or strategies".[75] It was unclear as the 1994 elections approached what posture Indian South Africans would take. Would the ethnic entrepreneurs continue to ally with whites? Would the working classes be split between alliance with Africans and alienation from all politics? Or could the Congress leadership persuade a majority of Indians to see their own interest as congruent with the broad aspirations of Africans?

Indians under the post-apartheid regime

Social niche

Since 1994, Indian and Coloured South Africans have continued to occupy a middle economic status between whites and Africans. Though African household incomes quadrupled between 2001 and 2015, and Coloured family incomes more than trebled across the same period, the numbers for Indians only increased about two and a half times. But because some Indians were already ethnic entrepreneurs before 1948, and began to gain favoured access to technical and managerial training in the 1960s, they were already materially ahead of coloured people, and remained substantially so into the twenty-first century.[76] Also, according to one scholar in the

73 "Mass democratic movement", *South African History Online*, available at https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/mass-democratic-movement-mdm-begins-their-defiance-campaign (accessed on 4 Nov 2022).

74 B Freund, *Insiders and outsiders ...,* p. 89.

75 B Freund, *Insiders and outsiders*..., p. 90.

76 Republic of South Africa, *Census South Africa, 2011*, Household income data from 2001 and 2011, Pretoria, South Africa, 2012 and 2015 data from "Whites earn 5 times more than blacks in South Africa", *BusinessTech*, 2017, available at https://businesstech.co.za/news/wealth/153485/whites-earn-5-times-more-than-blacks-in-south-africa-stats-sa/ (accessed 11 Apr 2018).

field, not plagued by chronic social pathologies such as alcoholism, drug abuse and crime to the extent that coloured communities are prone, Indians have been able to maximise the opportunities afforded by their middling economic and political status.[77]

Societal hostility

After 1994, periodic episodes featuring anti-Indian hostility, laced with the traditional stereotypes, have riveted the public discourse. However, unlike the classical middlemen who cowered in the face of such vitriol, South African Indians used the system to protect their rights as citizens. In one instance they filed a complaint about an anti-Indian popular song with the South African Human Rights Commission and got it banned.[78] In another, two leaders of the African nationalist Mazibuye African Forum were convicted for "hate speech directed against the Indian community in South Africa… [and] ordered to pay R42,000 in damages by a magistrate sitting in the Equality Court".[79] South Africa is a democracy now. What would such a fundamental change in the system mean regarding Indians' electoral behaviour in the post-apartheid era?

Indian politics

The Indian congresses were involved in debates dating a far back as the 1930s on whether the future South Africa should be a society in which race ceases to matter, or one where racial inequality is consciously targeted to be dismantled.[80] It was into this ideological thicket that Indians, as middleman minorities, sought to find their political compass after 1990. The NIC and TIC were divided over the role Indian identity should play in the future. Some feel that Indians cannot retain an ethnic identity and yet embrace a non-racial future. They warn that continuing to do so might cause distrust among Africans. Others counter that ethnicity is a human reality that cannot be erased, and that making ethnically-based appeals to mobilise Indians to support the ANC against their common oppressors makes sense.[81] Thus it

77 M Amberger, "The state of the Coloured people in South Africa" (Unpublished manuscript, martin-amberger@web.de Department of Social Science, University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany, 2006).

78 "Ngema 'regrets' public ban of AmaNdiya", *News South Africa,* 20 June 2002, available at https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/ngema-regrets-public-ban- of- amandiya -88413, (accessed 3 Mar 2018).

79 C Lutchman "Gandhi's great grandson slams fine for racists", *IOL*, 19 July 2019 (available at https://www.iol.co.za/thepost/news/gandhis-great-grandson-slams-fine-for-racists-29418323 (accessed 4 Oct 2019).

80 For an extended discussion of the evolution of competing national identities in South Africa, see I Chipkin, *Do South Africans exist? Democracy and the identity of the people* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press 2007); D Everatt, *The origins of non-racialism: White opposition to apartheid in the 1950s* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2010); R Fatton, Jr., *Black consciousness in South Africa: The dialectics of opposition to white supremacy* (New York, State University of New York Press, 1986); J Frederikse, *The unbreakable thread: Non-racialism in South Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990).

81 E Ramsamy, "Between non-racialism and multiculturalism: Indian identity and nation-building in South Africa", *Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 98(4), 2007, pp. 472-473.

appears that Indian anti-apartheid forces are divided.

Both of the dominant races sought to fill their political status gap by making appeals to Indian voters in the run up to the 1994 elections. The New National Party (NNP) had the courage to initiate the process of ending apartheid and packaging itself as best-suited to lead the country toward a stable and prosperous future. The ANC responded by making ethnically directed appeals toward Indians despite its formal support for non-racialism. However, on election day approximately half of the South African Indians voted for the NNP, while only a quarter voted for the ANC.[82] A major problem for Indian South Africans and the country in general is the inadequacy of the concept of non-racialism in a society so driven by race and racially constructed class cleavages. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, "big government", and social welfarism internationally, the ANC had few answers for the poor of any race in 1994. Ironically then, it was its class-blindness in the wake of growing inequality, rather than colour-blindness, which plagued the ANC as it sought to close its political status gap in relation to the Indian community.

Over the next electoral cycles the Indian vote continued to be fragmented and unstable. The NNP became fractured after the retirement of leader FW de Klerk. While it was the choice of most white voters in 1994, as it had been since 1948, over half of its vote came from non-white voters, including majorities of Coloureds and Indians. In 1999 the liberally viewed Democratic Party (DP) won 55% of the white vote and 18 percent of the Indian vote. In contrast, the NNP won only 20 percent of the white vote and 16% of the Indian vote. The ANC, despite making targeted ethnic appeals to Indian communities, won approximately the same number of Indian votes (500 000) as it had in 1994. Because of lower turnout, this actually meant an increase from 25 to 30 percent of the Indian vote; still not a ringing endorsement for the party of liberation from white supremacy.[83]

In 2004 the ANC made a determined effort to deny Zulu-based Inkatha victory in KwaZulu-Natal. It figured that Indians would be crucial swing voters and changed its appeal. The party opened its campaign in the working-class Indian township of Phoenix with a message about economic opportunity and crime that "addressed the security concerns of the Indian community".[84] That strategy bore fruit when the party outpolled Inkatha in the province. That, combined with the decline of the NNP nationally, allowed the ANC to win 36% of the Indian vote.[85] It doubled the percentage won by the DP, which thereby the party became the official opposition.

82 A Reynolds, *Election '94 South Africa: The campaigns, results and future prospects* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 35; 56; 191-192.

83 A Reynolds, *Election '99 South Africa…*, pp. 179-185.

84 E Ramsamy, "Between non-racialism and multiculturalism ...", *Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 98(4), 2007, p. 474.

85 KE Ferree, *Framing race in South Africa: The political origins of racial census elections* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 6.

The 2009 election was a watershed moment in the evolution of South African democracy. The Democratic Alliance (formerly the DP) established itself as the main opposition party. Though its percentage of the national vote was only at 16.67%, that was more than a four percent increase from 2004. Beginning in 2009, the movement of Indians to the DA was seen. The Indian vote had been fragmented, with class being a primary indicator of voting behaviour. In 2009 those class divisions virtually disappeared. Phoenix and Chatsworth townships of Durban, working class, and the largest two Indian townships in the country, had never delivered a majority vote to any party. The climate changed in 2009 when the DA took 50% of the vote in those townships in 2009, and 73% in 2014.[86] These trends continued in the 2016 municipal elections. While the ANC did manage to retain control of metropolitan Durban, Cyril Madlala reported that "the Indian vote [had] flocked to the DA" and "today Chatsworth and Phoenix are home to the DA".[87]

The bumbling ineptitude and outright corruption of the Zuma government against a backdrop of lingering economic stagnation caused growing African frustration with the ANC. In 2016 the ANC lost control of five of the six largest cities to DA-led governments, indicating significant loss of support from urban Africans.[88] As the party loses some African voters, its political status gap with other races grows more salient. While it retained control in Durban and KwaZulu-Natal, the vitriol unleashed toward Indians hastened their migration to the DA.

Conclusion

In the discussion it was illustrated that Indian South Africans have over the years been a "middleman minority" in two ways. First as classical ethnic entrepreneurs filling the economic status gap, but also as indentured labourers who became a semi-privileged proletariat, advantaged above Africans in the labour force. It furthermore demonstrates how in the settler colonial situation, a political status gap emerged between the dominant white minority, with full legal rights, and Africans with the fewest rights. Between them were two "middleman minorities": Indians and Coloureds.

86 JJ Joubert, "Indians and urban Coloured move en masse to DA", *Times Live*, 12 May, 2014, available at https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2014- 05-12-indians-and-urban-coloureds-move-en-masse-to-da/, (accessed 17 Mar 2018).

87 C Madlala, "KwaZulu-Natal: ANC leadership casts a rosy glow on election outcome", *Daily Maverick,* 8 August 2016, available at https://www.dailymaverick. co.za/article/2016-08-08-kwazulu-natal-anc-leadership-casts-a-rosy-glow-on-election-outcome/#.Ws5wtYjwbcs, (accessed 30 Jan 2018).

88 N McMurry, P Martin, E Lieberman, D de Kadt, "Here are four reasons that South Africa's ANC lost ground in this month's elections", *Washington Post*, 12 August 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/08/12/here-are-4-reasons-that-south-africas-african-national-congress-lost-ground-in-this-months-election/ (accessed 17 Jan 2023); M Nkosi, "South Africa elections: ANC loses power in Johannesburg for first time," *BBC News*, 23 August, 2016, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37161530, (accessed 17 Jan 2023).

Finally, it illuminates the ways in which the political status gap is a two-way street. The Indian congresses first recognised this and sought to fill it by aligning with the African National Congress in the 1940s. Africans saw the wisdom of having coalition partners to strengthen their movement and reciprocated. However, with the growth of the multiracial movement against apartheid, the National Party recognised its own political status gap. It then made a series of economic and political reforms to deter Indians from joining the anti-apartheid movement *en masse*. That hegemonic project collapsed after most Indians boycotted the so-called "reforms" by the introduction of the Tricameral Parliament in 1983.

Democratic politics in the post-apartheid era has witnessed a hegemonic battle between the ANC and the DA. The DA, founded by whites has advanced a vision based on effective service delivery and clean government in order to alleviate its political status gap. The DA was able to advance its agenda among Indians because of persistent anti-Indian rhetoric on the part of Africans against Indians, many of whom have a sense of economic and personal insecurity. Without the political imagination or the will to address economic problems, the ANC has settled for a hegemonic vision of political domination based upon "vague African populism".[89] In doing so, it has alienated all other races, and is losing its grip on educated Africans as well. Its political status gap may be opening across the entire political landscape.

The blood and sweat of Indian South Africans are in the soil. But the Bantu-speaking indigenous people of the country are by far the most destitute of the racialised groups at aggregate levels; and they form over 75% of the population. Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, two leading Indian South African scholars, put the matter trenchantly in the conclusion to their recent text:[90]

> That [w]hites and then Indians and Coloureds, in that order, will be required to cede more economically is a fact of democratic and demographic politics. The last quarter of a century has shown that race and class inequality will not disappear with capitalist economic growth.

Desai and Vahed describe a political status gap that all races must address. If South Africa cannot find a way to pursue economic justice in a multiracial society, the anger of the African masses may boil over at some point. If that day comes, Indian South Africans, as well as the privileged strata of all races will be caught in the "middle" as they face the rage of the impoverished African majority.

89 TB Hansen, *Melancholia of freedom*..., p. 294.
90 A Desai and G Vahed, *A history of the present:* ..., p. 331.