

*The Elusive Quest for the “Rainbow” nation:
Ethnic Particularity and National Identities 20th years after the fall of apartheid*

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa’s transformation from the “apartheid state” into the “Rainbow Nation” through a peaceful, negotiated settlement was a marvel that no one living in the twentieth century expected to see in their own lifetimes. Yet, in 1994, this is exactly what happened, as centuries of White supremacist rule gave way to Black majority rule. However, behind the euphoria of the country’s first democratic elections were tedious and often tense deliberations over policies to reverse separate and unequal development. One of the major problems facing the new nation was how to forge a sense of national unity to overcome the legacy of deep social division along racial lines.

This challenge was artfully dramatized in the critically acclaimed film, *Invictus*. Based on John Carlin’s book *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made the Nation*, *Invictus* (featuring Morgan Freeman as President Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon as the captain of the South African Rugby team, the Springboks), is about how a visionary Nelson Mandela used sport to stir national passion and steered the racially fractured nation toward unity. Mandela’s political acumen is tested as he is called upon to support Black aspirations while having to assuage White anxiety in the wake of apartheid. Rugby, long viewed by South Africa’s non-White majority as a symbol of White hegemony, was never embraced by the African majority. Yet, less than one year into his presidency, Mandela successfully rallies the country around the South African rugby team as they went on to win the 1995 World Rugby Cup. Thus

the Springboks became the symbol that united Blacks and Whites in a new, multi-racial South Africa.

While *Invictus* tells the story of Black and White reconciliation, à la Hollywood, this paper deals with the problem of national unity at the regional scale, paying particular attention to ethno-nationalism and the politics of identity. While the fabled Black-White divide in South Africa is now the stuff of feature films, the less well-known but equally important story of rising ethno-nationalism remains to be told, particularly with respect to the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), which nearly derailed the transition to democratic rule in South Africa. The paper examines how this threat shaped the politics of the Indian minority in the province of KZN and how Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) responded to the threat in the interest of national unity. The paper is divided into three parts: the first part examines the role played by ethnicity in restructuring the geography of apartheid. The second and third parts of the paper deal with the challenges of ethno-nationalism and identity politics within the Zulu and Indian communities, respectively.

REGIONALISM AND ETHNO-NATIONALISM

Restructuring the geography of apartheid was major task confronting the new government in South Africa. Upon ascending to power in 1948, the National Party (NP) had consolidated Afrikaner nationalism and vigorously applied its policy of separate development. Under apartheid, Africans, were officially divided into nine major “tribal” groups and allotted their own linguistically defined “homelands” or “Bantustans” (See Figure 1).



Figure 1 – The Bantustans/Homelands

Under this provision, Africans, who were 75 percent of the population, could be citizens of these separate but independent, “sovereign” states, while the Whites, about 10 percent of the population, retained control over the remainder of South Africa, which was approximately eighty-seven percent of the landmass (Christopher 1995a). When economic reality forced the majority of the African population to reside outside their designated ethnic homelands, the White government resorted to large-scale population removal and resettlement schemes in order to substantiate its claim that the homelands can sufficiently accommodate the national aspirations of Africans. By 1985, at least 3.5 million Africans had been forcibly relocated as a consequence of this policy (Platzky and Walker 1985; Unterhalter 1987). By granting limited political autonomy to these homelands, the National Party aimed to deflect African demands for common political rights under a unified, democratic South African state.

The ANC and other liberation movements had officially rejected the homeland policy. According to Narsiah and Maharaj (1997:236), prior to the transition, “the ANC’s view of a future South African dispensation was avowedly one of a unitary state, emphatically anti-regionalist and anti-federalist.” However, the ANC’s preference for a centralized, unitary state was curtailed subsequently by the demands of other political parties, given emerging material realities. A rhetoric of consensus building and pragmatism emerged within the ANC, that eventually came to characterize the entire transition process. At a forum on the regional question, Zola Skweyiya, Director of the ANC’s Department of Legal and Constitutional Affairs, stated that

... the ANC has always believed in a unitary state because this is the form of the constitution that has the most continuity with the past. However, as we have searched, with other organizations and parties within the country, and listened to their concerns, we have come to believe that it will be useful to be as inclusive in our thinking as possible. We must look more clearly and deeply into the questions of regionalism, because there are realities that one has to face in South Africa at present.¹

Thus, the ANC compromised its stance on a unitary state and conceded to the reality of regionalism in South Africa, which is described below. The challenge of redefining regions in

¹ Comments made at an Urban Foundation seminar on the regional question in South Africa. Transcripts of the discussion were reprinted in *Development and Democracy*, 5, 1993. See page 16 for Zola Skweyiya’s comments.

South Africa was assigned to the Commission on Demarcation/Delimitation of Regions (CDDR), which had as one of its most urgent tasks the incorporation of the so-called “homelands” into South Africa². While all of the 26 political parties involved in the negotiations made submissions to the Commission, the process, like the transition in general, was dominated by the ANC and NP (Christopher 1995b). The groundwork for this project was actually laid in 1982 when the then Department of Constitutional Development and Planning (DCDP) began to rethink the homeland policy and proposed nine new development regions (see Figure 2).

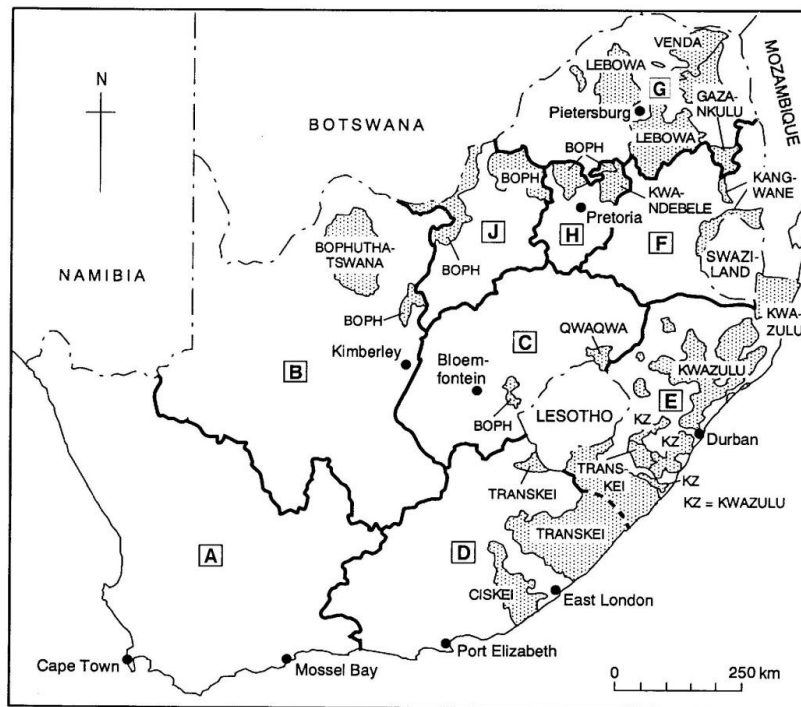


Figure 2: The Nine Development Regions Proposed by the National Party (NP) in 1982

The NP submitted two proposals, for nine and seven regions, respectively. The first was essentially a modified version of the 1982 DCDP proposal of nine development regions.

² The CDDR was established on May 28, 1993. The commission was given six weeks to demarcate a new regional geography for South Africa. Khosa and Muthien (1998) offer a comprehensive analysis of this process, detailing the makeup of the commission, the major debates on the regional question, and the shortcomings of the CDDR’s recommendations.

According to Fox (1995:23), the initial proposal was subsequently reduced to seven regions in August 1992 in response to two developments: a ten region proposal advanced by the constitutional committee of the ANC; and the prospect of an alliance with conservative homeland leaders. The ANC's ten region proposal (Figure 3), while not radically different from the NP's proposals, called for a reunification of the Transkei homeland, possibly in order to accede to the wishes of its former ally, General Holomisa, the Transkei leader (Lemon 1996).

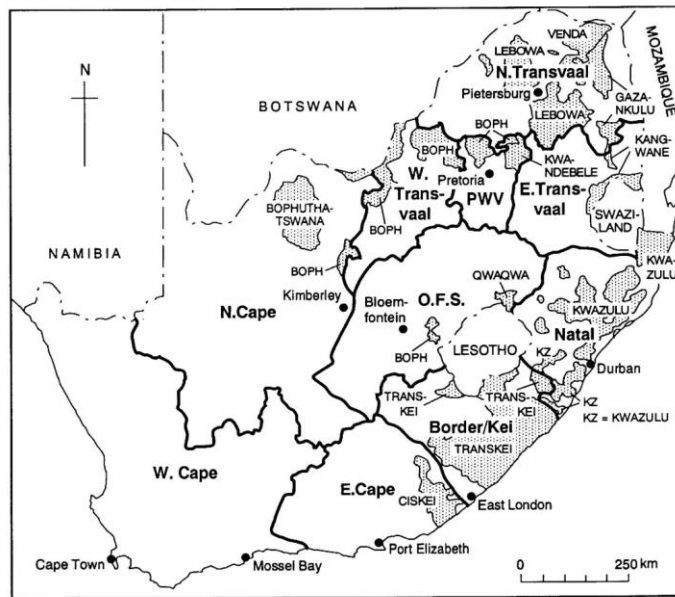


Figure 3: Ten Regions Proposed by the ANC in 1992

The final regional map, negotiated by the ANC and NP behind closed doors, accepted a nine region delimitation of the country (figure 4). The final map bore a striking resemblance to the original 1982 NP regional development plan. The compromise between the NP and ANC was clearly evident in the unity of the Eastern Cape and the division of the Western Cape, which was a victory for the NP given the concentration of the Coloured vote in this region. This, according to Lemon (101), was “the NP’s *quid pro quo* for accepting the unification of the Transkei.”

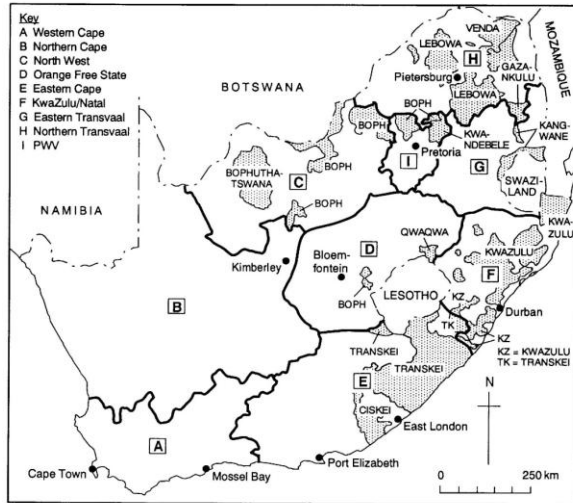


Figure 4: Nine-Regions approved by the Delimitation Commission in late 1993

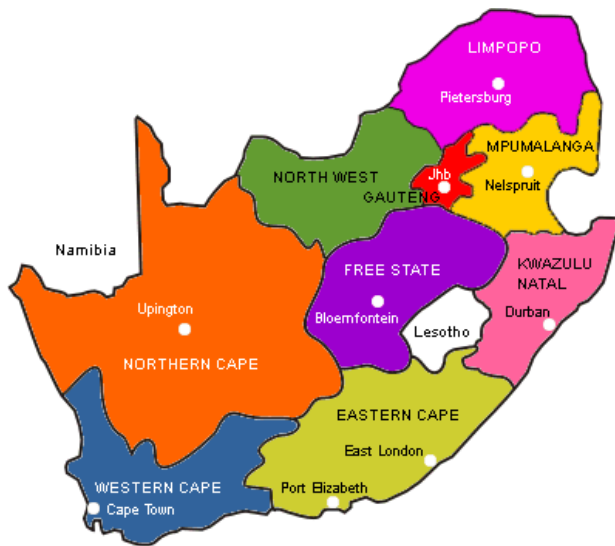


Figure 5: Current Provinces of South Africa

Since the creation of ethnically based homelands had been a cornerstone of apartheid policy, neither the NP nor the ANC overtly advocated ethnically based regions. However, ethnic considerations did influence the regional demarcation process. McCarthy (1993:41) argues that while the entho-linguistic diversity of South Africa complicates the designation of ethnically homogenous regions, there is a close correspondence between the new regions and the ethno-

linguistic regions of the country in three important areas: the Western Cape, where Afrikaans is spoken by a majority of the people; the Eastern Cape, where the Xhosa ethnic group is dominant; and KwaZulu-Natal, where Zulus outnumber others by far. The debate over the regional restructuring and the creation of the ultimate regional map of South Africa (see Figure 5) demonstrate that the force of ethnicity is far from spent in South African politics.

THE POLITICS OF ZULU NATIONALISM

The ANC tacitly acknowledged the potential danger of mobilized Zulu ethnicity under the banner of Inkatha by not challenging the territorial integrity of KwaZulu-Natal in the regional demarcation process. In fact, at the time, Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi and his Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) posed one of the most serious challenges to the ANC in its quest for a non-ethnic political future for South Africa (Lemon 1996). A descendent of Zulu aristocracy, Buthelezi was a complex and contradictory figure in the South African political scene during apartheid and through the transition. Leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement held joint forums with him in the early 1970s; for example, at a meeting in Edendale, Pietmaritzburg in 1971, Buthelezi shared a platform with Steve Biko and Saths Cooper (an Indian BCM executive) and even wrote articles on Black unity for the early issues of the SASO newsletter (Mzala 1988). In 1976, Buthelezi revived Inkatha and opened the movement to all Africans as a pan-African liberation movement in an attempt to catapult the organization beyond the narrow confines of Zuluness and cast it as a nationalist liberation movement.³ In contrast to the other homeland leaders, Buthelezi refused to accept independence for KwaZulu, voiced strong

³ The origin of Inkatha dates to the 1920s when the Zulu monarch King Solomon ka Dinizulu (the uncle of chief Buthelezi) formed Inkatha Ya Ka Zulu to preserve Zulu traditions and protect the monarchy. Inkatha is the name of a sacred coil symbolizing the unity of the people, as well as the traditional Zulu headband. The organization collapsed within a few years. Buthelezi's attempts to revive the movement in 1959 failed, but it was successfully re-founded by him in 1975. Buthelezi became chief minister of KwaZulu when the territory was granted self-government in 1977, which gave him and Inkatha almost complete control over a KwaZulu legislative assembly comprised of mostly Inkatha members.

opposition to apartheid, and campaigned against certain government structures like the Tri-cameral parliament system.

Jung (1996:48) points out that Inkatha was initially set up as “an internal and complementary wing of the liberation movement” with the ANC’s approval. Oliver Tambo, in particular, encouraged Buthelezi to assume his role as leader of KwaZulu, intending for Inkatha to be “a Trojan Horse under the protective umbrella of a bantustan” (Adam and Moodley 1993:134). However, Inkatha’s relationship with the ANC eventually fractured for a number of reasons, including Buthelezi’s refusal to allow the ANC to recruit for its military wing, his conservatism, his anti-communism, his dealings with the NP, his anti-sanction stance, and his criticism of the militant action of the burgeoning youth movements against the apartheid state in the 1970s. Buthelezi was embraced by business and White political groups as oppositional politics became increasingly radicalized. In the 1980s, he was courted at a high level by the United States and British governments, which also funded projects directly through the KwaZulu government. Revelations by the Goldstone Commission have conclusively proved that the National Party had always secretly funded Inkatha and provided it with police and military support (Africa Watch 1993).⁴

In the mid-1980s, the conflict between the ANC and Inkatha in parts of Natal escalated into a small scale civil-war. Interestingly, the conflict between the two parties has been frequently and incorrectly represented in the media in ethnic terms or as “Black-on-Black” violence. An article in the *Johannesburg Star* stated that “it is nonsense to think that one could isolate political divisions from ethnic divisions.” Another article in *Spear of the Nation* also examined the conflict through the lens of ethnicity and argued that “the fierce fighting between

⁴ See *The New York Times*, March 19, 1994. The Goldstone Commission was established to investigate the political violence in South Africa. The report by Richard J. Goldstone, chairman of the Commission, showed that white security forces were illicitly funding and aiding Inkatha.

Xhosas and Zulus [is] deeply rooted in the past, particularly in the proud warrior history of the Zulu nation.”⁵ Such descriptions are inaccurate because they conflate two different conflicts. *Inter-ethnic* tensions were mostly confined to migrant workers’ hostels whereas the far more serious violence in Natal, in which some 30,000 people died from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, was largely an *intra-ethnic*, ideological conflict among Zulus. Adam et al (1997:126) situate the conflict within three larger, overlapping socio-cultural struggles: modernity versus traditionalism, traditional legitimacy versus democratic legitimacy, and urban insiders versus rural outsiders. In fact, the conflict originated in the early 1980s when Inkatha tried to incorporate several urban townships under its authority in order to strengthen its weak urban base. Inkatha was pushed further to the right of the political spectrum as movements like the United Democratic Front (UDF) assumed the center stage of oppositional politics. With the assistance of the apartheid state, Buthelezi’s Inkatha movement increasingly resorted to terror tactics couched in Zulu nationalism in order to solidify its weakening position (Mare and Hamilton 1987; Sutcliffe and Wellings 1988).

The un-banning of the ANC, PAC, and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in February 1990 fundamentally altered South African political scene for Buthelezi. Once regarded as the ruling classes’ ‘great white hope’, Buthelezi found himself marginalized from the national and international scene as Nelson Mandela’s ANC assumed center stage. Buthelezi also felt alienated from the transition process as the NP and ANC made a number of bilateral deals. The end of apartheid also spelled the demise of the homeland system and with it, Inkatha’s access to institutionalized power, funds, protection, and means of coercion. As a consequence, Inkatha attempted to reinvent itself. However, despite its rhetoric of an inclusive pan-Africanism, Inkatha remained essentially a Zulu political organization. In an effort to keep up with political

⁵ These quotations are cited from Taylor (1991:4)

transformation in South Africa, Inkatha presented itself as a broader-based political party by changing its name to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and opening itself up to all races. Senzo Mfayela, chair of IFP local government election campaign, explained the transformation as follows:

...we thought, as a party in 1990, after de Klerk's speech and the release of Mandela, politics had changed dramatically in South Africa. It was no more a case of fighting against apartheid. That was gone. So we entered a new phase of politics where we had an open political market and were now moving away from protest politics to the politics of building one South Africa that includes everybody...

...there was a big exodus of whites into the IFP...they played a very crucial role, getting the IFP to understand...how whites in this country think politically. They are an important constituency in this country...any party that wants to be taken seriously has to address white concerns. That is why you see so many whites in the IFP hierarchical system...and a lot of Indians as well.⁶

While the IFP attempted to broaden its base, it simultaneously evoked images of Zulu nationalism in order to strengthen its position in the negotiation process. For example, Buthelezi refused to participate in CODESA (Congress for a Democratic South Africa) because the Zulu

⁶ Cited from Jung (1996:48).

monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini, was not represented at the talks.⁷ Through the transition process and beyond, Buthelezi continued to be “the most insistent entrepreneur of politicised Zulu identity” (Campbell et al 1995:289). In his speeches, he underlined the history of Zulu resistance to British colonialism and repeatedly accused the ANC of engaging in a campaign to “eliminate KwaZulu entirely from the new South Africa.” “Can we tolerate the great Zulu nation being brought to its knees?” he asked. “We are born Zulu South Africans and we will die Zulu South Africans, and we have a historic responsibility to make our Zulu contribution to the emergence of a new, just, free, and prosperous South Africa. For this we will die.”⁸ To Nixon (1993:16), Buthelezi’s manipulation of Zulu identity is a “neo-genetic attempt at shielding [his] ethnic organization against competing claims of historical identities.”

The ANC experienced great difficulty in articulating a clear policy toward Buthelezi and his divisive Zulu nationalism. Prior to its un-banning in 1990, the ANC tried to isolate Buthelezi, criticizing his ethno-nationalism and collaboration with the NP. In a highly critical book, *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda*, Mzala (1988) of the ANC’s research department portrays Buthelezi as an opportunistic fraud who willingly cooperated with the White ruling classes and subverted African interests in his own quest for power. John Saul (1991:16), a Canadian activist/intellectual and ANC sympathizer, called Buthelezi “a hired tool of the security services.” The ANC’s instinct was to sideline Buthelezi since his advocacy of Zulu nationalism ran contrary to its own commitment to non-racialism. However, in contrast to the prevailing ANC view on Inkatha at the time, Nelson Mandela surprised everyone by adopting a tone of reconciliation in his first public speech on the conflict in Natal, just two weeks after his release from prison. Departing from the accepted ANC view that held Inkatha for the conflict in

⁷ The new political dispensation in South Africa was negotiated as The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).

⁸ Statements made at King Shaka Day Celebrations, September 24, 1995.

KwaZulu-Natal, Mandela said that the responsibility for the violence must be shared: “We have reached a stage where none of the parties can be regarded as right or wrong. Each carries the painful legacy of the past few years.” With that statement, Mandela drew his first jeers and boos from an audience since his release on February 12, 1990, when he praised Inkatha for demanding that the ANC be legalized. “While there are fundamental differences between us, Inkatha has spurned the government’s attempts to entice it into a separate negotiated settlement. This stand of Inkatha has contributed in no small measure to making it difficult for the regime to implement successive schemes designed to perpetuate minority rule.” The crowd responded disapprovingly when Mandela said, “We extend a hand of peace to Inkatha and hope that it might one day be possible for us to share a platform with its leader, Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi.”⁹

The ANC’s leadership in exile also did not respond favorably to Mandela’s reconciliatory gestures toward Inkatha. A proposed meeting between Mandela and Buthelezi was unilaterally canceled by the ANC and the two sides met only in late September 1990 after an escalation of the violence.¹⁰ However, the political wisdom of isolating Inkatha, in light of the increasing violence, was increasingly questioned by many within and outside the ANC. Vilakazi (1991) argued, in the left-leaning publication *Work in Progress*, that the ANC had made a strategic error in trying to isolate Inkatha. Furthermore, the ANC’s contradictory policies and double standards toward the homelands exacerbated the situation. While Buthelezi’s bantustan regime was vilified by the ANC, other ANC-aligned Bantustans, like the Transkei, were embraced. Thus the ANC’s own unprincipled and contradictory position reinforced and legitimated the ethnic suspicions of Zulus who supported Buthelezi (Adam and Moodley 1993). This eventual realization by the

⁹ Reported in *The New York Times*, February 26, 1990

¹⁰ Reported in *The New York Times*, September 21, 1990

ANC affirmed Mandela's astute reading of the political situation and vindicated his offer of the olive branch to Buthelezi.

In light of these realities, the ANC began to rethink its entire position on non-racialism. For a start, it tried to appropriate symbols of Zuluness and Zulu culture for its own political purposes. In the early 1990s, when the violence in Natal had reached staggering heights, the NP considered banning the carrying of weapons (mainly spears and shields) in public. The IFP protested, arguing that the Zulus had a right to carry their 'cultural weapons' and that a restriction on traditional weapons "would stifle the cultural expression of the Zulus" (Jung:1996:48). After initially opposing the IFP on the issue of 'cultural weapons', the ANC changed its position. It questioned Buthelezi's construction of Zulu identity and challenged his monopoly of Zulu culture and symbols. S'bu Ndebele, an ANC member of the provincial legislature, put it as follows:

Finally I made a decision and it caused quite a stir within the ANC even. I said 'we are also Zulus, we also have the right to carry traditional weapons.' And I said that to the people, because...we don't have the right to tell any Zulu not to carry those weapons... It was at Inanda. There were about 60 000 or 70 000 people there... carrying anything that could vaguely be called a traditional weapon. They had spears, clubs, everything... And we were using the same slogans about Zuluness and about the King, and Shaka. We were using the same slogans.¹¹

¹¹ Cited from Jung (1996:49)

In response, Buthelezi alleged that his Inkatha movement was the sole guardian of Zulu culture, while the ANC attempted to subvert this claim by illustrating that Zulu history was an integral part of the ANC's legacy. The memory of Albert Luthuli, the Nobel laureate and Zulu leader of the ANC, was frequently evoked by the ANC to counteract claims that it was predominantly a Xhosa movement. Ndebele explains this strategy:

Then we had the Sonke festival. Sonke means 'all of us', and the slogan of the festival was 'many cultures one people'. It was a response to ethnic mobilization ... in October 1993 ... 80 years after 1913, the anniversary of 80 years after King Mtimizwe, king of the Zulus then and grandfather of the present king, who was made the first honorary president of the ANC.

So we used the symbolism of the king, and we also used many other symbolisms. A hundred years since the arrival of Gandhi, 50 years since the start of the ANC Youth League, 20 years after the Durban workers' strikes, which led to the legalization of the trade unions. And we invited all the kings of southern Africa. From the Eastern Cape, the Transkei, the Lesotho King, the Swazi king, from KwaNdebele in the Northern Transvaal.¹²

In this manner, the ANC conceded to the potential power of ethnic mobilization around Zulu identity. However, the ANC's dialogue with the IFP and its challenge of the IFP's

¹² Cited from Jung (1996:49)

monopoly of Zulu symbols had mixed results. On one hand, the conferences between the ANC and IFP did help in lowering the levels of violence; South Africa breathed a sigh of relief when Buthelezi made a last minute decision to call off a potentially calamitous boycott of the 1994 elections.¹³ The IFP went on to win the provincial election with 50.3 % of the vote, contrary to expectations and opinion polls. Lemon (1996:111) contends that the IFP's electoral victory in KwaZulu-Natal "was effectively a negotiated outcome following substantial evidence of electoral malpractice in the region." The IFP became part of the national government, with Buthelezi occupying the important cabinet position of Minister of Home Affairs. He also acted as president occasionally during Mandela's visits abroad. There was even repeated speculation of a merger between the ANC and the IFP in hopes that it will bring about peace in KwaZulu-Natal, but that did not take place. On the other hand, cooperation at the top did not automatically translate into stability at the grassroots. Local leaders and warlords would not relinquish fiefdoms carved out from decades of bitter conflict just because political elites were striking deals in conference halls.

Nelson Mandela and the ANC played an important role in unsettling the idea that Buthelezi and the IFP were the sole, legitimate custodians of Zulu culture and tradition, as maintained by the IFP and promoted by the apartheid government. Indeed, the ANC's strategies in mitigating and deflecting the politicization of Zulu identity helped to prevent a civil war in South Africa. In that effort, the current president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, had played an

¹³ Buthelezi's decision to participate in the elections was based on a series of concessions he extracted at the last minute: 1) a promise of mediation over existing differences with the ANC; 2) he secured a special deal for the Zulu monarch that entrenched his position and granted powers no other traditional leader had and; 3) it was reported after the elections that the NP transferred some 3 million acres of land to the Zulu king as an inducement to participate in the election just two days before the new constitution ended white minority rule. This poses a major dilemma for the ANC: the deal deprives the ANC of much needed land to resettle displaced Africans and could generate resentment among other ethnic groups who were not favored with such deals. On the other hand, revoking the transfer and reclaiming the land could re-ignite the conflict in the volatile province. This was reported in the *Christian Science Monitor* (What Buthelezi Gained By Joining the Elections), April 21, 1994. Also see *New York Times*, May 25, 1994 for analysis of this issue.

important role. For example, Zuma was instrumental in persuading the Zulu royal family to remain neutral in the conflict between the ANC and the IFP. Often calling himself a “100% Zulu boy,” Jacob Zuma frequently appears in Zulu dress and invokes Zulu tradition to deflect criticism against his numerous polygamous marriages. He has also developed close relationships with traditional Zulu leaders across the province of KwaZulu-Natal and played a central role in unseating the IFP as the majority party in KwaZulu-Natal in the 2004 national elections. However, Zuma’s self-serving appropriation of Zulu identity has created its own problems.

INDIAN SOUTH AFRICANS AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

The presence South Africans of Indian ancestry in KZN adds another dimension to the politics of that province. Indians comprise just 3 percent of the South African population nationally, but approximately 80 percent of Indians live in KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, most of this population is concentrated in and around the Durban metropolitan region, which gives them considerable voice in this area despite their small numbers nationally. The already volatile situation in the province is now complicated by the presence of another racial group (Desai and Maharaj 1996). While Indians came from a variety of ethnic, class, and caste backgrounds, the racial hierarchy instituted by Whites by 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 identities from India.¹⁴ This was partly because the state homogenized their differences into a single category for its own purposes of classification. As a result, Indian community had developed "a neo-creole Indian identity" which now articulates with South African politics as a

¹⁴ Indians first came to South Africa in 1860 as indentured laborers in order 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.

single grouping (Freund 1995:8). This, in turn, has led other non-White groups, such as Africans and Coloureds, to perceive “Indians” as a unified collective.

Indians and the Transition to Democratic Rule

As the ANC transformed itself from a national liberation movement into a political party preparing to govern the country, it had to formulate a strategy to gain the support of the Indian and Coloured minorities of South Africans, it had to show that they were represented in the organization’s ranks. In his opening address at the historic 48th National Conference of the ANC (the first to be held inside South Africa in 33 years) Nelson Mandela (1991a, p.7) acknowledged the great challenge his organization faced in appealing to and gaining the support of minority communities:

We can ill afford to be content with the relatively low level of success that we are making with regard to drawing whites, Coloureds, and Indians into the organisation. We must ask ourselves frankly why this is so. In this context, we should not be afraid to confront the real issue that these national minorities might have fears about the future, which we should address.

We must remain a movement representative of all the people of South Africa - a people's movement, both in name and in reality. As we build our organization, we must constantly watch this issue to ensure that we do not just concentrate on one sector of our population.

Deliberations at the conference were aware that the ANC was perceived as an African organization and that significant numbers of Indians and Coloureds had difficulty identifying with it. In his closing address, Mandela (1991b, p.3) recognized that:

There has been no effective communication between the ANC and minority groups of this country. ... Some of our structures have been set up to exclude the minority group. That has been a serious weakness, because it indicates that the overwhelming majority of the Africans in this country are not taking into account the minority groups of this country. It is true our policies are non-racial, but let us be realistic about it. There are different ethnic groups in this country, and ethnicity, especially because of the policies of the government, is still a dangerous threat to us. We have to redouble our efforts to make sure we have the confidence of all the different sections of the people of this country, something which is not there at the present moment.

In its attempt to confront this situation and construct a common national narrative, the ANC has frequently invoked Archbishop Desmond Tutu's metaphor of the "Rainbow Nation," in which the colors of the "rainbow" represent the various racial and ethnic groupings of South Africa, united as a harmonious whole. The metaphor represents a compromise between the ANC's commitment to non-racialism and its attempt to deal with the politicization of cultural and ethnic identity in post-apartheid South Africa. In contrast to the ANC's rigid non-racial position and rejection of racial categories, the "rainbow nation" idea was more accepting of ethnic and racial difference, viewed them as a given reality, and regarded them as integral parts of a new, South

African identity. Indians were thus acknowledged as a constituent “color” of the South African rainbow.

When the first democratic nationwide elections were held in 1994, it was expected that Indians would overwhelmingly support the ANC given their collective disfranchisement under apartheid. Natal Indian Congress activist and social historian Yunus Carrim predicted that most Indians would vote for the ANC:

It would seem that the history of the Indian people, their past political engagement, their subordinate position under White minority rule and the virulent anti-Indianism of the NP in the past, would constitute an important foundation for the ANC to win significant support among Indians.¹⁵

Contrary to this expectation, however, the majority of Indians voted for De Klerk’s National Party. The method of polling actually used in the national election made it difficult to ascertain exactly how specific ethnic/racial groups voted, since the results were reported in terms of provincial totals. Consequently, Indian voting patterns had to be gauged from opinion polls. Reynolds (1994:192) estimates that approximately 65% to 70% of Indians and Coloureds voted for the NP. The NP received approximately one-tenth of the Natal vote, which meant that it depended heavily on Indian supporters. Furthermore, a significant number of Indian voters in Natal remained loyal to the former Tri-cameral parliament politician Amichand Rajbansi who gave his Minority Party its only seat in parliament. A similar trend was observed in the Western Cape where the Coloured population also voted for the NP.

¹⁵ Reported *The Daily News (Durban)*, November 10, 1993.

A clearly disappointed Nelson Mandela said after the elections,

In the Indian and Coloured areas you find that as much as seventy percent of the population voted against an African government. They decided to vote to be part of a minority and not the majority. They decided to be part of a past which had divided us, created conflict, hostility, instead of being part of the future ... We have had the most difficult task in the government of National Unity because of the fact that the Indian and Coloured communities have identified themselves with the oppressors, and have created problems for me in promoting a spirit of reconciliation and the building of a nation which will be the joint activity of all South Africans.¹⁶

With respect to the Coloured vote, Erasmus *et al* (1997) “summed up” the situation as follows:

1) Coloured people share a language and religious affiliation with White people; 2) They are racist in their attitude toward Africans and anti-ANC; 3) They suffer from slave mentality and are psychologically damaged; 4) They have to unshackle themselves from their ideological chains.

However, such emotive and facile “explanations” not only leave unexamined the more complicated reality that shaped the Indian and Coloured minorities’ choices during the elections,

¹⁶ Speech delivered on receiving the freedom of Tongaat, a town linked to the sugar industry in Natal with a significant Indian population, October 21, 1994.

but serve to decontextualize and dehistoricize the Indian and Coloured political agency within the South African social formation. They ignore the precarious political position of numerically small non-White minorities that had to carve out an existence between the economically and militarily powerful White minority and the numerically and politically powerful African majority.

First of all, in attempting to reach beyond its traditional White constituency, the NP tried to manipulate the fears of the Indian community. In an aggressive election campaign, some NP officials spread rumors that Africans will soon seize Indian homes.¹⁷ These claims were not entirely baseless, as Indians had, in fact, lost homes to Africans in the past. On his campaign trail, F.W. De Klerk repeatedly stated that the Indians have been intimidated by ANC supporters, not NP supporters, and that their homes were under threat.¹⁸ The National Party campaign successfully tapped into existing economic and racial insecurities in the Indian and Coloured communities. For instance, the invasion by African squatters of vacant low-income Indian homes in Cato Manor, Durban, substantiated the Indian community's fears.¹⁹ Many Indians saw these events as indicative of future measures to dispossess them of their hard-earned gains. During its election campaign, the ANC tried to allay Indian fears about their property rights but people remained skeptical because of the ANC's inability to take action during the invasion.²⁰

Secondly, while there are a number of Indians within the hierarchy of the ANC, the frequent rejection of Indian identity by Indian ANC activists, in the name of racial solidarity with Africans, also contributed to the community's misgivings towards the ANC. After having

¹⁷ Reported in *The Natal Post*, March 2-5, 1994

¹⁸ Reported in *The Natal Post*, March 9-12, 1994

¹⁹ Reported in *The Daily News(Durban)*, February 9, 1994

²⁰ Reported in *The Natal Post*, March 16-19, 1994.

historically demoted ethnicity in favor of the umbrella ideology of non-racialism, the ANC found itself in a quandary, unsure about how to respond the power of ethnic identification in the Indian and Coloured communities, a phenomenon already witnessed among Africans in the case of Zulu nationalism. Furthermore, these communities also perceived the ANC as an organization that promoted African identity and interests.

Third, the symbolic “Africanization” of the ANC, as exemplified by its overtures to the Zulus in light of Zulu nationalism, made it difficult for the ANC to gain the support of Indians and Coloureds, many of whom feared African political and cultural domination as a replacement for White domination (Adam and Moodley 1993). In an attempt to woo the Indian vote, Mandela invited the actress Shabana Azmi, from India, to campaign for the ANC.²¹ The ANC also named two avowedly Indian Tri-cameral politicians, J. N. Reddy and D. S. Rajah, as ANC parliamentary candidates, giving them priority over the more radical, “non-racial” NIC leaders George Sewpersad and Ismail Meer, who commanded respect in “progressive” circles but could not elicit the vote of ordinary Indians. The NIC protested, claiming that it is hypocritical for their organization to campaign for the same individuals they had protested during the Tri-cameral elections. Reddy and Rajah were subsequently dropped from the ticket²² but the ANC had yet to reach the Indian population.

Fourth, generational differences also play a role in the political choices made by the Indian community. The trauma of the Indian-African riot of 1949 remains embedded in the folk history of the older generation, creating a sense of mistrust and doom. The poorest sections of the Indian community bore the brunt of the upheaval because of their proximity to the African poor in outlying slum areas. In fact, surveys indicate that the Indian poor feel greater fear of the

²¹ Reported in *The Star*, July 18, 1991

²² Reported in *The Sunday Times (Extra)*, January 23, 1994

possible negative repercussions of “Africanization” than do more affluent Indians. Freund (1995) estimates that the ANC’s share of the Indian vote in the 1994 elections, 25 percent, came from younger, more educated middle-class Indians. Thus, fifth, class and other socio-economic factors, such as education, were also important in determining the Indian vote.

The final major factor that influenced Indian attitudes toward the elections as a harbinger of the new, post-apartheid order was the factional warfare between the ANC and Inkatha in KwaZulu Natal, where 80 percent of the Indian population lived. For example, Indian support for the ANC would have antagonized Buthelezi's Zulu nationalist Inkatha movement. The Indian community itself was frequently threatened with violence by Buthelezi, particularly when Indian activists and politicians openly criticized his conservative 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 on Robben Island,” her statement was raised in the KwaZulu legislature as a case of Indians insulting African leaders, 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, Indian students protested that he was a stooge of the White regime. Again, Buthelezi responded with threats of “another 1949”. He threatened Indians yet again in 1990 when African and Indian student activists prevented him from speaking at the University of Durban-Westville. Furthermore, the boycott of the Tri-cameral system by Indians 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. Thus, when Inkatha and the UDF both campaigned for a boycott of the Tri-cameral elections, Indians expressed their commitment to a politics of non-racialism most forcefully. Therefore, it is clear that tensions between Inkatha and the ANC during the national elections of 1994 played a role in the Indian community’s

support for the National Party, which they perceived as less threatening. Similarly, in the 1999 general election, the majority of the Indian and Coloured communities voted for the Democratic Party.²³

In both the 1994 and 1999 general elections, the ANC attempted to court the Indian community as a specific cultural group, by adopting Indian cultural symbols and identifying with Indian icons. However, this class-blind strategy did not address the sense of material insecurity felt by sections of the Indian community in contemporary South Africa, particularly the Indian poor. Therefore, in light of these realities, the reluctance of many Indians to embrace the ANC constitutes “a defensive action to avoid increasing material hardships in a hostile macroeconomic environment” under African majority rule (Naidu 2000, p.2).

The 2004 national elections, however, defied expectations based on the previous national elections, when the ANC received significant support from the same segments of the Indian community that had shied away from the party in the previous elections. This time, the ANC made a concerted effort to wrest control of KwaZulu-Natal from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). In light of the fact that African support for the ANC and IFP was almost evenly split in KwaZulu-Natal, the ANC strategized that the Indian vote could prove pivotal in shifting the balance of power in the ANC’s favour. In order to demonstrate the seriousness of its commitment to displace the IFP, the ANC decided to launch its national election manifesto in KwaZulu-Natal, with the top leadership of the ANC campaigning in Durban in early January 2004. As a gesture of its regard for the importance of the Indian vote, the ANC’s campaign began in the predominantly low-income Indian residential area of Phoenix, where Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula addressed the security concerns of Indians. On the same day, Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota addressed a gathering of Indians in Northdale,

²³ The Democratic Party was a merger of the National Party and other White liberal parties.

Pietermaritzburg (*Sunday Times*, January 11, 2004). These efforts yielded the results sought by the ANC: close to 47% of the total vote in KwaZulu Natal as compared to the IFP's 37%, which translated into 38 legislative seats for the ANC as compared to the IFP's 30 seats.

Thus, the shift in Indian political allegiance played an important role in the ANC's 2004 KwaZulu-Natal electoral victory. The ANC won 15 out of 18 voting districts in Reservoir Hills, a middle to upper-class Indian residential area in Durban and a stronghold of the ANC in all three democratic elections. However, the most impressive gains for the ANC were in poor areas such as Phoenix, Chatsworth, Umkomass, and Stanger, which had supported the New National Party (NNP) and the DP in the 1994 and 1999 elections respectively. The DP had won a majority of the vote in Chatsworth in the 1999 elections. However, in the 2004 elections, the ANC and the Minority Front (MF)²⁴ won over 69% of the vote in Chatsworth as compared to the Democratic Alliance's (DA) 17.3%. This represents a 50% loss for the DA since the 1999 elections. A similar trend was observed in Phoenix, where the ANC's share of votes increased from 8.9% to 25.4%, surpassing support for the DA in the area. Durban Deputy Mayor Logie Naidoo, a member of the ANC, ecstatically proclaimed, "We kicked some DA butt ... We have said all along that the ANC is the natural home for the Indian community" (Naidu 2004a). The ANC's success in garnering the Indian vote was not confined to KZN alone, but part of a national pattern. The party secured the largest share of the Indian vote in parts of the Cape, as well as in Lenasia and Laudium in Gauteng. Nine out of ten voting districts in Lenasia went to the ANC, increasing its majority from 41% in 1991 to 55.7% in 2004 (Daniel 2004).

A number of factors are responsible for this increase in Indian support for the ANC in the 2004 elections. After ten years of relatively stable democratic rule, some Indian anxieties toward

²⁴ The Minority Front is a political party formed by former Tricameral politician Amichand Rajbansi. While the party claims to represent minority groups, it draws support primarily from the Indian community. It won 2 seats in the National Assembly and is also represented in the Durban City Council.

the ANC had been allayed. Also, the ANC's election campaign had tried to appeal to Indians both as citizens and as a specific cultural group. As Habib and Naidu (2004, p.2) note,

... there is also a new breed of electoral strategists in the ANC who recognize that Indians voters are not a homogenous category, simply moved by cultural and language concerns. Rather, they recognize that the Indian voter is influenced by a variety of concerns and, while cultural and ideological predispositions may be factors, they are by no means the most important ones.

ANC leaders repeatedly referred to "bread-and-butter" issues affecting the Indian community and stressed that Indians were an integral part of South African society. In addressing the marginalization that Indians felt in South Africa, President Thabo Mbeki and KwaZulu-Natal's ANC Chairman S'bu Ndebele reiterated on several occasions that: "As far as [we are] concerned, Indian people are as much South African as S'bu and myself." A number of ANC rallies were organized in working class and poor neighborhoods one week prior to elections, and featured both Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. President Mbeki also made appearances at key Indian cultural events just days before the elections. He participated in Tamil New Year celebrations while prominent ANC member and Durban city manager Mike Sutcliffe attended a Hare Krishna festival at which he addressed 10,000 people (Naidoo 2004). Mbeki even tried to shed his long-standing image as a thoroughly Westernized African. He was no longer the distant, aloof president. He was now an engaged leader with popular appeal, having participated in an unprecedented national door-to-door campaign that aimed to show that the president was in touch with ordinary people. The ANC also used images of Mahatma Gandhi in its election posters, one of which asked, "Who

would Gandhi have voted for?” Another poster featured Gandhi’s granddaughter Ela and the words, “My grandfather would have voted ANC.” Major highways near traditionally Indian residential areas were plastered with thousands of posters depicting Gandhi alongside Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki (Naidu 2004b).

The ANC’s electoral victory in 2004 marks an important moment in the history of Indian identification with the African majority. However, increased optimism for overcoming the racial divide between Africans and Indians has been dampened by series of xenophobic statements made by some prominent Africans, in stark contrast to the inclusive rhetoric of “the rainbow nation.” Just before the 1999 elections, Amos Maphumulo, former editor of the Durban-based *Ilanga* newspaper wrote that Whites and Indians were responsible for marginalizing and exploiting Africans. He was particularly vitriolic in his attack against Indians, claiming that “during the Black-on-Black [*sic*] riots, Indians were clandestinely inciting the clash by distributing weapons to African youths so that they could fight each other so that the Black nation could be exterminated [*sic*].” His diatribe against Indians continued: “...wishing that one day an African woman would give birth to another Idi Amin,” referring to the Ugandan dictator who expelled Indians from Uganda in 1972. Refusing to apologize at first, Maphumulo defended and rationalized his views by stating, “My views are clearly stated in the editorial and I have nothing more to add. I do not care what those political parties are saying.” (*The Sunday Times*, March 28, 1999). He went on: “I challenge anyone who wants to suggest that there are no Black people in South Africa, in particular KwaZulu-Natal that do not believe pace of change in this country is slow. People believe that Indians are acting in cahoots with Whites to exclude Blacks (*Business Day*, March 30, 1999).” While the *Ilanga* editorial was condemned by the leadership of all the

major political parties and Maphumulo subsequently apologized under intense pressure, “what was less expected was the confirmation by a range of people, including prominent clergy, of the general prevalence of such sentiments, and the warning that they should be addressed” (Mare 2001:93).

Anti-Indian statements in popular culture appeared again in 2002 when award-winning Zulu musician and playwright Mbongeni Ngema ignited a major controversy with his song *Amandiya* (Indians). The lyrics of the song claim that “Whites are better than Indians” and calls for “strong brave men to confront Indians.” According to Ngema, “The reason [Africans] face hardship and poverty in Durban is because everything is taken by Indians. But they in turn exploit us.” Ngema claimed that he wrote the song only to “promote dialogue” between Indians and Africans:

First and foremost I wish to state that the song is intended to begin a public debate on the issue and not cause racial hatred. I believe my role as an artist is to mirror the society and highlight the plight of people on the ground. The leadership relies on us artists to voice issues where there is perceived oversight. (*The Star*, May 28, 2002).

The song ignited a major controversy and was perceived as a racist assault by the Indian community. Fatima Meer, a member of the ANC and Indian activist, expressed the frustration and disappointment of the Indian community: “It’s a disgusting bit of diatribe which has no truth in it. I never thought that the man had so much rancor in his heart. As far as I am concerned, with this one song he wipes away whatever glory he had earned over the years.” (*The Star*, May 28, 2002).

Another episode of anti-Indianism involves the controversy over the memorialization of Mohandas Gandhi in South Africa. The memory and contributions of Gandhi are invoked often by Indians and Africans alike as a reminder of the role that he and other Indians played in the struggle against apartheid. For example, in support of his nomination for *Time Magazine*'s Person of the Century, Nelson Mandela (1999, p.124) wrote that:

India is Gandhi's country of birth; South Africa his country of adoption. He is both an Indian and a South African citizen. Both countries contributed to his intellectual and moral genius, and he shaped the liberatory movements in both colonial theaters...He is the archetypal anti-colonial revolutionary. His strategy of non-cooperation, his assertion that we can be dominated only if we cooperate with our dominators, and his non violent resistance inspired anti-colonial and antiracist movements internationally in our century.

It is not uncommon for marginalized ethnic/racial minorities to celebrate the life of a heroic figure from their community who appeals to the greater society. They often lobby for the recognition of that figure nationally, as part of an effort to augment their sense of belonging in spaces that have been historically alien and hostile to them. The achievements of such an individual, they believe, would lend strength to the community's claim to democratic rights in that society. In October 2003, Gandhi's memory was honored with the unveiling of his statue in central Johannesburg, near the location of his law office of 21 years. The statue is simultaneously a national symbol of South Africa's recognition of Gandhi's vital role in organizing popular resistance to White minority rule, and a gesture of the government's recognition of its Indian population.

However, that recognition was not universal among the African population. A number of press reports and opinion pieces in African newspapers that appeared at the time of the statue's unveiling alleged that Gandhi was an imperial loyalist who identified with the Indian merchant class exclusively, that he shunned the Indian poor, and harbored racist views toward the African population. One editorial by Nhlanhla Hlongwane titled, "The Two Faces of Mahatma Gandhi," claimed that Gandhi was a racist who "failed to see African people as human beings," and "supported the separatist and racist policies of the apartheid government." (Hlongwane 2003).

These incidents have augmented Indians' sense of vulnerability in post-apartheid South Africa and reinforced cultural narcissism in the Indian community as a way of boosting self-regard after political assault. Appeals to the Ugandan dictator Amin's atrocities and caricatures of exploitative Indian businessmen in popular culture draw upon incorrect, stereotypical representations of Indians as a homogenous group made up exclusively of traders who came to South Africa with the sole purpose of exploiting Africans. Anti-Indian diatribes by segments of the African population seek to gain political purchase by willfully overlooking the fact that the majority of South African Indians are, in fact, the descendents of indentured laborers (Adam and Moodley 1993, p.108). By ignoring the individuality and heterogeneity of South African Indians, on one hand, and the harsh, systemic realities that produced a racial hierarchy in the first place, on the other hand, anti-Indianism takes advantage of Indians' sandwiched position between an economically powerful White minority and an impoverished African majority. Furthermore, anti-Indianism trivializes and diminishes the history of Indian resistance and cooperation with other non-White South Africans, which contributed to the downfall of apartheid.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to show how the nation-building project in the “new” South Africa was more complicated and problematic than what was portrayed in the film *Invictus* and other popular narratives. In addition to creating a sense of nationhood in a society that continues to be fractured along ethnic and racial lines, South Africa now faces the overwhelming challenge of socio-economic inequality. Some factions within the ruling ANC recognized early on that a common nationalism can be fostered only by accepting cultural diversity in South Africa, despite the fact that “diversity” was used historically as a euphemism for apartheid. Understanding cultural diversity need not be tantamount to legitimating the old apartheid order or backsliding into particularist and reactionary nationalisms. If diversity is used to foster mutual recognition, then a joint uplift of self and other can occur. Cultural ethnicity becomes problematic when it is translated into an economic and political ethnicity that is intended to give particular groups leverage over others, as in the case of apartheid.

The growing rhetoric of “Africanization” and “Black Economic Empowerment” in contemporary South Africa represents a new African politico-economic ethnicity offers an opportunity to examine the distinction made just above. The current mobilization of African particularities under these new rubrics threatens to undermine the ANC’s historic commitment to a democratic and inclusive political order. In a paper delivered at a special ANC parliamentary caucus on the national question, ANC member of parliament, Wally Serote writes about being “African”:

... their being indigenous to South Africa, their being in the majority and most important, their being the most oppressed group in the country, dictates to and seeks a special positioning for them within the liberation process and the resolution of the National Question.²⁵

Serote goes on to argue that “the liberation movement is overwhelmingly African both in numbers and content, and that it is the African vote which has established the initial stages of the democratic South Africa, whose base is a democratic culture.” Peter Mokaba, the former deputy minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, calls for unity and empowerment of Africans first:

... the need to consolidate power in our country must first and foremost entail the imperative of consolidating our power base. On the basis of that strength we must move to consolidate the Black power base. ... If 60% of the 62% that voted the ANC into power is African, why is it that the percentages of other national groups in the leadership structures is more than their contribution to the democratic vote?²⁶

²⁵ Wally Serote, “A Question of the National Question” May 24, 1997

²⁶ Peter Mokaba “The National Question”, July 24, 1997

The increasing appeal of “Africanization” to the ANC’s leadership and membership can be understood partly resulting from the need for restoring self-worth after years of economic and psychological battery under apartheid. It is also a general and instinctive response to the degradation of African humanity in Western thought and practice, historically. Africanization as cultural resistance was an important element in the struggle of a particular marginalized population to assert its identity agency in the face of Eurocentric denial of its agency. In this context, according to Hall, cultural nationalism may be understood as “the source of the production of new subjectivity”.²⁷ Said (1991:16) adds that “for those of us emerging from marginality and persecution, nationalism is a necessary thing: a long-deferred and denied identity that needs to come out into the open and take its place among other identities.” However, national liberation struggles around the world have shown that the euphoria of nationalism often masks the bitter reality of the decolonization process: national elites resort to the same divisive techniques of their colonial precursors in order to guarantee their own privilege and maintain their power base. Fanon (1963) perceptively observes in *Wretched of the Earth* that unless national consciousness is transformed, at the moment of success, into a genuine desire and quest to re-order society on a more equitable basis, it risks extending the old order by other means. National elites, Fanon warned, are easily co-opted agents of the former colonial elite; the hierarchies and divisions of the old order are merely reconstituted by placing new ethnicities at the helm.

²⁷ Interview with Stuart Hall, “Culture, Progressive Politics and Global Change,” featured in *Common Purposes*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University. 1993

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