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From Apartheid Social Stratification to Democratic Social Divisions: Examining the Contradictory Notions of Social Transformation Between Indian and Black South Africans

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Introduction

Apartheid was a system founded on an unsustainable notion of racial superiority. Racial discrimination was an integral part of its perverted logic. For its continued existence apartheid required not only statutory provisions but also a social structure that would help safeguard white interests by sowing seeds of division among the oppressed. At a politico-legal level, therefore, apartheid was constituted by a set of legal provisions that compartmentalised blacks into distinct ethnic categories while simultaneously creating separate intermediary categories, i.e., Indian and coloured, under the theory of separate development. Though these groups were also considered inferior to whites, they were accorded better treatment than the 'savage' blacks, thus setting them apart from this social group.

Apartheid social stratification, therefore, was a skewed social engineering process, which involved constructing and deconstructing social identities in accordance with the dictates of white racial domination. Differential racialisation was a central aspect of this engineering process. Despite, the inferiority status of all non-whites and their collective classification at certain historical junctures as blacks, political exigencies led to hierarchical modes of self-perception that correlated to that of the prevailing social structure. The identity formation discourse, along with mental constructs through which

social relations were to be negotiated, occurred and developed within the strictures of the apartheid epistemology (for an elaboration of this view see various contributions to the volume edited by Erasmus 2001).

Through education and other social policies, group consciousness was imbued with discriminatory concepts that were later to be used by these groups in negotiating their social relations within the inter-subjective space of apartheid coexistence. Images of blacks as culturally inferior, coloureds as alcoholics and violent, and Indians as unreliable and deceptive, were conjured up and signified 'the other'. More importantly, it dictated the nature of social relations between these groups. An asymmetrical apartheid social system of signification therefore emerged in which the intermediary groups were placed below whites and above blacks.

A corollary of this was the racial ordering of opportunities which led to unequal development among the dominated. The form of this unequal development entailed not only access to better infrastructure, social amenities and opportunities for social progress, but also notions of superiority encapsulated in the variables of prestige and honour. Hence, '[G]rowing up coloured meant knowing that you were not only not white, but less than white, not only not black, but better than black' (Erasmus 2001:13). A similar attitude, perhaps in a more pronounced form, was prevalent among Indians. Beyond drawing our attention to this fact, the above quotation also points to a gap in the literature on social relations under apartheid in South Africa. Further research on the nature of inter-group social relations among the dominated is, therefore, necessary to complement the studies that focus mainly on black and white relations.

The notion of being better than blacks common among coloureds is replicated in the notion of 'being' held by Indians (see Reddy 1995; Bhana 1997; Prabhakara 2003). The attitude and behaviour of some Indian leaders towards blacks is reflective of the general group attitude. Bhana affirms this in his observation that 'Gandhi in common with the Indian leaders generally, not only harboured racial prejudice against Africans but considered them inferior' (cited in Prabhakara 2003). Gandhi's objection to sharing the same facilities with 'Kaffirs', as he referred to blacks, in prison evocatively displays this prejudice. Gandhi was not persuaded by the fact that his arrest occasioned by protests against discriminatory laws aimed at non-whites generally was a reason cogent enough to forge a common agenda with all those whose rights were violated by the same laws (particularly blacks). In affirmation of his attitude he wrote, in 1909, about Indians and their view of the black other, 'we may entertain no aversion to "Kaffirs" but we cannot ignore the fact that

there is no common ground between them and us in the daily affairs of life' (Reddy 1995:19).

The above depicts the social mantra upon which rested the politico-legal superstructure of apartheid. The interaction between constitutive social and political elements of apartheid together with the contradictions they produced are all summed in what we refer to as apartheid social stratification. The integration of different groups into the apartheid economic system to perform roles determined for them by their social identities was coterminous with the unequal social ranking of non-white groups. This system reinforced, through the award of material benefits, prestige and social honour, the fissures in the apartheid social structure.

This chapter examines these divergent sources of power, prestige and the notions of social relations they entail with the ultimate goal of fashioning an understanding of the multi-faceted task of democratising them. Democratising social relations in post-apartheid South Africa, a task euphemistically referred to as social transformation, logically involves the deconstruction of social relations and stratification ostensibly designed for the purposes of perpetuating apartheid. Put differently, its theory and practice (social transformation) has to be historically located in the apartheid project. As social constructs, South African identities are located in apartheid histories. The historicity of these identities and social relations is not only continuous with the task of transformation in the post-apartheid South Africa, but also provides the historical material for such a project. A dominant view in the literature and public policy discourse in South Africa was that the history of social relations in the apartheid era was purely a history of class (interfaced with race) conflict or economic relations.

Employing a historical analysis of the social relations between Indians and black South Africans, this chapter shows the limitations of the Marxian understanding of apartheid, especially its conception of racial capitalism. The chapter contends that this conceptualisation failed to direct attention to other subtle but equally important aspects of apartheid social stratification. Consequently, it led to a limited notion of social transformation as essentially a democratisation of black and white socio-economic relations. This conceptualisation negates the reality of other historically constructed social categories that are neither black nor white. In a study of coloured identity politics aptly titled 'Coloured by History, Shaped by Place', Erasmus recognised the need for a perspective of social transformation that 'creates a space for voices until recently lost in debates centred around a black and white reductionism'. Quite correctly, she argued that the black and white notion of transformation is a fixated framework that 'too often assumes that someone's

politics can be read off the colour of her skin with little attention to her everyday practices' (2001:15).

This chapter will show that, like most other South African identities, an Indian identity is a product of racialised power relations and privilege (apartheid social engineering), loaded with meanings that took their social significance from the apartheid racial discourse. It, furthermore, contends that social transformation is a complex process that extends beyond 'democratising' relations between blacks and whites. The chapter draws on both Marxist and Weberian analysis, believing that, together, they provide a more adequate explanation for the social relations that developed between Indians and Africans. The remaining part of this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section outlines a broader framework for analysing social inequality in South Africa. The second section analyses the historical construction of a distinctly South African Indian identity and the inter-group relations that emerged between it and blacks. The third section highlights a new social transformation challenge, and the fourth concludes the chapter.

Explaining inequality: Between Marx and Weber

The field of political sociology has spawned an extensive literature with divergent perspectives (see Coser 1966). Though they all study the same phenomenon—inequality—they emphasise different aspects and deploy different units of analysis. Structural functionalists are concerned with the problem of integration and equilibrium in society and employ the individual and occupational categories as units of analysis (leading proponents of this school include Warner 1941, 1949, and his associates in the Warner school, Davis and Moore 1945; Parsons 1966, 1970). Marxists and neo-Marxists pay closer attention to material inequality engendered by different class relations to the forces of production, i.e., the social organisation of labour is the principal cause of inequality. Max Weber undercut the long dominance of the Marxian school of thought. In response to Marx, Weber formulated the concept of a status group, thereby pointing to the equal significance of non-economic sources of inequality. This sparked a popular debate between Marxian and Weberian sociology.

The dominant perspective of apartheid, in the 1970s and 1980s, was Marxists. It theorised apartheid South Africa as capitalism interfaced with race or what is fashionably referred to in the literature as 'racial capitalism' (for this perspective see Slovo 1976; Magubane 1979; Marks and Trapido 1987; Adam 1971; Wolpe 1972, 1980 and several issues of the *African Communist*, Journal of the South African Communist Party). Champions of this school interpreted the apartheid social structure in essentially economic

terms that defined the black majority as an alienated working class that fulfilled the labour needs of a racialised capitalist system. By implication social relations in this society were a secondary function of relations of production, read as the relations between persons marked off from each other by differential rights and obligations with regard to productive property. We return later to the inadequacies of this perspective but it suffices to point out that it glosses over aspects of inter-group relations that are outside the boundaries of its economically determined social structure. This lacuna observable in the Marxian analysis is addressed in Weber's construct of social stratification which notes that interaction among individuals and groups is also conditioned by cultural, socio-psychological and other non-economic determinants.

Notwithstanding the barrage of criticism that Marxian sociology has been subjected to, its relevance and analytical value has not diminished. We elaborate here on Marx's theory of social inequality bearing in mind Littlejohn's counsel that, 'Marx's theory of social stratification is not something distinct from his theory of society and its development' (1972:11).

For Marx the development of society is a continuous struggle between social forces whose interests are either, secured and identifiable in the current (class society) or in the envisaged epoch (classless society). Qualitative changes that occur after the conflict (class conflict) are located in the economic mode of production. Societies evolve historically in this fashion (his theory of historical materialism). For Marx, capitalism is constituted by two identifiable classes; the dominant (that owns the means of production) and the dominated (working class that only owns their labour). Simply put, every other aspect of their social existence is a function of the relations of production: the economy, therefore, constitutes the base of the political and legal superstructure.

The politico-legal superstructure functions in furtherance of the capitalist economic aim of social production and individual appropriation. In the logic of the Marxist perspective people relate to each other on the basis of their class interests. Effectively, therefore, in a capitalist society people experience social relations as economic relations. Unequal economic relations result in unequal social relations. The following oft-quoted statement found in the preface to *A Critique of Political Economy* captures the essence of Marx's theory of stratification:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which a legal and political superstructure arises and to which definite forms

of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness... With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations, the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out (Quoted in Littlejohn 1972:11-12).

From the above quotation Marx's ideas on social structure can be gleaned. It is, therefore, the existence of classes that signifies social divisions and inequality. Socio-political organisation and the distribution of goods in the superstructure have a causal relationship with economic relations in a particular society, i.e., the social organisation of a society and its social relations are but a manifestation of the economic structure and the relations it embodies (for a detailed analysis see Giddens 1971; Avineri 1968; Turner 1987; Elster 1985).

Marxists studying South Africa used the above framework in their explanation of apartheid. In their view, social relations under apartheid were a consequence of economic relations. This view of apartheid as an interface between capitalism and race continues to inform the crippled notion of transformation in the democratic South Africa. Many of its proponents were linked to the liberation movement and, therefore, developed it as a theory of the South African revolution.

The ideas of apartheid as a racial capitalist system conflated class and race interests. Apartheid was seen as a system designed for white capitalist interests, logically ending in the domination and exploitation of the majority black working class. In strict class terms, the means of production were an exclusive preserve of the white bourgeoisie while blacks were inserted into the apartheid capitalist edifice as providers of labour. The organisation of the superstructure corresponded with the capitalist dictates of wealth accumulation by the minority white bourgeoisie. The state and other political institutions found in the superstructure were but instruments, at the hands of the white owners of the means of production, for black working class domination/oppression.

These scholars were confronted with two challenges: the first was whether it was inherently necessary to politically marginalise the blacks in order to sustain capitalist economic relations? Slovo, a leading revolutionary theorist,

explained the link between economic exploitation of the black majority and their political domination as a function of economic interests. He argued that;

[Y]et for all the overt signs of race as the mechanism of domination, the legal and institutional domination of the white minority over the black majority has its origins in, and is perpetuated by, economic exploitation. This exploitation, in the contemporary period, serves the interests primarily of South Africa's all-white bourgeoisie... Since race discrimination is the mechanism of this exploitation and functional to it, since it is the modus operandi of South African capitalism, the struggle to destroy 'white supremacy' is ultimately bound up with the very destruction of capitalism itself (1976:118).

The second was the presence of different supposedly antagonistic classes within the two racial (and supposedly class) categories. But, blacks, just like whites, were not a homogenous class category.

Though a member of the Marxist school of thought, Wolpe recognised that classes as social categories do not automatically translate into social forces and that they are not constituted only on the basis of relations of production. Although he recognised that political, ideological and social instances also play a significant part in the unification of classes as social forces, he failed to transcend the boundaries of class analysis and continued to consider classes as the basic units of analysis. The dominant/dominated, bourgeoisie/working class and black/ white dichotomy, for him, also remained the fundamental contradiction of the apartheid system.

This was the guiding theory of the revolution and it is from it that the currently prevalent notion of transformation in South Africa is largely drawn. The popular view that the task of transforming the post-apartheid society begins and ends with the democratisation of socio-economic relations between blacks and whites is inextricably linked to the declared goal of national liberation as the elimination of the economic basis of national oppression. This meant democratising the process of accumulation. Liberals and communists within the liberation movement proffered different and, at times, contradictory interpretations of the liberation theory. However, the common denominator between all these interpretations was the inability to transcend the economic realm and recognise apartheid's social relations as power relations founded not only on relations of production but also on non-economic cultural and symbolic values.

It is precisely the privileging of economic factors as the only determinants of the nature of social relations that marks a break between Marx and Weber's notion of social stratification. As we elaborate on the meaning and logic of

Weber's construct of social stratification it becomes abundantly clear that the economic determinism of Marxist sociology is oblivious to cultural, educational and other sources of power that often lead to a society divided not along class lines but along status lines. The ability of the apartheid state to forge out of indentured Indian labourers and from people of diverse ethnic, religious and caste backgrounds a relatively cohesive social group that ironically came to define itself as better civilised than blacks cannot be accounted for within the strictures of the Marxist perspective. Both groups were equally integrated into the apartheid economic system as exploited labour but unequally rewarded socially and symbolically.

Why did Indians then fail to consider the destruction of racial capitalism as an integral part of their liberation if like blacks they can be conceptualised as the dominated working class? What were the sources of their supposed 'superiority' over blacks? How were their interests located in the system of differential racialisation? The search for answers to these questions has to transcend the boundaries of Marxian sociology simply because they are beyond its scope. We extend the search for these answers to Weber's construct of social stratification, though these two perspectives should not be considered mutually exclusive.

At the core of the debate between Weberian and Marxist sociology is whether status groups or classes are the basic forms of division, whether classes or status groups are the primary groups in society, and, lastly, whether economic resources singularly or in concert with other resources determine social inequality. Turner captures this tension when he notes:

[T]he tensions between Weberian and Marxist sociology are focused on the problem of whether economic classes or status groups are the most significant features of social stratification, and thus around the character of political conflict in modern societies. Whereas classical Marxism anticipated the disappearance of economic classes with the erosion of private property in socialism, Weber anticipated the continuation of status differences and status-group conflicts under both capitalism and socialism (1988:2).

A question that arises and to which we now turn is what is the meaning and logic of a status group and status politics. Status connotes one's position in society. It is how positions are assigned in society and what criteria are used that constitutes the whole gamut of status politics-cum-social stratification. For structural-functionalists, role setting and role performance both determine and justify social stratification. Borrowing from Abercrombie, we define roles as 'bundles of socially-defined attributes and expectations associated with

social position' (1984:180). For Weberian sociological analysis status becomes important because status positions in society are hierarchically ranked, not on the basis of economic variables, but, rather, in 'terms of greater or lesser privileges and prestige' (Turner 1988). Furthermore, the bases upon which one's status is determined in society are varied and multi-dimensional, ranging from educational attainment, income, profession, to race, class, ethnicity and gender. It can be concluded then that, on the basis of the above, classes are not the only sites within which inequality is lived and experienced.

Weber draws an important distinction between 'ascribed' status (what in ethnic studies is referred to as the 'givens' of life) and 'achieved' status (a position one attains either through educational qualifications or other competitive means) status. Where status positions are allocated on the basis of ascribed attributes, social mobility in such a society is a near impossibility. The hierarchical apartheid social structure which placed whites at the apex followed by Indians then coloureds and lastly blacks defies the Marxian logic of social stratification (on the basis of one's relations to the means of production). The Marxist perspective fails to disaggregate blacks, Indians and coloureds (actually different groups) whose standing in society differed. It fails to realise that differential racialisation ensured that by virtue of being Indian or coloured and not on the basis of one's relationship to the means of production one was pre-determined to have better life chances than a black person. Weber defined status groups at an individual level as a 'plurality of social actors who within a larger social environment successfully claimed a specific social honour and enjoyed certain social privileges'; while at the group level they could be 'communal groups which have privileged access to scarce resources, especially where these resources entail a cultural, moral or symbolic attribute' (quoted in Turner 1988:6). This conceptual framework lends credence to our conclusion about apartheid social structuration being a function of multiple and varied social, economic and cultural factors.

Weber introduces a further distinction between what he calls subjective and objective status. While the distinction between ascribed and achieved status can be considered as the static side of social difference, the latter distinction constitutes its dynamic side. This draws our attention to the social dynamics or implications of social difference, how it is lived, acted upon and internalised. Findings from identity studies informs us that identities are always defined in relative terms—on the basis of difference or similarity (see Barth 1969; Osaghae 1986). Subjective status means self-definition and self-perception. Common consciousness arises when people share the same self-definition\perception, which, according to Weber, results in a collective culture, lifestyle and community of interests. Objectively or externally defined status

refers to how outsiders cognitively interact with the social existence of different groups in relation to theirs. Do they recognise them as different? What this means is that as status groups 'belong to the sphere of social honour and are distinguished in the first place by varying degrees of prestige', those status groups conferred with a lesser degree of prestige should recognise this fact and accord the more prestigious groups necessary respect in whatever way (Littlejohn 1972:23). Mayer is perhaps more explicit: 'prestige is a socio-psychological category; an individual or social group cannot enjoy it unless their prestige claims are recognised by others willing to give them difference. Hence, the existence of status differences depends upon awareness of prestige rankings' (1955:66).

As status groups share the same privileges and lifestyle, they tend to cohere into solidarity communities that strive to protect and advance their interests by exercising status closure or social exclusion. Weberian sociology thus argued, contrary to Marxists thought, that inequality in society could also be a consequence of the unequal distribution of social honour and prestige, and not just material rewards. For Weber, economic wealth is not the only criterion for social power and influence. He found in Chinese society an archetype of societies where prestige flowing from educational and or cultural competition was more significant and enduring than economically derived power.

Weberian sociology is alive to the fact that all socially stratified societies are afflicted by conflict although the nature and mode of this conflict may be disguised, hidden or more subtle in expression. Negative perception about the other and its consideration and treatment as inferior are all subtle forms of this struggle that elude all legal mechanisms, including constitutional measures designed to address them.

Of much more interest to us here are the notions of social relations entailed in the difference between classes and status groups. In Marxist sociology all social relations are reduced to economic relations. The framework does not provide space for the non-economic life attributes, i.e., cultural distinctions, educational qualifications, social and occupational mobility. By emphasising socio-political aspects Weber perceptively recognises all social relations as power relations or better still relations of domination (which do not necessarily have to be exclusively economic).

The history of social relations between blacks and Indians in South Africa illustrates the difference between these two perspectives. The relatively better Indian socio-political and socio-economic standing, according to the adherents of the Marxist school, does not alter the larger apartheid capitalist class structure. So, despite their relatively privileged position occasioned by state-backed social advantages and racial laws, the social position and situation of

Indians remain similar to that of blacks. In that sense, their Indian consciousness (typified by both positive and negative claim to social honour and prestige) was a case of false consciousness. In this regard, Slovo argued that:

...the 2 million coloured people and the three-quarter of a million Indians are subjected to similar disabilities as groups even though the degree of discrimination and exploitation is in their case not as far reaching and intense. It is only amongst Indian group (the overwhelming majority of whom are workers) that there has emerged a sizeable group of commercial bourgeoisie which is, nevertheless, barred from using its economic resources to break into the top layer of the capitalist structures. In general, the Coloured and Indian people form a natural ally of the African working class masses even though the ruling class often attempts to use their slightly more favourable position to divert them from full involvement in the struggle for all-round radical change (1976:126).

This contention is symptomatic of economic reductionism typical in Marxist sociology.

Historical evidence suggests that the differences which Slovo describes as 'their slightly more favourable conditions' are in need of further delineation as they shaped and informed social relations between these groups and the black majority. Again, history has shown that the reasons for the 1949 Durban riots (these were violent clashes between blacks and Indians in Durban in which several lives were lost) are located in these 'slightly more favourable conditions' enjoyed by Indians at the expense of blacks (Meer 2002). A further examination of inequalities between Indians and blacks reveal that between these groups there exists significant differences which the Marxian conception of apartheid social relations fails to capture. This leads to an incorrect presupposition that social relations between these groups are economic relations. In strict Marxist terms relations between these two groups would for the lack of a better term be considered intra-working class relations. By extension since intra-class conflict is a near impossibility the 1949 Durban riots cannot be explained using Marxian tools of analysis. This leaves a grey area in the Marxist perspective of apartheid social stratification. That grey area, we argue, can only be illuminated through the logic in Weber's construct of social stratification—inequality is explained by the unequal distribution of cultural, educational, social and symbolic resources (honour/prestige)—status.

If employed simultaneously these two perspectives prove a veritable framework for understanding the dynamics of group identity formation and relations under apartheid. Taking the foregoing as a point of departure, we

argue that the Indian identity group should be understood as a status group rather than a class in a Marxist sense. This is not to suggest that in its evolution it was insulated from the effects of the racial economic system. On the contrary, it is racialised capitalism that bestowed it with relatively better social conditions in contrast to blacks. In the next section, we look at how these different sources and forms of social power interacted to produce a distinctly South African Indian identity. We hope to show that it emerged as a direct consequence of apartheid social engineering. Secondly, we attempt to tease out from its historical process of evolution the cultural, social and economic meanings through which this group was to negotiate social relations, particularly with black South Africans.

Colonial and apartheid origins of a South African Indian identity, 1860–1994

Before proceeding, a methodological caveat needs to be made, i.e., an exhaustive history of South African Indians is beyond the scope of this chapter and empirical evidence for our historical analysis is drawn mainly from the politics of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC). The Natal Indian Congress came into existence two decades (1894) before both the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) (1924) and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) (1927), and largely laid the foundation for Indian politics. The dominance of the NIC in Indian politics is partly explained by the fact that Natal had the highest number of Indians who settled there throughout the colonial period. Natal is a representative site of Indian politics in all its ramifications and provides a laboratory for testing theoretical postulations about Indian politics. For recent data on Indian politics we are largely dependent upon events in this province, now known as KwaZulu-Natal.

The arrival of Indians in South Africa was due to the needs of the early colonial economy of Natal, particularly the sugar cane agricultural sector. The local Zulu population in the then Natal, unaccustomed to wage labour, was considered unreliable and alternative sources of labour had to be found, leading to the replication of indentured labour that had earlier been applied in other British colonies, e.g, Mauritius. When Sir George Grey, the then Governor of the Cape Colony and the High Commissioner over British Territories in Southern Africa, visited Natal in 1855 an appeal was made to him by the Natal sugar cane planters to recommend the procurement of labour from India. The Indian government's initial ambivalence towards making available Indian workers was to later change after the British Government committed itself to safeguarding their interests as subjects within

the Empire (South Africa, at the time, was part of the expansive British Empire).

By 12 November 1860, the first set of indentured Indian labourers had arrived in South Africa. Bagwandeem reports that '342 persons' came on that date while a further '351' strong group came on the 26th of the same month (1989: 4). This trend was to continue until 1911 when the importation of labour from India was discontinued. A total of 152, 184 indentured Indian labourers had by this time arrived in South Africa (Bhana 1997:2). They came mainly from the poor southern and central provinces of India. These migrant workers had the option of serving two five-year contract terms, and upon completion they were allowed to settle in Natal or return to India. Those who chose to serve two five-year contracts were rewarded with a land allocation if they chose to remain in Natal (this privilege was extended to them only until 1891).

Other than this category, another class of immigrants made up of individuals mainly from the western parts of India came at their own volition and expense. These Indians, who were mainly traders, were referred to as 'free' or 'passenger' Indians and mistakenly called Arabs. Business calculations were behind their immigration to South Africa. With the importation of their indentured compatriots, they saw an uncontested market to be exploited. However, this is not to suggest that they were all rich merchants as some of them did not have the requisite capital to start private businesses and, therefore, ended up in petty trading (Bhana 1997). As shown later in the study, this group considered itself superior in status to indentured labourers. These two broad categories, however, conceal other deep-seated cultural, linguistic, religious, ethnic, and caste differences. Unavailability of reliable data indicating the population numbers along the lines indicated, in earlier years, compel us to use 1956 statistics by which time demographic trends might have changed. Notwithstanding this fact, what is indisputable is that the early Indian community in South Africa was as heterogeneous as the Indian society back in India. Analysing intra-group plurality among Indians, Kuper found that by 1956:

the Hindus, who constitute over 70 percent, of the total South African Indian population are themselves culturally heterogeneous, with differences particularly marked between the Dravidians (Tamil and Telugu speaking) originally from the South of India and the Aryans (Hindustani and Gujarat) who migrated from the North. The Muslims (approximately 19 percent) and the Christians (approximately 6 percent) are mainly descendents of converts from Hinduism... Apart from religion, differences in wealth, education, sophistication *read as status group differences* are probably greater

within the Indian population than any other ethnic group in South Africa (Kuper 1956:15 italics mine).

Kuper concluded that ‘in most situations it is misleading to generalise about the Indians’ (1956:15). Kuper, however, failed to appreciate that a community of interest had by 1956 crystallised among these desperate varnas, ethnic and religious groups. We return to this point in the next section.

Intra-group differences in early Indian politics

Though Bhana does not provide statistical data, he gives a more graphic sociological depiction of the differences that defined the early Indian community in South Africa. We quote him at length in order to show how deeply divided this community was:

[I]t is important to recognise that, in addition to the obvious regional and class differences between the two categories of immigrants, there were also cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. Among the immigrants from the Southern part of India were Tamil and Telegu speakers; and those who came from the northern and western parts spoke Bhojpuri and Gujarati respectively. They represented Hinduism, Islam and in much smaller numbers, Christianity. India was overwhelmingly subject to the system of castes; and the immigrants who came to South Africa brought with them this aspect of their cultural legacy. In short, the Indians in Natal were an extremely heterogeneous group; and this was soon to be reflected in the organisations that they created for themselves to fulfil basic needs of identity and sub-group cohesion (1997:4-5).

Despite these differences in status, class, religion or ethnic composition, this section of the South African population soon experienced colonial and apartheid discriminatory policies as one ‘political’ group. It was the collective experience of domination and being consistently lumped together as an undifferentiated group that laid the basis for what was to later become a recognisably South African Indian identity and social category. In the early years of their settlement Indians responded to discriminatory colonial laws through the NIC. It was a mooted bill that was to be tabled before the Natal colonial legislature that prompted Gandhi to mobilise Indians. On 22 August 1894, leading Indian merchants in Natal met in one of the businessmen’s residence and agreed to oppose the bill. That meeting marked the birth of the NIC and of Indian politics in South Africa.

The circumstances of its birth made the organisation *ab initio* a business elite association. Its prohibitive £3 subscription fee excluded the majority of indentured labourers and other petty traders. Consequently, the issues that

made it onto the agenda of Indian politics were merchant elite interests. For a considerable number of years the modus operandi of the NIC and other Indian Congresses reflected the elitist nature of its leadership. In resolving the issues that affected them, they submitted petitions and memorials to colonial and imperial offices. They paid agents to lobby prominent individuals and government officials. It is, however, not only their interests that set them apart from those in the lower ranks. Bhana reports that many 'of the NIC's commercial elite were keenly aware of the social distance between them and the indentured Indians, and probably did not think seriously of them as potential political allies' (1997: 21). This division between rich and poor Indians coincided with other social divisions. Most indentured labourers, for example, came from the poor regions populated mainly by people of the lower caste while the merchant elite came from the richer regions of India.

The dominance of Indian politics by the merchant elite came to an unexpected end in 1913 when Gandhi, for reasons of political expediency and self-validation, enlisted the support of indentured Indians for the Satyagraha movement. This action caused discomfort among the merchant elite because it would offend the sensibilities of the white ruling class which they naively thought could be persuaded to accommodate their interests without fundamentally altering the overall colonial/apartheid system. Herein lay the foundation of a view that persisted until 1994, albeit in different forms, that Indian interests were not antithetical to white rule but could be accommodated within it, or better still, that Indian interests were coterminous with white interests.

Though it polarised the Indian community, Gandhi's action, in a paradoxical way, also contributed to the emergence of an inclusive Indian political community. The inclusion of indentured labourers and their interests through fighting for the scrapping of the three pounds tax payable by those who wished to remain in South Africa at the expiration of their contracts helped to unite diverse Indian interests and create a sense of 'Indianess'. This 'Indianess', to a certain extent, came at the expense of black South Africans. In order to validate and position themselves Indians were to relate to blacks not as another dominated group but as the 'Kaffir other' whose condition bore no semblance to their own. Through this act, a line between blacks (and black interests) and Indians (and Indian interests) was drawn. Indians defined their position within the colonial and apartheid space by reassuring whites that 'Indians came from a civilisation that was consistent with all the colonial markers of acceptability. The 'Kaffir' was the real source of white fears' (Bhana 1997:31). This can be seen when Gandhi reportedly told the Rev. S.S. Thema as late as 1939 that '[I]t would be a mistake for Indians to join the Africans

politically because they would be pooling together not strength but weakness' (cited in Reddy 1995:25). Intra-group divisions, therefore, became less significant while inter-group difference was exacerbated.

Though the NIC and the other Indian Congresses were secular organisations open to people of different religious, ethnic and varna backgrounds, they failed to undercut the necessity of other narrow sectional ethnic and religious organisations whose existence also perpetuated intra-group difference and consciousness. Differences and socially discriminatory practices typical of Indian society were imported wholesale by these organisations and kept alive through customary, religious or varna practices (e.g., the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha which promoted Hinduism, while cultural markers of ethnicity were maintained through organisations like 'Gujarati Youngmen's Society, Karnatic Music Society, Gyaan Prachar Natak Mundal, and so forth) (see Bhana 1997: 137–138).

Linguistic differences appear to reinforce the notion of superiority of passenger Indians. Those of passenger origins often considered themselves as progenies of a nobler social history than those with a history of indenture. This consideration went beyond the immediate past of leaving India and arriving in South Africa. It had its roots in the Indian socio-political set-up. Again Bhana's account is instructive in this regard:

[T]he passenger Indians came mainly from western parts of India where Gujarati was spoken, and used the term 'Girmitiyas' to refer dismissively to indentured Indians; in the post-indentured period other terms were used with similar irreverence: 'Culcultias' for Bhojpuri-speakers from the Ganges valley, and 'Madrassis' for Tamil-and Telugu-speakers from the Southern parts of India. Not infrequently, the term 'banias' was reserved for the Gujarati-speaking traders to suggest that they were grasping individuals not to be trusted (1997: 37).

Various other lines of difference existed among Indians in their early years in South Africa that we do not consider here. These were mainly class and/or status (inclusive of varna differences) differences also observable in the patterns of settlement, occupational roles, and material endowment. (For a discussion of these aspects of difference see the volumes by Arkin, et al, 1989; Palmer et al 1956; and Meer 1969) The next section will show that though a homogenous Indian identity was a political imposition, it was also willingly accepted and internalised by the Indian community.

The Politics of Indian Sameness and Black Difference

How intra-group differences became submerged into a cohesive and integrated identity group with a curious notion of superiority over native blacks receives our attention in this section. As an immigrant community, Indians in South Africa faced similar problem of integration and were inclined to look inwards for solace and solidarity. Moreover, colonial and apartheid settlement patterns were deliberately designed to ensure inter-group difference and this resulted in a high level of intra-group consciousness. As early as 1906, long before the apartheid social engineering, there were hostile relations between Indians and blacks. Indians willingly participated in the crushing of the Bambatha rebellion in that same year. Gandhi's racist slurs and those of other Indian leaders further aggravated the already vexed relations between the two groups. Such tendencies were not only a function of colonial and apartheid policies. Indian attitudes towards blacks, early in their history in South Africa, suggest that they arrived already contemptuous of blacks. Any attempt to explain the 'othering' of blacks by Indians, therefore, has to incorporate explanations from theories of race (I am indebted to Professor Mijere for drawing my attention to this fact). This chapter is not able to do so given space constraints. However, those aspects of Indian identity that continue to impact upon the transformation challenge can be accounted for within the analysis of colonial and apartheid structures and the dynamics of differential racialisation imputed a slightly different meaning to the otherwise well-studied variant of Asian racism.

Colonial and apartheid regimes in South Africa employed political, economic, social and symbolic measures to consolidate a distinctly South African Indian identity. Immediately after arrival, Indians began to experience collective political discrimination irrespective of their class, ethnic and religious differences. This collective experience engendered a collective response. The long list of colonial laws that Indians were confronted with and to which they had to respond collectively include the Immigration Registration Act of 1897, the Dealer's License Act of 1897, the Franchise Law Amendment Act of 1896, and Act 17 of 1895. Although these laws appear to have been directed at different sections of the Indian population, they were indicative of the larger political situation under which Indians were going to live. The fact that they were barred from the Free State and that their movement between Natal and Transvaal was severely curtailed indicated to them that their disaggregation by the other laws was a matter of political expedience.

Apartheid defined Indians, as it did with all other groups, as separate and distinct. This it did within the dominant discourse centred on racial categorisation. This dominant racial discourse had as its principal objectives

foreclosing the plausibility of a united non-white opposition, and, secondly, ensuring that the logic of separate development found meaning in all aspects of social existence. It is this same logic that leads Reddy to conclude that '[V]ery little under the apartheid system could have made any legislative and administrative sense without a framework of racial and ethnic classification inscribed in the legal order... Apartheid made the "racial group" the determinant of all social interaction'. He goes further to ask rhetorically: '[H]ow else could it have been possible to restrict "racial groups" to particular places of residence, to develop racially defined public services, to allow for the unequal access and provision of public goods?' (2001:73). The Population Registration Act of 1950 together with the Group Areas Act, its corollary, gave force and effect to the above logic by classifying all social groups in the country. Accordingly, each individual was defined either as a white, Indian, coloured or an ethnic subject, and entered into the population register as such. One's definition and categorisation was also a determinant of one's life chances. Reddy's contention vividly shows this but perhaps more illuminating of the effects of the racial policy discourse on group notions of identity is the narrow consideration of the Group Areas Act by Indians as nothing more than an assault on their business interests (Bhana 1997; Mesthrie 1989).

The formation of the Department of Indian Affairs in 1961 as well as their incorporation into the tri-cameral parliament in 1984 are representative of the attempts to create and define separate Indian political categories which, in turn, reinforced a distinct Indian identity. Through the Population Registration and Group Areas Acts the apartheid state determined whom one was, his/her residential area, with who he/she could associate and what social services were to be availed to him/her. Social service provisioning was, therefore, not determined according to the acceptable norms of need, population, taxation, etc., but according to the meaning and logic of differential racialisation. The quality of social services availed to different groups under apartheid are a clear denotation of the hierarchical ranking of groups under apartheid into status groups. Statistics that provide a conclusive picture of the difference in ratio of state spending per group are not freely available, and, where available, are subject to dispute. To circumvent the problem of inconclusive statistics on social spending under apartheid we refer to the 1995/1996 data. These statistics indicate the cumulative effect of years of uneven social spending between groups.

Table 1 shows through two indicators of the conditions of living—water and sanitation—the disparities (which are a result of uneven social spending) between groups, particularly the gap between Indians and Africans (blacks). Were we to factor in the number of blacks who own houses, where these

amenities can be enjoyed, the picture is bound to become more complicated. Table 2 shows the disparity in educational attainment which is not a function of ability or intelligence but of the racial structuring of opportunity(ies). Again the gap between Indians and blacks is more than fourfold. These patterns are replicated in other sectors, e.g., health and housing.

Table 1: Indicators of Living Conditions

| | African | Coloured | Indian | White |
|-------------------|---------|----------|--------|-------|
| Indoor Water | | | | |
| Urban | 56 % | 80 % | 98 % | 99 % |
| Rural | 12 % | 44 % | 81 % | 78 % |
| Indoor Sanitation | | | | |
| Urban | 42 % | 70 % | 97 % | 99 % |
| Rural | 5 % | 38 % | 72 % | 98 % |

Source: Adapted from South Africa Survey 1996/97, pp. 803–804, 806–807, 779.

Table 2: Education of Persons over 20, 1995

| | Africans | Coloured | Indian | White | Total |
|----------------|------------|-----------|---------|-----------|------------|
| No Education | 2,640,000 | 182,000 | 34,000 | 8,000 | 2,864,000 |
| Some Primary | 4,495,000 | 690,000 | 84,000 | 35,000 | 5,304,000 |
| Some Secondary | 7,413,000 | 1,001,000 | 448,000 | 2,632,000 | 11,494,000 |
| Some Tertiary | 822,000 | 102,000 | 74,000 | 952,000 | 1,950,000 |
| TOTAL | 15,370,000 | 1,975,000 | 640,000 | 3,627,000 | 21,612,000 |

Source: Central Statistical Services, 1995 October Household Survey.

With a relatively better quality education Indians had a competitive advantage over blacks in the labour market. This skewed education system also ensured that they emerged more confident and assertive in their social relations compared to blacks. In a system that attached importance and value to education as a source not only of livelihood but also of respect, Indians could, and, indeed, laid claim to better social honour and prestige. Closely related to this non-economic determinant of power is a symbolic one that was particularly accessible to Indians in Natal. In almost all the cities, Indians were allowed unrestricted access and use of certain parts of the city. Grey Street and its environs in Durban became their commercial hub, and, in the

early days, also doubled as a residential area. The city, a location representative of modernity and civilisation, means that presence in it symbolises one's modernity and civility. Being denied presence in the location of modernity meant blacks were inferior while it symbolically validated the superiority of Indian culture and identity.

The majority of Indians who came to South Africa as indentured labourers were later absorbed into the secondary industry as semi-skilled labourers: public sector labour needs could no longer be satiated by the limited white labour. Table 3 partly shows how mobile Indians were within the apartheid occupational structure. The apartheid economy not only accorded Indians greater occupational mobility but also, even if within the constraints of white capitalism, permitted the emergence of a small merchant and commercial class among them. This is how they were invariably made an accomplice in the domination and exploitation of the black majority. The effects of white and Indian economic dominance over blacks is well summed up in Hamburg's contention that:

[P]overty is partly a matter of income and partly a matter of human dignity. It is one thing to have a very low income but to be treated with respect by your compatriots; it is quite another matter to have a very low income and be harshly depreciated by more powerful compatriots. Let us speak then of human impoverishment: low income plus harsh disrespect... To speak of impoverishment in this sense is to speak of human degradation so profound as to undermine any reasonable and decent standard of human life (cited in Lushaba 1998:54).

Table 3: Distribution of Race Groups by Selected Occupational Levels, 1995 (in %)

| | African | Coloured | Indian | White |
|-----------------------|---------|----------|--------|-------|
| Senior Management | 2.9 | 2.0 | 10.7 | 14.6 |
| Professional | 2.0 | 1.7 | 6.7 | 8.4 |
| Technician/related | 9.6 | 6.6 | 11.9 | 18.5 |
| Clerical | 7.8 | 10.8 | 20.9 | 22.5 |
| Service | 11.2 | 11.6 | 13.3 | 10.6 |
| Craft | 10.2 | 14.3 | 16.0 | 15.0 |
| Operators | 14.0 | 12.3 | 12.7 | 3.8 |
| Elementary Occupation | 40.1 | 38.8 | 6.0 | 1.6 |

Source: Adapted from Central Statistical Services, 1995 October Household Survey.

Taken singly or collectively, the above factors, over time, shaped a distinctly South Africa Indian identity group and armed it with what Hendricks (in this volume and following Bourdieu) calls 'cultural capital', a combination of all forms of advantage in a competitive capitalist economy. In effect, apartheid invested the Indian identity with both material and symbolic benefits and helped to make the identity attractive. While material benefits ensured instrumental loyalty to this group identity, symbolic validation rationalised its intrinsic value resulting in unalloyed loyalty. The socio-economic situation of Indians by the 1980s can be summarily presented as that of social progress. Almost all classes and status groups within the Indian community had experienced upward social and economic mobility. A curious contrast exists between Indians and Coloureds in this respect. Among Coloureds, particularly those who were politically active, there existed a consciousness of the fact that their identity was, to a certain extent, an apartheid construct that had to be deconstructed or discarded if complete liberation was to be realised (a leading proponent and adherent of this view was Neville Alexander).

That a distinctly South African Indian identity developed at the apron strings of apartheid is by now a fairly established fact. What still needs to be answered is how it related to other social categories particularly blacks? Indian social structure is identifiable with the varna/caste system, which, like race under apartheid, determines one's life chances. Evidence suggests that by the 1980s, Indians, irrespective of their caste backgrounds, had opportunities to progress with serious consequences for social organisation. This, coupled with the influence of western education, led to English becoming a lingua franca, especially for Natal Indians, thus obliterating linguistic differences. The emergence in 1921 of the Colonial Born and Settler Indian Association (CBSIA), mainly constituted by the first generation of South African Indians who did not trace their origins beyond the South African borders, with an inward looking political approach, was in sharp contrast with what Bhana (1997) calls the politics of 'Imperial Brotherhood' prevalent until the early 1920s. The last distinguishing fact, for us, is not peculiar to South African Indians but characteristic of all other migrant communities. As people settle in a new place stories are created and told about it, a new history about the group then emerges. A new history of Indian South Africans emerged within the colonial and apartheid milieu, completely different from that of Indians in India.

We conclude this section by briefly looking at how Indians related to blacks while establishing our claim that largely the same processes that were responsible for the emergence of a distinctly South African Indian identity determined the nature of these relations. The relatively better conditions under

which Indians experienced domination, particularly under apartheid, interspersed with accommodation politics of the merchant class which dominated Indian political organisations until the late 1930s set an Indian political agenda that consciously differentiated them from the larger liberation politics of the black majority. For them the total dismantling of apartheid was not the fundamental goal of their struggle. Were their interests to be accommodated by the white oligarchy their struggle would have accomplished its mission at that material point in time. Apartheid, for this group, was not recognised for what it was—an amoral and despicable system of racial domination—but was thought of as a system that deprived them socio-economic progress and prosperity.

Radicals that moved into leadership positions within the Indian Congresses fostered a new form of politics unprecedented in the history of South African Indian activism. Contrary to Gandhi's advice they expanded the domain of Indian politics by going into an alliance with other non-European organisations, particularly the African National Congress(ANC), and agreed on a need for collaborative politics. Superficial observation has led to the incorrect conclusion that this broadening of the front can be dubbed a success. We argue conversely that its success only went as far as the recognition of the fact that apartheid domination was an evil against all non-whites that had to be fought collectively. In the realm of practice, this realisation was defeated by the extent to which Indianess had been entrenched and become a prism through which this community read political developments in the country.

Their ambivalence towards the 1950 Defiance Campaign—a collaborative programme—starkly demonstrates the fact that Indians generally considered 'collaborating with blacks a pulling together not of strength but of weakness'. Essentially to them collaborating would have suggested to the government that they should be treated in the same way as blacks, or, rather, that their interests were commensurate with those of the black majority. This, for them, was an eventuality far from what they wished for. Again, here, Bhana's observation on the Indian response to collaborative politics is apt:

[T]he Indian participation in the passive resistance campaign of 1946-48, was substantial and even enthusiastic in the beginning. In contrast, the response to the congressional alliance was guarded. The alliance signalled a kind of multi-racial vision as articulated in the Freedom Charter that left many Indians ambivalent. The Indian congressional leadership, by its own admission, failed to prepare—*that is to disabuse their constituency of the thinking that their interests are not commensurate or are anti-thetical to those of the black majority*—the ground adequately among its constituents. The doubts about

how multi-racialism would impact upon them in their daily lives persisted (1997:87–88, italics mine).

Marginal integration into the apartheid economy and bureaucracy of Indians with its concomitant status-enhancing effect happened alongside deep immiseration of the black majority, leading to a resentment of this group by blacks generally. An extensive study of the consciousness that emerged among blacks is necessary in order to counter-balance the many uni-dimensional studies of social relations between these groups. However, a few preliminary remarks are possible to make here. Reference to Indians as traitors and exploiters of black labour led to their categorisation in the black consciousness as part of the enemy and as targets of the informal insurgency as black political organisations conceptualised them differently. In black street argot, it became a progressive act to steal from an Indian's shop or business, or to even assault an Indian. During the 1980s, an era of civil disobedience, Indian business interests were identified as targets. Derogatory references to Indians as '*amakula, os'tsharo, mamu*' (derogatory referents) became part of popular public speech among youth comrades, and, interestingly, those who worked for Indian establishments were harbingers of more deep-seated anger and resentment.

That the 1949 Durban riots came at a time when the alliance between black and Indian organisations was already in existence suggests that though state complicity in fanning anti-Indian sentiments among blacks cannot be ignored, there were deep-rooted or underlying feelings of anger that needed to be addressed. Institutionalised inequality, the relative affluence of Indians, displayed in the midst of abject black poverty, the presence in the city constructed as a space of modernity and progress, all led to a resentment of this group by blacks who saw them as doing very little to challenge the state precisely because of the status the system accorded them. All these together led to a conflict between these groups that bore little semblance to class conflict but rather had every mark of conflict between status groups known in Weberian terms as 'the politics of resentment' (Turner 1988). These vexed social relations have implications for the post-apartheid South Africa. A need to transcend apartheid social relations is a social transformation imperative that cannot be overemphasised. What then is supposed to be the nature of democratic social divisions and how can they be attained? We ponder briefly over these questions in the next section.

The challenge of social transformation

Taking the foregoing as a point of departure, it is possible to conclude that South African Indians and the larger social relations that were entailed in the apartheid social stratification cannot be adequately analysed from a Marxist

perspective. Apartheid group identities, as the analysis has shown, do not fit neatly into the class categories. Although non-whites were all discriminated against, Indians and Coloureds were better treated, had better social services, were more upwardly mobile and were marginally integrated into the political system.

Domination and exclusion of black South Africans minimised the competition for better opportunities, employment and upward mobility that Indians were to enjoy. Their sense of self was developed at the apron strings of apartheid. What implications does this then have for the post-apartheid social transformation challenge? Marxists would argue that socialising the means of production resolves all contradictions that apartheid spawned. Fragments of evidence from the post-apartheid South Africa seem to validate Weber's proposition that social divisions remain a reality even after socialising the means of production. Alexander has argued quite correctly that:

it can be said with a huge degree of certainty that even if the proportion of real as opposed to token black ownership of the economy were to rise substantially over the next twenty years or so, this will not automatically translate into any radical improvement in social relations. That is to say, a reduction in racial and social prejudice and a concomitant strengthening of our sense of national unity are by no means mechanical functions of changes in economic or class relations (2001: 483).

Accepting this argument only exposes one weakness in the materialist notion of transformation, that social relations are not a mechanical result of economic processes. The second weakness in the materialist notion of transformation is that it understands domination as having been experienced uniformly by all non-whites. If this perspective were to correctly conceptualise the variations in the experience of domination, it would then be better placed to appreciate the existence of contradictory notions of transformation—particularly between Indian and black South Africans—and therefore expand its transformation framework beyond democratising black and white socio-economic relations to include engendering democratic social relations.

Democratic social relations cannot be legislated into existence neither can the old apartheid begotten relations be legislated out of the public consciousness. Social relations between Indians and blacks are characterised by resentment, despite the efforts at equalisation of opportunities. The transformation challenge, therefore, has to be extended to the realm of identity politics. One such attempt was through the notion of a 'Rainbow Nation' associated with the first democratic president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. The limits of this approach have been the subject of much academic criticism

and, therefore, we need not restate the arguments against it here (for such criticisms see Gqola 2001; Alexander 2001; Mamdani 2001). What is worth stating here is that this perspective only focuses on the positive aspects that are to be celebrated while it hides the underbelly of difference.

The weakness of the previous attempts at democratising social relations in the post-apartheid era can be seen in the salience of apartheid-engineered social relations, particularly between Indian and black South Africans, albeit in a different, subtle and disguised form. Empirically these social relations are encompassed in the contradictory notions of transformation between the two social groups. According to the *South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, to transform means to, 'make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, character, etc' (1994: 1030). Our observations of Indian political, social and economic attitudes in KwaZulu-Natal do not suggest that this group is given to the idea of a thorough, dramatic and complete change of the apartheid begotten political, social and economic relations. This can also be seen in what we refer to as a 'minimalist' notion of transformation that they hold.

Though it may not be entirely correct to argue that the Indian voting patterns in both the 1994 and 1999 elections conclusively show a convergence of white and Indian political interests, it is a sign that the apartheid-sown distrust for black majority rule still resonates in their consciousness (for a different view on the Indian vote see Habib and Naidu 1999). Perhaps the statement by a conservative Indian leader in 1938 that Indians 'do not desire to alter the political complexion of this country' and further that 'there is a community of interest between Europeans and Indians in trade, industry, professions, farming and in every phase of life' has become prophetic (cited in Bhana 1997). What most arguments, in our estimates, about the political alignment of interests between Indians and whites miss is the fact that the generality of the Indian population has never pretended to be fighting for a complete destruction of the structures of white domination.

Today some Indians still show little inhibition in their consideration and treatment of blacks as inferior, in itself a part of the white structuration of political dominance. The respect they extend to other social groups other than blacks is conspicuously absent when their everyday interactions with blacks are considered. Two examples from the author's field notes will perhaps help demonstrate the point. Indians own most of the shops, a fact of apartheid history on its own, in and around Esplanade and Russell Streets in Durban, a residential part of the city now largely populated by blacks. On this particular Indian-owned shop in a ten-floor building on Russell Street, the author noticed a public announcement which reads: 'COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT IS

ON THE 50th FLOOR'. The author curiously asked what necessitated such a notice. A young Indian boy behind the counter answered quite contemptuously : '[Y]ou blacks (pointing directly at the author's forehead) complain a lot. There is no time for complaints here (pointing suggestively to the confines of the shop). If you are not satisfied you leave'.

The second interesting observation was at the University of Natal (Durban) where the author was conducting library research. After receiving our orders (this author and a research assistant) in a student cafeteria we looked around for an empty table but instead found one meant for four with two Indians comfortably settled on it. Immediately after we placed ourselves in their midst they stood and left the table. It was through my discussion with an old colleague now working in the university and careful observations over a period of time that I was able to understand the offence we had committed. The campus is *de facto* compartmentalised into racial and group zones. The trend is that once a part of campus (including hostels, recreational facilities and areas) has become too 'black' for comfort, Indians and whites migrate to 'safer' zones which they define as theirs through occupation and frequent visits. This, of course, is a trend replicated in the larger society.

Exigencies of transformation require that both public and private institutions should reflect the demographics of the country and report progress to that end to the Ministry of Labour. White business interests that have not yet reconciled themselves with the eventuality of apartheid's collapse and that seek to perpetuate it in subtler ways have found willing accomplices among Indians whose minimalist notion of transformation is in consonance with their agenda. As most laws pertaining to the transformation process define Indians as blacks, it has become politically expedient for these white business interests to promote Indians ahead of blacks simply because, for them, transformation ends with their occupation of these positions and not fundamental change in the overall institutional setting of white privilege, i.e., ownership, equity, corporate and institutional culture, etc. It is perhaps this situation that agitated the political editor of the *Sunday Times* to ask in the title of one editorial, 'Why have all our managers become Indian?'

Closely connected to this is another form of economic racism. As white business seeks to perpetuate another form of racism, economic racism, by moving out of the cities that have become too 'black' for comfort to the shopping malls located in the suburbs beyond the reach of the poor black majority, Indians are replacing them as proxies, perpetuating apartheid in the form of Indian complicity in black labour exploitation. Not only are Indians replacing whites in the city centres as proxies, but they are also extending their own economic presence into the space left behind by retreating white

business interests, a process aided by their comparative advantage over blacks in terms of access to capital, business expertise, etc. As a result, perceptions of Indian economic dominance are beginning to emerge among blacks.

The picture painted above brings Indians through their minimalist notions of transformation into direct confrontation with blacks to whom transformation entails a complete dismantling of white domination, including the relative dominance of Indians over them—hence the ‘maximalist’ notion of transformation. It is this notion of transformation that was being expressed in Mbongeni Ngema’s composition lamenting the negative attitude towards the economic dominance of Indians over blacks in KwaZulu-Natal. The popular public reception of the song by blacks is enough proof for a need to expand the sites of transformation to those areas not covered by the crippled materialist notion currently dominant in the public policy discourse. Such a transformation challenge has to include the democratisation of social relations between apartheid created social groups. For Erasmus (2001) this challenge requires an admission of complicity on the part of those groups that were brought in as junior partners in the apartheid social system. This does not seem to be happening, especially among Indians in KwaZulu-Natal. The post-apartheid notion of transformation has failed to democratise social relations simply because it sees only in black and white. But, just as the motto of an Indian radio station, Radio Lotus, declares; ‘not everything is black and white’.

Conclusion

Let us conclude this discussion by stating that the purpose of the above argument is not to deny that Indians played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid. There is an endless list of Indians who formed part of the liberation movement and NIC and TIC were instrumental in the struggle against apartheid. They, however, receive little of our attention simply because they did not alter the larger outlook and pattern of Indian politics. They mostly represented views of a minority that could not be accommodated in the mainstream conservative Indian politics.

Let us sum the essence of this discussion in the following five propositions: (1) Indians under apartheid should be conceptualised not as a class but a status group; (2) a distinctly South African Indian Identity developed inseparably from apartheid; (3) social relations between Indian and black South Africans were characterised by contempt and resentment; (4) notions of transformation held by these groups are continuous with their position under apartheid; (5) for the post-apartheid South Africa to move beyond apartheid social stratification, the social transformation agenda should include the democratisation of social relations.

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